# Early career teacher experience in teaching students with diverse learning needs in general education classes: A constructivist grounded theory study

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# Presentation Overview

- 'Setting the scene' – Who am I & my study context

- Study aim

- Assumptions & preconceptions

- Research methodology & methods

- Participants

- Outcomes & significance

- References

# Acknowledgement of Country

'I am presenting from Far North Queensland on Djiri land. I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this land as well as the different lands on which we are all on today, and pay my respect to Elders past, present and emerging. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.'

# Research focus
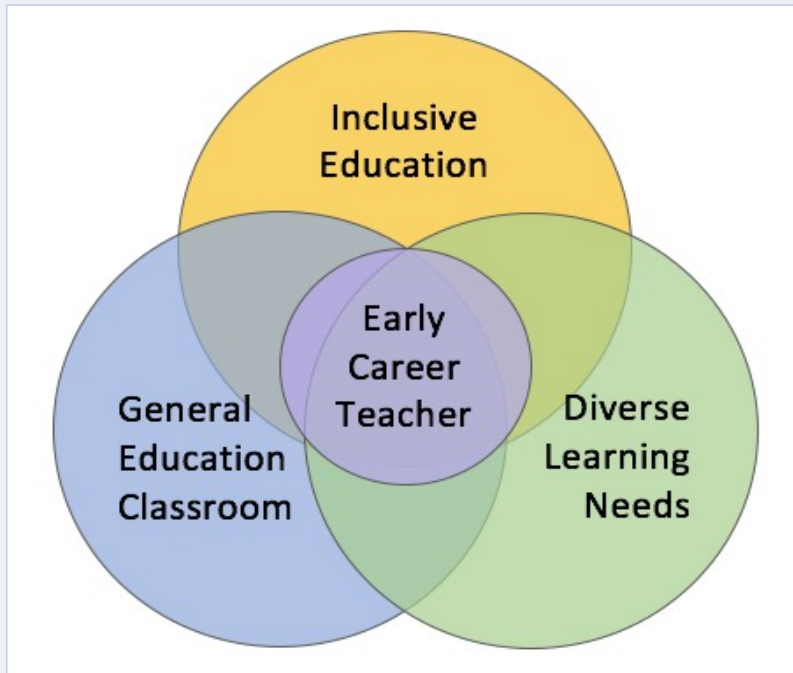


The experiences of early career teachers (ECTs) teaching students with diverse learning needs in general education classroom settings using a constructivist grounded theory approach.
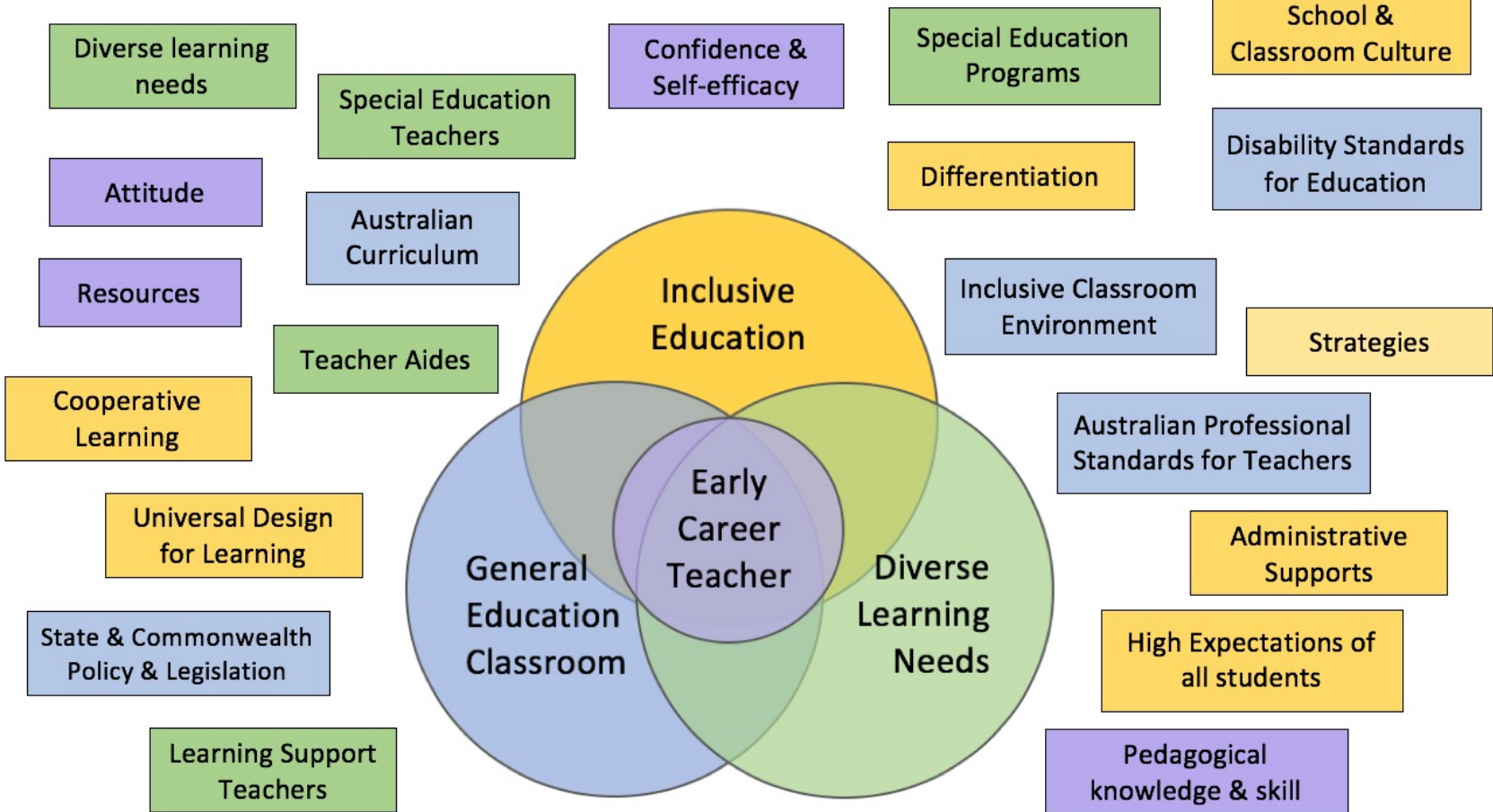
# Researcher background

