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**COLÁISTE NÁISIÚNTA EALAÍNE IS DEARTHÁ**

**NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN**

**INTEGRATION AND THE SPECIAL NEEDS CHILD**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE**

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**IN CANDIDACY FOR THE**

**DIPLOMA FOR ART AND DESIGN TEACHERS**

**BY**

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I hereby declare that this dissertation is entirely  
my own work and that it has not been submitted as  
an exercise for a diploma or degree in any other  
college or university.

Signed Nade Ghomri



# **ABSTRACT**

## **Classroom Integration and the Special Needs Child**

The main objective of this dissertation is to investigate the experiences of Special Needs individuals in the Irish Educational System, examining their social and academic requirements for personal growth within an integrated society. Explorative research examined philosophies of past educators and how their findings have gradually promoted the education of the mentally challenged to a mainstream setting. Central to this was the application of a method which allowed integration within the second level mainstream classroom to occur. Examination of current Government and European policies and historical background of Special Education in Ireland gave a good foundation to research. Literature by educators reinforced and explained the emergence of current thinking. Interviews with school principals concerned with integration added concrete reinforcement to the benefits and disadvantages of active integration policies, within a mainstream setting. The work with the children proved to be successful in both it's aims and objectives with all pupils participating fully in every lesson. In conclusion, one major concern for further growth of positive integration experiences emerged. This was a deficiency in the area of teacher training and which resulted in an inability to successfully operate an integrated classroom environment.



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This Dissertation is dedicated to Cathal

One particle of dust is raised and the earth lies therein;  
one flower blooms and the universe rises with it.

Zen Haiku



## **INTRODUCTION**

The main objective of this thesis is to investigate the experiences of special needs individuals in the Irish Educational System, examining their social and academic requirements for personal growth within an integrated society. It is based the personal interest of the researcher and has its foundations in their past experiences of working with Special Needs adults and children. The dissertation will give an informative background knowledge to the history of educating the mentally challenged and current educational policies in Ireland. This will be documented in Chapter One. Chapter Two will relate the application of a devised staged sensorial teaching method based on the work of Doctor Maria Montessori, within an integrated mainstream class. The author shall endeavour to explore and discuss the results of this teaching programme throughout Chapter Three, with reference to the European Policies for promoting integration of the exceptional individual into mainstream education through the Helios II programme.



# CHAPTER 1

## The Development of Educational Policies for the Exceptional Child.

### DEFINITION OF SPECIAL NEED

In order to firstly understand the context classroom integration of the special needs child it is prudent that the term “Special Needs” or “exceptional” child is fully comprehended. Through research several definitions have emerged, all of them being very narrow and specific in nature. None appeared to be all encompassing as the definition of any individual should be. By examination of the terms used at a basic level a more informed and compassionate resolution should hence result. The special or exceptional child could then be defined as, *“one who differs from the average or normal child in mental or sensory abilities, communication abilities, behaviour or emotional development or physical characteristics.”*<sup>1</sup>

It can then be concurred that the above definition is a broad statement. Although clearly identifying individual characteristics it also opens huge areas for further unresolved discussion. For example if a child is colour blind a condition understood to be a sensory ailment, can an assumption be made that they are “Special Needs” even though many sufferers lead unaffected lives? Without refinement of this definition almost 50% of every mainstream class will be labeled special needs.



Clarification and fine tuning of the definition allow for exact precision in the use of the term. USA psychologists and educationalist's Kirk and Gallagher offered the following explanation "*children are considered educationally exceptional only when it is necessary to alter an educational program.*"<sup>2</sup>

With the clarity of the above statement reassessment of the original understanding results and hence the special needs individuals can be divided into the following categories. The children are either so far advanced they are bored with the current classroom curriculum and it must be modified to suit their own "gifted" learning abilities, or the children are extremely weak finding tasks given to be too difficult and outside their capabilities. It is fundamental at this last level that new strategies be devised and considered in order to facilitate full developmental growth of his/her unique talents. The author shall endeavour to discuss children in the latter category within the range of mild mental handicap. As it is at this level of disability that integration occurs in the Irish mainstream Educational programme. This sector of special needs children has been identified by the "PRIMARY EDUCATION REVIEW BODY" as being "*The largest single category of handicap.*"<sup>3</sup>

### **EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES - 1800'S**

It is essential therefore that examination of the personal development of this group occurs through the educational systems in Ireland currently. It is possible to use the word "educational" as a pivotal point in the discussion as consideration can be given to the work of early professionals in the 1800's.



At this time, exceptional individuals were often referred to and identified as being “idiots”, “fools” or imbeciles”. No education or life skills were proffered and they were deprived of any social integration. The majority spent their lives miserable in institutionalised surroundings, without family or peer influence. There were many educators working at this time, for example Pestalozzi and his predecessor Rousseau. However, teachers were not the first profession to pay attention to special needs of these children. Indeed, it was the doctors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who gave of their skills to research in this area. They did many studies and exhaustive research on the unique characteristics of children. Unfortunately, they failed to see the importance of the exceptional child in context. They concentrated purely on the medical or diagnostic symptoms on their conditions. Very little if any credence was given to the role of family, culture or society. It was vastly more important to cure the condition than to accept it and the child as an entity.

From the perspective of current forward looking educators, fault can easily be found with their “medical approach”, however it would be detrimental if their results were ignored. Much of their research became the ground work for the modern twentieth century educators. For example the work of Jean Marc Itard (1775-1838), who worked in France around the time of the French Revolution a physician who specialised and founded an area of medical science known as “otology”. This section of science treats diseases and deficiencies of the ear. Itard documented his educational efforts and his findings through research in exact detail. He worked with a mentally deficient young boy otherwise known as “Savage of Aveyron” for eight years. Here he used his already successful method of methodical education for the sense of hearing for treating and educating all the senses.





Itard experienced huge success with his staged approach of teaching the sense of hearing. He restored hearing to partially deaf children, which then enabled him to teach them how to speak.

His work did, however, play a major role in the development of special needs education. Itard's research laid the foundations for the work of a French teacher Edward Seguin (1812-1880). If Itard was a pioneer in this area Seguin has been credited with having "*Perfected a real educational system for defective children*"<sup>4</sup> while working with retarded children from an asylum in Paris, he refined the established methods of Itard. As a result of this, a new method of education for feeble minded children was devised. He viewed the individual as a whole and brought them through very solid learning experiences. Encompassing all areas of their well being "*to lead a child, as it was by the hand from education of the muscles to that of the nervous system and of the senses.*"<sup>5</sup> But Seguin's education was not based purely on academic attainment, he saw for the first time the necessity of educating the physical and the spiritual. Using their environment he brought them "*from an education of the senses to concepts, from concepts to ideas, and from ideas to a realisation of right and wrong.*"<sup>6</sup>

Although Itard's skills were mainly medical he is credited as being a pioneer in the field of single subject scientific education. He not only showed concern for the treatment of the medical condition but he used his scientific background and studies to help build and reinforce the personalities of these children. By employing his knowledge he encouraged the growth of increased self esteem and self confidence, to the individual. Itard's work remains revolutionary even under examination in the twentieth century.



Unfortunately, as he was developing his ideas with the mentally deficient in society, his methods were not given credence. Neither the medical nor educational professionals at the time were overly enthused by his findings.

It was at this point the medical model of previous years had been left behind and advances were made towards a holistic or ecological method of teaching the special needs child. An understanding has been attained that all educational practices for these individuals must be specifically designed, crucial to this is a consideration of the child's environment. This is an essential factor in designing a program for education in order for them to fully grow and benefit from any educational experience.

In the years after Seguin huge advances were made by professionals in the study of education for the special needs individual. Without dismissing his findings they used their knowledge to push and expand the exploration of "Scientific Teaching Methods". We can refer to the work of French psychologist Alfred Binet (1857-1911). Binet was a doctor who worked with mentally handicapped children in France. He was also commissioned by the French Government to study the children and identify their "Practical Educational Needs". In other words to isolate what aspect of intellect is necessary for the ability to learn, in academic setting. Binet, through research, established a scale of intelligence measuring that is now recognised as the I.Q. Test. Binet's work is important as it offered categories for educational assessment of children. For example they were either educable or mentally retarded without learning capabilities.





