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Blindness, Education and Society

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A Doctortal Thesis

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ABSTRACT.

This thesis looks at social scientific and disability related research on visual impairment and education. It starts from a historical perspective, and outlines the radical change of emphasis in research and thinking brought about by the Disabled People's Movement. After showing how this movement has developed, it looks at various aspects of visual impairment, concentrating on rehabilitation, personality research and the symbolism of the eye.

The next section looks at the development of education for visually impaired people. It starts from a historical perspective, and relates this to mainstream Sociological research on classroom interaction and school culture.

All of these sections highlight the importance of attitudes and social factors, whilst not denying the undoubted impact of visual impairment in itself. 23 visually impaired school pupils were interviewed, each individually, in a wide range of schools, and from a variety of social and educational backgrounds although an age range of 14 to 18 years seemed most suitable, for various reasons, the ages of those interviewed range from 13 to 19 years. For more detail see Chapter 7. The results highlighted a lack of understanding amongst educational establishment and society at large, especially with regard to partial sight. They showed that generally people can live normal lives, but that it is difficult for them to become fully part of groups which include sighted people, mainly due to problems in sighted people's attitudes and the effects of not seeing who and what is around. Varying levels of confidence were found in both mainstream and special schools, and these often related to the level of
encouragement given by staff for the visually impaired people to mix with sighted people.

10 sighted colleagues of the visually impaired respondents at three of the schools were also interviewed, again individually. They were aged 15 and 16. Again, see Chapter 7 for more details. They highlighted issues including looking different, not "knowing how to act" around a visually impaired person, and in some schools, a lack of information about visual impairment. It was these issues, along with the availability of more mainstream information for visually impaired people, (especially “top shelf” material) that concerned respondents the most.
CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION AND TERMINOLOGY.

This chapter sets out to provide a general context within which this thesis should be read. It explains what this thesis is about, why it is important, and who it was intended to be for. It then sets the context within which the terminology used throughout the thesis should be read. This is of vital importance. It reflects the diversity of the work involved, and does not reflect currently “acceptable” standards.

Background.

The author read for a degree in sociology with social psychology. This had stimulated interest in areas such as labelling, in- and out-groups, group dynamics and the inter-relationships of various social structures. From this point on, attitudes became a major area of interest. Attendance of the 1992 annual conference of the Association of Blind and Partially Sighted Teachers and Students stimulated interest in the disability movement. This led to a final year dissertation on the subject of “Mainstream Education for Visually Impaired People: Integration or Assimilation?”

This initiated interest in the effects of eye contact and different eye conditions, a very contrasting area from the disability movement perspective of stressing social factors. It became obvious from this work that there were so many areas needing to be investigated that further work was necessary. After the completion of this thesis, although much important work has now been done, this seems just as much to be the case.
Outline.

This thesis seeks to examine the social and Sociological impacts of different types of education on visually impaired people. To do this it looks at a wide range of areas of research, to bring together what could have been described as a tangled web of disparate and previously unrelated ideas. It must be stated that access to relevant material was sometimes very difficult. When books were available, usually from charities run for visually impaired people, they were not always complete. This is true for publications from several countries used during the preparation of this thesis, and is more of a problem with older material. This included incomplete bibliographical information, as well as whole reference sections and other important items being missed out. Even books written by disabled people over the last 20 years are still made accessible to visually impaired people by a charity run for them, not by the Disabled People's Movement itself. This should not be seen as a criticism of RNIB, without whom such a study would have been almost impossible, as they are striving hard to improve quality. But it does highlight the discrimination, unintentional as it may be, within the disability movement. Surely books published within the movement should be made available in all formats at the same time to ensure equality.

Any study that wishes to look at attitudes must try to understand their origins, so a historical perspective must be at the foundation of this thesis. This highlights the important role of the education system, showing how the position of visually impaired people has developed as a result of educational progress. The immense change in attitudes of disabled people over the past 20 years is a very interesting phenomenon, and the relationship that
organisations “of” and “for” blind people have had with other disability groups has only recently been attracting any attention. This thesis will examine those relationships and stress both the commonalities and the diversity of the experiences of different disability groups. It will emphasise both the commonality and diversity of experience within the visual impairment field as well.

After tracing these historical developments, the thesis takes a step back to analyse more closely some of the important factors associated with visual impairment and attitudes towards it. These include the symbolism of the Eye, and many attributes that have been associated with it. There are many examples of theories that have been misinterpreted, including the prevalence of “latent homosexuality” and other “deviant” behaviour within certain environments. This will lead into a discussion of the important role of Eye Contact and a discussion of the formation of different types of relationship.

The thesis also looks at personality research. It has been argued that visual impairment has a major reorganising effect on the whole nervous system, which in turn leads to a very different personality. This idea has been reduced in importance through the years, but is re-examined here. Various reasons are given for personality differences which have been highlighted over the years. They include environmental, attitudinal and “social learning theory” explanations.

The thesis then returns to the theme of education, and re-traces the historical analysis, setting it within the context of the way education has developed, and the underlying reasons for developments. Topics include the relationship of the visually impaired student and the teacher, the relationships with
classmates, the effects of the presence of a support teacher on classroom dynamics, and a detailed look at sociological approaches to special education and classroom interaction. Other school-related factors, such as participation in sports and social activities, are also discussed. What is not touched upon in any meaningful way in this thesis is educational achievement. This has been very well studied through the years, and it should continue to be investigated, both educationally and in a social science setting.

This thesis then sets out to investigate many of the issues in the modern day setting. A qualitative analysis is given of interviews carried out in a variety of educational settings, with a wide variety of people. 23 visually impaired people were interviewed, each individually, in 6 different schools, all using different types of educational provision. These ranged in academic ability, level of social integration, and by how they were perceived by staff, to include as many different types of people as possible. To add reliability, 10 sighted peers were interviewed, again individually, in 4 of the schools, using a very similar interview schedule. Most similar studies have merely interviewed visually impaired people, and the differences in perspective provided by the sighted interviewees are of immense value.

The interviews sought to find out how visually impaired people regard themselves with relation to sighted and other disabled people, whether or not they considered themselves disabled, and whether it was people's attitudes or the education system that made them feel the way they did. They sought to find out if visually impaired people were made to feel different, or considered themselves “Normal”, and what any differences were. Did visually impaired
people identify with the values of the disabled people's movement, believing in the social model and their rights, or were they more influenced by other considerations, such as medical and psychological theories. Would any factors relating to eye condition and level of sight be seen as important? How easy would they find it to establish a peer group with which they were happy, and would this be influenced by level of sight, type of educational provision, or people's attitudes? Would these factors influence the types of out of class activities visually impaired people could undertake, and with whom? More detailed questions were asked to find out how respondents felt about asking for and receiving help, and about sighted people's attitudes in general. Next, what seemed to be major issues were selected for detailed questioning. These sought to find out what types of information visually impaired people might miss out on, covering topics as diverse as current affairs, sport and body language, how they fair in a variety of social situations, and how they felt about relationships. In particular, there were several questions around body language, self concept, and chances to raise issues such as bullying, which were not specifically asked about. It was important to ask general questions to try to find out what were the main social influences on visually impaired pupils, and if these were different than they would be for sighted people. The questions for sighted people largely mirrored those for visually impaired people, aiming to find out how frank they would be about their fears and attitudes towards visual impairment, and to see if there were any factors that visually impaired people were not aware of. Several opportunities were given for issues to be raised by all interviewees, and surprising numbers were.
They revealed major gaps in communication between visually impaired and sighted classmates in the mainstream schools, and provided evidence of many of the attitudes towards visual impairment, on the part of both visually impaired and sighted people, that have often been written about. They highlighted great diversity of experience, both from school to school and from person to person.

A major theme that runs through all of this thesis is that different groups within society fail to be able to communicate with each other. This includes visually impaired and sighted classmates, but also includes the different groups of professionals working with or for visually impaired students. Visual impairment is portrayed as a disability that does have major consequences, but one that can be got round in most cases. Environmental and attitudinal barriers are shown to be the main reasons for any disadvantages suffered, but by no means the only ones. Examples are given of situations where visually impaired people will always lose out, just by virtue of not being able to see. Loss of information, and loss of choice are strongly highlighted, in every area of life. However, the normality of the experience of being a visually impaired person comes through strikingly, especially where issues have been faced.

This thesis is important also because it highlights many issues to do with group dynamics. Do visually impaired people have equality of access to different social groups? How does the education system contribute to this? Does the presence of a support teacher, although of vital importance for educational success, preclude freedom of social interaction with classmates? Are visually impaired pupils less free to fail than sighted peers? The thesis
stresses the problems that visually impaired people have in presenting themselves in a way appropriate for the social groups within which they wish to interact, and their receiving appropriate information about how to access them. This information is available to sighted peers. It is shown that within the special school, there are often too few students for a variety of friendship groups to be possible, but that the mainstream sector can be equally, if not more, restrictive. It is for these reasons that the interviews with sighted peers were of pivotal importance to this work, and could help to inform future educational policy. Future policies must be based on the concept of the “whole person” and this thesis outlines many of the requirements of the visually impaired person.
Key Dates.

September 1993: Funding, in the form of a scholarship from the Department of Education at Loughborough University was approved.

First term: funding from a variety of charities in order to purchase extra technology was approved, adaptations to room carried out, and work station was constructed.

November 1993: Start of literature review.

November 1994: The cues for the interview schedule for visually impaired people were drawn up.

January 1995: Initial letters were sent to a variety of schools and Local Education Authorities seeking participants. There was a limited response. Many were phoned in follow up, largely leading to the eventual sample. Chapter 6 gives more details about the sample. Chapter 7 gives more detail about the gender and age of respondents.

March 1995: Four visually impaired people were interviewed in a special school for people with a visual impairment, which also catered for other disabilities. The school catered for ages 2 to 19 years and all abilities. Location: unused classroom, noisy but private.
June 1995: four visually impaired people were interviewed in an accommodation block for visually impaired people attached to a mainstream comprehensive school. Location: independence flat, which was quiet and private.

July 1995: five visually impaired people were interviewed at a special school, by invitation in their rooms. The school catered for people of higher than average academic abilities. The interviews were subject to occasional interruption, but private.

October 1995: The Sighted interview schedule was developed and piloted on two sighted people.

November 1995: Schools where visually impaired people were being interviewed were approached with regard to interviewing sighted people.

March 1996: Five visually impaired people were interviewed in a mainstream school with a resource base for visually impaired students in the Midlands. The Interviews were conducted in a small room, with some interruptions and background noise.

April 1996: Four visually impaired people were interviewed in a mainstream community school with a resource base for visually impaired students, in a variety of settings.
May 1996: Four sighted people were interviewed in the comprehensive school in the Midlands (see above).

May 1996: one visually impaired person and two sighted peers were interviewed in a school in the Midlands. This was the only visually impaired person in the school, which was his neighbourhood school. The Interviews were carried out with a university photographer present, all parties having consented.

May 1996: Four sighted pupils were interviewed at the mainstream school with attached accommodation for visually impaired people. The interviews were carried out in a back room at one of their houses. This was Private and quiet, with people close by.

September 1996: funding from the university ended. Subsequent work was carried out whilst in full time employment.

Autumn 1996: The interviews were transcribed and coded. See Chapter 6.

1997: The transcripts were analysed and written up and literature review completed.

1998: Extensive proof reading was undertaken and the thesis drawn together and completed.
Terminology.

It is hoped that the language of this thesis will make it accessible to as many people as possible, in the hope that its findings will benefit as many people as possible. The inclusion of "mainstream" theorists such as Delamont, Fielding, Freud and Goffman will stimulate interest among social scientists (of whatever discipline) in general. It is also hoped that this work will be seen as a contribution to one of the most important trends within the disability studies field at this time: the bringing together of a wide range of different theories is leading to a greater understanding and a more moderate, thoughtful approach. In the early 1990s, when the idea of this thesis came about, there was still a need for much radical campaigning. But this has begun to change as the "disabled people's movement" has become more mature and confident. However, it is also hoped that this thesis will be able to influence people in many professions, with whom visually impaired people have contact: service planners, policy makers, medical practitioners, teachers and other educationalists, and anybody interested in attitudes or personality. The aim is to include as many perspectives as possible, and relate them to each other. This type of exercise is fraught with problems. The wide range of perspectives and theories included could not properly be reflected without using terminology that may cause offence today. Therefore, it is necessary to set many of the terms used within the context of the original theories being discussed at the time.

There are several terms which will be used frequently throughout this work, and various reasons why they will be used. In some respects, it is felt necessary to go against the modern trend for political correctness, since
words such as “Blind” will appear frequently and with justification in this work. The author’s position on which terms are preferable has altered slightly, during the completion of this thesis since there appears to be a growing awareness of “visual impairment” as a concept amongst the general public: many people now ask “how much can you see” whereas it has previously been assumed that blind people are totally blind. Therefore, where appropriate, the term “visually impaired” will be used to describe any person with a visual impairment, whether this be total or slight. The term “blind” will be used when describing people who are totally blind, or who have a little sight, but to whom the issues of blindness, rather than having partial sight, are relevant: those with vision which gives them some, but limited independence. Any reference made to partially sighted people will indicate that there may be different issues which need to be researched, which may not effect totally blind people in the same way, an example being the “double-identity” complex, (Hellewell, 1991), which will not be investigated in any detail here. Throughout the decades, the terminology used to describe visual impairment has changed greatly. Many early authors used terms such as “unsighted” and “Sightless” (Kirtley, 1975). However, during the 1960s, it was realised that these terms and others such as “Partially Blind” were too negative (Mcnamara, 1994). This latter term was replaced by the currently acceptable “partially sighted” This was followed in turn by the use of the terms “Visually Handicapped” and “Visually Impaired”. The difference between impairment and handicap will be discussed below. Mcnamara sarcastically wrote in The New Beacon in June 1994 that the latest term which has been suggested has had as little effect on the lives of blind people as any others. Visually impaired
may mean facially distorted, so the correct term should be “Vision Impaired”.
However, it seems inappropriate to the author to introduce any new terms, just
as the currently acceptable one is becoming understood by the general public.
Either of these latter two terms allow one important connection to be made:
the use of the initials VIP: Very Important Person: this point is useful in raising
the esteem and political will of the visually impaired population, which is the
only way of bringing about changes, which are still, despite much progress,
greatly needed.
Many people ask what the importance of terminology really is, since to the
visually impaired population themselves, blind, partially sighted and visually
impaired are all just descriptive phrases. It is only those who become involved
in disability politics to whom such terms really matter. The general visually
impaired population will, however, object to terms like “unsighted”, “sightless”
“visually disabled”, but may be amused by terms such as “blinkies”
(Mcnamara, 1994), “blindies” etc. The major point which does need to be
considered is whether the term is negative or positive sounding and whether it
has a clear meaning.
The disability movement has looked at disability from a non-medical
perspective, and increasingly located it within society. This has led to
extensive debate about the differences between the terms Handicapped,
Impaired and Disabled. These distinctions should be born in mind when
looking at current and early writings on blindness, since it enables the
individual to feel more worthwhile and not to regard himself as inferior to the
rest of society since he has a medical condition which disables him.
Oliver (1986) starts by pointing out that in legislation, disability and illness are seen as one and the same thing: it is usually doctors who have contact with disabled people, since their medical needs dictate that this will be the case. Thus, the impression given to the rest of society is that it is a medical problem. This is naturally reflected in the services provided for disabled people, since they are run by non-disabled members of society, who are generally influenced by the medical profession, rather than by the people they serve, or rather, “look after”. Oliver points out that this results in many myths about disability, ranging from the medical dominance, to the belief that physical disability equates to mental disability. Disability is always seen as “somebody else’s problem” whether this be the home help organiser or the doctor.

Phelan (no date) argues that there must be a distinction between disease and disability. He redefines disability as a cluster of implications which result in inability to do things, caused mainly by the organisation of the society in which the disabled person lives. He argues that the three major problems for disabled people are the Medical Portcullis, where doctors are relied upon to decide what needs are, the Bureaucratic Barricade, where services are allocated according to numbers of users, and the Personality Pitfall, where disabled people cannot become politically active due to the complex nature of the system and the attitudes of able bodied people. He believes that disabled people are the most discriminated against group, since legislation has effectively stopped discrimination on sexual or racial grounds. Finkelstein (1980) put it more radically. Disability, to him, is an oppressive social relationship, a group discrimination, which occurs when someone cannot do something as a result of an impairment, the impairment being constructed as
the medical part of the disability. He saw the most important issues to be independence and changing people's attitudes towards disability and impairment. These ideas were reiterated by Oliver (1990). Another strand of thought is reflected by Halliday (1971) who uses the term impairment in the same way as previously indicated, and the term “handicap” to denote a learned social role. This will be outlined when looking at the work of Robert Scott. The major difference to note between these terms is that disability locates the problems within social structures, whereas handicap explicitly states that these structures are formed in such a way that disabled people are taught how to behave. Whilst this is a useful definition, the term Handicap is associated with begging and dependency, and it is unsurprising, therefore, that the disability movement have not used it. However, if the existence of disability is not to be denied, then the negative, as well as the positive, must be stated. It is with this philosophy in mind that attention must be given to defining exactly what blindness is, what it does to the visually impaired person’s life, and what can be done to minimise its effects. The analysis will be underpinned by the belief that although there are many severe effects of blindness, which some authors have sought to brush aside, adequate rehabilitation and social awareness would vastly reduce the significance of the impairment.

In several sections of this thesis, original terminology will be retained, despite the fact that it is now seen as unacceptable. This is to give a greater qualitative feel to the work, to properly reflect the context of the time when the terms were acceptable. This would include such terms as “the blind” which are often seen as depersonalising. It is intended that the reader should be aware
of changes taking place over time, and that as true a picture as possible, in a work of this length, can be given by the use of these terms. The fact that they are unacceptable to many people now must also be noted and understood.
CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

To understand how society views blindness, it is necessary to look at the status this group has held in society through history, since attitudes are generally thought to take decades, if not centuries (according to Lowenfeld, 1975), to change. In this chapter, a brief outline of the social history of visual impairment will be given, outlining the role of certain characters and social institutions. This will lead into a discussion of how the “disabled people’s movement” has redefined disability as a social construct, and the effects this has had. Educational history will be discussed in Chapter 5. Here, it is important to show why attitudes and beliefs have developed as they have, in a very negative way, in many societies. Whilst this does not reflect the current status of many blind or partially sighted people, it has generally been assumed through history, that losing sight is the worst possible fate that could befall a person. However, this appears to be changing, since innovations which help blind people have received much publicity in the last few years. In some circles, deafness is now regarded as a much more socially disabling condition, and reliance on a wheelchair is also increasingly cited as inconvenient. Greater visibility makes people realise exactly what problems various disabilities cause. It cannot be stated which is the greatest disability, since experiencing several disabilities causes different problems than single disabilities experienced alone, thus comparison is impossible. A person with one disability generally regards other disabilities as worse, especially amongst the blind population, where there is a natural fear of deafness. This can be likened to trying to compare race, gender and disability discrimination, and
treat them in isolation, rather than looking at discrimination from the single viewpoint of the person experiencing it (Stewart, 1992).

The history of disability can generally, although perhaps over simplistically, be divided into three stages: Liability, Institutional and Modern. It must be pointed out that various authors have defined each of these stages differently, but this only serves to emphasise the varying experiences of different groups of disabilities. For instance, Finkelstein (1980) considers the institutional phase to have begun around the time of the industrial revolution, when talking about disability in general, whereas Kirtley (1975) argues that this stage began with the early Christian hospitals and brotherhoods in terms of blind people.

The Liability Stage.

The majority of blind people through the ages have been considered incapable of performing any useful function in society. In the most primitive societies, Koty (1934) shows that much care was taken of the old, sick and infirm, which implies that where possible all physically handicapped people would have been looked after. One tribe were noted for treating the blind well and the deaf poorly. Simons (1952) looked in some detail at the Hopi, a farming tribe, and found that handicapped and old people generally found useful things to do, such as spinning, but that at a certain age, or with serious handicap, a liability stage was reached, and attitudes became negative. For such people survival was the most important thing and personal life was secondary. Therefore, the old, sick or infirm would accept that they must be sacrificed if the tribe was ever threatened. Contrary to what many have thought, routine killing of handicapped people occurred mainly in Martial
Societies, which had reached a higher state of development. Killing was routinely practised most often in harsh climates, and in nomadic groups. Kirtley (1975) gives the example of ancient Prussia, where sons killed there infirm parents, and fathers killed disabled children. Elaborate routines of brutal torture, and use of the sword, were commonplace. Even children with a mere squint would be killed in this way. Hanks and Hanks (1948) found 5 predominant social statuses for the handicapped:

1. Pariah: This was where there was no assistance for the handicapped, who were regarded as a threat to the community as a whole.

2. Economic Liability: Although not regarded specifically as a threat, handicapped people were often simply left, since they were regarded as an economic liability.

3. Tolerant Utilisation: This was where family obligations meant that handicapped people would be protected, and allowed to share in some of the jobs and food of the community.

4. Limited Participation: This differs from tolerant utilisation in that it allows more independence, although this was rarely achieved.

5. Laissez faire: This meant that participation in society was only limited by impairment. It seems very unlikely that this state actually existed in its true form, despite what Hanks and Hanks argue. All societies have held negative views, according to Wright (1960), of most groups of handicapped people.

Kirtley showed how in Rome blind men were often sold as galley slaves, and girls were forced into prostitution (an interesting contrast to modern views of blind people's sexuality). Aid was rarely given to blind people, who were...
loathed, most often being beggars, and owning only their knapsack and the clothes they wore. When aid was given, it was usually by someone who wanted to increase his popularity or show his social status. In Israel, there was a two-tier system, whereby the lower strata of society were highly stigmatised, blind people being regarded as “living dead”, and many believing that the mere touch of a blind person would communicate the condition. In the higher strata of society, many were offered education, and became very successful and independent. Things were similarly poor in Greece, except for citizens of Athens, who were granted a pension, which was regarded as a right, not charity. Blindness seems to have been quite common in Egypt, where welfare provision was relatively systematic, and poor and disabled people were regular guests at feasts. There were no famous artists or scholars, unlike in other countries. Finkelstein (1980) points to a general belief that one was responsible for one’s own social status, making disability a highly individual experience. However, Lowenfeld demonstrates that parents often felt guilty if their children were disabled, and that poor people and parents of disabled children often killed their offspring to prevent them from leading a miserable life. Blindness became associated with begging since it was not a visible disability, so children had often already been accepted into the family. Blinding was also regarded as a punishment from the gods, and any special skills a person acquired were thought to be by way of compensation, which lead to a tendency for veneration. Handicapped people were generally regarded as either superhuman, or more normally, subhuman, but never normal. Other factors which discriminated against blind people in such societies included elitism, slavery and its disregard for human dignity.
the Greek and Roman ideals of beauty and strength, and religious beliefs, such as the use of sacrificial offerings to the gods.

Lowenfeld gives a different picture of how Judaism responded to blindness. Charity became a religious duty, which meant that begging occupied a higher social status. Old age was regarded as a desirable state, and education became more important. The early Christians developed this since in the small communities, any blind people who were not looked after by their own families were taken in as house guests by others. However, after the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire in about 300 AD, circumstances rapidly declined back to what had previously been the case. This lead to what Lowenfeld argues is the start of institutionalisation: the monasteries and small hospitals began to care for the sick and handicapped during this period.

Institutionalisation.

For well over 500 years, it can be argued, institutions have been a characteristic of the life of many blind people. This has happened on an ever increasing scale, until the last few years. Whilst it is generally agreed that they lead to segregation of blind people from the rest of the community, it is also accepted that they have enabled a great degree of progress to be made. It is not intended to go into detail about individual establishments here, rather to show how they have contributed to a change in status of blind people in the general community which should not be ignored.

The first hospital for the blind was founded in the 5th century in Syria, but it was not for another several hundred years that institutions for blind people became a relatively common phenomenon. Many were founded as almost
monastic communities, such as the Quinze-vingts in Paris. Even at the time, there was criticism of making so many blind people live together, but other brotherhoods enabled blind people to survive very hard times by begging together and helping each other, whilst having to observe many religious exercises. In Italy, Spain and Germany, free brotherhoods were also formed. The church still claimed to protect the blind, but this was not really the case. The reformation was to help to change things radically. The decline in the ability of the church to help blind people lead to state welfare provision, and the influence of the Protestant work ethic meant that it was generally to be accepted, eventually, that blind people should be enabled to perform some useful function. Kirtley paints a picture of hoards of “the blind” roaming the streets noisily, attracting lepers and other “undesirables” (author’s terminology) who were regarded as “unspeakable pests”. The role of the blind bard also became associated with begging since the invention of printing lead to an increase in formal music, which largely supplanted the bard. From this, it is fair to assume that by about 1700, things could not really get any worse for blind people, and someone had to do something. Vives (1526) was the first westerner to recognise that blind people had as much right as anyone else to be able to work, but the lead had been taken many centuries earlier by the early Islamic countries and Japan. A systematic education was provided at Cairo’s University of Al-Azhar and, in the 8th century, a similar institution had been set up in Japan, where blind people specialised in occupations such as shampooing, Massage and acupuncture. Islam and Buddhism led to much more favourable cultures for blind people than Christianity, advocating tolerance and protection of “the weak”.

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From the 17th century onwards, there emerged several famous and successful blind people, after a gap of about 1500 years. They were to play an important role in raising the profile of work for the blind, and improving facilities and living conditions. In 1640, Lana-Tersi invented the first writing frame and embossed communication for the blind, which meant that reading became more of a possibility. Louis Braille was to vastly improve this situation with his invention in the 19th century. The invention of printing had raised the profile of reading and the importance of education for the sighted, and this was to follow eventually for blind people too. The rise of the Protestant work ethic also encouraged people to strive harder for achievement. Another important change in the status of blind people at this time was caused by the industrial revolution. As the rest of the family was employed in manufacturing industries, blind people were left at home to look after the house, since they could not usually join in. This meant they once again had a useful function. This was also a time of a renewed stress on the importance of the individual, a trend which is still continuing today. Diderot (1848) also attracted attention to the fact that blind people had the same intellect as anyone else in his “letter on the blind”. This attracted people’s attention to look at the place of the blind in society, since he had already been a respected academic.

Perhaps the second most important event ever in the history of blind people in western societies was the founding of the first school for the blind by Hauy in 1784. His example was soon followed around the world, and although this is not the place to examine in detail the functioning of such establishments, their importance for the development in work for and with blind people cannot possibly be overstated. Hauy started what can truly be described as the
Institutional stage for blind people, since it was from this time that they proliferated rapidly. Hauy must be credited, according to Lowenfeld (1975) with founding the first school for the blind, use of embossed print as a reading and writing medium, and the introduction of vocational training in the form of workshops. Some historians, such as French (1932), are very negative about Hauy since the early schools made all pupils learn a trade to ensure their independence, which created a repressive regime. Klein founded one of the best schools in Austria in 1822, and he was the first to aim to have his school recognised by the state, since he believed that all blind children had a right to education. One of the most important aims was to integrate people into society as much as possible. Lowenfeld describes the modern period as “integration”, arguing that the schools make this possible. This is interesting because they are usually regarded as a segregating force. He points out that integrated education would not have come about without the special schools to lay the foundations and develop many of the educational techniques that are used today. The first American private school for the blind opened in 1832, and two more followed shortly afterwards. These schools used exhibition trips to demonstrate what they could do and raise money. There was a feeling that it had to be proved that people with such a severe handicap could be educated and trained. State residential schools for the blind followed, but these began to be phased out by the turn of the century.

The Modern Era.

Integration happened much more slowly in England. However, Lowenfeld argues that other European countries have been more separationist in
attitude, pointing to the “protective” segregation practised around the turn of the century in Germany. One reason for segregation used to be that it was assumed that parents were the worst enemy of the blind, but with the rise of Maternal Deprivation Theory this perspective changed. Whilst much of this theory is now discredited, the increased tendency for blind children to be allowed to remain at home, rather than automatically placed in RNIB Sunshine homes has been one of its more beneficial effects. Preschool services are supposed to be available to parents of blind children, and in America, and to a lesser extent Britain, attempts are made to place children in mainstream nurseries, and allow them a “normal” socialisation. This, in itself, would eliminate some of the differences that had previously been found between blind and sighted children. Another normalising factor is the end of segregation of boys from girls in special school. A good recent example of this can be found in the merger of the former Worcester College for the Blind and the Chorleywood College for Blind Girls, in 1987. The new arrangements for accommodation have changed the atmosphere and culture of the RNIB New College radically. The days of one school building and everyone sleeping in dormitories are gone. Whilst the environment at such a school will always be very different from that of a mainstream school, it is radically less different than it used to be.

Of the three founding fathers of the education of the blind, Klein and Howe both considered whether integration would be possible, only Hauy did not. Although some had been educated before the boarding schools, they increased opportunities. A sustained integration programme began in America, according to Lowenfeld, in 1900. British cities had pioneered such
schemes, beginning in Edinburgh and London, but it became more widespread in the first ten years of this century in the States. It was made possible through the invention of Braille, and the creation of the American Printing House for the Blind (whose material the author has used) with responsibilities for providing up-to-date texts. Braille production has steadily increased as cost has declined, especially with the more recent introduction of computer technology, which should eventually make it little more expensive than print.

The status of blind people in the modern era can be traced also by looking at what is termed “Vocational Rehabilitation” in America. This is, as the name suggests, to train blind people for occupations. It originated with the start of school workshops. Hauy and Howe thought that blind people would never be able to enter normal work (Hauy since they could not compete, and Howe because normal workshops would be too dangerous and they should not have to rely on other people to guide them), according to Lowenfeld. In England, there was more confidence in their abilities, reflected in the stress on vocations and independence in the early Royal School for the Blind in Liverpool (which the author attended as a child). In Germany, it was still felt that anyone who expected blind people to do competitive work was their enemy, not their friend (Lowenfeld).

There was a gradual integrative trend in the workshops. The original ones were part of the schools, but adults and children mixing caused many problems. This lead to a trend for the workshop to move away from the school, and employ any blind person, thus becoming a home for the blind. The next trend was for them to evolve into day workshops, and for employees
to be integrated into the community as a whole, wherever possible. However, the types of work available in them were limited, and had changed very little by 1931, when Clunk argued that blind people could do many jobs not previously thought of. It was realised that blind people could be employed in the mainstream thanks to their vast contribution in all areas during the Second World War, and employment became an increasingly important issue thereafter. From 1965, more money was available for all services, and the need for evaluation of each person was stressed since they all have different potential. Services include counselling, supervised training, placement and periodical check ups, to ensure things are still going well. It must be noted that an extensive medical test must be undergone before services can become available. It is in this regard that blind people are made more dependent and become part of what Oliver calls “professional Imperialism” whereby the professionals take over the life of the person to a great extent. It is perhaps this emphasis on medical conditions which has brought the experiences of blind people more into line with those of other disabled people. Blind people had previously been at the forefront of any attempt to integrate “handicapped” people. There had always been a lesser emphasis on medical care in schools for the blind than there is in other special schools, although this is not true in some more modern “hospital type” schools which cater for people with multiple disabilities. The issue of whether disability is a medical or a social concept is highlighted by this, and will be discussed below. The client status is also reflected in the schools, and in the vocational rehabilitation services, since a submissive blind person is much easier for such “helpers” to handle. However, Bauman (1971) argues that a slightly aggressive person is...
much more likely to succeed in getting jobs. Services seem to concentrate on getting jobs, not on personal improvement. This is not true of British social services. In this country, rehabilitation workers help with personal skills, such as mobility, shopping and daily living skills, and employment is dealt with by a separate department. In America, many rehabilitation workers are blind, but in Britain most teach mobility, so need sight. Although this means that employment prospects have increased dramatically, two factors which still make it difficult for blind people to get jobs are employer attitudes, and the fact that blindness makes it harder for a person to become confident and skilled in a job. Both of these are vital, and are the subject matter of other sections on attitudes and on the effects of blindness.

However, it is clear that blind people have in theory moved from a low status to a reasonable position within society. What is also clear is that they are still a marginal group, and it will take time for images of the past to disappear. Perhaps blind people would understand sighted attitudes if they were more aware of the history of blindness, since today's social situation does not justify many of the stereotypes, whereas three hundred years ago it would have done. (This is not to blame the blind people of that period, rather to say that social provisions were not available to integrate them at the time). A historical vision is always important in determining attitudes, and it would surely help blind people to know more about the history of their disability. In special schools this would be very easy to achieve, in personal development or living skills lessons, although it may be harder for these in integrated settings, since a degree of highly specialist knowledge is required to teach this subject. However, its importance cannot be overstated.
The Disability Movement.

Whilst we have seen that the social status of visually impaired people has improved over time, the examples given have revolved around the provisions made by society. Visually impaired people had never been consulted about what they wanted. However, as Campbell and Oliver (1996) show, they were amongst the first disability groups to form their own organisations. The National League of the Blind was formed as a trades union for any blind person in 1899, and affiliated to the Trades Union Congress in 1902. They were responsible for many campaigns on employment issues, leading notable marches to protest against low wages and poor working conditions in 1920 and 1933. These dates are included in Campbell and Oliver’s initial historical section, but subsequent, highly important, events, such as the formation of the National Federation of the Blind of the United Kingdom (NFB) in 1947 are not. The NFB formed as a non-political organisation “of” visually impaired people, and has campaigned ever since to improve all aspects of life for blind and partially sighted people. These organisations gave visually impaired people a chance to meet outside the restrictions of workshops or segregated schools, and set their own agendas. The next dates in Campbell and Oliver’s analysis are given as 1947: Formation of the Disabled Drivers Association and 1965: the formation of Disability Incomes Group. However, they do include in their first chapter a quote from Colin Low, visually impaired researcher and activist: “First of all, one or two points about the central focus ... which I think require some re-emphasis if it is to do full justice to historical reality. Your proposal paper reads as if the disability movement owes its origins to the developments of the 1980s. This does not take sufficient account of the great amount of
activity undertaken before that time by organisations such as the National League of the Blind and the British Deaf Association, which dates back to the 1890s, and the National Federation of the Blind which was founded in 1947.

Nor, I think, should one lose sight of the contribution of the Disablement Income Group from the mid 60s. Simply confining myself to things which are within my own knowledge, these organisations undertook an enormous amount of self organisation, representation, lobbying, agitation, and general development of the disability consciousness. Perhaps the most outstanding illustration of this is the agitation of the National League of the Blind which led to the passing of the Blind Persons acts of 1920 and 1938.”

However, there is a philosophical reason for their standpoint. They, along with many other disabled writers like French (1994) regard the most important date as being 1974, when the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation was formed. They regard this organisation as important for two major reasons: Firstly, it established new definitions of Disability and Impairment, locating disability within society, rather than the individual, as other groups, along with the rest of society, had done, and secondly, because it was a cross-impairment and multi-issue organisation. Previously, all of the organisations had been based around a single impairment (or condition) or a single issue. The first point is, undoubtedly, important, but the second does not completely hold because many groups of disabled people, including visually impaired and deaf people, who have sensory, rather than physical, impairments were excluded by its terms of reference. It was male dominated and aimed mainly at people within institutions. In order that people could be critical without the risk of retribution, it was completely confidential, which lead
to accusations that it was secretive. It never attracted a mass membership, but was highly focussed on its primary task of developing what has become known as “the social model”. Michelene Mason (interview quoted in Campbell and Oliver, 1996) argued that, by contrast, LNDP (the Liberation Network of Disabled People) was lead by women, although men were members, and was critical as a looser network where all activists could hold debates and develop a wide range of thinking. French (1994) points out that many of its ideas are re-emerging in the 1990s, although it had died out as an organisation by the mid 1980s. All of its members had remained involved in the movement. However, 1981 was the critical year that influenced the way the movement developed. Not only was this the international Year of Disabled People (IYDP) but also the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People formed. This was to be an umbrella organisation co-ordinating the activities of and representing organisations run and controlled by disabled people. (This meant that at least 51 percent of the voting members must be disabled).

Colin Low and Mike Barrett (quoted in Campbell and Oliver) both argued that at the time, they felt there were already too many organisations of and for disabled people, and therefore, NLBD (National League of the Blind and Disabled) were very unsure whether to join. Many of the leading figures in NFB devoted little time to this new organisation. The National Union of the Deaf (NUD) was opposed to BCODP in many ways, and these factors combined to ensure that BCODP, like UPIAS before, was dominated by the physically disabled. It has also helped to inspire people to organise at a local level, and there are now various "coalitions" of disabled people who, unlike previously, are not isolated, having a national structure into which they can
feed and contribute ideas. Here, there is overlap in function between the BCODP and “Group D” of the RNIB Executive Council, an issue which will be returned to later. BCODP, in turn, is a member of DPI (Disabled People’s International). This organisation formed when a group of disabled members of Rehabilitation International called for a group run by disabled people to form within that organisation, a demand that was rejected. Some 250 delegates to the Rehabilitation International Congress in 1976 then went about forming their own organisation, which was established as DPI also in 1981. DPI originally based their definition of disability on the World Health Organisation, (Wood 1980) and it was entirely down to BCODP that this definition was replaced by their own.