- Years of educational experiences – student, parent, teacher, & teacher advisor for curriculum & students with ASD.

- Current teacher educator.

- Observed/involved in successes, frustrations, overcoming barriers, achievements & failures.

- Aware of the expectations, pressures & challenges from self, students, family, school administrators & colleagues, community, standards, regulations, legislation…

- Early career teachers go into the profession with a range of attitudes & expectations in regard to teaching practice in general, and inclusive practices specifically.

- Vast literature base as to what/how teachers should teach in inclusive context, and identified challenges ECTs have in their early years of teaching.
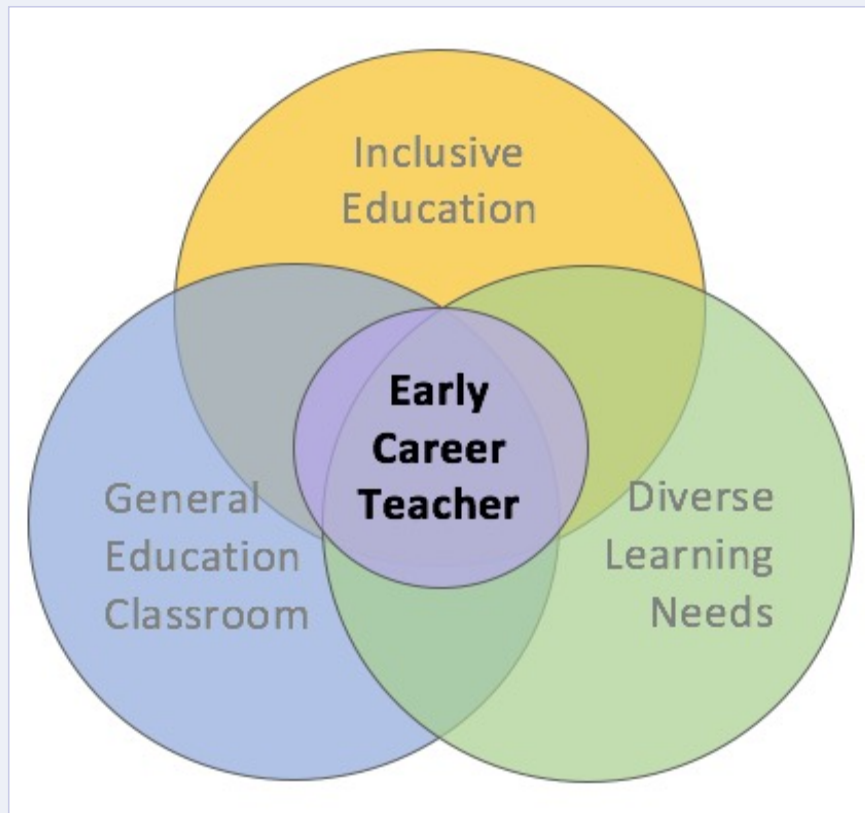
# 'Setting the scene'

- Inclusive education is an expectation in Australian schools.

- Evidence suggests ECTs experience challenge in managing the workload expectations of classroom teaching, including managing challenging behaviours and catering for the needs of diverse learners.

