Implementing Inclusion: Classroom Journeys

Moya Elvey

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Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education and Arts

Federation University Australia

PO Box 663, University Drive, Mount Helen

Ballarat, Victoria 3353

Australia

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Abstract

This study interrogates the professional experiences, attitudes and pedagogical choices of eight classroom teachers in regular schools and inquires into their impact on the development of inclusive teaching practices. Approached from the perspective of an experienced teaching practitioner, the study responds to the call for an increased focus on the role of classroom teachers in implementing inclusion in schools. The study is underpinned by a theoretical stance that promotes the value of inclusive education through a human rights, access and equity framework. It advocates for the importance of overcoming the discriminatory practices that marginalise some students.

Consistent with a qualitative, ethnographic methodology, observations and interviews with practicing teachers provide insights into the factors that encourage, and sometimes discourage, the enactment of inclusive pedagogies. The literature on inclusive education provides guidance throughout the data collection and analysis process. This includes frameworks designed by other researchers that outline and define inclusive teaching strategies.

The study exposes the pivotal role that ongoing teacher professional learning, along with strategic guidance and support from colleagues and school leaders, plays in enhancing teacher capacity and positive attitudes towards student diversity. It also uncovers evidence that when medical reports and pressure from ‘others’ such as health professionals, encourage teachers to focus on student ‘deficits’ and ‘problems’, they are more likely to seek out and adopt strategies that marginalise and set some students apart from their peers. A fundamental finding of this study is that when teachers and their school leaders focus on developing understanding about ‘effective’ pedagogies - on quality education for all - responsive, inclusive, student-centred teaching approaches often become embedded in their everyday classroom practice.

Statement of Authorship

Except when explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgement in the main text and the bibliography of the thesis.

Signed:	Signed:
Date: 30/7/2018	Date: 30/7/2018
Moya Elvey Candidate	Associate Professor Jenene Burke Principal Supervisor

Ethics Approval

Approval

Human Research Ethics Committee

Principal Researcher:	Jenene Burke
Other/Student Researcher/s:	Genee Marks Moya Elvey
School/Section:	SEA
Project Number:	A13-013
Project Title:	Implementing inclusion: Classroom journeys
For the period:	16/4/2013 **to** 30/11/2016

NB: **Please submit DEECD approval and approval from the Catholic Education Office Ballarat before beginning the project.**

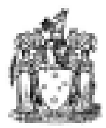
Please quote the Project No. in all correspondence regarding this application.

REPORTS TO HREC:

An annual report for this project must be submitted to the Ethics Officer on:
16 April 2014
16 April 2015
16 April 2016

A final report for this project must be submitted to the Ethics Officer on:
30 December 2016

These report forms can be found at:
http://www.ballarat.edu.au/research/research-services/forms/ethics-forms



Department of Education and
Early Childhood Development

Strategy and Review Group

2 Treasury Place
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002
Telephone: +61 3 9637 2000
DX 210083
GPO Box 4367
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

2013_001941

Mrs Moya Elvey
University of Ballarat
PO Box 31
MEREDITH 3333

Dear Mrs Elvey

Thank you for your application of 26 March 2013 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools and/or early childhood settings titled *Implementing inclusion: classroom journeys.*

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals and/or centre directors. This is to be supported by the DEECD approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.

3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for its consideration before you proceed.

4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.

5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in any publications arising from the research.

6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study's indicative completion date.

7. If DEECD has commissioned you to undertake this research, the responsible Branch/Division will need to approve any material you provide for publication on the Department's Research Register.

I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Youla Michaels, Project Support Officer, Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 2707 or by email at michaels.youla.y@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

GE13/0009 Project#1891

3 April 2013

Mrs Moya Elvey
PO Box 31
MEREDITH VIC 3333

Dear Mrs Elvey

I am writing with regard to your research application received on 8 February 2013 concerning your forthcoming project titled **Implementing Inclusion: Classroom Journeys.** You have asked approval to involve a Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, as you wish to involve students.

I am pleased to advise that your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the eight standard conditions outlined below.

1. The decision as to whether or not research can proceed in a school rests with the school's principal, so you will need to obtain approval directly from the principal of the school that you wish to involve.

2. You should provide the principal with an outline of your research proposal and indicate what will be asked of the school. A copy of this letter of approval, and a copy of notification of approval from the organisations/university's Ethics Committee, should also be provided. As advised, your project is currently under consideration by the university's ethics committee.