One of the major problems faced by “the movement” is that of funding. BCODP and its affiliates are in competition with the more traditional organisations for disabled people for funding. Colin Low again notes the differences between the “disabled” and “visual impairment” sectors, commenting that the organisations of visually impaired people, which had formed by the 1970s, several of which he was an active member, infiltrated the more traditional organisations, namely the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB). He believed that this meant that any potential conflict had been removed by the mid 1970s. Needless to say, there have been conflicts between organisations “of” visually impaired people and the RNIB in the intervening years, but these have generally been solved through the channels of representation which exist, and through dialogue, sometimes constructive, sometimes more confrontational in nature. RNIB policies must be ratified by its Executive Council. In fact, around two thirds of RNIB’s voting membership
in 1997 was visually impaired (RNIB 1997). Organisations elect members to sit on the Executive Council. To do so, they must become members of RNIB. They are then able to use the committee structure to gain involvement in issues that concern them. “Group D” of the council consists of members of organisations “of” visually impaired people. These organisations regularly meet as a group, both to formulate questions and policies they wish to put to Executive Council and also to question RNIB officers. Mainly as a result of pressure from these organisations, RNIB has changed many of its policies and practices, although there are still bound to be times when there are conflicts between RNIB and organisations “of” visually impaired people. Two of RNIB’s directors are visually impaired. RNIB has helped many organisations, often by producing materials for them, and by allocating monies to be spent on the groups represented by organisations, such as computer users and students. However, the organisations “of” visually impaired people do struggle for funds, and do still have many more issues in common with other disabled people’s organisations than areas of conflict. It is interesting to see how these issues have changed over time, as the movement has grown in confidence and matured.

One of the founders of the disability movement was Finkelstein. He was a member of UPIAS, and has been one of the foremost academics in the field. In 1980, he produced one of the most influential texts: Attitudes and Disabled People (Finkelstein, 1980). In this, he characterised disability as “an oppressive social relationship”. He argued that the majority of what disabled people actually experience relates to people’s attitudes towards them. Disability is experienced as a social, not an individual thing. For instance, we
should not think of impairments, but of concepts like “housing disabilities” or “print disabilities”. Disability is a restriction on what people can do. Because of the way society works. For visually impaired people much of this is true. It is a genuinely empowering experience to locate disability within society, and begin to talk of concepts like “inclusion” and “equal value”. However, the fact is that it is almost impossible to think of a way of reorganising society where limited or lack of vision would not result in disabilities. For a wheelchair user, a place can be accessed if the environment is appropriately built. However, for a visually impaired person, even with a good environment, how do they know that that place is actually there? Even talking signs would only tell you information about the places immediately adjacent, whereas eyes can tell you about shops half way down the street, or on the other side of the road, and much more quickly than any talking device or tactile map. Notwithstanding this, visually impaired people have made many gains from this type of philosophy. Finkelstein did make useful points about where attitudes come from. He argued that most perceptions of disabled people in society at large stem from images portrayed by “helpers”. They, because of their need for disabled people to keep them in a job, portray images of a group in need of help and sympathy. He also pointed out that if people used “role play” to demonstrate the effects of a disability, people’s attitudes changed considerably. This is now commonplace in awareness and rehabilitation training courses. Dartington (1981) showed how careful we must be when looking at attitudes. He argued that attitudes are often used as ways of reinforcing current models of thought and provision. He believed that many of the schemes which had been set up to allow disabled people to live “in the
community” rather than in residential homes in the 1970s, were just as restrictive as the homes, because they were governed by the expectations of the professionals who ran them, whose only experience of disability was that gained in running residential homes. He highlighted many of the problems disabled people must face when living in the community, and warned that these have been used as “reasons” for providing residential care. In all situations, Dartington argues, disabled people’s needs are not taken into account, only those of the service providers.

Oliver (1986) argued that disabled people are in an oppressive relationship with society, and concentrated on the problems within the field of social work. He characterised social work as being “for” disabled people whereas it should be “with” disabled people. For instance, relevant services were provided at a time that suited the service provider, not the individual. Whilst most analysis of this type has revolved around the provision of home helps and home nursing facilities, it is generally also true that mobility training, for example, falls into the same category. This is very important for visually impaired people to be able to find their way around whatever environment they are in.

Oliver extended his analysis (1990) by arguing that currently, the state, largely through these services, seeks to reproduce the status quo. He gives a Marxist view of the relationship between disabled people and the state, believing that disability is politically and socially constructed. He argues that the state has tried to divide different disability groups, through such tactics as the introduction of the Blind Person’s Tax Allowance. It is in this context that radicalism and political action are justified by Oliver, a philosophy that has been widely accepted within the disability movement. There has been a
general feeling of oppression, and terms such as “equal value” and “emancipation” reflect the feeling amongst disabled people that they are not regarded or treated as equal by society, or the state. Disabled people are dependent upon the state, because of the services it provides, but must not, Oliver states, enter into compliant relationships with it.

Much of the political development of the disabled people’s movement is a result of the work of Oliver, Finkelstein, Swain, French and Barton. Whilst the early years saw them setting their agenda, locating disability within society, rather than the individual, more recent publications have been much more diverse. The movement has become more confident, as it has established its agenda, and is now looking at wider issues and developing more wide-hanging philosophies. One organisation that is increasingly being cited, although it no longer exists, is the Liberation Network of Disabled People (LNDP). Issues which it discussed included sexuality, gender, ethnicity and impairment. Such issues have re-emerged in the 1990s. For instance, Morris (1991) highlighted many of the issues involved with gender identity and disability, Shakespeare (1994) outlines the central role which should be played by the study of culture as well as looking at issues such as abuse. Barton and Oliver (1997) have drawn together many of these themes, and responded by what may have appeared to be criticisms. They show that a second generation of writers has begun to emerge, including Shakespeare and Morris, who have concentrated on the experience of disability, rather than the construction of it. Barton and Oliver give a good perspective on the origins and development of the movement and how it has developed, an exercise far too detailed to do justice to in this thesis. It is more relevant to
examine some of the issues which effect the experience of visually impaired people, and this will be done in the next three chapters.
CHAPTER 3.

SIGHT LOSS AND THE ROLE OF THE EYE.

The last chapter showed how attitudes have changed in the last 30 years amongst many disabled people. However, in many ways, older attitudes do persist. These are generally more negative, but are encountered all too regularly by visually impaired people. This chapter looks at the role of the eye, and how theories based on the eye influence people’s attitudes. It then briefly examines the results of these attitudes in terms of rehabilitation issues.

The Importance Of The Eye.

One way of defining visual impairment is to look at it as either an absence or dysfunction of the Eye. Therefore, any consideration of visual impairment as a disability must look at exactly what the role of the eye is, and how the loss or limitation of its use changes the life of the person to whom it belongs. This has many dimensions, all of which relate to each other in various ways. For instance, a purely medical approach to this would see it as something that must be cured by doctors or treated by other professionals. However, there are many social dimensions to this, that relate both to professional attitudes to patients and clients, and to their attitudes towards the loss of the ability to see. Therefore, this medical sounding definition has very obvious social implications, which must be fully investigated.

There are several components which must be discussed. Firstly, what are the direct effects of the loss of sight upon the individual concerned? Next, what are the implications for visually impaired people of the way people react to this in their everyday lives? What influences the way people react to eye
conditions? What role do sighted people think the eye plays apart from providing sight? What role does rehabilitation play?

**What is a Blind Person?**

The often used, rather flippant answer to the question of “what is a visually impaired person” is to say “a person without sight”. However, this is not a realistic way of looking at it. What a visually impaired person is, in fact, is a person, not a person without sight. Herein lies a vital concept that must be understood before analysing visual impairment: human senses do not work in isolation from each other. As Cutsforth (1933) has shown, the loss of the one sense, rather than simply depriving the person of that sense, completely reorganises the way the other senses work in relation to each other in response to this loss. He shows how visually impaired people react to different stimuli than sighted people, since they rely on hearing, touch, taste and smell. This fact plays a vital role in explaining the way many visually impaired children grow up. Cutsforth showed how one visually impaired man aged 24 had very poor motor development since he had always lived at home and had been taught to do very little for himself. This is possible since visually impaired people lack much of the external information, and therefore, motivation to act, provided by sight. Halliday (1971) points out that a visually impaired child must be taught to look for things. Cutsforth argued that visually impaired babies cannot understand that things exist unless they have concrete contact with them, by touch. They must be taught that things do not just disappear into nothingness, but that things may still exist, such as a toy which is on the other side of the room, that a sighted child would be able to see. Cutsforth argues that this means that visually impaired people have a
much narrower field of experience, and development relies on personal experience. Halliday argues that different modes of learning must be used by the visually impaired baby, who has all the same needs, feelings and requirements as any other. Lorimer argues that what actually changes is the horizon, since tactile and other perception is more limited than visual perception: "For the seeing, their horizon is as far and wide as eyes can see, whereas for the blind it is only so far as fingers can reach and ears can hear. Furthermore, eyes are constantly aware of the immediate environment and are continually and often unconsciously enriching and refining knowledge of it. Visual experience is constantly stimulating thought and action. For the blind, experience of concrete objects occurs only when fingers chance to encounter them or when attention is directed to them. Fingers are sometimes referred to as "the eyes of the blind" yet, as noted earlier, their perceptual span is much smaller than that of eyes. Eyes are able to perceive objects as instantaneous whole shapes. But an object as small and simple as a dice cannot be perceived as a whole through the fingers in the same way. Since the fingers can "see" only parts of the dice, time is needed by the brain to integrate the separate impressions to form a concept of whole shape. The larger and more complex the object examined by touch, the longer and less certain will be the process of concept forming. The blind are far more restricted than the seeing in the opportunities they have of learning about their environment through direct experience. Inability to move about with ease and over protection by sighted people place many objects beyond the reach of blind children. Even many objects that are within their reach cannot be explored. A house is too big. A grain of sand is too small. Flowers are often too fragile. And an
animal, or a piece of machinery could be too dangerous. Some areas of everyday visual experience can never be experienced by the congenitally blind. For example, light, colour, perspective and facial expression can never be fully comprehended. Because of the limited amount and range of their experiences young blind children's concepts of their physical environment will often be fragmentary, vague, erroneous and they may even be non-existent. ... Tactile perception demands movement and touch". (Lorimer, 1992, pp 21-23). Of course, this could leave a "catch 22" situation, where lack of knowledge of environment means no stimulation, and no reason for movement, which further limits the ability to use tactile skills. However, it also points out what can be achieved by totally blind children, and gives an insight into how it is done.

This shows the development of thoughts about visual impairment in the 60 years since Cutsforth's often criticised, although highly innovative and informative, book was written. The concentration has moved on from delineating all the problems of loss of sight-based stimulation to finding ways around it. Many have viewed Cutsforth as arguing that visually impaired people are vastly deviant. What he was actually showing was that the important factor in the development of a visually impaired person is the environment and teaching offered them. He studied a certain section of the visually impaired population of the United States around the first world war: some of those who were educated in institutions. Many of the criticisms of the environment and teaching qualities of these no longer apply today. He argued that many of the prominent visually impaired people of his day were those who had been educated in the mainstream sector. However, it is very
difficult for most to accept that any criticism of services provided for visually impaired people can be valid. They automatically move the emphasis from the services, the environment, the education, to the visually impaired people, or, more properly, to the disability itself.

Cutsforth's work shows the importance of the early years of the life of a visually impaired person. It is very important to ensure that sufficient stimulation is given to create a motivation for action in the visually impaired baby. This is necessary to allow motor development to take place. Halliday looked in detail at how the visually impaired baby can be helped, and where problems can lie. For instance, she showed that while discipline should be normal in most respects, some extra consideration is necessary. Some activities that help the visually impaired baby achieve certain stages of motor development can be particularly messy, involving toys that can be torn or have their shape transformed, such as newspapers or Plasticene. Whereas a sighted baby would automatically be stopped from making too much mess, it may be necessary to make some (although by no means complete) exception to this rule. Wills (1981) reaffirms Cutsforth's assertion that visually impaired babies react to different stimuli. The latter's example of a baby preferring to play with an old boot rather than toys, since it has a simple shape, can be manipulated easily with the hands, and possibly because it smells different illustrates how they must be given the chance to use all their senses to the maximum ability. They must learn that many things cannot be touched, although they must use this sense as much as possible, as soon as possible. Development may initially be slower since hand-eye co-ordination can be
used at about five months, according to Halliday, whereas ear-eye co-
ordination only becomes of any use at ten months.

These writers clearly show that the development of a visually impaired child
can either be successful or disastrous. The differences in approach of the
three are that in Cutsforth's day it was necessary to highlight why the
problems were occurring, whereas Halliday and Wills were more concerned
with the idea of getting the message through to the mother and anyone else
congrued with the early development of a visually impaired child that their
attitudes were of vital importance.

What is the role of the eye?

One area that is particularly difficult to come to terms with is the loss
perceived by sighted people when confronted by a visually impaired person.
Of course, this is vital, since many visually impaired people spend most of
their lives with sighted people, or want to, so their reactions and attitudes are
of overriding importance to how visually impaired people live. General
attitudes are best traced by looking at the history of visual impairment, but
there is one dimension that should be covered here, and that is the role of the
eye. Cutsforth stressed the importance of it in 1933, Kirtley (1975) devoted a
chapter to "The Symbolism of the Eye and Its Dysfunction", many of its most
useful functions, and therefore, the social limitations for a visually impaired
person were discussed by Gibbs (1979) and Davies (1992). In general, the
discussion ranges from a basic outline of the problems caused by a lack of
eye contact to a discussion of the sexual implications of a defective eye.
Cutsforth and Halliday concentrated on the effects this has on babies, a
theme taken up by Barraga (1976) who argues that lack of eye contact means
that interaction between the mother and baby is less motivating for the mother, since a lack of eye contact gives the negative signal of "no interest". The combination of this and the lack of stimulation for the baby can lead to disastrous results. Cutsforth shows this with his case of Bert, who had never been taught to do many of the things he needed to be able to, and had simply been brought up to do what he had to in the home, and was tolerated there until he went to school aged 24, and could hardly do or learn to do anything for himself. Davies highlights the problems faced by two schoolchildren when entering mainstream schools in the Birmingham area: Michael's teacher had a serious problem with the way the boy looked at her, which was caused by his eye condition, and Kevin was regarded as immature since he tended to invade personal space. What must be remembered is that a visually impaired person may find it hard to learn how far other people stand from each other, only knowing what seems right for him or herself. This is likely to mean getting closer to people since it makes them easier to hear, again highlighting the reorganisation of the other senses, because interaction for a visually impaired person is mainly through hearing, rather than sight. Davies highlights less serious problems, but ones which, as far as the author can judge, were not created out of particularly unusual social circumstances. In other words, the nature of the problems faced by the two schoolboys could be fairly typical of visually impaired children.

This leads us on to look at other problems that may be encountered when integrating a visually impaired child into a mainstream school. For instance, Gibbs highlights the problem that the eyes allow one to scan a room to select the people one wants to associate with, and John Hull, (1990) in his
autobiography "Touching The Rock" argues that he felt very socially isolated since he was no longer able to judge whether he would be welcome in a group or not, since this is often done through certain looks and gesture. Davies, who quotes this, argues that in this case it is no wonder visually impaired children are often less mature and secure in themselves. However, they are also likely to lose out in social interactions within the classroom. Delamont (1983) argues that a pupils' status within the class is gauged by how many others they can mobilise against the teacher. Support within such a situation is offered by establishing eye contact, sympathetic silences and laughs, only two of which are available to blind and many partially sighted pupils. Support is withdrawn either by withdrawing eye contact, unsympathetic silences or telling on each other, again only two being available to the visually impaired person. Older children may also suffer in that, according to Delamont, classroom status is influenced by wearing fashionable clothes, being a good dancer, physical prowess, and having successful relationships.

This latter argument raises several dilemmas for the integration of older visually impaired children. Gibbs identifies several ways in which visually impaired people might have problems in the area of relationships. For instance, it is impossible to look across a room and select the type of person in whom you may be interested. You are restricted to those in close proximity. Blind people may also have different definitions of who are interesting people, since as Cutsforth showed, hearing will become the most important initial indicator, and a visually impaired person may well be attracted, quite legitimately, to someone who is viewed as unattractive by many of the other
pupils, which can affect status within the class. In fact, although the author is not aware of any writer who has proved this, there are indications that many sighted people would not go out with a visually impaired person, simply because of the disability itself, rather than based on any appearance or personality factors. In relation to the other factors which Delamont argues are important in classroom status, visually impaired people are likely to suffer in dancing, since they cannot see to compare themselves with others, in physical prowess since they are often excluded from parts of the physical education programme, and in fashion, because they cannot see to make their own selections. In saying this, it must be remembered that the handicap is not as big as may be inferred, since it is possible to pick up information from friends in many of these areas. This again may make visually impaired people associate with those who are the most informative, rather than those who are in favour within the class. However, from Delamont’s interactionist perspective, a visually impaired person will find it harder to find an interaction set within a class. An interaction set, according to Delamont, is “a group of pupils who view things in a similar way, communicate with each other and act together.” Whilst arguments have largely died down about the educational side of integrating visually impaired people into mainstream classrooms, this aspect has not been covered in a meaningful way. As pupils become older, contact outside the classroom becomes more important, as do relationships with the opposite sex. Thus, status becomes harder to achieve. The issue of sexuality is also deeply connected with the eye, and the functionality and appearance of it, so it seems appropriate to examine this issue briefly here.
Blindness, Sexuality, and the Symbolism of the Eye.

In discussing this issue, it is vital to examine very carefully exactly what has been written and read this in the context of negative social views and images of visually impaired people's sexuality. Many have been read as arguing that visually impaired people are very deviant in this way, for example, Kirtley's (1975) interpretation of what Cutsforth argued: Kirtley failed to recognise that Cutsforth believed that visually impaired people could have a normal sex life, stressing the prevalence of masturbation and latent homosexuality. Cutsforth did not attribute this to blindness, but to the environment within the institution schools for the visually impaired of his day. He pointed out that many visually impaired people had normal marriages and sex lives, although they had usually been educated in mainstream settings. This again highlights an inability to accept that problems could be caused by the environment and the services provided for visually impaired people, rather than by visual impairment itself. Cutsforth also highlighted a case in one residential school, where a head who knew nothing about the problems of educating visually impaired people took over, and created as nearly normal an environment as possible, as did his successor. During the time of these two heads, there were no inter-marriages between members of the institution, which was very unusual, and many of the pupils married sighted partners. Cutsforth clearly stated his reasons for highlighting a sexual problem within residential school. Boys and girls rarely ever came into contact with each other. The only contact they often had with members of the opposite sex was through teachers, which lead to teacher fantasies being rather more common than they are for sighted children (although they do happen for the latter). The schools did everything
possible to make sure heterosexual relationships were not allowed, since intermarriage was viewed negatively. Therefore, the only way a pupil could engage in sexual activity was with his room-mate, because this was harder to detect, and this lead to homosexuality. Cutsforth argued, with much justification, that this problem would disappear if there was a more normal social environment, in which sexual experience could develop in a more normal manner. The author has experienced both single sex and co-educational settings, since he attended a school at a time when it merged with a girls only school. Whilst there was never a serious problem at the school, there is evidence that much more normal attitudes have developed in the years since the merger between the two schools.

Any disadvantage visually impaired people may face with regard to developing relationships are about one of three things: sighted attitudes towards visual impairment and sexuality, the social dynamics of finding the right partner and the difficulties in gaining the relevant social experience necessary to develop the right attitudes. So why have writers made such a big issue out of it? Davies (1992) points out that there is a huge visual vocabulary in sexuality, and Kirtley has reviewed many areas of visual imagery and vocabulary, which reveal underlying attitudes that cannot really be accessed through surveys and interviews.

Kirtley provides a psychoanalytic approach to the issue, arguing that the biggest fear of the visually impaired amongst sighted people is caused by castration anxiety. It is felt that because the visually impaired person cannot look at the genitals either of himself or others, that he must be pure, at least in the visual sphere. One way of “looking” at this is to regard sexual experience
as pleasurable, which most people do, and take the view that the first reaction to blindness is usually to pity the person, and fear that they live a life of no joy or pleasure. This rules out sexual activity, a contention which is very frustrating whatever way it is manifested. Parents often teach children not to look at disabled people, since they feel themselves the depression which they project onto the disabled person. Blindness is associated with darkness, since the sighted person, as Cutsforth explained, is unable to understand that many have no concept of, or simply get used to, what can or cannot be seen, and most others do have some residual vision. Many titles of magazines for the visually impaired still reflect the idea that they need light in their lives, for example, The New Beacon. Charities, such as “The Torch Trust for the Blind” also reflect this. Many people fear the dark, and since they associate visual impairment with it, they fear “sufferers” also. There are religious connotations, such as referring to the Devil as “The Prince Of Darkness” and “Let The Light Of The Lord Shine Down”. Whilst the Freudian element of the argument may seem to overstate the situation, in folklore, masturbation has always been associated with visual impairment. One of the standard punishments, according to Kirtley, in many societies, for sexual offences has been to be blinded. So whether the approach seems logical or not, it is based on people’s actual perceptions, so must be taken into account.

A more down to earth consideration must be made of the role of the eye in sexuality: the importance of eye contact and the visual dynamics involved in first forming a relationship. It is widely believed, even amongst the general population who have made no study, that a lasting impression of somebody can be made within four or five seconds simply by looking at them. The
visually impaired person has three dilemmas related to this. Firstly, they cannot use this information to judge other people, as argued by Gibbs (1979). Secondly, they cannot be sure to be able to present themselves in a visually pleasing way if they wish to. Thirdly, they are likely to have no concept of this role of sight, since they may have little more knowledge about sight than sighted people do about visual impairment. For instance, how can one understand the concept of “giving an evil eye” “looking daggers” “looking down” “slit-eye” or any other positive or negative aspect of looking or the appearance of the eye if unable to see? Davies (1992) lists a number of such examples, and argues that looks are very important in attractiveness and romance. There are many expressions involving the eye, that all convey much more than the words actually say: a steady gaze means “honest”; blank looks (stupidity); sideways looks (craftiness); looking up (respect); looking daggers (anger); looking through (rejection); looking down (disdain); giving the evil eye (wickedness). All of these can result from eye disorders, and have nothing to do with personality traits. Eye imagery is important in stories: a villain may have “crossed eyes” or “slit eyes” and in romantic novels people “give the glad eye” or “have a gleam in the eye”. The appearance of the eyes is vital in judging attractiveness. It might be concluded that people who have unattractive eyes through accident or disease may be viewed, unfoundedly, with suspicion.

It is not only the visually impaired who are deprived; it is the sighted too: deprived of eye contact with the visually impaired person. They are not sure if the information is being received, or if the mood is being gauged. Visually impaired people will never be fully integrated into our culture until this is
understood, because culture has so many prejudices that involve vision and the eyes. The social implications of visual impairment must be fully understood to make this possible. Gibbs (1979) gives a good summary of what these could be in terms of finding a partner. Firstly, a visually impaired person cannot see what others do in any situation, so it is harder to know what they should do themselves. Then, they may not know as much about the other person’s body, since it is inappropriate to be too tactile. (In fact, there are possible legal implications if visually impaired people are not allowed to develop their knowledge, since they may simply be trying to find out about someone, and it could be taken as molesting). Since visually impaired people cannot see natural reproduction, they are likely to remain ignorant about sex for much longer than a sighted child. Putting all these together means that it is much harder for a visually impaired person to know how to show interest in someone in an appropriate way. This, combined with the difficulties caused by social attitudes towards disability, is likely to restrict the number of sighted partners a visually impaired person can have, and explains the relatively high number of inter-marriages between visually impaired people, highlighted by Gibbs, and also by Cutsforth. This lack of opportunity to experience sexual relationships has a lasting effect, since if the relevant attitudes have not been able to develop, which necessitates a certain amount of experience in many cases, then it is even harder to act appropriately. This brings us back to Cutsforth’s original point, that visually impaired people need the relevant education to enable more normal relationships to develop.
However, the visually impaired person is not as restricted as this analysis may suggest. Although it draws on the experiences of visually impaired people, it is written by sighted authors who are not fully aware of the compensatory strategies that can be employed. For instance, Gibbs gives one quote: “I think I know what a woman’s breasts are, but I’m not sure I know where they are”. To the author, this seems to suggest a lack of any kind of basic physical contact, such as that which any normal baby would have with its mother. Surely it does not have to be pointed out that one does not need to touch breasts with the hand to know where they are because they can be sensed when they touch any part of the body. Any child with any amount of curiosity would (or should) notice obvious external differences such as this, although the point holds with internal bodily differences, which would have to be pointed out in more detail. Whilst Gibbs’ point that visually impaired people can only make judgements about those in close proximity is also true, it would not be realised by a sighted person that a visually impaired person can gain much information about a person when being guided, which is one good reason to accept help when it is not actually needed: this is accepting help for one’s own benefit, not admitting inferiority. Whilst it is necessary for visually impaired people and their educators to face these difficulties, they must never be regarded as insurmountable, since the one thing that is really essential is for the visually impaired person to have self confidence, since they are more likely to be able to approach people than if they are made to feel unsure of themselves.

The role of the eye is obviously very important in all social situations. It is much more important than most visually impaired people can understand, and
it is much less important for the visually impaired person than any sighted person who tries to consider the issues can understand. The sighted person cannot understand the compensatory strategies that a visually impaired person can employ. The only key to trying to break down these barriers can be mutual education. However, many visually impaired people, especially those who have little contact with sighted people, will find these issues very hard to understand. Attitudes about disability and sexuality in general must be tackled, since, especially with visually impaired people, inappropriate behaviour is caused either by being sheltered from a normal environment, or not having the chance to acquire the relevant knowledge, and therefore, the relevant aptitudes and attitudes. The one way in which visually impaired people really can lose out is that they cannot compare themselves with others, and therefore cannot judge whether or not they are conforming to social norms. Of course, they may not wish to conform, but even so, a sighted person would be more likely to be aware of whether or not they were conforming.

People losing sight find the experience very traumatic, as shown by Conyers (1992). As sighted people, they had many of these attitudes towards visual impairment. This shapes the way they perceive themselves when losing sight. Although congenitally blind people have not have to come to terms with losing something they once had in the same way, they do experience many frustrations. Their parents would have been expecting a fully sighted child, however, so it is they who feel the loss. They also have expectations of what their child will be like, when they discover the visual impairment. In either case, the most important time is the initial period of “getting used to” or
“adjusting” to visual impairment. Rehabilitation and other professionals play a vital role in this. Therefore, it is necessary to understand a little about theories of rehabilitation.

**Theories of Blindness and Rehabilitation.**

This section aims to provide a summary, rather than a full overview, of theories about blindness and rehabilitation. Many of the practical day-to-day issues involved in rehabilitation will be covered in the interview stage, and the main emphasis of this work is to look at the effects of education and attitudes. The most important concept to base any theory around is “the blindness system” as outlined by Scott (1969). It is this network of professionals and others who deal with blind people in all aspects of their lives, which forms the first point of contact when a person either loses sight or realises that their child is visually impaired. The fact that the “system” is not truly a system is the most important problem faced by the newly blind (Conyers, 1992) or the family of a blind child (Halliday, 1971). This, rather than the medical side of defining blindness, is the focus of this section.

One of the earlier theories with a rehabilitative strand was that of Braverman (1951). This was based on a Freudian analysis concentrating on the importance of the eyes in sexuality. She believed that this was the basis for many people’s attitudes towards the blind, and that to change attitudes would be very difficult. Most sighted people pity the blind resulting in self-gratification, on the part of service providers rather than helping in the most appropriate way. Blindness is cast in this theory as a punishment. Rowlands (1986) points out that this does not mean a definite link with castration anxiety, and that the theory is untestable. It is one example of a very partial
theory on blindness, which highlights one possible problem associated with the impairment, but is of little other use. Monbeck (1973) argues that blindness entails a loss of consciousness, and that people feel threatened when they are confronted by it. Their unconscious projects onto the blind person what has been repressed in themselves. Again, blindness is regarded as a punishment, for sexual deviance, and again this cannot be tested. Although the theory gives no practical consideration to being blind, it does show the irrationality of people's attitudes, one of the hardest things a visually impaired person must cope with.

A much more satisfactory theory for defining blindness was put forward by Carroll, (1961), who was a Catholic priest. He compared sight loss to death and rebirth, arguing that blindness comprises a series of losses, for which adequate adjustments can be made. It means the end of established relationships with people and the environment, and finding new ways of doing things. Blindness is a multiple handicap involving 20 losses (or disadvantages) in 6 areas. These include physical integrity: wholeness, including body image and loss of confidence in the remaining senses, (general sense performance is poorer among the blind than other groups). Another category of losses is loss of reality contact with the environment. This includes visual background: light security, mobility, daily living techniques, particularly dressing, ease of written and spoken communication and the importance of gesture. Carroll argued that another series of losses occurred in what he called informational progress: including visual perception of the pleasurable. Recreation, career, vocational goals, job opportunities, financial security and independence form another group of losses. Quite a
way down the list, although of vital importance, was personal independence: social inadequacy, often inflicted by the public, privacy and expectations of greater conformity than for the sighted. Also cited as areas of loss were self esteem and personality organisation.

Although this theory has been well received, Rowlands points out some flaws in it. For instance, it is dependent on a fixed course of events, on a discontinuity of personality, and on the idea that each loss requires a compensation which will not fully meet former standards. Carroll undervalues the sense of touch, Rowlands pointing out that there is a rich tactile vocabulary for the visual arts, and that there is a tactile aesthetic. Whilst Rowlands criticises Carroll for starting with the perspective of the fully sighted person, this theory was especially dealing with losing sight, rather than being born blind, and this means that in this case it would be appropriate to start from this perspective. It takes into consideration the fact that rehabilitation may not immediately be useful, although it could be more flexible in outlining the stages involved in going blind. Whilst it makes many valid comments on the state of blindness, it is not truly meant to be a definition of the aforementioned, but of the process of sight loss instead.

Sight loss is excellently portrayed in terms of rehabilitation and other needs by Connyers (1992) who looked specifically at services within two authorities in London. It was found that those losing sight were caught between many different professionals who did not know each other's roles, and that the lack of a medical cure led to denial of the situation. This led in turn to delayed registration, and therefore, a further delay before rehabilitation could begin. She found a lack of blind people in ethnic minorities, and a lack of
communication between professionals, which is backed up in many works, including Halliday (1971), Scott (1969) and Tomlinson (1982). Unlike Carroll, Connyers argues that the mourning process may never finish for some, and that other factors may effect the way they react to becoming blind. Schultz (1977) identified the important role of the family, and that sight loss is rarely accepted by other family members. The patient can also be seriously effected by the Opthalmologist who is likely to avoid telling them any diagnosis, and is unlikely to know about rehabilitation services. This denies the patient the opportunity to prepare for the future. Registration is seen as a key event, many finding it an upsetting process, many not even knowing it can happen. It underlines the permanence of sight loss.

Connyers regards sight loss as being like a career. It starts with the first awareness of eye problems, and patient being sent back and forth between optician and GP before a diagnosis is made. Many patients avoid going to the doctor unless it is necessary, but most were happy with the service they received. The career progresses to the Ophthalmologist, who may take up to a year after the first consultation to provide a diagnosis. Lack of preparation for sight loss means that patients are unlikely to want to take up rehabilitation services. Different information was often given by different professionals, a problem which could be solved by the use of a key worker system. Most patients claimed there was a lack of psychological help, and rehabilitation workers were not able to enter the scene soon enough. Dodds (1993) argued that the role of psychologist was one which rehabilitation workers were very likely to have to perform.
Shaw (no date) argues that registration marks a point of no return, a social labelling. This means that social workers can become involved, although many clients do not receive visits. Delays in registration produce over-dependence and other undesirable coping strategies, whilst allowing false hope to be maintained. Many are not told what registration is, or its implications, especially if they are partially sighted. Most clients, and their families, stated that they felt very stressed, shocked and numbed by the whole experience. Other themes mentioned were fear of stigma, and depersonalisation, feeling like part of a group, rather than an individual person. Negative denial was common. Resignation could be a more positive way to react. It allowed people to think about the advantages of registration, such as extra social security benefits.

There were further delays after filling in the BID 8 form which formalises the registration, before the social services received it, and then more delays before they visited. Entitlement to rehabilitation must not, therefore, be dependent upon registration. From the information provided by Connyers, it is possible to estimate that from the first consultation with the ophthalmologist to the first visit by a social worker can take eighteen months. This is a reprehensible situation which must be remedied as soon as absolutely possible. It is no wonder attitudes amongst the general public are hard to change if there are so many blind people who cannot cope because of lack of opportunity to learn how to do so. Arguing that older people are of lower priority also, therefore, has a detrimental effect on the younger blind population.
When all of these hurdles have been overcome, it is time to think about the future, and this is where all the social considerations become apparent.

Former attitudes towards blind people have some effect, although this is minimised because people expect total blindness in others, but usually have some useful vision of their own (Lukoof, 1972). Conners asks the question “do we become what we think we are?” In other words, what other people tell us we should be? This supports Scott’s (1969) theory that blindness is a learned social role, where people are taught how to behave. Many of Conyers’ interviewees complained that other people organised their lives for them, and found it hard to make friends of their own. Some even had suicidal thoughts.

One of the most important disagreements with Carroll’s theory here is that two years after registration, most clients had found a deterioration in most aspects of their lives, ranging from practical abilities to relationships. Conyers found that there was a fear of pity which led to an increased desire for independence, which does not help with rehabilitation. Psychological counselling would still have been very helpful, most still longing to be able to see two years after registration. This is said in a context where the only help some people received was a cane through the post. This is both dangerous for themselves and for other people, since technical training is absolutely vital. Many clients didn’t really know what help they could use, so highly trained social workers are an absolute must. Conyers found that psychological adjustment was very hard to achieve, but that rehabilitation services were successful in achieving practical adjustment, even if this only meant tolerating the disability. She was very supportive of any services that were provided, but
found serious and dangerous omission in service provision, and that services for the partially sighted were more lacking than for totally blind people. Dodds (1993) argued that many rehabilitation officers would need to play the role of psychologists, amongst many other things, and found that newly visually impaired people often had more positive attitudes about what they could achieve than other family members. He made the important link between attitudes held previously and expectations after sight loss, although he argued that research into this was a relatively new development.

A potentially useful way of looking at blindness, especially in the early days of rehabilitation was provided by Jernighan (1974). He defined blindness as a limitation, in the same way as youth, old age, gender, race, or any other personal characteristic. In common with all other limitations, it reduces the levels of adaptability, and the possibilities for achieving certain goals. For instance, youth may prevent one from getting a job, a degree may leave you over-qualified, and men are usually barred from certain jobs in the caring professions. Jernighan argues that one of the most important problems is that blind people regard themselves as others do, i.e. inferior, and that many services are provided on this basis. Rowlands (1986) argues that this is too general to represent a useful theory, but that the concept of complexes of limitations could be a useful one to look at. It has no effect on widely held negative images, and is therefore somewhat inappropriate, although it may be useful in certain rehabilitation situations.

Another useful way of looking at blindness was provided by Foulke (1972) who defined it as “the reprogramming of the system”, believing it to be “one amongst many situational variables”. All individuals have different sensory
and motor capacities. Since blind people are denied the richest source of information, i.e. through sight, they must adapt to compensate for it. He discards previous ideas about blindness and personality, arguing that it must be understood in terms of a general, rather than a specific theory. However, Rowlands correctly points out the limited usefulness of the theory since it is purely based on a behaviourist approach, a methodology which is currently much criticised in the age of cognitive and discourse approaches in social psychology. It would seem sensible to recast this theory slightly into a cognitive approach, where a blind person adapts to be able to gather as much information as is possible.

The issue of information, of course, is even more vital for the newly born blind child (Halliday, 1971). The most important concept to understand here is that children may not even be aware that there is a world around them, unless they are shown it, and the role of the parent is of paramount importance. In support of this, the author has heard of a 6 year old child who had to be shown how to climb stairs, because they had never been encountered before. This is one factor which is not readily understood by the sighted community in general, and where special schools are of undoubted benefit to visually impaired children. It is not the fact that stairs could be a problem which would surprise many sighted people, but that a blind person may not have the wherewithall to be able to cope with something that cannot readily be touched to be understood. It is likely that the blind child in that instance would not have been taught to climb stairs, and would have been confined to the ground floor forever. Blind children have all the same needs and feelings as their sighted peers, but often they must be shown how to do things when others
would learn visually. During the early years, the parents are also vital in shaping the child’s self concept, and in teaching them that they are learning to know the world properly despite the fact that they are visually impaired. Halliday argues that amongst the factors which may make development different for the blind child are that ear-hand co-ordination starts much later than eye-hand co-ordination. They must be taught about the surrounding environment and to look for things. Parents must be made aware that there will be initial delays in development, although these can be made up later. Social encounters must be more planned, since the blind child is much less likely to be able to initiate them than others. Parents must be taught that blind children can learn, and that there will be pleasure, since the lack of eye contact often produces false negative images about the interactions with, and the ability of, the child. It is easy to interpret frustration on behalf of the child as meaning that the challenges which have been set are unreasonable, and this is probably not the case. It is vital to provide physical activities, and children must have certain skills and aptitudes before they are ready to go to school.

Whilst it does not actually define blindness, this theory sets out many of the limitations it imposes and how to avoid them. It is one of only a few theories which looks at the congenitally blind child, rather than the person who has lost sight later, and is therefore very useful. It concentrates on the practicalities of blindness, rather than on coming to terms with the fact of blindness, which preoccupies many other writers. The latter has been covered extensively which is why this work does not deal with it in great detail.
Another theory that looks at the congenitally blind is put forward by Scott (1969) who concentrates on blindness as "a learned social role". Rowlands argues that this is not really a theory because it denies any commonality, arguing that all characteristics are learned. Scott actually argues in quite a theoretical way. He starts from the assumption that relationships between blind and sighted people are automatically power relations, since the sighted pity the blind and feel they must help, without expecting anything in return: the benefactor. Many rehabilitation agencies are dependent on benefactors for their survival, and therefore must reinforce their beliefs. As a result, they claim that blind people cannot achieve independence, thus creating the need for financial support. This is known as accommodative rehabilitation. The approach stressed by Carroll (1961), known as restorative rehabilitation means that the blind person will aim to rejoin their former society. Agencies which believe in restorative rehabilitation struggle financially, and workers for them are regarded as a nuisance. Sighted people use any possible avoidance tactic, thus encouraging accommodative agencies, and reducing the visibility, and therefore the awareness of, blindness. Blind people must behave in certain ways within the agencies in order to get on their training programmes, therefore being socialised into a role. Scott argues that the blindness system could be a powerful force for change if properly organised. This would mean guaranteeing funds for restorative rehabilitation, and limiting any accommodative service to those who really need it. This would not seem to conflict with theories which find certain traits in blind people, except when they argue that these are a direct result of blindness.
CHAPTER 4.

