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Circles within Circles: The Transformative Learning of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) Tutors in UK Universities when they engage Collaboratively with Theories of Social Justice and Critical Pedagogy

by

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<u>Abstract</u>

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Circles within Circles: The Transformative Learning of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) Tutors in UK Universities when they engage Collaboratively with Theories of Social Justice and Critical Pedagogy

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This thesis considers the transformative learning of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) tutors when they engage collaboratively with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy. SpLD tutors in UK universities work with students with dyslexia, Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD)/dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Tourette's Syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Their training typically does not include theories of social justice and inclusion. Instead, the focus is usually on psychological impacts on learners such as working memory impairment and phonological difficulties. This privileges a deficit-led psychological model and, problematically, it ignores a multitude of issues that intersect and impact upon learners and on tutors' ability to work with them. Moreover, SpLD tutors are often overlooked in research literature and discussions on inclusive practice in universities. There is a specific gap in the research literature in that the training, development and practice of SpLD tutors is not addressed in relation to social and inclusion issues. The aim of this research was to consider the transformative learning of tutors when they engaged collaboratively with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy.

Working within a broadly constructivist ontological and epistemological framework, the study applied qualitative bricolage methodology incorporating elements of inclusive, creative and social justice research methods. The SpLD tutors acted as co-inquirers and engaged in Collaborative Inquiry Circles (CICs) to explore through dialogue the theories of Giroux, Freire, Bourdieu, Sen, hooks and Ahmed. As issues of inclusive practice were considered paramount, these theories were presented in a variety of accessible formats such as blogs and videos. In keeping with the aims of inclusive research, willing co-inquirers as well as the researcher thematically analysed the findings.

Findings indicate that engaging with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy was transformative for the co-inquirers both personally and professionally. The co-inquirers recounted how issues of justice within the theories were particularly resonant to their own work in terms of recognition of their professional practice and the issues facing students. This was particularly evident for co-inquirers with SpLDs who did not consider themselves 'academic' enough. The theories of Freire, Bourdieu and Ahmed were considered by the co-inquirers to be more applicable to their contexts than others. CICs were considered highly accessible by the co-inquirers who identified as neurodivergent.

It is concluded that SpLD tutors should be afforded the opportunity to learn about theories of social justice and critical pedagogy. Such theories support SpLD tutors to develop awareness of their practice and their place in the university and to consider the interplay between social justice and inclusion in their work. As universities work towards becoming more inclusive institutions, the views and needs of SpLD tutors in relation to supporting students with learning differences should be taken into account.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: SADHBH O'DWYER

Title of thesis: Circles within Circles: The Transformative Learning of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) Tutors in UK Universities when they engage collaboratively with Theories of Social Justice and Critical Pedagogy

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

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3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
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6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: .... Date: 26/09/2021

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Maureen Bn Uí Dhuibhir, Richard Leaning and Patricia Leaning

Definitions and Abbreviations

ADSHE ....Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education

ADHD...................................Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ASD......................................Autistic Spectrum Disorder

BAME..................................Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

BDA.....................................British Dyslexia Association

BIS ....Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

CIC ....Collaborative Inquiry Circle

DCD ....Developmental Coordination Disorder

DfE......................................Department for Education

DSA.....................................Disabled Students' Allowances

DSA-QAG ....Disabled Students' Allowances Quality Assurance Group

HEI ....Higher Education Institution

IASSIDD...............................International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

PATOSS...............................Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

NMHs ....Non-medical Helpers

SASC ....SpLD Standards Assessment Committee

SpLD ....Specific Learning Difficulty

SFE......................................Student Finance England

Chapter 1   **Introduction**

1.1   **Research context and research question**

'Learning is a process where knowledge is presented to us, then shaped through understanding, discussion and reflection' (Freire 1998, p. 22). This thesis has been shaped by the understanding, discussion and reflection of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) tutors in UK universities. Shape too is important to this research, in particular the use of circles both as a metaphor and a transformative learning space. SpLDs comprise dyslexia, Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD)/dyspraxia, dyscalculia and maths differences, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Tourette's Syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorders (British Dyslexia Association 2020; Brunswick 2012). SpLD is the term used to describe neurological processing issues which can have an impact on the acquisition of language, literacy, co-ordination, automaticity and numeracy skills (Harkin *et al.* 2015). SpLD tutors (of which I am one) work with learners in UK universities who have a diagnosis of SPLDs.

The focus of my research is the potential for transformative learning from engagement with social justice theories and critical pedagogy rather than the dominant neuro-biological or psychological frameworks that are typically associated with SpLD work (Macdonald 2009). I wanted to do a PhD on this subject *with* other SpLD tutors. I believe that SpLD tutors have great potential to support social justice and inclusion in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). However, while some SpLD tutors have conducted doctoral research, SpLD tutors themselves are rarely the focus of research in UK universities. Therefore, to understand the motivations behind this research, it is important to know the context within which SpLD tutors work in Higher Education (HE), their understandings of SpLDs and the dominance of psychological interpretations over more sociological approaches to SpLDs. The context includes the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) which typically funds the work of the SpLD tutor and growing casualization within the HE workplace.

1.2   **SpLDs as a disability**

SpLDs are considered a disability, although the nature of the disablement has been a point of much contention. There has been a year on year increase in the number of disabled students attending HEIs including 122,755 students with SpLDs in 2019/2020 (HESA 2021). Learners with SpLDs account for a third of students who declare a disability (HESA 2021). Higher levels of educational attainment has long been associated with better health outcomes (World Health

Organisation 2008). Under the Equality Act 2010, HEIs must provide equality of access and teaching provision to disabled students (Ryder and Norwich 2018).

Dyslexia is the most common SpLD (British Dyslexia Association, 2020) and will be the focus of much of the SpLD discussions in this text. There is no full consensus on definitions for dyslexia (Siegel and Smythe 2006). The most common definition is that used by the British Dyslexia Associate (BDA) - an amalgamation of findings on dyslexia from the Rose Report and the BDA's additional interpretations for visual and auditory processing issues:

> Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties with phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed. Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points. Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not by themselves, markers of dyslexia. A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds, or has responded, to well-founded intervention. In addition to these characteristics, the BDA acknowledges the visual and auditory processing difficulties that some individuals with dyslexia can experience. It points out that dyslexic readers can show a combination of abilities and difficulties that affect the learning process. (BDA 2019)

The definition above is recommended for use in assessments for HE students with dyslexia. The discourse primarily reflects a medical model of disability. Dyslexia and the other SpLDs have typically been overwhelmingly described in medical and psychological terms (MacDonald 2009, Mortimore and Dupree 2010). After all, students in HE are only entitled to support and accommodations from the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) if they have undergone a range of psychometric tests leading to a diagnosis of SpLD (DSA 2019). While these psychometric tests are useful to highlight areas of strength and difficulty for the learner, this feeds into the psychological discourse surrounding SpLDs. However, there is growing awareness that the psychological discourse itself is not enough, that SpLDs like dyslexia are 'constructed by discourses of learning, disability and literacy. It is therefore a mistake to consider dyslexia to be just about reading or to allow psychological concepts of poor working-memory, processing speeds and literacy skills to dominate' (Cameron 2016, p. 235).

Another problematic issue is the continued use of IQ tests as part of the battery of psychometric tests used to diagnose dyslexia and other learning differences. IQ tests are highly contested. It is

argued that many IQ tests are discriminatory as they 'do not assess "innate ability" but rather acquired knowledge and language skills' reflecting social and cultural capital (Ryder and Norwich 2018, p.112) as seen in the performance of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups in these tests. BAME learners tend to score below expectations in IQ tests and this has particularly been the case for Black students in the UK (Gillborn 2018). It was Barton and Tomlinson (1984) who first wrote about negative assumptions made about the IQ of Afro-Caribbean boys in British schools. Theirs was a sociological approach to explore questions of power and politics within the special education narrative and to question the 'discourses of benevolence and psychological defect' (Slee 2010, p. 567), the intersection between race and disability.

Yet despite these concerns especially in terms of sociological analysis, IQ tests continue to be used in diagnostic tests for dyslexia to rule out General Learning Difficulties (McLoughlin and Leather 2013). However, there has been a move away from this controversial discrepancy-based model of dyslexia (Goswami *et al.* 2021). The IQ-discrepancy concept has lost credibility in that there has not been significant 'qualitative differences in reading (and the phonological skills that underpin it) between children with dyslexia and children with more general learning problems' (Snowling *et al.* 2020, p. 502). Snowling *et al.* (2020) argue for a more multi-faceted view of dyslexia and co-occurrences rather than placing value on IQ alone. However, despite the evidence against IQ testing for learners with dyslexia, IQ tests are still recommended by the SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) as part of the assessment battery for university students (SASC 2021).

The IQ test typically used by Educational Psychologists to assess for dyslexia is the Wechsler Scales (Wechsler and Edwards 1974). Some SpLD tutors are also dyslexia assessors, known as SpLD specialist teacher/assessors. Qualified SpLD teacher/assessors cannot access the Wechsler Scales as this is reserved for Educational Psychologists. Instead, the IQ test used by specialist teacher/assessors is the Wide Range Intelligence Test (WRIT) (Glutting *et al.* 2000). This is an American test published in 2000 and now out of standardisation. Shields *et al.* (2004) examine issues of race/ethnicity/gender/education level in the WRIT findings no evidence of statistical difference between demographic subgroups but fail to mention that the third author of the article was the creator of the WRIT, Glutting himself. I have argued to my professional body Association for Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education (ADSHE) that parts of the WRIT IQ test, Verbal Analogies, are an assessment of social and cultural capital. It contains questions which require a knowledge of John Coltrane's music and the sculpture of Rodin. However, the test is still on the mandatory list of assessments to include when assessing for SpLDs. Sociological analysis rather than psychological analysis is still not readily understood amongst the profession.

Chapter 1

A number of authors note that there is an overriding sense of deficiency and impairment used in discussions on SpLDs (Tamboer *et al.* 2016; Mortimore and Crozier 2006). The causal theories of dyslexia use the language of neuroscience and psychology, such as the double deficit theory (Wolf and Bowers 1999) or the dyslexic brain and the *non-impaired* brain in the work of Shaywitz *et al.* (2002). This discourse can be disempowering, focusing not on difference but on lack. Skinner (2011, p.32) an academic with dyslexia, writes of how she became 'used to being defined in psychological discourse… [which gave her] a distorted over-dependence (sometimes but not always) on this psychological discourse to define me, focusing on my disability rather than my abilities'. Pollak (2012, p. 72) rejects this neuropsychological viewing of dyslexia, calling for a rejection of 'pathologizing this common kind of brain; truly accessible teaching removes the need to do this'. In order to get accessible teaching, however, we need to move away from using a psychological lens alone, as while 'psychology helps us to understand the cognitive dimensions of dyslexia; […] it is lacking in the tools to explore the how and why and what of its social and political construction' (Cameron and Billington 2017, p.1390). For Tomlinson (1987, p. 34), 'why children fail might lie as much in the social, economic and political structures of a society as in anything intrinsic to children or "lacking" in a child'. It is these structures that are very often overlooked in SpLD work.

To gain access to support in university, students have to describe themselves in 'categorical and deficit terms' (Lewthwaite 2014, p.1161). Cooper (2006), an academic with dyslexia has rejected this concept of lack and advocates viewing dyslexia through the social model of disability.

> 'Neurodiversity' is a social construct. We are perceived as 'neurodiverse' when we come into conflict with social expectations and demands. The real issue is not neurodiversity, but institutional discrimination against certain kinds of neurodiversity.(Cooper 2006, p. 2)

Notably, Cooper directly takes aim at the more 'psychological' determiners of intelligence, namely working memory, early literacy and executive functioning skills such as organisation, all part of a medical model of disability. Cooper's advocacy of a social model of disability rather than a medical model is predicated on the social model concept that people are 'not disabled by the functional limitations of their impairments but by the external barriers that prevented their full participation in the societies in which they lived' (Oliver and Barnes 2010, pp.549–550). The social model focuses not on people's impairments but on the ways in which they are excluded or included by society (Shakespeare 2006). The social model is central to the seminal work of Barton (1998, p. 61) in calling for more inclusive models of education by examining the 'institutional barriers to participation in education […] It is an essential part of the process of engagement that the struggle for inclusive policy and practice involves'.

There has been some criticism of the original, British social model of disability. Impairment is very much part of the everyday experience of disabled people and Shakespeare (2006) argues against an over simplistic, binary concept of medical model (bad), social model (good). The redefinition of disability by the Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation (UPIAS) and emergence of the social model of disability in the 1960s and 70s in the UK has helped contribute to political aims of barrier removal and to liberate disabled people from thinking that they, rather than society, are at fault. However, it makes taking an impairment-specific response to disability problematic (Barnes 2004). Furthermore, research into mitigating medical issues could be considered as unnecessary as it would take away from the issue of barrier removal, while a focus on the society as whole could also remove the need to meet individual needs (Barnes 2004). For Shakespeare (2006, p.35), both the medical and the social are intertwined in that, 'the problem arises out of the combination of impairment effects and social restrictions'. Shakespeare uses dyslexia as an example where it does not become an impairment 'until society demands literacy of its citizens' (p.35). In Chapter Two, I discuss the depictions of dyslexia within different theoretical frameworks in greater depth.

The social model is largely absent in the terminology surrounding the support given to students with dyslexia in UK HEIs. Under the terms of the 2001 Special Education Needs and Disability Act (SENDA), UK universities were required to provide accommodations for students with dyslexia. The Equality Act 2010 went further in terms of making these accommodations into required 'reasonable adjustments' so that students with disabilities are not placed at a disadvantage compared to their non-disabled peers. For the vast majority of UK HEIs, this means using the DSA to support learners with SpLDs. However, many students with SpLDs or mental-health conditions tend not to identify as disabled and therefore tend not to apply for DSA funding (Riddell and Weedon 2014).

In 2009, Student Finance England (SFE) took over administration of the DSA (National Audit Office *et al.* 2010). The DSA funds assistive technology, mentoring support and printing costs for these learners. This support is considered as 'payments (neither means-tested nor repayable) to help with essential, additional expenditure a disabled student incurs while studying, because of their disability (which includes long-term health conditions, mental health conditions, or specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia)' (Johnson *et al.* 2019, p.8). The DSA also funds a student's access to one-to-one study support from SpLD tutors – worth up to £21,987 per student for the 2018/2019 academic year (Student Finance England 2019). It is these SpLD tutors that are the object of study in this research.

1.3   SpLD Tutors: Non-Medical Helpers (NMHS)

SpLD tutors who are funded by SFE via the DSA are known as Band Four Non-Medical Helpers (NMHs) (Student Loans Company, 2017). This somewhat demeaning term does not acknowledge the pedagogic skills that NMHS bring. To work as a recommended 'Band Four Non-Medical Helper' you must have a teaching qualification or equivalent, a Level 5 qualification (although a Level 7 is more desirable) in SpLDs and membership of a Professional Association (DSA-QAG 2019). These associations include the BDA; Professional Organisation of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (PATOSS); Association of Dyslexia Tutors in Higher Education (ADSHE); and Dyslexia Guild (DSA-QAG 2019). These bodies are responsible for delivering continual professional development (CPD) of which SpLD tutors are required to do at least ten hours per year (ADSHE 2020). The Department for Education (DfE) recommends that funding bodies only use NMHs who are registered with the Disabled Students Allowances Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG). DSA-QAG was responsible for regulating the provision of DSA support however it was suddenly disbanded in December 2019 (DfE 2019). As yet there has been no replacement for DSA-QAG but universities have carried on using the DSA-QAG guidance. There is concern that due to the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic that there will be no replacement. There is further growing concern that the DSA itself will be removed.

This concern became manifest when changes in DSA provision were put in place in 2016/2017 by the then Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). HEIs were required to put in place their own measures to facilitate support for learners with SpLDs.

> We expect HEIs to introduce changes which can further reduce reliance on DSAs and help mainstream support. … The need for some individual non-medical help (NMH) may be removed through different ways of delivering courses and information (BIS 2014).

Later announcements from the DfE demonstrate the move away from DSA provision. 'The expectation is that Higher Education Providers will offset the impact of the removal of DSAs funding by providing reasonable adjustments to disabled students as they are required to do under the Equality Act 2010' (DfE 2019, p. 8).

It can be argued that these changes were seen as a further way of reducing support for disabled students but articulated under the banner of bringing support in-house. There is concern that the support for students with SpLDs in particular will be reduced as these are the students 'singled out for the biggest cuts' (Lewthwaite 2014, p.1161). Yet these students have complex needs including issues with self-esteem and self-confidence 'as a result of years of struggle with the education system, as well as years of embarrassment because of their poor memory or poor

personal organization' (Brunswick 2012, p.61) There is a strong connection between student self-esteem and academic achievement (Rhodes and Nevill 2004) and one of the aims of ADSHE is to address learner anxiety which can manifest in forms of low self-esteem and academic self-worth (ADSHE 2019). There is also a significant increase in the numbers of students declaring a mental health condition in HE, with a 450% increase in student mental health declarations in the past ten years (UCAS 2021). Carrol and Iles (2006), following on from the work of Riddell (1999), found that undergraduate learners with dyslexia have higher trait anxiety in academic and social situations compared to HE learners without dyslexia. Anxiety about academic performance (particularly reading) can therefore develop into anxiety about social situations. Therefore, SpLD tutors are more likely to work one-to-one with learners who may also have mental health conditions as well as issues of low self-esteem, which can impact on academic performance. The SpLD tutor must not only provide a learner with academic support, such as developing reading strategies and academic writing approaches, implementing planning techniques and developing a learner's metacognition, but also support a learner who may have mental health issues as well as low self-esteem and self-confidence. The SpLD tutor needs to be a very skilled educationalist to work effectively. The term *non-medical helper* does not adequately describe the role.

This approach of allocating a label without an educational connotation – NHM — to SpLD professionals with tutor qualifications is indicative of attitudes towards SpLD provision itself. SpLD provision is often an 'add-on' to teaching in HEIs rather than integrated into teaching. Typically, SpLD work is overseen by student support services rather than academic departments. Furthermore, SpLD tutors are increasingly outsourced by universities, often on zero-hours contracts. Tutors on zero-hours contracts or casual contracts are considered as being 'on call to work when you need them; you do not have to give them work; they do not have to work when asked' (HM Government 2021).

For example, in the University of Southampton there are only three SpLD tutors employed directly by the University for a student body of 22,715 students (Rich 2020). The remaining tutors are outsourced on zero-hours contracts. We are not alone however in being outsourced members of staff in HEIs. In November 2019, the cleaning staff, porters and security guards of University College London went on strike to protest against their conditions of work as outsourced members of staff. This was the 'biggest strike of outsourced workers in UK Higher Education history' (IWGB 2019). There is growing concern about casualization in universities as seen by the series of industrial actions taken by UK academic staff in recent times such as the 8 day industrial action in November/December 2019 and the 14 day strike in February/March 2020 (UCU 2020). SpLD tutors however are not usually members of a union. A recent survey of ADSHE members found that members felt 'there didn't seem to be a union that represented our work' (Fletcher 2020).

Another said of her experience when Randstad cut their pay rates 'the union were of no use as their response was that zero hours staff have little legal protection and there was nothing they as a union could do to intervene' (Fletcher 2020).

1.4   Change in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Universities in the UK can be best thought of as 'hybrid institutions' (Sherer and Zakaria 2018, p. 721). They receive a certain amount of government funding but this funding is subject to frequent change (HESA 2021). HEIs are regulated like the public sector but are increasingly working to a more neo-liberalist approach in terms of generating 'market-based behaviour more akin to commercial companies than public sector bodies' (Sherer and Zakaria 2018, p. 721). While Western universities were traditionally considered to be forces for nation building and the public good, the increasing emphasis from the 1980s onwards on marketisation and competition has resulted in major change for HEIs in the UK (Musselin 2018). There were approximately 164 UK HEIs in the 2018/2019 academic year (HESA 2021). These institutions are not all the same, some are considered more research-intensive than others, and some have come into existence after 1992 when former polytechnics were reclassified as universities. They can be broken down as follows:

- Russell Group institutions – the largest research-intensive universities in the UK (University of Southampton is part of the Russell Group)
- Other Research-intensive institutions – smaller research-intensive universities such as the University of Swansea
- Post-1992 institutions – former polytechnics such as the University of Portsmouth
- Post-2000 institutions – often former Higher Education colleges such as Bath Spa University
- Specialist institutions – single subject institutions such as the Royal Veterinary College (Sherer and Zakaria 2018)

HEIs are therefore not all the same yet SpLD tutors work across all these different institutions. As mentioned previously, some institutions will employ SpLD tutors directly but many have begun to outsource SpLD tutors to companies where you work on zero-hour contracts. This treatment of SpLD tutors is indicative of the growing commodification of UK HEIs. Lawrence and Sharma (2002, p.661) were among the first to warn of the potential negative impacts of commodifying education and memorably wrote that 'treating education as a private good, and students as customers, is a constitutive re-ordering of university life, and potential degradation of its function in society'. Lawrence and Sharma (2002, p.669) were writing before the introduction of student fees into

English universities but their work uncannily discussed the concept of the student as consumer where students 'buy their education and shop around for classes and majors'. Moreover, they write of how research itself has become a commercial asset and how academics are therefore 'commodified as productive achievers of research rankings, and attractors of funding' (2002, p.672). Lecturers are seen as valuable commodities because of their abilities to perform research, however, those who do not perform research, such as SpLD tutors may be viewed as less valuable, and perhaps are even less valuable as they work with students with disabilities. From a historical materialist viewpoint, people with disabilities were viewed as unproductive members of the workforce due to the 'commodification of labour' (Gleeson 1997, p.195). It could be argued that this viewpoint continues in the treatment of SpLD tutors. SpLD tutors do not typically produce research and furthermore work with those who could be considered as 'unproductive' and are therefore not worthy of investment much less acknowledgement.

1.5   Engaging with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy

It is therefore out of this context of social injustice that my research has come about, research that is inspired to seek alternatives to the dominant models of intrinsic psychological deficit in dyslexia and other learning differences. Slee (2010, p. 568) recommends using a more sociological framework as 'a means for identifying the multiplicity of oppressions in everyday life for disabled people and building cultures and practices that dismantle barriers'. Learners with SpLDs experience barriers in their learning at university – SpLD tutors after all would not exist if universities were more inclusive learning spaces. SpLD tutors themselves experience barriers in their roles where they are marginalised within the university. This is social injustice. I therefore wanted to offer tutors the opportunity to engage in other ways of thinking about these barriers and these ways of thinking may be transformative for them. The foundation of this approach was to use a combination of theories of social justice and critical pedagogy as thinking tools for SpLD practitioners.

This concept of using social justice and critical pedagogy theories as thinking tools comes from the work of Bourdieu who described his view of theory in the following way:

> Let me say outright and very forcefully that I never ' theorise ', if by that we
> mean engage in the kind of conceptual gobbledygook … that is good for
> textbooks and which, through an extraordinary misconstrual of the logic of
> science, passes for Theory in much of Anglo-American social science … There is
> no doubt a theory in my work, or, better, a set of thinking tools visible through
> the results they yield, but it is not built as such … It is a temporary construct

> which takes shape for and by empirical work. (Bourdieu, in Wacquant 1989,
> cited by Jenkins, 1992, p. 67)

For Bourdieu, theory is intensely practical, a set of ideas that are to be used but equally to be 'discarded when it begins to dominate and steer the analysis' (Thomas and Loxley 2007, p. 11). This warning however is necessary as there has been concern about the application of theories from other disciplines to education studies. Davis and Sumara (2002, p. 417) warn that 'theories developed in psychology, sociology, cultural studies or elsewhere cannot be unproblematically transplanted into the field of education … are not necessarily fitted or aligned with, the concerns and projects of education'.

I am aware of these concerns about theory in education particularly when the 'consequences of theory…are in the real world of classrooms and the real lives of teachers' (Thomas 2007, p. 35). However, I believe that theories of social justice and critical pedagogy are theories with beneficial and potentially transformative consequences. SpLD tutors should be given the *opportunity* to engage with these theories. Using these theories as thinking tools fits with Bourdieu's own interests in equality in education as well as his views as theories as method which will be discussed further in the dissertation (Murphy and Costa 2016).

1.6   Research question and aims

The research question is as follows:

What happens when Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) tutors in Higher Education engage collaboratively with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy?

I wanted to explore the potential transformative learning that collaborative engagement with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy may bring to practitioners. Furthermore, if engagement with theory is not a transformative experience, I was interested in the reasons for this.

The intended aims were to:

1. Facilitate SpLD practitioner engagement with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy
2. Trace the transformative (or otherwise) learning journey for SpLD tutors when we engage with theory.
3. Explore the use of Collaborative Inquiry Circles (CICs) in research.
4. Develop as a researcher and offer other SpLD tutors the opportunity to become involved in the research process too.

I designed the research so that SpLD tutors would meet in Collaborative Inquiry Circles (CICs) where we would discuss a range of theories and their impacts (Broderick *et al.* 2012). The SpLD tutors are considered co-inquirers in this research. One co-inquirer, Ford, described a CIC as like 'a book club but without the wine' – a pithy if pertinent observation. However, instead of discussing the latest bestsellers, these CICs discussed the work of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, Pierre Bourdieu, Amartya Sen and Sara Ahmed.

My own experiences of learning about social justice theories on the MSc in Education (SpLD) in the University of Southampton was deeply transformative and has had a beneficial impact on my practice. This module was not on the pathway for the SpLD tutor MSc. I felt that this was an omission and that such a module would be of great benefit for my learning. I asked permission from the course director to take part on this module. It was a lecture on the Capability Approach that was given by my now supervisor Dr Cristina Azaola that particularly sparked my interest in applying social justice theories to SpLD work. I would not have considered doing a PhD if it were not for taking part in this module. This personal experience of transformative learning as an adult learner led me to examine the concepts of transformative learning more deeply and to consider if other SpLD tutors would have similar experiences. In Chapter Two, I discuss the origins of transformative learning; the influence of other thinkers; transformative learning's continuing evolution; critique that has been levelled at it; and possible impacts that it can have on my research.

1.7   Chapter summary

SpLD tutors are not considered as valuable contributors to the HE landscape. We work with learners who are considered 'less valuable' and we do not contribute the research that would 'add' to our value. We are not included in the main body of the university, rather we are on the margins in support roles where we are increasingly outsourced under precarious zero-hours contracts. This is not socially just or inclusive and SpLD tutors have very few opportunities to engage in research. The research that is there on SpLDs especially dyslexia is primarily from a psychological lens with an emphasis on deficit. It is this psychological deficit that enables students to access support from the DSA but this emphasis on psychological deficit is limiting. The aim of this research was therefore to broaden our concepts of SpLDs to include theories of social justice and critical pedagogy and to explore the potential transformative impact this has for SpLD tutors. I wanted SpLD tutors too to get involved in research which perhaps mirrored my own transformative change from SpLD tutor to researcher. It was the use of CICs in particular that piqued my interest and I wanted to see if CICs were of benefit in this research.

Chapter 2   **Literature Review**

2.1   Introduction

This literature review has been shaped by my conceptual framework (Chapter 3) as both have been written in interaction with each other. I view the literature review as the outer circle that encompasses the conceptual framework for applying social justice and critical pedagogy to SpLD support in UK universities. I have written it from the standpoint of an 'insider' working within HE as an SpLD tutor. I have 'a particular standpoint' as well as the 'openness that is prepared to risk having that standpoint changed' (Attia and Edge 2017, p.34). For Onwuegbuzie (2016, p.19), it is unavoidable that a literature review is outside of personal influence, as 'everything you do in your reviewing of literature is a result of cultural assumptions and your beliefs on a topic'. Gramsci (1971, p.324) advocates that you reflect back on your journey to this place of writing which is 'the consciousness of what one really is, and is "knowing thy self" as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an affinity of traces, without leaving an inventory'. In reflecting on my journey, I do not view my 'historical' influences and cultural assumption as 'contamination of the data' (Attia and Edge 2017, p.35). Indeed, reflecting on these influences has helped me to consider my literature choices and the narrative I weave throughout the text as a whole. My narrative focuses on depictions of social justice and critical pedagogy for SpLD tutors in UK Higher Education as well as the lack of research on SpLD tutors from a social justice perspective. Transformative learning is central to my research question and I discuss the origins of transformative learning; the influence of other thinkers; transformative learning's continuing evolution; critique that has been levelled at it; and possible impacts that it can have on my research.

2.2   The literature search process

I used a mixture of approaches to search for literature on SpLD tutors in UK HEIs, including backwards and forwards searching (snowball searching), citation searching, hand searching as well as accessing grey literature (Wohlin 2014; Greenhalgh and Peacock 2005). Grey literature comprises unpublished works that do not undergo the peer review process, such as theses, reports, working papers (Alberani *et al.* 1990). One particular benefit of grey literature is that it can provide you with up-to-date information as there can be an 'emergence-to-publication time lag' between when an article is finally published and as to when the research has actually taken place (Onwuegbuzie 2016, p.205). The reason I drew so heavily on grey literature was necessity.

Chapter 2

I used a range of databases and online search tools to create this literature review: Google Scholar and a range of commercial databases that use EBSCOhost. I developed four key search terms derived from my research question: Specific Learning Differences, UK Higher Education, SpLD tutor, social justice. These terms serve as broad categories for numerous other expressions that are associated with them. Accordingly, the category terms were developed into a list that included their irregular plural forms, synonyms and related terms which resulted in a list of 15 separate entries grouped under the four initial categories (see Table 1).

Table 1 Search Terms

Original terms	Specific Learning Difficulties	UK Higher Education	SpLD Tutor	Social Justice
Variated terms	Specific Learning Differences	UK Higher Education Institutions	Study Skills Tutor	Socially Just
	SpLD	UK University	Support Worker	
	S.P.L.D.	UK Universities	Support Staff	
	Dyslexia	UK College		
	Dyslexic			
	Neurodiversity			
	Neurodiverse			

These terms were then developed into a Boolean search string that could be used on multiple databases. The search string comprised search terms grouped into the three categories using AND OR statements to filter. I entered the string into Google Scholar and the commercial databases on two occasions: 20 July 2019 and 8 June 2021. I used a date range from 2000 to the present. The majority of these search results were on the experiences of university students with dyslexia as discussed previously rather than on the experiences of SpLD tutors.

Professional associations such as PATOSS, ADSHE and the BDA publish their own journals focusing on SpLDs in HE. However, these journals are not indexed to educational databases and therefore do not appear on databases or on Google Scholar. These journals are typically only available to members of these organisations. As a member of these organisations, I was able to hand-search through their journals and while there was research on SpLD tutors they did not find any research

on the experiences of SpLD tutors and social justice in UK HE. Cowan (2018) who is a highly regarded expert on nursing and SpLDs, recounts similar difficulties in locating research for her PhD research on students' decisions to access dyslexia assessments; she too had to use a wide range of literature such as blog posts and newspaper articles, not just empirical research.

2.3   Existing research on dyslexia and SpLD tutors in HE

The majority of the research on SpLDs in HE has a focus on students with dyslexia or the DSA, such as the work of Cameron and Billington (2017), Reid (2013) and Richardson (2015). While valuable research, this was not a good fit to my research question. Some peer-reviewed research focuses on the experiences of SpLD tutors in UK universities, but it is not extensive. I looked at the work of Graham (2020) who examined the impact of SpLD tutor support. She posits that SpLD support is of particular benefit to those students at risk of disengagement and found a positive correlation between attainment and SpLD sessions. From a cohort of students with SpLDs, ten per cent of those who had not accessed SpLD support dropped out of their courses (Graham, 2020). SpLD one-to-one sessions offer that opportunity to connect with a learner throughout the academic year where you typically meet every week. It can be a space where 'challenges can be discussed alongside the teaching of study skills' (Graham 2020, p. 125). However, the views of the SpLD tutors who work with these learners are not expressed in this research.

Newman (2019), an SpLD tutor who investigated the use of multisensory methods in one-to-one SpLD support sessions, argues the 'privilege of working as a specialist study skills tutor is that one gains a deep understanding of the nature of each learner's strengths and weaknesses so enabling the former to be used to support the latter' (p. 15). This is indeed a privilege with great potential for transformative learning. However, while Newman's research gives interesting vignettes of various multisensory approaches, there is no SpLD tutor voice in the text.

Worrall (2019) explores the potential of the SpLD tutorial space arguing these tutorials could also be used to support students with confidence and engagement. This would support student retention but also, hypothetically, student well-being. It is a space where you are listened to. However, again there is no direct representation of SpLD tutors' views, much less any viewpoints on social justice. While these articles were interesting, they did not provide insights into potential applications of social justice and critical pedagogy approaches in SpLD work.

I also looked at understandings of dyslexia and other SpLDs from those in teaching roles in universities. There have been previous studies of HE lecturers' understanding of dyslexia and support which have been very influential in the field such as the work of Mortimore and Crozier (2006); Riddell and Weedon (2006); Cameron and Nunkoosing (2012); Mortimore (2013); and

Evans (2014). It was evident from these studies that there remains much work to be done to support lecturers' understanding of dyslexia. Few lecturers appear to have received targeted training on SpLDs and those who had awareness of dyslexia had gained it from contextual personal experiences through family or friends (Evans, 2014; Cameron and Nunkoosing, 2012). The medical model remains a dominant lens through which to view SpLDs (Mortimore 2013; Mortimore and Crozier 2006, Riddell and Weedon 2006). A sense of intrinsic deficit continues with some lecturers stating that a dyslexia diagnosis could have a negative impact on a learner's professional life such as in nursing or teaching (Evans 2014; Riddick and English 2006). Making reasonable accommodations, such as changing marking policy or giving learners additional time in examinations, was considered by some as 'dumbing down' (Riddell and Weedon, 2006). These tropes were still to be found in more recent research on HE lecturers by Ryder and Norwich (2019). According to Ryder and Norwich (2019, p. 170) HE lecturers:

> Need to be armed with the necessary, albeit complex, knowledge about the condition, as currently diagnosed, in order to ensure the efficacy and quality of their pedagogic practice, as well as to engage fully with legislative and institutional policies aimed at securing fair and equal access to higher education for all students.

Noteworthy here is that while there is mention of fairness and equity, there is no mention of concepts of social justice much less the experience of SpLD tutors and their potential to support pedagogic practice.

I subsequently examined other work of Ryder and Norwich (2018) that I thought pertinent to my research, namely their research on SpLD assessors in UK universities. These comprised Educational Psychologists (EPs) and Specialist Teacher Assessors (STs). Some of these Special Teacher Assessors may also have worked as SpLD tutors but the focus of the research here was on SpLD assessment rather than SpLD support. The discrepancy model, although discredited, still held sway over the assessment process whereby 'average or above average ability discrepant with some aspect of academic attainment or processing skill difficulty seemed integral to most assessors' concept of dyslexia'(Ryder and Norwich 2018, p. 118). It was also notable how the assessors excluded environmental considerations from their assessments with one assessor stating, 'it is extremely difficult to determine whether mature students, particularly those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, have an underlying difficulty or educational disadvantage' (Ryder and Norwich 2018, p. 121). While assessors appear to be aware of potential societal impacts, they do not appear to engage in exploring this further. Again, this is reminiscent of Cameron's (see McNamee *et al.* 2020) assertion that it is easier to stick with assessing an 'intrinsic' psychological difficulty rather than question the impacts of the wider learning

environment. Social justice concepts do not seem to figure in assessments but perhaps this is also linked to a lack of training on theories of social justice and critical pedagogy. There is no mention of the experiences of SpLD tutors in this research, they appear to be invisible.

As there appears to be a lack of published empirical research on SpLD tutors' experiences of social justice, I went further over to the 'grey side' where I explored more doctoral research on dyslexia. Campbell (2017) is an SpLD tutor whose doctoral thesis explores HE dyslexia tutors' interpretations of dyslexia and the pedagogical approaches that they use. Campbell uses a Foucauldian lens to explore social constructions of dyslexia. His focus is on the pedagogic skills used by both study skills tutors and dyslexia tutors and he posits that ultimately the same skills are used for both dyslexic and non-dyslexic learners. His thesis comprises interviews with eight dyslexia tutors and their views of dyslexia support in HE. While this research is similar to mine in that it places the views of SpLD tutors throughout the text, it is dissimilar in that the tutors are not given access to learn about theory, such as in this case to learn more about social constructions of disability and dyslexia. The tutors were not involved in the analysis of the research and while Campbell offered the opportunity to comment on the thesis, only one person did so.

There appears to be a gap in the knowledge base on SpLD tutors and social justice in the UK which limits how I can locate my work within a body of established literature and 'set the stage' (Charmaz 2006, p.166) for the thesis. I have had to reflect upon why I thought there was such a gap and how to take this forward, concluding that SpLD tutors are so marginalised within UK HE that they are not even considered as worthy subjects of research in their own right.

2.4   Social justice and SpLDs

In discussing social justice and SpLDs, I return to the key understanding of social justice as the following:

> Social justice is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe.(Adams *et al.* 2007, p. 2)

The idea of full and equal participation of SpLD tutors and a space that is shaped to meet the needs of their learners, would seem to be an obvious area of research. Yet there is a dearth of literature on SpLD tutors and social justice but there is research on the social impacts of dyslexia as well as commentary of the lack of social research. Riddick, writing on stigma associated with getting a dyslexic 'label', wrote that 'we need to know more about the social psychological factors

that influence it [labelling] and their reciprocal interaction with wider cultural influences' (Riddick 2000, p. 666). She was the first to advocate for a social model of dyslexia as 'an approach focused solely on remediating difficulties will not always be sufficient and that at some point a social model of disability perspective, which questions current assumptions, norms and practices in relation to literacy, needs to be included' (Riddick 2001, p.234). Mortimore and Dupre (2010) expanded upon the idea of the social model of dyslexia to make the case for more inclusive and holistic teaching methods for all students including those with SpLDs. They include Nind's (2005) recommendation that we move away from individualised lesson plans for learners with special needs and instead create an inclusive learning environment where everyone can participate. This transformative change, however, requires 'reflection and action on social justice, beliefs about the learning potential of everybody, theories of good teaching and learning and a reconceptionlisation of the curriculum and learning support' (Nind 2005, p.274).

The work of Madriaga and Goodley (2010) calls for more socially just approaches to meet the needs of autistic learners in Higher Education. While this research was not written about SpLD tutors, it is striking in its emphasis on a need for more socially just approaches to pedagogy in HE. This is based on previous work by Goodley (2007; 2001). Goodley (2001, p.211) while ostensibly writing about people with learning difficulties, not SpLD, decries the notion of people as 'personal tragedies of their unchangeable organic impairments'. Critical pedagogy is a socially just approach to use to counter such concepts of innate deficit (Goodley, 2007).

Critical pedagogy, as pioneered by Freire, 'is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relation of the wider community and society' (Breunig 2005, p. 109). Taking this critical pedagogy idea further when applied to HE, Madriaga and Goodley (2010, p. 128) call for more inclusive socially just approaches in HE to support autistic learners and advocate a critical pedagogy stance where we 'move beyond base-level thinking and traditional modes of teaching and assessment towards "best practice". This requires an emphasis on student desires rather on so-called deficits'.

In reflecting on social justice, MacDonald's (2009) research focused on a social model approach that included people with dyslexia from different social classes . His work was the first in particular to investigate the disabling barriers of social-class structures upon people with dyslexia. The education system itself was found to be a disabling barrier notably the 'individualist ethos in education where blame seems to fall on the pupils' ability rather than teaching methods' (Macdonald 2009, p.354). MacDonald found that middle-class pupils had access to better, specialised support than their working-class peers. Working class students with dyslexia appeared

to be more likely to become disillusioned with school and leave without gaining qualifications. Their difficulties with literacy also affected their ability to get better-paid jobs. Middle-class students with dyslexia, while still experiencing stigma, were better able to access assistive technology support, were more likely to gain qualifications and highly-paid employment. This showed that 'social class interacts with disabling barriers which affect dyslexia…. Social class positioning, combined with issues relating to disabling barriers, restricts access to education and employment provision' (Macdonald 2009, p.359). MacDonald (2009) calls for further research into dyslexia from a sociological context rather than using an educational or psychological lens alone. In so doing, we 'shift the focus from individual limitations to the removal of social barriers within institutions'(MacDonald 2009, p.360). My research therefore carries on the call from MacDonald to redress the primacy given to a psychological view of SpLDs and to explore sociological approaches such as social justice theories of dyslexia.

MacDonald (2010) also explores the social impacts of dyslexia especially in terms of access to support (notably technology) for certain groups. MacDonald (2010, p.279) notes 'there has been so little research on the social aspects […] may be the starting point to develop specific sociological knowledge on their unique experiences'. It is this lack of a social impact that is very striking here, again pointing to the dominance of a psychological and medical model of viewing dyslexia and lack of social justice perspectives. Furthermore, he argues that dyslexia is a social identity that 'needs to be theoretically conceptualised in such a way that incorporates the lived experiences of people with this condition' (Macdonald, cited by Donovan and Kearney, 2013, p.69). Macdonald is strident in his call for dyslexia to be researched from a more sociological viewpoint and from the lived experiences of people with dyslexia. It is clear from the literature review that there is very little research on social concepts of dyslexia, the lived experiences of SpLD tutors, or the impact of social justice theories of dyslexia, other SpLDs and SpLD tutors and their practice, much less how they intersect.

2.5   Intersectionality and SpLD tutors

Intersectionality is the investigation into 'how overlapping and intersecting identities affect the experiences of individuals in society' (Bhopal and Alibhai-Brown 2018, p.47). Kimberlé Crenshaw famously coined the term intersectionality in the 1980s when she wrote of the racism and misogyny that black women experienced in the US workforce and she is an advocate of the concept of intersectionality as a 'practical intervention in a world characterized by extreme inequalities' (Cho *et al.* 2013, p.785). The work of Black feminists like Crenshaw and the

transdisciplinary field of Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been critical for the developing field of 'DisCrit' studies (Annamma *et al.* 2018). At the time of writing this PhD, teaching CRT has been an object of alarming discussion by the UK government where English schools have been told not to teach narratives that are 'harmful to British society' (Department for Education 2020). DisCrit is where the intersectionality of disability and race is further examined as 'racisms and ableism inform and rely on each other in interdependent ways' (Connor *et al.* 2016).

In the UK, the work of Cameron and Greenland (2019) is strikingly unusual in its focus on the experiences of Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) dyslexic students in UK universities. There is little research on such students' experiences in the UK and indeed, Black students in particular are under-represented in what is considered the more prestigious universities (Younger *et al.* 2019). Anecdotally, in my own experience as an SpLD specialist in a Russell Group institution, I have only worked with one Black dyslexic learner. This was not the case when I worked at post-92 institutions. Such intersectionality is important to understand the overlap between ableism and racism in our institutions and to widen understandings of privilege, of oppressive practice and of social justice. Such interactions shape multiple dimensions of our experiences (Hernández-Saca *et al.* 2018).

For social justice theorists, there is value in exploring the 'particular histories and characteristics of specific forms of oppression [...] as well as the patterns that connect and mutually reinforce different oppressions in a system that is inclusive and pervasive' (Adams *et al.* 2007, p. 5). The 'particular history' of this thesis is that of the SpLD tutor but I remain cognisant of the intersections of other forms of oppression such as racism and ableism.

2.6   Dyslexia as disability

Tanner (2009 p. 796) describes discussing dyslexia in purely medical and scientific terms as an 'exclusionary and oppressive ideology that is reflected in our language use, belief systems and attitudes'. Collinson (2020 p. 1004) argues that 'in the case of dyslexics, it is better to focus on, and study, why dyslexics are Othered; focusing on 'dyslexia' ignores the social misconception'. This is in keeping with a more social constructivist view of dyslexia and other SpLDs whereby our knowledge of SpLDs comes about through social processes (Kirby 2020). It is these social processes that reflect the 'values, assumptions, and ways of life of the time and culture' (McNamee *et al.* 2020, p. 5). It is our current values and assumptions that have constructed assumptions of SpLDs and in the process Othered learners and SpLD tutors in UK universities.

Of course, it is pertinent to remind ourselves of key concepts of disability theory such as ableism notably described by Kumari Campbell (2001, p. 44) whereby disability is 'cast as a diminished state of being human'. Ableism in academia has been described by some researchers as 'endemic' (Brown and Leigh 2018, p. 988). Being disabled in a university brings with it a sense of stigma, of being somewhat deviant in an ableist society (Goffman 1990). Goodley (2014, p. 26) writes how such stigma is heightened in a culture of 'neoliberal-ableism' where autonomy and self-sufficiency are valued to the detriment of disabled people.

However, it must be said that it is no mean feat to challenge the dominant psychological/medical models of SpLDs in universities as 'naming the disorder and situating it within a person is much less socially disruptive to the hierarchical *status quo* than naming and changing the oppressive constructive relations in the wider socio-environmental web' (Cameron 2020, p. 383). It was this concept of change that led me to investigate transformative learning as a means of inner if not outer change.

2.7 Transformative learning

The concept of transformation in education is not new. Piaget believed 'that persons can only know the world through mental activity that organizes and transforms their perceptions' (Reiman, 1999, pp.600–601). Freire's concept of transformative learning through dialogue was a strong influence on Jack Mezirow who is considered the 'father of transformative learning' (Papastamatis and Panitsides 2014, p.75). Mezirow (2003, pp.58–59) views transformative learning as 'learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change'. Mezirow (1978, p.105) set out specific steps for the process of transformative learning by which an adult learner's 'meaning perspective … thought, feeling and will' change. This meaning perspective enables the learner to 'reinterpret an old experience (or a new one) from a new set of expectations, thus giving a new meaning and perspective to an old experience' (Mezirow 1991, p.5). In his research, Mezirow (1978) concluded that the adult learners had experienced a 'personal transformation' and that this transformation contained within it ten distinct phases (although, Erickson (2007) notes that Mezirow later stated that not all ten phases of learning are required for a transformative learning experience). In keeping with my interest in using the circle as a visual metaphor, I tend to view these phases as part of a circle as seen in Figure 1 below.
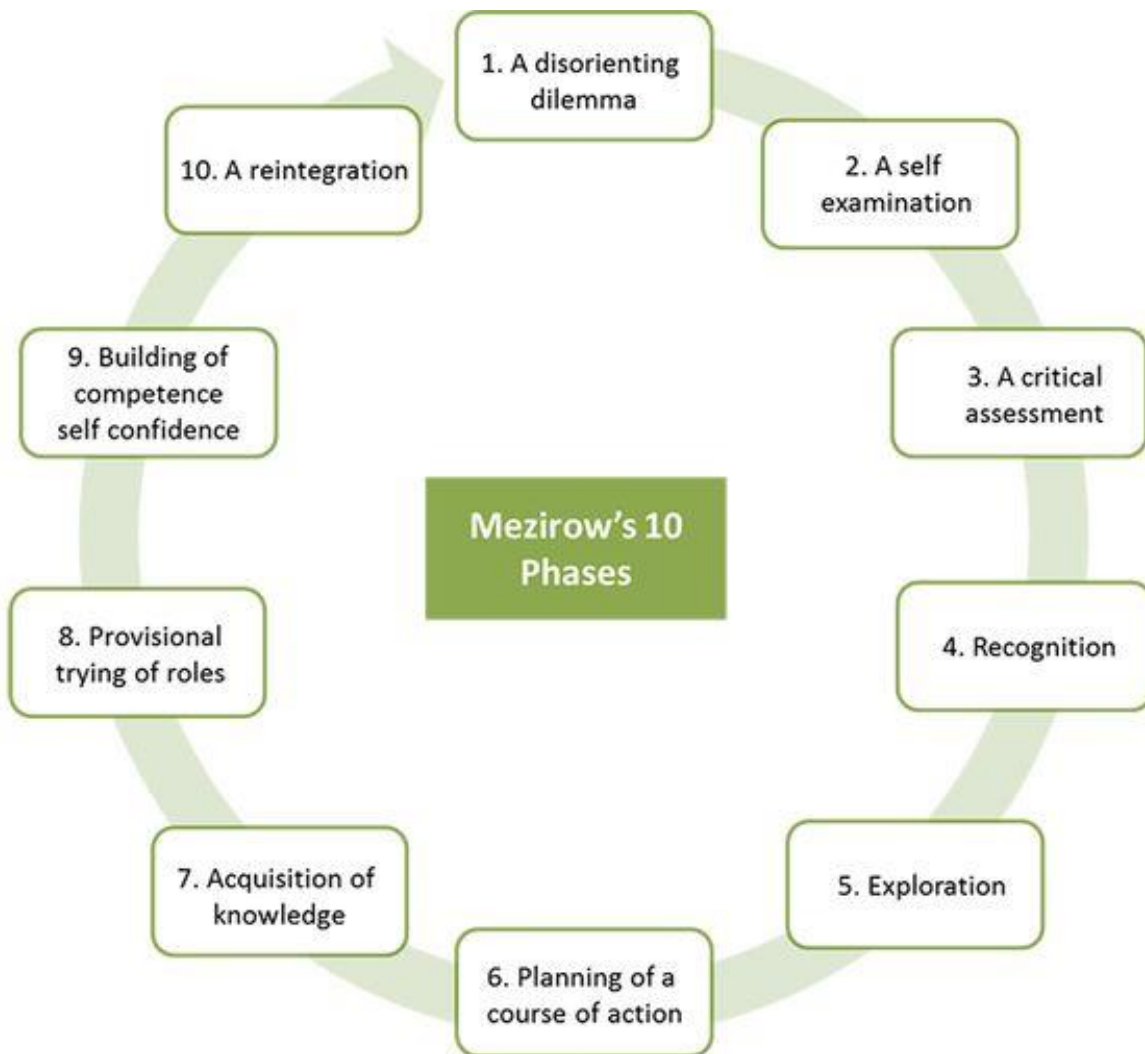
Figure 1 Mezirow's Ten Phases of Transformative Learning

(Kolagani, 2019)

Mezirow's ten phases of learning may initially appear as a linear succession of steps but there is a 'complex causality' involved in each step that impacts a range of outcomes such as emotions and relationships that in turn impact the other phases in transformative learning (Morin 1992; Taylor and Cranton 2012). This is what Morin (1992) refers to as a 'recursive loop' whereby 'products and effects are themselves producers of what produces them'(Taylor and Cranton 2012, p. 183). For Sinnott (2003) transformative learning requires that we pay attention to the processes involved that can be both linear and nonlinear. This links with evolving studies of transformative learning as a spiral that is 'produced and/or inhibited by the multiple changes that constitute the learner's own evolution' (Taylor and Cranton 2012, p. 183).

