The impact of children's gender on the identification of learning difficulties by primary school teachers

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Abstract

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More boys than girls are consistently identified as having learning difficulties. This imbalance is longstanding but has only recently been problematised. The reasons for the imbalance are likely to be complex. This research investigated the possible existence of gender bias in the judgements and expectations of primary school teachers regarding girls and boys described as having learning difficulties. The research was undertaken in two phases. In the first a sample of primary teachers were asked to identify children in their classes whom they thought had learning difficulties; 15 girls and 49 boys were identified by 17 teachers; thus, confirming the gender imbalance. The teachers' views regarding these children's difficulties were elicited by means of a questionnaire. In the second phase a different sample of teachers were asked their views regarding girls and boys with learning difficulties described in a series of five vignettes. The vignettes covered a range of learning difficulties. Each vignette was adjusted for pupil gender. The teachers' views about the children's difficulties were elicited by means of a questionnaire similar to that used in the first phase. Fifty-two teachers completed questionnaires, providing responses regarding 206 vignettes covering male and female versions of the five problem areas. Over the two phases it was evident that whilst there was a good deal of overlap between the teachers' views of girls and boys with learning difficulties, many areas of difference in perception of the problem and expectation were evident. The pattern of differential interpretation varied according to the nature of the learning difficulty. In addition it was evident that with regard to academic learning, the prognosis for the girls was seen to be less good than for the boys and that there was a higher level of expectation of behavioural difficulties for the boys. It can therefore be concluded that gender bias is evident in the judgements made about children's learning difficulties by at least some teachers.

The Impact of Children's Gender on the Identification of Learning Difficulties by Primary School Teachers

Robert John Vardill

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Declaration

I declare that none of the material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university.

Statement of copyright

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor David Galloway, my supervisor throughout this work, and Maria Goulding who was my supervisor until leaving Durham to take up a post in York. In the early stages of this work David and Maria provided a superbly complementary team in helping me to think through the many issues involved in venturing into research in this area. David's perseverance has seen me to its conclusion.

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I also wish to thank my wife, Sandra, for her patience and support, not to mention her careful proof reading, without which I would probably still be struggling to complete this thesis.

A note about terminology

A potential stumbling block when considering gender or sex difference is that of terminology. By convention the term 'sex' is used to refer to the biological sex of the individual – whether a person is physically female or male. 'Gender' then is used to refer to the social role of being a woman/girl or a man/boy – being 'feminine' or 'masculine'. Gender, therefore, comprises many features or characteristics that a particular society deems to be appropriate for a conventional male or female within that society. This apparent distinction is confounded by the fact that the term 'gender' has now almost entirely replaced 'sex' as the socially acceptable term to the extent that, as Archer & Lloyd (2002) point out, when a form asks whether a person is a man or a woman invariably it is their 'gender' that is requested. The lack of clarity about quite what is meant when either term is used is apparent in reading much research or other work that refers to sex or gender differences. Practically all work that has referred to itself as examining gender differences in special educational needs, and for that matter in education generally, has simply been interested in the possibility of differential treatment according to whether pupils are girls or boys. In the less common circumstances where the focus of interest relates more closely to 'gender' for example when considering the influence of 'femininity' or 'masculinity' this is usually made explicit. It can, therefore, safely be assumed that most of this work referred to in this thesis is examining sex-differences unless otherwise stated. I have, when discussing others' work, used the terminology that the authors have chosen to use in the original. Although, my preference would be to attempt to retain the distinction between the terms, I have chosen the socially accepted term 'gender' in my title and have, for this reason, in general used this term when discussing issues relating to the sex of the children in this research.

Part I

The background to the research

Introduction
to Part I

My route to the research question

The immediate prompt for me to investigate the evident gender imbalance within special educational needs comes from my work as a Local Education Authority educational psychologist, in the course of which I have had direct experience of the preponderance of boys in the case-load of such services. My experience during the previous phase of my career in teaching had alerted me to some issues of gender in education. For example, when training to teach I had been interested in teaching young children but, in the mid-to-late 1970s, as a man, I experienced considerable resistance to being appointed to teach infant age children. This is an interesting area of gender debate in itself, but beyond the scope of this work[1]. I, later, found myself teaching in the much more gender-stereotypical setting of secondary school science departments. In particular, I taught physics which, at examination level, attracted far fewer girls than boys and in which, towards the end of my time teaching, in the mid 1980s, there were growing initiatives to encourage the participation of girls such as Girls into Science and Technology (GIST) (see for example Kelly, Whyte and Smail, 1984; Whyte, 1985) which had followed the report in the HMI Matters for Discussion: Girls and Science (DES, 1980). This experience had, to some extent, prepared me to notice and question

[1] Skelton (2001), Chapter 6, provides a useful account of issues relating to male teachers in primary schools.

the massive gender imbalance in my caseload as an educational psychologist, if not to understand it.

I set out to learn more about gender issues in education. This was achieved partially by means of involvement in a Local Authority working group considering gender inequality in schools. This primarily focused on the ways in which the opportunities for girls were restricted and worked to raise awareness in schools and to produce guidance for good practice, with the aim of encouraging schools to avoid sexist practice. This work fuelled my interest in learning more about the theoretical underpinnings of gender work which I did by means of studying the Gender in Education module of the Open University MA in Education. The project and research based elements of that course and a subsequent dissertation module of the OU MA gave me the structured opportunity to begin an examination of the working practice of the Educational Psychology Service in this respect. The literature on the practice of educational psychology revealed little. Wright and Payne (1979) in their evaluation of an educational psychology service devoted a single paragraph to a description of the sex differences in referrals to the service. They stated that overall approximately twice the number of boys compared to girls were referred over a sample period of one year, with the ratio being larger (more boys) below the age of 11-12 years. In discussing the reasons for referral their view was that:

> *"Pre-school children and children up to about age 9 years were, for both sexes, far more likely to be referred because of learning difficulties. Boys retained this equivalence into the secondary school age range, but at these ages girls were referred more frequently for behaviour problems than learning difficulties, and were referred for behaviour problems in the same number as boys."* (p. 9)

What is clear from this account is that girls at any age were seen to be relatively infrequently referred for learning difficulties. Campion (1985) analysed referrals from a group of schools and provided a breakdown of the reasons for referral in three age sectors: infant/nursery; junior and secondary. In this analysis only 15% of pupils referred from infant and nursery schools and 17% from junior schools

were female whereas 39% of those referred at secondary school level were female. Campion also analysed the pattern of referrals under five headings: behaviour problems; learning difficulties; behaviour problems and learning difficulties; non-attendance; other. The relative proportions of boys and girls within each 'category', were not given. Reference to gender imbalance in the work of educational psychologists in more recent publications has been in relation to particular issues such as disruption (Todman et al, 1991) or provision for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties (Malcolm & Haddock, 1992) rather than an examination of the overall pattern of referral. It was in this context that a study arising from my Open University work was undertaken (Vardill, 1996). This was followed by work with a colleague in which the pattern of referrals to the service in which we worked was considered (Vardill and Calvert, 2000). In that study, which examined the referrals to the Educational Psychology Service over a period of two years, an overall male:female referral ratio of more than 3:1 was apparent. More boys than girls were referred in all age phases with the preponderance of boys being greatest in the primary sector.

Although looking at the children referred to the Educational Psychology Service has provided further evidence of the extent of the gender imbalance and insight into some of the pertinent issues, throughout this work it has been apparent that, in order to gain a better understanding, it would be essential to look at the earlier stages of identification of concerns about a child. Therefore, in wishing to examine the gender imbalance in special educational needs, I came to the conclusion that it would be necessary to look at the decisions and judgements that teachers make about the children in their classes that lead them to consider that the child may have a special need.

Before describing the research that I have undertaken with the aim of exploring this issue, the remaining chapters in this first part of the thesis will review areas of work that provide the context for such decision making.

- Chapter One, will examine the evidence which suggests that more boys than girls have special educational needs.
- Chapter Two, *Gender, schooling and achievement,* will look at the differential classroom experience of girls and boys and the extent to which this provides a context for the gender difference in identification of children with learning difficulties.
- Chapter Three, *Special educational needs – a framework for decision making,* will discuss the legislative and procedural context in which teachers identify concerns about the learning of their pupils with particular reference to potential sources of gender bias.
- Chapter 4 will consider issues and questions from the literature review and will then clarify the research questions to be addressed in Part II.

Chapter One

More boys than girls have special educational needs?

In this first chapter I will be presenting evidence to support the assertion that more boys than girls are considered to have special educational needs, also that this assertion is usually accepted as fact and thus rarely, if ever, challenged by professionals working within the field of special needs education.

1.1 Special educational needs

The contemporary view of learning difficulty is broadly derived from the report of the Warnock Committee (DES, 1978) which was established to review educational provision for children who, up to that time, were considered 'handicapped by disabilities of body or mind' and the consequent legislation of the 1981 Education Act. Here the following definition is offered:

> *"...a child has 'special educational needs' if he (sic) has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him."*
>
> *"...a child has a 'learning difficulty' if:*
>
> *(a) he has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of his age; or*
> *(b) he has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided in schools,*

within the area of the local authority concerned, for children of his age; or

(c) he is under the age of five years and is, or would be if special educational provision were not made for him, likely to fall within paragraph (a) or (b) when over that age."

(Section 1 paragraphs 1 and 2)

Subsequent legislation and guidance have not altered the definition. The possible impact of the definitions and conceptualisations of special educational needs and learning difficulty will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three: Special educational needs - a framework for decision making.

1.2 Evidence of patterns of gender imbalance within special educational needs

My intention here is to provide evidence of gender imbalance. Suggested explanations, where they have been offered, will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

1.2(a) work that has reported on gender difference incidentally or as a minor element of a broader study

(i) Studies that influenced the Warnock Report

The Warnock Report made use of recent large epidemiological studies in formulating its account of the nature and incidence of a wide range of difficulties which affect children's learning. One of the major sources was The National Child Development Study (NCDS) which involved a longitudinal study of health, social and educational aspects of virtually all of the children born in England and Wales in one week in 1958. Such work was carried out in the tradition predominant in the 1950s and 1960s that had examined social class and socio-economic factors as precursors of advantage or disadvantage. The published reports of this study were among the sources used by the Warnock Committee to estimate the overall proportions of children expected to have special educational

needs. Some sections of the NCDS findings provide evidence of gender imbalance in areas that relate to special educational needs.

Pringle, Butler and Davie (1966), in the first report of the study, indicate that teachers identified a greater proportion of boys compared to girls in response to being asked how many children were at present receiving special help 'because of educational or mental backwardness' and how many others would benefit from such help if it were available. The gender difference in both groups was statistically significant (p. 154). Gender differences were also apparent in relation to a range of educational indicators. Girls' level of reading was found to be significantly superior to that of boys; by their final term of their infant schooling, twice as many boys as girls had barely made a start with reading according to their scores in tests and place in reading schemes. Teachers also identified more boys (27.8%) than girls (15.8%) as poor readers and as non-readers (3.1% of boys; 1.4% of girls)[1]. More boys (4.5%) than girls (2.3%) were seen to have 'markedly poor oral ability' (p. 34). With regard to number and early mathematical skills, boys were seen to have superior skills in that more were found at the higher levels of achievement but roughly equal proportions of boys and girls were found at the below average levels. Thus within the range of skills examined there were no pointers of relevance to gender differences in children seen as having special educational needs in this area. With specific reference to the children receiving help within the school 'because of educational or mental backwardness', approximately 7% of the boys in the sample and 4% of the girls were receiving this help. As regards the additional children whose teachers considered that they would benefit from such help, these represented 10% of the boys and 6% of the girls. Headteachers considered that, of their present mainstream population, 2.6% of the boys and 1.4% of the girls would benefit from attendance at a special school. Further, 6.3% of the boys and 3.4% of the girls were considered to be likely to need some form of special schooling or some other form of special educational help within the next two years. In all of the

[1] data extracted from Pringle, Butler & Davie (1966) Table 7, page 28

cases cited above the difference between boys and girls was at a statistically significant level.

By the time of the second NCDS report (Davie, Butler & Goldstein, 1972) some additional data were available, but the authors suggested that these left the previous conclusions unaltered. The preponderance of boys among those about whom there were special educational concerns is seen to have a strong association with a greater perceived tendency in boys to 'backwardness' in language development and reading. As a consequence, the discussion of issues of special educational treatment relates mainly to reading (pp. 112-115). In each of the further NCDS publications it has been reported that more boys than girls were receiving special educational provision. For example, Fogelman (1983), reporting on the follow-up studies, indicated that at the age of 11 years 150 of the boys and 89 of the girls were categorised as ESN(M), the equivalent of having moderate learning difficulties in more recent terminology. A further 159 boys and 83 girls were described by their teachers as 'would benefit from attending special school'. Of the children receiving remedial help the ratio of boys to girls was similar. These findings were typical of all ages.

The NCDS also gave consideration to behaviour and social adjustment. In ratings by teachers and parents, boys were reported as more frequently showing behaviour with an aggressive component. Boys were reported to be more restless than girls while girls were more likely to suck their thumbs, bite their nails and be 'miserable' or 'tearful' than boys. Davie, Butler and Goldstein (1972) concluded that sex and social class differences in behaviour and adjustment were often very marked. Overall their comments on sex differences tended to suggest that they reflected 'natural' differences rather than being seen as the consequence of disadvantage, discrimination or some other social mechanism. Their interpretation was that the findings simply confirmed earlier work on sex differences in ability and sex-roles, and were accepted on this basis. Good adjustment was therefore seen in relation to the development of the appropriate,

i.e. stereotypical, sex-role behaviour[2]. As a consequence sex differences were not questioned and no action was seen to be necessary to alter the situation.

The other large scale study used by the Warnock committee was that carried out in the Isle of Wight by means of a series of surveys into the education, health and behaviour of 9 to 12 year old children in 1964 and 1965 by Rutter and his colleagues (Rutter, Tizard and Whitmore; 1970). In the chapters reporting on the prevalence of 'intellectual and educational retardation' sex differences were again reported. In their discussion of sex ratios in intellectual and educational retardation (pp. 42-46) Rutter et al distinguish between mental subnormality and intellectual retardation. Mental subnormality, the diagnosis of which, they say, is *"made partly on the basis of educational failure, which will include children with educational backwardness (who are mainly boys) as well as children with intellectual retardation (where there is an approximately equal sex ratio)"* (p. 43). 'Intellectual retardation' which was seen to be equally common in the two sexes, refers to children with *"a low level of general intellectual functioning"* (p. 19) with what would now be considered the more severe learning difficulties which are often associated with some organic or genetic impairment. By way of contrast Rutter and colleagues found that 'reading retardation' was much more common in boys than in girls with the ratio being around 3 or 4 to 1. This in turn was seen to be associated with a more general delay in other areas of development, in particular, language.

By the late 1970s there was a growing body of literature which demonstrated the negative effects of stereotypical sex-roles and gender divisions in school on pupils' learning. National and governmental acknowledgement of these issues was highlighted by the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975 and the subsequent establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), yet the report of the Warnock committee made use of work that was rooted in an earlier

[2] Davie et al's brief section on sex differences can be found in Davie, Butler & Goldstein (1972) pp 141-142.

generation of research to define and explain special educational needs and did not take issue with any of the gender inequalities that were reported in these works.

(ii) Post-Warnock studies

The report of the Inner London Education Authority Committee reviewing provision to meet special educational needs (The Fish Report; ILEA, 1985) noted a gender imbalance at all points, including the relative numbers of boys and girls in special provision, but, commented that: *"This pattern mirrors national statistics"* (para 2.9.6.). There was again no challenge to the fact of the imbalance, merely a subsidiary recommendation (3.20.7 (vi)) that: *"The particular needs of girls and children of primary age should be urgently reconsidered in relation to their small numbers in some special schools"*. It would seem therefore that the perceived problem relates to being in a minority within a particular type of provision rather than anything to do with the characteristics of the children identified as having problems.

In a study, which aimed specifically to describe the special educational needs of junior age children as seen by their teachers following the publication of the Warnock Report, Croll and Moses (1985) reported that the teacher nominations of pupils with special educational needs revealed a ratio of almost two to one boys to girls. Four hundred and twenty-eight junior class teachers in sixty-one schools across the country were surveyed. The teachers were asked to nominate any pupils in their classes whom they regarded as having special educational needs. Overall 24.4% of boys were described as having special needs of some sort compared to 13.2% of the girls. The comparative figures for learning difficulties were: boys, 19.5%; girls 11.1%. Further sub-categories of concern included: slow learners (15.5% of boys and 8.8% of girls) and poor readers (17.5% of boys and 9.5% of girls).

Apart from reporting these ratios, Croll and Moses limit their comment to indicating that their findings were similar to those of the epidemiological studies

cited above (see pp. 30-31). It is therefore implied that this imbalance is simply what might be expected and not a matter for further discussion. It is interesting to note that in the subsequent section (pp. 32-37) there is more detailed discussion of the variations in proportions between ethnic groups of children identified by their teachers. In a follow-up study (Croll and Moses; 2000) which, like its forerunner, was concerned with special needs mainly from the perspective of mainstream primary teachers within Key Stage 2, discussion of the gender imbalance is given a little more prominence. The authors indicate that:

> *"In the 1981 survey ...The most striking difference was between boys and girls: boys in the classrooms studied were almost twice as likely as girls to be regarded by their teachers as having special educational needs."* (pp. 38-39)

They go on to provide data regarding the prevalence of special educational needs in boys and girls in their study. By way of context they say:

> *"The over-representation of boys among children experiencing difficulties in school is a very well-established phenomenon. Recent concern has focused on an apparent increase in such difficulties and, in particular, the issue of boys' 'underachievement'."* (pp. 39-40)

Their data from the 1981 and 1998 surveys confirm the preponderance of boys but do not suggest an increase. This can be seen in Tables 1.1 and 1.2 below:

TABLE 1.1 – Percentages of boys and of girls with special educational needs in 1981 and 1998 (Croll & Moses, 2000)

CHILDREN WITH ANY SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS		
Year	Male %	Female %
1981	24.4	13.2
1998	32.1	19.5

Figures extracted from Croll and Moses (2000) Table 4:1, page 40

TABLE 1.2 – Percentages of boys and of girls with learning difficulties in 1981 and 1998 (Croll & Moses, 2000)

CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES		
Year	Male %	Female %
1981	19.5	11.1
1998	27.7	18.1

Figures extracted from Croll and Moses (2000) Table 4:1, page 40

The proportions of boys and girls seen as having special educational needs have increased but the ratio of boys to girls has reduced slightly from 1.85:1 to 1.65:1. For those children nominated as having learning difficulties the ratio of boys to girls was 1.76:1 in 1981 and 1.53:1 in 1998. It would therefore appear that the relative proportion of girls seen to have learning difficulties and special educational needs in general has increased to a greater extent than that for boys. It is with regard to emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) that the prevalence of boys had increased most dramatically as shown in Table 1.3. In fact the proportion of girls seen to have EBD has reduced slightly whereas the proportion of boys has increased.

TABLE 1.3 – Percentages of boys and of girls with emotional and behavioural difficulties in 1981 and 1998 (Croll & Moses, 2000)

CHILDREN WITH EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES		
Year	Male %	Female %
1981	10.9	4.5
1998	14.3	4.0

Figures extracted from Croll and Moses (2000) Table 4:1, page 40

1.2(b) work that has set out to examine the gender imbalance in special educational needs

Relatively few studies have set out specifically to examine the gender imbalance within special educational needs. These have all confirmed an imbalance in levels of reported incidence and have each begun to identify strands in the possible mechanism.

From data collected in her role as a special needs support teacher, Green (1993) found that a sample of class teachers and support teachers identified 240 boys and 95 girls as having special educational needs. Within this sample she found that a higher proportion of the boys (53%) than the girls (46%) were considered to have a behavioural problem whereas a higher proportion of the girls (20%) than boys (15%) were considered to have a social or emotional problem. In general, Green found that teachers and other professionals had more to say about the boys that they identified and, from a qualitative analysis of the comments, she suggests that *"gender bias exists within the identification of the special needs pupils within the sample group"* (p. 79). This is largely seen to be because the teachers were more likely to respond to the boys with difficulties on account of the greater incidence of additional behavioural problems exhibited by the boys.

Hill (1994) sought to examine gender in the process of statutory assessment of special educational needs. In addition to reporting on the relative numbers of boys and girls in each of a number of categories of special educational need, he carried out an analysis of language and terminology used by teachers and educational psychologists in their written advice. His review of the population of children with a statement of special educational needs in one local education authority in a particular year consisted of 144 boys (67.6%) and 69 girls (32.4%). The relative numbers within selected categories of provision are shown in Table 1.4.

TABLE 1.4 – The relative numbers of boys and girls identified for selected categories of provision in one LEA (Hill, 1994)

PROVISION	BOYS	GIRLS
Mild learning difficulties	23	8
Moderate learning difficulties	20	18
Severe learning difficulties	4	3

Figures extracted from Hill (1994) Table 1, page 347

It is interesting to note that although boys predominate in all levels of learning difficulty, it is in the mild learning difficulty range that the difference is most apparent. Hill found that the teachers and other educational professionals tended to offer more and a wider range of comments when describing boys than girls. His analysis of the language used in comments about the children's difficulties suggests that both teachers and psychologists present girls in a more positive way, in particular in relation to descriptions of personality / behavioural features. There is some suggestion of differential behavioural attribution in relation to acting out and disruptive behaviours. There was on the other hand the slight tendency for the girls to be viewed in more academically negative terms than boys. Hill concludes that the statementing system is therefore not a neutral process.

One element of my earlier work in this field (Vardill, 1996) involved the analysis of the responses to a Local Authority wide questionnaire, completed by class teachers, which was intended to identify Year 2 children at risk of learning difficulty. In the sample from one year 383 boys (21.7% of all boys) and 248 girls (14.8% of all girls) were identified for further discussion. The responses to selected questions are shown in Table 1.5.

TABLE 1.5 – Percentages of boys and of girls identified for special help or for referral to an educational psychologist (Vardill, 1996)

QUESTION	BOYS %	GIRLS %
Does the child receive any special help in school?	17.7	10.2
Does the child need additional special help?	12.5	6.3
Has the child been referred to the Educational Psychology Service?	5.1	1.2
Do you wish to discuss this child's special educational needs and difficulties with the educational psychologist?	5.8	2.0

Again here it is interesting to note that although more boys than girls were already receiving special help in school (1.73:1), the proportion of boys seen to require additional special help was higher (1.98:1) and that a considerably higher proportion of boys had been referred to the Educational Psychology Service (4.25:1). The teachers also showed much more interest in discussing the special educational needs of the boys (2.9:1). The belief that boys were more likely to experience difficulties with language and reading was cited as a major contributor to their perceived difficulties. There was also some suggestion that boys with learning problems were more likely to exhibit additional behavioural difficulties.

Male (1996) surveyed a sample of 75 schools for children with moderate learning difficulties across England, 54 of which (72%) responded. This sample represented some 6500 pupils. The responses indicated that boys predominated on the roll of most of the schools; 85% reported that between one half and three-quarters of their roll were boys and a further 7.5% reported that more than three-quarters were boys. Only 5.5% of the schools reported near equal proportions of boys to girls. Most (81%) of the schools indicated that these proportions were relatively long standing.

Further light is shed on the process of identification of pupils for such schooling in a paper published around the same time as this by Bibby, Lamb, Leyden and

Wood (1996). Their research, which examined the gender effects in children attending schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD), suggests that a selection bias operates in the teacher referral process for children with learning difficulties. They base this on their analysis of the population of a sample of MLD schools. One analysis looked at the effectiveness of IQ, and measures of mathematics, reading comprehension, and communication to predict gender. Gender effects were found for IQ, mathematics and reading comprehension with boys outperforming girls on each of these tests. Bibby et al suggest that the basis for the selection bias is the boys' propensity to be disruptive.

> *"Thus, they are often identified as requiring special needs support when their abilities are actually greater than other children who are not especially disruptive... When children who are not particularly difficult to handle are identified it is probably because their abilities and attainments are genuinely very low."* (p.165)

This latter group is seen to be more likely to include girls. This relates to the suggestion in Green's research and again implies that it is not the learning difficulty per se which determines the provision but the combined effect of learning and behaviour, with behaviour tipping the balance.

In one of the very few relatively large scale pieces of work to specifically look at this issue, Daniels and colleagues in the Gender and Special Educational Needs Provision in Mainstream Schools research project (GENSEN) aimed to examine the gender differences in special needs practices in mainstream schools (Daniels; 1996, 1998; Daniels, Hey, Leonard and Smith, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999; Hey, Leonard, Daniels and Smith, 1998). They, again, found an overall ratio of boys to girls receiving support of between 2 and 3 to 1; but considerable variation between schools was evident.

The pilot phase of the GENSEN project involved an audit of all forms of special educational needs in selected mainstream primary schools in one LEA. The schools used in the project had been identified by LEA officers as ones in which

there was a high level of commitment to equal opportunities policy and practice. Findings from the pilot included:

- Significant gender differences existed in the numbers of children receiving extra support irrespective of the identification procedure (teacher-based assessment or normative test-based screening).
- The effective reasons for referral revealed gender differences. The reasons were rarely made explicit if referral had been made to agencies outside the school, or in some cases, outside the classroom.
- Boys were often given forms of support which were not designed to meet the needs identified (e.g. instruction in reading as a response to inappropriate behaviour).

Their first phase consisted of a broad survey of special provision at Key Stage 2 in one LEA. Thirty-five schools, out of 42 that had been approached, responded to this first survey and provided information regarding their Additional Educational Needs budget and some other data. Twenty-one of these schools provided the researchers with access to data on each pupil receiving additional support. The information gathered included the child's gender and a range of other characteristics in addition to the provision allocated by the school and the type of special educational needs registered by the school[3]. The overall gender ratio in the 21 schools was 1:1.84 (126 girls and 232 boys). They found wide variation between schools in the proportions of boys and girls seen as having special educational needs and the school's apparent conceptualisation of special educational need. Within schools, gender differences were seen to vary according to the category of special educational needs used by the teachers and SENCos to describe the pupils. The most marked difference related to EBD and the smallest in relation to mild learning difficulty (see Table 1.6)

[3] See, for example, Daniels et al (1999) for more detailed information about the range of data collected.

TABLE 1.6 – Relative numbers of girls and boys identified by teachers as having special needs (Daniels et al, 1999)

CATEGORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED	GIRLS	BOYS	RATIO G : B
Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	6	41	1:6.83
Moderate Learning Difficulties	26	51	1:1.96
Specific Learning Difficulties	39	54	1:1.38
Mild Learning Difficulties	30	38	1:1.26

Data extracted from Daniels et al (1999) Figure 4, page 193

The data further revealed that not only were more boys than girls identified as having special educational needs but that the boys were in general given more additional support. This involved the provision of more time and in the allocation of more prestigious and more expensive forms of support (e.g. additional teaching rather than help from a learning support assistant). Further, the researchers could find no overall relationship between measures of attainment and the gender ratios, apart from a slight positive association between a school's poor performance in science SATs and increased gender ratios (more boys) (Daniels et al, 1999). In an earlier publication (Daniels et al, 1995) the authors pointed out that both formal testing and referral by teachers suggested that about twice as many boys as girls had special needs and that, despite this, three to five times as many boys as girls were being given extra help in school. It would appear clear that as Daniels et al (1996) comment *"social processes serve to bias and distort the allocation of mainstream support for SEN"* (p. 17). I shall return to the GENSEN project in Chapters Three and Four in order to discuss some of the issues arising from it in relation to the ways in which research in special educational needs and gender can be brought together.

Gender imbalance within special educational needs is not unique to the English system. Data and research from Scotland indicate a very similar picture of the gender imbalance in special educational needs. Turner, Riddell and Brown (1995), in the course of a study entitled 'Gender Equality in Scottish Schools' for the

Equal Opportunities Commission, report that in special schools boys outnumber girls by 2:1. Boys outnumbered girls in all categories of difficulty. Similar patterns of difference were apparent for children with recorded special educational needs (the Scottish equivalent of having a Statement of special educational needs) in mainstream schools (see their figure 6.11 page 70). Further, in three out of four case studies in primary schools more boys than girls were seen as having learning difficulties and were in receipt of learning support. Teachers tended to expect a greater incidence of difficulty in boys.

It has been unusual for issues of special educational needs to be reported or discussed within the broader context of gender equality work. Turner et al note that gender issues are of relevance to special educational needs since "*a higher proportion of boys than girls required special educational needs provision and at an earlier age*" (p. 157). Funding in these areas from the education budget was seen to be sparse.

Reports of gender imbalance have emerged from other countries. For example, in Australia, the O'Doherty Report (New South Wales Government Advisory Committee on Education, Training and Tourism, 1994) indicated that boys were significantly over-represented in special language and reading classes. The ubiquity of the imbalance was referred to in a report on special educational needs statistics and indicators by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2000). Overall, a 60:40 ratio of males to females in special education systems of the OECD member countries was reported. The finding was considered to be robust but not easy to interpret. The gender imbalance was, therefore, seen as an area where further research is needed to clarify the situation.

1.3 Concluding comments

The research reported in this chapter provides compelling evidence that boys outnumber girls in all areas of special educational need. It is also apparent that

although this has been recognised for many years it has not been seen as problematic until recently. Further, there are indications that boys' comparatively slow development in the areas of language and literacy is often seen to be of significance as is the greater incidence or expectation of behavioural problems in boys. It would also seem that teachers' judgements about children's learning difficulties may be influenced by gender stereotypical expectations. In this respect the research to this point provides some suggestion that:

- Teachers have more to say about boys than girls with special educational needs.
- Teachers appear to expect boys with learning difficulties to have or develop behavioural problems.
- Teachers see boys with difficulties as a higher priority than girls for intervention / alternative placement on account of this expectation.
- Girls may need to have more severe learning problems than boys to be identified as causing concern.
- Even when boys and girls are seen to have similar learning difficulties, the boys tend to be given more support than the girls. The support given to boys is often of higher status but does not necessarily match their needs.

The fact of a numerical imbalance does not necessarily result in a disadvantage. The notion of advantage or disadvantage to over or under-inclusion within special educational needs has rarely been discussed in relation to gender. To be identified as having special educational needs often results in the allocation of additional resource (a possible advantage) but may also influence teachers' and others' expectations about a child's learning ability (a possible disadvantage). Turner et al (1995) conclude that:

> *One could argue, therefore, that the greater representation of boys among those recorded as having special educational needs is disadvantageous. Alternatively, the greater likelihood of boys having a Record of Needs could be seen as advantageous because it leads to additional resources and support being devoted to them.* (p. 71)

As things stand, more boys than girls are in receipt of the advantage or disadvantage associated with being identified as having special educational needs. They are therefore gaining a disproportionate share of the available resources. What of the girls? Since fewer girls are seen to have learning difficulties they receive fewer additional resources and less support. Are there girls who have learning difficulties that are not being recognised either because they do not conform to the usual male pattern or because they do not cause sufficient difficulty for the teacher? Clearly, there is much to disentangle in trying to understand the interaction of gender and special educational needs.

It is also necessary to consider recent changes in the focus of interest in gender within the education system. During the second half of the 1980s and into the early 1990s, when my thinking about this topic was developing, it was in the context of an interest in promoting gender equality in schools. In these early stages topics of concern were still very much on the ways that schooling was a less favourable experience for girls than it was for boys. There was still felt to be a need to promote gender equality in terms of discouraging gender-stereotypical curriculum and career choices and in ensuring that girls were seen to be equal participants in school life. Boys dominated: in the playground and in the classroom. Girls were underachieving particularly in mathematics and science and work was being done in schools to promote the achievement of girls. As my research has progressed the focus of concerns about gender has changed with concern turning to the apparent underachievement of boys. The national media have promoted this as a crisis for this generation and even in areas of the country where work to reduce the inequality experienced by girls developed slowly the concern about boys seems to have increased at a prodigious rate and has now overtaken the more long-standing gender concerns. Despite the rising interest in the apparent under-achievement of boys this has not readily been linked with the issue of special educational needs in which boys have long predominated.

When I began my work in this area, concern about the relatively high proportion of boys seen as having learning difficulties or special educational needs appeared out of step with the more general concern about girls' underachievement in that it was a clear example of a way in which at least some boys were achieving at a very low level. Now, at least superficially, the high proportion of boys having learning difficulties would seem to be consistent with a more general concern about the under-achievement of boys. Naturally the matter is much more complex as the relatively high number of boys seen as having learning difficulties has been a consistent feature through the changes in the overall achievement of girls and boys over recent decades.

I shall continue my discussion of the decision making by teachers when identifying children as having special educational needs in Chapter Three. Before that, in the next chapter, I shall be reviewing literature relating to gender, schooling and achievement with particular reference to teachers' attitudes, beliefs and behaviour towards girls and boys as learners since this is the context in which gender difference in the identification of learning difficulties must be considered.

Chapter Two

Gender, Schooling and Achievement

For most of the recent history of education, those with an interest in ways in which the process may be gendered have been concerned with closing the various gender gaps that made schooling a less favourable experience for girls than it was for boys. Since the mid-1990s an apparently new discourse of "boys' underachievement" has emerged. The gender gap now appears to 'favour' girls. The relative proportions of girls and boys achieving good GCSE grades has received considerable attention as has boys' low levels of literacy. In earlier drafts of this chapter, the major emphasis had been on work, largely from feminist perspectives, which had examined the dynamics of the classroom since this appeared to be of particular relevance to research into teacher identification of concerns about individual pupils' progress or learning. Work on gender and attainment per se had been considered towards the end of the chapter as an interesting, although not necessarily central, aspect of this study. The prodigious growth in interest and publication on 'failing boys' over the last few years has pushed boys' achievement to the forefront of the view of gender issues in education. It now seems necessary to deal with this phenomenon at the beginning of the chapter, not least because of the possible link between low levels of achievement and special educational needs. My intention is not so much to

examine the evidence demonstrating boys' new inferiority (or as it is less frequently described, girls' new supremacy) but to try to draw out the discourse regarding gender and attainment that is emerging and to consider how this may influence the ways that teachers conceptualise boys and girls as learners.

The focus of research on gender and attainment may have shifted but there is less to suggest that the gender dynamics in schools have changed as much. I therefore intend, in the second part of the chapter, to give an overview of evidence indicating differential classroom experience of girls and boys, with particular reference to teacher/pupil interaction and teachers' attitudes, beliefs and behaviour towards girls and boys as learners. This will be followed by a consideration of teachers' beliefs about the difficulties experienced by girls and boys in their learning and how this relates to special educational needs. In the final section of the chapter, before the concluding comments, I shall discuss ways in which the contemporary discourses of gender and achievement may influence teachers' views of girls and boys as learners.

2.1 Recent work on gender and attainment

Over the last few years the publication of each set of SAT or public examination results has been followed by press reports and debate about the underachievement of boys. Since 1998 LEAs have been required to include proposals to tackle boys' underachievement in their Education Development Plans. In September 2000 the DfEE launched an interactive Gender and Achievement web site *"which will include advice on how best to raise the performance of underachieving boys..."* (Blunkett, 2000).

The high level of concern about boys' apparently declining attainments has given rise to a number of research reviews of gender and attainment, several of which are briefly discussed below in order to give a flavour of the work.

Powney (1996) produced a review of Gender and Attainment for the Scottish Office Industry and Education Department which was published by The Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE). The review covers statistics and studies providing information about the attainments of boys and girls by the time they leave school. Powney notes that with regard to public examinations at 16 years of age:

- The entry rate for girls is slightly higher than that for boys.
- There are distinct gender differences in subjects taken (eg about 3:1, boys to girls in physics).
- Girls do particularly well in language and communication, also in creative subjects.
- Regardless of the overall grade there are gender differences within elements of the subjects.

Arnot, Gray, James, Rudduck and Duveen (1998) were commissioned to produce a review of research on gender and educational performance for OFSTED in order to extend the enquiry and debate from the earlier report *The Gender Divide* (OFSTED / EOC, 1996). In the first section of their report on the size and nature of the gender gap, using evidence from the 1995 SATs and public examinations, Arnot et al point out that:

- Girls get off to a better start in reading than boys; the lead that they have established by Key Stage 1 is maintained at Key Stages 2 and 3.
- Boys' and girls' recent performance was at very similar levels in the Key Stage tests in mathematics.
- After making a comparable start in Science boys begin to pull ahead of girls by Key Stage 2.
- Blanket statements about girls performing better than boys or vice versa are difficult to justify – reference always needs to be made to a specific aspect of the curriculum.
- Commonalities are as important as differences - boys and girls are to be found in roughly equal proportions at *all* levels of performance.

- By 1995 girls were outperforming boys at GCSE in terms of the proportions obtaining five or more higher grade passes. Girls outperformed boys by some considerable distance in English. In science boys maintained a small advantage whereas in mathematics performance was basically similar.
- The size and nature of the gender gap in GCSE entries differs from subject to subject. Some subjects (e.g. physics, chemistry, computer studies etc) remain male dominated whilst others (e.g. home economics, social studies, modern foreign languages, biology etc) remain female dominated.

The data from the 2000 SATs, published on the DfES's Gender and Achievement web site[1] show a similar pattern to the proportions quoted by Arnot et al. At Key Stage 1 around 10% more girls than boys achieved level 2 or better in reading, writing and spelling. Girls were also slightly ahead in mathematics. The gender gap in favour of girls in English appears to be larger for the higher attaining pupils whereas more boys than girls achieved level 3 in mathematics. At Key Stage 2 around 10% more girls than boys achieved level 4 in English with the gap being larger for writing than reading. Similar numbers of boys and girls achieved level 4 in mathematics but slightly more boys than girls achieved level 4 in science. Again differences were greater at the higher levels of achievement. Considerably more girls than boys achieved level 5 in English subjects but more boys than girls reached level 5 in mathematics.

It would seem that although patterns of attainment are changing, in many respects the well established, stereotypical, patterns of difference in subject preference are still evident. What these results show, although this is not discussed in the same way, is that more boys than girls are to be found at the lower levels of achievement, particularly in reading, writing and spelling.

In addition to reviews and research which have focused on gender and educational achievement (however narrowly defined), there have been many other studies

[1] www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/genderandachievement

which have been undertaken with the premise that performance data suggest that boys have been underachieving. These have, therefore, attempted to identify barriers to boys' learning and to identify strategies to promote boys' learning. In 1997 EMIE (Education Management Information Exchange) published a report entitled Raising Levels of Achievement in Boys (Arnold, 1997) which related raising boys' achievement to school improvement issues. The report was based on information from 32 LEAs and discussed perceptions of the reasons for boys' underachievement and LEA initiatives to address this issue. Two years later the NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) published a review of the relevant literature (MacDonald, Saunders and Benefield;1999) which arose from a commission from Islington Council's Education Department. In Northern Ireland the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA,1999), again under the heading of school improvement, issued a document aiming to give guidance to teachers on improving boys' attainment.

Many other publications over recent years have aimed to promote strategies to raise boys' achievement, for example: *Raising Boys' Achievement* (Kirklees LEA, 1996); *Can Boys Do Better?* (Bray et al, 1997); *Raising Boys' Achievement* (Pickering, 1997); *Can Do Better* (QCA, 1998); *Raising Boys Achievement in Schools* (Bleach, 1998). Titles have often included phrases such as 'can do better' or, as with most of the examples above, have simply focused on raising achievement. Interestingly, one of the first books aiming to prompt teachers to reflect on their practice to be published in 2000 acknowledged in its title that girls still needed to be considered (although perhaps as an afterthought); the title: *Getting it Right for Boys ...and Girls* (Noble and Bradford, 2000).

Despite the impression given by the media, this is not a new issue. Douglas (1964) considered that:

> *"There is much evidence from past studies that girls are more successful than boys in the primary schools. In reading, writing, English and spelling, the average eleven-year-old girl beats the average eleven-year-old boy."* (p. 70)

The difference at that time was in what was seen to happen subsequently. Douglas suggested that although girls tended to retain their superiority in basic subjects they tended to fall behind in many other areas, particularly mathematics and science. Similarly the 'School Matters' research in the mid-1980s (Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis and Ecob; 1988) confirmed girls' superior achievements in reading in the primary years. CCEA (1999), in Appendix 1 of their report cited above, point out that in the context of the 1970s and early 1980s, when the perceived problem was the underachievement of girls, research showed that primary school girls were outperforming boys, especially in reading. The view taken at the time was that girls had only an initial advantage related to their reaching physical maturity at an earlier age but that boys overtook girls in the teenage years, hence the differences in public examinations. During the 1990s, when evidence suggests that the academic performance of boys was lagging behind that of girls, the general trend for both sexes had been upwards. Girls had, though, been improving at a faster rate than boys.

Although there continues to be much debate about the significance and validity of some of the data and its interpretation, it is undeniable that gender differences in achievement exist and that at present girls appear to have improved at a greater rate than boys in many areas. This does not necessarily mean that boys are underachieving, but as Raphael Reed (1998) points out:

> *"deconstructing the subject of the underachieving boy is not to engage in an argument about whether male underachievement exists: its 'reality' is a measure of its productivity in shaping educational policies and practices"*. (p. 60)

For whatever reason, it is a 'real' issue at the present time and will need to be acknowledged in any examination of the significance of gender in the identification of special educational needs.

It is interesting to note that in attempting to put their findings about achievement into context by looking at school influences, most of these reviews refer to the

work on gender and schooling from the 1980 which was carried out in a different context; that being a focus on girls. Two main areas of debate draw from more contemporary influences: changes in the curriculum and the changing social agendas in the world of work beyond school (e.g male unemployment). Arnot, David and Weiner (1999) claim that the place of schooling in boys' lives has been transformed over the last two decades. It has been changed by the loss of traditional transitions from school to work and the replacement of traditional skills. Adaptation educationally, personally and occupationally has proved more difficult for boys than for girls.

Whatever the reasons for the changing patterns of boys' and girls' achievement, the relevance of this debate to my research is the influence it may have on the ways in which teachers view or conceptualise girls and boys as learners. The next section will therefore provide an overview of work that has looked at the differential experience of schooling for girls and boys with particular reference to the role of the teacher in this process.

2.2 The differential classroom experience of girls and boys

The main area to be considered in this section is work that has examined teachers' perceptions regarding gender differences in ability, aptitude or attainment, also their perceptions and expectations regarding different patterns of behaviour in boys and girls as it is these issues which are likely to have the greatest relevance to my research. The work in this section is drawn largely from studies which have explicitly examined and reported on gender differences; as a consequence much of it has been undertaken from a feminist standpoint within the body of work that developed from the mid 1970s. I have summarised some of the pertinent literature in this area under two sub-headings:

(a) Teacher - pupil interaction

(b) Teachers' beliefs and expectations regarding girls and boys as learners

2.2(a) Teacher - pupil interaction

A great deal of work has examined the processes in classrooms and schools, noting differences in experience for girls and boys. This work has tended to suggest that boys receive more teacher time than girls do and that the content of the interaction differs.

A relatively recent review of research in the area of gender and classroom interaction has been provided by the SCRE (Howe, 1997). Howe points out (p.5) that although there is considerable evidence that gender differences in classroom interaction do exist, virtually all of the classroom interaction research is limited to descriptions of what takes place. Very few studies have related interaction to measures of academic performance or social attitude.

With regard to whole-class interaction Howe indicates that the following points emerge from the research:

- On average, boys contribute more to whole-class interaction than girls, regardless of whether the number of utterances or the quality of their content is looked at.
- The predominance of boys' contributions stems from the extreme talkativeness of a subgroup.
- Teachers select boys to contribute more often than girls, in part at least, because boys attract their attention more in whole-class contexts.
- Boys receive more feedback on their contributions, both more positive and more negative, although a greater percentage of their feedback is negative when compared with girls'.
- Teacher characteristics, including sex, have no significant bearing on these findings.
- The results are unlikely to bear directly on academic performance, although they may have relevance to the learning strategies pupils adopt.

- The putatively more 'public' strategy of boys and the putatively more 'private' strategy of girls may have a consequence for gender divisions, but no research of relevance is currently available.

In attempting to draw conclusions, Howe suggests that:

> *"...boys typically are more vocal than girls during classroom interaction. The substantive contributions, relating to the subject being taught, come from them, and it is these contributions which become the focus of feedback. If girls have roles, these are usually less obvious, involving eliciting contributions from others and supporting contributions when they occur. During whole-class sessions teachers fulfil the elicitation and feedback function, and so, in that context girls are effectively silenced. These differences can partially be interpreted in terms of male dominance and female submissiveness, or male activity and female passivity."* (p. 44)

Broadly similar conclusions were drawn by two major, but quite different, reviews in the 1980s; Brophy (1985) who provided a comprehensive review of studies summarising their findings and Kelly (1988) who carried out a meta-analysis of studies in which quantitative comparisons of teacher-pupil interactions were reported. I shall not report the findings of these two reviews in detail but will mention a number of observations of particular relevance.

With regard to studies focusing on the elementary school years, Brophy concluded that:

> *"For the most part, the studies conducted at the elementary school level in the last decade continue to suggest that male versus female student differences are due almost entirely to gender role related differences in the behaviour of the students themselves and not to any general tendency of teachers of either sex to treat boys and girls differently.* (p.132)

This was not to say that the studies did not reveal differential patterns of teacher-pupil interaction but that in Brophy's view most of the reported teacher behaviour in these interactions was *"situationally determined and reactive rather than proactivly planned and systematic"* (p. 137).

Brophy does, though, highlight areas of exception to this general rule where the subject matter of the lesson is taken into account. Here, he says the evidence suggests that girls may be getting more or better instruction in reading and boys may be getting more or better instruction in mathematics. He adds that some studies which examined more subtle qualitative aspects of teacher behaviour suggest that teachers may be socialising boys more towards self-reliance and independent achievement while socialising girls more towards conformity and responsibility.

Kelly (1988) included over 80 studies which provided quantifiable data on teacher-pupil interactions in her meta-analysis. She examined gender ratios in a number of areas including: praise, criticism and instruction in addition to considering the figure for all interaction. The meta-analysis revealed that in these studies:

- Teachers consistently interacted with boys more than with girls – on average teachers spent 44% of their time with girls and 56% of their time with boys. Girls under six years received only 41% of their teachers' attention.
- Girls and boys were equally likely to be praised for giving correct answers, criticised for incorrect answers, and given no feedback for their responses.
- The sexes were in general similar in proportion for the praise received for academic work.
- Boys received more academic and more behavioural criticism.
- Girls got less criticism but also less instruction.
- A higher proportion of the criticism directed at boys than that at girls was for their behaviour – 84% of boys' criticism was for behaviour compared with 74% of girls' criticism.
- Girls were particularly under-involved in lessons on science and social studies.
- In mathematics girls were markedly under-represented in instructional contacts.

Kelly concludes that:

> *"Boys get more of all kinds of classroom interaction. The discrepancy is most marked for behavioural criticism, but this does not explain the overall imbalance. Boys also get more instructional contacts, more high-level questions, more academic criticism and slightly more praise than girls. Girls are just as likely as boys to volunteer to answer questions in class, but boys are much more likely to call out the answers. The discrepancies are just as large in teacher-initiated interactions as in pupil-initiated interactions, which suggests that teachers are either unaware of the way in which males dominate in class, or are unsuccessful in controlling this domination."* (pp. 20-21)

Another dimension is added by Sadker & Sadker (1994) who suggest that teachers give more classroom attention and more esteem building encouragement to boys. They cite research in the USA which indicates that boys in elementary and middle schools called out answers eight times more often than girls. When boys called out, teachers listened. But when girls called out, they were told to "raise your hand if you want to speak". Even when boys do not volunteer, teachers are more often likely to encourage them to give an answer or an opinion than they are to encourage girls.

Despite the overwhelming evidence regarding the disparity in attention given to girls and boys, many teachers are unaware of this in their own practice. In a study of 'Gender and School Education', carried out by the Australian Council for Educational Research, which involved surveying teachers and pupils in 213 primary and 195 secondary schools across Australia (Collins et al. 1996), 80% of teachers in co-educational schools believed that they gave time equally to girls and to boys. This is view was reinforced by Younger et al (1999) who comment that:

> *"The perception of some teachers that there is little differential treatment of girls and boys in the classroom, is simply not borne out by the observational evidence of this study..."* (p. 339).

2.2(b) Teachers' beliefs and expectations regarding girls and boys as learners

Douglas (1964), in his 'Study of Ability and Attainment in the Primary School' carried out under the auspices of the Population Investigation Committee, reported that:

> *"teachers tend to see the boys as less hardworking, less able to concentrate and less willing to submit to discipline than the girls."* (p. 73)

In a study, much quoted in the feminist work, Clarricoates (1980) spent 18 months observing in four primary schools concentrating on the constructs of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' within the schools. She reports that in all of the schools 'femininity' and 'masculinity' were seen as *"immutable characteristics of normal proper behaviour"* (p. 26). In all schools teachers readily enumerated many differences between girls and boys. Girls were typically: obedient, tidy, neat, conscientious, orderly, fussy, catty, bitchy, gossiping. Boys were typically: livelier, adventurous, aggressive, boisterous, self-confident, independent, independent, energetic, couldn't-care-less, loyal. Despite differences in expectations between schools both with regard to academic aspirations and standards of behaviour some features were evident in all schools. Of particular relevance here were:

- a tendency to categorise behaviour differently according to whether it was exhibited by a girl or a boy. This also included different responses or levels of response to e.g. displays of aggression or swearing;
- an overall higher level of academic aspiration / expectation for boys compared to girls. This was associated with an occasionally expressed belief that although girls might achieve well it was the boys who had the real ability;
- a disparity between the espoused beliefs in equality and teacher behaviour.

This research is quite dated now. Work has been done in schools to reduce the gender stereotypes and divisions with regard to subject choice and in the curriculum. There may also have been some shift in the strength of the strict gender divisions of behaviour described thus changing the ecological balance

which influence the construction of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'. Nevertheless, Clarricoates' work remains important not least because it is so frequently quoted but also because it highlights the importance of the teacher's role in the process.