BLINDNESS AND PERSONALITY.

The study of personality, essentially a psychological concept, is vital for this work since it provides an indication of how people feel about themselves, and how they fit into the general pattern of society. This effects the way they interpret others’ actions, and thus the way they interact. In particular, Blank (1957) argues that adjustment to blindness, is reflected in blind people’s attitudes towards the sighted. Adjustment refers to whether one views blindness as a total disaster, or a slight nuisance, as opposed to reaching a position where it is regarded as a serious handicap, but one which can be got round. One rehabilitation officer went as far as saying “The most difficult thing for a blind person to cope with is Sighted”. (Sighted is a term generally used in the vocabulary of blind people to describe those with full sight). Needless to say, for a blind person to progress in the education system or in any other aspect of society, this basic, fundamental problem must be tackled and successfully resolved, since a failure to do so can lead to serious social and interactional difficulties. This in turn impedes progress in other spheres of life. It also has a significant bearing on self concept, which is of vital importance.

One of the themes which will run through this chapter is that many of the problems highlighted within are not directly caused by blindness, but by an inability to come to terms with the consequences thereof. As shown in the last chapter, this is often caused by lack of rehabilitation.

In this chapter it is proposed to look briefly at some psychological material, concerning child development and the shaping of self-concept and self image, both for children and older people. This will highlight the important role of the
parents or other family, and will argue that one of the most important factors in determining both developmental success, and adjustment to blindness (which cannot truly occur without the former) is experience. It can clearly be demonstrated that in order for a blind child to become successful in the world, special attention must be paid to developing certain abilities to a much higher degree than is normally found, and that this requires assistance of a very high degree from parents. Inappropriate levels of attention will increase the tendency for self stimulation. This will result in certain physical movements, commonly known as “blindisms”, but which are also found in other categories of young children who are deprived of external stimulation. This may also lead to a serious lack of adjustment to blindness and ability to come to terms with the demands of the sighted world. The way society in general regards blindness will always have a great effect on personality and general development. It is therefore of great importance to look at the roles which have been assigned to blind people throughout history.

Throughout history, blind people have played prominent roles in all kinds of societies, ranging from ancient Greece, to medieval Europe and modern day America. Kirtley (1975) has shown how they have developed their abilities to take advantage of existing skills despite blindness. The most prominent activities engaged in by blind people through history have been poetry, philosophy and other academic work such as the study of history, and music, although there have been some reputable scientists and mathematicians. In ancient Greece, Timoleon was regarded as a prophet, and Homer was said also to have been blind. Hellewell (1991) argues, in contrast, that in Greek society, blind people were put to death to prevent burden on the state, and
considered useless. Blindness was often used as a punishment in Tibet, and was depicted as such in the Bible. However, by contrast, in the 4th century BC, the Roman Emperor Appius Claudius was blind, although it was said that he should not be called blind because his wisdom was “the eye of the state” (Kirtley, 1975). There were also many blind lawyers and scholars in ancient Rome, and other societies of that period. In the middle ages there were many blind monarchs. Ziska is regarded as the best leader, since, in the 15th century he had the necessary skills to plan his own military strategy, and the enemy feared him greatly, likening him to Samson. Also in the middle ages, there were many blind scholars, especially in France. Fields of study included philosophy, music, poetry, history, Latin, maths, physics and even astronomy. During this period there were also many blind Bards, the most famous being “Blind Jack” who travelled very widely without assistance. There were also formal musicians, such as Landini in the 14th century, although little is known about their general quality of life.

In more recent times, blind people have achieved much more widespread fame. For instance, Milton’s greatest works came after sight loss, and in Samson Agonistes, he showed how he regarded this as a great tragedy. It is known that he had three marriages, and that the last of these was long and happy, although Kirtley does not make it clear how many of them came after sight loss. He was generally regarded as cheerful, although he suffered periodic depressions. Saunderson, an outstanding mathematician, was also blind. It is known that he invented the first mathematical board for the blind, and that he was highly regarded by Isaac Newton. However, it is also well documented that he had a very unhappy family life, and the community in
general regarded his family as unhappy and very unfortunate. It is suggested that this was primarily his own fault, but highlights the fact that even very successful blind people may not be well adjusted to the disability at all. The theme of adjustment will be returned to later.

Huber, like Saunderson was Swiss. This outstanding blind scientist was said to have a happy family life, and was regarded as compassionate, affable and urbane. This difference demonstrates that, despite often hostile attitudes, blind people's reactions and interactional skills have a large part to play in their role in the community, again stressing the importance of a proper adjustment to the disability.

John Metcalf was one of the most widely written about blind people of the early modern period. His life was documented in terms of great physical development and sporting achievement, a high level of independent mobility, a successful family life, being a good engineer and running many successful businesses. He is also said, according to Kirtley, to have led troops into battle. However, the latter again highlights the high degree of superstition that is evoked by blindness, since he again had a profound effect on the enemy.

There were also several blind politicians around Europe in the 19th century, the most famous of whom was Henry Fawcett, who became postmaster general and introduced the parcel post. These developments have been overshadowed by the achievements of David Blunkett, who, in 1997, became the first ever totally blind cabinet minister. More interestingly, his portfolio initially did not include disability, and he stresses (to the author in person) that he is a politician first, and a blind person second. Responsibility for disability policy has, however, been moved into a junior ministerial position within
Blunkett's department, Education and Employment, rather than being regarded as a health or social security matter, which many will regard as a significant advance.

Kirtley used this material to show that there are many dimensions to blind people's aptitudes, and that the disability has little effect on a person's potential. However, he points out correctly that this kind of material tells us nothing about the physical development of the congenitally blind, since all his cases were born with sight, and what little it tells us about emotional development is not encouraging. It is inferred from this material that the congenitally blind were almost without exception confined to menial tasks in life, and it is widely held that this was deemed an acceptable contribution to society, and they were sustained on this basis. It is in this context that our culture has come to believe that there are certain roles which a blind person can perform, and that they should be encouraged to do so, without trying to take on new tasks. Anyone who successfully follows a different career, such as being a military general, is surrounded in superstition, and regarded as divine. On the other hand, even the great Milton's blindness was deemed as divine retribution for his loyal support of the Puritan movement in the 16th century. This shows that people will always try to find an explanation for blindness, in terms of deep rooted cultural beliefs. Our culture (or should that be "sighted" culture), does not know how to deal with blindness, and blind people know it, making the task of adjustment all the harder. Hellewell argues that the idea of blindness is surrounded by gloom and darkness, and that sighteds cannot understand the concept of blind people being happy. This
creates pity, and a need for action. For this reason, sighted people avoid contact with blind people unless they perceive special qualities in them. Kirtley spends some considerable time looking at exactly what the nature of blindness is, and how blind people feel about it, or adjust to it. Whilst adjustment may seem like an outdated term, it correctly implies change, coping with, coming to terms with and facing issues. It can be demonstrated that blind people themselves, and partially sighted people to an even greater extent, suffer from the problem of being unable to face some of the important issues surrounding the disability, just as much as sighted people. Kirtley argues that blind people tend to show one of two extreme reactions. The first is to view it as a tragedy, and stress the psychological, social, physical and other restraints it places upon them. This reaction tends to lead to passivity and dependency. It was shown in Chapter 2 that this fits in with the cultural view of disability, and is often inculpated into blind people by others. The other prevalent way to view blindness is to try to ignore it, arguing that it is a slight inconvenience and should not affect life at all. This ignores some obvious effects which do have disabling consequences, especially in a social sense. It tends to lead those who feel thus to blame others, looking only for environmental and social prejudice type explanations for any problems.

Rowlands (1986) states that “The world of the blind is actually limited by the sighted”. The emergence of the disability movement shows just how much theories of disability in general, but also blindness and personality have evolved over the last 70 years. Cutsforth (1933) argued that blindness led to great neuroticism, profoundly reorganising the psychic life of the person. Cutsforth argued that normal children integrate face and voice. This is their
stimulus to reach and crawl. It is the absence of this which leads to Blindisms. Not surprisingly, his theory was one of the most negative concerning blindness, since it was one of the earliest. Since then, his ideas have become less fashionable, and it has been more common to reduce the reorganising capacity of blindness as a disability. In a similar way to Kirtley, Cutsforth believed that blind people tend to show one of two reactions: either denial, or compulsive withdrawal, leading to passivity. He found that blind people were typically egocentric, sexually maladjusted and often submissive. He argued that a negative self concept causes more problems for a blind person than social factors, and suggested that the only way this could be overcome was by making people take personal responsibility for themselves. These problems are primarily caused, according to Cutsforth, by parental over supervision, segregated education and a tendency for blindness organisations to encourage dependency in their clients. However, authors such as Bauman (1954) and Cowen (1961) argue that Cutsforth places too much emphasis on neuroticism and self hate, and too little on social factors. Lowenfeld (1963) classified blind people’s problems into three areas: cognitive, mobility, and psycho-social, the last of which is not directly related to blindness. Cognitive effects include space perception, although those who go blind later use visual memory. The congenitally blind are able to integrate discrete tactile observations into a whole picture of an object, since they are able to recreate objects in modelling. However, it is not known how this is done. Other affected areas are sensory acuity, memory and creative abilities. There is no innate difference between visually impaired and other people. although
this has often been perceived to be the case. Any superiority is achieved through practice, contrary to popular belief. There is little or no difference in modelling abilities.

Studies have also been made to see if there is any effect, as often thought, on intelligence and academic achievement. IQ scores were found to be more variable than the norm by Lowenfeld. The greater percentage of low scores was due to adverse home circumstances, whilst the greater percentage of higher than average scores was due to higher motivation, for academic achievement (or perhaps through fewer diversions from academic achievement). The only difference reported in intelligence was lower arithmetic knowledge, although there was nothing in Lowenfeld's work to suggest that this was not purely an educational problem.

Investigations were also conducted to find out if there was any effect on speech. There were no consistent findings on this, although slower speech, louder speech, less vocal range and less lip movement have all been reported in various studies.

One area which is obviously effected was also studied, and this is that of reading. Tactile reading was found to be three times slower than visual reading, although some of the difference could be made up by the use of tapes and live readers. This has obvious implications for study methods, and is one reason why extensive practice of memorisation is common. Lowenfeld adds that the cultural touch taboo does not help with the development of tactile reading skills.

Another area which is fundamentally effected is mobility. Lowenfeld found that ability to develop a cognitive map, spatial awareness, time location and
many other factors have been studied in depth. There is some evidence to suggest that congenitally blind people struggle more. It has long been thought that visually impaired people may display certain personality traits. Although many negative characteristics have been found in blind people, the inventories used have been questioned. Firstly, some questions may have different meanings for blind people, and secondly, life situations are very different, so comparisons are not always possible. Body image and self concept cannot truly investigated without both visually impaired and sighted people being involved in the process. Davis (1964) argues that the typical blind child cannot distinguish cardinal environmental features and his own bodily ones. It is often the case that he or she does not know their own body, let alone the physical features of others. It is argued that a healthy self concept is impossible without a healthy body image. For those blinded later in life, a new self concept must be learned. This happens more quickly the younger a visual impairment occurs. Partially sighted children find it harder, since society treats them sometimes as blind and sometimes as sighted, and they are expected to perform a dual role. This impedes the development of a stable body- and self-image. McDaniel (1969) questions the centrality of body- and self-image in behaviour. In two separate multi-dimensional, longitudinal studies, Bauman (1954) and Cowen (1961), looked at various groups of visually impaired people. Bauman looked at three groups of blind people: group A. were well adjusted, group B. were reasonably adjusted and group C. were maladjusted. He found that group A. had higher intelligence, self concept and mobility skills. There was no correlation between group membership and amount of education. Age of
onset of blindness, IQ and personality tests were found to reflect adjustment more closely than anything else. A follow up was conducted 14 years later, and the predictions of the original study were generally borne out. Positive movements in adjustment were related to rehabilitation training, negative ones to emotional problems. Bauman argued that adjustment to blindness should be understood instead as adjustment to life under the accidental strain of blindness. Hellewell has since found that partially sighted people are less well adjusted, and have less good jobs.

Cowen et. al. tested for differences between blind and sighted adolescents, matching the sighted group to two blind groups: one who had received a segregated education, the other who had not. He found little difference, but parental attitudes, interestingly, were much less negative about blindness, leading to much less over-protection, in the group who went to segregated schools. The most important finding was that visual impairment in itself cannot be associated with maladjustment.

Chevigny and Braverman (1950) argue that society is very neurotic about blindness, and also point out that there is a natural destructive drive, and minority groups form natural scapegoats, and so can expect no utopia. They believe that public education could help a little. Blank (1957) points out that the psychology of the blind person is basically the same as that of other people. Problems have the same causes, but are found more often. He also looked at the effects of going blind later in life. He argued that there are two stages in the adjustment process: immediate shock, which may last a few days, where there is a feeling of depersonalisation, and then depression. During this process it is pointless to try rehabilitation since it often leads to
negative views of readjustment, which may then be irreversible. Forewarning eliminates the shock period, and reduces the depression, since some of the mourning has already been done. Losing of sight is likened to losing a friend or relative, or any other part of your life. The recovery period also involves acceptance of blindness as a handicap, rather than masochistic submission, or denial that it makes you different. Attitudes towards sighteds are important in this regard. Blank argued that a uniform attitude towards sighteds can be linked with self hate. Of course, for those who lose sight later in life, their adjustment will reflect attitudes held widely within society, meaning that this process is a good way to judge them.

The acquisition of correct facial expression is achieved through mimicry in sighted children, whereas for the blind it must happen through maturation and explanation. Blind children become less able to reflect their emotions in an appropriate manner with age. Therefore, non-visual means of acquiring facial expressions must be included in the education of blind children. Over protection can lead to extensive problems in motor development, neglect less so. Cutsforth (1933) argued that there was a high prevalence of incest, conflict, masturbation and latent homosexuality. Both Cutsforth and Blank (1958) argued that this was not a general characteristic of blindness, but a result of the environment in which blind people found themselves, and that a normal sexual adjustment was perfectly possible.

Facial disfigurement, the effects of long-term hospitalisation or medical treatment and late onset of blindness are associated with emotional problems. Lowenfeld argued that physical development follows the same pattern for blind children as for anyone else, although it may happen more slowly.
Blindisms, such as rocking, swaying or other repetitive physical movements occur because of a lack of external stimulation, and these also happen in similarly effected sighted children. Reactions to blind children by parents are generally either over protection or expecting too much. Studies have found that the congenitally blind do not have to adjust as such, so have fewer emotional problems, although they are more strongly affected by what other people think. Partially sighted children have more of a problem in this regard because of the double identity crisis mentioned previously. However, intelligence is always found to be the most important factor in adjustment. Wright (1969) argued that deafness is much more handicapping socially and communicatively than blindness, especially if present from birth. McDaniel (1969) believes that there is no association between different disabilities and personality traits, although certain behaviours can result from certain conditions. Kirtley concludes that “to view blindness either as a physical nuisance, or as a complete disaster, are two extreme and inappropriate views.” Blindness is a serious handicap, but one which can be overcome given the right intelligence, motivation, education and physical and economic environments. Lowenfeld argued that the research conducted up to 1963 was either mainly statistical, or primarily observational, and that neither is good enough on its own. Kirtley argued that this situation had not changed in 1975, and this is still true today. It is interesting to note that of the works reported, Blank (1957 and 1958) stresses the normality of blind people. Most other writers argue that whilst blindness itself does not cause problems, the implications of it do. Lowenfeld
argued that development may be slowed, Chevigny and Braverman argue
that society naturally targets minority groups when times are tough, and that
blind people will always struggle to establish themselves fully. The most
stressed factors are parental attitudes, with the argument that over
supervision is more harmful than neglect, the vitally important role of
rehabilitation, and the effects of the inability to mimic. This is one of the most
important reasons why physical self concept is one of the dimensions most
affected by blindness. It is impossible for the blind person to construct a
physical self concept based on others, and present themselves appropriately
in terms of dress, hair style, posture and facial expression in some (although
by no means all) situations. One of the most interesting findings is that
parental attitudes are more positive for children who are sent away to
segregated, boarding schools. Given the effect of over supervision, and the
fact that this group are less prone to it, this surely should be one of many
factors taken into account when allocating educational provision, along with
the socialising effects of both mainstream and special schools. Whilst the
amount of education received is not linked to self concept as such, academic
achievement is, and given the socialising role of the education system, these
factors must be taken into account.
It is important, therefore, to take a more detailed look at self concept theory
and how this has been studied in relation to blindness. Hellewell (1991)
reviewed self concept theory as part of a study of the relationship between the
above and blindness. She started by arguing that "man is the only creature
who can view himself objectively, form a self image, and adapt his behaviour
to make it appropriate to a situation". The development of self image and role
behaviour is what enables us to predict how others will behave, according to Goffman (1959). This depends on environment and significant others. Childhood experiences are absolutely vital, since one learns to be human through imitation of and comparison with others. Certain circumstances can limit the opportunity to improve self concept, especially for the young, old and handicapped. Locke (1961) developed the idea that there must be a purpose to life, and that people need to be seen to be able to influence what happens, pointing out the importance of sensory experience, and the centrality of the self in all behaviour. James (1890) argued that the self has 4 main elements. The first is the spirit: self esteem, thinking and feeling. The next is the material self: all of ones wealth and possessions. The third element of the self is the social self: how we adapt to situations, meaning that there are many of these for each person; and the final element is the bodily self. This was viewed as the least important by James, although it is often argued that it is, in fact, the most important. James also overlooked the losses of self esteem related to a failure to meet others’ goals, relating it only to goals we set ourselves. The idea of adapting to social situations relies on being able to interpret them. This is one of the main tenets of interactionist theory, where people are seen as actors, who observe, interpret and act upon what goes on around them. This permits change in self concept since our idea of the self can evolve by our learning how to act in new situations. Mead (1934) argued that we cannot stand in another’s shoes, but we can gain an impression of their attitudes towards us. Language is the most important mediator of such values.
This brief outline of self concept theory shows us that blind people may lose out in some ways since much interaction is visual. The self is presented in many ways, some of which cannot be appropriately reflected without visual knowledge. For instance, it is sometimes hard to judge others’ reactions to our behaviour without looking at their facial expressions. Thus if self concept is developed through interactions with others, and on a trial and error basis, the opportunity for blind people is limited. This is supported by strong evidence of a high degree of egocentrism amongst the blind. Again, the vital role of childhood experience is stressed. Parental reactions are a particular problem since training is not usually available to them. If it is, many do not know where to go and find it. Another area where blind people may struggle a little is in terms of feeling that they can influence situations, since they cannot see the effect they have on others. It is also interesting to note observations about James’ work, since Hellewell argued that he overlooked the losses in self concept caused by failure to meet others’ goals. Kirtley showed both that many react to blindness by expecting too much, and that other people’s opinions are more important to the congenitally blind than to others. Both these factors may cause a negative effect on self esteem. It is important to strike some balance in this analysis, however, since much experience is not visual. Therefore, situations can still be interpreted, other’s reactions can still be gauged to some extent and imitation of verbal actions is as good a way as most to learn how to cope with many social situations. Mead argued that language is the most important mediator of other people’s attitudes towards us.
There is a relatively small amount of literature on blindness itself. Perhaps this is because of the general fear of it. The general public, according to Hellewell, believe that the practical problems associated with visual impairment are the over-riding concern. In fact, deeper analysis shows that the social problems cause much more concern for visually impaired people, although this is often slow to emerge. Most people who write about blindness are social workers or rehabilitation officers, and based in America.

So few blind people are young that there is a lack of awareness of how to bring up a blind child. Fraiberg found that many mothers feel estranged from their blind children, and this leads to deviant behaviour. Hellewell found that total blindness was harder to adjust to than partial sight, and that anxiety destroys motivation, especially with mobility. One of the most notable problems is the loss of choice associated with blindness. One aspect of this is that blind people in general are often not accepted into the sighted world, and thus compelled to mix mainly with other blind people. This creates a resentment, and explains why some people resist the efforts of the disability movement to enable disabled people to mix freely either with other disabled people or anyone else.

In her self concept research, Hellewell (1991) used semi-structured interviews rather than more traditional systems, since she was trying to find out whether negative self esteem amongst the blind population of Bradford was actually caused by blindness, or by other factors. She used questions which asked about life situations, like “can you remember a time when you felt a sense of achievement” or “when you learned something new about yourself” or “when you did what was expected of you against your own inclination.” She could
not make up a representative sample, but it was sufficient for her research project, which was on a similar scale to the current work. She was careful to make the interviews as reliable as possible, by ensuring that inter-personal attractions, and her own blindness, did not effect proceedings. Many of her subjects raised issues relating to their upbringing, and caring parents seemed to be the most important factor in deciding self esteem. Some subjects were obviously very conscious of their blindness, even though one of them who raised this issue had perfect sight in one eye. It was felt that going to special schools meant that you only compete against other blind people, giving a false sense of self confidence. People who suggested this argued that they could not then face the harsh realities of the sighted world. Many subjects said things like “well, you mix with your own don’t you” and seemed confident with other blind people, but not with sighteds. Those who had guide dogs felt more independent. Those who had jobs found it hard to make friends at work, and felt they had been given the job as a favour. There was a tendency either to mix with other blind people all the time, or almost never. Many felt quite simply that they had nothing in common with sighted people. None of the subjects had sighted friends. (Ibid p 310). It was felt that lasting friendships only occurred with people from “blind schools, where you were taught to stick up for yourself”. The worst problems were experienced by partially sighted people who had a normal education with no support at all. Employment prospects seemed better for the congenitally blind than for those who had lost their sight later. Marriage seemed to cause the most anxiety, since marrying a sighted partner was regarded as a gateway to the sighted community. The inability to find an appropriate marriage partner, according to
Hellewell, is “the most severe deprivation endured by all handicapped people”. Those who had been to schools for blind people had more positive self concepts than those who had been mainstreamed, since a major factor in feelings of inferiority is sighteds’ attitudes towards blindness. Many failed to take advantage of opportunities presented to them for fear of failure and had personality characteristics which made them unattractive to others. The kind of upbringing a child had received was the only factor which seemed to be related to self concept in any meaningful way.

Hellewell pointed out that if future research of this nature was conducted, a sighted control group would be a good idea, especially with school children, since it would allow better comparisons.

Amongst the many issues touched upon by Hellewell is the loss of choice associated with blindness. People’s attitude towards disability can be demonstrated by the fact that this is not regarded as a civil rights issue, since such a loss of choice, experienced by any “normal” person would not be tolerated. For instance, why is there only one major shop (Boots) which funds the production of a Braille catalogue and ensures that staff will definitely be available to help blind people choose independently what they want to buy? This question may seem to be totally off the point with regard to this analysis, but it is not, since it is deep rooted attitudes and practices such as these which help to shape a blind person’s view of themselves and their disability.

This permeates into the rest of life, and contributes to a marked reduction in the quality of life, from a very early age. Many aspects of culture are in this way denied to blind people, and since this does not really occur to the rest of the population, they assume that blind people must not be interested. In a
school setting, this can lead to characterisations such as “boring” or “stupid” which further alienate the blind person from the rest of society. The dynamics of a school are such that this type of labelling can be reflected in lower educational achievement and participation, as demonstrated by Delamont (1983). Status within a peer group (such as members of a class) is often achieved through eye contact and visual cues, since talking in lessons is not permitted. It must also be remembered that a visually impaired person is likely to require a support teacher. If there is no support teacher, they must possess the knowledge they need to be able to access the curriculum. Either of these effects the relationship both with teachers and with the rest of the class. Either the extra knowledge, or the presence of a support teacher can be perceived as a threat by the class teacher, leading to being treated differently by the teacher, whose primary interest is to protect their authority over the whole class. This gives the blind person much less power in the classroom, since they are much less likely to be able to generate resistance to the teacher, whereas other pupils will often do this. This may lead to a feeling of powerlessness and marginalisation, yet another cause for a blind person to feel inferior. Another interesting point raised was that partial sight was regarded as easier to adjust to than total blindness, whereas partially sighted people, who had experienced a normal education (although without any support) experienced the worst problems with regard to self concept and social integration and employment. In other words, Hellewell is saying that until attitudes towards blindness change, integration into the community will be very difficult. This fits in with earlier work, arguing that society will always
turn on its minority groups when times get tough, so blind people should not expect any Utopia in the future.

Other works on blindness and self concept have been more negative in nature. Kane (1973) found that although blind people in his sample seemed to be part of their communities, they felt isolated, contact being very important. “At the time of interview the self-anchoring statements, as they were recorded, indicated a sadness and social isolation paralleled only by age or the mentally ill in our society. The blind are socially constructed, and do not function, in general, as the sighted community appears to wish them to”. There was a much clearer picture of what makes a good person than of what makes a bad person. There was an over-riding need for interpersonal experiences, and these could be gained only with other blind people.

In a similar vein, Meighan (1971) argued that blindness is viewed by society as the worst possible disability, which is diffused throughout the whole behaviour system of the “victim”. Pity is shown, and gratitude is expected in return. This is a vital point to grasp, since most theory of self concept locates it primarily in interaction with others, and reflected appraisals of significant others. The blind person is left wondering exactly how to regard any appraisals given: either in terms of their reflecting pity, assigning superhuman status, or occasionally, somewhere reasonably nearly half way between the two. Since achievement of aspirations is an important factor, blind people will always suffer since they are less able to judge other’s reactions. Inferiority complexes also often develop around weak or defective organs.

There are many links between self concept and the education system. Jurseld (1951) argued that the education system ought to reflect a need to
develop positive self concept to a greater extent. Fink (1962) demonstrated a link between self concept and achievement, whilst praise and blame have also been shown to effect classroom performance, according to Thomson et. al. (1944). Self concept has been correlated with reading and mathematical achievement by Williams and Cole (1968), and academic achievement in general by Cooper-Smith (1959), and Brooke and Bodwin (1962). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) demonstrated the importance of parental attitudes and many writers have shown the effect of feelings about body on feelings about self, which are also important in the classroom setting, as shown by Delamont (1983). Meighan (1971) looked at self concept in various groups of visually impaired adolescents trying to find out whether blindness had any effect, whether it effected only certain groups, and whether educational achievement could be correlated to self concept. He found that visually impaired people form a highly deviant group in terms of self concept, the effects appearing to be highly negative. His method enabled data to be collected relating to identity, self satisfaction and behaviour. He then related these to physical self, moral ethical self, personal self, family self, and social self, of which there are several for each person. He found that in none of these did blind people rate equally or positively compared to the average sighted person. The least effected scores were social self, family self and self acceptance, although these were still lower than average. No differences were found between racial, gender and sight category groups. There was much less variability in scores than for "normal" people, blindness appearing to be the determining factor. In addition, there seemed to be little correlation between academic achievement and self concept, except for the group of black males.
This negative effect on self concept is due mainly to a downward flowing pattern of pity, for which gratitude is expected, according to Cowan (1961). This results in an inferior social status. Havighurst (1946) argued that there will always be an identity quest, and that negative identity is therefore very important. Ericson (1960), saw the development of identity as the most fundamental Psychological challenge during adolescence. If this was not successfully achieved, he argued there was an identity diffusion crisis. Is this a defence against threat to self, or a desire for self stability? both have been argued frequently.

It was also reported by Meighan that Jervis found the reverse: i.e. there was no negative effect on self concept amongst blind people, and the amount of variability was much greater, although the research instrument was very different. These two would appear to contradict each other, giving further weight to Meighan's work, which is notable for the consistency of its findings. This again shows, however, that there must be a concern for the person, and not the disability, amongst rehabilitation workers, since it is clearly not the disability itself which causes the negative effects, but cultural attitudes towards blindness. This is equally true for professionals within the education system, which is another of the most important mediators of self concept. Any study of disability that seeks to look at personal development must consider the impact of the education system. Therefore, the next chapter will do just this. It will look at the development of education, its history and the consequences for visually impaired students today.
CHAPTER 5

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED.

The previous chapters have shown that visual impairment in itself is not necessarily disabling. We have seen that personality factors are very important. We have also seen that people's attitudes, including those of professionals who help visually impaired people, are very important. However, Chapter 2 showed that above all, through history, the development of educational provision has probably made as much impact on visually impaired people as anything else. Hence, it is necessary to look at education in more detail.

To understand the current system for the education of visually impaired pupils, it is necessary to understand how it came about. As with most educational developments in the United Kingdom, it happened in a piecemeal way. We have already seen in Chapter 2, how attitudes have developed over the centuries, and that the education of visually impaired children is a relatively recent development. The idea that blind people should be educated stemmed from the industrial revolution, which changed their social status. Lowenfeld (1975) argues that whereas they had previously relied on begging to survive, the move to the cities meant that they could look after the home, giving them a positive (although different to what their peers would be doing) role. One of the prevailing public attitudes of this time was the importance of the Protestant work ethic, where everyone should be productive and useful. So inevitably, questions began to be asked about whether blind people could
be of any use to society. Given this concern, various experiments began to take place to see whether this would be possible, through educating blind individuals, and eventually through the setting up of schools. There was evidence that blind people could be educated, since they had been attending St. John’s College, Oxford since 1656, according to Roy (1996).

Another motivating factor in the beginnings of educational provision for blind pupils was the renewed scientific interest in them. People started to raise the possibility that they could be as intelligent as everybody else (Diderot, 1949). It was this which led to the founding of several schools for the blind from 1784 onwards.

The Special School.

Hauy founded the first special school in 1784 in France. Lowenfeld argues that Hauy must be credited with three important achievements in the history of educating blind children: the opening of the first special school, the use of embossed print as a reading medium, and the introduction of vocational training in the form of workshops. He also thought that music was important, since blind people were supposed to be naturally good at it. Many of the schools forced all pupils to learn a trade, creating repressive regimes to do so, a development not welcomed by historians such as French (1932). However, as Tomlinson (1982) argues, education systems are created to serve the vested interests of the economy and professionals. So, this was an entirely predictable facet of these schools, since it was the only way that blind people could be made employable at that time. It was also reflected in the title of a school that opened in 1793: The Edinburgh School For The Industrious Blind. There were 16 special schools in the United Kingdom by 1850.
There was a general feeling of satisfaction noted by Prichard (1963) about the achievement of educating blind people. This was summed up in The Mirror (1838) (taken from Roy, 1996) which approved of the opening of a special school, “since it transformed a house once so notorious as a resort of debauch, called the “Dog and duck” into an extremely good day out which provided “a moral and by no means unpleasant lesson to the sensitive heart”. The anonymous writer added that “you will... find the pupils... animated in their amusement during the hours of recreation, and cheerfully attentive to their work during those of employment”. Kline was one of the earliest to argue that all blind children had a right to education, and that this should be in public schools. His school in Austria was renowned as one of the best, but it was seen as a first step. Lowenfeld regards him as one of the most important figures in the history of the education of visually impaired people. The first American private school for the blind opened in 1832, and two more followed shortly afterwards. These schools used exhibition trips to demonstrate what they could do and raise money. There was a feeling that it had to be proved that people with such a severe handicap could be educated and trained.

The most influential early American figure was Howe, who headed the New England Institute For The Blind. He objected to the way many of the special schools were run, since pupils lived like inmates in barracks, and he believed they should be trained to take part in economic and social life after leaving school. He believed in a well rounded curriculum, but with an added emphasis on crafts, music and PE. However, he thought it important that the curriculum should conform as closely as possible to that in ordinary schools.
Each pupil should be treated as an individual, according to Lowenfeld. This contrasted to most American and English schools, where there was perceived to be a need to train the pupil for an occupation, prove that it could be done, and aim to get a placement with a craftsman, since this was the closest that could be achieved to an apprenticeship. The early schools were responding to the social attitudes of the time, which regarded blind people still to be unemployable, and incapable of work. Most of them were run by charities, especially in the UK, and there was a need for people to show how well they were doing by making the education of blind pupils possible. They aimed to make blind people as “normal” as possible. One of the consequences of this was that it was not regarded as normal to marry another blind person, and Cutsforth (1933) showed how much effort was put into the prevention of heterosexual relationships between pupils in these schools.

Whether it was for this reason or not, the first school offering an education up to university level opened as an all boys school. This was what later became Worcester College For The Blind, which opened in 1866. There has been a regular flow of students going to all universities from this school, with a good number going to Oxford and Cambridge. The emphasis on education was a marked contrast to the concentration on skills such as piano tuning in other schools, such as the Royal Normal College, which was founded in 1872. Interestingly, sighted pupils were also admitted to Worcester in its early years, often to perform the role of readers in lessons. To qualify they had to be sons of clergy, who were considered more likely, according to Bell (1967), to be more sensitive to the needs of visually impaired people and preferably from the diocese of Worcester. This reflects the importance of religion within all the
early special schools since most of them were run by religious charities or
clergy. The practice of admitting sighted students declined as Braille became
more widely used at Worcester, but sets an interesting precedent, which might
be followed up in the 21st century. A similar grammar school to the one at
Worcester was founded in 1921 to cater for girls. The two schools merged in
1987 to form one co-educational grammar school for the visually impaired.
The Education Act (Blind and Deaf Children) of 1893 imposed a duty on all
school authorities to provide an education for these groups. However, they
still believed that special provision was necessary, and the years before the
First World War, according to Lowenfeld, can be regarded as a time of
consolidation. Bell showed that Worcester College struggled financially
during all of its early years, and the time of consolidation cannot really be said
to have begun for them until after the First World War. It has been recognised
that blind people can enter more and more occupations during the time since,
and a variety of different schools opened to serve different needs. In 1915,
the National Institute For The Blind opened a school of physiotherapy, mainly
intended for those blinded in war. Exhall Grange school, initially designed to
provide a high standard of education for partially sighted children was not
founded until 1951. This has become a national school that provides
individualised programmes for pupils with varying disabilities, from the age of
2 to the age of 19. It is relatively unusual to find a special school which
caters only for a certain age range, Worcester and Chorleywood (the former
girls’ grammar school) being exceptions. In many cases, the other schools
act as primary schools for those who progress to Worcester, but others
continue until the age of 16. On this theme, RNIB has now established a
college of further education on the campus of a mainstream college at Loughborough. This is widely regarded as a very positive step since, in theory, it brings blind and partially sighted pupils at a specialist college into much closer contact with their sighted peers. Other similar schemes exist, although mostly in the early stages. Dorton College, for example, runs a program where about two thirds of its students spend some or all of their time in mainstream colleges. These schemes are likely to increase in number, as special education looks as if it may come under increasing scrutiny, following the Tomlinson report (Tomlinson, 1997).

The Sociology Of Special Education.

In general, mainstream Sociology has remained very quiet about disability, and even quieter about the concept of special education. The two most influential texts in this field relate to the physically handicapped and what are now classified as SEN-M and SEN-S schools. Where schools are similar, the sociological analysis from these books is generally sound, but in many cases, schools for visually impaired children have not conformed to the norms within the special education sector, as can be witnessed by the differing types of special schools which have been set up. The fundamental questions to be asked in a sociology of special education are: What is education for? Who controls it? What are their interests and priorities? How do these effect the key players in the system? What is the interaction between the special education system and the other social structures which make up society? It is not intended to explore all these issues in full here, but to look at Tomlinson and Barton’s contributions to this field: (Tomlinson, 1982; Barton and Tomlinson 1981).
Squibb (in Barton and Tomlinson, 1981) provides a structuralist approach to the study of special education. He starts from the assumption that education, like many parts of society, serves the function of reproducing the existing social structures. This creates a need to classify and categorise everything, since there is a need to know where it fits in and what its purpose is. This in turn leads to a problem based approach: what are the problems and what shall we do about them in order to maintain the status quo? However, the effect of creating structures to deal with particular problems is that they are then more readily identified, so the numbers of people affected rise. This is shown by the provision of figures for the numbers of handicapped people in various categories for the years 1961 and 1976 (Squibb in Barton and Tomlinson, 1981). He shows that most of the categories have shown a significant rise in this period. Blindness is exempt from this, since it was identified as a problem much earlier, and the structures have been established for a long time.

This analysis is good in that it recognises that categories are social constructs, not individual medical conditions, the example of "possession by the devil" being used as something which was seen as a major illness at one time. It also gives a context within which special education is set, locating it within the super structure of society (the part which recreates society as it already exists). However, it misses one of the important points of many special schools, especially those for blind people: they have almost always been a force for change, trying to improve the position of people who have been categorised negatively by society. A more relevant argument now would be whether or not they have served this purpose, and whether they are
of relevance today. This is one of the underlying questions of the current research. The fact remains that “Visually Impaired” and “Educationally Blind” are categories, social constructs, requiring structures to place them correctly within society. The question which follows on from this is: Who controls these structures?

