

**A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF A GIFTED
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT WITH ASPERGER SYNDROME (AS).**

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DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this piece of work first of all to God, without whom none of it would have been possible. Secondly, to my beloved family: my husband Ronnie and my two adorable kids Justin and Kristen, who demonstrated their tireless support by being there for me throughout this journey. Thirdly, my parents, for their undying love and tremendous faith in me.

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*“ If a man does not keep pace with his companions,
perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him
step to the music he hears, however measured or far away ”*

(Henry David Thoreau, 1854).

ABSTRACT

A Narrative Inquiry Into The Experiences of A Gifted Secondary School Student With Asperger Syndrome (AS).

Michele Mohammed

This narrative inquiry is designed to investigate the scholastic experiences of a student diagnosed with a dual exceptionality of Asperger Syndrome (AS) and giftedness at a Secondary College. The research aims at providing educators with an insight into the world of a dual exceptional condition from a student's perspective.

Data are collected through the use of semi-structured interviews, observation and documental sources, inclusive of a reflective journal maintained by the participant. The story which emerges is analysed through a narrative inquiry methodology, from which four pertinent themes impacting on the quality of the student's experiences at the college are elicited: (a) support mechanisms (b) peer relations (c) need for coping mechanism (sensory domain) and (d) need for autonomy. The insights from the findings are valuable for all teachers at the college and anyone involved in the field of inclusive education.

Keywords: Asperger Syndrome (AS); Giftedness; Dual Exceptionality; Autistic
Savant.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Who is Joshua? Why his story?

Joshua is a fifteen year old who at first glance appears like any other teenaged boy but at a subsequent glance reveals characteristics of an individual that sets him apart from boys his age. His stereotypical and repetitive motor mannerisms as manifested by the twitching of his head and the constant tapping of his hand on the desk or any object in his reach and apparent unwillingness to engage in conversation with his peers accompanied by an occasional outburst of temper seem to point to something amiss. Yet, there is something else. He has an amazing ability to excel in the understanding and application of mathematical and scientific concepts and an uncanny talent at the piano that propelled him to attain a Professional Performance Diploma, the highest award in music by the tender age of 14. All of these factors add a further dimension to this seemingly complex individual.

In the researcher's quest to glean a deeper understanding of Joshua, she embarked on a journey which required her first of all to comprehend what exactly is the disorder known as Asperger Syndrome (AS), what the exceptionality of giftedness signifies and whether there are any strategies that are used to accommodate gifted children. Secondly, how therefore, the presence of another exceptionality such as giftedness impacts on someone with AS was examined, a condition known in the literature as the 'twice-exceptional' child and finally the local context and that of the

school in which Joshua functions on a daily basis were investigated. These issues were explored with a view to determining how they impact on making Joshua into the individual he is today.

WHAT IS A DISORDER? WHAT IS ASPERGER SYNDROME?

The terms 'disability', 'disorders', 'special needs' and 'exceptional children' seem to be used interchangeably in the literature in reference to individuals that require special education and or related services because of either an impairment which has reduced their functioning or where gifted children are concerned, exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative or artistic areas (Smith, 2004; Heward, 2003).

The educational literature posits that there are as many as 12 categories of special needs or disabilities that can be found among individuals in any given society, which can be either of a physical, mental, emotional, behavioural or neurological nature. The disorder of AS, a milder form of Autism, was added to the neurological category in the 1990's (Heward, 2003). AS is therefore currently known as a neurological disorder, grouped under the broad Autism spectrum of Pervasive Developmental Disorders (Smith, 2004).

The disorder manifests itself, mainly but not exclusively by a deficit in oral communication; marked impairment in nonverbal behaviours such as eye-to-eye contact, facial expressions and other communicative gestures that regulate social interaction and an inflexible adherence to specific routines or rituals (Smith, 2004).

Another area of manifestation is in what is known as Tourette's disorder, of which 60% of individuals with Asperger possess, and which reveals itself by motor or vocal tics. These take the form of involuntary twitches of the body or face and/or the emission of grunting, animal-like sounds (Attwood, 2006). Additionally, about 70% of children on the Autism spectrum have a condition known as 'hyperacusis' which basically is defined as an acute auditory sensitivity to specific kinds of sounds such as sudden noises, several people talking at once and even natural sounds such as the rustling of leaves (Attwood). These noises are what their neurotypical peers deem ordinary and unremarkable, but which to AS children, can be a source of major distress and anxiety (Griffin et al, 2006).

In terms of academic ability, the literature posits that AS children have extremes of ability, they are on either end of the continuum. Some are very gifted and others are below average, but for the greater part they tend to possess strong mechanical, mathematical and musical ability (Attwood, 2006). In the domain of music in particular, several of them are described as having 'perfect pitch', a terminology used in reference to someone who can either recognise or produce a musical note at its precise pitch without prior knowledge of that note (James, 2006).

Presently the disorder affects approximately one in every 150 individuals and has facilitated extensive research on the issue (Griffin et al, 2006). However, this research has been executed mainly at the elementary school level and not at the secondary (Myles & Adreon, 2001). Further review of the literature interestingly reveals that the characteristics of AS tend to be accentuated at adolescence since the

condition now becomes intertwined with the complexity of puberty and the individual having to interact in a larger, more socially dynamic environment as characterises the secondary school (Adreon & Stella, 2001). The condition also becomes exacerbated when it is coupled with another condition, such as the exceptionality of giftedness (Niehart, 2000).

Yet within all of this, the voice of the AS child himself should not be ignored. The notion of empowering individuals with disabilities through eliciting their viewpoints is highly supported in educational psychology (Eggen & Kauchak, 2004) and in the case of AS children it is no different. Some researchers in the field maintain that the AS child should be allowed substantial input into the decisions that are made about them since although there are commonalities in characteristics of the syndrome, each child's experience of it is different (Myles & Adreon, 2001; Carrington et al, 2003). The importance of allowing the AS individual to express how he feels about issues that affect him is echoed in the words of a prominent researcher in the field: **"I think that those who have Asperger's Syndrome should have the last comment"** (Attwood, 2006) and reinforced by these utterances of a victim of the disorder: **"children with Asperger Syndrome are the best experts on AS. They can tell adults what seem unusual about their world"** (Hall, 2001, p.103).

THE CONCEPTION OF GIFTEDNESS

Although there are varying conceptions as to what the term 'giftedness' means, the educational literature now posits that there seems to be a broader conception of the term which traditionally only took into account one's cognitive superiority but which currently includes a person's propensity for talent and creativity. As defined in the research, gifted children are those **"who exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity or excel in specific academic fields.... they require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school"** (Smith, 2004, p. 227).

There is no standardised programme in place either for identifying or accommodating the needs of gifted children when identified, because of varying conceptions on what the term should mean and from a social perspective some researchers maintain that providing for the so-called 'gifted' is encouraging an elitist society especially in an age of attempts at inclusion (Margolin, 1996, as cited in Smith, 2004). Another factor that perhaps impedes standardised provision for them is the relatively low prevalence of the exceptionality, which is about two to five percent of the school's population (Smith), a percentage which parallels the local figure of two percent in Trinidad and Tobago (Ministry of Education, 2004). In spite of this however, some educational institutions both internationally and locally have adopted their own programmes to cater to the gifted students in their midst (Heward, 2003; Niehart, 2000).

TWICE EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

An emerging issue of concern is the notion of the 'twice exceptional' child. Traditionally the term referred to gifted students with only learning disabilities (Nielsen et al, 1993) but presently the conception has broadened to include gifted students with any type of disability that appears under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 (Smith, 2004). There are biases in society with regard to individuals with disabilities and in fact very often people do not equate the term 'disability' with 'giftedness' and as a result most students with disabilities are not included in any form of education that may be provided for the gifted (Smith). Experts in the field of special education contend that it is possible for the two to co-exist although they may present challenges to educators (Niehart, 2000). The challenge is of a two-fold nature since it requires “ **educators to address both aspects of their talents and their disabilities**” (Nielsen, 2002, as cited in Smith).

The gifted student with AS is currently gaining recognition in the field of special education (Niehart, 2000). This type of student is also sometimes referred to as the 'autistic savant', defined typically as an individual on the autism spectrum who manifests gifted abilities (Donnelly, 1994). The dual condition of giftedness and AS poses a tremendous challenge to educators since owing to the fact that AS and gifted children tend to share some similar characteristics, such as alienation from peers and highly focussed interests, one of the exceptional conditions can be overlooked in an individual and therefore not addressed. Another issue is the fact that there is sometimes misdiagnosis. The condition of Asperger in gifted children tend to cause

unusual behaviour in such children and this may also result in them either being wrongly diagnosed, as for example having a learning disability or their behaviour being attributed solely to their giftedness (Nielsen, 2002, as cited in Smith, 2004). When both areas of a child's dual condition are not attended to, especially in the case of AS in gifted children, the exceptionality of AS can in fact be exacerbated (Niehart).

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

In tandem with one of the fundamental aims of the Education system of Trinidad and Tobago where it is advocated that no child be left out of receiving an education (Ministry of Education, 2004), the Ministry of Education through the Student Support Services is currently attempting to meet the needs of the differing students in the education system, inclusive of those with exceptional conditions: **"The central focus of the student support services system is to support all students to maximize their learning potential, do well at school, achieve to their capabilities and develop holistically"** (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 9).

Locally, while there are no firm statistics yet available on the amount of children that are diagnosed with the disorder of AS, according to the President of the Autistic Society, Teresina Sieunarine, there are over 250 families registered with the Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago (ASTT). ASTT is a Non- Governmental Organization parent support group for children on the Autism spectrum, established since 1990 (personal communication, March 5, 2007). It is estimated that there are over 8,000 persons on the Autism Spectrum Disorder in the total population of

Trinidad and Tobago, more than half of whom are children of school age that are cared for at home and not receiving appropriate teaching since there is a lack of trained personnel in the country to work with children on the spectrum at schools (T. Sieunarine, personal communication, March 5, 2007). In view of the fact that teachers feel ill-equipped to deal with students that are autistic and there is a lack of resources at the schools to accommodate the condition of such students, once the child is diagnosed through the assistance of the Student Support Services, teachers tend to advise parents to either send their children to a special school or to home-school them (personal communication). In an age of inclusion, such a situation contradicts the very essence of what the current education system embraces.

THE SCHOOL

At the school in which the study is being conducted, a Catholic, traditional, highly academic institution of about 140 years, the intellectual needs of the gifted child, have traditionally and continue, to be addressed today. There is a support mechanism in place through an acceleration programme at the form two level to accommodate the students considered "gifted" by the school's standards, as those demonstrating cognitive superiority by the culmination of the first form examinations. These "gifted" students are placed in a specialized form two class and complete both the second and third form syllabi in the second year thus making them eligible to advance to the fourth form at the end of the second year.

Within recent times, owing to the current thrust in the educational system toward inclusion (Ministry of Education, 2004) there is an increasing number of

students being admitted to the college with emotional and behavioural disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and perhaps on varying levels of the autism spectrum. The institution however, partly owing to its age, does not have sufficient resources in terms of personnel, training or infrastructure to either recognise or provide adequately for students with disabilities. As a result, these students are basically required to manage the best they can on the school compound. It is generally expected by the administration and staff that such students, having been made known to the institution by their caregivers, are recipients of some sort of therapy accompanied sometimes by prescribed medication, which have been organised by their parents or guardians outside the perimeters of the school.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

At the school in which the study is being conducted, a Catholic, traditional, highly academic institution of about 140 years, while a support mechanism has been put in place through an acceleration programme to accommodate the needs of the gifted child, the institution is not equipped with all the necessary resources to accommodate students with disabilities. The situation is compounded when students possess a dual exceptionality, as is the case with the participant under study, Joshua, who demonstrates both giftedness and AS. As a result while the participant's academic and talent needs are being met to a greater degree, there is no system in place to address the other dimensions of his being, namely in the social and sensory domain which may be compromised due to his

condition of AS. It is this lack of a system, which translates itself into ignorance on the part of the college, as to how students like Joshua perceive their own situation and how best they think they can be accommodated.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

This narrative inquiry will attempt, in keeping with the view that persons who suffer with AS are the best 'experts' on the disorder, through an intrinsic case study, to glean understandings from the themes derived from Joshua's story, his personal experience of being twice exceptional as he operates on a daily basis in his school environment. The inquiry will, through the study of his experience, elicit the type of support base that should be provided for him at the school.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The fundamental research question that underpins the study is:
What is it like to be a young adolescent gifted student with Asperger Syndrome in a highly traditional and academic institution?

SUB-QUESTIONS

The sub-questions extracted from the main research question are:

- How has his disorder affected his social and academic participation in the secondary school milieu of which he is a part?
- What aspects of his secondary school environment are supportive of his dual condition?

- What aspects of his secondary school environment are not supportive of his dual condition?

CHALLENGES TO THE CONDUCT OF THE STUDY

LIMITATIONS

The major challenge perceived by the researcher in the conduct of this study was, given the fact that AS individuals are characterised by a deficit in oral communication and social skills, the eliciting of substantial information from him in order to glean an in-depth understanding of his situation.

Another serious challenge was, given the fact that narrative inquiry is a collaborative approach between participant and researcher, determining how much of the participant's voice to include and when to interrupt that voice with the researcher's commentary and analysis.

Added to those two challenges was that her position as teacher of the student for the past four years meant that her biases or prejudices could also affect her observations and analyses. It was therefore necessary for her to guard against this limitation.

DELIMITATIONS

The study was restricted to one student's experience of being twice exceptional in a secondary school.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Operational definitions of some key terms that were used in the study are highlighted below:

Narrative inquiry:

"The process of gathering information for the purpose of research through story telling" (Chataika, 2005, p.2). "In principle it is a form of inquiry that is committed to representing the actions of the relatively unknown, perhaps oppressed and ignored social groups"(Chataika, p.3). "The narrative inquiry is a shared narrative construction between participant and researcher"(Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.5).