3. A *Working with Children* (WWC) check – or registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) – is necessary for all researchers visiting schools. Appropriate documentation must be shown to the principal before starting the research in the school.

4. No student is to participate in the research study unless s/he is willing to do so and informed consent is given in writing by a parent/guardian.

5. Any substantial modifications to the research proposal, or additional research involving use of the data collected, will require a further research approval submission to this Office.

1 of 2

Acknowledgements

As the first member of my family to graduate from tertiary studies, and having completed my secondary education in a school and community where few students went on to pursue further education, I certainly have a sense that in completing this doctoral study I have 'defied the odds'. Subsequently, it seems appropriate to begin with recognising the important role that my parents played in encouraging me to embark on and complete my initial teaching training. Instead of urging me to enter the workforce, like most of my peers were doing, they celebrated and helped me to value the opportunities that higher education presented. For this I am eternally grateful

My first degree was completed at time when tertiary studies were free, when I and other trainee teachers were allocated a 'studentship', a scholarship from the Department of Education, which provided a small weekly allowance along with a guaranteed teaching position on completion of the course. It was these financial supports and job guarantee, combined with encouragement from my parents that made my initial entry into tertiary education possible.

My decision to pursue further study was influenced by my experiences, especially the many students that I have worked with during my career as a primary teacher and my recognition of ways that student diversity enriched learning in my classroom. I also acknowledge the role my school principal and teaching colleagues played. Their endeavours to create a learning community where everyone was welcomed, valued and had fun, and where teaching staff learnt about, shared and implemented new and innovative ideas, were instrumental in developing my commitment to inclusive education and helped to provide the motivation for this study.

I am extremely grateful to my supervisors, for their continued guidance. I thank my principal supervisor Associate Professor Jenene Burke for so freely giving her time, sharing with me her own passion for inclusive education, and providing both advice, and encouragement throughout all phases of this study. I also thank my associate supervisor Dr Genee Marks, for initially suggesting that I embark on doctoral studies, and sharing with me her knowledge and expertise.

Without the consent and cooperation of the Department of Education, Catholic Education Office, relevant school principals and the research participants, this study would not have

taken place. While I appreciate the support I received from each of these parties, I would particularly like to thank the research participants. Their willingness to welcome me into their classroom and share with me their ideas and experiences about the joys and challenges of teaching was what made this study possible.

Lastly, I thank my family, especially my partner Jim, for understanding and accepting the intrusions that this study brought to our life together. Without his encouragement, support and positive attitude this thesis would never have been completed.

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Dedication

To Jim, Matt and Cameron

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List of Abbreviations

ABLES	Abilities Based Learning and Educational Support (State Government of Victoria. 2017a, 2017 b)
ACARA	Australian Curriculum and Research Authority (2018)
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2017)
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.
CAFE	A literacy program that focuses on developing skills and strategies in the key areas of: Comprehension, Accuracy, Fluency and Extending Vocabulary (Boushey & Moser, 2014)
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2009)
DET	Department of Education and Training (State Government of Victoria, 2016, 2017a, 2017b)
ESS/ESO	Education Support Staff /Education Support Officer
!CT	Information and Communication Technology
IEP/ILP	Individual Education Plan/ Individual Learning Plan
IPAA	Inclusive Pedagogical Approach in Action Framework (Florian, 2014)
IPP	Inclusive Practice Project (Rouse, 2008)
MUSEC	Macquarie University Special Education Centre
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (National Assessment Program, 2018)
PLIS	Plain Language Information Statement
SSG	Student Support Group
UNESCO	The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VATE	The Victorian Association for the Teaching of English
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2015)
YCDI	You Can Do It Education (Bernard, 2001; Bernard, Stammers & Willich, 1994)

Chapter One: Background to the Study

Introduction

This study is motivated by my classroom experiences and observations of students and colleagues during my career as a primary teacher. It relates to the development of my understanding about ways that teachers' pedagogical choices can enhance, or impede, the participation and learning of individual students, or groups of students. From my perspective as both an academic and a teacher practitioner, I came to identify the critical role that classroom teachers play in the development of inclusive schools, and the need for further research into the processes, practices and influences that impact on the implementation of inclusive teaching strategies. This study, an investigation into what classroom teachers 'know', 'do' and 'believe' (Rouse, 2008) in regard to catering for the full diversity of learners, seeks to contribute insights into, and further understanding of the factors that support, and sometimes hinder, the implementation of inclusive pedagogies. The experiences and everyday teaching practices of eight classroom teachers in regular[1] primary[2] schools provide the data for the research.