This is a question of politics and administration. Barton and Tomlinson point out that administrative values should be regarded as “the context within which educational debates take place.” Disability has, in the past, been solely regarded as a “medical problem” (See the writings of Finkelstein, French, Oliver, Swain, etc.) Therefore, responsibility for administering the categorisation of disabled people fell into the hands of the medical profession. Tomlinson (1982) showed how this process has become more complex, involving educational psychologists and many other professionals. These writers all argue that in taking control, the professionals create for themselves a mystique, claiming a monopoly on knowledge, and therefore power over the other players in the situation, a concept known as Professional Imperialism. The children are passive recipients of treatment and care, their parents devoid of normal parental rights. (This is a situation that has changed somewhat with the introduction of new legislation, although some parental powers are still removed in this way). This in turn explains why many special schools are run more with medical concerns than educational. However, there is another reason for this: charities, to raise money, must portray themselves as doing a wonderful job catering for an unfortunate group who would otherwise have little or no opportunity. Many of the schools
(although not the ones referred to by Barton and Tomlinson, who concentrate on state schools) are run by charities, so this is an important concept. Special education must be viewed as one fragment of the education system as a whole, and therefore analyses of the purpose of mainstream education can show how deep rooted and entrenched government and professional attitudes really are. Bowles and Gintis (1977) in a similar way to Squibb, believe that the purpose of education is "the reproduction of labour power". In other words, it recreates the class structure which legitimates the authority and power of those who have political control. Making provision for disabled people, therefore, can be seen as creating the climate for a potential threat to their political power, since there is a fear of them becoming too demanding and too much of a strain on economic resources. This would threaten the position of the elite within society, since they control the majority of the economic resources. This could be illustrated, it seems to the author, by the political interest in the concept of egalitarianism during the times of increasing prosperity after the Second World War, when there was not a perception of a threat to power by increasing opportunities for disadvantaged groups, and by the return to beliefs based on individuality, competition, and selection from the 1970s onwards, when economic certainties began to disappear. It is also logical to assume that many of those who run most charities, with the exception of the smaller, self help type groups, also belong to the ruling elite, since they have the economic resources needed. They would also be interested in maintaining the status quo, to protect both their economic, and their charity, position. It is this type of charity that has come into conflict with the disability movement over the last fifteen years. This is because many
authors, especially Finkelstein (1980) and Oliver (1990) believe that the traditional pity-based advertising campaigns and their relationships with groups of professionals are part of the way in which charities recreate the existing social position of disabled people. Webber (1972) argues that this is done through authority. He distinguishes between legitimate and coercive authority, and this is the point of contention of authors such as Barton and Tomlinson, who do not believe that the authority of the medical and psychological professions within the special school is legitimate. Tomlinson argues that increasing groups of professionals have become involved in special education. This has removed any claim to power of the parents and pupils, since they can always argue that the parents do not have sufficient knowledge to make judgements. This can make it very difficult for them to take the opportunities that are increasingly open to parents to have some say in the education of their child. In the visual impairment field, some of the special schools can be argued to be part of the elite system, since their role is to provide students for universities, lawyers, journalists and politicians. Some go on to run charities such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind, RNIB, thus directly influencing future provision, and reproducing the existing system. It is only recently that RNIB have begun to be seriously interested in concepts such as integration. This has been caused by intense political pressure from groups such as the National Federation of the Blind of the United Kingdom (NFB) and the Association of Blind And Partially Sighted Teachers And Students (ABAPSTAS). (For an overview on their views on integration See NFB/ABAPSTAS, 1989). More recently, Barton (1995) has argued that special education is a means of excluding disabled people from society.
viewing an entitlement to an education in a mainstream school as a human right. He argues that the education and political systems must be significantly overhauled to ensure that everybody is included fully. Herein lies a controversy in terminology. We have generally used the term “integration” to mean the placement of visually impaired people in mainstream schools. The debate is now focussing not merely on placement, but on making sure that the mainstream school provides an environment where everybody can be fully included. Barriers to this are often put forward, but citing these should not be seen to imply opposition to this viewpoint. It is necessary to locate the experiences of visually impaired people in both special and mainstream education, to find out how the systems, structures and labels used effect them. These labels, in turn, are often derived from medical classifications, that see problems as an individual tragedy (Finkelstein 1980, Oliver 1983, 1986 and 1990). This type of classification is likely to result in individual remedies being sought, rather than the fundamental changes Barton argues for.

Whilst many of the approaches, covered in this section, give a good insight into the structural aspects of special education, they do not take into account children and their individual requirements. This is probably best done by looking at the mainstream sector, how that has developed, and what problems arise for visually impaired pupils in mainstream classrooms. They can then be compared on a more personal level with special schools.

The Development Of Mainstream Education For The Visually Impaired.

The field of Mainstream education is very complex. Firstly, It is proposed to outline the various meanings associated with the word mainstream and to
provide a sociological examination of what these actually mean. Then, there will be a brief summary of some of the major research into the provision of mainstream education, to outline the general position. The aim will be to show whether and how mainstream education happens, and to show the sociological implications for teachers and pupils.

Before embarking on this section, it is very important that the reader should be aware of the author’s viewpoint on the so-called integration debate. It is easy to show that there is currently still a need for special education to occur, as will be demonstrated from the interview data for this work. On the other hand, for many people, the benefits of mainstreaming can far outweigh the disadvantages. The most important point is that there should be no attempt by LEA’s to prevent a child from receiving either a special or a mainstream education, since there are always differing needs amongst the visually impaired population. Hence, any criticisms made of differing educational styles do not mean that they should be ruled out, or judged to be superior, since they have differing pros and cons. This is not, therefore, the place, to spend much time discussing the philosophies of the disability movement and their perspective, although this will be briefly mentioned. This will be clear from other sections of the work.

Before discussing the meanings of terms such as “mainstreaming”, “integration” and “inclusion”, however, it is proposed to outline the basic “structures” of provision. The word “structures” is chosen because there is no coherent policy on this issue. as Stockley (1987) concluded from her survey of LEA’s, and Dawkins (1991) reiterated. Stockley outlined 5 main types of service run by local education authorities. These were:
A. Generic special needs service: some integrated, some special placements.

   No specific head of service.

B. Service specifically for visually impaired children, offering some integration, but with some placed in special schools.

C. As above, using local special places rather than out-of-area schools.

D. Units attached to mainstream schools. Occasional placement.

E. Access to resource bases attached to mainstream schools, with occasional placement.

Services in categories A. and B. were generally less developed, and those in D. and especially E. were well developed and extensive. Within this framework, there are many types of school and provision. These are:

A. Residential boarding school. These can be specifically for visually impaired children but can be less specific, including SEN-M schools.

B. Local schools for visually impaired or partially sighted children.

C. Resource units within mainstream schools, with accommodation provided.

D. Resource bases within mainstream schools.

E. Integration into a mainstream school, but on a smaller scale, without resource bases.

F. Neighbourhood integration: going to the same school that would have been attended if the person was fully sighted. Support provided.

G. Neighbourhood integration, without support.

To the author’s knowledge, this particular delineation of schools has never been set out, but it reflects the range of provision, and the fact that levels of
integration should be regarded as running along a continuum. All of these categories of provision have been known to occur, with varying degrees of success, both educationally, and more importantly (for the purpose of this work) sociologically. To evaluate the sociological impact of different types of mainstreaming, integration or inclusion, we must first understand why it happens, and what goals lie behind it. What social movements is it linked to? What do various groups of professionals feel about it? How does it effect the people at the sharp end: teachers, and visually impaired pupils themselves? To this end, we must look at how much integration is allowed by each category of school. To do this, we will include both educational and home integration, since one of the main arguments in favour of integration is that it allows blind children to have increased social interaction with their family and those who live near their home. The summary given below is based on information gained during interviews.
Levels of Integration of Visually Impaired Pupils in Different Types of School.

A. Residential Boarding Schools.

These are usually weekly or half-termly boarding schools, attended by people from a wide area. They provide varying levels of education, (Tomlinson, 1982, Roy 1996) and extra curricular activities. They usually allow visually impaired people to mix mainly with other visually impaired people, or sometimes with people with other disabilities (See Dawkins, 1991). For instance, some visually impaired people, such as one of the interviewees, generally because of other disabilities, such as partial deafness, are placed in schools for “disabled children” which also include wheelchair users and people with learning difficulties. Thus, contacts with the family are infrequent, and contact with friends at home is even less frequent. It is very difficult to become part of a community in which you spend, at best, two days a week, and in some cases, about twelve weeks a year, as a result of being at a school in a different area, or maybe, a different part of the country. In compensation, some schools provide an environment where sports and social activities can take place, opportunities for which may not exist at other places (see Worcester prospectus). These occasionally involve contact with non-disabled people, such as the use of coxswain from local schools in rowing, or football matches against sighted teams. Interaction outside this type of activity, however, is very limited. But information about help and facilities which may be available after leaving school, from agencies like RNIB, is often fairly good.
RNIB Vocational College, Loughborough, however, is an example of a residential boarding college, providing further and continuing education, based on the campus of a mainstream FE college, and linked with the Students’ Union, which covers the college, as well as the mainstream FE college, and Loughborough University. In practice, however, many of its social activities do not involve students from the other institutions, and those who attend the college very often mix more with each other than anybody else. Sociologically, it would be interesting to know whether the main reason for this is choice, which is what the students would like to say, or whether it is more due to the attitudes of other students. Perhaps, on the other hand, it signifies the fact that blind people are different, as argued by Cutsforth (1933) and Scott (1969). The latter points out that this is because they are often socialised to play a particular role. (See Blindness and Personality, above).

B. Local Schools For Visually Impaired Or Partially Sighted Children.

These provide varying educational opportunities, but support only those who live close enough to be able to go home at night. These schools can organise sports and social activities, and do allow more contact with the family. They may not allow much meaningful contact with friends at home, and out of school socialisation with school friends may be a problem due to the distances travelled. Pupils usually go home by taxi, meaning that they must leave at a specific time, so arrangements must be made well in advance. Some of these schools can also include visually impaired people mixing with people with other disabilities. They do still offer a special educational environment, catering specifically for their pupils.
C. Resource Units Within Mainstream Schools, With Accommodation Provided.

Pupils can either stay over night, or go home at a convenient time. They allow for sporting and social activities, special working environments and the ability to mix with sighted classmates during school hours. In practice, because the visually impaired children are based in the unit (although taught in the classroom), they do not mix much with sighted classmates. Levels of family and home interaction depend on distances travelled, and number of nights which pupils stay. In other words, it suffers from all the problems caused by making mainstream provision, and many of those suffered by the special school, whilst not really providing any of the advantages of either.

D. Resource Bases Within Mainstream Schools.

Visually Impaired children are generally taught in mainstream classes for most of the time, and have varying levels of success in integrating with sighted children out of class. They often have to travel up to 20 miles to get to school, so although they have regular family contact, they have to be exempted from detentions and other activities after class, unless special taxi arrangements can be made. It also means they have limited opportunities to form friendships at home. Sports and social activities are hard to organise, as they often require the presence of several blind people. This means that some blind children are isolated. Units hold up to 12 children in general, with only one or two in each year. These small groups of blind children in the same year often end up with each other, because it is harder to interact with sighted people (see interview analysis, below).
E. Integration Into A Mainstream School, but without Resource Bases.

This is where one school is used as a centre for teaching visually impaired pupils, but only has a small number. This can result in improved opportunities to form friendships in class, although it may still suffer from the problems associated with travelling to a school further away from home. There is also likely to be less awareness about facilities and services for visually impaired people, so good links with social services, for the teaching of daily living skills and mobility are even more important than in resource unit settings. It is also important to have the relevant knowledge and resources to ensure that VI pupils can use whatever equipment and skills necessary, such as Braille, tape or large print, computers, interpretation of diagrams, etc. This can, almost inevitably, lead to over-reliance on ancillary staff. Training is vital for mainstream teachers.

F. Neighbourhood Integration With Support.

This allows VI children to attend the school that their sighted neighbours attend, thus removing problems associated with travelling longer distances. However, learning the necessary skills still requires much support, and is even more important if there are no other visually impaired pupils for staff to use as a reference group when deciding what expectations to have. Opportunities for sport and other activities must be sought. As with all mainstream education, parental support is vital, and they must be given the knowledge necessary to bring up a blind child. This type of problem can be alleviated if there are parent support groups, or other children at school who can be used as a reference group.
G. Neighbourhood Integration Without Support.

Needless to say, this is not desirable at present. As above, but with no extra support staff. All support must be provided by the mainstream teachers. This would alleviate any problems caused by the presence of a support teacher in terms of social inclusion, but would require expertise on the part of all of the mainstream teachers. This in turn would require a radical shake up of the organisation of any school, creating requirements for training and preparation of materials. It may be that this could be the aim in the future. A truly inclusive school should be able to cater, so some argue, for absolutely anyone.

Whilst this shows that types of services and schools which can be used, it is important to look at some of the research which has taken place into mainstream education for visually impaired children, as this has, unwittingly, touched on many of the central issues of this work. The research detailed below was not intended to be sociological, but highlights some very useful points. A sociological analysis of this research will stress the centrality of attitudes and awareness.

Types of provision and standards vary drastically, although vast improvements have and are still taking place. These improvements were spurred by the Warnock report (Warnock, 1978) and subsequent education acts. These have increased the statutory commitments of local education authorities to provide an education for all types of people, and an integrated approach has been suggested.
An RNIB survey was conducted between 1984 and 1986 to assess the nature and extent of provision of integrated education, and how RNIB might support this and initiate new projects (Stockley, 1987). It should be noted that since this time, the nature of provision has moved strongly in favour of further integration, but that this report sets out in a lot of detail many of the major issues. The main study comprised a questionnaire sent to 110 LEA’s, shorter versions later being sent to 30 non-respondents. Questions covered all aspects of educational provision, including what equipment had been purchased, what kind of integration was undertaken, and for whom, what support was provided both in terms of staffing and financial resources, and how successful integration schemes were. It referred to all visually impaired children known about, whether or not they were statemented. (A statement of special needs is issued for children who need a special educational programme). About two thirds of LEA’s had either a generic special needs or a specific visual impairment service, and used some integration and some special provision. Most of these were in the early stages of service provision. Most LEA’s endorsed the principle of integration, but economic considerations have slowed the process. Provision at this stage was often for partially sighted people only. Many LEA’s had recently increased services, none had cut back. Fewer LEA’S were planning any future change. Stockley points out that many of those that weren’t had generic special needs services, rather than specific visual impairment provision. Many authorities had increased the number of staff posts, but found it difficult to fill them with qualified staff. Once staff were qualified they transferred to areas with good services, where staff could have been trained. Most LEA’s had generic service budgets, although
provision was patchy. Few had spent large sums. “Clerical and welfare” services were sometimes included.  

Most areas had preschool provision. Whilst there are more partially sighted than blind children in education, the numbers may actually be higher since some problems may not be spotted until school age. Many partially sighted people were integrated and many went to special school at secondary age only.  

Provision of free services by RNIB was important to LEA’s. Technological advice was popular for those who did not spend as much time assessing specific needs, and equipment loan was popular. Quick transcription and taping services as well as reference services were less popular. Many authorities said they would continue using most services if there were a nominal charge, but not reference and transcription. Any type of in-service training support, even if charged for, was quite popular.  

Stockley argues that the role of the advisory teacher is vital. These are difficult to find because there is a lack of qualified staff and training courses. Most have to be trained within the LEA itself. If a special school has closed the resources have usually been put in a resource centre, and library areas can be provided. Non-teaching help, which may include dictating work, copying work done in Braille by a pupil, mobility training (training in specific skills required by a blind person to enable them to get around either a school or any other area) and many other types of help can be provided.  

Interviews with staff and children involved in integrated settings were also conducted. Common themes included a narrower curriculum and too much help given by other children. Some poorly socialised children who had many
problems were still accepted by others, although independence was not a possibility. Lack of experienced helpers in developing service, with worries about a possible transfer to special school, problems with PE and provision of equipment to enable work at home, need for a lot of physical contact, and worries about financial support were also often mentioned. She also interviewed parents, some of whom expressed worries about particular integration schemes, including problems with physical activities, mobility, location of school, number of teachers at secondary level and the fact that integration is difficult if a child has previously been to a special school.

Stockley identified the following conditions that must be met for a successful integration scheme to come about:

1. The child must be motivated.
2. The child must be able to identify and express their needs.
3. The child must be able to tolerate people's reactions.
4. Parents wishes must stem from motives other than keeping the child at home.
5. Staff should be enthusiastic and well prepared. In service training is vital. Enthusiasm alone is not enough
6. Administrators must be aware that integration is not a cheaper alternative.
7. Support must be adequate to meet all needs, but not intrusive since this would lead to undesired segregation.
8. Progress may appear slower. Patience must be shown by all and any required adaptations must be made.
The recommendations, of this report, in terms of what RNIB could do were very wide-ranging. For instance, they included the following: advise on where staff can be found; advise authorities with a specialist service; expand facilities for training all teachers and helpers of the visually impaired; liaison about, and special places for pre-school children; maintain some special schools and further education provision; visit integrating schools; continue to provide Braille and tape services for LEA's; have regional supplies of equipment, since trying it is vital, and the loan schemes are very popular; keep reference lists of where equipment can be viewed; make and market videos relating to any aspect of visual impairment; loan specific subject equipment like volt meters; 75 percent of LEA's want a portable exhibition of equipment; publicise what is available to make people aware; offer meeting facilities for support staff; co-ordinate a national network of parent discussion groups; make some holiday provision at special schools; and provide an emergency service for the families of newly blinded children.

This list shows that most people are aware of the educational issues involved here, and these are well covered in this book. Some of the conditions necessary for a successful integration scheme are necessary for any successful education, and should not be regarded as special concerns of visually impaired people, although they are, perhaps, rather more important for them than for others. However, it also shows that more contacts between parents, support teachers and blind children in integration are needed. Some of the studies of individual children hinted at major social problems, but did not elaborate to any great extent. Whilst some integration schemes went very well, others did not. Clearly, there is a need for people to understand the
social and sociological implications of visual impairment, as well as the educational. However, this must not be seen as a criticism of Stockley’s work since it was not meant to be a sociological text.

The most recent major study on the subject of integrated education for visually impaired children was conducted by Jasmin Dawkins for RNIB (Dawkins, 1991). Eight LEA’s were studied in detail and 14 individuals were also included for detailed study. They were selected randomly, not for any particular type of service or result. Various issues were raised when looking at service provision. The types of service and issues raised are outlined below:

1. Long thin county. Integration of blind as well as partially sighted people. Ancillary as well as specialist help available. Use of computers. Team of 6 teachers visit blind children more often than others. Neighbourhood integration for all. Blind people often sent away for further education.

2. Integration of the blind since 1987, usually in neighbourhood schools. Less use of computers. No secretarial help, and not enough mobility training. Good in-service training, emphasis on self-confidence.

3. Large county with two resource bases, although neighbourhood integration in remote areas. New service with little training or mobility help. Some equipment bought. Parent support group possible.


5. Used by five neighbouring LEA’s as well. Based on special school, with increasing Braille-using population because partially sighted children were
integrated. Everyone has a choice. Good mobility and in-service training.

Some daily living skills training under consideration.


7. Metropolitan area with resource bases. These initially taught partially sighted children, but as they became integrated into their own school the emphasis here has changed to Blind children. Neighbourhood integration if possible. Good financial support. Many staff, not all qualified, and lack of in-service training. Good mobility training, very good equipment provision, Braille library and much transcription, staff of all kinds.

8. Service developed from special school that closed in 1987. Head of school became head of service. Good equipment. Resource bases with up to 12 people in each. Special school still an option. Individual learning programs. Good in-service training and informal training for mainstream staff. No one travels more than 20 miles. Equipment can be taken home.

There are many issues raised by these studies, especially the varied nature of the provision given. Amongst these are the disadvantages of not being able to work at home, if there is no equipment, which forms a barrier to normal schoolwork patterns, the fact that there may be many children in a resource base, and there is no indication that anything is done to ensure good relationships between the visually impaired pupils in them and their classes.
(There is always some integration into the mainstream classes, generally for
around 90 percent of the time, from a resource base). Only one service was
specifically mentioned for looking into the implications of particular eye
conditions, and this is a very important factor as the work of Kirtley (1975) and
Davies (1992) shows. Whilst there was a lack of qualified staff in many
services, some seemed more adaptable than others, especially no. 7. LEA 8
particularly emphasised making sure its pupils were independent. This is not
surprising since there had previously been a special school and the service
was based on that.

Dawkins also used personal studies which found that unforeseen problems
often occurred. For instance, Robert I had "development" problems. These
included a lack of ability to imitate, an important way of learning behaviour
patterns. He had some walking problems, but mobility training could be given
and these problems were being overcome. Emma G’s parents had no help in
the early years and had to contend with psychologists who thought she had
learning difficulties. Steven T was partially sighted and had no false eye in
one socket. He had suffered significant name calling from people in his own
and other classes, resulting in a great sensitivity to his condition and a lack of
confidence. He was frequently tense and had difficulty locating his friends in
the playground. Jennifer K was also reported to have suffered bullying, but no
detail was given. Martin N was nine and had gradually lost most of his sight.
This had led to aggression towards sighted peers because of his awareness
of his condition, which lead to teasing. He had persistently had problems with
relationships with sighted peers. This shows the importance of studying
interaction as this problem could persist throughout his life. Imran was fifteen
and doing well. However he was partially sighted, and found it difficult to tell
to people this. So, if he knocked something off a desk or could not find what he
had dropped, people made fun of him. A lack of confidence was noted. If he
were to reach higher education this could be a problem. Peter R was sixteen
and at school with a partially sighted friend. This limited relations with sighted
peers, but to what extent is not clear. Again this emphasises the issue that
visually impaired people may stick, or perhaps sometimes be forced, together,
and may not have sufficient experience of contact with sighted peers. William
G had little idea of perspective, and so did not take design subjects. Ashraf B
had many problems, since his lack of sight was only identified at secondary
school. He had been teased by teachers and staff in cricket, but only when
one teacher asked him to read did the problem become apparent. He had
many problems because he had difficulty establishing friendships, and could
not break into appropriate peer groups.

Dawkins made many observations and recommendations. For instance, does
an education service concentrate entirely on education? If so, it could have
serious consequences for the child. Those who go to resource bases tend to
feel like outsiders at home, although they allow a concentration of resources.
However, lack of social experiences could lead to lack of knowledge that other
members of the class may have, which may lead to labels like “thick” being
created. Many are categorised as “slow learners” because a visual problem is
not detected. Dawkins argues that it must also be remembered that mobility
training for the blind is equivalent to road safety training for sighted people,
and that this is another example of where a lack of awareness and
observation skills could lead to unhelpful labels being attached. It must also
be remembered that for satisfactory interaction to develop, full social integration is necessary, which may mean more supervision in the very early days. Parents must also be advised as soon as possible, since they often don’t know how to cope with a disability even if they recognise it. This is a crucial factor in socialisation. One of the most important conclusions was that LEA’s must work together rather than in isolation, and that blind children can learn from each other: they often feel isolated by their lack of vision. This is an argument not for resource bases, but for holiday provisions to be made. Dawkins also believed that all staff must be trained, including cleaners and dinner staff. The special needs must be recognised, so that visually impaired people can be full members of the community.

Other problems highlighted included posture problems, language problems, (because of a lack of reading material) frequent tension and difficulty locating friends in the playground. There were often difficulties with relationships with sighted peers, due to problems caused by eye conditions. This limits relations with sighted peers, but to what extent is not clear. Attention has been given to lack of perspective in design subjects.

Perspective, however, is a term that accurately describes one’s outlook on the world. Whilst it has been recognised that visual impairment may cause problems appreciating visual perspective, the fact that lack of vision, and lack of ability to see others, may, in some cases, cause a lack of social perspective as well has not been fully understood.

The issue of independence is crucial: should one do everything for oneself, or should one take help in certain circumstances when it is not necessary? This, and many of the other issues highlighted show that there is a need for
sources of information and help for staff in mainstream schools. As the number of people with additional disabilities, especially learning difficulties, increases, this will become an increasing problem. One possible solution is outlined below.

Jowett, Hegarty and Moses (1988) have shown that one good way of providing such services is through links between special and ordinary schools. The Warnock report (1978) recommended that links be fostered, so that ordinary schools, which may not be funded or prepared adequately to educate people with special educational needs can tap into the resources and know how of special schools. The study looked at various link schemes and considered the implications for all people involved. A third of the special school staff had regular work in mainstream schools, and another third had some work in ordinary schools. There was some movement in the opposite direction. It was also argued that people on care courses may gain practical experience by working on placement in special schools. The aim of links was often to help special school pupils enjoy some education in ordinary schools. The presence of a teacher from the special school was helpful. One headmaster said "pupils often flounder and seem lost if not supported". Special teachers provided emotional support and continuity. Support teachers often felt awkward if there was nothing to do and team teaching was usually the best solution. Mainstream teachers often did not understand what the link was about, and even if they appreciated it they often did not find out if it could help others. Mainstream staff felt uneasy about having support teachers in their classes, and felt that they were often unable to adapt and negotiate, leading to a lack of understanding and tension. Mainstream
teachers sometimes gained a new perspective on how to cope with less able pupils, whilst special teachers gained autonomy from working in several schools. The aims of any scheme must be clearly established at the outset or there will be unease and conflict. Teachers often did not know how to react, giving too much attention in some cases, or treating everyone as normal, when this may not have been appropriate if the lesson was not accessible.

Teachers need to be trained, and some were resistant to taking inset courses. For the pupils themselves, link schemes can be a gradual move to full time ordinary education. Jowett et. al. argued that it should take about a year for a move to be made once a pupil has been judged ready for an individual “programme of assimilation” (p 105). Links provide wider curricular and social activities even if they do not mean a permanent move, although the change can cause problems. Part-time schemes can be helpful for communications between schools, but if people are only integrated for lessons this isolates them. This was referred to as “isolated integration”. Jowett et. al. argued that teachers did not often understand the implications of their lessons for the pupils: for example, those who find it difficult to write, hold figures in their head rather than writing down all their working, which teachers failed to realise.

Also, telling a person that they can’t have a perfect life, and that they must just get the best may make them feel inferior. The authors also argue that many pupils feel they are tolerated rather than accepted, and hence do not like to bother teachers, and suffer in many ways. A great deal of self confidence is required by any pupil who has an unorthodox route to joining a school. They may find questions about this difficult to deal with. Teasing and curiosity may seem unacceptable to them. Some found that after an initial period of a
month pupils started letting down wheels on wheelchairs and turning off hearing aids. Jowett also found that people can be stopped from teasing if the teacher tells them that their victim has feelings like anyone else. However, amicable acceptance does not mean people have close friendships. Many found friendships hard to form and appreciated psychological support. Whilst links increased the awareness of mainstream pupils and local communities, many of those involved felt isolated, and used their friends from special school as their peer group. Link schemes raised many aspects of special education, and led to the following observations being made in the report. The special school has a special and separate atmosphere, and acts as a sanctuary. This is the only environment in which some can survive, and the only place where some may have a positive image. Many feel that people are too readily accepted as they are in a special school and morale may be low amongst staff who are teaching older pupils who have little future. They can see an effect of their work where people gained clear benefits like link schemes or full time integration. Hegarty (1987) argues that special schools in the future are likely to have a different function, specialising in short-term, diagnostic placements. However, all of these reports show the importance of studying the sociological and social psychological factors that influence classroom behaviour and the formation of meaningful social relationships with peers. It is important to analyse some of the interactional processes that occur within the school context to gain a fuller understanding. Delamont (1983) provides an interactionist analysis of teaching and classroom processes. She starts from the perspective that when anyone
starts a new job they watch others to work out how they are expected to behave. We act according to the way we see the world around us. If our actions are too different from others, we are seen as bad or mad. We constantly reinterpret situations since successful participation depends on successful definitions of a situation. Classroom life is about the generation of shared meanings, and is never static, changing over time. Type of school and classroom also affect the interaction that takes place within the class. For instance, an open plan classroom may lead to a very different pattern of interaction than a traditional one. School policies also affect how a classroom is run: if discipline in school is strict, teachers may regard problems as a personal problem, and not talk about it. Each curriculum has its own rules that are taken for granted and called the "hidden curriculum". Classroom processes can only be understood in context. Being a teacher is a job, but also a role played by many different people. Unlike other professionals, a teacher can rarely consult colleagues, being required to have instant answers, and this means that power is very important to them. Delamont argues that this means that teachers have control over knowledge, and decide what is appropriate for anyone to know: teacher knows best. Vulnerability is constant: they resent others having control over knowledge. Teachers monitor and correct pupils' behaviour and language. The teachers' concept of the classroom is very important since it effects what goes on in the class. Staffroom labelling is also very important since teachers do most of the talking in class (about 70 percent) and sizing up of pupils is another factor that has a major impact on classroom interaction. Streaming is a good example of the importance of "self fulfilling prophecies" where teachers teach
less to a group labelled as “thick” or “less able”. Low expectation leads to failure. Teachers are always concerned about control, and whether they teach at the right pace. A good teacher must follow what happens in the classroom rather than excessively planning. They are expected to produce plans for everything they do, but these must allow for flexibility.

Pupil power is group power, so if the audience is attentive the teaching style will be warmer. Pupils react to teachers according to what they think others will feel. The pupil is supposed to play a role of subservience: any power is illegitimate. Power is related to the numbers that can be mobilised against the teacher. An interaction set is a group of pupils who define a situation in a similar way, and act together. Delamont argues that they offer support by offering eye contact, sympathetic silence and laughter. They show a lack of support by withdrawing from eye contact, unsympathetic silence and telling on each other. Classroom status is often also affected by things like physical prowess, fashionable clothes, and good dancing. Status in a peer group is affected by action in the classroom: effort and ability.

Classroom interaction is based on a negotiation between teacher and pupil, so a full understanding of clearly defined roles is helpful. Teachers define the situation and impose their knowledge directly. Pupils must always see a benefit to what they are doing, otherwise there will be disruptive behaviour. Classroom interaction is here characterised as a “battle” between the pupil and the teacher. This is quite important when the teacher has to start consulting someone about what their needs are.

It is important to understand how everyone defines, or makes sense of, a situation, including the school. Ball (1981) does this by referring to everyday
il 19 cut-off life, or the "real world". He noted that in the second year there was a cut-off between school life and home life, school friends rarely meeting outside the school. Much time was spent at home, watching television, or doing domestic work. In the third year activities such as going to concerts and discos, buying records, visiting friends, and relationships with the opposite sex become common, life becoming less home centred. Good looks and good clothes are important, but secondary to a good personality. Personality becomes more important as people get older. In the fourth and fifth years, ex-school social life is more independent of the home, and pop culture effects everyone, including what Ball calls "pro-school" pupils. School culture is typified by "teacher knows best" whereas pupil culture is typified by the notion of individual choice.

Status in a peer group is affected by action in the classroom: effort and ability. Pupil perspectives are strongly affected by paralinguistics, like gesture and posture, which rely on sight. Goffman (Goffman, 1968) argues that stigmatised people will be restricted in their actions: there are some things a blind person cannot do without censure.

This is usually centred around the development of interpersonal, especially sexual, relationships. There is little research on first encounters, which are vital, since first impressions tend to last. Scott (1969) shows how they can be very awkward, and that relationships of any description take longer to develop for many visually impaired people.

Classroom interaction is based on a negotiation between teacher and pupil, so a full understanding of clearly defined roles is helpful. Teachers define the situation and impose their knowledge directly. There is little work on individual
tuition and interaction with the teacher, since this rarely occurs. Ball showed that those who participated less in pop culture tended to get more involved with the staff at Beachside and relations became less formal. This shows the importance of identifying problems early, since the older one gets the more important personality becomes. It is important to ensure that a visually impaired child does not lose out in interaction by the time he or she gets to the third form, or preferably much earlier. Whilst the extra knowledge required for a visually impaired person to fully benefit from the classroom situation may appear to be a power base, and thus, according to Delamont, a threat to the authority of the teacher, this does not conflict with pupil culture necessarily, since this stresses individual choice. Delamont would have been very interested in the effect a support teacher and a visually impaired child would have, since the child is required to know about their needs and how best to cope with them, which is a potent source of power. This also represents a divergence amongst the pupils since others may (but not always do) resent this power. Other pupils may well be affected by the presence of a support teacher, which will, in turn, effect visually impaired pupils’ ability to attain a high status within any peer group. Conversely, the more academic in a class may wish to use the support teacher, especially in team teaching situations, to further their own ability, leading to others observing the visually impaired pupil both with staff, and with those who Ball (loc. cit.) would call “pro-school” pupils. In addition, visually impaired pupils would probably require extra desk space, and certainly different equipment. This could be a source either of curiosity, or amusement to others in the class. There are many instances of magnifying glasses being removed when teachers were
not looking, and other such problems. In one of the schools visited, the support staff were deliberately as unobtrusive as possible to try to minimise these problems, and it may explain why one of the students interviewed was reluctant to use specialist equipment. In any of these situations, other pupils in the vicinity are likely to feel that their space has been intruded upon. This could either be by staff, or just by the presence of "someone different", different because of the extra desk space, equipment etc. This may restrict visually impaired people in terms of the types of group they can join, as would the obvious problems they would have in terms of physical prowess, fashion and dancing.

Current debates are more concerned with the concept of inclusion, and when analysing any of the material above, it is important to remember the contribution of, in particular, Barton, who, in common with the majority of the disability movement, has called for an education system which includes everyone. This means including everyone socially, not just educationally. Barton (1995) argues that this would require fundamental change: change in the way resources are allocated, the structure of schools, the structure of the curriculum and in people's attitudes.
CHAPTER 6.

THE RESEARCH.

This chapter details the actual research and the methods used to collect data. It discusses research methods in general, and disability research methods in particular, highlighting some of the strengths and weaknesses of this work. It then looks at the experience of carrying out research as a visually impaired person and the way this could have had both positive and negative impacts on the findings. The findings will then be discussed in the following chapters. They outline the complexities involved and give detailed analysis. It is important for a work of this type to include as much detail as possible, given the limitations of previous research, and to outline possible weaknesses of this work.

The preceding sections have highlighted some of the things a blind person must cope with: Public attitudes and stigma, lack of information, dependence on others for basic and private functions such as correspondence, lack of choice in life, and perhaps most importantly, the piecemeal nature of the system which is put in place to give the impression that blindness is a priority for politicians. We must establish what the real social needs associated with blindness are, by asking blind people themselves. It is also important to find out to what extent blind people feel different from others, and whether this is a result of segregated education. It may be that taking people out of the community is the thing that makes them feel different, rather than the fact that they are blind. One final issue which is vital is that of communication: eye contact, body language, the importance of verbal communication, the lack of written material, and the implications of all of these. To what extent is a visual
impairment a limitation, and how far do blind people adapt and use other sources of information?

Communication, in fact, affects everything one does, since it effects the way all information is processed and analysed, and therefore, to what extent one has to reorganise the way things are done. It does, therefore, cover well the effects of visual impairment in a holistic sense, which is a very important achievement for any research.

Disability Research.

Over the last few years, it has become increasingly obvious that disability research has not been achieving what it would have liked to. (Oliver, 1992 and 1997, Zarb 1992). Their concerns lie in the relationship between the researcher and the research process, and the disabled people the research is supposed to be about. They start by asking whether disabled people benefit from their own research, and conclude that they probably do not. They argue that the main beneficiaries are themselves: they have published books, and progressed their academic careers. They believe that their research has not led to any improvements in the lives of disabled people. There have not been changes in government policy or social attitudes. They also believe that in conducting research, they have recreated the alienating relationships that have always existed between disabled people and the research process, as disabled people are still seen as things to be researched. In this type of research, they are treated as objects, rather than subjects.

It has been argued that research on disability has gone through three major stages. These can be defined as:
1. Positivist: researching for facts and figures. This type of research seeks to find out “how many people have difficulty walking” or “how many people cannot see”. It locates disability within the individual (see discussion of the OPCS reports in Abberley, 1992). He shows how questions were asked that located disability entirely within the individual, whereas questions could have been asked which would have elicited the needs of disabled people from the viewpoint that many of the problems are caused by society. OPCS reports are generally regarded as official statistics, so are important.

2. Participatory. Qualitative research automatically gives much more freedom of expression to people taking part, as it seeks to find out their opinions and experiences. Because questions are not closed (requiring specific answers such as yes or no), people have an opportunity to express themselves. However, this does not mean that they can address the issues they wish to, as the topics to be researched are not under their control, either partially or totally.

3. Emancipatory. This differs from other forms of research in that the aim should be for the researcher to “place his skills and knowledge at the disposal” of those being researched. (Oliver, 1992). This is research about the oppression of disabled people, and trying to change it. It should aim to bring about real change in the lives of disabled people. It is important also that disabled people are able to play a full part in this type of research: choosing to take part, viewing possible questions and being able to propose amendments, being able to see interview transcripts and approve them.

In trying to achieve these goals, Vernon (1997) used a three stage approach, similar to that outlined as important by Barnes (1992). This involves either an
informal discussion or preliminary interview, the main interview, and another meeting or chance to review the transcript. In this way, it is argued, disabled people are given much more control over the research than is achieved merely by participating. There are many advantages to using such methods. One is that you can be much more sure that you are asking relevant questions, as you can get to know the concerns of the subjects. Vernon found this invaluable, and made lasting friendships with some of her interviewees. In many cases, they were delighted to have someone to talk to that understood all of their experiences. (She was conducting research into the oppression of disabled women from ethnic minorities). It is important to have some sort of personal affinity between researcher and interviewees, especially if asking questions of a personal nature, and discussing their experiences, as with the current work.

However, it is argued that for research to be Emancipatory, the researcher must be openly politically committed to the goals of the disabled people’s movement, and that research should be used as a tool to bring these goals about. There is a belief that research, by its very nature, is alienating and oppressive. If the researcher is not committed to these ideals, then they will not bring about change for disabled people. They will reinforce the oppression that already exists. (Barnes 1992 and 1996, Oliver 1992 and 1997, Zarb 1992). This implies an all or nothing scenario: as Barnes (1996) put it, you are either “for us or against us”.

Both Bury (1996) and Shakespear (1996) reject this. Bury regarded this particular contention as a threat: if you don’t say what we want you to say, don’t say anything! Clough (1996) in common with Bury and Shakespear
argue that there must be different perspectives in research, Shakespeare drawing on his grounding in Feminist work, where this is definitely the case. Barnes, Oliver and Zarb are generally hostile to much of academia, arguing that it is dominated by the middle and upper classes and has no relevance to the people it researches. They should probably be known as research “objects”, rather than subjects. Bury contends that it is necessary for there to be different types of research. It is important to be able to stand back and analyse in order to be able to create theory. It is this theory which will be the basis of future research. For instance, The Politics Of Disablement (Oliver, 1990) was very theoretical, and a difficult read. This would not conform to the Emancipatory ideal of being accessible to disabled people. However, many ordinary disabled people have read it, and it has had a positive effect on many people’s lives. Thus, although not conforming to what Barnes and Oliver wish to accomplish now, it was a seminal work, and the academic basis of much work in the disability studies field today.