Gifted children:

"Those who exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity or excel in specific academic fields... they require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school" (Smith, 2004, p. 227).

Asperger syndrome:

"A pervasive developmental disorder that is characterised by an inability to understand how to interact socially. Typical features of the syndrome also may include clumsy and uncoordinated motor movements, social impairment with

extreme egocentricity, limited interests, unusual preoccupations, repetitive routines and non-verbal communication problems”(www.medterm.com).

Twice exceptional:

“A student is considered twice exceptional when he/she is identified as gifted and having a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004” (www.desoto.k12ms.us/gifted/twice-exceptional.htm).

Autistic savant:

“This refers to individuals with autism who are above average intelligence and who manifest gifted abilities” (Donnelly, 1994, p.1).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

An exploration of the narrative of this gifted student with Asperger will serve to:

- (a) Add to the current research on students with dual exceptionalities in particular giftedness couple with AS.
- (b) Sensitise educators at the college to the needs of such students in the classroom.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review focussed on several pertinent issues which affect the student, with special emphasis on the adolescent diagnosed with AS and also the gifted AS individual. In this regard, research carried out on social problems faced by

AS adolescent victims were first explored, secondly the domain of sensory sensitivity and its effect on behaviour was examined and finally the dual condition of both giftedness and AS was investigated. In each of the areas, in an attempt to provide the optimal class or school environment for the gifted AS child, the review focused on identifying specific challenges facing educators, as well as strategies that researchers claimed could alleviate some of these.

THE SOCIAL DILEMMA

In order to gain an insight into the social world of AS teenagers diagnosed with the syndrome, a study conducted by Carrington and Graham (2003) was examined on the perceptions that two AS teenage boys and their mothers have of school. The study provided a voice for teenage victims of the disorder in that it allowed them to express how they feel with regard to matters concerning the school environment, in particular forming friendships. It is well documented in the literature that one of the major characteristics of AS is an impairment in social interaction and that during adolescence the situation tends to be compounded by the onset of puberty and the larger, more dynamic secondary environment (Myles & Adreon, 2001; Smith, 2004; Griffin et al, 2006). The purpose of the study was to develop an understanding of the challenges faced by teenagers who experience the syndrome and their families.

A case study approach was employed whereby data was collected from two thirteen-year old school boys and their mothers in a large secondary school in Australia. The report was descriptive and its emphasis was on the use of personal stories and reflections. Semi-structured interviews were the primary form of data

collection to obtain information from the participants in order to allow them to express their feelings openly. From the findings, the researcher elicited that among the general problems associated with Asperger such as communication and social difficulties, other findings related to stress and masquerading were also discovered. Both boys expressed that they experienced stress when they were required to complete school assignments by a specific time and in meeting the social expectations of peers. Their mothers also added that many of their feelings were hidden or masked in the school environment. From the students it was also gathered that both boys were aware of 'not fitting in' and they tried very hard to mask their deficits but it was a stressful experience to do so.

In another study conducted by Carrington and Graham (2001) on the perceptions of friendship faced by five teenagers diagnosed with AS where a multiple case study methodology and semi-structured interviews were employed, it was discovered that these AS teenagers did in fact have a desire to fit in but did not know how to do so. They did not understand the notion of 'friendship'. The themes extracted from the data included (a) understanding of concepts or language regarding friendships; (b) description of what is a friend; (c) description of what is not a friend; (d) description of an acquaintance; (e) using masquerade to cope with social deficits. The results from the data collected revealed that although the students desired friendships, they did not seem to comprehend the nature and reciprocity of friendship so their relationships with others tended to be superficial, a concern that is supported in the literature among most AS children (Myles & Adreon, 2001). In addition,

according to Attwood (2006), there generally seems to be no depth to the relationships AS individuals, particularly teenagers, have with their peers.

Another of the findings was that there was a lack of insight into these children's own social deficits since most of them did not see themselves as having problems in friendships, an insight also shared by Barnhill (2001) who conducted similar studies on AS children and friendships. Although Carrington's (2001) study did not take into consideration the cognitive level of the students which apparently can have an impact on this phenomenon, in other research, Barnhill (2001) has found that the more cognitively superior an AS individual was, the more aware he or she became aware of his/her social deficiencies. Attwood (2006) has also found that some students, when they realise their differences to their peers, resort to one of two forms of behaviour. They either internalise their problem by using escapism into an imaginary world, thus becoming self-absorbed, or externalise it by becoming angry and aggressive to those around them.

Social skills instruction is imperative to the AS child especially at adolescence where the social demands of the school environment are greater (Myles & Adreon, 2001). Carrington and Graham (2001) propose the teaching of social skills with repeated practice as one effective strategy in addressing this deficit in students with AS. Owing to these children's basic lack of social instinct, it appears to be useful to teach them social skills from an intellectual perspective. It is suggested that it can be incorporated during the entire school day or during specified social skills group time. Attwood (2006) also advocates the use of social stories where illustrations are used

with a narrative to impart knowledge to AS individuals as to what are acceptable and non-acceptable forms of social behaviours. Barnhill (2001) suggests the use of role-play of social situations whereby opportunities are provided for students of AS to model desired social behaviour in simulated settings.

SENSORY SENSITIVITY

Another characteristic of AS which can sometimes be overlooked in the school environment, is sensory sensitivity. Extreme sensitivity to some types of sensory stimuli, in particular sound and touch, is common among children with AS (Attwood, 2006). The literature purports that the more severe the sensory integration problem, the more difficult it is for the AS child to adopt appropriate classroom behaviour and the more challenging it is for him to cope with stress and change (Niehart, 2000). This has implications for the AS gifted child where, if he is part of a gifted programme, the likelihood of unpredictability is even greater and as a result the level of stress can be augmented (Niehart).

Dunn et al (2000) as cited in Barnhill (2001), conducted a study on 42 school children with Asperger Syndrome, their level of sensory functioning and how the sensory domain impacts on their behaviour in the classroom. The majority (75%) of the students under study had overt behavioural and emotional responses by aggression to sensory stimuli, in particular noise. The results underscored for him the need to take into consideration the effect that sensory issues have on the behaviour of students with AS. In tandem with the study, the literature posits that 70% of

individuals on the Autism Spectrum have sensory sensitivity, particularly acute auditory sensitivity to specific sounds such as several people engaging in conversation simultaneously (Attwood, 2006). Victims of the disorder require a coping mechanism when they experience sensory overload since many of them resort to disruptive behaviour in the classroom, sometimes directed toward self (Attwood).

It is imperative that teachers be able to determine whether a tantrum or other forms of non-acceptable behaviour by an AS child is emanating from pain or fear. The literature purports that deviant behaviour and tantrums are quite often the direct result of sounds in the environment that may be hurtful to their ears (Grandin, 1995, as cited in Smith, 2004).

Several strategies have been advocated to reduce the effects of sensory stimulation on Asperger children in the classroom, some of which include the use of ear plugs; social stories, a method of preparing such individuals for the noises and what they mean in the school environment through story telling; sensory integration therapy and the use of a 'safe harbour' (Dunn et al, 2002, as cited in Griffin, 2006). The 'safe harbour' concept a home-based intervention strategy which has been proven to be successful, involves designating a portion of the classroom or in some cases a room in the school as a quiet area (Attwood, 2006). It is a place where AS individuals can go to recover composure, a necessary form of retreat for them, especially in the secondary school environment where the noise level is augmented (Adreon & Stella, 2001). The concept of a safe retreat for AS children is echoed in

these sentiments: **“these guys need a safe harbour in the storm of life
....somewhere they can calm down”** (Attwood).

THE TWICE EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATION.

An area of growing concern in educational research is the twice-exceptional student, the gifted child diagnosed with a disability (Smith, 2004). The dual exceptionality of Asperger and giftedness pose an even greater concern (Niehart, 2000). It is purported that while individuals with AS face many challenges, when the condition is coupled with another such as giftedness, the condition of AS can be exacerbated, if both exceptionalities are not adequately addressed (Niehart). Although the gifted child on the Autism spectrum of disorders is a low incidence population, of which about 10% are extremely gifted and known as ‘autistic savants’, the needs of these individuals have to be accommodated (Donnelly, 1994).

Unfortunately some gifted students on the Autism spectrum have either been undiagnosed or misdiagnosed as having a learning disability, and as a result they have not been included in any sort of programme that may be provided for gifted students (Niehart, 2000). This occurs for several reasons. Misdiagnosis takes place sometimes because of a lack of a proper system in place inclusive of a multidisciplinary team to ensure proper diagnosis of either exceptionality. According to the President of the Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago, Teresina Sieunarine, both early and thorough diagnosis are lacking in Trinidad and Tobago due to an insufficient supply

of professional personnel to conduct expert diagnosis (T. Sieunarine, personal communication, March, 5, 2007). In the more developed countries such as the United States, expert diagnosis is made by a multidisciplinary team. However, when the condition of AS is coupled with giftedness it nevertheless poses a challenge. There are several reasons why this is challenging for educators. One of these is due to the fact that some of the characteristics of AS and giftedness tend to overlap (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2002).

Asperger and gifted children share several characteristics. One example is in the area of socializing (Smith, 2004; Niehart, 2000). However, noteworthy is the fact that research is showing that the root causes of this overlap are in fact different (Donnelly et al, 1994). In the case of Asperger children, the deficit in social skills is neurologically based and therefore more severe, as evidenced by a deficit in initial knowledge of social rules and lack of insight or awareness regarding the feelings, needs and interests of other people unlike the normal gifted child (Donnelly et al).

The literature posits therefore that while the treatment for social skills deficit in both gifted or Asperger is similar and can involve individual counselling and/or small group social therapy (Donnelly, 1994), the root cause and severity of the social disorder, compounded by the dual syndrome in the gifted AS child will require that he or she receives more in-depth social therapy (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2002). It seems that this pronounced lack of social awareness is one of the factors that makes participation in gifted programmes such a challenge for gifted AS students (Niehart, 2000).

According to Gallagher and Gallagher (2002) the gifted AS child may therefore require alternate interventions and strategies from normal gifted children or non-gifted AS children. The gifted AS child is not completely like a gifted child nor is he completely like an AS child. Children diagnosed with AS, consistent with children diagnosed with other disabilities usually have an Individualised Educational Plan (IEP), formulated by a multidisciplinary team of teachers, therapists, psychologists, parents and any other related specialists to the specific disability (Smith, 2004). Gifted children however have never been included in Individualised Educational Plans, although in many institutions both internationally and locally, these children have received some sort of separate programming (Smith; Heward, 2003).

While there are not yet studies available to prove the effectiveness of a gifted programme on a gifted AS child, a survey conducted with parents of gifted AS children, some of whom were public-schooled and others private-schooled, revealed that regardless of the type of institution, the gifted AS children who received gifted programming benefited greatly (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2002). The parents reported that the children when stimulated intellectually experienced improvement in their emotional state. This might underscore the point that the gifted AS child should not be excluded from any programming provided for the gifted, which sometimes happens, due particularly to their social limitations (Gallagher & Gallagher).

A note of contention however lies in the fact that although gifted education may be beneficial to gifted AS children, it nevertheless poses a challenge for

educators in these programmes. The learning environment that is encouraged for the gifted child is normally one that is open, complex and free will (Smith, 2004; Gallagher & Gallagher, 2002). However the traits characteristic of Asperger children such as adherence to routines and rigid structure, as cited earlier (Niehart, 2000) may be in conflict with the optimal environment that is normally advocated for the gifted (Gallagher & Gallagher). Research is showing that one useful strategy in helping the AS gifted child to adjust to a gifted programme might be sensory integration therapy. This form of therapy is a method designed by specially trained occupational therapists and it assists in providing AS students with a wider repertoire of skills to cope with sensory stimuli in their environment. It has also been found to be effective in helping students to cope with change (Niehart).

Another challenge faced by the AS gifted child is the fact that AS children are concrete, visual learners and this is contrary to the expectation in the gifted classroom where learners are required to think abstractly and verbally (Niehart, 2000). There may be a need to make adjustments to the gifted programme, which however may not be deemed fair to the normal gifted child, or what is ideal, provide an Individualised Educational Plan (IEP) for gifted children with AS (Smith).

From a review of the literature, tantamount to addressing the needs of the gifted child with AS, seem to be two main requisites. Firstly, it is imperative that accurate diagnosis be carried out by an interdisciplinary team, comprising therapists, psychologists, parents and teachers (Smith, 2004). While at the Eric Williams Medical Complex at Mount Hope in Trinidad and Tobago, some sort of diagnosis is

made; it is not adequate, since it is not performed by a multidisciplinary team (T. Sieunarine, personal communication, March, 5, 2007).

Secondly, research documents the fact that various forms of therapy which can take the form of sensory integration, social, speech and in some cases behavioural need to be provided for both Asperger and AS gifted children in order for them to function effectively in the school environment and this is even more pertinent if they are participating in a gifted programme since some of them may require coping mechanisms in adjusting to the demands of gifted education (Smith, 2004; Heward, 2003; Gallagher & Gallagher, 2002).

While the ideal situation is the provision of an Individualised Educational Plan (IEP), in the absence of one for gifted children which compounds the situation of the gifted AS child, several strategies to reduce the effect of noise and by extension uncertainty on AS children in these environments have been employed, one of which includes the 'safe harbour' strategy, a practical and readily accessible intervention (Attwood, 2006). The usefulness of one strategy over another is however to be determined by the degree to which the person is affected by a particular disability and hence this reiterates the importance of gleaning as much knowledge as possible about the particular individual's case, notwithstanding the insider's knowledge which can only be learnt from the victim himself (Carrington et al, 2003; Hall, 2001).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

An investigation into the experience of a gifted student with Asperger Syndrome required a research method that allowed for an in-depth understanding, as gleaned primarily through the participant's eyes, of how the phenomenon of being twice exceptional impacts on a young adolescent who experiences this phenomenon. The research was rendered qualitative through the knowledge that was being sought by the researcher which is grounded in the philosophical base of hermeneutics, a theory of understanding that recognises reality as not being uniform but multiple, as people generally experience the world differently and construct their own meanings to make sense of the environment in which they live (Eggen & Kauchak, 2004; Creswell, 1998).