Porter (1992) asked student primary teachers in New South Wales to identify two children in the class they were currently practice teaching, one whom they were always speaking to negatively and one who continually received positive teacher attention. The first group was overwhelmingly boys and the second overwhelmingly girls. This was repeated with experienced pre-school teachers with similar results. He cites Rodd (1986) who found that with pre-school student teachers the most frequently used words to describe pre-school boys were: aggressive, adventurous, loud, masculine, disorderly, courageous, handsome, tough, forceful and strong. The ten words most typically associated with girls were: gentle, feminine, affectionate, appreciative, fussy, sensitive, mild, meek, complaining, emotional. This work is flawed in that the respondents were simply asked to categorise words from a list as characteristically male or female, the list having been compiled of "gender-stereotypic" terms. It does though provide an interesting comparison with Clarricoates' lists.

Porter also cites Clark (1989) who interviewed teachers in Australian primary schools. It was evident that girls and boys were seen as different, often with girls being judged in relation to boys' perceived characteristics. There was evidence of boys being in some way superior and certainly more interesting and more challenging. Another element was that although the majority of 'naughty' students were boys they were seen as normal. On the other hand some behaviour (e.g. aggression) that was seen as normal in boys was seen as intolerable in girls.

Lewis and Kellaghan (1993) carried out a survey in the Republic of Ireland in which responses were received from 608 out of 800 schools approached. They found that teachers reported observing gender differences in a number of behavioural characteristics. Whilst they perceived the behaviour of all their pupils

positively, boys tended to be perceived more negatively than girls were. In mixed schools, at all grade levels, attentiveness, helpfulness, 'telling-tales', and conscientiousness were more frequently associated with girls. On the other hand boys were more often perceived as insolent and heedless, engaging in fighting, 'object-throwing', daydreaming and interfering with other pupils' learning. It was also reported that, in general, a range of disciplinary measures was used more frequently with boys than with girls. Overall it was suggested that boys present more problems to teachers in schools than girls do. This being evident in a range of areas both related to management of behaviour and delivery of the curriculum.

Further insight can be gained from studies which have considered pupils' perceptions of teachers' attitudes. In Cullingford's (1993) study of children's views of gender issues in school 53 Year 7 pupils were interviewed regarding their experiences of school including their recollections of primary school. It was found that children were aware of, and in some cases resented, the differential treatment of boys and girls. This study suggested that boys often see themselves as being treated unfairly and being reprimanded more than girls as if teachers let girls get away with more. Both boys and girls said that teachers expect boys to be noisier. Neither boys nor girls thought that the gender of the teacher made a difference with regard to how they behaved towards girls and boys or how the pupils were treated. This corresponds to the research on teacher-pupil interaction cited above which suggests that it is pupil gender that is significant. Similarly, Pickering (1997) shows that girls perceived boys to be reprimanded more by the teacher, and to a degree of severity not thought consonant with their behaviour. Pickering also found that many girls believed that boys' learning was more affected by their relationship with their teachers and the quality of the those teachers than their own learning was.

Historically there is evidence that teachers have held different expectations about the abilities of boys and girls in key areas of the curriculum. I shall only discuss work which has looked at literacy and numeracy/mathematics as they are the areas

most likely to be seen as significant by teachers in relation to judgements and decision making about a pupil's learning difficulties. There is other work which has shown differences in teachers' judgements about the quality of work, the level of interest and potential of pupils in science depending on whether the work was attributed to a boy or a girl (e.g. Spear, 1987).

Arnold (1977) found that when a group of 250 primary teachers were asked to estimate the reading ages of their pupils an overestimation for girls and an underestimation for boys was evident when compared with their scores on a standardised reading test. More recently, OFSTED (1993) and Wiltshire Education Support and Training (1996) note that teachers' expectations of boys were lower than those for girls in English. There is some suggestion that teachers under-predict boys' and over-predict girls' performance at GCSE in comparison with students' own estimates and their ultimate results (Younger and Warrington, 1996).

Walden and Walkerdine (1982, 1985) examined the interaction between teachers' interpretation of girls' and boys' classroom behaviour and the teachers' understanding of the qualities needed to be a good mathematician. Walden and Walkerdine concluded that girls tend to be allocated to easier routes in maths than their ability warrants because they are seen as hardworking rather than bright and because they may be felt to be anxious about failure.

Fennema et al (1990) discuss teachers' attributions and beliefs about girls, boys, and mathematics. Teachers of first grade pupils in the USA were asked to identify their most successful mathematics student and were then asked to pick from a list the major reason why this student succeeded in learning mathematics. The same procedure was followed in asking the teacher for the major reason the student had difficulty learning a mathematical idea. The teacher then went through their next most successful. This continued until the teacher had responded about two girls and two boys. In a similar way the teachers were asked

to identify students (two girls and two boys) who had the most trouble in mathematics.

In the attribution interviews 8% of the teachers chose no boys for the free choice selection of most successful mathematics student while 45% chose no girls. When choosing the least successful, 82% chose at least one boy and 61% chose at least one girl. Thus boys tended to be chosen more often as both most and least successful. Teachers' nominations of most and least successful were matched against test scores. With the most successful students teachers were more accurate in selecting girls than boys which like Arnold's finding in relation to reading suggests that the teachers were more likely to overestimate boys' achievement.

With regard to attribution, the success of the most successful students was attributed to various causes in the proportions shown in table 2.1.

Table 2.1 – Teachers' attributions of success of their most successful students (Fennema et al, 1990)

	GIRLS	BOYS
Ability	33%	58%
Effort	37%	12%
Intrinsic motivation	18%	25%
Help	10%	4%

In the case of the failure of the least successful, which is the area that relates most closely to special educational needs, the attributions were as shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 – Teachers' attributions of failure of their least successful students (Fennema et al, 1990)

	GIRLS	BOYS
Ability	29%	22%
Effort	28%	22%
Task	28%	20%

Overall, therefore, boys' successes were attributed more to ability than were girls' successes. It was also interesting that teachers appeared to suggest that teacher help or lack of help was more important to their least successful boys' successes and failures than it was to the girls' successes or failures. Fennema and colleagues draw on these findings to suggest that teachers' beliefs could be seen as an influence on the development of gender differences in mathematics.

Specific reference to teachers' perceptions their pupils' learning difficulties as such has been uncommon in the work considering gender difference; discussion has tended to focus on teachers' views of success or failure in particular aspects of learning as discussed above.

In a review of teachers' differential expectations for girls and boys, La France (1991) noted that teachers rated boys' ability to concentrate, their determination when facing difficulties, their productivity in class, their self-esteem and social skills all less highly than those of girls. This operated at a conscious and sub-conscious level. It could take the form of teachers being less patient with boys, ignoring their attempts to take part in activities or blaming them disproportionately for misdemeanours. La France concluded that this was bad for boys because they were expected to be self-reliant and less in need of support and for girls because they were discouraged from taking risks and being active learners. With regard to expectancy she notes that the 'immaturity' of young male students is a recurrent concern for primary school teachers. She goes on to observe that 'immaturity' is significant since embedded in the use of this term is the assumption of eventual maturity. Males are expected to fully develop their abilities and eventually to achieve their maximum potential. Females on the other hand, even in primary schools, may be assumed to have reached theirs.

In Lewis and Kellaghan's (1993) study which was discussed earlier, one of the areas explored was teachers' perceptions of subjects in which pupils needed additional help. Overall the subjects in which pupils were most frequently

perceived as requiring additional help were mathematics and Irish. In mixed schools teachers of all grade levels identified differences between boys and girls in the frequency with which they were perceived as requiring help in most subjects. Boys were perceived as needing assistance more frequently than girls in Irish, reading/English, music, arts and craft activities; and in writing at senior-infant level. Girls were perceived as needing assistance more frequently than boys in mathematics and P.E.

Booth (1995) in attempting to "map the terrain" of inclusion and exclusion in a particular school refers to the categorisations by attainment and 'presumed ability' which reveal other categorisations particularly by gender. He examined the classification of pupils, including 'covert category systems' and found that, despite the roughly equal numbers of girls and boys in the school, there were noticeable gender imbalances in the sets. Girls outnumbered boys in top sets by as much as 4:1 and boys outnumbered girls in the lowest sets. He comments that:

> *"teachers and students had a range of explanations for the gender disparity in the students. Some teachers felt it must be a reflection of 'ability' because it was this on which sets were based. Most of the students and some of the teachers thought that the inequality had more to do with behaviour. Other teachers thought that, in an area where, in the past, men had been virtually guaranteed a manual job, there had been little incentive for boys to gain qualifications through education and that this had persisted in the culture."* (p. 107)

Booth suggests that:

> *"whatever the local explanation for the gender imbalance in sets at this school an association of 'learning difficulty' with boys is a common feature of education systems."* (p. 107)

He further suggests that there are ways in which differences in cultural expectations and categorisation of boys and girls may *construct* difficulties in learning. In this section Booth finally contends that:

> *"Attainment and 'ability' appear to provide a screen on which a variety of categorisations can be projected and then hidden from critical gaze."* (p. 108)

By adjusting the metaphor, I would suggest that, rather, the notions of ability and attainment are used as screens behind which the other categorisations are hidden.

The issue of 'special educational needs' received some attention in two relatively recent reviews of research in the area of gender and education. In the EOC review of the impact of recent educational reforms on gender equality in Scottish schools (Turner, Riddell & Brown; 1995) special educational needs was identified as:

> *"an area where gender issues were of relevance"* because *"a higher proportion of boys than girls required special educational needs provision and at an earlier age."* (p. 157)

Arnot et al's (1998) review of research on gender and educational performance for OFSTED included a section entitled 'Pupil Behaviour and Special Needs' which begins by stating that:

> *"New links are being made between the assessment of pupil needs and male and female patterns of performance, and the role that gender values of the school and teachers might play in creating gender differences in outcomes"* (p. 62)

Much of the rest of that section discusses differential rates of exclusion between various gender and ethnic groups[2]. As regards special educational needs in a broader sense Hill's work (cited here in Chapter One) is mentioned as are the early reports from the GENSEN project. The final paragraph in the section includes the suggestion that:

> *"More research on special needs is needed to see how far teachers' assumptions about black and white masculinity and femininity account for these gender differences."* (p. 65)

I would suggest that there is a need to broaden the focus to consider ways in which teachers' gender values may influence their judgements about girls and boys who appear to be experiencing learning difficulties, not just those whose difficulties result in extreme behavioural problems.

[2] Concern about these differential rates of exclusion has prompted a number of research studies including Wright et al (2000) in which issues around race, class and gender in exclusion are discussed.

2.3 So what is different now? – How the contemporary discourses of gender and achievement may influence teachers' views of girls and boys as learners

The work discussed in the previous section was mainly produced during the period when girls were seen to be disadvantaged in a variety of ways in the education system. In this penultimate section of the chapter the influence of the recent upsurgence of debate about boys' underachievement and the ways in which teachers may conceptualise boys and girls as learners will be considered.

It is interesting to note that in the many recent publications about gender and attainment the influence of the social context of the school is given very little attention. School related issues are focused more on the curriculum and modes of assessment. Some examples of the minimal attention to school factors are:

- Powney (1996) has a section covering almost six pages on 'school' within a chapter on 'Environmental theories'. She refers to some evidence that *"teachers have had different expectations of male and female students"* (p. 55). The discussion soon moves on to issues around curriculum choices by pupils but acknowledges some ways in which teachers' expectations may have an influence e.g. the suggestion that teachers tended to give girls easier routes in mathematics because they were seen as hardworking rather than bright and because they may be felt to be anxious about failure.
- Sukhnandan (1999) in a page on 'Relations in schools' talks almost exclusively about boys' attitude to school and learning.
- CCEA (1999) In an appendix to the report 'School Improvement Focus on Boys' there is discussion of potential contributing factors. Whilst there is discussion of: pupils' attitudes, pupils' perceptions and ambitions, genetic influences, learning style and a brief section on child-rearing which refers to differential toys and play activities prior to entering school, no mention is made of the possibility of teachers' differential management or expectations of boys and girls.

In addition it is worthy of note that very little work has been published recently concerning teachers' stereotypical views of boys and girls. This may relate to the view expressed by Arnot et al (1998) who point out that there have been few recent surveys of teachers' attitudes to gender or equal opportunities issues as it is likely that respondents may be too familiar with the 'right answers'. They point out that recent investigations in the UK and Australia indicate that primary teachers who interpret child-centred approaches to include an expectation of 'normal stages of development' may endorse stronger gender differences. It is suggested that the teachers' training may have encouraged them to expect 'boys to be boys' and 'girls to be girls' and thus accept that, for example boys will express themselves more aggressively and boisterously. Other teachers may adopt a gender-blind stance as indicated in some of the case studies in the EOC's review of gender equity in Scottish schools (Turner et al, 1995):

> *"I mean we just totally disregard gender and just let them get on with their education."* – male teacher (p. 139)

It is also apparent that in recent years there has been a shift from viewing perceptions of gender difference as negative to a more active consideration of gender differences in learning style as an influence on differential achievement, in particular, the plethora of recent publications aimed at raising boys' achievement. It has become acceptable to discuss the differences in approaches to learning and learning style of boys and girls. The role of the teacher in devising and implementing strategies to promote achievement is clear. In general it is seen to be positive that gender differences in approach to learning are taken into account but this does not mean that teachers and others have stopped holding stereotypical views of the learning abilities of boys and girls. Neither does it mean that acknowledgement of differences does not result in practice that limits, rather than makes best use of this knowledge to the advantage of, the individual. It may even be that the acknowledgement of gender differences in approach to learning and learning style may give teachers and others permission to hold on to stereotypical views of boys and girls as learners.

One might argue that, in the more recent work, the learning characteristics of boys, since they are the main focus, are give appropriate precedence. It would seem, though, that in shifting the gender focus from girls to boys, there has also been a shift to a more within-child, or deficit, model of explaining the problem. This is something that the girl-focused gender work of the 1980s tried hard to dispel. The significance of the school had been an important feature in much of the feminist work. For example, Delamont (1990) argued that:

> *"...schools develop and reinforce sex segregations, stereotypes, and even discriminations which exaggerate the negative aspects of sex roles in the outside world, when they could be trying to alleviate them."* (p. 2)

In her review of 'Gender and Classroom Interaction', Howe (1997) responds specifically to this by suggesting that: *"Might it not be that schools merely perpetuate tendencies which already exist?"* (p. 46), and further:

> *"Probably, then, the children are already armed with gender-differentiated patterns of social interaction when they come to school. However, this does not mean that everything is settled by the age of five. In the first place, schools are clearly providing opportunities for the patterns to be practiced and consolidated. In addition, there is evidence that some gender differences emerge for the first time during schooling."* (p. 46-47)

Arnot, Gray, James Rudduck and Duveen (1998) in their review of research on 'Gender and Educational Performance' for OFSTED acknowledge the influence of teaching and the classroom process and make reference to teachers' 'gender values' as an important influence in shaping pupils' perceptions of and reactions to school. They point out though that there is little research that directly links classroom interactions with academic outcomes. In the introductory section of their report, they indicate that:

> *"There is concern ...that the supposed superior achievement of girls may be used as an argument that there is no longer a need to focus on their education and that effort, therefore, needs to be put exclusively into work with boys. The issues surrounding boys' achievement are real and should not be underestimated but the question of gender and performance is more complex, affecting different sub-groups of boys and girls in different ways and often reflecting the influence of class and ethnicity."* (p. 1)

Cohen (1998) provides a useful historical perspective on the perceived underachievement of boys. She points out that there is evidence to suggest that boys have been underachieving for centuries. Of particular significance is her contention that the overall underachievement of boys has never been properly addressed because although it has been of concern the underachievement has never been treated as a problem of boys:

> *"The main reason for this is the way the discourse on achievement has been organised and deployed. Boys' achievement has been attributed to something within – the nature of their intellect – but their failure has been attributed to something external – a pedagogy, methods, texts, teachers. The full significance of this becomes clear when the subject of the discourse is girls, for in their case it is their failure that is attributed to something within – usually the nature of their intellect – and their success to something external: methods, teachers or particularly conditions."*
>
> (p. 20)

A variety of other views have emerged in the literature. Epstein et al (1998) in their introductory chapter to an edited volume suggest that three of the dominant discourses in the public debates about boys and achievement are: the 'poor boys' discourse; the 'failing schools' discourse, and the 'boys will be boys' discourse. In brief the key elements of these discourses are:

- The 'poor boys' discourse arises from the view that men, and boys, have lost control of their lives because of attacks from assertive women. Boys are seen to be disadvantaged by the 'feminisation' of schools and the curriculum.
- The 'failing schools – failing boys' discourse sees boys as the main victims of a failing system and that intervention to increase the effectiveness of schools will raise standards, particularly those of boys.
- The 'boys will be boys' discourse is essentially a biologically based discourse which relates boys' early disadvantage to later maturation and, like the 'poor boys' discourse sees a mismatch between boys' preferred modes of operating and contemporary schooling.

Another strand of thinking that appears to emerge is what Kenway et al (1998) describe as a 'zero / sum mentality' which leads many to argue that if girls are succeeding then boys must be failing. This would certainly seem to be evident in much of the popular writing on the current issues. Little reference is made to overall improvement and girls' improvement is largely reported as in introduction to the concerns about boys' relative failure. This stance is often followed by the sentiment that surely enough has been done for girls; it is the poor boys turn now. This may be taken as backlash or a naïve notion of justice in which teachers and others believe that progress is achieved by promoting the opportunities for one group then letting another have its turn. An implication of the 'poor boys' standpoint is that not only have girls had their share but that all the girl-focused work has actually harmed boys in some way. This does not prevent protagonists urging the adoption of teaching and learning approaches that favour boys whilst failing to recognise that this may be to the possible detriment of girls' learning.

Mahony (1998) suggests that when the focus was on the 'underachievement' of girls, it took a good deal of persuasion before policy makers would look beyond the innate capacities of girls themselves for explanations of their 'failure' in mathematics and science. By way of contrast the high level of interest in boys' 'underachievement' has shifted the conceptualisation from a problem of girls to a problem for boys. This is a key point.

There is an argument that the parameters of success for feminist girls' work were set too narrow; by concentrating perceptions of achievement in the (masculine) areas where girls had been under-represented or in which they were underachieving. This has allowed many to suggest that now more girls are succeeding in maths and science, the work is done. Opportunities for access, a liberal feminist approach, was not enough and has allowed boys' needs to take over. Jackson (1998) among others suggests that during the period in which boys' underachievement has taken centre stage much re-framing has taken place in

education. The discourse of school effectiveness, standards and performance has taken precedence, displacing the more common concerns of equal opportunity and social justice. The old language of educational inequality has been replaced by the language of boys' underachievement and male disadvantage. Raphael Reed (1998) similarly sees the discourses of 'the failing school' and 'the underachieving boy' as being intimately linked.

Jackson (1998) argues that we seem to be locked into a dichotomized, confrontational model of the girls' disadvantage versus the boys' disadvantage discourse. He suggests that to *"be concerned about what is happening to boys today does not mean that one is automatically anti-woman. Also to be concerned about some boys' distress at school ... does not mean that one is wanting to betray the feminist agenda in schools"* (p. 82). This is certainly true but unfortunately this is not the impression given by the education press and much of the work currently being produced encouraging teachers to raise boys' achievement. Often the approaches suggested are likely, in their attempts to promote boys' learning, to disadvantage girls. The dichotomy is alive and strong. Jackson argues that the agenda of school effectiveness, standards and performance has tended to mask the issues of gender equality and social justice. Issues of internal school organisation such as the supervision of boys' homework and the development of boys' language and literacy skills are brought to the fore. Further, Jackson suggests that historically boys have not been seen as gendered beings in schools. To be male, white and heterosexual has simply been normal hence many behaviours exhibited by boys are interpreted in this way and girls behaviour must be interpreted against this standard.

Arnot, Weiner and David (1999) comment on the conservative hostility to feminism and the consequent reluctance to acknowledge feminism as a force of change in its own right. There has been even more hostility to feminist efforts to improve conditions for girls and women as a group; reminiscent of Faludi's (1991) 'backlash'.

> *"In respect of education the effects of the backlash have been to convert girls' educational success into a moral panic about boys' failure. Girls' achievements* per se *are not seen as representative of an educational revolution of modern times. They are rendered problematic, and teachers' work is thereby denigrated rather than praised. The threat of a future that is female is one which has captured the public imagination through media representations."* (Arnot et al, 1999; p. 151)

The significance of this debate to the ways in which teachers conceptualise the learning difficulties of boys and girls will be picked up in subsequent chapters.

2.4 Concluding comments

In this chapter I have attempted to consider research evidence relating to teachers' differential perceptions and expectations of girls and boys in the context of the contemporary debate about gender and achievement. Historically, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that boys have been seen as relatively slow to acquire the skills of literacy and that they, as a group, have been more likely to experience difficulties. The work relating to gender and attainment discussed in this chapter suggests that for much of the mid to latter part of the twentieth century girls were seen to do comparatively well during the primary years but that it was believed that boys overtook and out-performed them in the secondary years and beyond. This was certainly seen to be the case in relation to higher education and employment. The final decade of the twentieth century saw a change, with girls progressively out-performing boys in standard assessment tests and public examinations. This has been headlined as a period of malaise for boys in which they are "underachieving". It has been claimed that aspects of the curriculum have been feminised and that boys do not fare well in the female dominated primary years in particular. Despite this, studies of gender and schooling have continued to demonstrate that in very many respects boys dominate socially and in respect of teacher-pupil interaction. A number of themes emerge from this literature:

- Teachers see girls and boys as having different qualities and hold differential beliefs about the learning abilities of girls and boys.
- Teachers tend to behave differently towards girls and boys and to give girls and boys different types of and amounts of attention in the classroom.
- Teachers' expectations of boys and girls are different with respect to their learning in key areas such as literacy and numeracy (mathematics).
- These expectations and the consequent predictions of achievement can be inaccurate.
- Teachers tend to overestimate girls in some areas and overestimate boys in others.
- Teacher pupil interaction is different for boys and girls – this may be appropriate if it matches differences in learning style but it may also maintain inequalities.
- The nature of the different interaction may result in different judgements about girls' and boys' learning abilities.

Although there has been relatively little consideration of gender differences in low achievement or learning difficulty in this body of work, there is some suggestion that teachers have held gender stereotypical views regarding areas of the curriculum that girls and boys may find difficult. Boys tend to be seen as more likely to require help in literacy related work and some creative activities whereas girls tend to be seen as more likely to require help in mathematics and some more practical activities. In addition some research has suggested that teachers rate boys' ability to concentrate and their determination when facing difficulties as lower than those of girls. A pertinent construct in relation to young boys' engagement with learning would appear to be that of immaturity.

Clearly the evidence reported here about teachers' differential judgements and expectations about girls' and boys' learning aptitudes, abilities and difficulties may have an impact on the process by which children are identified as having learning difficulties or special educational needs. If, for example, teachers hold

the stereotypical view that boys are more likely to have difficulties acquiring the skills of literacy, it is possible that a boy seen to be having problems may be more readily identified as having 'a learning difficulty' than a girl with similar problems. Such a response may be justified if it leads to an appropriate intervention but it may on the other hand act to perpetuate an inappropriate imbalance. It is evident that research to date in the area of gender and achievement has shed little light on the processes involved in the identification of children with learning difficulties. As discussed in Chapter One, the more recent debate about "boys' underachievement" has not been linked to any extent with notions of special educational need. Any interpretation is made more complex by the present uncertainty and contradictions around differential responses to the perceived gender differences in learning style as discussed in Section 2.3 in this chapter. In Chapter Four I shall be discussing the possible relationship between this work from the gender tradition and the identification of children with special educational needs in more detail. This discussion will be followed by an outline of possible routes to investigation of the phenomenon of the predominance of boys within special educational needs. Before that, in the next chapter, I turn to a consideration of the context in which children are identified as having learning difficulties. In the first part of the chapter I will look at the legislative and procedural framework and debate around the conceptualisation of special educational needs. I will then consider issues around the gender imbalance in the identification of children in more detail.

Chapter Three

Special Educational Needs – a framework for decision making

In the introduction to this part of the thesis and Chapter One I pointed out that more boys than girls are consistently identified as having learning difficulties. I shall begin this chapter by looking at the legislative and procedural context in which teachers identify concerns about children's learning. This will be followed by a brief discussion of some of the perspectives on special educational needs. In the remaining part of the chapter I shall consider some of the issues of particular relevance to my research. The first of these will be to look at some of the research which has examined the identification of children with special educational needs by teachers with particular reference to how this may help understand the gender imbalance. The final section will look again at work that has specifically attempted to examine the gender imbalance in special educational needs with a view to identifying the mechanisms or explanations for this imbalance that have been offered, if any.

3.1 Special educational needs and learning difficulties – the legislative and procedural framework

The contemporary legislative and procedural framework for the identification of children's special educational needs is derived from the Warnock Report (DES,

1978) which recommended the adoption of the term 'special educational needs' as a generic term to replace the range of categories of handicap established by the 1944 Education Act. The legislation of the Education Act 1981, which followed the Warnock report, provided the definition given in Chapter One. The definition has remained unaltered through subsequent legislation but the Education Act 1993 introduced a Code of Practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs (DFE, 1994) giving practical guidance in respect of the discharge by local education authorities and the governing bodies of schools of their responsibilities towards children with special educational needs.

A revised Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001a) has now been implemented with effect from January 2002. The revision was said to draw, in part, on the Government thinking on inclusion. Since my research was carried out during the lifetime of the 1994 Code of Practice, the discussion in this chapter and the main body of the thesis will be restricted to the legislation and procedures pertaining to that Code. The possible implications of the procedures arising from the new Code and developments in special educational needs since the time of data collection will be discussed in the final chapter. That discussion will include a consideration of whether any of those changes are likely to influence the evident gender imbalance in special educational needs.

The 1994 Code of Practice cites the definitions of special educational needs and learning difficulty from the Education Act 1993 but, unlike the Acts, refers to boys and girls:

> A child has *special educational needs* if he or she has a *learning difficulty* which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.
>
> A child has a learning difficulty if he or she:
> (a) has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age
> (b) has a disability which either prevents or hinders the child from making use of educational facilities of a kind provided for children

of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority

(c) is under five and falls within the definition at (a) or (b) above or would do if special educational provision was not made for the child.

A child must not be regarded as having a learning difficulty solely because the language or form of language of the home is different from the language in which he or she is or will be taught.

(Section 156)

As well as reiterating these definitions, the Code of Practice confirms the assertion, made by the Warnock Report, that "*Nationally, about 20 per cent of children may have some form of special educational needs at some time*" (p. 5).

The Code of Practice was significant in that it provided procedural guidance for the decision making about children with special educational needs for the first time. It recommended the general adoption of a staged approach to special educational needs and provided a five stage model:

Stage 1: class or subject teachers identify or register a child's special educational needs and, consulting the school's SEN coordinator, take initial action

Stage 2: the school's SEN coordinator takes lead responsibility for gathering information and for coordinating the child's special educational provision, working with the child's teachers

Stage 3: teachers and the SEN coordinator are supported by specialists from outside the school

Stage 4: the LEA consider the need for a statutory assessment and, if appropriate, make a multidisciplinary assessment

Stage 5: the LEA consider the need for a statement of special educational needs and, if appropriate, make a statement and arrange, monitor and review provision

(p. 3)

Stage 1 was seen to be triggered by an initial expression of concern that a child is showing signs of having special educational needs, together with the evidence for that concern. The first three stages were seen as based in the school but calling upon the help of external specialists as necessary. The early identification, assessment and provision for any child who may have special educational needs was emphasised as being of importance. It was suggested that schools would wish to make use of appropriate specific screening or assessment tools in addition to National Curriculum based assessment to assist with the early identification of children with special educational needs.

3.2 Perspectives on special educational needs

From the time of its publication, the Warnock Report has been criticised by many for its lack of sociological perspective; see, for example, Lewis and Vulliamy (1981). There continues to be much criticism and debate around the conceptualisation of special educational needs and learning difficulty as presented by contemporary legislation and guidance on account of its continuing focus on the individual needs of the child. A major concern is the apparent location of the problem in the child derived from the 'medical' model. Norwich (1993) argued that the thinking in the Warnock Report did not confront basic dilemmas about identifying some children as needing additional or different provision.

Many authors have offered descriptions or interpretations of the conceptual frameworks operating within special educational needs. Ainscow and Hart (1992), for example, identified three overall perspectives on educational difficulties:

- The first seeks to explain educational difficulties in terms of the characteristics of individual pupils – this remains the dominant perspective in special needs where the nature of the educational difficulties is explained in terms of a particular disability or psychological attributes.

- The second perspective explains educational difficulties in terms of a mismatch between the characteristics of particular children and the organisation and /or curriculum arrangements for them.
- The third perspective explains educational difficulties in terms of curriculum limitations. An assumption is that changes introduced for the benefit of those experiencing difficulty can improve learning for all.

Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson (1994) provide a useful account of the origins and meaning of special educational needs. They make it clear that the criteria for defining special educational needs are culturally determined. They point out (p. 14) that the term 'special educational needs' continues to be confused on philosophical grounds. Confusion is not limited to the definition; it is also apparent in relation to deciding when it is appropriate to use or apply the term. Further, they argue that as the 'problem' of widespread low and/or under-achievement came to be recognised by politicians and by the media, three areas of discourse emerged about the causes and the solutions. These were:

- The 'special needs pupil' discourse;
- The 'school and teacher effectiveness' discourse;
- The 'school failure' discourse.

It is argued that the 'special needs pupil' discourse is essentially individualistic, attributing learning difficulties to factors in the pupil and in the pupil's family and social background. In practice, although the family and social background may be seen as having a causative effect on the child's difficulties, little real attention is paid to these factors in responding to the difficulty. The school and teacher effectiveness discourse explicitly acknowledge that learning and behavioural problems may be attributable, at least in part, to tensions in curriculum delivery, pedagogy or school climate. It is clear, as Galloway et al state (p. 101) that the 1981 Education Act is based on the 'special needs child' discourse. Children's individual needs must be identified, and resources provided to meet them. They go on to say that, in contrast, the 1988 Education Reform Act and subsequent

legislation have been based on the 'school failure' discourse. Whilst it may be true that 'low achievement' and to some extent behavioural difficulties have been seen as a result of 'inadequate teaching' with the consequence that a series of measures have been introduced to 'Raise Standards' the individual child focus has been preserved within special educational needs. This reasoning can be seen to continue into the contemporary rhetoric of striving for excellence, the agenda for which was introduced in the Government White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997a). Special educational needs was paid particular attention in a Green Paper *Excellence for All Children* (DfEE, 1997b) and a subsequent Programme of Action (DfEE, 1998). The Programme of Action gave rise to the revision of the Code of Practice referred to in section 3.1 but it indicated that it was seen as unnecessary to change the legal definition of special educational needs as:

> *"Schools and LEAs undoubtedly interpret the term in different ways: but it is unlikely that any alternative definition would itself lead to greater consistency. We shall instead seek to establish common understanding of the provision that is appropriate to meet different levels of special educational needs."* (p. 15)

A significant part of the proposed agenda was to promote the development of a more inclusive education system in which a higher proportion of children would be educated within a mainstream setting. The development of inclusive practice is a major theme of contemporary publication within special educational needs. The question of whether inclusive practice will reduce the number of pupils seen to have special educational needs or whether it will influence the nature of the problems experienced by those children perceived as having special educational needs is as yet unclear. These developments appear to have had little impact on the special educational needs discourse identified by Galloway et al. This discourse, let alone any of the others, does not really address the issues of achievement, or under-achievement, around gender.

Norwich (1996) argues the notion of special educational needs has proved problematic since in practice it appears to set up a number of false dichotomies. These include that special educational needs is relative to the educational context

as opposed to being a stable characteristic of the child. Other such dichotomies according to this argument may include the separation of the social versus the medical view of a learning difficulty.

Norwich suggests that the term 'learning difficulty' is used in at least three distinct ways. The first refers to a significant gap between expectation and attainment whatever the cause. The second refers to a child having a difficulty the cause of which is attributed to the child rather than to some aspect of teaching or the curriculum. The third refers to a specific kind of difficulty in which the cause is attributed to a particular cognitive deficit. As an alternative to approaches which focus on difficulties or disabilities in which the deficit becomes the key defining aspect of provision and approaches which play down the difficulties as characteristics of children, Norwich (1996, p. 34) offers an approach which consideres a balance between different kinds of needs (figure 3.1):

Figure 3.1 – Kinds of educational needs (Norwich, 1996)

- individual needs
  - arising from characteristics different from all others
- exceptional needs
  - arising from characteristics shared by some, e.g. visual impairments, high musical abilities
- common needs
  - arising from characteristics shared by all

In this approach each child can be seen in terms of three kinds of need. Individual needs relate to characteristics and goals which are unique to the individual. Common needs relate to goals and needs which are appropriate for all. Exceptional needs which arise from characteristics shared by some others (this may be related to a learning difficulty). Norwich suggests that this way of

regarding educational needs is based on the assumption that from one perspective everyone is different and unique, from another, people are like some but different from others, and from a third perspective, everyone is alike. The advantage of this is that if we decide to talk about special needs as a type of exceptional need we are not talking about something that is unique to the child – each child with this type of exceptional need will have different individual needs. The child's exceptional need does not fully define their individual needs. Also, talk of the child's special needs does not preclude common needs shared with all other children. While this model does a lot to remove the focus from the special need as that which defines the child it lacks a dimension that is of relevance to this research. Children may also have needs which arise from their membership of a group, for example by virtue of their gender or ethnicity, which should be taken into account in providing a complete education for them. Since gender and ethnicity are characteristics shared with some but not all other children they might be seen to fit into the 'exceptional needs' band, but this would, perhaps, be unfortunate in that it might imply a minority need. I would, therefore, suggest the inclusion of a fourth kind of need, between exceptional and common needs, which could apply to small or large groups of children. This could relate to such factors as gender, ethnicity, or some socio-economic grouping. It could thus, perhaps, acknowledge some of the issues from the social constructionist view of special educational needs.

Clearly there is no uniform conceptualisation of learning difficulty. Clark, Dyson and Millward (1998) point to the shift from attempts to explain children's difficulties using the natural scientific rules of (some sorts of) psychology and medicine towards an explanation of them in terms of social processes of construction and production, using the rules of interpretivism. Although they see this as a shift the movement is by no means new or universal; there continues to be a strong focus on the individual deficit model.

3.3 Research on the identification of children with special educational needs by teachers

The Code of Practice emphasised the importance of early identification of and response to a child showing signs of special educational needs. It also recognised the key role played by the class teacher at the early stages. The centrality of the class teacher, as recommended in the Warnock Report, provided a focus for a number of research studies in the 1980s. One of the fundamental aims of Croll and Moses' (1985) study, referred to in Chapter One, was to describe the special educational needs of junior age children as seen by their teachers. The primary method of data collection was personal interviews with teachers and headteachers. The problem areas most frequently identified related to reading, with behaviour problems being the next largest group. A combination of learning and behavioural difficulties was common. It was reported that teachers were sensitive to a variety of behavioural difficulties. On this basis, Croll and Moses suggested that teachers do not only identify behavioural and emotional difficulties when they present an overt problem of classroom control.

Although Croll and Moses give some consideration to the range of provision available for children once identified, it was not clear how priorities were established or which of the children were more likely to receive the available resource. They expressed concerns about the validity of teachers' judgements in some circumstances. They suggest that their investigation shows that *"accurate assessment of special needs is at times hampered by the teacher's perception of certain types of pupil as being more likely than others to have difficulties."* (p. 150). Further insight into this was provided in an earlier study by Moses (1982). She sought to investigate the relationship between class teachers' assessments, the scores achieved by the children on standardised tests and the children's observed classroom behaviour. Moses asked teachers to identify children about whom they had concerns. It was felt to be important not to direct the teachers too rigidly in the scope of special needs since their own nominations were considered to be of prime importance. Of the children nominated 78% were seen to be 'slow

learners' / 'poor readers' and 44% were nominated for behaviour problems. The categories were not exclusive with many children falling into more than one category. Although the teachers did differentiate between the terms, all children nominated as 'slow learners' were also nominated as 'poor readers'. The teachers also generated a category of 'under achiever'.

Once the children had been identified, two groups of children were created, by means of standardised assessment of their non-verbal ability. They were those seen as 'all-round slow learners' and those who were 'poor readers' but who achieved within the average range on the non-verbal test. In addition two further groups were introduced: (a) children with test scores that teachers found very much lower than they expected and (b) children with test scores much higher than teachers expected. On the basis of further systematic observation Moses concluded that there was *"a slow learners' behaviour pattern"* which was characterised by large parts of classroom work time spent not working. In addition to only partially working, the nominated slow learners spent much more of their time fidgeting and more time distracted. They also received a proportionally higher amount of individual attention from their teachers. The children who surprised their teachers by their high scores on tests tended to behave in the same way in the classroom as children with poor test results with the apparent consequence that their teachers under-rated their ability. In contrast there was a group of children who behaved in a similar way to the average children but who had low scores. These children were not nominated as slow learners. Moses concludes:

> *"It would seem that a child who displays the slow learner pattern of behaviour is more likely to be regarded as a slow child and a teacher may well overlook his abilities. It is particularly likely if these abilities are primarily non-verbal. On the other hand children who do not display the slow learner pattern of behaviour may not be regarded as slow. This is not likely to happen to very slow children but it may well apply to other children who have learning difficulties and who need help."* (p. 120)

Gipps, Gross & Goldstein (1987) undertook a research project to look at policy and practice in the identification of, and provision for children with special needs in the primary school. One component of the data collection was a questionnaire which asked teachers what criteria they used to decide which of their children had special needs. The major indicators were the teacher's personal judgement, mentioned by 86%; and a composite of the child's progress / teacher's records, mentioned by 82%. Scores from tests or checklists were mentioned by 59%. It was apparent that most teachers used more than one indicator. When teachers were asked how they identified children who needed outside help they were much less likely to mention test scores (mentioned by 5%). The child's progress was the major indicator (mentioned by 46%) with lack of resources or time to help the child being mentioned by 15%. This research is important in the current context since it raised the issue of the extent to which teachers use subjective as opposed to objective data in their selection of children with special needs. It is limited in scope in that teachers were asked to focus on the group of children described as having academic learning difficulties, described as 'remedial'. There was no reference to gender in the questionnaire, either in relation to the child or the teacher.

In their follow-up study Croll and Moses (2000) discuss the comparison between teachers' views of the aetiology of special educational needs in their original study and in 1998. Among the areas of questioning was the perceived reason for the child's learning difficulty. In summary the major explanations for children's learning difficulties offered by teachers when interviewed are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 – Teachers' explanations for learning difficulties (Croll & Moses, 2000)

LOCATION OF SUGGESTED FACTORS	1981	1998
'Within child'	70.5	48.1
Home and family	29.8	24.9
School / teaching	3.2	1.2
Don't know	9.0	21.5

(data extracted from Croll & Moses, 2000 – Table 5.3, page 67)

In both studies teachers were most likely to suggest that a child's learning difficulties could be attributed to 'within child' factors such as ability (intelligence), attitude, lack of concentration etc. It is interesting to note, though, that in the follow-up study they were far less likely to do so. The number of citations of teaching or other school related explanations also fell, admittedly from an already low level. The most significant increase was in the teachers' uncertainty about the basis of the children's learning problems. It is possible that this increase is on account of a greater recognition of the complexity of the basis of children's learning problems. It may simply have been an unwillingness to commit themselves.

More recently, in a research project commissioned by the DfEE which formed part of the review of the 1994 Code of Practice prompted by the Government Green Paper *Excellence for All Children* (DfEE, 1997b) and the subsequent Programme of Action (DfEE, 1998), Dyson and colleagues (Dyson et al, 2002) examined the decision-making within the framework of the Code. They found that decision-making by LEAs and schools continued to be highly individualised and situation-specific, relying heavily on professional judgement. Approximately 60% of SEN Co-ordinators (SENCos) reported that they had produced criteria for the stages of the 1994 Code for use in their school. By means of interview, SENCos were asked to describe the criteria they took into account when considering placing pupils at stage 2. When considering a child with general learning difficulties the most important factors were teacher concern and perceived lack of progress by the pupil which were mentioned by 77% and 81% respectively. Test scores were cited as a source of additional evidence but it was clear that SENCos' concerns about lack of progress were established from a combination of the intuitive professional judgements of their colleagues and data from test scores. In reporting on the difference between decisions made about pupils with general and those with specific learning difficulties it appeared that teacher judgements were given relatively higher weighting than test data in the case of specific difficulties. These factors were also the most important

considerations in moving a child from stage 2 to stage 3. At this point parental concern was given similar weighting. It is evident that the flexible basis of the decision making with its reliance on professional judgement, at best, allows decision-making to be responsive to the individual needs of pupils. On the other hand, it raises doubts about the consistency and equity of the decisions that are made.

3.4 Gender as an issue within special educational needs

As was seen in Chapter One, evidence of the gender imbalance in the numbers of girls and boys identified as having special educational needs has been reported for many years but it has only recently been seen as an issue that requires discussion or further investigation. There are parallels with Barrs' (1993) discussion of the issue of boys and reading. She suggests that the differences between boys and girls as readers have been so long-standing that they have (perhaps until recently) engendered little discussion and have simply been accepted as truisms. She suggested that there was a need to problematise the long accepted differences between girls and boys as readers. This argument holds for the long accepted gender imbalance in the numbers of girls and boys identified as having learning difficulties.

In this penultimate section of the chapter I will discuss work that has offered some interpretation of this gender imbalance. As has been argued earlier, the predominant view in special educational needs is that of the individual child who has additional or special needs. It is therefore unsurprising that much of the research carried out within the special educational needs tradition has interpreted the gender imbalance in relation to this perspective. The conclusion, therefore, has tended to be that it is something to do with boys or girls that makes them more or less likely to be identified. One strand of interpretation has been to link the imbalance with other areas of known, or commonly reported, gender difference in attainment or ability, for example reading or disruptive behaviour.

Clearly, there are other voices within the special educational needs debate, such as those who wish to incorporate a sociological perspective, who would be more likely to offer additional or alternative interpretations. There are yet others amongst those who have considered gender difference in achievement from for example a feminist perspective who may wish to view the gender imbalance in different ways or offer a broader view. Few from this background have yet turned their gaze to special educational needs.

Turner et al (1995) in their review of gender equity in Scottish schools for the EOC, refer to the ongoing debate on the extent to which differences in the rates of incidence of special educational needs arise from:

- biological differences reflecting male susceptibility to 'germs and trauma';
- a tendency to construct male behaviour in school as deviant;
- males being more prone to learning and behavioural difficulties for social rather than physiological reasons.

These are very similar areas of concern to those suggested by Arnot et al (1998) in respect of more general gender differences in attainment which were:

- biological explanations of educational performance;
- social and psychological explanations;
- gender values in school cultures.

With more of a focus on special educational needs, Daniels et al (1995), suggested that in attempting to explain the disparities there is a need to consider:

- the nature of special educational provision;
- the conceptualisation of special educational needs;
- analyses of gender inequalities.

All of these have different foci and use different language and concepts and/or discourses because they are the concerns of different academic disciplines.

In my view it is likely that the basis of the gender difference in incidence of learning difficulties will arise out of an interaction between biological, psychological and sociological factors. My particular interest is in considering the possible influence of teachers in the process of identification. I shall therefore, in the remaining part of this section, discuss some publications which might shed, at least a little, light on this aspect.

An element of the Croll and Moses (1985) study which is of particular relevance here is that, whilst confirming that around twice as many boys as girls were identified as having special needs, it was suggested that at particular levels of reading difficulty boys were more likely than girls to be identified as poor readers. This was also the case for children with behaviour problems and the younger children within a class. There is further the indication that teachers showed a tendency to over-estimate the reading skills of girls and under-estimate those of boys when assessments were compared with test performance. Croll and Moses point out that in the context of special needs, teachers may therefore sometimes fail to recognise the reading difficulties experienced by girls in their classes.

In their more recent study, Croll and Moses (2000) also carried out some analysis of pupil attainment and special educational needs. The level of the children's reading was seen as being of central importance. Children whose reading was two years behind their chronological age (CA) were fairly consistently described by their teachers as having learning and reading problems. Girls described as having learning difficulties had on average slightly higher reading scores (1 year 7 months below their CA) compared to boys described in this way (1 year 9 months below their CA). Croll and Moses go on to contend that:

> *"This comparison shows that the considerable over-representation of boys among children with special educational needs has not come about as a result of being 'over-identified', at least in comparison with their overall levels of achievement: the learning difficulties of boys in this group, at least as measured by reading ages, are slightly more severe than those of the girls."* (p. 50)

Clearly, this is only looking at reading as an indicator of learning difficulties. However important, it is unlikely to be the only issue taken into account when nominating children as having special educational needs, as was evident in Croll and Moses earlier study. It is perhaps noteworthy that the girls are seen as having special educational needs with slightly higher reading levels which could suggest that there are different levels of expectation for girls and boys in this respect.

Vogel (1990) in drawing conclusions from a review of studies which had reported gender imbalance in the identification of special needs in the USA, indicated that there was evidence to suggest that girls who have already been identified as 'learning disabled' have lower IQ scores and have more severe academic achievement deficits than their male contemporaries. She notes that the findings should be interpreted with caution since the samples of already identified students may be biased on account of existing selection criteria. She suggests though that:

> *"in order for females to be identified for referral and to be diagnosed as LD, they have to (a) be significantly lower in intelligence than the referred males, (b) be more severely impaired, or (c) have a larger discrepancy between aptitude and achievement."* (p. 50)

These findings compare with those of Bibby et al (1996) who, as discussed in Chapter One, suggested the possibility of similar mechanisms for selection bias in the population of schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties in this country.

Riddell (1996) in reporting on Scottish national statistics pointed out that the gender imbalance was greatest in areas where there was greater scope for subjective teacher judgement to play a part such as emotional and behavioural difficulties and moderate learning difficulties. Differences were apparent in areas where there was seen to be a higher level of agreement over definitions such as sensory impairment and profound learning difficulties, but that the imbalance was generally markedly smaller. She relates these categories to Tomlinson's (1982) distinction between 'non-normative' and 'normative' learning difficulties

respectively. Clearly if gender differences in identification are greatest in the areas of non-normative difficulty then there would appear to be a possibility of some gender bias in the process of identification. The studies by Green (1993) and Hill (1994) which were discussed in Chapter One also hint at the possibility of bias in teachers' judgements. The possibility of bias in the management of limited resource by SENCos is also considered by Daniels et al (1995). They suggest the possibility that teachers may be aware of girls' difficulties but that because certain boys dominate the classroom they become more demanding and thus it is their needs that are attended to first.

Anderson (1997), reviewing work in the USA which had reported or examined gender imbalance in special education referrals, concludes:

> *"There is compelling evidence pointing to gender bias as a central factor in the referral of learning disabled students to special educational services."* (p. 160)

Others are more sceptical about the influence of bias. Cline and Ertubey (1997) undertook a piece of research with the aim of investigating whether children's gender would have an influence on teachers' judgements about the children's difficulties in school. They looked at examples of three problem areas: specific learning difficulties in literacy, selective mutism and learning problems associated with hearing impairment. On the basis of their findings, they considered that:

> *"The implication may be that an explanation for the predominance of boys in most kinds of SEN provision cannot be sought in gender stereotyping by individual teachers."* (p. 453)

This piece of work is discussed in more detail in respect of its methodology in Chapter Seven.

On the basis of examining the differences between samples of children at different ages with a range of types of learning difficulty in Norway, Skarbrevik (2002) concluded that the prevalence of boys was evident at all ages. He acknowledges that the predominance of boys seen as requiring special educational provision in

the school years is associated with the higher reported incidence of disruptive behaviour and of literacy based problems in boys. His interpretation was that the higher incidence of boys in the pre-school years is attributable to genetic or biological differences between the sexes whereas the preponderance of boys in school age children must be attributed to an interaction between genetic or biological factors and *"a pedagogy that does not match the educational needs of male students"* (p.105).

It is clear that many different views and interpretations are possible in this area which, to date, remains relatively under-researched.

3.5 Concluding comments

In this chapter I have considered special educational needs as the framework within which children are identified as having learning difficulties. Pertinent issues arising from this discussion are:

- The predominant perspective within special educational needs focuses on the needs of the individual child with respect to how these might be additional to or different from those of a child without learning difficulties.
- The concept of special educational needs has long been criticised for its lack of sociological perspective.
- The majority of children who are likely to require special educational provision manifest their difficulties for the first time at school.
- The prevailing procedures and guidance place emphasis on early intervention and the responsibility of class teachers.
- Although schools may have in place screening or assessment procedures research would suggest that the teacher's judgement is of fundamental importance.
- The centrality of teacher judgement and the lack of a functional definition of what constitutes a special educational need provides the opportunity for

judgements to be subjective with the inherent risk of these being influenced by bias.

- None of the established perspectives on special educational needs is adequate to conceptualise the evident gender imbalance.

With respect to the gender imbalance in the numbers of children identified as having special educational needs, it would appear that despite the changes in that balance of average performance between girls and boys, boys have continued to predominate at the lower end of the achievement range. Thus the higher proportion of boys seen as having learning difficulties has been a constant feature and is evident internationally across a variety of special education systems. Despite its ubiquity, this gender imbalance has been paid relatively little attention. Until recently it appeared to have been accepted as the way things are. For those who have discussed the imbalance as an issue, there is uncertainty about how it should be explained or interpreted. Common-sense interpretations have looked to make links with already established patterns of gender difference such as boys' reputed relative slowness in acquiring and developing language and literacy or boys' reported greater tendency to disruptive or difficult behaviour. Researchers who have attempted to analyse or identify the basis of the gender imbalance have offered a variety of other interpretations which have included reference to: genetic or biological factors, social and socio-economic factors and, more directly school or teacher related factors. Whilst there is a strong suggestion of the possible importance of teacher bias from many of the studies, there is relatively little direct evidence. Other researchers are, on the other hand, more sceptical about the importance of bias in teachers' identification of children with learning difficulties. In my view it is likely that the basis of gender difference in incidence of learning difficulties arises out of an interaction between biological, psychological and sociological factors. There is undoubtedly a need for further research into the possible influences on this gender imbalance. The focus of my interest is to explore the possible biasing influence of teacher judgement and expectation in the process of identification.

In the next chapter, which concludes this first part of the thesis, I shall be drawing together issues from the two major areas of literature discussed so far, gender and special educational needs, and will use this to clarify the research questions to be addressed in Part II.

Chapter Four

Issues and questions arising from the literature review

In this final chapter of the background, I shall begin by recapitulating the main points from the preceding chapters and will suggest some links between the strands emerging from the gender work and special educational needs to establish a framework for thinking about my research. I shall then relate the issues to my research question and discuss the parameters of the present research.