Having reviewed literature from several fields, however, it was obvious that what would be researched here would be more to do with attitudes and experience. One of the fundamental questions underlying this thesis was to what extent visually impaired people actually identify themselves as visually impaired, let alone disabled. To find this out required a profile of the interviewees’ views and experiences, and not direct questioning. This also meant that there were specific questions that had to be covered, so researcher control was also an issue.
The role of the researcher.

Given current debates around the role of the researcher, it is necessary to say a few words here. This will lead into a description of the experience of doing research as a visually impaired person. By definition, unlike the rest of the thesis, this will be presented in the first person.

There have been a wide range of views expressed on the role of the researcher within disability studies in the last few years. These primarily arose as a result of two things. Firstly, the increased stress on emancipatory research (Barnes 1992 and 1996, Oliver 1992 and 1997, Vernon 1997, Zarb 1992) which argued that the researcher could never be independent, or “objective” as positivist theorists would cast them created a pressure for people to state what their perspective on disability was when doing any research. Secondly, the introduction of a wider range of discussions into the discipline necessitated an examination of the implications of using different types of research method. (Booth and Booth 1996 and 1997, Clough 1995 and 1996, Vernon 1997). In particular, Clough (1996) and Swain (1995) looked at the impact and role of the researcher in schools and a college respectively. Swain conducted long term participatory research into student participation at a new special college. He found that the staff appreciated the research as it gave plenty of opportunities for them to improve their working methods, and was one of the best ways for them to keep in touch with each other. By reading about each other’s experiences, issues and dilemmas, they felt much less isolated than they would otherwise have done. College staff rarely get any quality time to discuss how they are feeling and performing. They did, however, feel that they and the college were being evaluated, which
Swain sought to reassure them about at all times. The students also showed two types of reaction. Firstly, many of them were keen to be interviewed. They saw it as a chance to have their say and have a chat. On the other hand, they thought that they and their work were being evaluated. His methods included unstructured interviews, held periodically, reflection documents, showing what he was finding, and participant observation. Swain commented that whilst his research did not bring about major change in the college, some of the issues he raised were taken to the staff council by students. However, Swain was only dealing with one organisation. Stone (1997) showed that in dealing with various organisations it becomes more difficult to control research. Since different organisations often want different things from the research, it is not possible to devolve control to the actual participants in the same way. Riddell, Brown and Duffield (1995) also found this. In order to gain access to their research settings, they often had to convince the organisations concerned, acting as gatekeepers, of their credibility. There were often fears of their political intent. That could easily have been true for this research as well, and the same tactics were used by myself and Riddell, Brown and Duffield to try to overcome this. In this type of situation, it is often necessary to appear not to have a political stance, in order to gain access.
So Where Do I Stand?

As I have stated elsewhere, I found my introduction to the social model very empowering, and it has been an important part of what I believe ever since. However, I have always been acutely aware that many visually impaired people do not wish to associate themselves with visual impairment or other visually impaired people. I also felt that many of the issues were very different for visually impaired people than for physically disabled people. Jones and Pullen (1992) showed the dynamics of deaf and hearing people working together. Although the communication needs of visually impaired people are different to those of deaf people, they are very different also to those of sighted people. This places visually impaired people at different types of disadvantage to physically disabled people. As I outlined in Chapter 2, these have not been sufficiently explored within disability studies.

What I wanted to do with this research was to identify what visually impaired people felt about the disadvantages they face, and to get some clues about their identity. It was therefore necessary to go into this research presenting an agenda that allowed people to discuss what the issues were for them, whilst asking some specific questions. These questions related to areas that were either of personal concern to me, or had been highlighted either from within the disabled people’s movement or other literature. As I show, both when talking about my experience of doing research, and when discussing the interviews, I was always acutely aware that the researcher is part of any situation, and that my role was to try to get people to raise issues of concern to them, or to ask them if issues did concern them, and what their experience was, and not simply to gather facts.
The Research Experience.

Shakespear (1997) showed that he had been involved in research covering topics at least as sensitive as this work, and that he was researching areas in which he already had an interest. Stone (1997) showed how the identity of the person conducting research is also very important: having something in common with the people you are interviewing can break down many barriers. Although it was not possible to carry out a three stage research project due to the necessary involvement of other organisations (Stone, 1997), I did present plenty of opportunities for interviewees to influence the conduct of the research. Of course, the fact that I am totally blind did not always relax interviewees as much as would have been desirable, but it did help. At one school, the fact that I was a former pupil, and some people actually remembered me being there, meant that they could see that I was not as distant from their situation as many researchers seem. Interviewees were encouraged to ask questions at any stage, including a specific request to ask if there was anything they would like to know about me, which did yield several questions. Further, I was in a position to support what an interviewee had said by telling them that I had had similar experiences, at which questions often followed. Discussions often wandered onto topics such as careers, or different sources of information, on which I happily provided what advice I could. In presenting myself, I always took an informal approach: stating who I was, and why I was there, but trying to treat the interviewees as if they were friends, in whom I was interested. In fact, in a personal way, I was very interested in many of their situations, and in some cases the students had a good moan about the staff. In one case where this happened, the staff asked
my advice on what I thought they should do to further help the student. Therefore, whilst this research would not be defined as emancipatory (Oliver, 1992) it did allow people to bring their own interests, personality and issues into the situation. That was what it was trying to find out about. I was always aware that the questionnaire had been drawn up by myself, in collaboration only with my supervisor. I took the opinion, which I still hold, that in conducting research in schools, it was important to have firm ideas about what I wanted to cover, but that there must be opportunities for people to bring new issues in.

Interviewing sighted school children was an excellent and rewarding experience, both for me, and, I perceived, for many of them. One of the biggest risks I took was interviewing in the home of one of them. They met me at the railway station, guided me to their house, including a bus journey, and made me very welcome, giving me one of the most private interview settings I had for the whole project, but with people close enough at hand if either myself or the interviewees wanted them. Many of them were interested in what I wanted to know, and kept asking me if they were doing the right thing by visually impaired people. Again, this allowed for a discussion, rather than direct questioning, which was something I tried to achieve whenever possible. My cues often allowed this as one cue would naturally lead the students into starting to talk about the next one.

My journey to one of the schools illustrated the way disabled people are treated by society. I had arranged assistance to help me from one train to the other, changing at two stations in a major city. When I was assisted to a seat on my final train, I got talking to the person next to me, and found that she had
attended the school I was about to visit. So I started asking her what the school was like, what she thought of it, and so on. Just as we had got talking, the official from the railway company re-entered the train (which had not yet started moving) and informed me that I had to sit elsewhere. I protested about this, but was not given the choice, so bang went that opportunity to find out more information.

Tape recording was the only effective way I could take notes. As Vernon (1997) states, this means it is possible to devote your whole attention to the interview, rather than trying to take notes, although I did note things down after each interview if I thought they could be useful in the future. The tape recorder was a source of interest for some, as it was a 4 track, half speed machine, which not everybody had seen. For others, however, it undoubtedly meant that they said less than they might otherwise have done. Nobody questioned the use of a tape recorder. The visually impaired interviewees were mostly very familiar with this way of taking notes, so were not effected so much. The sighted interviewees were interested in the way I approached the interviews and the notetaking process. The people who were most uneasy were two of the partially sighted interviewees. For one of these, it undoubtedly made her think about her visual impairment, and having to work in a different way, which was an issue for her in general, but I do not believe it harmed the quality of the data from the interview. With hindsight, I could have used an external microphone as it was often hard to hear what was said, but I feel that this may have had an adverse effect on the interviewees.

The fact that I am blind undoubtedly helped me to gain access to some sensitive situations, which a sighted interviewer may have found more difficult.
There were two probable reasons for this. Firstly, I sent outlines of my research to all establishments where I wanted to conduct interviews, in which I was able to alleviate any fears people may have had about my motives. My introduction made it clear that I wanted to talk about the actual experience of the visually impaired pupils, and that I did not have an agenda of promoting one type of education over another. The second reason was that many of the staff saw me as a useful source of advice, and wanted to know what I thought of their provision, as a visually impaired person. In some instances, I felt that I was treated very well by staff, and that students were less so. Looking back, the question has to be asked as to whether this was because they did not perceive me as a threat, because they did not expect me to be at all critical in my findings. Surely I would be very impressed with what they did. I don't think this was the case. I genuinely believe that I was treated as such because my advice was being sought. Two of the schools I visited with mainstream provision had difficult issues to deal with, and did not know what to do. My introduction was such that they seemed to feel that it would be good for their students to have somebody different to talk to about their problems. My specific request for as wide a profile as possible did allow for a mixture of this approach, and those who were probably expected to be more positive about the services.

One of the toughest personal aspects of the project was nothing to do with the research process itself. It was that because I had to have proper accommodation all year round, rather than being able to move out of hall for the summer, I had to stay in one particular residence. I found myself in a strange situation. In the second year of my stay there, I found that there were
quite a number of undergraduates. In fact, I had more in common with them than anybody else in the hall. However, a postgraduate student who had become a "senior student" had noticed that when entering the dining room, I was very reliant on staff to find me a seat, which meant I could not always find friends. He took it into his head, without talking to me about it, to try to tell the staff who I wanted to sit with, of course excluding many of the people I did want to associate with. This made it very difficult to get to know them. The hall was primarily a postgraduate hall, with very few social events. On the other hand, many of the students were Oriental postgraduates, who had paid the usual high fees to come and study here. Their priorities were studying and mixing in their own groups. If only I had been aware of Emma Stone’s work at the time, I would have been able to relate the kinds of questions I was frequently asked in hall about my disability. Often, a meal was not a relaxing experience, but an inquisition about my eyes! I have to say that this combination of circumstances did not help my frame of mind one little bit, so I was glad when I got an opportunity to live off campus.

It is precisely this sort of experience which has stimulated my interest in the ways that visually impaired people get on at school. I hope that relating these experiences gives a flavour of the kinds of things many of my interviewees discuss below. The fact that my experience as an undergraduate had been very different, especially in my first and final years, shows the importance of the environment, and that the same person can flourish or struggle as a result of this.
Initial Stages.

It was first necessary to establish what information would be sought. This process was complex, as it was inevitable that sensitive questions would be asked. Much time was taken with initial consideration of how best to get at how people were really feeling. Various research methods were considered for this. These included questionnaires and interviews of various types. The questions were generally related to attitudes and lifestyles, and would therefore require detailed, qualitative answers. Much of the ground had never been covered before, and, as Fielding (1993) pointed out, this also requires detailed, less structured questioning. Fielding also points out the value of probing in interviews, where the interviewer asks for information to verify the accuracy of what the respondent has said.

One approach that was considered was to use cues or prompts, asking if people could remember a situation when a certain type of event had happened, modified from Hellewell (1991). In the event, some of the questions did use this type of format.

It became increasingly obvious that the only way to collect the information required would be to concentrate on using relatively unstructured interviews, although in the event, there were over 60 cues. These were to take about 45 minutes each, on average, but varied considerably from person to person. The topics covered were to include an introductory section, a section about education, then feelings about visual impairment, people’s attitudes, information, posture and appearance, relationships and a concluding section. These were obviously highly personal topics, and it would be very important to get the right setting and atmosphere for the interviews. Initially, we were
looking for a sample of about 40 people, in line with works such as Oakley (1974) and Hellewell (1991). It was felt that we should limit the interviews to those aged 14-18, as it seemed that this would be the age group that would be facing the majority of the issues. It was decided that some of the interviewees should also be sighted colleagues of visually impaired students. This would give increased reliability, since we would be able to judge the situations at the schools we would visit from three perspectives: that of the visually impaired student, that of sighted colleagues, and also of staff. The idea of using a sighted interviewer was also considered, but it was thought that with a suitable introduction, issues could be better dealt with by the author, who is totally blind. It was felt that this would make visually impaired people feel more comfortable, and that sufficient numbers of sighted people would give information for a relatively complete picture of the situation to be drawn. Fielding outlined the importance of the interviewer being relaxed, interested but not intrusive, and as similar as possible in social background to the interviewees (Fielding, 1993). He also outlined the value of indirect questioning. One method used to get better information was to ask interviewees to talk about their observations of others, as well as their own experiences. This often opened up discussions, in which the interviewer participated. This meant that the interviewee felt they were talking to someone who was interested and understood the issues they were talking about, often asking questions as well as answering. This also somewhat alleviated the feeling of powerlessness often associated with disability (Finkelstein, 1980. Oliver, 1990). It must be stated, however, that, inevitably, given the nature of the questions, some respondents did feel uncomfortable
with some of the questions. These were dealt with as sensitively as possible in the interviews and in the interpretation, although questions could be asked about whether an accurate picture was revealed. Examples included questions about relationships, posture and appearance, and issues around help taking and independence. In fact, it was found that some questions had to be rephrased continuously during the early interviews, so the cues were changed to make them more user-friendly. A couple of questions, which were not producing meaningful answers were removed altogether.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that the later interviews ran more smoothly than the early ones, although there were never serious problems. There were three main reasons for this: firstly, experience gained by the interviewer, secondly, rephrases of some of the cues, and thirdly, the ages of respondents. Some of the early interviews were, in fact, conducted with people under the age range initially targeted, due to problems in establishing a sample.

**Sampling Issues.**

One of the most notorious problems in any disability research has been that of “gaining access”. It is often very difficult to gain information about where disabled people are, and then to get in touch with them. Although there are registers of visually impaired people held by local authorities, other sampling requirements meant that these would be almost useless. It was important that we found respondents in as many varied settings as possible, since concentrating simply on those who were easy to find may have affected the results. It was decided that the most important factors were the age range of the respondents, the type of school they attended, and then trying to find
different subgroups within each school. As many of the issues under investigation related to emotions, feelings and attitudes, it was important to select a lower age limit and it seemed sensible that this should be 14. Also, as the education system has been undergoing rapid and radical change, it was important to find people who were actually in schools at the time, rather than looking at past experiences. Therefore, an upper age limit was initially set at 18, although some of the sample were 19.

It was decided that a mixture of two methods of making initial contacts should be used: using personal contacts of both the author and the supervisor, and writing to local education authorities in the hope that unknown students could be found. The initial letters were sent in January 1995, and the interviews were completed in mid 1996. This shows the complexities of finding visually impaired students at all, let alone those who fitted into the criteria for this sample.

The first interviews took place in March, 1995. They were held at a special school in the Midlands and conducted in a relatively quiet room, with no interruptions. Four students were interviewed, and they were from a wide variety of backgrounds: educationally, socially and visually. These interviews were very successful. They gave lots of insight into the interview process, as the author had never undertaken such detailed interviewing work previously, and much valuable information to the research.

The remaining interviews that were held in special schools took place in June and July 1995. These were held in a variety of settings. At one school a flat was used, which was unoccupied at the time, and this was quiet and private. Staff were always close at hand, although totally unintrusive. This was
especially important for this was the school where the ages of the interviewees was generally 13 or 14. At the third special school, the author was given complete freedom about who and where to interview. This produced a varied sample of 5 students, and interviews were generally held by invitation in people’s rooms. This gave great privacy, although there were occasional interruptions.

There was then a gap of about eight months before another spate of interviewing took place. These interviews were held in three mainstream schools, and in all cases, it was difficult to find appropriate rooms in which to conduct them. Space is generally very limited in mainstream schools, and it is never easy to find somewhere quiet. This poses obvious problems for the use of tapes, although that was the only practicable method which could be used for recording.

The sighted interview schedule was developed in late 1995, and interviews were held at 3 of the schools visited, in a variety of makeshift settings. This had been left until late so as to benefit from experiences gained interviewing visually impaired people, and the sighted interview schedule was piloted on two friends of the author, who made some very positive contributions to further improving it. In two of the schools, second visits were made to do the interviewing of the sighted peers, and in one case, the sample was selected jointly by the author and one of the sighted interviewees. In one instance, a visually impaired student was interviewed in his neighbourhood school, and two of his colleagues, who were both relatively close friends, were interviewed on the same day. These interviews were also observed by a photographer from the University.
This had been agreed by all concerned, and appeared to have no effect on the quality of the interviews. Once schools had been identified, individual students had to be targeted. The approach taken was to make very specific requests. Firstly, amongst the visually impaired students, we wanted as wide a variety of ages, within the limits, as possible, people with different social backgrounds, and a mixture of academic and social abilities. Apart from one school, where there was only one visually impaired student, and another, where the sample was selected by the author, in combination with several students, all the sample met, as far as possible these criteria. Four or five people were interviewed in each school, as anticipated. When interviewing in mainstream schools, there was a good mixture of those who were perceived (by staff) to have integrated well, and those who were not, except that in one school, there were well recognised problems in social integration, and most people were struggling. When interviewing sighted students, it was seen as very important to find a mixture of close friends, and those who knew little of visually impaired students, and in two of the three schools this worked well. In the neighbourhood school, both students were close friends of the visually impaired student, but had very different perspectives on the disability. This led to interesting contrasts in their answers. In fact, whilst it was obvious that some of the sighted interviewees felt a little awkward, the use of a good introduction, and the indirect phrasing of many of the questions produced some very revealing answers.

All of the interviews were recorded onto a special tape recorder that is designed to fit 6 hours of information onto a standard C 90 cassette, and has a very sensitive microphone. This proved vital as some respondents were
very quietly spoken. The interviews were then transcribed onto a notetaker. This meant that full transcription was not possible, although exact words were generally used for the answers given. Questions were generally abbreviated unless the sense of them was important for the transcription. It should be recognised that what resulted, whilst not being a full transcript, did not abbreviate quotes that could have ended up being relevant, although some answers were decoded to such things as "yes", "no", "not sure", "don't know", where nothing more meaningful was spoken, and pauses were generally represented thus:

(pause)

or

(very long pause).

In this way, most of the detail was retained. However, this process did cut the time taken to transcribe each interview considerably. Using this method, it is probably reasonable to assume 5 or 6 hours taken per hour of interview, rather than the standard 8 (Fielding, 1993). However, some of the interviews did prove difficult to hear, due to lots of background noise, and so took considerably longer. Some questions and answers had to be repeated several times before an attempt at accurate transcription could be made. Only when all the interviews had been fully transcribed could the analysis begin. To do this, each interview was broken down into the various cues, and all the responses to each question were then put together. This enabled a question by question analysis to take place, and this is presented below.
The Schools and the Respondents.

Before beginning an analysis of the results of the interviewees, it is necessary to give some general information about the schools and the students interviewed. It is intended to give as much information at this point as possible, without the risk being taken that respondents could be identified. The “blind (or visually impaired) world is a very small place” as the saying goes, and there are few schools, especially in the specialist sector. Therefore, it is probable that the schools used may, in some cases, be identified by readers, although there should be little chance of individual students being revealed.

The first school where interviews took place will be known as the “all purpose” or “all purpose special” school. This is based in the Midlands, and admits anyone with a visual impairment, aged 2 to 19 years. They cater for all academic abilities and for multi-disabled visually impaired people. This school is run by the local authority, although it takes pupils from anywhere in the country. Numbers had fallen considerably in the previous couple of years, and the atmosphere was quiet, although there was a sense of purpose and fun.

Four students were interviewed at this school, selected by the school, according to the criteria given. This resulted in interviewing one student who had so much sight that she was often in the position of making observations about others, rather than herself, one who was totally blind and “partially deaf” as he put it, and one ethnic minority student, the only one interviewed.

The next school where interviews took place comprised of a “unit for visually impaired people” based in a mainstream comprehensive school in the North
of England. There had once been a special school, but numbers had fallen so much that it had closed. Accommodation was provided for those who needed it, and more locally based students would often use this as a base for receiving help with homework and joining in with activities. This school will be referred to as the “regional unit” school. Four visually impaired students were interviewed, chosen jointly by the author, staff and a list of volunteers. An evening was spent looking at the accommodation, eating with and getting to know the students, in an attempt to familiarise the interviewer and interviewees with each other as much as possible. This led, of course, to informal conversations, which have been included on occasions in the analysis, where appropriate. At a later date, four sighted students from the comprehensive school, with whom the author had a chance meeting, but were very interested in the project, were interviewed outside the school campus. Again, the sample was chosen jointly, and the people who were involved were not all close school friends. This process actually worked very well, producing an interesting mix of common themes and contrasting answers.

The third school where interviews took place will be known as the “selective” school. This is a specialist establishment based in the Midlands, which caters specifically for “visually impaired people of higher than average academic ability”. It provides all of its facilities, like the all purpose school, on one campus, which includes academic, residential and sporting facilities. At this school, the author was given great freedom and the sample was chosen by a “snowballing” technique, where each interviewee suggested other people who would be useful. The numbers of suggestions were such that selection could
take place, and it was decided to restrict the number interviewed to five, as any higher numbers could have lead to a less representative sample overall.

The next school comprised of a resource base in a mainstream comprehensive school, and will be known as the “comprehensive” or “comprehensive resource base” school. This was based in the Midlands, and was visited twice, once to interview five visually impaired people, and once to interview four sighted people. Both sets of interviewees were chosen by a mixture of staff and self-referral. In both cases, the visit lasted for a full day, allowing time to be taken for observation and consultation on an informal basis with both staff and students.

The next school was based in the Northwest of England. It comprised a resource base in a community school, in a small local authority with a high population density. This meant that all visually impaired students in that area were educated in one place, but nobody had to travel more than five miles to school. Again, the visit lasted for a full day, allowing considerable observation and informal discussion to take place. This will be known as the “community” or “community resource base” school. Four visually impaired students were interviewed, chosen by the staff of the resource base. They deliberately included some with whom they had a good relationship and some with whom they perceived problems, as had happened at the comprehensive school.

The final school where interviews took place will be known as the “neighbourhood” school. There was only one visually impaired student at this school, which was the nearest to his home. Two sighted peers were interviewed at the same time, and the visit lasted for one morning, which meant that less observation was possible. These interviews, with the support
of the project supervisor, were observed by a university photographer, as the 
university wished to use pictures of them to highlight its provision for disabled 
students in its prospectus. This had little effect on the interview process, 
despite initial reservations on the part of the interviewer.

All in all this made for a varied set of schools and contexts in which the 
interviews took place, and an interesting set of answers resulted.
CHAPTER 7.

SETTING THE SCENE.

This chapter begins the process of examining and analysing the results. It looks at the introductory section of the interviews, and at the educational questions that the visually impaired respondents answered. The aim of these sections was to establish a good working relationship and set the scene for the later questions.

The full lists of cues or questions are given in the appendices to this thesis; the schedule for Visually Impaired respondents in Appendix I and for sighted respondents as Appendix II. In nearly every case these cues were followed closely, although not necessarily in the order listed. Where there were minor departures from the list, generally for the comfort of an interviewee, this is described in the text of the next three chapters. Readers will find it useful to keep a marker in the position of these appendices when reading the discussion, although the chapter sub-headings follow the same pattern.

Introductory Section.

The questions in this section were aimed at familiarisation between the interviewer and interviewee. In all cases, names were given, and these will remain confidential. Of the visually impaired respondents, 13 were male and 10 were female. At the regional unit, there was only one female, the one neighbourhood student was male, and at the selective school, the balance was three males and two females. At the two remaining schools, equal numbers of male and female respondents participated. Of the sighted interviewees, six were male, including both those interviewed at the
neighbourhood school, leaving four females. At both of the other schools where interviews took place, two males and two females participated. This illustrates one of the drawbacks of the sampling process because it led to 60 percent of the sighted sample and 57 percent of the visually impaired sample being male. It was appropriate that both of the sighted interviewees at the neighbourhood school were male, since the visually impaired student interviewed was also. The main regret was the imbalance in the visually impaired sample at the regional unit, although given the difficulty in finding interviewees, it was not a high priority to obtain gender equality in this sample. Gender may have been a modifying factor in some of the answers obtained from the visually impaired sample at the regional unit school.

Ages of Respondents.

The next question in both the blind and sighted interview schedules asked people for their age, as this is very important when considering issues of personal and social development. The results were as follows:

Table 1. Ages of respondents in the blind interview schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aged 13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These figures were varied due to circumstances at each school. At the Regional Unit the pupils were younger than average, none being over 14. At the Selective school, as is often the case, the average age for each year in the school was somewhat higher than usual leading to a sample of 18 and 19 year olds.

Table 2. Ages of respondents in the sighted interview schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aged 15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures were much more uniform, and do not reflect the ages of the blind pupils interviewed in the same schools, except in the Comprehensive resource base.

**Educational History.**

The next question in the blind interview schedule dealt with the topic of previous education, and was basically used to try to gain an idea of how many pupils had been integrated, and how many had received segregated provision. This is a difficult topic, and can only really be analysed in terms of whether people have received one or both types of provision. Of the 10 pupils interviewed in mainstream schools, 9 had spent their entire education in the mainstream, only one requiring a special school, and this being due to other difficulties. Of the four interviewed at the regional unit, all had previously attended the special primary school in the area (visual impairment only), so although they were integrated into mainstream classrooms, their provision
was vastly different from the others in ordinary schools. Of the remaining 9, 3 had spent almost their entire educational careers in mainstream schools before moving into special schools. In two cases this had been due to the major lack of support and resultant problems caused by it, and in one case it was a complex decision taken because of the extensive movements of the family. Of the remaining six, all in special schools at the time of the interviews, 2 had attended mainstream primary schools, but had gone to special schools around age 11, one had attended a local school for children with all disabilities, due to his being partially deaf as well as totally blind, and the remaining 3 had spent their entire educational careers in schools for visually impaired people only. This is a low figure, and one which would make pleasurable reading for many people. However, the lack of support received by some of the 20 who had experienced mainstream provision is a cause of much concern.

Levels of Sight.

The next question in the blind interview schedule established how much sight each person had. Of the 23 visually impaired people interviewed, 11 were either totally blind, or had no useful vision, known as “educationally blind”. This is an unusually high number of people to have such low levels of vision, but that was the aim of the research, and so is a pleasing result. 7 of these 11 were born with little or no sight, whilst 5 said that they could remember at least colours. This means that of the 7, only 1 could actually remember anything about vision. Of these 11, 3 were at the regional unit, 4 in other special schools and 4 in the mainstream. In other words, 75 percent of the sample at the regional unit had no sight at all, 44 percent of those in special
schools had no sight and 40 percent of those in other mainstream schools had no sight at all. There were 3 others who had a level of sight which was useful, but barely more than that. One of these was based in the regional unit, two at the comprehensive resource base. Sight classification is a difficult issue, so for the sake of simplicity, we will refer to the 14 as the “blind” group, and the remaining 9 as the “partially sighted” group. Of the “blind” group, then, 4 were based in special schools, 4 in the regional unit, and 6 in the other mainstream schools. This alters the percentages considerably, giving a 100 percent sample of blind people in the regional unit, a 44 percent sample in the special schools, and a 60 percent sample in mainstream schools. It is interesting that the lowest percentage figure here was in the special schools, and that the regional unit seemed to specialise in “blind” rather than “partially sighted” pupils, since many of the latter were integrated into mainstream classrooms elsewhere. The vision of the remaining nine ranged from being able to read “big” rather than “large” print, (in other words, print designed for sighted people which is bigger than average” (based in the mainstream) to almost perfect vision, but likely to deteriorate, based in the all-purpose special school. Of the “partially sighted” group, 4 were based in the mainstream, and 5 in special schools, giving percentage totals of 40 and 56 respectively. This leads to the somewhat surprising finding that the average level of sight in this particular sample was higher in the special schools than in the mainstream schools. It also singles out the regional unit as having a startlingly high percentage of people with no useful vision.
Awareness of Disability.

The next question asked interviewees how often they actually thought about the fact that they couldn’t see properly. Five categories were given:

A. Never.
B. Rarely.
C. Sometimes.
D. Fairly Often.
E. Regularly.

Two interviewees said that they never really thought about it. Both were in mainstream schools. Both of these were totally blind.

6 people said that they only thought about it rarely, 5 of these were in either special schools or the regional unit, where accommodation was provided. Of these, one stated that when they had been in a mainstream school, the answer would have been either fairly often or regularly. This implies that those people in special schools had to face the issues of visual impairment much less than those in mainstream schools, since 5 of 9 said they rarely thought about blindness. 10 respondents said that they thought about visual impairment “sometimes”. 4 of these came from the 9 people in special schools, 44 percent, 2 came from the regional unit, 50 percent, and 6 came from mainstream schools, 60 percent.

Four said that they thought about visual impairment fairly often. 1 was the partially deaf student in the all-purpose special school, one was from the regional unit, the remaining 2 from mainstream schools. All four were totally blind. 1 partially sighted student at the high school said they thought about visual impairment regularly.
Therefore, amongst the people at special schools, blind people appeared to think about the fact that they could not see properly more than partially sighted people, whereas in mainstream schools, the findings were much less clear, but trended the other way if anything. This is probably due to the fact that in special schools, where there is one basic provision model, partially sighted students gain more benefits, especially from the social life, than blind pupils, whereas in mainstream schools, partial sight is far harder to understand, and can lead to problems in provision and the attitudes of other students are more visible to a partially sighted person than to a totally blind person.

Social Interaction with Visually Impaired and Sighted People.

The next question asked people whether they mixed more with blind or sighted people. 4 said that they mixed more with blind people, and another 2 said that they used to mix more with sighted people, but now they mixed more with blind. 1 of these was in a mainstream school, all the others either in special schools or the regional unit. One other person said they mixed more with partially sighted people, at the all-purpose special school. 3 more people, one in the all purpose special school, and 2 at the regional unit said that they associated with a mixture of blind and sighted people. This left 13 people who said they associated more with sighted people, 8 in mainstream schools, 1 in the regional unit, the others in special schools, but more particularly at the selective school. There seemed to be little correlation between whether people associated with blind or sighted people and how much they thought about being blind, or with how much they could see.
Comparisons of Sighted and Visually Impaired People.

The next question had a more qualitative feel, and appeared in slightly different forms on the blind and sighted questionnaire. On the blind questionnaire, the question asked if people had noticed any differences between blind and sighted people, and on the sighted questionnaire, it appeared as two questions, firstly asking if the interviewee had any observations about blind people in general, and then asking them to complete the sentence “Compared to sighted people, I think blind people are: ...”

Of the blind subjects, 13 said that they could identify no real differences between blind and sighted people. These were spread equally in all types of school and all sight levels. Of the remaining ten, there were basically three types of answer: one which argued that blind people are less confident than sighted people, an argument that is looked at elsewhere; one which points out the problems of getting around for blind people; and one that argues that blind people are basically a little slower to do things and develop than sighted people. This theme will also be returned to later. One respondent said that he felt that blind people were better accepted by fully sighted people than were partially sighted people. The latter group, he believed, struggle to mix well with either totally blind or fully sighted people. This respondent was totally blind.

In the first of the sighted questions, 7 of the interviewees either specifically said that blind people were just the same as anybody else, or could not answer the question regarding any observations about blind people. Of the remaining 3, one said that they believed that the other senses became much better, citing the ability of a blind pupil in music. One argued that blind people
were less affected by peer pressure than sighted people, citing the general rule at that particular school whereby all people try to go as far as possible to not wear the uniform, but one blind person, in particular, deliberately always wore it, because he knew that it would “wind up” sighted people. The remaining response did not highlight any differences, but revealed some of the general attitudes held by sighted people, saying that “well, they must find it so hard to talk to people because they don’t know who’s around and who’s not because they can’t see who’s there, like how many people are in the classroom”. This was not a typical response, however, because it went on to discuss the fact that blind people can’t see what sort of people are around them, and touched, in a tentative way, on the idea that blind people can’t go up to people and talk to them in the same way that sighted people can. For the second question, asking them to complete the sentence “compared to sighted people, I think blind people are ...” there were 6 people who either could not answer or said “pretty much the same”. Of the other four, one said that they do different things to achieve the same end, one said that they were much friendlier than sighted people, one said that they have more senses than sighted people, and there were two comments which said that blind people are either “interesting” or “unique” in their own way. One respondent also repeated what he had said for the previous question about lack of conformity.

Age of First Meeting a Visually Impaired Person.

The next question on the sighted interview schedule asked respondents how old they were when they first met a blind person. 3 people had known blind children at infant school, one had a blind granddad, one only met a blind
person properly aged 14, but the other 5 all said either 10 or 11. The age at which people had first met a blind child seemed not to correlate with any of the earlier answers given.

**Images of Visual Impairment.**

They were then asked if they could remember how they felt about blindness at the time they first met a blind person. Of the nine people who were asked this question, (one missed because she had a blind granddad) there were several reoccurring themes. The most important of these were that people were apprehensive when meeting blind people, not knowing what to expect, but that when they got to know them they found that they were just like anyone else. Several people said they just didn't understand it. Only one person admitted that they thought about it from their perspective, thinking about how bad they would feel if they had no sight, and implicitly projecting this misery onto the blind person. Only one person said that they had just wanted to help as much as possible. One person said that they were worried that blind people wouldn't be able to find their way around, and one said that they were just worried that a blind person would be totally different, and was really surprised to find he was just a normal person. It is not surprising that apprehensiveness was the main theme to come from the question, and this is discussed in other parts of this work.

Next, the sighted interviewees were asked if there were any images or attitudes about blindness that had been challenged or dispelled since they first met a blind person. Of the 9 people who were asked this question, 4 said either that they hadn't thought about blindness enough to know, or that there was nothing that had been changed. From the remaining 5, 3 cited
helplessness, one thought “they all had a dog” and one was surprised because “he’s more outgoing than I thought he’d be. He’ll try anything”. One person also stated that he thought they wouldn’t hold their own opinions, and had been proven very wrong. After this, they were asked if there were any ideas or attitudes which had been reinforced when first meeting blind people. Of the 9 people asked, 5 said that no attitudes had been reinforced. Of the others, themes included pride in themselves, that they were more sensitive to what people say about them, and that they were just the same as everybody else.

The remaining questions in the introductory question of the sighted interview schedule appeared later on in the blind interview schedule, and will be covered at that time. The blind questions then moved on to a brief discussion of the educational provisions made for the interviewees.

**Educational Questions.**

These questions appeared only in the blind interview schedule. It was felt that they did not need to be detailed, since there has been much research on the educational provision for visually impaired people already. Therefore, it was decided to find out a basic educational history for each person, and discuss social and sociological questions instead.

**Appropriateness of Educational Provision.**

The first question asked how appropriate people had found their education, considering their visual impairment, and for those in mainstream schools, asked what support services had been like. At the all purpose special school, all four were happy with the provision at that school, but 3 of them outlined
problems they had had at previous schools. In one case, it had not been realised that the pupil was partially sighted for a long time, and she said “the teachers just treated me as if I was thick, really”. When the problem was identified, at her second school, she was taught to read, and given all possible help, but still found that she gained a lot of confidence by going to the present school. Another person had problems due to attending a school that dealt with all disabilities, where his education had not really been taken seriously. At the regional unit, 2 said that it was very appropriate, and the other 2 said that they found it a bit annoying that they couldn’t do any drawing when the others did, which happened quite frequently. One of these was the only person with any sight at all in this part of the sample. Of the 5 interviewees at the selective school, all were happy with the provision there, but one outlined how she had moved from the North of England to the South, where there would have been a perfect school for her, except that the headmaster refused to take her because she was partially sighted. She then went to a second mainstream school, and found it very restricting that she had to take a taxi every day, and couldn’t get to know people in her local area as a result. The support at this school was also inadequate, and she felt that she lost out in no way at all by attending a special school. She had done nothing but gain. One of the other subjects at this school thought that going into integrated settings had helped him mature because he had had more to cope with than the average child. The others had no comments to make. Of those in mainstream schools, the response was generally good. In the comprehensive resource base school, two of the pupils were concerned about the level of scientific support, and one of these was also concerned about the fact that
they have no living skills training, and had to have this during the holidays. It has to be remembered that blind people are likely to need more help in learning to do things for themselves but there will always be arguments about when exactly this should happen. Many people would say that this is a very important subject area for blind people to be taught, whereas others would push for the maximum possible integration into the mainstream timetable. It is important that responsibility is taken for this, but whether this should be by rehabilitation staff or the school is a matter for others to debate. In the community resource base school, one pupil was concerned that the staff were trying to encourage her to use learning techniques that she didn’t like. She was being encouraged to use a EUREKA, (A note-taker/computer with speech output and a Braille keyboard) whereas she would have preferred to use a laptop computer. The staff argued that she had difficulty accepting her lack of vision, and believed that she would not benefit from using print based techniques. She had said that her vision was good for long distance, but that she struggled with close-up work, in which case she may well have struggled with a lap-top, depending on the level of magnification and screen conditions she needed. This is very difficult for a totally blind researcher to make a judgement on, but does highlight one of the potential problems that can be caused by failing to come to terms with having a visual problem. This is the fact that it may be difficult to know what technology, teaching methods and levels of help (both educational and social) would be appropriate. The one pupil who was integrated on his own said that he was very happy. It seems fair to argue, looking at these responses that the level of provision in mainstream schools is still very mixed, and that those who had experienced
significant problems had ended up in special schools. Several people pointed out that some lessons are difficult but felt that support was as good as could be expected. The experiences of one pupil, however, showed that there is not always a social benefit to integration, a topic that was examined in more detail in the next question.