Qualitative research allows for a "rich, thick description" of a phenomenon that is being explored (Creswell, 1998) and it is the richness of this data which facilitates a thorough, holistic understanding of the issue of being twice exceptional, which by its very nature, needs to be explored in detail. In addition, the qualitative paradigm as evidenced in its methods, seeks an "**interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world, to make sense of, or to interpret phenomenon through a variety of methods, e.g. case study, personal experience, narrative life story, artifacts**" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.3). These various traditions in the qualitative mode of inquiry, from which a narrative inquiry was employed for this particular

research, afforded the researcher the opportunity to select a method to her inquiry that would best elicit the detailed, rich, insider knowledge that was being sought (Creswell, 1998).

RATIONALE AND STRUCTURE OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) are in accord that **“humans are storytelling organisms who individually and socially lead storied lives”** (Connelly & Clandinin, p. 2). Narrative inquiry therefore allowed the researcher the opportunity to study and document the way one specific human being experiences the world. The narrative inquiry approach is one that is advocated especially for representation of oppressed, relatively unknown and ignored social groups in society (Chataika, 2005). Recently, narrative research has been gaining a more prominent place in qualitative research, especially in the field of disability education (Chataika). In this qualitative study it was therefore an apt methodology in capturing how an AS gifted student makes sense of his scholastic world.

Since there is no one unifying method as to how to interpret stories that are told, approaches to narrative analysis vary in structure. They also differ in how the researcher uses tone, rhetorical devices and discursive structures (Chataika, 2005). One common thread throughout this type of research however is that it is participatory and collaborative, involving both the participant and the researcher in constructing and reconstructing the story as the themes emerge.

Although the researcher and participant work collaboratively, a distinction is made by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) in the analysis between 'story' and 'narrative'. The 'story' is the phenomenon or event experienced by the participant and 'narrative' is the analytical framework that researchers use to describe those stories. In terms of plot, it is described as the organizing theme that brings coherence to the telling of events (Ezzy, 1998 as cited in Riley & Hawe, 2005).

The essential tool in narrative research is the interview, preferably of an unstructured or semi-structured nature to allow for the unearthing of rich, valuable data. Given the condition of the participant in this study, semi-structured interviews were employed as opposed to unstructured interviews. Some other essential tools of narrative inquiry are journal records and field notes made during observation, both of which were also utilised by the researcher.

In structuring this narrative inquiry of an AS gifted adolescent, attention was paid to Clandinin and Connelly's (1990) experiential dimension of narrative where 'time' and 'place' in which plot and scene are embedded, form the outline of the plot. 'Time' is a temporal construct which guides the story, focussing on the three-fold structure of past, present and future (Clandinin & Connelly). 'Place' is the context. It is where the action occurs. In narrative research 'place' incorporates characters, the physical and socio-cultural environment and the events, all of which play either restraining or enabling roles in the unfolding of the participant's story (Clandinin & Connelly) (see Appendix A).

Setting

Given that human behaviour is rarely context free (Chataika, 2005), it was imperative that the natural setting in which the participant functions on a daily basis be given due consideration in the inquiry and added to that is the fact that context is an inherent aspect of the experiential quality of narrative research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

The Secondary College under study forms part of a trio of colleges founded by the congregation of Holy Ghost Fathers, an ecclesiastical order whose special mission is to undertake the work of apostleship and sound academic education. This particular secondary college is the first of the trio of colleges to be established by the order in Trinidad and Tobago in 1863. It comprises a male student population of approximately 1040 students and staff of 71 teachers, inclusive of Principal. While 20% of the students are admitted to the college yearly by the Principal, through the Concordat agreement, the vast majority 80% of the students are admitted based on the attainment of a percentile score of about 94% or above on the Secondary Entrance Examination.

From its inception in 1863, the college is endorsed by its legacy of producing scholarship winners and while it is also marked by its successes in other fields such as music and sports, is generally renowned for its thrust in the academic arena.

A significant amount of scholarships are attained annually at the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE) and at the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) 98% of students achieve a full certificate of five Ordinary Level passes or more.

Potential scholarship winners are gleaned from as early as the first year at the college, where students who exhibit extreme academic brilliance at the culmination of the first form examination, are moulded in a separate second year class through an accelerated programme, at the end of which they are allowed to advance to the fourth level, having completed both the second and third year programmes in one academic year. However, consequent to the second year accelerated programme, the 'gifted' students are integrated in regular classes.

Selection of Participant

Purposeful or purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) was employed for the selection of the participant in this research. The sampling procedure was appropriate since in the researcher's aim to 'discover, understand and gain insight' into the particular phenomenon, a participant who embodied the duality of giftedness with a disorder had to be selected (Merriam, 1998). The fact that it was an intrinsic case study, which involved one person's unique experience of a dual exceptionality, did not require that more participants be studied in the research (Creswell, 1998).

Since the study was delicate by nature, it was incumbent that strict ethical guidelines were followed, such as those highlighted by Merriam (1998). Permission had been sought, prior to the commencement of the research, by the participant's parents, the school Principal and the participant himself. The participant was made fully aware, as were his parents, of the procedures to be employed in data collection and how the results were to be analysed. They were also assured of the utmost

confidentiality with which the research was to be treated. Finally, the student under study was informed of his right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Profile of participant

The participant in the research is a fifteen-year old boy who was diagnosed with the disorder/disability known as Asperger syndrome by the age of two years old. On the school compound he appears to be a social misfit, he has stereotypical, jerky, bodily actions and does not seem to comprehend the nuances associate with social behaviour. For the greater part of the school day he seems to be lost in his own self-absorbed world.

There is more to this AS individual however. It was discovered that by elementary school age his cognitive superiority in logical-mathematical areas became apparent and teachers were baffled by the fact that 'he never had to be taught Math'. At a very young age his parents also reiterated that they became aware of the fact that he was musically gifted. His music teacher remarked that he had perfect pitch, a rare occurrence in people even in the music world, but common to many AS individuals (James, 2006). By age 15, he had attained his Performance Diploma in Music, the British equivalent of an Associate Degree, a feat typically accomplished by adults.

On an average he would be absent from school at least twice per week to attend therapy sessions, organised by his parents. As part of the recommended treatment of individuals with Asperger, he visits a speech therapist, behavioural

psychologist and physical therapist. He does not receive any form of therapy on the school compound.

DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

In the qualitative paradigm of research, in particular narrative inquiry, the major source of data collection is often interviewing, described as “**the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals**” (Merriam, 1998, p.72). The primary mode of data collection in this research was therefore interviews, which allowed for a greater depth of understanding (Creswell, 1998) and also reflection on experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The use of this instrument, though extremely challenging at times, given the nature of the participant’s condition of AS in which oral communication is an area of weakness (Attwood, 2006) nevertheless afforded the researcher the opportunity to be more patient and creative in her questioning in order to gain a deeper understanding about how the participant feels about his world (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) (see Appendix B). Apart from the participant under study, other significant individuals that were interviewed were three of his teachers, one of his parents and two of his peers to allow for as much rich, thick data as possible to be unfolded (Creswell, 1998) (see Appendix C).

The interviews of the participant and of his parent, conducted separately, were semi-structured, lasted approximately 40 minutes on each occasion and were carried out in the privacy of the participant’s home to allow for the creation of a non-

judgmental and non-threatening atmosphere which was so crucial to this study (Merriam, 1998). The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to digress beyond prepared questions and while the responses from the participant were mainly brief one-word or one-line answers which is common to individuals with AS syndrome (Myles & Adreon, 2001), the triangulation of the data through the use of a reflective journal kept by the participant and observation by the researcher assisted in the understanding of his experience. The interviews of the significant others, namely teachers and peers, were conducted on separate occasions in the Language Laboratory, a private room at the college.

Another source of data collection, was documents, first of all in the form of a reflective journal kept by the participant (See Appendix D). The reflective journal in which thoughts, views and impressions are recorded, is highly advocated by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) in narrative research. In the researcher's pursuit of a deeper comprehension of the individual's experience of his dual phenomena, allowing him to keep a journal in which he recorded his feelings and thoughts about the day proved to be very useful not only in corroborating evidence but also in crystallizing and concretising the researcher's own ideas about the inquiry (Chataika, 2005). The use of a journal or diary in which experiences and feelings are expressed is also recommended for individuals with AS, who, since they may have a deficit in oral expression, appear to be more willing to express themselves in writing or drawing, thus allowing also for those with giftedness and creativity in these areas to flourish (Attwood, 2006). Other documental sources included the participant's assessment

record for the second term's period of the fourth form academic year of 2005-2006 and the first term's assessment of the fifth form year of 2006-2007 respectively (see Appendix E)

The final major source of data collection strategies was observation. Having sought permission from the participant's teachers, access was gained to two of his classes and an observational protocol, as a method for recording field notes was maintained by the researcher (Creswell, 1998) (See Appendix F). In the observational protocol, both descriptive and reflective notes were accumulated, as both are useful in the employment of observation as a data collection technique (Creswell). Unobtrusive observation of the participant was also carried out during the recreational and lunch breaks at the school.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process whereby order, structure and meaning are brought to a mass of collective data. It involves a time-consuming, creative and fascinating process of transforming raw data into significant meaningful findings (Creswell, 1998). A researcher engaging in qualitative research should address three essential stages before the raw data can be analysed. The stages include: data management, data reduction and data display (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data management is the process whereby data is organized to allow for easier accessibility. Data reduction refers to categorizing the data into salient themes and data display involves highlighting the themes for analysis (Miles & Huberman).

Prior to the actual three-fold process, the researcher, in an effort to prepare herself for data analysis, engaged in self-reflection in order to 'bracket' pre-conceived notions and biases she may have had that could have impacted on the research issue. Added to this, the researcher immersed herself in the material by repeatedly reading through the transcripts of the interview and journal data in order to get an initial 'feel' of the data. This strategy of analytic induction in qualitative research is recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1998).

Analysis began by management of the data. Interview data were collected by a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim to facilitate easier scanning of the document and to ensure that a hard copy was available in the event that the recorded version was erased. This document was then presented to the interviewees in order to verify that their opinions and perspectives recorded were in fact plausible. Three files were then created in order to manage the data more effectively. An identity file was used to code the identity of the participants in the study. A tape file secured all the recorded interviews that were conducted and a content file held the documents inclusive of observation notes that were made throughout the course of the study.

The data was then reduced through thorough examination and manual coding. Colour coding was used to facilitate display and easier reading of the data, which in turn allowed for the generation of recurring, salient themes or patterns and even anomalies to surface. Identified themes were then linked to the research questions and used to produce a thorough narrative on the findings (see Appendix G). The analysis was done in the light of current research on the issue.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Gergen &Gergen (1984 as cited in Riley & Hawe, 2005) refer to narrative analysis as that which focuses on who is mentioned in the telling of events and who is absent and the role they have in the telling of events. These roles they describe as either restraining or enabling in a person's life. Characters in the protagonist's story are referred to as the supporting cast of a person's narrative.

This chapter reports the findings that emerged from the data, Joshua's story, as told primarily by him, but also by his mother, since recollection of events in his earlier life were difficult for him. Excerpts of his story were also taken from significant others of the narrative cast with a view to determining whether these significant persons played either restraining or enabling roles in his story. Four emerging major themes and several sub-themes were elicited and explored in relation to the research questions (see Appendix G). The protagonist's experiences, from which Joshua's needs were depicted and interpreted as themes, were punctuated by an analysis by the researcher in light of the research questions and current literature on the issues. The researcher discerned four pertinent emerging needs/themes:

- **SUPPORT MECHANISMS : Home; Professional (internal; external);
School (administration; teachers)**
- **PEER RELATIONS**
- **COPING MECHANISM (coping with noise)**
- **AUTONOMY (expression of desires; making of decisions)**

THE SUPPORT MECHANISMS: THE HOME

Joshua's rendition of his earlier life and his mother's recollection of events point to the fact that he received tremendous support from his parents to assist him in his condition. The chapter addresses the first sub-question as to how Joshua's disorder affects his academic and social participation in the school. It seeks to demonstrate that the substantial parental support Joshua received from his home eventually contributed to an easier transition in the school environment for him.

Joshua recounts:

In the beginning...

I don't remember much about my earlier life, mum showed me pictures.

I see where she and dad helped me to do stuff and learn things. I think school was basically at home...people came home to help me.

Thus begins the story of Joshua's life as seen through his eyes. Details of the chronology of events, which encompassed his past, were gleaned from his mother:

The symptoms were there a lot earlier on than we thought. However at that time we thought it was a series of isolated events. Firstly he did not walk until he was sixteen months...I also remember very distinctly when he was about 18 months he would point to the moon and say "moo" and then one day he just lost it, he stopped vocalizing and stopped pointing, he had a vocabulary of about four words at that time and he lost them. Another thing is that when we bought our new home, Joshua had an adverse reaction to the texture of the floor

he refused to walk on it, he would scream and shriek when his foot touched the floor, it was very distressing. Also he seemed oblivious to us, we would try to get his attention and it was no use, it was as if we did not exist. He would show no anxiety at our departure and no joy at our entering a room. I would say it was probably just before two that we realized something was wrong, but looking back in hindsight, the symptoms were there all along...