- ECTs working in general education settings are expected to effectively cater for the diverse learning needs of all students in their classroom.

- Using a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology, the lived experiences of ECTs teaching students with diverse learning needs in general education classroom settings has been explored.
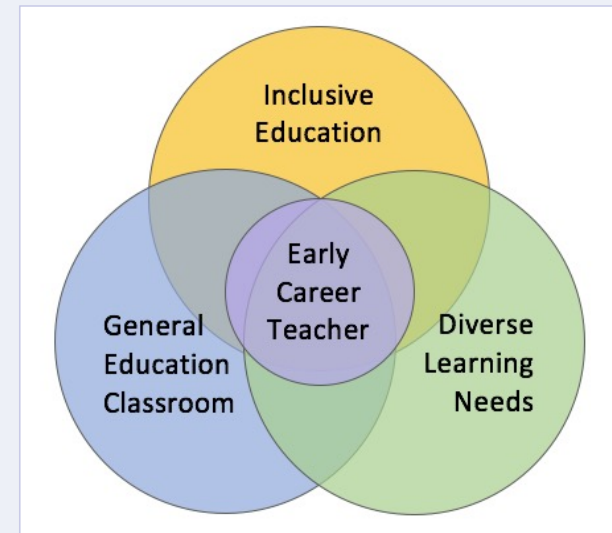
Researcher assumptions & preconceptions – **Pressures & influences for early career teachers**

Diverse learning needs

Special Education Teachers

Confidence & Self-efficacy

Special Education Programs

School & Classroom Culture

Attitude

Australian Curriculum

Differentiation

Disability Standards for Education

Resources

Teacher Aides

Inclusive Classroom Environment

Strategies

Cooperative Learning

Inclusive Education

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Universal Design for Learning

Early Career Teacher

Administrative Supports

General Education Classroom

Diverse Learning Needs

High Expectations of all students

State & Commonwealth Policy & Legislation

Pedagogical knowledge & skill

Learning Support Teachers

# Early Career Teachers



**Early career teacher**

- First five years of teaching;
- Knowledge, skills, & pedagogy;
- Developing teacher identity;
- Building confidence, attitude & self-efficacy;
- 'Classroom ready';
- Graduate level - Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs);
- Identifying and managing expectations.

# General education classrooms
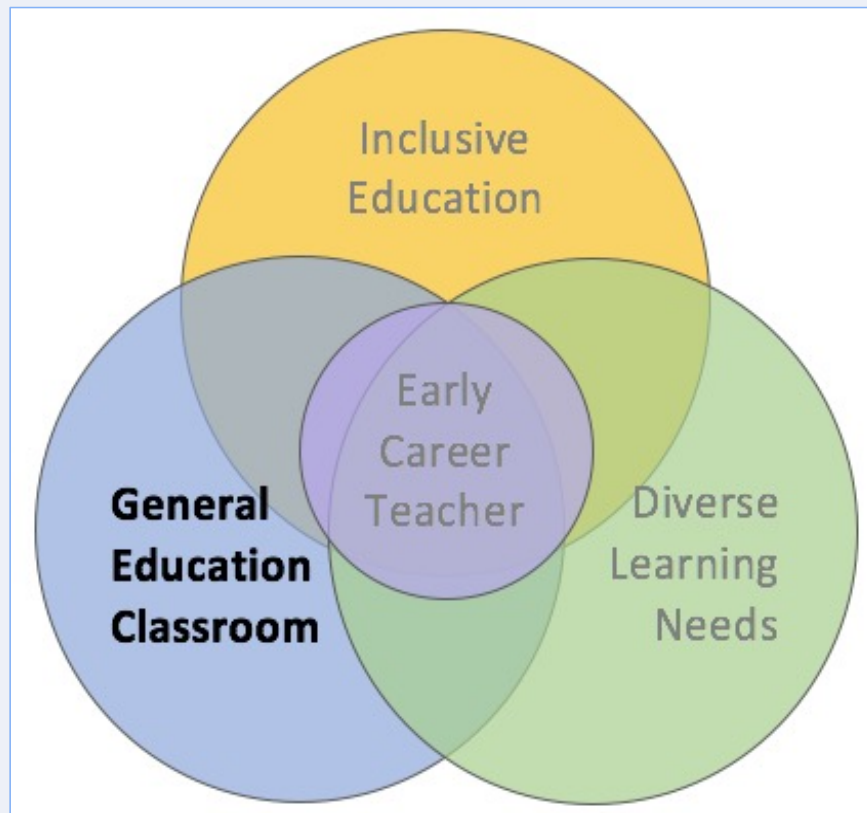


**General Education Classroom**
- Australian Curriculum;
- Inclusive educational mandate;
- Teaching & catering for needs of all students / diverse learners;
- High expectations with appropriate adjustments;
- Pedagogical recommendations:
  - UDL, Differentiation, Cooperative learning
- Supports & collaboration;
- School & classroom culture;
- Multi-tiered support systems.