Mezirow was influenced by the work of Kuhn (2009) on concept of paradigms, Freire's (1972) conscientisation and Habermas's (1971 and 1984) domains of learnings. Kuhn (1962, p.viii) wrote on legitimate scientific inquiry and theorized that paradigms are 'scientific achievements that […] provide model problems and solutions to community of practitioners'. Mezirow (1985) took this

concept of the paradigm and developed it into frames of reference. A frame of reference is the 'structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition and feelings. They set our "line of action"' (Mezirow 1997, p.5). A frame of reference contains within it *habits of mind* which are considered our 'broad, habitual ways of thinking' (Erickson 2007, p.66). As well as habits of mind, a frame of reference also includes *meaning perspectives* which is 'the structure of cultural assumptions within which new experience is assimilated to – and transformed by – one's past experiences' (Mezirow 1978, p.101). This is 'how we are caught in our own history and are reliving it' (Mezirow 1978, p.101). For Mezirow (1978), it is crucial to examine these frames of reference otherwise we are condemned, like in Camus's *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, to constantly live out our lives without challenging assumptions. When learners examine their habitual ways of thinking and their cultural assumptions, this can then lead to a *perspective transformation* (Mezirow 1978).

Perspective transformation can occur painlessly through accumulating transformations in set meaning schemes (Mezirow 1985). Kitchener (2008) gives the example of an educator examining how she learnt keyboard shortcuts in Word and realising that she could apply these shortcuts to other Microsoft applications. However, perspective transformation can also occur in difficult circumstances that can necessitate a critical re-evaluation. This could be where an SpLD tutor critically examines her approaches to using Assistive Technology and realises that she may not be using it effectively.

Perspective transformation in particular for Mezirow (1978) can lead to social action such the Black awareness movement and the anti-war movement in the US. I find this linkage between education and social action very interesting as it is inspired by Mezirow's reading of Freire's work. In this praxis of radical pedagogy, learners combine critical thought with critical action. It is this notion of criticality that underpins Mezirow's concepts of the disorientating dilemma, critical reflection and critical self-reflection on assumptions. Critical reflection and critical self-reflection are the primary means for Mezirow of enacting transformative change along with the ten phases of transformative learning. Mezirow (1995, p.46) wrote that reflection is 'the process of turning our attention to the justification for what we know, feel, believe and act upon'. He places such value on reflection that in 1991 he added an additional phase to the original 10-phase model of transformative learning. This phase reflects the importance of critical self-reflection and is 'renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships'. It is this emphasis on reflection that I feel is highly valuable for my research and fits with concepts of reflexivity which is discussed in later chapters.

However, Mezirow has been criticised for not fully applying Freire's concept of criticality for social action further (Pietrykowski 1996 ; Collard and Law 1989). Mezirow (1978, p.103) acknowledges that Freire has 'extended the possibilities of using education to transform one's frame of reference [...] in fostering personal and social change'. Mezirow (1978, p.102) refers to social action and consciousness raising throughout his work such as the women's movement and US social movements which he uses as examples of 'the pervasiveness of perspective transformation for social action'. For Mezirow, conscientisation and perspective transformation are the same thing (Collard and Law 1989). However, he is not clear on what form collective social action should take. For Collard and Law (1989) Mezirow's theories therefore lack the socio-political critique which is central to the European tradition of critical theory and therefore transformative learning is not fully emancipatory. Mezirow's work is a product of US individualism and is 'essentially liberal democratic' in character and thus lacks the 'radical praxis' of Freire and others (Collard and Law 1989, p.106). This issue of individualism is increasingly prevalent in UK universities and in the DSA where the onus as ever is on the individual to declare their needs in education.

Hart (1990, p.136), while acknowledging criticism of Mezirow's work, finds that the concept of 'emancipatory education in itself a form of social action which [...] has as its purpose to draw attention to and to correct those distortions that manifest themselves in individually experienced patterns of thought and action'. It is the distortions in particular which reflect the influence of Habermas's social philosophy on Mezirow but there has also been criticism of Mezirow's incorporation of Habermasian thought into his work.

Habermas (1974) drew up three primary domains to demonstrate how people generate knowledge: 1) the technical; 2) the practical; 3) the emancipatory. Technical learning is governed by rules, practical learning involves social norms and emancipatory learning requires self-reflection. For Mezirow (1981), perspective transformation encompasses these three domains which is in itself, an emancipatory process. It is interest in this emancipatory process in particular that underpins my research.

According to Mezirow (1981, p.6), an emancipatory process can lead to

> Becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings.

This emancipatory process, based on Habermas's (1974) three domains of learning was subsequently reframed by Mezirow (1985) as the following domains: a) instrumental; b) dialogic; c) self-reflective. Within each of these three learning domains are three learning processes: a) learning within meaning schemes; b) learning new meaning schemes; c) learning through meaning transformation (Kitchener 2008). While these Habermasian-influenced categories are useful, for Hart (1990) these categories lose their impact in the way that Mezirow uses them. Hart observes that Habermas writes extensively on power and dominance, but Mezirow does not put power or dominance into his interpretation of transformative learning. Mezirow categorizes areas of 'distortions' but 'without directly criticizing current economic, social and political arrangements which are inherently tied to these "distortions"' (Hart 1990, p.127). Education, argues Hart (1990, p.127) 'needs to be explicitly concerned with the causes even when it treats the symptoms'. Mezirow (1989, p.172) has responded to these critiques stating that social action is 'crucial but is not the only goal of adult education'. Educators can enlighten learners about social justice issues but must be careful of 'indoctrination', a distinction which is also found in Freire's work (Mezirow 1989, p.172). Furthermore, for Mezirow (1989, p.174), there is no 'simple linear relationship between transformative learning and social action; there are many kinds of transformative learning and many kinds of social action'. As concerns my research, I was not expecting research participants to suddenly 'burn down' universities but I wanted to investigate if there is more criticality of 'the cause' and not just the 'symptoms' of SpLD provision in HE.

It is this concept of many 'kinds' of transformative learning that has led to accusations of a 'vagueness' of the theory (Hoggan 2016, p.66). The term transformative could be seen to be applied to almost any type of change and that Mezirow's view of transformative learning is simply an 'epistemic shift' on what could be a large and varied field (Hoggan 2016, p.65). This could be a critique of my research – is any kind of change transformative?

To address this question and the divergent aspects of transformative learning, Mezirow invited scholars to contribute their ideas on transformative learning. While Mezirow (2000) acknowledged the influence of the emotional and the symbolic on learning, his approach is still centred on a critical reflective process (Dirkx *et al.* 2006). However, other researchers have moved away from Mezirow's epistemological approach of a rational cognitive framework and have developed more 'open' ways of knowing, such as a person's ability to 'distance herself from the power of her own convictions, interrogate her emotional investments and enter into a dialogue about a deeply held belief, entertaining others' beliefs as reasonable' (Willink and Jacobs 2011, p.151). It is this issue of dialogue that has great resonance for me and is a crucial part of the research methodology.

There is a growing movement towards a more holistic concept of transformative learning 'demonstrating that effective learning rests on holistic development' (Papastamatis and Panitsides 2014, p.78). Indeed, authors wrote of developing deeper metacognition (Rusch and Brunner 2013) and developing several ways of knowing (Tanaka *et al.* 2012). There has been an ontological change in the research literature in terms of interpretations of how people exist in the world especially in terms of ways of being. This is a learning that is beneath consciousness (Blalock and Akehi 2018). Dirkx (2014) emphasises the influence of imagination and emotion in transformative learning. Furthermore, Dirkx (cited by Leonard and Willis, 2008) views transformative learning as a deep process known as soul work. For Dirkx (1997, p.82), soul work 'beckons to a relationship between the individual and his or her broader world'. This broader world, for scholars like O'Connor (2002, p. 242) includes the environment, and so transformative learning is 'somatic and emotional ways of knowing and our place in the natural world and the connections we have to one another as human beings'. Again, this sense of connection – although perhaps with 'hippy' connotations – is what I wanted to explore with the research participants.

For Hoggan (2016; (p.77), a way to reconcile the disparity between the multiple interpretations of transformative learning is to use the term *perspective transformation* when referring to Mezirow's theory and *transformational learning* should be applied to the theories that refer to 'personal, social, or cultural transformation'. In this way, Hoggan (2016) argues that Mezirow's perspective transformation is a theory and that transformational learning is a metatheory, an overarching umbrella under which the various approaches can be classified. Transformative learning could be applied to the *extent*, *depth* and *breadth* to which an experience can be transformative and it can be framed as the 'processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualises and interacts with the world' (Hoggan 2016, pp.77-78). This clarification is key for this PhD research, especially as the research methodology is centred on SpLD practitioners' interaction with critical pedagogy and social justice theories but also in their interactions and reflections with each other. The emphasis in the research is on the *dialogue* the practitioners have with each other as well as with themselves. For Blalock and Akehi (2018, p.101) 'dialogue can be a powerful mechanism for transformative learning. Having a conversation with another person can allow beliefs and assumptions […] to be made available for examination and critique by the sharer and listener alike'.

2.8   Chapter summary

In reflecting back on my Literature Review, I encountered difficulties in sourcing research on the experiences of SpLD tutors in HE. However, these difficulties did prompt me to investigate grey literature on the subject, which was helpful to reframe my thinking. Cowan (2018) had

encountered similar difficulty in her research and it was reassuring to know that I was not alone in experiencing difficulty. It is also however quite striking that there is very little research on the lived experiences of SpLD tutors in UK HE. Those who are involved in working with learners with disability are rarely given a voice in the research. However, it is interesting to note that SpLD tutors like Campbell (2017) and myself are increasingly carrying out doctoral research. There is a growing movement towards more social constructionist views of SpLDs as well as a growing movement towards intersectional approaches. However, the voices of SpLD tutors as participants in research are largely silent. I hope that this research can help readdress the balance.

Another absence in the research is that of a social justice depiction of SpLDs, namely dyslexia. Dyslexia in particular is dominated by the psychological and medical, rather than a social model of disability. The work of Riddick (2001; 2000) is the first to advocate for a social model of dyslexia. This model was subsequently enlarged on by Macdonald who has called for a sociological interpretation of dyslexia and discussion on the social impacts of dyslexia (2019; 2010; 2009). It is the social constructions too of dyslexia and SpLDs that are interesting to me as they post an alternative to a deficit-led psychological model.

However, what I have found in the literature review is the potential that transformative learning offers for emancipatory change such as that detailed by Mezirow (2000; 1981; 1978). Perspective transformation is linked to social action and awareness which is of interest to this research. In the literature, transformative learning is considered as a holistic process which brings with it an element of 'soul work'. Dialogue gives the opportunity to discover if 'soul work' and perspective transformation occur (Dirkx 2014). This could be of real benefit for SpLD tutors.

Chapter 3 **Conceptual Framework**

3.1 Introduction

My concern about the lack of representation of social approaches to SpLDs led me to consider using theories of social justice with SpLD tutors. In the previous chapter, I argued that there is a lack of literature on the impact of social justice theories on SpLD work and very little research on or with SpLD tutors. I wanted to explore theories that would resonate with the lived experiences of SpLD tutors thus filling a gap in representation. There are many theorists that I could have chosen from such as the work of Michel Foucault, Nancy Fraser, indigenous researchers such as Karen Martin-Booran Mirraboopa amongst others. Ultimately, I decided to use the work of Henry Giroux, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Pierre Bourdieu and Amartya Sen as I believed that there are parts of their work in particular that could resonate with SpLD work in HE. While these theorists may be well-known in educational research, they are not so well-known in SpLD training. The last theorist I will discuss is Sara Ahmed. The choice of Sara Ahmed was a collective one. The co-inquirers themselves asked for a feminist approach to social justice with one co-inquirer wryly noting 'we have enough of dead white French men' (Georgina). Increasingly as I went through the PhD journey, I found that the literature review, conceptual theories and research methods began to encircle each other and this has been beneficial in refining my focus. The focus therefore in this chapter is on theories from social justice and critical pedagogy that SpLD tutors like me could apply to our work. While these theorists may be well-known in educational research, these are theories that are *not* typically used in our training to become SpLD tutors. I have presented the theorists here in the order that we discussed them in the CICs. I have taken the following viewpoint of a conceptual framework

> Conceptual frameworks are simply the current version of the researcher's map of the territory being investigated. As the explorer's knowledge of the terrain improves, the map becomes correspondingly more differentiated and integrated. Thus, conceptual frameworks are developed at the beginning of the study and evolve as the study progresses (Miles *et al.* 2014, p.20).

This is my map of research territory, a territory populated by theorists. You navigate through the territory by moving from theorist to theorist. These are the circles within a circle.

3.2   Henry Giroux

Giroux has been a long-time critic of the influence of neo-liberalism in education. Shamir (2008, p.3) provides a useful definition of neo-liberalism as a 'set of practices that are organized around a certain imagination of "the market" as a basis for the universalisation of social relations, with the corresponding incursion of such relations into almost every single aspect of our lives'. It is this incursion of neoliberalism in an American educational context that Giroux explores. He critiques the 'neo-liberal market-driven approach to education' which has weakened the relationship between education and 'critical thinking and active citizenship and … the connection between education and social and political change' (Giroux 2019, p.35). It was these following lines, written during the Trump presidency and the Johnson government in the UK that resonated with me:

> If teachers do not have control over the conditions of their labour, and if students lack the ability to address how knowledge is related to power, morality, social responsibility and justice, they will have neither the power nor the language necessary to engage in collective forms of struggle against society's efforts to write them out of the script of democracy. (Giroux 2019, p. 35)

I felt that the work of Giroux would resonate with SpLD tutors as tutors are increasingly employed on precarious zero-hours contracts which exemplifies the casualisation of HE in the UK. This casualisation of the SpLD experience was not discussed in any of our SpLD training. Most SpLD tutors had no knowledge of the work of Giroux, work that although based in the US, speaks directly to the experiences of the SpLD tutor in UK universities. These SpLD tutors do not have the 'power nor the language' to discuss the larger societal changes to their work lives but the work of Giroux can offer us this language.

Education is not a neutral space devoid of social, cultural and political interactions (Giroux 1988). *None* of the SpLD training courses in the UK offer modules on inclusion, social justice or concepts of disability. SpLD teacher-trainers and professional organisations make no connection between our work and educational change. For example, at the time of writing there has been no official announcement from these organisations in support of the Black Lives Matter movement despite this being a global movement with ramifications for BAME students with SpLDs in HE. This silence is what Giroux (1985) refers to as domination of the 'cultural forms that bear down the oppressed but also to the way in which the oppressed internalise and participate in their own silence' (Azaola 2014, p. 83). There is silence on issues of social justice and inclusion in the SpLD tutor community, an internalisation perhaps of the marginalisation for those of us who work with learners who learn differently. Yet the work of SpLD tutors is very much concerned with these

issues. We are very much being pushed to the margins of HE and the growing neo-liberalist approaches to our work in universities impacts our profession and how we work with learners with SpLDs.

SpLD tutors are not considered as professionals and it is this that steered me to other work by Giroux. Giroux and McLaren (1989, p.xxxiii) emphasise the importance of educators addressing 'the matrix between knowledge, power, and desire' in addressing social and political issues at work in education. Giroux has notably written about the teacher as an intellectual in their own right. This acknowledgement of the teacher as intellectual 'challenges the dominant view of teachers as primarily technicians or public servants whose role is primarily to implement rather than conceptualize pedagogic practice' (Giroux 2005, p.129). Ball (2016, p.1057) too calls for teachers to be recognised as having intellectual value, 'to express themselves and their practice as public intellectuals and not just be numbers'. SpLD tutors do not appear to see themselves as intellectuals in their own right. My aim is that, in taking part in this research, tutors can demonstrate to themselves that they can understand and debate theory. The work of Giroux is crucial therefore to supporting SpLD tutors to develop their understandings of being an intellectual and of being in a space to view and critique the application of neo-liberalist approaches to SpLD support.

3.3   Paulo Freire

SpLD tutors could very easily fall into the category of being a number. The naming of SpLD tutors as Non-Medical Helpers demonstrates the view that SpLD practice is not pedagogic practice, that practitioners are not intellectuals, just simple 'helpers'. However, what is intriguing about SpLD work in universities is that it is a radical practice in being entirely student-led. Its pedagogic value lies in working with the student through collaboration, a direct challenge to what Freire (1972, p.72) calls 'traditional banking education'. Such banking education is where students passively receive knowledge from the teachers who 'deposit knowledge into the empty repository of the student mind' (Breunig 2016, p.108). I felt that delving into concepts such as banking education would be highly beneficial for the SpLD tutor participants, in particular to give opportunities to discuss Freire's view of Critical Pedagogy, which places an emphasis on the social construction of knowledge. Knowledge is the 'product of agreement or consent between individuals who live out particular social relations... some forms of knowledge have more power and legitimacy than others' (McLaren, cited by Darder *et al.*, 2017, p.58). It is this emphasis on the social interpretations of knowledge and accompanying issues of power and legitimacy that I find pertinent in terms of a social representation of SpLDs – issues which are not discussed in our training.

SpLD tutors are officially described as 'helpers' yet we do not want to be 'helpers'; we want to work to empower the learner (Diversity and Ability 2020). When Freire (1972, p.50) wrote of adult literacy learners in Brazil, he described how 'the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of "welfare recipients". They are treated as individualised cases, as marginal persons'. This paternalistic approach is all too evidently applied to the 'powerless' SpLD learner in HE who needs a 'helper' who is also powerless – an educational helper that stays on the margins rather than being included within the university itself to challenge non-inclusive teaching practice. Notably, Freire (1985, p.21) uses the language of the market when describing oppressive educational practices of how 'an educator replaces self-expression with a "deposit" that a student is expected to "capitalize"'. Banking education fits within the remit of an increasingly commodified university experience. I wanted therefore to include these concepts for discussion with SpLD tutors to see if they felt that there was an element of paternalism in our work, of power and legitimacy but also to explore if we operate as Freirean educators.

To defy the oppressive practices of commodification, Freire (1972) advocates for liberatory learning. This is approach to education that 'must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students' (Freire 1972, p.46). It is this openness to being both learner and teacher that is seen in SpLD work, work that encourages the learner to be a collaborator and to engage in dialogue and reflection.

Freire (1972) encouraged adult learners in Brazil to take part in literacy circles in order to develop their awareness through 'problem posing education' that requires the learner and the teacher to examine social-cultural issues through dialogue and reflection. This is a method to develop 'conscientization' whereby 'people develop their power to perceive critically […]; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation' (Freire 1972, p.83). Such discussions are transformative in that 'people should be able to question why they are facing oppressing conditions and how to stop and transform those conditions towards their liberation' (Sleeter *et al.* 2004, p.82). Through conscientisation, learners develop critical consciousness, which occurs through three stages of consciousness growth: intransitive thought, semi-transitive thought and critical transitivity (Freire 1972). It is critical transitivity in particular that Freire argues impels people to think critically both at an individual and a global level in order to take action for social change. Freire's liberatory circles are an influence on the research methodology itself as I discus in later chapters.

There has been some critique however of Freirean approaches, specifically that certain practitioners have incorporated an element of 'white saviour' complex to their understanding of his work (Straubhaar 2015). In order to combat the potential of coming in as the omnipotent liberator from oppression, Straubhaar, who worked on a Freirean-based adult education development organisation in Africa, found that he initially had overlooked his white privilege and unconsciously reinforced oppressive practice. It was only by returning to Freirean basics of critical consciousness through 'a process of reflection and action (praxis)' that he was able to 'mitigate the effects of privilege in work conducted by development practitioners, especially those who experience intersections of privilege on the basis of nationality, race, gender and so forth' (Straubhaar 2015, p.382).

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3.4   Amartya Sen

It is this concept of learners' different identities - different abilities - that led me to investigate Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) in relation to SpLDs. SpLD tutors work with learners in HE who are considered as lacking certain 'abilities' as evidenced by a psychometric profile of dyslexia, a profile that is typically considered as showing deficit in certain areas such as reading and retention. I was particularly taken with a view of the CA as promoting 'a person's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being; [it] represents the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be – the various "functionings" he or she can achieve' (Nussbaum *et al.* 1993, p.30). While the CA is highly regarded in disability work, SpLD tutors do not experience any training or discussion on the work of SEN and I felt that the CA could be an appropriate theory for our work.

In particular, the CA places an emphasis on the diversity among individuals (Norwich, 2014) and this diversity is key in providing one-to-one SpLD support. McLoughlin and Leather (2013) recommend that a tailored, individual approach is taken for each person's needs. SpLD tutors who adhere to the Seven Principles of one-to-one support of ADSHE (2020) do take a tailored, individualised approach but there is no direct recommendation to *reframe* a learner's abilities in terms of specific capabilities or functionings.

For Sen (1985, p.10) one's capability depends on a functioning, 'an achievement of a person: what she or he manages to do and become'. Therefore, we could view capabilities and functionings as interdependent — together with an SpLD tutor, the learner explores their capabilities in order to achieve outcomes they view as valuable. In this way, you achieve well-being and agency. This concept of agency is of key importance in one-to-one SpLD support in that agency, according to

Sen (2001, p.19), is when someone 'acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives'. Educational researchers with an interest in social justice have found this concept of agency to be of great interest (Walker and Unterhalter 2010). This concept of agency has potential for widening participation in HE 'since in this policy context individual agency is subject to very limited interpretation' (Hart 2013, p.31). It is noteworthy that students with dyslexia who access university through widening participation courses 'and therefore individual support … are outperforming their peers for whom there is limited support' (Fraser 2012, p.49). It is when their capabilities are given appropriate support that these students can flourish and achieve well-being.

Fraser (2012, p.43) (a former director of dyslexia support in the University of Middlesex) also warns that 'dyslexia tutors … are aware that they should not be addressing subject-specific areas, nor for that matter, areas relating to wider participation and the possible lack of HE preparation'. This attitude, that the social context of the student is not relevant to the SpLD tutor, is prevalent. Such attitudes explain why there is no research in the UK on applying the CA to SpLDs. We are actively told by our community not to engage with social issues. This absence is one that I wanted to address, which is why I thought the CA would be of interest to SpLD tutors in HE. Reframing dyslexia through the capability approach could empower those who are typically excluded from debate on SpLDs – SpLD tutors and students who are often thought of as 'lacking' – to bring their contributions to the discussions.

Sen views empowerment as a way in which individual capabilities can be developed so that a person can 'choose a life that is *valued*' (Glassman and Patton 2014, p.1355). People who are marginalised must have the opportunity to come together and debate so as to make 'informed… and reflected choices. These process are crucial to the formation of values and priorities' (Sen 2001, p.153). This links with Freire's view of empowerment through critical consciousness, *conscientisation*. There are two elements in Freire's concept of empowerment – the time and effort involved when people develop the skills for reading for example and the time and effort involved when people develop awareness of reading the systems that surround us (Freire 1972). Such conscientisation gives marginalised groups the capability to participate, where 'the capacity to participate in determination of local functionings through shared, informed decision-making leads to greater capabilities' (Glassman and Patton 2014, p.1359). If SpLD tutors and students can develop their capabilities for conscientisation and could take part in decision-making on SpLDs then perhaps the narrative of what we value could be changed.

By enabling such conscientisation, you are enabling people to flourish, you are increasing their happiness. Sen writes about the concept of happiness in terms of the capability approach:

Our failure to get what we value can be a source of disappointment. So happiness and frustration relate, respectively, to our successes and failures to achieve the fulfilment of our objectives – no matter what these objectives are. This can be of great circumstantial relevance in checking whether people are succeeding or failing to get what they value and have reason to value (2010, p.276).

HE students with dyslexia may have experienced failure earlier in their lives in previous educational settings. In addition, a student with dyslexia who has internalised the psychological discourse of dyslexia as a deficit may have low self-esteem and fragile confidence. Some dyslexia tutors believe that it 'can be easier to teach someone to read than it is to improve their confidence. Even highly successful dyslexic people 'express doubts about their confidence' (McLoughlin and Leather 2013, p. 13). Unhappiness can also be seen in students with dyslexia with stress and anxiety being common. 'This stress and anxiety are the direct and indirect responses to actual and anticipated failure, fear, frustration, suppressed anger and erosion of confidence' (Scott 2004, p.151). SpLD tutors, although not mental health professionals, need to have an awareness of a learner's emotional needs as well as academic needs. In terms of the capability approach, the emotional needs of a learner with dyslexia could be factored into the one-to-one study skills support. In this, a tutor works with the learner's individual capabilities and functionings so as to empower that student to reach a state of well-being and happiness. As Sen writes, 'it would be odd to claim that a person broken down by pain and misery is doing very well' (1985, p.17).

3.5   bell hooks

It is this concern for well-being in education as well as the interplay of the social and political that led me to consider sharing the work of bell hooks with fellow SpLD tutors. After all, 'education is concerned with both individual and collective well-being. It is highly personal and individual and also highly social, political and public' (Griffiths 1998, p.66). For me, the work of bell hooks is highly personal as she expresses the pain that I felt at being excluded from educational debate in HE. Her following quote describes succinctly why I felt that theory was a way forward for both myself and SpLD tutors:

I came to theory because I was hurting […] I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around and within me. More importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing (hooks 1994, p.59).

This concept of theory as solace is one that I wanted to share with co-inquirers (and was subsequently discussed at length with them). We feel pain and it is important to acknowledge it in a holistic way. Acknowledging our vulnerabilities can also be empowering (hooks 1994). hooks' (1994, p. 21) concept of engaged pedagogy, which draws on Freire's critical pedagogy, is a holistic learning approach for both student *and* teacher, but 'empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks'. That vulnerability starts with an emphasis on a mutuality between learner and teacher through the process of praxis (hooks, 1994). Praxis from a Freirean point of view is action and reflection upon the world in order to change it (hooks, 1994). hooks (1994, p. 15) combines this with Buddhist approaches of wholeness – of viewing both the student and teacher as "whole" beings not just simply providers and consumers of knowledge. In this, hooks was influenced by the work of Thich Nhat Hahn, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk credited with bringing mindfulness to the West (Niemiec 2013). This holistic view of teacher and student is supported by Thich Nhat Hahn's mindfulness approaches of viewing the teacher as a healer. Thich Nhat Hanh advocates that 'the practice of a healer, therapist, teacher or any helping professional should be directed toward his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people' (hooks 1994, p. 15).

It is unusual in HE to view oneself as a healer, much less to examine one's own well-being. Yet this was borne out by my findings in my MSc research. The focus of my research was the benefit of mindfulness approaches for students with dyslexia and one unexpected result was that the process of using mindfulness with students impacted positively on my own well-being and also helped my practice in terms of developing my awareness and listening skills (O'Dwyer 2015). In dyslexia research, the focus is usually the student, not the SpLD tutor so this holistic approach incorporating mindfulness ideals for the benefit of *both* tutor and student is one that I felt could be of interest to this research. The influence of the mindfulness circle will be discussed in Chapter 4 as it had an impact on the implementation of the CICs.

A key question that hooks examines is that of marginalisation. She writes of her experiences of marginalisation when attending exclusively white institutions as a student and her subsequent experiences of employment as a black female academic (hooks 1989). While the position of the typically white, middle-class and middle-aged female SpLD tutor is not the same experience as hooks, there are certain similarities that resonate. We may be members of the professional bodies such as PATOSS and ADSHE but we are also marginalised, we work increasingly for outsourced companies on zero-hours contracts and are not embedded into the 'mainstream' of universities. As stated earlier, we work on the margins of university life. This can be a position of powerlessness but equally the 'margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance' (hooks 1989, p. 21). This reframing of the margins as a place of resistance is a key tenant in hooks'

work. While you may not choose the site of marginalisation you can chose to make the site one of resistance as 'this site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination' (hooks 1989, p. 23). This concept of reframing our marginalisation as resistance is a key discussion point in the CICs. This is teaching to transgress, a moving past boundaries to become a shift in paradigms (hooks 1994).

A further point of discussion of hooks' engaged pedagogy is that of requiring the teacher to look at their own roles in empowering learners in order to overcome the traditional forms of teacher dominance. She argues that it is 'only through the process of praxis, the reciprocal arrangement between those helping and those being helped that the act of "helping" is freed from manipulative and domineering motivations' (Florence 1998, p.83). It is this investigation into the act of 'helping' that is notably absent from discussions on SpLD teaching. We do not discuss issues of power and dominance in our work. There is no attention, much less reflection, brought to concepts of dominance in one-to-one work in which 'however well-intentioned the interaction… there is always an element of the giver and the given' (Florence 1998, p.83). SpLD work is meant to be empowering, but it is difficult to see if it can truly be empowering if we do not investigate issues of power that can be at play in a one-to-one session between the SpLD tutor and the learner. It was these issues of power that led me to my fifth theorist, Pierre Bourdieu.

3.6   Pierre Bourdieu

The work of Bourdieu is very well-known in the sociology of education and in ethnography but is strikingly absent in SpLD teaching and training. There is a rich body of work created by Bourdieu and his concepts of research reflexivity has helped shaped the research methodology – again demonstrating the circularity of this research where the conceptual framework for the research also frames the research methodology itself. I discuss this further in Chapter Four. For this conceptual framework, I include key concepts from the work of Bourdieu that fit well into an SpLD context — habitus, fields, capital and reproduction.

Habitus is an internalised understanding of ideology that unconsciously shapes us (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). These internalised ideologies are 'acquired during lengthy periods of exposure to particular social conditions' (Watson *et al.* 2009, p.670). Habitus can be 'structured by one's past and present circumstances such as family upbringing and educational experiences' (Grenfell 2008, p.51). All of this serves as a reminder that a learner is not a 'blank slate' arriving into one's session with the SpLD tutor. Learners will have acquired and unconsciously internalised certain thoughts and concepts. One unconscious ideology, for example, which is typically seen in an SpLD context is the concept that spelling difficulty means low intelligence. Learners with dyslexia will frequently

apologise for their spelling as they may have internalised bad spelling as a sign of lack of intelligence from school experiences as a child or from family members. In my own experience, when such an internalised concept does come to light in a session, it can take time to dissuade a learner from such a viewpoint of 'I am a bad speller therefore I am not academic'. This is understandable as 'habitus as the word implies, is that which one has acquired but has become durably incorporated into the body in the form of permanent dispositions' (Bourdieu 1993, p.86).

To understand and deal with issues caused by habitus, we also need to consider the issue of the field. The field is considered the other side of the coin to habitus (Watson *et al.* 2009). Bourdieu's concept of the field — *le champs* — is that of a space of social forces and conflicting approaches to deal with these forces (Wacquant 1989). It is a 'structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space' (Bourdieu 1998, pp.40–41). Fields contain distinct social worlds that often exist beside or in relation to each other (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1994). Each field operates with each own set of rules, 'each field has its own distinctive logic of practice' (Grenfell 2008, p.70). It is these rules in particular that can cause difficulty to the SpLD learner in university. There are prescribed rules – not explicit – of ways of being in certain fields. In the field of education, it is the rule that you sit down without moving and concentrate for one hour in a lecture theatre. Sitting down and not moving around can be problematic for learners with SpLDs, especially people with ADHD and DCD/dyspraxia. They may need to move or create other forms of stimulus but this is breaking the rules of being an adult learner in HE. Learners with autism may unwittingly break the rules of the field if these rules are not explicit and internalised. Learners with SpLDs are working with both the unwritten rules of the field and the internalised ideologies of their various habitus but these concepts are not acknowledged in SpLD training.

A further concept is that of capital which is the currency of the field (Grenfell 2009a). For Bourdieu, capital 'presents itself under three fundamental species (each with its own subtype), namely economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1994, pp.118–119). While SpLD tutors are aware of the concept of economic capital, we may be less aware of the meaning of social and cultural capital. Bourdieu defines social capital as 'the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition'(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1994, p.119). This accumulation of social resources can be a source of social inequality. As I have argued, people with dyslexia from the middle classes – those with good social capital as well as economic capital – fare better than people with dyslexia from working class backgrounds (Macdonald and Deacon 2019). They have greater social links that can support education and employment. Social capital acts as an exclusionary force, keeping the

circles of the elites free from the lower classes and thus preserving power with the elites (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1994).

Cultural capital comprises three states: an embodied state, such as a person who speaks with a 'refined' accent; an objective state, comprising objects like paintings and books which have a 'high' cultural value; and an institutional state, such as 'high ranking' qualifications (Grenfell 2009b). This cultural capital is another exclusionary force and in terms of education 'cultural capital is easily acquired by the most advantaged students who have been exposed by their families to it for longer' (Azaola 2012, p. 83). The advantaged in society, the elites, become the most dominant and their social and cultural capital becomes the most legitimate forms of knowledge (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). This privileging of what is considered 'high' social and cultural capital can be seen in the IQ tests that are administered to students with dyslexia. The Wide Range Intelligence Test (WRIT) contains a subtest (Verbal Analogies) that is supposed to measure a person's ability to make analogies and tests verbal reasoning. However, to score highly in this test, you need a very specific form of social and cultural capital, such as a knowledge of Rodin and the music of John Coltrane. When I presented a workshop on this test at the ADSHE conference in 2019, this was considered highly unusual to make a connection between dyslexia assessments and unfair expectations of social and cultural capital in UK HE!

The education system, including the SpLD assessment system, has internalised what constitutes social and cultural capital and passes it on throughout the system, a system of *reproduction*. In this way, the education system 'contributes to the reproduction of social opportunities or injustices across different social classes' (Azaola 2012, p. 83). This is glaringly obvious in the UK where the current Prime Minister is the 20th to have been educated at Eton. 'Those trained in a certain discipline or a certain school have in common a certain *mentality*' (Bourdieu, cited by Dale and The Open University, 1976, p.193). The elites use the structures of habitus and the field to engineer advantage and trade in social and cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, p. 197).

HE also reproduces a neurotypical approach to learning where assessment is typically in the form of the 2,500 word essay and an exam at the end of the academic semester. Researchers are looking at other methods of assessment but no one seems to take the experience of the learners with SpLDs fully into account (Evans 2016). Habitus can become very apparent when you work one-to-one with a learner with dyslexia who lacks "high" social or cultural capital. The academic lexicon is hard to access for those who have difficulty with literacy in the first place and may not have been exposed to high levels of language at home. The intersectionality of being a first-generation student, of being from lower socio-economic backgrounds and so on is not considered in our work, but access to social and cultural capital as well as being a learner with SpLDs impacts

experiences of education. A critique of Bourdieu's theories is that they could be viewed as deterministic especially in terms of an over-simplification of the experiences of those in the working class and their access to education (Azaola 2012; Reed-Danahay 2005). It would be very wrong to assume that a first-generation learner with dyslexia is bound for failure. Bourdieu refutes this 'mechanical determinism' in the text *The Inheritors,* stating that not everyone will be impacted in the same way by their social background (Reed-Danahay 2005). It is interesting to note however how Bourdieu makes reference to students' sense of 'belonging' in the classroom and how some do not feel at home in the classroom (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979). It is this concept of belonging that has now garnered more research attention in recent years as the inclusion debate within dyslexia studies becomes more forceful (Reid 2019). Learners with SpLDs, especially those who may not possess 'high' levels of social and cultural capital may feel a 'double whammy' of exclusion from neurotypical education.

3.7   Sara Ahmed

The final theorist that I discuss here is Sara Ahmed. The decision to look at the work of Sara Ahmed was a collective one made during the fieldwork. The co-inquirers felt that there was a lack of female representation in the theories selected (the damning words 'why are we just looking at dead white French men' still rings in my ears). In requesting more feminist texts, I think the co-inquirers – all women – were requesting a representation of experience that would resonate with their own. I suggested Ahmed as she talks explicitly of her experiences of being a woman in academia and in dealing with issues of diversity. While Ahmed's work is not as extensive as the other theorists, she discusses the intersectionality of being a woman of colour and of dealing with issues of inclusion/exclusion in her texts. She also writes in a way that is very accessible. Furthermore, her *Feminist Killjoys* blog is free to access unlike journal articles which outsourced SpLD tutors cannot read for free because we do not get university library privileges.

Ahmed writes about being a feminist and especially about living a feminist life. In particular she describes how 'feminism needs to be everywhere because feminism is not everywhere' (Ahmed 2017, p. 4). It is this absence of representation that I felt would be of relevance to our SpLD tutor community. We are not represented in the HE system and our voice is not heard. Furthermore, the majority of SpLD tutors are women. In particular, I was drawn to the statement of how we 'become feminists in dialogue with others' (Ahmed 2017, p.5). This concept of dialogue with each other is central to the research and central too to this report. I want to put the voice of the researcher and the co-inquirers at the centre of this work. In her writing, Ahmed succeeds in putting her voice at the centre of the narrative, and makes you feel like you are in dialogue with her. Ahmed directly addresses the reader in her texts, which is quite different to the texts written

by Bourdieu for example. It is doubtful that Bourdieu has ever used the phrase 'feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit' (Ahmed 2017, p.5).

Feminism is transformative practice and Ahmed discusses how learning about theory enables you to transform your worldview – 'critical theory is like any language; you can learn it, and when you learn it, you begin to move around in it'. Moving on from Bourdieu's concept of the field, she explores the 'space' of the university, using Puwar's (2004) concept of being a 'space invader'. Women are considered 'space invaders' when they unwittingly disrupt the space of the university but also can invade theory too by 'asking the wrong questions' (Ahmed 2017, p.9). I wanted to see if this concept of 'asking the wrong question' would resonate with the co-inquirers. They may feel marginalised in the university but also marginalised in their discussions on theory because 'not all feminists are at home in the academy, and that the academic language of feminist theory can be alienating' (Ahmed 2017, p.11). This is why she advocates viewing feminist theory as homework, something to take home, to discuss, reflect upon as all too often theory has been 'understood as something that we do when we are away from home'(Ahmed 2017, p.8). I liked this idea of feminist homework and considered it would fit with the CICs where we would be doing 'social justice theory homework'.

In terms of transformation, Ahmed (2017, p.91) looks at two issues: the transformation of institutions but also the diversity work you do when you 'do not quite inhabit the norms of an institution'. Diversity work in HE in particular can be 'work that is less supported' (Ahmed 2017, p.96). People can be appointed to do diversity work in institutions but that may not necessarily mean that the institution is willing to transform and therefore you will encounter resistance (Ahmed 2017). This resistance can come in many forms but chiefly in the manner of not hearing those who are trying to transform, often because 'they expect you to speak in a certain way. The diversity worker could be described as an institutional killjoy' (Ahmed 2017, p.99). If you do not speak in the way that is expected, you are that most boring and pointless of individuals, the 'killjoy' (*Feminist Killjoy* is the title of Ahmed's blog). It is this concept of being the unheard 'killjoy' that fits the SpLD community. In many cases, SpLD tutors liaise with departments in order to ensure support or understanding for their learners. For example, a learner with dyslexia who has not been given appropriate exam accommodations will often bring these concerns to their SpLD tutor. The tutor may subsequently liaise with the appropriate department on behalf of the learner. The tutor may not be recognised as having the authority to support the student away from the one-to-one space. One university I worked in, for example, requested the SpLD tutors stop liaising with academic departments on behalf of learners.

Ahmed (2017, p.109) refers to difficulties such as these as 'pushy work'. You have to push against existing arrangements, push against structures that support inequality. 'You have to push to make room for those who are not accommodated by this restriction' (Ahmed 2017, p.110). Ahmed views feminists as diversity workers by pushing for equality and a parallel can be made between SpLD tutors who push for equality of education for their learners. Ahmed does not make any precise mention of dyslexia or other SpLDs but she does discuss disability access in her blog. In a post titled *The Same Door* (Ahmed 2019a), she shows a picture of a door – a door that is usable for her but not for a wheelchair user. The door is a metaphor for access, for the bodies deemed appropriate to pass through and as a way to block complaint. 'Doors can thus function as containers of complaint. My own task is to open the container'(Ahmed 2019a). This idea of complaint is one that I felt would also resonate with SpLD tutors. Students with SpLDs have to complain if they do not receive their accommodations, their study skills support, their Assistive Technology. The onus is always on the individual and then the Study Skills tutor to support the individual. It is the SpLD tutor who is the killjoy who keeps pushing against the doors.

3.8   Chapter summary

In conclusion, this chapter has addressed the gaps in the representation of social justice and SpLD work in UK HE. In providing an overview of the work of five theorists, I am not providing a full account of the works of all the theorists, rather it is, to harken back to the circle metaphor, interconnecting circles of different social justice theories that are of relevance to those of us who work in UK SpLD support. These circles provide an array of theoretical materials to choose from, all in the aim of provoking dialogue and discussion. In writing this chapter I have also become aware of the intermingling of the social justice theories and the research methodology and how in researching social justice, theories can impact on the choice of research methods. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

Chapter 4   **Methodology and research methods**

4.1   **Introduction**

This chapter explains the research methodology used in this research. Moreover, it details my journey from practitioner to researcher and I have been guided in the evolution of my thinking by the following quote: 'Becoming a researcher means much more than learning specific skills and procedures. It involves changing your way of thinking about yourself, and your relations with others. It involves feeling comfortable with the role of "researcher"'(Bogdan and Biklen 1982, p.57). Lastly, this chapter discusses the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the difficulties of carrying out research during a global health crisis.

Having questioned, studied and reflected on my research practice *and my own transformative journey*, I have become emboldened to be a researcher who feels comfortable enough to 'create her own process' (O'Connor 2002, p.242). The research process that I have created is a dynamic one, informed by qualitative inquiry in a creative yet inclusive transformative research framework. I also become emboldened to use elements of autoethnographic research to include my own personal narratives of this research, which I weave into the text. I have chosen a bricolage methodology as I feel it resonates with the core research aims of this research project to use the tools at hand to investigate the transformative learning of social justice approaches to dyslexia and of working collaboratively *and* reflexively with fellow SpLD tutors, my co-inquirers, within the research.

Research in education draws on 'an extraordinarily wide range of research … to improve education… Educational research can perform a range of functions, all contributing to the improvement of education, and achieve them through a variety of methods' (Griffiths 1998, p.67). Griffiths reassures that looking at a range of research methods is 'ok' which led me to investigate bricolage research and in this chapter, I want to show my research journey into methodology, a journey that that has in turn been influenced by the theories we examine in this research such as Paulo Freire's conscientisation. Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of reflexivity in particular have been influential in my research. As mentioned in the previously chapters, SpLD tutors are frequently marginalised in their work and I wanted this research, including the analysis to be inclusive of SpLD tutors which is reflected in the research design. My research design centres on Collaborative Inquiry Circles (CICs) as a creative and inclusive method to examine and discuss social justice theories, an approach that is typically used in practitioner research. I wanted the data generation and analysis to also be creative and inclusive. The co-inquirers were given the choice to take part

in the data analysis stage and some co-inquirers did indeed analyse their contributions in the CICs. Co-inquirers were also given a feedback questionnaire at the end of the CICs and four people responded (see questionnaire in Appendix E). I will subsequently discuss our use of thematic analysis and how, through coding, I was able to 'discover' the stories within the circles.

4.2   Research paradigm

To structure my research question and research aims, I had to first define where I was situated in terms of my research paradigm. Thomas Kuhn (1962) was the first to promote the concept of the research paradigm as an overarching framework of research which encompasses a communality of ideas, assumptions, beliefs and practices among researchers. A paradigm can be further viewed as 'a basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways' (Guba and Lincoln 1994, p.105). Accordingly, Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue, there is a need for the researcher to examine three fundamentals:

- Ontology: the way in which we perceive reality
- Epistemology: the relationship between how we interpret and understand
- Methodology: the way in which the research process is undertaken.

Ontology and epistemology are interrelated and impact on research methodology (Punch 2009). Ontology, epistemology and methodology all underpin assumptions in research and can help to situate research within a research paradigm (Patel 2015).

It took me some time to situate myself within a research paradigm as I was concerned about the influence of more positivist approaches to research in my area. There is a strong advocacy for evidence-based research in SpLD assessment and support. It is the site where psychology and education combine and evidence-based research is very much the dominant model. However, this has never sat well with me. Biesta (2007, p. 21) famously wrote that 'the whole discussion about evidence-based practice is focused on technical questions – questions about "what works" – while forgetting the need for critical inquiry into normative and political questions about what is educationally desirable'.

I knew that I wanted more inquiry into the normative and political rather than 'what works'. I was therefore very taken with the notion of the assumptions that shape the stories that we tell of our research. I found resonance with a broadly inductive epistemology that simultaneously recognised and valued the lived experience – bricolage. Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.4) depict the bricoleur as someone 'who understands that the research is an interactive process shaped by all these forces and who also knows that the researchers all tell stories about the worlds they have

studied. Thus, different ontological and epistemological assumptions are deployed in undertaking research'.

In French, the word bricoleur is the term for a 'handyman or handywoman who makes use of the tools available to complete a task' (Kincheloe and Berry 2004, p.1). The Francophone in me loves this idea of being a bricoleur – a mixer of methods – from which derives the term 'bricolage' as first coined by Claude Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss 2000). This concept of the bricoleur serves to reinforce the notion that I am seeking to understand and share the stories of other SpLD practitioners as well as my own journey into research, therefore an interpretative research paradigm is most suitable for me. After all, 'any good researcher knows that your choice of method should not be predetermined. Rather, you should choose a method that is appropriate to what you are trying to find out' (Silverman 2010, p.10). Interpretative or qualitative research is 'fundamentally well suited for locating the *meanings* that people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the *social world* around them' (Miles *et al.* 2014, p.11). Meaning is what I was searching for, but I was also searching for a qualitative research methodology that could be collaborative, reflexive, inclusive and transformative.

4.3   Qualitative research methodology (the 'sweaty labour')

In committing to a qualitative research process, I have taken to heart the warning that 'qualitative research is only suitable for people who care about it, take it seriously, and are prepared for commitment. It must be done properly or not at all — so unless you are fired with zeal, don't do it' (Delamont 2002, p.ix). Zeal, however, is not enough to guide research and I have looked for guidance from other methodologists. This is not unusual as it is considered that 'qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p.2). I took comfort from the assertion that 'no study conforms exactly to a standard methodology; each one calls for the researcher to bend the methodology to the uniqueness of the setting or case' (Miles *et al.* 2014, p.7).

It takes a lot of intellectual labour to work out which qualitative methodology is the best fit. Ahmed (2017, p.13) describes this labour as being a 'sweaty concept' and argues, 'We have been taught to tidy our texts, not to reveal the struggle we have in getting somewhere'. It was a struggle for this researcher-in-training to work out where to place the research methodology and the research methods as there is such a variety of qualitative approaches. Luttrell (2010, pp.4–5) makes note of how this 'feature of qualitative research may be anxiety-producing for researchers-

in-training who might wish for a "researcher-proof" plan'. I too wished for a plan but realised that I had to make my own.

Denzin (2010, p.10) notably describes this proliferation of qualitative research as a 'big tent' which can accommodate both those who 'view methods as objective tools' and those who view 'method as praxis'. The unifying force between these two 'tent poles' is the central pole of 'social justice' (Denzin 2010, p.55). Social justice theories form a key part of this research as does critical pedagogy. I felt that there would be an element of cognitive dissonance if the research methodology did not reflect the theories of social justice and critical pedagogy that are the subject of the research.

The emphasis in my research is working *together* with fellow practitioners with a transformative aim. Our focus is on social justice theories and to see if they have a transformative impact on us and on our practice. At first, I felt that action research (AR) would be a good fit for my PhD. There are many different interpretations of AR but I feel most at ease with viewing AR as 'a collaborative transformative approach with joint focus on rigorous data collection, knowledge generation, reflection and distinctive action/change elements that pursue practical solutions' (Piggot-Irvine *et al.* 2015, p.548). In my initial research proposal, I planned to use the well-known Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) self-reflective action research spiral:

- Planning a change
- Acting and observing the consequences of the change
- Reflecting on these processes and consequences and then
- Replanning
- Acting and observing, reflecting, and so on. (Punch 2011, p.136)

However, coming back to education to do a PhD was my chance to really immerse myself in research and I did not want to 'play it safe'. I wanted to look deeper at what else was out there in the research world. Furthermore, I did not feel comfortable with the concept of a 'practical solution' as I felt it did not acknowledge the complexity of the work of SpLD tutors in an increasingly changing university environment.

I then looked more at participatory action research (PAR). I was drawn to the concepts of working with people within a participatory framework, one that would be very much based on a 'local' context (Marshall and Rossman 2006; Chandler and Torbert 2003). It was this sense of the 'local', of who the 'locals' are in my research that drew me to look closer at practitioner research.