This question asked all pupils how they had found the social side of their schools. Responses from those in the all-purpose special school were very interesting. The totally blind pupils were happy, although one said that because the numbers had dropped the atmosphere had gone. The two partially sighted pupils were less satisfied. One thought that compared to her previous special school, where she had not been a boarder, that she was very restricted, arguing that people were wrapped up in cotton wool, although she perceived that the restrictions were fair enough in the context of the school setting. The other said that she had struggled in her mainstream schools, and thought that this may be because the teachers treated her as if she was different, so the other pupils did likewise. She also said that there were just not enough people at the special school for there to be a good social life. It was interesting to note the division here between the blind pupils, who were positive, and the partially sighted, who were more negative. At the selective school, everyone was very positive about that school, but those who had been in other schools previously all had criticisms. These were mostly fairly general in nature, except for one respondent. She had gone to a mainstream school in the North of England aged 5, and had had a reasonably good time. She then moved to the South, and received a lot of hassle from various groups all the way through school until transfer to the selective school. She felt that this
was because people were more likely to make judgements when they were 9-10 years old than at 5, at which age they were more ready to accept her as an ordinary person. At that time, the selective school had not really begun to suffer from falling numbers of pupils, although this seems to be the case now, as in most other special schools. At the regional unit, although responses were not negative, there were a lot of responses such as “I go round a lot on my own”. All four respondents said that they spent more time with other visually impaired people than with sighted people, and three outlined the isolation they felt. One person responded to this question by explaining that after school they did sport together, and this is probably a very important factor, since the visually impaired pupils ended up spending much more time with each other in school, because they already knew each other from after school activities. This is the danger of having too many visually impaired people in a mainstream school: they associate more with each other, for the reasons outlined above, and because it is much easier to socialise with other blind people than with sighted people who often feel awkward. This undermines one of the most often cited reasons for placing visually impaired pupils in mainstream schools. All four respondents had said that they do very few out of class activities with sighted people, further strengthening this point. At the comprehensive resource base, only one student seemed happy with their social situation. Two, who were twins, felt extremely isolated and alienated by the lack of friends and the way most other pupils ignored them. All of the four who were negative said that primary school had been much better. None of them were happy because they had to travel from different parts of the city, and this meant they had no friends at home. At this school,
most of the VI pupils returned to the resource base at lunch times, since resource base staff (apparently) would not help them in the canteen. Very few sighted pupils entered the resource base, limiting the number of opportunities for social integration. The one person who seemed to have made a few friends at this school also said that her previous school had been much better. At the community resource base school, however, whilst one pupil admitted that some people had treated her differently, and another admitted that she could do with a few more friends, everybody was fairly positive. The key difference seemed to be that staff were very keen to encourage pupils not to congregate in the resource base, and they were helped in every way possible to join in with activities undertaken by everybody else during breaktimes. The final student, who was the only blind pupil in his school, summed up the general position thus: "I found that when I was at Babbington I was put together with a lot of visually impaired students. There, I was making friends more with them, but since I’ve come to more mainstream schools, I’ve been making friends with sighted people, and it seems to be OK."

**Types of School.**

The next question asked people if they would have preferred a different type of education, or to outline what the ideal type of education would be for them. Not one person said that they would have liked to be in a different type of school, given current circumstances. There were various themes raised tentatively, mainly by students at the regional unit and the selective school. At the regional unit, comments included the merits of being with sighted children, and the merits of having “the lodge” (accommodation block) to go back to at
night, to receive help with homework as well as to live during the week. At the selective school, pupils outlined the problems they would have had academically if they had stayed in mainstream schools. This fear was always prevalent at this school, partly because of reality, partly because of the academic reputation of the school. In the mainstream schools, the only thing raised was the desire to be in schools nearer home, although this was said with a resigned air, the respondents believing that although they should be educated in their neighbourhood school, that it wasn’t likely to be able to happen.

Out of Class Activities.

The next three questions should be analysed collectively, as answers vary according to the type of school attended by the nature of the questions. They ask respondents how regularly they do out of class activities with other blind people their own age, and with sighted people their own age, and ask if they are happy with the amounts they do. It is obvious that people in special schools would do more with other blind people, and that people in mainstream schools would not do as much with blind people, and vice versa with sighted people.

In response to the first question, at the all-purpose special school, pupils outlined the following activities: problems with P.E. classes because of lack of interest, BBS (British Blind Sport) activities, an outing to waterworld, cinema, zap-zoning, and holiday activities. At the selective school, activities mentioned included music (twice), pubbing (twice), going to town, a young enterprise company that had been in partnership with another (mainstream) school, and sports (three times). The greater amount of activity may be
attributable to the fact that this was a school where the vast majority of pupils were half-termly boarders, so had more leisure time within school. At the regional unit school, three of the four said that they did out of class activities once or twice a week, and the other respondent said "quite a lot" they all mentioned swimming and watersports, organised by "the unit", and one respondent and one other person who was not actually interviewed mentioned trips to a local shopping centre. Numbers were not high enough to allow much BBS activity. In the inclusive schools, responses were varied. Three of 10 said that they did not want to do any out of class activities with other blind people. Most of the remainder did very little, and what they did was sport. Two mentioned a club for visually impaired girls in their area that they attended once a week. One mentioned RNIB independence holidays and felt that everyone who attended the holidays she had been on was very helpful, which made a pleasant change from the way she was treated at school.

In response to the second question, at the all-purpose special school, two people said they did quite a lot with sighted people, mentioning bowling, youth hostelling and mountain climbing, whilst two said it was more difficult. At the selective school, two of the 5 simply said "not much", one used to play rugby for a sighted team, one used to be in the air cadets, and one used to do many activities whilst at mainstream school, which had now transferred over to being with blind people. At the regional unit, all four said that they did very little in the way of out of class activities with sighted people, even though they were in a mainstream school. One said "they don’t hang around with us much" and they all complained about not having many sighted friends at home either. This gave a lower amount of contact with sighted people than in
the truly segregated schools, showing that educational integration is no
guarantee of even the slightest degree of social integration. These pupils
seemed to be less well served in terms of coping with sighted people than
those in the special schools! In the truly mainstream schools, 9 of the 10 said
that they did regular out of class activities. These ranged from political work
to sport, eating out, and everyday social activities, and holidays. One
respondent said that it was more difficult because of living on a busy road and
the problems associated with travelling. But in general, in all three schools,
they were happy. In one of the schools, the staff told me about who had
integrated well, and who had not, highlighting that one person had not
integrated particularly well because of difficulties coming to terms with a visual
impairment. She had very recently been registered blind and this seemed to
be helping her cope with it, and therefore to be more outgoing. At this school
in particular, the community resource base, they were very aware of the social
issues, ranging from the role of the support teacher within the classroom to
the role taken in out of class activities. This needs to be discussed in much
more detail later.

In response to the question about whether they were happy with the mix
between out of class activities with blind and with sighted people, there was a
stark division, but not the one that would be predicted. At the mainstream
schools, and the all-purpose special school, everybody answered yes to this
question. At the selective school, three of five said that it would be good to do
more with sighted people, but everyone was fairly happy. What was
predictable, taking into account the answers to the previous question was that
at the regional unit, all four said they would prefer more activities with sighted
people, arguing that they were treated very differently. This is examined in more detail in terms of the role of support staff.

One issue which was mentioned consistently throughout this section was the problem of being distant from home. This affected people in all the schools except the neighbourhood integration school.

**Shortfalls in Provision.**

The next question asked the blind interviewees if there had been anything lacking in their education. This was particularly designed to gain any negative comments or constructive criticisms, without particularly asking about educational systems. The very first respondent identified what seems to be a very very fundamental weakness, and this was in the all-purpose special school: “To be able to read Braille properly. Spelling I have learned on computers, so that is the major thing that is lacking.” This seems to be a basic educational point, and special schools really ought to be able to cope with Braille requirements. This was a very disappointing first answer to this question, but it shows that the basic skills are necessary even in the computer age. Of the others in the all-purpose school, one identified a problem with sport at her previous (mainstream) school, since her sight was such that she could not really play team games, so she had often been left out, and the other two said that nothing was lacking. This suggests that although there was a weakness in teaching some of the skills needed by totally blind people, especially Brailists, that things in general were very healthy at this school.

At the regional unit, on this question, there was only one point raised, and this was about the problems associated with pictures in textbooks, which is a
general problem for Braille and tape users. Otherwise, the respondents were very happy with the educational provision.

At the selective school, everybody was very happy with the provisions. One respondent argued that it was easy for those who like sport, but must be more difficult for those who don't, and another said that they had experienced major problems in their previous (mainstream) school, not even being able to gain large print examination papers from one of the examining boards, which had to apologise. Also, the support staff had not been qualified teachers, and this had lead to significant problems.

At the comprehensive resource base, one interviewee identified a lack of diagrams on certain occasions, and one outlined a lack of books. These are always problems if mainstream staff are using new material, and are not prepared a long time in advance. Otherwise, all the pupils were reasonably happy with the support they received. Whilst concerns about the level of scientific support had been expressed earlier, they were not judged so serious that they should be raised again at this point.

In the community resource base, everyone was very happy, although one outlined problems with spelling, and another was unhappy about the equipment they were using, although it seemed that it may be more appropriate than they realised due to problems coming to terms with visual impairment. This pupil has been highlighted in this regard several times, but it must be stated that the general air of the interview was one of a very happy and contented pupil whose overriding desire was just to be an ordinary member of the school.
The one pupil in a neighbourhood school said there was nothing lacking in his education, and seemed to have very good support.

It is not surprising that the answers to this question were fairly positive, since it was really aimed at finding fundamental weakness. There were no really consistent criticisms at any of the schools, although the Braille issue at the all-purpose school reflects what could be a dangerous trend away from Braille as a medium. It is said to be slow and expensive to produce, and there are fewer and fewer readers. For those who use it, it is absolutely vital, however, and must not be cast aside. There are many activities which are more easily undertaken with Braille than any other medium, and some type of paper reading seems to be a vital skill for everyone to learn. It should be regarded as a basic right for all visually impaired people, as for everybody else.

The educational section of the questionnaire was rounded off by a question asking if the pupils had been made to feel different in any way because of their visual impairment. The answers fell into no particular pattern. Some said that they were not made to feel different, but they did anyway, some complained about teachers treating them differently, some about minor bullying, one about not being able to do sport because of his condition, and one about a special school advertising itself as such when it stressed normality to its pupils. All in all, however, this question showed that the differences pupils did feel were usually fairly minor. One in particular had lost all confidence in asking people where seats were in the classroom, and for help in general, and the staff seemed to be becoming concerned about her, although educationally she was doing well. This pupil had said that they would not like to be in a special school, and there are many arguments for her
being in the school she was, but in some ways she may be the sort of person who would benefit socially from being with more visually impaired people. This is always a tricky issue, and in the final analysis, she would not have wanted to move, and that is the most important thing.

Whilst this section of the questionnaire identified many of the issues facing visually impaired pupils, teachers, support staff, educational providers and policy makers, it showed many instances of positive experiences, which should serve as an example of what can be done. These issues were examined more thoroughly in the remaining sections of the interviews.
CHAPTER 8.
FEELINGS ABOUT VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND INFORMATION.

This chapter covers the next two major sections of the interview schedule. These were: feelings about blindness, and information. These two topics looked at services in more detail than in other sections, and gave an insight into how visually impaired and sighted people feel about the levels of provision that exist.

Feelings About Blindness.

At this point, the blind interview schedule moved on to look at how the individuals actually felt about being visually impaired. These questions had equivalent questions in the sighted schedule, looking at how sighted people feel about visual impairment.

Is Blindness a Serious Disability?

The first question asked if blindness is a serious disability or not? This appeared as question 17 on the blind interview schedule and question 9 on the sighted interview schedule.

Of the visually impaired respondents, three said that they felt it was a serious disability. One was based in the neighbourhood school, and argued that it was serious because you often need sighted people to help you. One was based in the community resource base, and another, (who also had learning difficulties) in the comprehensive resource base. Neither gave a reason. The remaining 20 either said that it was definitely not serious, or that it could be serious, depending on what type of person you are and what you want to do.
Themes raised included the restrictions it imposes, such as not being able to
drive and not being able to join the police (raised by the partially sighted
students at the all-purpose special school), the need for good mobility training
(raised by two students at the resource unit) and that you can’t see how other
people are reacting to you (raised by one student at the comprehensive
resource base school). Of the 10 sighted respondents, four thought blindness
was a serious disability. Of the others, one thought it was unfortunate, but not
that serious, one thought that it would have been serious 50 years ago, but
technology had improved the situation, and one thought it was serious for
those who wanted sighted people to help them with everything. The others
said that it depended what the person wanted to do, whether or not it was
serious.

What Is the Biggest Disadvantage of Blindness?

The next three questions should be analysed together. They asked blind
respondents, in question 18, what the biggest disadvantage caused by
blindness was, and in question 19, what they perceived sighted people
thought was the biggest disadvantage, and asked sighted people, in question
10, what they thought the biggest disadvantage was.

In response to the last of these, sighted people revealed no common
patterns. Three said that they thought it would be “not knowing what was
immediately around you”, and other comments included, interestingly, “non-
verbal communication”, “not being able to see facial expressions”, and less
surprisingly, difficulties with schoolwork, getting around, and not being able to
appreciate “beautiful things”. Blind people had expected sighted people to
think that getting around was the hardest thing, since four said this explicitly,
and one other person mentioned it. Other themes were raised on an individual basis, including non-verbal communication, knowing what people can and cannot see, knowing what people can and cannot do, the ability to learn Braille, and one person even said “they can’t understand how we survive, really”. Many people argued in response to this question that sighted people do not know how to cope with visual impairment at all, finding it very difficult, thinking that “we’re not all there”. Themes did vary from school to school. At the all-purpose school, the students were very conscious of being watched, at the regional unit they were concerned about mobility, at the selective school they didn’t really know, at the comprehensive resource base it was mobility again, and there was no pattern at the community resource base. The responses to the first of these questions, however, were very interesting indeed. The most often cited disadvantage was “getting around” or “mobility” which was mentioned by five people in three different schools. Two of these also mentioned that they found it hard to go up to someone and ask for help when they needed it, and also that they found “cutting up meat” very difficult. Several people mentioned problems like “not being able to read” “the blackboard” or “menus in MacDonalds”, and one person mentioned not being able to drive, whilst another had mentioned this in an earlier question. One person mentioned facial expressions, one person mentioned difficulties recognising when people are speaking to you in a large crowd, and one mentioned difficulties identifying people when shouting across the street to you. One person said that they had found it difficult to join in with many activities as a child since they lacked the confidence of knowing what was immediately around them, and another said that it had been very difficult to
join in activities with sighted children, resulting in his now being unfit, which led to more problems. These were in the all-purpose and regional unit schools.

**Help Giving and Help Taking.**

This leads us onto the issue of how easy people find it to ask for help, and how people react to offers of help. This appeared as two questions on the blind interview schedule, and on the sighted interview schedule, one question about the thought processes involved and one about the reactions given when sighted people offer help.

The answers given by sighted respondents to this question were amazing in that they gave three relatively consistent patterns: one in each school. In the comprehensive resource base, there was a general pattern of opinion that blind people should be helped whenever possible, and should accept that help. One person stated that they were offended when a blind person refused offers of help, without even considering whether that help was necessary or not. In the regional unit, on the other hand, more information appears to have been given since the pupils were all aware that although it was nice to help people, they should be regarded as people, who should be spoken to normally, and it should not be taken for granted that they would need help, or as one person said “we’ve been told we shouldn’t treat them as charity cases”. In the neighbourhood school, both of the people who were interviewed said that they allowed the one blind pupil at the school to try to do things for himself, and it was normally obvious when help was wanted.

In the case of the neighbourhood school, this reflects the fact that both of the interviewees were close friends of the pupil concerned. This link cannot be
made at either of the other two schools since the sample consisted of a mixture of people who did know the visually impaired pupils quite well and those who did not and the answers given were consistent despite this. At the comprehensive resource base, there was an interesting contrast between the sighted pupils saying that help was always offered, and what some of the blind pupils said, for it was at this school that two people complained bitterly about always being left alone. What is demonstrated, perhaps, is a serious lack of communication between the visually impaired and sighted pupils at that school. It seems that very few of the sighted pupils had anything to do with the visually impaired ones. However, this does not mean that more pupils at the regional unit had more than passing involvement with the visually impaired ones, since greater knowledge, gained both from what teachers had said and personal family experience, accounts for at least some of the differences in answers.

When asked how visually impaired people react to offers of help, the pattern almost repeated itself. The same considerations about “gratitude” and “snappiness” were raised at the comprehensive resource base, although 2 of the students (50 percent of the sample from that school) just answered “OK.” At the other two schools, people answered in a fairly uniform manner, saying that if help was offered in a patronising way then they tended to get a snappy response, and this was generally accepted as normal.

The blind interviewees were asked how easy they find it to ask for help in the first place. Each school showed a split between two kinds of answers: those who would only ask for help if absolutely necessary, preferring “to be independent” as several people said, and those who asked for help when they
perceived they needed it. This question produced no patterns at all apart from the above, thus pointing to a problem that seems to affect people in a totally random way. Many visually impaired people do find it difficult to ask for help, because they feel that sighted people treat them in an inferior manner and they have to prove them wrong. However, this was a general feeling amongst the visually impaired people interviewed, and bore no relationship to the amount of knowledge or expertise shown by their sighted peers in their interviews.

However, one sighted person and one visually impaired person (at different schools) raised another issue that can be important for some people. This was that it is very difficult to go up to people and ask for help: "No. You’re getting on to the thing that I find most difficult in the whole world and that’s walking up to someone and speaking to them. Because, (for) one thing, you don’t know whether they’re there, you don’t know whether they’re looking at you, or whether what you are walking up to is a person or a lamp-post. So I find it difficult to ask for help. If I walk into a room and I want a teacher, I usually slip in very quietly, and stand by the door, which is the wrong thing to do. People tell you to walk into a room and tell you to say “hello” so you know who’s there, but I find that very strange so I don’t do that. I just stand there. And people say, “why didn’t you speak?” and I think, I didn’t know there was anyone in here, you know. That and eating with people, eating meat with people. Cutting up meat and things. That’s difficult" (totally blind respondent at comprehensive resource base).

This passage reveals some of the many concerns held by some visually impaired people, and many of them apply equally to blind and partially sighted
people alike. Whilst they are by no means universal, they are very genuine
and not uncommon. It is probable that they are more connected with
personality and confidence than with visual impairment, although the latter
always exacerbates any such problems. However, this would account for the
lack of relationship between the answers of the sighted and visually impaired
interviewees since if visual impairment was the cause there should have been
a closer relationship. This also demonstrates that in some circumstances,
successful integration into the life of a school depends far more on the visually
impaired people, in terms of their personality and how they are taught to cope
with living in the sighted community than it does on raising awareness
amongst that sighted community, although it is doubtful that either of these
needs can be overstated. Whilst it is important for teachers and pupils to
know about visual impairment, it is absolutely vital that the visually impaired
people themselves are empowered with the knowledge and confidence they
need to make the best of the situations in which they find themselves. This
raises the issue of the extent to which this can be done by purely sighted staff,
and the need for contact between visually impaired pupils and other visually
impaired people, be they staff or others. Visually impaired people need role
models, preferably visually impaired themselves, probably to a far greater
extent than ordinary school pupils, since expectations are often far too low,
and there is a lack of knowledge and experience of how to communicate skills
which are crucial to the visually impaired person.

One of the things demonstrated by these answers was that visually impaired
people sometimes feel very self-conscious about their disability.
Visibility of Visual Impairment.

All interviewees were asked how easy it is to tell that someone is visually impaired. The visually impaired respondents were equally divided between those who thought it was easy to tell that someone is visually impaired and those who thought it wasn’t, although the latter were mainly concentrated in the all purpose and regional unit schools. One said it was easy to tell because he wore dark glasses, another because their eyes always move, and several only when they were carrying a cane or a Brailler. The sighted respondents generally thought it was difficult to tell, especially when just sat talking, although one person in the regional unit and one in the comprehensive resource base schools said it was quite easy. One person said that blind people look lost a lot of the time, and another two said it was easy to tell when someone was walking.

Are Visually Impaired People Treated Differently to Others?

All of the interviewees were also asked whether they thought blind people were more likely to be taken advantage of or to be allowed to get away with things that a sighted person couldn’t. Of the blind respondents, most said that they were allowed to get away with things, like not doing homework, and “winding teachers up”, especially in the mainstream. A sizeable minority said that it was “50 : 50” and another sizeable minority didn’t know. The sighted students almost universally thought it was a mixture of both. In other words, sometimes they are taken advantage of, but often they are allowed to get away with things that a sighted person couldn’t. The danger in this, of course is that a blind person may be totally unaware, unless told, that they are
behaving any differently from anyone else. This is especially true with such issues as posture and body language. The visually impaired respondents were also asked if they tended to be treated as inferior, normal, or very special by sighted people. The answers tended to suggest that people were generally surprised when visually impaired people had any ability at all, so at first, people expected them to be inferior, but would then treat them as special. Some said that a few people treated them just as normal people, and some said that everyone did, although it is sometimes difficult to admit that people don’t, so this may be slightly misleading.

The next question covered the issue of whether people thought that visually impaired people tended to have other disabilities. It asked visually impaired people if other people tended to think they had other disabilities, and sighted people whether they had expected the first blind person they ever met to have other disabilities. It must be noted that this is a difficult question for the sighted interviewees to answer, and may not, therefore, totally reflect the reality of how they actually felt at that time. Even so, three of the ten sighted interviewees admitted that they thought “something else would be different”. Of these, they all admitted that they thought there would be a mental deficit, one said that they thought that blind people would not be able to hear, and another said they had expected blind people to “feel different”, possibly meaning that they didn’t feel like a “whole person”. One person mentioned that this might have been because of the young age at which they met a blind person, although this was true of all the respondents. In fact only nine people were asked this question, since one had a blind granddad, and so had always been used to blind people. In other words, a third of the people questioned
thought that blind people would have other disabilities when they first met them, and felt able to admit this. In the sample of visually impaired people, the answers to this question were very interesting. At the selective school, and the one neighbourhood school, all six believed that some or most people do generally expect visually impaired people to have other disabilities, ranging from deafness to mental disabilities as well as not being able to walk. One interviewee quoted an example of a person being offered a wheelchair when looking round a university. At the comprehensive resource base three out of five believed this, at the regional unit the figure was two out of four, and at the all purpose school one person agreed with this, and another thought that people only expected him to have problems with his back, which he admitted to, and believed that many blind people suffer from this. The interesting exception to this was the reaction at the community resource base school, where no-one believed that people tended to expect them to have other disabilities. There does not seem to be any logical explanation for this, apart, perhaps, from self image, since no-one at this school considered themselves any different from anyone else.

Everybody was also asked whether or not visually impaired people face "much discrimination". This question was deliberately left as open ended, since it was intended to find out what people thought, and making it more definite would have prompted them to give certain answers. At the all purpose school three out of four cited some discrimination, two of them being worried about getting jobs, but not really saying anything about discrimination that had already happened to them (not surprising when they had spent a lot of time in special schools) and one spoke about his dual disability, saying that
he found people much more understanding about his total blindness than his partial deafness. He said that people at the school had always “teased” him about it a lot, and explained that people could not relate to what he could and could not hear. In other words, just because somebody has a disability it does not mean that they will be more sensitive about different disability groups or individuals in practice, even if they are more sympathetic in principle. This demonstrates that experience of different disabilities is necessary if they are to be understood. At the regional unit, where pupils spent most of their daytimes in contact with sighted people, two said that people did discriminate against them, and another said that people didn’t really, but then cited examples of bullying, which had been highlighted by the other two. This included “tapping on my shoulder and running away” and “telling me to watch out for something when there’s nothing there” and “making out as if I’d hit them with my Perkins (Braille) when I knew I hadn’t”. This did not appear to be a serious problem, but one that had to be faced. The answers at the selective school were very interesting. One person had previously been in mainstream school, and pointed out that one result of having to get a taxi home every night was that when the whole class was on detention she had to be let off. This meant that the others resented her, and gave her a lot of verbal abuse about this. She said that the staff had always treated her as if she was totally different, and this meant that the other pupils did too. One person said that they had experienced discrimination when looking round universities, one said that it was much better than it used to be, one said there was no discrimination, and the fifth said that discrimination only existed in the “minds of those who are paranoid” arguing that if he considered
the issue of discrimination against him he would “end up with a chip on my shoulder”. At the comprehensive resource base, two people said that some people at school discriminated against them, one had almost been refused for physics “A” level. At the community resource base, three out of four said they faced no discrimination, and one said that the term “disabled” was discriminatory because it was associated too much with people in wheelchairs. This is consistent with the last set of answers from that school, where visual impairment seems not to have been an issue to the pupils. The one person in his neighbourhood school also said that he didn’t face any discrimination. None of these five associated with other visually impaired people or really wanted to class themselves as visually impaired. Whilst this may be true to a certain extent with other people, it seems to have been more exaggerated here. The sighted people, with two exceptions, all said that visually impaired people faced discrimination. The two exceptions were in the comprehensive resource base and regional unit schools. In the neighbourhood school, both people said that the student faced some discrimination. Themes raised included “I don’t know how to act” and “people expected him to be less able” although people were aware that they didn’t know much about visual impairment in the regional unit. In all the schools, people said that visually impaired people were ignored by a lot (but not all) of the other pupils.

The main theme that linked most of the answers to this question was that visually impaired people do face disadvantage, and do have a limited number of people who are prepared to socialise with them, but that this is seen more as a fact of life than as discrimination. It must be remembered that some of
the people interviewed would simply not know how many people were around, so may not be aware that they had problems in getting people to speak to them.

**Sighted Reactions To Visual Impairment.**

When asked how they are treated by a random stranger when they first meet them, the visually impaired people gave a range of answers, through which ran several themes. Firstly, a minority of people would treat some of the respondents as if they were normal. However, most people reported that they expected to be either patronised or ignored. They expected people to be shocked that they were able to do anything, and often lost for words, being frightened to use words like “see” since they thought it would be upsetting for the blind person. There was another minority tendency to grab people’s arms and for people to be overhelpful. There was no overall pattern to these answers, but they give a good perspective when taken together on how people tend to react, and how blind people are treated. This can be one of the most demoralising aspects of visual impairment, since it serves as a constant reminder, (or should that be imposition of sighted prejudices) that you are “not normal”.

Continuing in a similar vein, the visually impaired interviewees were asked if they had ever encountered any really strange reactions. The majority said that they had not encountered any really strange reactions, but those who had gave some interesting reactions. One person said that they felt that many blind people “give blind people a bad name”, talking about head movements and other “blindisms”. One person said that people were very odd about the fact that they wore glasses when it was sunny, and another had an instance
of “an elderly gentleman coming up, putting his arms around me and saying “aaah””. There was also one person who reported that some of the children at school didn’t believe they couldn’t see when bumping into someone.

**Independence.**

The next set of questions looked at the question of independence, asking sighted people what they thought the easiest and hardest things for blind people to do would be, and asking visually impaired people when people are too helpful, not helpful enough, and sighted people’s reactions when meeting them. Sighted interviewees were generally unsure when blind people would be at their most independent, five out of ten not knowing, but others said “at school”, “at home” and “in familiar surroundings”. However, there was a majority view, six respondents saying that the time blind people would need the most help would be getting around town and new places, and shopping. Two people mentioned steps, one saying that you “need vision” to go up and down steps. One person mentioned a lack of library services as an issue. Not surprisingly, eleven of the twenty-three visually impaired interviewees, when asked in what situation people are likely to be too helpful, mentioned “getting around town” or “doing routes that I know” or “transport” “getting off buses” and the like. The next most popular answer was “with schoolwork” which was mentioned five times. One person criticised the Visually Impaired unit at their school, arguing that they imposed inappropriate working methods and were too helpful. Consultations with the staff appeared to suggest that they thought that this person would not recognise that their sight was deteriorating and this was influencing them in trying to make them use a Braille notetaker, rather than a lap-top with large print. Of course, it would be
possible to use a lap-top computer with speech. Other issues raised were limited but included sport. When asked in what situations people did not give enough help, there was no consensus, but issues raised included schoolwork, mobility, libraries and sport.

**Common Questions About Visual Impairment.**

Another question covered the issue of the most common questions about visual impairment, asking the visually impaired respondents what was the most common question people asked them, and the sighted respondents what question they would most like to ask. There were two common answers to this question, for the visually impaired people, namely "how far can you see" and "what's it like to be blind?" One person was most frequently asked if they had a guide dog. Five of the sighted respondents wanted to know what it felt like to be blind, two asked how people treat you, and three didn't know what question they would ask about visual impairment.

**Social Services.**

The next question was similarly subjective and difficult to answer, dealing with the issue of social services and other provisions. This question was inserted in a vague format to try to discern whether anybody felt that there was any kind of backlash against disabled people because of the benefits and services they receive. It could be anticipated that if somebody felt that they received too much in the way of benefits they would say so. It also gauged to a certain extent how visually impaired people felt about service levels. The visually impaired people were basically divided into two groups: those who thought they should only receive such benefits if absolutely essential, based at the all
purpose and regional unit schools, and those who either were not sure or thought current provisions were justified. Bus passes were seen as important by most, because of the difficulties of knowing prices and finding change, whereas Severe Disablement Allowance was seen as more of a talking point, but justified on grounds of extra expense by several people. Two people said that sighted people also deserved more in the way of benefits. The sighted interviewees were all totally committed, without exception, to the idea that visually impaired people deserve any service which makes life any easier or "more normal". There was no questioning of anything received, and at the regional unit, not being able to drive, and the expense of equipment were given as good reasons for receiving extra benefits.

Again, this question is difficult because for people to admit that they thought blind people receive too much would be difficult, but given the level of admissions on more personal questions, the absolute commitment on these answers is quite revealing. The young people seem very committed to the idea of good social services. In a political sense, the sighted respondents thought more along lines of need and community, whereas the visually impaired people seemed to think in terms of "deserving". Whether this demonstrates anything is doubtful, but it is an interesting contrast.


The final question of this type asked everybody where they thought sighted people's attitudes about visual impairment came from: in other words, what created them, what influenced them to consider blindness in whatever way they do. For the visually impaired respondents, the most often cited cause of negative attitudes was "the media". One person specifically complained about
the RNIB's adverts, in which they used to use a “bent over man with a cane” as he put it, arguing that “they give us an image of being more disabled than we really are.”. The next most common answer, coming five times, was "parents and other people”. One person mentioned older people, arguing that most people who lose their sight are older, and this is the dominant image. Several people also mentioned a lack of understanding and experience, and talking about the experiences sighted people have of blind people. One person commented that she knew a visually impaired person who didn’t realise that picking his nose and his eyes was not the done thing, since nobody had mentioned it, so anybody who saw him doing it would presume that that was the kind of thing that blind people do. This is where it is really important that blind people do get feedback on what sighted people would or wouldn’t do in any situation. Sighted people gave quite similar answers, blaming the media, newspapers and television, followed by parents and folklore, and lack of information and experience. One person commented that they had no information at their school on what blindness is like or how to treat a blind person (comprehensive resource base school), and one said that information wasn’t easily available as it was for things like cancer. Whilst to many blind people this would seem an unfortunate comparison to make, it is a point that is beginning to be addressed by the RNIB, although it still remains valid.

The questionnaires then took a different tack, and looked in more detail at single topics. These will now be examined in turn, and the information gained from them is highly qualitative in nature. The questions were such that similar topics could be covered in many different questions, so it is more sensible to
cover some of these topics on a person by person, rather than a question by question basis. This approach will only be taken where necessary to put the information in a sensible order.

Information.

One of the most important areas of research is the topic of information: what information is available and what is not available to visually impaired people? what are they well informed about, and what areas of life do they need more information about?

Of course, this is a difficult issue to analyse since if people do not have a piece of information, how are they going to be able to go about actually getting it? Firstly, they must be aware that it is available, somewhere, even if they do not know where. Then, they must find it, and make sure that it is in a form that they can understand. For instance, if somebody moves to a new area, and is interested in rowing, but does not know there is a rowing club, they must not only ask somebody if they know of a rowing club, but ask somebody that knows there is a rowing club, since somebody who does not know may say “Not that I know of” or something to that effect. However, when asked what information is needed, it is difficult to quantify what you want, without having an idea what is there. For instance, if you enter a pub for a meal, and are asked “what kind of food are you interested in”, you cannot answer unless you know what is on the menu. You could guess and say “a hot meal” but if you like jacket potatoes, or baguettes, but don’t know they are on the menu, you must go through a process of elimination. (The author’s suggestion is to ask what is on the menu because it is generally quicker if
someone starts to read, you can then eliminate things you are not interested in).

The questionnaire started by asking sighted people how well informed they considered the visually impaired people they knew to be. Three of the sighted people said that they thought blind people may be a little less well informed than sighted people, due to the fact that they could not see pictures, what things look like, and dress sense. The others all thought that blind people were very well informed. However, in saying this, they exclusively talked about current affairs, and what you can learn from the radio. One person mentioned that they had seen a tactile map in the bus station, but that there was no way of finding it. Unless a blind person knew in advance that there was a tactile map, they would not even think of asking if there was one, because it is such a rare occurrence. Even if they had been told that there was a tactile map, they would have to find it, and this means finding someone who has noticed it, since the majority of the public may not be able to tell them where it is. If they do not know where it is, it is of no use, even if it is placed in a convenient position.

Current Affairs.

The next question asked how well informed visually impaired people felt, and sighted people considered visually impaired people to be, on current affairs. Two of the sighted people considered the particular blind people they knew to be better informed than any of the sighted people they knew, the others thought they were about the same. Nine of the 23 visually impaired people were not interested in current affairs. Of the others, radio news was the main way of gathering information, some also using the television. Two people said
they would like more, a third complained that papers and magazines were always abridged.

Sport.

On sport, the sighted people generally perceived the blind people to be well informed when interested, although three people said they would be less well informed, two because they couldn't see what was happening, and one because it is more difficult to do. Of the visually impaired people, 8 were not interested, the remainder were generally very happy with the level of information they could get about sport.

Fashion.

The next topic that was covered proved to be far more of a problem. With fashion, 6 of the visually impaired students said that they definitely needed more information, with several requests for a magazine dealing specifically with the problems of visual impairment and fashion. Another seven were totally uninterested, four of whom were in the regional unit: 100 percent of the pupils at that school, whilst three said that their idea of fashion was jeans and T-shirts. This leaves seven who seemed fairly happy.

Eight of the sighted interviewees thought visually impaired people would be less well informed, regarding it as a serious problem, one didn't know, and one thought they would be well informed. Two people mentioned the fact that you have to tell visually impaired people the things that sighted people can see.

This is a very important area of concern since simple things determine what type of sighted person is more likely to approach a visually impaired person.
This could include hairstyle, any clothes worn other than school uniform, and maybe even how that uniform is worn, levels of tidiness and untidiness, and other such visual cues. If visually impaired people cannot use these to attract the right kind of people, they are not likely to find it easy to establish an appropriate peer group.

Remaining topics were only covered on the visually impaired interviews, since it was considered that sighted people should only be asked the most basic questions.

**Range of Products Available in Shops.**

They were asked how much information they have about what is available in shops. Eight of the students felt they had problems in this field, and 5 said that they could see enough to get by, leaving only ten who were relatively happy, although recognising an information deficit. Several people mentioned the "Boots Christmas Catalogue" as an example of good practice.

**Blind Welfare.**

The visually impaired interviewees were asked if they receive information and are interested in blind welfare issues. Only 5 gave any positive answer to this question, revealing that at this age people are totally uninterested in VI issues. Two said they would probably become more interested when they were older.

**Gaps in Information Provision.**

They were asked, as a conclusion to this section, if there was anything that they would like more information about. Only seven people asked for any extra information at all: two asked for more Braille books, one saying they
should be in the library, one asked for more magazines, saying it should be the publisher’s responsibility to provide accessible information. The others concentrated on shopping, holidays, special offers on food and fashion, although they were all very brief.

The sighted interviewees were asked, in conclusion to their information section, whether they thought there was anything that visually impaired people couldn’t get information about or tended not to know about. Only two people gave any indication that they thought visually impaired people would be less well informed, one person talking about art, and the other made an interesting comment that one of the visually impaired interviewees could not understand the concepts around distance vision and horizon, and that things "get smaller as they are further away". This shows that in terms of information retention and knowledge, sighted people hold blind people in very high regard. However, this may often lead to an image being formed that blind people are “brain boxes”, which is often not how they want to be viewed.

They want to be able to choose what type of peer group they have, and if the peer group they desire is not the academic type, then this image can lead to difficulties. Of course, this is a problem that does not happen to the same degree in a special school, since visual impairment is the norm, and people are seen as equals, in open competition with each other. Herein lies an interesting point, since one of the interviewees at the regional unit school had argued that “competition with sighted children” was one of the main reasons for inclusion, whereas in reality sighted people do not tend to regard visually impaired people as in direct competition with them, even though they do accept competition to a certain degree. There are misconceptions on both
sides, and the level of openness between the visually impaired and sighted students at a school can depend on many things, but there is a tendency for visually impaired people to be regarded as more intelligent by their sighted classmates since they often have to have much better information retention skills in order to complete the same work. It is simply a case of the different abilities of visually impaired pupils leading to the formation of images, attitudes and prejudices about them. It is necessary to view this in terms of school and classroom culture (see discussion of Ball, 1981, Delamont, 1983 and Willis, 1977).

However, this leads us very nicely on to look at the social situations that visually impaired people face in their daily lives, and how easily or otherwise they tackle them.
CHAPTER 9.

SOCIAL SITUATIONS.

This chapter looks at the next major section of the interviews, which looked at “social situations”. It looks in general at how the presence of a visually impaired person effects social situations, and at how their posture and appearance can have a bearing on this.

Questions On Social Situations.

The questions took slightly different forms in the two questionnaires, but basically covered the following issues: how confident do blind people feel/how well do they cope, in general, in first encounters, other one-to-one situations (with people they know better), in small groups, large crowds, discos, the classroom, formal situations (like meetings and interviews) and finally in trying to find a specific person, either in a large crowd or around a school or other large building. The nature of these questions was such that the conversations proved to be very dynamic, and this is where analysis seems best conducted interview by interview, rather than question by question, drawing together the conclusions at the end.

All Purpose Special School.