## MARIA MONTESSORI

As a good basic knowledge of the historical background to special education has been established it is the intention of the author to use the work of Itard, Seguin and Binet as a link to connect history with modern philosophy. By investigating the work of Dr. Maria Montessori the author intends to bridge the educational gap of special education between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) was born in Ancona in Southern Italy. She had a disciplined childhood and grew up with a profound interest in the poor and a sense of personal dignity of the human being. Montessori rebelled against the educational constraints of the nineteenth century for women. At the age of twenty six years she qualified as the first female doctor in Italy. Through her successful studies Montessori earned high academic status within her profession, and she lectured in the university of Rome on Hygiene. Soon she obtained a post attached to the university in the psychiatric clinic. Initially Montessori worked as an assistant, using her time there to study the sick and insane in the asylum. Within the same building, mentally retarded children were also treated. It was here that her interest in feeble minded children was aroused. She like her fellow contemporaries in the medical profession began to study children's diseases, for example the thyroid gland and its deficiencies. During this period Montessori familiarised herself with the works of Itard and Seguin. Astounded by their research she began to formulate her own ideas for educating the "weaker" individual. Montessori felt isolated from popular opinion as she believed "*mental deficiency was more of an educational than a medical problem.*"<sup>7</sup>



In 1898, by request of the Minister for Education, Montessori began training teachers, specifically for the educating of special needs children. Although many teachers/educators were familiar with the methods of Seguin, little evidence of the use of his materials was available. Montessori believed this to be due to lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of the teachers. Like Pestalozzi she believed that "*A teacher must have a special training that is not simply intellectual but also touches the heart.*"<sup>8</sup> As director of a school for the handicapped Montessori personally began to educate the children using her own apparatus and materials. They were based on Itard and Seguin's earlier theory and practice, but suitably adapted to her scientific method of education. Montessori's equipment was in the form of sense-training didactic toys. She managed to teach retarded children, who were thought to be uneducable how to read and write. Her methods proved so successful they were able to sit and pass a state examination for the mainstream child.

Brief assessment is necessary of the methods she used to enable her to take institutionalised children and to educate and hence integrate them at mainstream level. Montessori viewed the problems and difficulties of the feeble minded from her medical and psychological training. Her methods are pertinent to this thesis as the author will be employing adaptations of sensorial teaching while also investigating a process of staged learning, allowing special pupils within a mainstream environment to work at their own pace. Montessori through her observations evolved a theory of mental development as constructed from a series of consecutive stages, each stage being important for specific aspects of development. We could relate her work to the ancient saying "*There is nothing in the intellect which was not first in some way in the senses.*"<sup>9</sup>



Montessori found that the development of the five senses, particularly sight and touch were fundamental to intellectual growth and understanding of abstract concepts. She designed didactic materials to promote sensory development through repetition of the task - all within the prepared environment, for example, the Sound Boxes. Montessori designed a set of six brown wooden boxes with red coloured tops. Each box contained a small amount of a different substance such as salt, rice, or dried beans. The sounds produced vary in intensity from soft to loud. There is also a second set of boxes with blue tops. Each red - topped box can be matched with a blue - topped box. The child must find the pairs by listening and then grade the boxes from the loudest to the softest. By repeating and perfecting this material the child develops acute auditory or hearing skills.

For the purpose of this study Montessori's work has been observed at a basic level. Her philosophy and pedagogy theories would in themselves need investigation of a more in-depth degree. However, it has been illustrated that by revoking the traditional approach of education in Italy and creating a new scientific method of stage teaching she taught the feeble minded individual. The author feels it necessary to stress that Montessori did not educate the child at a restricted level to suit their limited capabilities. Instead she lifted them from the asylums for the insane to a level of national literacy. This combined with the independence learnt through her practical life exercises allowed the special needs individual to witness valid integration within society.



In conclusion, we could say that Montessori gives us the first tangible evidence of educating the special needs child. She recognised the need for specific educational methods, and the importance of the environment in their success. However, she also identified the spiritual aspect of the child in its growth to be a fully developed individual. All teachers of her methods therefore had to be specifically trained in the needs of the child.

### **A CONCISE HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN IRELAND**

Focus now moves from mainland Europe of the late 1800's /1900's to Ireland of the same period. In Italy, Montessorian philosophy had been embraced by the state with funding for special schools. While in Ireland conditions appear to be archaic in comparison. Examination of the Irish Educational Documents compiled by educationalists Hyland and Milne 1992 it is evident that special education was provided by Religious Orders. Their services catered for the deaf and the blind and were run entirely as charitable institutions. For example from the mid 1800's The Dominican Sisters in Cabra, Dublin worked for the deaf. However, they did not receive State recognition until 1926 and 1952 when they were given National School status. Similar treatment was given to schools for the blind in 1918. However, it was not until 1952 that the schools for the blind received a new pupil teacher ratio of 1:15 and funding for equipment. It is only at this point the real beginnings of special education in Ireland can be identified by Hyland and Milne "*This seems to have been the first occasion on which the Department gave official recognition to the special needs of handicapped children.*"<sup>10</sup> Official existence of the first special school is documented in 1950.





Development of an educational policy for the mild mentally handicapped group which is the core group of this thesis, derives mainly from the 1960's. During this period a report was commissioned by the Department of Education. Recommendations in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap, 1965, favoured the provisions of special schools. It gave consideration to all aspects of educational establishments of the mildly mentally handicapped, for example day schools, residential special schools and special classes. It investigated levels of integration for the child and results indicated merits to fall in the category of special schools. No consideration was given to the importance of peer relationships or the combined effects of school, society and peers on the development of the special individual.

Huge changes were made to all educational policies in Ireland during the following two decades and they had direct influence on Special Education policies. In October 1993, the report of the Special Education Review Committee released its finished paper, after two years of intensive research it provided the Department of Education with a fundamental framework to build an educational system. This was comprehensive in its acknowledgement of the needs of mainstream and special needs children "*the provision of a high quality education to each person, including a person who has special educational needs*"<sup>11</sup> is a commitment made in the 1997 Education Bill.



The underlying philosophy of the committee can best be described as saying that “*we favour as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as is necessary.*”<sup>12</sup> The term integration can be defined as “*The participation of pupils with disabilities in school activities with other pupils, to the maximum extent which is consistent with the broader overall interests of both the pupils with disabilities and the other pupils in the class / group.*”<sup>13</sup> Currently all schools in the country are working towards guidelines in this report while also adhering to the recommendations in the white paper, “*Implementing the Agenda for Change.*”<sup>14</sup> It states as its mission - “*to ensure the provision of a comprehensive, cost - effective and accessible educational system*”<sup>15</sup> while also to “*enable individuals to develop to their full potential as persons and to participate fully as citizens in society.*”<sup>16</sup> These agendas for education appear if implementation in a non ideal world is achievable. In order to assess their value in the everyday school environment the author undertook investigative research to interview two school Principals who address integration of the special needs child on a daily basis. For the purpose of this investigation the author will refer to the schools as School A and School B.





## RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS

School A is a mainstream primary school in Dublin, with special provision for children with special needs. It is unique in Ireland as it has 50 pupils of exceptional needs integrated in the mainstream cycle. They are in the mild mental/borderline/dull - normal categories, with associated conditions such as Cerebral Palsy and Dyspraxia. Full social interaction exists during everyday activities with all children participating together. The Principal is proud of the school's achievement but he is conscious that the needs of the mainstream child must also be met. Although they will grow on a social and moral level, it is difficult to address academic growth if the teacher is to tend to the less capable at the same time. Partial integration occurs with the pupils attending classes for non academic subjects, choir, sport, art, drama, and religion. During this period, children from mainstream go to the special unit for extra help with core subjects, Irish, English and Maths. This reverse integration policy provides a perfect balance for all attending the school. A report by psychologist Nollaig Rowan states the *"nature of the setting means the children in mainstream gain by realising that there are other children who may need their help and certainly their understanding."*<sup>17</sup>

School B is a co-educational community school in Dublin which offers places to both mainstream pupils and special needs individuals. It is in existence 15 years and places a high value on the place of the exceptional individual within the school environment. A well-structured programme of education allows the less capable to experience full integration at all levels on a daily basis.

They attend mainstream classes for Geography, History, Music, P.E., Irish, English and Maths. During the "options" periods the pupils go to L.S.C. - Learning Support Classes. Here they are provided with specific resource assistance for core subjects under the tuition of trained remedial teachers. All students take foundation Irish even though many have the state exemption from the subject. The Principal feels that this adds to their anonymity within their peer groups which is essential for their personal confidence. Teachers are unaware of the special pupils ability unless through their behaviour. Approximately 50 pupils are in attendance each year, and they fall into the mild mental handicap category. The school has a proven success record with Downs Syndrome children while also catering for the needs of the emotionally, socially and behaviorally disadvantaged. All special pupils sit the Junior Certificate and most go on to take either the Leaving Certificate or Leaving Certificate Applied. The Principal has encountered no social prejudice from the parents of mainstream children and shows concern now that the same levels of achievement be reached with the academic pupils at Leaving Certificate. A strict discipline policy exists within the school, known as Discipline for Learning, it encourages self discipline of the individual. This in turn promotes the growth of the personality and self esteem.