It was with this sense of uncertainty that I investigated Practitioner Research (PR) which falls under the umbrella of AR. I liked that PR offers a shift in ownership away from academic

researchers alone to practitioners (Gewirtz 2009). I am an SpLD practitioner undertaking research and typically 'in all forms of practitioner inquiry, the practitioner himself or herself takes on the role of the researcher'(Campbell and Groundwater-Smith 2007, p.26). This background would fit the view that practitioner research 'is built on the assumption that the knowledge needed to understand, analyse and ultimately improve educational situations cannot be generated primarily outside of those contexts' (Campbell and Groundwater-Smith 2007, p.26). Kemmis (1991) argued that AR had become too 'individualized' and was concerned that AR may be carried out to meet the needs of teachers and institutions themselves 'for their own intrinsic purposes or externally motivations' (Tobin and Kincheloe 2006, p.175). The fact that I do not belong to an institution in a conventional sense may actually give me freedom from possible external influences from an institution. However, I do belong to a community of SpLD practitioners, a community that is primarily focused on a psychological viewpoint of SpLDs.

AR, PAR and PR offer much in terms of their strong emphasis on democratic approaches to research. As universities continue to become entrenched in neo-liberalist practice, Greenwood (2012, p.129) passionately claims that 'everyone needs to practice reflective collaborative action of the sort action research lays claim to and create openings for this sort of work in what is otherwise a hostile higher education environment'. I wanted to navigate through this hostile environment and in order to do so, I felt I needed to investigate all the *tools* at my disposal. I particularly felt that my position within the research as a practitioner and a researcher merited more attention particularly in dealing with my own transformative journey from practitioner to researcher. This led me to consider autoethnographic approaches.

I am very drawn to the view of autoethnography being that of detailing 'repeated feelings, stories and happenings' (Ellis *et al.* 2011, p. 277). From the very beginning of this project, I have written a series of field notes and reflections throughout the research which detailed my own feelings, the stories that emerged during the research and the unexpected happening (not least a global pandemic). I have always felt at home with writing – my original degrees are in literature and languages and I worked as a technical writer. Writing has always been a way to process my thoughts. Yet I had not initially considered using an autoethnographic approach. Autoethnography speaks to my own internalised ideas of what constitutes 'real research' which was initially more positivist; I felt unsure about having the 'right' to position myself within the research. Later I appreciated that establishing yourself into the body of the research itself is considered a valid approach in autoethnography and particularly in feminist methodologies (White and Dotson 2010). *The Handbook of Ethnography* was very helpful in supporting my understanding of autoethnography, particularly in terms of how 'we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions'

(Adams *et al.* 2016, p. 10). This resonates with what I had read of reflexivity and how crucial it is for the researcher to keep challenging her ideas of what we believe is happening in the research. I have found this idea of observing ourselves in the act of observation very helpful later in the research when carrying out the CICs and subsequently writing them up.

Many researchers write of the transformative experiences that an autoethnographic research approach affords. Raab (2015, p. 14) writes of how 'autoethnography encompasses the idea of fostering self-awareness and self-discovery, which may lead to transformation. The autoethnographical researcher must be comfortable exposing his or her deepest emotions'. Emotion is very present in my reflections and I have not shied away from writing about both the joys and the difficulties I experienced. It was not easy, particularly during the start of the Covid-19 pandemic but I did find that it helped to process my thoughts. That sense of transformation is discussed further in Chapter Five. For Custer (2014, p. 11) 'autoethnography is a transformative research method because it changes time, requires vulnerability, fosters empathy, embodies creativity and innovation, eliminates boundaries, honors subjectivity, and provides therapeutic benefits'. I particularly liked that Custer included vulnerability in his definition of autoethnography as doctoral researchers feel pressure to hide vulnerability to appear 'professional'. However, I have found that writing of my own vulnerabilities and difficulties was helpful for me and also helped to forge empathetic connection in the CICs. I was reassured when reading Attia and Edge (2017, p. 34) that 'qualitative research demands an empathic ability to relate to social and psychological realities other than one's own'. Empathetic connection is crucial in one-to-one SpLD work and I found that empathy was a key element in supporting the discussions in the CIC.

Empathy can also play a central role when considering the work of the embodied researcher. Merleau-Ponty when writing on phenomenology described 'the body is the vehicle of being in the world' (Marshall 2008, p. 98). I had not explored this idea of being an embodied researcher before starting this research and found great solace in the view of the embodied researcher writing a

> Story reflecting the research artist's collaboration with people, culture, and time. It is generated in the liminal spaces between experience and language, between the known and the unknown, between the somatic and semantic. The text and the body that generates it cannot be separated (Spry 2001, p. 726).

What I found particularly intriguing was this sense of the relationship between the body and the text that I am creating but also the relationship between myself and people - the research participants. This connection, this empathy I view as 'feeling with the Other – a reciprocal process where one seeks to find ways to allow the Other to present him- or herself to and through one' (Finlay 2005, p. 289). This made me consider finding ways of embedding an awareness of myself

the embodied researcher but also that of a mutuality of understanding, of empathy between myself and the research participants.

With these thoughts in my mind, of bringing elements of the autoethnographic, the embodied and empathetic researcher, I wanted a research methodology that could both weave and reflect the diverse threads and approaches of my argument together. I wanted to make it my own. Ultimately, it was this sense of making and of using interconnected threads that led me to explore a bricolage approach.

4.4   Bricolage

I first come across bricolage in my previous MA in French where I studied the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss wrote about bricolage from a position of structuralist inquiry as part of his work in *The Savage Mind* (2000). Bricolage – from the French to *bricoler,* to 'cobble together', 'Do-It-Yourself DIY' – requires the researcher to be 'adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but unlike the engineer, he (sic) does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project'(Lévi-Strauss 2000, p.17). You make meaning by combining your imagination with the range of knowledge tools that you have at your disposal as well as artifacts in your given contexts (Rogers 2012).

This approach to meaning making was subsequently applied by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln to the shifting boundaries in qualitative research. This meaning making is multi-theoretical and multi-methodological which is 'the combination of multiple methodological practices, and empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, p.6). Such blurring of boundaries is 'a key innovation in developing criticality' (Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg and Monzó 2018, p.470).

This sense of an *emergent process* is central to bricolage and a key metaphor for the bricoleur qualitative researcher is that of a quilt maker, using 'the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, developing whatever strategies, methods, and empirical materials are at hand' (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, p.8). This visual metaphor really works for me as it shows that my research is part of an emergent process where I am gathering different threads and arguments together. I felt therefore that I could construct an approach under an AR umbrella but one that included strands from other methodologies such as PR, transformative research and social justice.

Quilting too can be multi-faceted where patterns emerge from connecting together different materials and layers of fabric. This sense of overlapping and contrasting fabrics links to the idea

that bricolage investigates the 'connection that shapes the identities of human beings and the nature of the complex social fabric' (Kincheloe and Berry 2004, p.73). In bringing AR and PR together, something new can emerge. It was while wrestling with these ideas of overlap and contrast that a friend sent me this image of a quilt created by her wife. The visual metaphor of the quilt appeals to me as it helps to support my understanding of meaning making from a bricolage epistemology as seen in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 The quilt as a metaphor for bricolage

Quilting too is a form of feminist resistance for Handforth and Taylor (2016). In their work they draw inspiration from the work of Hélène Cixous and *écriture feminine* (women's writing). They view the bricolage quilt as affording a feminist approach to academic writing in its own right. Writing as quilt making is not 'only a skilled, technical process of making but as a political act of intervention such that stitching together meaning from whatever lies at hand (cotton, fur and fabrics of all colours) skews dominant forms of research practice' (Handforth and Taylor 2016, p.638). Bricolage therefore can be seen as an opportunity to reflect upon dominance, such as in feminist research but I would argue that bricolage also incorporates an opportunity for reflexivity.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998) there are five bricoleur approaches: interpretive, methodological, theoretical, political and narrative bricolage. I would view myself as an interpretive bricoleur in that I view knowledge (i.e. my research) as being subject to positioning and political interpretation (Rogers 2012). I take Finlay's (2002, p.532) view that research reflexivity is the 'continual evaluation of subjective responses, intersubjective dynamics, and the research process itself […] recognizing how we actively construct our knowledge'. In this research, the co-inquirers and I worked on constructing our knowledge together.

According to Dean (2017, p.59) 'the key to being a good student of the social sciences is to develop a critical attitude towards societal processes: to achieve sufficient mastery of theoretical, methodological, and analytical skills to be able to see when established or "common sense" ideas

have become unthinking or incorrect orthodoxies'. It is this criticality that I aimed to cultivate in myself and my co-inquirers. The etymology of the word reflexivity means to bend back on oneself (Zienkowski 2017). I could do this 'bending back' by using a Bourdieu-inspired approach. Leander (2008) describes how the work of Bourdieu (which she experienced for the first time in the intensely hierarchical world of French Higher Education) gave her a vocabulary to deal with the issues of power that she experienced. Bourdieu has given me not only a vocabulary to deal with research but also *thinking tools* to apply to research methods. Bourdieu's concept of reflexivity in particular has had an impact on the methodology of this PhD.

4.5   Reflexivity

Bourdieu, contrary to popular belief, viewed his theories as being intensely practical and he has offered the concept of reflexivity in research as a tool for researchers to use, particularly for reflection on work both in and of the research field (Grenfell 2008). For Bourdieu, human beings have the capacity for 'socio-analysis', the capacity to reflect upon and 'to be reflexive about our habitus' which is crucial for good research (Rawolle and Lingard, 2013, p.118; Bourdieu 2004). This capacity (an echo perhaps of Sen's idea of capability) is something I have wanted to encourage both in myself and in my co-inquirers. The capacity to be reflexive is beneficial for research as 'it adds new dimensions to the knowledge being gathered' (Kara 2015, p.72). While it may not be feasible to stop and question every aspect at every stage of the research, it is feasible to choose when to focus on reflexivity and one way to do this is through regular reflexive writing which can help with the development of the reflexivity of the research (Attia and Edge 2017).

I have written regular reflections after key steps in my research as well as after each supervisory meeting (see Appendix B for a sample of these). This is considered good inclusive practice as 'there is much to be learned by inclusive researchers reflecting on their own practices and disseminating information about their processes as well as findings' (Nind 2014, p.63). Writing such reflections is recommended as it helps develop reflexivity (McNiff and Whitehead 2010). Even the act of selecting reflections for the thesis and appendices required me to be reflexive. While as Bourdieu states there is no epistemological innocence (Rawolle and Lingard 2013), I have decided to be as 'real' as possible and have included a range of reflections which detail the highs and lows of my research journey. One entry for example, deals with the difficulty and pain of researching while losing someone during this pandemic. I felt it was also important to include this reflexive diary in order to 'foreground the practices of shaping, crafting, and polishing that academics usually hide (and hide behind)' (Handforth and Taylor 2016, p.638). It is my way of showing how I have navigated my way through the process. I have threaded these reflections through Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

Encouraging reflexivity in my research can also mean reflecting on the 'quality and validity' of my methodology as well as the concept of 'epistemological prudence' (Leander 2008, p.24). This reflexive approach requires the researcher to use Bourdieu's thinking tools to analyse themselves, which requires analysis of how knowledge is being produced and examining concepts such as bias (Leander 2008). However, terminology such as bias appears to be more from a quantitative research paradigm and may not be as pertinent for qualitative research. Furthermore, it is an established trope within qualitative research that we can never eliminate researcher bias from our findings (Corbin and Strauss 1990). Concepts such as rigour or trustworthiness are more pertinent for qualitative research (Morse *et al.* 2002). Moreover, the more traditional quantitative research methods are 'designed to manage and contain complexity by seeking to control, limit and even deny ambiguity' (Haseman and Mafe 2009, p.220). Denzin and Lincoln advocate that using a bricolage methodology enables researchers to 'respect the complexity of meaning making processes and the contradictions of the lived world' (Rogers 2012, p.4). For Kara (2015), who writes on creative research methods, complexity is central to reflexive practice. I sought to use my creativity to help my reflexivity and one way to do that was to use my visual awareness. Initially, I thought that creativity and research could not exist together but on reading that 'creativity is any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one' (Czikszentmihalyi 1997, p.28), I began to see that I could be a creative researcher such as using visual metaphors to help transform my thinking.

4.6   The research star

In order to keep mindful of the research process itself and its construction, I explored the work of Luttrell (2010) on reflexive qualitative research. I was drawn to the work of Luttrell as, firstly, she is someone who promotes a 'public sociology' to raise public awareness about social issues and social justice (Luttrell 2020) and her writing on her reflexive model of research design and her use of shape has guided my view of research. For Luttrell, qualitative research is where researchers 'transform the "object" of their study into a multi-dimensional and lively representation of lived experiences, social processes and complex webs of meanings and values' (Luttrell 2010, p.160). Luttrell (2010) likens this research transformation to an origami star (as an English teacher in Japan I spent many hopeless hours learning origami). Origami is where you can turn a 'a flat and static piece of paper into a three-dimensional representation of an object' (Luttrell, 2010, p.160).
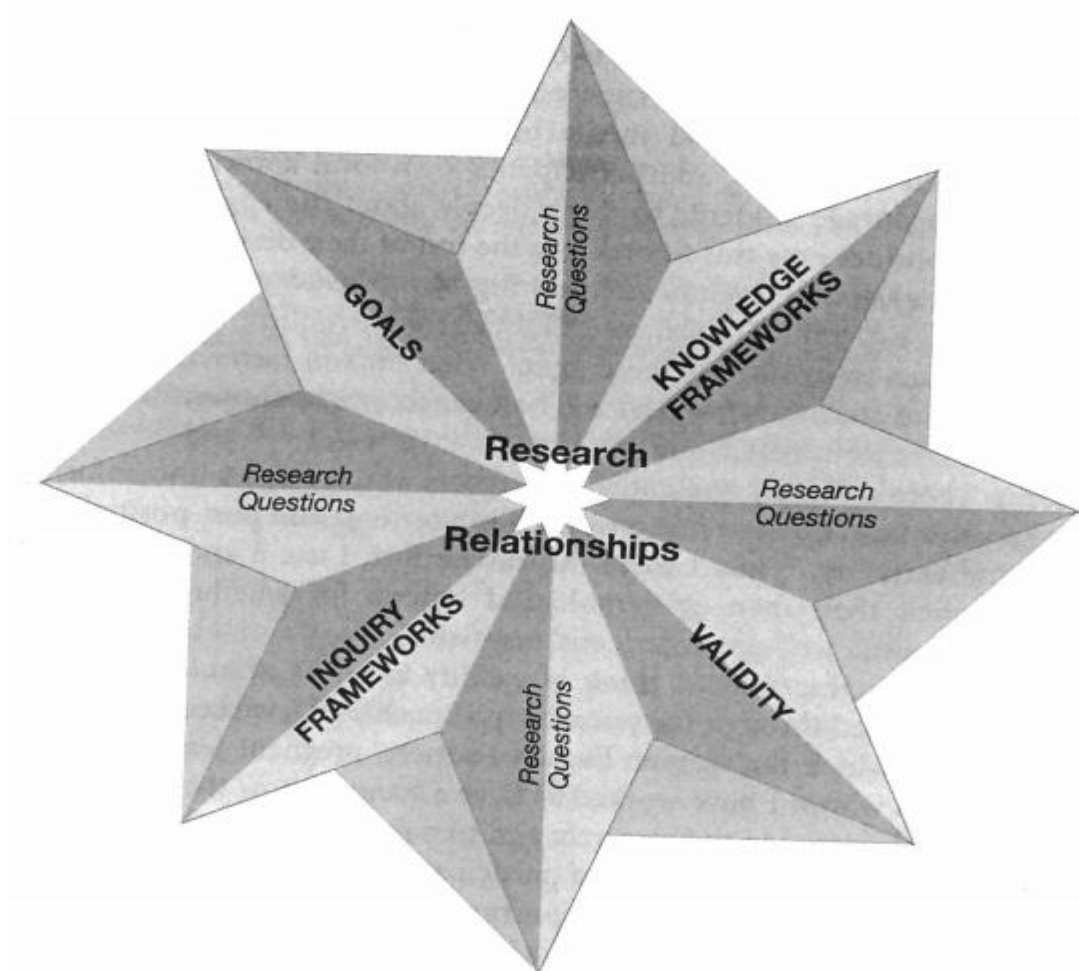
Figure 3 Luttrell's Reflexive Model of Research Design

(Luttrell 2010, p.161)

Visualising research as an image helps to bring the concept to life; moreover, Luttrell's star image 'makes visible the central role that *research relationships* play. Negotiating and representing research relationships – what and how we learn with and about others and ourselves – is at the heart of the research journey' (Luttrell 2010, p.160). This is a model that puts the research relationship at its heart and 'emphasizes reflexivity as the centrepiece of qualitative research design and process' (Luttrell 2010, p.160). It is this *emphasis* on reflexivity and the research relationship that I want to bring to the fore in this research as it fits with my research aims. I want to put the research participants at the centre of this study so that we work collaboratively. What I have also gained from Luttrell's reflexive model is the encouragement to use different knowledge and inquiry frameworks within which to situate the research.

Luttrell's model could therefore be considered bricolage too. In terms of bricolage, when 'a researcher's positioning is embraced, a phenomenon's intertextuality, interconnectedness, and relationships with other phenomena can be explored' (Rogers 2012, pp.4–5). Luttrell's model is situated with a qualitative reflexive framework and it is one which draws upon an array of

interconnected methods, notwithstanding the central emphasis of keeping the research relationships at its core. What I also liked about this model is that it is one of transformation – of transforming the research methodology itself into a reflexive entity. Here we see again an intermingling of the research methodology and the research subject of transformation through learning about social justice theories.

4.7   Transformative research

In transformative learning you aim to 'engage discursively with others in reflecting critically on the presuppositions underpinning our values and beliefs" (Taylor in Gunstone 2015, p.1080). A transformative research framework advances this discursive engagement further for researchers who 'place a priority on social justice and the furtherance of human rights' (Mertens 2010, p.469). A transformative research paradigm includes research theories and approaches that promote social justice (Mertens 2010). It can include emancipatory and activist research, as well as participatory research (Kara 2015). For Mertens (2010) , transformative research comprises an examination of marginalisation and oppression as well as analysis of how inequality is linked with power relations, with a further analysis of how the results of social inquiry are linked to political and social action. Mertens (2010, p.21) expands on this concept of social action by stating that 'transformative researchers consciously and explicitly position themselves side by side with the less powerful in a joint effort to bring about social transformation'. As such, a transformative research framework is a way for researchers to support social justice approaches in education.

I argue that SpLD tutors are marginalized in HE, not least due to socio-political changes; SpLD tutors have become increasingly less powerful in universities as their positions are now highly likely to be outsourced to agencies who offer precarious, hourly-paid zero-hours contracts under the neo-liberalist 'marketisation' of student choice (Cameron *et al.,* 2019; Cameron and Billington 2017). Neoliberalism too has impacted on interpretations of SpLDs like dyslexia. Just as Freire (1972) stated that education is not neutral, SpLD too is not a 'socially neutral label; its meaning is bound to political, educational, and social contexts, and to individual experiences' (Cameron and Billington 2017, p.1360).

In pursuing transformative research, which can be considered 'research that challenges mainstream and institutionalized findings, interpretations and paradigms', researchers can be described 'pejoratively as "advocates" rather than scholars' (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006, p.xvii). However, this concept of an advocate is one that I willingly adopt, I am an advocate for social justice and I am an advocate for research on social justice and critical pedagogy for SpLD tutors. This space of researcher/advocate can, as Banks cautions, be 'professionally risky but […][it] is

personally enriching because it makes a difference' (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006, p.xii). The transformative research framework could therefore be a space within which to accommodate the concept of being both a researcher and an advocate.

Kara (2015) cautions about using a transformative research framework in a non-ethical way. The term 'transformative', she argues, can sometimes be applied in research to pay lip service to concepts of inclusion and diversity. I do not want to glibly say that my research is transformative and thus fall into the lip service trap. In particular, I must think of the impact on participants who are also active SpLD tutors. This is particularly the case in terms of dealing with 'demands from participants' families and employers, among others' (Kara 2015, p.46). I would need to build into the research design that the inquiry circle times, locations and dates be suited the co-inquirers. While this was time consuming and sometimes meant that I had to meet with the co-inquirers on evenings and weekends, I felt that this flexibility was a good fit within the ethics of a transformative research framework.

4.8   Inclusive research

My view of my research process is that it can be interpreted from many different viewpoints and that this plurality is to be embraced. The 'big tent' of this research includes elements of inclusive research. Inclusive research places value on the communality between a range of approaches such as feminist, participatory, emancipatory, action research and so on (Nind 2014). A tenet of inclusive research, according to Walmsley and Johnson (2003, p.10), is that it 'involves people who may otherwise be seen as subjects for the research as instigators of ideas, research designers, interviewers, data analysts, authors, disseminators and users'. This is very much fits with the move away from research *on* people to research *with* people (Griffiths 1998). There has been a growing awareness, particularly in disability research, about involving participants in all stages of the research process, including data analysis (Nind 2016; Irairte, O'Brien and Chadwick 2014). In our study, each research participant was considered a collaborator across stages of the research process including the data analysis stage. I view each participant as a *co-inquirer*. We are all co-inquirers in that I am also an SpLD specialist in HE, albeit a co-inquirer who has had the opportunity to undertake doctoral research. A negative by-product of treating participants as 'research subjects' rather than co-inquirers would be that in so doing they would act 'as research subjects which is different from how they usually act' (Bogdan and Biklen 1982, p.43). The research methodology was also guided by Nind (2014, p.1) who views inclusive research as a 'democratization of the research process'. This democratisation of research is, one could say, social justice enacted within the research methodology itself.

Furthermore, such democratisation supports the ecological validity of the research, the 'extent to which data are based in and relevant to real-world settings' (Nnawulezi *et al.* 2019, p.4817). A way to achieve such ecological validity is by engaging with co-inquirers to determine what to study (as is seen in our choice of theorist for CIC 3) and by working together to find ways of analysing the research findings. Nnawulezi *et al.* (2019, p.4817) in their work with agencies that support survivors of domestic violence, viewed ecological validity as a way 'of conducting research that is likely to produce findings that are meaningful to communities'. This for me is social justice in action and I would hope that my research is also meaningful to the SpLD tutor community. While social justice theories are central to the research so too is the concept of transformative research through collaborative inquiry.

4.9 Collaborative Inquiry

The idea of collaborative inquiry resonates strongly with my research aims. Firstly, collaborative inquiry (CI) is where 'new meaning is created through dialogue and critical reflection on experience and actions taken out in the world' (Alcantara, Hayes and Yorks cited by Mezirow and Taylor, 2009, p.254). I really wanted to encourage dialogue as SpLD tutors rarely get the opportunity to discuss and reflect with each other. Collaborative inquiry is used predominantly in the United States for 'engaging teachers in professional learning' (DeLuca *et al.* 2017, p.67). Teachers have found CI beneficial because 'teachers inquired into their own problems of practice and used a research process that was relevant and meaningful to their daily work'(Donohoo and Velasco 2016, pp. 32–33). SpLD tutors are not teachers but they are educational professionals and as teaching professionals it is expected that we continue our professional development and learning. While CI is partially based on action research approaches, it has its own unique approach.

> CI rests on an evolving paradigm of inquiry that celebrates participation and democracy.
> [CI] honors a holistic perspective on what constitutes valid knowledge. Effective
> collaborative inquiry demystifies research and treats it as a form of learning that should
> be accessible by everyone interested in gaining a better understanding of his or her world.
> (Bray 2000, p.3)

It is this *democratisation* and *demystification* of research that is important to me. I want SpLD tutors to feel that they belong in a democratic research setting and that their views and discussions are valued. You do not have to have a PhD to discuss learning and your views of social justice! What I liked too about the origins of CI is that it draws upon the seminal work of Heron (1996) in qualitative participatory research methods where research participants organise

themselves into small groups to address a problem through constant cycles of reflection and action (Bray 2000).

As part of this continuation of participatory approaches, the co-inquirers would take part in 'member-checks' throughout the process where co-inquirers can share their thoughts of the research process as well as their analysis of the data they have created (as described by Hesse-Biber and Johnson 2016). Such an approach is helpful for qualitative researchers as it will can 'ensure that there is a good correspondence between their findings and the perspectives and experiences of their research participants' (Bryman 2004, p.274). This deepens the opportunities for reflection for both research and co-inquirers and supports the internal methodological basis of this research, research that is socially just, collaborative and inclusive. Furthermore, as part of this democratisation and demystification of research, this thesis has been written in an accessible style for a readership that includes the co-inquirers.

4.10   The shape of the research – Collaborative Inquiry Circles

Therefore, it was this idea of collaborative inquiry in a small group that I wanted to take forward for this research. I had initially considered using focus groups and spent some time researching focus group approaches. You can have a typical focus group of five to ten people which would be 'small enough for everyone to have opportunity to share insights and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions' (Krueger and Casey 2009, p.6). You can use focus groups for a wide range of methodologies and indeed Bryman (2004) argues that focus groups are particularly appropriate for those using feminist methodologies as there is more emphasis placed on group interaction. The intent is that of a 'collective conversation' (Ryan *et al.* 2014, p. 329). I was very taken with this idea of the collective conversation, this was what I wanted for my research. This sense of the collective conversation subsequently transformed into that of the Collaborative Inquiry Circle (CIC).

While researching focus groups, I had been thinking about shapes. Visual metaphors such as the bricolage quilt and the research star had helped steer my thinking about my methodology. As a dyslexia specialist, I had been trained to incorporate visual imagery into my work with learners as an aid for interpretation. There does not have to be a traditional, text-heavy approach. My 'aha' moment of incorporating 'shape' with my research occurred when I read about Collaborative Inquiry Circles (CICs) in Broderick *et al.* (2012). This paper details the research experiences of 'dually certified' inclusive educators in the New York primary school system (i.e. they are qualified to work with learners with and without disabilities). The majority of the research participants were recent graduates from a dual-certification programme who wanted the opportunity, post-

graduation, to *reflect* on concepts of inclusion and social justice. They viewed the collaborative inquiry circle in particular as a way to 'continue dialogue with colleagues who share similar experiences and challenges' with a particular emphasis on 'what it means for inclusive educators to teach for social justice […] to engage in socially just teacher preparation of inclusive education' (Broderick *et al.* 2012, pp.827–828).

Similar to SpLD teacher training courses in the UK, Broderick *et al.* (2012) were responding to a lack of discourse on social justice or on conceptual frameworks of disability and inclusion in the New York teacher training course. The research participants spent a year in discussion and debate on a series of theoretical and methodological texts. Participants spent a year reflecting on their experiences in reflective journals and identified one area in particular that they would like to pursue both on an individual and on a collective level. They found, through discussion with their fellow educators that they felt that their educational settings reinforce narrow binaries of able/disabled and reported feeling constrained by the systems around them. However, they also reported how they felt that 'discussions with fellow educators about social justice education gave […] the impetus to offer counternarratives. I was not alone' (Broderick *et al.* 2012, p.837). In particular, they felt strongly that teacher education tends to simply focus on the 'tools' needed for the classroom but not the theoretical tools needed to analyse and discuss the ideological systems that impact the classroom (Broderick *et al.* 2012). This resonates with the work of Pantić and Florian (2015) who advocate for teachers, especially teachers in training, to be given the theoretical tools in order come together to work collaboratively as agents of change. These tools can foster teacher approaches for 'inclusion and social justice, which in many places is likely to involve efforts to transform the structures and cultures, as well as acting as within them' (Pantić and Florian 2015, p.345).

While I felt that focus groups were indeed an important data collection method, I felt that CICs were a better fit for my research. CICs are a way for SpLD tutors to come together to work collaboratively together on theories and to afford people the opportunity for free dialogue. Freire (1996) too had also used the concept of the circle. His literary circles enabled participants to engage in dialogue and reflection. This process of dialogue and reflection leads to what Freire (1970) has famously described as 'conscientization' which can lead to a praxis of liberation. We chose to study Freirean ideas of critical pedagogy in the CICs and these ideas also formed part of the research methodology. My research is strongly guided by Freire's (1972, p.53) view that 'knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other'. This collaborative hopeful inquiry of theory is a crucial part in the rationale. As SpLD training courses do not offer core modules on theories of social justice or critical pedagogy these

circles could offer SpLD tutors the opportunity for inquiry in a safe space. In the next sections I detail how I created the CICs, who took part in the CICs, how they were recruited and what they discussed in the CICS.

4.11   Structure of the CICs

The CICs were envisaged therefore as safe research spaces to explore the experiences of SpLD practitioners when they engage with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy. As seen in the Participant Information Sheet in Appendix A, research participants were invited to take part in the CICs. I explained in advance to potential CIC participants that they would be given access to materials on social justice and critical pedagogy theories in a variety of formats (text/video/audio) and that everyone would be required to engage with a number of these materials before each CIC. I had envisaged that the CICs would take place as face-to-face meetings in the SpLD tutors' university setting (or online for the online participants) at the following times:

- Meeting 1: October- December 2019
- Meeting 2: January – March 2020
- Meeting 3: April – June 2020
- Meeting 4: July – September 2020 – participant coding
- Meeting 5: October – December 2020 – all collaborative inquiry circles meet up

These times however changed as the PhD progressed and was impacted by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is the actual schedule that we followed:

- CIC 1 meetings: October – December 2019 (1 hour)
  Two face-to-face meetings and one online meeting
- CIC 2 meetings: January – March 2020 (1 hour)
  One face-to-face meeting and two online meetings
- CIC 3 meetings: April – June 2020 (1 hour)
  Three online meetings
- Combined CIC meeting of all groups: June 2020 (1 hour)
  One online meeting
- Participant coding meeting
  Four individual meetings online

The initial meetings went over one hour, particularly for those in the online meetings.

4.12   Facilitating a CIC

There is not much guidance on how to facilitate a CIC unlike the plethora of information that is available on focus groups and interview methods. I turned to my prior knowledge for this – namely using mindfulness approaches. My MSc research was on the use of mindfulness approaches in one-to-one SpLD work in HE. Mindfulness draws on core concepts of Buddhism, namely that of developing an inquiring yet non-judgemental mind (Kabat-Zinn 2013). I had previous experience in mindfulness circles and to facilitate a mindfulness circle you need to incorporate four main concepts: stewardship, homiletics, guidance and inquiry (McCown 2013). Stewardship is the sense of making everyone feel welcome while homiletics (deriving from the Greek) is the term for friendly conversation so that everyone feels at ease. The facilitator then guides the circle so that people can engage in inquiry, an inquiry that is 'shared work, which no one owes or controls' (McCown 2013, pp.110–111). It is this sense of sharing without control and ownership that resonated with me and fit with the idea of inclusive research, of the research not been 'owned' by the researcher alone. Furthermore, as I was coming from the same background as the co-inquirers, I could ask questions that would resonate with them in that 'the academic training one has had affects the questions one brings to an area of inquiry' (Bogdan and Biklen 1982, p.44). I prepared a set of key questions that would act as a set of prompts for the circles (see example in Appendix D) but I also wanted the co-inquirers to feel free to bring their own questions, in keeping with a sense of 'shared' enquiry. I therefore felt that I had expertise in facilitating mindfulness circles which could work to bring the CIC into life. I would therefore apply the principles of facilitating a mindfulness circle to facilitating a series of CICs, each involving a group of SpLD tutors who may or may not be known to each other.

4.13   Contents of the CICs

I spent a year of this PhD researching materials that would be suitable to introduce SpLD tutors to more sociological theories of social justice in education. I was guided by the core goal to provide accessible materials to spark discussion and enable reflection on concepts of social justice and education. As discussed in Chapter 3, I decided to focus on Freire, Bourdieu, Giroux, hooks, Sen. I chose these theorists as, firstly, they are well-known in academia but are not so well known in the SpLD world, and, secondly, I felt that their ideas of resistance, inquiry, justice and societal reproduction could resonate well with the thirteen co-inquirers. What was so intriguing later on in

the research, was to see whose theories resonated most with the research participants and whose did not.

I wanted to create enough resources for three CIC meetings on three separate topics which could be spaced out evenly over the academic year. In collating the resources, I made sure that resources were in a variety of formats. As an SpLD practitioner, I am only too aware of how educational resources are usually only available to learners in text format. As someone with an interest in inclusion and accessibility, it would not be socially just if I 'required' the co-inquirers to read long pieces of text alone. It was interesting to note that this range of resources in different formats was later commented upon favourably by a co-inquirer (Ford) who has DCD/dyspraxia. I therefore accrued a range of journal articles, blogs, slide shares, videos, accessible secondary sources and book chapters. I made these materials available on a password-protected shared drive. You can access the contents of the CICs in Appendix C.

My plan was that participants would be free to choose whatever they wished to read/view before the CIC met. I did not want to dictate what we 'should' engage with, rather I wished to offer a range of theories and materials to enable discussion. The idea was not to provide a full in-depth MSc-level course on social justice and critical pedagogy, rather signpost the participants to theories which could then be discussed together. It was interesting to note that as the research progressed, this idea of 'choice' was negatively received by certain CICs and I was asked to provide more of a 'steer' for future CICs. They wanted to be told what to do!

The content of CIC 1 was themed 'Pedagogies of Resistance' and contained works by Freire, Bourdieu, hooks and Giroux. These pedagogies were divided into four folders:

- Social Capital Bourdieu
- Pedagogy of Repression Giroux
- Engaged Pedagogy hooks
- Critical Pedagogy Freire

These folders appear as shown in Figure 4 below:

My Drive > Collaborative Inquiry Circle 1 > Pedagogies of resistance ▾ ⚏

Folders   Name ↓

📁 Social Capital Bourdieu   📁 Pedagogy of repression Giroux

📁 Engaged pedagogy hooks   📁 Critical pedagogy Freire
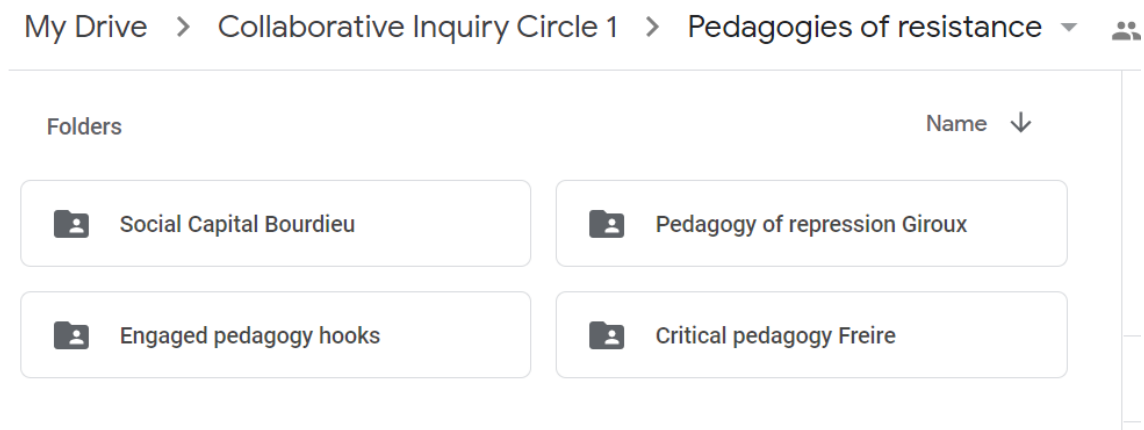
Figure 4 Folders for CIC 1

The second CIC was themed 'The Capability Approach' and focused on the work of Sen with a selection of secondary texts/videos/slide shares on the work of Sen. Unexpectedly, after each CIC, some co-inquirers from the different CICs shared further readings in group emails which I subsequently uploaded to the shared drive. I was happy that this happened as I wanted to make the CICs as dynamic as possible. Figure 5 below shows the layout of the CIC 2 folder.

My Drive > Collaborative Inquiry Circle 2 ▾ ⚏

Folders   Name ↓

📁 Journal Articles   📁 Info sheets and videos

📁 Book chapters
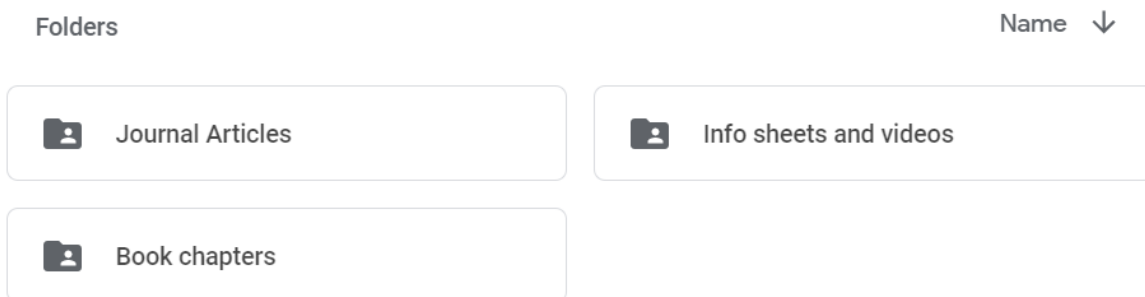
Figure 5 Layout of CIC 2

Based on feedback from the co-inquirers, I created a feminist theory theme for CIC3. I felt it important to respond to the feedback of the co-inquirers as this makes the research process more inclusive and responsive to their wishes. The third CIC focused on the work of Sara Ahmed and the intersection of feminist theory and diversity. Sara Ahmed writes a blog *Feminist Killjoys* which is very accessible as are her books and journal articles. I felt that this accessibility in tone as well as content would fit well with the co-inquirers. Figure 6 below demonstrates the layout of CIC 3 resources.
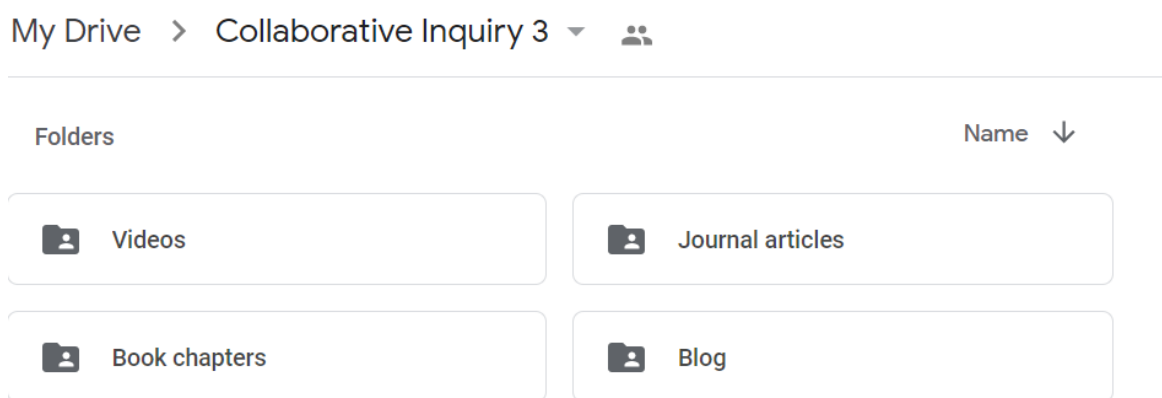
Figure 6 Layout of CIC 3

The questions for the CICs were shaped by what the co-inquirers had read/engaged with. Each co-inquirer was asked what they had read, what they had enjoyed, what they had not enjoyed and did they see any relevance to their own practice.

4.14   Recruitment and sampling

Recruitment was not a challenge for this research. This may not be typical but it speaks perhaps of the drive among some within the SpLD community to learn more about theories other than psychology (the co-inquirers all spoke within the CICs of how they valued the opportunity to learn and to engage in dialogue). Recruitment was through professional associations using inductive snowball research sampling (Lewis-Beck *et al.* 2004). Sampling in qualitative research is typically purposive rather than random (Miles *et al.* 2014) and this was especially the case in this research. I needed SpLD tutors to be part of the CICs as they had the 'special knowledge or experiences that are helpful for the study' (Krueger and Casey 2009, p. 204).

I was conscious of the work of Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012) who counsels researchers to be mindful of the socio-cultural context in which we carry out research. The socio-cultural context here is that of the SpLD specialist in HE, a sector that is predominately female (Fletcher 2020). All the research participants were female. The sample could be considered representative of the sector as a whole in terms of gender dynamics. However, I also needed research participants who were willing to give time and effort to the research as Collaborative Inquiry relies on participants to engage with ideas and materials. Therefore, the research sample required participants with an initial interest in social justice and critical pedagogy. Therefore, the sample is not representative of *all* SpLD tutors in UK HE, rather it is representative in some way of SpLD tutors in UK HE with an interest in learning more about theories of social justice and this was central to the research design. I also wanted the research participants to come from a mixture of self-employed and employed backgrounds which, as discussed in Chapter One, forms part of the precarious nature of

SpLD work in UK universities. The research participants in the CICs were a mix of self-employed or employed by institutions. Their HEIs were a mixture of Russell Group, post-92 and specialist subject institutions.

It was through a workshop that I had devised that I initially recruited research participants. I presented at the ADSHE 2019 Conference on theories of social justice and critical pedagogy. I devised a workshop on a tombola theme which was a fun and accessible way for practitioners to engage with these theories. I mentioned in the workshop that these theories were a core component of my PhD. After the workshop, I was approached by Ford who asked about my PhD research and stated that she would very much like to be involved. Ford subsequently recruited her colleagues Darcy, Catherine and Harriet. This is textbook snowball sampling where the 'identification of an initial subject [sic] is used to provide the names of other actors. These actors may themselves open possibilities for an expanding web of contact and inquiry' (Atkinson and Flint 2020, p.1044).

These four SpLD tutors all work together as a collective of freelance SpLD tutors in the north of England called Diversity Learning and I therefore called their CIC Diversity Learning. Ford is the head of the collective and they viewed this research project as opportunity to gain knowledge which could also be counted as Continuous Professional Development (CPD). SpLD professionals must gain a certain quota of CPD hours per year in order to work in the area. It was Ford who suggested that we meet online as these practitioners deliver most of their SpLD support online. When, later in the research, I had to move towards doing the remainder of the CICs online, this group of co-inquirers were unaffected by the move to online meetings as this was their normal way of working.

I subsequently presented this workshop on social justice and critical pedagogy for an ADSHE London event in the Central School of Speech and Drama. Again, I was asked by the workshop participants including Georgina and Jane if they could take part in the PhD research. I emailed the participants of the ADSHE workshop in London about potential participation in the research project and attached the consent forms and information sheets. I made it very clear that people could drop out at any time and that it was collaborative participation that was key. This became the basis for our London CIC which comprised five SpLD tutors.

My third CIC group belong to a university in the south of England. Shuri also took part in my ADSHE workshop on social justice and critical pedagogy and asked to be involved in the PhD research. I used snowball sampling again here. While snowball sampling is an informal method its value also lies in recruiting participants 'where higher levels of trust are required to initiate contact'. I felt that this concept of trust was important as trust helps with rapport which

subsequently can help facilitate dialogue. Shuri signposted me to three other colleagues in her university who were also interested in these topics and together these four tutors form part of the South of England CIC.

4.15   Ethics

I did not start immediately working with these SpLD tutors who had approached me as I was undergoing the Ethics approval process at the time. Going through the Ethics process was helpful as it helped me to reflect upon ways of working with co-inquirers. I felt it was crucial that the potential co-inquirers received full and frank information about the research (as advised by Brooks *et al.* 2014). However, I was concerned that I did not want to influence the co-inquirers unduly so I needed to reflect upon 'the extent to which one should be explicit about the aims and objectives of the study' (Brooks *et al.* 2014, pp.95–96). While I was impatient to start the research process, it was good to wait and reflect upon ethical issues such as informed consent as this led me to think about ethics 'reflexively, in a way that opens up - rather than closes down – a space for negotiation, questioning and dialogue' (Gallagher *et al.* 2010, p.473). I decided therefore to be open with the potential research participants and to also be open about the dynamic nature of the research – that their involvement was central to the process and this is what would shape the work.

Initially, for this research that I gave the co-inquirers the choice to use pseudonyms which I felt was in keeping with the inclusive and democratic nature of the research. The majority chose to use a pseudonym while others stated that they would like to use their own names. They felt strongly about the research and wanted to be identified with them. However, after discussion with supervisors and examiners, it was considered best to use pseudonyms for everyone. There would prevent concerns of risk to participant confidentiality and well-being. I went back to the co-inquirers and fed back that in order to safeguard everyone from potential risk, it would be best to use pseudonyms. I offered the co-inquirers the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms with a considerable number opting to use names of Jane Austen characters (there is a possible research project in its own right on the links between Jane Austen and SpLD specialists).

Dialogue is central to this research, whether it be about the dynamics of the research project, research ethics or social justice theories. I felt it was important to include the co-inquirers in dialogue on these matters. This emphasis on dialogue is encapsulated in a Buddhist quote that Kitty emailed me after our first South of England CIC:

> Dialogue is a positive endeavour. It builds solidarity and creates unity. To reject others only has negative repercussions. It invites division and leads to destruction. The point is to

meet and talk. It is only natural that our perspective may at times differ from that of
others. But dialogue gives rise to trust, even among those who don't see eye-to-eye'
(Ikeda, 2006)

For Kitty, the CICs had developed a sense of dialogue in a safe and trusting space. This is indeed
the endeavour that I hoped to foster in the ethical decisions taken to create the CICs.

4.16 Collaborative Inquiry Circles – people and practicalities

There were three CICs: one group in the south of England, one group in London and the Diversity
Learning group in the north of England. Initially, the south of England and London groups met
face-to-face while the northern group met online via Zoom. All of these thirteen co-inquirers were
SpLD tutors working in Higher Education. Some were people with SpLDs including dyslexia, ADHD
and dyspraxia. I asked the co-inquirers if they would like to write a short biography for this
research. Some were comfortable writing their own while others were happy for me to
contribute. I have compiled these biographies in the tables below. Text in italics signifies that it
was written by the co-inquirers themselves.

Table 2 South of England CIC
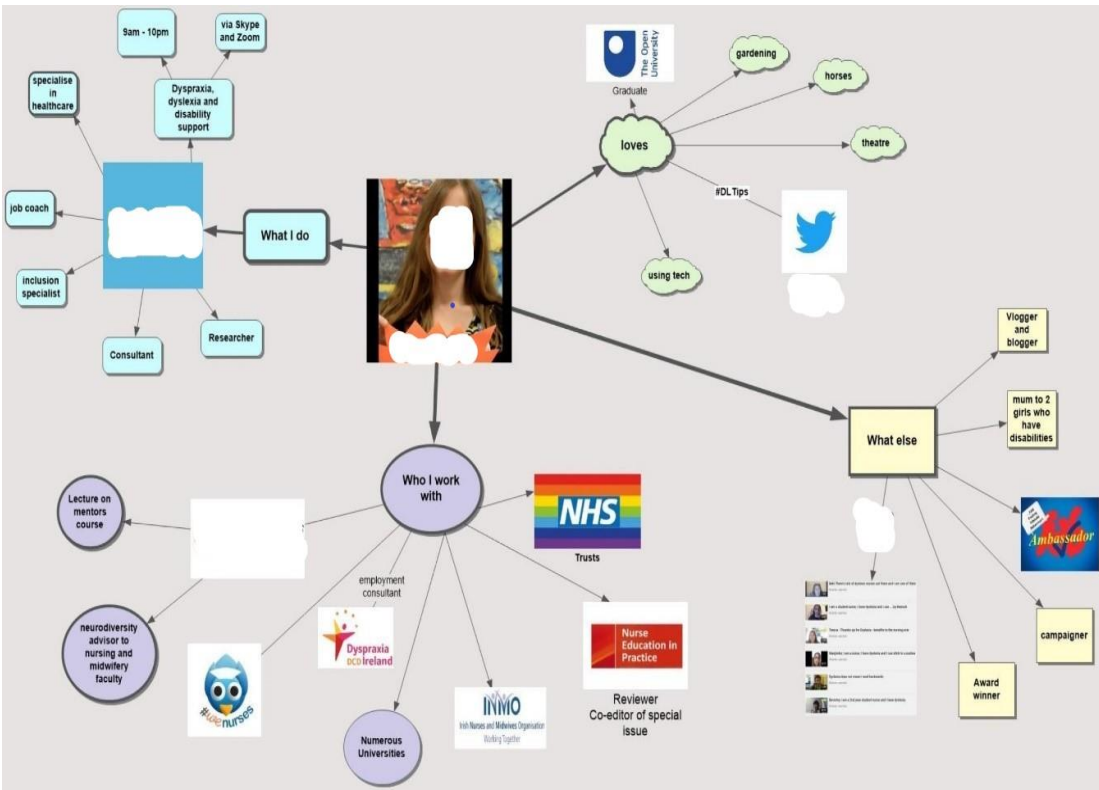
Name	Biography
Shuri	*Shuri reckons it was predestination that steered her journey into education, as both her parents, her grandfather and various combinations of relatives were/are teachers. She developed her pedagogical philosophy, however, through her first full time teaching position at a Quaker Primary School in Cambridge, MA. Here, she was mentored by an exceptional learning specialist and education activist, Merryl Pisha, who instilled a strong sense of equity in Shuri's teaching practice. Building on this, Shuri went on to teach at a Boston secondary preparatory school for students with learning differences. Becoming a parent reunited her with England (where she had received her MA in literature at the University of London, Royal Holloway years before) and her past experiences as a teacher led her to pursue her PGCE in specific learning difficulties. She has worked in HE for the past thirteen years and wonders where the time has gone!*

Mary	Mary is from the UK. Like Shuri, she had been a primary school teacher. Mary is dyslexic and disagreed with the way that literacy was being taught to children. 'Things were not being inclusive for the kids in my class. And I was being taught to teach in ways that I didn't agree with and you know, and I could see the impact it was having on the kids'. Mary left primary education and subsequently retrained as an SpLD tutor. She is very interested in the work of Freire.
Eliza	*I always wanted to work with books and settled on an English Literature degree which I followed with training as a TEFL teacher and a year and a half teaching English in Poland. In the early 90s I did a secondary PGCE in English and taught this age range until 2000, when I stopped for a couple of years and marked GCSE English papers to keep my hand in. I had a brief foray with Primary teaching when I did a six month Return to Teaching course in 2004 but settled on teaching GCSE English retake classes at a local Sixth Form. This led to English teaching at a medium secure adolescent mental health unit where I learnt a lot about vulnerability and de-escalation plus gaining a renewed interest in specific learning difficulties. I signed up to do a Masters in Dyslexia: MSc in Education (SpLDs) in 2013. I then got a job with an FE college as a Skills Development lecturer with a focus on working with students with particular needs, as well as assessing for exam access arrangements. I also work as a Study Skills tutor with HE students as well as doing exam arrangements at a local secondary school.*
Kitty	Kitty is from the UK. She had worked as a sign-language interpreter before moving into SpLD support. She is also a practising Buddhist and incorporates mindfulness approaches into her work. Kitty is a parent of a neurodiverse child and is one of the managers in the SpLD support unit at her university.