The first interviewee seemed a little defensive about some of these questions since, although time was taken to explain that they related to visual impairment, rather than personality, they were taken, understandably, in a personal way. He reported that although he was confident in general, he did not like large crowds, and had some difficulty finding people, although he
could do it. The next interviewee was in general very confident, apart from in formal situations, where she did not like speaking her mind (a common problem, rather than anything to do with visual impairment) and could not find people in crowds or large buildings unless they were in a specific situation. She stated that she often panicked when meeting people at railway stations: “No. I hate that. I always have it’s like meeting somebody at the station, I always have to have them standing somewhere, you know, and they’ve gotta be there. If they’re not there I just panic. unless they were exactly in the position arranged.” She was not defensive, understanding exactly what the questions were about. It was also obvious throughout the interview that she had considerably more social experience than many of the others, although she was more frank about any problems she did face. The next interviewee was also very confident, in all but formal situations, and this was due to personal preference. To find someone in a large crowd, he reported “I use my nose”. The final interviewee at the all purpose special school said that she was a little nervous with people at first, but otherwise reported no problems.

Regional Unit School.

The first interviewee at the regional unit school was nervous in first encounters, small groups unless they knew somebody and trying to find someone, although confident in other situations. Not being able to see facial expressions, and gauge a person by them seemed a particular problem. The next interviewee did not like large crowds, discos, or trying to find people, and would not tackle any of these situations alone. They were concerned about being “bumped into” and the level of noise. The next interviewee also
reported not liking discos, and was nervous in first encounters, but happy in the classroom, small crowds (as long as there was someone to do the guiding, which was a concern) and formal situations (provided mobility was given). The final interviewee at this school was confident about finding people, but less so about large crowds, and especially formal situations and discos. He also reported that people tended to flick pencils at him in the classroom, but this only happened when there were no support staff present, and he could never find out who had done it to “get them back”.

Selective School.

At the selective school, the first interviewee said that she believed being partially sighted made her more confident, and determined to prove that she could cope as well as anybody else. She said that picking people out in a crowd was difficult, but was generally happy as long as she knew where she was. The one problem she reported was in mainstream classrooms.

“I found it really, really difficult at mainstream, because when I first moved down into the middle school it was like half way through the 4 years of middle school, and there was a few people that just really couldn’t handle the fact that I was in a mainstream school and I was partially sighted. And I got a lot of hassle from them all the way through until I came here. Like for the six years. Before I moved down to Sussex, because I’d gone all the way through school with the same people, they knew me better, and when you’re like 5 and 6, you don’t really know what partially sighted is, so they were used to it, so they knew me as a person. But I found that people were more willing to make preconceived judgements based on the fact that “she’s partially sighted” which was the biggest problem. It was mainly playing rounders or something.
and there was this lad that used to bat before me, and I always used to run
him out, and he always used to swear at me, and there was a group of girls
who I got a lot of hassle from."
The issue of bullying was one which cropped up at various different stages in
people's interviews, and was very serious, although it only occurred in a few
cases. This passage also illustrates the importance of the whole situation,
and the impact of moving from school to school at an unexpected age, which
is something that is quite likely to happen to a visually impaired person, since
problems seem to occur on far too frequent a basis in mainstream schools. It
has also been recognised over a period of years that extra time may be
needed to learn Braille, or other adaptive techniques, which may lead to a
change of forms, causing just as much problem, partly because of the
resulting age difference. This is a theme which was returned to in one of the
later interviews. The next person was relatively confident, but did not like
discos or large crowds and felt nervous when first meeting people. She felt
that she had to represent blind people, and give the right image. "You do have
extra pressure put on you". The next interviewee felt that visual impairment
might affect some people's level of confidence, and that in one-to-one
situations they might suffer because they could not establish eye contact, but
apart from that there was no major difference. The fourth interviewee at this
school raised important issues at every stage during this set of questions. He
was very aware that blind people could suffer through lack of eye contact and
from poor first impressions, since he believed that it takes only 5 seconds for
visual stimuli to work and for people to form a first impression. He was aware
that many people have eyes that look "challenging" and that many partially
sighted people tend to stare, which could be off-putting to a sighted person in a one-to-one situation. He argued that visually impaired people need much help if they are to do well socially, and that it does not occur to many of them that they need this help, since they are not aware of the disadvantages they are at. The final interviewee at the selective school said that most visually impaired people were socially less confident than sighted people, although there were a few who were more confident than most sighted people. They were particularly effected in first encounters and other one-to-one situations by the lack of eye contact, and their audible cues were non-existent in large crowds, but formal situations, small groups and classrooms were generally OK. He did think there was a danger that if a blind person was at a disco there could be problems. "yeah. You can have some, if you collide with someone, and they don't know you're blind, you could end up with a black eye or something".

Comprehensive Resource Base School.

At the comprehensive resource base school, the first interviewee sometimes felt confident in social situations. He felt that if people had never met a visually impaired person before they tended to ask lots of questions, and that big crowds and discos were difficult, since people tended not to realise he had a visual impairment, so would not move out of the way if he was trying to get around. However, when trying to find people, he would either arrange to meet them somewhere, or work out what lesson they had, and go and find them there. The next pupil at this school said that it was difficult not knowing what people look like, and didn't like big crowds, but otherwise was happy, in small groups, the classroom, discos and everything else. Despite (or maybe
because of) the fact that this person had learning difficulties in addition to a visual impairment, she had settled in very well at this school, much better than some of the other pupils. She was not aware of major problems, but this may be because she was less self-conscious than some of the other students, and this always eases what is usually a difficult initial encounter. The next interviewee at this school was generally confident, although didn't like asking people for help because he didn't know how they would react. He thought that people treated him differently in a first encounter, and that in discos it was difficult because the disco was more important than anything else. However, he had never experienced a formal situation, and classrooms and large crowds were fine, because visual impairment tended not to be noticed in the latter case. The third person at this school was not very confident. She often had to explain to people that she could not see, which she did not like, and she found that many people would come up to her but not say anything, which she did not like. She would not even try to find someone in a large crowd, had only ever been to one school disco, which she did not enjoy, and was unsure of herself in small groups. The one kind of situation she was happy in was formal situations, since she was politically very active. She said that she had very few friends, and she had problems trusting anybody because of the bad experiences she said that she had had. She had developed an attitude of mind that made her believe that all of the sighted pupils at the school (with one exception) were against her, and not to be trusted. This was a problem that the staff were trying to address, but they faced great difficulties, as she was very strong in her opinions. However, she did know that some of the problem (by no means all) was in her own mind, but seemed unable to do
much about it. She presented these arguments in a reasoned and well
spoken manner, which may also have an alienating effect on some less
elloquent students. She was searching hard for words, resulting in the
passage being too broken to quote. The manner in which a person presents
themselves is, of course, always going to have a major bearing on how they
are received by others. However, in a subsequent visit, she showed that she
would be a considerable advocate for any cause she supported, and the
honesty of these answers was very refreshing, and absolutely vital to this
research. She was not shy of being critical of the author’s speech style, and
maybe this honesty also contributed something to the problems she faced.
The final interviewee at the comprehensive resource base school also spoke
of a lack of confidence, and was very concerned about social interaction in
general, constantly referring to “learning a lot about people’s attitudes”. She
hoped that people would “change as they grow older” when asked about
classrooms, and did not like large crowds, and especially discos: “How do you
dance? You’ve never seen people dance in the “in” way.” Neither was she
confident about finding people in a large crowd, only seeming to feel
comfortable in formal situations, where people speak in turn. It may be that
part of the problem for these last two was that they were twins, and therefore
were much closer to each other than most people would be, possibly making
it more difficult either for them to relate to others, or for others to relate to
them. Again, visually impaired people who spend more time with each other
than with other people seemed to have far greater problems with social
situations than did other visually impaired people. However, it certainly does
not account for the entirety of the problem.
Community Resource Base School.

The first person to be interviewed at the community resource base school was confident, and liked small groups, large crowds and discos, since he was a disk jockey. He was aware that the first time he met somebody he would not know if they were putting their hand out to shake his and that he would struggle if he had to try to find someone in a large crowd. The next interviewee was less confident, and he said that it depended how people reacted whether or not he felt comfortable in one-to-one situations, small groups or large crowds. He had only ever been to school discos, which were “different because everybody knows me”. He was not really sure about this section of questions at all, probably because he had never even thought about any of the issues involved. The third interviewee was very confident, and had no problems, apart from people “taking the mickey” when she used binoculars in the classroom, although she didn’t find this a problem. The only problem she reported was not being able to spot her friends. The final interviewee was even more sure of herself, although she said that people would often ask if she was all right, and would sometimes grab hold of her to help her across a road. She thought she was able to cope with all of the situations listed, but doubted whether the other students could. Discussions with staff revealed that she sometimes failed to acknowledge how poor her vision was.

Neighbourhood School.

The final interviewee was the only visually impaired person in his school, and he was less sure of himself, although generally happy. He reported few
problems, although he was aware that other pupils were less likely to want to sit near him in class if a support teacher was present, which would naturally effect the numbers of people who he could get to know well. “Yeah, I think so. Other students are less likely to sit with me because they know a teachers with me so they know they can’t tell dirty jokes and things.” He knew that he would have difficulty finding friends in a large crowd, but was prepared to ask people or find someone else he knew.

Analysis.

It can be seen that each school produced a different pattern of answers. The all purpose school showed a reasonable level of confidence, whereas the regional unit, and especially the comprehensive resource base schools showed low levels of confidence. The selective school produced the most interesting answers, probably mainly due to the fact that the students interviewed there were older, averaging 18-19. The community resource base school was characterised by extreme confidence and few problems, although it may be the case that the students were unable to acknowledge some of the problems they faced, whilst the one person in his neighbourhood school, whilst not saying so, seemed to cope well with most situations.

Particular problems are worth looking at in more detail. Many of these varied from school to school. For instance, whilst large crowds were fairly unpopular at all the schools, levels of confidence in general varied considerably. Many people seemed worried about large crowds, and were aware that this may impact on them more later in their lives. There were some people, totally blind as well as partially sighted who did like large crowds, but not discos, whilst one person overcame many of the problems that visual impairment can cause
by being a disk jockey. This overcomes problems since it gives people a reason for approaching the visually impaired person, which is necessary, but very difficult for many people to do. Most people were nervous about first encounters, although they generally believed that things got easier as people got to know them. The problems noted concerning the twins at the comprehensive resource base, and the fact that the one person in a neighbourhood school mentioned it, show the importance of the role of the support teacher. The classroom is a static situation most of the time, which makes it easy for the visually impaired person to work out who is present and where they are. Whilst they often need support teachers in a classroom, there is a great danger that their presence will hinder the student's ability to do this, and we have already seen that it can put other students off sitting near them. This can lead to classroom isolation, which may in turn lead to breaktime isolation. This means that there is a danger of a visually impaired person receiving only educational provision from a school, and not the social development, largely based on experience, which is necessary. This is a particular danger at the regional unit, where many of the students had complained about isolation and being alone during free time, and where the provision for them tended to revolve around support for lessons, homework and organised activities. Of course, this can effect levels of self confidence, and therefore the ability to go on to other things, such as further study or employment after school. Alternatively, it can lead to a "brainbox" label being attached to the visually impaired student, and this is what had happened in the case of the twins. (See Bowles and Gintis, 1977). What this highlights is the impact upon the visually impaired person not only of poor support, but
also of good support. If visually impaired students are to be able to truly integrate themselves into the whole life of the school, support is very necessary, but it must also be as unobtrusive as possible (and this is sometimes not possible). It is very difficult for support staff to achieve the right balance between being too helpful, not giving enough help, and being too noticeable to the other students. It is an issue that many of them are already aware of, and which many do a good job in trying to tackle. The schools visited displayed different attitudes on how best to provide social support to visually impaired students. At the community resource base, where levels of confidence seem to have been highest, students were facilitated and encouraged in trying to make sighted friends, to the point where some would be asked to leave the resource room, which often seems like an easier place to stay. No-one was made to do anything that was inappropriate, as far as can be seen, but people were strongly encouraged to take part in the social life of the school. At the comprehensive resource base, staff took the view that students should be able to “look after themselves” and little help appears (as far as can be ascertained) to have been given with such things as using the canteen at lunchtime. However, sighted students were encouraged to go into the resource centre. One was learning Braille, but few others used it on a regular basis. At the neighbourhood school, the student had settled for having few friends, but close ones, and seemed very happy with this. They appeared to be able to guess when he needed help with anything and when he did not, and this seemed to work well. Whilst some schools (whether or not included in this study) may well need to make radical improvements in this field, it must be recognised that nobody is going to achieve perfection.
Sighted Interviews.

Sighted pupils were interviewed at three of the schools: the regional unit, comprehensive resource base and neighbourhood schools. The questions they were asked mirrored those for the visually impaired interviewees, asking firstly how the presence of a blind person effects social situations in general, and then asking how they thought blind or sighted people would be effected in first encounters, other one-to-one situations, small groups, large crowds, classrooms, discos, and how easy they would find it to locate someone in a large crowd or place. They were asked, in conclusion, whether they thought that being visually impaired imposed any social limitations on a person.

The first interviewee at the comprehensive resource base school thought that the presence of a visually impaired person could effect a social situation in a number of ways, depending on the other people involved, but it did not always. “Sometimes people would act as if nothing was different, sometimes they would just ignore the blind person and sometimes they would try to be too helpful.” The same was generally true of a first encounter, and large crowds would be a problem when people were not aware that the person was blind. “It depends whether somebody in the large crowd knows that they’re there. Because if somebody didn’t know that they were there, they probably wouldn’t. And then you’d get someone would say “there’s a blind person over there” and then walk the opposite way. Or they’d say we’d better go and help him sit down, or some people just say who cares?”

He also said (and he was a close friend of the twins) that he thought that “some visually impaired people would believe that they could not go out and enjoy themselves because nobody would want to talk to them.” The next
person thought that first encounters, large crowds and discos might be a problem, but only if the other people involved were not used to having blind people around, and that otherwise there would be no effect. He complained about the noise that Braillers make during exams. The third interviewee at this school thought there would only be a problem if people were not used to visually impaired people “They’re still a person. They’ve still got a heart” was her comment about first encounters. She thought that discos could be a problem and that Braillers were annoying. The fourth interviewee was a close friend of one of the other visually impaired students, and thought that first encounters, discos and one-to-one situations were a problem, although large crowds would be OK because people would “leave them alone”. When talking about discos he said “I think they’d get lost easily if they started to dance, and got muddled up. and people would take the Mickey out of them and say “how can you dance? how do you know your way around?” He also said that his visually impaired friend frequently complained about “not being able to get a girl-friend” and felt restricted in that he could not go everywhere that a sighted person could without people helping him.

The next interviews took place at the neighbourhood school, where two sighted pupils answered the questions. The first said that there was only a problem in any situation if the visually impaired person could not do what the sighted person or people wanted. For instance, you would not run across a road when a visually impaired person was around. He had never been in a large crowd with a blind person, but had experienced problems in the classroom, where other pupils always wanted the one blind pupil to take out his false eye. Not surprisingly, this was a source of some annoyance. The
second interviewee thought that sighted people would have more of a problem with the presence of a blind person in general than visually impaired people would have in dealing with various social situations. He thought that large crowds would be a problem, but that the classroom and other situations were OK. He thought that visual impairment would be socially quite limiting, since visually impaired people may well not feel comfortable with anybody they didn’t know very well. The contrast between the two answers was very interesting, but demonstrated how many people either do not notice or will not talk about problems, whilst others will. It may also be that one person judged classroom problems to be minor, and therefore not worth mentioning.

The remaining four interviews took place at the regional unit school, where the first person thought that large crowds would be a problem, and that people would, in general, be very “wary” when a blind person was around. They also spoke about difficulties in the classroom: some because of inadequate teaching, and some because of the social barriers put up by the presence of a support teacher, which prevents the blind person from joining in the general interaction in the classroom. We have already discussed how the presence of a support teacher can put sighted pupils off sitting next to a visually impaired person, but this is about the general “chit-chat” that goes on in the classroom, often to the chagrin of the teacher. It was this type of situation that Delamont (1983) referred to in relation to classroom dynamics and peer group status. She argued that power to influence events in the classroom was highly correlated with peer group status. Therefore, the presence of a support teacher can, unwittingly, effect the peer groups within which a visually impaired person can operate. This interviewee also went into detail about the
problems that could occur in a disco or large crowd, since it would not be possible to know who was in the room, and whether anyone was trying to contact you. It was also mentioned that blind people would not know how to dance, because they would not be able to compare it with how others were dancing. The next interviewee was very positive, not thinking that there would be any problems, apart from sighted pupils disliking the noise made by Brailers in the classroom. They said that discos would not be a problem since "it's mainly music, isn't it?" The third interviewee at this school thought that there would always be people who just could not accept visually impaired people, and that this would have a particular effect in small groups and first encounters. He considered that visually impaired people would find large crowds and formal situations easier because there would be people who would take them seriously. When discussing the classroom, he came on to a very interesting issue: that of social groups. He believed that blind people tended to get on better with people who "are doing well" at school and do more things based on "literature" rather than "going out to the cinema, or playing hockey, and then going for a drink". He thought that more outgoing people would find it more difficult to accept visually impaired people, although he thought there was a strong possibility that visually impaired people would want to do those things. "Yes. A lot of it depends on the person, what they do. The people who, not the people who want to do well, 'cos some groups want to do well but don't find it easy to accept blind people, but I would say it was the people who are doing well, and there is an obvious gap there between the people who are doing well and the people who want to do well. I think there's a big social gap there. Obviously, the people who do hang around with the blind
people they’re into less sport, probably due to study. really, they’d probably do more similar things to the blind people as others would, like they’d do more reading and more work, more, you know, things that involve more literature, and say, they wouldn’t go and watch football matches they’d listen to it on the radio when a different social group would probably go and watch the football match as a social occasion with their mates. I’d say there’s quite a big difference between what the two groups actually do. I’d expect that the group that tend not to accept the blind people would go out more, going out being going for a drink or play hockey and going for a drink after that, or going to the cinema, or going ice skating, I’m not saying that blind people wouldn’t do things like that, but I’m saying that the groups that, in my experience they tend to mix with, wouldn’t tend to do things in a more social way.” He also suggested that “the harder an area gets, the harder it would be for a visually impaired person to find a friendship group, because they wouldn’t be accepted as well as they would in a nicer area”. He argued that these comments were based on experience, and realised that they did not reflect the aspirations of visually impaired people, raising the issue (although he didn’t take it to this logical conclusion) that they were deprived of the choices given a sighted person of peer and reference group selection. Consequently, he did acknowledged that being visually impaired, rather than visual impairment, places social barriers in front of people. The final interviewee thought that first encounters may be a problem for sighted people, since they tend not to know how to treat visually impaired people, and either ignore them, or go over the top in trying to be helpful. She considered small groups not to be a problem, especially when the blind person knew all members. On
large crowds, she commented that blind people often miss out because they cannot see much of the visual communication that occurs, giving the example that one of her friends amuses people by doing “silly dances” and the blind person would not be able to appreciate this. This also implies that they would have a significant disadvantage in discos. She believed that they would not be able to play football, which is interesting since at most of the other schools, visually impaired people’s interest in sport was generally acknowledged. Taken together, these answers illustrate that differences in personality and environment are far more important than visual impairment itself, in determining how well or otherwise people handle social situations, and that there will always be a proportion of sighted people who just cannot handle visual impairment as a concept. It was interesting that two out of four at the comprehensive resource base school considered Braillers to be a serious nuisance, and that the sighted pupils at the regional unit school were so concerned about social dynamics. This last point contrasts with the information given by the visually impaired interviewees, suggesting that maybe their age was another factor, since they were the youngest group in the whole sample.

**Posture and Appearance.**

The next three questions dealt with the area of posture and appearance. This topic was chosen as part of the interview for several reasons: firstly, to find out how visually impaired people feel about it, secondly to find out how sighted people think they measure up to expectations, and thirdly to begin to touch on the question of how much visually impaired people should, and are expected to conform to social (sighted) norms.
The first question asked visually impaired people how conscious they felt they, or other visually impaired people, were about posture and appearance. The interviews at the all purpose special school showed many of the benefits of the style of questioning employed, as the final interviewee gave information about two of the others, that they themselves had not provided. She was sighted enough to be one of the people who helped one of the other interviewees do their shopping, and explained that as they were colour blind, she had to identify colours and explain what to buy and what not to buy. This interviewee had simply answered “that’s OK” to this question. Another interviewee had explained that he had problems with his back, and that people very often told him that he was not standing in an appropriate manner, as his back was bent. He said nothing about clothes or appearance.

However, the final interviewee felt very much that he seemed not to care about the clothes he wore and how he looked. She felt very strongly that the major problem was that visually impaired people are not given enough information about appearance, colours, fashion and cosmetics in general. These interviews showed that the visually impaired people at the school did not regard it as important, but showed how sighted people could be expected to react. For this topic, therefore, it seems most sensible to group this final interviewee with the sighted interviews, rather than the visually impaired, thus giving some visual feedback from four of the six schools. It would not have been appropriate to make this change at an earlier stage, since in all of the topics so far covered, she had the experiences that made her act and feel visually impaired, whereas she had been able to develop independently and without hindrance. her attitudes and tastes about clothes, posture and
appearance. This is but one example of what authors have termed the “double identity complex” experienced by partially sighted people (see Hellewell, 1991).

The answers at the regional unit show many of the same points again. Two interviewees said that they were more aware now than they had been when they arrived at the school, and a third was also aware of problems. These ranged from “twiddling my hands” to “standing facing a wall”. All four of the sighted interviewees from this school thought that visually impaired people were generally very conscious of trying to “fit in”, but that they didn’t know what other people were doing. One person commented that the only real difference was “posture and walking” arguing that it is very difficult for a blind person to walk in the way a sighted person would. Given this comment, it is unsurprising that people are not confident of a blind person’s physical abilities. It shows that blind people must be made aware that, through no fault of their own, they may look different when walking, and therefore should expect people to be unsure of their physical abilities. Many simply do not understand why people always ask them if they can manage steps and other such simple tasks. It is not just a case of trying to “normalise” them but to explain to them why they are questioned in the way they are. The actual differences between a blind person’s walk and sighted people’s walk should be pointed out, although it is questionable whether a visually impaired person should try to walk in a more “normal” manner, as they are less likely to trip if they keep their legs stiffer and their knees less bent during strides. Currently, visually impaired people do not tend to realise this, and then wonder why sighted people treat them as if they have other disabilities.
The answers at the selective school were very uniform and consistent. They all stated that visually impaired people were often more conscious than sighted people about the way they look, and that they needed to be. However, they felt that some visually impaired people did not care, or were not as concerned as they should be. One of the interviewees admitted this about himself. There were general complaints, however, that the appearance of students at that school tended to be “rather greasy”.

At the comprehensive resource base school only one interviewee felt happy about their posture and appearance, the others all giving reasons why visually impaired people were not conscious about their appearance, although one said that he tried to look tidy if he was going to a disco, and another said that many didn’t because their parents felt too sorry for them to mention it if they didn’t look good (this was a blind student). The sighted students interviewed, conversely, thought that visually impaired people were very conscious of posture and appearance, and thought it very important. One student commented that one of the blind students tended to “lean on his cane and look dead miserable, which he’s not”. This was because he could not see how other people looked. Referring to the same student, he said “he just goes with his own fashion, knows what he wants to wear”. This may be true, of course, but it may be that he didn’t know what was available, and what other people were wearing.

At the community resource base school, three of the four identified problems. One said that they were often told to correct their posture, one was aware of possible problems when going for job interviews, and one thought that people tend to think they look different because they are visually impaired.
fact, they don't. The one student in a neighbourhood school had no answer to this question, and the sighted students didn't see any problems. The one student at this school had had some sight for the majority of his life, which may have meant that he was more aware of the posture and body language generally used by sighted people.

The next question asked visually impaired people how they went about buying clothes and deciding what to wear. Of the three remaining students at the all-purpose special school, one answered flippantly, saying that he liked shopping at markets (totally blind) and he just bought what he wanted, one thought that it was not a problem, (although the fourth student had described shopping with her to help choose colours), and the other student said that he knew not to wear certain colour combinations, but wasn't bothered any further than that. At the regional unit school, three of the four said that their mother helped them with shopping, and the fourth that they did it for themselves. At the selective school, one person said that their cousin helped, and was about the same age, and another said they just asked people at school what they wore and where they shopped. Interestingly, at the comprehensive resource base, all students said that their mother helped, repeating the pattern at the regional unit. At the community resource base school, one said their parents helped, and one said friends helped, whereas the others thought they could see enough to shop for themselves, whilst the neighbourhood student said that his parents helped with shopping. This means that at all of the schools where sighted pupils were also interviewed, parents were mentioned by 9 out of 10 students, whereas few at other schools mentioned them.
The next question repeated the format asking about hairstyles. At the all purpose school, two students had enough sight, one was not bothered, and one thought it was a real problem, saying that he would ask friends, but sounding like he was considering who he would ask if he ever did. At the regional unit, two just liked it short, one thought it not a problem, and one just wanted to keep it tidy. At the selective school, nobody had a problem, one just saying that they always keep it the same. The students at the comprehensive resource base school gave no clues, one at the community resource base school said their parents helped, and the one person in a neighbourhood school also said that their parents helped. No other problems or issues were raised.

The sighted interviewees were then asked what they thought the clothes and hairstyles of visually impaired people tended to be like compared with those of sighted people of a similar age. The general consensus was that they are fairly similar. One person at the regional unit said that visually impaired people do not “inherit the scruffiness” of sighted teenagers, and another said that they tend not to have any “really wild haircuts or anything”. However, the scope of this question is probably fairly limited in the school context. These questions reflected, however, that although there is a disadvantage or “deficit” as social scientists often like to call it, visually impaired people generally fared reasonably well in terms of posture and appearance.
CHAPTER 10.

INTER-PERSONAL FACTORS.

At this stage the interviews became more concerned with views about people: how visually impaired people felt about sighted people, how sighted people felt about visually impaired people, and about inter-personal attraction. It is at this stage that factors such as age, environment and type of school attended have an even greater influence, and it is much more difficult for people to make generalised statements about people's experience. Questions were directed strongly towards attempting to encourage people to talk not only about their own experiences, but their perceptions of other people's experiences also, since it was felt that many of the subject areas covered could be too close to home to elicit many answers. Even so, some questions were not answered by quite a large percentage of the interviewees.

Significant Others.

In a highly simplistic attempt to evaluate the importance of "significant others" and who they might be, visually impaired people were first asked whose opinions of them were most important to them. At the all purpose school, there was a range of answers. One person said that their parents' opinions, and maybe a few staff, were most important, another said that it was their older brother, and the others both said that everybody's opinion was important, one saying that they were there to be listened to, but ignored if he did not agree with them, and another saying that she got very upset if people didn't like her. This was the student who had had major problems in mainstream schools. At the regional unit, two people said family or staff, one
said sighted friends, and the other said sighted or partially sighted friends. At
the selective school, parents were mentioned three times, peers twice,
although one person said that she did not care what people thought of her,
and this sometimes got her into trouble. One of the students said that mainly
older people mattered. Another specifically used the word “peers”. Answers
were similar at the comprehensive resource base school, with one person
specifically saying that they counted their parents’ opinions about looks, and
their twin sister’s (also interviewed) on personality. The twins were very
conscious about whether or not they trusted people in anything, and this was
especially important in this question. At the community resource base school,
one person said that their own opinions were most important, two said friends,
and one said family and friends. The neighbourhood student said that his
parents tended to tell him he looked brilliant, even if he didn’t, which echoes
the point about over protection made by one of the visually impaired students
(at another school) when talking about fashion.

The danger is that given the importance given to parents in these answers,
visually impaired people are dealing mainly with older people, and thus may
be less influenced by peer groups. This has two consequences: firstly that
they may not be regarded as part of the group by sighted pupils, and it will
therefore be much harder to make friends, and secondly that they will
probably mature in a different way, partly because of this. At the community
resource base school, friends were given much higher priority, maybe
explaining why the staff in the resource base often thought that the students
had a tendency to avoid dealing with issues of visual impairment. They were
very aware of being “normal”. This meant that they generally managed to
integrate into the social life of the school quite well, although it did mean that they could be resistant to using appropriate study methods. It could also be important that the student support staff at the community resource base intervened far less often, and concentrated on making the students as self-sufficient or independent as possible. This meant that peers were bound to see the students without staff present more often than at other schools, so it may well be that they genuinely were subject to greater peer pressure, as most teenagers are.

The next three questions will be taken together. Visually impaired people were asked how well sighted people read them as people, and sighted people were asked how well visually impaired people read them as people. Sighted people were also asked how well they thought they could understand visually impaired people as people. At the all purpose school, the three “blind” students thought that people could read them well. However, the remaining student commented that one of those was generally found to be “baffling” to sighted people. This shows us that visually impaired people may be totally unaware of how sighted people are reacting to them, which means they cannot judge the appropriateness of their actions. Therefore, they need feedback. Nobody at the regional unit thought there was a problem, but at the selective school, the answers were totally opposite. Everybody thought there were problems. One student said that after initial problems, sighted people usually read blind people quite well, but the others quoted many of the stereotypes which are often cited: “sighted people think they just sit there and read Braille all day” “they think we’re all superbrains, which, if you look at their exam results, sometimes they’re not” “they either think we are geniuses or.
the classic, piano tuners” and “they think we’re thick and shuffle along”.

These answers touched on the issues of intelligence, careers, physical appearance and the lack of a balanced view. This last point has been stressed in many books, but was actually sighted, without any attempt to enquire about it, by a student. Visually impaired people are seen as just about anything, but not just ordinary “normal” people, by the public at large. One student echoed exactly this point at the comprehensive resource base school: “when they realise that you’re sort of normal, they, actually “people are very good really, they realise that you are a person, its just they think you’re abnormal a lot of the time.” The others at this school, and all the students at the community resource base school, did not see it as an issue. The neighbourhood student said that people were still coming to terms with his visual impairment, and that it took much longer to get to know a blind person than it does another sighted person. The interesting thing is that the real answers to this question did not fall into a pattern that has occurred before. The majority of answers came at the selective school, and an interesting response from the one neighbourhood school, whereas only one other blind student could see this as an issue. The interesting answer at the all purpose school came from the one student who has very good vision, which is why she should be analysed as another sighted student for the purposes of this question. Doing so, however, highlights once again the fact that partially sighted people are often treated as sighted, but sometimes as blind, and they must deal with being treated in many different ways, to a far greater extent than totally blind people.
When asking sighted people how well visually impaired people can gauge them as people, the students from the regional unit school generally thought it would be different because visually impaired people are alert to different things, and one thought them more intelligent. At the neighbourhood school the students were not sure, but at the comprehensive school they all thought that visually impaired people gauge people better than sighted people, since they are not deceived by appearances.

The final question in this series asked sighted students how well they thought they could gauge what visually impaired people were like. The very first time this question was asked, at the comprehensive school appearances were mentioned, since one of the visually impaired students would often be judged by the fact that he had not combed his hair. This student thought that appearances were deceptive. Two of the other three thought they could gauge what visually impaired people are like, but one thought it was not easy at all. At the neighbourhood school, one student said they thought that the visually impaired student kept himself to himself, so they were not sure they could judge what he was like, whilst the others thought they could. At the regional unit school, where the visually impaired students had not been able to identify this as an issue, two of the sighted students thought that it was very difficult to work out what visually impaired people are like, and two thought they could. Two (one of each of the above groups) thought it took a long time to get any idea what a visually impaired person is like, and another mentioned the fact that you have to learn to ignore appearances.

All of this seems to suggest a position where visually impaired and sighted people regard each other as different, maybe with suspicion, although not with
hostility in the vast majority of cases. Some people seem to integrate well with the other group. Many have problems, either initially, or all the time. Many of the attitudes often mentioned in the literature were described at a personal level, showing that previously identified prejudices are still valid and real.

**Attitudes.**

The next item covered attitudes. Whilst previous questions had discussed attitudes, it was felt necessary to ask specific questions. It seemed that family attitudes were of particular importance to visually impaired people, so it was important to find out how they felt about their family's attitudes towards them and their disability. Again, the very first time this question was asked, there was an interesting, but not surprising response. The student, who attended the all purpose school, said that his parents were "over protective in a big way" and that "I wish I could have experienced much more", having lived a very sheltered life. There was clear evidence of frustration in this answer, as sighted people had not allowed him to do many of the things he wanted, and this could result in a general interpretation of sighted people as being over protective after leaving school, since he is only used to being treated as normal by visually impaired people, and by staff at the school. The two other blind students also reported that their parents were over protective, although one of them explained that his mother had had to fight for funding for him to attend the school, and had had to fight the medical profession for information about his eye sight. The mother of the partially sighted student had taught people with special needs anyway, so she said that she had never had a problem.
At the regional unit, families seemed to display a mixture of over protection and treating people as normal in every single case. At the selective school, again, all the responses were very similar, in that all the students thought their family had a very good attitude towards their disability. The pattern was almost repeated at the comprehensive resource base, although one of the twins said that her mother tended to be a little over protective. At the community resource base, one student reported that their mother had become a rehabilitation officer due to having a visually impaired child, and one said that their parents had been a little over protective when they were younger. All of them were happy with their parents’ attitudes at the time of interview. The neighbourhood student also said that his family was not over protective. None of the students talked about how their brothers and sisters treated them when answering this question, and it was interesting that the only school where problems were consistently reported was the all purpose special school, and that problems were generally not reported in the mainstream schools. This would appear to go against previous research which has shown that attending a special school has often helped to improve parental attitudes. In fact, one of the justifications for visually impaired people attending special schools in the past was that they would not be able to develop properly with their parents, since they would be too over protective. This certainly does not seem to be the case now, according to the findings from these interviews. Sighted students were asked what they thought about other people’s attitudes towards visual impairment. This question was designed to see if they would say things about other people that they could not admit about themselves, and, to some extent, it worked. At the comprehensive school, three of the
four students said that most people “do as much as they can for them” which infers that they always need help. Two also said that people generally take advantage, often thinking they can do anything they like, either behind the back, or to the face, of a visually impaired person. Two of the students also said that some people do treat visually impaired people as normal, but one got the feeling that this was a minority. At the neighbourhood school, one did not know what other people’s attitudes are like, and one said that people think visually impaired people are more dependent than they actually are. At the regional unit school, one person said that people are often taken advantage of, saying that in the school, some sighted pupils purposely stand in the way, waiting for a blind person to hit them as they walk past holding a Brailler (it is quite painful if a Brailler hits you because they are hard and heavy). One person said that people try to help as much as possible. However, one answer was very interesting because it displayed hesitancy, thought, and a feeling of being uncomfortable with the answer being given, and therefore, with people’s, and maybe his own, attitudes towards visual impairment: “I think most, now, I think its er, I think people just treat them, I hope, I hope, people just treat them like other human beings. I think people might be over-helpful, which I’d find quite annoying, because people are more aware of blind people and different people with disabilities nowadays. In the olden days they might not have been as aware, a bit frightened of them, I don’t know.” In this answer were many of the issues tackled by the disability movement: dehumanisation, inferiority, an uncomfortable relationship, uneasiness, but a refreshing and vital honesty. However, the problems stated are obviously not universally felt, since some respondents obviously had close friendships with
visually impaired people. It was interesting that the two schools where sighted people were interviewed and spoke about problems were the regional unit school, where the visually impaired people felt quite isolated, and the comprehensive resource base, where two of the visually impaired people felt extremely alienated. There were obvious gaps in communication between visually impaired and sighted students at these schools. However, it is something which is often accepted, sometimes reluctantly, as part of life by visually impaired people.

Relationships.