# Diverse learners with diverse learning needs
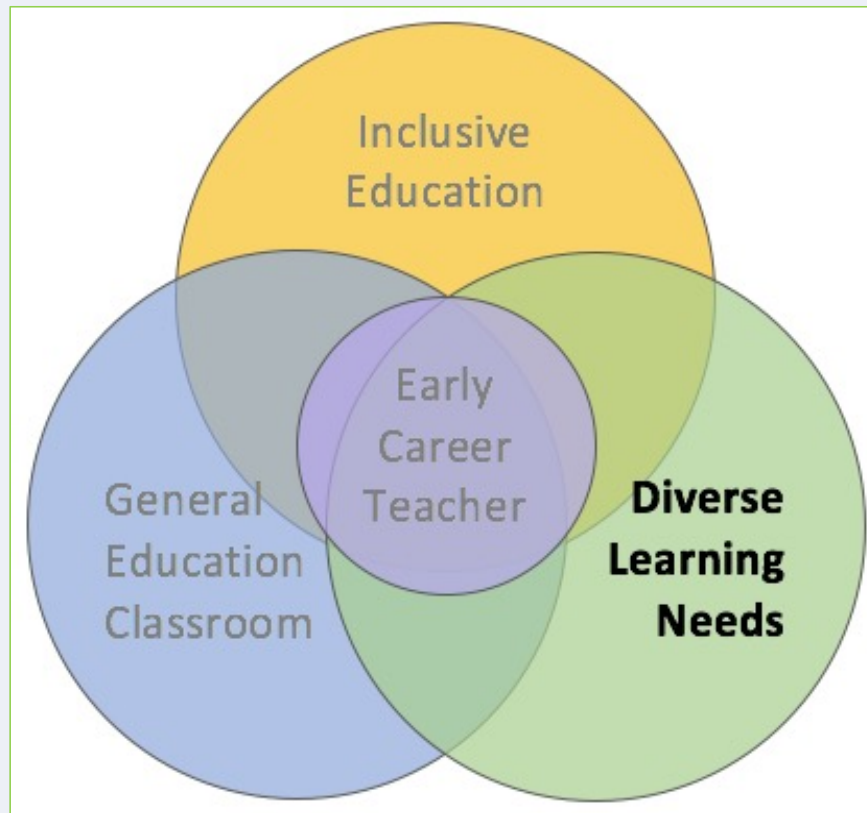


**Diverse learners** (traditionally marginalised groups):
- Students with disability
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
- English as a Second Language or Dialect (EALD)
- Gifted & talented
- Cultural
- Socioeconomic
- LGBTIQ
- Social-emotional challenges
- Behavioural challenges