It is the intention of the author to explore the idea of integration within a mainstream cycle, using a suitably adapted module to facilitate all pupils within the class. Each individual should be comfortable in the environment and also in the task. This exercise shall occur within School B, and shall question the validity of the notion of integration and its benefits/disadvantages for all involved. Attention will be paid to the practicalities of its implementation within the Art Class specifically and the implications it has for the teacher.



As Kirk and Gallagher state "*Special Education is no longer the exclusive province of special educators. Practically all schools can expect to encounter exceptional children in their classrooms*"<sup>18</sup>



## Footnotes

### Chapter 1

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<sup>1</sup> Kirk, Gallagher, Educating Exceptional Children, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co. 1976, p.10

<sup>2</sup> IBID p.11

<sup>3</sup> An Roinn Oideachais, Special Education Report of the Primary Education Review Body, Dublin, December 1990, p.58

<sup>4</sup> Montessori Maria, The Discovery of the Child, The Clio Montessori Series. Oxford, England, Clio Press, 1988, p.26

<sup>5</sup> IBID, p. 31

<sup>6</sup> IBID, p. 31

<sup>7</sup> IBID, p. 24

<sup>8</sup> IBID, p. 32

<sup>9</sup> Ball Mary, Behavioural Science Lecture, "Intelligence"- NCAD, Dublin, February 1999.

<sup>10</sup> An Roinn Oideachais, Special Education in Ireland, Report of the Special Education Review Committee, Dublin, 1993, p. 48

<sup>11</sup> Minister for Education, Education Bill, 1997, An Roinn Oideachais, Dublin 1997 p.5

<sup>12</sup> An Roinn Oideachais, Special Education in Ireland, Report of the Special Education Review Committee, Dublin, 1993, p. 22

<sup>13</sup> IBID, p.18







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<sup>14</sup> An Roinn Oideachais, Department of Education, Implementing Agenda for Change, Dublin 1996, p. 5

<sup>15</sup> IBID, p. 3

<sup>16</sup> IBID, p. 3

<sup>17</sup> Rowan Nollaig, M.Psych. Sc., Report on Good Shepherd National School, Special Education Section, Support Service, Dublin, 1997, p.5

<sup>18</sup> Kirk, Gallagher, Educating Exceptional Children, p. 30



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **The Practical Application of the Staged Sensorial Module based on the Methods of Maria Montessori**

In this chapter the author will document the scheme of work undertaken with a group of 2nd year pupils of mixed ability, aged between thirteen and fourteen years. The class consists of twenty four pupils from broad social and geographical backgrounds. Integrated within this group are three pupils who have been designated as having special needs. Their conditions comprise of Dyslexia, Downs Syndrome and behavioural problems, each pupil falls into the mild mental handicap range. It was necessary for the children to be in this category for two reasons, firstly so that the author could refer to the methods of Montessori who worked with the mild mental handicapped group. Secondly it was crucial to the children's ability to attend a mainstream second level school on a fully integrated level, the development of which is the main objective of this thesis. It is prudent to identify at this point that although there are pupils with specific needs in the class, other uncategorised pupils presented with lower reading ages and poorer manual dexterity.



### SCHEME OF WORK

The module occurred over a ten week period and was been designed on the current Junior Certificate programme which the pupils will sit next year. In order to fulfil the requirements of this exam it is necessary for each student to complete a project in the following areas; Painting, 3D, and craft work. The module has been specifically created to facilitate both normal and less capable children. Attention has been paid to camouflaging the deficiencies of the exceptional child without allowing them to lose their anonymity. This is a crucial element in any art class where integration occurs. Art therapist David Henley states "*The art process should not accentuate a child's deficits or broadcast to others the extent or nature of a disability.*"<sup>1</sup>

Adaptation of the traditional approach to teaching a 3D art form occurred through the implementation of staged sensorial teaching methods as devised by Maria Montessori. The pupils engaged in a new learning experience in each lesson and responded positively to cross curricular connections with history and their environment. As the module was introduced as an individual, rather than a group project it was hoped that the work would be executed creatively without the excess pressure of obvious external goals. It was the aim of the author that the work would not be judged on a cognitive level but rather enjoyed for its integrity and power at an aesthetic level. The objective of the scheme was to design and create a papier mache mask using colour to express a carnival atmosphere.

It was also the wish of the author to teach the more conceptual art elements such as Line, Tone and Proportion in an experimental manner, where learning would be obvious at the conclusion of each class. Each lesson consisted of an introduction and demonstration, which were reinforced through the appropriate use of a teaching aid and support images of relevant materials. Illustrations throughout this chapter will show an example of work by a good and average mainstream child and by a special needs individual.

### **LESSON ONE AND TWO**

The objective of lesson one was To familiarise pupils with facial proportion through accurate line drawings of the face Without comprehensive knowledge of the face and its featural proportion any attempt to build a mask would be purely superficial. This was an ideal opportunity to allow the senses guide the learning, the mainstream child could rely on observation, the exceptional individual needs concrete reference. The pupils used their index finger and thumb to measure the face and explore the positioning of the features for example the eyes lie half way down the face, if we draw a line with our fingers from the centre of the eyes we will find the outer corner of the mouth.

Likewise trace from the corner of the eye to the top of the ear while all students enjoyed this game, they had all reinforced their learning through their hand. Each pupil completed a drawing of a partner, at their own level of skill (see fig. 2.1). Some of the students had obvious natural ability while others relied entirely on the knowledge they had just learnt.

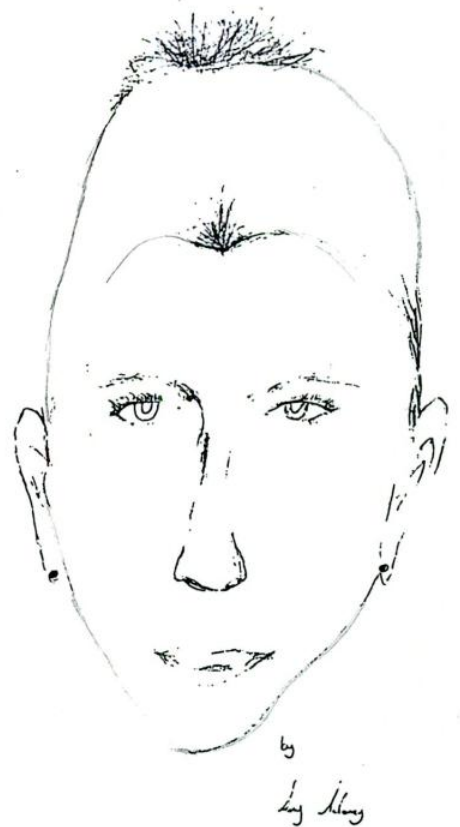








(fig. 2.1)



As proportional qualities of the face were adhered to, there was no attention to drawing technique. The next stage needed the pupils to become familiar with the relief qualities of the face, to support them during the practical building stage. The lesson objective for the second class was to develop an understanding of facial structure through the exploration of tone. Once again the pupils used their hands to explore the structure of the head. By feeling the hard bone of the skull and depressing the soft tissue in the recess areas of the cheeks the pupils used this experience to guide them in using tone. Charcoal was the chosen medium and pupils were encouraged to investigate tonal gradations on a rough piece of paper prior to execution of a finished piece. This allowed the researcher to teach how to use the material without the individuals becoming precious about their work. Darker tones indicated areas of low relief while lighter tones related to high sections on the facial planes, for example the nose and forehead. (see fig 2.2)

### **LESSON THREE**

The pupils had now established a firm knowledge of the face and its features by sensorial learning through tactile sensation of the fingers. It was now necessary to allow the children to use this information in a practical way. The main objective then of lesson three was to experiment with colour in the production of a design for a mask, using their knowledge of proportion and tone as guidelines. In order to fit the criteria for the Junior Certificate pupils must become familiar with the design process, therefore it was necessary for them to create their own design.







(fig. 2.2)



This had to show a carnival spirit through the use of only primary colours (red, blue, yellow) and secondary colours (orange, purple, green) (see fig 2.3). To compensate for poor technical skill in drawing the shape of the head, the children worked on prepared sheets. Each sheet contained an oval/egg shaped outline, this reduced the risk of small drawings or irregular shapes. The individuals used contours of their face once again by finger tracing to help them design patterns and flat colour areas. Every pupil worked well, with each one benefiting from the staged learning activities of the previous lessons. Completion of a worksheet on colour for homework reinforced the learning during the day in a fun way.

### **LESSONS FOUR, FIVE AND SIX**

Lessons four, five and six all involved the physical production of their mask. The pupils had to recreate their flat two dimensional designs into a three dimensional form. The researcher chose papier mache technique for the pupils to work with, as it is a versatile medium which would be beneficial for them with regard to Junior Certificate Projects in the future. The objective of Lesson four was to allow the pupils to gain an understanding of papier mache while becoming familiar and competent with the technique. To facilitate the class period and utilise it to its fullest a high level of preparation was required. All pupils were given blown up balloons, polyvinyl adhesive, (P.V.A.), and water solution (see fig 2.4). Each table was laid out with newspapers, for spillage and protection purposes and a bag of torn newspaper pieces. A clear explanation was given on how to complete the task- which was to cover the balloon in  $\frac{3}{4}$  layers of papier mache.