On further interaction with Joshua's mother the researcher learnt that at around the age of two, he was professionally diagnosed with infantile autism. Joshua's past, which included his infant, pre-primary and primary school years were characterised by a strict home-management plan as recommended by his psychologist and regular visits to speech, occupational and psychiatric therapists. The words of Joshua's mother echo their initiative and the tireless support that was given to Joshua during these initial stages of his development:

As parents we also started doing research on our own because as parents it hits you like a ton of bricks to see your child's future so limited. So we researched, attended workshops and we also took him away to the sick kids' hospital in Toronto to get another psychological and psychiatric evaluation done on him and it was found that although he was still aloof in all his actions, he had begun to make eye contact. This was within five months of his last evaluation, he was now two years and seven months so it was partly as a result of us working with him at home... our days at home especially in the early years were not an eight to two or eight to four job. It was all day

because sometimes he would click and other times he would be so unresponsive. I had to quit my job to do this with him because it was of course very time-consuming but you don't mind because it is your child and you love him and want the best for him no matter what it costs.

Joshua's story is unique, in that, he is a victim of a dual exceptionality, Asperger coupled with giftedness. His parents demonstrated their support by attempting to address both of his exceptionalities. His remarkable gift at the piano was nurtured by a professional piano tutor who visited his home to conduct lessons several days per week. His earlier life, from the age of six to his present is engraved with accomplishments of brilliance especially in the domain of music. Aware of his talent and the effect it has on him, Joshua remarks through his story:

I can play anything. I can even play classical music... I love music... It makes me feel happy and relaxed.

His extraordinary talent is again highlighted through his current music teacher's words:

He is the best I've seen, really great, I humbly admit that I do not need to teach him since he is now as professionally qualified as I am.

Yet again in the words of his mother:

Music is his strength. From very young we were told he had perfect pitch. This is unusual because normally you can teach someone near-perfect pitch in the music world but he did not have to be taught that. If you hit a spoon on a glass he could tell you exactly what note it was.

According to the literature on AS gifted children, there are some reports of perfect pitch among these 'savant' individuals (Donnelly, 1994).

It would appear that Joshua's parents fulfilled enabling roles in his life as evidenced by the fact that they attended to his needs brought on by his dual condition of AS and giftedness. From having a music tutor provide piano lessons for him since the age of six, to home-schooling him until he was ready for integration in the regular school environment, indicate the support base they offered for him. This would seem to offset some of the challenges that surface due particularly to AS in the social and learning domains and allowed for an easier transition into the regular school environment. In addressing the first sub-question therefore, which sought to answer how Joshua's disorder affected his participation in the school, the claim can be made that with the strong support base received from his parents, Joshua's participation in the academic and social aspects of the school environment were not as difficult as they could have been.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

Arising out of the story, another critical area of support for Joshua seems to be in the professional arena. In his present situation at school, having been asked about the sort of help that should be provided for him, his confirming response was:

A counsellor that I could talk to ...

In recalling what was said to her, Joshua's parent also reiterates the tremendous assistance therapy has been for her son:

He himself told me the other day that had he not done all that structured social work at home and with his psychologist, he would not have been able to survive at the school.

In partial response to the first sub-question as to how Joshua's disorder affects his full academic and social participation in the school, the researcher acknowledges that another reason why Joshua seems to have been able to function fairly effectively is due to the therapeutic intervention he received as a child and continues to receive as an adolescent. However, the fact that he mentions that he would **"like a counsellor to talk to"** on the school's compound implies therefore that the absence of a guidance officer or counsellor at the college indicates that there is a need in him that is not being fulfilled.

Therapeutic intervention, which Joshua fully recognises as pertinent, would seem to be the anchor that secures him as he wades his way through the turbulent seas of adolescence at the college. In this regard, with special reference to the third sub-question as to what aspects of the school environment are not supportive of Joshua's condition, it is apparent that with the lack of a counsellor on board, a fundamental need of his is not being addressed.

THE SCHOOL

In examining the second and third research questions as to what aspects of Joshua's school environment are supportive and non-supportive of his condition, it became evident that several aspects of the school fulfilled pertinent roles in how

events impacted on him. These sub-categories included: the Administration and teachers. In the area of teachers, three subsequent themes which impacted on Joshua's academic experience, emerged: teacher willingness; teacher punctuality and regularity and teaching strategies.

ADMINISTRATION

One of the primary ways in which the school could be of assistance is through the Administration. This is best illustrated by allowing those who interact on a daily basis with Joshua to become aware of his condition. The educational literature recommends that this awareness knowledge serves to offset some of the difficulties brought on by AS with regard to how teachers deal with these students and also how peers interact with them (Myles & Adreon, 2001). The researcher, on analysis of events recalled in Joshua's story, discerned the significance that the Administration plays in the process especially with regard to awareness knowledge. Joshua's mother, in recalling the enabling role the Principal executed in his primary school experience, recounts:

The Principal of his primary school, a private school took a keen interest in Joshua's condition as it was the first time she had heard of it. She arranged a meeting with who would then be his class teacher, herself and us the parents and allowed us to explain his condition fully. That support meant the world to us and I would expect Joshua. There was one unfortunate incident that I recall though. Joshua's processing time is slow and because of his condition of AS he could come across as being rude or impolite. The secretary of the primary school apparently told him something and

interpreted his reaction as insolence. She reacted to this and so did Joshua. Luckily the Principal saw what was happening, intervened and held Joshua. After that she decided to have a meeting with the entire staff, teaching and non-teaching to make them aware of his condition.

It is also expected that knowledge of a student's condition should translate into teacher willingness to make necessary adjustments. This brought the researcher to the role of yet another member of the significant cast in Joshua's life, the teacher.

TEACHERS

In support of the insight that knowledge of Joshua's condition could make a difference in the way teachers engage in positive manners to assist him, the researcher interviewed his English Language and Literature teacher, who recounts:

I was at the staff meeting years ago when we were informed of Joshua's condition. I never actually knew who the boy was because I had never met him. How I knew it was the same boy is because I picked up little strange things about this student in my class. He had a constant need for clarification, he had uncontrolled movements at times, the not wanting to communicate too much orally... I knew something was wrong and then it dawned on me, this is the boy with Asperger we were told about. It is amazing but he is very talented academically...He does have a problem with language being used inferentially but I have been working with him on this. I have been trying to sensitise him to the inferences, taking my time, explaining to him to see beyond the surface lines in a poem or a passage.

Another event narrated by his Mathematics and Form teacher reinforced for the researcher that apart from awareness knowledge, ensuring that this knowledge is disseminated through the school even as new members of staff join the cohort, is of paramount importance. At the school under study, there is a relatively high turn over of staff and as a result, given the fact that the staff was apprised of Joshua's situation when he entered the first form, teachers coming into the system during the subsequent years were not necessarily aware of his condition, as was the case with Joshua's current Mathematics and form teacher:

In my opinion he is top of the line academically but he is very strange. He flies off the hook too easily, he gets angry quickly. I experienced it more than once with him so much so that I don't tell him anything again, once it's not work related. I made a joke with him once and it was something that in my opinion any normal boy his age would not get upset about. They would just laugh it off. They always do at my jokes. He got real angry, he seemed to be contorting and his hands flared up in the air, his tone changed... I told myself not me again with this boy... no one told me anything about him and I could see now that something is definitely wrong with him... if someone told me what was wrong with him before, I would have known not to make jokes with him like that, I would know where to draw the boundaries.

Joshua, as so many others on the Autism spectrum, is not like his neurotypical peers. Difficulty in comprehending the subtleties of language and the social cues that embody jokes are characteristic features of the AS individual (Attwood, 2006). Lack

of prior knowledge of the student's condition seems to have led to an uncomfortable relationship between Joshua and his form teacher. The absence of knowledge of Joshua's situation on some teachers' part would appear to play a restraining role in his school's experience. Given the incident that occurred with his form teacher, Joshua does not share a comfortable relationship with this teacher and the teacher in turn feels awkward in his presence.

TEACHER WILLINGNESS

That knowledge of Joshua's condition would readily translate into positive action on the teacher's part was a point that the researcher had to re-consider as Joshua's present experiences in the classroom unfolded. His parent related an incident involving a teacher who had prior knowledge of her son's condition but who chose to react contrary to the manner that what was expected of him. His mother recalls:

When Joshua was in the accelerated class in form two, teacher X, his History teacher had heard of this 'wiz kid' with Asperger, as he admitted to us later, and decided to administer a 'surprise' test one day to the class. He said he was basically astonished that the boy did badly on the test and proceeded to question the student as to why he did badly. Not satisfied with his answers, he proceeded to punish him by putting him to stand on a chair in front of the class. Joshua tells us everything, he told us he felt so humiliated, all that kept running through his mind he said, was what everyone must think of him. So we set up a meeting with the teacher and explained to him that because of Joshua's condition, the concept of a surprise test is not one he

understood. The reaction I got was not one I anticipated. He said to me not to question his approach, that he had been a teacher for more than 20 years and it was simply a matter of the boy not knowing his work. The teacher never took the time to look at his assessment marks in his other areas and see that they were all A's. He seemed to have dismissed Joshua's condition.

The researcher, on analysis of what was relayed to her, regarded this as an anomaly since she recognised that her pre-conceived notion of teachers' prior knowledge of the student's condition led her to believe that this would automatically lead to improved handling of events in the classroom. It pointed to the fact that while this is a crucial factor which might aid the process, it is still up to the teacher to exercise his or her willingness to make accommodations in support of the student.

TEACHER REGULARITY AND PUNCTUALITY

As the chronology of his experiences continued, yet another sub-theme surfaced to the fore with regard to the teaching staff. Some teachers' irregularity and lack of punctuality to class appear to impact on Joshua's experience in the classroom. In his journal he writes:

Mr. X came to class late and made absolutely no sense. In the end almost everyone got a detention... he is to blame for it though, he likes to come late...

On another occasion in his journal:

Not much happening, it's a crazy day. Lots of teachers absent. Why do

they bother to pay them? Why don't they just look for other jobs?

Today was a mad house in school, awful!!!...

Yet on another:

Great day today! Handed in my S.B.A. and all my teachers came to class.

Joshua's primary school experience was evidently different to his present. Encountering teachers coming to class late or being absent fairly frequently are not what he had come to expect of school. It would appear from his declarations that some of his teacher's tardiness and absences affect him negatively.

At the present school, teacher absenteeism and lack of punctuality among some members of the teaching staff are growing concerns at the institution. While there are students who may revel in the fact that some teachers are absent, for Joshua, given his condition of Asperger in particular, this serves as a restraining factor in his experience at the college since it would seem that it contributes in constituting what he terms as an 'awful' day as opposed to a 'great' one. In this regard, in response to the third sub-question of the manner in which the school is unsupportive of Joshua's condition, it is plausible to conclude that when teachers are late or absent from school, this is also not conducive to his positive experience in the classroom as an AS individual, given his adherence to rules and rituals.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

From Joshua's story, a pertinent issue that emerged is how he is taught at the college and the amount of time he is given to complete assignments. Being taught in a

manner that is not congruent with his learning needs seems at times to compound the situation for Joshua and appears to be a major source of stress for him. The literature posits that AS individuals require visual supports to achieve maximum learning (Myles & Adreon, 2001). Teachers at the college tend to be very traditional in their approach to imparting material. Joshua laments:

A good teacher is someone who comes to class on time and explains stuff.

At my school now Mr. X would give these huge, big assignments without explaining them properly and want them done in a short time... teachers could maybe write down the homework on the board instead of always calling it out... maybe use pictures in teaching...

Joshua's need for more explicit instruction and extra time in completing assignments arises out of his condition of AS and is reflective of most children on the Autism spectrum (Hall, 2001; Smith, 2004).

His mother's recollection of events as she compares his primary school's experience with his present further emphasises this point:

At his primary school it was the little things you know, no great adjustments.

Joshua needed to sit in close proximity to the teacher because of his condition so they ensured this. Another thing because of his stereotyping with his hands, his constant tapping which could disturb other children in the classroom, the teacher developed cues to let him know not to do it, for instance she might touch him or give him something to hold instead. You see the tactile stimulation is a very real neurological

need in an AS child, hence the tapping, but because his teacher understood that, a lot of negative situations were avoided. The school and the home worked simultaneously and this developed his strengths... Children with Autism are visual learners, your school environment is more auditory. Visual cues can be of tremendous help. Little things really, touching him on the shoulder when he is tapping, allowing him to get out of the class when he needs a breather so to speak, just understanding his condition and being willing to go that extra mile.

In an attempt to corroborate what was being gleaned from Joshua's story, the researcher visited one of his classes as a participant observer. It was a Business class (see Appendix F). From observation, it became apparent that Joshua was distracted throughout the entire session. The teacher commenced the class by correcting homework from the previous night and then went on to a new chapter in the text, from which he taught the new topic. His teaching style was predominantly auditory. Joshua was also not challenged in any way as a gifted student, nor were his needs as an AS individual taken into account. One reason that perhaps contributed to this was because of a lack of awareness on the teacher's part as to Joshua's situation, as the teacher later told the researcher. Another could be the fact that as a senior teacher, he had grown accustomed to a traditional method of teaching. He however also seemed willing to dismiss Joshua's disorder due to the student's level of intelligence, a fairly regular occurrence according to the literature on AS gifted children (Niehart, 2000).

PEER RELATIONS

The second major prevalent theme that emerged from the study of the events in Joshua's life was that of his social relationships with his peers. It is well documented in the literature that one of the primary traits of AS children is in their inability to form and maintain friendships (Myles & Adreon, 2001; Attwood, 2006). The situation is exacerbated as they enter adolescence and become part of the secondary school system where the rules of social behaviour are much more subtle and therefore harder to detect by AS teenagers (Myles & Adreon). Whether Joshua understands the meaning of true friendship or not, one aspect in the social domain that became apparent to the researcher was the fact that he enjoyed interacting with his peers. He admits:

What I like most about our school is getting to interact with the boys.

I have a group of about four or five friends...