While most schools in Victoria, Australia, enrol students with diverse abilities, the inclusion of a child identified as having additional learning needs can bring about considerable pressures and challenges for some classroom teachers (Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2011; Rapp & Arndt, 2012). Without sufficient guidance and support, teachers' concerns about their self-efficacy and their ability to cater for needs of diverse students frequently lead to negative beliefs and attitudes towards inclusive education (Black-Hawkins & Amrhein, 2014; Carrington et al., 2012; Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2005; Harvey-Koelpin, 2006; Loreman et al., 2011; Mittler, 2000; Rouse, 2008; Vaz et al., 2015; Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2017). Medical reports and psychological assessments, along with suggestions for classroom modifications that should be implemented to assist with learning, often add to these pressures as teachers try to grapple with how they can implement the suggested strategies. Such strategies often encourage teachers to focus on fixing the problems faced by the students and to interpret disability as a deficiency that requires specialist intervention or promotes approaches that that are

[1] Regular schools: Neighbourhood schools, where student enrolment is related to the geographical location of a child's home or parental choice. Students in these schools are educated with their peers, usually within their local community. These are sometimes referred to as mainstream schools.

[2] Primary school: A school for students ranging in age from four to twelve years of age. These schools encompass grade levels from Foundation, the first compulsory year of schooling, then Grade One through to Grade Six.

impractical or even impossible for a mainstream teacher to implement (Ainscow, 1999). My experience working in regular primary schools also suggests that these pressures, and uncertainty about required strategies and interventions, can cause teachers to question their ability to cater for the learning needs of some of their students.

Teachers' concerns and the belief that expertise and specialist training are necessary to teach some students, particularly those with identified disabilities and impairments, is reinforced by the existence and promotion of a designated specialist setting schools, schools that only accept enrolments for some students (Danforth et al., 2005; Mittler, 2000). Similarly, societal pressures and medical definitions of disability that focus on deficit and remediation, can result in regular teachers reflecting negatively on their preparation and training for managing children with disabilities, leading them to conclude that their lack of specialised training leaves them ill-equipped to cater for the diverse needs of such students (Danforth et al., 2005. Teachers' self-doubt about their efficacy, combined with educational policies and practices that focus on limitations, problems and labels can impact on classroom practice, encouraging less informed educators towards the use of traditional segregated and restrictive teaching methods, rather than the adoption of inclusive pedagogical approaches (Poed, Cologon, & Jackson, 2017).

In 2008, as part of my Master of Education (Special Education) I spent time observing classes in two regional Special Schools[3] for students with disabilities. Before this, like many of my teaching colleagues, I believed that students with additional learning needs were often more effectively catered for in special educational settings. Consistent with the opinions expressed by Mittler (2000), Danforth et al. (2005) and the findings of Pijl et al. (1999), that many regular classroom teachers believe that Special Schools provide a preferable and more supportive learning environment for children with a diagnosed condition, I perceived that the teachers that worked in special setting schools would have superior knowledge and skills in teaching students with additional learning needs, teaching expertise that regular classroom teachers did not have.

During my visits to these Special Schools and my observations of teachers, students and classroom management approaches, I came to rethink the role that regular classroom teachers play in teaching students with additional learning needs. I quickly came to recognise that effective teaching and learning transcends not only age differences, but also levels and types of student need. Teachers in specialist setting schools *may* have particular expertise or experience,

[3] Special School: Specialist setting school for students with a diagnosis that meets the Department of Education and Training (Victorian Government, Australia) criteria for disability and impairment.

but effective regular classroom teachers are equipped with a wide range of relevant knowledge and skills that allow them to cater for differing student needs. The very nature of regular classrooms which accept and educate all comers, means that there can be vast variation in the social, emotional, academic and physical skills and experiences of student cohorts, irrespective of any labels or disability diagnosis (Hayes, 2012). Diversity is a 'part and parcel' of everyday classrooms, and my experiences observing teaching practices in Special School classrooms have heightened my awareness of strategies that regular classroom teachers use to cater for differing student needs (including, but not limited to, students with a disability diagnosis) in the more inclusive environment of a regular school.