(fig. 2.3)





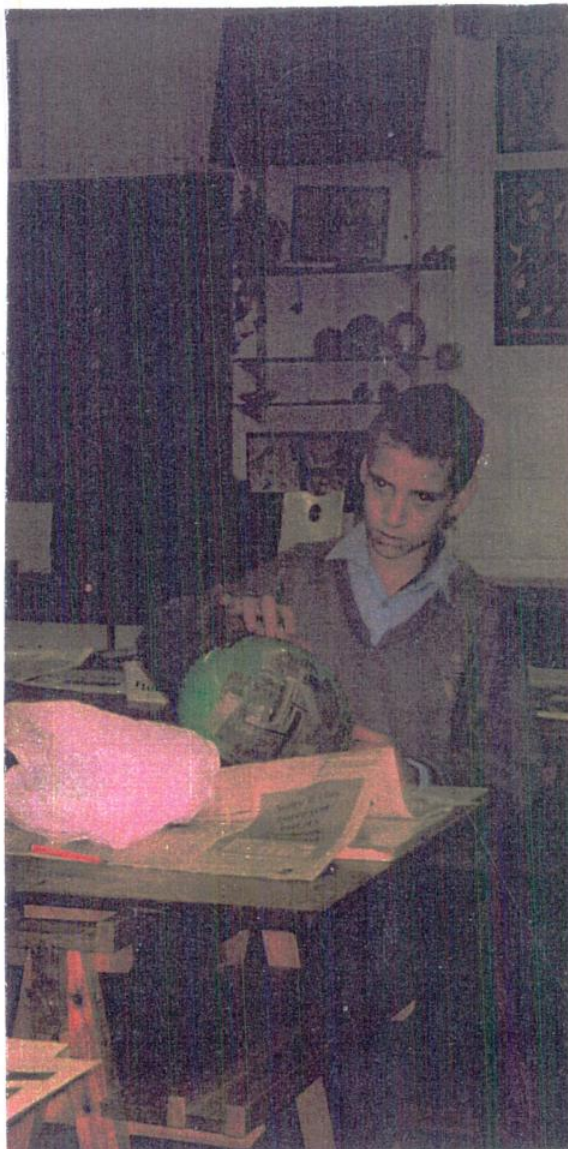
(fig 2.4)

Through a careful demonstration and constant questioning the children gradually understood the technique by partaking in definite stages of learning. The researcher accommodated the special individuals and assisted them in producing a well executed piece without isolating or identifying the specific needs.

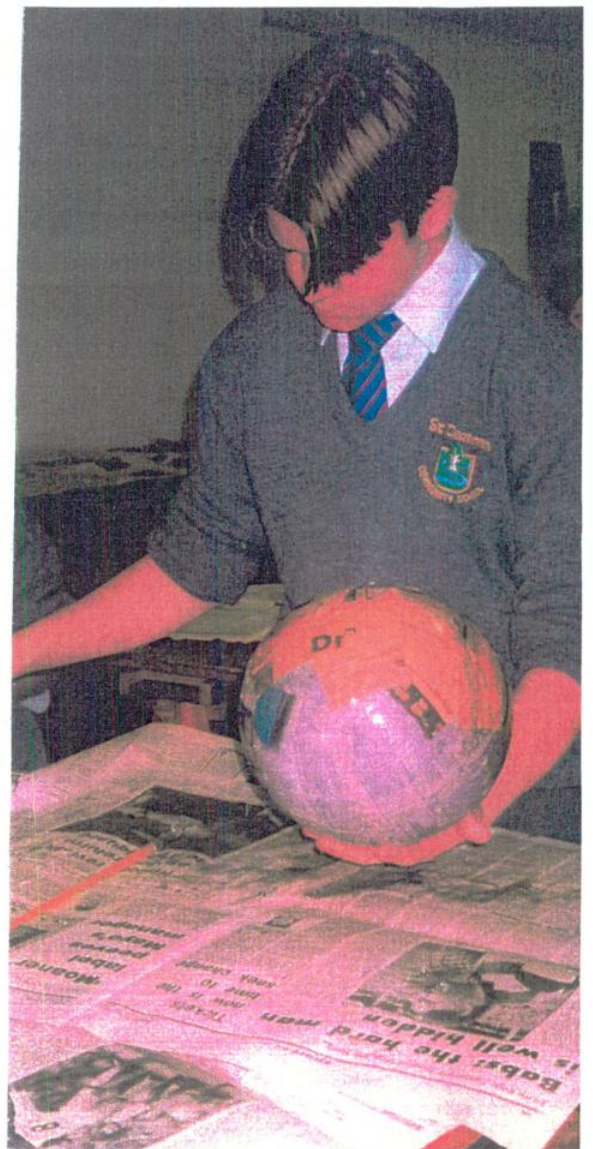
Using two different colour newspapers the pupils first completed a layer in one colour and then layered in the alternate (see fig 2.5). The reason for employing alternative colours was to allow the mentally challenged child to create a piece which would be structurally sound. Flaws can often occur during the traditional approach to building in this method as children tend to overlap in some areas and neglect others. Training them in the process through sensorial identification of the layering technique prevents this from happening. During lessons 5 and 6 the learning objective was to further explore facial proportion and structure, through construction of facial features using dough and papier mache. The features were blocked into position first with dough which was covered with newspaper and P.V.A. (see fig 2.6). The following week these crude forms were refined with plasticene to create more real life like structures and finally covered with tissue to give a suitable base for painting on (fig 2.7). Although the work has constantly reinforced learning at every stage of the piece a steady manageable pace encouraged the pupils to work to a high standard and gain a full understanding of every specific stage. This method of teaching is based on the ethos of Montessori, whereby every stage of development in learning had to be understood before progression to the next level could be undertaken. Adaptations of this approach by the author allowed every member of the class to benefit fully from each lesson.