From his story it would appear that he is aware that his friends do perceive him as different but he seems to think that his academic capability provides a rite of passage for him in securing a group of about four or five friends. This incredible insight is perhaps attributed to his giftedness. He states:

I think they see me as different but they don't really treat me that way. They know I am bright.

There is a mode of thought that contend that when AS children are 'savant' in certain areas, they experience less bullying and rejection from peers as their expertise

tend to overshadow some of their social deficits (Myles & Adreon, 2001; Donnelly, 1994).

The words of one of the friends in his circle also tend to confirm this:

When we both made it to the 2-5 accelerated class was when I began noticing his interaction with the boys was different... some of the boys, because he has, what can I say, weird body movements, nick-named him 'twitch'.. it does not seem to bother him though. I noticed too that he was extremely bright, gifted in my opinion. Another thing I noticed was that he would state the obvious, you know me and my partners we would think things and not say it but he would say what people might think, say the truth regardless of how the person may feel and I think he stepped on some people's toes. But you see Miss, as I told you he is very intelligent so all in all I think the boys respect him, teachers too.

From the researcher's unobtrusive observation of Joshua during the recreation breaks, she corroborated what was being said by his peer. He does seem to interact frequently with a small group of about four students and while his other peers seem unconcerned by some of his awkward mannerisms owing to his condition of AS, they would flock around him at the lunch breaks when he is on the computer or even lend a listening ear to some of his verbose explanations to queries they may have.

Joshua's relationship with his peers would appear to be a supportive factor in his school's experience. One of his friends demonstrates how he is of support to Joshua during this troubled time of adolescence:

Wow... in dealing with girls right now, I help him. He is interested in this girl so I am showing him how he should talk to her, use his words properly. He does not do that so well, you know, so he could seem like a normal guy. He can't express himself with what he wants to say all the time. When we are talking to the girl I realise it gets worse. So I need to be there you understand Miss? Sometime he says what he shouldn't say which could be embarrassing, he is a little too honest...

This assistance from one of the members of his circle of friends would appear to be very helpful to Joshua as he navigates the seas of adolescence and is not equipped with the necessary tools to get through this phase. Puberty is inevitable even for children with pervasive disorders, as one researcher remarks: **“developmental delay does not mean physical delay, puberty will happen”** (Attwood, 2006).

From Joshua's rendition, the researcher became aware that while he enjoys interacting with his friends since it constitutes the **‘best thing’** for him about the school, he does recognise their limitations and deem it necessary to have professional assistance on the school's compound to help him in his weak moments. When asked about how the school could be of assistance to him, he responds:

“ A counsellor that I could talk to ... my friends don't always understand me”

While his condition of AS does not seem to warrant him a large number of friends, his academic brilliance seems to have earned him sufficient respect among his peers and it is this which perhaps alleviates some of the distress he might have otherwise experienced as a student with the exceptionality of AS. In response to the

second sub-question, even though Joshua recognises his friends' limitations, it would appear that his circle of about four to five friends serve as a sustaining and positive element in his social experience at the school.

NEED FOR COPING MECHANISM: THE NOISE

In Joshua's recounting of his school's experiences and through the thoughts that surfaced from his journal, the researcher perceived that the noise factor was a major issue in his academic life and one for which he did not seem to possess the skills to manage. The third research question which seeks to answer what aspects of Joshua's school environment are non-supportive of his condition, is addressed in this chapter. In this excerpt Joshua talks about his present school environment and goes on to compare his primary with the current educational experience:

I do not like the noise...I do not know how to deal with it, I can't. I get a headache...If there was one thing I could change about the school it would be the noise. I preferred the primary school because it was not so noisy and it was a smaller environment.

In the journal he writes on one occasion:

Class gets noisy, noisy, noisy when Miss is not there. Today was a mad house. Awful!

And on another:

Spent the day outside the Principal's office on couch today. Head hurts. Class was crazy. Mr. X was absent, so too was Miss Y. Head hurts...

Joshua, like so many others on the Autism spectrum, does not seem to have a coping mechanism to deal with the noise that emanates in the secondary school (Myles & Adreon, 2001). His inability to cope with the noise would seem to be a serious area that requires attention since it appears to contribute to the level of stress he experiences and it is one that renders him a feeling of helplessness.

It is posited that children who have difficulty in coping with noise seem to also experience problems in handling the spontaneous activities that characterise some gifted programmes (Niehart, 2000). In Joshua's case, this might serve as a plausible explanation for his inability to accept the notion of the 'surprise' test that was administered to him while he was in the accelerated form two class. The noise in the school environment would seem to execute a restraining role in Joshua's scholastic experience and in correlation with the third sub-question, it does not serve to support his condition of AS.

THE NEED FOR AUTONOMY (past, present and future...)

The final major though subtle theme which emerged from Joshua's story was his need for autonomy. It is very often believed that children with Autistic disorders are not capable of understanding how they feel or making decisions for themselves (Smith, 2004). Yet it is by listening to the voice of these youngsters that valuable insight is gained into the way their complex minds work and what they desire for themselves (Hall, 2001). Joshua's past and present life have been shaped to a significant degree by decisions his parents allowed him to make in his life. From his

parents' dilemma as to whether to send him to the secondary college which he attends now, to their decision to keep him there even after a traumatic incident that he experienced, were seemingly influenced by what Joshua desired. His mother recounts:

By the time he was ready to enter secondary school, I honestly think we were more afraid for him than he was because he had an older brother attending there and his brother would always tell us how mean the boys were to each other. He also felt the environment would not be right for Joshua. Anyway we went to orientation, signed him up but still unsure about sending him. But in the end it was Joshua who decided for us. He said he was ready and that was it. I remember his words "don't worry, I am ready". His behavioural psychologist always used to tell him to say when he was ready about anything and so he did. Although she herself did not approve of the large secondary school environment for him either, in the end Joshua made the decision for us all...

On another occasion, after the incident involving the teacher who punished him for performing poorly in a surprise test, his parents were prepared to take him out of the school but again Joshua's feelings on the matter were given precedence. His mother narrates:

I was so upset at that time, we did not want all the work we had done with Joshua to be undone, so we started looking into other schools and one day we even spent the entire day in another school to see if he would like it, again however he said he wanted to stay at his secondary school...

The literature does support the view that more attention be paid to the voices of children with exceptional conditions, inclusive of AS in an attempt to improve educational programmes that are devised to cater for their special needs (Smith, 2004; Attwood, 2006).

As Joshua's story came to a close, the researcher reflected on what the future may have in store for him and allowed him to express some of his own desires for his life. Joshua narrates:

I want to go into computers in the future. I like that. I want to be a computer programmer... family, I don't know, yes, maybe get married and have two kids...

Here is an adolescent characterised by two exceptionalities but with dreams and aspirations like any ordinary adolescent. His initial diagnosis at the age of about two did not map out an encouraging future for him. His mother recalls:

After his first psychological evaluation, he had to undergo several, it was reported to us that his future looked very grim...

Yet, his own views as to his future appear to be optimistic.

On analysis of this theme, the researcher perceives that at the college, Joshua is not given the autonomy he needs to express how he feels or to make decisions. This serves as a hindrance in allowing his strengths to flourish because it is evident from his story that on the occasions where he was allowed to make his own decisions, he made them appropriately and with a conviction that would ordinarily have not been noticed, had he not been given the opportunity to do so.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Joshua' story, from which input was gained from several sources, generated a voluminous amount of data. Four pertinent themes and subsequent sub-themes were derived from the data which formed the basis for the discussion. Interwoven into this discussion, are recommendations aimed at maximising Joshua' scholastic experience. One significant theme which emerged from the findings was the support mechanisms in Joshua's life. It was evident that the home and professional arenas interrelated and contributed significantly to the type of scholastic experience Joshua had.

HOME AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT MECHANISMS

From the perspective of the home and professional areas, it became clear from the data that Joshua's therapists and parents worked collaboratively in providing the required support mechanism for the student throughout the tumultuous years of his earlier and present life. This finding is supported in the educational literature with regard to exceptional children (Myles & Adreon, 2001; Smith, 2004). Research underscores the fact that parents in particular play a crucial role in the process since **"much of what we have learned about Asperger Syndrome over the years has come from individuals with this exceptionality and their parents"** (Myles & Adreon, 2001, p. 137). With respect to professional therapeutic support, it has been found that disorders on the Autism spectrum tend to be lifelong disabilities and as a result, most people with any of these disorders require comprehensive services and extensive support for their entire lives (Smith, 2004). The ideal to be accomplished

however is to allow the home to work in conjunction with the psychologist and the school in catering to the needs of these children (Attwood, 2006). At present however, as was discerned from the findings, the school is not functioning collaboratively with the other two domains in order to provide adequately for Joshua.

The researcher recognises that time and monetary resources can impinge on the degree of involvement parents might have in attending to such a child's needs. In most developed countries, professional, material and monetary resources are provided to families of children with disabilities, inclusive of those on the autism spectrum (Smith, 2004). In Trinidad and Tobago, according to the President of the Autistic Society, while the situation has improved through the family support group of ASTT where some of the therapy for autistic children are without monetary charge, greater funding of the organisation would lead to the provision of more resources to cater to these children. This is especially needed at the level of schooling where there is a lack of personnel to address the deficiencies inherent in AS children and as a result many of these parents choose to home-school their children instead (T. Sieunarine, personal communication, March 5, 2007).

THE SCHOOL

In the domain of support mechanisms, the role that the school is expected to adopt became abundantly clear. The findings seem to suggest that presently the school is operating more as a restraining factor in Joshua's experience especially in the area of teaching. One significant sub-theme arising out of the research was teaching strategies adopted in the classroom and how they impacted on Joshua.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

From the researcher's observation of two of Joshua's classes, it became apparent that after having completed the form two accelerated class Joshua was (a) no longer being challenged sufficiently as a gifted student, the assumption being that he is already bright, so he will do well anyway, a notion which should be guarded against according to educational research (Smith, 2004) and (b) his academic needs as an AS student were not being accommodated by the school. With the exception of one instructor, his English Language teacher, who admits to **"taking the time to teach him about inferences"**, having known about his condition with AS, the majority of his teachers, perhaps due to lack of knowledge of his condition, continued to employ a traditional auditory approach to teaching, which is not conducive to the way the AS child learns (Attwood, 2006).

While the negative effect of relying entirely on an auditory method is not readily reflected in his grades (see Appendix E), such an approach to teaching does not maximise Joshua's learning potential (Myles & Adreon, 2001). His sentiments as to the way he is taught at the college are clearly illustrated in his words: **"explain things properly...maybe use pictures...write down the homework instead of always calling it out."** The educational literature underscores the fact that visual support is mandatory for AS gifted children since they assist in the clarification of issues for them (Myles & Adreon). Although in most gifted education programmes the use of visual supports are not prominent as a strategy, the gifted AS child processes information differently and therefore would require visual aides to enhance

his/her learning (Niehart, 2000). A recommendation for educators at the college would therefore be to exploit a plethora of teaching methods, with special emphasis on the visual to cater to Joshua's need for visual representation of knowledge. This is consistent in the literature for AS and AS gifted children (Myles & Adreon, 2001; Gallagher & Gallagher, 2002). The need for more time to complete his assignments is also a crucial point to be considered by teachers and it is one that is highly advocated for AS children in particular (Myles & Adreon).

In terms of the school as a support mechanism, it became apparent from the findings that Joshua's other exceptionality of giftedness contributed significantly to the type of experience he has had at the college. The educational literature purports that only about 10% of children on the autism spectrum exhibit uncanny giftedness in one field or another and are known as 'autistic savants' (Donnelly, 1994).

Joshua's giftedness manifests itself in his logical-mathematical capability and his remarkable accomplishments at the piano. Perhaps owing to the traditional cultural ethos of the college which embraces giftedness and talent, teachers as well as his peers seem to be in awe of Joshua's brilliance and even appear willing to overlook his other condition of AS due to his intelligence. His giftedness would also seem to counteract some of the negative experiences at the college he might have otherwise encountered amongst his peers. This observance is in tandem with the literature on AS gifted children whereby it has been found that when AS children are gifted, their condition of AS tend to be dismissed by others (Niehart, 2000; Gallagher & Gallagher, 2002).

The challenge for the educator of these 'savant' individuals would seem to be in the teacher's ability to recognise the particular gift among those on the Autism spectrum and channel that talent into productive areas (Donnelly, 1994). With the exception of the domain of music, where Joshua had been allowed to participate in several music festival events, academically, it would seem that it is this very perception of his giftedness which mitigates against his full experience in the classroom. After the second form accelerated class at the college whereby students are integrated in the mainstream classes, it became apparent to the researcher having visited two of Joshua's classes that he was no longer being challenged sufficiently as a gifted student, the assumption being that he is already "**bright**" and "**will do well anyway**". This is a notion that should be guarded against according to research on AS gifted children (Smith, 2004).

One recommendation, though fraught with its challenges, would be to locate a balance between Joshua's needs as both an AS and gifted child and explore teaching strategies which would accommodate his dual condition. In the domain of music, another recommendation to be considered is that his propensity for music can be a useful calming tool for him in stressful situations. His acknowledgement to the fact that music makes him feel "**happy and relaxed**" could be examined by the educators at the college as a means of procuring a strategy to aid in his more stressful moments. Studies are now showing that occupational therapists are using music as an adjunct to their intervention strategy when treating both children and adults with differing exceptional conditions (Hall & Smith, 2007).

The suggestion of employing visual aides and challenging the special AS gifted child are not readily applicable to many teachers, particularly newer teachers in the system who would require specific training in these areas. Also, of benefit to all teachers at the college would be training in identification of students like Joshua or with differing exceptionalities, on the compound. One of the dilemmas facing teachers is that with the changing face of education now, they do not feel equipped to meet the unique needs of students with exceptionalities. Today's classroom is characterised by students with varying conditions and learning abilities in keeping with the notion of inclusive education (Ministry of Education, 2004). Yet teachers are not cognizant of appropriate approaches to utilise to meet the needs of these children (Eggen & Kauchak, 2004).