# Inclusive Education
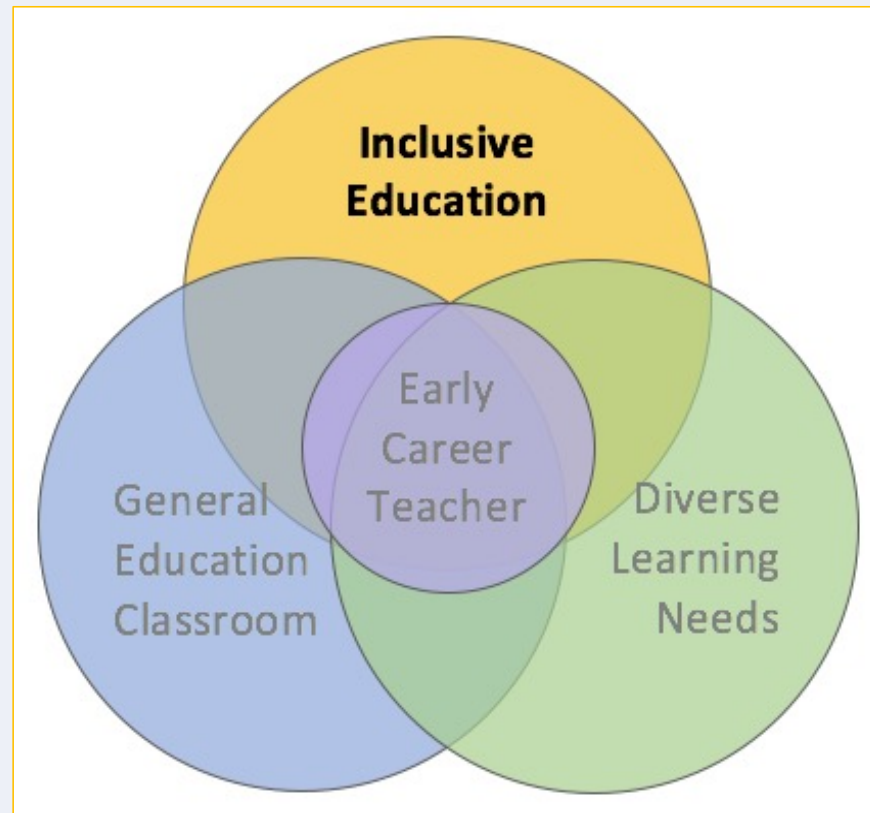


**Inclusive Education**
- Expectation across Australia with variable implementation;
- Defined in the CRPD but not widely understood;
- Legislative mandates and professional expectations (DDA, DSE, Education Declarations)
- Educational participation for **ALL** students with their same-age peers;
- Acknowledges/supports the range of diverse learners.

**Research question:**

What is the day-to-day experience of early career teachers in general education classrooms teaching diverse learners?

*Constructivist grounded theory was chosen as my research methodology to ensure that teacher experience and perspective remained central in the data collection and analysis.*

# Theorising from the data...

**Early Career Teachers**

The aim of my study is to theorise and better understand the experience of early career teachers (ECTs) teaching students with diverse learning needs in general education classroom settings.
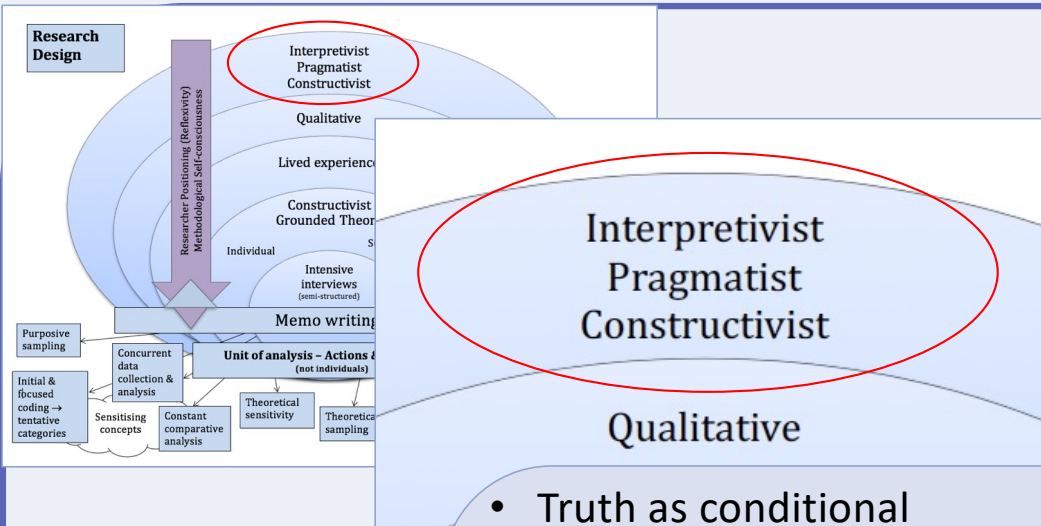
CGT methodology & methods encourage & support collection, analysis, & theorisation **grounded** in teacher voice, experience, & perspective regarding teaching students with diverse learning needs in general education classrooms.

# Constructivist Grounded Theory

- Qualitative research methodology, philosophically underpinned by *Interpretivism*, *Constructivism* & *Pragmatism.*

- Views "research as constructed" and acknowledges "subjectivity and the researcher's involvement in the construction and interpretation of the data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13).

- Values subjectivity, multiple perspectives, a fluid and indeterminate reality, and problem solving (Charmaz, 2014).

- A framework for ascertaining, understanding, and theorising on lived experiences through identifying patterns, trends and generalisations of this experience (Birks & Mills, 2015).

- Uses an inductive process to generate and analyse data with the ultimate goal of theory generation (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014).

# Research Design

Interpretivist
Pragmatist
Constructivist

Qualitative

Lived experience

Constructivist
Grounded Theory

Individual

Subjective

Intensive
interviews
(semi-structured)

Relative

Researcher Positioning (Reflexivity)
Methodological Self-consciousness

Theory Generation

Memo writing

Purposive sampling

Concurrent data collection & analysis

**Unit of analysis – Actions & processes**
**(not individuals)**

Theoretical integration

Initial & focused coding → tentative categories

Sensitising concepts

Constant comparative analysis

Theoretical sensitivity

Theoretical sampling

Conceptual categories

Properties of categories

Theoretical plausibility

Theoretical saturation

# Theoretical underpinnings

Research Design

Interpretivist
Pragmatist
Constructivist

Qualitative

Researcher Positioning (Reflexivity) Methodological Self-consciousness

- Truth as conditional

- Reality as socially constructed; defined by individual experience and perspective