Chapter 4

Table 3 London CIC

Name	Biography
Georgina	*Georgina is a dyslexia support tutor and lecturer on a PGCert in Creative Education. She has been compiling an Inclusivity Guide for PGCert students and staff for several years. At the heart of this is the drive for social justice.*
Emma	Emma is an SpLD tutor with a deep interest in the intersectionality of race on SpLD support. She would like to see more diverse representation within the SpLD tutor/assessor community particularly those from African, Caribbean and Asian backgrounds.
Leticia	Leticia moved to the UK from the US over 20 years ago. She received training in dyslexia support from her university and now does both SpLD support and general academic study skills support.
Jane	*From a background in Linguistics and Primary Education, Jane began supporting neurodiversity in Higher Education in 2007. She is currently a specialist study skills tutor for the University of X, London, and the School of X where she is trialling small group support and developing a bank of self-help resources. Jane also provides long-term support to PhD students in the creative and therapeutic arts and is a part-time short prose and flash fiction writer. Her Advance HE Fellowship study, Fostering Criticality and Confidence in Neurodivergent Students' Academic Reading and Writing is published in the Autumn 2020 issue of The Journal of Neurodivergent Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.*
Fanny	Fanny is an SpLD tutor with extensive experience in working with adults with SpLDs.

Table 4 Diversity Learning CIC

Name	Biography
Ford	Ford chose to give her biography in the form of a mind map.
Darcy	*My responses/experiences / comments during the collaborative circle sessions were informed by me being:* • *a woman* • *first in family to go to Uni* • *from a working-class background* • *mature student (33 when studied)* • *retired health care professional (midwife)* • *current SpLD specialist tutor for 15 years (7 years freelance)* • *a gay woman - and/so/but/therefore (insert as you wish) a feminist perspective was of particular interest*
Catherine	*I currently work as an online study skills tutor for students with neurodiversity, teaching English as a foreign language and as an artist. Two years ago, I moved to Spain, as my husband is from Huesca. We live near the Pyrenees and farm a few almond and olive trees close to his family home. I'm originally from Leicestershire although I studied ceramics in London and then settled in the Southwest. I worked in community education in pottery night classes and family learning. Then, after my PGCE for adults 2005, I went straight into SpLD, ASC and MH student support with University of X students, which has been my main type of*

	work since then. In recent years, I have volunteered as a children's meditation teacher, and also language assistant for refugees learning English.
Harriet	Harriet has worked as a teacher in primary, secondary and now in SpLD support in HE/FE. She was initially a student who was supported by the Diversity Learning group! Harriet identifies as neurodiverse.

There was one other CIC in the south of England but the participants had difficulty meeting. There were five members in this group but for the first initial meeting all five dropped out. We held our first CIC in February 2020 (the first CICs for the other groups had started in November 2019). Logistical issues intervened again with these co-inquirers unable to meet for a second CIC until later in the academic year. This substantial delay to the research would negatively impact on the ability of the other groups to come together to meet as a collective. I therefore decided to discontinue the CIC in the south of England but to still afford these co-inquirers access to the materials about the theorists in the shared drive.

The remaining CICs met three times to discuss the different theories. In June 2020, all three CICs came together to meet online. This was a very special opportunity for us to discuss the theories we have studied and shared the experiences and potential impacts of engagement with theory. I had initially envisaged that we would meet up in a central location but due to Covid-19 restrictions, we met online. Eleven of the thirteen co-inquirers attended the online meeting. Meeting online was actually a more accessible way of conducting the meeting rather than finding a central location where people would have to travel to attend.

4.17   Covid-19 Pandemic

The UK introduced a lockdown on 24 March 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This lockdown was a measure to reduce the spread of the coronavirus and included restrictions on movement and meetings. The safety and well-being of both the researcher and the co-inquirers would have been compromised by meeting face-to-face. Therefore, following an amendment to the ethics protocol, information sheets and consent forms, I moved the face-to-face CICs to online meetings. The London and south of England CICs had been meeting face-to-face and had completed two sessions each. Before the lockdown was implemented, I asked these co-inquirers from the London CICs and the south of England CICs if they would be amenable to the option of doing research online. While some of the co-inquirers in London stated that they would prefer to

meet face-to-face they were not opposed to meeting online. The UK subsequently entered into lockdown and face-to-face meetings were no longer viable.

Three co-inquirers were not used to using online technologies. I sent them instructions on how to use Zoom and also offered to do 'practice runs' with them. There was no need to carry out the practice runs in the end but they did state that they found the instructions useful (not least as it helped them transition to using Zoom in their own SpLD work with students). I reiterated to the co-inquirers that they were free to leave the project at any time just like as in face-to-face research.

My immediate thoughts at the start of the pandemic echoed that of Kara (2020b) namely 'does this research need doing – or does it need doing now, in the middle of a global collective trauma?' It was a very uncertain time and I was concerned about asking the co-inquirers to continue as I did not want to cause them unnecessary difficulty. However, while this was a difficult time for all of us, we did find comfort in coming together online and the co-inquirers said that the CICs provided interesting avenues of discussion in the middle of the general awfulness. Liegghio and Caragata (2021) also found that this sense of coming together online was of great benefit to their research participants, young people who were particularly adversely affected by the isolation that occurred due to social distancing measures in their communities. I had not expected that the CICs would be a source of solace. However, it is clear that Covid-19 has caused both medical and social upheaval in our lives (Teti *et al.* 2020). It was notable therefore that the online meetings in our CICs were seen as supportive space for the co-inquirers especially at the start of the first lockdown.

Covid-19 did impact my research but unlike my peers who were conducting research in schools, we were able to easily change from face-to-face meetings to remote meetings. We had already been conducting one CIC group online. Chatha and Bretz (2020) have concerns about the impacts of changing from face-to-face to remote research interviews especially in terms of reliability and validity of data. However, I feel that we had already been used to a combination of data acquired from both online and face-to-face CICs. We had already established a collaborative connection from the face-to-face CICs which enabled a successful transfer to online CICs. I felt that I was able to facilitate the online CICs quite well. I had over five years' experience of working remotely, as had the members of the Diversity Learning CIC. I used the skills I had acquired from teaching remotely, such as use of body language – smiling, nodding, frowning, hand gestures – which all contribute to what Develotte (2018) refers to as telepresence, your presence in the online space. I feel these skills helped me facilitate the online CICs as a welcoming space for inquiry.

An unexpected positive to take from the impact of Covid-19 was that co-inquirers did not have to travel to take part in the CICs. Online CICs were by far more immediately accessible. This was

particularly helpful for our final CIC where all the different CIC groups came together. I would not have thought to do this online before the pandemic. Brown (2021) found that conducting research online was highly beneficial for disabled research participants particularly as it afforded greater flexibility in taking part. There were less concerns about barriers to engagement such as travel. This was also true of our research especially for our co-inquirers who had mobility issues. Covid-19 has changed us and our lives but we were able to navigate our way throughout these changes and produce research together.

4.18   Collaboration as social justice

At the beginning of this PhD I had written

> *I applied to do a PhD because of my belief in social justice and I need to channel this belief into my writing. [...] I believe in the rights of learners who learn differently and I also believe in giving voice to those of us who are part of the community of SpLD specialists.*

> (Reflection 4 *Get Off the Fence*)

I felt that it was the socially just thing to do to embed not just the views but the analysis too of the SpLD tutors into this research. I wanted to give the co-inquirers the opportunity to analyse what *they* said in the circles, to reflect upon what they have learnt and discuss possible transformative impacts. This follows the collaborative data analysis practice of Nind and Vinha (2014) who carried out group analysis sessions as the culmination of a series of focus groups. Such co-analysis is part of the process of 'democratising' the research process, a process that is out of reach for many SpLD tutors. I hoped that this continual interaction/negotiation with data will open up the research process for the tutors and also 'demystify' the research process. Other researchers have commented on how collaborative approaches to writing and interpretation have a positive impact on research work (Robinson-Pant and Singal 2020, p. 871). Working collaboratively is also in keeping with a bricolage approach. A melding of different voices means that 'heterogeneous elements can (must) be brought together, that no one authorial voice predominates' (Handforth and Taylor 2016, p.18). SpLD tutors rarely engage in research and this would be an opportunity to put their hands into the data analysis. Working collaboratively is becoming increasingly common in qualitative research and is very usual in indigenous research (Kara 2015). A further aspect of collaborative research is that it helps to reduce unconscious bias and other negative impacts such as competing agendas (Kara 2020a).

However, I am mindful too of my place within the research and the positions that I hold. I am an SpLD specialist in HE but ultimately as I am the leader in the research project, I hold multiple positions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1994). I was therefore mindful of the different power relationships that could occur within the research (Aluwihare-Samaranayake 2012). However, I took the view of Carroll (2009) that I am an 'alongsider', a researcher working with and alongside SpLD tutors and working to place a 'shared lens on the practice' (Nind and Lewthwaite 2018). I tapped into this feeling of being an 'alongsider' to help me with managing what to leave out and what to leave in when it came to collating and analysing the data.

In my discussions with the co-inquirers, I explained the use of thematic analysis in research as 'identifying and interpreting, or "extracting" patterns of meaning from data' (Mackieson *et al.* 2019, p.969). This sense of pattern making links bring me back again to the quilt metaphor. The image of the quilt (Figure 7) fits with the concept that 'thematic analysis involves a number of choices … these questions should be considered before analysis (and sometimes even collection) of the data begins(Braun and Clarke 2006, pp.81–82).
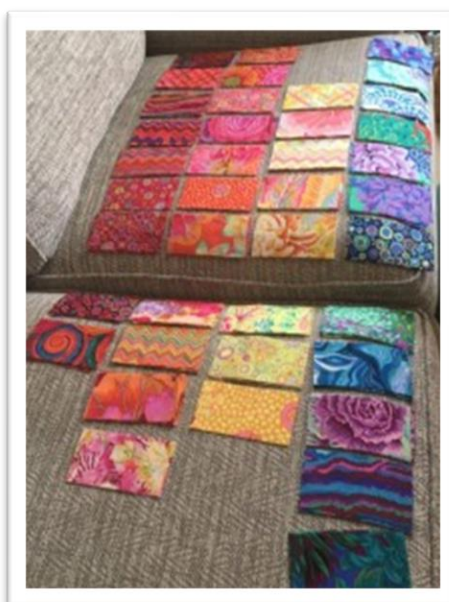
Figure 7 Making patterns

4.19   After the CICs: questionnaires and analysis

When the CICs had finished, I emailed all the co-inquirers a short feedback questionnaire. This was a questionnaire with seven open-ended questions. I wanted to give the co-inquirers as much an opportunity as possible to share their thoughts. I chose this method as I felt questionnaires are useful as a method that was different to CIC dialogue and in particular 'questionnaires can be

useful for collecting information about behaviors that are not directly observable' (Artino et al. 2014, p.464). It was notable how open the co-inquirers had been in the CICs and there had been much sharing of beliefs and attitudes. However, in case there had been opportunities that I had missed in gathering everyone's contributions, I wanted to use a feedback questionnaire in case there was anything else that people wanted to share or found helpful.

I created the questionnaires drawing on recommendations that questionnaires should be based on observational and ethnographic approaches (Cohen *et al.* 2018). Therefore, I kept the questionnaires focused on our research questions while keeping the questions open-ended. I chose to use open questions as I wanted to ensure that co-inquirers could 'write a free account in their own terms, to explain and qualify their responses and avoid the limitations of pre-set categories of response'(Cohen *et al.* 2018, p.476). Four of the thirteen co-inquirers responded and these questionnaire responses form part of the data analysis.

4.20   Approach to data analysis

I have been guided by Johnny Saldana's approach to qualitative data analysis. According to Saldana *et al.* (2011, p.96) 'coding is a heuristic – a method of discovery – to the meanings of individual sections of data'. I am very much taken with this view of coding as discovery as Piaget-influenced discovery learning is something we emphasise in SpLD work. Using this viewpoint of coding as discovery, we used Saldana's method of First Cycle coding and Second Cycle coding (Miles *et al.* 2014). We viewed First Cycle coding as a way to 'summarize segments of data' (Miles *et al.* 2014, p.86). In our discussions we have talked about codes as the following:

> Prompts or triggers for deeper reflection on the data's meaning. Coding is thus a data condensation task that enables you to retrieve the most meaningful material, to assemble chunks of data that go together, and to further condense the bulk into readily analysable units (Miles *et al.* 2014, p.73).

We have made choice in our analysis of working inductively in the first cycle to be open to 'discovering' what themes unfold for us in the first cycle. This is based on Charmaz's (2006, p. 14) constructivist grounded theory approaches where 'first you view a broad sweep of the landscape. Subsequently you change your lens several times to bring scenes closer and closer into view'. While this is not a grounded theory research project, I wanted us to stay open to discovery by working inductively. By doing the coding in this way, we are establishing the 'bones' of the data analysis which I can then assemble into a 'working skeleton' (Charmaz 2006, p. 45).

In the second cycle of coding, I then worked deductively from the research question:

What happens when Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) tutors in Higher Education engage collaboratively with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy?

Joffe (2012 p.210) argues that it is good practice to use both deductive and inductive approaches as 'one goes to the data with certain preconceived categories derived from theories, yet one also remains open to new concepts that emerge'.

As a former technical writer and as someone who uses Assistive Technology in my SpLD work, I am not 'afraid' to work with technology. Equally, I am a fan of coding by hand. The tactile nature of holding the research in my hand helps me to visualise how I want to place the data. It helps me to 'see' it which may be due to my own dyspraxic traits! I wanted to offer the co-inquirers the opportunity to use both approaches. The benefit of Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) is that 'selected programs can visually display which code you've assigned to which chunk of data through clear, at-a-glance graphics' (Miles *et al.*, 2014, p.48). CAQDAS is also useful in terms of data management. I have a large amount of research data from ten CIC meetings, and each meeting is between 60-120 minutes. This fits with Bryman's (2004, p.399) view that 'one of the main difficulties with qualitative research is that it very rapidly generates a large, cumbersome database'. I would hesitate to call my precious research data 'cumbersome' but it could be difficult and time consuming to navigate through.

I therefore wanted to investigate using CAQDAS and I did training in both NVivo software and Quirkos software and reflected

> *I got to meet with the chaps who do Quirkos software and they very kindly gave me a demo on how to use it. It also helped me refine my thinking a little more about how we do research. I want my participants to be involved in the data analysis process and whether or not we do it by hand or electronically doesn't matter, what does matter is the collaboration and the giving voice to those of us hidden away in the crevices of Higher Education. (Reflection 10 Summer reflection)*

Ultimately, I felt that Quirkos software was the best fit for this research. Firstly, it is very intuitive to use – each theme or 'quirk' appears as a coloured bubble and the drag-and-drop functionality is quick to acquire. Secondly, Quirkos is geared towards collaboration; a cloud version means data can be accessed remotely and easily shared within a group. This was very useful in these Covid times where many people were working from home and possibly unable to access their workplace desktop software. Furthermore, Quirkos is fully GDPR compliant with their storage on UK servers. I was also taken with the synchronicity of the name Quirkos. It comes from the Greek word for

circle 'kirkos' and 'qu' for qualitative which 'represents the Qualitative Bubbles (Quirks) that are central to the interface' (Quirkos 2021).

4.21   Coding the circles

I was initially somewhat overwhelmed by the amount of data that I needed to code for this research. The co-inquirers had taken part in 10 CICs in total. There were three CICs for each group and one final CIC where all the groups came together to reflect on our experiences. I had written 18 reflections throughout my PhD which I have interwoven with the CIC data. This was my own 'thread' of an SpLD tutor and an evolving researcher. As discussed earlier in this chapter, I felt it important to develop my own reflexivity as a researcher to observe my own process of observation. Writing my own reflections throughout the process was very helpful in tracing the evolution of my thoughts as a researcher and the difficulties at times of being a doctoral researcher as well as supporting the co-inquirers while also staying part of the 'SpLD tutor' clan.

Four co-inquirers coded their contributions to their CICs, which I subsequently analysed as part of the second cycle of coding. Looking back at one of my reflections at the time, I stated

> *I am experiencing a bit of an analysis paralysis […] – I LOVE it but I am also feeling slightly*
> *swamped* (Reflection 15 *Analysis and ALDI).*

It was hard to know where to start. I initially divided the data into separate blocks as follows:

- CICs (online recordings)
- My own reflections (written text)
- Feedback questionnaires (written text)
- Co-inquirers' analysis (Quirkos analysis)

I started my analysis with the CICs. I had been working on the transcription of the CICs from the beginning of the fieldwork. This was approximately 20 hours of online recordings to work with. As a workaround, I had initially planned to use Otter.ai, an automated transcription service. However, I was concerned about data storage issues for GDPR and there was not full accuracy in the transcription. I then turned to a professional academic transcription service who transcribed half the data for me while I transcribed the rest. I am mindful though that transcription is 'fraught with slippage; it is dependent on the knowledge and skill of the transcribing person' (Miles *et al.* 2014, p.71). I checked back over the transcriptions that had been completed by the professional company and while they did make (understandable) errors with my name and some of the names of the theorists, they did a good job.

Transcription coding was an initial step to help me develop hierarchies of codes and themes. This is an example of transcription coding from CIC3 with the Diversity Learning group in Figure 8.

Figure 8 Example of transcription coding

I found it helpful to associate colours with my initial themes. Perhaps this speaks to my own experiences as a researcher with dyspraxic traits but I found the colour coding to help me work out my hierarchies without getting too overwhelmed. Here is an example below of themes and their associated colours (see Figure 9).

Figure 9 Example of associated themes and colours

I then applied the same process of transcription coding and then linking colours with themes to my reflections, the feedback questionnaire responses and the co-inquirers analysis. These supported me to move onto developing a hierarchy of themes and codes which was really helpful for my Second Cycle of coding.

4.22   Second Cycle coding

In this next stage, Second Cycle coding, I needed to group these codes into smaller categories or patterns. These patterns help to identify emergent themes and can be viewed 'as a sort of meta code' (Miles *et al.* 2014, p.86). Saldana (2011) advocates the use of reflexivity in the research process particularly using analytical memos. In my own reflections I had written:

> *Bourdieu talks about being a reflexive researcher and about acknowledging where you the*
> *researcher are in the research process. There is no 'epistemological innocence' but you*
> *have to be 'real' so to speak about your position in the data collection process and so on.*
> *(Reflection 7 La misère du monde)*

To be that reflexive researcher, I therefore need to be honest about how difficult I found moving from the First to Second cycles of coding and the judgements I needed to make to meld codes together.

I think it is important to keep in mind that 'all coding is a judgement call since we bring our subjectiveness, our personalities, our predispositions [and] our quirks to the process' (Sipe and Ghiso 2004, pp. 482–483). This helped me reflect on the 'shape' I was bringing to the research analysis. Quirky, difficult-to-define themes emerged quite strongly in the second coding phrase. (Saldana *et al.* 2011, p. 207) describe this second coding cycle as a 'metasynthesis of the data corpus' where all the categories collide. Some of my original codes changed in this second cycle and I found myself having to take time to sit with the data. This is the stage that Saldana et al. (2011, p.58) refer to as requiring skills in 'classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building'.

Coding was uncomfortable; it was difficult. This is again the 'sweaty labour' of research that I found in the work of Ahmed (2017). What helped me through this period was delving back into the research again such as listening back to the recordings of the CICs. In Chapter 5, I discuss more about 'listening' to the stories and it was this sense of the 'story' that really helped me with my analysis. There was a story in the CICs, a story in the reflections, a story in the feedback responses and a story in the analysis created by the co-inquirers. It was when the story began to 'collide' that I felt I was getting somewhere.

While 'listening to the story' was important, another influence was bringing a 'shape' to my second coding cycle. This was due to teaching! I had started (at the last minute) teaching an online module on inclusion and SEN in the University of Limerick in Ireland. I had to find a way to explain quite complex ideas in an accessible way to pre-service teachers. This led me to reflect on my own research and to think more about how I could narrow down the complexities in my codes. I began to think about putting a shape onto these codes — a shape to help tell their stories. This where I returned to the trope of the circle, of returning to the circle and letting the story unfold within a circular narrative, of returning to its original beginning.

I also had to 'get physical' with the research. I printed out key codes and cut them into strips. I had to 'feel' the research and move them around like building blocks. I am someone with dyspraxic traits and we use such multisensory techniques in SpLD work itself. Guba and Lincoln (1994) refer to how researchers use a variety of means to get a 'feel' for their data and in my case I literally had to see, feel and move the data in order to see where the categories lay (see Figure 10 below).
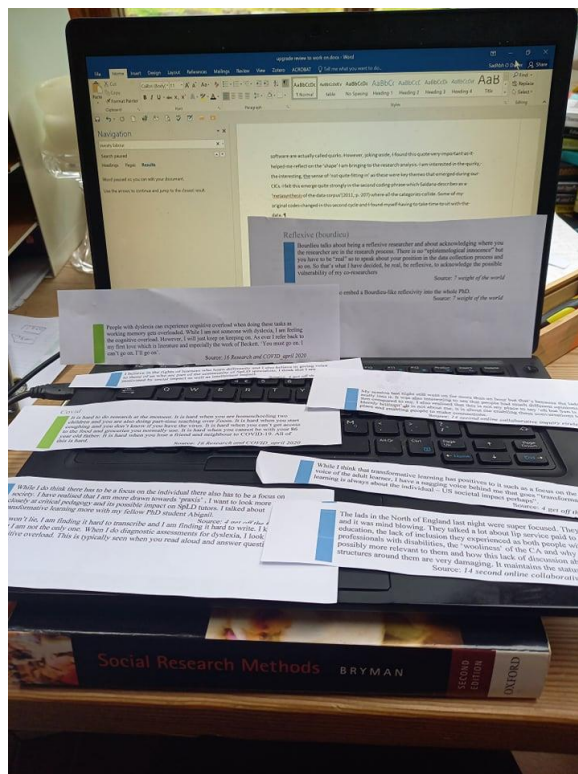
Figure 10 Getting a 'feel' for the research

To support the judgement calls needed for the second cycle of coding analysis, I took up

Charmaz's (2006, p.51) recommendation that you ask questions of your research. Engaging in

such criticality 'forces asking yourself questions about your data. These questions help you to see

actions and to identify significant processes'. To help me develop this trait, I turned to Boudah's

(2011, p.231) recommended questions to delineate themes more finely, namely 'Which

categories belong together? Why do they belong together? What makes them similar in some

way yet unique? How do the characteristics of a category interact?' This was a transformative

moment for me in my own learning as a researcher, a moment that gave me confidence in my

own sense of being an embodied researcher (I discuss my own transformative learning in the later

chapters). Furthermore, it was this process of asking myself questions – often questions to which I

did not want to know the answer as it would invariably mean more 'sweaty labour' – and sitting

with the themes, feeling and seeing the data, that led me to narrow down my research findings to

key themes and codes, starting with the initial overriding themes of tyranny, resistance and rage.

Here is an example of hierarchies that I created and it is interesting to see how some of these

hierarchies subsequently evolved into headings that I have used in this thesis text (see Figure 11).
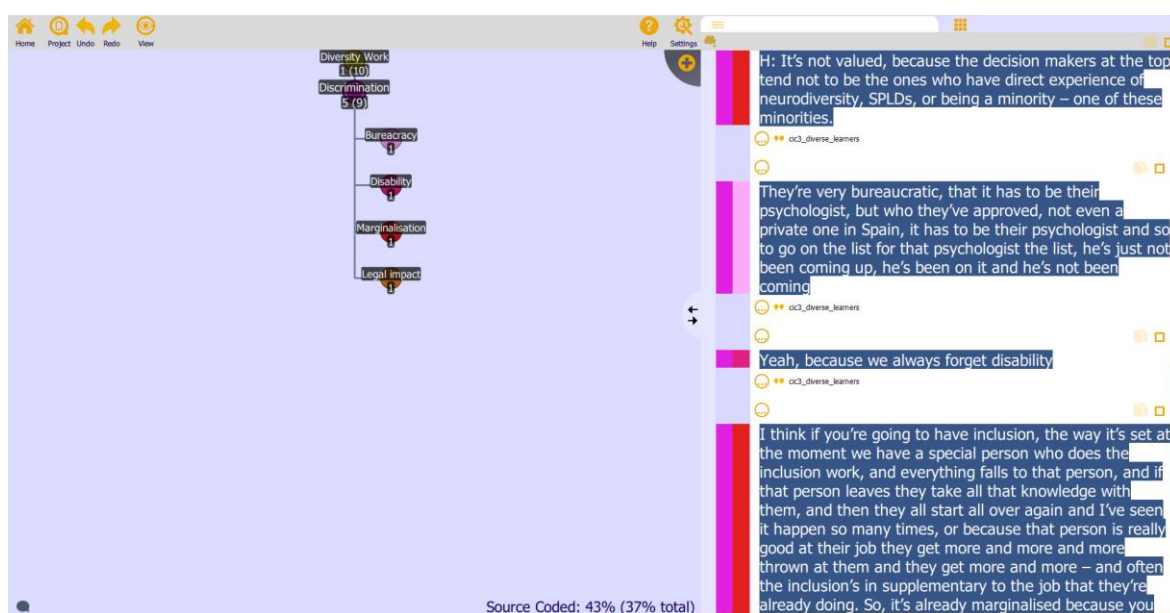
Figure 11 Example of hierarchy of codes

4.23 Co-inquirers' analysis

In our final joint CIC, we discussed our experiences of the CICs and whether we would like to take our experiences further such as possibly writing about our research journey. Some co-inquirers had expressed a desire to do this which is very exciting. It had been made clear to all the tutors throughout the research that there would be an opportunity to do collaborative data analysis. At the final CIC, I asked which of the co-inquirers would like to do analysis of their own contributions. Of the thirteen tutors, eight volunteered to do analysis.

I was mindful of the impact on the co-inquirers especially in terms of doing analysis in their precious free time. All the co-inquirers worked extremely hard providing support during the lockdown (some found that their workloads increased). However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of the tutors were staying at home rather than taking a holiday away. Remote working has now become the norm and the tutors were very open to doing data analysis at home instead of the planned data analysis together as a group in a face-to-face setting. Circumstance forced my hand in turning towards doing analysis remotely but perhaps this has helped me in affording access to analysis for tutors who otherwise might not have been involved. I offered the tutors the choice between analysing their contributions manually or electronically. They all asked to get training on using CAQDAS.

Quirkos was created by an academic with an interest in collaborative qualitative research – Dr Daniel Turner. I explained my research project to Daniel and he very kindly gave the co-inquirers free access to Quirkos Cloud for one month. I did one-to-one training with each co-inquirer on thematic analysis and coding. As one co-inquirer, Darcy, said to me 'this is very brave of you'. I do

not feel that this is brave, rather I feel that this is a crucial part of any research project, that you give your participants the opportunity to be involved in data analysis. After each training session, I sent each co-inquirer a transcript which they could upload to Quirkos and then code their contributions in the CICs.

I expected to see descriptive coding which is 'primarily nouns that simply summarize the topic of a datum' (Saldana *et al.*, 2011, p.104). However, it was interesting to see that the co-inquirers did more values coding which is the 'values, attitudes and beliefs of a participant'(Saldana *et al.* 2011, p.105). We can see this in the figure below. It is interesting to note that the co-inquirer, Jane, has even created a 'quirk' named *beliefs and values*. In Jane's analysis, the sense of isolation and marginalisation was a very strong theme which fitted with our discussions earlier in the CICs (see example 12 below).
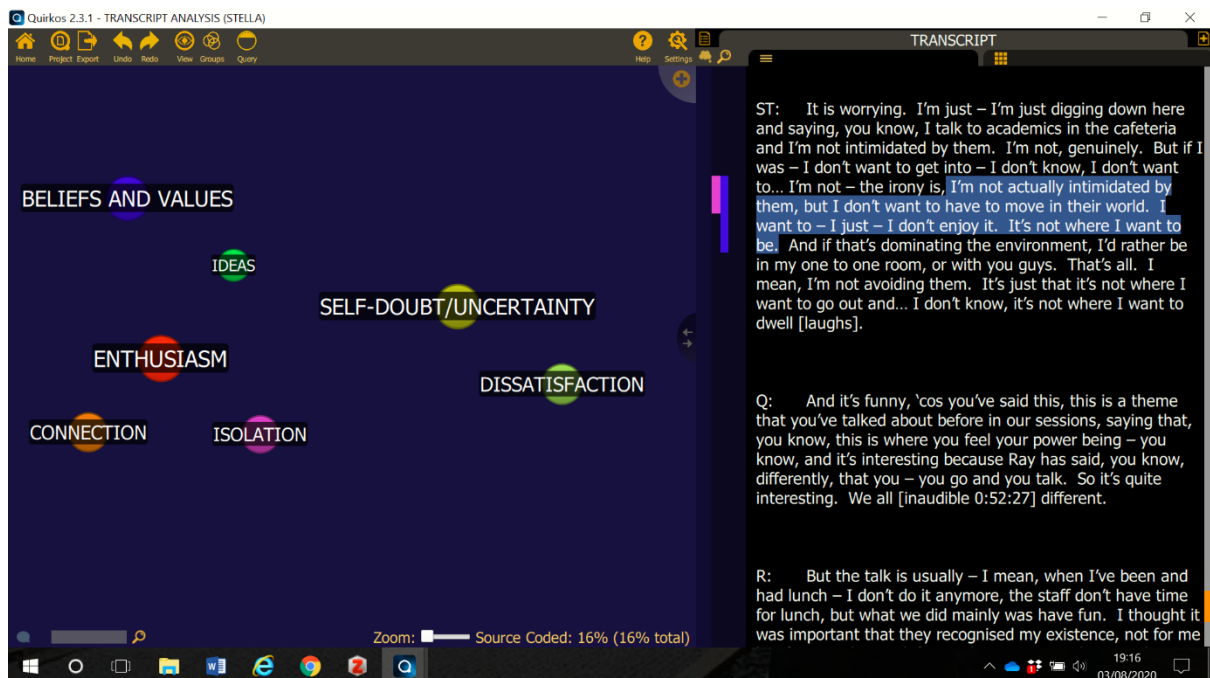
Figure 12 Values coding from Jane

4.24   Chapter summary

My research methods and methodology were heavily influenced by visual metaphors such as that of the bricoleur-quilter and the circles that shape our stories — a creation comprised of diverse patterns and fabrics. The underlying fabric here is that of qualitative research and the different threads of inclusion, reflexivity and transformation that thread these circles all together. I also return to Luttrell's (2010) image of qualitative research as an origami star. This star shows how the research process itself is dependent on research relationships. It is these relationships that are central to this research – the relationships created with the co-inquirers through CICs both face-

to-face and online as well as the connections that the co-inquirers have made with the social justice theories. A reflexive bricoleur research methodology enables such relationships to occur where the researcher takes the time to 'bend back' to examine her/his research approaches (Zienkowski 2017). I have not hidden the 'sweaty labour' that it takes to bend back over one's research approaches not least when conducting research in a global pandemic (Ahmed 2017). However, it is has been this labour that has taken me to use the model of CICs which fits within a transformative and inclusive research framework. Moreover, it would only be glib 'lip service' to transformative research to create a framework that did not hold social justice values at its centre (Kara 2015). Denzin's (2010) famous analogy of the 'big tent' of qualitative research put social justice as the central pole that unifies researchers. Social justice theories are the focus of this research and I therefore I aim for a socially just research methodology, one that is dynamic to respond to the co-inquirers needs and one that I hope can be transformative both in terms of research methodologies and in terms of research impacts.

Finally, I stress that the data analysis in this PhD was very much 'our' data analysis. It was envisaged from the start that the co-inquirers and I would work together on the research data as much as possible. While Covid-19 had an impact on how I conducted this research, it has made us more accustomed to working remotely and therefore more at ease in working remotely on data analysis.

Chapter 5   Research Findings: Writing the Circles

5.1   Introduction

> Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because
> there are stories inside and between stories and finding your way through them is as
> easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you
> are lost you start to open up and listen (Tafoya 1995, p. 12).

Terry Tafoya is an indigenous researcher and this quote has been central to my analysis of my
research findings – of listening to the stories that emerged often not in ways that I expected!
When there were times that I felt 'lost' in the data I came back to the central concept of this
research, that of the CIC as a welcoming space for shared inquiry and that in this welcoming
space, the stories of the co-inquirers did go in circles. Therefore, in order to 'find the findings'
from these circles, from my own observations and from the data analysis completed by my co-
inquirers, I had to 'listen' to the stories that were being told by co-inquirers and myself. I had to
embrace the circular narrative.

Therefore, this chapter comprises circles within circles. There were three separate groups who
took part in three distinct CICs. The three groups came together in one final CIC to discuss their
overall views of taking part in CICs and some co-inquirers went on to analyse their own research
data. Four co-inquirers completed a feedback questionnaire. The key stories that emerged from
these ten circles were experiences of oppression and resistance. The co-inquirers subsequently
linked these experiences to their readings of Giroux, Bourdieu, Sen, hooks, Freire and Ahmed.

The thread that weaves these circles together is my own reflexive analysis from fieldwork notes
and diary entries and these 'sew' the circles together. I liken this reflexive analysis to a reflexive
'thread' and this thread is in italics throughout this chapter. In this way I strive to adhere the
authenticity of the research experience, an authenticity that, according to Berger (1992, pp. 216–
217) 'comes from a single faithfulness: that to the ambiguity of experience. Its energy is to be
found in how one event leads to another. Its mystery is not in the words but on the page.' In this
chapter however, the starting event is that of resistance.

5.2   Tyranny, Resistance and Rage

Resistance against the 'tyranny of academia' is a phrase that comes from Emma (London CIC). This
sense of 'tyranny' was very present in the initial CICs and cut across all three groups. For the co-

inquirers, the tyranny came in two forms: tyranny for the students and tyranny in how SpLD tutors are treated. The co-inquirers also spoke strongly of the emotions they experienced – mostly that of anger about these situations. Throughout the CICs, the co-inquirers spoke at length of oppressive practices that either they or their students experienced. Catherine gave an example of how a student she worked with was not treated inclusively and how this impacted him.

> I supported a student who had cerebral palsy and he was in a wheelchair, studying biology, but he also had dyslexia and autism. And he gave up on his course, he got depressed, and part of it was that he was just not included in a proper way. And when his year all went on a two or three week field trip, or even longer, and he couldn't go, and he was told he'd do lab work for his dissertation and they'd all do field-based work – and he was given something to do using frozen insects, that he hadn't chosen, he really lost motivation. (Catherine CIC 1)

Darcy and Ford related the example of a student they had both supported. This was a student who was visually impaired and dyspraxic. This student was meant to receive printed copies of her lecture slides before her lecture. In one situation she was told to go make a photocopy of the lecture slides to make during a lecture.

> The photocopier is in a library in a different building. So, they just like hand it out then, so that person's having difficulty finding their way, both visually and dyspraxic wise, then finding the photocopier […] and then get back, and then they're told like, 'Oh well, we've moved on from that now,' because it's taken them thirty minutes to get out, do the photocopying and come back. 'Oh, but we hit our goal, we did give you the notes, be grateful.' (Ford CIC 1)

For the others in the CIC, this interaction was an example of oppressive behaviour.

> Harriet: But there's been no meaningful learning experience for that student whatsoever.
>
> Ford: No, absolutely.
>
> Harriet: They've not had a successful experience.
>
> Catherine: It has a negative effect on people's wellbeing, struggling to get their needs met. This is what really concerns me. (CIC 1)

For Georgina, the HE system was one of oppression for students who learn differently. There is very little inclusive practice. Georgina talked of how she directly contacted the Vice-Chancellor of her university as she was so concerned about the treatment of SpLD learners in her institution.

She talked directly to senior management but felt rebuffed. She talked of how this rebuttal fuels a sense of anger, of 'rage'.

> I keep writing directly to the vice chancellor actually, I think he must think I'm mad [all laugh] – and I go to meetings and I stop him. […] I stop him as he's leaving and I say […] I'm really sorry, I did ask you in the meeting but I'm still really concerned that in this strategy you don't talk about students. And afterwards I said [to myself] I had to stop, I thought I can't leave it like this, I have to, and I mean you will get beaten up, but I would – do you know - do it because it just grows in you that rage. (Georgina CIC 1)

Jane talked too of similar feelings of anger when she wrote to the head of her institution. She wanted the Warden to know what was happening in her sessions with learners.

> I just wrote a letter straight to the Warden […] I wrote it because I just talked about the coalface and this is what we're doing, and dah, dah, dah. I am just carrying a lot of this, I have quite a lot of anger in me at the moment. (Jane CIC 1)

Georgina tellingly refers to the isolation that SpLD tutors experience and that perhaps it is this sense of isolation that fuels the anger: 'I think we have to fight, and I don't think actually is talked enough about how isolated we are, and you know, and give us kind of strategies for getting in, you know, up close.'

This sense of isolation was powerfully described by Jane, who recounted, in 'big institutions I work in […] I don't get into opportunities where I can […] be more engaged with [course leaders]'. She added, 'I feel very isolated in my work there'. When Jane analysed her transcript she defined herself as a 'ghost worker' in the university space. She placed this code under the theme *(splendid) isolation*. Also included under the isolation theme was the following quote.

> I remember very vividly asking – assuming at the beginning, at my interview, saying, "So presumably, we triangulate with the academics […]." "Oh no, I'm afraid there's no time for that." And I just have never really been involved in that three-way dialogue. (Jane CIC 1)

This is not what Jane expected initially when she started her work at that institution.

Georgina referred to herself as a Don Quixote figure, the literary figure known for his individual and futile quests, forever tilting at windmills.

> I have had a friend at University for X who saw me as a sort of rather peculiar Don Quixote, she'd watch me get up onto my horse again, so angry and wave my rusty sword

around and then after a bit I'd fall off [all laugh], and then I was very sad. And then, you

know, if you get back on again, another year later up I'd get, and I've got something else

that enraged me about the way the students were treated. (Georgina CIC 1)

For Georgina, this was a rage fuelled by a sense in HEIs as a commercial entity, of it being like 'a

business'. It was interesting to hear Georgina speak of 'business', it beckons to a sense of the

growing neo-liberalisation of universities in the UK. I had chosen the work of Giroux as one of the

topics for the CICs for this very reason and it was intriguing to see how the tutors found

resonance with his ideas and their own situation.

5.3   Linking the rage to theories

Emma found that Georgina and Jane's experiences and their sense of justifiable anger linked with

her reading of Giroux. After listening to both of their experiences in trying to talk to senior

management, she read out to us the following quote from Giroux's journal article on

neoliberalism and the weaponising of language and education.

> There's a bit here where it says, and I quote, 'If teachers do not have control over the
>
> conditions of their labour and students lack the ability to address how knowledge is
>
> related to power, morality, social responsibility and justice, they will have neither the
>
> power nor the language necessary to engage in collective forms of struggle against
>
> society's efforts to write them out of script of democracy' (Giroux, 2019, p.35) (CIC 1).

Jane responded to this quote and elaborated this concept of neoliberalism in HEIs further.

> In the quote he says denying people voice is a violent act, doesn't he, and I think that's
>
> really like just so true isn't it? It's aggressive, it's violent, it's weaponising. (Jane CIC 1)

This sense of being denied a voice resonated with Georgina. She felt that SpLD tutors need to

'fight' in order to support their learners. However, she also acknowledged that this is difficult to

do when SpLD tutors are themselves in a position of powerlessness.

> It just seems to me that we have to fight and we have to keep fighting for what we're
>
> doing so that the staff understand that this isn't something separate, and this is vital to
>
> the way they are supporting the students and dealing with diversity in the classroom.
>
> They have a responsibility there, and I think we have to speak out, and they don't listen,
>
> and it is irritating, I've spent twenty years trying to do that, and as for harassment and
>
> bullying I have been going around waving my [laughs] arms everywhere, nobody will
>
> listen, because of course we are not important. … I think the way that universities work

nowadays is that they don't recognise the value of their staff, management are the important people who know everything. (Georgina CIC 1)

Emma, while agreeing with Georgina, felt that there was value in being a 'quiet revolutionary'.

There's all kinds of ways to fight, that's what I mean by that, and I don't – and all of them are valuable, and I think in the same way that in your situation Georgina you know, the people that are at the front, you know, the frontline and fighting need to be supported because again that is not sustainable, so you are going to fall off that board, and get up again. But you need to be supported, but also this idea that somehow, you're not a revolutionary unless it looks a certain way is what I am questioning, I am saying that it could be a quiet revolutionary […] we need to reframe this […] you also have to understand your role in the revolution. (Emma CIC 1)

5.4   Your role in the revolution and Bourdieu

When Emma talked about our different roles in the revolution this made sense to us. It made us think about our roles and the work that we do that can make a difference.

Sadhbh: Maybe we all have different roles?

Jane: We do, we do, I think that's so true.

Sadhbh: I love that, I think that's an amazing thing to have said and I think that's very inspiring.

Jane: And that in itself is empowering, it's when you do that with our students isn't it, this is who you are and this is what you're good at and this is the way you negotiate with the world, and then that's fine, it's just like knowing you're saying that about us as well, it's so true. (CIC 1)

It also led the co-inquirers to reflect upon power and what they had read in the work of Bourdieu.

Catherine: The Bourg jeu (sic). It's like a whole ideology I've learnt about, about how these power structures are all constructed.

Sadhbh: Exactly Catherine.

Catherine: And the power we've got as well. How the students see us, you know. We know more about their conditions than they do, the attitude they get from some SpLD tutors you know. Yeah, so it really reminded me of what the power dynamics can be.

Catherine: The student's interests get really lost. So yeah, and how do you say his name again this?

Sadhbh: Bourdieu.

Catherine: Bourdieu. Yeah. Yeah, I'm glad I'm making connections to the Bourdieu because I spent so much time just trying to learn the new language, and to get my head around a whole new ideology, and I spent about six hours reading one and half journals. (CIC 1)

It was great to see how Catherine had spent the time reading about Bourdieu and subsequently applied her learning to her own practice and the power structures within it. However, she also stated that it took her six hours to read. It takes time to access these texts because for the co-inquirers it was like learning a new language.

The language of social justice theories was new to the majority of the co-inquirers. It was not that they could not understand the concepts; they were living the concepts, which they demonstrated repeatedly when they recounted their experiences but they had not used this new vocabulary before. Catherine described this experience of engaging with theoretical language further: 'I had to work on it like learning a language, but it gave me new names for things'. She expanded on this as a 'new language, metaphors and concepts that are really useful in furthering my understanding and analysis of power structures, systems of oppression and experiences of those with disabilities'.

For Eliza, there was a parallel between the experiences of the students we work with and our experiences of learning new theories in the CICs.

I think that there's a language thing, because I just think that the concepts are not necessarily that difficult, and in a sense, I think a good concept, if it works, anyone should be able to understand it at a basic level. But I think the problem is there's a whole level of new language you have to learn and take on, but which in a sense is fine because it allows you [to] have nuance […] (Eliza CIC 3)

Eliza however is not neurodiverse. For co-inquirers like Harriet who is neurodiverse, words can form a barrier and it takes time to 'jump' over these barriers:

From a neurodiverse perspective […] I'm just so used to digging to the great depths of everything to try to make sense of something. I don't quite know whether it's unjust, you know, that's unjust or not, so you know, I just presume that everything's like that and it's my difficulty sometimes […] I wouldn't have a clue whether an academic phrase was

> particularly, you know, whether they weren't getting to the point or not until I'd explored that really deeply and then thought well why didn't they just bloody say that then [all laugh]. But at the beginning to make those choices around reading books and choosing titles I wouldn't have a clue, I'd just persevere and keep going because it's just something, the way that I've always had to do things. (Harriet CIC 2)

Ford who is also neurodiverse felt that we could work together on making the language surrounding such theories more accessible. She felt that a workable outcome of our research together would be to create a type of 'vocabulary list'. Ford advocated that as part of our research 'outcome we could contribute to a demystifying the language thing?' Demystifying is a powerful word to use and one of my research aims in using elements of inclusive research was to demystify both the research process itself as well as theories of social justice. Ford's use of the term 'demystifying' demonstrates a strong sense of language getting in the way of concepts while also maintaining a sense of criticality. This is especially a barrier for those of us who are dyslexic.

I loved that Ford suggested we work on creating an outcome or resource for SpLD tutors from our co-research. This fits with a transformative moment for me when I wrote in my reflections of using theories as tools – creating a toolkit for SpLD tutors in the future.

> *Cristina […] mentioned in our supervisory meeting that Bourdieu stated that his theories were to be viewed as tools. Aha!! Transformative moment for me! Theories can be likened as tools, which as Melanie said, gives them a different perspective, you see what tool works for you. While having a coffee after our session, I had this thought – I could develop a Social Justice Theory Toolkit for SpLD teachers! (*Reflection 6 *Transformative Moments with a Theoretical Toolkit)*

Making a toolkit could also fit with what Emma viewed as the challenge in getting ourselves heard. Emma found that working with the language used in theories of social justice and inclusion helps us:

> To actually communicate that in a way that people take us seriously, because it's a different language. So, I think the challenge is why is it that we are not listened to, what is it in the disconnect of what we do, as qualified, experienced, successful people, what is it that is creating that disconnect, and how do we challenge that?' (CIC 1)

This is the key question: what prevents us from getting our voices heard? When I posed this question in other CICs, it was felt that the systems and procedures surrounding SpLD learners, namely the DSA, would merit more analysis from a social justice viewpoint.

5.5   DSA process and Bourdieu

There would be no SpLD tutors if it were not for the DSA process. The DSA funds SpLD support and some tutors are funded by this process directly, some by agencies and some by the universities that directly employ them. However, the co-inquirers here had concerns about how this funding is allocated. There had been recent changes from SFE on how students are assessed for SpLD support by Needs Assessors (Needs Assessors too occupy a nebulous space in the DSA process). Catherine applied what she has learnt from Wacquant's famous interviews with Bourdieu to the role of Needs Assessors in the DSA:

> I am concerned about the power that assessors have; I think that's what's really stands out to me in this. And the fact that they have the power now. This is the article quote that's relevant if I can just find it. 'In academe, people fight constantly over the question of who, in this universe is socially mandated, authorised, to tell the truth of the social world (i.e. to define who and what is delinquent, where the boundaries of the working class lie, whether such and such a group exists and is entitled to rights, etc.) [Wacquant, 1989, p. 34]

> Delinquent! These are labels. These are people who are really defining other people's lives, they're in a role to define other people's lives […] they define the paths that people can take in this field, you know is it's all very defined what you can and can't do.[1] (Catherine CIC 1)

Needs Assessors write reports where they recommend students to use certain providers of SpLD support. There is an online list of providers that they can use but often it may come down to personal choice who a Needs Assessor recommends. Catherine and Ford discussed this process with their newfound knowledge of social and cultural capital.

> Catherine: A lot is down to who they know.

> Ford: Social capital

> Catherine: Social capital yeah.

> Ford: Social capital again it's going back to who they know. (CIC 1)

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[1] This journal article is translated from the French and the word 'delinquent' has a particular meaning in French that is not immediately clear for an English-speaker. In this context, the term implies deviance rather than juvenile delinquency. I explained this in the CICs.

Another support process for students when they graduate is the Access to Work (AtW) scheme. Ford gave an example of how similar this is to the DSA process. She was contacted to support a student about to graduate and that again it was due to the arbitrary nature of who people know.

> So, it's this power again, going back to the social capital, it's the money, it's the economics, it's networks it's cultural capital. (Ford CIC 1)

These conversations were taking place around the time of the 2019 General Election in the UK. The poll predictions at the time were that Boris Johnson's Tory government was going to maintain its position in government. For Catherine and Ford, the DSA process and the AtW process were reflections of government approaches.

> Catherine: It's corruption isn't it, and the corruption is coming down from the top. Because it's government funded and the structure is allowing corruption, and I just really hope and pray that this can be a good result. But they're so corrupt I can't believe that we're not going to get change of power.