Research is showing that where inclusion has been effective is where special education teachers, that is, those trained in the field of children with exceptionalities, in conjunction with regular teachers work collaboratively in accommodating the child (Smith, 2004). In the absence of special education teachers on the schools' compound of Trinidad and Tobago, the regular classroom teacher is left to manage the best he or she can and perhaps at times experience resentment and frustration. This is echoed in the statement by one educational psychologist who reiterates the need for this collaborative working: **"without this collaboration, full inclusion isn't effective and regular classroom teachers are resentful of being expected to individualize instruction without adequate support"** (Eggen & Kauchak, 2004, p.162).

TEACHER REGULARITY AND PUNCTUALITY

Another sub-theme which emerged from Joshua's story was that teachers were often unpunctual and irregular in their attendance at class. One of the prominent characteristics of Asperger children is their adherence to rituals, rules and routines (Smith 2004). For the AS adolescent in the secondary school, life becomes more challenging since his or her scholastic world is no longer as predictable as it once was (Myles & Adreon, 2001). Joshua's primary school experience was evidently different from his present secondary school's experience and his lamenting over this difference with regard to teachers' punctuality and regularity is evident in his interview and in his journal reflections.

Joshua's encountering of teachers' tardiness or lack of punctuality would appear to be a major source of stress for him since apart from it going against what was expected of teachers for him, as reflected in his journal (see Appendix D), it also contributes to the noise factor, a condition for which he appears to have no defence mechanism. This area of teacher absenteeism and lack of punctuality would have to be addressed from an Administrative perspective.

PEER RELATIONS

Socially, while, Joshua would appear to have progressed greatly from his elementary school experience, his reference to four or five people as his '**favourite friend**' and limited engagement in activities with them, suggests to the researcher that, consistent with the literature (Carrington et al, 2003), Joshua seems not to have been able to secure deep friendships. What apparently works in his favour though is

the fact that his peers, as well as his teachers to some degree, admire him due to his cognitive superiority, a point supported in the literature (Donnelly, 1994). Added to that, is the cultural ethos of the college, which, while it does not readily embrace difference from the perspective of disorders or disabilities, does applaud the exceptionality of giftedness since, traditionally it has been the school's insignia.

Joshua however recognises his friends' limitations in his statement that '**they don't always understand me**' and underscored for the researcher his very real need of a counsellor to talk to at the school. This is in keeping with the literature on AS children that therapeutic intervention on the school's compound is of paramount importance (Myles & Adreon, 2001). At present there is an insufficient supply of guidance officers for the schools of Trinidad and Tobago. It is the Ministry of Education's intention however, through the Student Support Services, to designate a Special Education Unit for each educational district in the country from which Guidance Officers will be provided on the establishment of all secondary and primary schools (Ministry of Education, 2004).

Apart from the provision of a counsellor and exploitation of teaching strategies, the school needs to explore ways in which Joshua's social experience at the college could be enhanced. One recommendation is through the use of social stories (Attwood, 2006) and others involve deeper social therapy which would allow for a deepening in the understanding of friendships (Barnhill, 2001). The latter would require assistance from special educators.

NEED FOR COPING MECHANISM FOR THE NOISE

As alluded to earlier, some AS children experience hypersensitivity to sound (Attwood, 2006). A significant theme which emerged from the findings was Joshua's sensitivity to noise. It is not an issue that affected him during his earlier years since the hypersensitivity then was tactile. The larger, more dynamic environment of the secondary school seemingly elicited this dormant vulnerability that is now prevalent due to his condition of AS, a weakness which surfaces in several cases of AS adolescents as they enter high school (Myles & Adreon, 2001). Joshua's inability to cope with the noise is poignantly echoed in these words in his interview **"I don't know how to deal with it, I can't... I get a headache."** This revelation was corroborated by reflections made in his journal: **'Class was crazy. Mr. X was absent...slept most of the morning... head hurts..'** Joshua's intolerance of the noise manifests itself in a physical condition, that of a headache and when it gets to be unbearable, he seemingly shuts himself out of his academic world.

As a school how do we address this? A sub-theme, which surfaced in the findings, was the need for awareness knowledge. Knowledge of a situation is a prerequisite to action. From the researcher's observation and interviews, the vast majority of Joshua's teachers are not aware of his condition of AS and by extension the effect of this condition. His apparent 'weird' behaviour is often attributed to his giftedness, a common misconception among teachers of gifted AS children (Niehart, 2000; Gallagher & Gallagher, 2002). Although the literature recommends several strategies to assist in reducing the impact of noise on the AS child, inclusive of the

seemingly readily-applicable 'safe harbour' strategy (Attwood, 2006), the logistics of its location, the duration and determining when it is needed would have to be determined by teachers and Administration who are equipped with the necessary knowledge of perceiving the warning signs and how best to address this condition. It is nevertheless a practical recommendation for dealing with the issue of sound and should be examined as a possible strategy in assisting Joshua in this crucial area of need.

THE NEED FOR AUTONOMY

Congruent with the theme of Autonomy which underlined almost every aspect of Joshua's life, a salient dimension to be considered is Joshua's views and feelings when formulating decisions regarding how best to address his deficiencies, since the voice of the victim himself should never be ignored (Hall, 2001; Eggen & Kauchak, 2004). Joshua's ability to make decisions was evidenced in his parent's recounting of events that occurred in his life and subsequent decisions he was allowed to make. At the school under study, perhaps owing to its traditional more authoritarian approach, students are rarely given the opportunity to state their opinions with regard to matters concerning the curriculum or any structural changes. In the absence of a Students' Council on the compound, the voices of these individuals are not heard. The situation is compounded for students like Joshua since prevalence should be given to how individuals like him feel owing to the fact that a substantial amount of knowledge about AS is learnt from the individual himself (James, 2006; Attwood, 2006).

In terms of recommendations, the researcher strongly advocates that Joshua be given the opportunity to express his concerns and feelings. Allowing the student to have a 'voice' would provide educators at the college with that insider knowledge which is so critical in catering to the needs of students with exceptional conditions such as epitomises Joshua.

Presently it can be deduced from the findings that the school is not providing the required support for Joshua in his areas of need, a major one being the noise factor. Thorough provision for his needs would only occur by the school's engaging in a multidisciplinary team effort, as suggested in the literature (Smith, 2004; Heward, 2003). The researcher firmly recommends this collaborative effort since it is only through joint collaboration with his therapist, parents and notwithstanding the student himself, that the school would be able to procure a holistic, in-depth understanding of the needs and its warning symptoms of this child.

REFLECTION

The initial stages of the narrative inquiry were fraught with challenges, unanticipated surprises and frustration owing to the fact that there was no single pre-determined manner in which studies of this nature were structured. Using recommendations from several prevalent researchers in the field of narrative inquiry, I had to formulate my own structure to the inquiry as the story evolved. I also felt disconcerted and daunted by the volumes of data that surfaced from the interviews.

However, as I began 'sifting' through to make sense of it, I became more enthralled by the story that was unfolding before my eyes.

It proved difficult to me at times to 'bracket' my own biases and perceptions I had during the retrieval of data. In order to avoid these pre-conceived notions from impinging on the story, I often had to engage in reflection throughout the entire process of the inquiry. Furthermore, deciding when would be the appropriate time to provide my input as part of the analysis of the story that was being told, also proved to be exceedingly challenging. It was helpful to learn that it is a difficulty which most researchers in the field of narrative inquiry face.

I can honestly state that in spite of the unforeseen challenges, the entire process of narrative inquiry situated within the qualitative paradigm was illuminating and intriguing. This type of inquiry facilitated me to delve into the life of another and see the world through his eyes, revealing to me a kaleidoscope of experiences and feelings, which I had never thought about prior to having engaged in the study. It has given me new insights into the realm of understanding of the gifted AS child and has taught me the value of listening to others, a task which is not always easy to accomplish especially when we are compelled to transcend the 'safe' boundaries of race, religion or our neurotypical interactions.

CONCLUSION

A narrative inquiry within the qualitative paradigm was selected to explore the overall research question that sought to determine what the experience was like for a gifted AS adolescent in a traditional secondary college. Purposive sampling was used to select the participant and data was collected primarily from the semi-structured interview but also from observation and a reflective journal, which the student kept during the study. The temporal framework or the plot for the study was shaped by the participant's reflection on his past and present experiences with school and sharing his aspirations for the future. The data (events) which formed the basis for the participant's story, was subsequently analysed against the context in which they occurred, from which the roles of the narrative cast were determined, as either enabling or restraining in Joshua's life. The student's needs, interpreted as themes that were elicited during the process, were explored against the research questions and current literature on the issues.

The findings demonstrate that owing to the enabling support mechanisms Joshua has had in his life, namely therapeutic and parental, he has managed to be functional to a greater degree in his present academic setting. While his full potential as a gifted student is not currently exploited at the school, nor are his specific AS needs, he still manages to secure outstanding grades and maintain a small group of about four friends. He however is in need of a certain measure of therapeutic support at the college to assist him during his more challenging moments which surface from time to time owing to his condition of AS. These challenging areas appear to be in his

inability to cope with the noise in the school environment and the predominantly traditional auditory manner in which he is taught. The requisite of more time to complete some assignments was also deduced from the findings. With respect to his giftedness, a balance has to be sought between catering to his learning deficits due to the AS and providing a challenging forum to accommodate his cognitive ability.

The school must guard against becoming a restraining factor in Joshua's life, as has occurred during specific events that were recounted in his story. Affording the participant a voice to express his desires is of utmost importance if the school is to gain that insider knowledge that is tantamount to improvement of his scholastic experience. Being part of a multidisciplinary team effort, the school would become knowledgeable of the student's dual condition and secure strategies in addressing both aspects of his exceptionality.

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APPENDIX A

SCHEMATIC OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY

APPENDIX A

Schematic: Narrative Inquiry of Joshua's Life

PLOT

TIME	CONTEXT (PLACE)		
	EVENTS	SUPPORTING CAST	SETTING
Past (birth to elementary school)	Incidents at Primary.	Parents	Home
		Teachers	Preschool
Present (secondary school)	Incidents at Secondary	Therapists	Primary Vs. Secondary School
		Peers	
Future (dreams and aspirations)			

- Support Mechanisms
- Peer Relations
- Need For Coping Mechanism
- Need For Autonomy

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW WITH JOSHUA

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW WITH JOSHUA

TRANSCRIPTION OF DATA

TIME OF INTERVIEW: 6.00p.m.

DATE: WEDNESDAY, 18th April, 2007

PLACE: HOME OF THE STUDENT UNDER STUDY

INTERVIEWER: RESEARCHER

INTERVIEWEE: THE STUDENT UNDER STUDY

**POSITION OF INTERVIEWEE: SEATED NEXT TO INTERVIEWER ON
PORCH**

*(I GAVE HIM A BRIEFING OF HOW I WOULD PROCEED, THAT I WOULD BEGIN
BY ASKING HIM ABOUT HIS PRE-SCHOOL EXPERIENCE, THEN GO INTO
PRIMARY AND FINALLY SECONDARY SCHOOL)*

1. Do you remember anything about your pre-school years Joshua, I know this may be difficult but is there anything you remember, liked or didn't like?

I don't know, I was home most of the time I guess, mum said I was home. I saw pictures, mum and dad helped me a lot. Mum said school was basically home.

2. And primary school, do you have any memories of primary school?

Yes that was fun

3. What made it fun?

Friends, classes were small, not noisy. I had six best friends.

4. That's great, what made them your best friends?

We would talk, play, talk again.

5. Did you and your friends do things apart from at school?

No, we hung out at school. My teacher, Mrs. X was nice to me.

6. In what way was she nice to you?

She helped me when I didn't know what to do, with my locker and stuff.

7. Is there any other way in which she helped you?

Yes she kept me close in front the class, she explained stuff.

8. Stuff like what?

About what I didn't understand.

9. What sort of things didn't you understand at primary school?

I like Math, yes I like Math, it was fun.

10. That's great, now is there anything you did not like?

I did not like... everything was easy, I guess, but maybe English, I think,

Social Studies too.

11. Why did you not like those subjects?

Boring. Math is fun, science is too, I have a telescope, I look through it everyday. Do you want to see it?

12. In a little bit Joshua, ok?

But I want to finish now.

13. Ok we will finish now, thank you very much for your time, we will

continue another time ok?

14. OK.

**THE INTERVIEW CONTINUED A FEW DAYS LATER AT HIS HOME
AGAIN. I EXPLAINED TO HIM THAT WE WOULD BE TALKING ABOUT
HIS PRESENT SCHOOL EXPERIENCE.**

1. What is your favourite subject at school now Joshua?

Math

2. Why do you like Math?

It's easy.

3. Is there anything else you like?

Yes the sciences especially computer

4. What do you like most about our school?

Getting to interact with the boys.

5. So do you have buddies or friends?

Yes lots.

6. Do you have a favourite friend?

Yes a group of about 4 or 5.

7. Do they share other activities with you beside school?

No, just school.

8. Do you think your friends see you as different?

Yes, I guess...but they know I am bright.

9. What don't you like about our school?

The noise.

10. So when it gets to be too much, very noisy how do you deal with it?

I don't know, I can't. I get a headache.

11. If there were one thing you could change about our school what would it be?

It would be the noise.

12. Ok, tell me something about your teachers, what in your opinion makes a good teacher?

Someone who comes to class on time and explains things properly.

13. Is there any particular thing about any teacher that you do not like?

Yes, Mr. X, he would give these big huge assignments without explaining them properly and want them done in a short time.

14. Is that difficult for you?

Yes

15. Why?

I don't know, I like it explained properly and I like more time I suppose.