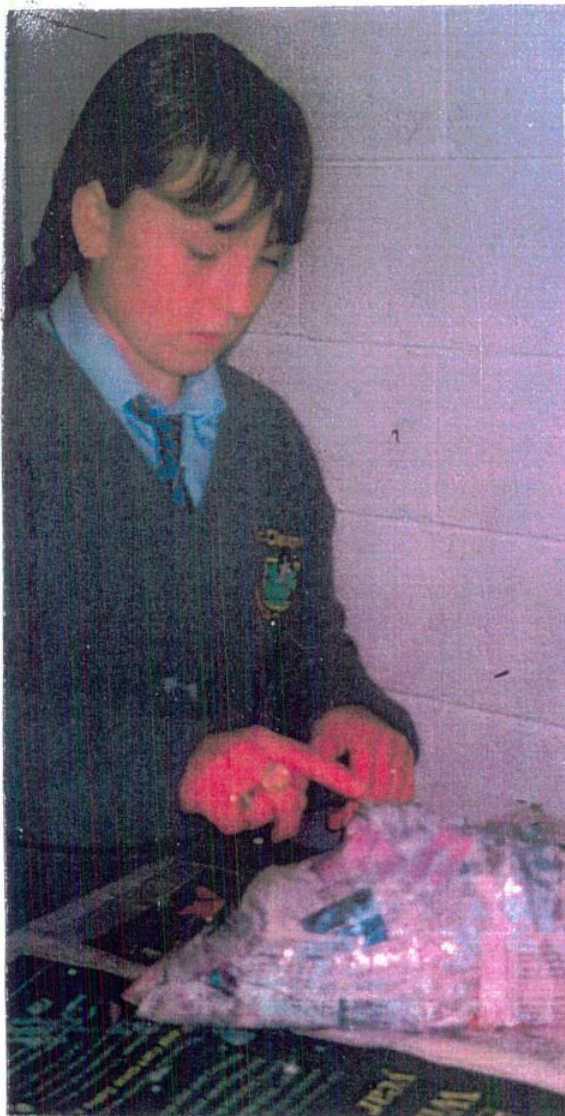




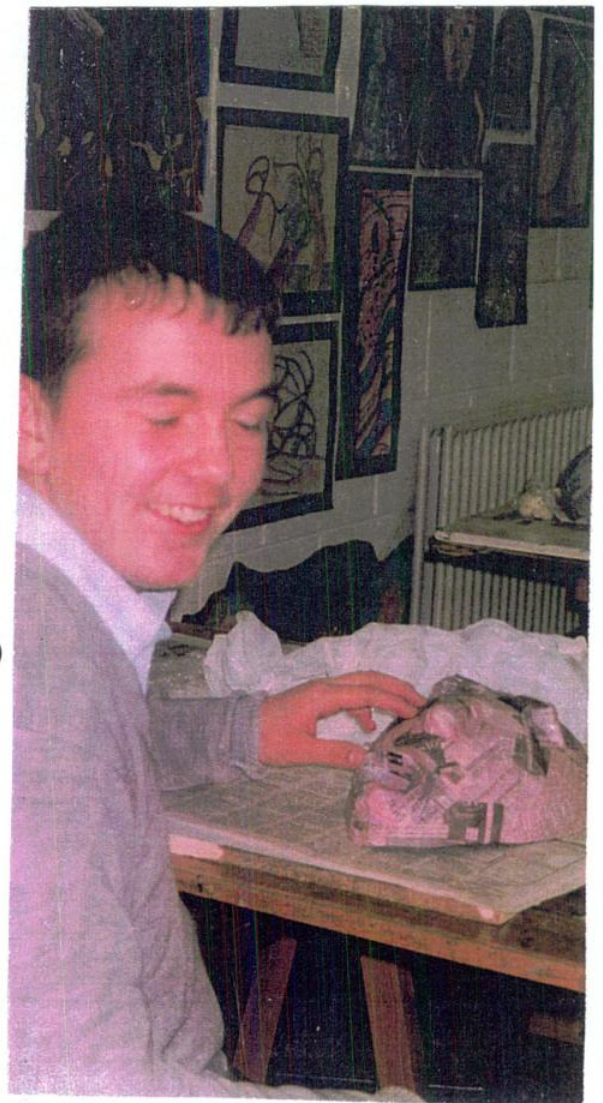
(fig. 2.5)

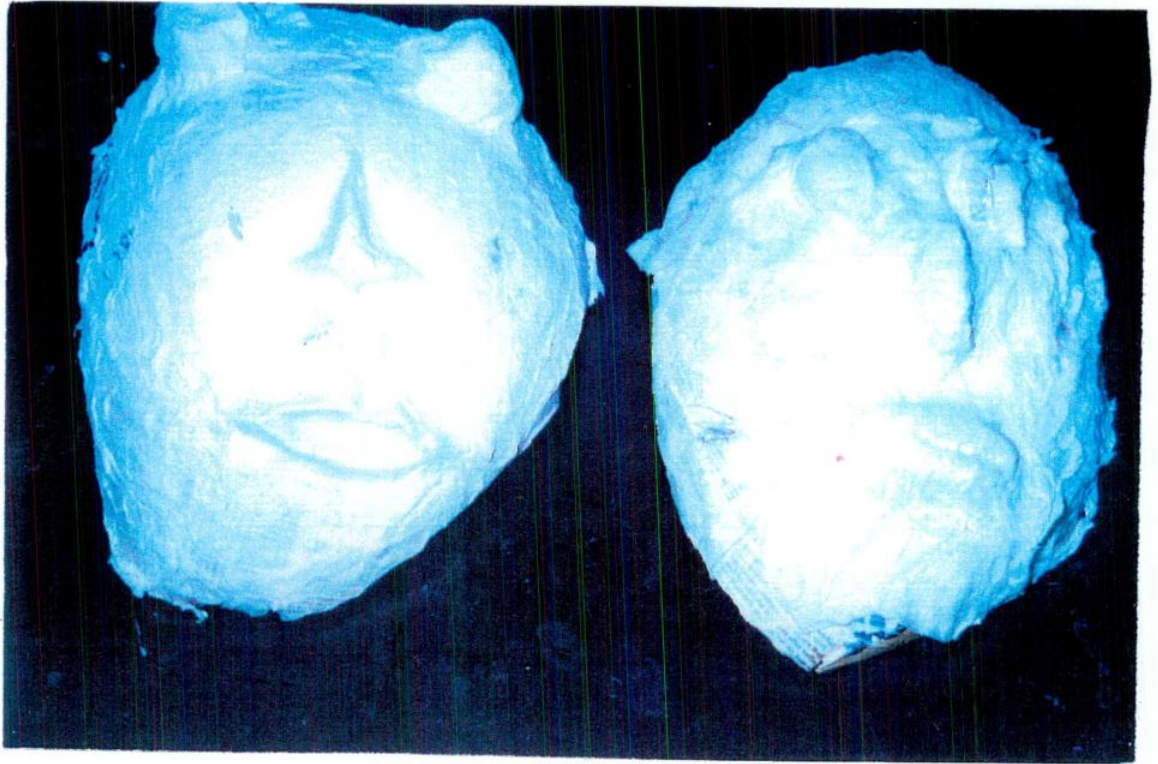






(fig. 2.6)





(fig. 2.7)





## LESSON SEVEN

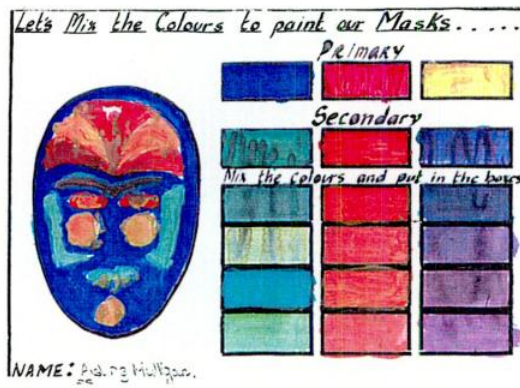
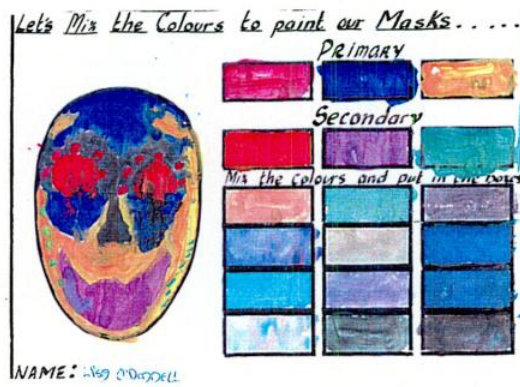
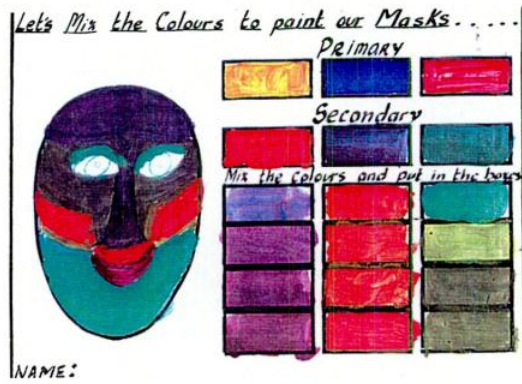
The learning objective of Lesson Seven was to introduce the use of white in highlighting form on the face, through creation of shadows on the bone structure. Also to explore the possible tones that can be achieved by mixing varying amounts of primary and secondary colours together, prior to painting their masks. For the first task they were required to paint a layer of white paint onto the mask, which would act as a base coat for further decoration.

Care was taken to give even coverage to all areas. The researcher used pertinent support studies of theatre and death masks where only white was used to emphasise how effective it can be. Cross curricular stories engaged the pupils in history during this first stage of lesson 7, by relating the story of "*l'connue de la Seine*"<sup>2</sup> to the pupils (see fig 2.8). In this story a young girl fell into the Seine in Paris during the 1800 s, and when her body was recovered she was smiling. She was taken to the mortuary where they were astounded by her mysterious expression and they took a mask of her face. Next they had to mix their secondary colours and go on to mix several gradient tones of these. They did this on prepared worksheets with full instruction which prevented errors, but allowed the pupils to freely experiment in the creation of tones (see fig 2.9). Here the individual was required to enter into decision making and self discipline where by they controlled the paint and hence the tone produced. Although some repetition of similar tones was evident on the worksheets, the researcher felt this to be a valued part of the learning process and made no remark to the individuals concerned.





(fig. 2.8)



(fig. 2.9)



Instead it is considerably more positive to equate this experience with the repetition documented by Montessori during the sensitive periods of the young child's development.