> Ford: And also, I think that's really interesting because of that culture. If you reframe it as a culture of power and a culture of corruption, that's very interesting if that then filters down into those fields isn't it. (CIC 2)

Ford here makes a connection between the Bourdieusian concept of the field. Ford is a specialist on DCD/dyspraxia and delivers training on this around the country. She uses the example of her biography in one of her training courses as depicting her habitus and the fields she belongs in:

> I have this slide, I'll see if I can find it in a minute, where it talks about me as the person and me as a practitioner, and the two things that link it are the dyspraxia and the disabilities. And so, I have this habitus, but I am both a practitioner and mother of kids and a disability person, all at the same time. (Ford CIC 1)

5.6   Unexpected theme of SpLD and the field

Ford then went on to establish a further link, that between difficulties in interpreting social and cultural fields for neurodiverse people:

> Absolutely and all the fields interact and what I was really interested in was if you're talking about cultural codes. I believe the cultural codes are a real weakness for people with SpLDs, particularly if they have dyspraxia and autism. (Ford CIC 1)

Ford's link between cultural fields and the experiences of neurodiverse people was a tangible example of how SpLD practitioners can apply a social lens to our practice rather than the more typical psychological lens. This was not a theme I expected. I subsequently asked Ford and the co-inquirers in her CIC if they thought it would be beneficial for SpLD tutors to explore the work of Bourdieu further. They replied that it would be good, although there was much frank discussion as to whether or not professional bodies that regulate our work would actually provide more of a hindrance than a help. They used their newfound knowledge of habitus and the field to discuss difficulties in working with agencies and professional bodies.

> Ideally, we'd be collaborating, like the social capital be amazing for our field if there wasn't so much competition and different vested interests and nepotism and imbalances of power with assessors given work to different people, of people working for all different companies and then all those companies are competing and then, where's the student in all of this? (Ford CIC 1)

The sense of unequal power held by the professional bodies resonated with Catherine. There is a sense that groups such as ADSHE and those in the ADSHE executive could do more to challenge the current DSA and AtW procedures:

> This is, this really connects with Bourdieu, because it is about, it's about the environment and competition. And yeah, I think that those, that those in the exec's motive is just a big themselves up, to hang on to their power, and to use it as, as their qualification. That's like the main thing actually, it seems to be interested in yeah validating people, you go validation, validating your social power position, but not challenging the status quo in any way. (Catherine CIC 1)

5.7   Linking with Sen (wellbeing and freedom)

It was intriguing to see the co-inquirers applying their learnings from the reading about the CA to their own practice and the DSA process. Georgina gave her interpretation of the CA to her co-inquirers in the London circle which helped Jane to see a link with her own practice.

> Georgina: So you've got two people with bicycles, and one of them whizzes about and does everything he wants to do, and the other one actually he's been given the resources […] but he doesn't know how to ride a bike, so it's have – it's of no value at all, it's not going to develop his capabilities.

> Jane: So that completely relates to our work, as dyslexia tutors! (CIC 2)

Chapter 5

Catherine read a chapter on the CA from Robeyn's (2017) *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice: The Capability Approach Reexamined*; she explained what she understood about CA:

> So, it's a conceptual framework for assessing individuals' wellbeing, or this thing called wellbeing freedom. So, it's the freedom to achieve wellbeing is a matter of what people are able to do and be, and thus the kind of life they're effectively able to lead. (Catherine CIC 2)

What was fascinating about Catherine's reading was that she applied the CA to our practice, particularly the DSA process. The CA is not usually applied to the process that learners with dyslexia or other SpLDs must use in order to receive support.

> Catherine: So, she mentions that it [CA] can be used for the measurement of disadvantages faced by disabled people. You can get thick description, descriptive analysis, so you could identify barriers. You could get into people's actual experiences. You could understand how institutions enable or hamper people's capabilities. And, ah, are capabilities truly open to us, given the choices made by others? That could apply to assessor decisions, faculty decisions, funding of dyslexia assessments? There's lots of sort of areas of DSA where that could apply, where other people are making decisions. But then I've just started just thinking that – sorry, I'm going on [laughter].
>
> Ford: No, no, go, go.
>
> Catherine: My main point is like how would – how could you potentially use a capabilities theory analysis to evaluate our work. Like, is it effective? I think you can go – I think these actually seven principles are quite limited, really.
>
> (CIC 2)

Catherine is making reference here to the ADSHE Seven Principles. These are considered the key guidance for how SpLD tutors work with students. The Seven Principles include the following: metacognition, motivation, overlearning, modelling, little and often, multisensory and relevance (ADSHE 2021). You can see that there is no consideration of criticality, no consideration of well-being, there are no theories of inclusion or social justice.

> So, they are [quite limited] but I think they all fit with the capabilities approach. And they [CA] could be another way of evaluating the support we provide. Have we met the students' goals in terms of capabilities, apart from beyond their academic and vocational goals? (Catherine CIC 2)

Ford agreed that this could be a possibility but she doubted that CA could ever be used in her field - nursing education. They may talk about well-being, she said, but often it would not be applied.

> But all of that stuff that Catherine's talking about, capability, is all the stuff that we're not collecting, but actually – and I've discussed this with loads of students, and I've observed everybody here doing that with everybody else as well, and it's always that stuff that's the most valuable. And that's the stuff that the students keep coming back and saying, you know, 'It was the boost of self-esteem that I got,' or, 'It was the self-confidence I received'. Or – but that's – what I got cross about was like, don't give – don't pretend you've got the answer to something if you're calling it a theory, an approach or a method analysis, because for those of us who work in healthcare in teaching, if it hasn't got that evidence-based practice and it hasn't got like an assessment and an outcome and a solution, like a SWOT analysis, it won't be implemented. (Ford CIC 2)

For Darcy, wellbeing in university can also be quite vague.

> That's the thing. I think it's very easy to pick up on where wellbeing isn't being met, but this – people can't sort of – not define, but they haven't got a concept of what wellbeing is, but they have a very good concept of where there's a lack of wellbeing, and being able to hit wellbeing is difficult if people can't even define what it is. (Darcy CIC 2)

Darcy, who was a midwife before she retrained as an SpLD tutor, connected with this depiction of studying in healthcare. She posed interesting questions about aspirations and capabilities, especially for mature students based on her reading of *How Do Aspirations Matter* (Hart, 2016). Darcy made innovative links between the experiences of the SpLD learner returning to education and the interchange between capabilities and aspirations in the health sciences.

> And what I took from that was that aspirations and capabilities are sort of a cycle, that some people will aspire to something based on what they perceive their capabilities to be, but then – I was going to say that sort of capabilities are subjective. You don't know what you're capable of until you aspire to something that is maybe a little bit beyond where you thought you could aim initially. But then the other end of that cycle is then that your aspirations then drive your capabilities as well. So, it's difficult to get into that circle and to put yourself in there, especially with the kind of students that Ford and I deal with a lot, and Catherine, mature students coming into the nursing profession, first person in the family to go to university, coming into what they see as a practical profession, but then having to write a 'book' about it at a university level. And probably the aspiration of being a nurse or a midwife wouldn't even – you know, it wouldn't even come into their heads if

> they thought, 'Oh, and I'm going to have to write a few essays about this at university
> level'. So, I found that really interesting, about the aspirations and whether they're driven
> by capabilities or they are driving capabilities. (Darcy CIC 2)

Harriet had read an article on CA and educational inequality (Hart, 2013) and found that this connected with both Darcy's and Ford's interpretations of aspirations and well-being. Harriet is an educator but also a student with SpLDs.

> And as Darcy was just speaking then about that sort of cycle of aspirations with
> capabilities, and capabilities informing our aspirations, there was quite a lot in this article
> that I could link with that in relation to inclusivity. And Ford, like you were saying about
> that tokenistic gesture of doing the health and wellbeing bit, and almost the way that I
> applied this to my role, this article, as an educationalist, not just in HE but throughout my
> past careers, is the inclusive curriculum, you know, that tokenistic inclusive curriculum.
> You know, "We're going on a field trip once this term so we're being inclusive, we're
> giving you an experience," and linking that with those abilities and that aspiration. This
> article talks a lot about those. (Harriet)
>
> […]
>
> Yeah, and the next level of that being the capability of being able to have your voice
> heard but not in a tokenistic way, in a real way that informs the curriculum that you're
> learning and the way that you learn, and what's beneficial for you. And that was
> something that really stood out powerfully for me out of this article. (Harriet CIC 2)

What was very evident in the circle was how Harriet applied her own experiences of being disempowered in her learning with the potential that the CA could provide. If Harriet could be listened to, if Harriet was given the opportunities to discuss her capabilities and her functionings, then her learning would be enhanced without feeling that she is incapable. Furthermore, Harriet felt that this could be easily done without huge financial implications.

> Sometimes you don't need lots of things doing for you in different ways. You just need
> one thing that changes to enable you to become independent, to be able to then – I know
> how I learn best. I know how I like materials, so just let me have them and I'll do it myself.
> I won't need to keep bugging you and asking you and sending emails and internalising
> that this is my issue, it's my fault. (Harriet CIC 2)

Ford agreed with Harriet, that learners tend to internalise this unacceptance of a diversity of learning and feel that these learners feel they are lacking in capabilities. This was an experience

that she had seen happen to other students when asking for accommodations such as prior access to lecture slides.

> And they keep saying, "But this is disempowering, I can be independent. Just put your slides up." And it's always – they're beginning to think – this is where the depression is coming on. They're beginning to get a bit paranoid because they're thinking about – this is where the capabilities and the wellbeing comes in. They're beginning to think, "Is it me? Am I being awkward?" (Ford CIC 2)

Here Ford is making a link between the overriding university systems and learner's own concepts of their capabilities and wellbeing. For these co-inquirers, CA, was of relevance to their interpretations of practice and the DSA system. However, while other co-inquirers did feel that CA was of interest, there were also criticisms of it.

5.8 Critique of CA and its relevance to SpLD tutors

The initial critique of the CA was that it was rather vague and then for some co-inquirers, they did not think it was the most relevant theory to their work. I found this a little difficult as I am very interested in the work of Sen and thought that it would be of great relevance for the co-inquirers. However, I realised that my role is to facilitate these conversations and not to wade in with my own opinions to steer the dialogue. I wrote about this after my second CIC with the Diversity Learning group:

> *It was also interesting to see that people had much different opinions of Sen compared to me. I also realised that this is not my place to say, 'oh but Sen is bloody brilliant'. It is not about me, it is about me enabling these conversations to take place and enabling people to make connections. (*Reflection 14 *Thoughts on my Second Online Collaborative Inquiry Circle)*

For Catherine, the CA can be a little 'woolly'. For Darcy, who has a particular interest in student wellbeing, she felt the CA on its own was not enough. She gave the examples of the types of assignments that are typically given in HE, usually an essay.

> It would be impossible to have wellbeing and have the individual benefits that you're talking about, unless you address the other things. So, unless you unpick why pieces, written pieces, written assessments, have to be written in that way, I mean people just do it and they don't have to explain themselves — it's just the way it is and it just disappears to somewhere very, very opaque. Why do we never get to the point where you can challenge that? […] For me, my experience of working with students is I'm not sure I

always get a sense of a reason as to why you have to do things other than this is how we've always done it. (Darcy CIC 4)

Georgina felt that there were further scenarios where the CA was not enough.

I did put – this is key I think to Sen, with adequate social opportunities, individuals can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other, and […] I mean I did actually think somewhere in this, that he could make you quite harsh in your judgement of some people if they've been given the adequate social opportunities, and they've blown them. And you know, I could – an example would be a friend's son who is in his forties now, never had a job, you know, was given the capabilities, went to a very smart school, and took to drugs. Now I don't think Sen deals with issues like that. (Georgina CIC 2)

Jane agreed with Georgina's interpretation of the CA being rather 'harsh' and not perhaps considering other potentials impacts on a person's well-being.

Jane: Yeah, it's quite a cold measure isn't it, yeah […]

Georgina: If we follow Sen, then if everybody's been given their – you give them the opportunities and the capabilities and the functions, all those things then they should achieve their goals.

(CIC 2)

This sense of coldness was echoed by Shuri. She found it hard to relate to the concepts of the CA possibly due to Sen's background in economics.

Shuri: I think, for me, for Sen, the capabilities, there's so much assumption that – how do I phrase it – there's so much assumption that it's almost as if calculation – careful calculation can stop this.

Sadhbh: Is that because he's an economist?

Shuri: I think so. Maybe – maybe because people – they're seeing there's a truth in this. But at the moment, it's this economic model – yes, it feels to me like that. I don't know, I'm sorry economists. [Laughter].

Mary: Some of my best friends … [laughter].

Shuri: None of mine [laughter]. I don't know – I don't know – I really – I really did, I struggled with this one a lot in trying to make it make sense. But it felt a little bit divorced from reality but it also might be because of the environment I'm in. (CIC 2)

For Georgina, while Sen was of interest, she did not think his work was particularly innovative, or as Ford put it 'all that'! For Georgina, it was the intersectionality of the CA in terms of bringing in a lens of social inequality that was of interest.

> I suspect some of the things that Sen talks about are part of our lives already and we don't, or I don't, quite see how pathfinding he was […] you know, when I was reading about the things he puts together, rather than looking at it in isolated pockets, I just, it says intersectionality to me… his ideas may have sort of moved into intersectionality, there seems to be a connection […] Before him people might have looked at one of the themes of inequality, or in another aspect, or another, but they didn't look at them together. Well now that's a, you know, looking at the three together it's a very intersectional. (Georgina CIC 4)

A key point that Georgina raises is the sense of SpLD tutors already working in socially just ways but perhaps not being aware of this. This is a point I return to further in this chapter. The concept of intersectionality is gaining greater currency and it was fascinating to see Georgina make these connections with Sen and intersectionality. This was unexpected and it was also unexpected that Sen's CA would not be considered as ground-breaking work.

It was interesting to note Emma's responses here. She has done a lot of work on promoting intersectional approaches to SpLD work especially in terms of race and identity. Yet for Emma, while acknowledging Georgina's point about intersectionality, she could also see potential in the CA especially in terms of overcoming paternalist approaches to education which are disempowering.

> Yes, absolutely, I guess […] where is your starting point? So as teachers are we going in there with that kind of helping paternalistic, you know, learned helplessness kind of, you know, perspective, albeit with good intentions, or are we starting from the point of potential, and then being informed by that and being part of the dialogue, you know, the learner is actually at the heart of it and in the driving seat. And then looking at where the functionings, if I'm understanding this correctly, work for or against the learner? (Emma CIC 2)

Shuri, who although was ambivalent about the CA, did try to apply her interpretation of CA to her practice with some interesting results. She was working with a student who was somewhat difficult to work with, who appeared really to want Shuri to do her work for her.

> If I tell her she's capable, what will she do? And, actually, I was shocked between last week and this week. And that is the truth. Because last week she came into my discussion,

and she started out fine and then she wanted me to do the work for her, I could tell. "I don't understand it. Well, I don't understand. Well, I don't understand." So, I was explaining and talking, "Well, I still don't understand it. What do I have to do?" And I said, "Well, it's your research, so I can't tell you." And then eventually she started shouting at me, and saying, "You're patronising me. You don't understand me. You're not trying to teach me. You just want me to go and do this without teaching me how to do it. You don't want to earn your work." And then she really laid it on thick. And I just said – then I said, "I'm doing my best. Perhaps my teaching style isn't working for you. Perhaps you might benefit from having another tutor." I'm the third tutor she's gone to, by the way. I'm the only one she's come back to more than once. So, I said all of these things. And I said, "You are capable." […] And I said, "You are capable of doing this because you are here. So clearly, you are capable. Whether you choose to put in the work to achieve that is up to you. Would you like me to let her know that you want to switch tutors?" And her end comment was, "Well, you're my third one. And it's not that I don't like you." And that was the end of it. She came back this week, she had done everything I asked her to do, that she told me the previous week was impossible, she had done. (Shuri CIC 2)

I found this a really fascinating example of applying the CA to SpLD tutor practice which appeared to work well in this example. Shuri herself, when reflecting on the CA at the end of the CICs said this:

> I struggled with the application of the CA in relation to my teaching when I tried to apply it directly as theory. However, if I watered it down in my mind's eye to acknowledgement of the abilities of my students and honouring those abilities, it made sense. I did sincerely struggle, however, to apply its relevance in relation to the way it was postulated originally. Unpicking it with others was a necessity for me. (Shuri CIC 2)

For Shuri, it is the original depictions of the CA in theory that did not work for her, although when she worked with others to discuss it and viewed CA as honouring students' abilities, it was more worthwhile for her.

I did ask the co-inquirers if they thought the CA would be helpful for writing up dyslexia assessments. I hold a dual role of specialist teacher and assessor where I can assess and write diagnostic assessments for students with Dyslexia, DCD/Dyspraxia and ADHD. However, the majority of co-inquirers did not do diagnostic assessments, it was only Emma who wrote diagnostic assessments.

Sadhbh: I also think in my own background as somebody who writes dyslexia reports, I worry that the language we use is limiting, and I think if we lose that sense of people's capabilities. So that I suppose would be the area in particular where I wonder if it would be fitting? But how many of us also write reports?

[Emma raises hand]

Sadhbh: That fun is denied to you [laughs]

Emma: Yeah, it wasn't fun, that's why I don't do it anymore [all laugh]. But I do think that's interesting in terms of the, you know, again the dilemma that always comes up in report writing and the functioning of, you know, is it supposed to be about capability or is it supposed to be about incapabilities, and how do you reconcile the two? (CIC 2)

In order to get access to DSA, a diagnostic report, while ideally strengths-based, is a psychometric assessment that has to demonstrate difficulties and recommend accommodations. It is therefore, as Emma says, difficult to write reports that can reconcile a learner's capabilities with their difficulties in a way that is not deficit-led. However, report writing was not an issue for the majority of the co-inquirers and it was therefore understandable why they did not view the CA as being relevant for report writing.

In my reflections, I write about the overwhelming feeling that Sen was not 'all that' for the co-inquirers. Rather, they wanted to talk more about the oppressive structures that surround them.

> *They talked a lot about lip service paid to inclusion on education, the lack of inclusion they experienced as both people with disabilities and professionals with disabilities, the 'wooliness' of the CA and why Bourdieu was possibly more relevant to them and how this lack of discussion about inclusion and the structures around them are very damaging. It maintains the status quo. (*Reflection 14 *Thoughts on my Second Online Collaborative Inquiry Circle)*

While the CA was of interest, it did not seem to speak to the co-inquirers in the same way as the work of Bourdieu and Freire. I posed the following question to Shuri:

Sadhbh: And do you feel, then, that Freire and Bourdieu are more practical?

Shuri: More practical. And therefore, maybe more focused on determining how to address rather than just here it is. So, Freire talks about conscientisation and then he's talking about revolutionising and creating this transformative process by action. It's not quick, but it's – there's action involved in it. Okay, I get the theory, I get this, I get that. But there is an action. It's slow, it can move us forward. There will be setbacks, but it's

better than, hello, this is the problem. Okay, look at it. And, in theory, it should be fixable because we now know what the problem is.

Sadhbh: And therein is the issue?

Shuri: Yeah. And with Bourdieu, his work seems to, again, push at the reality of it. Maybe he seems less active than Freire, but he doesn't seem to be – he doesn't seem to be separated from the reality of it. Sen, to me, feels quite, "I see this, I recognise it." (CIC 4)

The overwhelming sense from this interchange is that the CA is not rooted in the experiences of those in education and that it is Bourdieu and Freire (and to a lesser extent hooks) who speak more to the co-inquirers in their roles as SpLD tutors.

5.9   Freire and justice in SpLD work

The work of Paulo Freire appeared to resonate strongly with the co-inquirers. Most co-inquirers had come across the work of Freire before such as Catherine who studied Freire as part of her PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) although critical pedagogy was new for Darcy. However, it must be noted that the work of Freire did not feature as heavily in discussions with co-inquirers compared to other theories. This is possibly due to not engaging with certain readings which was a key feature of the first CICs and will be discussed further in this chapter. However, what united the co-inquirers was a sense of justice for what they view as oppressive conditions for learners in HEIs.

Sadhbh: Is it justice that drives us, us here?

Jane: Justice?

Emma: Yes, personally, yes.

Sadhbh: Is justice the right thing?

Jane: What is it?

Sadhbh: Do you know what, to support these people who wouldn't get support otherwise, they deserve the education?

Jane: Yes.

Sadhbh: Do you get it? Because they say you get –

Jane: The pedagogy of the oppressed [all laugh], I keep going back to Freire. (CIC 1)

For Mary, what rings true with Freire is the sense of how his work is so relevant to people with disability. Mary is an educator who is dyslexic, dyspraxic and has Tourette's. She has first-hand experience of oppressive practices herself but has also seen how her learners experience oppression.

> Many people that claim to, you know – different levels of well meaning, I suppose – but claim to kind of understand disability or oppression, or whatever it may be. But they've just read a few books of theory and have no understanding of the practical application. And they – you know, I've had educationalists tell me about, you know, dyslexia, or see them do it to other people. And, you know, well, actually it's like this. And they're just like, "Really?" They're sort of lacking that understanding, genuine understanding. And I think that links to what you were saying, Shuri, about where the theorists come from – whether they've experienced oppression. And I strongly feel that's one of the reasons I totally went with […] Freire, I was just like, oh my God, oh my God. This is it, like, you know, your life when you see it. And you see it even more when you start to understand how he describes oppression. You see it around you, you see what people are doing, how they act. And it's grounded in reality, like you say. It's got that – yeah. (Mary CIC 1)

It is clear here how much the work of Freire resonated with Mary on a personal and a professional level. She talked about becoming aware of the oppression around her, of conscientisation. She described it as being so important for her work but also as something that can be disheartening.

> I feel sometimes that the conscientisation is about – that awakening thing is sort of a bit cruel. Because you start to – you start to see these systems the way he describes so much. And I – the more I see it – and every day and every time you – you know, you meet different people – the more you kind of – you see how it's being enacted on other people to keep them in their place. And you just – I don't know, I keep trying to go, be hopeful, you know, keep hope. (Mary CIC 1)

Even though this conscientisation can be heavy at times, it is important to recognise it in order to change oppressive systems.

> That's true. […] if we can see how oppression works and we can see how this society is constructed, you know and challenge that and change it. Reconstruct it when it falls [laughs] when it falls! But there is that element of, you know, hope about it as well. (Mary CIC 1)

It is this sense of hope that is central to the work of Freire and perhaps hope is not as explicit in the other theories. Hopeful enquiry, as mentioned elsewhere in this PhD, was central to the

design of the CICs and it was highly serendipitous to see it emerge in Mary's responses. In one of my reflections, I mentioned how I had incorporated the sense of enquiry into my theory tombola workshops. These workshops subsequently influenced how I would run the CICs.

> *I had also worked in times for dialogue in the workshop as I wanted to put Freire's concept of 'hopeful enquiry' to work. In the feedback forms, people made special mention of how they appreciated having the time to talk to each other about these concepts. If I hadn't read about Freire's literacy circles and collaborative inquiry circles, I wouldn't have placed such an emphasis on participant dialogue in the workshop. (*Reflection 9 *First Progression Review Prep)*

Becoming aware of oppressive practice in SpLD work but in the spirit of hopeful enquiry, was therefore meaningful to both myself and the co-inquirers. The issue remained however of how to apply Freirean concepts to one's practice.

5.10   Applying Freirean concepts to practice

I had applied Freirean concepts of hopeful inquiry into my research approaches. Some of the co-inquirers talked of their efforts in applying Freirean critical pedagogy into their own practice. It is not easy at times. Catherine is an ESOL teacher as well as an SpLD tutor. She gave an example of how she tried to apply critical pedagogy approaches in her ESOL class.

> In my language teaching this week. I started to try and give more power to the students and get them to learn the language for leading the debate. And I had a cold, and I jokingly said, 'Oh, I want you to do my job because I've got a cold?' I was losing my voice. I was joking, I was like, 'you lead the debate'. And this is high level advanced English as a foreign language student, and one of them's actually left the course because he thought I wasn't doing my job. He doubted me. (Catherine CIC 2)

Catherine was applying what she had discussed in the CICs but this attempt to reverse 'banking education' approaches was not well received by all students. This speaks to what Shuri referred to as having 'that whole banking system in the, in your soul, so to speak. That's the way it goes'.

We have internalised banking approaches to education as the standard way of teaching. Darcy gave an example of how perplexed by non-traditional teaching methods on her midwifery course. She had returned to education as a mature learner and had also internalised banking education as the standard. She could not understand why, for example, she needed to give her own reflections on her learning.

> I recognise now that it is about getting the voice of the student, getting the experiences of the student, getting their perspectives. And I can see the benefits of that now but I honestly thought that the teachers weren't doing their job. Because we weren't given the rationale for using that kind of teaching with us. (Darcy CIC 1)

Just like the student in Catherine's class, Darcy also felt that the lecturers were not 'doing their job' by eliciting their experiences and views. Darcy held this view right through her course until she got to her final year where she realised that this was actually a valid teaching approach.

> We all expected, right up to the final year, that we will do a presentation of what we think it is, having gone and learned about it. We'll have a go at it, and then the lecturer will do it properly. We were fully expecting, like, "tell us then". (Darcy CIC 1)

Interestingly, Darcy was demonstrating how she and her classmates clearly wanted a traditional banking education experience. It gave insight into how we may need to be explicit about critical pedagogy approaches in our work with students in order to demystify the learning approach. Notably, Darcy had stated at the start of the CIC that she knew very little about Freire and critical pedagogy but she had given us a clear example of expectations about banking education.

> Sadhbh: So, does that make you feel that you, you thought you didn't know about critical pedagogy but you, as you said, had first-hand experience of critical pedagogy,
>
> Darcy: Yes, yes, absolutely. (CIC 1)

Catherine found Darcy's story helpful in terms of thinking of her own experience in teaching debating skills. Her students were disconcerted by being given positions of 'power' in the classroom. This is not the teaching they expected. They needed to have this approach explained to them.

> Catherine: So, that's coming back to Darcy's example, you need to explain your rationale. The material was even in the textbook I was using, 'look, you need to be leading the debate now, this is your chance to learn the debate language, to take more control'. But then they doubted me because they're expecting me to demonstrate my capacity as a teacher and they can look up to me.
>
> Darcy: Yeah, that's right. They want you to impart some knowledge, even if they don't. The expectation often is that you will be talking at them. (CIC 1)

There was consensus among the co-inquirers that critical pedagogy approaches were helpful especially in terms of developing conscientisation of oppression but the difficulties they faced was

in implementing critical pedagogy approaches in their work. Students may have internalised the banking system of learning and it may take time and clear discussion to explain what a critical pedagogy approach entails.

5.11   hooks and the role of the teacher

We continued our exploration of critical pedagogy by looking at the work of hooks. Everyone was given access to hooks's famous text *Teaching to Transgress.* Shuri was very taken with this quote from the book, and asked to read it out to her to her co-inquirers in CIC 1:

> Excitement in higher education was viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process. To enter classroom settings in colleges and universities with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement, was to transgress. Not only did it require movement beyond accepted boundaries, but excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices. Agendas had to be flexible, had to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction. Students had to be seen in their particularity as individuals (I drew on the strategies my grade school teachers used to get to know us) and interacted with according to their needs (here Freire was useful). (hooks, 1994, p.7) (CIC 1)

Shuri said that this quote resonated with her, so much so that she wrote it down and emailed it to her colleague Mary. Mary was giving a talk about the work of SpLD tutors and subsequently used this quote in her talk the following day. For Shuri and Mary, there needs to be a sharing of excitement and a sharing of spontaneity in their work, something that they both found crucial in their previous work as primary school teachers. Both Shuri and Mary had taught at primary level, Shuri in the US and Mary in England and they were both very taken with the idea of planning their work in a learner-centred way.

Shuri too returned to this concept of the teacher and made links between her role as an SpLD tutor and a 'typical' teacher: 'we don't subscribe to the idea that teaching should be inaccessible [laughs]…. Or punitive. Or inaccessible, I think inaccessible is the word.'

Mary also added to the discussion 'that it's considered a sign of good teaching if it's inaccessible.' This sense of the inaccessible was then matched with the sense of the exclusion of those with learning differences and the exclusion of those who work with them. Shuri went on to discuss the role that SpLD tutors hold, 'Yeah, yes, you're special [all laugh]. The special teachers. It's kind of

like that very archaic notion of, oh, you have special needs, we'll let the nice lady come in and teach you.'

Shuri was highly concerned about the role of the SpLD tutor as an extra to the academic needs of the university learner, an extra to those whose learning is different. This is a rather paternalistic add-on to the HE system, the kindly lady who comes in to 'help'. However, as Shuri remarked with great humour, 'the irony is, we are nice ladies that come in and teach them'. All the co-inquirers in this project are women which is typical of the SpLD tutoring context. This sense of 'special' and not being included will be elaborated on further in the Discussion chapter.

For Mary, the system of having an SpLD tutor 'come in' to work with a learner was akin to 'ghettoising' us. She made an interesting point that she viewed this as a system of control 'the way of having us in the ghetto is a way of controlling us'. Mary, like Shuri had worked as a primary school teacher, and Mary spoke of her experiences of a controlling system of teaching literacy to primary school children. As someone who is dyslexic herself, she found it challenging to have to implement an ever-changing series of literacy schemes which she could see were very difficult for her students, especially those who found learning to read difficult. She spoke of how her teaching assistant became 'a glorified tape recorder' while she herself began to question the system but 'I didn't have the confidence' to challenge an increasingly stringent system for very young children. Mary subsequently left primary school education to retrain as a dyslexia specialist for HE. We talked in our session about engaging children in reading and part too of this research was getting co-inquirers to engage in the materials for the CICs.

One of the issues that arose in the course of the CICs was that some people found it easier to engage with the reading materials than others. A significant number of the co-inquirers are dyslexic and reading long pieces of text can be tiring for them. In CIC 1 with the Diversity Learning group, I read the following quote from bell hooks as it was instrumental in driving me to using theory with SpLD tutors:

> I came to theory because I was hurting […] I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around and within me. More importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing (hooks 1994, p. 59)

Darcy's reaction to this quote, although humorous, was quite telling in her description of reading theory as being hurtful in itself, 'my immediate thought there, because I hadn't read that particular piece was 'Oh my god, theory would make me hurt more because there's so much of it'. (Laughter).'

Chapter 5

There was a sense in the group that not only was theory difficult but also inaccessible. This was particularly the case for Ford who is neurodiverse. She finds interacting with text difficult:

> I'm never going to read the articles and I'm never going to read the books. I'm always going to look at the infographs and the videos, and all the rest of it. […] Yeah, I'm just telling you now I haven't read any of the articles or books because they just, they make me hurt. (Ford CIC 1)

Acknowledging one's vulnerabilities in the research process is a brave thing to do. I did not want my co-inquirers to feel 'hurt' as this was counter to what I want to achieve. However, the CICs provided a supportive environment within which co-inquirers could safely explore vulnerabilities in terms of engaging with academic literature. I was aware that the very format itself of the CIC materials could be a source of difficulty to people with SpLDs and could indeed hinder them from engaging with the theories. Therefore, accessibility of resources was central to my research design.

I designed the CICs to use a variety of formats to make them accessible. This was influenced in part by my previous incarnation as a technical writer when I wrote materials using Universal Design for Learning (UDL). A key component of UDL is offering multiple means of engagement, expression, representation and action (Nelson 2014). Such variety is especially important when working with people who themselves are neurodiverse.

This multiplicity of formats was noticed by Ford who commented on the different formats available in the CICs, 'I wanted to praise you on that […] I wanted to go. This is what education should be like and it's not.'

However, it must be noted that not everyone felt that video and blog formats were suitable for them.

> I thought I'd go through the video and it was the guy talking for 10 minutes 20 minutes most about Freire. Well, that wasn't helping me either so I thought 'oh god I've got to read you' (Darcy CIC 1).

It was therefore apparent that people found some formats more accessible than others. This shows that it was crucial to have, not only a mix of theories, but a mix of formats in which to present the theories.

For some co-inquirers though it was difficult when others had not done the readings. For Letitica, she commented that:

If this were a class, I would feel the group was doing too much saying whatever we feel like without reading carefully, and I would want more instruction from the teacher, more challenge to be rigorous. (And I guess I have tacitly used your meetings as a class!) (Letitica Questionnaire Feedback)

However, CICs are not a class. They are based on Freirean concepts to encourage free dialogue and exchange. I did not want to instil concepts of banking education into the circles. Perhaps there is an element here of internalised banking education as the standard to follow just as Catherine had discovered when she introduced concepts of critical pedagogy into her ESOL class.

Georgina also felt that it would be more beneficial if everyone in the CIC had engaged with all the readings before coming to the sessions. Emma for example had read the wrong materials before the CIC but felt that it would still be beneficial to come along.

So, the confessional from me is that I read completely the wrong thing so I haven't read the capability approach. So, I did think about the value of me coming here, but one it is to be in the space first of all, and also I think as I've not read it hearing what everybody else is saying might stimulate something. (Emma CIC 2)

I was very glad that Emma felt that she would be welcome to come to the CIC and that it would still be beneficial to take part. She also gave valuable contributions on what she learnt from the others, notably Georgina, about the CA for example.

The following exchange from this CIC was quite insightful in that Georgina explained her feelings about people not doing readings before attending.

Georgina: I would like, I mean being honest about this, I would quite like to talk about the things that you have on your site. We did a bit of it, but I would love it if more people read the stuff.

Emma: I think that's fair comment [laughs], and what I will do, because what I wasn't sure about again was whether or not I should come and not having read it. There's a lot of missed material [laughs].

Emma: I certainly appreciated what you said and listened, and that's why I'm saying can I contribute afterwards, so I hope, yeah.

Georgina: I mean everything that's happened here was wonderful, and I loved everything I learnt, it's just that I would like to kind of get a sense, you've got us a shopping list,

you've got books and you've put them together purposefully, and I would love to see where that purpose leads.

Sadhbh: Ah, interesting, yes, good point.

Georgina: And I think that's important for you because you've put them together, you know, and if we are too divergent you get interesting stuff, but you did put together a set of –

Sadhbh: But divergence was also built in because I am looking for the divergence too, you see. (CIC 2)

What was interesting about this exchange was the sense that Georgina wanted to follow through on all the readings. However, I had not expected every co-inquirer to be able to read all the readings. Rather, it was put out as a selection of readings to engage in. Furthermore, I had to be explicit in the exchange in stating that divergence from key topics was acceptable in the circles, especially as it put the neurodiverse co-inquirers at ease (this will be expanded on further in this chapter). I had explained at the start of the very first CICs that they were based on Freirean concepts of dialogue and they were not a class. I liked how Jane pointed out to Georgina that she could hold the position of power by starting off and explaining what she had read. However, Georgina and our other co-inquirer Letitica did want a bit more direction, more classroom-based instruction. But perhaps this is telling that neither Georgina nor Letitica are neurodiverse and they do not have difficulty in accessing textual material. I felt it notable that Georgina referred to the CIC materials as 'homework': 'I do like it, I do like it, I want to do my homework'.

There is a dichotomy here of the readings being seen as 'homework' which I did not want. Yet I also wanted the co-inquirers to engage with the materials. This is a problem that I wrestled with in my own reflections on the first CIC I did with Georgina and her group. I wanted the co-inquirers to engage with the readings but I did not want it to be like a homework task for school.

What I did realise is that two out of the three co-inquirers hadn't done much reading. In fact, it was only Georgina who had done any reading. It was a bit tricky – a little bit like a seminar where you are the tutor and no one has done the reading. I didn't want it to be like a seminar though, I didn't want to be the teacher but I felt that the co-inquirers wanted me to be a teacher. At the end of the session, people shared that they would prefer if they had more direction rather than be given a choice of readings. (Reflection 13 Stories go in circles)

While I obviously wanted people to engage with the readings, I did not want CICs to be like a traditional class. In particular, I did want to support the neurodiverse co-inquirers by giving them the flexibility to engage in textual and visual/audio material as much or as little as they wanted. Ford was very open about how she difficult she found it to engage in material that she was not interested in. This is a very typical ADHD trait.

> Ford: So, I'm going to own up, I did that, 'I'll read ten minutes of that, don't like that. Read ten minutes of that, don't like that.' (CIC 2)

Harriet felt that it was important to reiterate that people need to have the opportunity to be heard, but that the great power in our circles was that it was collaborative, that we learnt from each other.

> It's almost like it's just an opportunity for somebody to have their voice heard and be heard, and other people to then have their – the chance to respond to that. So, it's not just everybody listening to anybody, it's about more about the interaction and letting it go where it needs to go before drawing it back to where it needs to be. So almost like, you know, I always think of it like my dog's extension lead, you know, his lead that I take him out, and I can let him go as far as I want but if there's something in the way I can reel him back in and that's how I used to review the restorative circles. So that's, I think that's what I automatically assumed it would be as soon as I heard the circle, but I think the collaborative bit, I agree with everybody else, I think that's what's made it more powerful. (Harriet CIC 4)

Harriet has a background in restorative practice circles so she had perhaps more experience of this type of engagement than some of the other co-inquirers. She did not expect the CICs to be like a class, she was aware that there would be an element of going 'off-piste' and then coming back to the topic.

It was noticeable in the CICs that co-inquirers learned from each other. Jane told Georgina that she found it helped her understanding to listen to Georgina's interpretation of the CA.

> You did a very good snapshot presentation of what capability meant, and then you built on that because you'd read some more about it. And then I talked, I had read it, but I needed to refresh so I'd watched that video today, because it was easier to quickly get refreshed myself, I think, to start from where you started. (Jane CIC 2)

It is precisely this type of learning exchange that I wanted to facilitate in the CICs, drawing on Freirean concepts of the learning circle. It was beneficial for Jane to listen to Georgina's analysis

of the CA but it could be said that perhaps Georgina did not find it so beneficial for her. We talked more about the aim of stimulating dialogue in the CICs and Georgina understood more when I explained the aims a little further.

> Georgina: Well, yes. Sadhbh, you know, the time that we have doing a full reading, the aim I suppose is just to get a taste of what is your interpretation and how in dialogue with others that it's our interpretation?
>
> Sadhbh: And is it relevant or not? But I am also just as mindful if you think that maybe it's more rigorous to have more time?
>
> Georgina: See I think it's fine. (CIC 2)

Georgina communicated her commitment to social justice and inclusion. She wanted to be rigorous and to make sure she was giving her all to the project. I needed to be explicit with co-inquirers about the purpose and aims of the research approach.

However, another issue to take into consideration is the degree of connection that people had with certain theories more than others. Of all the readings, it was the work of Sara Ahmed that appeared to resonate the most with the co-inquirers. The timing too of examining her work, at the onset of the Covid pandemic, may have also played a part. I wrote about this in my reflection on researching during the first lockdown.

> *Research doesn't seem so important in the face of a global pandemic. Yet I have found solace in my research participants. I had to hurriedly change my face-to-face research meeting to online meetings. I said to my co-inquirers 'you really don't have to do this you know, I completely understand'. And I was so surprised that so many said 'yes, we want to do this'. One co-inquirer who is worried about her 23-year-old daughter who works in a Covid ward said to me 'It has really helped me take my mind off things'. Another said, 'this is giving us something else to talk about'. It is this something else that gives me hope. Our last online inquiry circle with co-inquirers was on the work of Sara Ahmed. There was much fiery discussion on being a diversity worker and the lip service that is given to inclusion. There were nods of acknowledgement on the notions of complaint and one colleague had even gone so far as to create a diagram of oppression based on her interpretation of Ahmed's work. I was expecting none of this and was so amazed by them. (*Reflection 16 *Research and Covid-19)*

5.12   Sara Ahmed and Complaint

The concept of complaint as a form of disability protest is key in Ahmed's work. This concept was something that the Diverse Learner's CIC felt they could really relate too. Many of the students that they work with are students who have complained about issues in their university education but often with negative repercussions.

> Catherine: The thing is they might have been labelled as difficult. They have a very spikey profile and they are very intelligent, and they're very strong critical thinkers. And then, the problem is that this has not made them popular with their course teachers. They have been labelled as difficult; they are not conforming.
>
> Darcy: Yes, they can't put them in a box.
>
> Ford: Yeah, yeah, not popular I think it's a really good one. And often, I have students, yeah, we have loads of students who have disciplinaries. (CIC 3)

The Diversity Learning group also works with health care students, many of whom are mature students returning to education. These mature students in particular are often at the forefront of questioning decisions that are made while they are on placement.

> Ford: I always say to them, "No, we love that." That's what you should be, you should be questioning, you should be advocating for the patient, you should be speaking up. These are all campaigns within the NHS, speak up, advocate, communication, lifelong learner, but they're battered the fuck out of them because they're just so brutal.
>
> Sadhbh: It's the system that is battering?
>
> Ford: Yeah. (CIC 3)

Shuri too felt great connection with the issue of complaint for students. She had watched a video lecture from Ahmed about complaint. For Shuri, this was highly relevant for students who are neurodiverse who have experienced difficulty and wish to complain. The institutional systems work against these types of learners.

> Mary you're going to love it when you do watch it, this video about complaints, because they make it so that any kind of complaint actually cannot materialise. And it's doubly problematic for our students that we work with, because the complaints procedure is ridiculous to begin with, and second of all if you are a dyslexic, dyspraxia, autistic, you name it, someone who is not neurotypical, the barriers that a complaint puts forward which are ridiculous when you are neurotypical, become just untenable for a student

who's got to spend time thinking about how long is it going to take me to read my assignment and get my work done. And then if I want to make a complaint, how long is it going to take me to read this policy that they're going to send back to me that is written in legalistic language to discourage me from opening my mouth? Well actually I can't be bothered, because I need to read my assignment [laughs]. (Shuri CIC 3)

In my reflections, I wrote about how much the work of Ahmed really resonated with us all especially in terms of developing more inclusive approaches in HEIs.

*We had looked at the work of Sara Ahmed and it resonated so much with us – the sense of being a diversity work in institutions that didn't really want diversity or inclusion and the sense of a system that was not designed for us. (*Reflection 17 *Writing through a Pandemic)*

Often the onus of responsibility lies with the disabled student as evidenced by this example from Ford.

And it happens to all our students. I must have supported students to put complaints in so many times and they get to a certain level and you're thinking that the institutional discrimination within the complaints procedure, where it's the onus on the student to collect all the data, to collect all the emails, to prove that they didn't do wrong. […] But you know, you go through that, and I've been through a tribunal as well and you go through that and you start doubting yourself, you think you're going mad, you kind of go, my god, that's not right, but they're so vehement in saying this is what should happen and this is how it should be done. (Ford CIC 3)

In the example, the student and their supporters may doubt themselves because of the institutional pressures that surround them. It is this sense of the institutional injustice that led Catherine to view complaint as a political act.

That's where I see fighting discrimination happening and it is political, just politics, and it is complaining and you are going to do what Sara Ahmed said. I wrote down something she said about complaint, it happens again when making a complaint, it's painful, you're subjected to the will of another, you complain and it happens again when you make the complaint, and then the complaint is disqualified and it makes you wrong. And then it's not even recorded, and it's so many struggles are not recorded. And to me she's just given me language to explain the oppression that I've experienced which is incredibly powerful to just go yeah, this is, it's a mechanism, and this is how it feels to be silenced, to be not heard. (Catherine CIC 3)

For Catherine, Ahmed's sense of complaint was not just political, it was personal too. Catherine also analysed the transcript of this circle and created the code *Personal Relevance* from which the following quote is taken.

> Well, this has been really appropriate for me, and I didn't realise, you know. There was a lot going on that I needed language to understand and express, and for especially the social justice in the first week, and Sara Ahmed, both of them, they've been brilliant to give me personal ways to describe just how bad this shit is [laughs], because it's like what is really going on. (Catherine CIC 3)

She elaborated more on this with the aid of a diagram she created called the *Oppressive Education Life Cycle*.

Catherine's husband George is dyslexic. He is originally from Spain but studied for a teaching qualification in the UK where he received a diagnosis of dyslexia and SpLD support. On returning to Spain however, his SpLD profile was not supported. His dyslexia is not recognised, he does not get additional time in exams and he is finding it very hard to get a teaching job. On reading Ahmed's work, Catherine came to our CIC with a diagram she created called the *Cycle of Oppression*. She created this diagram to describe her husband's experience of dyslexia. Catherine is also an artist and it is interesting to see how she used visuals to depict George's experience. In Catherine's data analysis she coded the following quotes as *Understanding Mechanisms of Oppression.*

> Catherine: George's experience has been, it's become clearer to me, from the mechanisms of oppression I've understood in Sara Ahmed, it started with Ahmed, 'cos she talked about the doors, and I realised that George's just been blocked out, can't use his qualification, Spanish qualification in the UK and he can't –
>
> Ford: Really?
>
> Catherine: He can't do the teaching exam in Spain because they won't recognise his dyslexia certificate and they want him to get assessed again but it takes years to get assessed here, and even then they might say you don't have a high enough percentage of disability, so there's no one with dyslexia teaching in Spain, so here it is in a diagram. And he's called it the *Education Life Cycle*, I've called it the *Oppressive Education Life Cycle* [laughs], here goes.
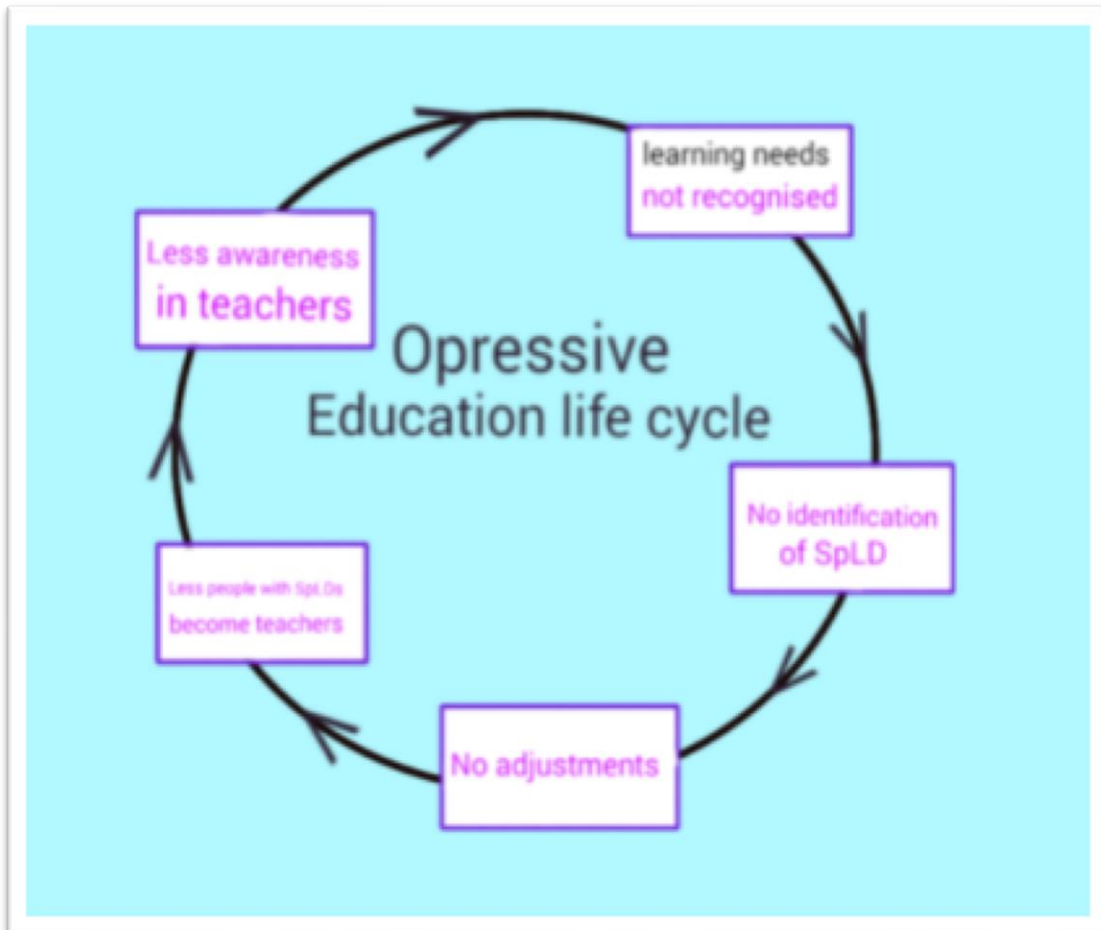
Figure 13 Oppressive Education Life Cycle

Catherine: So, he's, what he's got is the structure has no mechanism for the identification of SPLDs, there's no – they're not accepting the psychologist reports, they're putting him on a waiting list for an assessment that doesn't even exist, it was years in coming.

Sadhbh: Really?

Catherine: Yeah, and so they never make adjustments in the teaching exams 'cos no one ever gets given adjustments, there's no other room or other exam for people, because those people don't get given the opportunity. So, there aren't any teachers with SPLDs because there's no –

Ford: Because there's no demand.

Catherine: There's no awareness of SpLDs by teachers in Spain, usually. So how can they recognise the learning needs and identify the people and then that's how it goes on and I've done a reverse cycle, you know, the progressive cycle, sorry I haven't drawn it up to show you, but you can see fairly easily.

[…]

> Catherine: He needs the legal challenge, there's got to be a European law that this
> is breaking, the level of discrimination here. (CIC 3)

This was a very powerful exchange. It demonstrates the very real difficulty that people experience in systems that do not understand learning difference but it was also an amazing display of how Catherine had taken on board theories from the CIC and applied them to her own life. When I asked Catherine a little more about her situation, she replied that it was sometimes difficult to understand why George did not complain more about the injustices he faced, 'I just, I wanted to complain now, but also Sara Ahmed is helping me understand why he is not complaining'.