- Studies individual's actions to solve emergent problems

- Unites the viewer with the viewed; the researcher with the researched

- Acknowledges & seeks multiple perspectives

- Locates experience in social context

- Human agency – self-organising, proactive, self-reflective & self-regulating

(Charmaz, 2016, p. 5)

# Constructivist grounded theory Qualitative research
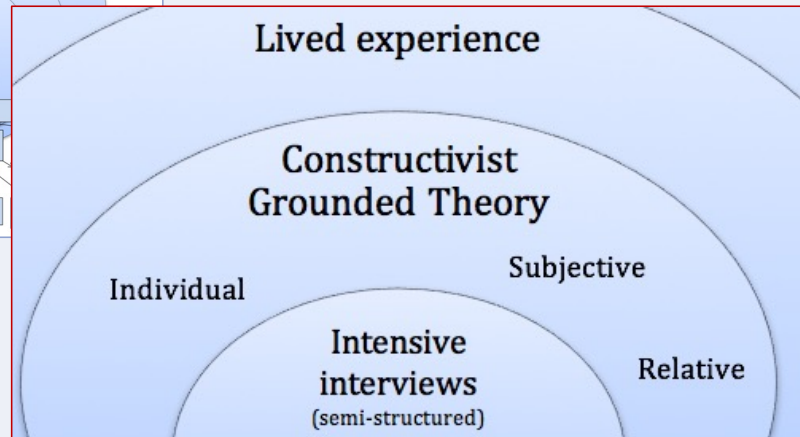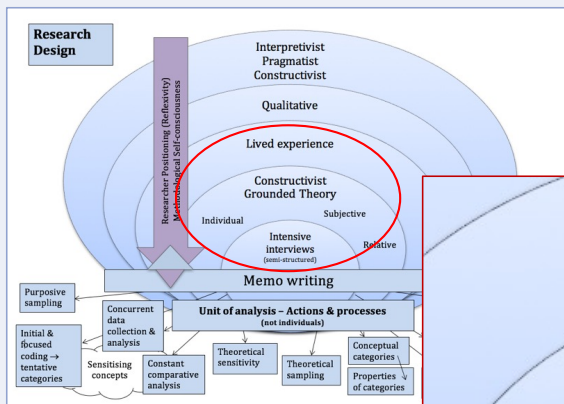


**Strength of qualitative research for this study:**

- Develop a deeper understanding of specific context
- Teacher perspective of their experience
- Understanding of experience as subjective and relative to individual and context
- Opportunity to theorise and better explain teacher experience in this context

# Essential methods in grounded theory
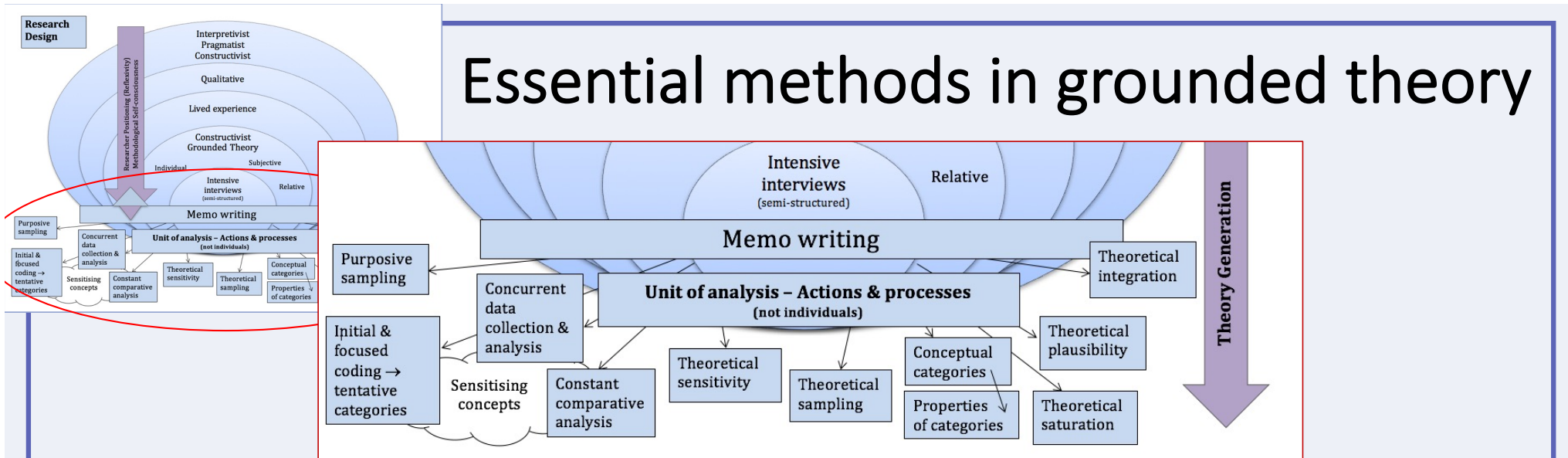


- **Constant comparative analysis** - concurrent data collection & analysis.