The Research Question

The research question for the study, which forms the basis of this thesis, 'How do regular primary classroom teachers implement inclusive practices for students with diverse learning needs, and what strategies do they use to support these practices?', was developed as a result of my interest in the implementation of inclusive practices in the regular education system, particularly with regard to practitioners' experiences and their everyday teaching and learning approaches. It relates to my growing awareness of the need for a greater understanding of what effective teachers *know* and *do* in regard to catering for the full diversity of their students. I came to recognise the critical role that teachers play, through both their attitudes and actions, in the development of inclusive learning environments, and saw the need for additional research in this area.

In explaining the need for research related to inclusive learning environments, Slee (2011) makes reference to how preoccupation with policies for inclusion and a noted fixation with symptoms, disorders and syndromes misrepresents disability as individual impairment and draws attention away from the importance of equipping teachers and schools to create diverse learning environments. Slee warns that an emphasis on measuring, mapping and labelling reduces inclusion to a technical problem and policy issue (Slee, 2011). Acknowledging the crucial role played by classroom teachers in the implementation of inclusive education, Kortman (2003) emphasises the need for an increased focus on teachers and learning environments, and calls for educational research that focuses on teachers' expertise, research that draws on "'insider' information constructed by teachers involved in inclusive practice" (p. 221). Similarly, Florian (2014), Black-Hawkins (2010), Spratt and Florian (2015), and Rouse (2008) stress the value of research that inquires into the implementation of inclusive practices,

the need for greater understanding of the "craft knowledge of teachers who are able to maintain high levels of academic achievement in diverse classrooms" (Spratt & Florian, 2015. p. 89). Clearly, there is a need for research related to inclusive education that further interrogates the skills, knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of everyday classroom teachers (Rouse, 2008).

This study investigates what Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) refer to as teacher craft knowledge, understanding about what teachers know and do in regard to implementing inclusive pedagogies. Throughout the research process I refer to academic literature on inclusive education, including interpretations and definitions of inclusion, what current authorities in the field identify as indicators of inclusive practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011; Black-Hawkins, 2010; Florian, 2014) and the barriers to participation and learning that some students encounter.

My experiences as a primary teacher have also encouraged me to recognise the importance of research that assists in developing an understanding of 'teachers' worlds' and seeking evidence of ways that teachers enact inclusive pedagogies (Florian, 2014). While my role was primarily that of researcher, whilst conducting the study my personal experiences as a teacher were utilised to develop rapport with participants, to encourage interactions with each of the teachers, and to guide me as I observed and discussed with them not only their teaching practices, but also, their attitudes, beliefs and influences.

Employing ethnographic techniques, this study documents and interrogates the practices and experiences of eight classroom teachers. Each of the research participants are educators that are currently working with diverse student cohorts in regular schools. They are classroom teachers who are endeavoring to implement inclusive practices. Consistent with the adoption of an ethnographic methodology, the research data consist of observations of the participants' classroom practices recorded in my research journal, combined with transcripts from a series of informal interviews conducted with each of the teachers.

The research documents and offers critiques of strategies that the eight research participants use to support students with diverse needs; particularly strategies that have the potential to enhance the learning of *all* students. Ainscow argues that "scrutiny of the practice of what we sometimes call ordinary teachers provides the best starting point for understanding how classrooms can be made more inclusive" (Ainscow, 1999, p. 5). Drawing on the voices and experiences of everyday classroom teachers, I sought to collect data that interrogates and promotes the implementation of inclusive practices in regular classrooms, data that also

provides insights into many of the concerns and misunderstandings about inclusive education that regular teachers have encountered. By documenting how participatory teaching practices were established and what has influenced their development, I have endeavoured to develop understanding of how inclusion can be achieved in everyday classrooms and provide a further stimulus for the development of teaching approaches that cater for diverse needs and abilities, approaches that meet the learning needs of *all* students.

Increasingly, primary schools in Australia are adopting personalised, student-centred teaching and learning approaches that acknowledge and cater for the full variance of learners. There is a growing emphasis on catering for a variety of learning styles, varying rates of development and fostering interaction and collaboration between students (ACARA, 2018; State Government of Victoria, 2016). Professional development programs for teachers currently include information related to differentiated approaches such as *the Australian Developmental Curriculum* (Walker, 2011), which provides intensive training for teachers and assists them in the implementation of an inquiry-learning approach within their classrooms. Progressive, regular classroom teachers are implementing flexible, student-centred programs and strategies that encourage them to adjust their teaching to accommodate differing learning needs (ACARA, 2018; State Government of Victoria, 2016). As these teachers steadily develop and utilise responsive, participatory practices, they increase their capacity to effectively cater for the learning needs of *all* students within their classrooms (Ainscow, 1999, 2007; Florian & Black-Hawkins 2012; Loreman et al., 2011).