The mechanisms that are put in place to prevent complaint are very real barriers to people like George. In Ahmed's blog post *The Same Door* she refers to doors that block access, doors that block complaint. Catherine and her co-inquirers go on to discuss this concept of the door.

5.13   Fitting in the door

The image of the doorway in Ahmed's blog post was helpful to the co-inquirers to visualise the barriers that people experience. When you are that person who has experienced that barrier or you see someone experience that barrier, then the visual metaphor becomes very real to you. Catherine discussed her hope that these barriers, these 'doors' will eventually change but we still need to support people.

> Catherine: I think that the doors are going to change shape, they're going to change size,
> more people might have a key to get through the door, but there's still going to be people
> who can't get through the door, and who should be there, maybe there shouldn't be a
> door.
>
> […]
>
> Catherine: So, by degrees, we're changing the doors, we've giving people access to the
> doors, the doors got to be changed from the inside.
>
> Ford: At the moment the doors are blown off, aren't they? (CIC 3)

We had CIC 3 during the first Covid-19 lockdown. It is interesting to see here how our sudden change to working exclusively online is seen by Ford as an opportunity for positive change for SpLD learners.

Catherine took some more time to discuss the metaphor of George being the 'wrong shape' for the door.

> Here in Spain, he's not even passed through the door to prove that he's eligible to have reasonable adjustments considered. And this is this thing as well. This is the door, hang on, it's a template, the normal template, the outline of the body that an object is designed for, the door, it becomes your issue if you missed it. A complaint amplifies what makes you not fit, foreign, it makes you feel the problem is you and it makes you scapegoated. And it's like that door he can't go through it, and they're saying you don't have what you need, you're the wrong shape for this door [laughs]. (Catherine CIC 3)

This idea of being the ''wrong shape' for the door, for putting the problem always with the person not the form was a source of connection for Ford. She even stated that this is why she created the Diversity Learning enterprise.

> That's why I mean, this is why I've got Diversity Learning, because I didn't – I first of all I said, 'look, that door's a funny shape'. And they didn't even recognise what I was saying. 'Look, there's no key for that door, there's no handle for that door'. And they weren't even recognising the door was a funny shape. I always compare it when I talk to people, I say there's, I'm talking about the shit, the big steaming pile of shit in the room, and nobody knows what I'm talking about because nobody's acknowledging the pink elephant. (Ford CIC 3)

The onus, Ford felt, was always on the learners to fit into a door that did not acknowledge their differences. Universities do not make 'doors' that fit the diversity of learners. For Ford, this was an interesting point to advocate for a more Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach in HEIs.

5.14   Sara Ahmed and UDL

UDL focuses on multiple methods of representation, engagement as well as action and expression (Centre for Applied Learning and Technology 2011). For Ford, the work of Ahmed has strong links with the aim of changing the doors that act as barriers in education for learners who may be neurodiverse. Rather than being a cycle of oppression, UDL has the potential for 'educational freedom'.

> And I also then thought about universal designs for learning. So, this is what got me really excited, is then if you think about universal design for learning, is the idea that actually the path is – take away all obstacles in the path, I feel like I should be singing, 'all obstacles in my way'. All the obstacles in the path, because you get from A to B and it's

already designated and there's no paths in it, and there's sorry obstacles in it. And I thought I wonder if universal design for learning is also, rather than the cycle of educational oppression, is actually the cycle of educational freedom. (Ford CIC 3)

Ahmed is writing about diversity. She does not explicitly mention UDL, SpLD learners or neurodiversity. However, the co-inquirers applied Ahmed's theories to their own work. I found this fascinating.

Sadhbh: Intriguing, I hadn't thought of that, and doesn't this show, this is what Ahmed is missing, she doesn't have that neurodiverse aspect to her, but this is where I think you guys have come in and put it, I love it.

Catherine: Or it's completely relevant, it's diversity work.

Ford: Yes. (CIC 3)

For Catherine, diversity work encompasses SpLD work. It is an inclusive approach.

Catherine: Diversity work, yeah, that is what it's like, it's about people's needs being met, whether it's through recognition of them having diversity or just by universal design removes the need to recognise the needs doesn't it? You don't need a diagnosis, you don't need to be recognised by a teacher, the universal design is there. So, you're going to succeed, and you're going to be a teacher, and you're going to understand the need for universal design because you've received it.

Ford: Yes, the bolt on idea, which is reasonable adjustments, or the lift, or whatever it may be.

Catherine: Which is what I've used in mine, yeah. (CIC 3)

Ford describes SpLD support as a 'bolt on', an afterthought to support learners who do not fit the 'door'. Our work is not embedded into university learning such as in a UDL framework, rather it is an additional extra to be applied. UDL is a more inclusive framework rather than having a separate SpLD add-on, a bolt placed on top of a metaphorical door. Using UDL approaches that combine SpLD support would be a much more inclusive approach to learning and would help to 'unbolt' that door.

5.15 Sara Ahmed and Lip service to disability

Mary had never come across the work of Sara Ahmed before but her work resonated very deeply with her too. While it was disheartening to read of other people's experiences of barriers in HE, there was also the sense of not being alone in experiencing this.

> It's basically all my rants and frustrations for the past seven years, rolled into one [all laugh] – I think the problem is you often see these things happening and you see all these barriers that they're constantly getting thrown up in your face and you so long, I don't know, you sort of thing is it just you sometimes and you suddenly read something like that and you're like, ah, okay, right, so it happens everywhere [all laugh]. (Mary CIC 3)

Significant in Mary's excerpt is the sense, yet again, of the individual being at fault. The onus is repeatedly placed on the individual to bear the cost of being 'different'.

One aspect that stood out for Mary was the concept of tokenistic approaches paid to diversity in HEIs. This is what Ahmed refers to as 'lip service'. Mary could see a link between this 'lip service' and her own approaches to embedding UDL at her institution.

> She kind of talks a lot about how you almost kind of play – if I've understood it correctly, kind of playing the game. You've got to sort of smile and be polite to the institution that you really are trying to challenge, and pretend, 'hello, I like you, I'm your friend', whilst trying to very one-handedly tear apart their systems that exclude individuals [laughs]. I think it's kind of something I've been feeling a lot, and I think Shuri and I have been going through this, it's insane.

> And I'm doing another project at the moment, another lovely colleague of ours called X where we're trying to look at introducing UDL. And we're getting the same sort of crap, where it's like people just don't want to know about it and you're sort of, they'll let you do lip service stuff, 'oh go and write a policy on it please', or 'go and do an action plan please' because that keeps you busy and, you know, then you won't be able to do too much damage [laughs]. I just read this chapter and I was just sat there going, oh yeah, that's familiar [laughs]. (Mary CIC 3)

The co-inquirers had experienced the 'polite' versions of resistance to change. While UDL may be officially welcomed by HEIs, it is not actually embedded into teaching frameworks. It is Mary and others who will encounter the particular forms of HEI resistance which can be endless paperwork or writing up policy documents that may never actually be implemented. It was interesting to see

the various forms of resistance that people had experienced in HEIs especially when it comes to implementing more inclusive practice.

5.16 Sara Ahmed and the path of neurodiversity

One concept that Ford wanted to discuss was that of the 'used path'. Ahmed talks of how the more you use a path, the more used it is by other people. For Ford, this idea of the path connected with her concepts of neurodiversity. People who are neurodiverse may use a different path.

> I found it really interesting when she was talking about as a path that gets created. And everybody uses the path and then there's a signpost that gets put at the beginning of the path because everybody's using the path, so therefore everybody sees the signpost and uses the path even more. See what was really interesting [laughs] for me is that I will go out of my way not to walk on the path! And I think that's true of a lot of neurodiverse people, well the ones that I know, and the ones that come to me […].So I thought that was quite an interesting juxtaposition from a neurodiverse point of view, that here's the path that everybody takes and then there's a signpost, or and then the other thing I then started to reflect on. I wonder if it's neurodiverse people who create the path and then there's a signpost for the path, because often we're very entrepreneurial, we're often creative thinkers, and then the way becomes the norm. (Ford CIC 3)

Ahmed does not mention neurodiversity in particular so it is interesting to see how Ford could make connections between the idea of following/not following the path and neurodiverse traits. This metaphor of going off the path was also evident in how we navigated through the CICs themselves.

5.17 CICs and neurodiversity

An unexpected finding from the CICs was that having the space and time to go 'off the path' was very helpful to the co-inquirers who are neurodiverse. Jane shared the following example of 'jumping around' in terms of ideas in the CICs which she likened to the 'grasshopper concept' of learning:

> I think it just gives us some space to sort of jump about as well which you know, everybody here loves probably as much as I do, but I think some of us clearly don't mind doing that. And I always think of that – from my teacher training days, my schoolteacher training days that Steve Chinn, who was a maths teacher – wrote brilliant books about

maths and he's got that dimension of grasshopper versus inchworm approach to solving problems. And there's a lot of grasshopping going on here and I just feel so – it's fun, and we do have to do a lot of inchworm stuff actually when we're in our tutorial rooms with our students, and it's just nice isn't it? (Jane CIC 2)

This 'jumping around' was also referred to by Ford who also acknowledged that CICs may have been hard to steer at times but that this jumping around was very beneficial:

It's very difficult to reign us all in when we're all barking all over the place, talking all over each other, swearing, going around in circles [all laugh], interrupting each other and then Catherine brings out this amazing pre-prepared perfect map of what she wants to say, and we're just like ah, ah, ah. So, it was great to have that for me as a person who's also a hexagon, well I'm not, I don't know what I am, I'm an octahedron or whatever it is that just doesn't even come anywhere near having a sign in a box. It was a very refreshing for me because I've had a very untraditional route […] And I felt Sadhbh that you did that really well, I didn't know it was a circle or whatever, I just felt it was like a bit of a vent and the fact it had no rules and I don't really like rules, and that's the one I liked the most. (Ford CIC 4)

This sense of 'going around in circles', of the CIC as an elastic space that is beneficial to those of us who are neurodiverse was an unexpected outcome. It was something that I too appreciated.

*Some of the co-inquirers are people with ADHD and other SpLDs and they can get distracted by other topics. But I too have similar traits and I love the digressions. I have always found the digressions in a conversation to be the most intriguing. (*Reflection 14 *Thoughts on my Second Online Collaborative Inquiry Circle)*

5.18   CICs as a safe, transformative space

For those who are not neurodiverse, like Emma, a CIC was valuable as it was a safe space to 'wrestle' with ideas.

So there are all of these tensions that are happening in some of these conversations, and I guess you know, not just Sen who I haven't read and I keep saying that […] I was reading that talking about, you know, the critical pedagogy, being able to wrestle with those things, that those tensions, and we don't – there are very few spaces, and I don't think they are actually really, that I have heard, those spaces to really wrestle with some of those tensions (Emma CIC 2)

When we reflected more on the role of the CICs, we realised that it gave us space but it also gave us the opportunity to engage in theoretical language and concepts. This was noted by Catherine who viewed the CICs in terms of:

> Examples, examples, articulation, recognition of patterns, yes, having the concepts, it's not just words, it's concepts, it's concepts to articulate experiences, and to recognise them for what they are (CIC 2)

While we referred to 'learning the language' of academic theory, CICs were also a way of dealing with concepts whether that be the CA or Ahmed's concept of complaint as diversity work. For Catherine, this helped her to gain understanding in a way that was transformative for her.

> It'd give meaning to my husband's struggle that's been going on for over ten years. It would give meaning to it if something came out of it, whether or not it's him getting that qualification. It would be a big difference, make a big difference, so for everybody, you know, to like say someone's got to campaign or this isn't going to change, and it would be amazing. (CIC 2)

I asked the co-inquirers to tell more about what they thought about taking part in the CICs. Harriet had not come across CICs before. She had mentioned that she felt somewhat anxious about taking part. However, taking part in the CICs boosted her confidence.

> At first, I was a little apprehensive, as I am relatively new to the field of teaching in SPLD and knew that others taking part had a lot more experience than me. I sometimes find my low self-esteem impacts me to be reluctant to take part. I am pleased that I did, as I gained some confidence after speaking to others that I had not met before (I only knew Ford). (Harriet Feedback Questionnaire)

Feeling confident to take part in CICs was also echoed by Jane. It is interesting that both Harriet and Jane are dyslexic and can feel uncertain about their abilities in similar types of meetings.

> I think the thing about it is – I feel – I think what you just said I feel the same, I feel kind of safe. I've been to so many meetings in institutions where you know, it's disability or it's academic skills, I've been sort of moved around in different – and just feeling like what I'm saying, I know I believe in it, but am I missing the plot somewhere. Or is there stuff I don't understand that I should understand. I just haven't felt any of that anxiety about being in this call. And I think that's probably coming from a dyslexic place of feeling scared to say something stupid, and I don't – and I think yeah, the same feeling of it just gives you confidence to maybe push your voice out there more, definitely. (Jane CIC 2)

This sense of safety was also echoed by Harriet. While CICs were new to her, she found that they were a supportive space.

> Often, opportunities to network are limited to 'conferences' and other 'structured' learning opportunities. The emphasis is usually on the traditional methods of 'chalk & talk''. This was the first opportunity that was presented to enable open dialogue in relation to pedagogy and theoretical thoughts in a safe and valuable way. I value the opportunity to converse without the need to provide 'answers'. (Harriet Feedback Questionnaire)

It is this idea of not having to know all the 'answers' right away that is key to CICs. This idea was true too for Shuri who found CICs to a safe and a transformative space. While you may not necessarily resolve all the issues under debate, you can find ways to understand the difficulties that SpLD tutors and students experience.

> I am sad that the CICs are over. I found myself looking forward to them, not because they were avenues to moan, but more because articulating the struggles with implementing inclusive practice in a supportive environment allowed me to have some 'light bulb moments'. These moments did not necessarily solve the issues at the institution, but I felt more empowered about my approaches and avenues to improve my own instruction so that I could empower more than enable. (Shuri Feedback Questionnaire)

This concept of the 'light bulb moment' that leads to empowerment is transformative. It was great to see how Shuri found that this also impacted her own practice in terms of viewing her work as empowering rather than enabling.

5.19   Impact on our practice

One of the key research aims was to see if learning about theories of social justice and critical pedagogy was transformative for the co-inquirers and their practice. Ford felt that theories were transformative for SpLD tutors.

> I think our profession would be so much better if we actually looked at the theory behind what we're doing. (Ford CIC 3)

In our professional association, ADSHE, we are guided in our work by the ADSHE Seven Principles. Ford felt that not only did we need these Seven Principles, that we also need key pillar theories too.

What has been really interesting for me is I think we almost need the seven pillar theories, if you know what I mean, the seven – so if you think they're the seven principles, and I think we need the pillars.

[…]

But if they're going to adopt the seven principles, they need to adopt however many theories they are that you've found into our work. (Ford CIC 3)

Later on, towards the end of our research time together, we discussed how we would embed these theories into our work. This is explored further in the Discussion Chapter.

Catherine agreed that these principles were of benefit especially in terms of increased understanding both for her students but also for the systems that surround them.

The greater understanding I gained has increased my empathy for some of my students. For example, those trapped in the university complaints system often have real cause for anger and frustration. Secondly, applying Bourdieu's concepts to individual situations helped me highlight social injustice, which I find motivating, as I wish to contribute to empowering oppressed individuals. I reflected on the importance of social injustice awareness, which it seems is lacking in many of those in decision making positions, possibly because of the cycles of oppression which open doors for certain privileged groups, who have little experience of being oppressed. (Catherine Feedback Questionnaire)

What was a really unexpected finding was the sense of validation that reading these theories gave the co-inquirers. Shuri described this feeling very accurately.

I think simply having the discussions around the theories impacted my practice because they were validating. In the profession, I rarely feel validated by those beyond my students. In theory, my students are all that matters, however, in attempting to advocate for my students, I need to be taken seriously as a professional. Validation from the theoretical aspect is rejuvenating. (Shuri Feedback Questionnaire)

For Shuri, the sense of validation from students as well as from the theories has helped to assure her of the importance of her work. In a fascinating discussion on the CA with her colleague Mary, they talked about the validation that theory gives their work. Mary refers to an example Shuri gave of boosting a student's wellbeing through promoting a more capabilities-based approach.

Mary: Is that the crux of the capability approach suggesting there? That – that like what you were doing there with that confidence boost you were giving and reassurance? And, because you say that the wellbeing side of things, is that what the capability approach is aiming at, at boosting the person's perception they can achieve this or –

Shuri: I don't know if I got that from it theoretically. But, if you simplify capabilities […] that's what it would be. But, if you look at it theoretically, that's not what it reads like to me. Does that make sense?

Sadhbh: Yeah.

Mary: You're absolutely right, though, because that is what – that is the CA, surely, that's what we do constantly with students.

[…]

Mary: Somebody's come up with an academic terminology for what people have been doing for years [laughs] and makes a theory [laughs]. (CIC 2)

This was a really unexpected finding that many of the co-inquirers felt they were engaging in activities that were supported by the theories they had just read. There was an overwhelming sense at times of 'we were already doing this'.

5.20   'We were already doing this'

Ford felt very strongly that she was 'already doing' this when it came to theories of social justice and inclusion, arguing 'I do all of this stuff but I had no idea there was names for it and there was theory behind it'. It is interesting here to see the phrase 'names for it'. It is that sense of academic terminology that SpLD tutors, notably those who are neurodiverse themselves, felt disengaged from. Catherine too felt that she had:

Learnt some new language, metaphors and concepts that are really useful in furthering my understanding and analysis of power structures, systems of oppression and experiences of those with disabilities. (Feedback Questionnaire)

Learning about social justice and critical pedagogy gave Catherine the ability to articulate her thoughts and experiences in text and diagrams. Ford too felt validated in that she could see how she was able to understand and articulate these theories, so much so that she was able to share these theories with her learners.

> Because so much of the stuff I do is kind of innate, it feels innate […] And then I'm going, 'oh shit, I do that', and 'this is what that's called'. And I found that, that's the thing, I found so interesting […] I've never thought of myself as an academic person before or knowing very much. I feel like I'm quite good at this, and then when you see that I'm thinking, 'oh I kind of feel, not clever, that's the wrong word, but I feel validated' because I'm thinking 'well actually I'm using this particular theory', '. And I know that so I've dropped some of this into the students that I know would appreciate it and it wouldn't be too much for them. (Ford CIC 3)

I found it noteworthy that Ford used the term 'academic'. Even though she is highly qualified, she works with the NHS and HEIs and is very well-regarded, she does not see herself as 'academic'. Perhaps these refers again to the language that is used, the language that can often be a barrier to people, especially those who have difficulty in accessing textual material.

Shuri viewed taking part in the CICs as meaningful for two reasons: firstly, to have the time to stop and reflect in dialogue with others and secondly because it allowed her to get back in touch with her academic 'skillset' by engaging with journal articles and critical theories.

> The reason I found it so valuable is because it is infrequently that I have an opportunity to stop, focus and reflect on issues about inclusivity with colleagues. Meaningful discussions are rare outside of quick voicings of frustrations without communicating about the true 'why'. Reading academic articles and critical theories also helped me remember that I am a person who had to acquire degrees to do the work that I do, as that is not something honoured/acknowledged or celebrated in our profession really. I looked forward to using my critical thinking brain to unpick what has happened in education and how this manifests in the lives of our students. (Shuri Feedback Questionnaire)

Both Shuri and Ford used the term 'academic' in a sense that they are not considered 'academic', yet they do work that is highly skilled in academia. It speaks perhaps to the liminal space occupied by the SpLD tutor who is not considered a lecturer or a teacher in a traditional sense.

Jane mentioned earlier in the CICs that she felt like a 'ghost worker' whose presence was not acknowledged.

> I feel like I am a very quiet voice behind the closed door in the academic institutions I work in, but I sort of don't care as long as I'm having something meaningful with my students. But I do feel, I do feel invisible, and I do feel sometimes a bit bitter and twisted

about it, because I get used a bit like a robot, you know. 'Send them to over there', and I don't get acknowledgement. (Jane CIC 1)

This sense of not being acknowledged can perhaps explain why the theories gave the co-inquirers a sense of validation. If 'big thinkers' like Bourdieu and Ahmed are talking about concepts that you can understand and make sense of and then impart in your work with learners, it validates your work. In the absence of acknowledgement from your institution, you can find acknowledgement from these theories.

5.21   Advancing towards collaboration

At the end of our time together, we reviewed what we felt had been transformative for us in our CICs. For Harriet, having the opportunity to reflect and relate theories to her practice had been beneficial, 'I think reviewing theoretical perspectives and relating to my practice has helped me become more reflective and start to question why I am using specific techniques etc.'

The collaborative nature of our work together was something that stood out for Harriet. She was thinking about doing research projects herself and making them more collaborative.

> I think it has been quite a creative experience. I have never heard of collaboration (in the form of dialogue and circles) being used in academic research and it intrigues me. It is something that I value and will certainly think about the approach in any future research that I may do. (Harriet Feedback Questionnaire)

Darcy felt that this PhD project was just the beginning for her: 'I feel like I'm just getting started, the group is like – but it's only maybe a transition now' (CIC 3).

Language as a barrier to engagement is a trope that Darcy identified here and this sense of textual barriers was identified throughout the CICs. I asked the co-inquirers a little more about this sense of textual barriers. Would they find it helpful if we created something about theories together?

Ford responded to this idea very favourably.

> Sadhbh, why can't that be an outcome? […] And I was wondering if that could be some sort of outcome, we could contribute to a demystifying the language thing. I've got no words [laughs]. (Ford CIC 3)

Ford acknowledged that while we were ostensibly engaged in the CICs as part of my PhD research, that we wanted something to come out of this that would be of benefit to all SpLD tutors.

> Sometimes I'm thinking, Sadhbh, don't play ball. Produce what you want to produce,
> that's useful for people in the way that it's useful for and you know, yes you need to get
> your PhD and jump through the circles, but you can jump through the circles going [makes
> gesture with hands], you know? Go through the circles, get what you want, but you could
> actually produce some gorgeous, beautiful stuff from this, and collaborative, we'll all
> jump in and help. (Ford CIC 3)

Ford was astutely acknowledging that while this is project is indeed driven by a PhD research project, which is valuable in its own right, that we also want something to come out of this project. We want to create something *together*. I made some suggestions.

> Sadhbh: Have we got an illustrated guide to theory? A dyslexia practitioner's guide to
> theory, and it could be a multisensory approach. (CIC 2)

Jane mentioned an example she had seen in her institution that might be a good source of inspiration: 'a sort of illustrated guide to academic writing'. I thought this was a great idea.

I have now been approached by ADSHE to deliver training to SpLD tutors on theories of social justice and inclusion. We aim to do this together in collaboration. This is a real, tangible outcome of this research and will have a transformative impact on our colleagues and our students.

In terms of gaining research knowledge, one co-inquirer (Jane) and I have presented on our findings at the 2021 online conference organised by the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IASSIDD). We presented on how we had used concepts from the field of inclusive research for our work together. Jane has now gone on to apply for Fellowship of Advance HE as has another co-inquirer Kitty. Two other co-inquirers, Shuri and Mary, are working on creating workshops for decolonising the curriculum. They will be using their knowledge of Freirean pedagogy to great effect here. We have set the research train in motion!

5.22   Chapter summary: Coming full circle

At the start of this chapter, I described the research findings in terms of listening to the stories from the circles. In listening to the circles there emerged stories of oppression, resistance to oppression and finding ways around institutional resistance to supporting learners with SpLD. Throughout the circles we discussed our interpretations of the different theorists and how they resonated with us and with our work. It was fascinating to 'listen' to how the co-inquirers connected with some concepts more than others. It was also interesting to note how the co-

inquirers could apply certain theories to their practice and could develop these theories to apply to neurodiversity and support for neurodiversity.

The structure of CICs was a little difficult for some co-inquirers initially especially for those who had not engaged as deeply in the readings as others. However, an unexpected finding was how the neurodiverse co-inquirers felt safe and accommodated in the elastic, collaborative space of a CIC. They stated how they appreciated being given the time to go 'off the path' and then to return. Another unexpected finding was how these theories resonated on both a personal and a professional level with the co-inquirers – although it must be reiterated that it was some theories more than others. I had thought for example that the CA would be considered beneficial for our work but the co-inquirers did not feel the work of Sen was so applicable to SpLD practice.

Another unexpected theme was the sense of academic language as a barrier. For the neurodiverse co-inquirers particularly, this sense of not being able to access certain terminology or concepts was quite strong. However, when they were given the opportunity to access materials in a variety of formats and to discuss materials with others, it became apparent that they were highly capable and able to interpret such materials. There were many instances of the word 'academic' being used where people did not view themselves as being 'academic' or indeed as being viewed by HEI as being 'academic' despite being highly qualified people. They therefore felt a sense of validation when they could interpret and apply these theories to their practice. Furthermore, many co-inquirers felt that they were working in a socially just way but they just did not know that there was a 'language' for this.

A tangible outcome which we would like to see from this research is to develop training for SpLD tutors. The co-inquirers felt very strongly that these theories should be made accessible to all SpLD tutors as it is beneficial to our practice but it also helps to 'demystify' the research process. I have been asked by ADSHE to deliver training on social justice and critical pedagogy theories and we would like to develop this training collaboratively in the spirit of nothing about us without us.

Chapter 6   **Discussion of the Circles**

In Chapter Five, the research findings unfolded from listening to the stories in the circles. In this Discussion chapter, I circle back to the original aims of this research and the research findings to explore what happened when SpLD tutors engaged collaboratively with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy. I found that these theories were transformative for the co-inquirers and that this is a valuable contribution to the research literature, a literature that has overlooked the experiences of SpLD tutors and that typically focuses on a psychological, deficit-led model. As a group of co-inquirers, we were different people by the end of the research project. This was transformative change, change that came about from difficulty and from working together to explore that difficulty with the aid of theory. The elastic structure of the CICs enabled discussion on the theories as well as affording the co-inquirers (especially those who were neurodiverse) the space to go off-topic and then to return to the topic. There were some 'dents' in our circles along the way, not least the start of the first Covid-19 lockdown in the UK. This was a time of great difficulty for all of us and we found solace in coming together to discuss social justice and critical pedagogy. I explore these 'dents' in this chapter, including areas that could have been expanded better to include concepts of intersectionality and deeper collaboration at the data analysis stage.

Some of the co-inquirers may have initially thought that they were the wrong 'fit' for theory, that they were not 'academic' enough. However, by the end of the research they had proven to themselves that they could 'fit' with theory. Admittedly, the co-inquirers felt that some theories were a better fit for them and their practice than others. However, we would not have discovered this without having these collaborative dialogues and subsequently analysing these dialogues together.

6.1   Research question

To recap, the research question posed at the start of this thesis was:

What happens when Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) tutors in Higher Education engage collaboratively with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy?

In term of the research aims, I wanted to:

1. Facilitate SpLD practitioner engagement with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy
2. Trace the transformative (or otherwise) learning journey for SpLD tutors when we engage with theory.

3. Explore the use of Collaborative Inquiry Circles (CICs) in research.

4. Develop as a researcher and offer other SpLD tutors the opportunity to become involved in the research process too.

Transformative learning was central to this research and I was intrigued by the association of transformative learning and pre-existing struggle whereby 'transformative learning does not create struggle; it is the gradual and progressive creation of a conceptual framework for participation in a struggle already begun' (Mezirow 1990, p. 89). This sense of being part of a struggle was one of the most overriding themes in the research findings. Repeatedly the co-inquirers evoked their sense of being in a struggle, whether that be the struggle for full support for their learners, the struggle for recognition of their work, or the struggle for HEIs to become more inclusive spaces for all learners. Included in that struggle was the SpLD tutors' sense of isolation, of a lack of engagement not just with other tutors but within departments and the universities as a whole. Part of this isolation is seen in the very employment status of these tutors in HEIs. Many SpLD tutors either work part-time or on zero-hours contracts, which speaks to the increasing casualization of academia where 'an increasing number of higher education faculty are reduced to part-time positions, constituting the new subaltern class of academic labour' (Giroux 2010, p. 715).

The SpLD tutor as a subaltern fits with the experiences of the tutors who seemed to be working in isolation without what Jane referred to as 'triangulation with academics'. Yet this seems a perverse decision, with the rise in students with SpLDs attending UK universities (HESA 2021). However, we can view this increase in learners from a social justice perspective too and not just in terms of economic or health benefits (Hornsby and Osman 2014). For Arvanitakis (2014), greater access to university education is a matter of public good and is a way to break down barriers to education for the those not from the 'elite'. The SpLD tutors in the CICs felt very strongly that increased access to education for students with SpLDs was a matter of public good. There was a palpable sense of anger and sadness however as they felt UK university education could be made so much better. Our universities could be much more inclusive spaces. This struggle had therefore already begun before we started our transformative journey into investigating theories of social justice and critical pedagogy.

6.2   Experience of engaging with Bourdieu's theories

It was the sense of re-interpreting university as a space for the elite that led me to use the work of Bourdieu in the CICs. I wanted the co-inquirers to investigate the idea of reproduction in HEIs in terms of social justice. I was guided by following quote:

> The apparently purely academic cult of hierarchy always contributes to the defence and legitimation of social hierarchies, because academic hierarchies, whether of degrees or diplomas or establishments and disciplines, always owe something to the social hierarchies which they tend to re-produce (in both senses) (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, p.152)

Our training as SpLD tutors focuses on the psychological alone and does not take concepts such as reproduction into account, even though we know from the POLAR (Participation of Local Area) HESA statistics that participation in HE is higher in students from a middle-class background. The complex impact of poverty on aspirations and educational life choices is still strong (Richardson *et al.* 2020). White working-class boys are more likely to be placed in lower ability groups in UK secondary schools which can adversely affect both their expectations and those of their teachers (Travers 2017). I felt that this lack of emphasis on social justice was an issue for those of us who work with disabled students, particularly in terms of the intersectionality of disability, class, race and gender. For example, students from certain minority ethnic groups are disproportionally represented in special education in the UK and in the USA (Allan and Harwood 2016; Skiba *et al.* 2008). Yet none of this intersectionality is discussed and will continue not to be discussed while we privilege the psychological over other issues such as social justice that impact both SpLD tutors and the SpLD learner.

The CICs gave us the opportunity to reflect on hierarchies of power and how it is constructed in society and in our education systems. What was unexpected was how this led to applying the work of Bourdieu to the DSA system. The SpLD tutors referred to the significant changes in the DSA process that had come about with the introduction of the Higher Education Research Act (HERA 2017). These changes included students now paying £200 towards the cost of laptops or computers and the removal of funding such as Band 1 practical support and Band 2 note-taking support (Adams 2020). There have been further changes now announced for the academic year 2021/22. The four main allowances awarded to students are to be merged to create one allowance of up to £25,000 per year. While this allows for more flexibility of choice in spending, it results in a cut of £2,000 for those with the highest support needs (Kernohan 2020).

Catherine applied her understanding of the Wacquant-Bourdieu interviews to the DSA process and spoke of the power vested in people like Needs Assessors to authorise these supports and to say who is entitled to which support. While ostensibly the changes in the DSA process are to move towards a more social model of provision, it is the Needs Assessors who determine support based on medical or educational psychological evidence which seems to undermine the social model of disability (Office for Students 2019; Byrom 2015). It also is a process that has been described as

impersonal and lacking student input 'where provision is based on a homogenous, universal approach that ignores the individual requirements of students in favour of a traditional notion of professional knowledge and existing practices' (Croft 2020, p. 390). Furthermore, the Needs Assessors use a drop-down list of providers when deciding which provider to allocate to students. For Catherine and Ford this was an example of shared economic, cultural and social capital in terms of how provision is allocated. A Needs Assessor's social, economic cultural capital is considered 'the set of actually usable resources and powers' that can impact your position in society (Bourdieu and Bourdieu 1984, p. 114). Catherine and Ford believed that assessors are more likely to use people who are from similar fields and habitus to them. Ford also felt that the same approaches of shared capital, fields and habitus were used to support graduates who take part in the Access to Work (AtW) scheme.

For Catherine, this bias in DSA provision for HEIs was an echo of what was happening on a wider level in UK society. For her, this was a trickle-down effect from Conservative Government policy, policies that have been accused of corruption. Here Catherine was again deploying a Bourdieusian lens to reflect on wider inequalities in society and universities which Bourdieu (1990, p. 57) describes as a 'dialectic between habitus and institutions'. While HEIs may 'talk the talk' of inclusion and widening access for SpLD learners, these narratives do not stand up to close scrutiny when disabled students are still less likely to 'continue their degrees, graduate with a good degree and progress onto a skilled job or further study' (Office for Students 2019, p. 1). Sadly, our universities still reflect 'wider societal attitudes disadvantaging disabled people' (Madriaga 2007, p. 400). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999) referred to 'racial sociodicy' in education and perhaps here too we could compare the DSA process to a disability sociodicy. This connection between inequality in society and the DSA process was a very powerful transformative moment of understanding for Catherine and she later stated that she found this very helpful to understand issues not only on a larger scale but also on a personal level too.

6.3   Habitus and not belonging for the SpLD tutor and learner

When we talked about habitus in the CICs, it was with the sense of what Bourdieu (1967, p. 344) calls the 'cultured habitus'. This is the constantly evolving habitus required for students to 'fit in' in academia. Watson *et al.* (2009) explored this sense of adjusting the academic habitus for those from non-traditional academic backgrounds. The habitus of UK universities 'serves to benefit those whose habitus reflects the dominant culture' (Watson *et al.* 2009, p. 675). In our CICs there was also this sense of a dominant habitus that did not reflect the SpLD tutors' experience. This lent itself to their sense of not fitting into the habitus of the academic community. The word 'academic' featured heavily in our sessions, often when the SpLD tutors referred to themselves as

not being 'academic' or not 'academic enough'. At first glance this is quite curious considering that the SpLD tutors are all highly qualified and could not work in HEIs without primary degrees and specialist qualifications in SpLD support (typically a Level 5 qualification). This sense of not being 'academic' enough was particularly strong in the tutors who were dyslexic themselves. This may well be due to difficult experiences for dyslexic learners in the education system earlier in life which can have a negative impact on self-esteem (Alexander-Passe 2015). Dyslexic learners may become used to being 'defined as non-academic on the strength of their abilities to work within a cultural framework that prioritises literacy as a dominant discourse that defines academic ability' (Collinson and Penketh 2010, p. 10). Reasonable accommodations such as access to a scribe, software or a separate room for examinations, while beneficial, may also make learners feel isolated. Such 'dyslexia-related challenges interact with environmental and social factors in producing a feeling of being an outcast' (Cameron 2016, p. 235). It is understandable therefore that for the dyslexic co-inquirers in particular, taking part in CICs that required interaction with theories could bring up these feelings of inadequacy because of learning in a way that is considered 'different'. Dyslexic SpLD tutors in this research did not feel that they belong in academia although this changed later in the course of this research. Taking part in CICs showed them how capable they were and how they felt a feeling of belonging in the CICs.

This fits with the Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argument of feeling like a 'fish out of water' when there is a disconnect between the university habitus and the individual's habitus. This is particularly the case for non-traditional learners (Newton and Telfer 2017; Meuleman et al. 2015; Watson et al. 2009). In Newton and Telfer's (2017) research at the University of Bolton, where there is a high proportion of 'non-traditional' learners, this sense of not belonging is very strong. They argue that more should be done to 'successfully help learners to become independent and part of the University social habitus' (Newton and Telfer 2017, p. 43). I completely support this idea of supporting students to be part of a university habitus but I would argue that the university habitus needs to change to encompass the needs of all learners particularly those with SpLDs. SpLD tutors with a knowledge of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, capital and fields can be key agents in doing this. This was one of the key motivators in carrying out this research. An unexpected finding however, was that participating SpLD tutors did not feel that they fit the university habitus. Therefore, we should offer opportunities to engage with Bourdieu's theories to investigate these concepts of belonging to the university habitus to the SpLD tutors themselves. If SpLD tutors do not feel that they are part of their institution's social habitus, then how can they support their students to belong to this habitus? A positive impact from this research is that SpLD tutors did feel that they belonged to the habitus that we created in the CICs. I presented theory in an accessible way in an accessible setting, which subsequently enabled the co-

inquirers to re-evaluate their sense of being capable 'academic' beings. Perhaps this speaks to a sense of neurotypical reproduction in HE – that we must work and think in a certain way in order to be considered as doing 'academia' properly. When we change our ways of working and thinking to include more inclusive approaches, we are actually doing academia as it should be.

6.4   Neurotypical reproduction in education

Neurotypical reproduction in the university habitus was a key finding for us. Reproduction in education is typically considered in terms of reproducing hierarchies in society but it can also be seen as reproducing neurotypical hierarchies – those who are neurodiverse may feel inadequate and unwelcome in an arena that prizes literacy abilities as the marker of academic ability. However, the co-inquirers showed time and time again that they were more than capable of engaging with 'academic' texts when they were given access in a variety of formats. Furthermore, their criticality of interpretation was strong, engaging and they applied their understanding in new and interesting ways. Yet many of the co-inquirers stated that they felt that they needed to put in a lot of effort to learn new 'words', which Catherine referred to as learning a new language. It is this sense of language as barrier to engagement that really stood out in the findings. These co-inquirers are no doubt more sensitive to engagement with textual material as they are acutely aware of the barriers that can be posed by academic text both for their students and for themselves. Harriet and Ford are neurodiverse and spoke of how they have to put so much effort into engaging with academic texts. It can be extremely fatiguing and also extremely off-putting. The language of academia can be considered as:

> An extreme form of the literary disposition towards language which is proper to the
> privileged classes, who are inclined to make the choice of language and the manner of
> its use a means of excluding the vulgar and thereby affirming their distinction. (Bourdieu
> and Passeron 1977, pp. 117–118).

This sense of exclusion was keenly felt by the dyslexic co-inquirers such as Harriet who had to work very hard to read such texts and often, in the case of Ford, this can stop her from engaging. From our findings, I advocate that we strongly consider how we present materials to our HE colleagues, particularly to those of us who are dyslexic. Academic materials in text format alone can act as a barrier for them which is why it was important to have CIC materials available in a range of formats, not just text. Dyslexic learners in HE face similar barriers all the time.

6.5   Habitus and the autistic learner in HE

Another unexpected finding comes from exploring Bourdieusian concepts of habitus and the fields and the potential difficulties for autistic students in university. Habitus, according to Bourdieu, can be 'restructured, transformed in its makeup by the pressure of the objective structures' (Rooksby and Hillier 2017, p. 47). This mutability could prove difficult for these learners as there can be 'challenges for autistic university students with social communication, specifically around the requirement to understand and respond to subtle communicative interactions' (Vincent *et al.* 2017, p. 303). We discussed how universities are sites of different fields and habitus that interconnect. The co-inquirers had watched a short animated YouTube video on Bourdieu which gives a very clear explanation of an individual entering into various fields (Reynolds 2013). The video discusses the unwritten rules, the doxa that govern our behaviours in the different fields. Ford talked about how this gave her an insight into the experiences of autistic students in university. These students may not know what is expected in the different fields, the expected doxa may not be explicit, they may not understand which forms of capital are considered more valuable than others. This was an unexpected finding and shows how valuable a knowledge of habitus and the fields and their doxa is at work in universities. It shows us that our students, particularly our autistic students, may need more support in understanding the different spaces that they will encounter in university that may be different from their habitus.

6.6   Critical Pedagogy (Freire, Giroux and hooks)

One of the texts we had read came from Giroux's *Teachers as Intellectuals.* I wanted the co-inquirers to accept themselves as educators who are highly capable of academic thought. I wanted us to consider ourselves as public intellectuals but I also wanted to 'make knowledge meaningful in order to make it critical and transformative'(Giroux 2010, p. 717). This is therefore why I turned to critical pedagogy as a way of helping us make sense of the social justice issues that surround the SpLD tutor in UK universities.

> Critical pedagogy, unlike dominant modes of teaching, insists that one of the fundamental tasks of educators is to make sure that the future points the way to a more socially just world, a world in which the discourses of critique and possibility in conjunction with the values of research, freedom, and equality function to alter, as part of a broader democratic project, the grounds upon which life is lived. (Giroux 2010, p. 717)

It was this emphasis here on the educator as critically reflecting on issues that impact the social justice of the world we live in that I wanted to bring to the fore. The CICs were therefore designed as a space for reflection on social justice in a way that is meaningful for SpLD tutors. In particular, what we discovered in our time together in the CICs validated our experiences in seeking more for our students, in keeping with the struggle for recognition of our roles and to create a more inclusive university space.

The co-inquirers all spoke of the concept of justice for their students within current HE practices. They felt that the students were mired in a system that did not fully support their needs. They gave examples of students that they worked with who were not treated in a fair or socially just manner (see Section 5.2). Having the opportunity to share this together was transformative as it gave the co-inquirers not just the opportunity to voice their experiences but also an opportunity to examine these experiences together. This consciousness-raising was transformative for them in that it validated their feelings. They frequently spoke of how validating it was to share these personal experiences with others who understood. Mary spoke of how she connected very strongly with the work of Freire on a personal level (see Section 5.9). She felt that you could see that he had personal experience of oppressive systems (after the military coup in Brazil in 1964, Freire was imprisoned and then lived in exile for 15 years). Mezirow (1990, p.66) explains how such consciousness-raising is transformative on an individual level:

> I believe this is the crucial point where consciousness-raising as a *radical* method to examine and overcome the articulation of power in subjective experience and individual consciousness is transformed into the *liberal* (and essentially individualist) enterprise of validating feelings or personal experience).

This consciousness-raising is what Freire refers to as conscientisation, which is 'exclusively a human process as only individuals are able to achieve a complex operation of understanding and transforming the world' (Azaola 2014, p. 84). However, I would also argue that this voicing of issues of social justice in our research was transformative on an individual and group level. This was Freirean conscientisation in action. By taking part in the CICs, the co-inquirers had created a conscientisation of their own academic self on an individual level while on a collective level they had created a conscientisation of the systems that oppress their work.

Such conscientisation in action is seen in the work of French and Herrington (2008) who created action/focus groups of dyslexic learners in their research in the universities of Leicester, Nottingham and Wolverhampton. They proposed that dyslexic students in HE work with Student Services and other university departments as a Freirean way of 'naming the world' so as to

reframe the 'support' that is offered to learners (French and Herrington 2008). This is part of the Freirean idea for the

> dispossessed themselves to employ their own words and develop their own voice, to
> represent the way in which their positions had been developed and sustained and that
> processes of conscientization (becoming aware of how they had been subjugated) were
> a prerequisite for liberatory education (French and Herrington 2008, p. 526).

In our CICs, the co-inquirers named their own world, that of systems that did not adequately support their learners or themselves. They spoke of how their voices are not usually listened to in the HE space. They would like their professional bodies like ADSHE to be more forceful when it comes to issues like social justice.

Some co-inquirers talked of the feelings of sadness and disillusionment they experienced when they did examine the systems of power around them in HEIs. Catherine spoke of how she had not realised how bad things could be (see Section 5.12). For Freire, critical pedagogy requires this conscientisation in order to 'read the world critically and effectively problematize the asymmetrical relations of power which structurally reproduce inequalities' (Darder *et al.* 2017, p. 367). Yet, despite the awareness of the difficulties around them, some co-inquirers like Mary spoke of how they still remained hopeful. In *Pedagogy of Hope*: *Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire *et al.* 2004, p. 81) Freire advocates for real listening to the voices of the oppressed in order to reshape our societies in a more inclusive way:

> Here is one of the tasks of democratic popular education, of a pedagogy of hope; that of
> enabling the popular classes to develop their language – not the sectarian, authoritarian,
> goobledygook of educators but their own language, emerging from and returning to their
> reality, sketches out the conjectures, design and anticipations of their new world.

If SpLD tutors had the opportunity to speak and to be truly listened to, then we would have the hope of reframing inclusive practice in our universities. The word 'gobbledygook' was resonant one for the co-inquirers who, as discussed previously, viewed certain academic terminology as a barrier. Using our own voice and our own language is therefore part of the hopeful enquiry within which our co-inquiry began. I would also argue that it is of more use to SpLD practitioners when our investigations are written in an accessible way such as this thesis. It is transformative both on a personal and on a societal level – justice in action.

6.7   Praxis

The reflective act of conscientisation must be accompanied by action in order to become praxis. It is this praxis that leads to transformation. Taylor (1993, p. 56) describes praxis succinctly as 'active reflection and reflective action'. When we talked about Freirean concepts in our CICs, we gave each other space to reflect critically with issues that impact our work as SpLD tutors and impact the learners that we work with. In particular we discussed 'banking education' where knowledge is imparted unto the student from the teacher who is the learned authority on the topic (Ward and Blanchfield 2018 ; Freire 1972). We had talked about how hard it is to reject this banking education in favour of more problem-posing education. The banking model is so prevalent and students appear to expect it.

Catherine had followed these active reflections with her own reflective action in her work. She tried to challenge the expected banking model with her students. However, one student in particular found this very difficult and actually left her class (see Section 5.10). Perhaps this speaks to how important it is to make explicit to learners what banking education is and why an educator would choose to use other approaches? Darcy gave examples from her own experiences of returning to education and how puzzled she and her cohort were by non-banking approaches to learning. This underlines the very real importance of the dialogue between learner and teacher to promote mutual interaction and learning that is key to critical pedagogy. Freire (1972) advocates for humility on the part of the teacher in order to encourage dialogue between the teacher and student so that the teacher is not seen as that 'case apart' from the student. In SpLD work we can do this by putting that dialogue at the centre of our one-to-one sessions, by creating a safe space for that dialogue. In this praxis our roles change where 'the teacher-of the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers' (Freire 1972, p. 67).

SpLD tutors in UK universities are arguably well-placed to embed this concept of praxis into our work. We work one-to-one and our work is based on strong rapport with the learner. This rapport can support us to work through often internalised concepts of banking education towards critical pedagogy. When our roles change, the student takes on more responsibility for their learning. This is crucial in SpLD support as otherwise it could be seen as a prime example of banking education — the SpLD tutor as the expert who comes in to impart knowledge to the unknowledgeable dyslexic student. Co-learning is our aim rather than 'fixing'.

However, while we as educators can recognise the transformative and socially just benefits of embedding critical pedagogy into SpLD work, we need our institutions to recognise this too. It should be a 'joint venture for both organisations and individuals: where organisations on the one

hand recognise the value and economic worth of employees; and individuals in their turn apply critical approaches to direct development of themselves and to influence educational purposes' (Melling and Pilkington, 2018, p. 169). Some of the co-inquirers spoke of their disillusionment with their institutions and a very real sense of concern about the way in which their roles are treated. This speaks to increasingly accepted neo-liberalist, market-driven approaches in UK HEIs such as very real concerns that co-inquirers have about their employment and status within their institutions. Giroux (2019, p. 35) argues that it is just as crucial that educators are treated fairly as much as enabling students to question knowledge creation:

> If teachers do not have control over the conditions of their labour, and if students lack the ability to address how knowledge is related to power, morality, social responsibility and justice, they will have neither the power nor the language necessary to engage in collective forms of struggle.

For Giroux, there is a moral imperative to treating educators in a just manner. Without justice for both educators and students, we cannot transform ourselves or our education systems.

Transgression and the role of the SpLD tutor stood out for the co-inquirers when they read bell hooks' writing on Engaged Pedagogy. The role of the SpLD tutor is often not made very clear in institutions which can be disconcerting for tutors. HEFCE commissioned a report on support for learners with SpLDs in HE and found that it was not 'possible to formally assess the impact of SpLD support or student learning outcomes or indeed the relative effectiveness of different support practices' (York Consulting and University of Leeds 2015, p. 65). It is rather disheartening for the SpLD tutor when HEFCE consultants have nothing to say about the value of your role and what you do. This discomfort could also be heightened when SpLD tutors come to the role from a variety of backgrounds. No one tutor has the same journey. In our research the co-inquirers came from a wide range of teaching backgrounds. Shuri, Mary and Harriet for example had all taught in primary school. Ford and Kitty have worked in sign language interpretation for D/deaf students. This might add to the sense, as previously discussed, of not being 'academic enough'. Therefore, there was a certain solace to be taken from hooks' (1994, pp.142-43) words that there is 'no model or example of how to teach in a different way […] it takes fierce commitment, a will to struggle to let our work as teachers reflect progressive pedagogies'. It is the commitment to struggle that all the co-inquirers could connect with, a commitment that unified all the tutors regardless of their initial teaching background.

The SpLD space is ideally suited to support the Engaged Pedagogy concepts of enhanced student well-being. hooks (1994) places great emphasis on well-being and how when we share our vulnerability we are empowered, both teacher and student, to evaluate how we think and feel.

Tutors however 'must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students' (hooks 1994, p.15). While there is rightly an emphasis on student well-being in the SpLD space, there is rarely any mention made of educator well-being, much less the well-being of the SpLD tutor. Therefore, it would be highly beneficial for us to consider our own well-being as those educators who can successfully engage with students are those who are 'wholly present in mind, body, and spirit' (hooks 1994, p.21). It is hard however to be wholly present if you feel that your role is not fully understood or valued.

This sense of a lack of understanding of your role does however have some unexpected benefits in terms of freedom to create your role. Shuri (see Section 5.11), shared the following quote with her colleague Mary as she found that it really fit with how they want to promote the role of the SpLD tutor in their institution.

> There could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices. Agendas had to be flexible, had to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction. Students had to be seen in their particularity as individuals (I drew on the strategies my grade school teachers used to get to know us) and interacted with according to their needs (here Freire was useful). (hooks 1994, p.7).