4.1 Key issues from the literature

In Chapter One, evidence was presented to demonstrate that consistently more boys than girls have been identified as having special educational needs or difficulties with learning. International research would suggest that the imbalance is evident in every country where comparative data are available. There is nothing to suggest that this is a new phenomenon. In the UK, the gender imbalance was certainly evident in the epidemiological studies prior the Warnock Report and continues to be apparent in more recent studies. There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that boys have been seen as relatively slow to acquire the skills of literacy and that they, as a group, have been more likely to experience difficulties in this area. The work relating to gender and attainment discussed in

Chapter Two suggests that for much of the mid to latter part of the twentieth century girls were seen to do comparatively well during the primary years but that it was believed that boys overtook and out-performed them in the secondary years and beyond. This was certainly seen to be the case in relation to higher education and employment. The final decade of the twentieth century saw a change with girls progressively out-performing boys in standard assessment tests and public examinations. In the popular media and in other forums this has often been presented as a period of malaise for boys in which they are "underachieving". It has been claimed that aspects of the curriculum have been feminised and that boys do not fare well in the female dominated primary years in particular. Despite this, studies of gender and schooling have continued to demonstrate that in very many respects boys dominate socially and with regard to teacher-pupil interaction. The literature discussed in Chapter Two suggested that teachers tend to see girls and boys as having different qualities with respect to their social and emotional functioning, also with respect to their learning abilities and aptitudes. It was argued that this can result in teachers holding different expectations of girls and boys which can lead to over or under-estimation of performance in particular areas of the curriculum. Further, some research suggested that teachers rate boys' concentration and their determination when encountering difficulties as lower than that of girls. A key construct in relation to young boys' engagement with learning is that of immaturity. A more detailed summary of these points was presented on page 50.

Related themes arose in the work on gender and special educational needs discussed in Chapter One. Key points from this work were summarised on page 21. Included there was the suggestion that teachers have more to say about boys than girls with learning difficulties. Teachers also appear to expect boys with learning difficulties to have or develop behavioural problems. There is also a suggestion that boys with difficulties are seen as a higher priority than girls with similar problems for intervention or alternative placement. This may be on account of the greater expectation of behavioural difficulties for boys and may

mean that girls need to have more severe learning problems to be identified and provided with additional support or referral to support services.

Chapter Three considered special educational needs as the framework within which children are identified as having learning difficulties. Pertinent issues from this discussion were summarised on pages 69-70. Here it was seen as significant that the predominant perspective within special educational needs focuses on the individual child and that the concept has long been criticised for its lack of sociological perspective. Various perspectives of special educational need were discussed in Section 3.2. Although attempts have been made by some to broaden the consideration of social influences none of these perspectives appears adequate to conceptualise the evident gender imbalance. A further key component was seen to be the centrality of teacher identification of concerns about a child's learning. It was suggested that this, together with the lack of a functional definition of what constitutes a special educational need, provides the opportunity for judgements to be subjective with the consequent risk of these judgements being influenced by bias or stereotypical beliefs.

The limited extent to which gender has been considered as an issue within special educational needs was discussed in Section 3.4. From this and the gender focussed work discussed in Chapter Two it was concluded that the higher proportion of boys seen as having learning difficulties has been a constant feature over time despite the changes in that balance of average performance between girls and boys. Boys have continued to predominate at the lower end of the achievement range and within the group seen as having special educational needs. This gender imbalance has been paid relatively little attention. Until recently it seems to have been taken for granted. Even when the gender imbalance has been noted there has been uncertainty about how it should be explained or interpreted. Interpretations have included attempts to make links with already established patterns of gender difference such as boys' relative slowness in acquiring and developing language and literacy or boys' reported greater tendency to disruptive

or difficult behaviour. Interpretations have ranged from reference to genetic or biological factors through to consideration of social and socio-economic factors and, more directly school or teacher related factors. Whilst there is a strong suggestion of the possible importance of teacher bias from many of the studies, there is relatively little direct evidence. Other researchers are more sceptical about the importance of bias in teachers' identification of children with learning difficulties. There is undoubtedly a need for further research into the possible influences on the gender imbalance in the relative numbers of girls and boys identified as having learning difficulties or special educational needs.

In my view it is likely that the basis of gender difference in incidence of learning difficulties arises out of an interaction between biological, psychological and sociological factors. The work from the gender tradition convinces me that teacher judgements and teacher behaviour can be very powerful factors in influencing classroom interaction and achievement in the broadest sense. The gender oriented research has also demonstrated that these are areas that are accessible to research and in which change can be effected in the classroom as a practitioner-researcher. The focus of my interest in the present research is therefore to explore the possible biasing influence of teacher judgement and expectation in the process of identification of girls and boys as having learning difficulties. Before considering the parameters of my research and the particular research question addressed in this thesis, I shall consider in a little more detail some of the possible links between these two traditions of knowledge and research.

4.2 Possible links between the gender and special needs work

Before considering the possible routes such investigation could take I would like to give some attention to possible links between the two areas of work that I have discussed in the preceding chapters since as Daniels et al (1995) pointed out, they have not only used different language, concepts and discourses; the sorts of

explanations each produces have been kept apart. Some of the areas in which links can be forged are:

The individual child focus

Criticism of the individual child focus within special educational needs has, as discussed in Chapter Three, expressed concerns about the lack of consideration of context and other social factors in the account of a child's difficulties. In view of what is known about the differential judgements some teachers make about their pupils and the growing knowledge about gender differences in learning style it would seem that an important dimension is missing if gender is not taken into account in some way.

There are parallels with the criticism of the child-centred approach to primary education by feminist writers in the 1980s who argued that child-centred approaches failed to address the gender imbalances within schools. Skelton (1989), for example, argued that by treating gender as a non-issue in primary education, discrimination was actually perpetuated. She says that Alexander (1984) following King (1978) pointed out that the ideology of child-centredness comprises four elements one of which is individualism (where teachers need to respond to children as unique individuals). In discussing the preparation of student teachers for the classroom, Skelton comments:

> *"It was the emphasis given to individualism which appeared to be the major contributory factor in the students' idea of gender-stereotypical practices as an issue inapplicable to the education of primary school children. Constantly students were told that work prepared for school practice had to be based around the individual needs of each child in the class. There is no reason to suppose that by allowing children to develop at an individual pace gender discrimination will be prevented."* (p. 59)

Skelton goes on to provide examples of children's choice of activity reinforcing gender stereotypes. Thus:

> *"...providing opportunities for children to develop according to their 'individual needs' does not take into account the gender power relationships within the classroom."* (p. 60)

Skelton's (1987) research was concerned with the ways in which gender issues were addressed within a teacher training establishment. She reports that the student teachers were told certain 'facts' about girls and boys such as: boys experience greater problems in learning to read, they are disruptive in the classroom and they are better at maths than girls. Skelton (1989) contends:

> *"The 'facts' that students were told about the abilities and behaviour of girls and boys are social facts rather than natural facts ...The danger is that as student teachers were 'taught' these 'facts' as a part of the professional socialisation it is possible that these messages might have been internalised and could affect their expectations of boys' behaviour and reading capabilities."* (p. 62).

This argument is picked up by Acker (1994) who points out that there is an implicit belief that individualisation and attention to children's differences and particular needs effectively eliminate categorisation. The belief assumes that:

> *"If children were truly treated as individuals, it would be impossible to discriminate against a social group."* (pp. 98-99)

This argument has striking parallels with the perception that if attention is paid to an individual child's special educational needs then they are treated fairly and equitably in all respects. Therefore, there has been no need to question the gender imbalance in rates of identification or indeed even to see it as an issue.

Teacher bias in the identification of children with special educational needs

As has been argued in Chapter Three, the centrality of teacher identification in special educational needs carries with it the potential use of subjective judgement which may allow decisions to be based on stereotype, myth or incomplete information. I would suggest that gender bias is one possible outcome of this. Some of the work which has suggested that particular characteristics of children as learners are significant to teachers in the process of identification hint at this possibility. The 'slow learner behaviour pattern', Moses (1982), which was discussed in Chapter Three has some interesting parallels with Leach's (1977) account of teachers' perceptual frameworks regarding: (a) the number and kinds

of 'problem' children defined in school and (b) the various outcomes of such definitions in terms of provision or other action. He describes 'perceptual frameworks' as incorporating the current set of working hypotheses which have been built up by individuals from their past experiences to make sense of and to increase predictability in their current experiences of everyday life. Leach draws out what he sees as some of the major constructs. One of these is that of the 'ideal-pupil' type. He suggests that children who are candidates for ideal typing are those who are rated highly on constructs such as: lively, well-behaved, eager to learn, mature, stable, responsible, high IQ, good social background, stable family history. He goes on to say that teachers may 'mis-rate' children if they are typified on a few significant personal constructs. So some children may be mis-idealised on the basis of, for example, neat work, polite speech, nice appearance etc. Further, he suggests that any less-than-ideal pupils are more likely to be judged on the basis of their deficits rather their assets. Another significant issue is the suggestion that some children are more likely to be helped than others. Leach relates this to the type of pupil the child is perceived to be.

> *"More specifically, it is related to teachers' perceptions of* why *he has become that type of non-ideal pupil. Three dominant construct dimensions seem to be very important in this respect:*
>
> *i. The rating (or judgement) of a pupil according to whether he is 'remediable' or 'non-remediable'.*
>
> *ii. The rating (or judgement) of him according to whether he has 'potential' or 'little potential' for change.*
>
> *iii. The rating (or judgement) of the causes of his perceived unacceptable behaviour or performance according to whether they are states of the individual inaccessible to educational modification or whether they are open to the influence of the school environment (i.e. teacher influence)."* (pp. 195-196)

Leach relates this to the within-child medical model of looking at learning difficulties. Difficulties are often seen as the result of inherent pupil malfunctions or of social determinants which are beyond teachers' control and sphere of influence. Hence these children are more likely to be seen as non-remediable. The ideas in this work are very interesting but it appears to contain a lot of argument and assertion, which is only tentatively linked with any evidence. It

nevertheless provides a useful framework for conceptualising the decision making about children's difficulties. Neither Leach nor Moses considered gender in their studies but it is not difficult to see that many of the characteristics referred to related to the gender divisions in descriptors listed by Clarricoates (1980) and others so that consideration of the interaction between gender and being seen as an 'ideal' pupil type would be interesting. In Moses' study it would seem likely that most, if not all, of the children nominated were boys but it would have been fascinating to analyse the behaviour patterns in relation to gender also. It would be useful here to consider the 'slow learner behaviour pattern' in relation to teachers' views of typical male and female patterns of behaviour and the 'ideal pupil' behaviour as discussed in work on gender and schooling. I would suggest that the 'slow learner behaviour pattern' is likely to be more typically male and that the child of lower ability who does not exhibit the pattern and is therefore not identified (unless very poor) is more likely to be female. Of additional interest and relevance here would be any relationship between gender and notions of 'remediability'.

The discourses of boys' underachievement and special educational needs

Although one of the anticipated benefits of the recent Government initiatives to raise achievement in literacy and numeracy would be a reduction in the numbers of children having difficulties in these areas, much of the debate about underachievement does not include pupils with recognised learning difficulties. Some studies actively distinguish between those with special educational needs and those seen to be underachieving. Consequently, there would be some value in attempting to establish links between the discourses of underachievement, in particular the developing debate about boys' underachievement, and special educational needs. There are obvious similarities between the discourses of boys' underachievement and those of special educational needs; both consider a similar range of reasons or explanations for the pupils' lack of achievement. There are certainly similarities in relation to accounts of teachers' perceptions of ability

which lead to overestimation of boys' ability in some areas and which might lead to lack of progress being interpreted as underachievement.

An additional strand is identified in Myhill's (2002) study which discusses the participation and interaction of high achieving boys and girls and under-achieving boys and girls in the classroom. Patterns of difference emerged in which in first and middle schools under-achieving boys were the most consistently reluctant to participate. In addition, under-achieving boys are more likely to call out than their high-achieving peers. Calling out unrelated to the task was predominantly the domain of under-achievers, particularly the boys. Under-achievers are also more likely to be engaged in off-task interactions. Evidently the under-achieving pupils were by various means relatively visible within the classroom. This relates to the argument that one of the mechanisms by which boys are more likely to be identified as having learning difficulties is their greater visibility in the classroom on account of aspects of their behaviour. This begs the question of which children are seen by their teachers as underachieving, which children are seen as having learning difficulties and how much overlap is there?

4.3 The parameters of my research

Clearly there are many complex issues about the relative preponderance of boys seen to have special educational needs. As already established, my particular interest here is in the influence of teachers in the process of the identification of girls and boys with learning difficulties. There is a suggestion in some earlier work that there is scope for and evidence of such bias. I wish to explore this further.

Before outlining more precisely the questions that I wish to address, it is necessary to clarify the parameters of this research, particularly in respect of what will not be considered.

The scope of learning difficulty to be addressed in this research

According to the Code of Practice and associated legislation a child has special educational needs as a consequence of their learning difficulty. In practice the terms are often used interchangeably. In addition to this 'learning difficulty' covers a wide range of difficulties that affect a child's learning including emotional, behavioural and sensory issues. On occasions 'learning difficulty' is used in this way but at other times it is used to refer more narrowly to difficulties with academic learning. In this research, it is my intention to focus primarily on difficulties with academic learning. It is evident that concerns about behaviour are a significant feature of teachers' concerns about pupils with special educational needs but it is also apparent that there are wide ranging gender issues in relation to behaviour and the ways in which emotional difficulties are expressed in behaviour. The relationship between gender and emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) has received some attention although as noted in Chapter Two the concern initially was limited to the suitability of special provision for girls when they were in such a small minority. The gender imbalance in EBD provision was confirmed by Cooper, Upton & Smith (1991) and more recently others (e.g. Malcolm and Haddock, 1992; Dawn et al, 2000) have begun to examine it in more detail. In addition the differential experience of girls excluded from school has been a topic of research interest (Osler et al, 2002).

While behaviour is a significant issue, my interest has been in relation to the gender imbalance in academic learning difficulties which, as has been show in previous chapters, has not been interpreted as a 'problem' to the same extent. It is therefore likely that a clearer view of the issues and influences on teachers' decision making about pupils' academic learning difficulties can be established if behaviour is not offered as a primary presenting problem. I intend to ask teachers to consider children who are experiencing difficulties with academic learning. If in doing so the teachers introduce concerns about behaviour these will be secondary to the main concern and may be an area in which a gender difference is apparent.

An area of great significance that I have not discussed in any detail in the literature review is that of race or ethnicity. This is not because I consider race to be of no significance in teachers' judgements and decision making about children. Within education there is research and survey data to demonstrate different levels of achievement according to ethnicity. Further, this interacts with gender to make the picture more complex. As has already been mentioned there is concern about the different exclusion rates between ethnic groups, with particular concern about the relatively high exclusion rate among black boys. With regard to special educational needs the possibility of bias in identification was placed firmly on the agenda in the 1970s by Coard (1971). Croll & Moses (1985) presented data to demonstrate variation between different ethnic groups by gender in the numbers identified in various categories of special educational need. The imbalance was also demonstrated in some of the GENSEN publications. Clearly considering race and gender within any study increases the complexity of the possible causative relationships for any difference. In addition, it is apparent that different research traditions have grown up around gender and race issues in schools in the same way that they have between gender and special educational needs. This again adds to the complexity. The inter-relationship of gender and race research is in itself an area of considerable debate. For these reasons, whilst acknowledging that ultimately there is a need to gain an understanding of the combined influence of gender, ethnicity and other socio-economic factors on the identification of children as having special educational needs, I have like many others opted to consider a simpler relationship at this stage. In any case, in an area such as this which is relatively under-researched it would seem helpful to gain a view of various simpler relationships as a step towards a more holistic understanding.

There is also an issue around the compatibility of the discourse around the imbalance between ethnic groups and that between girls and boys in relation to special educational needs. It has long been argued that there is an over-

identification of children from certain minority ethnic groups (e.g. Graf, 1992). It is less clear how the relatively large proportion of males has been seen. Does this, too, imply that there may be an over-identification of boys?

In summary, therefore, in this research I shall not be attempting to:

- establish whether there are differences in the likelihood of girls and boys experiencing particular types of learning difficulty;
- introduce emotional and behavioural difficulties as a major presenting problem;
- consider ethnicity of the child as a dimension in the decisions made by teachers.

4.4 My research question

My particular interest in this study is to investigate the impact of the class teacher in identifying children's learning difficulties. I want to see whether there is anything in the teachers' expectations or decision-making that introduces gender-bias into the process. Ideally therefore I would need to try to see whether teachers will behave in the same way in respect of a girl and a boy with the same learning difficulties. Therefore a null hypothesis could be that if teachers are presented with a child with a particular learning difficulty they would make the same decisions and hold the same expectations regardless of whether the child is a girl or a boy. If there are differences it will be necessary to consider whether the differential judgements can be seen as valid. The differential treatment could be seen as invalid if it derives from stereotypical views of girls and boys rather than firm evidence about the learning of the individuals.

This research will therefore have at its centre the children whom teachers identify as having academic learning difficulties. This will be in order to consider the extent to which the teachers see the girls' and boys' difficulties as similar or

different. In order to do this, it will be necessary to collect the teachers' views on a variety of dimensions including:

- the basis of the problem;
- the perceived severity of the problem;
- the ways in which it can be responded to;
- the child's need for support;
- the teachers' expectations for the future.

In each case the fundamental aim is to reveal the extent of any difference which is determined by the gender of the child.

Part II

The research

Introduction to
Part II

The research –
an overview

My aim when planning this research was to attempt to establish whether there was any evidence of gender bias in the identification of children with learning difficulties by class teachers. In this way I hoped to gain a view of the mechanisms involved in the apparent gender imbalance in the relative numbers of girls and boys identified as having learning difficulties. The class teacher is of key importance in the early identification of children with special educational needs, as was made clear in the Code of Practice. I therefore considered it important to attempt to examine the early stages of the process of identifying children as being a 'cause for concern'. This is the point at which a class teacher begins to have concerns about a pupil and begins to construct the view that he or she has a learning difficulty or special educational need. For the reasons given in Chapter Four, my focus in this research has been on academic learning difficulties rather than all of special needs.

As will be discussed in Chapter Five, researching gender difference in special educational needs presents some difficulty. A major problem is the paucity of

data about girls. Far fewer girls are identified therefore there is little information to make use of when attempting to establish what is going on with regard to girls compared to boys. In addition, asking teachers directly about the gender imbalance may simply yield what might be viewed as 'acceptable' responses in a way that is reminiscent of the proposition by Arnot et al (1998) that teachers may now be too familiar with the 'right answers' when it comes to surveying their attitudes to gender or equal opportunities issues to imagine that the responses reveal their individual values or perceptions. I wanted to know about the gender bias in identification of children with learning difficulties, but simply asking teachers about their practice would be unlikely to reveal all that was going on. It was therefore necessary to consider collecting data in a number of ways. I wished to collect data about the way class teachers thought about the children they had concerns about but this was bound to be limited for the reasons outlined above. I had therefore decided from early on to supplement this by seeking teachers' views about fictitious children with learning difficulties.

The research was conceptualised as having three complementary strands:

- Seeking teachers' views about the learning difficulties of real children in their own classes
- Seeking teachers' views about fictitious children with learning difficulties described in a series of brief vignettes
- Dialogue with teachers to examine their views regarding gender differences within learning difficulties

The first two of these strands would look at teachers' judgements, attributions and expectations regarding children with learning difficulties with the aim of seeing whether they are gendered. It would therefore be necessary here not to reveal that gender was the focus of my interest. The research would have to be presented as an examination of the identification of children with learning difficulties. Only in the third strand could gender be raised as a focus of interest. This could only be done with the participating teachers in both phases following the initial data

collection in relation to both the actual children and those portrayed in the vignettes. The plan was to do this by feeding back findings to respondents and offering the opportunity to discuss them.

The proposed sequence of events changed at various points in my working through the problem. I eventually settled on two major phases of data collection in the following sequence:

Phase One

In this phase of data collection I planned to ask a sample of class teachers about the children in their classes about whom they had concerns. I hoped that this might provide some insight into the teachers' conceptualisations of these children's learning difficulties in order to see if there were any ways in which these might be gendered. Also, at a later stage, I aimed to attempt to gain some insight into the teachers' views on the gender-ratio in the group of children that had been identified. The key to this stage was to consider children that the teachers themselves had identified from their own classes.

Data were to be collected by means of:

- An initial questionnaire to collect basic information and views about each child identified.
- A follow-up discussion with each teacher which was to be arranged with the explicit purpose of considering the progress of the children they had identified. The main aim of this would be to provide an opportunity to present the teachers with information about the patterns of sex-difference in the numbers of children identified and to seek their views on this issue.

Phase Two

In the second phase of data collection I planned to make use of vignettes describing fictitious children with a range of possible learning difficulties. Teachers were to be provided with an exercise in which they were asked to make

judgements about these fictitious children with a view to seeing whether the gender of the child was a significant factor in the teachers' view or judgements about the children's learning difficulties. By using vignettes it would be possible to ensure that:

- a range of types of learning difficulty could be considered;
- a number of teachers could be asked questions about the same problem;
- equal numbers of girls and boys could be considered;
- boys and girls with 'identical' learning difficulties could be considered;
- teachers could be presented with a broader range of problems for girls and for boys.

In this way it was hoped that, by controlling other factors such as the account of the problem, a clearer view of the influence of the children's gender on the teachers' judgements would emerge.

A key issue is the inter-relationship of the two phases. It is important to note that although there are two phases of data collection they should not be seen as sequential. The two phases have been planned to be complementary; each aiming to illuminate the phenomenon of gender imbalance in identification of learning difficulties from a different angle. The first phase is important in that it has the face validity of asking teachers to talk about the children in their classes who are a cause of concern. The issues raised are real to them. The limitations are the inevitable gender imbalance and the uncertainty of whether the boys and girls being compared have similar learning difficulties. The second phase can provide the teachers with descriptions of children with a range of learning difficulties and teachers can be presented with descriptions of girls and boys with identical learning difficulties. In this way a clearer view of the possibility of gender bias can be examined. This phase and the vignettes can only have validity if the teachers can relate to the descriptions and if the range of issues and questions compare with those arising from the real children. For this reason the range of

questions asked about the children in the two phases had to be similar and the overview for interpretation must be comparable.

The chapters in this section will give an account of how the research developed and its findings. The structure is as follows:

- Chapter Five *Methodological issues – the first phase,* which includes an account of the procedure for data collection in the first phase;
- Chapter Six *Children identified by class teachers,* which gives an account and some preliminary analysis of the data collected in the first phase;
- Chapter Seven *Methodological issues – the second phase,* which includes a commentary on the first phase, a review of research using vignettes and an account of the procedure for data collection in the second phase;
- Chapter Eight *Vignettes of girls and boys with learning difficulties,* which provides an account and preliminary analysis of the data from the second phase;
- Chapter Nine *Discussion of issues from both phases,* in which the findings from the two phases are discussed and some further analysis is presented;
- Chapter Ten *Overview and conclusions.*

Finally, in Chapter Eleven I shall consider some theoretical implications of this research and will be make some suggestions regarding how this area of work may be progressed.

Chapter Five

Methodological issues – the first phase

Setting out to investigate the impact of children's gender on the identification of learning difficulties by primary school teachers was certainly challenging in prospect since it involved delving into two significant areas of research and theory which, until recently, appear to have been blind to each other. These are research into gender in education and research into special educational needs. Before giving an account of how I carried out my research in this hybrid area, it will be of value to consider some of the pertinent methodological issues from each of these areas of work. My discussion will be structured under the following sub-headings:

- researching special educational needs
- researching special educational needs as an educational psychologist
- researching gender-difference
- researching the gender imbalance in special educational needs

This will be followed by an account of the method and procedure for the first phase of my research.

5.1 Researching special educational needs

My research is located within mainstream schooling but aims to consider the decision making about special educational needs. It perhaps therefore should be related as much to mainstream educational research as to special needs research. In any case, Mertens & McLaughlin (1995) point out that there are no research methods that are unique to special education. Instead the authors consider ways to adapt research methods from other fields to the special education context. They suggest that the unique political, social and contextual factors of special education have implications for research conceptualisation, design, implementation, interpretation and reporting. One of the key issues they identify is the uncertainty or lack of clarity in just who should be classified as having special educational needs. Clearly, this issue is central to my research. As discussed in Chapter Three, there is a firmly held notion that learning difficulties, particularly at the mild to moderate end of the range, and hence the criteria for identifying children as having learning difficulties, are socially constructed. It would seem reasonable then that any research into this area should be undertaken within a constructivist paradigm. Any conclusions that it may be possible to draw from the data are going to be products of the social construction of learning difficulties and the perceived characteristics of boys and girls as learners, or perhaps more appropriately as failing learners.

Interestingly, another link made by Mertens & McLaughlin is that between researchers adopting a 'reform ideology' within the field of special education and feminist researchers. They suggest that the perspectives of feminist researchers have particular importance for researchers in special education. Among their reasons is the fact that as Asch and Fine (1992) put it "*women with disabilities traditionally have been ignored not only by those concerned about disability but also by those examining women's experiences.*" (p. 141)

Ainscow (1998) argues that traditionally research in special education has been influenced by theories derived from psychology and biology. This was consistent

with the idea that special education was seen as a search for effective methods to solve a technical problem. This clearly has implications for the ways in which children with special needs have been perceived. He therefore proposes the extended use of practitioner action research since it leads to a greater understanding of the ways in which educational contexts can be developed to foster the learning of all children. The need for research in special educational needs to both involve practitioners and inform practice continues to be stressed in more recent publications for example, Rose and Grosvenor (2001) and Rose (2002).

Others, for example Clough and Barton (1995), have stressed the need for researchers to acknowledge the social and political nature of the field and confront their assumptions about special educational needs and how these may influence their methodology and interpretation of data from their research. In this view the research itself is an agent in constructing the conceptualisation of special educational needs.

5.2 Researching special educational needs as an educational psychologist

There is an extensive literature regarding the problems faced by teachers researching teachers (see for example: Cohen & Manion, 1994; Elliott, 1991; Walford, 1991). The circumstances of an educational psychologist are in many ways similar but a number of other issues enter the scene. In a more conventional action research model, the research is carried out by a teacher from within the school; perhaps supported by an academic, or other, from without. In the case of an educational psychologist researching teachers, the educational psychologist, although a member of the network of support available to the school (and part of the LEA) is from outside the school. In addition the educational psychologist's role and responsibilities can be seen as placing them not only at a distance from the school but also, in some senses, in a position of elevated power in the decision making about children with special educational needs, since in some cases it is to

the psychologist that the concerns about the children are being referred. Although many educational psychologists may hold a different view of their role, the perceived role of the educational psychologist as gatekeeper to additional resource or provision lingers in many schools. Even if the educational psychologist is not perceived in this way it is still likely that she or he may be seen as judgmental about the school's special educational needs procedures and individual teachers' response to problems. All of this may influence teachers' responses to research or within a research activity.

Educational psychologists have always carried out research even if only as part of their final professional training, but this is an area of activity that is growing particularly with the introduction of professional training to doctoral level. I shall not discuss the literature regarding educational psychologists as researchers other than to note that it continues to be an area of debate as is demonstrated, for example, by the a themed issue of one of the professional journals, *Educational and Child Psychology*, in 1998 which was entitled 'Paradigms for research in professional educational psychology' (Lunt, 1998). In relation to the debate there are clearly parallels with the points made by Ainscow in respect of the historical tradition of special needs research as discussed in the previous section. In this context Norwich (1998) cites Burden's (1997) argument that many educational psychologists will have received a rather narrow training in positivist research methodologies and that an alternative model better suited to the real world is required.

Whatever view educational psychologists take of themselves as researchers, schools' and teachers' perceptions of educational psychologists and the Educational Psychology Service is likely to influence their willingness to participate in any research. As Fox and Rendall (2002) point out:

> *"Participants' views of what an educational psychologist does, and their values and their attitudes inherently affect the research and at the same time affect the ethics of the process."* (p. 62)

Another key ethical consideration is the need to establish a distinction between research and professional practice. This also has implications for practising educational psychologists in the selection of a research methodology and mode of reporting that does as little as possible to jeopardise their future professional relationship with the participants in any research. The educational psychologist as researcher may be further constrained by her or his position as a member of an Educational Psychology Service and as an officer of the LEA. These did indeed present some practical constraints to the ways in which my research could be carried out. This will be discussed further in subsequent sections and chapters as the research is described.

5.3 Researching gender-difference

I introduced the potential stumbling block of terminology in my note at the beginning of this thesis (p. xiv). There it was established that the term 'sex' has by convention been used to refer to the biological sex of an individual and that 'gender' refers to the social role of being a woman/girl or a man/boy, but that the term 'gender' has now almost entirely replaced 'sex' as the socially acceptable term. Clearly there is scope for much debate about how biological sex and social gender interact. This debate underlies most of the controversies in the study of sex and gender. All research which attempts to explore differences between the behaviour or circumstances of males and females must acknowledge the variety of views about the basis of any differences that they may find. Caplan & Caplan (1999) point out what they describe as two dangerous assumptions that muddy our understanding of the work which has attempted to research sex-differences. The first is the assumption that, if a 'sex-difference' in some ability or kind of behaviour is found, all males do a particular thing and all females do another quite different thing. The second is the assumption that sex-differences are biologically based and, therefore, inevitable and unchangeable. Both of these are misleading. Findings of 'sex-differences' in ability or behaviour refer to a difference in the average score of the males and females who were studied. It is important to

consider also the extent of the overlap, and hence the similarity in performance between males and females. With regard to the second possible assumption it is not easy to distinguish the contribution of genetics from that of the environment and socialisation. The conviction with which each of these is considered to be the major factor often seems as much a matter of fashion or political conviction as of scientific objectivity.

My research does not aim to examine sex-difference or even gender difference as such. Although children who are seen to have learning difficulties may be seen as the subject of the research, it is the potential bias in the judgements and decisions about these children made by teachers that may arise on account of the sex of the children that I am interested in. Any bias may arise from the teachers' beliefs about sex-difference or gender-difference rather than any actual difference. In this respect it is essential to avoid Caplan and Caplan's first assumption by being clear that not all teachers will judge all girls or all boys in the same ways.

There are parallels between the relationship of my research to special needs research and its relationship to gender-difference research. In respect of both I am not researching the pupils who may be the subject of differential treatment; it is the teachers who are providing the treatment that I intended to study.

In carrying out any research in the area of gender it is essential to consider how it relates to models of feminist thinking or research. There is no unifying feminist position. Much of the earlier work that examined gender differences in the school experience of girls and boys was carried out from a liberal feminist standpoint which aimed to work for equal opportunities between the genders. Other work has been undertaken from a more radical feminist standpoint which acknowledges the differences between the genders but which sees different experiences or different outcomes as arising from power differentials between the genders. Whatever the standpoint, feminist research in general regards women's and girls' experience as at least as valid as that of men and boys. The position of men as

potential researchers in the field of gender in education has, unsurprisingly, been a focus of debate. This has become a matter of particular concern with the growth of research focusing on boys' achievements as an addition to the established feminist work focusing on girls' experience. There are publications within this new tradition that represent a 'backlash' and are pointedly anti-feminist in position whilst other work is sympathetic to the feminist traditions. Such work is described by some as 'pro-feminist'. Lingard and Douglas (1999) describe a pro-feminist perspective as follows:

> *"Pro-feminism sees the need to change men and masculinities, as well as masculine social structures while recognising the hidden injuries of gender for many men and boys. Pro-feminists also support feminist reform agendas in education and more broadly, and at the same time recognise the structural inequalities of the current societal gender order, and of the gender regime within educational systems."* (p. 4)

I shall consider how my research relates to other research in the field of gender in education and with regard to feminist positions in section 5.5 when drawing these introductory sections together.

5.4 Researching the gender imbalance in special educational needs

Before considering the methodology of work that has specifically examined the gender imbalance in special educational needs, I shall briefly mention the methods used by the studies into teacher identification of children with learning difficulties that were discussed in Chapter Three. Croll and Moses (1985) recognised that the class teacher was a central agent in determining which children are deemed to have special educational needs. Their primary method of data collection was personal interviews with teachers and headteachers with the aim of establishing how the special educational needs of junior-age children were seen by their teachers. Gipps et al (1987) aimed to look at policy and practice in the identification of and provision for children with special educational needs in the primary school. One component of the data collection was a questionnaire which

simply asked teachers what criteria they used to decide which of their children had special educational needs.

As previously discussed, much of the little evidence that exists regarding the gender imbalance in special educational needs has arisen from studies which have reported different rates of incidence and then offered some interpretation. Some studies have looked further at patterns of resource allocation and criteria for selection. Others have asked the views of class teachers and other professionals regarding the gender imbalance by means of interview or questionnaire. It would appear that in a good deal of this research the issue of gender was 'up-front'. It is therefore possible that respondents had a tendency to give what might be viewed as 'acceptable' or what are perceived as 'politically-correct' responses. In view of view of the lack of debate on this issue, it is unclear what the conventionally 'right' answers about girls, boys and learning difficulties might be. Teachers may draw from earlier equal opportunities work or the more recent boys' underachievement discourse. The alternative approach of examining teachers' behaviour or response to children for signs of gender bias without declaring the purpose of the research carries with it an obvious concern regarding such deception. I shall discuss this ethical issue further in relation to my research in subsequent sections of this chapter.

A recurrent problem in much of this work has been the paucity of data about girls in view of the relatively small number identified as having learning difficulties. In addition to this many of the studies reported that teachers had much more to say about the boys thus adding to the disproportion in the data. In relation to the GENSEN research, Hey et al (1998) comment that in Phase 3 of their research:

> *"It proved difficult to elicit teachers' views concerning girls' special needs, since boys and their problems dominated both the formal interviews and informal staffroom conversations."* (p. 131)

They go on to describe a technique that they called 'classroom mapping' which was used in order to gain more detailed information about patterns of help-

seeking and help-giving. In this way a more accurate account of the gender balance in the 'helping' systems within a classroom could be established.

In other studies a variety of means have been employed to increase the data concerning girls. An example might be asking teachers to select equal numbers of girls and boys to compare within a particular category of difficulty, as Fennema et al (1990) did in their study of teachers' perceptions about their most and least able mathematics students. Clearly this is artificial but it ensured that two girls and two boys in each category were discussed. In so doing it makes the category something different. The result would be a comparison of the most and least successful boys with the most and least successful girls rather than a true opportunity to compare gender differences within the groups of most and least successful students per se. Whatever techniques are used to increase the data about girls for consideration it is essential to consider whether doing this distorts the issue or question under examination. This will be discussed further in Chapter Seven in relation to the methodology for the second phase of this research.

5.5 My methodological stance

In acknowledgement of the probable influences of social construction within both special educational needs and gender difference, it is appropriate to consider the background and beliefs in relation to these areas that I bring to this research.

My involvement in relation to special educational needs arises primarily from my working experience as an educational psychologist. My position both as a practitioner and as a researcher is to acknowledge there are genetic and biological differences between individuals which may influence their learning but to believe that these differences interact with a multitude of social and cultural factors. Hence any learning ability or difficulty should be seen as a product of this interaction. Further, I believe that any definition of learning difficulty or special educational needs is culturally determined.

My involvement in respect of gender issues in education arose primarily from concerns about the ways in which girls have been disadvantaged by the process. An early motivation to examine the gender imbalance in referrals to the Educational Psychology Service arose from a concern that, because boys predominate, some girls with significant needs may be overlooked. This included the view that special educational needs may be defined by boys' needs, therefore girls with difficulties, particularly those girls who did not get themselves noticed and perhaps those with significant emotional needs could be missed with possible long-term consequences. In relation to the feminist traditions of research in gender and education, I should be best described as a male with pro-feminist sympathies. My pro-feminist position is that, although there are obvious differences between the sexes, genders and gender roles are to a large extent culturally determined. Further, whatever the differences, both genders should have equal opportunity to access provision in the education system that meets their needs on an equitable basis[1].

I would argue that the flawed individual deficit model of special educational needs does not ensure an equitable distribution of such provision and that the basis by which equity can be ensured is not yet understood. I hope that my research may contribute to a better understanding of how the notion of equal opportunities can be applied within special educational needs with regard to girls and boys.

The research itself falls somewhere between researching special educational needs and researching gender. It can be seen as relating to earlier work on teacher identification of learning difficulties from the special educational needs tradition and to work on teachers' views and judgements of girls and boys as learners from the gender tradition. The research will both report any pattern of gender

[1] I am grateful for Becky Francis' declaration of her feminist position (Francis, 1998; p. 1) which provided me with a formulation by which to consider my position.

difference and will offer some interpretation of these patterns. The focus of interest on children within mainstream and on teacher identification is likely to mean that in general the children's learning difficulties will be at the mild to moderate end of the range; those with more severe and complex difficulties are likely to have been identified earlier. This means that the work is firmly within the range in which it is considered that the 'learning difficulty' may be socially constructed.

An overview of the stages of data collection was provided in the introduction to this section. In the remaining part of this chapter I shall provide an account of the methods and procedure used in the first phase of data collection. Methodological issues and the procedure for the second phase will be described in Chapter Seven.

5.6 The methodology for the first phase of this research

At the time of this phase of the research I was working as an educational psychologist in Sunderland. Permission to approach schools and to carry out the research had been gained from the Principal Educational Psychologist and the Director of Education in July 1995. In gaining this consent there was the clear expectation from the Director that *"academic work should be done in your own time and not detract from your professional duties"*. This inevitably placed a range of practical constraints on the way in which the research in this phase could be carried out.

As has already been made clear, the aim of this phase of the research was to elicit from teachers their views regarding children in their classes whom they considered had learning difficulties. A simple procedure for nominating the children was therefore necessary, together with a way of eliciting and recording the teachers' views, by means of which it would be possible to establish whether there were any patterns of gender difference in the responses. As was mentioned earlier in the chapter such an approach involves withholding from the

participating teachers some information pertaining to the purpose of the research at the point when they agree to participate and during the initial data collection. This type of methodology has been common in research that has examined gender difference for the obvious reason that revealing the details of the hypothesis under investigation would be likely to affect the teachers' behaviour. I decided to proceed in this way by inviting teachers to participate in research into decision-making in the identification of children with learning difficulties, but withholding the fact that I was interested in the gender imbalance. Thus details of the hypothesis under test were withheld. The distinction between this and falsely informing participants of the purpose of research is acknowledged in, for example, the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society[2]. Whilst I had decided to undertake research in which the main focus would not be revealed to participants at the outset, I was keen to ensure that there was the opportunity to debrief teachers regarding this focus of interest after the primary data had been collected. This will be described in the procedural account of the research. In addition, all participants were to be assured that my interest was in patterns of response rather than the responses or views of identifiable individuals.

The key to this phase was to consider children that the teachers themselves had identified as having learning difficulties in their own classes. Although it would have been possible to identify children from the schools' special educational needs register and then approach teachers with a list, the aim was to engage teachers in the data collection by asking them to select the children themselves. I wanted to access the teachers' views and wished for them to see themselves as central in the process rather than simply responding to their school's mechanism for identification, whatever it was. It would be important to seek randomly selected or, more realistically, volunteer teachers rather than ones nominated by their headteachers.

[2] The British Psychological Society (2000) *Code of Conduct Ethical Principles & Guidelines.* Leicester: BPS.

With regard to eliciting their views about the children, the method employed would need to be usable for the second phase, so that comparison between the more naturalistic data here and that arising from the vignettes would be possible. For this reason I decided to use a questionnaire. This also relates to the earlier research into identification discussed previously in this chapter. The questionnaire needed to cover a fairly wide range of issues and to include both closed and open questions for reasons of analysis and comparison.

The possibility of interviewing the teachers in detail about the children they had identified was also considered, but although it may have yielded rich data, I decided that it was impractical both in respect of the commitment required from the teachers and in relation to the restrictions imposed by my then employers. Such interviews would both be time consuming and would represent a more obvious compromise to my role with the teachers as an educational psychologist. In addition the interview would not relate so readily to the proposed vignette stage of the research in which teachers would be asked to talk in some detail about fictitious children about whom they had relatively little information. I considered that some conversations with teachers would be of value and I planned that I would talk with each of the teachers towards the end of the school year. The main aim for the discussion would be to present the teachers with some of the issues relating to the characteristics of the group of children identified, most particularly the anticipated gender imbalance, in order to seek their views on these issues. This would provide the opportunity to discuss gender openly with the teachers and to "come clean" and reveal the real focus of interest in the research which had previously been presented to them as simply being about identification and decision making. This would be presented and introduced as an opportunity to follow up the children's progress and to discuss any issues arising.

In view of the nature of the data collection in this phase and the need to have contact on several occasions with the teachers who agreed to participate, I decided to approach schools within my 'patch', i.e. schools to which I already made

regular visits in the course of my professional duties. This was mainly to make the meetings and discussions with teachers easier to arrange. It was hoped that the existing relationship with the school would make it easy for open dialogue with teachers to be developed rather than having to establish a suitable level of trust. Clearly, though, there were potential disadvantages such as the risk of confusion over my role as school's educational psychologist and my role as researcher. In approaching the schools and individual teachers it would therefore be necessary to make the distinction clear, for example, by establishing that any conversation about children carried out as part of the research did not constitute referral to or involvement of the Educational Psychology Service. Meetings were to be carried out in break-times, at lunch times or after school and were not to be seen as part of the school's allocated time from the Educational Psychology Service. As discussed earlier in the chapter, my position as an educational psychologist, and in particular as the educational psychologist to the schools in which I was planning to carry out the research may have had an influence on the responses provided by the teachers. This is a potential issue in all practitioner research.

Preliminary work

During the school year 1994/95, prior to the beginning of the formal data collection of the first phase I carried out some informal exploratory interviews with a small sample of class teachers. The aim of this was to elicit general data on teachers' beliefs and opinions about learning difficulties and sex differences in special educational needs with the aim of using this to inform the data collection in later stages.

The construction of the questionnaire

The teachers' views were to be elicited by providing them with a questionnaire, headed 'children with learning difficulties' to be completed for each child they had identified in their class. This would ensure consideration of a range of standard questions to allow comparisons to be made. The range of questions in

the questionnaire was derived from my experience as an educational psychologist together with discussions with teachers in the preliminary stages of this work in which they were asked about the range of issues pertinent to the identification and decision making about children about whom they had concerns. The topics and areas of concern covered in the questionnaire are intended to reflect broadly the issues that might arise in the consideration of a child about whom a class teacher has concerns. The questionnaire might therefore represent a, somewhat stilted, conversation between a teacher and an educational psychologist or special needs support teacher. The fifteen questions used in the questionnaire for this phase are as follows:

1. To what extent is the problem arising from the child's lack of ability?

2. Do you consider that this child has general learning difficulties?

3. Do you consider that this child has some sort of specific learning difficulty?

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for this child's difficulties?

5. To what extent do you think that the problem could be alleviated by improvements in the level of involvement from the child's parents?

6. Do you consider that factors within the child's home might be influencing his/her learning difficulties?

7. To what extent could the difficulties be reduced by the child making increased effort?

8. What do you consider is the extent of the influence of the child's learning difficulties on his/her behaviour?

9. What is the extent of the influence of the child's behaviour on his/her learning?

10. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for this child within the classroom without additional support?

11. How likely is the child to respond to within class measures?

12. How likely are this child's difficulties to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in your class?

13. How great is the need for the involvement of the SENCo or other expertise from within the school?

14. How great is the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school?

15. How likely is this child to respond to any additional support or help that may be offered?

Each of the 15 questions required a response to be selected from four options which were intended to cover a range of levels of severity of the teacher's concern about the issue. A four-point 'scale' was selected in order to force respondents to avoid a respone at the mid-point of the range. The wording of the response options was adjusted to be consistent with the question. After a good deal of reflection I decided to use this form of response rather than one more like a rating scale despite the fact that it would have implications for possible analysis of the data. It was expected that the teachers would find the form of words chosen easier and more friendly to use and that this would enhance the validity of their responses. I was helped in my decision making by asking several teachers to read through and respond to the two possible forms of the questions and response styles.

The order of increasing severity of the response options was randomly assigned to questions so that on some it went from left to right and other right to left in order to avoid routine patterns of responses confounding the data.

The full list of questions used and the associated response options in this phase can be found in Appendix A.

The questionnaire also included a number of open questions which gave greater opportunity for teachers to expand on their views. They were given the opportunity to provide additional comments regarding:

- the origin or basis of the child's learning difficulties
- home related matters as they may influence the child's learning difficulties
- the child's motivation
- the relationship between the child's learning difficulties and behaviour
- the ease or difficulty of providing for the child's learning difficulties in class and/or the effects of meeting the child's needs on the teacher's ability to provide appropriately for the other children in the class
- the need for advice or support from other professionals
- the likelihood of the child showing significant improvement during the forthcoming year

5.7 A procedural account of the first phase of data collection

As it was planned that teachers would be asked to identify concerns about children at the beginning of the school year, when the children were relatively new to the class and teacher, it was necessary to approach schools before the end of the previous school year to seek their agreement to participate. This would ensure that that contact could be made with the teachers immediately the new year began. Headteachers of the seven primary schools in my patch were approached in July 1995, at which time I outlined the fact that I was planning to carry out some research into the identification and decisions made about children with learning difficulties and that I was hoping to ask class teachers to talk with me and complete questionnaires about children they had identified. The headteachers were given a copy of an information sheet (Appendix B). As discussed earlier, although the focus of my interest was on possible gender bias in the identification of children with learning difficulties, it would not be helpful or appropriate to mention gender at this stage of the data collection. The research was therefore presented to all potential respondents as an investigation of "the identification and decisions made about children with learning difficulties". All letters and information sheets were headed as such. I managed to speak with six of the seven headteachers at this stage. This was followed up with a letter (Appendix C) sent

in late August with the expectation that this would arrive at the beginning of the new school year. The seventh headteacher with whom I had not managed to make contact was sent a slightly different letter in which more of the introductory information was provided together with an information sheet.

At an early stage in the autumn term 1995, further telephone or personal contact in the course of a visit to the school was made with each Headteacher in order to make arrangements for me to meet with members of staff who might be willing to participate in the research. At this stage one school declined to be involved further. The headteacher indicated that the school was expecting an OFSTED inspection in the course of the year and that he was unwilling to ask the staff to take anything else on. Of the remaining six schools, meetings to talk about the research with groups of interested staff were arranged in five. In the sixth just one person expressed interest and I met with her individually. All of these meetings took place during the first few weeks of the autumn term.

At the meetings I gave the teachers a brief outline of the research, indicating that teachers in several schools were helping me with this work. It was emphasised that I was aiming to collect information from class teachers about children in their classes with learning difficulties. My interest in children seen to have academic learning difficulties as the major presenting problem was stressed. The stages of data collection within this phase were outlined and the teachers were informed of what they would be asked to do if they agreed to become involved. They were given a copy of an information sheet (Appendix D) which outlined the procedures and requirements. They were also given a copy of the questionnaire, headed 'Children with learning difficulties' which they would be required to complete regarding each child in their class at Stages 1 to 3 of the Code of Practice or any others about whom they had concern. It was made clear that they could identify as many or as few children as they thought appropriate. The term used consistently in referring to the children about whom I was interested was 'learning difficulties' rather than the potentially broader 'special needs'. Those teachers

who subsequently agreed to participate were then given as many copies of the questionnaire as they required for the children they had identified in their class and were asked to return them to me over the next few weeks.

The teachers were given assurance that in the reporting of the research no comments would be attributed to named individuals and no children would be identified. At this stage 35 teachers from the six schools indicated their willingness to participate and took questionnaires (see Appendix E for further detail). By the end of the first term of the school year seventeen teachers from five of the six schools has completed and returned questionnaires. In total 70 completed questionnaires were received from the seventeen teachers; meaning that they had between them identified 70 children as having learning difficulties in their classes. Further detail of the characteristics of the teachers and the distribution of the questionnaires will be given in Chapter Six.

I maintained contact with many of the teachers who had completed questionnaires in the course of my visits to their schools throughout the school year; having brief conversations with some of them about the questionnaires and their participation in this stage of the research. In the summer term I reminded the teachers that they had agreed to talk with me towards the end of the school year in order to follow-up the questionnaires. Meetings were arranged with 15 of them during June and July of that year. It did not prove possible to find a mutually convenient time to meet the other two. At the beginning of the meeting with each teacher they were given the opportunity to provide an update on the situation regarding of each of the children they had identified. This allowed them to refocus on the research questionnaires. Following this, I introduced the topic of the gender imbalance by letting them know the numbers of boys and girls for whom questionnaires had been completed in the whole sample together with the relative numbers in their school and identified by them in their class. I then attempted to engage the teacher in conversation about the gender imbalance by asking questions or providing prompts around a loose schedule. The questions or prompts included

asking whether the imbalance surprised them; why they thought it occurred; and whether they had any other views about gender imbalance in relation to learning difficulty (including any notion of areas in which it was more or less likely to occur). These conversations were tape recorded for transcription and analysis at a later stage.

In summary, the stages and timings of the data collection in this phase were as follows:

Negotiation of access with head teachers	*July 1995*
Meetings with teachers who had expressed interest / Issuing of questionnaires to participants	*September 1995*
Return of Questionnaires	*October to December1995*
Follow-up discussions with teachers	*June – July 1996*

The response and data from analysis of the questionnaires will be reported in Chapter Six. Issues arising from the data will be discussed together with issues from the second phase in Chapter Nine. Issues arising from the follow-up discussions with the teacher participants will also be reported and discussed in Chapter Nine in respect of teachers' views on the gender imbalance.

Chapter Six

Children identified by class teachers – the first phase of data collection

6.1 The teacher respondents

The headteachers of seven schools had been approached to participate in this phase of the research. Six of these agreed. Following the series of meetings with potentially interested teachers, 35 took questionnaires. Of these, 33 were female and two male, both in junior schools. As reported at the end of the previous chapter, by the end of the first term of the school year seventeen teachers, from five of the six schools, had completed and returned questionnaires. The breakdown of those who responded is shown in Table 6.1.