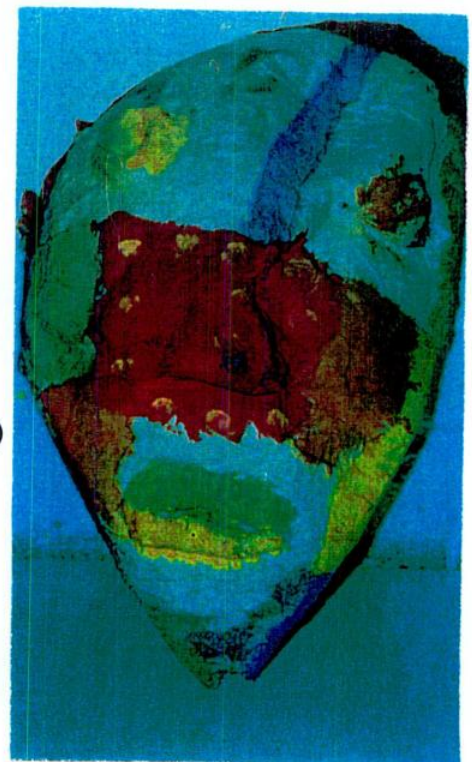
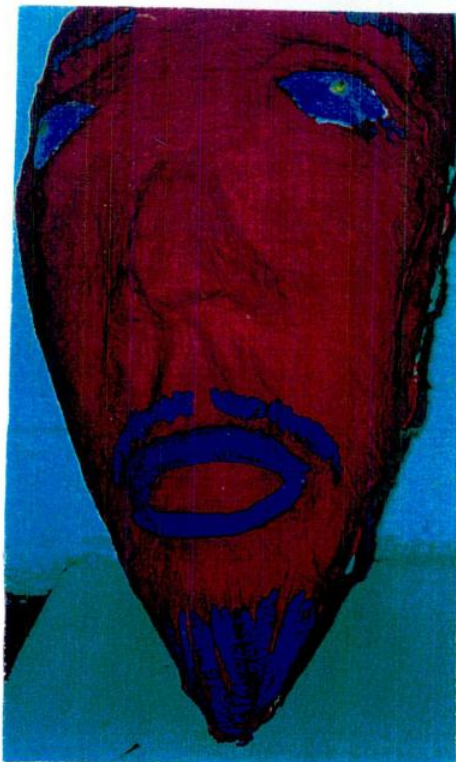
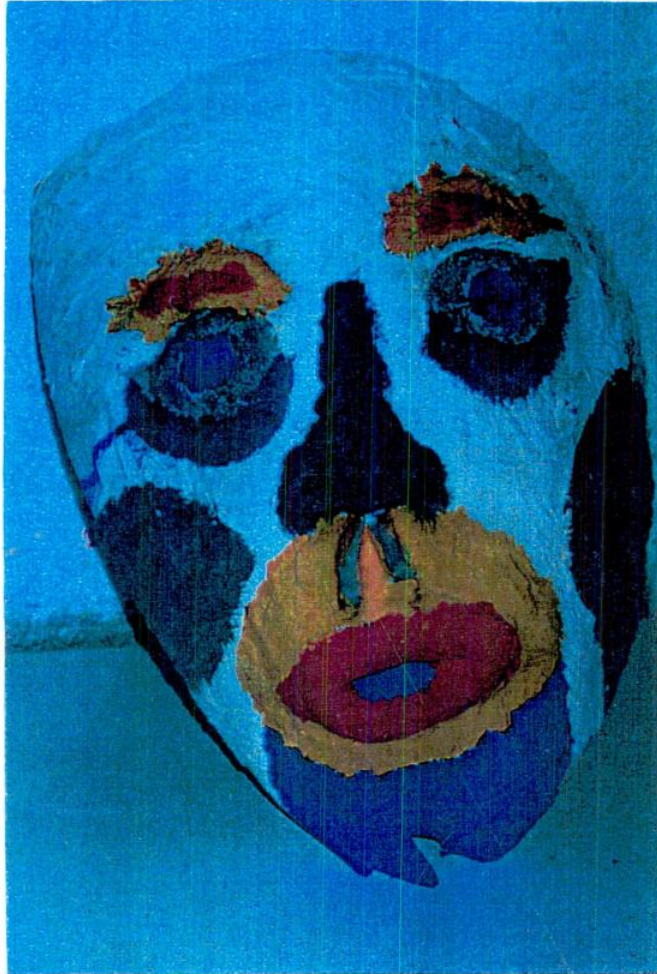
A task was continuously executed, with full concentration until the individual felt comfortable in their knowledge of it. Obvious learning occurred during this lesson and proved to be a positive step as an introduction to painting the actual mask.

### **LESSON EIGHT**

In Lesson Eight pupils were made familiar with technical linguistic painting terms through the application of paint to their masks. In the process gaining knowledge about the transition of painting from a 2D to a 3D surface. Through questioning the pupils identified the obvious differences between the two surfaces- flat versus raised. The sensorial method of finger tracing reinforced this and pupils formed areas on the face where recesses existed for example the eye sockets, side of nostrils, and the cheekbones. This enabled the individuals to easily find similar areas on their masks where particular attention had to be paid during painting. Pupils were requested only to paint in flat areas of colour which would be developed in later stages in the scheme (see fig 2.10). This prevented overworking areas on wet paint which would hinder effective pattern or decoration to exist. Careful explanation of brush sizes and good work practices allowed each pupil to complete the task with skill and competency.







(fig 2.10)

New painting terms were presented through the demonstration, for example, consistency, wash, and intensity, which were later recalled in an evaluation of learning at the end of the class. Lessons Nine and Ten saw the scheme drawing to a close, it was the aim of the researcher to ensure that the pupils continued to maintain a high standard of execution and professionalism in their work during this final period.

### **LESSON NINE**

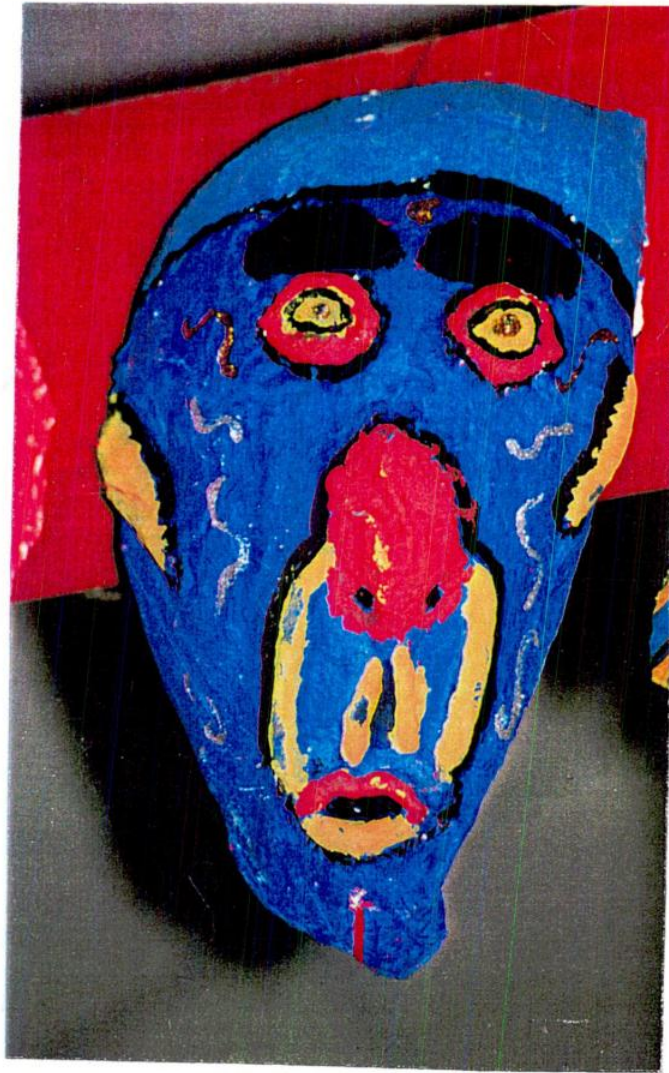
With the masks dry in Lesson Nine, the main objective was to encourage pupils to explore the decorative possibilities of using line/pattern to break up areas of flat colour on the masks. Finger tracing along the contour of lines showed the children exactly how a path could be created and this sensorial information acted as a guideline when they began painting. The author provided the fine brushes to each child for this task and demonstrated clearly how to apply the finishing touches. Pupils worked diligently, and successfully painted decorative details onto areas of flat colour. It was important to stress, not to overwork the pattern and hence reduce the visual impact of the original design (see fig 2.11).

### **LESSON TEN**

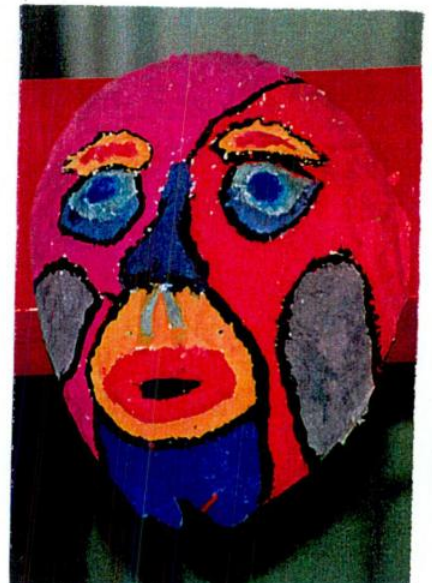
The last lesson in the ten week scheme was met with great excitement from the pupils. Many arrived with materials for decoration, bringing glitter wool and fabric to add personality to their masks.