- **Theoretical sampling** - "the process of identifying and pursuing clues that arise during analysis" (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 68).

- Theoretical sampling & constant comparative analysis guide future data collection in order to obtain relevant data needed to inform **theory generation** (Charmaz, 2014).

- **Memo writing** – "informal analytical notes" provides opportunity, and prompts for, the researcher to be reflexive and "actively engaged" throughout the whole of the research process (Charmaz, 2014, p.162).

## Data sources – Participant Interview

**Participants are:**

- Early career teachers,

- General education classrooms,

- Primary and or secondary school,

- Full time,

- Queensland school & Queensland registered,

- Self-selected – invitation to participate via word-of-mouth, social media, professional networks.

Other data sources may include memos, researcher journal entries, artefacts, relevant documents, related literature.

## Data collection – Semi-structured, intensive interview

**One-to-one interview**

- Semi-structured / Open-ended questions

- About an hour duration

- Intensive – "a gently guided one-sided conversation" (Charmaz, 2014, p.56).

- Via Zoom with one F2F – enabled participation from a distance

- Video/audio recorded, and transcribed

- Ethically – low risk/low harm (ethical clearance obtained).

**"Grand tour" interview opener:** *Tell me about your experience teaching students with diverse learning needs...*

## Participants

**11 early career teachers interviewed:**

- Purposive sample of self-nominated participants (snowball)

- Nine female / two male

- Range of ages – early 20's through 40+

- Between one and five full-time years teaching – State and Independent schools – range of school types and size

- Two teaching secondary, the rest primary – variety of year levels

- Across Queensland – metro, regional, rural and remote

- Four had relocated for their teaching position

**Only constant across participants is their early career status and role of teaching in a general education class.**

## Data analysis process

**Using tenets of constructivist grounded theory** (Charmaz, 2014)

- **Initial coding** – 'By hand', line by line coding of all transcripts, sequentially, using gerunds to ensure focus on actions of the participants

- **Memo writing** to track, question, & articulate my thinking

- NVivo used for next phase of coding – **Focused coding** refined and consolidated the initial codes into emerging categories, and confirmed data saturation

- **Constant comparative analysis** through a 'back and forth' between current and earlier coded transcripts, continuing throughout the analysis process

**Eight categories have emerged describing the collective experience of these ECTs in teaching students with diverse learning needs in general education classrooms.**

**Early Career Teachers are:**



- Managing Student Needs
- Understanding organisational processes
- Seeking Support
- Developing Pedagogical Practice
- Early Career Teacher Experience
- Building Relationships
- Experiencing (intense) Feelings
- Recognising the Theory to Practice Gap
- Meeting Curriculum Expectations

Emerging theoretical concept:

Differing Expectations

Managing Student Needs

Understanding organisational processes

Seeking Support

Developing Pedagogical Practice

ECTs expect to experience these but did not expect them to be as time-consuming, overwhelming, or extreme (e.g., student needs)
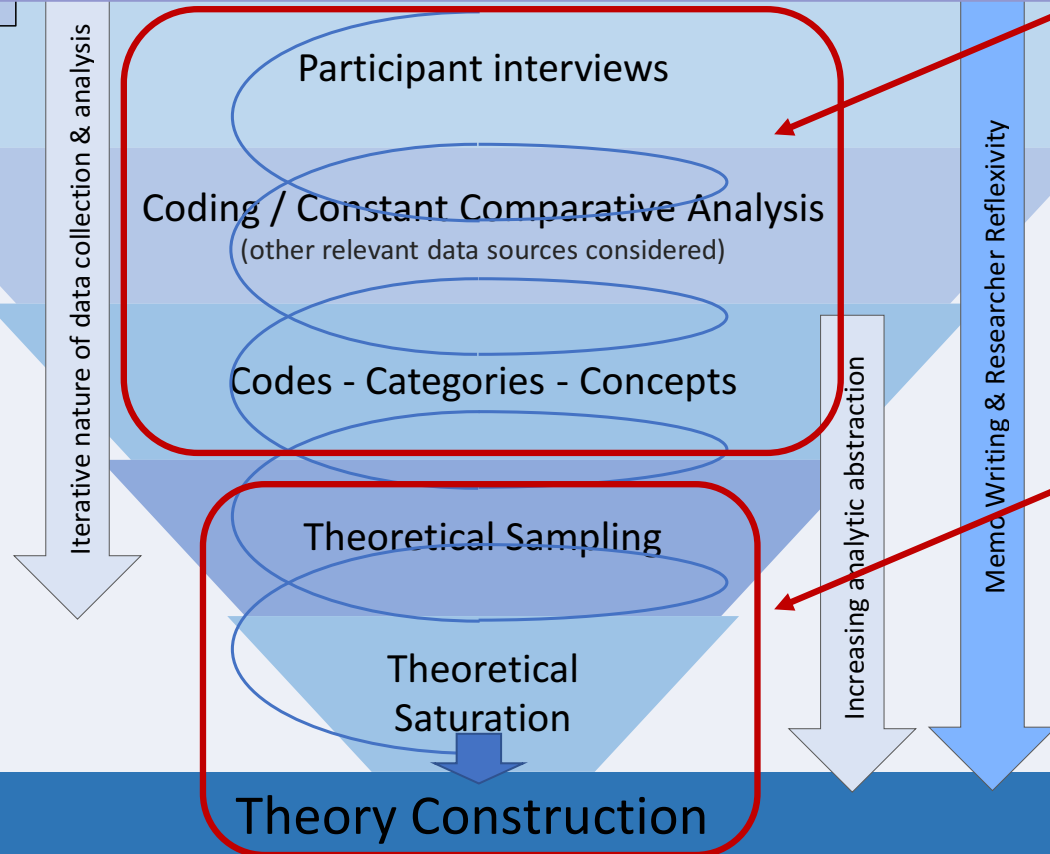
Building Relationships