The final major topic to be covered in the interview schedule was that of boy friends and girl friends. Both sets of students were asked whether they thought that blindness effected people in any way in terms of finding boy friends and girl friends. The questions were aimed at finding out people’s perceptions about others, rather than asking them about themselves. It was also stressed that it could be the sighted person who was affected, not just visually impaired people. At the all purpose school, the question was asked to the three blind students, and all of them felt there was some effect. One commented that people could not understand how he could appreciate beauty, and another said that some people would make people feel pressured not to go out with a blind person. The question was not asked to the blind students at the regional unit, since their answers would be very different given their average age. At the selective school, two students did not know, and the others thought there would be some effect. One said that blind women would find it easier to find sighted partners than blind men, and another complained about the “quality” of the girls at that school, saying that there were none who
wanted to find a happy medium between doing no work and lots of work. He just wanted someone who wanted to “live life, get fit and do the minimum amount of work necessary to get by”. At the comprehensive resource base, three students thought they would be effected, but gave no specific examples. At the community resource base school, two people thought they would be effected, one person (a blind male student) saying that they could not “pick” who they wanted to go out with. By this, he meant that you cannot look around to get an idea of what types of people are actually in the school or other place. You simply have to go by the people who actually come into contact with you. Selection, in all aspects of life, is something which is often denied to visually impaired people. The neighbourhood student felt that girls found visually impaired people more challenging, so it was more difficult. Of the 23 original interviewees, 17 were asked this question, and 11, or 65 percent, thought there would be some effect, 4 did not know, and only 2 thought there would be no effect. This is a major issue for all teenagers, so the strength of this negative finding in this age group is very important. The students were then asked about a series of factors, and how, if at all, each effected them. Only 7 of the visually impaired students thought that eye contact could be an important factor, and one thought that eye contact simply meant looking in the direction of somebody. Only one student thought that both parties were at a disadvantage for different reasons, saying that visually impaired people often missed out on being able to judge somebody’s mood, whilst the sighted person missed out much more. Six people thought that appearance was important, mainly based in mainstream schools. One person, in response to a different question, but to which she referred back.
said: "and also, people make personal comments about how you look. Then you can't compare yourself to how other people look to argue back. And if it's a personal comment, sometimes you don't wanna ask someone else about it. Especially when you're growing and developing it can make you feel quite miserable." Whilst these feelings are, in the main, similar to those which would be expressed by most teenagers, they are exaggerated by the fact that, as a blind person, you cannot compare yourself, although even that does not give a true reflection of how others really feel. However, visually impaired people also have a lack of access to appropriate magazines, which many sighted people gain much comfort from reading. They can relate to the stories and problems which are included, and, whilst some provision is made by the RNIB, it is far too blind orientated, and is not seen in the same light, simply because of the organisation which provides it. Visually impaired teenagers need mainstream magazines and publications. Only four people thought visual impairment itself would be important, although others thought that it may be, but they had not met sufficient numbers of sighted people to know. Three of the four were based at the comprehensive resource base school. Whilst one student said that personality was more important for visually impaired people, only three others thought that visual impairment effected the importance of this in any way, one simply stressing that it was important, and the others not really commenting. Those people who did answer this question seemed to be saying that visual impairment does not effect personality. Only four people thought there could be a potential problem with reading the intentions of a sighted person, and three of these were in mainstream schools: two at the community resource base, and the one neighbourhood
student. The fourth person did have a lot of contact with sighted people and
was aware of many visually impaired people having problems dealing with
sighted people at any level. It was interesting that the people who thought
this could potentially be a problem tended to be those who had been very
positive in response to other questions. It was especially surprising that two
people at the community resource base thought this a problem, since they, as
a group, seemed less willing to accept any limitations placed upon them by
visual impairment than any others. This is probably because they had much
more contact with sighted people, and it requires contact, (or attempted
contact) at an intimate level, to become aware of the potential pitfalls. Three
interviewees thought that body language could be a problem. In fact, this
question was added late in the process as the issue became obvious, but it
seemed to be particularly important at the comprehensive resource base.
Another observation at the selective, all purpose and comprehensive resource
base schools was that visually impaired people would choose who they
wanted to go out with in a different way, since they would not be prejudiced
about looks. There are many instances where visually impaired people are
racist, however, so this is not, by any means, a universal truth. (The latter
observation is taken from the author's personal experience). However, it
holds, in that it is unlikely that a totally blind person would be influenced by
hair colour. Much of what is meant by appearance relates to shape and size,
and visually impaired people would have preferences in these areas.
However, the most surprising element of the findings from these questions
was that the factor which most concerned the visually impaired respondents
was the loss of eye contact. Appearance, the next most visual characteristic,
was the second highest in importance, which means that visually impaired people are very aware that they are at a disadvantage visually, both in terms of what they do not see, and self presentation. The higher the degree of contact with sighted people, the higher this awareness becomes, accounting for a lack of awareness amongst those who attended special schools in their traditional form, where visually impaired people were their only contacts. This also means that those sighted people interviewed for this work came into contact with the more aware of the visually impaired people, and so may be less aware of the problems that some face.

The sighted interviewees were asked a similar set of questions to the visually impaired. The first question asked them whether they thought visual impairment had any effect on the way people thought about boy-friends and girl-friends. The answers were extremely interesting. At the comprehensive resource base school, two thought their may be some effect, two said not. At the neighbourhood school, both said that there would be no effect. However, at the regional unit, where the visually impaired students had reported feeling very isolated, (despite this question not being asked to the visually impaired students there), all four said that there would be some problems. One said that sighted people would feel they could not go out with a visually impaired person because this would be seen as too different, and they would feel forced to conform to peer group pressure on who to go out with. Another said that they would probably find it easier as they got older, whilst the others were less sure. These answers were very much in line with those given for previous questions, those at the regional unit being the most talkative at most stages of the interviews. The next question dealt with eye contact, and
whether the loss of it would have any effect, and only two people, one at each of the unit schools, said that it would. The one person at the regional unit commented that it effected both the blind and sighted person, since they could both miss information. For the next question on the effect of the appearance of visually impaired people, again, two people said that it would have an effect, both at the regional unit. One had argued throughout that visually impaired people appear smarter than sighted people, as they cannot appreciate scruffiness, and this would have some effect. Comments not made by any of the interviewees, but which have frequently been made regarding visually impaired people usually revolve around exactly the opposite point: the visually impaired people not looking smart. This is because they appear not to look after themselves, wash, change clothes, as frequently as sighted people do, whilst not appreciating how to deliberately look scruffy. There appears to be a perceptible difference between deliberate (sighted) and accidental (visually impaired) scruffiness. (Some visually impaired people do deliberately try to be scruffy, but there are a sizeable group who do it without even trying). The next question asked whether or not blindness itself would have any effect. Two people, both at the comprehensive resource base school said that it would not, others were not sure. However, one person at the comprehensive resource base and three at the regional unit thought that it would cause problems, due to the difficulties of knowing how to act in the presence of visually impaired people in the first place. They were then asked if a visually impaired person’s personality would have any effect. Only two people commented that it might, and one of these was merely concerned about the blind person having inaccurate images of things which may lead to
arguments. This was not viewed as a serious source of problems. Sighted interviewees were then asked if body language could be a factor in any problems. Four people thought there could be potential problems, as visually impaired people cannot use body language in the same way, and cannot read what sighted people are saying non-verbally. Two people thought there would definitely not be any additional difficulties in this area which is interesting as it shows how little people think about body language, and therefore how instinctive and intuitive it is to sighted people. Sighted people were then asked a separate question, as to whether visually impaired people would have any difficulty in reading other people’s intentions. Two thought there could be a problem, and related it straight to body language. They had spoken previously about this subject, meaning that most were totally unaware of this area as a potential problem. This could lead to blind people being regarded as different in personality or intelligence, which may not be the case. Next, they were asked if sighted people could ever misread a visually impaired person’s intentions, and again three people, two of them different people, said that there could be a problem, and related it to body language. The two new people, one at the comprehensive resource base, and one at the regional unit, who had previously spoken about body language, obviously could understand that visually impaired people used different body language, but not that visually impaired people are unable in many cases to understand sighted people’s body language. It is almost as if in their minds visual impairment switches itself off once you get past the well-known issues like guide dogs and reading. The section was rounded off by asking if any other factors could cause potential problems. Only one person, at the
comprehensive resource base, and who had also highlighted problems for most of the areas above, said that there could be a problem with where they would live, because it would take the visually impaired person a long time to get used to the surroundings. This opens up a whole series of issues relating to mobility and orientation, the environment and public transport which are becoming increasingly important as visually impaired people play a fuller part in society. Whilst they are beyond the scope of this work, it is vital to stress their importance: it is all very well allowing visually impaired people into mainstream schools, but if they are one of the lucky ones who gets a job at the end of it, are they going to be forced to rely on taxis to get everywhere? If so, are they going to meet sighted people in society at large? This opening up of wider issues shows how much more work there is to do, but that they are too complex to be investigated here. It was felt that sufficient ground had already been covered, and so the interviews were drawn to a conclusion with two more questions.

Concluding Questions.

Everybody was asked where they thought sighted people's attitudes originated from. The visually impaired people were actually asked this question in the section about attitudes, but it is analysed here as it helps draw us to a conclusion, and it fits with the sighted interview schedule. At the all purpose school, one person highlighted the high degree of fear which sighted people feel, and that they try to imagine how they could live without sight. She herself was partially sighted and had previously been at a mainstream school. One person said that he had always been taught that people reacted strangely because they had not experienced meeting visually impaired
people, but he did not believe this, choosing to argue that they look at
people's eyes, and read difference into them. Another argued that attitudes
relate to the fact that the majority of visually impaired people are old and
getting "ill". the fourth did not have an answer. At the regional unit, nobody
had any idea at all. At the selective school two argued that the media play a
role, although one of these said that parents and grand parents are more
important in shaping people's attitudes. One said that people have a view of
a disabled person being useless and always needing help, although not
where this originated, and one talked about the fact that many people just do
not understand the concept of "partially sighted". At the comprehensive
resource base, two people had no idea, but the other answers were very
interesting. One again highlighted the role the media plays, another pointed
out that if you don't hear somebody, or realise they are talking to you in a
crowded room that people automatically think you are deaf, which is not the
case, and the final person argued that in the past, visually impaired people did
not get "a good education, so they probably did appear thick", and went into
detail about some of the issues she had been asked about, where blind
people were unaware that what they were doing was not really acceptable. It
is very easy to understand why these attitudes result, and it is also easy for
someone who has been visually impaired for a long time to take things for
granted, and not understand why people react the way they do. The answers
at the community resource base school echoed earlier answers: one not
knowing, one citing parents, one the media, and one the fact that visually
impaired people look different. The final interviewee, in his neighbourhood
school, summed up many of the arguments at once thus: "I think its the first
image of a visually impaired person, I think the RNIB’s way of using a bent
over man with a cane. That’s not really what its about. Visually impaired
people can be really independent. But the media and other things make them
out to be more disabled than perhaps they are. (Note: This interviewee was
referring to RNIB advertising campaigns which were dropped several years
ago. There are many issues around charity advertising, which are beyond the
scope of this work, but are discussed elsewhere.) Overall, for this question, 5
people did mention the media, and other important themes were “looking
different” and attitudes around noticing difference in the eyes, and projecting
this onto the whole of the person.

The sighted interviewees also gave interesting answers. At the
comprehensive resource base school, two people argued that attitudes are
mainly shaped by other people, rather than by thinking about things, one of
these citing myth, legend and “old wives tales”. A third person said there was
not enough information around, arguing that compared to issues such as
cancer, people have little knowledge. At the neighbourhood school, both
blamed the media, and one talked about parents and first impressions, which
exactly reflects what the one visually impaired student had said. At the
regional unit, two said it was merely ignorance and lack of information, and
three cited parents or friends, talking about peer group pressures (one
mentioned both of these). Again, media came out as important, but the
sighted respondents identified additional issues of lack of information and
peer group pressure, not identified by the visually impaired respondents.

Finally, all the interviewees were asked if they had any further comments,
issues or questions they would like to raise by way of conclusion. At the all
purpose school, only one person commented to this question, although it lead
to a detailed and interesting discussion. Feelings of bitterness about losing
sight, wishing it would get better, and how these had diminished over the
years were expressed, as well as issues of how to cope, the fact that
someone has to “sit you down and tell you you’ve lost your sight and you’re
going to have to get used to it” and that if this does not happen “some blind
people just sit there and feel sorry for themselves. You can’t blame them for
that, but they do, and someone just has to sit them down and tell them at
some point in their lives”. This highlights the importance of the rehabilitation
process, and the issues which must be faced. This respondent was
conscious of being looked at because of the necessity of wearing glasses at
all times, and was frightened of how people would react to her when she
moved on to a mainstream college. She also analysed the fact that
sometimes the pupils at that school were told they were “special children” with
many abilities, but other times were made to feel like “spastics, and I hate
using that word, but it’s the only one I can think of. Sometimes we are made
to feel really thick”. Whilst feeling that the staff were “hypocrites” the
statement was then further considered, by asking whether it was possible to
avoid such conflicts, to which she replied that it was very difficult to get the
balance right, and overall she felt very happy with the school. At the regional
unit, one person felt that the teachers drew more attention to the visually
impaired students than necessary, by asking people to hold doors open for
example, and another commented about the difficulties of getting information
about leisure facilities. At the selective school, there was only one comment,
which was that one of the interviewee’s mother had gone through “the
system" herself 20 years ago, and felt that the situation now was much better than then. Interestingly, at the comprehensive resource base school, only one person commented, and that was to say that they were apprehensive about when they were older, and at the community resource base school, one person commented about the difficulties of diagrams and graphs. There were no other comments.

Amongst the sighted interviewees, there were some very interesting responses. At the comprehensive school, one interviewee commented that people were scared to talk about visual impairment, and one student went into great detail about the bullying that went on. After detailed questioning on this issue, it appear that it was particularly people from the 13-14 age group who took advantage of visually impaired students, generally that people of the same gender bullied each other, that it happened every week, did not depend upon personality, just on the fact that the student was visually impaired. It mainly seemed to occur in sporting activities for the boys, and in the classroom for the girls. This probably reflects gender differences, but also that the two girls who seemed most aware of the bullying spent very little time outside the classroom or the VI unit. The fact that only one person mentioned it could mean that it was being overstated, or that other people were, as one interviewee said, scared to talk about it. At the neighbourhood school, there were no additional comments or issues, and only one person raised any questions at the community resource base school, and that was that the effects on sighted people of being around visually impaired people should be highlighted. This had been meant in terms of loss of eye contact and when and how help should be given and other related issues.
CHAPTER 11.

CONCLUSIONS.

Chapter 1 of this thesis introduced the main issues and terminology, pointing out that in many cases original terminology would be retained. This meant that currently unacceptable terms would appear throughout the work. This was illustrated in Chapter 2, "Historical Perspective". It was shown that the status of visually impaired people has changed radically throughout time, especially since the advent of education and Braille. They had been reduced to the role of beggars during the middle ages, but their status has risen rapidly since that time. Many social attitudes are based on historical facts, and in folklore, many blind people are regarded as being punished or given divine powers. These relate to attitudes often noted within the disabled people’s movement, where they tend to be treated either as super human or as vastly inferior to the rest of society. The important role that has been played by disabled people themselves was also shown. The difference between older perspectives on disability and the newer "social model" was highlighted, although it was stressed that non-social factors must not be ruled out completely. This is a view that is becoming increasingly prevalent within the disabled people’s movement, as it becomes more confident that the social model is becoming established. They have radically changed the way that disabled people think about themselves, and are beginning to influence society at large more and more. Chapter 3 reinforced the message that service provision is usually based on medical definitions, focusing on the role of the eye. This impacts on the way visually impaired people think of themselves, either when losing sight, or for parents of a newly born baby.
The conflicting and uncoordinated roles of different professionals were highlighted. It was shown that delays in registration caused grave problems. It was recommended that there should be a keyworker system, where one person can co-ordinate the services and information received by a client during the process of sight loss and registration. The social nature of visual impairment was again stressed, highlighting the "labelling" process and the idea that registration is seen as a "point of no return". The idea that blindness is a "learned social role" ran through this chapter in many ways. It was stated that service provision must not be dependent upon registration, and that Psychological counselling, mobility training, and general rehabilitation work are often not provided to a desirable level. This leaves newly blind people, and children born blind, over dependent, reinforcing negative attitudes. Differences between the senses of touch and sight were shown to be very important, and seldom understood. This impacts on the way information can be received and processed, and this has a profound effect on how ultimate aims can be achieved. Visually impaired people often have to approach a task in a very different way than other people. Chapter 4 showed that history has played a major role in defining what society sees fit for its visually impaired members to do. It showed that, contrary to what has often been argued, there is a mass of evidence showing that personality and self concept development are determined not by visual impairment, but by the environment, and significant others, such as parents. It showed that inappropriate levels of attention can have disastrous consequences. Too much attention can be worse than too little attention because it leads to over dependence, as shown in Chapter 3, but too little
attention can also be disastrous. Developmental problems also lead to difficulties with coming to terms with visual impairment, or “adjustment”. It is stated that “The world of the blind is actually limited by the sighted”. It has been argued that blind people tend to show one of two reactions: either denial, or compulsive withdrawal, leading to passivity. A negative self concept causes more problems for a blind person than social factors, and suggested that the only way this could be overcome was by making people take personal responsibility for themselves. These problems were primarily caused, by parental over supervision, segregated education and a tendency for blindness organisations to encourage dependency in their clients. The strict regimes that developed in many special schools were seen as the main factor, however, not segregated education in itself, as has often been suggested. Many have argued, that it is very difficult for blind people to develop a healthy body image, leading to a low level of self esteem. This is sometimes argued to be even more the case for partially sighted people who are expected to be blind and sighted at different times by society. There are many theories about blindness and self concept that look at the process of sight loss and regard it as very difficult. Others point out the negative views often reported in the wider society. The sheer number of these highlight the prejudiced and negative public attitudes that visually impaired people must learn to live with. Those losing sight later in life carry with them the attitudes they previously had about blindness.

An important recommendation to help congenitally blind children with many of these issues is that non-visual means of learning facial expressions and other body language must be included in the education of visually impaired children.
Motor development must also be encouraged. Over protection is a theme that runs through the whole thesis as a major obstacle for such developments to take place.

The factors most commonly stressed in research about adjustment of congenitally blind children are that parental over supervision is disastrous, and that intelligence, education and the role of rehabilitation are vital. The inability to mimic others' behaviour is a serious barrier to learning. This means that it is not possible to develop a physical self concept based on others, as comparison cannot take place. It is not possible to be able to dress and present oneself appropriately in many situations. Much effort must be put into developing other methods of teaching children to do such things. One of the most interesting findings is that parental attitudes are often more positive for children who are sent away to segregated boarding schools. Positive attitudes tend to lead parents to be less protective, and allow more development to take place. Given the effect of over supervision, and the fact that this group are less prone to it, this surely should be one of many factors taken into account when allocating educational provision, along with the socialising effects of both mainstream and special schools.

Interactionist theory regards all people as actors, who observe, interpret and act upon what occurs around them. Much of this information is visual, so blind people are at a significant disadvantage in this regard. The self is presented in many ways. These are often visual, and cannot be appropriately reflected without visual knowledge. For instance, it is sometimes hard to judge others' reactions to our behaviour without looking at their facial expressions. Thus if self concept is developed through interactions with others, and on a trial and
error basis, the opportunity for blind people to develop a healthy self concept is limited. This is supported by strong evidence of a high degree of egocentrism amongst the blind.

Again, the vital role of childhood experience is stressed. Parental reactions are a particular problem since training on how to teach a visually impaired child the skills they will need is not usually available. If it is, many do not know where to go and find it. They will not ask for it because they will not be aware that it is there. Similarly, they will not necessarily think of the issues that they need training on. Another area where blind people may struggle a little is in terms of feeling that they can influence situations, since they cannot see the effect they have on others. These arguments show that self concept and social development are inextricably linked, meaning that it is not possible to say that one is more important than the other. It is important to strike some balance in this analysis, however, since much experience is not visual.

Therefore, situations can still be interpreted, other’s reactions can still be gauged to some extent and imitation of verbal actions is as good a way as most to learn how to cope with many social situations. The general public, are commonly seen to believe that the practical problems associated with visual impairment are the over-riding concern. In fact, deeper analysis shows that the social problems cause much more concern for visually impaired people, although this is often slow to emerge. One of the most notable problems is the loss of choice associated with blindness. One aspect of this is that blind people in general are often not accepted into the sighted world, and thus compelled to mix mainly with other blind people. This creates a resentment, and explains why some people resist the efforts of the disability movement to
enable disabled people to mix freely either with other disabled people or anyone else.

The inability to find an appropriate marriage partner, according to Hellewell (1991), is "the most severe deprivation endured by all handicapped people". Other examples of loss of choice are shown to include the way information is not provided and the way people make selections for a visually impaired person rather than giving them full choice. When reading a menu, some people will ask "what sort of meal do you want" without telling you what the options are, or what is contained within them. A sighted person would not have to make such a choice without fully reviewing the entirety of each option. People's attitude towards disability can be demonstrated by the fact that this is not regarded as a civil rights issue, since such a loss of choice, experienced by any "normal" person would not be tolerated. Many aspects of culture are denied to visually impaired people because they are highly visual. This means that visually impaired people will often not be able to enter conversations about cultural issues, popular or otherwise, in the same way. In a school setting, this can lead to characterisations such as "boring" or "stupid" which further alienate the blind person from the rest of the class. Status within a peer group (such as members of a class) is often achieved through eye contact and visual cues, since talking in lessons is not permitted. It was shown that blind people are expected to fulfil certain roles, and to be grateful for anything that is done for them. They were seen as there to be pitied.

In Chapter 5, these theories were linked to an analysis of the development of education for visually impaired people. The development of special education was outlined, from the opening of the first special school in 1784 to the
present day. The aim of many of the early schools was to enable visually impaired people to gain employment. They tended to be vocational, and developed strict regimes. Many were run by charities. They often stressed normality. This even meant that marriage to other blind people would not be permitted, and much effort was put into preventing it. It was this kind of regime that led to the tendency for homosexuality described in Chapters 3 and 4. These regimes have become less common more recently.

Little sociological attention has been given to schools for visually impaired people. They do not always act in the same ways as schools for other disability groups, as academic achievement is often much more important. However, much of the analysis does apply, and Barton and Tomlinson’s work was reviewed in detail. They do not fully appreciate that special schools for the visually impaired have almost always been a positive force for change. They concentrate on the predominance of medical issues within state and other special schools, giving sound critiques of the ways in which pupils are treated at such schools. The mainstream “sector” was then examined, to show the impact it has had. The view that both types of education should be open to all visually impaired children was stated.

The “integration debate” was then set in a context of many different types of service provided by different LEA’s, and various types of school. These were set out in an original delineation, placing them on a continuum of types of “integration”. For this purpose, integration included all opportunities that would be open to a sighted person: family interaction, ability to participate in local communities, extended curricula and sport. It was stressed that special schools can provide different opportunities for visually impaired students than
mainstream ones, and that levels of integration into a school vary considerably depending on the type of provision made. For instance, those who attend a school with a resource base may have fewer friends than those who attend a residential boarding school. If there are a few visually impaired people in any school or class they tend to be pushed together, and sighted peers often ignore or bully them. Schools with a resource base may also require students to live away from home, thus preventing normal interaction with the family as well as out of class activities with school peers, yet are less able to provide sport and many other recreational activities than boarding schools. They do, however, provide access to a wider curriculum than many residential schools, which are too small, and better support than neighbourhood schools.

Stockley (1987) identified the following conditions that must be met for a successful integration scheme to come about:

1. The child must be motivated.
2. The child must be able to identify and express their needs.
3. The child must be able to tolerate people’s reactions.
4. Parents’ wishes must stem from motives other than keeping the child at home.
5. Staff should be enthusiastic and well prepared. In service training is vital. Enthusiasm alone is not enough
6. Administrators must be aware that integration is not a cheaper alternative.
7. Support must be adequate to meet all needs, but not intrusive since this would lead to undesired segregation.
8. Progress may appear slower. Patience must be shown by all and any required adaptations must be made.

The recommendations, of this report, in terms of what RNIB could do were very wide-ranging. For instance, they included the following: advise on where staff can be found; advise authorities with a specialist service; expand facilities for training all teachers and helpers of the visually impaired: liaison about, and special places for pre-school children; maintain some special schools and further education provision; visit integrating schools; continue to provide Braille and tape services for LEA's; have regional supplies of equipment, since trying it is vital, and the loan schemes are very popular; keep reference lists of where equipment can be viewed; make and market videos relating to any aspect of visual impairment; loan specific subject equipment like volt meters; 75 percent of LEA's want a portable exhibition of equipment; publicise what is available to make people aware; offer meeting facilities for support staff; co-ordinate a national network of parent discussion groups; make some holiday provision at special schools; and provide an emergency service for the families of newly blinded children.

Some of the conditions necessary for a successful integration scheme are necessary for any successful education, and should not be regarded as special concerns of visually impaired people, although they are, perhaps, rather more important for them than for others. However, it also shows that more contacts between parents, support teachers and blind children in integration are needed.

It was stressed that any education service must take into account much more than purely educational issues. Many are categorised as "slow learners"
because a visual problem is not detected. It must also be remembered that
mobility training for visually impaired people is equivalent to road safety
training for sighted people. This is another example of where a lack of
awareness and observation skills could lead to unhelpful labels being
attached due to possible problems with posture and body language. In
addition, for satisfactory interaction to develop, full social integration is
necessary, which may mean more supervision in the very early days. One of
the most important conclusions was that LEA's must work together rather than
in isolation, and that blind children can learn from each other: they often feel
isolated by their lack of vision. This is an argument not for resource bases,
but for holiday provisions to be made. All staff must be trained, including
cleaners and dinner staff. Special needs must be properly recognised, so that
visually impaired people can be full members of the community.
Whilst it has been recognised that visual impairment may cause problems
appreciating visual perspective, the fact that lack of vision, and lack of ability
to see others, may, in some cases, cause a lack of social perspective as well
has not been fully understood.
This, and many of the other issues highlighted show that there is a need for
sources of information and help for staff in mainstream schools. As the
number of people with additional disabilities, especially learning difficulties,
increases, this will become an increasing problem. Educational services can
be shown to have developed in a piecemeal manner. The result of this is that
it is hard to identify sources of help and information. There has to be some
coordination of education for visually impaired people, or any existing
expertise could easily be lost. It is too often the case that people do not have
time to trawl through extensive publications and journals, so concise and comprehensive sources of information are vital. Tackling a tactile diagram in a mainstream school would be very difficult if the student has not had the proper training in how to read them, or the staff have not had the proper training in creating or introducing them. Other parts of the curriculum could just as easily suffer from similar problems. There can be a danger that the support teacher ends up doing too much for the visually impaired student, who appears to be struggling. The result is that the necessary skills to have an independent life, a goal which is usually seen as desirable and attainable by visually impaired people, may not develop.

Attitudes and interactions form the basis of the way people feel about themselves, and detailed questioning is required to explicate these. This merely perpetuates the dependence that exists. Role models, visually impaired people who have these skills can help by inspiring staff and showing them what is possible. This is why the attitudes of visually impaired and sighted people alike are so important, and why qualitative research about them was so necessary.

Chapter 6 discussed the research methods to be used to do just that. It was argued that communications, in the widest sense, are the focus of the research. This includes all information given and received, and how it is processed.

33 interviews, averaging 45 minutes each in length were held at various schools around the country, 10 of those interviews being with sighted people at schools where visually impaired people were integrated. They were highly qualitative in nature, as many of the questions were about attitudes and
feelings. As discussions were held outside the interview settings with staff at these schools, the involvement of sighted interviewees increased the validity of the findings, as we could analyse from three different perspectives: visually impaired interviewees, sighted peers and staff. The interviews were all conducted by the author, who is totally blind, although the use of a sighted interviewer, either for a control group, or for the sighted interviewees had been considered. Much effort was made to make interviewees feel as relaxed as possible, and the quality of the information given suggests that this was largely achieved in most cases. Finding interviewees proved extremely difficult and time consuming. Hence, interviews were conducted with people in the age range 13-19 years, whereas we had sought an age range of 14-18 years. The ages did have an impact on the types of answers given, particularly at one school, where all the interviewees were 13 or 14 years old. Although the whole sampling process was fraught with problems and issues, the result was a generally well balanced selection of interviewees. Chapter 6 highlights any possible issues and problems in detail.

Interviews took place in six schools. Brief descriptions of these were as follows:

All purpose school: a special school catering for all age ranges and academic abilities, including multiply disabled people.

Regional unit: A mainstream comprehensive school with a "hostel" where accommodation and extra support could be provided.

Selective school: a specialist grammar school.

Comprehensive resource base: a mainstream comprehensive school with an attached resource base.
Community resource base: a comprehensive school with a resource base attached, provided a service for a very compact area.

Neighbourhood school: a comprehensive school where one visually impaired person was integrated into his neighbourhood school.

The following chapters presented the analysis of the interview data. This is summarised below:

It is difficult to draw out themes from these interviews, reflecting the diversity of experience of visual impairment. The following are some of the key points:

Gender inequality: this was a particular problem at the regional unit. In total, 57 percent of the visually impaired sample and 60 percent of the sighted sample were male, purely as a result of the sampling method used. Whilst there are no obvious results of this in the majority of the results, gender differences were highlighted in relation to bullying at the comprehensive school.

Levels of sight: People with the most vision were mainly based in special schools, often having had problems in the mainstream, whereas in the mainstream, the majority of the sample had little or no sight and seemed to have fewer problems, as their needs were better understood and recognised. Because many partially sighted students had been integrated into their neighbourhood schools, or other units in the area, the regional unit seemed to specialise in those with little or no sight.

When asked how often people thought about the fact that they were visually impaired, totally blind people in special schools, and partially sighted people in mainstream schools did so more often than others, in general. This seemed to be because partially sighted people were very dominant socially in special
schools, whereas total blindness was easier to understand, and therefore provide support for, in mainstream schools.

Most of the sighted interviewees admitted being apprehensive when first meeting a visually impaired person, although they now believed them to be much like anyone else. This kind of apprehension had been highlighted in Chapter 4.

At least four of those in special schools at the time of interview were only there because of the inadequacies of the support they had received in mainstream settings.

Many who attended schools with VI units, as had been suggested in earlier chapters, found it very difficult to mix with sighted peers, partly because either they had their own planned after school activities for the visually impaired students, or because they had to travel home by taxi. At one school, however, staff were reluctant to allow students to spend time in the unit, and this seemed to have a very positive effect on the amount of time spent with sighted peers. The staff of this school were very concerned about over dependence, and tried hard to provide as much adaptive technology as possible to help students work as much as possible by themselves. The staff were, however, also conscious of issues around visual impairment, and suspected one of the students of not properly facing them.

The majority of those in mainstream schools felt that many of their problems, especially social problems, were caused by living too far from the school they attended.

Mobility issues were seen to cause more problems than many other issues for visually impaired students in two of the schools: the comprehensive resource
base, and more especially in the regional unit. Many of the sighted interviewees also thought that "getting around" was one of the biggest problems for visually impaired people. This highlights the over-riding importance of "good mobility training" as one interviewee put it. Rehabilitation issues remain very important to individual visually impaired people.

13 of the 23 visually impaired interviewees thought that people expected them to have other disabilities. At the community resource base school, nobody believed this. This could be because they all expressed that they felt much like anyone else. This leaves 13 out of 19 interviewed at the other schools feeling that people expected them to have other disabilities.

8 out of 10 sighted interviewees thought that visually impaired people faced discrimination, whilst the visually impaired respondents were divided on this issue. Issues raised centred around "not knowing how to act" and "a lot of people ignore them" which are both sometimes missed by visually impaired people. It is interesting that it was social considerations that rose to the top of the sighted agenda on this question, as practical problems often dominate such answers.

On the topic of information, visually impaired people felt they were well informed about sport and current affairs, but had serious problems with the amount and type of information available about fashion and shopping in general. They were generally not interested at all in blind welfare issues. Whilst it is difficult to pull out headlines from the questions about social situations, the diversity and depth of answers was very rewarding. In general, environmental and attitudinal factors far outweighed visual impairment in the
answers of both visually impaired and sighted people. Further research on such topics would be very helpful.

Posture and appearance was seen as a major issue by all. Many, both visually impaired and sighted, felt that visually impaired people, in the main, were more self conscious than sighted people, but differences were probably not as great as people thought. There was a need for such issues to be raised much more with visually impaired people.

Visually impaired students were often subject to the opinions of older people, be they support staff, or more usually parents, in many aspects of life, but especially in terms of appearance and fashion. It seemed that at the community resource base school, where staff tried to ensure that students were on their own (or with peers) whenever possible, a much better level of social inclusion was achieved.

11 out of 17 visually impaired people who were asked considered that visual impairment would have a detrimental effect on the ability to form relationships with people of the opposite sex.

In general, those in traditional special schools, who had had little contact with sighted people, were unaware of the issues. Loss of eye contact and appearance were seen as the most important factors, although some of those who had intimate contact with sighted people thought there could be problems for visually impaired people reading sighted people's intentions, and vice versa.

Many interviewees, both visually impaired and sighted, thought that media representations and charity advertising had the most influence on sighted people's attitudes to visual impairment. The next most important factor was
seen by both groups to be parental attitudes, followed by lack of information. Sighted people spoke also about fear and apprehension, as well as people “looking different”.

The Future.

The diverse material covered, and variety of answers made this a very interesting piece of research to carry out. Many issues were highlighted during the process, and not actually followed up. It was asked whether parents had more chance to become involved in the education of their children in neighbourhood schools. Many authors have commented about exclusion of parents from the whole process. It seems that the answer to this question may be more dependent on individual schools than type of school, and this would probably be best discussed in a more statistical way, as a far higher number of schools could be included in the sample. The role of parents was stressed throughout, and information and services for parents should be the topics of future research.

This thesis established a link between theories about interaction in the classroom and visual impairment issues. Detailed observation could yield some very interesting aspects of school life, in all types of education. It would be important to observe discreetly in a vast number of settings: different types of school, and in-class and out-of-class. The issue of the importance of sport for the motor-development and general well-being of school pupils was highlighted. It would be well worth conducting a specific survey on the amount of participation by visually impaired people in physical education and sporting activities across a wide range of schools. Issues of loss of choice
and isolation could also be studied amongst the visually impaired population in all spheres of life, not just education.

The thesis did study some of the potential problems caused by lack of eye contact. These must be looked into from two perspectives: firstly, how visually impaired people themselves feel about it, and secondly from that of how sighted people react to it. A related topic is that of imitation: this is one of the most important ways of learning behaviour, and its effects should also be studied across all spheres of life.

Follow up of recommendations within this work is also vital. Effort must be made to provide relevant information about access to the curriculum and visual impairment to all sectors of the education system, and systems developed to allow professionals to work together in a way that is not depersonalising. Issues of overdependence must be monitored with great care. There must never be a situation where independence is seen as doing everything for oneself, but it must be stressed that visually impaired people must have the same responsibilities for doing things for themselves as their sighted peers. They must then be given the support they need in addition to this. The rich data from the interviews reinforced the belief in the "whole person" and denial of other opportunities, just to include a visually impaired person in a mainstream class, is just as much of a problem as forcing someone to attend a special school. These points must be reflected in educational policies.
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APPENDIX I:

Interview schedule used with visually impaired respondents.

The following were cues used to guide the interviews with visually impaired respondents. Each cue was only covered if deemed appropriate during the interview.

1. Name?
2. Age?
3. What schools have you been to?
4. Level of sight?
5. Visual history?
6. How often do you think about blindness: a-never, b-rarely, c-sometimes, d-fairly often, e-most of the time?
7. Do you mix more with blind or sighted people?
8. Do you notice differences between blind and sighted people?

Your education.

9. Appropriateness for you as a blind person, and support services?
10. Feelings about social side of schools.
11. Would you have preferred a different type of education and why?
12. Out of class activities with blind peers.
13. Out of class activities with sighted peers.
14. Happy with the mix between the two?
15. Was anything lacking in your education?
16. Did it make you feel different from others?

**Feelings about blindness.**

17. Serious disability?

18. Biggest disadvantage?

19. What do sighteds perceive hardest thing to be?

20. Do you ask for help only when really necessary or when you can get other benefit from someone doing something you can do yourself?

21. How do you react to unwanted offers of help?

22. Do you explain any points or just keep quiet?

23. Do people notice you're blindness straight away?

24. Do you face much discrimination?

25. Should you receive social services only when really necessary or if they make life easier?

**Sighted attitudes.**

26. What reaction do you expect when first meeting a random stranger?

27. Most common question about blindness?

28. Do people treat you normal, inferior, special?

29. Do people take advantage, or let you do things others couldn’t?

30. Do people expect you to have other disabilities?

31. When are people too helpful?

32. When do you need more help than you actually get?

33. Strange reactions?

34. Where do sighted attitudes come from?
Information.

What information do you get, and what would you like that you can't get, on the following:

35. Current affairs?
36. Sport?
37. Fashion?
38. What's available in shops?
39. Blind welfare and equipment?
40. What other information would you like?

Social situations.

41. In general, how confident are you in social situations?

Do any of the following pose particular problems?

42. One-to-one situation?
43. First encounter?
44. Small group?
45. Large crowd?
46. Formal situations?
47. The classroom?
48. The disco.
49. Trying to find someone in a large crowd like at breaktime?

Posture and appearance.

50. How conscious do you think blind people are about posture and appearance?

51. How do you go about buying clothes and deciding what to wear?
52. How do you decide what hairstyle to have?

**People's views of you as a person.**

53. Whose opinions are most important?
54. Do you think people read you accurately as a person?
55. What are your family's attitudes like?
56. Has your blindness any effect on the way people perceive you sexually?

   Do you think blindness is a hindrance in any of the following ways:

57. Loss of eye contact.
58. Your appearance.
59. Blindness itself?
60. Personality?
61. Body language?
62. Your reading of other people's intentions?
63. What are the most important factors in choosing your ideal partner?
64. Are these similar to those for sighted people?
65. What else should I have asked?
APPENDIX II

Interview Schedule used with sighted respondents.

The following cues were used during the interviews with sighted respondents.

Each cue was omitted if deemed of no use during the interview.

Introduction.

1. Name?
2. Age?
3. Before I start, have you any observations about blind people at school. or others you may know?
4. Compared to sighted people, I think blind people are?
5. How old were you when you first met a blind person?
6. Can you remember how you felt about blindness at that time?
7. What images did they contradict?
8. What images did they reinforce?
9. Is it a serious disability?
10. What do you think the biggest disadvantage is?
11. How easy is it to tell someone is blind?
12. If you could ask any question about blindness, what would it be?

Position in society.

13. Do blind people face much discrimination?
14. Should blind people receive social services only if really necessary or if they make life easier?
15. Is a blind person more likely to be taken advantage of, or allowed to get away with things other people couldn’t?

16. When you first met a blind person, did you expect them to have other disabilities?

**Independence.**

17. How do you feel about helping blind people?

18. How do they tend to react if you offer help?

19. When do you perceive blind people to be at their most independent?

20. When do you think they most likely need help?

**Information.**

21. How well informed do blind people tend to be in general?

22. On current affairs?

23. Sport?

24. Fashion?

25. Is there anything they tend not to know about?

**Social situations.**

26. In general, how does the presence of a blind person effect a social situation?

   Do any of the following pose particular problems?

27. One-to-one situations?

28. First encounter?

29. Small groups

30. Large crowds?
31. Formal situations?
32. The classroom?
33. The disco?
34. What limitations does blindness impose socially?
35. How conscious are blind people about posture and appearance?
36. What do their clothes and hairstyles tend to be like compared to sighted people their own age?
37. Do you think blind people can gauge what you are like as a person easily?
38. Do you think you can gauge what blind people are really like as people?
39. What are other people’s attitudes towards blindness like in general?

**Sexuality.**

40. Does blindness effect the way people think about boyfriends and girlfriends?
   Do you think blindness is a disadvantage in any of the following?
41. Loss of eye contact?
42. Their appearance?
43. Blindness itself?
44. Personality?
45. Body language?
46. Their reading of other people’s intentions?
47. Other people’s reading of their intentions?
48. Any other?
Final.

49. Where do sighted attitudes come from?