TABLE 6.1 – The number of participating teachers in each school

SCHOOL	TYPE	NUMBER OF TEACHERS
A	Primary	3
B	Infant	2
C	Primary	3
D	Infant	4
E	Junior	5
F	Primary	0
Total participating teachers		17

All of the teachers who returned completed questionnaires and participated in the further stages of data collection were female. Clearly, therefore, there was some under-representation of male teachers in this sample. Whilst the two infant schools had exclusively female teaching staffs each of the other schools had two or three male teachers.

6.2 The children identified

In the course of the term, 70 completed questionnaires were received from the 17 teachers. Thus, 70 children were identified as having learning difficulties that would warrant them being placed within Stages 1 to 3 of the Code of Practice. On receipt, each questionnaire was given a number by which to identify the child in future analysis. Each teacher was also given an identifying number. Both of these numbers were allocated simply on the basis of order of receipt of the questionnaires. Although it was necessary to retain the children's names on the questionnaires for the follow-up discussions with the teachers, once the data collection was complete the children, teachers and schools were only referred to by their identifiers. The coding allowed analysis or comparison between children, teachers and schools to be made whilst retaining anonymity of children and their teachers. Where the responses regarding individual children have been given in this chapter identifier codes have been provided. Any names used are not the children's real names.

Of the 70 children regarding whom questionnaires were completed, 17 were girls and 53 were boys.

On the front page of the questionnaire for each child, the teachers had been asked to "give a brief account of the areas of concern". This information was used to classify the children's reported problem according to a number of main areas of concern as will be discussed in subsequent sections. Despite the fact that it had been made clear in the briefing sessions that my interest was in academic learning

difficulties, a number of other areas of concern were offered. Two children, one boy and one girl, were put forward for predominately behavioural issues. Several others were identified by virtue of sensory or medical concerns which may have been likely to affect the child's educational progress. Although of interest, these children will not be included in the analysis of this phase of the research. As indicated in earlier chapters, the focus is to be on children seen to have problems of 'academic learning' which affect their progress or ability to function in school rather than some other problem which may be seen to affect learning and hence progress. This, therefore, reduces the number of children identified to 64. The rates of identification by teachers are shown in Table 6.2. The relative numbers of girls and boys identified in each school are shown in Table 6.3.

TABLE 6.2 – The numbers of girls and boys with learning difficulties identified by each teacher

TEACHER	SCHOOL	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
1	E	2	2	4
2	E	1	7	8
3	B	3	3	6
4	A	0	3	3
5	A	0	3	3
6	A	1	1	2
7	D	0	1	1
8	D	1	2	3
9	D	1	1	2
10	C	0	1	1
11	C	0	2	2
12	C	0	4	4
13	B	2	4	6
14	D	2	3	5
15	E	1	1	2
16	E	0	5	5
17	E	1	6	7
All teachers		15	49	64

TABLE 6.3 – The numbers of girls and boys with learning difficulties identified in each school

SCHOOL	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
A (3 teachers)	1	7	8
B (2 teachers)	5	7	12
C (3 teachers)	0	7	7
D (4 teachers)	4	7	11
E (5 teachers)	5	21	26
All schools	15	49	64

The overall ratio of girls to boys identified by the seventeen teachers is 1 : 3.27; over three times more boys than girls were seen to have learning difficulties by this sample of teachers.

Variations between teachers and schools

The number of children identified by each teacher varied. The ratio of girls to boys identified also varied considerably. Five teachers identified an equal number of girls and boys. The remaining twelve identified more boys than girls; seven of these identified no girls. No teacher in the sample identified more girls than boys. The differences between schools is also interesting to note especially since in one school 7 boys were identified but no girls. It may be worthy of note that this group of schools constituted the main feeders to one large secondary school and that there was at the time a close working relationship between the SENCos of all of these schools on account of a regular cluster group meeting at which they shared practice and attempted to adopt uniform approaches. It might therefore have been expected that there would be greater uniformity of practice. It is clearly difficult to know whether the teachers who volunteered to participate in this research are representative of their schools. No attempt was made to select teachers in this way. It is therefore more appropriate to consider the teachers as a number of individuals from several different schools whilst acknowledging that their practice is likely to be influenced by the context in which they were working. The OECD report (OECD, 2000) mentioned in Chapter One comments on the

apparent consistency of the gender imbalance across types of provision including children in mainstream classes throughout the member countries. Clearly, though, variation between teachers is evident, as is variation between schools as was been indicated in the GENSEN studies. It is not possible within the scope of this piece of work to look more closely at the school variables since it has been designed with the aim of establishing an overview of the possible impact of teacher judgement on the gender imbalance in rates of identification of learning difficulties. Nevertheless, in the accumulation of data in a relatively under-researched area it, perhaps, complements the consideration of school issues by Daniels and colleagues within the GENSEN project as discussed in Chapters One and Three. Undoubtedly, as will be discussed in the final chapters of this thesis, further research with a particular focus on teacher and school variables will be required to explore the significance of these issues more comprehensively.

6. 3 The primary presenting problem

Categorisation of the difficulties

The information provided by the teachers on the front page of the questionnaire under the heading "Please give a brief account of the areas of concern" was used to categorise the learning problem. As already mentioned this information was also used to exclude six questionnaires from the following analysis. As regards the remaining 64 questionnaires the descriptions of the problem were used to generate categories. In many cases the primary area of concern was clear. In 29 cases it was not possible to consider the concern as anything other than one regarding the child's general learning or progress. For 18 children it was equally clear that the major concern related to literacy. In one case the major concern was with problems in numeracy. In the cases of a further ten children, although general learning appeared to be the major concern additional subsidiary concerns were mentioned. In this first analysis these children were categorised separately. In addition, for six other children, the concerns related to speech and/or spoken

language but in most of these cases some additional issues were reported. In this way the range of presenting problems was arrived at with the primary categorisation being on the basis of the most significant presenting problem. The distribution within the full range of problem areas is listed in Table 6.4.

TABLE 6.4 - The range of primary presenting problems, by gender, within the group of 64 children

MAIN AREA OF CONCERN	NUMBER OF GIRLS	NUMBER OF BOYS	TOTAL
General learning	6	23	29
General learning /Attention	2	1	3
General learning /Behaviour	0	2	2
General learning /Language	0	2	2
General learning /Literacy	0	2	2
General learning /Medical	0	1	1
All General learning	8	31	39
Literacy	3	15	18
Numeracy	1	0	1
Speech	1	0	1
Language	0	1	1
Speech/Language	0	1	1
Language/Motor	2	0	2
S&L/Behaviour	0	1	1
All Speech/Language	3	3	6
All learning difficulties	15	49	64

Issues in the categorisation of difficulties

In addition to the obvious differences in the relative numbers of girls and boys identified by the teachers it was apparent that they were not all using terminology in the same ways, even within the same schools. The most obvious area of potential confusion was that many of the teachers referred to 'language' difficulties when they were actually talking about difficulties in the broader areas of literacy and language rather than difficulties with spoken language. In this case

where, for example, from the account provided the teacher had been referring to literacy, the problem was categorised as such. Therefore the children listed as having language or speech and language problems are those where speech and or oral language difficulties were clearly the major focus of concern.

A further source of potential confusion was that many teachers' accounts talked almost exclusively of language / literacy when it was not really clear whether they were using this as an indicator of a general learning difficulty, talking of a specific difficulty, or simply seeing language / literacy as the most important area to be concerned about. In general, unless it had been made clear in the description that the child is seen to be experiencing some sort of specific difficulty, these have all been categorised as general learning / literacy problems.

6.4 The gender ratios within the primary presenting problems

Clearly, boys predominate overall. In most areas in excess of three times the number of girls were identified. This is consistent with other research as discussed in Chapters One and Three. The largest imbalance in the numbers of girls and boys identified, with a ratio of approximately five to one, was in the area of literacy when this was identified as the primary problem rather than an issue within more general learning difficulties. This clearly corresponds with much reported evidence of literacy as a relative problem area for boys. The one area in which girls and boys were identified in equal numbers (three of each) was speech and language. This is perhaps surprising since boys are reported to predominate in the referrals to speech and language therapy services[1]. It is possible that boys were more likely to be seen as having more general learning difficulties. Certainly, when the children seen to have language problems associated with other learning difficulties are included, the relative number of boys increases. Perhaps it was only the children with an obvious speech or specific language

[1] See, for example, Whitehurst and Fischel (1994) which cites several studies in which the proportion of young children with all types of specific language delay or disorder ranged from 67% to 84% male.

problem who were described exclusively in terms of a language difficulty. As discussed above, there was a lack of clarity in the use of the term language which adds to the uncertainty. Only one child was nominated as having problems with numeracy as the primary area for concern. This was a girl. The ratios of girls to boys in each of the main areas of concern are shown in Table 6.5.

TABLE 6.5 – The gender ratio in each of the main areas of concern

AREA OF CONCERN	NUMBER OF GIRLS	NUMBER OF BOYS	RATIO G:B
General learning	8	31	1 : 3.9
Literacy	3	15	1 : 5
Numeracy	1	0	-
Speech & Language	3	3	1 : 1
All Learning Difficulties	15	49	1 : 3.3

6.5 The basis and structure of further analysis and reporting

In view of the limited numbers of children in some areas listed above, the major analysis of the questionnaire responses in this phase will simply compare the 49 boys and the 15 girls seen to have learning difficulties. This means that all of the learning problems will be put together but where possible additional comments will be made about sub-groups. The group that, perhaps, fits least comfortably with the others is the six children seen to have primarily speech and language problems. This is mainly on account of the fact that the gender distribution is equal. It would, though, be hard to exclude these children from the main group on account of the lack of clarity about the use of the term 'language', as discussed above, and the very obvious relationship between problems with language and difficulties in the acquisition of literacy and other basic academic skills.

The data reported in the remaining part of this chapter are derived from the teachers' responses to the fifteen questions and the pertinent 'any other

comments' boxes in the questionnaire. Full details of the pattern of responses to the fifteen questions can be found in Appendix F. Where comments by teachers are quoted, the child and teacher are denoted by their identifier code, together with an indication of whether the child is female (F) or male (M), so that any other comments about that child or by that teacher can be related. The names of the children, where used, have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

Detailed analysis of the data regarding the children identified presents some difficulties on account of the disproportionately small number of girls and the lack of coherence within the groups of boys and girls on account of the variability of the nature of reported difficulty and level of its severity. As a consequence only fairly simple descriptive analysis of the patterns of response for girls and boys for each question has been carried out.

As indicated in Chapter Five, the questionnaire was structured around seven areas of enquiry. These were, in summary:

- the problem and its origins
- home related matters
- the child's motivation
- the relationship between the child's learning difficulties and behaviour
- the ease of managing the child in class
- the need for the involvement of other professionals
- the likelihood of significant improvement

The following sections are structured to be consistent with the sequence of areas covered by the questionnaire.

6.6 The problem and its origins

This section draws on both the account of the main area of concern and any additional comments that were offered about the origin or basis of the child's learning difficulties following questions 1 - 4.

The teachers provided information about the children's difficulties and their concerns in different ways. Some simply gave an account of the child's difficulties in curriculum related terms, detailing, for example, the level of skill in relation to knowledge of letter sounds, sight vocabulary etc. Others offered views on a broader range of issues such as the child's approach to learning or associated behaviour etc. The comments fell into the following main areas:

- the ability to work independently
- attitude / motivation
- maturity / immaturity
- attention / concentration
- confidence
- behaviour / disruptiveness

These areas emerged as clusters within the comments from open coding and content analysis. Within each of these areas, a range of both positive and negative comments was made about the children in relation to possible influence on their learning. The number of comments in each of these categories is shown in Table 6.6.

TABLE 6.6 – Teachers' comments about the girls' and boys' learning

DIMENSION	NUMBERS OF POSITIVE COMMENTS		NUMBERS OF NEGATIVE COMMENTS	
	Girls (n = 15)	Boys (n = 49)	Girls (n = 15)	Boys (n = 49)
ability to work independently	2	4	5	17
attitude / motivation	4	8	3	4
maturity	0	0	3	14
attention / concentration	0	2	6	15
confidence	1	0	1	3
behaviour / disruptiveness	0	1	3	4

Some teachers commented about a particular child in more than one of these categories. The figures therefore simply give an indication of the range of issues considered and the relative frequency of them being mentioned for girls and for boys.

Clearly, more negative comments were made than positive, which is, perhaps, not surprising since this was within an account of the teachers' concerns. Although the ratio of negative to positive comments was slightly higher for the boys (3.8:1) than for the girls (3:1), overall, proportionately more negative comments were offered regarding the girls than were for the boys. This relates well to Hill's (1994) analysis of the comments made by teachers and educational psychologists in their Advice submitted to statutory assessment of children's special educational needs in which he found that, although teachers tended to write more about boys than girls, the girls were described more negatively in relation to their educational attributes. Despite this imbalance towards the girls, it is noticeable here that the boys received a relatively high numbers of negative comments in two areas: the ability to work independently and maturity. Interestingly, within the few positive comments that were made, proportionately more were made about girls in several areas; most particularly in relation to ability to work independently and in respect of their attitude/motivation.

The teachers' responses to the first four questions on the questionnaire add relatively little to the written accounts they gave of the child's problem. There is a slight suggestion that the boys' problems were seen to be more likely to arise from their lack of ability. For 93.8% of the boys their teachers thought that the problem 'possibly' or 'probably' arose from their lack of ability. This compared to 86.6% of the girls for whom this was thought to be the case. The teachers appeared to have more certainty with respect to the boys as is shown in Table 6.7.

TABLE 6.7 – The extent to which the problem was seen to be arising from the child's lack of ability

	GIRLS (N=15)	BOYS (N=49)	RATIO G : B
Possibly arising from lack of ability	53.3% (8)	40.8% (20)	1 : 0.76
Probably arising from lack of ability	33.3% (5)	53.0% (26)	1 : 1.59

The responses to Question 2 suggested that the boys were seen to be more likely than the girls to have a general learning difficulty. 87.7% (43) of the boys were seen by their teachers to 'possibly' or 'probably' have a general learning difficulty compared to 66.6% (10) of the girls. It was also thought that 59.2% (29) of the boys and 53.4% (8) of the girls 'possibly' or 'probably' had a specific learning difficulty of some sort (Question 3). This was thought to be 'very unlikely' for 13.3% (2) of the girls and 6.1% (3) of the boys.

The teachers appeared to consider that there was a slightly higher likelihood that there could be a medical or physical reason for the girls' learning difficulties. They considered that there might 'possibly' or 'probably' be a medical or physical reason for 40.0% (6) of the girls' difficulties compared to 18.4% (9) of the boys.

The perceived level of priority

On the front page of each questionnaire, in addition to providing an account of their concerns, the teachers had been asked to indicate how they perceived the level of priority for the child in relation to the others in their class. A higher proportion of the boys (44.9%) were described as being of 'very high' or 'high' priority compared to the girls (20.0%). The lower levels of priority were more or less evenly balanced. Interestingly, though, for 46.6% of the girls no level of priority was indicated. This compared to 22.4% of the boys. The full breakdown of perceived level of priority as reported by the teachers is shown in Table 6.8.

TABLE 6.8 – The level of priority ascribed to girls and boys:

LEVEL OF PRIORITY	PERCENTAGE OF GIRLS (N=15)	PERCENTAGE OF BOYS (N=49)	RATIO % GIRLS : % BOYS
Very high / High	20% (3)	44.9% (22)	1 : 2.24
Medium	13.3% (2)	12.2% (6)	1 : 0.92
Low	20% (3)	20.4% (10)	1 : 1.02
None indicated	46.6% (7)	22.4% (11)	1 : 0.48

Where a level of priority was given, the teachers' additional comments appeared to relate to a number of different characteristics:

High priority was often simply on account of poor perceived ability. For example:

> *"Top priority – Dean manages very little that even the other s.e.n. children do."* (Child 60 M, Teacher 16)

> *"Very, very poor ability. Very high priority in class and year group."* (Child 42 M, Teacher 12)

> *"High Priority – because Philippa is so far behind I tend to feel she needs so much more help."* (Child 32 F, Teacher 9)

> *"She is unable to complete any tasks without support. Very high priority"* (Child 19 F, Teacher 3)

Very poor perceived ability or very limited academic progress was given as the reason for 13 of the 22 boys and all 3 of the girls who were seen as high priority.

High priority was ascribed on account of associated behavioural factors for four of the boys. For example:

> *"Not poorest ability but probably the most demanding of teacher's time as he cannot settle to task."* (Child 43 M, Teacher 12)

> *"Highest Priority – he has the poorest attitude to work. Although work is suited to his ability he feels no compulsion to complete it. He often appears detached from the rest of the class and in a dream. His concentration span and listening skills are poor, yet I feel that he has slightly more potential than he displays in class."* (Child 21 M, Teacher 4)

> *"High priority – Billy needs a lot of support and attention if he is to achieve any degree of literacy. This is very demanding on the teacher's time and can be very disruptive." (Child 31 M, Teacher 8)*

On two further occasions the perceived possibility of future behavioural difficulties was sufficient reason for teachers to indicate that the child, in both cases a boy, was of high priority. For example:

> *"Fairly high priority – Gary is highly motivated and keen to please. He tries hard and frustration begins to show."* (Child 37 M, Teacher 11)

The relationship between perceived immaturity and level of priority is interesting. Although immaturity was mentioned for three of girls, in all of these it was seen as simply a reflection of slow development and a purely negative factor. For example:

> *"Philippa is so far behind"* (Child 32 F, Teacher 9).

In one case it was attributed to parental behaviour:

> *"Very immature girl who is 'babied' by parents and plays up to this"* (Child 44 F, Teacher 13).

In the case of boys there was more often a positive turn to the immaturity for example:

> *"I think Jason may be a slow starter"* (Child 14 M, Teacher 3);

> *"Immature, lack of application and concentration therefore all work affected. I am sure Anthony has the capabilities ... he is very high on my list of priorities"* (Child 41 M, Teacher 12);

> *"Quite high priority because he appears to be more able than work demonstrates"* (Child 9 M, Teacher 2).

In all of these examples it was clear that the child was perceived as having ability; behind the problem there is hidden potential. This type of justification was evident exclusively in the case of boys in this sample.

The reasons given for placing a child low in the order of priority were similarly varied but often related to the child's ability to work independently. For example:

> *"Low priority – can do some work independently."*
> (Child 70 M, Teacher 17)

This reasoning was equally likely to be applied to girls and boys.

6. 7 Home-related matters

In general the teachers appeared not to hold strong views regarding the extent to which they thought that the problem could be alleviated by improvements in the level of involvement from the child's parents (Question 5). For both girls and boys most respondents opted for the middle ground with the potential benefit being seen as 'possible' or 'unlikely' for around 80% of the girls and the boys. There was though a perceived greater likelihood of factors within the home influencing the girls' learning difficulties than for the boys (Question 6). Home influences were seen to be 'possibly' or 'probably' influential for 66% of the girls compared with 52.1% of the boys. Further, the influence was felt to be 'probable' for 33.3% of the girls.

Additional comments about the possible influence of home related matters on the child's learning were offered for 9 (60%) of the 15 girls and 26 (53%) of the 49 boys. There was little to distinguish the range of issues identified for the girls and the boys apart from the fact that concern about 'parenting' was mentioned specifically for three of the boys and for none of the girls. In addition the influence of 'social' factors was mentioned for proportionately more girls (3 out of 15) than boys (2 out of 49). These were qualitatively different. For the girls they included Social Services Department involvement with the family and

problems with neighbours; each mentioned for one child. For the two boys the concern was related to marital breakdown and the absence of their father from the home, e.g.:

> *"Peter was very shaken and upset by the separation of his parents last year. His mother commented that both she and Peter were devastated by the event and are only now getting on an even keel"*
> (Child 22 M, Teacher 4)

Another factor that was cited for three of the boys but none of the girls was a family history of problems, often related to the school's experience of difficulty with an older sibling. In all cases this was a brother.

Other comments appeared to relate to the theme of immaturity, in some cases attributing this, at least in part, to parental influence. The following are some examples of the comments:

> *"Naughty in the home and demanding. Apparently he settled a lot last year comparing beginning and end of year. I have the impression the he is molly-coddled at home"* (Child 11 M, Teacher 2)

> *"Spoken to mum and she says he's her baby and doesn't really want him to grow up. Realises that it not 'good' for Gary"* Child 37 M, Teacher 11)

> *"Very much helped at home, shows no independence at school."*
> (Child 41 M, Teacher 12)

> *"More support in helping Simon gain in independence ie in dressing himself would probably help"* (Child 54 M, Teacher 14)

This was a child regarding whom the teacher commented:

> *"Simon may well be just immature in the class. He is the youngest."*

A further very noticeable issue, although not necessarily one that reveals a gender difference, was the overall negativity of the teachers' comments about parents and parental support. Lack of parental support was specifically mentioned for 10 children (9 of them boys). The presence of parental support was mentioned for just 4 children, but in two cases it was a somewhat weak acknowledgement:

> *"I'm not sure about home problems but I think parents have split up. Mother has been in to see me to voice concerns over child's reading problem – therefore I assume she is supportive."* (Child 6 M, Teacher 2)

> *"Last year Sean's aunt used to come into school to request homework, reading etc. but tended not to follow it up"* (Child 8 M, Teacher 2)

Further, in two of the four cases parental involvement was seen to be inappropriate or unproductive e.g.:

> *"Parents are very supportive and helpful yet do not seem to want to accept the difficulties that the child is experiencing"* (Child 28 M, Teacher 7)

> *" ...parents listening to reading get frustrated and exacerbate the problem* ...(and later) ... *waiting for report from nurse who has visited home to check on home circumstances."* (Child 65 F, Teacher 17)

6.8 The children's motivation

The teachers were equivocal about the benefit of increased effort by the children. In the responses to Question 7 it was considered that for most (80%) of the girls, increased effort was 'unlikely' or could only 'possibly' reduce their difficulties. The picture was a little different for the boys. Again most, but a smaller proportion, (61.2%) of the boys were seen to be in this mid-range of responses. More of the boys were seen at the extremes of the range of possibilities; for 18.4% of the boys it was considered that increased effort would 'probably' result in a reduced problem but for a further 18.4% this was seen to be 'very unlikely'.

Additional comments were provided for 9 (60%) of the 15 girls and 43 (88%) of the 49 boys. For many of these children, 4 (27%) girls and 26 (53%) boys, the comments constituted a positive remark on their effort. For 2 (13%) girls and 9 (18%) boys a negative remark about effort was made.

Difficulty in sustaining effort was remarked on for 8 (16%) of the boys and 2 (13%) of the girls. In addition, 4 (8%) of the boys were described as being

distractible. This descriptor was not applied to any of the girls in relation to their motivation. For the boys there seemed to be two main bases of their non-engagement with work. For two, disruptiveness or the potential to become disruptive was seen as central:

> *"He is working as hard as he can although I feel he has the potential to be distracted and to distract others."* (Child 6 M, Teacher 2)

> *"Not the poorest ability but probably the most demanding of teacher's time and he cannot settle to task. ...Lacks confidence "I can't!" Very poor concentration span. Won't work without teacher, disruptive in sets"*
> (Child 43 M, Teacher 12)

For others, immaturity again featured as an explanation for lack of progress but the prospect of improvement is hinted at. For example:

> *"Terry is a quiet, well behaved boy who does not yet appear to understand that he needs to work in class. He is quite happy to draw / build etc but appears to lack motivation in work-orientated tasks."*
> (Child 45 M, Teacher 13)

There were fewer comments about the girls' motivation and nearly half of these indicated that they tried hard but found the work difficult. Of the few comments suggesting that a girl could, or would, not persist, two referred to lack of confidence, e.g.:

> *"Lacks confidence and concentration. Must feel absolutely sure about a task before she will attempt it."* (Child 3 F, Teacher 1)

One girl was described as having no motivation and a lack of self-esteem and one was seen simply to be unmotivated:

> *"I feel Emily feels she can get by doing as little as possible."*
> (Child 13 F, Teacher 3)

Seven of the boys were reported to work with support. It is unclear whether this was a positive comment about their responsiveness or further evidence of their difficulty in working independently. No such comment was made about a girl which again may simply reflect that fewer of the girls were seen to have problems with motivation or independent working. Although for about a quarter of the girls and half the boys a positive comment was made indicating that at least they tried

hard, little other detail was given about their responsiveness. Only six children, two (13.3%) girls and four (8.2%) boys, were said to respond to praise or incentives.

6. 9 The relationship between the children's learning difficulties and their behaviour

For almost half of the children, 46.7% of the girls and 49.0% of the boys, it was felt that their behaviour had only a 'minimal' influence on their learning (Question 9). When considering the girls their teachers thought that for 46.7% of them the influence was likely to be 'moderate' or 'high'. For 26.7% the influence was considered to be 'high'. This compared to 24.5% of the boys for whom the influence was seen to be 'moderate' or 'high'. There is insufficient information to do more than speculate about this possible gender difference but it is interesting to note that a for a higher proportion of girls than boys their behaviour was felt to influence their learning. One possible interpretation is that although there are fewer girls, those who were identified were seen to have more severe problems.

When the influence of the child's learning difficulties on their behaviour was considered, nearly all of the girls were placed either in the mid-part of the range or at the lower end. The relationship was seen to be 'minimal' in 46.7% of the cases. Proportionately more of the boys were seen at either extreme, the relationship being seen as 'minimal' for 57.1% and as 'high' for 14.3%. As a consequence only 26.5% were seen in the mid-range compared with 46.7% of the girls (Question 8).

Additional comments about the relationship between the child's learning difficulties and their behaviour were offered for 6 (40%) of the 15 girls and 36 (73%) of the 49 boys. Although there were fewer comments about the girls, they covered a wider range than for the boys. In the case of the girls, three of the six comments consisted of positive remarks about the child's behaviour but in one case this was linked to concerns about distractibility and in another concerns

about an *"unwillingness to have a go"*. Two of the comments related to the child's positive response to support or individual help/supervision.

A number of the teachers made positive remarks about the behaviour of boys, although several appeared to feel it necessary to comment that the learning difficulties appeared to have no effect on the behaviour. General positive comments about behaviour were made about eight boys and for a further five the teacher specifically noted the lack of a link between learning and behaviour. One teacher observed that there were no behavioural concerns *"at present"*, as if this was unlikely to continue, when commenting on four of the five boys she had identified. Such sentiments were echoed by two of the teachers who predicted that behavioural difficulties could arise in the future.

> *"I feel that behaviour problems may get worse as Barry grows older and continues to fall behind."* (Child 33 M, Teacher 9)

> *"At present variety and demands of classroom tasks do not put Tim into a situation where he feels inadequate but as he gets older and language tasks become more complex problems will arise."* (Child 27 M, Teacher 6)

No teacher actually made a negative remark about the behaviour of a girl whereas explicit negative remarks were made about 11 of the boys with difficulties being anticipated for two others as mentioned above. The negative comments were generally accounts of a failure to meet behavioural expectations although for seven boys distractibility was mentioned. In all but two cases a negative comment about the boy's behaviour was simply offered with no particular reference made to how this related to his learning.

Immaturity again featured in some comments about the boys' behaviour on occasions as an interpretation or a justification for what might otherwise be described as difficult behaviour, for example:

> *Ricky's behaviour is not so bad that it interferes with his learning. He is still immature, with poor concentration skills rather than badly behaved."*
> (Child 46 M, Teacher 13)

6.10 The ease of managing the children in class

The teachers considered that 46.7% (7) of the girls and 30.6% (15) of the boys would be 'very easy' or 'fairly easy' to provide for in class (Question 10). No boy was seen to be 'very easy' to provide for. This meant that a slightly higher proportion of boys were considered to be 'fairly difficult' or 'very difficult' to provide for (61.2% of the boys and 53% of the girls).

A higher proportion of the girls (53.3%) were seen to be 'very likely' or 'fairly likely' to respond to within class measures compared to the boys (38.8%) (Question 11).

In response to Question 12, the teachers considered that the difficulties of 40% of the girls and the same proportion of boys would be 'unlikely' to interfere with or restrict the learning of others. As regards the few children whose difficulties were considered to be 'very likely' to interfere with the learning of others, two were girls (13.3%) and two were boys (4.1%); a lower proportion of boys. It is interesting to note though that in the additional comments, the effect on other pupils was mentioned in relation to more boys (12; 24.5%) than girls (2; 13.3%).

The additional comments on the ease of providing for the children in class revealed other differences in perception. Overall, comments were provided for 8 (53%) of the girls and 39 (80%) of the boys. The fact that proportionately more teachers chose to make additional comments about the boys is in itself revealing. The need for a high level of individual support was cited for 36 out of the 64 children (56.25%) but was more likely to be seen as a requirement for boys than girls. This was indicated for 61.2% of the boys compared to 40.0% of the girls. There was also a hint of difference in the reasons for this. For all of the girls where this was felt to be necessary, it was simply to support their learning. This was also true for many of the boys but for six of these, the consequences in terms of deteriorating behaviour when no support was provided were mentioned.

Similarly, reference to difficulties in catering for the child in class on account of their effect on other pupils was mentioned more often for boys than for girls (boys: 24.5%; girls: 13.3%).

6.11 The need for the involvement of other professionals

There was little difference between the girls and boys in the perceived need for involving the SENCo or other expertise from within the school, with it being seen as potentially 'helpful' rather than 'necessary' or 'essential' for both boys and girls (Question 13). The perceived need for other professionals from outside the school showed some gender differences (Question 14). Such involvement was seen as 'essential' for 14.3% (7) of the boys but no girls whereas it was felt to be 'unnecessary' for almost half (46.7%; 7) of the girls as compared to 30.6% (15) of the boys.

The additional comments, which were provided for 5 (33%) of the 15 girls and 27 (55%) of the 49 boys, suggested that the requests for involvement were in some cases for a specific reason, e.g. Speech and Language Therapy assessment, which related to the particular problem regardless of gender. On the other hand the desire for additional hands-on support was mentioned for 8 of the boys but no girls. There was also a suggestion that for some of the children the teacher wanted to wait and see how the child responded to in-class support before making such a judgement. There was little suggestion of gender difference in this respect.

6.12 The likelihood of significant improvement

Most children were seen as likely to respond to any additional support that was offered but the probability was thought to be higher for girls than boys. Response was thought to be 'highly' likely or 'probable' for 86.6% (13) of the girls and 71.4% (35) of the boys. It was, though, thought 'highly' likely for 53.3% (8) of the girls and only 36.7% (18) of the boys (Question 15). This relates to the

teachers' responses to Question 11 which suggested that a higher proportion of the girls would be likely to respond to within class measures.

The additional comments about the likelihood of the child showing significant improvement during the forthcoming year showed little in the way of gender difference. Comments were provided for 10 (66%) of the girls and 28 (57%) of the boys. For both boys and girls the need for extra help was seen as important in promoting improvement. Teachers were optimistic about 13 (27%) of the boys and 4 (27%) of the girls. On the other hand comments suggested that significant improvement was thought to be 'unlikely' or 'limited' for 10 (20%) of the boys and 2 (13%) of the girls. No teacher made a comment suggesting that improvement was 'unlikely' for a girl.

6.13 Other ways in which the data from the questionnaires can be considered

Variations between sub-groups of children

As was discussed in sections 6.3 and 6.5 of this chapter, although it was possible to classify the children's presenting problems into a number of categories, analysis offered so far has been based on the two main groups: all girls and all boys. The numbers of children, in particular the very low number of girls, in most of the sub-groups of learning difficulty makes any comparison between those sub-groups extremely difficult.

One of the areas for comparison that I had considered was between the sub-group whose presenting problem had been categorised as specific literacy difficulties and the group of those seen as having a more general learning difficulty of which literacy was an element. Of interest here would be a comparison of the teachers' responses to questions 2 and 3 which asked whether the child was seen to have a general learning difficulty or some sort of specific difficulty respectively. When this was done it proved very difficult to distinguish between the two groups on the

basis of the teachers' responses to these questions. This having been established, I abandoned any other efforts to make comparisons between these or any other sub-groups of children; the numbers being too small. The issue of distinguishing between perceived general and specific learning difficulties, however, will be discussed further in Chapter Nine.

School and teacher differences

As reported in section 6.2, there were differences between teachers and schools with regard to the relative numbers of boys and girls identified.

- It has already been established that although the between school variation is potentially interesting the basis on which teachers were recruited would make any comparison between schools invalid.
- The numbers girls and boys identified by each teacher also varied considerably which would be a very interesting basis for further analysis. There are again significant limitations on the possibility of any analysis on account of the small sample size and the large discrepancy between the numbers of girls and boys in the sample. In any case, the teachers came from a variety of schools which may have introduced their own variables.
- It is also worthy of note that all of the teachers who contributed to this phase of the research were female; therefore no comparison on the responses by gender of the teacher is possible.

6.14 Summary of emerging issues from this phase

A number of issues are clearly evident from the children identified and the accounts of their problems provided by their teachers. These include:

- More boys than girls were identified as having learning difficulties by this sample of teachers.
- Problems with literacy featured as a key factor in the descriptions of children with perceived learning difficulties.

The more detailed information provided by the teachers in their responses to the questionnaires revealed a range of relatively subtle differences in a number of areas. These suggest that the teachers may hold differential perceptions of the needs of the girls and boys in this sample; also that the teachers' expectations for these children may show similar gender bias. The areas in which such differentiation was most apparent relate to:

- Perceptions of immaturity
- Perceptions of level of priority and reasons for being seen as a high priority
- Motivation / distractibility
- Confidence / lack of confidence
- Ease of management and responsiveness to support
- The relative numbers of additional comments

I will consider each of these only briefly here but will discuss them in more detail in Chapter Nine alongside issues that arise from the second phase of data collection.

Gender imbalance in identification

Over three times the number of boys as girls were identified as having learning difficulties by this sample of teachers. Twelve out of seventeen teachers identified more boys than girls. The other five teachers identified equal numbers of boys and girls. No teacher identified more girls than boys. Seven teachers identified no girls in their class as having learning difficulties.

Immaturity

Reference to immaturity was made by some teachers in each of the areas in which additional comments were invited. The term was frequently used as an explanation for or justification for perceiving a child as having learning difficulties. Immaturity was mentioned more frequently for boys than for girls. There is also a suggestion of different issues being associated with immaturity for

girls and boys. The notion is much more straightforward for girls for whom immaturity was associated with general delay which seems likely to continue. For boys, immaturity seemed to be associated with potential. A boy was more likely to be described as immature but having untapped potential which could be fulfilled either by time or by finding the right conditions or support.

Perceived level of priority

Nearly half of the boys identified were seen as being high priority. Only 20% of the girls were seen as high priority.

A variety of reasons were given for seeing a child as of high priority:

- On account of being seen as the most needy
- On account of being seen as the most demanding i.e. the greatest problem to the teacher
- On account of poor attitude
- On account of having a good attitude and being seen as having the potential for change / achievement (being remediable)
- Not being able to work independently

Motivation / distractibility

Boys were more likely to be seen as distractible; this was often associated with immaturity. Girls were more often seen as well motivated but finding difficulty with their work. Here poor attainment was less likely to be seen as hiding unfulfilled potential.

Lack of confidence

This appeared to be associated more often with girls as a reason for their lack of achievement.

Ease of management and responsiveness to support

The boys were more likely to be seen as harder to provide for in class and their difficulties were seen as more likely to interfere with the learning of others in the class. The girls were more likely to be seen as responsive to any support that was offered. There was no difference between girls and boys in respect of the perceived need for the involvement of the SENCo but boys were more often seen to need the involvement of outside agencies. The boys were more likely to be seen to need the provision of additional hands-on support from adults.

The relative numbers of additional comments

In general teachers wanted to say more about the boys. A higher proportion of boys were commented on in relation to four of the six areas of concern: motivation, relationship between learning and behaviour, ease of management in class, the need for the involvement of other professionals. In each case the difference was by a wide margin. In the two areas in which girls received proportionally more comments, the margin was smaller. These were: home related matters and the likelihood of improvement. The percentage of girls and boys receiving additional comments in each area are shown in Table 6.9.

Table 6.9 – The relative proportions of girls and boys receiving comments in each area of questioning

AREA	% GIRLS RECEIVING COMMENTS	% BOYS RECEIVING COMMENTS
Home related factors	60	53
Children's motivation	60	88
Relationship between learning and behaviour	40	73
Ease of management in class	53	80
Need for other professionals	33	55
Likelihood of improvement	66	57

6.15 Concluding comments

As outlined in the previous section, this first phase of the research has provided some indication of a number of areas in which there is a suggestion of differential perceptions or expectations regarding the girls and boys who were identified by their class teachers as having learning difficulties. It is equally apparent that it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from these data on account of the range and variability of the problems identified and differences in their perceived severity. Detailed comparisons of the girls and boys is also difficult on account of the relatively very small group of girls identified. This though in itself adds to the evidence of gender imbalance in this area.

As regards the method of eliciting teachers' views of girls and boys with learning difficulties employed in this phase, the range and quality of information collected suggests that the approach has some validity. Each of the areas of questioning has yielded interesting and useful data. This confirms the potential usefulness of the methodological approach for the second phase of data collection using vignettes. Naturally, some areas of questioning will require adjustment or refinement to suit that different context. This, together with some other observations regarding this first phase will be discussed in the introductory sections of the next chapter. The chapter will then move on to a consideration of methodological issues for the second phase before providing a procedural account of that phase. As already mentioned, the issues arising from this phase of the research will be discussed more fully, alongside issues from the second phase, in Chapter Nine.

Chapter Seven

Methodological issues – the second phase

7.1 Commentary on the first phase and introduction to the second

In the first phase it was apparent that more boys than girls were identified as having learning difficulties by the group of participating teachers. The teachers' responses to the questionnaires also revealed a range of relatively subtle differences in their perceptions of the children's needs, their attributions, and their expectations according to whether the children were girls or boys. The data available for analysis were limited on account of the under-representation of girls in the sample. The range of problems presented by the teachers was fairly wide but was dominated by concerns about literacy. The low numbers of children seen to have problems in other or additional areas again made any sort of comparison including by gender extremely difficult. For example only one child was identified as having a problem associated with numeracy.

Other problems of comparing the boys and girls as groups include the fact that there is no guarantee that the problems identified even within the same category were indeed similar. In addition, although the aim was to look at children nominated by these teachers the situation was not as simple as that. The children were new to their current teachers, but it was often the case that the children had

already been identified as a cause for concern. The teacher had therefore been passed information from the previous teacher. The judgements of the teachers in the research sample were likely to have been influenced by the information passed to them by the child's previous teacher therefore some expectations would have been set up for the current teacher. The teachers may also have acquired other information about these children and their circumstances such as family issues or the teachers' experience of siblings which may have influenced their view of the children as learners. This knowledge of the individuals and their circumstances may have a greater biasing effect than gender. The overview of teachers' responses to girls' and boys' learning problems is further complicated by the fact that comparisons were being made between different teachers' perceptions of different children. This makes it difficult to disentangle teacher differences and pupil differences and as a consequence it is hard to be sure of the reasons for any apparent gender influences. Clearly this first phase of the research was carried out in the real world so such potential lack of clarity is inevitable.

The first phase of this research demonstrated some of the problems in trying to elicit teachers' views in a way in which useful comparisons can be made. The method of seeking information proved effective but the variation in the range of learning problems identified and discussed made it very difficult to compare teachers' views of girls and boys. The limited number of girls exacerbated the problem.

When planning a second phase of data collection, the research could have been extended in a number of different ways. These include:

- looking in depth at what happens within particular schools with regard to the identification and treatment of girls and boys with learning difficulties in order to establish whether any differential practices are evident;
- exploring the differences between schools with a view to identifying the characteristics that may influence gender differences in patterns of identification;

- exploring the differences between teachers with a view to identifying the characteristics that may be associated with gender differences in patterns of identification;
- looking at teachers' responses to different problems or problem areas with the aim of identifying any gender differentiated beliefs or practices;
- aiming to gain a clearer view of the overall gender imbalance in teachers' perceptions and responses to girls and boys considered to have learning difficulties.

At this stage of undertaking research in the relatively unexplored area of gender and special educational needs I chose to retain as my focus the judgements made by teachers with the aim of establishing an overview of any differences in the ways that girls and boys identified as having learning difficulties are seen. Clearly, as has already been established, there are differences between teachers and between schools but further investigation of these will need to be the matter of subsequent research. This will be discussed further in Chapter Eleven in the light of the findings from the present study.

If the second phase of my research is to add anything, it must, in addition to exploring the gender imbalance from a different angle, attempt to control some of these variables and present a clearer view of the issues and variables under investigation while retaining validity as an indication of the judgements made by teachers.

Although the second phase of this research was carried out after the first phase, the two phases were planned to be complementary, looking at the same issue in different ways. I was keen to find a way in which the method of eliciting views from teachers in the first phase (i.e. the questionnaire) and the basis of analysis of their responses could be employed in the second phase. In this way useful comparisons between the data collected in the two phases could be made. My intention was to establish a strong link between the two phases. I also wished to

find a way to consider all or most of the areas of learning difficulty raised by teachers in the first phase: general learning, literacy, numeracy, language etc for which there were too few examples to make comparisons within that sample of children. As mentioned in the introduction to this part of the thesis I had at an early stage decided to make use of accounts of fictitious children (vignettes) as the stimulus in this second phase. By using vignettes it would be possible to ensure that:

- a range of types of learning difficulty could be considered;
- a number of teachers could be asked questions about the same problem;
- equal numbers of girls and boys could be considered;
- boys and girls with 'identical' learning difficulties could be considered;
- teachers could be presented with a broader range of problems for girls and for boys.

In this way it was hoped that, by controlling other factors such as the account of the problem, a clearer view of the influence of gender would emerge. Vignettes offer a way to provide material in a standardised way so that responses across participants can be compared. The use of vignettes provides the unique opportunity to explore teachers' responses to a girl and a boy who, apart from their gender, are identical and experience the same problem described in the same way.

The following two sections give a brief background to vignette based research and describe some examples of research using vignettes in the field of special educational needs respectively. In the remaining part of the chapter I shall provide an account of the method and procedure used in this second phase of data collection.

7.2 Using vignettes

Vignettes are short descriptions of hypothetical situations which contain the information necessary for respondents to base their judgements on. Poulou (1999) provides a useful review of the use of vignettes as a technique in attempting to elicit teachers' causal attributions, perceptions and responses within educational settings. She points out that in this work vignettes have usually consisted of written, fictitious material including background, referral or observational information which is held constant, the only exception being the variable under study. Following the presentation of the vignette, teachers' views are usually elicited by means of an interview or the completion of a questionnaire, often including ratings on Likert scales. Poulou cites Huebner (1991) who suggested that research on special education decisions benefits from the use of vignettes; arguing that this analogue format enables the researcher to exercise greater control over the variable under scrutiny and so increase the internal validity of the study. Clearly, though, in order to elicit useful and valid responses, the situations described in vignettes need to approximate reality for the respondent. Respondents are therefore given the opportunity to express their own perceptions on topics familiar to them while remaining detached from personal involvement and therefore arguably safe from personal threat regarding the judgements made. It is argued therefore that respondents do not have to bias their responses and give socially approved answers. A significant additional advantage of vignettes is that they allow the manipulation of variables so that different participants can be given versions of the vignette which are adjusted with the only difference being the variable being investigated.

Poulou concludes her review by suggesting that the use of vignettes has a number of advantages including the fact that they are non-directive in that they enable the respondent to form her/his own interpretation of the situation described. In addition they are concrete and specific, delineating the situation under investigation. Vignettes therefore carry the advantage of being able to elicit both individualised and comparative responses. A further advantage of employing

vignettes is that they do not require much time from the respondent. The commitment is simply to read the account and respond to the questions. The length of time will largely be determined by the complexity of the questioning rather than the teachers' need to collect information.

Poulou acknowledges the limitations of vignettes. To be effective vignettes need to be clear and consistent. They must be easily understood but must be constructed to stimulate respondents' imagination. The need for simplicity and clarity also represents a limitation in relation to the generalisability of responses. Vignettes can present only a snippet that approximates a real life situation. They cannot take into account all of the possible environmental or personal factors that may influence decisions in real life. Although vignettes can provide respondents with the opportunity to respond in a way that is safe from personal threat regarding their judgements, they can by the same token allow respondents to respond in a idealised way that they know would not be possible in real life.

On balance though, the use of vignettes is a valid and effective technique for the study of teachers' beliefs and perceptions. In the case of the present research the use of vignettes compensates for the limitations of the real life data collection in the first phase by providing the unique opportunity to present teachers with descriptions of boys and girls with identical problems.

7.3 Some examples of vignette based research in special educational needs

Todman et al (1991) wished to test the hypothesis that primary aged children with learning difficulties were more likely to be referred to the Educational Psychology Service if they presented accompanying disruptive behaviour than if they showed non-disruptive social problems. In order to test this hypothesis vignettes were used in the following way. Four teachers in each of 17 primary schools were presented with a fictitious profile describing a pupil with special needs. There were four versions of the profile, each of which described identical learning

difficulties but varied according to the type of social/emotional problem referred and the sex of the pupil. The emotional problem was summarised as either 'disruptive' or 'withdrawn' and the pupil's sex was indicated by the name (Paul or Pauline) and the personal pronoun used in the profile. A different version of the profile was randomly allocated to each of the four teachers within each school. Having read their version of the profile, the teachers were asked to rank eight possible responses or action choices. These included the involvement of external agencies, actions within the school and no action. This design ensured that each of the four versions of the profile was seen and responded to in all of the schools thus ensuring some consistency of the possible cultural differences across the four experimental conditions. Although differences between the disruptive and non-disruptive children were found, there was no overall gender difference between the groups. Gender was therefore not discussed in any more detail.

Cline and Ertubey (1997) were interested in investigating whether children's gender would have an influence on teachers' judgements about the children's difficulties in school. The teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire on what action might be required in their school for children with difficulties who were described in short vignettes. Their sample consisted or 523 teachers from 79 schools. A random sample of 800 schools had been approached initially and sets of questionnaire were sent to the first 140 headteachers who replied. As an incentive, each school that returned five or more completed questionnaires was offered 'feedback that could help in future planning' and £20 in book tokens. Three different problem areas were described in the vignettes: specific learning difficulties in literacy, selective mutism, learning problems associated with hearing impairment. The researchers considered that their approach involved using 'rounded' vignettes to provide fuller context for teachers. Each teacher's questionnaire contained three different vignettes. There were two versions of the questionnaire. In one version the first and second children were presented as boys and the third a girl. In the other version this was reversed, i.e. the first two were presented as girls and the third as a boy. All teachers in the same school received

the same version of the questionnaire. The researchers' conclusion from their data was that when the experimental task was carefully contextualised the gender-of-child effect disappeared. They consider: *"The implication may be that an explanation for the predominance of boys in most kinds of SEN provision cannot be sought in gender stereotyping by individual teachers."* (p. 453). They acknowledge that their data related to a small and restricted range of types of difficulty. I would suggest that the types of difficulty are far from representative of the learning difficulties presented in most primary schools. It is possible that the mutism and hearing impairment are sufficiently out of the ordinary to be truly responded to in relation to the problem and not significantly influenced by gender. The specific literacy difficulty is more typical but this again represents a specific area of difficulty that may be responded to in a different way than a more general learning problem. I would suggest that this piece of research might have achieved greater face validity if it had considered more typical or general learning difficulties. This use of vignettes demonstrates some of the problems in ensuring the 'reality' of the problem in respect of how representative it is of the area it purports to investigate. A further methodological issue might be the use of three vignettes in a questionnaire. In order to provide equal numbers of responses for the male and female versions of each vignette, half of the respondents were given a questionnaire in which two vignettes were about girls, the first two at that. In investigating an area in which it is known that boys predominate this high profile presentation of girls with problems runs the risk of generating suspicion which may in turn reduce the validity of the findings.

In her own work, Poulou made use of vignettes in her research into teachers' perceptions, emotional responses and coping strategies regarding children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (Poulou, 1999; Poulou & Norwich, 2000; Poulou & Norwich, 2001). She constructed a set of vignettes describing pupils with three types of problem: conduct difficulties, emotional difficulties and mixed difficulties. For each problem area, a mild and a severe version of the problem was prepared thus producing six different vignettes. They were constructed to

present realistic pupil behaviours with details of the pupil's background excluded since it was assumed that this might influence the teachers' perceptions. Thus no information was given about pupil's age, grade or intelligence. They did though provide information about the pupil's gender: three were given boys' names and three girls', in order to *"convey a sense of reality"* (Poulou, 1999, p. 139). Her sample consisted of 391 elementary teachers in Greece. Each teacher was given two vignettes; to *"avoid biased perceptions, however, the 2 vignettes which corresponded to each behaviour type, referred one each to a male and a female child."* (p. 140). Poulou's work did not aim to explore the impact of pupil gender on the teachers' perceptions but this represents a striking example of the perception that gender is a non-issue in the area of special educational needs.

This brief survey of some recent work that has made use of vignettes to investigate aspects of special educational needs presents a picture of the potential for the use of such a technique. It is evident though that each carries its own cautionary tale in respect of: the level at which comparison between groups is made (whole group quantitative or more qualitative), the selection of the range of problems to be considered, the over or under inclusion of information in the vignettes and the inclusion of a potential variable which is treated as a constant or irrelevant piece of information. These are all issues to be considered very carefully in the planning of research using vignettes.

7.4 The methodology for the second phase of this research

As has been established, my intention was that the second phase methodology would be broadly similar to that of the first in that the teachers were to be asked to complete a questionnaire about children with learning difficulties. The difference would be that in the second phase the children would be described in vignettes rather than being children known to the teachers. To emphasise the similarity and the comparison between the data, the range of questions asked would need to be broadly similar.

The construction of the vignettes

In selecting the areas of concern to be described in the vignettes, I wished to cover a range of relatively common or typical problem areas that related to the problems that were identified in the naturalistic data of phase one. The problems and descriptions of the children were therefore derived from the data in the questionnaires and from my experience as an educational psychologist. In addition to covering typical problem areas the vignettes also provide the opportunity to seek more information about problems that were identified in insufficient numbers to examine closely in the first phase, for example difficulties with numeracy.

The five problem areas that I settled on covered three varieties of general learning difficulty each with a different slant or additional area of concern: general delay/immaturity, emotional issues, attention/motivational problems. The other two each relate to an area of specific learning difficulty: literacy and numeracy respectively. The rationale for selecting each of these is as follows:

- general learning difficulties (delay or immaturity) – immaturity is an issue that emerged in relation to learning difficulties in the first phase and appeared to have a gender dimension as discussed in Chapter 6.
- a general learning difficulty with an emotional dimension – this was selected to see whether there are different interpretations / expectations of boys and girls since issues of emotional response are perhaps more likely to be expected in girls. Certainly emotional problems and issues are less likely to be identified as special educational needs than the more overt behavioural difficulties – again a gender dimension might be expected to emerge.
- a learning difficulty with possible attentional / motivational / language concerns – it was thought that the ambiguity might be a useful feature to elicit difference in response to boys and girls. There is also a hint of possible management difficulties.