16. What about your other subjects the languages for example, what do you like?

I like Spanish, I like English, I love Music. I play classical music.

17. At what age did you learn to play the piano?

At age 6, I can play anything. I love music.

18. Do you have any certificates to show for music?

Yep (goes and brings them), I won music festival couple of times, I have this, sort of like my degree in music. I have perfect pitch my teacher says.

19. Do you consider yourself gifted in music then?

Yes, I never really had to learn my teacher says, I had perfect pitch.

20. How do you feel when you play the piano?

Happy and relaxed...

I play chess. I enter tournaments, won a few, tennis three times a week.

19. And academically would you describe yourself as gifted?

Yep, especially in Math, Science and Computer. My grades are good.

20. Great that is just great, now I want to ask you to compare your primary school experience with your secondary school one which do you prefer and why?

The primary school because it is not so noisy and it's a smaller environment.

21. If we could do more to help you Joshua, what would you recommend?

A counsellor that I could talk to.

22. You said you have friends, aren't they enough to talk to?

No. They don't always understand me.

23. And what about in terms of teaching, the way we teach, what could we do?

Explain things properly, I don't know how to say it, but explain it clearly.

24. Well maybe can you give me an example of what you would like to see your teacher do in the classroom?

Ok.... maybe use pictures I don't know.... write down the home work on the board instead of always calling it out, I don't think everyone hears anyway.

25. I want to ask you one final question about your future, what do you want to do when you get older in terms of a profession?

I want to go into computers. I like that...be a computer programmer.

26. And in terms of family life, do you see yourself married some day?

I suppose... yes actually, I want two kids also.

27. Well that's it Joshua thank you so much for your time.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER; PARENT; PEER

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW WITH JOSHUA'S FORM TEACHER WHO IS ALSO HIS MATH TEACHER.

TIME: 10.15a.m.

DATE: THURSDAY 27 MARCH, 2007

PLACE: SCHOOL'S COMPOUND, LANGUAGE LABORATORY

INTERVIEWER: RESEARCHER

INTERVIEWEE: JOSHUA'S FORM/MATH TEACHER

POSITION: SEATED OPPOSITE TO EACH OTHER

1. . Mr. X how long have you been a teacher?

About two years.

2. Do you enjoy teaching?

Yes very much.

3. Mr. X. what can you tell me about Joshua in your experience with him as a
form teacher?

In terms of academics he is a very brilliant student and he is very disciplined
but I will be very honest with you and don't be surprised when I say this, he is
very strange.

4. What do you mean by strange?

Well he flies off the hook too easily, he gets angry quickly. I experienced it more than once with him so much so that I don't tell him anything again once it's not work-related.

5. Do you care to talk about one of the incidents that made him upset?

I barely recall it now in terms of what I said, I made a joke at him and it was something that in my opinion any normal boy would not get upset about, they would just laugh it off. They always do at my jokes, he got real angry, he seemed to be contorting, his hands flared up in the air, his tone changed. I told myself 'not me again' with this boy.

6. So what sort of conclusion did you come to of the boy after that?

Of course I realized that something was definitely wrong with this boy.

7. Did you ever seek to enquire what was wrong perhaps from another source, as his form teacher did you try to find out more?

No, I never did, I don't know why.

8. So did anyone volunteer any information to you about him?

No, no one ever told me anything about him and I could see now that something is definitely wrong with him.

9. Well, I will tell you, seeing that you interact with him on a daily basis you should have been informed. He has Asperger (I proceed to explain what the condition is about)

Now it makes sense why he is so different...even his body movements.

10. So tell me something how is he in Maths and the other disciplines?

Top of the line, he is just brilliant but especially strong in Math, the Sciences.

11. So the incidents, at least the one you mentioned affected your relationship with him to the point where you don't interact with him much anymore?

Precisely, listen if I knew, if someone told me what was wrong with him before I would have known not to make jokes with him like that, I would know where to draw the boundaries then. As it is now we don't have a good relationship I don't think he likes me and well... I find him strange.

12. Well, is there anything else you wish to add to this interview?

Not really but thanks for the information all the same.

13. Do you think knowing now will make a difference to your relationship?

I can't say, it's too soon to tell.

14. Ok, thanks very much for your time.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW WITH PARENT

TRANSCRIPTION OF DATA

PROJECT: *EXPERIENCES OF A GIFTED ASPERGER ADOLESCENT AT A SECONDARY COLLEGE.*

TIME OF INTERVIEW: 5.00 p.m.

DATE: TUESDAY, 20th MARCH, 2007.

PLACE: RESIDENCE OF ASPERGER CHILD

INTERVIEWER: RESEARCHER

INTERVIEWEE: PARENT (MOTHER)

POSITION: INTERVIEWEE SEATED NEXT TO INTERVIEWER ON
COUCH IN THE PORCH

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

1. Good morning, Mrs. Johnson, how are you?

I am doing quite well Mrs. Mohammed.

2. Ok, well you know the purpose of this visit as I had explained to you before so I believe we can get right into the questions. Mrs. Johnson how did you first come to realize Joshua's condition?

Well in hindsight when we look back, the symptoms were there a lot earlier on than we thought however at that time we thought it was a series of isolated events. Firstly he did not walk until he was sixteen months which in isolation is

is not alarming developmentally for a child however he also pulled his hair out, again the paediatrician said in isolation some children do that. He toe-walked, again in isolation we were told that it can happen with some kids and he suffered chronic ear infections and so.... It was a whole series of events.. however we did not think anything of it, one more thing when he was born, he was born with a bacterial infection and had to be fed intravenously at twenty-four hours old. The thing about it is because Autism and Asperger, which is its milder form, is so new, it was only in the 20th century that it was really studied and documented, no one knew the cause of it. At first it was thought it was as a result of parents who did not show their children enough love, it was only afterward studies were done and it was realized it was neurological. It starts before birth but it does not manifest itself until a few months when the child is let's say... in the first two years of life. Now having talked about these things which we experienced with Joshua, there were certain other little things which when all put together made us concerned. I remember very distinctly, when he was about 18 months he would point to the moon and say "moo" and then one day just like that he lost it, he stopped vocalizing and stopped pointing, he had had a vocabulary of about 4 words at that time and he lost them. Another thing that stands out in my mind is we had bought a house and while it was renovating we lived at my mother's house, when it was ready and we moved into it, Joshua had an adverse reaction to the texture of the floor and he refused to walk on the floor, he would scream and shriek when his foot touched the floor, it was distressing for him. Secondly while living at mummy's house we noticed that the only activity he loved to

do was open and close windows, at first we did not think anything strange about it so we used to take him to the window and let him open and close it as he could not reach it on his own. However when we moved into our home and he was able to reach the windows because they were long enough, it is all he would do and it is as if he were oblivious to us. We would try to get his attention and it was no use it was as if we did not exist. He would show no anxiety at our departure and no joy at our entering a room. The only real emotion he displayed at that time was sheer distress. Mind you he would laugh at times but it would not be related to any social interaction for example he had a cart on wheels and he would push it and laughed as it came back and push it again, it was not quite appropriate laughter so I think it was around that point that we realized that Joshua did not even know we existed as parents, much less his siblings. We have four children and Joshua is the third of the fourth. So anyway we went to the paediatrician again, he was about two years and two months now and that was when she recommended that we get a psychological evaluation done on him. So in answer to your question I would say it was probably just before two that we began looking closely and realized that something was wrong but looking back in hindsight the symptoms were there all along. Studies show that many children with Asperger toe-walk and seem to suffer chronic ear infections. In the worst cases of Autism, some children not only pull their hair out but they damage themselves as well. Anyway one of her diagnosis was infantile autism and she recommended that we see a speech therapist and structure a home management programme for him. In all the tests she administered to him, he

did not respond to them. I want to quote what she said of him after the tests:

"there is no struggle for control or autonomy, there is an absence of emotion, no joy or fun in contact with family. He seems to be functioning like an infant in his first year in terms of psychosocial issues. He also has no expressive language except for infantile noises."

3. Based on his prognosis then, what was recommended for him in terms of schooling?

Am... ok...after his first psychological evaluation, he had to undergo several, it was reported to us that his future looked very grim so when we expressed the fact that we wanted him in a regular school like his siblings we were told that we should start considering other options. So we went to a school for developmentally disabled children both physically and mentally, and we spoke to the Principal there, she in turn put us on to the president of the Autistic society. As parents we also started doing research on our own because as parents this hits you like a ton of bricks to see your child's future so limited. So we researched, attended workshops, we also took him away to the sick kids hospital in Toronto to get a psychological and psychiatric evaluation and it was found that although he was aloof in all his actions he did show some eye contact. This was within five months of his last evaluation, he was now 2 years and 7 months, so that was as a result of us working with him, the other areas were about the same, there was humming, he manipulated his fingers in a stereotypical manner at all times and that is very typical of Asperger. At that time we went to a resource centre in Toronto as well and learnt about Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA). We also invested in certain toys for him as part of the programme because he had to be

taught how to play. Because it involved so much work we decided to keep him at home for a while before sending him to pre-school and work with him. We started off with one step instructions, body parts, gross motor actions, fine motor skills and so on. Step by step he had to be taught everything that we take for granted. In the area of language we had to teach him the receptive vocabulary and after he started developing the receptive, then we taught him the expressive vocabulary. We then had to teach him to have meaning because he would just imitate language without understanding, teach him things in context after he learnt the words as well. Another area was emotional labelling because his world was black and white, so we got a chart, taught him the emotions basically the rules of everything had to be taught to him, of language, of emotion, of social play... everything.

4. Did you and your husband receive any other training in the area or did you continue reading and teaching yourselves?

We read continuously but we were also trained, we went to the seminar I told you about which was our first formal training then after that I went to about 3 more workshops and each time I went I learnt more because he would be at a different point in his development, we had to chart and document every bit of his growth. Our days at home especially in the early years were not an eight to two or eight to four job. It was all day because sometimes he would click and other times he would be so unresponsive, his graph for his chart was never constant where learning was concerned, he would have these long plateaux and then suddenly there would be a leap. I had to quit my job to do this with him because it was

of course very time- consuming but you don't mind because it's your child and you love him and want the best for him and will do it no matter the cost. It must be difficult for a parent who has to work and cannot give up her job, or if the family does not have the resources to help their children who may have a disorder of this kind. In most developed countries they give the money and the resources to families with children like this so that they can develop into independent, productive individuals and not have to be institutionalised. In our country now it is a little easier, the Austistic society of which I am a member, do a lot of therapy for free and we also have a resource centre at the Eric Williams complex. We are finding that a lot of the cases in Trinidad are the severe cases of Autism. What is unfortunate is that a lot of parents are ashamed of their children when they are like that.

5. So after you worked with him at home for a while, what did you eventually do, did you send him to a regular school or just continued to home -school him?

Well we worked with him at home and he also attended speech therapy and to psychologists as well. When he reached about three, it was recommended by the psychologist that we send him to a school environment so he could interact with other kids. We visited about four Montessori schools before we finally decided on one. Most teachers at the schools we visited had never heard of Asperger. The one we finally decided to send him to was as a result of the Principal's attitude, she was so positive and willing, she also knew of the condition since she had an adult cousin with Autism. Something I forgot to mention is that when we had gone to the school for abnormally developed

children, the principal there had said something to us which stayed with us and perhaps influenced our decision to send him to a regular school, she said "do not let anyone convince you to institutionalise him, do all you can for him before you make a decision like that." So we worked with him from home and sent him, at first I had to stay with him at school for about an hour each day then I was able to sit in the car park in case anything happened because he was at that time suffering from separation anxiety as he associated me with his learning and almost everything and so he continued to develop and is still developing. When it was time for primary school because he was not developmentally ready we took an extra year with him at the Montessori.

The principal of the primary school which again was a regular private school fortunately for us took a keen interest in his condition as it was the first time she had heard of it. She arranged a meeting with who would then be his class teacher, herself and us and we explained his condition fully, that support meant the world to us. There was one unfortunate incident however which I recall, Joshua's processing time is slow because of his condition so it could come across to someone who did not know of his situation that he was being rude or impolite. The secretary of the school apparently told him something and she interpreted his reaction as insolence, she reacted also, luckily the principal saw what was happening and intervened and held Joshua. After that, she decided to have a meeting with the entire staff of her school and make them aware of Joshua's condition.

6. In what other ways were they supportive to Joshua, what other things did they let's

say put in place to support him?

When I think about it Mrs Mohammed, it's little things you know, very little adjustments but which were so important and so helpful. One of the things is that Joshua needed to sit in close proximity to the teacher so they ensured this. Another thing, because of his stereotyping with his hands, his constant tapping which could disturb other children in the classroom, the teacher developed cues to let him know not to do it, she might touch him or give him something to hold. You see the tactile stimulation is a very real neurological need in an Asperger child, hence the tapping, but because his teacher understood that, a lot of negative situations were avoided, I suppose another teacher who if not aware of his condition might have reacted differently which might have led to creating a very angry or aggressive child because he would not understand why he was being punished. The school and the home worked simultaneously and this developed his strengths.

7. As you mention his strengths, what are some of his strengths?

Well because of the way his mind was made up, that is he was so black and white in his thinking, his strengths were anything logical for instance Math. Over the years teachers always would tell us they never had to teach him Math, it just came to him. Music is his strength, he finished grade eight and he is now preparing for his Performance Diploma in Music which is the British equivalent of an Associate Degree. From very young we were told that he had perfect pitch. This is also unusual because normally you can teach someone near-perfect pitch in the music world but he did not have to be

taught that, if you hit a spoon on a glass he could tell you exactly what note it was.

8. In terms of his weaknesses then what would you say are those?

Definitely language and the subtleties of language, also his social skills.