(fig. 2.11)



The objective of the lesson was to promote an understanding of the decorative effects that can be achieved through the application of materials. Pupils wished to attach hair beards and moustaches to the faces, while also adding the final finishing touches to the contoured areas. Critical thinking on behalf of the pupils was required, as they had to consider the final embellishments and whether the mask needed them or not. Rather than using glue which can often be difficult for pupils with undeveloped manual dexterity, the researcher showed alternatives to the children.

One such example was where the mask was punctured with a scissors or pencil. Hair was then threaded through this slit and secured at the rear with masking tape. This technique allowed the added features to become part of the overall piece in a very sophisticated fashion rather than being crudely attached with adhesive. Learning this finishing method will also be beneficial during other craft projects at Junior Certificate level, for example puppets.

Each pupil in the class, inclusive of the exceptional individuals, participated successfully in this project. The masks were interesting aesthetically and showed good understanding of the technical process the pupils engaged in. The adapted teaching programme provided both the mainstream and special child with valuable learning experiences. Each child's needs were addressed without identifying the deficiencies of the special child. They remained anonymous within a mainstream class, building peer relationships and co existing in the working environment. (see fig. 2.12)







(fig 2.12)

Support of the caring teacher provides the special needs individual with security to develop personally and socially on an integrated level. The researcher deems this project a success and shall investigate the possibilities of using staged/sensorial teaching for special needs individuals in other subjects at second level.



## Footnotes

## Chapter 2

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<sup>1</sup> Henley, David R., *Exceptional Children, Exceptional Art*, Massachusetts, Davis Publications Inc. 1992, p.10

<sup>2</sup> Sorrell Walter, *The Other Face.. The Mask in the Arts*, New York, Bobbs Merrill, 1973, p.79





## CHAPTER 3

### Results and Discussions - Integration and the way forward

It is the aim of the researcher in this final chapter to discuss the scheme undertaken with the children, and how beneficial a staged teaching method was to the successful integration of the exceptional child within the art class. However the main objective as a result of this analysis would be to question, how valid a devised programme of sensorial / staged learning would be to other subjects within the second level curriculum. In other words could every subject be taught in a similar fashion with the same levels of success? As integration is becoming a more integral part of society, educational opportunities at both primary and secondary school have to be investigated to accommodate the particular needs of the mentally challenged. No longer are exceptional individuals banished to live in sheltered homes but rather they and their families are demanding they take their place within the integrated world. Kirk and Gallagher state *“with mainstreaming and the marked decrease in institutionalization of exceptional individuals, we are all as a society becoming increasingly aware that these individuals are like ourselves and most important part of the human community”*<sup>1</sup>

The author based the projection the ideas and methods of Maria Montessori combining her sensorial exercises for learning with a staged approach of skill development.

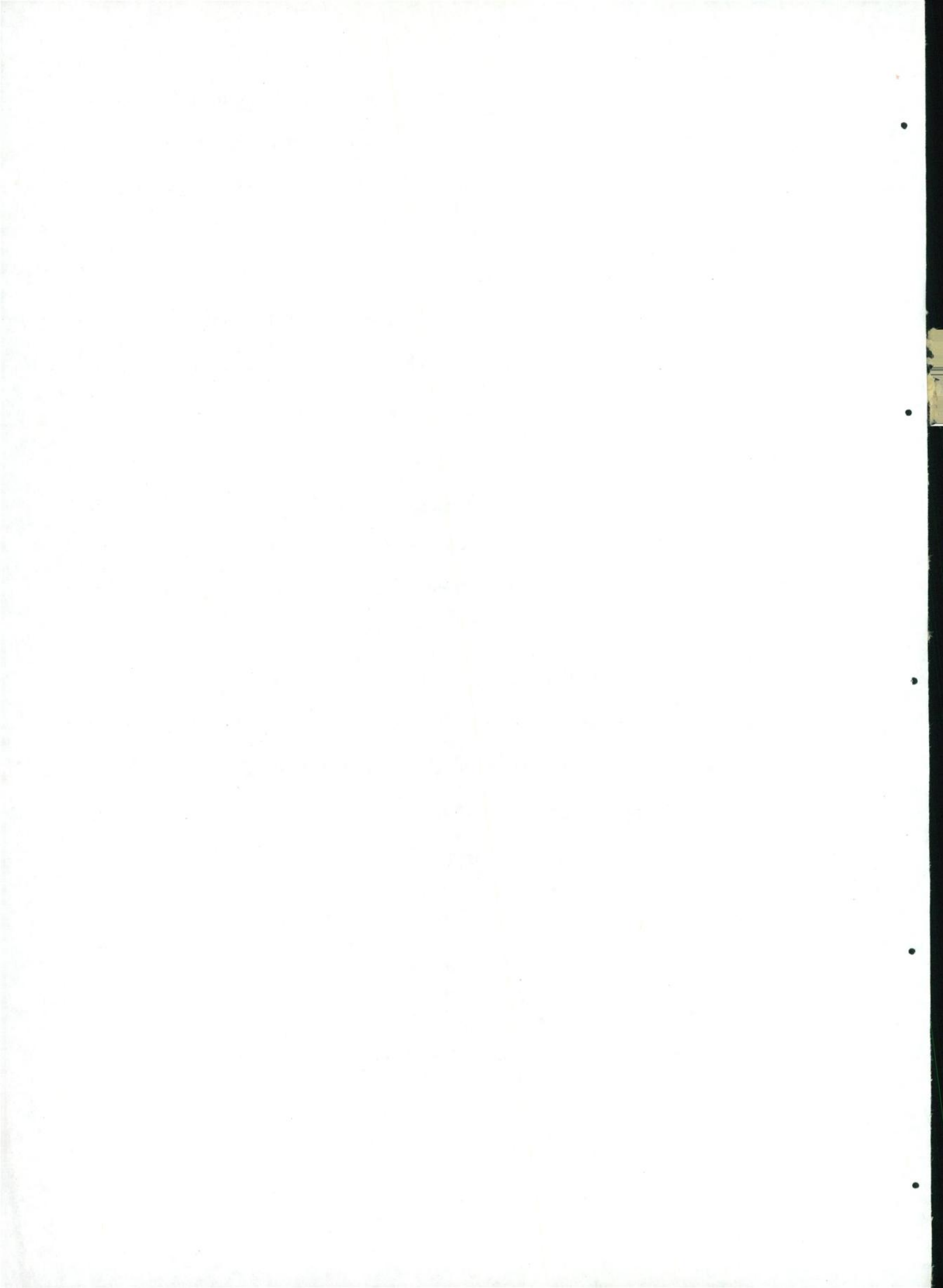


These were modified and adapted to devise a scheme which suited the requirements of a senior cycle mixed ability group. Rather than adapt the traditional teaching method for one or two exceptional individuals, as would usually occur in specifically designed programmes for the special needs, a new approach was taken. This encompassed all students and their particular needs, encouraging integration of the mainstream and the mentally challenged child. Previous experience within the area of special education has proven to be a valuable asset to the researcher during this period, allowing for alteration of the programme when the need arose due to a knowledge and understanding of the children in the group.

It was relatively easy to work as guide and teacher in the classroom, as an integration policy was already in place. A schedule of work had to be then conceptualised and rendered operational before a valid teaching programme could begin with the group. Each lesson had solid learning objectives which were taught and demonstrated to the pupils through sensorial learning. These included the difficult concepts of the art elements. Montessori also taught complex abstract theories to the young child, by giving them tangible concrete materials to reinforce their learning. This can be illustrated by the use of the binomial cube in her teaching of algebra.

### **BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES**

The researcher found the scheme of work to have both advantages and disadvantages which need to be explored before further development of a similar approach in other subjects could be viable. Firstly the project did successfully integrate and accommodate the exceptional child in the group, with no obvious differences in their final pieces.



However as there were only three designated special children it could be asked if the small number for integration in this class is indicative of the result? How could more children be facilitated in this programme at the one time ? Or could they?

The opinions and research of the author would present themselves as being affirmative in the area of smaller numbers leading to more qualified success. It would be virtually impossible to cater for the needs of a mainstream group and integrated children if the numbers were to exceed three or four, in a class of twenty four. This would occur from the perspective of time management and the lack of one to one attention, which would be impossible with such a large group. A second critical point in the evaluation of the project is the huge amount of time needed to prepare for each class by the teacher. Organisation of materials and exact precision in calculating the pupils needs would definitely erode into the personal time of the teaching staff.

Although both of the above comments are negative, it is positive to have only two obvious disadvantages resulting after such an experimental piece of work. As a result of the success of the project, it would be unfortunate if further work would be hindered, due to a lack of hands on support for the teacher. Currently the Government and F.A.S. are offering limited placements of childcare positions as assistants within the classroom. If further provision of these placements were mandatory the preparatory work of the teacher could be shared while also allowing extra personal tuition time for the children when required.