- a specific literacy difficulty – this was selected on account of the view that boys make a slower start with literacy. I was interested to see whether this would be interpreted as a special educational need or is seen to be about a gender difference in development.
- a specific difficulty in number / mathematics – this was selected because it is an area that is under-represented in referrals for learning difficulty and on account of the view that girls may find maths more difficult than boys.

Having decided on the set of learning problems, I drafted the vignettes which consisted of one paragraph of around 125 words for each of the five problem areas. A male and female version of each vignette was then created by the provision of a girl's or a boy's name and the use of the appropriate personal pronouns. The names selected were intended to be in fairly common use. No other personal information is given about the children. The vignettes do not specify the age of the child but they are intended to be seen as describing children in the mid-junior age range as it was intended that questionnaires would be issued to teachers of children in years 3 to 6 inclusive.

The draft versions of the vignettes were read by teachers and colleagues to check their face validity as accounts of children with problems as intended and to check their appropriateness for the age range and any curricular matters referred to. Some minor comments were taken into account in producing the final versions of the vignettes. A summary of the nature of the problem and the names given to each problem pair is shown in figure 7.1. The full vignettes can be seen in Appendix G (G.a to G.e).

Figure 7.1 – Summary of the learning difficulty described in each vignette pair

PROBLEM	CHILD	SUMMARY
1f	Amy	A child with mild to moderate learning difficulties that suggests general immaturity or developmental delay and with no other complicating factors.
1m	Alan	
2f	Laura	A child with mild general learning difficulties with an associated emotional response.
2m	Daniel	
3f	Claire	A child with mild to moderate learning difficulties with associated attentional or motivational concerns and possible language difficulties.
3m	Steven	
4f	Sarah	A child who is orally capable but appears to have a specific literacy difficulty with some signs of frustration.
4m	Paul	
5f	Emma	A child who is making generally fair progress but who is having apparently specific difficulties in the acquisition of number and mathematical skills.
5m	Kevin	

The means of eliciting teachers' views – the questionnaire

It had been my intention to use essentially the same bank of questions in the two phases of data collections. Inevitably though some minor adjustments were necessary to make the questions suitable for the different context of the second phase. Two questions from the first phase (5 & 6) which asked about parental involvement and home related matters were omitted in the second phase since there was insufficient information in the vignettes to make these appropriate. Another question (11) which had asked about within class measures was also omitted since the teachers responding to vignettes were this time being asked about hypothetical children not members of their own classes.

In addition, the wording of some other questions was changed slightly to improve clarity in light of comments from the first phase. To replace the questions that had been omitted, two new questions (14, 15) were added to ask specifically about teachers' expectations for these children. Another question (13) about the children's acceptance of support was included to add to the teachers' view about their response to support.

These changes brought the question bank to 15, the same as in the first phase. The same questions were associated with each of the 10 vignettes with the appropriate name and personal pronouns inserted. Using the example from Amy's questionnaire, the questions used in phase two are as follows:

1. How likely is it that the problem is arising from Amy's lack of ability?
2. Do you consider that Amy has general learning difficulties?
3. Do you consider that Amy has some sort of specific learning difficulty?
4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for her difficulties?
5. How likely is it that the difficulties would be reduced by Amy making increased effort?
6. Do you think that Amy's behaviour is restricting her learning?
7. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for Amy within the classroom without additional support?
8. How likely would she be to respond to a moderate level of additional support in class (say up to 5 hours a week of auxiliary support)?
9. Do you think that Amy's learning difficulties are likely to be affecting her behaviour?
10. Are Amy's difficulties likely to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in her class?
11. How necessary do you consider the need for the involvement of the SENCo or for other expertise from within the school?
12. How great do you consider the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school? (e.g. ESS, EPS etc)
13. How likely do you think Amy will be to accept any additional support or help that may be offered?

14. If no additional help were offered to Amy, do you think that her learning difficulties are likely to become significantly more serious by this time next year?

15. If no additional help is offered to Amy, how likely are there to be significant concerns about her behaviour by this time next year?

As in the first phase, each of the 15 questions required a response to be selected from four options which were intended to cover a range of levels of severity of the teacher's concern about the issue. The wording of the options was adjusted to be consistent with the question. As discussed in Chapter Five, I decided use this form of response rather than one more like a rating scale despite the fact that it would have implications for possible analysis of the data. It was expected that the teachers would find the form of words chosen easier and more friendly and that this would enhance the validity of their responses. This was confirmed by those teachers who participated in the first phase.

The order of increasing severity of the response options was randomly assigned to questions so that on some it went from left to right and other right to left in order to avoid routine patterns or response confounding the data. Once the order was established for each question it was used in this way for all vignettes.

The full list of questions used and the associated response options in this phase can be found in Appendix H.

A further major difference between the questionnaire used in the two phases concerns the opportunity for teachers to make additional comments. In the first phase the teachers were given the opportunity to comment in seven areas related to the problem. In this second phase where the teachers were relying on brief vignettes it seemed unreasonable to ask them to make comments on seven occasions. Comments were therefore requested in two broad areas:

- "the child's difficulties and the most appropriate ways of addressing them"
- the teacher's "expectations for (the child) over the next year if (his/her) difficulties are not addressed appropriately".

The compilation of the questionnaire for each teacher

In the process of drafting the questionnaire and vignettes I approached several teachers in some of the schools I was currently working with to trial the questionnaire. I asked them to comment on the suitability of the vignettes, the ease of responding to the questions, and the time taken to complete the questionnaire associated with each vignette. This enabled me to establish that a questionnaire consisting of four vignettes, their associated questions together with a respondent information sheet would be reasonable in terms of the time it would take to complete. The trial had confirmed that it would take teachers something in the order of twenty minutes to complete the questionnaire. I had been keen to have an even number of vignettes in each questionnaire so that I could avoid the necessity of giving any respondent a questionnaire that included more girls than boys for the reasons discussed in section 7.3.

The questionnaire given to each potential respondent was therefore made up using two female vignettes and two male vignettes ensuring that it did not contain male and female versions of the same problem. Each questionnaire therefore contained four out of the five possible problem situations. A questionnaire consisting of one of the possible combinations of problems was randomly allocated to each potential respondent with the caveat that no two teachers in the same school would be given male and female versions of the same problem. The sequence of girl and boy within the questionnaire was also varied randomly.

The questionnaire front sheet (Appendix I) asked the teachers to provide information about their: sex, age (within ranges), the length of their teaching experience (within ranges), the age range of the school, the age range of their current class and whether they were a SENCo or had some other responsibility for

special educational needs. The preamble to this assured respondents that this information was to enable comparisons between groups and that at no point would the reporting of responses be linked with identifiable individual respondents.

7.5 A procedural account of the second phase of data collection

The context

By the time this phase of the data collection was to be undertaken I had taken up the post of Senior Educational Psychologist in Newcastle upon Tyne. This move carried with it both advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages was the fact that it would give me access to a new pool of teachers who had not been exposed to the earlier stages of the work or my previous research. The associated disadvantage was that being relatively new in the post at the time when I was planning to approach schools I could not rely on established professional relationships as a possible reason for teachers agreeing to participate.

Permission to approach schools had again to be negotiated with my new Principal Educational Psychologist and the Director of Education. This presented no problems but again assurances needed to be given that the work would not be carried out to the detriment of my professional duties and that it would be conducted outside of my working time.

Preparing the way

In April 1999 I wrote a memo to all educational psychologists in the Newcastle service giving them information about the research. I told them of my area of interest and that I had carried out an earlier phase of data collection in my previous post. I let them know that I was planning to approach headteachers to seek volunteer teachers and gave all members of the service a sample questionnaire for information and reference in case anyone in one of the schools mentioned it to them. I pointed out that although my interest was in gender for

'obvious reasons' I was intending to present the research as a study of the decision making about children with learning difficulties. I therefore asked my colleagues not to 'give the game away' at this stage. I pointed out, though, that I would be offering feedback to any teachers who took part in the research.

My colleagues were asked to suggest any headteachers who would be receptive to such an approach. The schools nominated by members of the Service and those in my patch therefore became the first to be approached. From then on I worked my way through the list of schools catering for children of the appropriate age range in Newcastle.

Finding respondents

At the beginning of the summer term 1999 I started my approach to schools in Newcastle. This was done by sending a letter (Appendix J) to headteachers of primary, first and middle schools in the LEA providing them with basic information about the research. The letter was headed 'Decision making in the identification of children with learning difficulties' and indicated that I was seeking teacher volunteers to complete a questionnaire. Included with the letter was an information sheet for intended for staffroom display. In the letter I said that I would contact the headteacher by telephone to find out whether teachers in their school would be willing to participate. Once teachers were identified the plan was to write to the them, by name, with instructions and their questionnaire; enclosing a stamped and addressed envelope for its return.

My initial approach to schools was done in stages to help me manage the follow-up contact and to allow me to gauge the response. This proved a slow, time consuming and relatively fruitless enterprise. Much time was spent attempting to make contact with headteachers who were unavailable. In some cases, when eventually I managed to contact them I found that they had not circulated the letter to their staff. By the end of the summer term 25 teachers had agreed to take questionnaires and 22 completed questionnaires had been returned. At the outset,

I had estimated that I needed at least 60 completed questionnaires in order to ensure reasonable coverage of each vignette to allow useful analysis of the data. It would therefore be essential to make further approaches to schools in the early part of the autumn term.

In September 1999 I made further attempts to collect sufficient data in a number of ways. Firstly, I sent a reminder letter to the headteachers of schools that I had not managed to contact by telephone in June and July and those who had not responded. The letter (Appendix K) incorporated a reply slip asking for the names of any teachers willing to take a questionnaire. This did not seem to adversely affect the response rate and saved a good deal of time previously spent on unproductive telephone calls. By October 1999 16 schools had indicated willingness and 34 questionnaires were issued. I also planned to approach selected schools in other LEAs. This produced a further 14 schools. In October 1999, letters were posted to most primary schools in Sunderland seeking volunteer teachers. Included with the letter, addressed to the headteacher was a flyer for display in the staffroom or for circulation which incorporated a reply slip Appendix L). A stamped self-addressed envelope was also included. I excluded schools in which I had undertaken earlier stages of the work or in which there had been discussion of my interest in this area of work. Finally, I approached the Principal Educational Psychologist in South Tyneside seeking suggestions of schools to approach and in reply was provided with a school list. I used this to write to most of the eligible schools on the list and sent questionnaires to those that responded in February and March.

In total 69 questionnaires were sent out. The final completed questionnaires were received in July 2000. The numbers of schools approached and those from which at least one teacher offered to take a questionnaire are shown in Table 7.1.

TABLE 7.1 – The numbers of schools approached and participating in each LEA

AUTHORITY	SCHOOLS APPROACHED	PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS	PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS AS A PERCENTAGE OF THOSE APPROACHED
Newcastle	84	16	19.0%
Sunderland	53	8	15.1%
South Tyneside	45	6	13.3%
Overall	182	30	16.5%

As a final part of the procedure I planned to offer some feedback to teachers who had completed questionnaires. Since I had undertaken not to identify teachers, no record was kept of the name of teachers who took or returned questionnaires, even when this information was provided. It would therefore be difficult to ensure that all respondents could be informed of a follow-up session. The most likely way to contact the greatest number would be to concentrate on those from Newcastle. I therefore planned to hold a 'twilight' session to feed the data back to teachers in at Newcastle Education Development Centre (EDC). In November 2000, I wrote to headteachers of all schools in Newcastle from which teachers had returned questionnaires. The letter (Appendix M) included a flyer (one copy for each respondent and one for staff room display) regarding a twilight session entitled *Gender and Special Needs* to be held at the EDC on Tuesday 23rd January 2001.

7.6 The response rate

As reported above, teachers from 30 schools in three LEAs offered to take questionnaires. The number of teachers in each school who accepted questionnaires ranged from one to five.

The response rate in the three LEAs was comparable with the lowest rate being in the last of the three to be approached and may have been affected by the

imminence of the summer break from school in July 2000. The numbers of questionnaires issued and returned is shown in Table 7.2:

TABLE 7.2 –The return rate for questionnaires for each LEA

AUTHORITY	QUESTIONNAIRES ISSUED	QUESTIONNAIRES RETURNED	RETURN RATE (%)
Newcastle	34	27	79.4%
Sunderland	20	15	75%
South Tyneside	15	10	66.6%
Overall	69	52	75.4%

The data from analysis of the questionnaires will be reported in Chapter Eight and the issues arising from the data together with issues from the first phase will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Nine. The discussion of issues related to the feedback session will be included with the discussion of teachers' views of the gender imbalance from the first phase in Chapter Nine.

Chapter Eight

Vignettes of girls and boys with learning difficulties – the second phase of data collection

8.1 The response

As reported in the previous chapter, questionnaires were received from 52 teachers. Each questionnaire contained four different vignettes; this meant that the 52 questionnaires should have contained, in total, responses regarding 208 vignettes. In fact, in one of the questionnaires responses for only two of the children were provided therefore responses were received for a total of 206 vignettes. The breakdown of returns for each vignette is show in Table 8.1.

TABLE 8.1 – The number of completed returns for each vignette

VIGNETTE	NAME	NUMBER OF RETURNS
Problem 1 female	Amy	22
Problem 1 male	Alan	21
Problem 2 female	Laura	21
Problem 2 male	Daniel	21
Problem 3 female	Claire	20
Problem 3 male	Steven	20
Problem 4 female	Sarah	19
Problem 4 male	Paul	21
Problem 5 female	Emma	21
Problem 5 male	Kevin	20

The Respondents

Of the fifty-two teachers who returned completed questionnaires only three indicated that they were male. Thirty-one indicated that they were female. This means that a further eighteen, just over one third of the sample, chose not to reveal their sex. This was in contrast to their willingness to give information about their age, teaching experience and the age range of children taught, regarding which all but two or three respondents provided information. It is difficult to know what to make of this but it is possible that some of the respondents showed an awareness of gender issues in that they may have been reluctant to have their response judged on the basis of their sex. Apart from the incomplete information about respondent gender it would appear that the teachers represented a fair range of ages and levels of experience (see Appendix N for details). Most, 42, taught in junior or primary schools. Sixteen of the sample were SENCos which represents a relatively high proportion and probably reflects the level of interest in special educational needs related matters in the sample as a whole but would suggest that it is not typical of all class teachers. One important feature of the design is that since all questionnaires contained two female and two male vignettes the overall characteristics of the respondents by age, sex, experience etc will be the same for all boys and all girls. It is possible though that there will be a degree of variation between the pairs of vignettes and within each pair.

8.2 The organisation of reporting of the teachers' responses

The teachers' responses to the questionnaires will be dealt with in a number of ways. In reading through the questionnaires it appeared that a story of gender difference, with areas of similarity, was emerging in the teachers' perceptions about each pair of children. This chapter will concentrate on the patterns of response to each pair of vignettes. In sections 8.3 to 8.7 these will be considered in turn in order to examine whether for each of the problem areas there was any

difference according to the ascribed gender of the child. The accounts will be organised into two sub-sections:

- the difficulties and the response to them
- prognosis – expectations over the next year

which correspond to the two areas regarding which the respondents were invited to make additional comments. The stories are drawn from the pattern of response to the fifteen questions and will be illustrated with data from the teachers' responses to particular questions and their additional comments. Tables will be included to summarise data where these reveal matters of particular interest; otherwise the account will draw from the data. Full details of the patterns of response to the 15 questions for each vignette pair can be found in Appendix O (O.a to O.e).

A summary of the nature of the problem for each pair of vignettes was shown in Figure 7.1 in the previous chapter (page 150). The full vignettes for each problem pair are in Appendix G (G.a to G.e).

As was discussed in Chapter Five, in designing the questionnaire I had considered, and rejected the idea of constructing a rating scale. The data produced from these questions represents a frequency score for each of the response options. It is therefore best treated as nominal or, at most, weak ordinal data. I was for this reason keen to avoid using any statistical tests which compromised the data by making invalid assumptions about its distribution or the intervals between the response options. As a consequence the possibilities for valid statistical analysis were limited. The use of a chi square test to compare the pattern of response for girls and boys for each of the 15 questions for each vignette pair was a possibility. In many cases the expected frequency for some response options was too low and it would have been necessary to combine some of the response categories in order to complete the analysis. Naturally this would reduce the meaningfulness of the data in other respects and it is important to avoid collapsing the data to such an extent that meaning is lost for the sake of

convenience of calculation. Another possibility would have been to combine the data from two or more questions. This again presents concerns since, although some of the questions enquire about related issues they were each selected to stand individually and the range of response options do not necessarily match exactly. Therefore, any attempt to combine questions to enable statistical analysis would be equally inappropriate and would compromise their distinct meaning or significance.

After giving the matter careful consideration and attempting some trial calculations, I decided not to report any statistical analysis of these data. The raw data provided an interesting account of possible differences in the teachers' judgements. In order to make comparisons between the patterns of response for the girls and the boys for each question the number of responses for each response option has been converted to a percentage of the possible total responses for each gender. This made the patterns of difference clear and as has been stated already the distribution and numbers of responses to each option made meaningful statistical analysis difficult. In this chapter and the remainder of the thesis, therefore, the data from this phase are reported in terms of percentages, as described above, and numbers of responses where helpful to illustrate the account of the patterns of response. Statistical analysis may have given a further indication of the level of significance of any differences but in these circumstances it was considered that this would add very little to the account.

In section 8.8 I shall give brief consideration to other ways in which the data can be considered. This includes an overview of the patterns of response for all boys and all girls regardless of the problem and the patterns that emerge from combining selected problems or vignette pairs. Issues arising from this and the earlier sections of the chapter will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Nine.

8.3 Amy / Alan

The vignette pair for Amy / Alan can be characterised as describing a child with mild to moderate learning difficulties that suggest general immaturity or developmental delay with no other complicating factors. The vignettes can be found in full in Appendix G.a.

Full details of the pattern of response to the 15 questions can be found in Appendix O.a.

The difficulties and the response to them

Although most of the teachers thought that both children's problem was 'possibly' or 'probably' one of general learning difficulties (90.9% for Amy and 90.4% for Alan), a slightly higher proportion (57.1%) thought that this was 'probably' so for Alan compared to the 40.9% who thought this for Amy (Q.2). This discrepancy is consistent with the fact that 63.6% of respondents thought that Amy 'possibly' or 'probably' had some sort of specific learning difficulty compared to 47.6% who thought this for Alan (Q.3). The difference was more marked for those considering that the child 'probably' had a specific learning difficulty (22.7% for Amy and 9.5% for Alan). Overall, though, most of the teachers thought that the problem for both children 'possibly' or 'probably' arose from their lack of ability (95.5% for Amy and 95.3% for Alan) (Q.1).

The respondents were equivocal about the possibility of there being medical or physical reasons for either child's difficulties. All responses for both Amy and for Alan were in the middle range ('unlikely' or 'possibly') although the possibility appeared slightly higher for Alan with 71.4% suggesting there was 'possibly' a medical or physical reason compared to 59.1% for Amy.

It was considered a little more likely that Amy's difficulties would be reduced by her making more effort; 54.5% thought this would 'possibly' help Amy compared

to 35.7% who thought this for Alan (Q.5). No respondent thought that it would 'probably' reduce either child's difficulty.

Although most of the teachers thought it 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that either child's behaviour was restricting their learning (59.0% for Amy and 66.7% for Alan) a slightly higher proportion thought that there was a 'possible' or 'probable' effect for Amy (Q.6). Indeed, 18.2% of respondents thought that Amy's behaviour was 'probably' restricting her learning while none thought that this was the case for Alan.

Most of the teachers thought that it would be 'fairly difficult' or 'very difficult' to provide appropriately for either child in the classroom without additional support (77.2% for Amy and 90.5% for Alan). It was seen to be more difficult for Alan with 22.7% thinking it would be 'easy' for Amy compared to 9.5% who thought that it would be easy to provide for Alan (Q.7). Amy was seen to be slightly more likely to accept additional support than Alan. 95.4% of respondents thought that Amy was 'highly likely' to accept it or 'probably' would compared to 85.7% who thought that this would be the case for Alan (Q.13). On the other hand, Alan was seen as much more likely to respond to a moderate level of additional support (95.3% thought this 'likely' or 'very likely' as compared to 45.5% for Amy). In fact 54.5% thought that Amy would be 'unlikely' to respond to a moderate level of support (Q.8). This compares to 52.4% who thought that Alan would be 'very likely' to respond and only 9.1% who thought this for Amy. There was a difference in the perceived need for help from the SENCo (Q.11); 86.4% of teachers thought it 'necessary' or 'essential' for Amy and 76.2% thought it 'necessary' or 'essential' for Alan. A bigger gender difference was apparent in respect of those who thought it essential: 36.4% for Amy and 23.8% for Alan. There was though relatively little difference in the perceived need for help from beyond the school (Q.12).

There was uncertainty about the extent to which either child's learning difficulties were affecting their behaviour (Q.9) 72.7% thought that there was a 'possible' or 'probable' effect for Amy and 80.9% thought this for Alan with 22.7% seeing this as 'probable' for Amy and 9.5% for Alan. There was also seen to be a possibility that either child's difficulties could interfere with or restrict the learning of others (45.4% thought that this could 'possibly' or 'probably' happen for Amy compared with 57.1% for Alan). 27.3% of respondents thought that this was 'very unlikely' in Amy's case while none thought this for Alan (Q.10).

Additional comments about the nature of the children's difficulties and the most appropriate ways of addressing them were made by 13 of the 22 respondents (59.1%) for Amy and 11 of the 21 (52.4%) for Alan.

There were few additional comments about the nature of the difficulties. Two respondents each for Alan and Amy simply confirmed the view that they thought the child had a general learning difficulty. Issues of confidence and self-esteem were mentioned, each by one respondent, for Amy. For Alan issues of immaturity and limited social skills were, again, each mentioned by one respondent. For example:

> *"The level to which his learning difficulties are likely to influence other children's learning depends on how his 'immaturity' manifests itself behaviourally or the 'gap in his social skills'."* (Alan – Teacher 215)

Another indicated that for Alan:

> *"Immaturity appears to be a major problem. As child matures problems may reduce."* (Alan – Teacher 163)

Far more comments were made about possible responses to the perceived difficulties. Most of these, 9 for Amy and 7 for Alan, referred to the need for additional support. Few other options were suggested for Alan but for Amy a range of other possibilities were discussed. Other areas mentioned are shown in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2 – Some suggested responses to Amy's / Alan's difficulties

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY OF CITATION	
	AMY	ALAN
peer support	1	0
social skills work	2	0
encouragement	5	1
need for reinforcement	4	1
involve parents	4	0
further assessment	1	0

It is interesting to note that a greater range of options appear to have been provided for Amy. The emphasis of these relates strongly to social forms of support including involving peers or her parents and the provision of encouragement. None of these seemed to be given serious consideration as options for Alan.

Prognosis – expectations over the next year

Despite the similarity between the views regarding Amy's and Alan's problem it was seen to be far more likely that her difficulties would become more serious in a year's time if no help was given (Q.14). All respondents thought it 'likely' or 'very likely' that Amy's learning difficulties would become significantly more serious compared to only 47.6% who thought this for Alan. There seems to be a view that Alan's problems can be remediated. It is possible that this relates to perceptions of immaturity – Alan is immature therefore will come good. On the other hand there was a slightly higher risk of his behaviour becoming a cause for concern (Q.15); 86.0% thought this 'likely' or 'very likely' for Alan whereas 63.7% thought this would be the case for Amy.

Additional comments about their expectations over the next year if the child's current difficulties were not properly addressed were offered by 9 of the 22 respondents (40.9%) for Amy and 10 of the 21 (47.6%) for Alan.

Five comments suggested that Alan might begin to show frustration compared to two similar comments for Amy. For Alan the suggestion of possible frustration was invariably associated with the expectation of deteriorating behaviour or the onset of behaviour problems. For Amy the occurrence of frustration was more likely to be associated with a loss self-esteem or motivation, even in one case anxiety:

> *"Amy will continue to lack confidence and become anxious about experiencing more difficult concepts."* (Teacher 207)

A further six respondents indicated the risk of deteriorating behaviour from Alan while only one suggested this possibility for Amy. On the other hand the chance of her becoming withdrawn, becoming the victim of bullies, losing confidence or being overlooked was seen to be greater than for Alan. All of these were mentioned by a relatively small number of respondents but put together these areas of concern were higher for Amy than for Alan (see Table 8.3).

Table 8.3 – Some additional areas of risk for Amy/Alan if their needs remain unmet

AREA OF RISK	FREQUENCY OF CITATION	
	AMY	ALAN
becoming overlooked	1	0
becoming a victim of bullies	1	0
becoming withdrawn	2	1
losing motivation	3	2
losing self-esteem / confidence	3	1

For Alan the consequence of falling further behind therefore appeared to be associated with a reaction whereas for Amy a rather more passive response was expected. In two individual examples this went as far as the teacher being concerned that she would be overlooked, for example:

> *"Amy does not appear to 'make a fuss' or demand attention. My fears would be that her difficulties might be overlooked in favour of more demanding pupils."* (Teacher 55)

or, in one case, that she would become the victim of bullies:

> *"Amy appears to be in a class of very helpful children but they may tire of mothering her especially as she is immature in many ways. Her problems are likely to increase and she may well become very withdrawn and end up as a victim to the bullies."* (Teacher 160)

Here in addition to the concern about Amy becoming withdrawn it is evident that immaturity is seen much more negatively for Amy than it was for Alan by these respondents. Amy's immaturity is seen as a hindrance – something that will make the other children get fed up with her. For Alan it was more likely to be taken as an indication of a slow start – he may be immature now but he will mature and come into his own.

The overall story that emerges for Amy / Alan is given in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1 – The story of Amy and Alan

Both Amy and Alan are seen as children with general learning difficulties which arise from their lack of ability but there is more certainty that Alan's learning difficulties are of a general nature. It is seen to be harder to provide for Alan in class. Amy is seen to be better placed to improve through her own efforts and more likely to accept any additional support that is offered. Despite this Alan is more likely to respond to support. In the longer term Amy's learning problems are more likely to become greater if she does not receive appropriate help but there is a greater likelihood of Alan's behaviour becoming problematic if he does not receive appropriate help. In these circumstances both may experience frustration which may lead in Amy's case to loss of confidence and self-esteem whereas for Alan it may result in behavioural problems. Although both children are seen as immature, there is a sense in which Alan is seen as remediable; his learning problems will reduce as he matures. Amy's immaturity is not seen in the same way. Immaturity is on Alan's side.

8.4 Laura / Daniel

The vignette pair for Laura / Daniel can be characterised as describing a child with general mild learning difficulties with an associated emotional response. The vignettes can be found in full in Appendix G.b.

Full details of the pattern of response to the 15 questions can be found in Appendix O.b.

The difficulties and the response to them

There is some suggestion that Daniel's problem is less likely than Laura's to arise from his lack of ability; 80.9% of the teachers thought that Laura's 'possibly' or 'probably' arose from her lack of ability compared to 66.7% for Daniel (Q.1). More respondents (95.3%) thought that Laura was 'possibly' or 'probably' experiencing a general learning difficulty compared to 71.4% who thought this for Daniel (Q.2). Most of the teachers (90.5%) also thought that Laura 'possibly' or 'probably' had a specific learning difficulty compared to 66.6% who thought this for Daniel (Q.3). There was clearly some confusion about the nature of the learning difficulty. It would also seem that there was greater certainty that Laura was experiencing some sort of learning difficulty.

A higher proportion (23.8%) thought it 'unlikely' that there were medical reasons for Daniel's problems compared to only 4.8% who thought this for Laura (Q.4). This means that 95.2% of respondents thought that there may 'possibly' or 'probably' be a medical or physical reason for Laura's difficulties compared to 76.2% who thought this might be the case for Daniel.

There was little difference between Laura and Daniel regarding perceptions of whether increased effort would help (Q.5). In both cases most responses fell

within the mid-range but with approximately two-thirds of respondents suggesting that increased effort would 'possibly' help.

It was seen as more difficult to provide for Laura than for Daniel without additional support. 97.6% of respondents thought that it might be 'fairly difficult' or 'very difficult' to provide appropriately for Laura in class without additional support whereas for Daniel, 71.4% thought this (Q.7). A higher proportion of respondents (28.5%) thought that Laura would be 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to respond to a moderate level of support; 14.3% of respondents thought that this might be the case for Daniel, none thought it 'very unlikely' (Q.8). Laura was, though, seen to be more likely to accept additional support than Daniel (Q.13) with 52.3% of respondents thinking that she would 'probably' or be 'highly likely' to accept the support compared to 23.8% who thought this for Daniel; none thought it 'highly likely' that he would accept support.

Almost all, 20 of the 21 (95.2%) thought that the involvement of the SENCo was 'necessary' or 'essential' for Laura compared to 81.0% who though this for Daniel (Q.11). A broader range of views was offered for him. Two respondents considered that the involvement of the SENCo was 'unnecessary' for Daniel. As regards the involvement of other agencies, four respondents (19.0%) thought it 'unnecessary' for Daniel and none thought this for Laura whilst 52.4% saw it as 'essential' for Laura as opposed to 23.8% for Daniel (Q.12).

Clearly, of the two children Laura is seen to be more problematic in a number of respects. This is reinforced by the fact that more of the teachers made additional comments about her difficulties than did for Daniel. 15 of the 21 respondents (71.4%) for Laura and 12 of the 21 (57.1%) for Daniel made additional comments about the nature of the learning difficulties or the most appropriate ways of addressing them. In fact a higher proportion of teachers made additional comments about Laura than were made about any other child in this phase of the research; see Table 8.13 on page 199 for further detail.

In referring to the nature of the difficulties a range of apparently emotional factors emerge. The term 'emotional' was used by four respondents when talking about Laura but only one used it when talking about Daniel. One teacher appears to avoid the issue by referring to a 'non-academic' problem rather than an emotional issue:

> *"Perhaps there is some other, non-academic, problem. Need to discover home background etc."* (Daniel – Teacher 202)

The range of suggested problem areas for both Laura and Daniel was broadly similar and reflects the lack of clarity of the teachers' view of the children's learning difficulties. The range of areas of difficulty commented on is shown in Table 8.4.

Table 8.4 – The suggested range of difficulties experienced by Laura / Daniel

AREAS COMMENTED ON	FREQUENCY OF CITATION	
	LAURA	DANIEL
General learning difficulties	2	0
Non-academic problems	0	1
Emotional (general)	1	0
Emotional (home origin)	3	1
Possible victim of bullying	1	1
Sensitivity to LD	1	1
Low self-esteem / confidence	2	2
Lack of motivation	1	2
Language / communication	1	1

The comments relating to the possible response to the problem were equally varied but in general referred to activities or strategies to address the social and emotional aspects of the concern. Teacher 157 appeared unique in commenting only on the learning difficulty:

> *"Laura appears to have general learning difficulties. She would gain from one-to-one support for reading and maths plus support within a group for other curriculum activities."* (Teacher 157)

The range of suggested responses is shown in Table 8.5.

Table 8.5 – Suggested responses to Laura's / Daniel's problems

POSSIBLE RESPONSES	FREQUENCY OF CITATION	
	LAURA	DANIEL
Need for additional adult help / support	9	4
Work to address reading	1	1
Peer support	3	1
Social skills work	2	1
Self-esteem work	5	4
Investigation of home situation	4	2
Investigation of emotional issues	2	2
Investigation of LD	2	1
Investigation of hearing / vision	0	3
Work with parents	2	3

From this it is evident that over twice as many (9:4) respondents suggested that Laura needed additional support. In addition, there appears to be a greater emphasis on social styles of response, such as peer support or social skills work, for Laura than for Daniel although both were seen to require work to develop their self-esteem.

The level of uncertainty about the basis of these children's problems and ways in which to respond to them was evident from the relatively high incidence of suggestions that further investigation was required. Investigation of their home circumstances or emotional issues was mentioned for both. Three of the comments regarding Daniel suggested investigation of his hearing and / or vision. No one suggested such action for Laura.

Prognosis – expectations over the next year

Both Laura and Daniel were seen as 'likely' or 'very likely' to have more significant problems in a year if they did not receive additional support (100% for

Laura and 90.5% for Daniel) (Q.14) although more respondents thought it 'very likely' for Laura (61.9%) compared to Daniel (47.6%). The teachers also thought that there were likely to be significant concerns about the behaviour of both but again more respondents (57.1%) thought that this was 'very likely' for Laura compared to 33.3% for Daniel.

Many of the teachers made additional comments about their expectations for the children, but again the proportion was higher for Laura. Comments were made by 15 of the 21 respondents (71.4%) regarding Laura compared to 11 of the 21 (52.4%) regarding Daniel. The range of possibilities was quite wide-ranging but tended to emphasise the emotional response to the children's learning difficulties. Again here it was apparent that the prospects for Laura were seen as less good than for Daniel. The range of expectations is given in Table 8.6.

Table 8.6 – Teachers' expectations for Laura / Daniel

EXPECTATION	FREQUENCY OF CITATION	
	LAURA	DANIEL
Becoming more withdrawn / socially isolated	8	7
Reduced self-esteem	2	0
Possible victim of bullies	1	0
Increased avoidance	1	0
Worse attendance	5	7
Reduced motivation	2	2
Behaviour problems	3	2
Increased LD / poor academic progress	5	2
Increased 'problem'	5	1

It was apparent that there was a high level of concern that Laura / Daniel would become withdrawn, socially isolated or even 'lost' within the classroom. For example:

> *"Due to his lack of involvement within the classroom and little peer support his difficulties will increase. He will continue to be a 'lost child' in the classroom."* (Daniel - Teacher 153)

and:

> *"She needs careful support to develop her social/emotional skills. A caring, secure environment with precise learning targets is essential. She may become a target for bullies / she may hide behind inappropriate behaviour. Because she is so withdrawn she may be 'forgotten'."* (Laura – Teacher 204)

Whereas, these concerns and concerns about declining behaviour or attendance were more-or-less equally likely to be mentioned for both Laura and Daniel, a higher proportion of teachers expressed concern that her academic progress would decrease. A higher proportion (5:1) also indicated that they felt that her problem would increase in an unspecified fashion.

Laura/Daniel was clearly a child who troubled some of the respondents; for example:

> *"Unusually, Laura doesn't even respond to 1:1 with her teacher – there are no 'pluses' for Laura in school, she would probably avoid it even more by having more absences."* (Teacher 70)

and:

> *"He is not going to be a trouble maker but will end up having a very poor attendance as well as a total lack of interest in any school activity educational or otherwise. He will become a loner and the type of person who will either never work or be unable to hold down a job."* (Daniel – Teacher 160)

Overall it is clear that the teachers were troubled by these children's difficulties and their prospects. This pair received more additional comments than any of the other pairs (see Table 8.13, page 199). In addition it is apparent that Laura was seen as more problematic than Daniel. The story that emerges for Laura / Daniel is given in Figure 8.2.

Figure 8.2 – The story of Laura and Daniel

There is a good deal of uncertainty about the basis of both children's learning difficulties but Laura is seen as more likely to be experiencing a learning difficulty of some sort although the teachers were unsure whether it is general or specific. Daniel is seen as more likely to have a medical or physical basis for his problems which needs to be investigated. It is uncertain whether the children's problems will be alleviated by their own efforts. Laura is seen as more difficult to provide for in class and is generally seen to be a greater cause for concern with there being a greater need for the involvement of the SENCo and professionals from outside the school. Both children are seen as requiring additional support to meet their needs and it is the emotional aspects of their problems that require most attention although in Daniel's case investigation of the medical or physical basis for his problems needs attention. Without appropriate help there is a risk of both children becoming withdrawn or isolated but the prognosis for Laura is less good with there being a significant risk of her learning problems becoming greater and her developing behavioural problems.

8.5 Claire / Steven

The vignette pair for Claire / Steven can be characterised as describing a child with mild to moderate learning difficulties with associated attentional or motivational concerns and possible language difficulties. The vignettes can be found in full in Appendix G.c.

Full details of the pattern of response to the 15 questions can be found in Appendix O.c.

The difficulties and the response to them

There seems to have been some uncertainty about the nature of Claire/Steven's learning difficulties. Whilst nearly all respondents thought that she/he may have a general learning difficulty (Q.2), 32 of the 40 respondents also thought that she/he 'possibly' or 'probably' has some sort of specific learning difficulty (Q.3). It is here that there is some suggestion of a gender difference in that 45% suggested that Steven's difficulties were 'probably' specific in contrast with 20% who suggested that Claire's were. It was also seen to be more likely that Claire's difficulties were 'probably' due to lack of ability than Steven's (55%:35%) (Q.1).

Claire's difficulties were seen to be a little less likely to be reduced by her making increased effort (Q.5). This was thought to be 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' by 65% of respondents for Claire compared to 45% who thought this for Steven.

The influence of both children's behaviour (distractibility and wandering etc as described in the vignette), on their learning was acknowledged but for Steven, the influence was perhaps seen as greater with 80% of respondents indicating a 'probable' influence for him compared to 60% for Claire (Q.6).

Both children were seen by all of the teachers to be 'fairly difficult' or 'very difficult' to provide for in the classroom without additional support (Q.7). Both children were seen to be 'likely' or 'very likely' to respond to a moderate level of additional support by 85% of respondents (Q.8) but more respondents (30%) thought that Steven would be 'very likely' to do so than did for Claire (10%).

Both children's learning difficulties were seen to be likely to affect their behaviour by most respondents (Q.9) and their difficulties were seen as likely to restrict the learning of other children in the class by nearly all respondents (Q10) although in Steven's case this is seen to be 'probable' by 75% compared to 55% who thought this for Claire.

The involvement of the SENCo and outside professionals was generally felt to be necessary for both children with the exception of two respondents who thought that SENCo involvement was unnecessary for Claire (Q.11, Q.12).

Comments about the nature of Claire/Steven's difficulties and the most appropriate ways of addressing them were made regarding Claire by 12 of the 20 respondents (60.0%) and regarding Steven by 13 of the 20 respondents (65.0%). Six respondents, 4 for Claire and 2 for Steven, confirmed that they thought that the children had learning difficulties. The range of other comments about their difficulties is shown in Table 8.7.

Table 8.7 – Comments regarding Claire's / Steven's difficulties

AREA OF DIFFICULTY	FREQUENCY OF CITATION	
	CLAIRE	STEVEN
Concentration/ Attention / ADHD	5	3
Language / Comprehension / Communication	3	2
Listening	0	1
Attitude / Behaviour	3	2
Social problems	2	1
Hearing / Other medical	1	1

It would appear that most of the suggestions regarding difficulties that Claire/Steven might be experiencing relate to factors that might contribute to their social or communication problems. The fact that most of the areas of concern listed in Table 8.7 were mentioned more frequently for Claire was because a number of the respondents suggested several possibilities for her whereas the respondents for Steven tended to settle on one issue. There was clearly a higher level of uncertainty and concern about Claire. For example:

> *"Some children who are slow learners will be content to sit in all lessons despite their lack of involvement. Why is Claire unable to settle? Professional help may find this out."* (Teacher 165)

Comments about possible responses to the problem were similarly wide ranging. It is interesting to note that there were more suggestions of the provision of support or social skills based work for Claire. Steven on the other hand was more likely to be seen to require programmed work either for learning or behaviour. For example:

> *"Listening and attention skills are poor. Short timed tasks – working close to an adult at all times. Targets set to raise self-esteem. Review provision – learning environment – may be more suited to Early Years curriculum at present."* (Steven – Teacher 53)

Referral to agencies outside the school for assessment or support was mentioned much more frequently for Steven than for Claire although the only suggestion of referral to Speech and Language Therapy, presumably on account of language/communication concerns, was for her. Referral to an unspecified agency on account of learning, behaviour or other concerns was suggested only for Steven. The range and frequency of suggested responses is shown in Table 8.8.

Table 8.8 – Suggested responses to Claire's / Steven's difficulties

SUGGESTED RESPONSE	FREQUENCY OF CITATION	
	CLAIRE	STEVEN
Support / small group work	6	2
Small steps / short activities	1	4
Self-esteem work	0	2
Social skills work	2	0
Behaviour programme	3	4
Referral to Speech and Language Therapy	1	0
Referral to Educational Psychology Service	2	4
Referral for learning	0	2
Referral for behaviour	0	2
Referral for hearing / medical	0	3

Prognosis – expectations over the next year

It was considered 'likely' or, in most cases, 'very likely' that both children's learning difficulties would become significantly more serious in a year's time if

no additional help was offered (Q.14). No gender difference is apparent. Most of the teachers also thought it 'likely' or 'very likely' that there would also be significant concerns about the children's behaviour in a year's time if no help was given. More (90%) thought that this was 'very likely' for Steven compared to 65% who thought this for Claire. Interestingly, two respondents thought it 'very unlikely' that there would be significant concerns about Claire's behaviour (Q.15).

Further evidence of the concerns about the development of behaviour problems can be found in the additional comments in which 11 respondents made specific reference to an expectation of behavioural difficulties for Steven. Some examples of the types of comments are as follows:

> *"Unless problems are resolved, Steven will get further and further behind and will no doubt end in behavioural problems ..."* Teacher 64)
>
> *"Gaps in learning, little progress being made. Behaviour will probably become an increasing problem."* (Steven – Teacher 71)
>
> *"Steven will become more disruptive and be classed as a behaviour problem."* (Teacher 157)
>
> *"As he gets older and his work has not improved Steven is likely to become a troublemaker and possibly a bully. He obviously has no self-belief and his only way to attract attention is with poor behaviour."* (Teacher 160)
>
> *"As he becomes older, it is highly probable that his behaviour could worsen and become more entrenched. The effect on the other children in the class, long-term, is also detrimental."* (Teacher 219)

Overall there were fewer additional comments regarding the teachers' expectations for the children over the next year than had been offered about the nature of the difficulty. This was mainly on account of Claire receiving relatively few; 7 of the 20 (35.0%) respondents made a comment regarding her compared to 12 of the 20 (60.0%) who offered a comment regarding Steven. The range of comments is shown in Table 8.9.

Table 8.9 – Teachers' expectations for Claire / Steven

EXPECTATION	FREQUENCY OF CITATION	
	CLAIRE	STEVEN
May become more disruptive	2	4
Deterioration in behaviour	3	9
May become more isolated	1	0
May become less motivated	1	0
Reduced self-esteem	0	3
Poor attitude to learning	1	0
Deterioration in academic progress	2	7

Although the teachers' responses to Questions 14 and 15 showed relatively little in the way of difference in their expectations for Claire and Steven, the comments suggest that deterioration with regard to learning and/or behaviour was thought to be much more likely for Steven than for Claire.

The story that emerges for Claire / Steven is given in Figure 8.3.

Figure 8.3 – The story of Claire and Steven

Overall relatively few gender differences were evident in the teachers' responses to Claire and Steven. There was though some confusion about the basis of their learning problems. Although both were thought to have a general learning difficulty, there was also a suspicion that they might have a specific difficulty of some sort. The possibility of this was seen to be greater for Steven whereas Claire's problem was more likely to arise from her lack of ability than Steven's. Both are seen as difficult to provide for but both are likely to respond to the provision of additional support although Steven is more likely to respond. In both cases their learning difficulties appear to be affecting their behaviour but Steven's behaviour is in turn more likely to be affecting his learning. The difficulties experienced by both children are likely to restrict the learning of others but in Steven's case the effect is likely to be greater. The involvement of the SENCo and professionals from outside the school is necessary for both. If they do not receive appropriate help both children's learning problems will become more significant and both children's behaviour is likely to become more problematic although this is much more likely for Steven.

8.6 Sarah / Paul

The vignette pair for Sarah / Paul can be characterised as describing a child who is orally capable but appears to have a specific literacy difficulty which is affecting other aspect of her/his learning and who is showing some signs of frustration. The vignettes can be found in full in Appendix G.d.

Full details of the pattern of response to the 15 questions can be found in Appendix O.d.

The difficulties and the response to them

Most of the teachers agreed that the both children 'possibly' or 'probably' had some sort of specific learning difficulty (100% for Sarah and 90.5% for Paul) (Q.3). They appeared less sure of this in respect of Paul; whilst 84.2% thought that Sarah was 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to be have general learning difficulties only 57.1% thought that this was the case for Paul (Q.2).

In general there were relatively few gender differences in the teachers' perceptions of these two children's problems. For both it was felt that increased effort would be 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to reduce their difficulties (Q.5). Both were seen to be equally difficult to manage in class without additional support (Q.7). They were equally likely to accept any additional support that was offered (Q.13) and both were 'likely' or 'very likely' to respond to support but 68.4% thought that Sarah would be 'very likely' to respond as compared with 38.1% who thought that Paul would (Q.8).

There was, though, an inconsistent picture regarding the interaction between behaviour and learning for these children. For most respondents it was seen to be 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that their behaviour would be affecting their learning (73.7% for Sarah and 85.7% for Paul) yet there was a slightly higher possibility for Sarah (Q.6). It was also thought that there was a 'possibility' (or 'probability') of their learning difficulties affecting their behaviour (73.6% for Sarah and 71.5% for Paul) (Q.9).

In most cases it was felt to be 'necessary' or 'essential' for the SENCo to be involved (84.2% for Sarah and 83.3% for Paul) (Q.11) and although 57.9% of respondents for Sarah and 66.6% for Paul thought that involvement of outside agencies was 'necessary' or 'essential', 47.6% considered it 'essential' for Paul and only 21.1% considered it 'essential' for Sarah (Q.12).

Additional comments about the nature of the difficulties and most appropriate ways of addressing them were offered by 9 of the 19 respondents (47.4%) for Sarah and 14 of the 21 (66.7%) respondents for Paul. The view that the children had dyslexia or a specific literacy problem was confirmed by eleven respondents; 5 for Sarah and 6 for Paul. For example:

> *"Paul, I would presume had a specific learning difficulty, which if not addressed at an early stage could result in increasing frustration and ultimately behavioural problems."* (Teacher 217)

Lack of confidence was mentioned once for Sarah but not for Paul whereas two respondents commented that he was aware of his difficulties while none mentioned this for Sarah. For example:

> *"Paul seems well aware of his difficulties and is willing to accept help from his peers and therefore would probably appreciate and accept extra help preferably on a one to one basis. He appears to have some language ability (oral and gen knowledge) and as he is becoming frustrated he needs immediate help."* (Teacher 206)

With regard to ways in which the difficulty might be addressed, 12 respondents, six each for Sarah and Paul, referred to the need for specific literacy based work. A further ten comments referred to mechanisms for supporting this work as shown in Table 8.10

Table 8.10 – Modes of support suggested for Sarah / Paul

TYPE OF SUPPORT	FREQUENCY OF CITATION	
	SARAH	PAUL
Adult support	0	6
Peer support	2	0
ICT	2	0

It is interesting to note that additional adult support was seen as important for Paul, for example:

> *"He is aware of his capabilities and difficulties. He would respond well to extra support either one to one or in a small group."* (Teacher 205)

> *"Paul needs intensive and highly specialised help to overcome his difficulties before he develops a negative attitude to school."* (Teacher 54)

By way of contrast peer support and alternative modes of working (e.g. ICT) were mentioned for Sarah.

The need for further, more specialist assessment was mentioned in 19 comments. The range of possibilities is shown in Table 8.11.

Table 8.11 – Sources of specialist assessment suggested for Sarah / Paul

SOURCE OF ASSESSMENT	FREQUENCY OF CITATION	
	SARAH	PAUL
SENCo	3	2
Learning Support Service	1	5
Educational Psychology Service	2	3
Medical investigation	1	2

It is worthy of note that more respondents suggested that assessment by professionals from outside the school would be necessary for Paul than for Sarah. This possibly relates to the finding in the GENSEN research mentioned in Chapter One, that boys were more likely to be awarded higher status and more expensive forms of support.

Prognosis – expectations over the next year

All of the teachers considered it 'likely' or 'very likely', in similar proportions, that both Sarah's and Paul's learning difficulties would become significantly more serious in a year's time without additional help (Q.14). 73.7% of respondents thought it 'likely' or 'very likely' that there would be significant concerns about Sarah's behaviour compared to 90.4% for Paul. This difference was greater when comparing those who thought it 'very likely' (21.1% for Sarah and 33.3% for Paul) (Q.15). The higher level of concern regarding the possibility of Paul's behaviour becoming problematic is highlighted in some of the additional comments. For example:

> *"Simmering frustration will increase as the gap between Paul and his peers in term of literacy achievement increases. This could easily result in more significant behavioural difficulties."* (Teacher 215)
>
> *"He will probably use 'avoidance' tactics to maintain his peer group status. He will not wish other children to observe his difficulties. Inappropriate behaviour and consequences (removal from group/class) will provide an 'escape route' for him. This behaviour is likely to continue and indeed escalate as he establishes himself within his peer group.* (Teacher 204)
>
> *"Frustration will lead to anger."* (Teacher 57)

Comments about the respondent's expectations for the children were made by 8 of the19 teachers (42.1%) for Sarah and a higher proportion, 14 of the 21 teachers (66.7), for Paul. The range and distribution of comments is shown in Table 8.12.

Table 8.12 – Teachers' expectations for Sarah / Paul

EXPECTATION	FREQUENCY OF CITATION	
	SARAH	PAUL
Problems in other areas of curriculum	3	3
Deterioration in work	2	5
Reduced self-confidence esteem	2	2
Withdrawal / reluctance to participate	1	3
Avoidance	2	3
Frustration	4	8
Anger / aggression	0	2
Disaffection	0	3
Behaviour problems	4	8

Although it was acknowledged that the specific literacy difficulties experienced by both children would be likely to affect their progress in other areas and that it may affect their confidence or self-esteem, the possibility of deterioration was suggested more frequently for Paul than it was for Sarah. Far more respondents suggested that the possible deterioration in work and behaviour for Paul would be likely to result in a more active or aggressive opting out into behavioural problems.

The story that emerges for Sarah / Paul is given in Figure 8.4.