I remember one teacher at the primary school telling us he was such a good boy because at recreation he would not run about and play like the others in the yard, he would sit by himself inside. We had to explain to her that it was the opposite we wanted, he needed to interact with the others. Then there was the concern for what went on outside because he did not know all the social rules of play so we really wished someone would supervise his play. We asked them at the school if this could happen and you would not believe it, they did this for us, a teacher would be on the playground observing and supervising play. We were so grateful, another thing that touched me is that when the class came up with their own school rules his teacher came to me and asked me to read them to see if any were too abstract for Joshua. If Joshua did not have that sort of supportive school environment he would not be in the school he is today.

9. That brings me to another question how did you find the transition from primary to secondary school?

I honestly think we were more afraid for him than he was because he had an older brother attending the same secondary school and his brother would always tell us how mean the boys were to each other, all the bullying and so on, he felt that the environment would not be ideal for Joshua. We were admittedly very fearful of regression of Joshua's condition because we had done so much work with him at

home and at the primary level . So at first when it was time to enter secondary school after having sat the SEA and placing 4th in the country, he did very well. He did indeed pass for his first choice. We went to orientation with him, signed him up and everything and still were not sure we would send him. I think we were never confirmed in our decision to send him but Joshua decided for us. He said he was ready and that was it. Interestingly though, after he completed Primary 5 and did his SEA, his psychiatrist advised us to either home-school him or send him to a private secondary school, I suppose she was thinking of the size of the school or I don't know but Joshua in the end made the decision for us all. I remember his words he said " don't worry, I am ready." He said those words to his behavioural psychologist. She always used to tell him to say when he was ready about anything and so he did.

10. And so I remember we had a staff meeting when you and your husband were present to inform us of your son's condition when he entered form one, did you find the school environment supportive then and what about now?
- By the end of form one yes, he had an excellent dean, form teacher and other teachers just showed their support in the things they would say, the feedback we would get and so on. In form 2 however, 2-5, the accelerated class, because at the end of the form one year he scored very high and got into the accelerated class in form 2, there was one unfortunate incident involving a teacher which I think could have been avoided.

11. Did the teacher know of his condition?

I believe so.

12. Do you care to talk about it?

No problem... his History teacher at the time apparently went into the class with certain pre-conceived notions. He admitted long after to us that he had heard of this wiz kid in the class, referring to my son and he basically was astonished that when he administered a surprise test one day the boy did very badly in it. He, after seeing his result, proceeded to question him about the exam in class and not being satisfied by his answers because Joshua did not understand what he wanted from him, punished him by putting him to stand on the chair in front of the class. Joshua tells us everything because we developed that bond with him over the years, he said to us he was humiliated . All that kept running through his mind was what everyone thought of him, in a nutshell he was devastated by the incident. So we set up a meeting with the teacher and explained to him because of Joshua's condition, he abides by rules and he did not understand the concept of a surprise test. The reaction I got was not one I anticipated, he said to me not to question his approach, he was a teacher for 20 years it was simply a matter of this boy not knowing his work. The teacher never took the time to look at his assessment marks in his other areas and saw that they were all A's. I asked him if he ever explained to the class that he would be giving surprise tests from time to time, he said no, he did not have to, everyone knows what that means. I was so upset at that time, we did not want all the work we had done with Joshua to be undone, so we started looking into other schools and one day he even spent a day in another school to see if he would like it, again he said he wanted to stay at his secondary school. So I explained to him the concept of

surprise tests and that it meant that he had to be prepared at all times. He said to me: "Ok, then I shall read my notes everyday." And he did. By the time his next History test came along, he excelled and at the parent-teacher's meeting the same teacher came and apologised to us.

13. Ok, so he has completed 2-5 and is presently in form 4, how has it been since?

In terms of academics, he is doing quite well, in terms of socially I would say there is a lot of improvement. He himself told me the other day that had he not done all that structured social work at home and with his psychologist he would not have been able to survive at the school. He was probably able to negotiate his way through some difficult situations I would imagine.

14. One final question, what in your opinion could our school do or schools in general do to be more supportive of your son's condition or children with similar conditions?

I honestly feel each school should have a psychologist on board full time to deal with situations that would come up. Also just little things like in the primary school, children with Autism are visual learners, your school environment is more auditory. Visual cues can be of tremendous help. At primary school he had cues he kept in his pocket to help him organise his thoughts. Little things really, touching him on the shoulder when he is tapping, allowing him to get out of class if he needed a breather so to speak, just understanding his condition and being willing to go that extra mile. For isn't that what it is about? Teachers and parents working together for the best of the kids?

15.. I agree, well thank you so much Mrs Johnson for your openness, I assure you this

would be treated with the utmost confidentiality and again I thank you.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW WITH JOSHUA'S FRIEND

TRANSCRIPTION OF DATA

TIME: 10.15 a.m.

DATE: TUESDAY 27TH MARCH; 2007

PLACE: SCHOOL COMPOUND, LANGUAGE LABORATORY

INTERVIEWER: RESEARCHER

INTERVIEWEE: JOSHUA'S FRIEND AT SCHOOL, MARC.

POSITION OF INTERVIEWEE: SEATED ACROSS FROM INTERVIEWER.

1. Ok Marc, as Joshua's colleague or friend in his class, what can you tell me about how his peers behave toward him?

Well, they behave just as they behave toward any of us coming out of 2-5. They do not really like us. Some of the students though, because Joshua has what can I say weird body movements, like he is constantly blinking or twitching gave him the nick-name 'twitch'.

2. Does it bother him when they call him by this name?

No, it does not seem to bother him. I think he can handle it.

3. In your time of friendship with him, how have you had to show support to him, if you had to?

Wow, in dealing with girls. Right now he is interested in this girl it's the first time I have ever seen him interested in a girl like this so I am helping him, showing

him how he should talk to her, use his words properly, he does not do that so well sometimes, you know so he could seem like a normal guy.

4. What do you mean by he does not use his words so properly?

Well sometimes he can't express what he wants to say so well and when we are talking to the girl I realise it gets worse, so I need to be there you understand miss, then other times he might say what he shouldn't say which could be embarrassing, he is a little too honest.

5. Alright, now do you find our school system is doing enough to help Joshua, given his condition, because I know you know of his condition right?

Yes I do, Joshua in my opinion is doing very well, you don't see right away he has Asperger. I think the atmosphere at our school is just right for him because it would help to strengthen his skills.

6. Were you told about Joshua's condition before getting to know him or is it something you discovered?

We met in form one and we were not friends then so I did not pick up anything with him, it was when we both made it to 2-5, the accelerated class that I began noticing his interaction with the boys was different. He hardly spoke to them. I noticed too that he was extremely, really extremely bright, gifted in my opinion.

Another thing I noticed was that he would state the obvious, you know me and my partners we would think things and not say it but he would like say what people might think, you understand miss? Say the truth regardless which didn't bother me but I think he stepped on some people's toes. A friend of mine then one day told me of his condition and because by then Joshua and I were friends, I asked

him about it and he confirmed it and even explained the condition to me in detail.

But you see Miss he is intelligent so even if he is kind of weird I think the boys respect him because he is so bright.

7. . What is his relationship like with his teachers?

Quite good, teachers seem to like him too come on Miss he is bright, brilliant.

8. So all in all do you find he has a good handle on his condition?

Yes, he controls his condition very well, he has put it below the surface. To me you have to look very closely to know something is wrong with him. Only people who are close to him will know.

Thank you so much for your time Marc.

APPENDIX D

EXCERPTS FROM JOSHUA'S JOURNAL

Thurs. 22nd Feb., 2007

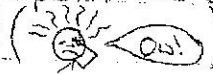
What a day! Mr. Johnson came to class late and made absolutely no sense. (☹️ Blah! → ☹️?) In the end, almost everyone got a detention, except, of course, for me. (☺️ Praised Thank God!) He is to blame for it, though; he likes to come late.

Tues. March 6th, 2007

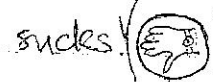
Class was good today. Computer was great! (YAY!) I got to install a new programme for Mr. Gray. That was cool! Mum picked me up early for a visit with my therapist. She's OK! Talks too much, though. (Bleh! Bleh! Bleh!) Sleepy now. (ZZZ... zzz...)

Monday 26th March, 2007

Spent the day outside Principal's office on couch today. Head hurts.



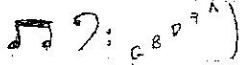
(Ow!) Class was crazy. Mr. Johnson and Miss Hare were absent. I saw him on the corridor; I know he was in school. That



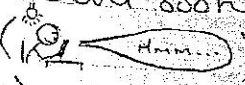
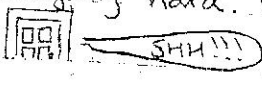
sucks! (Ow!) Slept most of the morning in class. Head hurts. I think

we need to ~~discipline~~ discipline about half the class; oh, and Mr. Johnson!

Wed. April 17th, 2007

Great day today! Handed in my SBA. All my teachers came to class. The boys were, well, still noisy, but everyone kinda paid attention. Miss Lera is ~~just~~ so boring!!!! She just talks and talks, makes empty noise! (Yap! Yap! Blah!) Going tennis in a bit. Love tennis. (Then, my music teacher comes over. Great! ^{aaaaah!} ) Wonder what's for dinner?  Hmm...  

Tuesday, 24th April, 2007

School's going to be over soon. Going home, then coming only for exams.
Studying hard. () Easier to study home, quiet in my room.
() No NOISE!!! Yippee! Like to study.

APPENDIX E

JOSHUA'S ASSESSMENT RECORD

NAME _____

CLASS 4-16YEAR 2005-2006ASSESSMENT: FROM January TO February

OR

EXAMINATION

Conduct: 9 Number in Class: 31 Percentage: 87 Place (exams only): _____

SUBJECTS	GRADE	APPLIC- ATION	CONDUCT	TEACHERS' COMMENTS
RELIGION I-V GENERAL PAPER VI				
Add Math	90	9	9	Well done, this was the highest in the class. Keep up the good work RPK
Business	70	9	9	Good work ! Keep up the good work. Will definitely improve J.R.
Chemistry	91	9	9	
Computer	100	10	10	Excellent coursework. Keep up the good work B
English A	81	9	9	Excellent result!
English B	81	9	9	
Mathematics	90	9	9	Excellent work. Keep it up. SP.
Physics	93	9	9	Excellent work J.R.

DEAN

Excellent.

Angel S. Joseph

FORM TEACHER

Excellent work. keep it up

SP.

PARENT/GUARDIAN

NAME _____

CLASS 5-27YEAR 2006-2007

ASSES _____

Assessment

OR

CHRISTMAS

EXAMINATION

Conduct: 9 Number in Class: 30 Percentage: 85-6 Place (exams only): _____

SUBJECTS	GRADE	APPLIC- ATION	CONDUCT	TEACHERS' COMMENTS
RELIGION I - V GENERAL PAPER VI				
Add Math	91	9	9	
Business	82	9	9	
Chemistry	84	9	9	
Computer	76	9	9	
English A	91	9	9	
English B	91	9	9	
Mathematics	92	9	9	
Physics	85	9	9	
PE	78	—	—	

DEAN

*On track for excellence!**Paul*

FORM TEACHER

[Signature]

PARENT/GUARDIAN

Paul de la Bastide
Dean - Form 5

APPENDIX F

OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL

Length of Activity : 90 minutes

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Teacher walks into class, introduces me as Mrs. X, whom they already know, and explains to them that I am doing some research in education so I came to observe.	<i>Class gets noisy as teacher enters. Not sure if a 'good morning' was said by the teacher. Everyone stands anyway.</i>
He then begins his class by asking: 'ok class where were we?' to which one boy shouts from the back 'sir we had homework'. The teacher seems very pleased with this reminder and proceeds by correcting home lesson.	<i>This obviously is not something they wanted to remind the teacher of as several students begin to make grunting sounds. Joshua seems oblivious to what is happening. He constantly looks to the boy on his right. They appear to be chatting.</i>
He elicits answers from the boys who had done the home lesson which seem to be the boys to the extreme right of him in the front row.	<i>Joshua does not participate in answering any questions. He seems to become increasingly distracted by the boy on his right.</i>
After being satisfied with the answers, he goes on to the topic of the day which is taken from the text book. He tells the class to turn to chapter seven and from there teaches verbatim from the text.	<i>Joshua gazes fleetingly at the teacher during the lesson and then gets back to whatever is interesting him in his row of seats.</i>
Questions are asked periodically to determine whether or not they understand, but he does not seek out individual responses from students.	<i>The participant under study is not called upon at any time nor is he challenged in anyway. What is going on at the front of the class does not seem to be of interest to him.</i>
By the end of the period, he thanks me and begins to take his leave, At the door he shouts to the boys to remember to read the rest of the chapter for home-lesson. After the class I had a chat with the teacher to see if he knew anything about Joshua's condition. He admitted that he didn't, he just knew he was bright. He also found him weird but that it didn't matter because he was an intelligent boy.	ChalkBoard ===== Teacher's desk Door □ ----- ----- ----- ----- □ ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- Seats for Students Sketch of Classroom □ = Researcher ■ = Participant

APPENDIX G

VISUAL REPRESENTATION: RESEARCH

QUESTIONS; THEMES; ROLES NARRATIVE CAST

APPENDIX G

Research Questions, Themes, Narrative Cast and Their Roles

Research Questions	Themes	Narrative Cast	Roles
a) How has Joshua's dual disorder affected his academic and social participation in the school? b) What aspects of his school environment are supportive of his dual condition? c) What aspects of his school environment are non-supportive of his dual condition?	SUPPORT MECHANISMS Home Professional School PEER RELATIONS NEED FOR COPING MECHANISM (NOISE) NEED FOR AUTONOMY	Parents Therapists Absence of Guidance Counsellor Administration Teachers Peers Absence of Resource Personnel Absence of Safe Harbour Parents Teachers	Enabling Enabling Restraining Restraining+ Enabling Restraining+ Enabling Enabling Restraining Restraining Enabling Restraining