For Shuri and Mary, this quote reflected their own experiences of being 'grade school' teachers and of creating sessions that built in spontaneity and flexibility. This quote resonates with the skills they had accrued from working in different educational sectors, and while these were not in universities, they had at their core the sense of getting to know the student as an individual and supporting that individual to harness their strengths in a holistic fashion. Shuri was particularly taken with the idea of how 'excitement in higher education was viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process' (hooks, 1994, p.7). This idea of excitement, fun and light-heartedness as transgressive is indeed an interesting point. Just because a session of support from a SpLD tutor may be relaxed, does not mean it is not a learning space. Again, this speaks to the banking education model of the stern educational expert imparting wisdom to the unknowing learner. 'Proper' education is not allowed to be fun or to be enjoyable. A relaxed SpLD space based on critical and engaged pedagogy is indeed a transgressive space as it is a direct challenge to traditional banking modes of education. It is an exciting space to be in. Excitement lends itself to transformation.

6.8   Sen and CA

I presumed that the sense of excitement for critical and engaged pedagogy among the CICs would also be found for Sen's CA. However, the co-inquirers did not seem to share my sense of excitement. There was perhaps a sense that CA was not as accessible as the other theories. I was surprised by this as I thought if the co-inquirers were inspired by Bourdieusian concepts of the field and so on, that the CA would be a good companion to this. This is a view shared by Hart (2013, p.62):

> Sen's CA offers some ethical principles to apply in approaches to developing and evaluating systems of education. Bourdieu's sociological concepts provide an ideal partner to these organising principles by offering tools for in-depth analysis and understanding of the social context in which education takes place.

A further reason to work with the CA is its emphasis on well-being, which fits well with hooks' emphasis on the well-being of the learner. However, Sen (1993) is not interested in individual well-being alone, rather he is interested in 'well-being freedom' as well as 'agency freedom'. Well-being freedom is an individual's attainment that supports their well-being while agency freedom is the freedom to 'bring about the achievements one values and which one attempts to produce' (Azaola 2014, p.84). In my research this would translate to structural inequalities having an impact on agency-freedom such as the impact of the DSA process on learners with disabilities.

Catherine explored the concept of well-being for learners with SpLDs based on her interpretation of Robeyns's work (2017) on well-being and the capability approach (see Section 5.7). For Robeyns (2017, p.50) 'the means of wellbeing, like the availability of commodities, legal entitlements to them, other social institutions, and so forth, are important, but the capability approach presses the point that they are not the ends of wellbeing, only their means'. Catherine applied this view to the ADSHE Seven Principles, this is a means of creating educational well-being for our learners. However, Catherine stated that the Seven Principles are quite limited. There is no interpretation of criticality, social justice, inclusion or well-being. Catherine suggested that the CA would be a good approach to evaluating the support that SpLD tutors provide. We do not think of capabilities in terms of students' goals or well-being. Darcy spoke of how well-being as a term is often used in HE. However, it is very hard to define what well-being is. Most often, it is described as students having a 'lack' of well-being. Well-being is difficult to support if we cannot define what it is. Ford who works primarily in nursing education agreed with this. Well-being may be a term that is featured prominently in nursing support but it is very difficult to apply. It is even harder to apply well-being freedom and agency freedom in these contexts, hence the co-inquirers' difficulties in applying the CA.

Darcy, a former midwife, who works with Ford in nursing support was interested in aspirations and the CA which she read in a journal article from Hart (2016. pp.326–327).

> An individual might set their aspirations in relation to what they know they can achieve or they might set aspirations more ambitiously to strive for ways of being and doing they are not sure of realizing. Some individuals might aspire in a non-specified way in terms of wanting "a better life," whereas others might strive for specific transformative social change, such as a change in the law.

Darcy discussed the aspirations of mature students who return to nursing education. Often these students are considered 'non-traditional' learners as they may be the first in the family to go to university, they may have different ideas of what it is to be a nurse especially in terms of what is required such as writing essays and a dissertation. Darcy was particularly interested in the interplay between capabilities and aspirations and she could see how this was relevant for her settings. These students may be driven by aspirations but these aspirations may also be based on perceptions of their capabilities. Darcy's thinking shows the potential for applying CA to SpLD support for students in nursing and the health sciences in particular.

However, despite the co-inquirers' innovative applications of Sen's work to SpLD support in HEIs, there was not an overwhelming sense of interest in the CA. Some co-inquirers described the CA as 'woolly'. Perhaps this was an error on my behalf as the CA approach has been expanded on in great detail by other theorists and perhaps the co-inquirers would have benefitted from exploring the work of these other theorists. Nussbaum (2000, pp.76–80 ; 2011, pp.33–34) developed her concept of the CA to include a list of 10 capabilities that people have a right to expect for their well-being, such as her exploration of education for human well-being. Here Nussbaum is adding more specificity than Sen and this could have been beneficial for the co-inquirers if they had more concrete examples to think about. However, the value of Sen's writing is its open-ended quality and lack of 'constraints and interferences that might (rightly) interfere with freedom and democratic ideals writ large' (Wood and Deprez 2012, p.476).

Another critique of the CA was that the co-inquirers found it 'cold'. This could possibly be due to the use of terms like 'functionings', which are possibly more usual in the discourses of economics rather than education. Language, as seen throughout the research, had a very strong impact on the co-inquirers. Some academic terms were unknown to the co-inquirers and for those who are neurodiverse unfamiliar words made them feel unwelcome, as if they did not have a right to be part of the academic space. This has a lot to do with the 'disabling discourses dominant in western education; that is, those discourses which tie "literacy" to morality and "intelligence", and which situate "success" and "failure" within the individual' (Cameron and Greenland 2019, p.3). Hence,

they associated the language of the CA with the language of disabling discourse in universities. This was not a finding that I expected and was somewhat paradoxical! However, this does point to the importance of thinking about the language we use. For some people, the language that a theory is couched in, can distract from the message of the theory itself. In this research, this was especially the case for co-inquirers who are dyslexic or had ADHD.

We do not have to dumb down our research but to think perhaps of writing in a more accessible way. This idea has been a factor in my own writing style that I use for this thesis. I want this thesis to be easily read especially by the co-inquirers. Accessible writing is a concept that is prominent in inclusive research where co-researchers with intellectual disability take up roles as contributors to the research, analysis, writing and reading of research articles (Riches *et al.* 2020). All too often, these co-researchers are not included in discussions and have been 'traditionally marginalized and silenced, which results in their perspectives being consistently ignored' (Seale *et al.* 2015, p.483). While the co-inquirers are not people with intellectual disabilities, some are people with learning differences which can make accessing theoretical texts difficult. However, it was not just access that was the issue, it was how it made them feel – having difficulty with a text brought up for some co-inquirers issues of internalised concepts of value and self-worth in academia. You cannot be an 'academic' person if you have difficulty with reading a text. Ironically, for some co-inquirers, the CA did not help them to feel capable.

6.9   Applying the CA to SpLD practice – already doing it?

One co-inquirer, Shuri, did implement her interpretation of the CA into her SpLD practice (see Section 5.8). She emphasised a learner's capabilities when the learner was very uncertain of her abilities. The learner in question had appeared to have internalised typical banking methods of education. She very much wanted Shuri to 'come in' and 'rescue' her. Shuri did not do this, instead she sent the student away to reflect on what she could do. The student returned and had completed all the tasks that previously she felt she could not do alone. This was a very interesting example of how we could implement the CA into SpLD support, to support the student's agency in discovering their capabilities. However, many of the co-inquirers felt that that the CA was not particularly innovative or valuable as this was something that they were 'already doing'. They felt that they have always been the ones to champion a learner's abilities and to support them to look at their strengths, their capabilities. However, the CA is more than just looking at people's strengths. It is a framework tool for evaluating social inequalities, policies, social arrangements, well-being, agency amongst other things (Robeyns, 2005). In the example that Shuri gave about her student, she not only gave the learner the opportunity to examine her strengths but she also challenged the banking style of education that the learner appeared to have internalised. She

empowered that learner to develop her own agency. I do not believe that this would have happened without Shuri learning about the CA and supporting the student to develop her own agency which is beneficial for her own well-being and ultimately supporting the learner to achieve her capabilities.

For Georgina, what stood out for her in terms of assessing the value of the CA for SpLD support was intersectionality in terms of a focus on inequality. Intersectionality is considered 'the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combination plays out in various settings' (Delgado and Stefancic 2012, p.51). Disability is not mentioned in this quote but there is increasing research now on the intersection between race and disability, such as the work of Connor *et al.* (2016); Crenshaw (2019); Collins (2019). Co-inquirer Emma was active in delivering training on the intersectionality of race and dyslexia in HEIs to dyslexia associations. She also gave the keynote speech on intersectionality and SpLD support at the 2018 ADSHE conference. This was highly unusual as institutional racism, sexism, classism and ableism are issues that we do not typically discuss in SpLD training, yet they will 'inform and rely upon each other in interdependent ways' (Cameron and Greenland 2019, p.4). In the CICs, the feeling was that the CA lent itself well to views on intersectionality particularly in terms of overcoming paternalistic approaches to SpLD support. However, I could have done more to cover issues of race and disability in our CICs. We did discuss intersectionality when we read the work of Sara Ahmed but we did not extend our reading to include race. The CICs met just before the Black Lives Matters (BLM) protests. The marches in the aftermath of George Floyd's death, the taking the knee of the England football team in the Euro 2021 matches and so forth, have all contributed to a growing awareness of institutional racism in society (despite government reports to the contrary). If the CICs had occurred after the BLM marches, perhaps there would have been more discussion on race in our circles.

The intersectionality of disability studies and critical race theory needs to be examined by SpLD tutors, particularly when it comes to thinking about the SpLD diagnosis process. For example, in the UK, black Caribbean children are more likely to be diagnosed with Special Educational Needs (SEN) compared to white children (Allan and Harwood 2016, p.187; Tomlinson 1987). Furthermore, learners living in areas of social deprivation are more likely to be diagnosed with social, emotional and behavioural issues and have an increased likelihood of being diagnosed with ADHD (Heberle and Carter 2020). This is an issue that we could have addressed more in our CICs and is an area worthy of further research. The work of Crenshaw (2019) in particular could have great resonance with SpLD tutors. However, the CA would resonate more with SpLD assessors rather than tutors. Also, if we were to embed the CA into diagnostic report writing, it would overcome the more deficit-laden medical models within these reports. SpLD assessors would

benefit too from more awareness of critical race theory and disability when doing assessments. This could be a further area of research to explore.

6.10   Connection with Sara Ahmed

Of all the theorists that we studied, it was the work of Sara Ahmed that seemed to resonate most among the co-inquirers. There were many reasons for this but primarily she made the co-inquirers feel less alone in their struggle for recognition for their learners and themselves. Her work spoke to their sense of isolation and marginalisation in the university space. Reading the work of Ahmed showed the co-inquirers that there were others out there who felt the same way as they did. Mary had humorously referred to how Ahmed had succinctly expressed all of Mary's frustrations with inclusive practice in HEIs! It was Ahmed's focus on complaint as diversity work in particular that rang true for the co-inquirers.

When you work as an SpLD tutor in a university, you presume, along with Ahmed that you are there to transform, to support change in the institution.

> To be appointed as a diversity practitioner, or to be given diversity and equality as one of your duties, is to be put into an oblique relation to the institution. You are appointed by an institution to transform the institution (Ahmed 2017, p.94)

While this may appear to be the case, you may be hampered in your efforts to transform the institution. All throughout the CICs, the co-inquirers spoke of their frustration, their sadness, their rage at not being able to change approaches to learning in their institutions. This may be because 'models for supporting disabled students are rigid, focussing predominantly on enhancing organisational accountability. This flawed application of supportive interventions often serve to disempower students' (Adefila *et al.* 2020, p.2). While Adefila *et al.* (2020) and Ahmed (2017) do not directly address the role of the SpLD tutor, there are parallels to be made. The DSA process created to support students can become a system to disempower the learner. The SpLD tutor, it could be said, becomes complicit in the act of disempowerment.

In order to resist this complicity, Ahmed (2017) argues that we need to be pushy, to push against what has already been built. The co-inquirers were very taken with Ahmed's metaphor of the door, a door that does not provide access to everyone. This is very much in keeping with moves towards UDL with its roots in architectural design and accessibility. It is our built environment but also our inner environment that must transform for diversity work. We need to change our language from that of accommodations, reasonable adjustments and so on to a 'whole-of-university design process that configures an accessible and equitable institution for all students'

(Brabazon 2015, p. 14). We need to push *for* more inclusive approaches in the outer and inner university environment rather than being part of the 'lip service' to inclusion (Ahmed, 2019a). We are not advocating however for a 'one size fits all' approach which is often seen in recommendations in Needs Assessments (Cameron *et al.* 2019). Rather, we would advocate for an approach that takes the needs of individual students and their environment into account such as is recommended for autistic students (Jansen *et al.* 2017).

For Wray and Houghton (2019, p.521), it is crucial that we 'focus on an understanding of the disabled student as being part of the whole student body and it is not relevant to articulate the "otherness" of disabled learners'. However, as attested by the co-inquirers, the 'otherness' of disabled learners is what leads to unequal treatment in university. It is for these students that the SpLD tutors complain. The complaint procedure can also be complicated and difficult to follow. This is doubly compounded if you are a student who has issues with writing and reading long pieces of text and have time management and organisational issues. In order to support these students you need to complain and you need to be wilful.

> Diversity work could thus be described as wilful work. You have to persist because they resist […] we notice the modification of spaces required to make them accessible reveals how spaces are already shaped by the bodies that inhabit them. (Ahmed 2017, p.113)

This sense of wilfulness appealed to the co-inquirers, that they and their students are considered awkward members of the educational community. It also made them realise that the inherent difficulties they experienced in university structures, are also mirrored in the wider community. The university 'door' and the community 'door' are not built for their wilful bodies. There is the sense that SpLD tutors and their students are 'awkward' shapes and in complaining they are being 'awkward'.

Catherine discussed how she found it difficult to understand why her husband Gerado did not complain about the injustice he has experienced. However, from reading Ahmed (2017) it is clear that there are so many barriers in his way: policy barriers, socio-economic barriers, educational barriers, emotional barriers. What is often not talked about is the labour that goes into complaint. Ahmed (2017 pp. 13–14) refers to this labour as a 'sweaty concept' that are 'generated by the practical experience of coming up against a world, or the practical experience of trying to transform a world'. The mechanism of complaint is power – coming up against that power over others and those who are holding onto that power. Complaint can be thought of as a type of work in its own right, work to stop the reproduction of inequality (Ahmed 2019b).

The linkage of complaint with Bourdieusian concepts of reproduction in education is novel and fits with what we have discussed in our CICs. We do not usually associate complaint as a mechanism of confronting reproduction and this is an interesting concept when we think of complaint as a transformative act. Complaint too can be associated with hope.

> The hope of complaint can end up being modest, tied closely to the wear and tear of fighting institutional battles; the hope of institutional change of some kind. That hope can be *in the trying.* A hope can thus be immanent: it can be in the institutions we are in; hope as the effort to transform institutions. (Ahmed 2019b)

Mary talked about how a Freirean pedagogy of hope helps to sustain her as otherwise she would be completely disillusioned with her work. It is interesting therefore to see the interconnections with Ahmed's work and the other theorists that we had studied in our CICs, namely Freire and Bourdieu. These resonate with the concept of diversity work.

Ahmed's metaphor of the door that does not afford access to all can also be used for theory. It is linked to a sense of not belonging. As discussed earlier, this sense of not belonging, of not being the right fit for academia, was felt very deeply by the co-inquirers. There are many reasons for this, the marginalisation of SpLD tutors within HEIs, the sense of alienation and powerlessness that they feel, the sense of being 'ghost workers' in the university space. It was the neurodiverse practitioners who seemed to feel this sense of being the 'wrong shape' for the door most keenly. Ahmed (2017, pp. 9–10) advises that we should not overlook the capabilities that we bring to academia, especially for the doors that were not shaped for us:

> But think of this: those of us who arrive in an academy that was not shaped by or for us bring knowledges, as well as worlds, that otherwise would not be here. Think of this: how we learn about worlds when they do not accommodate us. Think of the kinds of experiences you have when you are not expected to be here. These experiences are a resource to generate knowledge.

In thinking of the other theorists that we have studied, it could be said that we bring our different habitus, our different capabilities to HEIs. These are very valuable experiences and the more we bring these experiences, the more we will change the shape of the door. We are challenging neurotypical concepts of the university space and this is a powerful finding for us. We are also challenging the co-inquirers concepts of themselves as 'not academic' which was very evident when we talked about theory.

When the co-inquirers talked about their experiences of engaging with theory, they felt like it was learning another language – a language distinct from their world. Ahmed has also had this feeling

of theory as a new language. For her, 'critical theory is like any language; you can learn it, and when you learn it, you begin to move around in it' (Ahmed, 2017, p.9). Moving around in theory is key to transformative learning in our research project. Once the co-inquirers felt comfortable, in a safe space, then they could move and transform their understanding. The issue was to support them to 'get in the door'. As discussed earlier, for some co-inquirers, the act of reading to access the language of theory was difficult, which was an additional barrier in learning this 'language'. It made me reflect on how we access theory and how we 'open' up to the door of theory in the first place. Ahmed's work is written in a very accessible way and I included blog posts, videos and book chapters in the selection of her work to be discussed in the CICs (see Appendix C). In this way, the co-inquirers were able to not only move within theory but also open the *door* to theory.

6.11   Bringing theory home to the CIC

Despite implementing UDL approaches and taking care to select a variety of resources, it was sometimes hard to get people to do the readings required to open the door. I was torn between wanting people to do their 'homework' but I also did not want people to feel like these theories were 'chores' to be done. It is interesting therefore to see how Ahmed (2017, pp.9–10) refers to feminist theory as 'homework':

> To bring feminist theory home is to make feminism work in the places we live, the places we work. When we think of feminist theory as homework, the university too becomes something we work on as well as at. We use our particulars to challenge the universal

While Ahmed is referring to feminist theory, in our case we needed to bring the theories to our 'home', to make them work for our spaces and our institutions. Our homework therefore has been to give ourselves time to engage with the theories and reflect on how to bring them into our practice. The CICs were our mechanism to do this and hinged on people's ability to interpret and discuss the theories that were provided. However, when there were instances of people not engaging fully with the theories, they were still able to bring 'value' to the discussions especially when discussing their lived experiences. Many co-inquirers, particularly those with DCD/dyspraxia and ADHD, relished the opportunity to go 'off-piste' and then return to the main thread of the discussions. The structure of the CICs was set up to enable such space to move within theory and I feel that this space was highly beneficial for these co-inquirers in particular.

However, for some co-inquirers this freedom of movement was different to what they expected. They wanted more traditional, almost didactic approaches (although it is interesting to note that these co-inquirers did not identify as neurodiverse). One co-inquirer made reference to wanting a class more than a circle. This speaks to more internalised concepts of banking education. Lorde

(1990) in reference to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, talks of transformative power of challenging these banking concepts.

> The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships' (Lorde cited by Ferguson, 1990, p.287).

These embedded concepts of oppressive education became visible in this way in our research. It also demonstrates I needed to be explicit with co-inquirers about research approaches as we may all have internalised these banking models of education. This is especially necessary for working collaboratively.

When the neurodiverse co-inquirers were asked of their experiences of moving with CICs, they were unfailingly positive about their experiences in the space and how they felt that it was a safe space that fit them. We therefore made the door of the CICs fit all our shapes. It was perhaps a slightly different door to what some co-inquirers expected but I would argue that CICs are an inclusive space and are especially suitable for researching with neurodiverse people. They are a space to bring theory home.

6.12   What did we learn about learning about theory?

Initially, some co-inquirers may have felt that theory was not for them. As Ahmed (2017, p. 8) points out, 'within the academy, the word theory has a lot of capital'. The co-inquirers felt the weight of this capital when they first came to engage with theory. However, I would argue that by the end of the research that they felt that they were at home with theory, so much so that they felt validated by the theories they had read. This is resonant of Bourdieu's concept of theories as a set of thinking tools and of how it is his wish that we recognise ourselves in his theoretical thinking tools.

> Nothing would make me more happy than to have succeeded in enabling some of my readers, both men and women, to recognize their own experiences, difficulties, problems, sufferings, etc. in mine, and that they should derive from this realist identification, which is completely different from an exhalted imagination, the means to act and live a little bit better what they live and do (Bourdieu 2004, p.142)

Like Bourdieu, we did not simply engage in theory for theory's sake. We were not looking for theory to give SpLD work added 'cachet to simple ideas or propositions – and to claim some epistemological legitimacy and explanatory currency for these ideas and propositions' (Thomas

and Loxley 2007, p.11). Rather, we wanted to see if these theories were of transformative benefit to us and this was indeed the case (although admittedly, some theories were more transformative than others).

It was notable how the co-inquirers felt that they were already putting into practice certain theories of social justice and critical pedagogy. Ford and Catherine talked of how they felt that they were engaging with concepts of social justice in their work, they just did not know that there were 'words' for this. This was one of many 'aha moments' that the co-inquirers experienced. An 'aha' moment is what Mezirow (1990, p.56) describes as 'arising from her "entire being" shows that the perceptual shift occurring at the moment of remembrance and understanding, both crucial elements in the process of critical self-reflection, is itself an experience'. These transformative moments for Ford and Catherine comprised both remembrance and understanding. When we discussed these moments in our practice it was highly empowering. It showed the co-inquirers that they were using these concepts in their own praxis and they now had the opportunity to delve more deeply into these concepts in the CICs. Furthermore, it made co-inquirers feel less alone to know that there were others out there who shared the same ideas.

> Theory does more than express the arcane knowledge of some professional intellectual elite. It also empowers and, dare I say, can be used to resist the imposition of ideas and policies that come saturated with political interests that are often so antithetical to 'science' (Grenfell and Yates 2008, p.565).

Thinking about ideas and policies that impact our work was highly transformative for us and we were particularly able to do so as the CICs were a safe transformative space (see Section 5.18). When thinking about the spaces that learning occurs, one of the key findings for the co-inquirers from the work of Freire and Giroux was that SpLD work does not occur in a neutral space. SpLD work is shaped by outside influences whether that be government policy to ingrained, unquestioned socio-cultural mores. These are not concepts that are embraced by our professional organisations. The ADHSE Seven Principles of metacognition, relevance, overlearning, modelling, multi-sensory, motivation and 'little and often', while helpful, do not take issues of social justice and inclusion into account. There is no mention in the ADSHE principles of habitus, the fields, reproduction, capabilities, banking education, well-being or diversity work. The co-inquirers felt that such theoretical concepts all have a place in our work and should be included in the guidance of our professional bodies. Metacognition alone will not work without recognition of the systems within which we operate.

Therefore, we felt very strongly that theories of social justice and inclusion have a place in the work of the SpLD tutor. However, often the SpLD tutor may feel that they do not have a place in

theory! This is no doubt due to erroneous concepts of theory being seen as separate to practice and only belonging to those in the academic space (Thomas 2007). The academic space is one where SpLD tutors experience marginality alongside learners who are marginalised. This margin is what hooks (1990, p. 343) describes as a space where 'We are re-written. We are other. We are the margin'. However, I would argue that SpLD tutors can rewrite their space out of the margins in academia when they engage in social justice and inclusion theories. Engaging with theory shows that they have a place in academia and they are capable of understanding and enacting theory. We need to reclaim theory for ourselves.

I would therefore argue that the institutions that offer training for SpLD tutors and our professional bodies need to incorporate more theories of social justice and inclusion into their offerings. It is not enough to focus on issues like executive functioning alone while ignoring the intersection of sociological impacts on learners and ourselves.

Engaging with theory was transformative for us. This is not to deny that there were times when it was difficult to engage, process and interpret theories, especially when they challenged pre-existing or long-held concepts. 'Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle, together with those who we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals' (Lorde cited by Ferguson 1990, p.287). It made all of us change, including me as the doctoral researcher. I had pre-existing concepts of what I thought these theories would mean and my views changed through the dialogue with the others and my subsequent reflections. There were times in the CICs when I felt what Mezirow (1990) refers to as a blurring of roles, where I was not just the doctoral researcher but also a co-inquirer open to new ways of thinking. 'In transformative learning, the line between learning, education and research often become mercifully blurred. The educator becomes a co-learner, helping the learner explore alternative ways of interpreting his or her experiences.' (Mezirow 1990, pp. xix–xx). This was a very powerful experience, of how I could feel myself moving between roles in the CICs. As a doctoral researcher, you have to be brave enough to follow the blurring of roles in the research and it is due to my readings on transformative learning that I was able to do this. This was indeed transformative for me.

This blurring of roles is important too in SpLD practice, that we enable learners to interpret experiences through co-creation. For Freire (1972, p.51), we need this co-creation for our education to be truly transformative:

> Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality

> through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators.

Co-creation is good for SpLD practice as it enables us, both learner and tutor, to reflect on the hierarchies of power that surround us in our learning. It enables learners to discover their own agency and to challenge dominant ways of thinking. In our collaborative research, the co-inquirers discovered their own 'academic' agency. They affirmed to themselves that they were capable people, able to engage in theory and move within the world of theory. We could see how we were surrounded by internalised models and how, through dialogue, we were able to challenge these models. For Thomas (2012) it is through such sharing, dialogue and reflection on theory that transformative learning for our practice takes place, and this in turn, can help generate other theories. This transformation was supporting by the collaborative framework of the CICs which lend themselves to transformative practice.

6.13   Collaborative research was transformative

Collaborative and inclusive research approaches were central to the research design. These approaches aim to include the knowledge of people who do not typically get involved in research (Parsons 2021). Typically, it is children or learners with intellectual disabilities who are marginalised in educational research (Nind 2017; Pascal and Bertram 2012). However, SpLD tutors are also people who are marginalised in educational research. They do not get the opportunity to take part in research, much less to be part of the data analysis. We might think of using inclusive research approaches with teachers or learners but we do not typically think of using inclusive research approaches with SpLD tutors. I believe that this is due to the invisibility of SpLD tutors, an invisibility that was very striking in the research literature. However, this PhD research has shown that SpLD tutors can take part in research, SpLD tutors too can learn to analyse data. This is the novel aspect of this research design but it is also a way of reclaiming the research space for us SpLD tutors. It has shown us that we are capable people, who are capable of taking part in research, understanding research and also analysing research. It empowers our sense of self, our sense of deserving a place in the HE space. As Giroux (1988) advocates, we are teachers who can view ourselves as intellectuals. We have demonstrated our abilities and that we do belong in university space. It was the use of CICs and our analysis approach that enabled collaboration which in turn was transformative. This transformative impact is part of what Walmsley *et al.* (2018) refer to as the added value of inclusive research.

6.14   Being part of a circle was transformative

Being part of a circle was key to attaining this transformative impact. Throughout the research, the co-inquirers repeated how it felt like a 'safe space'. This was very important to enable dialogue and inquiry. I built this into the CICs by drawing on techniques from mindfulness circles to make co-inquirers feel welcomed and set the tone for discussion (McCown 2013). My previous experience as a mindfulness facilitator lent itself well to this type of research as did my previous teaching experience. This sense of mindful facilitation was important in terms of transformative impact as 'the way in which the process of carrying out a research project seems to promote psychological and even spiritual development and transformation.' (Bentz and Shapiro 1998). The way a CIC is created is as important as what happens in the CIC. Otherwise, transformation cannot occur.

This was particularly important for the co-inquirers who identify as neurodiverse. Our CICs were an elastic space which enabled discussions to move in and out of the topics. This was greatly valued by the neurodiverse co-inquirers who felt that this enabled more participation as it supported how they liked to work. It was however, a little difficult when some people had not done as much reading as others. This is something that perhaps I needed to account for more as some of the co-inquirers had difficulty accessing texts, everyone was working, and the last part of the research occurred during the first few months of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Difficulties aside, we did share our knowledge and experiences together in the CICs and it was in this sharing that we generated ideas especially in terms of applying theories of social justice and critical pedagogy to our practice. Emma and Georgina for example used the work of Giroux as a springboard to discussing the systems of oppression that surround SpLD tutors in the university space and how SpLD tutors need to be recognised (see Section 5.3). Shuri worked on emphasising capabilities to a learner who was reluctant to work independently (see Section 5.8). Ford discussed how concepts of the dominant habitus and reproduction can have a negative impact on neurodiverse learners (see Section 5.5). These ideas for our practice were transformative and I feel that they could only have occurred because we enabled the spaces to support transformative learning and application to our practice. It was empowering too to have SpLD tutors provide their experiences and their ideas. Research benefits from closer collaboration between practitioners like SpLD tutors and researchers (Guldberg 2017). We have much to contribute to inclusive education in HEIs and we have shown that we too can be researchers in the HEI space.

6.15   Demystifying research to enable research

Part of the work of this project was to demystify the research process. It is hard to collaborate if you do not feel you understand the research process and if you do not feel that you belong to the research space. This sense of not belonging, of not being 'academic enough' was a strong theme in our CICs as previously explored (see Sections 5.18 and 5.20). It was therefore important, not just to demystify the language of theory but also to demystify the language of research to enable a sense of belonging in research as well as theory. This sense of difficulty with research is an issue that is also seen in inclusive research with adults with intellectual disabilities. Walmsley *et al.* (2018, p. 752) discuss how 'co-researchers rarely have much experience of research when they begin work … are unlikely to be familiar with the literature or research methods'. While the experiences of SpLD tutors are very different to adult researchers with intellectual disabilities there was nevertheless the strong need to demystify the language of theory and the approaches used in this research process. The co-researchers frequently referred to theory as 'learning a new language'. Learning to analyse data was also a new experience for the majority of the co-inquirers.

However, not all the co-inquirers took part in the data analysis. Some of them simply did not have the time and others were not available. However, those who did participate in the data analysis said that it was a very valuable skill to have learned and one they could share with their students. Data analysis skills are not mentioned in the ADSHE Seven Principles (ADSHE 2021). SpLD tutors are recommended to support the development of a learner's research skills but typically these are considered more in terms of searching and interpreting of resources rather than actual data analysis. Therefore, data analysis is a skill that some SpLD tutors in the research project valued and felt that it would have a direct impact on their practice.

An unexpected finding from the research was how the neurodiverse co-inquirers responded to Quirkos. The strong visual impact of Quirkos and the functions such as the Word Cloud were elements that they praised. This speaks to the importance of inclusive design when creating CAQDAS software. The heightened visual aspects of Quirkos fit with key UDL approaches, of creating multiple means of engagement, representation and expression (Centre for Applied Learning and Technology 2011). However, I must also add that I had to be careful that my 'techy' background as a technical writer did not cloud my perception of the Quirkos software and do not get too enthused about the functionality of the software without losing sight of my methodological approach (Friese 2011).

The resultant outputs from the data analysis brought a richness to the research. Not only did it have a transformative impact on the co-inquirers but it also transformed my interpretations of

the data. The interpretations that the co-inquirers brought has given greater insight into the research such as the values coding from Jane's analysis. Her coding demonstrated her very strong feelings of isolation in her role and feelings of a lack of agency. This understanding would not have been possible without learning about the inclusive research benefits that occur when co-inquirers analyse their own data (Nind 2014). However, I could have used the collaborative functions of Quirkos more. On reflection, I feel I could have brought in all the contributors to see everyone's codes rather than just each co-inquirer looking at her own codes. This could have offered another opportunity to learn collaboratively from each other and to strengthen our collaborative relationships.

6.16   Ways to take our transformative learning forward

After our time together, members of the CICs and I have discussed ways to take our transformative learning forward. Chief among these is to create a theory toolkit for our professional body ADSHE which would contain the theories that we covered in our research. We plan to start working on this together in September 2021 with the aim to deliver workshops to our colleagues in the following semesters. I feel that it is very important to work together in collaboration as this way we are remaining true to the spirit of our CICs. It is also highly meaningful for us to be able to deliver these workshops to fellow SpLD tutors and to highlight the impact of these theories on our practice. We hope that in turn, these workshops will be transformative for our colleagues and by extension, students in UK HEIs.

It was very clear throughout the research how SpLD tutors did not feel like they were a good 'fit' for academia, often describing how they felt as not belonging or fitting in. This has had an impact on our well-being and our ability to flourish. However, we have started to claim our space in research such as our joint presentation at the 2021 IASSIDD conference as well as other colleagues going forward for fellowship of Advance HE. Two more co-inquirers are now developing their own workshops on decolonising the curriculum to be delivered in their university. These are very real tangible impacts from our research together.
We need to use our criticality and our skills to examine ongoing developments in society such as policies and procedures for inclusive practice in UK HEIs so that every student can benefit from inclusive practice (Moriña 2017, p. 13). Furthermore, I advocate that use the tools of 'critique, analysis and inquiry' to support our work to make UK HEIs more inclusive spaces (Broderick *et al.,* 2012, p. 839). However, we can only do this when we have opportunities for transformative learning such as collaboratively engaging with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy.

6.17   Chapter summary

Transformative learning truly occurred in our CICs. The SpLD tutors were changed by this research in a profound way especially in how they viewed themselves. This was also true for me as I view myself now as a researcher rather than a 'researcher-in-training'. The co-inquirers now view themselves as capable of being 'academic'. Furthermore, the co-inquirers found that they achieved a conscientisation on both an individual and on a collective level especially in terms of examining the oppressive structures that prevent the full inclusive engagement of the co-inquirers in the university space. The struggle of SpLD tutors and those of the students to 'fit' into the spaces of academia as well as the co-inquirers struggle to 'move' in theory were key themes in our research. It is in this struggle that transformation can occur and this transformation was enabled by our collaborative engagement with theory. It was notable that some theories seemed to fit more than others. The co-inquirers could see that some theories were easier to apply to SpLD practice than others.

The way in which we engaged with these theories was also crucial. Despite the difficulties of researching at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, we worked well together in the CICs. An interesting finding was that CICs suited neurodiverse co-researchers in particular as did the visual and intuitive functionality of our data analysis software. We used elements of inclusive research approaches in our work and this seemed to fit the needs of the co-inquirers very well. I would like to take our experiences of this research further and develop a 'theory toolkit' for SpLD colleagues in our professional organisations. We have started to 'move more' in research too and are beginning to occupy spaces within the academy. We have proved to ourselves that we have capabilities.

Chapter 7 **Conclusions and recommendations**

In this final chapter, I review the circles within circles that comprise this PhD. I began this PhD as an SpLD tutor who wanted to research the potential transformative power of social justice theories and critical pedagogy. I finish this PhD as a researcher who is also an SpLD tutor. My identity been transformed by the PhD process and the co-inquirers have been transformed by collaborative inquiry into these theories. I will detail our conclusions and recommendations. This research is a unique contribution to the field and has the potential to impact not just SpLD practice but also thinking on the role of the SpLD tutor in UK HEIs. Inclusive practice needs to involve not just learners with SpLDs but also to engage tutors that work with these learners. The co-inquirers have shown in this research that they have strong capabilities despite perhaps initially feeling that they were not 'academic enough'. SpLD tutors who took part in this research can 'move' within theory and these theories in turn can transform their SpLD practice for the better and move it away from more deficit-led views of learning. The ability of SpLD tutors to therefore contribute to inclusive and socially just practice in UK universities has the potential to transform the experiences of both students and tutors.

7.1 **Significance of research**

I found that SpLD tutors felt that their work was continually one of struggle. This struggle can take many forms: the struggle for inclusive practice for their learners on their courses of study; the struggle for recognition for the role of the SpLD tutor; the struggle to get their voices recognised; the struggle for belonging, the struggle to feel that they were 'academic' enough especially if they were neurodivergent; the struggle to 'fit' into the university space; the struggle to 'move' in theory; ultimately they were involved in a struggle for social justice.

Struggle is often the site for transformative change and learning. Mezirow (1990, p. 13) famously asserted that 'perspective transformation' can occur as a response to difficult situations. Such transformative change involves us 'reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting'. The theories of social justice and critical pedagogy all referenced struggle and the co-inquirers particularly connected with the work of theorists that placed emphasis on struggle and the need for change such as Freire and Ahmed. Engaging with theory was somewhat off-putting initially for the co-inquirers, especially for those who seemed to have internalised feelings of not being 'academic enough'. However, as the CICs went on, the collaborative voicing of discomfort lessened, possibly as people

began to realise that they were actually 'academic enough'. Doing this work collaboratively enabled people to voice their concerns, for these concerns to be heard and to finally use the collaborative space to discuss their interpretations of theory. Collaborative inquiry worked well for us although sometimes it was a little difficult when some co-inquirers had done more inquiry research than others.

An unexpected finding was that CICs were particularly suited for neurodivergent co-inquirers. The space to digress and then return to a topic was highly valued and made these co-inquirers in particular feel very much at ease. A CIC is a space to make people feel welcomed and valued. People in all their different capabilities add 'shape' to the circle and this was particularly true in the case of the co-inquirers.

The Quirkos CAQDAS software worked well for the co-inquirers. Again, this was particularly appreciated by the neurodivergent co-inquirers. The strong visual interface and use of colour made coding highly accessible. The co-inquirers who did complete data analysis found this a very worthwhile task, not only in terms of adding depth to our research but also in terms of acquiring other skills. They felt that these data analysis skills could be shared with their learners and was of deep benefit for their practice. It is thanks to readings on inclusive research that I included data analysis as part of our research together.

Ultimately, the co-inquirers felt that learning about theories of social justice and critical pedagogy was transformative. They had changed in many ways – from their understandings of social justice, to developing their thinking on the systems and structures that surround us. They realised that education is not a neutral space. The treatment and isolation of SpLD tutors within the academic space, their sense of discomfort and lack of belonging demonstrated what Ahmed referred to as the 'lip service' to academia. SpLD tutors do not want to be a box-ticking exercise for an equality, diversity and inclusion committee, rather we would like to see real change in inclusive practice in our institutions. Therefore, learning about theories helped SpLD tutors to feel less alone, helped us to find the 'words' and the 'concepts' to help 'move in theory'.

The co-inquirers felt that other colleagues needed to know about these theories. As Ford stated, if we can have the ADSHE Seven Principles, we could also have our own theoretical principles. We have therefore started working on creating our own theoretical toolbox that we will share with our colleagues. Learning about such theories really is transformative especially when it is collaborative.

7.2   Contribution to the body of knowledge

This research is highly innovative and brings new contributions to our understandings of the transformative experiences of SpLD tutors in UK Higher Education. Before carrying out my research, I have shown that while there is some research on the experiences of SpLD tutors but is limited, particularly in terms of engagement with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy (Graham 2020; Newman 2019; Worrall 2019). SpLD tutors do not usually get to engage in theories of social justice or critical pedagogy. SpLD training is often more to do with educational psychology than educational sociology. However, in the course of this research I have demonstrated that learning about theories of social justice and critical pedagogy has been deeply transformative for us and has great potential to impact our practice. SpLD tutors benefit from engagement with theories of social justice, inclusion and critical pedagogy in terms of conscientisation of their practice and the structures that surround them. I have also shown how SpLD tutors can feel like they are 'academic enough' to belong in the HEI environment. Yet SpLD tutors have so much to give and can contribute greatly to making our universities more inclusive spaces.

Another contribution to knowledge is that of the use of CICs. They are a very good way to work collaboratively on theories and in this research I have also found that the CIC space is highly suited for neurodivergent people. Taking part in research was also highly valued by the SpLD tutors and they felt that they had learned skills that were beneficial both for themselves and for their learners. My research has also shown how elements of inclusive research can be very beneficial when working with SpLD tutors, particularly for people who are neurodivergent. Finally, the majority of research in the field is usually on the experiences of SpLD students. SpLD tutors are rarely the subject of research much less given the opportunity to do such research. Here both co-inquirers and I have worked collaboratively and have given voice to the experiences of SpLD tutors. This demonstrates the capabilities of SpLD tutors to be not just as objects of research but also as researchers in their own right.

7.3   Recommendations for future research and practice

I recommend that SpLD tutors are given the opportunity to learn about theories of social justice, inclusion and critical pedagogy (data analysis too has proven to be a beneficial skill to learn). These theories can transform SpLD learning and practice. HEIs need to listen to SpLD tutors more. SpLD tutors have great experience in working directly with learners and yet our expertise and experiences are rarely called on. While I acknowledge that HEIs are not monolithic entities, we can make HEIs more inclusive spaces if we could advise on inclusive practice for SpLD learners

such as providing materials in more accessible formats and moving away from traditional forms of assessment such essay writing.

I also recommend that CICs are used more in research, particularly when working with neurodivergent people. The elastic shape of the CIC can be very welcoming and accommodating. Doing our own data analysis on your research contributions was also highly beneficial. It enriched the data collection and gave the co-inquirers new skills. It also demonstrated to the co-inquirers just how capable they were. They too are researchers, they too can share this knowledge with others, especially HE students who learn about research methodology too.

It is important too when working with different theoretical concepts, to offer co-inquirers multiple means of engagement and representation. These are key UDL principles and was central to supporting all the co-inquirers in their transformative learning. As there was a high proportion of neurodivergent co-inquirers, it was crucial that their needs were met. It would not be a very socially just and inclusive research project if the research materials themselves were not presented in an inclusive way!

The co-inquirers in this PhD research project have shown that they benefitted from collaborative working and that the CICs lent themselves to enabling transformative learning to occur. If we want more transformative learning then we need more collaborative approaches to learning. For Papastamatis and Panitsides (2014, p. 77) transformative learning is 'an interdependent process built on trust and involvement of other individuals, rather than an independent act'. I would therefore recommend that SpLD tutors are given more opportunities to work collaboratively to develop their abilities to engage in theory. This may also support the SpLD tutors in feeling less alone in their work. It may also demonstrate to the SpLD tutors that they are capable, that they are 'academic' enough. The co-inquirers were also given the opportunity to further their research skills in terms of taking part in data analysis. Not all the co-inquirers did this but for those who did participate in the data analysis, they deemed it a valuable skill to have learned and beneficial for supporting their learners. I would therefore also advocate that SpLD tutors be given more opportunities to develop their own research skills which can be beneficial both for their practice but also as researchers in their own right.

7.4   Implications for policy

There have been changes in DSA policy since 2016. There has been a move away from government providing funding to disabled students and more towards placing the onus on HEIs to provide support. This change has 'led to a greater focus on the impact of support that has traditionally been offered to disabled students by staff within HE settings' (Graham, 2020, p. 123).

More changes occurred in the academic year 2020/2021 where the maximum allowances for the DSA were combined into one maximum allowance of £25,000 (Hubble and Bolton 2020). These changes were condemned by the National Union of Students (NUS) as students with high support needs lost over £2,000 in funding (Higgins 2020).

These changes have led to concerns that disabled students may lose out on the types of support that they experience at the moment. However, we do want our HEIs to become more inclusive institutions and to be more universally designed. If HEIs are to become more inclusive institutions, they need to give SpLD tutors the opportunity to share their expertise. This research has shown that SpLD tutors have much to offer in terms of their knowledge of the support offered to disabled students, yet these tutors are rarely asked to share this knowledge. We need to be included in helping shape policies for inclusion in our institutions.

This research too has shown how SpLD tutors benefited from considering themselves as intellectuals (Giroux 1988). SpLD tutors are capable of moving within theory, of reflecting on the impact of the policies that shape our institutions, our practice and our lives. We know now that education is not a neutral space (Freire 1972). For Freire and Shor (1987, p. 66) 'confrontations are inevitable over pedagogy and policy'. The transformative learnings gained from engaging with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy can help SpLD tutors in these confrontations, in promoting our message for supporting disabled students. We found our voices in reflecting in theories together. Engaging in policy discussions in HEIs is our opportunity to put these voices into praxis. Such empowerment is an act of social justice (Freire and Shor 1987).

7.5 Impacts on praxis and plans for dissemination

The co-inquirers and I are currently in the process of creating workshops for our SpLD colleagues on behalf of our professional organisation ADSHE. These workshops will be created by SpLD tutors for SpLD tutors based on our transformative experiences of learning about social justice and critical pedagogy. There is a gap in the training given to SpLD tutors – there is no training on theories of social justice and critical pedagogy. Therefore, our workshops are a way to address this gap. Furthermore, we will take the concept of CICs to ADSHE. Many of the ADHSE members are also neurodivergent and we have seen in our research how CICs are a space where neurodivergent people do not have to 'struggle' to fit. There is an elasticity to the CIC which can support dialogue, discussion, debate while also giving space for 'movement' within theory.

My supervisors and I have started writing a journal article about the use of circles in qualitative research. I will share our experiences of CICs in the article and will recommend that we look anew at the CIC as a transformative space. Furthermore, Palgrave McMillian have shown interest in the

potential to publish this research as either a monograph or a Palgrave Pivot as part of their Studies in Alternative Education series.

Jane and I have presented on our research experiences at International Association of Scientific Study IASSDD 2021. This conference was online so our presentations took the form of two videos. While we sadly did not get the opportunity to get to Amsterdam, we did have the experience of presenting at an international conference. We spoke of how we had used elements of inclusive research in this PhD research and how transformative it was for us. We hope that others may find our approaches helpful for their research.

7.6   Limitations of this study

This work could have drawn more on intersectionality of race and disability (DisCrit studies) particularly when discussing the work of Sara Ahmed. While the issue of race did come up when discussing the work of bell hooks, we did not bring together Ahmed's other writings on diversity and race, namely *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Ahmed 2012). This was an oversight on my behalf and perhaps speaks to how 'racism can be obscured when diversity becomes institutionalised and is used as "evidence" or the "solution" to the problem of racism' (Longman and De Graeve 2014, p. 37). Ahmed (2012, p. 14) refers to this misplaced optimism in diversity as a 'happy' understanding of inclusion, and when this occurs 'the feminist color of critique is obscured'. Intersectionality has become more prominent since the CICs on Ahmed's work (those CICs finished just before the death of George Floyd in May 2020). The subsequent BLM protests of that summer (attended by some of the co-inquirers) would have fit well as subjects of discussion within our CICs. Going forward, areas for future development we will bring more of a focus on the intersectionality of race and disability within our theory toolkit workshops.

A second limitation of this research is that we could have done more collaborative work with our data analysis. While this PhD is notable for its adaption of inclusive research approaches of co-inquirers taking part in data analysis, I would have liked to have maximised our collaboration. Ideally, we would have had another CIC on our codes and the emergent themes. The cloud-based collaborative functionality of Quirkos software would have enabled us to see our coding as a group and we could have shared these codes online. However, this data analysis took place in the first summer of the Covid-19 pandemic and many co-inquirers stated that they were fatigued after a turbulent semester. I felt that one more CIC on coding and data analysis was too much for the co-inquirers. I needed to show respect for the co-inquirers, a respect for their rights, needs, interests and feelings (Kraft *et al.* 2020). While another collaborative coding session would have

added more depth to our research, I felt in light of the circumstances that it was best to leave the co-inquirers take time out over the summer of 2020.

7.7   My own transformative learning

My own learning has been transformed throughout this research. I initially found it difficult to see myself as a researcher. I had made the decision to come back to education to do a PhD on this topic as I was so interested in social justice theories and I wanted SpLD tutors to be represented in the research community. However, like the co-inquirers, there were times when I did not feel that I was 'academic' enough. As Catherine stated so pertinently, it was like learning a whole new language to express new concepts.

Throughout the PhD I kept a series of reflective entries in a research diary and looking back through my writings I can trace a transformative journey of my own (see Appendix B). Here is an example of when I first decided to look at inclusive research methods.

> *Now, I like me the work of Blalock & Akehi (2018) because they mention the*
> *transformative power of dialogue. This is what I want to use in my research – a dialogue-*
> *rich reflective enquiry circle for SpLD specialists. At the risk of sucking up to my secondary*
> *supervisor too much, I was really helped by Melanie's workshop on Inclusive Research. I*
> *think inclusive research methods could give me a real wealth of data where I could bring*
> *the dialogue of my participants to the fore. I also really like the idea of involving my*
> *participants' right throughout the research process especially in the data analysis. I want*
> *to look at the use of coding software like Quirkos – it's an intuitive and accessible piece*
> *of software and might be helpful to the rookie researchers like myself and my*
> *participants! I have also been helped this month by Patrick Brindle's training course on*
> *Writing your Methodology chapter. He used to work for Sage and he really helped me to*
> *redefine my focus. (Reflection 6 Transformative Moments with a Theoretical Toolkit)*

I can trace where I begin to tentatively 'move' in research and to gather the confidence to design my own research, to be the bricoleur interested in inclusive, collaborative and creative research methods. However, researching in a pandemic has not been easy. I wrote this piece in April 2020.

> *This has been a challenging time to be a PhD student. You feel slightly ashamed to*
> *complain when you know people are putting their lives at risk on the frontlines. I do*
> *consultancy work for Health Education England and there are no words for the*
> *admiration I feel for the junior doctors and surgeons who have sent emails apologising*
> *that they can't do SpLD assessments or support with me as they have been called up to*

support frontline staff. A cursory clap at 8pm on Thursdays is not enough to support these people. We won't even mention brave Boris the battler.

But (and there is always a but), what about doing research? It is hard to do research at the moment. It is hard when you are homeschooling two children and you are also doing part-time teaching over Zoom. It is hard when you start coughing and you don't know if you have the virus. It is hard when you can't get access to the food and groceries you normally use. It is hard when you cannot be with your 86-year-old father. It is hard when you lose a friend and neighbour to COVID-19. All of this is hard.