Figure 8.4 – The story of Sarah and Paul

There are indications that the teachers' perceptions of the problem are similar for Sarah and Paul. Both are seen as children with specific literacy problems although there is slightly less certainty that Paul does not have a more general problem. In both cases their problems are such that increased effort alone is unlikely to help. Although both children are seen to be equally likely to accept additional support, Sarah is seen as more likely to respond to it. The involvement of the SENCo is seen as necessary for both but there is a higher level of perceived need for the involvement of outside agencies for Paul. Paul is also seen to need the provision of additional adult support while Sarah's difficulties could be approached in other ways. If they do not receive appropriate support both children's learning difficulties will become more significant but it is more likely that Steven's difficulties will lead to frustration, anger and behavioural problems. So despite the fact that the learning problem is seen to be essentially similar for both, there appears to be greater concern regarding Paul. Paul needs a higher order of response, Sarah will be OK with what is available in school - she can cope with it.

8.7 Emma / Kevin

The vignette pair for Emma / Kevin can be characterised as describing a child who is making generally fair progress but who is having apparently specific difficulties in the acquisition of number and mathematical skills. The vignettes can be found in full in Appendix G.e.

Full details of the pattern of response to the 15 questions can be found in Appendix O.e.

The difficulties and the response to them

Whilst most of the teachers thought it either 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that either child was experiencing a general learning difficulty (71.4% for Emma and 75.0% for Kevin), only 15.0% thought it 'very unlikely' for Kevin as compared to 33.3% for Emma (Q.2). Similarly most respondents thought that both children 'possibly' or 'probably' had a specific learning difficulty (95.2% for Emma and 90.0% for Kevin); 61.9% thought this was 'probably' the case for Emma as compared to 45.0% for Kevin (Q.3). Interestingly, while one half thought that the difficulty 'possibly' or 'probably' arose from Kevin's lack of ability, two-thirds thought that it arose from Emma's lack of ability (Q.1). Clearly, there is potential ambiguity in the use of the term 'ability'. One interpretation could be as an indicator of the child's intelligence in a broad sense; alternatively, it could be seen as referring to a more particular area of skill. In this instance, since most of the teachers thought that the children did not have a general learning difficulty, it is likely to refer to the specific nature of the learning difficulty. It would seem to suggest that for Emma the teachers thought that there was a greater possibility of a within child reason for the difficulty.

The respondents were equally divided as to whether it would be 'easy' or 'fairly difficult' to provide for Kevin in class without additional support. On the other hand 69.0% thought that it would be 'fairly difficult' to provide for Emma in similar circumstances (Q.7). It was also thought that Emma would be less able to help herself with 85.7% indicating that her difficulties would be 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to be reduced by her making increased effort while 60.0% thought this for Kevin (Q.5). All respondents thought that both Emma and Kevin would be 'likely' or 'very likely' to respond to a moderate level of additional support (Q.8). Of these, 81.0% thought that Emma would be 'highly likely' to accept any

support that was offered whereas just 50.0% thought that Kevin would be 'highly likely' to do so (Q.13). Despite the perception that Emma's problem would be less likely to be reduced by her own effort, but perhaps because she was seen as more likely to accept support, the need for involvement of the SENCo was seen as proportionately higher for Kevin. The SENCo's involvement was seen to be 'necessary' or 'essential' for Kevin by 67.5% of respondents compared to 57.1% who thought this for Emma (Q.11). The need for the involvement of the educational psychologist or other outside expertise was considered to be 'necessary' or 'essential' by similar proportions for both children (33.4% for Emma and 35.0% for Kevin) (Q.12).

All of the teachers thought it 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that either Emma's or Kevin's behaviour was restricting their learning; although this was seen to be less likely for Emma (Q.6). It was seen to be 'very unlikely' in Emma's case by 61.9% of respondents compared to 50.0% for Kevin. Most respondents thought it 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that either child's learning difficulties was affecting their behaviour (71.4% for Emma and 60.0% for Kevin). There was thus a slightly higher likelihood that Kevin's behaviour could possibly be affected (40.0%) than for Emma (28.6%) (Q.9). In addition, it was considered to be 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that the children's difficulties would interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils for 85.7% of responses for Emma and 80.0% for Kevin.

Additional comments about the nature of the children's difficulties and the most appropriate ways of addressing them were made by 12 of the 21 respondents (57.1%) for Emma and 11 of the 20 respondents (55.0%) for Kevin. Those of the comments that referred to the nature of the difficulty tended to confirm the respondent's view that the child was experiencing a specific (maths) problem. There were ten such comments for Emma; eight of which mentioned maths particularly and one each talked of possible organisational problems or dyslexia. Kevin received four comments confirming a specific maths problem. Although

most of those who commented talked about some sort of specific maths problem many did not seem to know what to make of it. For example:

> *"Difficult to assess – it may be one specific aspect of eg Number or general difficulty in maths. This would affect how it would be addressed. If it is one area eg shape then some homework may cure the problem, but if it was a total block eg number then more specific support would be necessary."* (Emma - Teacher 52)

One teacher indicated that:

> *"Kevin's problem seems to be particularly Numeracy. Perhaps he was inappropriately taught in early years. Maths is ongoing. Sensitive differentiated teaching (in class) could build his confidence and promote learning."* (Teacher 54)

This reference to the possible impact of inappropriate early teaching was unique. No other comment for any of the children by any respondent suggested that teaching may have been a cause of any of the difficulties. Clearly, it would not be appropriate to make too much of a single comment but it is interesting to note that it occurred in the case of a boy having difficulties in maths/number.

Comments about ways in which the problem might be addressed were a little more wide-ranging. The provision of additional support was mentioned by ten respondents, six for Kevin and four for Emma, whereas the need for a specific programme of work was mentioned more frequently for Emma; on seven occasions compared to four for Kevin. This again appears to relate to the apparent perception of the specific and more intractable nature of Emma's problem – she needs a specific programme, whereas he needs support. Although, in response to Question 12, a low proportion of respondents had indicated the need for seeking the involvement of external agencies for either child, this was mentioned in nine of the additional comments, eight of which related to Emma. The agencies concerned covered a range including: the educational psychology service, occupational or physiotherapy, the learning support service etc. Two respondents, one each for Emma and Kevin suggested the provision of a programme for motor skills. Only two respondents, again one each for Emma and

Kevin, suggested that advice might be sought from the school's maths post holder. One further respondent suggested the use of ICT for Kevin. It is interesting to note that several respondents commented on Kevin's apparent willingness to accept or respond to help. Maths seems to be considered differently for both Emma and Kevin.

Prognosis – expectations over the next year

Most, 95.3%, respondents thought that Emma's difficulties would be 'likely' or 'very likely' to be more serious in a year's time if no additional help was offered. A high, but lower proportion, (80.0%) thought this would be the case for Kevin in similar circumstances (Q.14). Most, in similar proportions, thought it 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that there would be significant concerns about either child's behaviour by this time in similar circumstances, 61.9% for Emma and 60.0% for Kevin (Q.15).

Additional comments about the teachers' expectations for the children over the next year if their needs were not addressed properly were offered by 10 of the 21 respondents (47.6%) for Emma and 10 of the 20 respondents (50.0%) for Kevin. The relative proportion of respondents making each of a range of comments for Emma and Kevin was very similar. The only exception was that 7 respondents said that they thought that Kevin may lose motivation. None of the respondents suggested that this might happen for Emma; the closest being two who suggested that she might become disillusioned. A decline in self-esteem or loss of confidence was mentioned by five for Emma and six for Kevin. The risk of frustration was specifically mentioned on two occasions each for Emma and Kevin. The risk of a deterioration in behaviour or of becoming alienated was mentioned on three occasions each for Emma and Kevin. More respondents considered that the problem and/or its effect on the child's progress in other subject areas would increase (7 for Emma and 5 for Kevin).

Overall with this pair of vignettes an interesting story emerges. It is shown in Figure 8.5.

Figure 8.5 – The story of Emma and Kevin

Both Emma and Kevin are seen as good pupils who do not present behavioural problems and are not likely to do so in the future despite their difficulties. In this respect they are similar but when it comes to the learning difficulty, there is more certainty that Emma has a specific problem which is more likely to be on account of her lack of ability in mathematics. It is therefore harder to provide for her in class and she is less likely to improve by dint of her own effort. Neither child is seen as likely to respond to additional support but Emma is much more likely than Kevin to accept help. Despite the fact that it is harder to provide for Emma in class the involvement of the SENCo is of greater necessity for Kevin. There is an equally low level of need for the involvement for outside agencies for both children. Without the provision of appropriate help both children's difficulties are likely to become more significant but the likelihood is greater for Emma. There is overall a sense that the teachers are unsure of how to respond to a specific maths related problem but that there is a better chance that Kevin's difficulty will be relieved whereas Emma is stuck with hers.

8.8 Other ways in which the data from the questionnaires can be considered

In working through the responses to the five vignette pairs, it was apparent that the teachers viewed each of the problems differently. This quite clear from the patterns of responses to the fifteen questions which are shown in Appendix P, *Teachers' perceptions of the differences between the problems regardless of pupil gender*. It was also apparent that for each of the problem areas there was some

evidence to suggest that teachers viewed the problem differently depending on whether it was experienced by a girl or by a boy. The gender differences were not necessarily the same for each problem. It would therefore seem that the nature of the problem has an influence on the ways in which teachers view the girls and boys experiencing it. This begs the question of whether any consistent overall differences were evident in the ways in which teachers responded to the vignettes depending on whether they depicted a girl or a boy.

The responses for all girls and all boys regardless of the problem

In total, questionnaires were completed for 103 girls and 103 boys. Differences between the responses for girls and for boys were apparent on some questions. The pattern of response to the fifteen questions for all the girls and all the boys is shown in Appendix Q. The areas in which this appears worthy of comment were as follows.

A higher proportion of the teachers (44.7%) thought that the girls' problems were 'probably' arising from lack of ability compared to the 35.9% who thought this for the boys (Q.1). Similar proportions thought that the girls and the boys were likely to have general learning difficulties (Q.2) but a higher proportion (85.4%) thought that the girls 'possibly' or 'probably' had some sort of specific learning difficulty compared to 74.8% who thought this for the boys (Q.3).

It was seen to be less likely that the girls' difficulties would be reduced by them making more effort; 62.1% of the teachers thought it 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' for the girls whereas 53.9% thought this for the boys (Q.5). The boys were also thought to be more likely to respond to additional support. Most (92.2%) of the teachers thought that the boys would be 'likely' or 'very likely' to respond to a moderate level of additional support whereas 79.6% thought this for the girls (Q.8). On the other hand, 47.6% thought the girls 'highly likely' to accept additional support compared to 34.95% who thought this for the boys (Q.13).

There was little overall difference in the pattern of the perceived need for the involvement of the SENCo or expertise from outside the school for the boys and the girls (Q.11, Q.12).

The girls' difficulties were seen as less likely to interfere with the learning of others; 20.3% of respondents thought this 'very unlikely' for the girls whereas 14.6% though this in the case of the boys (Q.10). Clearly though most teachers thought that the girls' and the boys' difficulties would be likely to interfere with the learning of other children in one way or another.

The prognoses for the girls and boys over the forthcoming year if they did not receive additional help were seen to be different. Most of the teachers (97.1%) thought it 'likely' or 'very likely' that the girls' learning difficulties would become significantly more serious compared to 82.5% who thought this about the boys (Q 14). On the other hand 79.6% thought it 'likely' or 'very likely' that there would be significant concerns about the boys' behaviour compared to 69.9% who thought that this would be the case for the girls (Q.15).

Overall therefore, a slightly different picture emerges for the girls compared to the boys. The vignettes described the same range of learning problems for the girls and the boys but the teachers tended to see it as more likely that the girls' problems arose from their poor ability. This is consistent with the view that the boys were seen to have better prospects for improvement. They were seen as more likely to improve by making more effort. They were also seen as more likely to respond to support despite the view that the girls were seen as more likely to accept the support. Further, although without the provision of support none of the children were expected to fare particularly well, it was seen as more likely that the girls' learning difficulties would become more significant. By way of contrast, it was seen as more likely that there would be significant concerns about the boys' behaviour.

This difference is perhaps reinforced by the fact that while equal numbers of teachers provided additional comments about the girls' and the boys' difficulties, a higher proportion of the teachers (55.3%) made additional comments about their expectations for the boys than those who commented on their expectations for the girls (47.6%).

Overall, therefore, there is a suggestion of differential response and expectations regarding the girls and boys regardless of the particular nature of their learning problems. The stories that emerged from each vignette pair suggests that a good deal of variation was evident between the different problems. In considering how the nature of the problem interacts with the teachers' perceptions regarding the children's gender it may be of value to look further at various combinations of problem.

On the basis of the brief characterisations of the problems given in the previous sections it might seem reasonable to separate them into two groups comprising the first three (Amy/Alan, Laura/Daniel, Claire/Steven) whose vignettes broadly describe a general learning difficulty and the other two (Sarah/Paul, Emma/Kevin) whose vignettes more obviously describe a specific learning difficulty. It was clear, though, from the stories emerging from the responses that problem Two (Laura/Daniel) was seen quite differently from the other four problems seemingly on account of the emotional element. It would, therefore, be better to let this problem stand in its own. This means that only problems One and Three should be considered as presenting more straight-forward general learning difficulties. I therefore propose to look at the gender differences within General Learning Difficulties (Problems One and Three) and gender differences within Specific Learning Difficulties (Problems Four and Five). It will also be of interest to compare the gender differences between the general and the specific difficulties.

The two girls and two boys with an apparent general learning difficulty

This group contains 42 girls and 41 boys taken from problems One and Three (Amy, Alan, Claire, Steven). The pattern of responses to the fifteen questions for these girls and boys is shown in Appendix R. When these two pairs of vignettes are considered together the following points of interest emerge.

Although for 91.6% of the girls and 92.7% of the boys the teachers considered that they 'possibly' or 'probably' had general learning difficulties, the level of certainty was higher for the boys. The teachers indicated that it was 'probably' a general difficulty for 51.2% of the boys but fewer (38.1%) of the girls (Q.2). The lack of certainty was confirmed by the responses to Question 3 in which 71.4% indicated that the girls 'possibly' or 'probably' had some sort of specific difficulty compared to 63.4% who thought this in respect of the boys.

The teachers thought it would be more difficult to provide for the boys with general learning difficulties; 95.1% considered that it would be 'fairly difficult' or 'very difficult' to provide appropriately for them whereas 83.3% thought this for the girls. A greater gender difference was apparent for those who thought that it would be 'very difficult'; 31.7% for the boys and 23.8% for the girls (Q.7). Despite this, more teachers thought that the boys would respond to additional support with 41.5% considering it 'very likely' compared to 9.5% who thought it 'very likely' that the girls would. Most thought it 'likely' or 'very likely'; 64.3% for the girls and 90.3% for the boys (Q.8)

Although most respondents though that there was a risk that the children's difficulties could restrict or interfere with the learning of other pupils with 69.0% considering this could 'possibly' or 'probably' occur for the girls and 78.1% for the boys, there was a suggestion that the level of certainty was higher in the case of the boys. No teacher considered it 'very unlikely' for a boy yet 16.7% considered the risk this low for the girls (Q.10)

More teachers (97.6%) considered it 'likely' or 'very likely' that the girls' difficulties would become significantly more serious in a year's time with no additional help than thought this for the boys (70.7%) (Q.14). This compares to the response to Question 15 in which a higher proportion of teachers (90.2%) considered it 'likely' or 'very likely' that there could be significant concerns about the boys' behaviour in a year's time in these circumstances compared to 63.8% of teachers who thought this for the girls.

The two girls and two boys with an apparent specific learning difficulty

This group contains 40 girls and 41 boys taken from problems Four and Five (Sarah, Paul, Emma, Kevin). The pattern of responses to the fifteen questions for these girls and boys is shown in Appendix S. When these two pairs of vignettes are considered together the following points of interest emerge.

A higher proportion (60.0%) of the teachers thought that the girls' problems 'possibly' or 'probably' arose from their lack of ability compared to 51.2% of respondents for the boys. There was a greater discrepancy when comparing those who thought it was 'probably' on account of lack of ability; 30.0% for the girls and 17.1% for the boys (Q.1).

Although most of the teachers considered it 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that the children had a general learning difficulty (77.5% for the girls and 65.9% for the boys), there was clearly a little less certainty regarding the boys (Q.2). This is echoed in the response to Question 3 in which although 97.5% of the girls and 90.2% of the boys were considered to 'possibly' or 'probably' have a specific learning difficulty, the level of certainty appeared greater for the girls. The difficulty was seen to be 'probably' specific for 62.5% of the girls and 46.3% of the boys. There is also a slightly higher chance of there 'possibly' or 'probably' being a medical or physical reason for the boys' problems (65.8%) compared to the 50% who thought this for the girls (Q.4).

More, 85.0% of the teachers, thought it 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that the girls' difficulties would be reduced with increased effort compared to 65.9% who thought this for the boys. Around twice as many (25%) thought it 'very unlikely' for the girls than thought this for the boys (12.2%) (Q.5).

The teachers thought it would be slightly more difficult to provide appropriately for the girls in class. For the girls, 80.25% thought it 'fairly difficult' or 'very difficult' compared to 71.9% who thought this for the boys. Again when it came to the children's likely response to a moderate level of support, although nearly all teachers thought all the children likely to respond, 67.5% thought the girls 'very likely' to respond compared to 46.3% of the boys (Q.8). More respondents thought the girls would accept the support; 75.0% thinking the girls would be 'highly' likely to accept support compared to 51.2% who thought this in the case of the boys (Q.13).

Whilst a few more respondents thought the involvement of the SENCo was essential for the boys (41.5%) compared to (32.5%) for the girls (Q.11), the gender difference was greater when the involvement of professionals from outside the school was considered; 29.3% thought it essential for the boys while 12.5% thought it essential for the girls. Overall 45% had considered such involvement 'necessary' or 'essential' for the girls and 51.3% thought this for the boys; a much smaller difference (Q.12).

Although very similar proportions thought that if the children were not given additional help their learning difficulties were 'likely' or 'very likely' to become significantly more serious in a year's time (97.5% for the girls and 90.3% for the boys) (Q.14), the likelihood of significant behavioural concerns was considered greater for the boys. 65.9% thought this 'likely' or 'very likely' for the boys compared to 55.0% for the girls. When it came to those who thought it 'very likely', the gender difference was greater; 19.5% for the boys and 10.0% for the girls (Q.15).

Comparing the gender imbalance for general learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties

A number of points of interest arise in relation to the teachers' perceptions of whether they saw the children as experiencing a general or a specific learning difficulty. This theme will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. For the time being, I shall comment on two related issues that arise from comparing the responses for the girls and boys with general learning difficulties and those with specific difficulties. The first of these relates to the perceived ease with which the children's needs could be met in class (Q.7). In the case of the children with a general learning difficulty it was considered more difficult to provide for the boys than the girls. It was considered 'fairly difficult' or 'very difficult' for 83.3% of the girls and 95.1% of the boys. The position was reversed for the children with specific learning difficulties. For them it was considered 'fairly difficult' or 'very difficult' for 80.25% of the girls and 71.9% of the boys. The second issue relates to the teachers' expectations for the children if they did not receive appropriate support (Q.14). In the case of the children with general learning difficulties, if no help was offered 97.6% of the teachers thought it 'likely' or 'very likely' that the girls learning difficulties would become more severe. A lower proportion (70.7%) thought this for the boys. The position was different for the children with specific learning difficulties. Most teachers (97.5%) again thought it highly likely that the girls' problems would become more significant but here almost as high a proportion (90.3%) also thought this for the boys.

In addition to these possible differences in the gender discrepancy between the children seen as having general and those having specific learning difficulties, it is apparent from the pattern of responses that there were differences within the specific learning difficulties group. It was evident that the gender discrepancies were different according to whether the specific difficulty was related to literacy or numeracy. This will be discussed further in Chapter Nine.

The relative proportions of girls and boys receiving additional comments

A further indication of the way that perceptions of gender difference varied across the problems is the relative number of additional comments offered regarding the boys and girls associated with each problem area. This is shown in table 8.13.

Table 8.13 – The relative number and percentage of additional comments for each vignette

PROBLEM	CHILD	NUMBER OF RETURNS	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS RE: DIFFICULTIES		ADDITIONAL COMMENTS RE: PROGNOSIS	
			Number	%	Number	%
1 f	Amy	22	13	59.1	9	40.9
1 m	Alan	21	11	52.4	10	47.6
2 f	Laura	21	15	71.4	15	71.4
2 m	Daniel	21	12	57.1	11	52.4
3 f	Claire	20	12	60.0	7	35.0
3 m	Steven	20	13	65.0	12	60.0
4 f	Sarah	19	9	47.4	8	42.1
4 m	Paul	21	14	66.7	14	66.7
5 f	Emma	21	12	57.1	10	47.6
5 m	Kevin	20	11	55.0	10	50.0

Overall exactly the same number of additional comments were made about the difficulties experienced by the boys and the girls. The ratio for the different problems varied as shown in Table 8.14.

Table 8.14 – The ratio of the percentage of girls commented on to the percentage of boys commented on for each vignette pair

VIGNETTE PAIR	GIRL : BOY RATIO ADDITIONAL COMMENTS RE: DIFFICULTIES	GIRL : BOY RATIO ADDITIONAL COMMENTS RE: PROGNOSIS
Amy / Alan	1 : 0.89	1 : 1.17
Laura / Daniel	1 : 0.80	1 : 0.73
Claire / Steven	1 : 1.08	1 : 1.71
Sarah / Paul	1 : 1.41	1 : 1.58
Emma / Kevin	1 : 0.93	1 : 1.05
All girls / All boys	1 : 1	1 : 1.16

There was a slightly higher proportion of comments about the problems of three of the five girls. The largest discrepancy was for Laura over Daniel. On the other hand four out of the five boys received a higher proportion of additional comments about their prognosis. The exception was Laura who received noticeably more comments than Daniel. The Laura / Daniel pair is the only one in which more additional comments were made about the girl than the boy both with respect to the difficulty and the prognosis. This was the problem in which there were indications of an emotional problem associated with the learning difficulty and this seems to have had a marked influence on the teachers' views of the learning difficulty. This issue will be picked up in Chapter Nine.

8.9 Concluding comments

It is apparent is that in making judgements about the children's learning difficulties the teachers were not simply responding to the learning difficulty as such but were taking into account a variety of associated or additional factors. These factors might include something to do with the expectations about the child's behaviour or some other quality of the problem. Some of these additional factors might carry with them the potential for gender bias. Rather than reporting on a detailed comparison of the responses to individual questions across the various vignette pairs, it will be more productive to identify a range of issues or

areas of concern across the five problems and to look at the variation in the perceptions of gender difference within each of these areas. Issues that have arisen in consideration of the vignette pairs in this chapter include:

- whether the problem is seen as general or specific
- the influence of emotional or behavioural issues
- the child's ability to help themselves / motivation
- the child's acceptance of and response to support
- the ease of providing for the child in class
- the need for the involvement other professionals
- teachers' expectations for the future

The range of issues that emerge here is similar to that generated from the questionnaires in the first phase. The complete range from both phases will be discussed in Chapter Nine.

Chapter Nine

Discussion of issues from both phases

In this chapter I shall be considering the issues raised by the two phases of data collection. I intend to discuss the issues in more detail than was done in Chapters 6 and 8 respectively and, where appropriate, to report further analysis of the data in order to illustrate or extend this discussion. The chapter will be structured around the major areas for potential gender bias that have emerged from the two phases. These are as follows:

- Whether the problem is seen as general or specific
- Teachers' perceptions about the child's ability
- Teachers' differential perceptions of immaturity
- The child's perceived ability to help themselves / motivation
- The ease of providing for the child in class
- The child's acceptance of and response to support
- The influence of behavioural concerns
- The influence of emotional factors
- The need for the involvement other professionals
- The teachers' expectations for the future
- The relationship between teachers' expectations and the need for the involvement of other professionals

This will be followed by a discussion of the teachers' views on the gender imbalance. The chapter will be concluded with consideration of some of the themes and questions that emerge from the issues discussed in the chapter.

9.1 Is the learning difficulty seen as general or specific?

In the first phase, of the children identified by their class teachers the boys were more likely than the girls to be seen as having a general learning difficulty. Almost nine out of ten of the boys and two thirds of the girls were seen to 'possibly' or 'probably' have a general learning difficulty. There was a degree of uncertainty since just over half of the boys and of the girls were seen as 'possibly' or 'probably' having a specific learning difficulty. Clearly with respect to the first phase it is difficult to be sure of how the nature of the learning difficulties experienced by each child compared. It is therefore difficult to know how accurately the teachers' judgements related to the problem itself or how accurate their perception of the problem was.

In the second phase, where the account of the problem provided by the vignettes was expected to give some guidance as to the general or specific nature of the learning difficulty, the teachers still showed a degree of uncertainty in their responses. In the cases of the children whose problems were described as being of a more general nature, nearly all of the teachers thought that this was 'possibly' or 'probably' so. The degree of certainty of this appeared greater for the boys with a higher proportion of the teachers considering that the girls might 'possibly' or 'probably' have some sort of specific learning difficulty.

Where the account of the problem provided by the vignettes suggested that these were of a more specific nature, almost all of the teachers confirmed that they thought that both girls and boys 'possibly' or 'probably' had a specific difficulty. There was a higher degree of certainty about the girls since almost two thirds of

respondents thought it 'probable' for the girls whilst just under half thought it probable for the boys. Indeed, approximately one third thought that the boys 'possibly' or 'probably' had a general learning difficulty compared to approximately one quarter who thought this for the girls.

Overall, therefore, it would seem that a girl with a learning difficulty is thought to be more likely to be experiencing some sort of specific problem than a boy with an apparently similar difficulty. Alternatively, it could be that when presented with a girl experiencing a learning difficulty, teachers are more likely to be open to the possibility that it is of a specific nature, whereas in the case of a boy it is more likely to be thought of as a more general problem. This attribution of the basis of the problem has implications for the teacher's perceptions of the responsiveness of the child and their expectations for that child, as was clear from the differential patterns of response to the questionnaires, as discussed in Chapter Eight. The relevance of the teachers' perception of the basis of the learning problem is also apparent in the discussion of the issues considered in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

9.2 Perceptions about the child's ability

In the first phase the teachers thought that for most of the children they had identified, the problem 'possibly' or 'probably' arose from their lack of ability. Their responses revealed a higher level of conviction with respect to the boys. In the second phase there was considerably more variation in the gender difference in the extent to which the children's problems were seen to arise from lack of ability. Although overall a higher proportion of teachers thought that the girls' problems 'possibly' or 'probably' arose from their lack of ability, this gender difference was most apparent in respect of Emma/Kevin who had a specific numeracy problem and Laura/Daniel who had a general learning difficulty with associated emotional problems. Very little difference between the girls and boys was apparent in this respect in the cases of the children with apparently

uncomplicated learning problems and with specific literacy problems. Clearly it is difficult to be sure how teachers were responding to the term 'ability'. This was perhaps different in relation to the different problems. In some instances, most notably in respect of Amy/Alan and to a lesser extent in respect of the other children with general learning difficulties, it appeared that some general notion of ability was being considered since most of the responses suggested that its lack was at the root of the problem regardless of the child's gender. The situation was seen to be more complex in respect of the children with specific learning difficulties. Clearly, a notion of general ability was seen to play a part since the problem was less likely to be attributed to lack of ability in these cases. In addition to this, some notion of a specific area of ability also seemed to be considered and it was here that the gender disparity was most apparent. The case of Emma/Kevin who had specific numeracy problems is the most striking example of this. As discussed in Chapter Eight, the teachers appeared much more likely to attribute Emma's difficulties to her lack of ability. This is perhaps unsurprising in respect of numeracy, an area in which by tradition girls have been expected to perform less well than boys. As was reported in Chapter Eight the numeracy difficulty provided the only example of a teacher suggesting that the child's difficulty may have arisen from inappropriate early teaching rather than their lack of ability. This was in respect of Kevin.

9.3 Differential perceptions of immaturity

As mentioned in Chapter Six, in the first phase immaturity was mentioned more frequently for boys than for girls. This is consistent with the findings of Davies and Brember (1991, 1992) who reported that teachers in nursery classes perceived boys to be less well-adjusted to school than girls. In the first phase of the present research the notion of immaturity was also applied in respect of children several years into their primary education. Further, when reference to immaturity was made in the teachers' additional comments the term was frequently used as an explanation or justification for perceiving a child as having learning difficulties.

There was also a suggestion of different issues being associated with immaturity for the girls and the boys. The notion appeared to be seen as much more straightforward for girls for whom immaturity was associated with general delay which was thought likely to continue. For boys, immaturity seemed to be associated with potential. A boy was more likely to be described as immature but having untapped potential which could be fulfilled either by time or by finding the right conditions or support.

Since the first phase dealt with real children identified by their class teachers it provided the opportunity to examine how the teachers' perceptions of a child's maturity related to their actual age within the year group. Table 9.1 shows the distribution of the children's birthdays across the three school terms. Unfortunately, some teachers failed to give the child's date of birth so the percentages in each column do not add up to 100%.

Table 9.1 – The relative numbers and percentages of girls and boys born in each of the three terms

SEASON OF BIRTH	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
Autumn	0 (0%)	11 (22.4%)	11 (17.2%)
Spring	5 (33.3%)	13 (26.5%)	18 (28.1%)
Summer	8 (53.3%)	22 (44.9%)	30 (46.9%)

The distribution across the three terms reveals little in the way of gender difference but is interesting in itself since it demonstrates that at a higher proportion of the children identified by their teachers as having learning difficulties were born in the summer months and were consequently among the youngest children in their classes. This relates with the literature which suggests that the summer born are more likely to have difficulties in school and in particular are more likely to be seen as having learning difficulties (e.g. Pumfrey, 1975; Drabman et al, 1987; Bibby et al, 1996).

The summer born children might reasonably be described as relatively immature compared to their classmates but, as Table 9.2 shows, it is not only these children that the teachers referred to as being immature in their additional comments.

Table 9.2 – The numbers and percentages of girls and boys from each season of birth regarding whom reference to immaturity was made

SEASON OF BIRTH	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
Autumn	0	1 (2.0%)	1 (1.6%)
Spring	0	5 (10.2%)	5 (7.8%)
Summer	2 (13.3%)	7 (14.3%)	9 (14.1%)

Of the girls, teachers only made reference to immaturity regarding two who were summer born. In the case of the boys although most such comments related to the summer born there was specific reference to immaturity regarding almost as many children born in the spring and in one instance regarding an autumn born boy. It would seem therefore that 'immaturity' is a term that is more readily applied to boys who are having problems with learning.

In addition, perceived potential despite present immaturity was cited as a reason for placing children, invariably boys, high in the order of priority for special needs intervention or referral to outside professionals.

As discussed in Chapter Eight, immaturity also featured in the additional comment offered for many of the children in the second phase. The most explicit account of differences in perceptions about children's immaturity related to Amy/Alan whose vignettes suggested a general delay in development. Comments were offered that related to both Alan's and Amy's perceived immaturity, but immaturity as such was specifically mentioned more frequently for Alan than it was for Amy. In addition there was a suggestion that the immaturity had more of a positive turn for him; he would be expected to pick up after a slow start. Amy's immaturity was seen as more long-term. This is consistent with the way that the term 'immaturity' was applied or interpreted in respect of girls in the first phase.

There appears to be a good deal of support for the notion that the 'immaturity' of young male students is a recurrent concern for primary school teachers and that, as discussed by LaFrance (1991), for them immaturity implies the assumption of eventual maturity.

9.4 The child's ability to help themselves / motivation

In the first phase the teachers had been equivocal about the benefit of increased effort by the children. This was particularly so for the girls in the sample. Although the teachers were relatively non-committal about most of the boys, increased effort was seen to be 'probably' beneficial for a number and 'very unlikely' to be beneficial for a similar number. No girls figured at these extremes. The teachers offered proportionately more negative comments about the boys' ability to work independently. Comments about the boys often suggested that they tried but that they were distractible or had the potential to be disruptive. Comments about the girls were more likely to suggest that they tried hard but that they found the work difficult.

In the second phase, overall the teachers thought increased effort by the children would be less likely to reduce the girls' difficulties than it would the boys' difficulties. The pattern though was different in respect of the various types of learning difficulty. In the case of Amy/Alan who experienced a general delay, it was though that there was a better chance that Amy's difficulties would be reduced by her making increased effort compared to Alan. The difference was much smaller for Claire/Steven, the other pair with a more general difficulty, but still favoured Claire. In the case of Laura/Daniel who had the additional complicating emotional response, teachers were equivocal about the benefits of increased effort and no appreciable gender difference was apparent. The situation was quite different for the children with specific learning difficulties. In the case of the specific literacy difficulty (Sarah/Paul) the teachers suggested no

appreciable gender difference, thinking it unlikely that increased effort would be of much benefit to either child. When the specific numeracy problem was considered, it was perceived to be much less likely that Emma's problems would be reduced by increased effort than would Kevin's. This would appear to relate to the teachers' perception that Emma's difficulties with numeracy arose from her lack of ability which was seen to be long-term.

Research such as that of Leo and Galloway (1994) confirms that teachers tend to perceive children with learning or behavioural difficulties as having maladaptive motivational style, and further, that with regard to primary age children, teachers perceive a maladaptive motivational style as more common among boys than girls. This relationship is, perhaps, seen more clearly here in respect of the children with general learning difficulties than those with specific problems.

9.5 The ease of providing for the child in class

In the first phase, the teachers thought that a higher proportion of the boys than of the girls would be difficult to provide for in class without additional support. The teachers' additional comments indicated that a higher proportion of the boys were seen to require additional support. A higher proportion of the boys were seen to find it more difficult to work independently and this was seen as a key reason for requiring additional support. For the boys it was seen that additional hands-on support was required to manage them, in particular in respect of the prospect of their deteriorating behaviour. For the girls additional expertise or support was seen as being needed to assist with their learning in a more straightforward way.

In the second phase, the teachers appeared to see a major difference between the children with general learning difficulties and those with specific learning difficulties in terms of how easy they would be to provide for in class without additional support. In the case of the children with a general learning difficulty it was considered more difficult to provide for the boys than the girls. This

difference was greater for the children with relatively uncomplicated learning problems. When there were additional factors, such as the attentional problems experienced by Claire and Steven, the gender difference was smaller. In the case of Laura and Daniel, when the additional issues were of an emotional nature, the teachers' perception was that Laura would be the more difficult of the two to manage without extra help. When the children with specific learning difficulties were considered, the teachers thought that the girls would be more difficult than the boys to manage in class without additional support. In one case, the specific literacy difficulty (Sarah/Paul), the difference was minimal. In the case of the specific numeracy problem (Emma/Kevin), the difference was relatively large. In fact, the greatest differences between the perceived level of difficulty for the girls and the boys were for the numeracy problem (Emma/Kevin) and the learning difficulty with associated emotional issues (Laura/Daniel). In both of these cases the teachers appeared less sure that they had the wherewithal to provide for these children.

A further indicator of different perceptions would be the extent to which the teachers saw the children's difficulties as interfering with the learning of others. In the first phase there was little or no difference between the girls and the boys. The view that the child's difficulties would affect others was limited to a very small number of particular individuals in both cases. In the second phase again there was little overall difference and although there were differences between the problem areas in the extent to which they were seen as likely to have an impact on the class, the differences between the girls and boys were minimal. The picture becomes different when the possibility of the behavioural concerns is considered as will be shown in the section 9.7. The next section will consider another related issue: that of the children's perceived acceptance of and response to support.

9.6 The child's acceptance of and response to support

In the first phase teachers saw:

- the girls as more likely than the boys to respond to within class measures;
- the boys as more likely than the girls to require additional hands on support;
- the girls as more likely than the boys to respond to additional support.

As already mentioned, there was a qualitative difference in the nature of the support that the teachers thought was required for the girls and for the boys. For the girls the support was required to facilitate their learning; for the boys it was also to contribute to the management of their expected deteriorating behaviour.

In the second phase in response to the vignettes, overall the teachers saw the girls as more likely than the boys to accept additional support, but the boys were seen as more likely than the girls to respond to support. The girls' perceived greater likelihood of accepting support was evident in four of the five problem areas although the extent of the gender difference showed some variation. The exception was the specific literacy problem in relation to which Sarah and Paul were seen as equally likely to accept additional support. Most teachers were optimistic that the girls and the boys would be likely to respond to additional support but in general it was seen to be more likely that the boys would. In Alan's case he was seen as much more likely than Amy to respond, to the extent that just over half of the teachers who responded to Amy's vignette thought she would be unlikely to respond. For the other children with more general learning difficulties a higher proportion of the teachers thought that the boys were 'highly likely' to respond to support. Again, the situation appeared to be seen differently for the children with specific difficulties. In relation to the numeracy problem both children were seen as equally likely to respond. In relation to the literacy problem again both children were seen as likely to respond but it was Sarah who was seen by more teachers as 'highly likely' to respond. This was the only instance of the girl being seen as being more responsive to support than the boy. Since this was a literacy problem, a possible interpretation is that teachers may

have had in mind the traditional view that this is an area in which girls are seen as having the greater facility and therefore assumed that this would influence the outcome.

It is also worthy of note that a higher proportion of teachers thought that more children, girls and boys, would respond to support than would accept it. This difference was greater for the children in the first phase. In the second phase, as has been seen, the variation between the problem areas was considerable. The difference between the phases in respect of whether boys or girls were seen as more likely to respond to the additional support is interesting. It is possible that in the second phase, the response relates to the learning problem more specifically. The difference could also reflect an area of difference between the analogue and naturalistic data in that where teachers know the children, they are more certain that the girls will respond (or are more optimistic), and for the vignettes, the response relates more to a stereotypical view.

9.7 The influence of behavioural concerns

The influence of behaviour on learning

In the second phase, in response to the direct question about the extent to which the teachers thought that the children's behaviour was restricting their learning, no real gender difference was apparent. For the girls and the boys overall the responses were distributed fairly evenly across the options. The differences between the problem areas were much greater than any gender differences. It was seen as much less likely that the behaviour of the children with the specific learning difficulties would be restricting their learning than would be the case for those with more general problems. The problem area in which the risk was seen to be greatest was the one in which the child was described as having attentional problems (Claire/Steven); it is here that there is some suggestion of a gender

difference. It was seen as a little more likely that Steven's behaviour would affect his learning than that Claire's behaviour would affect hers.

This compares to the first phase in which, although for almost half of the children identified, it was felt that their behaviour had only a minimal influence on their learning, the proportion of girls for whom the influence was seen to be high was greater than for the boys. As was discussed in section 6.9, the actual number of girls this concerned was very small so it is difficult to do more than speculate about any possible significance of this.

The influence of learning on behaviour

In both phases the teachers were also asked about the possible influence of the children's learning difficulties on their behaviour. In the first phase some gender difference was apparent in that the teachers tended not to see a strong influence for the girls; placing them at the mid-part or the lower end of the range of response options. More of the boys were seen at either extreme of the possibilities. For many the relationship was seen as minimal but for a proportion the influence was seen as high. In addition the anticipation of behavioural concerns was noticeable in the additional comments regarding the boys in a way that it was not for the girls.

In the second phase, again, overall for all of the girls and all of the boys there was little discernible gender difference in the distribution of responses. Variation between the different problem areas was evident but in most cases the range of distribution of responses was similar for the girls and the boys. There was some suspicion that the influence was more likely for some of the girls. The one exception was in relation to the specific numeracy difficulty in relation to which, although most of the teachers thought that the effect was unlikely for both children, a higher proportion thought that Kevin's learning difficulties might be affecting his behaviour than thought this for Emma.

The responses to these questions concerned the teachers' perceptions of the current situation regarding the influence of the children's learning difficulties on their behaviour. In these circumstances it was clear that there was little difference between their views regarding the girls and the boys. If anything, the possible influence was seen to be very slightly higher for many of the girls. There was also some suggestion of gender difference in relation to any frustration that the child may have in response to their learning difficulty. This was mentioned in some of the additional comments regarding Alan/Amy and Sarah/Paul. In both cases, for the girls frustration was seen as more likely to result in a loss of self-esteem or motivation. For the boys, on the other hand, frustration was seen to be a precursor to anger or deteriorating behaviour. This became more explicit when the teachers reported their expectations for future developments as will be discussed in section 9.10.

9.8 The influence of emotional factors

As already discussed, there are suggestions of gender difference in relation to the teachers' expectation of the children's possible emotional response to frustration over their learning difficulties. The teachers' response to such emotional factors was revealed most explicitly by their responses to the vignettes for Laura and Daniel. There was a high level of concern and uncertainty about Laura/Daniel – a child with obvious emotional issues. This was also atypical in that the highest level of general concern was, as discussed in section 8.4, about the girl.

9.9 The need for the involvement of other professionals

In the first phase there was little difference between the girls and the boys in respect of the perceived need for the involvement of the SENCo. Such involvement was generally seen as potentially helpful rather than necessary. The perceived need for the involvement of other professionals from outside the school showed some differences. Whilst this was not seen as essential for any of the

girls it was seen as essential for a proportion of the boys (14.3%). At the other extreme, such involvement was seen to be unnecessary for almost half the girls and almost one third of the boys.

In the second phase the range of responses overall showed no particular differences between the girls and the boys with respect to the need for the involvement of the SENCo or professionals from outside the school. Interestingly, for the boys and the girls, approximately 85% of the teachers considered that the involvement of the SENCo was necessary or essential and approximately 58% of the teachers thought that the involvement of professionals from outside the school was necessary or essential. The relatively high level of perceived need for these measures would seem to confirm that the teachers saw the descriptions in the vignettes as depictions of realistic special needs problems that required some action.

The overall similarity between the responses for the girls and the boys disguised the existence of differences in the perceived need for the involvement of other professionals for girls and boys in relation to the various problem areas. In respect of the involvement of the SENCo, the need was seen as of a slightly higher order for two of the girls, Amy and Laura, compared to the boys with the same problems. The need for the SENCo's involvement was seen to be of a slightly higher order for three of the boys Steven, Paul and Kevin than for the girls with the same problems. In the case of the specific literacy difficulty (Sarah/Paul) the difference was very small.

The perceived need for the involvement of outside professionals showed more variation between the problem areas. Little gender difference was apparent in relation to the two relatively straightforward general learning difficulties (Amy/Alan, Clare/Steven). With respect to the children with a general learning difficulty and associated emotional problems, it was Laura rather than Steven whom the teachers thought had the greatest need for the involvement of outside

professionals. In relation to the specific literacy problem, more teachers considered that the involvement of outside professionals was essential for Paul than did for Sarah. The teachers thought that there was generally a lower level of need for the involvement of outside professionals in respect of the specific numeracy problem and no particular gender difference was evident.

9.10 Teachers' expectations for the future

In the first phase, the teachers indicated that they were generally fairly optimistic about the likelihood of improvement for the girls and the boys. As discussed above they thought that most of the children would be likely to respond to support but it was clear that additional help was seen to be necessary. The teachers were less optimistic about a relatively small number of children for whom they thought the possibility of significant improvement was limited or unlikely. This group included a higher proportion of boys. No teacher suggested that improvement for a girl was unlikely.

In the second phase the teachers were asked specifically about their expectations in addition to being invited to make additional comments. From the overview of responses to all girls and all boys there was a suggestion that the teachers thought it more likely that the girls' learning problems would become more significant without appropriate support but that concerns about the boys' behaviour would increase in such circumstances.

The greater likelihood of increasing learning difficulties in the girls was apparent in four of the five problem areas to a greater or lesser extent. The gender difference was largest in respect of Amy and Alan, the children with apparently uncomplicated generally delayed learning. This appears to link firmly with the differential perceptions of immaturity and seems to confirm the view that, whilst Alan is delayed now, he has greater potential whereas Amy will continue to show significant delay and will fall further behind her peers. The only exception to this

pattern was the specific literacy problem in relation to which all of the teachers thought it likely or very likely that Sarah's and Paul's learning difficulties would become more serious but a higher proportion considered it very likely in Paul's case.

The greater likelihood of increasing concerns about the boys' behaviour was also evident in four out of the five problem areas. This time the exception was the children who showed emotional problems associated with their learning difficulties. A higher proportion of teachers thought it very likely that significant concerns about Laura's behaviour would develop than did about Daniel. The gender difference in the expectation of behavioural difficulties was smaller for the children with specific learning difficulties and was least evident for Emma and Kevin, who had the numeracy problem.

Clearly, in part, the teachers were picking up on clues in the vignettes so that for Emma and Kevin, where there was little in the vignette to suggest the possibility of a behavioural concern, the expectation was lower generally than for any of the other children. This contrasted with Claire and Steven, where attentional problems and wandering abound the class were mentioned in the vignette, and for whom the general level of expectation of behavioural concerns was higher. Nevertheless, it is quite apparent that there was a difference in how these clues were responded to depending on whether they were associated with a girl or with a boy.

9.11 The relationship between teachers' expectations and the need for the involvement of other professionals

It might seem reasonable to think that if teachers expect that a child's problems are likely to become more significant without the provision of support then the child may be seen to have a high level of need for the involvement of other professionals. From the data arising from the questionnaires there are a number of way in which this possible relationship can be examined. I shall give one

example to illustrate. Table 9.3 shows the rank order position of the children in relation to the perceived likelihood of there being significant concerns about their learning and/or behaviour in a year's time and the perceived need for the involvement of the SENCo or other professionals. This draws from the teachers' responses to Questions 11, 12, 14 and 15 from the questionnaires in the second phase. In order that comparisons can be made, the rank order position is shown for each of these questions. The child ranked at '1' in each of the first three columns was the child regarding whom the highest percentage of teachers indicated that there were 'very likely' to be significant concerns in the relevant area. In the final two columns the ranking is based on the percentage of teachers indicating that involvement of the SENCo or outside professionals respectively was 'essential'. The figures on which these rankings are based are shown in a table in Appendix T.

Table 9.3 – The rank order of likelihood of expected significant problems and the need for the involvement of other professionals

CHILD	'VERY LIKELY' TO BE SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS ABOUT:			'ESSENTIAL' FOR THE INVOLVEMENT OF:	
	Learning	Behaviour	Learning & Behaviour	SENCo	Outside professionals
Amy	6	6	6	7	8
Alan	10	8	10	10	7
Laura	=3	3	3	5	1
Daniel	7	=4	5	2	5
Claire	1	2	2	1	4
Steven	2	1	1	4	2
Sarah	5	7	7	6	6
Paul	=3	=4	4	3	3
Emma	8	10	8	9	10
Kevin	9	9	9	8	9

Whilst it is apparent that there is no simple relationship between the expectation of increasingly significant learning or behavioural problems and the perceived need for the involvement of other professionals, the data in Table 9.3 suggest the following points:

- The expectation of increasingly significant learning difficulties alone is not sufficient to make a child top priority for referral to outside agencies or professionals.
- The combination of anticipated significant behavioural concerns and expected continuing learning problems appear important in determining the need for the involvement of other professionals.
- There was a consistently high level of concern for the child with attentional problems where there was the greatest anticipation of behavioural concerns. The gender difference here was relatively small although there was a slightly higher expectation of increasing problems for Steven. This was confirmed by examination of the additional comments in which there were many more references to his lack of ability to work independently, the need for high levels of supervision and the expectation of behavioural problems with the consequent need for referral to outside agencies for Steven.
- The greatest level of perceived need for the involvement of outside agencies was for the girl with emotional problems in additional to her learning difficulties (Laura). Although the expectation of increasing learning and behavioural difficulties was greater for other children more teachers clearly felt less well equipped to provide for her than for the boy with similar problems without additional help or expertise.
- There was also a high level of anticipated concern for the boy with specific literacy problems. A relatively large gender discrepancy was apparent here. The girl with similar difficulties was seen as lower in the order of priorities for the involvement of outside agencies perhaps because of the lower expectation of behavioural concerns developing.
- The lowest priorities for referral were the two children with a specific numeracy problem. This is possibly an indication that this area of difficulty is not considered within the special educational needs framework in quite the same way as the other problems

There are some interesting similarities between these points and the reasons given by teachers for seeing children as of high priority in the first phase. Clearly the higher level of expectation of behavioural problems is a consistently significant feature which raises the level of perceived priority for the boys. This relates to the differential perceptions of the consequences of frustration for the girls and boys referred to in earlier sections of this chapter and in Chapter Eight. This was apparent for some teachers in elevating Paul whose *"Simmering frustration ...could easily result in more significant behavioural difficulties"* (Teacher 215, page 175).

The relationship between the perceived ability of the children and their order of priority for the involvement of other professionals is less clear in the data from the second phase. The teachers were not asked to compare the children but simply to consider each on their own merits. There is though some suggestion that the children who were seen as most able to work independently or were seen to be likely to improve by virtue of their own efforts were seen as less likely to require the involvement of other professionals. This may also relate to the teachers' perceptions about the part played by immaturity in their judgements as discussed in section 9.3. This is, perhaps, illustrated by the case of Alan regarding whom progress by virtue of maturation was seen to be more likely than for any other child.

9.12 Teachers' views on the gender imbalance

As outlined in Chapters Five and Seven, the plan for both phases incorporated an opportunity to discuss issues around the gender imbalance and differential response with the participating teachers. In the first phase this was by means of a follow-up meeting with each teacher subsequent to receipt and initial analysis of the questionnaire data. The main aim of the meeting was to seek the teachers' views on the gender imbalance after they had been given an opportunity to consider the progress of each of the children regarding whom they had completed

questionnaires. The meetings are probably better described as conversations with teachers about the gender imbalance. Such conversations were held with 15 of the 17 participating teachers. In the second phase, participating teachers were invited to a 'twilight' session (Appendix M) at which I planned to report some data from preliminary analysis of the two phases and then to structure some discussion of the emerging issues. It was hoped that this discussion would yield information regarding these teachers' views to compare with the conversations from the first phase. Unfortunately, despite informal expressions of interest from a small number of teachers, no one indicated that they would attend the session and it was cancelled. This presented a problem in terms of the lack of comparability of the two phases. Nevertheless the discussions with teachers from the first phase have been transcribed. Rather than add any comments from these to the reporting of the first phase, I decided to retain the integrity of the questionnaire data over the two phases to allow comparisons to be made. I shall instead discuss some of the issues arising from these discussions in this section and will discuss this aspect of the data collection further in reflecting on the methodology in Chapter Ten. I will draw on this in suggesting directions for further research in Chapter Eleven.