Experiencing Feelings

Recognising the Theory to Practice Gap

Meeting Curriculum Expectations

# Data analysis – Constant comparative ar

**Completed**

Participant interviews

Coding / Constant Comparative Analysis
(other relevant data sources considered)

Codes - Categories - Concepts

**Yet to be completed**

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical Saturation

Theory Construction

Iterative nature of data collection & analysis

Increasing analytic abstraction

Memo Writing & Researcher Reflexivity

# Research trustworthiness

| (Charmaz, 2014, p. 337-338) | |
|---|---|
| **Credibility** | Researcher has achieved clear familiarity with the identified focus, and obtained sufficient data to support claims. There are strong logical links between data and analysis. |
| **Originality** | Analysis has provided new conceptual rendering of the data; categories are fresh and offer new insights. There is social and theoretical significance to the work and the grounded theory challenges, extends and or refines current thinking and practice. |
| **Resonance** | Categories portrays a fullness of the study focus. Grounded theory makes sense to participants and others in these situations, and data analysis offers deeper insights into these circumstances. |
| **Usefulness** | Analysis offers useful and usable interpretations. Analytic categories may extend into generic processes or applicability. Research contributes to knowledge in this substantive area, and may be useful in related areas. |

# Research trustworthiness

| (Birks &Mills, 2015, p. 147-148) | |
|---|---|
| **Researcher expertise** | The academic and scholarly skills of the researcher in regard to written communication, understanding of and adherence to the methodology and relevant methods, and awareness, acknowledgement and addressing of the study's limitations as possible. |
| **Methodological congruence** | Articulation of paradigmatic grounding and consistence of this with a grounded theory methodology; alignment between research aims and outcomes; articulated theory as an outcome of the research. |
| **Procedural precision** | Adherence to methodology and appropriately applied methods including all essential elements of a grounded theory. Theory that is credible and grounded in the data. |

# Contribution to knowledge base:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Theory** | The substantive theory developed from this conceptualisation will help to improve the understanding of ECT experience and these relationships. This theoretical insight can be used to provide targeted support systems for ECTs in the early years of their career as well as inform initial teacher education programs. |
| **Methodology** | Chosen because this methodology highly values participant voice, a constructivist grounded theory approach will provide an insight into ECT perspective, different from that of other research methodologies. |
| **Policy** | Conceptualisation and enhanced understanding of ECT experience in their early years of teaching can inform support systems for teacher retention and limit early career attrition rates.  Likewise, this research can inform the structure and learning of initial teacher education programs to ensure ECTs are appropriately prepared to be effective teachers in inclusive classroom environments. |
| **Practice** | Insights obtained can be used to inform the preparation of initial teacher education students in regard to teaching students with diverse learning needs as well as help enhance support systems for ECTs in the early years of their teaching practice. |

# Anticipated outcomes & significance

- A grounded theory approach in exploring a critically important topic.

- Development of substantive theory of the day to day experience of early career teachers teaching students with diverse learning needs in general education classrooms.

- A deeper understanding of early career teacher practice in inclusive educational settings.

- Further knowledge & understanding to inform:
  - Teacher education
  - Inclusive education – theory & pedagogy
  - School & jurisdictional process, procedure & policy.

# Thank you for listening

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