Research doesn't seem so important in the face of a global pandemic. Yet I have found solace in my research participants. I had to hurriedly change my face-to-face research meeting to online meetings. I said to my research colleagues 'you really don't have to do this you know, I completely understand'. And I was so surprised that so many said 'yes, we want to do this'. One research colleague who is worried about her 23-year-old daughter who works in a COVID ward said to me 'It has really helped me take my mind off things'. Another said, 'this is giving us something else to talk about'. It is this something else that gives me hope. (Reflection 16 Research and COVID-19)

We have all, both co-inquirer and PhD researcher, been impacted by Covid-19 in a multitude of ways. Despite this, we have come together in the CICs where we have *all* experienced transformative learning where we 'see aspects of the world in a new way, and personally value this way of seeing' (Pugh 2002, p. 1104). This research was therefore transformative for both researcher and co-inquirer.

7.8   Conclusions and overall summary

Inclusive practice in our HEIs is at a crossroads. The role of the SpLD tutor may be subject to change in the future. These tutors are a group of highly capable and talented professionals yet often they do not feel like they 'belong' in a university space. We can change this by acknowledging the role of the SpLD tutor more and the value that they can bring to the university space, especially when it comes to the diversity of learning. SpLD tutors are typically trained in issues of educational psychology rather than issues of social justice and critical pedagogy. Yet this work is shaped by the interactions and policies of others which profoundly impacts both SpLD tutors and their learners. In this research, SpLD tutors were transformed by engaging with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy. CICs enabled the co-inquirers to engage in an inclusive and socially just manner so that transformative learning could occur. This transformation occurred on different levels: transforming their views of themselves, their practice; their role in

the University environment; the structures that impact their work and the lives of students. Therefore, we need to include theories of social justice and critical pedagogy in the training of SpLD tutors and share this with our colleagues. When we work collaboratively, such as in CICs, we have more opportunities to deepen our discussions, our reflections and ultimately transform ourselves, our learning and the structures that surround us.

Appendix A   **Research materials**

Pre-Covid Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: Tracing a Transformative Journey: The Impact of Theories of Social Justice and Critical Pedagogy on SpLD Practitioners in UK Higher Education

Researcher: Sadhbh O'Dwyer

ERGO number: 52113

You are being invited to take part in the above research study. To help you decide whether you would like to take part or not, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide to take part in this research. You may like to discuss it with others but it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?

I am a student at the University of Southampton. I am doing this research as part of my PhD in Education. I will research the experiences of SpLD practitioners in Higher Education when they engage with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy. The objective of the research is to explore if SpLD practitioners experience transformative learning when engaging with these theories. As this is a collaborative research project, a key outcome is the involvement of SpLD specialists in the research project. Part of this outcome is that SpLD practitioners will gain awareness of the research process as well as gaining knowledge of social justice and critical pedagogy theories. This PhD has been funded by the Presidential Scholarship of the University of Southampton.

Why have I been asked to participate?

You are an SpLD practitioner working in Higher Education in the United Kingdom. This research is on the experiences of SpLD practitioners in Higher Education when they engage with theories of education. They may be up to 20 other SpLD practitioners taking part in the research.

What will happen to me if I take part?

This research explores the experiences of SpLD practitioners when they engage with theories of social justice and critical pedagogy. The research also aims to involve SpLD practitioners as collaborators in the research process.

You will be invited to take part in five group meetings known as Collaborative Inquiry Circles. You will be given access to materials on social justice and critical pedagogy theories in a variety of formats (text/video/audio). You will be asked to engage with a number of these materials before each Collaborative Inquiry Circle. The Collaborative Inquiry Circles will take place in your university setting (or online for the online participants) at the following times:

Meeting 1: October- December 2019

Meeting 2: January – March 2019

Meeting 3: April – June 2020

Meeting 4: July – September 2020 – participant coding

Meeting 5: October – December 2020 – all collaborative inquiry circles meet up

In each Collaborative Inquiry Circle, you will be asked to discuss your views on the theories. The Collaborative Inquiry Circles will be recorded. You will be asked to keep a diary of your thoughts and experiences after each meeting. This will form part of the research as well as the Collaborative Inquiry Circles. You can be creative with the diary entries - these can take the form of a text entry, a voice memo, a visual image or a handwritten text.

At the Fourth Collaborative Inquiry Circle meeting, you can do thematic analysis on your transcripts from previous meetings. In this way, you will be an active contributor to the data analysis of the research project. You will be shown how to perform thematic analysis and can do this either by hand or electronically. This meeting will now be carried out online via Zoom.

At the Fifth Collaborative Inquiry Circle meeting, all the different inquiry circle groups will come together to meet at a convenient location. There will also be an online meeting for those who cannot attend in person. We will discuss together our experiences of social justice and critical pedagogy theories. If you have carried out data analysis you will be given the data analysis of your transcript. This meeting will now be carried out online via Zoom.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

SpLD specialists have to do 10 hours of Continuous Professional Development a year (CPD). Involvement with this research qualifies as CPD. Furthermore, you will have the opportunity to develop your knowledge of educational theories as well as developing awareness of research processes. As this is a collaborative research project, you will be an active contributor to the research. There is a lack of research on the impact of social justice and critical pedagogy theories on SpLD practitioners in HE and you will help to improve our understanding of this area.

Are there any risks involved?

All engagement with research will have some element of risk. The aim of the research is to encourage dialogue but it is crucial to ensure that this dialogue and possible differences of opinions will be expressed in respectful ways that will not cause distress. I will be available to support participants throughout the study and afterwards. As a former mental health mentor, I am aware of support that is available to those experiencing distress. All participants will be provided with information on the support services available such as those available in a university setting. There will be no physical risks.

What data will be collected?

I will collect recordings from the collaborative inquiry circles as well as your diary entries. No third parties will be involved in collecting the data. I will not collect any special category data (as defined by Data Protection).

Appendix A

All electronic and non-electronic data will be stored securely. Electronic data will be encrypted with password protected access and backed up. Non-electronic data will be stored in a lockable cabinet. All data will be labelled and indexed. I have attended University of Southampton training on data management and on creating a data management plan. I will abide by the Research Data Management Policy (*http://www.calendar.soton.ac.uk/sectionIV/research-data-management.html*). The dissertation study data will be destroyed securely after degree conferment.

I will store contact details of participants for the duration of the study and this information will be encrypted and password-protected.

Will my participation be confidential?

Your participation and the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. All your data (including audio, video recordings and visuals) will be stored safely and encrypted and password protected. Recordings will be transcribed and the recordings will be destroyed after the research project has finished.

Only members of the research team and responsible members of the University of Southampton may be given access to data about you for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to your data. All of these people have a duty to keep your information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

Do I have to take part?

No, it is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you want to take part, you will need to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part. If you are part of a circle that has now changed to online meetings, you do not have to take part in online research.

What happens if I change my mind?

You have the right to change your mind and withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without your participant rights being affected. You can withdraw by sending an email to sdod1g13@soton.ac.uk or you can call or text to 07748011089.

If you withdraw from the study, I will keep the information about you that has been already obtained for the purposes of achieving the objectives of the study only. It would not be practicable to eliminate a participant's data after submission of the dissertation or after taking part in the collaborative inquiry circles.

What will happen to the results of the research?

Your personal details will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify you without your specific consent.

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions about research you can contact me: Sadhbh O'Dwyer, sdod1g13@soton.ac.uk.

University address: Southampton Education School, University of Southampton, Building 32, Highfield SO17 1BJ

Telephone: 07748011089

What happens if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions. Sdod1g13@soton.ac.uk

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Research Integrity and Governance Manager (023 8059 5058, rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk).

Data Protection Privacy Notice

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public interest when we use personally-identifiable information about people who have agreed to take part in research. This means that when you agree to take part in a research study, we will use information about you in the ways needed, and for the purposes specified, to conduct and complete the research project. Under data protection law, 'Personal data' means any information that relates to and is capable of identifying a living individual. The University's data protection policy governing the use of personal data by the University can be found on its website (https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page).

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For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton is the 'Data Controller' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information about you for 10 years after the study has finished after which time any link between you and your information will be removed.

To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal data necessary to achieve our research study objectives. Your data protection rights – such as to access, change, or transfer such information - may be limited, however, in order for the research output to be reliable and accurate. The University will not do anything with your personal data that you would not reasonably expect.

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Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and I hope that you will consider taking part in this research project.

Participant Information Sheet

Covid Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: Tracing a Transformative Journey: The Impact of Theories of Social Justice and Critical Pedagogy on SpLD Practitioners in UK Higher Education

Researcher: Sadhbh O'Dwyer

ERGO number: 52113

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To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal data necessary to achieve our research study objectives. Your data protection rights – such as to access, change, or

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Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and I hope that you will consider taking part in this research project.

Pre-Covid Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Study title: Tracing a Transformative Journey: The Impact of Theories of Social Justice and Critical Pedagogy on SpLD Practitioners in UK Higher Education

Researcher name: Sadhbh O'Dwyer

ERGO number: 52113

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study.	
I agree to take part in the collaborative inquiry circles for the purposes set out in the participation information sheet and understand that these will be recorded using audio and written notes.	
I understand that taking part in the study involves recordings which will be transcribed and then will be destroyed securely after degree conferment.	
I understand that my anonymity cannot be guaranteed in the collaborative inquiry circles but that my personal information collected about me such as my name or where I live and work will not be shared beyond the study team.	
I understand that I may be quoted directly in reports of the research but that I will not be directly identified (e.g. I can choose to use either my initials or a pseudonym).	
I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time for any reason without my participation rights being affected.	

Appendix A

I understand that should I withdraw from the study it would not be practicable to eliminate participant data after submission of the dissertation or after taking part in the collaborative inquiry circles.	

Name of participant (print name)..

Signature of participant..

Date...
....

Name of researcher (print name)...

Signature of researcher ....

Date...

Appendix B   **Reflections**

Reflection 4 Get off the fence

In our supervisory session we talked about transformative learning. I had sent Mel and Christina a somewhat informal couple of pages on Mezirow's concepts of transformative learning. I think I had misunderstood my writing task as Cristina and Mel were expecting a more typical review document whereas I sent a stream-of-consciousness tracking my change in thinking. I blame reading Joyce at an impressionable age! I had initially been very interested in the application of transformative learning to SpLD work but during my time away in Ireland I had reflected upon other experiences of a more political/social bent – where my mother defied convention at the time to get access to education for Irish traveller children. Thinking about that story make me realise that I am more inclined towards a radical pedagogy viewpoint like that of Freire. My mother was vocal about the rights of Traveller people and actively decried the racist viewpoints of those in power in society (a racism that still exists in Ireland). I believe in the rights of learners who learn differently and I also believe in giving voice to those of us who are part of the community of SpLD specialists. I think that I am motivated by social impact as well as intellectual impact.

However, the brief that I was given by my supervisors was to write about transformative learning! While I think that transformative learning has positives to it such as a focus on the voice of the adult learner, I have a nagging voice behind me that goes "transformative learning is always about the individual – US societal impact perhaps". While I do think there has to be a focus on the individual there also has to be a focus on society. I have realised that I am more drawn towards 'praxis' , I want to look more closely at critical pedagogy and its possible impact on SpLD tutors. I talked about transformative learning more with my fellow PhD student Abigail. Mel had recommended that we get together for a chat and I was so glad that we did. She too also shares a nagging doubt about transformative learning. "Isn't all learning transformative"? We spent an hour and half drinking the weird coffee in the Staff Lattes café talking about learning, our experiences of parenting children who learn differently, disability labelling, SpLDs and learning difficulties, and helpful journal articles. It is so refreshing to have someone to talk 'fighting talk' with. For me, this is really what university should be all about, the opportunity to talk, debate and to go away with a slight coffee headache going "I hadn't thought of that before".

So, in terms of fighting talk, I have decided, as Morwenna Griffith's says, to "get off the fence". I applied to do a PhD because of my belief in social justice and I need to channel this belief into my

writing. Christina and Melanie, possibly a bit concerned by the weird ramblings, talked to me about being more assertive in my writing, to keep a thread of my argument throughout a text. I think this was a very good thing to hear and I need to remind myself that this is my opportunity to create something new. My wise supervisors cautioned against jettisoning all talk of transformative learning right away. I can be quite impulsive at times so I might embrace a concept one month and throw it out the next. A modicum of reflection is always good. But I am still getting off that fence!

Reflection 6 Transformative Moments with a Theoretical Toolkit

I've been writing more about transformative learning this month. I have spent my time looking more deeply at Mezirow's views of Transformative Learning as well as critiques of his work. I think this is the first time in the PhD that I've had the opportunity to go much deeper into a piece of work and to think a bit more about these ideas. Melanie said she could notice this a lot more in my writing this month. I was looking in particular at the influence of Freire and Habermas on Mezirow's work. There has been criticism that Mezirow doesn't go far enough with his interpretation of Freire – possibly due to belonging to a more US individualist tradition (Mezirow was a professor of learning in Cornell University). In terms of Mezirow's interpretation of Habermas, he has been criticised for not fully addressing the concept of power. He draws on Habermas's distortions of power for example but does not put power at the centre of his work. So, I faced a dichotomy in my thinking about Mezirow – he talks about social justice but is that all it is, just talk? I need to think about this some more (Cristina asked me about this conundrum and I don't know the answer right now).

I also looked at other interpretations of transformative learning such as Dirkx's (2007) concept of soul work in transformative learning and I really liked O'Connor's (2002) application of transformative learning to the environment and human connection. What was really striking was the variety of approaches to transformative learning. Hoggan (2016) suggests that Mezirow's approach could be considered as *perspective transformation* and while transformative learning as a whole could be considered as a meta-theory, the umbrella under which other theorists such as Blalock & Akehi (2018) could be found.

Now, I like me the work of Blalock & Akehi (2018) because they mention the transformative power of dialogue. This is what I want to use in my research – a dialogue-rich reflective enquiry circle for SpLD specialists. At the risk of sucking up to my secondary supervisor too much, I was really helped by Melanie's workshop on Inclusive Research. I think inclusive research methods could give me a real wealth of data where I could bring the dialogue of my participants to the fore. I also really like the idea of involving my participants right throughout the research process especially in the data analysis. I want to look at the use of coding software like Quirkos – it's an intuitive and accessible piece of software and might be helpful to the rookie researchers like myself and my participants! I have also been helped this month by Patrick Brindle's training course on Writing your Methodology chapter. He used to work for Sage and he really helped me to redefine my focus. Here is my favourite post-it note right now (doesn't everyone have a favourite post-it note?):
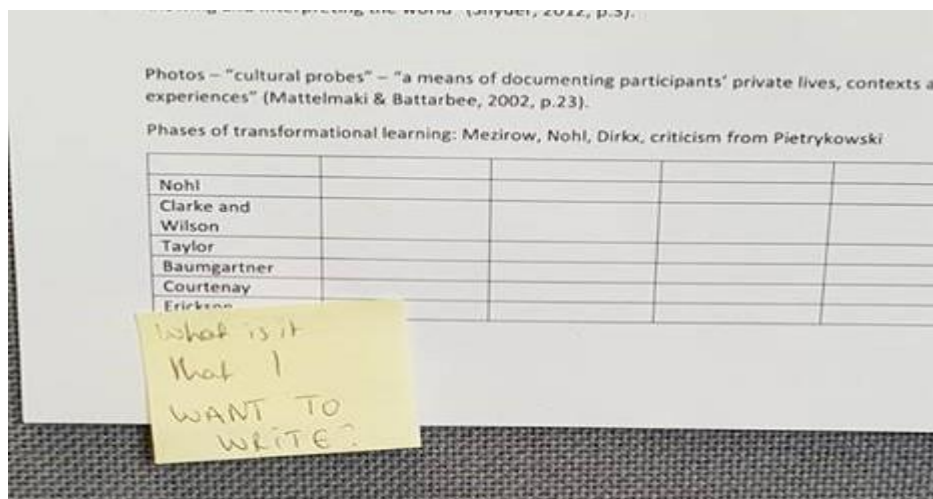
So, what is it that I want to write? Well, I want to write that people like me don't get much opportunity to do research. SpLD tutors are hidden away in different departments, working with learners from 9-5. They are not embedded into the university and they simply do not get much opportunity to engage with theory. However, SpLD tutors are really interested in getting involved with research (I have three people already ask me if they can take part in my research). Why don't I do something that involves these group of interesting and talented people in the research process and see if they find it transformative?

Now, the other question is, what will I do for the purposes of the research? Cristina, my ever-wonderful supervisor (sucking up at a great rate here) mentioned in our supervisory meeting that Bourdieu stated that his theories were to be viewed as tools. Aha!! Transformative moment for me! Theories can be likened as tools, which as Melanie said, gives them a different perspective, you see what tool works for you. While having a coffee after our session, I had this thought – I could develop a Social Justice Theory Toolkit for SpLD teachers!! Apologies for the exclamation marks but this was a breakthrough moment for me (I always seem to have break though ideas when I am having coffee). I want to give my fellow SpLD tutors access to different theories such as those by Sen, Freire, Bourdieu, bell hooks. I want them to give them the opportunity to learn about these theories and pick what would be helpful for their situations. I plan to trace the participants' engagement with the theories to see if it was transformative. I know that they use the idea of a tool kit in mental health support (I used to be a mental health mentor in the university) so why not apply it to theories? And look here, they even have a transformative theory toolkit in Sheffield Hallam University: https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/engagement/toolkit/transformative-learning-toolkit/?doing_wp_cron=1552570041.2286291122436523437500

I hear Sheffield is very beautiful this time of year (ahem). I might need to take a trip to Sheffield Hallam.

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Reflection 7 La misère du monde

This is the latest book that I am reading. I think it is pretty apt right now. The title in English is *The Weight of the World* but technically it translates as the world's misery. I have picked this book as a) I want to use Bourdieu's Thinking Tools (Wacquant 1986) in my research; b) I really liked the title; c) it gives me a good excuse to practise my French. You see, sometimes when you are doing a PhD you can feel a bit of the weight of the world on your shoulders. I'm an incurable optimist and annoyingly positive but I think sometimes you can feel a bit bogged down by the research process. I'll tell you why.

At our supervisory meeting, we talked about setting up research circles. I had attended an ADSHE (Association of Dyslexia Specialists in HE) event in March on working with learners with ASD. The course was run by the learning support team in the University of Surrey. I had worked with one of the team members before and I went for lunch with them. They asked me about my research and I told them about it. Then I cheekily mentioned that I was looking for research participants. "We would LOVE to do this" chorused the team. "This would be brilliant for our CPD and we don't get the chance to do research". Well, this was pretty much perfect. These are three highly engaged people doing very interesting things in an SpLD department in HE. I then talked to another dyslexia tutor at the University of Winchester and I got the same response. I came home from that training walking on air. Right now, I have three potential study circles in Southampton, Winchester and Guildford.

I told Melanie and Cristina about this at our meeting. They were really positive about this and said that access to participants does really help with the research process. BUT here is the but, they

added a note of caution. People can drop out, research will not go the way you think, there will always be issues that you can't account for. Of particular note is to think about why are dyslexia tutors so eager to be research participants. My view is that people are eager to be participants because they are excluded – we are the zero-hour heroes that nobody knows about. Not only do we get little opportunity to do research, no one researches us! Melanie said to reflect upon this, does this add a sense of vulnerability to the process? Oh god, I hadn't thought of that. I admit I feel a bit concerned about this, is there some element of exploitation here?

I think I am experiencing research trepidation. This has been bubbling away in my mind like the coffee machines in Waitrose (somehow my reflections always find a way to reference the Waitrose coffee). I've been thinking about this while I do my one-to-one study skills sessions (I do a couple with dyslexic learners in the university to keep "my hand in" so to speak). I have been working with one student for the past two years. This learner is profoundly dyslexic and has experienced very real difficulty with accessing texts. But she is very capable and right now she is in the middle of doing her dissertation. She is loving the research process as she is making some brilliants links between her research and the research literature (so much so that she has even been offered a job). The ability to make interesting conceptual links is considered a key trait of people with dyslexia.

I've realised that making links is crucial to my PhD process. I have been reading more about Bourdieu and while I do tend to get distracted by texts that are perhaps not quite relevant (*La Misère du Monde* I'm looking at you*)* I have found something that links to my own thoughts on research. Bourdieu talks about being a reflexive researcher and about acknowledging where you the researcher are in the research process. There is no "epistemological innocence" but you have to be "real" so to speak about your position in the data collection process and so on. So that's what I have decided, be real, be reflexive, to acknowledge the possible vulnerability of my co-researchers. I will be writing about Bourdieu, developing a Bourdieu SpLD teaching tool and I would also like to embed a Bourdieu-like reflexivity into the whole PhD. I've got to write up about my research methods for the First Progression Review this month and I think I will put this concept of reflexivity into the review. I'm still experiencing some research trepidation but at least now I can acknowledge this trepidation and my *misère du monde.*

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Reflection Meeting 9 First Progression Review prep

First progression review time (Version 2). I had to revise my First Progression Review report for this meeting and the consensus from Cristina and Mel was that I had failed a bit better this time. I am working on finding my voice in the research process. Sometimes your voice gets lost in the struggle to piece together the jigsaw of what is needed for a research project. I am in the process of moving house / renovating a new house at the moment and I feel that this Progression Review is akin to getting your kitchen redone: what are the key parts of the kitchen that you need and what design are you going to put on this kitchen?

In terms of my own "research kitchen", I need to work on making my research process clearer. This is a challenge for me to be frank. What is even more challenging is that some of my plans for the research kitchen are not behaving according to the floor plan! I had initially planned to do a pilot study in late July, however, one of the participants has now left HE to work full-time at the MOD while another participant is leaving HE to go work in Uganda! I had not planned for Uganda or the MOD in my Progression Review. How do I explain this one to poor Vasilis at the Review Meeting…

However, as one door closes, another one opens. I gave my theory tombola workshop at the ADSHE conference in Birmingham last week. It was exhausting in terms of preparing and getting there but the workshop appeared to go well. My old MSc supervisor Jane Warren was there. It was lovely to see her and she took part in the workshop so that was an interesting dynamic to have! The workshop was positively received (there was quite a lot of over excitement at one stage over the tombola and I was worried there would be a fight down the back of the room for the fridge magnets but thankfully this was averted). In the feedback after the sessions, people came up to me to say how much they enjoyed the workshop but that they also found the theories really interesting. There was not a lot of previous knowledge in the room of Freire, Sen, hooks or Bourdieu but people found it resonated strongly with them – especially the concepts of field theory, marginalisation and reproduction. I had also worked in times for dialogue in the workshop as I wanted to put Freire's concept of 'hopeful enquiry' to work. In the feedback forms, people made special mention of how they appreciated having the time to talk to each other about these concepts. If I hadn't read about Freire's literacy circles and collaborative inquiry circles, I wouldn't have placed such an emphasis on participant dialogue in the workshop. I think this shows how a knowledge of research approaches can also help your teaching/workshop approaches. So, thanks for that, PhD training process.

The workshop has affirmed to me that I am on the 'right track' so to speak. I really didn't know how the theories would go over. My research question is a bit of a gamble but the experience in

the workshop did show a real 'hunger' so to speak for more engagement with social justice theories in particular. One of the workshop participants (KP), came to speak to me after the session and asked if she could take part in the research. She has a company that specialises in providing support over Skype to learners with SpLDs (primarily students on placements such as those in the Health Sciences and in Social Work). KP said that she and her colleagues would be interested in taking part. This would have to be done remotely as KP and her team are scattered around parts of the North of England (and one lives in Spain). So, this could be a very interesting addition to the research – the experiences of people doing an online collaborative inquiry circle! I need to think about this more deeply and also how to put this on the Ethics application. My next step is to get through Ethics effectively and then get to work on putting these theories to the test (and move house).

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Reflection 10 Summer reflection

Ah summer, time to kick back and watch Wimbledon! Or if you are a first year PhD student, prepare for your First Progression Review, survive your First Progression Review, revise your thinking, go to a summer school on research methods, realise how much there is to learn and then start the ethics process.

Well, there was always the slight trepidation that one would fail the First Progression Review. However, it turned out to be a really helpful process and I *actually* (yes actually) enjoyed having the opportunity to discuss my project more with Vasilis and Cristina. What came out to me was the sheer practicality of my research – what is it that I want to do? I want to see if learning about social justice and critical pedagogy transforms the practitioner and does it have an impact on their practice. I had rather forgotten that key issue – how does it impact on the learner? Sometimes you can be so focused on one part of your research that you forget about other parts. Vasilis also had a query about getting practitioners to engage with a wide range of authors. Cristina recommended to think about using secondary sources rather than primary sources as secondary sources may be more accessible rather than plunging straight into a text by Bourdieu.

 We talked about these concerns at our supervisory meeting on 15 July. I had been thinking about maybe radically reducing the number of authors – 2 rather than 4 perhaps? Mel and Cristina turned vaguely pale and said something along the lines of 'chill the beans lady, 2 authors is way too little'. We talked then about perhaps embracing more accessible forms of information. Cristina said that this could be really helpful. For example, I had seen a really interesting (and short) video by Giroux which was really accessible:

https://truthout.org/video/henry-a-giroux-education-should-not-be-neutral/

I heart Giroux. He is like the John Cooper Clarke of Higher Education (http://johncooperclarke.com/poems/)

We talked a bit more about this and we came up with the idea of giving participants access to a folder of information that can encompass a wide range of materials not just 'here is a book chapter, please read'. Mel said that this could be an interesting activity to do while over the summer. I am slightly relieved as I didn't want to get rid of bell hooks. I have done 2 critical theory 'tombola' workshops this summer and bell hooks was particularly well received. I got some feedback from the practitioners who had attended the workshops and one in particular said 'I have gone to the library after this workshop to look up these authors' (I have attached the feedback). This reassures me that there is an interest out there in these ideas, I just don't know what this interest means in a research context however.

Speaking of research, I went to part of the NCRM's summer school on research methods. My son was ill with a hip problem so I couldn't go to all of it but I made it to the last day. I LOVED it, it was so helpful to meet others doing such interesting things but also to meet people who had similar values. That was really inspiring. I got to meet with the chaps who do Quirkos software and they very kindly gave me a demo on how to use it. It also helped me refine my thinking a little more about how we do research. I want my participants to be involved in the data analysis process and whether or not we do it by hand or electronically doesn't matter, what does matter is the collaboration and the giving voice to those of us hidden away in the crevices of Higher Education. So, my plan is to submit my ethics proposal (poor Cristina) and work on my Methodology chapter and my participant's folder over the summer.

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Reflection 13 Stories go in circles

The optimism and energy that was present in Year 1 of PhD life waned for me somewhat this October. I met with Cristina and Melanie on 15 October to discuss my burgeoning Methodology chapter. It's been interesting to start writing the methodology as it has prompted me to read more especially about ideas around reflexivity in research and concepts like critical realism. I want this PhD process to be a creative one – I think that this is my opportunity to do something different from the usual research approaches and to encourage reflexivity both in myself and in my participants. I have very much enjoyed talking to Fabio, the new Brazilian post-doc who has translated Mike Grenfell's texts on Bourdieu into Portuguese. I did some translation work in a former life and it was lovely to reconnect with that part of my life. Fabio brings a Bourdieussian approach to everything he does and it has been a real 'education' to spend time with him and discuss his interpretations. But with this reflexivity comes head-spinning and a lot of this stuff on Bourdieu and on critical realism is making my head spin. And my head wasn't in such a good place as I had stuff going on with poorly kids and so on.

But life goes on and I need to produce and keep thinking. I went to a seminar on academic writing. David Galbraith, my former MSc supervisor, is working on an idea of writing as a 'dual process' model. It reminded me a lot of the psychological discourse that is used in dyslexia – we talk of the hypercortex and the frontal lobe too and its impact on writing. David and a fellow PhD student are exploring the concept of 'writing as development' in terms of academic writing for students with dyslexia. But what also made me sad/mad is that there is no consideration of social/cultural capital and its impact on writing. I see this time and time again with learners with dyslexia such as those who are the first in the family to go to university. They have difficulty engaging with textual information and they often don't have the same social/cultural capital to engage with academic writing. But none of this featured in the talk and it made me think that I have perhaps turned into a Bourdieu bore but it shows me that psychological discourse is everywhere when it comes to dyslexia. I think I am on to something here with resisting this discourse and looking instead at alternatives in the form of the capability approach and other theories of social justice and critical pedagogy.

I talked to Sarah Lewthwaite after the seminar (she is amazing) and we also talked about academic writing as a muscle, the more you do it the easier it becomes. I need to do more writing and I haven't been doing it. I sent a more updated version of my methodology chapter to Cristina and Melanie this week. Still not much on it and I felt ashamed. Shame is an interesting concept isn't it – very prevalent in rural Ireland when I was growing up – but I realise I need to own the

shame and own the writing process. If it hasn't been a good month for me, I got to be real about it but I also got to get back on it. So, during my day of shame this week, I went to another seminar, this time on post-colonial and indigenous research. I had met with one of the presenters briefly during the summer at the NCRM summer school, Ian Caillou, and I knew that he had some very interesting things to say. He didn't disappoint me. I loved that he started off his presentation with a quote by Terry Tafoya 'stories go in circles'. The trope of the circle featured throughout Ian's research. He mentioned how he build 'circles of knowledge' and this made me think of my own research and how I want to build Collaborative Inquiry Circles. Mel told me to think a bit more about the importance of the circle and its impact. This resonated strongly with me and it was so fascinating to see the circle represented so strongly in Ian's work. I loved the creativity within his research but also the rigour and honestly that he evidenced too. He mentioned in the presentation 'I was being changed by the research'. This really struck home with me. I can see such a difference in myself in the space of a year of PhD life. This is the transformative power of education and I think I had just lost touch with this sense of transformation, so distracted had I been by other things happening in my life.

So, I am grateful for the inspiration from the academic community around me at the moment. I am also grateful for the inspiration from Melanie and Cristina. They experience difficulty and they keep on going. La vie continue. I have some interesting things going on this month – I presented to Health Education England yesterday on applying the Capability Approach to junior doctors and surgeons with dyslexia. I said that these people have great capabilities and we need to use more inclusive approaches for their well-being and agencies. I gave them some practical examples of software that people can use and although the internet connection broke down and I couldn't give some live examples, they really liked it. They come up to me afterwards wanting to know more and asking how they could apply it in their areas – one person is interesting it using it in his work with junior doctors with autism. I stopped off at the Waitrose in Chandlers Ford afterwards for my free coffee with a happy glow. This is impact and I said to myself 'I could not have done this without Cristina and Melanie'. So, there you go.

Now, luckily I like presenting as I am doing quite a few this month. November is talk time for me. I was asked by Solent University to do an afternoon of training and presenting on working with learners with dyslexia. I am presenting on 'neuro myths' at the PATOSS (our professional association) meeting in Solent, I will present on my research methodology at the next CRI meeting and I will present on the lack of awareness of social/cultural capital in dyslexia assessing to Needs Assessors in London. I will also have my first Collaborative Inquiry Circle in Southampton. This is very exciting not least because I get to use my new Dictaphone. Rather worryingly, the

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Dictaphone went missing for a week only to be discovered in use by poorly child who had been using it to record his singing. La vie continue.

Reflection 14

Thoughts on my second online collaborative inquiry circle

This research business is a bit nerve-wracking. Before each session I am always that bit nervous. Is it going to happen? Am I going to do something that will screw it up? The answer, well, I invariably do something stupid and I don't know what will happen. It is making peace with the unknown qualities of research that has been a good learning for me. My one-to-one SpLD work is completely student-led and I have always relished the 'unknown' quality of it and the challenge of thinking on my feet to meet a learner's needs. Therefore, you would think, the unknown qualities of a collaborative inquiry circle would not be so scary. But it is scary! You got to make sure you are recording properly, that everyone is getting a chance to contribute and that you are keeping the sessions focused. This is all still new to me.

Reflection on my first collaborative inquiry circles made me realise that I needed to keep sessions more focused. My first CIC with my online group in the North of England went on for over 2 hours. They love the chat! I know too that some of the co-researchers are people with ADHD and other SpLDs and they can get distracted by other topics. But I too have similar traits and I love the digressions. I have always found the digressions in a conversation to be the most intriguing. Again, I return to my love of Beckett and his digressions in his plays (Beckett season on in London at the moment). See I did it just there! Anyways, I realised that while this ability to chat and have a laugh is great at putting people at ease, it is not so helpful when you have 2 hours to transcribe and only one hour of relevant content. I had wanted the sessions to be very free form and while people said that they really liked the choice and variety of formats in which information was presented, they also really liked having a bit of a structure. So, I sent out some key questions to keep in mind for our upcoming session. Could people tell us why they chose the reading/infographic/video? What did they like/dislike? Was it relevant to their practice? If not/if so, why?

Well, guess what. The lads in the North of England last night were super focused. They came out fighting and it was mind blowing. They talked a lot about lip service paid to inclusion on education, the lack of inclusion they experienced as both people with disabilities and professionals with disabilities, the 'wooliness' of the CA and why Bourdieu was possibly more relevant to them and how this lack of discussion about inclusion and the structures around them are very damaging. It maintains the status quo. Well, I wasn't expecting any of this and I also realised that I had spent very little time talking compared to the previous session. Doing these sessions online, you get to look back at the visual as well as the text. I do appear slightly

demented and my accent seems very different compared to everyone else but it is really helpful to look at the interactions. I had spent the week doing transcription of the previous online circle and I had noticed how I tended to interject at times which could sometimes block the contribution of the co-researcher. So, I made the resolution to talk less and just nod. Looking back at the session from last night, I could see a difference in my interactions. I made an effort to nod but shut up. Maybe this is something I need to take on more in my personal life. Ahem.

To sum up, my sessions are getting a bit tighter thanks to adding a bit more structure into the sessions beforehand. My session last night still went on for more than an hour but that's because the lads got really into it. It was also interesting to see that people had much different opinions of Sen compared to me. I also realised that this is not my place to say, 'oh but Sen is bloody brilliant'. It is not about me; it is about me enabling these conversations to take place and enabling people to make connections. And I think I'm getting there (if I would just shut up a bit more).

Questions for Collaborative Inquiry Circle 2

1. **What did you choose?**

2. **Why did you choose it?**

3. **What did you think of it?**

4. **Was it of any relevance to your work?**

Reflection 15 Analysis and ALDI

Or the Aldi middle aisle as a metaphor for research analysis

When I'm not doing my PhD I do part-time dyslexia assessing and study support. I do some part-time consultancy for Health Education England. One morning a month, I do dyslexia assessments for doctors and surgeons. I worked with one doctor who used to be a professional ballet dancer. She talked to be about embodied learning, of when she danced professionally you didn't 'think' or 'analyse' the dances as 'analysis leads to paralysis'.

I loved this quote, not least because it gave us the opportunity to talk about embodied learning but also made me reflect on analysis. I am experiencing a bit of an analysis paralysis. I am lucky in that I am right in the middle of my research gathering phase – I LOVE it but I am also feeling slightly swamped. What kind of analysis am I doing? I'm transcribing as I go along and I can see themes emerging. What is interesting to note is that some of my Collaborative Inquiry Circles (CICs) have a different 'flavour' compared to others. For some circles, there is a definite sense of 'vocation' to what they do. They do this work because they are so driven despite lowering of wages and worsening levels of working conditions. Some of the other CICs have more of a 'fighting' talk feel to them. They talk about unifying together to resist against unfair practices and their experiences of complaining about injustice. Other members of the CICs talk about their own experiences of people with disability and how they are discriminated against as well as their students. Lots to talk about and I feel so privileged to share this journey with my research colleagues. This is the term I use – research colleagues as I feel it acknowledges their role as fellow practitioners engaged in research.

All good in the hood say my supervisors (well, words to that effect). But how Sadhbh, will you analyse this data they say? Well, that is indeed the question. I feel like I have already begun to analyse the data but what name to give this type of analysis? I also aim to involve my research colleagues in the analysis in the summertime so these questions are highly pertinent. So, when you think about the different types of analysis in qualitative research you can get a bit confused. There are so many different types of analysis. In our supervisory sessions we had talked about thematic analysis and narrative analysis. So far so normal. But when you dig a bit deeper you come across all sorts of approaches, a bit like the middle aisle in Aldi for research methodologies (I am a fan of the middle aisle but my ardour cooled slightly the day my 85-year-old father bought home a chain saw from a leading German retailer). Could Conversation Analysis be of use? Like a

metaphorical middle aisle chain saw, I disregarded this approach as it seemed more appropriate to a linguistic student not a middle-aged sociology of education student. I was also interested in Goffman's Frame analysis. After all, for 'Goffman, a frame is defined by its *use* rather than by its content'(Silverman 2010, p. 29). What do I want to *use* this data for? I decided I needed to get back to my research questions and reflect some more.

Well, reflect I did. And do you know what came back to me, my old friend Grounded Theory (GT). Now, some people groan when they hear the term grounded theory. If done badly, it can be very lazy research. But GT resonates with me, especially Charmaz's view of GT as analysis that is created "through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices" (2006, p.10). It's not a theory per se but a strategy and I love how inductive it is, how you can build it from the bottom up. I used GT in my MSc. It took ages but I really liked the flexibility of it. I liked the codes. I have realised that I am a bit of a nerd, I was playing around with the trial version of Quirkos and I could see how easy it is to develop codes using this CAQDAS. The thing that really grabs me about GT is the sense of adding value to a community. I am doing this PhD to see if learning about social justice theories and so on are of value to my community – the community of the SpLD professional. What is interesting in the research so far is the different reactions to different theories. These emerging themes are not what I expected and I LOVE this. It is slightly scary and I know it is going to be an awful lot of work but like the middle aisle in Aldi, it may yield some unexpected treasures (but please let it not be a chainsaw).

Reflection 16 Research and COVID-19

This has been a challenging time to be a PhD student. You feel slightly ashamed to complain when you know people are putting their lives at risk on the frontlines. I do consultancy work for Health Education England and there are no words for the admiration I feel for the junior doctors and surgeons who have sent emails apologising that they can't do SpLD assessments or support with me as they have been called up to support frontline staff. A cursory clap at 8pm on Thursdays is not enough to support these people. We won't even mention brave Boris the battler.

But (and there is always a but), what about doing research? It is hard to do research at the moment. It is hard when you are homeschooling two children and you are also doing part-time teaching over Zoom. It is hard when you start coughing and you don't know if you have the virus. It is hard when you can't get access to the food and groceries you normally use. It is hard when you cannot be with your 86-year-old father. It is hard when you lose a friend and neighbour to COVID-19. All of this is hard.

Research doesn't seem so important in the face of a global pandemic. Yet I have found solace in my research participants. I had to hurriedly change my face-to-face research meeting to online meetings. I said to my research colleagues 'you really don't have to do this you know, I completely understand'. And I was so surprised that so many said 'yes, we want to do this'. One research colleague who is worried about her 23-year-old daughter who works in a COVID ward said to me 'It has really helped me take my mind off things'. Another said, 'this is giving us something else to talk about'. It is this *something else* that gives me hope. Our last online inquiry circle with colleagues from Winchester, London and 'the North' was on the work of Sara Ahmed. There was much fiery discussion on being a diversity worker and the lip service that is given to inclusion. There were nods of acknowledgement on the notions of complaint and one colleague had even gone so far as to create a diagram of oppression based on her interpretation of Ahmed's work. I was expecting none of this and was so amazed by them.

I admit that for the online circle with colleagues in the north of England, I was somewhat lost in the fog of bereavement after my friend's passing. But their discussion lifted me, I loved the fight and the passion in their words. One of the colleagues said something along the lines of 'this research has given me the vocabulary to articulate my experiences'. That line alone has given me so much joy in the middle of all this.

I have one more online circle to do. This will be a coming together of all the groups where I will ask them to discuss their overall experiences together. I will also give them their transcriptions beforehand so that they can do some thematic analysis. I won't lie, I am finding it hard to

transcribe and I am finding it hard to write. I know that I am not the only one. When I do diagnostic assessments for dyslexia, I look for cognitive overload. This is typically seen when you read aloud and answer questions. People with dyslexia can experience cognitive overload when doing these tasks as working memory gets overloaded. While I am not someone with dyslexia, I am feeling the cognitive overload. However, I will just keep on keeping on. As ever I refer back to my first love which is literature and especially the work of Beckett. 'You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on'.

Reflection 17 Writing through a pandemic

When we had our supervisory meeting in March, we didn't know that the full extent of the COVID 19 pandemic that was about to hit the world. In this meeting we discussed my data gathering. I had been meeting people face-to-face but I was aware that elsewhere in the world there were concerns about the coronavirus (I had been keeping in touch with media in the Republic of Ireland who were advocating for a lockdown). I spoke to Mel and Christina about my concerns about meeting face-to-face and they suggested giving my participants the option to either meet face-to-face or online. I had been meeting with one group of participants online via Zoom but had been meeting the other two groups face-to-face. I emailed my participants mentioning the possibility of meeting online. One week later my husband and I developed a cough. My family and friends in Ireland were in lockdown and we decided to go into lockdown ourselves. Another week later, Boris Johnson announced that the UK was to go into lockdown.

I applied to the Ethics Committee to change my data gathering from face-to-face to online. This was agreed by the committee and we switched our Collaborative Inquiry Circles over to zoom meetings. I have been using Zoom for the past year myself for one-to-one tutoring and I also gave trainings to other SpLD tutors on how to use it. I was confident in how to use this software but in case my participants were not so confident, I provided them with 'how-to' guides and offered to walk them through the software.

By the 5 May we had stumbled through lockdown. I lost a friend to Covid 19 along the way. It was hard. It still is very hard. But we kept on. It was very hard to write and concentrate in March and April. I also had two kids at home who needed homeschooling, food and a lot of love. My husband is an academic and life became a baton-swop of work/children/food/work/children/food. I do part-time SpLD support and assessment for Health Education England and it quickly became apparent how burnt out the doctors were becoming. PhD life took a backburner for a while. However, the one positive out of all of this was that both myself and my research participants took great solace in the readings we did together. We had looked at the work of Sara Ahmed and it resonated so much with us – the sense of being a diversity work in institutions that didn't really want diversity or inclusion and the sense of a system that was not designed for us. This was ever more apparent in the outside world, looking at the decisions that the government were making and comparing them to decisions happening elsewhere in Europe. I started to write more for my Upgrade document which is due in September.

Appendix C   **Contents of CICs**

Materials in Collaborative Inquiry Circle (CIC) 1

The materials for CIC 1 were given the theme of Pedagogies of Resistance. These pedagogies were divided into four folders as follows:

1. Social Capital Bourdieu
2. Pedagogy of Repression Giroux
3. Engaged Pedagogy hooks
4. Critical Pedagogy Freire

1. The materials in the *Social Capital Bourdieu* folder were as follows:

Video / infographics

Adeluwoye, D., 2019. I thought I'd made it when I got to Cambridge University. How wrong I was. *The Guardian*. [viewed 8 October 2019] Available from

https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/23/cambridge-university-upward-mobility-working-class-background

Reynolds, C., 2013. 'Bourdieu Simple Explanation'. [viewed 24 July 2019]. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87BPL62wyyU

Social Capital Theory 2015, [viewed 24 July 2019] Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sts9upOA9EU

Journal articles

Grenfell, M., 2009. Applying Bourdieu's field theory: the case of social capital and education. *Education, Knowledge and Economy*, 3(1), 17–34

Kilpatrick, S., J. Field and I. Falk, 2003. Social Capital: An analytical tool for exploring lifelong learning and community development. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29(3), 417–432

Wacquant, L.J.D., 1989. Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu. *Sociological Theory*, 7(1), 26

Books/

Gauntlett, D., 2011. *Making is connecting: the social meaning of creativity from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*. Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press

Grenfell, M. and P. Bourdieu, 2019. *ENCOUNTER 1: Pierre Bourdieu in conversation with Michael Grenfell.* S.l.: RECENT WORK PRESS

2. The materials in the *Pedagogy of Repression Giroux* folder were as follows:

Video infographics

Giroux, H. (2019) 'All education is a struggle over what future you want for young people'.
[viewed on 3 August 2019] Available from

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCMXKt5vRQk&t=16s

Nino, A. (2013) 'Henry Giroux Ideas' Slideshare [viewed on 3 August 2019]. Available from

https://www.slideshare.net/alexisninomeneses/henry-giroux-ideas

Books

Giroux, H.A., 1988. *Teachers as intellectuals: toward a critical pedagogy of learning*. Granby, Mass: Bergin & Garvey

Giroux, H.A., 1989. *Schooling for democracy: critical pedagogy in the modern age*. London: Routledge

3. The materials in the *Engaged Pedagogy hooks* folder were as follows:

Video/infographics

Labor, S. (2011) 'Teaching to Transgress bell hooks' Slide Share [viewed 3 August 2019]. Available from https://slideplayer.com/slide/6010663/

Books

Florence, N., 1998. A critical analysis of bell hooks' engaged pedagogy: A transgressive education for the development of critical consciousness. Ph.D. Fordham University, United States -- New York

hooks, b, 1994. *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge

4. The materials in the *Critical Pedagogy Freire* folder were as follows:

Videos/infographics

Cammarota, Julio (2012) Critical Pedagogy Learning from Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed

[viewed 24 July 2019]. Available from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRiL7YSzMjg&t=479s

Journal articles

Breunig, M., 2005. Turning Experiential Education and Critical Pedagogy Theory into Praxis. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 28(2), 106–122

Collinson, C., L. Dunne and C. Woolhouse, 2012. Re-visioning disability and dyslexia down the camera lens: interpretations of representations on UK university websites and in a UK government guidance paper. *Studies in Higher Education*, 37(7), 859–873

Books

Freire, P., 1972. *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Herder and Herder

Freire, P., 1985. *The politics of education: culture, power, and liberation*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan

The materials were accessed via a Google Drive site:

CIC 1 Materials

Materials in Collaborative Inquiry Circle (CIC) 2

The materials for CIC 2 were given the theme of the Capability Approach. These materials were divided into three folders as follows:

- Journal articles
- Books
- Videos/infographics

1. **Journal Articles**

Hart, C.S., 2016. How Do Aspirations Matter? *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 17(3), 324–341

Hart, C.S., 2019. Education, inequality and social justice: A critical analysis applying the Sen-Bourdieu Analytical Framework. *Policy Futures in Education*, 17(5), 582–598

Books

Hart, C.S., 2013. *Aspirations, education, and social justice: applying Sen and Bourdieu*. London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Nussbaum, M.C., A. Sen and World Institute for Development Economics Research, eds., 1993. *The Quality of life*. Oxford [England] : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press

Robeyns, I., 2017. *Wellbeing, freedom and social justice: the capability approach re-examined*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers

Walker, M. and E. Unterhalter, 2010. *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education*. 1. paperback. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

2. **Video/Infographics**

Alkire, S., 2005. Briefing note: 'Capability and Functionings: Definition and Justification'. *Human Development and Capability Association*

Alkire, S. (2017) What is the Capability Approach to Development? [viewed on 6 September 2019].
Available from

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZgsFd-huFw

Anonymous. 2007. Briefing note: 'Capability and education'. *Human Development and Capability Association*

Courtoreille, T., T. Kerr, U.Khan, T. Rae, Shobe, W. (2015) 'The Capabilities Approach'. [viewed on 6 September 2019]. Available from

https://prezi.com/qxwhr5gb2aav/the-capabilities-approach/

Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (2011) Introduction to the Capability approach [viewed 24 July 2019] Video and Audio. Available from

https://ophi.org.uk/introduction-to-the-capability-approach-2/

The materials were accessed via a Google Drive site:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_PWY3nxD8SlmSh8MMp66P0Dx1jFNVHeJ?usp=sharing

Materials in Collaborative Inquiry Circle (CIC) 3

The materials for CIC 3 were given the theme of Feminism Sara Ahmed. These materials were divided into four folders as follows:

1. Videos
2. Journal Articles
3. Book chapters
4. Blog

Journal Articles

Burke, P.J., 2015. Re/imagining higher education pedagogies: gender, emotion and difference. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 20(4), 388–401

Skinner, T., 2011. Dyslexia, mothering and work: intersecting identities, reframing, 'drowning' and resistance. *Disability & Society*, 26(2), 125–137

Books

Ahmed, S., 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke University Press

Videos

Ahmed, S (2019). *Open lecture with Sara Ahmed, Honorary Doctor at Malmö University* [viewed 22 January 2020]. Available from

Open lecture with Sara Ahmed Malmo University

Feminist Research Institute UC Davis (2019) What is Feminist Research Series with Sara Ahmed [viewed 22 January 2020]. Available from

What is Feminist Research?

The materials were accessed via a Google Drive site:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dqjO0GK8sgVabxcYLHVou2IeB10c780m?usp=sharing

Appendix D   **Key Questions for Collaborative Inquiry**

Circle 2

1. **What did you choose?**

2. **Why did you choose it?**

3. **What did you think of it?**

4. **Was it of any relevance to your work?**

Appendix E   Feedback Questionnaire

1. **What did taking part in the research mean to you?**

2. **Which theories did you like/find most relevant?**

3. **Where there any theories that you did not like/did not think relevant?**

4. **Have any of these theories had an impact on your practice?**

5. **How did you find taking part in Collaborative Inquiry Circles?**

6. **Would you like to do research analysis of your transcripts?**

7. **Any other comments**

Glossary of Terms

ADSHE ....Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education

ADHD....................................Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ASD.......................................Autistic Spectrum Disorder

CIC ....Collaborative Inquiry Circle

DCD ....Developmental Coordination Disorder

DSA.......................................Disabled Students' Allowances

IASSIDD.................................International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

PATOSS.................................Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

NMHs ....Non-medical Helpers

SpLD ....Specific Learning Difficulty

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