Conversations with teachers about the gender imbalance – the first phase

Daniels (1998) comments that in the GENSEN research when data were reported back to staff in the LEA and in schools, they were alarmed, even shocked. It was noted that teachers often realised that more boys than girls were being given special help but even those sensitive to the issue through involvement in equal opportunities work underestimated the extent to which it was occurring. I found that when giving teachers information about respective numbers of girls and boys identified by all teachers, in their school and by them, they were rarely surprised that there were far more boys than girls, but some had not expected the imbalance to be quite so great. The acknowledgement of the gender imbalance was to some extent apparent in the discussions with teachers about progress made by the children, in which there was a suggestion that discussing boys in this context was more familiar and that the girls who were talked about were less usual.

The most obviously apparent feature of the conversations with teachers about the gender imbalance was that they did not know how to respond to being asked about it. It was evident that there was no discourse to draw on. They therefore tended to fall back to talking about more traditional or stereotypical responses about differential abilities of boys and girls or in some cases drew from the developing media interpretation of boys' underachievement. Others illustrated this with accounts of their own children, but rarely of children they had taught. In many cases it proved hard bringing the teachers back to a consideration of the gender imbalance in special educational needs. A number of issues or interpretations that correspond to those emerging from the questionnaires were referred to. These included:

- Many of the teachers expressed the view that girls got off to a better start academically, but that boys caught up or overtook them in the secondary school. This was often related to a perception of the relative immaturity of boys on entry to school.
- Some of the teachers talked in this context about the perception that girls showed greater readiness in terms of their willingness to settle and respond to teachers' requests and general compliance with the requirements of school.
- Some talked of their perception that while girls would complete tasks neatly and competently, many of the boys had greater ability which was sometimes not revealed in their work.
- In particular most of the teachers suggested that boys were slower to learn language and literacy based skills and that this may relate to the perception of a higher proportion of them having learning problems. A few suggested mechanisms by which this difference might be maintained.
- Most of the teachers expected that boys would be more likely to show behavioural problems.
- Some acknowledged that in some circumstances, girls with difficulties might be missed if their relatively well presented work was judged superficially.

Overall I gained the strong impression that to these primary teachers any gender difference in achievement that favoured girls at this age would be eroded by boys catching up in secondary school. It seemed as if the media interest in differential patterns of GCSE passes had done little to change the older firmly held stereotype that girls' early advantage is lost by virtue of boys' maturing later. Perhaps, the 'facts' about the differences between girls and boys that Skelton (1989) suggests teachers acquire in training as part of their professional socialisation are in many cases resistant to modification. It certainly seemed that, whatever beliefs or understandings about the differential learning abilities of girls and boys these teachers held, they found it hard to relate them to the continuing preponderance of boys within special educational needs throughout the age range.

9.13 Emerging themes and questions

It is apparent from the discussion of these various issues that a number of themes emerge. These include:

The significance of the nature of the problem

Whilst there is some indication of differences in the teachers' perceptions about girls and boys in general, the nature of the problem was a significant factor. This was apparent in respect of the differing ways in which the teachers viewed girls and boys depending on whether their learning problem related to a specific area or was of a more general nature. Further, it was apparent that the pattern of perceived gender difference for a girl and a boy with specific literacy difficulties was not that same as that for a girl and a boy with specific numeracy difficulties.

The significance of additional problems

It would appear that it was the teachers' perceptions about any problems that the child has in addition to their academic learning difficulty that were of greatest significance in determining the action taken. In some cases it would appear that it is the additional issues that carry the greatest potential for gender bias.

The significance of behavioural concerns

The expectation of behavioural difficulties tended to result in a child being seen as a greater cause for concern and in greater need for support or the involvement of other professionals. In relation to most of the problem areas the teachers considered it more likely that boys than girls would develop behavioural difficulties. Even when there was little in the vignette to suggest that behaviour was a concern, such difficulties were more likely to be anticipated for the boys. This begs the question of whether it is the expectation that is sufficient to make a boy a higher priority than a girl with a similar learning difficulty even if the behaviour is not yet problematic? There is also a possible issue about the way in which the emotional aspects of behavioural concerns are interpreted and responded to in girls and boys.

The significance of gender stereotypes

This was evident in the ready reference to apparent gender differences in maturity and the differential perceptions of immaturity as discussed above. There was also the suggestion of the impact of such differential views of girls' and boys' aptitudes and abilities in areas such as literacy and numeracy. This was certainly amplified in the conversations with teachers. It is possible that such accounts are resorted to in the absence of a discourse or framework for understanding gender differences in special educational needs.

These themes will be explored further in the next chapter in which I shall attempt to draw some conclusions from this research.

Chapter Ten

Overview and conclusions

This research was undertaken in the knowledge that considerably more boys than girls are seen as having special educational needs. I have attempted to examine the judgements and decisions made by teachers in identifying primary age children with learning difficulties in order to establish whether there was any evidence of gender bias.

10.1 What conclusions can be drawn from this research?

The disproportionate numbers of girls and boys identified by teachers in the first phase provided further confirmation of the gender imbalance. The teachers' responses to the questionnaires in the two phases yielded complementary information about their views regarding girls and boys seen as experiencing learning difficulties. There were many areas of similarity and some differences between the patterns of responses from the two phases as discussed in the previous chapter. Both phases of this research revealed differences in the ways that teachers perceived or responded to learning problems depending on whether the problem was shown by a girl or a boy. Some differences in the teachers' perceptions, attributions and expectations regarding girls and boys appeared to be applied across all of the problem areas but, the extent of the gender differences was more extreme in relation to particular problem areas. This was shown very

clearly by the different patterns of response to each of the problem areas presented in the vignettes in the second phase. The pattern of gender difference varied between each of the five problem areas. It would seem therefore that there is an interaction between the nature of the problem and the gender of the child which affects the teachers' impressions of the problem and their perceptions of the child's needs. Among the key factors that appeared to prompt different responses for girls and boys were whether the learning difficulty was of a general or more specific nature and if there were any indications of behavioural concerns. Clearly, there is continuing evidence of a gender imbalance in which boys predominate in all areas of learning difficulty and that some issues such as differential expectations of behavioural concerns appear to apply across all areas. It is, though, not really appropriate to talk in general terms about gender difference and learning difficulty in much the same way that Arnot et al (1998) point out that blanket statements about gender differences in attainment are hard to justify on account of the variation between different subject areas. The patterns of difference make it clear that it is necessary to consider each area of learning difficulty and probably each other area of special educational needs on its own merit.

It is important not to overstate what can be concluded from this research on account of the relatively small sample size in both phases. It is also evident that the patterns of differences were not necessary large or universal. Nevertheless, they reveal the potential for bias with respect to the description and conceptualisation of a learning problem based on the gender of the child. This carries with it the potential for differential expectations for the child and as a consequence differences in the suggested measures taken to address the problem. This does not mean that more boys than girls are identified as having learning difficulties solely because teachers are biased, neither does it mean that boys and girls do not experience different patterns of learning difficulty. What it does suggest is that whatever the differences between boys and girls in the characteristics of their learning difficulties, these differences may be exaggerated

by differences in perceptions of the difficulties depending on whether they are experienced by a boy or by a girl. For example, it may be so that more boys than girls are likely to have difficulties with reading and that teachers are aware of this. A possible consequence is that if a boy is seen to be having problems with reading this may be more likely to be perceived as a 'learning difficulty' and the expectations of improvement may therefore be different than for a girl. Clearly this does not provide a complete explanation for the evident gender imbalance in the relative numbers of girls and boys identified as experiencing a wide range of learning difficulties. It is likely that a variety of other factors will also contribute to this imbalance. These may include genetic or biological predisposition, and a variety of other social or societal factors including other factors within schools. This research did not address these issues and no comment on the significance of these can be made from the data. What this research does suggest though is the possibility of bias in teachers' perceptions and judgements based on the gender of the child. Clearly with this research and any other that might look at gender difference there are huge areas of overlap, with the similarities in the judgements made about girls and boys being greater than the differences. What we are talking about is the apparent gender bias introduced by some teachers. Many teachers will be making decisions about children that are relatively unbiased by the child's gender whilst others may be holding stereotypical views that bias their judgements.

Whilst this research does suggest that some teachers respond differently to girls and boys with apparently similar learning difficulties, it does not tell us anything about the possible appropriateness of this differential action. Nor does it help to understand whether the incidence of the range of learning problems considered is greater in boys than girls. Many questions remain. These include:

To what extent are teachers' differential perceptions and expectations appropriate?

There is appreciable evidence that differences exist between girls and boys in their subject preferences, learning styles and behaviour, all of which may have an

impact on the way that teachers perceive them as learners. It is therefore possible that some differential judgements may be appropriate. They are not appropriate if based on stereotype but they could be appropriate if based on a detailed knowledge of the child's learning styles and preferences etc. In the context of this research, teachers' responses to the vignettes could not be based on such detailed knowledge, therefore they can be seen to reveal bias. The teachers' responses in the first phase had a better chance of being based on more detailed knowledge but were completed relatively early in the school year when the teachers were getting to know the children. The question of appropriateness inevitably leads to the need to consider other related more specific questions.

What is the contribution of gender stereotypical beliefs about girls' and boys' aptitudes?

Concerns about language and literacy played an important part in the teachers' views and judgements about the children's learning difficulties in both phases. As has been discussed previously, there is a commonly held view that in general girls acquire and develop skills in these areas more readily than boys. This view was much in evidence in many of the teachers' responses in both phases of the research and was likely to influence their perceptions of the problems. Such gender based judgements were apparent in relation to the differences between the perceptions about the children with specific literacy difficulties in contrast to those with specific numeracy based difficulties.

What is the contribution of differential expectations regarding emotional and behavioural difficulties?

Although I deliberately avoided presenting behavioural difficulties as the primary problem under consideration, concerns about behaviour were a consistently prevalent feature of the teachers' views and judgements. It may be that boys are more likely to exhibit behavioural difficulties but it is the teachers' expectation of behavioural difficulty rather than the difficulty itself that interests me here. It would seem that this higher level of expectation for a boy may be sufficient to make a him a higher priority than a girl with a similar learning difficulty even if

the behaviour is not yet problematic. The situation may be different in the event of an emotional or behavioural problem that is actually evident. There was certainly a suggestion that an emotional problem was interpreted differently in a girl compared to a boy. The uncertainty therefore relates to the balance between existing and anticipated problems which may be seen to affect girls and boys in different ways and to different extents.

To what extent are the identified problems of girls and boys actually similar?

The teachers' responses to the vignettes revealed differences in perceptions and expectations regarding the girls and boys with apparently similar learning difficulties. As has been discussed in the first phase there was no way of being sure that the learning problems shown by the girls and boys identified by their teachers were actually similar. This relates to the obvious difficulty in knowing how to interpret the gender imbalance in the rate of identification. It could be that fewer girls have such learning difficulties but it is unlikely to be as simple as that. A number of studies such as that by Bibby et al (1996) suggest that on account of various factors including the greater visibility of boys and their apparently greater propensity to develop behavioural problem, girls may need to have more significant learning problems to be identified. This begs the question of how alike are the girls and the boys who are actually identified in other respects. A view that is sometimes expressed by teachers is that those girls who have been identified present greater problems than many of the boys. This piece of educational folklore may be one of the 'facts' that teachers learn as part of their professional socialisation. It is certainly a view promulgated in childhood fiction:

> *"I have discovered, Miss Honey, during my long career as a teacher that a bad girl is a far more dangerous creature than a bad boy."*[1]

There was certainly some suggestion of the possible influence of this view in some of the responses and discussion with teachers as reported in previous

[1] This advice is given to the young teacher Miss Honey by the experienced headteacher Miss Trunchball in Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1989, Puffin Books)

chapters but as with any of the other areas of uncertainty, the extent of its influence is difficult to determine.

Despite the questions and caveats discussed above, this research provides evidence that there are differences between the ways that at least some teachers perceive girls and boys with a range of learning difficulties. In summary therefore the major findings of this research are:

- More boys than girls were identified by their class teachers as having learning difficulties.
- Teachers in general had more to say about the boys.
- Many teachers interpreted learning difficulties differently according to whether they were experienced by a girl or a boy.
- The expectation of behavioural problems was greater for boys than girls.
- The pattern of differential interpretation varied according to the nature of the learning problem.
- The combination of a significant learning problems and the expectation of behavioural problems increased the perceived need for the involvement of outside agencies and additional support. This effect appeared to promote concerns about boys.
- Teachers tended to see immaturity as a key feature of the learning difficulties of many boys.
- Where boys were seen to be immature there was often the expectation of maturation therefore improvement. For girls the problem was more likely to be seen as long lasting.
- With the exception of behavioural concerns, the prognosis for girls in respect of their learning difficulties tended to be less good than that for boys.
- Girls were seen as more willing to accept support but boys more likely to respond to support.
- Teachers were particularly troubled by a girl with emotional problems and indicated a high level of need for the involvement of other professionals in respect of managing her difficulties.

- Teachers were less likely to see problems with numeracy within a special educational needs framework but tended to see girls' problems in this area as more significant than those of boys.

In addition it was apparent that the teachers did not have or were not familiar with a discourse to account for gender imbalance in special educational needs. They therefore drew from the various other discourses of gender and attainment rather than discourses of special educational needs.

10.2 How do these findings relate to other work in the field?

The findings of this research are consistent with other work that has examined the gender imbalance in special educational needs such as Green (1993), Hill (1994) and the GENSEN research in a number of elements including factors such as teachers having more to say about boys than girls, the significance of behavioural issues and the suggestion of teacher bias in teacher identification of children with learning difficulties. This research has provided a more detailed view of the possibility and variation in teacher bias in the judgements about children's learning difficulties. In particular it raises issues about the differing patterns of bias in respect of different areas of learning difficulty. In some of the previous studies it has been reported that although teachers have been aware of a gender imbalance, they have been surprised about the magnitude of the difference in the numbers of boys and girls receiving special help. My research would confirm this but adds the view that the teachers in this study appeared not to have a way of conceptualising gender issues within special educational needs.

Within the GENSEN work, Hey et al (1998) suggest that school culture influences the ways that special educational needs are seen and therefore influences or determines patterns of identification and provision. My research focussed on the possible influence of teacher bias in perception and expectation regarding girls' and boys' learning difficulties. In any school these may cut across but will, no

doubt, interact with school culture. Hey et al list a series of factors which they see as constituting the school's local framing of special educational needs:

- the orientations of the school's managerial culture – the degree to which the head teacher and her/his staff can be said to work within democratic or autocratic modes, and the degree to which staff feel empowered to effect change;
- the staff's theories of causation – the extent to which S.E.N. attributions are described as psychological, sociological, moral or pedagogic in origin;
- the staff's focus for intervention – the site or type of response;
- the resultant nature of the provision – the form, extent and duration of the provision.

To these must be added teachers' knowledge and beliefs about gender differences in approaches to learning and learning abilities. The implications of this work for the possible conceptualisations of special educational needs will be discussed further in the following chapter.

The patterns of gender difference in the teachers' responses revealed in this research relate closely with the literature on gender and learning both with respect to teachers' views about girls and boys learning in different subject areas and what is known about the classroom experience and teachers' expectations of girls and boys in the classroom. There is little to suggest that there is anything particularly different going on with respect to these children who are seen as having learning difficulties. It does though make it clear that being identified as having a learning difficulty is no protection from the gender biases that operate for all children in school. Thus the view of a child's individual special needs could equally well be biased. This does not necessarily mean that the notion of trying to identify and respond to a child's individual needs is inappropriate. It simply means that it may not be achieved successfully if only a limited range of needs are taken into account and/or other needs are assumed on the basis of stereotype.

There is much in the work on gender in schooling that was discussed in Chapter Two which suggests that the teacher is of key significance in determining patterns of gender bias. The teacher also has a primary role in the identification of children's special educational needs. This research could be seen to provide evidence of a link regarding the possible significance of the teacher's role in maintaining at least some of the gender imbalances within special educational needs.

Acker (1994) suggests that teachers' influence on differential achievement can be effected in a variety of ways including:

- direct action (e.g. treating girls and boys differently or holding different expectations for them);
- the less direct influences of the 'hidden curriculum' or 'gender code' (MacDonald, 1980) by which messages about models of masculinity or femininity are conveyed in everyday school practices;
- teachers failing to take action where such action might reduce bias or improve opportunities.

All three of these might be seen to apply to the gender differences within special educational needs. This research provides further evidence regarding the possibility of teachers holding different expectations of girls and boys with learning difficulties. There are many ways in which indirect messages are conveyed including the daily evidence of the preponderance of boys in receipt of special educational needs support which teachers and pupils will be used to. Finally, with respect to special educational needs and learning difficulties, not only do teachers fail to act in respect of the gender imbalance, they do not recognise it as an issue and have no discourse by which to discuss or problematise it.

10.3 Some comments on the methodology

As explained in Chapters Five and Seven, the methodology was subject to a range of limitations. Nevertheless, the methods were selected with the aim of attempting to investigate the possibility of gender bias in teachers' judgements about children with special educational needs and evidently served that purpose. In this respect I shall offer brief comments about the major instruments used in this research: the questionnaire and the vignettes.

The questionnaire

The questionnaires proved an effective means of eliciting teachers' views about a range of issues relating to the children's learning difficulties and the teachers' perceptions of the factors that were influencing these difficulties. The range of questions enabled comparisons to be made between girls and boys and yielded patterns of response that revealed differences between each of the problem areas in the second phase. This, together with the comparability between the data arising in relation to the real children and the vignettes, would suggest that the questionnaire was a useful and valid instrument.

No statistical analysis was undertaken for the reasons given in earlier chapters. The questionnaires nevertheless yielded interesting and useful data. If a similar questionnaire was used in further research with a larger sample or response, it would be necessary to consider amending the response options to enhance the validity of any statistical analysis that might be undertaken.

The vignettes

The effectiveness of vignettes as a means of exploring gender difference in teachers' perceptions was made evident in several ways:

- In reading through the responses to the vignettes, I certainly gained a sense that the teachers were talking about five different problems.
- In addition, in reading through the responses to each problem pair, I gained a real feeling that two different children were being discussed. Admittedly I

was focussed on gender difference but it was easy to read a story of a boy and a girl with similar problems who were being seen differently.

- The fact that so many differences were apparent suggests that the vignettes were effective and that teachers could relate to them and were responding to the children as real. This was confirmed by the fact that, as discussed in section 9.9 in the previous chapter, approximately 85% of the teachers considered that the involvement of the SENCo was necessary or essential. For the girls and the boys approximately 58% of the teachers thought that the involvement of professionals from outside the school was necessary or essential. The relatively high level of perceived need for these measures would seem to confirm that the teachers saw the descriptions in the vignettes as depictions of realistic special needs problems that required some action.

The relationship to this field of research to a social constructivist paradigm was acknowledged earlier in the thesis. Clearly the research was not carried out in association with the teachers whose views were being investigated. In addition my attempts to involve participants with the data met with limited success. Therefore, although the 'facts' uncovered by this research are likely to be products of social construction this has yet to be explored with the teachers concerned. Such action must therefore form part of any proposals to take this work forward. This issue will be discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter Eleven

Implications and possible directions for future research

The points and issues discussed in the previous two chapters give an indication of the contribution that this research could make to the development of a better understanding of the complex issues around gender and learning difficulty. For this contribution to be realised it is important that it influences both the thinking about gender within special educational needs (also special educational needs within gender and education) and the direction of future investigation / research which aims to develop teachers' practice. In this final chapter, I shall first consider the theoretical implications of this study, before offering some suggestions regarding directions for future research and development activities.

11.1 Theoretical implications

It is evident that, as has been discussed in previous chapters, the prevalent conceptualisations of special educational needs are limited in the extent to which they include or acknowledge 'social' factors in determining learning difficulties. It is apparent that present models are insufficient to account for the evident gender imbalance but it would be beyond the scope of this research to re-define 'special educational needs'. It is also evident that the various discourses of special

educational needs do not provide a way for teachers to conceptualise, let alone counter, potential gender bias in the identification or decision making processes. Dyson et al (2002) in their review of decision making within the framework of the Code of Practice suggest that the 1994 Code established common terminology and to an extent common procedures across schools and LEAs. They acknowledge though that it is not possible to ensure an equitable special needs system by relying on the Code alone. The revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001a) stresses the importance of the early identification of any child who may have special educational needs, as did the previous Code. In a shift of emphasis, the 2001 Code indicates that a key test of the need for action to be taken in respect of a child's presumed special educational needs is evidence that current rates of progress are inadequate. This can be seen as a positive development in that it is a shift from an emphasis on simple measures of pupil attainment as a significant indicator of need to an indicator which requires some evaluation of the measures taken by the school. Nevertheless, the attribution of reasons for 'inadequate progress' still has the potential to be child focused as well as school action focused. As the Code puts it:

> *"There should not be an assumption that all children will progress at the same rate. A judgement has to be made in each case as to what it is reasonable to expect a particular child to achieve."* (Section 5.41; p. 52)

Here lies the potential for gender bias. The new Code of Practice offers no more assurance of gender equity than its predecessor.

As was discussed in Chapter Three, the revision of the Code of Practice has been presented as part of the Government's strategy to raise the achievement of all children. This has included measures specifically designed to promote the development of literacy[1] and numeracy[2] which, it was suggested, would improve levels of achievement to the extent that fewer children would be seen as having difficulties in basic skills that would require special educational provision. This

[1] The National Literacy Strategy: www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/literacy

[2] The National Numeracy Strategy: www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/numeracy

proposed link between the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and special educational needs necessitates a consideration of teachers' conceptualisation of the basis of children's problems in these areas. It, perhaps, represents a meeting between the notions of 'underachievement' and 'learning difficulty'. Daniels et al (1995) pointed out that 'having special educational needs' is seen as being different from 'underachieving' educationally. Responses to 'underachievement' have been more likely to consider 'social' factors as is evidenced by the various discourses of "boys' underachievement" which were discussed in Chapter Two. It is likely that concern about a pupil's progress in the acquisition and development of basic academic skills, in particular literacy, will remain central to them being seen as having learning difficulties. It is therefore essential that if gender equity is to be achieved in relation to learning difficulties, the large and growing body of knowledge about the differences between girls and boys as learners in these areas is taken into consideration in the ways that learning difficulties are defined. The impact of teachers' understanding and beliefs about girls and boys as learners in these respects must also be included. In the previous chapter I suggested that the gender bias evident in this research in respect of children seen as having learning difficulties reflects teachers' perceptions of girls and boys as learners more generally. Clearly, therefore, the re-conceptualisation of 'special educational needs' to take into account 'social' factors, although necessary, would not be sufficient to counter any inappropriate gender imbalance. Measures to address the gender bias in teachers', and others', judgements are also necessary. Even within the context of the existing and developing special educational needs procedures, some benefit could be achieved by developing teachers' understanding of the relevance of gender issues to special educational needs. As has been argued there has traditionally been a view that if a child is considered within special educational needs procedures all of their needs are dealt with. This is plainly not the case. By promoting the relevance of gender issues and debates to special educational needs it is to be hoped that a discourse of gender and learning difficulty can evolve. In doing so it will be important to establish how

this relates to the various discourses of underachievement and of equality of opportunity.

The question of just what 'equality of opportunity' and 'equity' in resource allocation mean in relation to special educational needs continues to be a matter of uncertainty and debate (see for example, Corbett, 2001; Norwich, 2001). Often, the opportunities (access, provision etc) for children or adults with identified special educational needs are seen as the equality of opportunity issues in this area. Clearly these are important, as is acknowledged in the recent implementation of the special educational needs strand of the Disability Discrimination Act, but it should not be taken to mean that there are not equal opportunities issues in respect of who is seen to have learning difficulties. Cline and Reason (1993) raised questions concerning the lack of attention to issues of equal opportunity in relation to specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) and Mittler (1999) drew attention to the continuing link between social and economic deprivation and special educational needs. I would suggest that the gender differences in rates of identification and resource allocation in special educational needs must now be considered as an equality of opportunity / equity issue.

The new Code of Practice is predicated on the rhetoric of 'inclusive schooling' which carries with it new statutory guidance (DfES, 2001b). Within this rhetoric schools are required to consider the ways in which they can cater for a diversity of learning needs. If there is a route to increased gender equity in special educational needs within the existing procedures it must be hoped that teachers can be encouraged to encompass the diversity of learning that relates to pupil gender. Daniels et al (2001) brought a consideration of gender, equity and equality together in one of the journals of The National Association for Special Educational Needs and concluded that they were:

> *"arguing for pedagogies that construct equity in process and learning identities which offer the possibility of equitable outcome."* (p. 116)

Clearly there is a considerable amount of work to be done both in relation to teacher education in respect of the pertinence of gender issues to special educational needs and in determining how the notion of equity can be applied appropriately in this area. In the next, and final, section I shall offer some suggestions regarding possible ways to take this matter forward.

11.2 Possible directions for future research and development

It is clear that this research has looked at one contributory element in the gender imbalance in special educational needs; that of possible teacher bias. To take forward and extend this specific area of work, it needs to be considered in relation to other possible influences on the gender imbalance. To conclude this thesis I shall consider three areas of possible development:

- research;
- school-based development or action research;
- teacher development.

Suggestions for further research

Clearly, as has been suggested previously, it is likely that the most effective research, in terms of developing practice in this area, will involve practitioners examining their own constructs of gender and learning difficulty. Nevertheless, a contribution to the knowledge base and understanding in this relatively under-researched field can be achieved by other means and modes of study. Areas for further investigation might include:

- Further analysis of Local Authority and national data regarding the numbers of girls and boys identified as having learning difficulties through the Code of Practice procedures. An area of focus might be a consideration of any changes corresponding to the changes in procedure introduced by the new Code and the promotion of inclusive practice. Such work might help to clarify the characteristics of the girls and boys seen to have special educational needs in this new context. Although limited in its theoretical base, the data

from such work could be useful in the awareness raising that is necessary to promote other strands of development.

- Vignette-based research has proved to be a useful tool to explore some of these issues and could be employed in larger scale studies to replicate, validate and extend the findings presented here.
- A particular issue that appears worthy of further investigation is the interaction of season of birth effects and gender. The apparent greater tendency for immaturity to be seen as a factor in the identification of boys as having learning difficulties needs to be explored further in this context.
- At all levels, further research to investigate teachers' constructs of the relationship between gender and learning difficulty is necessary. Such work can contribute to the development of a discourse or discourses of gender and learning difficulty. Until teachers have a mutually understandable way of discussing the pertinent issues it is likely that they and the systems will continue either to fail to recognise these issues or will interpret them using other discourses which may not be appropriate.
- The research presented here examined teachers' perceptions and expectations. It is clearly necessary to consider extending research to examine the extent to which these differences lead to differential action.
- In view of the range of ways in which 'special educational needs' is constructed in different schools, research aiming to explore these differences in schools where there are widely differing gender ratios in rates of identification of learning difficulties may be enlightening. Such research may identify characteristics of these schools which influence the variation in gender ratio.

Suggestions for school-based development or action research

For the work suggested above to be useful in developing gender equity in respect of pupils with learning difficulties it is vital that it influences school based developments and action research through which teachers can explore the issues in their own context.

A potentially interesting next step to take with schools could be to use the information that has come from the vignettes to enter into action research with schools in which the purpose is explicit. This could lead to an active examination of the special educational needs decision-making process about girls and boys within that context with the aim of working to avoid gender stereotyping. This could include consideration of the response to learning problems with regard to provision and outcomes.

Suggestions for teacher development

The significance of the teacher as an agent has been stressed throughout this thesis. Raphael Reed (1999) suggests the continuing need for enquiry into the ways in which classroom processes are active in the construction of and maintenance of particular forms of gender identity. Clearly this has applications in relation to the construction of gendered views of learning difficulties. A key to developing equitable practice must be the actions of individual teachers. Drudy and Ui Chathain (1999) say that *"In order to begin to develop a personal understanding of gender issues, ...the teacher must first become aware of her or his own gender biases"* (p. 4). It is therefore essential that any proposals to move this issue forward must include work intended to assist teachers in the exploration of their own biases and to recognise the biasing effects of the existing procedures.

In conclusion, as a final acknowledgement of the social constructivist paradigm and the possible contribution of this research to the re-conceptualisation of special educational needs, I shall mention my continuing efforts to involve the teacher participants in the research findings. Although the proposed feedback session for teachers involved in the second phase of this research did not take place, I have achieved some success in placing gender on the special educational needs agenda in my LEA. A session entitled *"More boys than girls have special educational*

needs?" has, at my instigation, been included in the programme of forthcoming events in the Authority's central INSET programme. I can but hope that this will represent the beginning of a dialogue with teachers that may lead to the development of a discourse of gender and learning difficulty within this LEA.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The questions and associated response options used in the questionnaire for the first phase

1. To what extent is the problem arising from the child's lack of ability?
very unlikely unlikely possibly probably

2. Do you consider that this child has general learning difficulties?
very unlikely unlikely possibly probably

3. Do you consider that this child has some sort of specific learning difficulty?
very unlikely unlikely possibly probably

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for this child's difficulties?
unlikely unsure possibly probably

5. To what extent do you think that the problem could be alleviated by improvements in the level of involvement from the child's parents?
probably possibly unlikely very unlikely

6. Do you consider that factors within the child's home might be influencing his/her learning difficulties?
very unlikely unlikely possibly probably

7. To what extent could the difficulties be reduced by the child making increased effort?
probably possibly unlikely very unlikely

8. What do you consider is the extent of the influence of the child's learning difficulties on his/her behaviour?
minimal possible moderate high

9. What is the extent of the influence of the child's behaviour on his/her learning?
minimal possible moderate high

10. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for this child within the classroom without additional support?

very easy fairly easy fairly difficult very difficult

11. How likely is the child to respond to within class measures?

very fairly possibly unlikely

12. How likely are this child's difficulties to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in your class?

unlikely possibly fairly very

13. How great is the need for the involvement on the SENCo or other expertise from within the school?

unnecessary helpful necessary essential

14. How great is the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school?

unnecessary helpful necessary essential

15. How likely is this child to respond to any additional support or help that may be offered?

highly probably possibly unlikely

Appendix B

Information sheet for headteachers – first phase

RESEARCH INTO THE IDENTIFICATION AND DECISIONS MADE ABOUT CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

I am seeking to collect information from a number of class teachers about the children in their classes who have learning difficulties. I am planning to collect this information during the school year 1995/6. It is hoped that several teachers in each school will be willing to help and that the amount of additional work for each will be small.

Each teacher willing to participate will be asked to:

1. Meet with me at the beginning of the year to talk through the procedures.
2. Complete a short questionnaire about each child with learning difficulties in their class. This will take just a few minutes each. (September 1995).
3. Talk briefly with me about the children as a group (September / October 1995).
4. Complete a questionnaire about any additional children identified as having learning difficulties during the first term.
5. Near the end of the year, talk with me to review the information collected, to consider updated impressions of the children's learning difficulties, and to discuss some related issues.

R.J.Vardill
07.95

Appendix C

Letter to headteachers – first phase

August 1995

Dear

Research into the identification and decisions made about children with learning difficulties

Further to our brief discussion about the research which I propose to carry out during the forthcoming school year, you will recall that you kindly agreed to approach members of the teaching staff in your school with a view to seeing if anyone was willing to help me with this research. Since I would like to meet with any willing teachers as early as possible in the term, I will telephone you during the first week of term in order to find out who is interested and to arrange a time when I can meet them as a group in order to talk through the procedures.

For your information, I attach a copy of the information sheet which I gave you in July.

Thank you very much for your time and co-operation in this work.

With best wishes,

Robert Vardill

Appendix D

Information sheet for teacher respondents – first phase

Research into the identification and decisions made about children with learning difficulties

Thank you for offering to help me with this research.

Together with this information sheet you will find a number of copies of a proforma / questionnaire headed **Children with learning difficulties**. At the beginning of the school year, within the first few weeks of term please complete one of these questionnaires for each child in your class with learning difficulties recorded at stage 1, 2 or 3 of the Code of Practice and any others about whom you have concerns. In addition please complete a form for each new child identified as having learning difficulties during the first term.

Although the forms ask for your name and the child's name to be recorded, I would like to assure you that any information extracted from the forms will not be attributed to named individuals. The purpose of asking for the names at this stage is simply to enable me to link all the information related to individuals. Once this information has been collated, personal identifiers will be deleted.

All completed forms should be passed to me either directly when I am in school or by sending them to me at the Educational Psychology Service an envelope marked personal so that it will not be opened by the EPS admin staff.

In addition to asking you to complete the 'Children with learning difficulties' forms, I would like to talk with you about the children's progress in the course of the school year. In particular, I would like to meet you again towards the end of the year in order to review the information collected and to discuss some related issues.

I hope that your involvement in this project will not be arduous and that, in addition to providing me with research data, this exercise may be of some value to you in considering issues related to meeting the special educational needs of your pupils.

I would like to thank you in anticipation of the time and thought that you will be giving to this work.

Robert Vardill
September 1995

Appendix E

The characteristics of the teacher respondents – first phase

Seven schools were approached to participate in the first phase of this research. The headteachers of six of these were willing for me to meet with staff to introduce the research.

Following the initial contact with the school and meetings with groups of potentially interested teachers 35 expressed a willingness to participate and took copies of the questionnaire. The breakdown was as follows:

Table A.1 – The numbers of female and male teachers who offered to participate in the first phase of the research

SCHOOL	TYPE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL
A	Primary	5	0	5
B	Infant	5	0	5
C	Primary	5	0	5
D	Infant	8	0	8
E	Junior	9	2	11
F	Primary	1	0	1
All schools		33	2	35

Completed questionnaires were received from 17 of these teachers from five of the six schools. All of the teachers who provided completed questionnaires were female. The numbers of participating teachers from each school are shown in Table 6.1 in section 6.1 of Chapter Six in which the teacher respondents for the first phase are described.

Appendix F

The responses to the fifteen questions – first phase

1. To what extent is the problem arising from the child's lack of ability?

Sex	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably	no response
Female (n=15)	6.7% (1)	6.7% (1)	53.3% (8)	33.3% (5)	0%
Male (n=49)	2.0% (1)	4.1% (2)	40.8% (20)	53.0% (26)	0%
F:M ratio	1 : 0.30	1 : 0.61	1 : 0.76	1 : 1.59	

2. Do you consider that this child has general learning difficulties?

Sex	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably	no response
Female (n=15)	6.7% (1)	26.7% (4)	33.3% (5)	33.3% (5)	0%
Male (n=49)	0% (0)	10.2% (5)	46.9% (23)	40.8% (20)	2.0% (1)
F:M ratio	-	1 : 0.38	1 : 1.41	1 : 1.22	

3. Do you consider that this child has some sort of specific learning difficulty?

Sex	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably	no response
Female (n=15)	13.3% (2)	26.7% (4)	46.7% (7)	6.7% (1)	6.7% (1)
Male (n=49)	6.1% (3)	24.5% (12)	49.0% (24)	10.2% (5)	10.2% (5)
F:M ratio	1 : 0.46	1 : 0.92	1 : 1.05	1 : 1.52	

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for this child's difficulties?

Sex	unlikely	unsure	possibly	probably	no response
Female (n=15)	33.3% (5)	26.7% (4)	40.0% (6)	0% (0)	0%
Male (n=49)	46.9% (23)	30.6% (15)	14.3% (7)	4.1% (2)	4.1% (2)
F:M ratio	1 : 1.41	1 : 1.15	1 : 0.36	-	

5. To what extent do you think that the problem could be alleviated by improvements in the level of involvement from the child's parents?

Sex	probably	possibly	unlikely	very unlikely	no response
Female (n=15)	13.3% (2)	40.0% (6)	40.0% (6)	6.7% (1)	0%
Male (n=49)	4.1% (2)	42.9% (21)	38.8% (19)	8.2% (4)	6.1% (3)
F:M ratio	1 : 0.31	1 : 1.07	1 : 0.97	1 : 1.22	-

6. Do you consider that factors within the child's home might be influencing his/her learning difficulties?

Sex	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably	no response
Female (n=15)	6.7% (1)	26.7% (4)	33.3% (5)	33.3% (5)	0%
Male (n=49)	8.2% (4)	22.5% (11)	42.9% (21)	10.2% (5)	16.3% (8)
F:M ratio	1 : 1.22	1 : 0.84	1 : 1.29	1 : 0.31	

7. To what extent could the difficulties be reduced by the child making increased effort?

Sex	probably	possibly	unlikely	very unlikely	no response
Female (n=15)	13.3% (2)	46.7% (7)	33.3% (5)	6.7% (1)	0%
Male (n=49)	18.4% (9)	34.7% (17)	26.5% (13)	18.4% (9)	2.0% (1)
F:M ratio	1 : 1.38	1 : 0.74	1 : 0.80	1 : 2.75	

8. What do you consider is the extent of the influence of the child's learning difficulties on his/her behaviour?

Sex	minimal	possible	moderate	high	no response
Female (n=15)	46.7% (7)	20.0% (3)	26.7% (4)	6.7% (1)	0%
Male (n=49)	57.1% (28)	14.3% (7)	12.2% (6)	14.3% (7)	2.0% (1)
F:M ratio	1 : 1.22	1 : 0.71	1 : 0.46	1 : 2.13	

9. What is the extent of the influence of the child's behaviour on his/her learning?

Sex	minimal	possible	moderate	high	no response
Female (n=15)	46.7% (7)	6.7% (1)	20.0% (3)	26.7% (4)	0%
Male (n=49)	49.0% (24)	24.5% (12)	10.2% (5)	14.3% (7)	2.0% (1)
F:M ratio	1 : 1.05	1 : 3.66	1 : 0.51	1 : 0.54	

10. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for this child within the classroom without additional support?

Sex	very easy	fairly easy	fairly difficult	very difficult	no response
Female (n=15)	6.7% (1)	40.0% (6)	26.7% (4)	26.7% (4)	0%
Male (n=49)	0% (0)	30.6% (15)	36.7% (18)	24.5% (12)	8.2% (4)
F:M ratio	-	1 : 0.76	1 : 1.37	1 : 0.92	

11. How likely is the child to respond to within class measures?

Sex	very	fairly	possibly	unlikely	no response
Female (n=15)	20.0% (3)	33.3% (5)	26.7% (4)	20.0% (3)	0%
Male (n=49)	18.4% (9)	20.4% (10)	32.6% (16)	16.3% (8)	12.2% (6)
F:M ratio	1 : 0.92	1 : 0.61	1 : 1.22	1 : 0.81	

12. How likely are this child's difficulties to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in your class?

Sex	unlikely	possibly	fairly	very	no response
Female (n=15)	40.0% (6)	33.3% (5)	13.3% (2)	13.3% (2)	0%
Male (n=49)	40.8% (20)	28.6% (14)	24.5% (12)	4.1% (2)	2.0% (1)
F:M ratio	1 : 1.02	1 : 0.86	1 : 1.84	1 : 0.31	

13. How great is the need for the involvement on the SENCo or other expertise from within the school?

Sex	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential	no response
Female (n=15)	13.3% (2)	40.0% (6)	13.3% (2)	20.0% (3)	13.3% (2)
Male (n=49)	8.2% (4)	46.9% (23)	10.2% (5)	24.5% (12)	10.2% (5)
F:M ratio	1 : 0.62	1 : 1.17	1 : 0.77	1 : 1.22	

14. How great is the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school?

Sex	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential	no response
Female (n=15)	46.7% (7)	13.3% (2)	33.3% (5)	0% (0)	6.7% (1)
Male (n=49)	30.6% (15)	30.6% (15)	16.3% (8)	14.3% (7)	8.2% (4)
F:M ratio	1 : 0.65	1 : 2.30	1 : 0.49	-	

15. How likely is this child to respond to any additional support or help that may be offered?

Sex	highly	probably	possibly	unlikely	no response
Female (n=15)	53.3% (8)	33.3% (5)	6.7% (1)	6.7% (1)	0%
Male (n=49)	36.7% (18)	34.7% (17)	18.4% (9)	0% (0)	10.2% (5)
F:M ratio	1 : 0.69	1 : 1.04	1 : 2.75	-	

Appendix G

The vignettes used in the second phase of the research

G.a – The vignettes for Amy / Alan

A child with mild to moderate learning difficulties that suggest general immaturity or developmental delay with no other complicating factors.

Amy is a fairly quiet member of the class who is amenable but rather unforthcoming. After a slow start she is beginning to make some progress with reading but seems to need extra practice and her teacher has suggested that her parents try to read with her at home regularly. In class she can be slow to learn new skills or information and needs a good deal of practice in all areas of the curriculum to make sure that skills are well established. She seems generally immature for her age but has a few friends and some of the more able children do things for her to help her out. It is evident that the gap between her levels of attainment and social skill and those of the others in the class is becoming wider.

Alan is a fairly quiet member of the class who is amenable but rather unforthcoming. After a slow start he is beginning to make some progress with reading but seems to need extra practice and his teacher has suggested that his parents try to read with him at home regularly. In class he can be slow to learn new skills or information and needs a good deal of practice in all areas of the curriculum to make sure that skills are well established. He seems generally immature for his age but has a few friends and some of the more able children do things for him to help him out. It is evident that the gap between his levels of attainment and social skill and those of the others in the class is becoming wider.

G.b – The vignettes for Laura / Daniel

A child with mild general learning difficulties with an associated emotional response.

Laura has made a start with reading but lacks confidence and fluency. She progresses slowly with any work in class and sometimes appears distracted. She makes few demands for attention from her teachers and her general standard of work is barely adequate. She is reluctant to contribute to class or group discussions and seems quite distressed when asked to read or talk in front of the others. When working alone with her teachers she seems unsettled and has little to say even when attempting familiar tasks. She does not have a particular friend and mixes little with the other children. She has quite frequent absence from school and her parents say that she is sometimes reluctant to come to school.

Daniel has made a start with reading but lacks confidence and fluency. He progresses slowly with any work in class and sometimes appears distracted. He makes few demands for attention from his teachers and his general standard of work is barely adequate. He is reluctant to contribute to class or group discussions and seems quite distressed when asked to read or talk in front of the others. When working alone with his teachers he seems unsettled and has little to say even when attempting familiar tasks. He does not have a particular friend and mixes little with the other children. He has quite frequent absence from school and his parents say that he is sometimes reluctant to come to school.

G.c – The vignettes for Claire / Steven

A child with mild to moderate learning difficulties with associated attentional or motivational concerns and possible language difficulties.

Claire has had difficulties since entering school, finding it hard to settle. She has made some start in the basics of reading but her comprehension is not good. She finds it difficult to settle to any task of work and often needs to have instructions repeated. She is very easily distracted from her work and without close supervision she produces very little. She also sometimes gets up and wanders around the room when un-occupied which can be a source of distraction to others. She joins in group and class activities but often her contributions are irrelevant which sometimes is a source of amusement to the other children. She also finds it difficult to wait to receive attention and will tend to call out at inappropriate times.

Steven has had difficulties since entering school, finding it hard to settle. He has made some start in the basics of reading but his comprehension is not good. He finds it difficult to settle to any task of work and often needs to have instructions repeated. He is very easily distracted from his work and without close supervision he produces very little. He also sometimes gets up and wanders around the room when un-occupied which can be a source of distraction to others. He joins in group and class activities but often his contributions are irrelevant which sometimes is a source of amusement to the other children. He also finds it difficult to wait to receive attention and will tend to call out at inappropriate times.

G.d – The vignettes for Sarah / Paul

A child who is orally capable but appears to have a specific literacy difficulty with some signs of frustration:

Sarah has made a slow start with reading but appears quite competent orally and contributes in class using well developed language. Her contributions show good general knowledge and understanding of many aspects of the work. She has a number of friends in class with whom she works well and who often help her with written instructions. Her written work is very limited and although she can participate competently in a range of practical activities she records little in writing. Her difficulties with reading and written language are beginning to affect her progress in other areas of the curriculum. She is polite and well behaved in class, but it is evident that she is becoming frustrated by her difficulties.

Paul has made a slow start with reading but appears quite competent orally and contributes in class using well developed language. His contributions show good general knowledge and understanding of many aspects of the work. He has a number of friends in class with whom he works well and who often help him with written instructions. His written work is very limited and although he can participate competently in a range of practical activities he records little in writing. His difficulties with reading and written language are beginning to affect his progress in other areas of the curriculum. He is polite and well behaved in class, but it is evident that he is becoming frustrated by his difficulties.

G.e – The vignettes for Emma / Kevin

A child who is making generally fair progress but who is having apparently specific difficulties in the acquisition of number and mathematical skills.

Emma is a pleasant, keen pupil. She can read fairly well and can produce quite good written language. She is making fair progress in most areas of the curriculum but she has found it difficult to acquire number and spatial concepts and as a consequence is progressing noticeably more slowly in mathematics. Her maths and number work are now at a level well below most of her peers and are poor compared to her work in other areas especially in reading and language. She gets on well with most of the other pupils and has a small group of particular friends most of whom have few academic problems. She has expressed some concern to her teacher about her difficulties in maths.

Kevin is a pleasant, keen pupil. He can read fairly well and can produce quite good written language. He is making fair progress in most areas of the curriculum but he has found it difficult to acquire number and spatial concepts and as a consequence is progressing noticeably more slowly in mathematics. His maths and number work are now at a level well below most of his peers and are poor compared to his work in other areas especially in reading and language. He gets on well with most of the other pupils and has a small group of particular friends most of whom have few academic problems. He has expressed some concern to his teacher about his difficulties in maths.

Appendix H

The questions and associated response options used in the questionnaire for the second phase

1. How likely is it that the problem is arising from Amy's lack of ability?
   very unlikely unlikely possibly probably

2. Do you consider that Amy has general learning difficulties?
   probably possibly unlikely very unlikely

3. Do you consider that Amy has some sort of specific learning difficulty?
   probably possibly unlikely very unlikely

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for her difficulties?
   very unlikely unlikely possibly probably

5. How likely is it that the difficulties would be reduced by Amy making increased effort?
   probably possibly unlikely very unlikely

6. Do you think that Amy's behaviour is restricting her learning?
   very unlikely unlikely possibly probably

7. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for Amy within the classroom without additional support?
   very difficult fairly difficult easy very easy

8. How likely would she be to respond to a moderate level of additional support in class (say up to 5 hours a week of auxiliary support)?
   very likely likely unlikely very unlikely

9. Do you think that Amy's learning difficulties are likely to be affecting her behaviour?
   probably possibly unlikely very unlikely

10. Are Amy's difficulties likely to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in her class?
    very unlikely unlikely possibly probably

11. How necessary do you consider the need for the involvement of the SENCo or for other expertise from within the school?
    essential necessary helpful unnecessary

12. How great do you consider the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school? (e.g. ESS, EPS etc)
    unnecessary helpful necessary essential

13. How likely do you think Amy will be to accept any additional support or help that may be offered?
    highly probably possibly unlikely

14. If no additional help were offered to Amy, do you think that her learning difficulties are likely to become significantly more serious by this time next year?
    very unlikely unlikely likely very likely

15. If no additional help is offered to Amy, how likely are there to be significant concerns about her behaviour by this time next year?
    very likely likely unlikely very unlikely

Appendix I

The questionnaire front sheet – second phase

Decision making in the identification of children with learning difficulties

Thank you for offering to help me with this research. On the following pages you will find brief descriptions of four children with learning difficulties. After each of these pen-portraits there is a series of questions, each of which requires a response to be selected from four. There is also the opportunity to make any additional comments about the child. I would like you to read each of the descriptions in turn and answer the questions about that child before moving on to the next.

It would be helpful if you could provide the following information about yourself. The answers to these questions will enable comparisons to be made between groups. At no point in the reporting of this research will responses be linked to the individual who made the response.

Please ring the appropriate response:

Are you:	female male

Your age:	The length of your teaching experience:
under 30	less than 5 years
30 – 39	5 – 9 years
40 - 49	10 – 19 years
50 or over	20 – 29 years
	30 years or over

What type of school are you teaching in:	First Junior Primary Middle

The age range of your current class:	Year 3 4 5 6

Are you a SENCo?	yes no

Do you have some other responsibility for special educational needs? yes no

If yes, what is it?

When you have completed the questionnaire please return it, in the envelope provided, to:

Robert Vardill, Senior Educational Psychologist,
Educational Psychology Service,
The College Street Centre, College Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8DX.

If you have any questions about the research or would like to discuss it please contact me at the above address or by telephone at 0191 232 2555.

Appendix J

Letter to headteachers / information sheet – second phase

Dear

Decision making in the identification of children with learning difficulties

I am carrying out research into the identification of children with learning difficulties. In particular I am interested in the judgements and decisions made by class teachers. This research is being supervised by Professor David Galloway and Ms Maria Goulding of the School of Education at the University of Durham and forms part of my work towards the degree of PhD. As you know, I am a Senior Educational Psychologist in the Newcastle Educational Psychology Service. I had previously worked in Sunderland and have carried out the earlier stages of this work there.

The reason for writing to you is that I am now approaching the final stage of data collection which involves asking a sample of class teachers to complete a questionnaire about a number of fictitious children who may have learning difficulties. I am seeking volunteer teachers of classes from Year 3 to 6 to complete a questionnaire. I would therefore be grateful if you could ask whether any members of your staff would be willing to help me in this way.

This research is being carried out with the knowledge and approval of Sue Ridgway, Principal Educational Psychologist, and David Bell, Director of Education and Libraries.

I attach an information sheet that may be helpful for any teachers considering participating. I would be grateful if you could let your staff know about this research and/or display the information sheet in the staffroom. Perhaps I could telephone you in a week or two in order to find out if any member of your staff would be willing to participate. Alternatively, please feel free to let me know.

Should you or any member of your staff like to know more about the research or would like to discuss it before making a decision please contact me at the Educational Psychology Service 0191 232 2555 or at home 01429 836 372.

Thank you in anticipation of your response to this request.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Vardill

Decision making in the identification of children with learning difficulties

I am carrying out a research project into the judgements and decisions that class teachers make about children they suspect of experiencing learning difficulties.

As part this work, I am seeking teachers of children in the age range Year 3 to Year 6, inclusive, to complete a questionnaire.

The questionnaire takes approximately 25 minutes to complete and involves answering questions about a small number of fictitious children who are described in a set of pen-portraits. The descriptions of the children are based on my experience as an educational psychologist and on information gathered in earlier stages of this research project.

If you might be willing to complete a questionnaire please let me know.