As already noted there were many worthwhile advantages to the scheme, which can be sourced at both a cognitive and social level. Primarily it resulted in full participation of all students, in every lesson- with obvious learning taking place. Pupils learnt high conceptual and abstract ideals easily through language and relevant demonstrations. This would have been unlikely to occur in a traditional approach to relating the same topics.

Exact preparation of each task meant that work could begin immediately without delays or indecision. The class developed skills in visual awareness, and critical analysis, through the design process and the physical building of their masks. Cross curricular experiences are formed easily by reference to the local environment, history and language which all led to broaden the mind of the young adult. During the demonstration and the introduction period valuable questioning encourages pupils to give their opinions which further develops their awareness of what is going on around them. The class were accustomed to working together, and they facilitated each others needs. No prejudice towards the exceptional child was evident, with every pupil doing his / her own work. A social balance of equality existed within the classroom, which permitted personal growth in an unhindered fashion.

#### **POSSIBLE APPLICATION OF SIMILAR METHODS TO OTHER SUBJECTS**

The results of the project can easily identify how beneficial this teaching method was to teaching the special needs individual in the mainstream art class. It would be crucial to follow through this approach and pursue it's execution in relation to teaching other subjects at both primary and secondary levels.



For example, if examination of Home Economics a practical subject and Mathematics a theoretical subject were to be introduced in a staged sensorial approach, how would they manifest themselves? During a cookery class for instance, weighing / measuring of ingredients could all be carried out in cup measurements to elevate the problems of inaccurate readings on the scales. Sensory education would occur by the identification of the consistency of substances through the smell, the taste and the touch.

Worksheets/handouts and information would all reinforce the learning of each class.

In Mathematics abstract theories and concepts could all be related to the children through positive learning materials. Montessori introduced mathematical concepts during pre school years with simple number rods counters and blocks. Gradually pupils developed a basic ground knowledge which can then be built upon during later stages. For example if the young child was to be introduced to fractions through the sensorial method they would first encounter the problem visually, learning to segment the whole object into its relevant sections - halves or quarters. The complex problem of the written equation would then lose its uncomprehendable abstract quality, as pupils will already be familiar with the fact that there are two halves in one whole object. Montessori's use of didactic materials proved to have highly successful results when employed with both the exceptional child and the mainstream individual. Recently, within the Irish primary school system the Letterland system of reading has been introduced. The children are taught to read through the phonic method, adapted from the sound based technique used by Montessori. Such an introduction can only be welcomed as the benefits to the young child, especially those with specific needs are evident within a short learning period. Language is no longer presented as





abstract symbols but rather letters and words become identified by their characters and their sounds. While early identification and intervention in the area of special education is prudent on an academic level, it is also necessary to remember their importance for personal growth and social development.

## HELIOS II

The Helios 11 programme promotes the integration of the physically and mentally challenged and encourage equality of opportunity. The programme was established in Europe in 1993 on the request of the Ministers for Education in Europe. Many studies have been undertaken by approximately 200 bodies involved in Helios throughout Europe.

Over its three years in existence it collaborated and combined results of the research and hence devised guidelines identifying the critical issues in integration and special education. As the report encompassed countries across European including Ireland, their findings can then be referred to in the Irish Education System. One of the main findings of the report indicates that early intervention in the identification of special needs individual has a significant effect upon their subsequent developments. The working documents of the final Helios Seminar in 1996 states that *"the aims of early intervention is to give help at an early stage to the child with the disability, to further its habilitation in autonomy and integration in all educational and social contexts"*<sup>2</sup>



This concept reinforces the findings of the researcher, during the application of their devised staged sensorial teaching module. The pupils involved were engaging in an integrated classroom policy for the second year, and were obviously finding the experience to be very worthwhile and beneficial.

If integration at this level could operate so successfully over such a short period of time, earlier introduction could make huge differences to concerned for life. However even if Montessorian methods were introduced through the Irish Primary School system, integration of special needs cannot just be the responsibility of the educators. Parents play a huge role in the development of the young child and their support and advice should be sought and listened to if integration of the exceptional child will work. If parents and professional specialists were to work in unison a holistic learning environment could be developed for the child. As actively concerned parents they *“should take into consideration the child’s needs, interests and wishes having always in mind the autonomy and independence of the child”*<sup>3</sup>

### **“ANATOMY IS NOT DESTINY”**

Linda Blumberg who herself is physically challenged comments on this idea of autonomy in her article of “Anatomy is not Destiny”<sup>4</sup>. In 1998 she recalls a very healthy and happy childhood experience in the sheltered surrounds of her family home. Co existence as an equal allowed her to grow in self confidence without the feel of being different. However her memories of school life are somewhat different, although she had tolerant and a caring teachers she did not experience scholastic integration. Immediately she was labelled as being different by her peers, after living anonymously within society up to this.



This experience affected her as an individual, while also reflecting the attitudes of society around her. Blumberg had always known her own physical limitations, however she was only made to feel isolated and different during her first encounter with an uneducated society. Her experiences echo the philosophy of Montessori who saw every child as being special and insisted on the less capable being treated in an equal fashion to the normal child. Only the teaching approach should be adapted rather than the status of the exceptional individual. It is possible to state the currently in education “*we no longer think this child is disabled, he needs special education so we need to create a special structure, but this child has special needs we will co-ordinate the resources needed for education*”<sup>5</sup> A clear idea of what a policy on integration has now become evident from the child’s perspective.

### **TEACHER TRAINING**

However it is naive to envisage this occurring without addressing the wider circle of the school and what its role shall be. All modern educators acknowledge that teachers must be trained to a high level of expertise in order to be fully competent in this area. Pestalozzi in the 1800’s addressed this as did Montessori and the Kildare Place Society with specific establishments for teacher training. It is crucial that training and information covers all aspects of educational or scholastic integration including “*specific teaching techniques, child psychology and the holding of meetings and evaluation*”<sup>6</sup> The results of the Thematic Group 5 of the Helios Seminar 1995 also places teacher training high on the list of priorities with regard to early intervention policies of the future. Recommendations are made for specific training policies on two levels, firstly during basic teacher training





courses and secondly more intensive in-service education opportunities throughout their careers. In research they discovered that the majority of teachers had received no formal education in the area of the exceptional individual, for those who had it was little more than a limited general introduction.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the most critical issue to be reinforced is that of teacher training. The current educational policy in Ireland promotes integration of the mentally challenged within the mainstream cycle from primary level. However, there appears to be no foundation training for teachers to aid in the establishing of this criteria. This obvious lack of specific knowledge reiterates the findings of the Helios Seminar as already noted. The author investigated the situation in teacher training colleges in Ireland presently, and found similar situations apparent within the curriculum of the Degree courses. A student taking a Bachelor of Education Degree will not touch on the area of special education during the first three years of the course, which will qualify them with a Pass Degree. In order to obtain an Honours qualification they must attend a series of lectures as part of their one year Teaching Diploma. At this stage they select four out of seven modules one of which covers special education. It is an unfortunate situation as most young teachers will avoid the area due to a lack of knowledge. Secondly by this time many may be actually working in an environment which includes the mentally or physically challenged with no formal training to assist them in their experience. It is crucial to address several issues in order to promote scholastic integration fully for the special needs individual. Further development of the curriculum in the staged sensorial approach of Montessori could have beneficial results for all the children involved. An improved support system provided by the Department of Education for the teacher in an integrated classroom would provide prudent assistance on a practical day to day basis. Finally the author would indicate strongly that in





order for the teachers to be able to offer a comprehensive education to the exceptional child they must first have education in this particular area during their initial training. Guidance at this stage would aid in the demystification of the concept of special needs and as a result the specifically trained teacher would *“know how to exceed the sole objective of socialization use different teaching methods to allow children with special needs to learn in school. They also have an obligation to promote scholastic integration to spread the word that is an opportunity for the whole of the educational system”*<sup>7</sup>



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## Footnotes

### Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup> Kirk , Gallagher, Educating Exceptional Children, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company  
1976, p.20

<sup>2</sup> Helios, Working Documents, Luxembourg, November 1996, conclusions p.3

<sup>3</sup> IBID, p.3

<sup>4</sup> Blumberg, Linda, Anatomy is not Destiny, Boston Globe Magazine, January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1988,  
p.19

<sup>5</sup> Helios, Working Documents, p.2

<sup>6</sup> IBID p.5

<sup>7</sup> IBID p.6



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## 4. Interviews

- Interviews with two School Principals, Eoin McLoughlin, acting Principal, Good Shepard National School, Whitehall Road, Dublin 14 and Tim Geraghty, St. Tiernans Community School, Sandyford, Co Dublin.
- Conversation with Primary Education Degree Students