I have written to your Headteacher about this research and will be in touch with the school within the next two weeks to find out if anyone is willing to help me with it. If, in the meantime, you would like to know more about the project before making a decision, please contact me.

Robert Vardill
Senior Educational Psychologist
Educational Psychology Service
The College Street Centre
College Street
Newcastle upon Tyne

0191 232 2555

Appendix K

Amended letter to headteachers – second phase

Dear

Decision making in the identification of children with learning difficulties

I wrote to you in June about the research that I am carrying out into the identification of children with learning difficulties. You will recall that I am seeking volunteer teachers of classes from Year 3 to 6, inclusive, to complete a questionnaire about a number of fictitious children who may have learning difficulties.

I said that I would telephone you in order to find out if any member(s) of your staff would be willing to participate. Unfortunately, though, it did not prove possible to contact you before the end of term in July. I would therefore be grateful if you could make use of the reply slip at the bottom of this letter to let me know of any members of your staff who would be willing to help me in this way. I enclose a self-addressed envelope so that the slip can be returned by means of the courier system.

I also enclose an additional copy of an information sheet that may be helpful for any teachers considering participating. Should you or any member of your staff like to know more about the research, or would like to discuss it before making a decision, please contact me at the Educational Psychology Service 0191 232 2555 or at home 01429 836 372.

Thank you in anticipation of your response to this request.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Vardill

.....

Name of school:

Name(s) of teachers willing to complete a questionnaire:

Appendix L

Letter to headteachers in other LEAs / flyer – second phase

Dear

Decision making in the identification of children with learning difficulties

I am carrying out research into the identification of children with learning difficulties. In particular I am interested in the judgements and decisions made by class teachers. This research is being supervised by Professor David Galloway and Ms Maria Goulding of the School of Education at the University of Durham and forms part of my work towards the degree of PhD. I am a senior educational psychologist in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Educational Psychology Service.

The reason for writing to you is that I am now completing the final stage of data collection which involves asking a sample of class teachers to complete a questionnaire about a number of fictitious children who may have learning difficulties. I have completed some of this work in Newcastle schools and would now like to extend this into neighbouring LEAs. In particular, I am seeking volunteer teachers of classes from Year 3 to Year 6 to complete a questionnaire. I would therefore be grateful if you could ask whether any members of your staff would be willing to help me in this way.

I attach an information sheet that may be helpful for any teachers considering participating. I would be grateful if you could let your staff know about this research and/or display the information sheet in the staffroom.

If any members of your staff would be interested in completing a questionnaire for me, I would be grateful if you could complete and return the reply slip attached to the information sheet. I have enclosed a self-addressed envelope for this purpose.

Should you or any member of your staff like to know more about the research or would like to discuss it before making a decision please contact me at Newcastle Educational Psychology Service 0191 232 2555 or at home 01429 836 372

Thank you in anticipation of your response to this request.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Vardill

Decision making in the identification of children with learning difficulties

I am carrying out a research project into the judgements and decisions that class teachers make about children they suspect of experiencing learning difficulties.

As part this work, **I am seeking teachers of children in the age range Year 3 to Year 6, inclusive, to complete a questionnaire.**

The questionnaire takes approximately 25 minutes to complete and involves answering questions about a small number of fictitious children who are described in a set of pen-portraits. The descriptions of the children are based on my experience as an educational psychologist and on information gathered in earlier stages of this research project.

I have written to your Headteacher about this research and asked if I could be informed of anyone who is willing to help me with it.

If you might be willing to complete a questionnaire please let me know or write your name on the reply slip below. If you would like to know more about the project before making a decision, please contact me.

Robert Vardill
Senior Educational Psychologist
Newcastle upon Tyne Educational Psychology Service

Telephone work: 0191 232 2555
home: 01429 836372

.....

Name of school:

Names of teacher(s) willing to complete a questionnaire:

Appendix M

Letter to headteachers and flyer for the feedback session – second phase

Dear

Decision making in the identification of children with learning difficulties

Some members of your staff were kind enough to help me in this research during the previous school year by completing a questionnaire. I have now finished collecting data and have carried out some analysis of my findings.

I am now proposing to present some of my findings at a twilight session at Pendower Hall. I would therefore be grateful if you could pass the attached information sheet to any staff who completed a questionnaire. You may also like to display a copy in the staff room. I have enclosed sufficient copies for each member of your staff who offered to complete a questionnaire together with an additional copy for staff room display. I am unable to approach individual respondents personally since the questionnaires were completed and returned anonymously.

I am grateful for your attention to this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Vardill
Senior Educational Psychologist

Decision making in the identification of children with learning difficulties

During the last school year a number of teachers from schools in Newcastle helped me in my research into the judgements and decisions that class teachers make about children with learning difficulties by completing a questionnaire about a selection of fictitious children.

If you were one of those teachers, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and to invite you to a twilight meeting at Pendower Hall EDC when I will be reporting some of my findings.

One of my central interests in carrying out this work was to consider the fact that far more boys than girls are identified as having learning difficulties. The session will provide the opportunity to consider the evidence from my research regarding possible differential interpretation of the problems experienced by boys and girls. In addition to providing feedback to those who contributed to the data collection, I am very interested in hearing your views on my interpretation of the findings. The details of the session are as follows:

Gender and Special Needs
Tuesday 23rd January 2001 at 4.00 pm
Room 10, Pendower Hall EDC

The session is also open to other interested teachers.
If you are interested in attending please fill in the reply slip below and return it to me at:

Educational Psychology Service, The College Street Centre, College Street, Newcastle NE1 8DX.

Alternatively you may like to let me know by:
Telephone: 0191 232 2555, or Email: robert.vardill@newcastle.gov.uk

Robert Vardill
Senior Educational Psychologist

.....

I would like to attend ***Gender and Special Needs*** at Pendower Hall on 23 January 2001

Name(s)

Appendix N

The characteristics of the teacher respondents – second phase

As described in Section 8.1 in chapter Eight, fifty-two teachers completed and returned questionnaires in the second phase of this research. Key issues relating to the characteristics of this group of respondents were reported and discussed in that section. The table on the following page provides a full account of the information provided by the teachers in response to the questions about them on the front sheet of the questionnaire.

Table A.2 – Characteristics of the teacher respondents – second phase

Sex	Not declared	female	male			
	18	31	3			
Age (years)	Not declared	< 30	30 - 39	40 - 49	50 +	
	2	7	11	21	11	
Teaching experience (years)	Not declared	< 5	5 - 9	10 -19	20 - 29	30 +
	3	7	11	13	13	5
Type of school	Not declared	First	Junior	Primary	Middle	
	1	8	8	34	1	
Age range of class	Not declared	3	4	5	6	mixed
	4	8	10	11	8	12 3/4 – 9 4/5 – 1 4/5/6 – 1 5/6 – 1
SENCo	Not declared	Yes	No			
	0	16	36			

Appendix O

The responses to the fifteen questions for each vignette pair – second phase

O.a – The responses for Amy / Alan

A child with mild to moderate learning difficulties that suggest general immaturity or developmental delay with no other complicating factors.

1. How likely is it that the problem is arising from Amy's/Alan's lack of ability?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy (n = 22)	0% (0)	4.5% (1)	36.4% (8)	59.1% (13)
Alan (n = 21)	0% (0)	4.8% (1)	28.6% (6)	66.7% (14)

2. Do you consider that Amy/Alan has general learning difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy (n = 22)	0% (0)	9.1% (2)	50% (11)	40.9% (9)
Alan (n = 21)	0% (0)	9.5% (2)	33.3% (7)	57.1% (12)

3. Do you consider that Amy/Alan has some sort of specific learning difficulty?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy (n = 22)	0% (0)	36.4% (8)	40.9% (9)	22.7% (5)
Alan (n = 21)	0% (0)	52.4% (11)	38.1% (8)	9.5% (2)

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for her/his difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy (n = 22)	0% (0)	40.9% (9)	59.1% (13)	0% (0)
Alan (n = 21)	0% (0)	28.6% (6)	71.4% (15)	0% (0)

5. How likely is it that the difficulties would be reduced by Amy/Alan making increased effort?

	probably	possibly	unlikely	very unlikely
Amy (n = 22)	0% (0)	54.5% (12)	45.4% (10)	0% (0)
Alan (n = 21)	0% (0)	35.7% (7.5)	54.8% (11.5)	9.5% (2)

6. Do you think that Amy's/Alan's behaviour is restricting her/his learning?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy (n = 22)	13.6% (3)	45.4% (10)	22.7% (5)	18.2% (4)
Alan (n = 21)	14.3% (3)	52.4% (11)	33.3% (7)	0% (0)

7. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for Amy/Alan within the classroom without additional support?

	very easy	easy	fairly difficult	very difficult
Amy (n = 22)	0% (0)	22.7% (5)	72.7% (16)	4.5% (1)
Alan (n = 21)	0% (0)	9.5% (2)	81.0% (17)	9.5% (2)

8. How likely would she/he be to respond to a moderate level of additional support in class (say up to 5 hours a week of auxiliary support)?

	very likely	likely	unlikely	very unlikely
Amy (n = 22)	9.1% (2)	36.4% (8)	54.5% (12)	0% (0)
Alan (n = 21)	52.4% (11)	42.9% (9)	4.8% (1)	0% (0)

9. Do you think that Amy's/Alan's learning difficulties are likely to be affecting her/his behaviour?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy (n = 22)	9.1% (2)	18.2% (4)	50.0% (11)	22.7% (5)
Alan (n = 21)	0% (0)	19.0% (4)	71.4% (15)	9.5% (2)

10. Are Amy's/Alan's difficulties likely to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in her/his class?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy (n = 22)	27.3% (6)	27.3% (6)	31.8% (7)	13.6% (3)
Alan (n = 21)	0% (0)	42.9% (9)	47.6% (10)	9.5% (2)

11. How necessary do you consider the need for the involvement of the SENCo or for other expertise from within the school?

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Amy (n = 22)	0% (0)	13.6% (3)	50.0% (11)	36.4% (8)
Alan (n = 21)	0% (0)	23.8% (5)	52.4% (11)	23.8% (5)

12. How great do you consider the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school? (e.g. ESS, EPS etc)

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Amy (n = 22)	4.5% (1)	47.7% (10.5)	34.1% (7.5)	13.6% (3)
Alan (n = 21)	4.8% (1)	52.4% (11)	28.6% (6)	14.3% (3)

13. How likely do you think Amy/Alan will be to accept any additional support or help that may be offered?

	highly	probably	possibly	unlikely
Amy (n = 22)	54.5% (12)	40.9% (9)	4.5% (1)	0% (0)
Alan (n = 21)	47.6% (10)	38.1% (8)	14.3% (3)	0% (0)

14. If no additional help were offered to Amy/Alan, do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to become significantly more serious by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Amy (n = 22)	0% (0)	0% (0)	50.0% (11)	50.0% (11)
Alan (n = 21)	4.8% (1)	47.6% (10)	47.6% (10)	0% (0)

15. If no additional help is offered to Amy/Alan, how likely are there to be significant concerns about her/his behaviour by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Amy (n = 22)	4.5% (1)	31.8% (7)	36.4% (8)	27.3% (6)
Alan (n = 21)	0% (0)	14.3% (3)	71.4% (15)	14.3% (3)

Ob – The responses for Laura / Daniel

A child with mild general learning difficulties with an associated emotional response.

1. How likely is it that the problem is arising from Laura's/Daniel's lack of ability?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Laura (n = 21)	0% (0)	19.0% (4)	33.3% (7)	47.6% (10)
Daniel (n = 21)	4.8% (1)	28.6% (6)	23.8% (5)	42.9% (9)

2. Do you consider that Laura/Daniel has general learning difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Laura (n = 21)	0% (0)	4.8% (1)	42.9% (9)	52.4% (11)
Daniel (n = 21)	0% (0)	28.6% (6)	38.1% (8)	33.3% (7)

3. Do you consider that Laura/Daniel has some sort of specific learning difficulty?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Laura (n = 21)	0% (0)	9.5% (2)	76.2% (16)	14.3% (3)
Daniel (n = 21)	9.5% (2)	23.8% (5)	57.1% (12)	9.5% (2)

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for her/his difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Laura (n = 21)	0% (0)	4.8% (1)	85.7% (18)	9.5% (2)
Daniel (n = 21)	0% (0)	23.8% (5)	71.4% (15)	4.8% (1)

5. How likely is it that the difficulties would be reduced by Laura/Daniel making increased effort?

	probably	possibly	unlikely	very unlikely
Laura (n = 21)	4.8% (1)	61.9% (13)	23.8% (5)	9.5% (2)
Daniel (n = 21)	4.8% (1)	66.7% (14)	23.8% (5)	4.8% (1)

6. Do you think that Laura's/Daniel's behaviour is restricting her/his learning?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Laura (n = 21)	0% (0)	4.8% (1)	38.1% (8)	57.1% (12)
Daniel (n = 21)	4.8% (1)	4.8% (1)	23.8% (5)	66.7% (14)

7. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for Laura/Daniel within the classroom without additional support?

	very easy	easy	fairly difficult	very difficult
Laura (n = 21)	0% (0)	2.4% (0.5)	69.0% (14.5)	28.6% (6)
Daniel (n = 21)	0% (0)	28.6% (6)	47.6% (10)	23.8% (5)

8. How likely would she/he be to respond to a moderate level of additional support in class (say up to 5 hours a week of auxiliary support)?

	very likely	likely	unlikely	very unlikely
Laura (n = 21)	23.8% (5)	47.6% (10)	19.0% (4)	9.5% (2)
Daniel (n = 21)	19.0% (4)	66.7% (14)	14.3% (3)	0% (0)

9. Do you think that Laura's/Daniel's learning difficulties are likely to be affecting his/her behaviour?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Laura (n = 21)	0% (0)	9.5% (2)	33.3% (7)	57.1% (12)
Daniel (n = 21)	0% (0)	23.8% (5)	19.0% (4)	57.1% (12)

10. Are Laura's/Daniel's difficulties likely to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in her/his class?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Laura (n = 21)	9.5% (2)	52.4% (11)	23.8% (5)	14.3% (3)
Daniel (n = 21)	33.3% (7)	33.3% (7)	28.6% (6)	4.8% (1)

11. How necessary do you consider the need for the involvement of the SENCo or for other expertise from within the school?

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Laura (n = 21)	0% (0)	4.8% (1)	47.6% (10)	47.6% (10)
Daniel (n = 21)	9.5% (2)	9.5% (2)	28.6% (6)	52.4% (11)

12. How great do you consider the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school? (e.g. ESS, EPS etc)

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Laura (n = 21)	0% (0)	23.8% (5)	23.8% (5)	52.4% (11)
Daniel (n = 21)	19.0% (4)	19.0% (4)	38.1% (8)	23.8% (5)

13. How likely do you think Laura/Daniel will be to accept any additional support or help that may be offered?

	highly	probably	possibly	unlikely
Laura (n = 21)	19.0% (4)	33.3% (7)	47.6% (10)	0% (0)
Daniel (n = 21)	0% (0)	23.8% (5)	71.4% (15)	4.8% (1)

14. If no additional help were offered to Laura/Daniel, do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to become significantly more serious by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Laura (n = 21)	0% (0)	0% (0)	38.1% (8)	61.9% (13)
Daniel (n = 21)	0% (0)	4.8% (1)	42.9% (9)	47.6% (10)

15. If no additional help is offered to Laura/Daniel, how likely are there to be significant concerns about her/his behaviour by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Laura (n = 21)	0% (0)	9.5% (2)	33.3% (7)	57.1% (12)
Daniel (n = 21)	0% (0)	14.3% (3)	52.4% (11)	33.3% (7)

O.c – The responses for Claire / Stephen

A child with mild to moderate learning difficulties with associated attentional or motivational concerns and possible language difficulties.

1. How likely is it that the problem is arising from Claire's/Steven's lack of ability?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Claire (n = 20)	0% (0)	15.0% (3)	30.0% (6)	55.0% (11)
Steven (n = 20)	0% (0)	15.0% (3)	50.0% (10)	35.0% (7)

2. Do you consider that Claire/Steven has general learning difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Claire (n = 20)	0% (0)	7.5% (1.5)	57.5% (11.5)	35.0% (7)
Steven (n = 20)	0% (0)	5.0% (1)	50.0% (10)	45.0% (9)

3. Do you consider that Claire/Steven has some sort of specific learning difficulty?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Claire (n = 20)	0% (0)	20.0% (4)	60.0% (12)	20.0% (4)
Steven (n = 20)	0% (0)	20.0% (4)	35.0% (7)	45.0% (9)

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for her/his difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Claire (n = 20)	0% (0)	10.0% (2)	75.0% (15)	15.0% (3)
Steven (n = 20)	0% (0)	25.0% (5)	50.0% (10)	25.0% (5)

5. How likely is it that the difficulties would be reduced by Claire/Steven making increased effort?

	probably	possibly	unlikely	very unlikely
Claire (n = 20)	5.0% (1)	30.0% (6)	55.0% (11)	10.0% (2)
Steven (n = 20)	10.0% (2)	45.0% (9)	30.0% (6)	15.0% (3)

6. Do you think that Claire's/Steven's behaviour is restricting her/his learning?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Claire (n = 20)	0% (0)	10.0% (2)	30.0% (6)	60.0% (12)
Steven (n = 20)	0% (0)	5.0% (1)	15.0% (3)	80.0% (16)

7. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for Claire/Steven within the classroom without additional support?

	very easy	easy	fairly difficult	very difficult
Claire (n = 20)	5.0% (1)	0% (0)	45.0% (9)	45.0% (9)
Steven (n = 20)	0% (0)	0% (0)	45.0% (9)	55.0% (11)

8. How likely would she/he be to respond to a moderate level of additional support in class (say up to 5 hours a week of auxiliary support)?

	very likely	likely	unlikely	very unlikely
Claire (n = 20)	10.0% (2)	75.0% (15)	15.0% (3)	0% (0)
Steven (n = 20)	30.0% (6)	55.0% (11)	15.0% (3)	0% (0)

9. Do you think that Claire's/Steven's learning difficulties are likely to be affecting her/his behaviour?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Claire (n = 20)	0% (0)	5.0% (1)	35.0% (7)	60.0% (12)
Steven (n = 20)	5.0% (1)	5.0% (1)	25.0% (5)	65.0% (13)

10. Are Claire's/Steven's difficulties likely to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in her/his class?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Claire (n = 20)	5.0% (1)	0% (0)	40.0% (8)	55.0% (11)
Steven (n = 20)	0% (0)	0% (0)	25.0% (5)	75.0% (15)

11. How necessary do you consider the need for the involvement of the SENCo or for other expertise from within the school?

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Claire (n = 20)	10.0% (2)	0% (0)	35.0% (7)	55.0% (11)
Steven (n = 20)	0% (0)	0% (0)	50.0% (10)	50.0% (10)

12. How great do you consider the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school? (e.g. ESS, EPS etc)

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Claire (n = 20)	5.0% (1)	25.0% (5)	25.0% (5)	45.0% (9)
Steven (n = 20)	5.0% (1)	20.0% (4)	25.0% (5)	50.0% (10)

13. How likely do you think Claire/Steven will be to accept any additional support or help that may be offered?

	highly	probably	possibly	unlikely
Claire (n = 20)	15.0% (3)	45.0% (9)	30.0% (6)	10.0% (2)
Steven (n = 20)	25.0% (5)	30.0% (6)	45.0% (9)	0% (0)

14. If no additional help were offered to Claire/Steven, do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to become significantly more serious by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Claire (n = 20)	0% (0)	5.0% (1)	20.0% (4)	75.0% (15)
Steven (n = 20)	0% (0)	5.0% (1)	25.0% (5)	70.0% (14)

15. If no additional help is offered to Claire/Steven, how likely are there to be significant concerns about her/his behaviour by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Claire (n = 20)	10.0% (2)	5.0% (1)	20.0% (4)	65.0% (13)
Steven (n = 20)	0% (0)	5.0% (1)	5.0% (1)	90.0% (18)

O.d – The responses for Sarah/Paul

A child who is orally capable but appears to have a specific literacy difficulty with some signs of frustration:

1. How likely is it that the problem is arising from Sarah's/Paul's lack of ability?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah (n = 19)	15.8% (3)	31.6% (6)	31.6% (6)	21.1% (4)
Paul (n = 21)	28.6% (6)	19.0% (4)	33.3% (7)	19.0% (4)

2. Do you consider that Sarah/Paul has general learning difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah (n = 19)	10.5% (2)	73.7% (14)	10.5% (2)	5.3% (1)
Paul (n = 21)	19.0% (4)	38.1% (8)	38.1% (8)	4.8% (1)

3. Do you consider that Sarah/Paul has some sort of specific learning difficulty?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah (n = 19)	0% (0)	0% (0)	36.8% (7)	63.2% (12)
Paul (n = 21)	4.8% (1)	4.8% (1)	42.9% (9)	47.6% (10)

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for her/his difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah (n = 19)	10.5% (2)	21.1% (4)	57.9% (11)	10.5% (2)
Paul (n = 21)	0% (0)	19.0% (4)	76.2% (16)	4.8% (1)

5. How likely is it that the difficulties would be reduced by Sarah/Paul making increased effort?

	probably	possibly	unlikely	very unlikely
Sarah (n = 19)	0% (0)	15.8% (3)	57.9% (11)	26.3% (5)
Paul (n = 21)	0% (0)	28.6% (6)	52.4% (11)	19.0% (4)

6. Do you think that Sarah's/Paul's behaviour is restricting her/his learning?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah (n = 19)	31.6% (6)	42.1% (8)	15.8% (3)	10.5% (2)
Paul (n = 21)	28.6% (6)	57.1% (12)	9.5% (2)	4.8% (1)

7. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for Sarah/Paul within the classroom without additional support?

	very easy	easy	fairly difficult	very difficult
Sarah (n = 19)	0% (0)	5.3% (1)	84.2% (16)	10.5% (2)
Paul (n = 21)	0% (0)	7.1% (1.5)	78.6% (16.5)	14.3% (3)

8. How likely would she/he be to respond to a moderate level of additional support in class (say up to 5 hours a week of auxiliary support)?

	very likely	likely	unlikely	very unlikely
Sarah (n = 19)	68.4% (13)	31.6% (6)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Paul (n = 21)	38.1% (8)	57.1% (12)	4.8% (1)	0% (0)

9. Do you think that Sarah's/Paul's learning difficulties are likely to be affecting her/his behaviour?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah (n = 19)	10.5% (2)	15.8% (3)	36.8% (7)	36.8% (7)
Paul (n = 21)	9.5% (2)	19.0 (4)	42.9% (9)	28.6% (6)

10. Are Sarah's/Paul's difficulties likely to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in her/his class?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah (n = 19)	10.5% (2)	47.4% (9)	36.8% (7)	5.3% (1)
Paul (n = 21)	4.8% (1)	47.6% (10)	47.6% (10)	0% (0)

11. How necessary do you consider the need for the involvement of the SENCo or for other expertise from within the school?

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Sarah (n = 19)	0% (0)	15.8% (3)	42.1% (8)	42.1% (8)
Paul (n = 21)	0% (0)	16.7% (3.5)	30.9% (6.5)	52.4% (11)

12. How great do you consider the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school? (e.g. ESS, EPS etc)

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Sarah (n = 19)	0% (0)	42.1% (8)	36.8% (7)	21.1% (4)
Paul (n = 21)	0% (0)	33.3% (7)	19.0% (4)	47.6% (10)

13. How likely do you think Sarah/Paul will be to accept any additional support or help that may be offered?

	highly	probably	possibly	unlikely
Sarah (n = 19)	68.4% (13)	15.8% (3)	15.8% (3)	0% (0)
Paul (n = 21)	52.4% (11)	33.3% (7)	14.3% (3)	0% (0)

14. If no additional help were offered to Sarah/Paul, do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to become significantly more serious by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very unlikely
Sarah (n = 19)	0% (0)	0% (0)	42.1% (8)	52.6% (10)
Paul (n = 21)	0% (0)	0% (0)	38.1% (8)	61.9% (13)

15. If no additional help is offered to Sarah/Paul, how likely are there to be significant concerns about her/his behaviour by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Sarah (n = 19)	0% (0)	21.1% (4)	52.6% (10)	21.1% (4)
Paul (n = 21)	4.8% (1)	4.8% (1)	57.1% (12)	33.3% (7)

O.e – The responses for Emma/Kevin

A child who is making generally fair progress but who is having apparently specific difficulties in the acquisition of number and mathematical skills.

1. How likely is it that the problem is arising from Emma's/Kevin's lack of ability?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Emma (n =21)	4.8% (1)	23.8% (5)	28.6% (6)	38.1% (8)
Kevin (n = 20)	0% (0)	50.0% (10)	35.0% (7)	15.0% (3)

2. Do you consider that Emma/Kevin has general learning difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Emma (n =21)	33.3% (7)	38.1% (8)	23.8% (5)	4.8% (1)
Kevin (n = 20)	15.0% (3)	60.0% (12)	20.0% (4)	5.0% (1)

3. Do you consider that Emma/Kevin has some sort of specific learning difficulty?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Emma (n =21)	0% (0)	4.8% (1)	33.3% (7)	61.9% (13)
Kevin (n = 20)	0% (0)	10.0% (2)	45.0% (9)	45.0% (9)

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for her/his difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Emma (n =21)	9.5% (2)	57.1% (12)	33.3% (7)	0% (0)
Kevin (n = 20)	0% (0)	50.0% (10)	50.0% (10)	0% (0)

5. How likely is it that the difficulties would be reduced by Emma/Kevin making increased effort?

	probably	possibly	unlikely	very unlikely
Emma (n =21)	4.8% (1)	9.5% (2)	61.9% (13)	23.8% (5)
Kevin (n = 20)	0% (0)	40.0% (8)	55.0% (11)	5.0% (1)

6. Do you think that Emma's/Kevin's behaviour is restricting her/his learning?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Emma (n =21)	61.9% (13)	28.6% (6)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Kevin (n = 20)	50.0% (10)	45.0% (9)	5.0% (1)	0% (0)

7. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for Emma/Kevin within the classroom without additional support?

	very easy	easy	fairly difficult	very difficult
Emma (n =21)	0% (0)	31.0% (6.5)	69.0% (14.5)	0% (0)
Kevin (n = 20)	0% (0)	50.0% (10)	50.0% (10)	0% (0)

8. How likely would she/he be to respond to a moderate level of additional support in class (say up to 5 hours a week of auxiliary support)?

	very likely	likely	unlikely	very unlikely
Emma (n =21)	66.7% (14)	33.3% (7)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Kevin (n = 20)	55.0% (11)	45.0% (9)	0% (0)	0% (0)

9. Do you think that Emma's/Kevin's learning difficulties are likely to be affecting her/his behaviour?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Emma (n =21)	23.8% (5)	47.6% (10)	28.6% (6)	0% (0)
Kevin (n = 20)	40.0% (8)	20.0% (4)	40.0% (8)	0% (0)

10. Are Emma's/Kevin's difficulties likely to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in her/his class?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Emma (n =21)	47.6% (10)	38.1% (8)	14.3% (3)	0% (0)
Kevin (n = 20)	35.0% (7)	45.0% (9)	20.0% (4)	0% (0)

11. How necessary do you consider the need for the involvement of the SENCo or for other expertise from within the school?

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Emma (n =21)	0% (0)	42.9% (9)	33.3% (7)	23.8% (5)
Kevin (n = 20)	5.0% (1)	27.5% (5.5)	37.5% (7.5)	30.0% (6)

12. How great do you consider the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school? (e.g. ESS, EPS etc)

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Emma (n =21)	9.5% (2)	57.1% (12)	28.6% (6)	4.8% (1)
Kevin (n = 20)	15.0% (3)	50.0% (10)	25.0% (5)	10.0% (2)

13. How likely do you think Emma/Kevin will be to accept any additional support or help that may be offered?

	highly	probably	possibly	unlikely
Emma (n =21)	81.0% (17)	11.9% (2.5)	2.4% (0.5)	4.8% (1)
Kevin (n = 20)	50.0% (10)	20.0% (4)	25.0% (5)	5.0% (1)

14. If no additional help were offered to Emma/Kevin, do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to become significantly more serious by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Emma (n =21)	0% (0)	4.8% (1)	52.4% (11)	42.9% (9)
Kevin (n = 20)	0% (0)	20.0% (4)	45.0% (9)	35.0% (7)

15. If no additional help is offered to Emma/Kevin, how likely are there to be significant concerns about her/his behaviour by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Emma (n =21)	19.0% (4)	42.9% (9)	38.1% (8)	0% (0)
Kevin (n = 20)	20.0% (4)	40.0% (8)	35.0% (7)	5.0% (1)

Appendix P

The teachers' perceptions of the differences between the problems regardless of pupil gender – second phase

1. How likely is it that the problem is arising from her/his lack of ability?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	0% (0)	4.7% (2)	32.6% (14)	62.8% (27)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	2.4% (1)	23.8% (10)	28.6% (12)	45.2% (19)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	0% (0)	15.0% (6)	40.0% (16)	45.0% (18)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	22.5% (9)	25.0% (10)	32.5% (13)	20.0% (8)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	2.4% (1)	36.6% (15)	31.7% (13)	26.8% (11)

2. Do you consider that he/she has general learning difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	0% (0)	9.3% (4)	41.9% (18)	48.8% (21)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	0% (0)	16.7% (7)	40.5% (17)	42.9% (18)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	0% (0)	6.25% (2.5)	53.75% (21.5)	40.0% (16)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	15.0% (6)	55.0% (22)	25.0% (10)	5.0% (2)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	24.4% (10)	48.8% (20)	22.0% (9)	4.9% (2)

3. Do you consider that he/she has some sort of specific learning difficulty?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	0% (0)	44.2% (19)	39.5% (17)	16.3% (7)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	4.8% (2)	16.7% (7)	66.7% (28)	11.9% (5)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	0% (0)	20.0% (8)	47.5% (19)	32.5% (13)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	2.5% (1)	2.5% (1)	40.0% (16)	55.0% (22)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	0% (0)	7.3% (3)	39.0% (16)	53.7% (22)

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for her/his difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	0% (0)	34.9% (15)	65.1% (28)	0% (0)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	0% (0)	14.3% (6)	78.6% (33)	7.1% (3)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	0% (0)	17.5% (7)	62.5% (25)	20.0% (8)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	5.0% (2)	20.0% (8)	67.7% (27)	7.5% (3)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	4.9% (2)	53.7% (22)	41.5% (17)	0% (0)

5. How likely is it that the difficulties would be reduced by her/him making increased effort?

	probably	possibly	unlikely	very unlikely
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	0% (0)	45.3% (19.5)	50.0% (21.5)	4.7% (2)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	4.8% (2)	64.3% (27)	23.8% (10)	7.1% (3)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	7.5% (3)	37.5% (15)	42.5% (17)	12.5% (5)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	0% (0)	22.5% (9)	55.0% (22)	22.5% (9)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	2.4% (1)	24.4% (10)	58.6% (24)	14.6% (6)

6. Do you think that her/his behaviour is restricting her/his learning?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	14.0% (6)	48.8% (21)	27.9% (12)	9.3% (4)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	2.4% (1)	4.8% (2)	31.0% (13)	61.9% (26)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	0% (0)	7.5% (3)	22.5% (9)	70.0% (28)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	30.0% (12)	50.0% (20)	12.5% (5)	7.5% (3)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	56.1% (23)	36.6% (15)	2.4% (1)	0% (0)

7. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for her/him within the classroom without additional support?

	very easy	easy	fairly difficult	very difficult
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	0% (0)	16.3% (7)	76.7% (33)	7.0% (3)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	0% (0)	15.5% (6.5)	58.3% (24.5)	26.2% (11)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	2.5% (1)	0% (0)	45.0% (18)	50.0% (20)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	0% (0)	6.25% (2.5)	81.25% (32.5)	12.5% (5)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	0% (0)	40.2% (16.5)	59.8% (24.5)	0% (0)

8. How likely would she/he be to respond to a moderate level of additional support in class (say up to 5 hours a week of auxiliary support)?

	very likely	likely	unlikely	very unlikely
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	30.2% (13)	39.5% (17)	30.2% (13)	0% (0)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	21.4% (9)	57.1% (24)	16.7% (7)	4.8% (2)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	20.0% (8)	65.0% (26)	15.0% (6)	0% (0)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	52.5% (21)	45.0% (18)	2.5% (1)	0% (0)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	61.0% (25)	39.0% (16)	0% (0)	0% (0)

9. Do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to be affecting her/his behaviour?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	4.7% (2)	18.6% (8)	60.5% (26)	16.3% (7)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	0% (0)	16.7% (7)	26.2% (11)	57.1% (24)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	2.5% (1)	5.0% (2)	30.0% (12)	62.5% (25)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	10.0% (4)	17.5% (7)	40.0% (16)	32.5% (13)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	31.7% (13)	34.1% (14)	34.1% (14)	0% (0)

10. Are her/his difficulties likely to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in her/his class?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	14.0% (6)	34.9% (15)	39.5% (17)	11.6% (5)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	21.4% (9)	42.9% (18)	26.2% (11)	9.5% (4)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	2.5% (1)	0% (0)	32.5% (13)	65.0% (26)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	7.5% (3)	47.5% (19)	42.5% (17)	2.5% (1)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	41.5% (17)	41.5% (17)	17.5% (7)	0% (0)

11. How necessary do you consider the need for the involvement of the SENCo or for other expertise from within the school?

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	0% (0)	18.6% (8)	51.2% (22)	30.2% (13)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	4.8% (2)	7.1% (3)	38.1% (16)	50.0% (21)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	5.0% (2)	0% (0)	42.5% (17)	52.5% (21)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	0% (0)	16.25% (6.5)	37.25% (14.5)	47.5% (19)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	2.4% (1)	35.4% (14.5)	35.4% (14.5)	26.8% (11)

12. How great do you consider the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school? (e.g. ESS, EPS etc)

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	4.7% (2)	50.0% (21.5)	31.4% (13.5)	14.0% (6)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	9.5% (4)	21.4% (9)	31.0% (13)	38.1% (16)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	5.0% (2)	22.5% (9)	25.0% (10)	47.5% (19)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	0% (0)	37.5% (15)	27.5% (11)	35.0% (14)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	12.2% (5)	53.7% (22)	26.8% (11)	7.3% (3)

13. How likely do you think she/he will be to accept any additional support or help that may be offered?

	highly	probably	possibly	unlikely
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	51.2% (22)	39.5% (17)	9.3% (4)	0% (0)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	9.5% (4)	28.6% (12)	59.5% (25)	2.4% (1)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	20.0% (8)	37.5% (15)	37.5% (15)	5.0% (2)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	60.0% (24)	25.0% (10)	15.0% (6)	0% (0)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	65.8% (27)	15.9% (6.5)	13.4% (5.5)	4.9% (2)

14. If no additional help were offered to her/him, do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to become significantly more serious by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	2.3% (1)	23.3% (10)	48.8% (21)	25.6% (11)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	0% (0)	2.4% (1)	40.5% (17)	54.8% (23)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	0% (0)	2.5% (1)	22.5% (9)	72.5% (29)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	0% (0)	0% (0)	40.0% (16)	57.5% (23)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	0% (0)	12.2% (5)	48.8% (20)	39.0% (16)

15. If no additional help is offered to her/him, how likely are there to be significant concerns about her/his behaviour by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Amy + Alan (n = 43)	2.3% (1)	23.3% (10)	53.5% (23)	20.9% (9)
Laura + Daniel (n = 42)	0% (0)	11.9% (5)	42.9% (18)	45.2% (19)
Claire + Steven (n = 40)	5.0% (2)	5.0% (2)	12.5% (5)	77.5% (31)
Sarah + Paul (n = 40)	2.5% (1)	12.5% (5)	55.0% (22)	27.5% (11)
Emma + Kevin (n = 41)	19.5% (8)	41.5% (17)	36.6% (15)	2.4% (1)

Appendix Q

The pattern of responses to the fifteen questions for all boys and all girls regardless of the problem – second phase

1. How likely is it that the problem is arising from her/his lack of ability?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
All girls (103)	3.9% (4)	18.4% (19)	32.0% (33)	44.7% (46)
All boys (103)	6.8% (7)	23.3% (24)	34.0% (35)	35.9% (37)

2. Do you consider that he/she has general learning difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
All girls (103)	8.7% (9)	25.7% (26.5)	37.4% (38.5)	28.1% (29)
All boys (103)	6.8% (7)	28.1% (29)	35.9% (37)	29.1% (30)

3. Do you consider that he/she has some sort of specific learning difficulty?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
All girls (103)	0% (0)	14.6% (15)	49.5% (51)	35.9% (37)
All boys (103)	2.9% (3)	22.3% (23)	43.7% (45)	31.1% (32)

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for her/his difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
All girls (103)	3.9% (4)	27.2% (28)	62.1% (64)	6.8% (7)
All boys (103)	0% (0)	29.1% (30)	64.1% (66)	6.8% (7)

5. How likely is it that the difficulties would be reduced by her/him making increased effort?

	probably	possibly	unlikely	very unlikely
All girls (103)	2.9% (3)	34.9% (36)	48.5% (50)	13.6% (14)
All boys (103)	2.9% (3)	43.2% (44.5)	43.2% (44.5)	10.7% (11)

6. Do you think that her/his behaviour is restricting her/his learning?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
All girls (103)	21.4% (22)	26.2% (27)	21.4% (22)	29.1% (30)
All boys (103)	19.4% (20)	33.0% (34)	17.5% (18)	30.1% (31)

7. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for her/him within the classroom without additional support?

	very easy	easy	fairly difficult	very difficult
All girls (103)	1.0% (1)	12.6% (13)	68.0% (70)	17.5% (18)
All boys (103)	0% (0)	18.9% (19.5)	60.7% (62.5)	20.4% (21)

8. How likely would she/he be to respond to a moderate level of additional support in class (say up to 5 hours a week of auxiliary support)?

	very likely	likely	unlikely	very unlikely
All girls (103)	34.9% (36)	44.7% (46)	18.4% (19)	1.9% (2)
All boys (103)	38.8% (40)	53.4% (55)	7.8% (8)	0% (0)

9. Do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to be affecting her/his behaviour?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
All girls (103)	8.7% (9)	19.4% (20)	36.9% (38)	34.9% (36)
All boys (103)	10.7% (11)	17.5% (18)	39.8% (41)	32.0% (33)

10. Are her/his difficulties likely to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in her/his class?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
All girls (103)	20.4% (21)	33.0% (34)	29.1% (30)	17.5% (18)
All boys (103)	14.6% (15)	34.0% (35)	34.0% (35)	17.5% (18)

11. How necessary do you consider the need for the involvement of the SENCo or for other expertise from within the school?

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
All girls (103)	1.9% (2)	15.5% (16)	41.7% (43)	40.8% (42)
All boys (103)	2.9% (3)	15.5% (16)	39.8% (41)	41.7% (43)

12. How great do you consider the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school? (e.g. ESS, EPS etc)

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
All girls (103)	3.9% (4)	39.3% (40.5)	29.6% (30.5)	27.2% (28)
All boys (103)	8.7% (9)	34.9% (36)	27.2% (28)	29.1% (30)

13. How likely do you think she/he will be to accept any additional support or help that may be offered?

	highly	probably	possibly	unlikely
All girls (103)	47.6% (49)	29.6% (30.5)	19.9% (20.5)	2.9% (3)
All boys (103)	34.9% (36)	29.1% (30)	34.0% (35)	1.9% (2)

14. If no additional help were offered to her/him, do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to become significantly more serious by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
All girls (103)	0% (0)	1.9% (2)	40.8% (42)	56.3% (58)
All boys (103)	1.0% (1)	15.5% (16)	39.8% (41)	42.7% (44)

15. If no additional help is offered to her/him, how likely are there to be significant concerns about her/his behaviour by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
All girls (103)	6.8% (7)	22.3% (23)	35.9% (37)	34.0% (35)
All boys (103)	4.8% (5)	15.5% (16)	44.7% (46)	34.9% (36)

Appendix R

The pattern of responses to the fifteen questions for the two girls and the two boys with an apparent general learning difficulty – second phase

1. How likely is it that the problem is arising from her/his lack of ability?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Claire (42)	0% (0)	9.5% (4)	33.3% (14)	57.1% (24)
Alan + Steven (41)	0% (0)	9.8% (4)	39.0% (16)	51.2% (21)

2. Do you consider that he/she has general learning difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Claire (42)	0% (0)	8.3% (3.5)	53.6% (22.5)	38.1% (16)
Alan + Steven (41)	0% (0)	7.3% (3)	41.5% (17)	51.2% (21)

3. Do you consider that he/she has some sort of specific learning difficulty?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Claire (42)	0% (0)	28.6% (12)	50.0% (21)	21.4% (9)
Alan + Steven (41)	0% (0)	36.6% (15)	36.6% (15)	26.8% (11)

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for her/his difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Claire (42)	0% (0)	26.2% (11)	66.7% (28)	7.1% (3)
Alan + Steven (41)	0% (0)	26.8% (11)	61.0% (25)	12.2% (5)

5. How likely is it that the difficulties would be reduced by her/him making increased effort?

	probably	possibly	unlikely	very unlikely
Amy + Claire (42)	2.4% (1)	42.9% (18)	50.0% (21)	4.8% (2)
Alan + Steven (41)	4.9% (2)	40.2% (16.5)	42.7% (17.5)	12.2% (5)

6. Do you think that her/his behaviour is restricting her/his learning?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Claire (42)	7.1% (3)	28.6% (12)	26.2% (11)	38.1% (16)
Alan + Steven (41)	7.3% (3)	29.3% (12)	24.4% (10)	39.0% (16)

7. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for her/him within the classroom without additional support?

	very easy	easy	fairly difficult	very difficult
Amy + Claire (42)	2.4% (1)	11.9% (5)	59.5% (25)	23.8% (10)
Alan + Steven (41)	0% (0)	4.9% (2)	63.4% (26)	31.7% (13)

8. How likely would she/he be to respond to a moderate level of additional support in class (say up to 5 hours a week of auxiliary support)?

	very likely	likely	unlikely	very unlikely
Amy + Claire (42)	9.5% (4)	54.8% (23)	35.7% (15)	0% (0)
Alan + Steven (41)	41.5% (17)	48.8% (20)	9.8% (4)	0% (0)

9. Do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to be affecting her/his behaviour?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Claire (42)	4.8% (2)	11.9% (5)	42.9% (18)	40.5% (17)
Alan + Steven (41)	2.4% (1)	12.2% (5)	48.8% (20)	36.6% (15)

10. Are her/his difficulties likely to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in her/his class?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Amy + Claire (42)	16.7% (7)	14.3% (6)	35.7% (15)	33.3% (14)
Alan + Steven (41)	0% (0)	22.0% (9)	36.6% (15)	41.5% (17)

11. How necessary do you consider the need for the involvement of the SENCo or for other expertise from within the school?

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Amy + Claire (42)	4.8% (2)	7.1% (3)	42.9% (18)	45.2% (19)
Alan + Steven (41)	0% (0)	12.2% (5)	51.2% (21)	36.6% (15)

12. How great do you consider the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school? (e.g. ESS, EPS etc)

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Amy + Claire (42)	4.8% (2)	36.9% (15.5)	29.8% (12.5)	28.6% (12)
Alan + Steven (41)	4.9% (2)	36.6% (15)	26.8% (11)	31.7% (13)

13. How likely do you think she/he will be to accept any additional support or help that may be offered?

	highly	probably	possibly	unlikely
Amy + Claire (42)	35.7% (15)	42.9% (18)	16.7% (7)	4.8% (2)
Alan + Steven (41)	36.6% (15)	34.1% (14)	29.3% (12)	0% (0)

14. If no additional help were offered to her/him, do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to become significantly more serious by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Amy + Claire (42)	0% (0)	2.4% (1)	35.7% (15)	61.9% (26)
Alan + Steven (41)	2.4% (1)	26.8% (11)	36.6% (15)	34.1% (14)

15. If no additional help is offered to her/him, how likely are there to be significant concerns about her/his behaviour by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Amy + Claire (42)	7.1% (3)	19.0% (8)	28.6% (12)	45.2% (19)
Alan + Steven (41)	0% (0)	9.8% (4)	39.0% (16)	51.2% (21)

Appendix S

The pattern of responses to the fifteen questions for the two girls and the two boys with an apparent specific learning difficulty – second phase

1. How likely is it that the problem is arising from her/his lack of ability?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah + Emma (40)	10.0% (4)	27.5% (11)	30.0% (12)	30.0% (12)
Paul + Kevin (41)	14.6% (6)	34.1% (14)	34.1% (14)	17.1% (7)

2. Do you consider that he/she has general learning difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah + Emma (40)	22.5% (9)	55.0% (22)	17.5% (7)	5.0% (2)
Paul + Kevin (41)	17.1% (7)	48.8% (20)	29.3% (12)	4.9% (2)

3. Do you consider that he/she has some sort of specific learning difficulty?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah + Emma (40)	0% (0)	2.5% (1)	35.0% (14)	62.5% (25)
Paul + Kevin (41)	2.4% (1)	7.3% (3)	43.9% (18)	46.3% (19)

4. Do you think that there might be any medical or physical reason for her/his difficulties?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah + Emma (40)	10.0% (4)	40.0% (16)	45.0% (18)	5.0% (2)
Paul + Kevin (41)	0% (0)	34.1% (14)	63.4% (26)	2.4% (1)

5. How likely is it that the difficulties would be reduced by her/him making increased effort?

	probably	possibly	unlikely	very unlikely
Sarah + Emma (40)	2.5% (1)	12.5% (5)	60.0% (24)	25.0% (10)
Paul + Kevin (41)	0% (0)	34.1% (14)	53.7% (22)	12.2% (5)

6. Do you think that her/his behaviour is restricting her/his learning?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah + Emma (40)	47.5% (19)	35.0% (14)	7.5% (3)	5.0% (2)
Paul + Kevin (41)	39.0% (16)	51.2% (21)	7.3% (3)	2.4% (1)

7. How easy do you think it would be to provide appropriately for her/him within the classroom without additional support?

	very easy	easy	fairly difficult	very difficult
Sarah + Emma (40)	0% (0)	18.75% (7.5)	75.25% (30.5)	5.0% (2)
Paul + Kevin (41)	0% (0)	28.0% (11.5)	64.6% (26.5)	7.3% (3)

8. How likely would she/he be to respond to a moderate level of additional support in class (say up to 5 hours a week of auxiliary support)?

	very likely	likely	unlikely	very unlikely
Sarah + Emma (40)	67.5% (27)	32.5% (13)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Paul + Kevin (41)	46.3% (19)	51.2% (21)	2.4% (1)	0% (0)

9. Do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to be affecting her/his behaviour?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah + Emma (40)	17.5% (7)	32.5% (13)	32.5% (13)	17.5% (7)
Paul + Kevin (41)	24.4% (10)	19.5% (8)	41.5% (17)	14.6% (6)

10. Are her/his difficulties likely to interfere with or restrict the learning of other pupils in her/his class?

	very unlikely	unlikely	possibly	probably
Sarah + Emma (40)	30.0% (12)	42.5% (17)	25.0% (10)	2.5% (1)
Paul + Kevin (41)	19.5% (8)	46.3% (19)	34.1% (14)	0% (0)

11. How necessary do you consider the need for the involvement of the SENCo or for other expertise from within the school?

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Sarah + Emma (40)	0% (0)	30.0% (12)	37.5% (15)	32.5% (13)
Paul + Kevin (41)	2.4% (1)	22.0% (9)	34.1% (14)	41.5% (17)

12. How great do you consider the need for the involvement of other professionals or agencies from outside the school? (e.g. ESS, EPS etc)

	unnecessary	helpful	necessary	essential
Sarah + Emma (40)	5.0% (2)	50.0% (20)	32.5% (13)	12.5% (5)
Paul + Kevin (41)	7.3% (3)	41.5% (17)	22.0% (9)	29.3% (12)

13. How likely do you think she/he will be to accept any additional support or help that may be offered?

	highly	probably	possibly	unlikely
Sarah + Emma (40)	75.0% (30)	13.75% (5.5)	8.75% (3.5)	2.5% (1)
Paul + Kevin (41)	51.2% (21)	26.8% (11)	19.5% (8)	2.4% (1)

14. If no additional help were offered to her/him, do you think that her/his learning difficulties are likely to become significantly more serious by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Sarah + Emma (40)	0% (0)	2.5% (1)	47.5% (19)	50.0% (20)
Paul + Kevin (41)	0% (0)	9.8% (4)	41.5% (17)	48.8% (20)

15. If no additional help is offered to her/him, how likely are there to be significant concerns about her/his behaviour by this time next year?

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Sarah + Emma (40)	10.0% (4)	32.5% (13)	45.0% (18)	10.0% (4)
Paul + Kevin (41)	12.2% (5)	22.0% (9)	46.3% (19)	19.5% (8)

Appendix T

The relationship between teachers' expectations of worsening problems and the need for the involvement of other professionals

Table A.3 shows the figures that were used to derive the rank order positions shown in Table 9.3 in Chapter Nine. It draws from the teachers' responses to Questions 11, 12, 14 and 15 from the questionnaires in the second phase. The first three columns show the percentage of teachers who indicated that there were 'very likely' to be significant concerns in the relevant area. The final two columns show the percentage of teachers indicating that involvement of the SENCo or outside professionals respectively was 'essential'.

Table A.3 – An indication of expected significant problems and the need for the involvement of other professionals

CHILD	VERY LIKELY TO BE SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS ABOUT:			ESSENTIAL FOR THE INVOLVEMENT OF:	
	Learning	Behaviour	Learning & Behaviour	SENCo	Outside professionals
Amy	50.0	27.3	38.65	36.4	13.6
Alan	0	14.3	7.15	23.8	14.3
Laura	61.9	57.1	59.5	47.6	52.4
Daniel	47.6	33.3	40.45	52.4	23.8
Claire	75.0	65.0	70.0	55.0	45.0
Steven	70.0	90.0	80.0	50.0	50.0
Sarah	52.6	21.1	36.85	42.1	21.1
Paul	61.9	33.3	47.6	52.4	47.6
Emma	42.9	0	21.45	23.8	4.8
Kevin	35.0	5.0	20.0	30.0	10.0

All figures are percentages of the possible responses to the pertinent questions