My personal teaching experiences and observations of both specialist setting and regular classrooms have encouraged me to explore further the practices and programs that regular classroom teachers currently use to ensure the inclusion of students with diverse learning needs within their general program. Through my research I hope to dispel a common myth among teachers, school leaders, health professionals and even some politicians; the belief that regular classroom teachers do not have the training, expertise or skills to cater for students with diverse learning needs (Ainscow, 1999; Carrington et. al., 2012; Danforth et al., 2005; Foreman, 2011; Mittler, 2000; Slee, 2011; UNESCO, 2017; Vaz et al., 2015).

The Rights of the Child

Acknowledging the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 2006a) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006b) to which Australia is a signatory, this doctoral thesis seeks to foster greater understanding of the implementation of inclusive teaching. The United

Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "requires States to the rights of people with a disability to an inclusive education and lifelong learning that will enable individuals to realise their potential" (United Nations, 2006b, Article 24). In addition to this, the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child, Committee on the Rights of the Child explain that inclusive education is "a set of values, principles and practices that seeks meaningful, effective, and quality education for all students, that does justice to the diversity of learning conditions and requirements not only of children with disabilities, but for all students" (United Nations, 2006a, p. 18). Schools in Victoria, Australia, are expected to facilitate the active and full participation of all students through the implementation of inclusive approaches (Forlin, Chambers, Loreman, Deppeler, & Sharma, 2013; State of Victoria, 2016). However, restrictive programs that involve generic teaching methods or withdrawal programs that marginalise some students remain prevalent in many primary schools (Forlin et al., 2013; Poed et al., 2017) and the creation of new segregated Special Schools continues to be a government priority (State Government of Victoria, 2017b).

My Teaching and Learning Journey

This research relates to the development of the research participants' understandings and their refinement and implementation of inclusive teaching practices. It explores their individual journeys, the influences, experiences and supports that have shaped their attitudes and beliefs and encouraged them to recognise and respond to the diverse learning needs of all students. It also involves an investigation into the participants' teaching practices, the approaches they use to cater for and support the full spectrum of learners in their classrooms. However, the title, '*Implementing Inclusion: Classroom Journeys*', also has connections to my own personal journey as a student, teacher and academic, one that has impacted on my classroom teaching approaches and motivated me in my endeavours to recognise, respect and cater for the social and academic needs *all* students.

Early experience as a pre-service teacher

When I first began studying education in the 1970s, I was introduced to details about new, innovative schools and methods of education that promoted the importance of a rich and stimulating learning environment (Holt, 1982; Holt, 1983). As a young student teacher, I naively looked forward to seeing in practice the new methods I had been learning about; an education system very different to the autocratic one that I had experienced during my own schooling.

However, on my first placement as a pre-service teacher, what I confronted was neither innovative nor engaging. Instead it was a very traditional classroom, a classroom that was ruled by fear of, and domination by the teacher. The teacher I was placed with controlled the class from his desk at the front of the room; he tooted upon his recorder to get attention and used corporal punishment, a strap[4], to maintain discipline. I found his approach both confronting and concerning. Instead of providing me with a model of 'good' teaching, this teacher allowed me to recognise what *not* to be. The approach he used, the way he oppressed interactions and student input and focused on discipline, enforcement and control relates to what Freire (1996) describes as the banking concept in education, in which students are viewed as passive vessels to be filled, learning is about receiving, and storing 'deposits' and the teacher is ultimately in control (Freire, 1996). My mentor teacher's actions aligned with a teaching philosophy based on student oppression and teacher domination; it involved regulation, student conformity and instilled fear. This was a teacher that was obsessed with control and student compliance.

Each day my mentor teacher conducted a competitive multiplication game with his students. The children took it in turns to represent their 'row'. When the game began, the competing students stood at the back of the classroom, next to their row of desks. They were required to call out the answer to each multiplication question. The child that gave the quickest correct answer stepped forward; the first to reach the front of the room was the winner. One of the children in the class had a disability, which I now recognise as cerebral palsy. He was able to compete academically with the other students and he was able to work out the answers, but was unable to respond and call out quickly. When it was his turn to compete and represent 'his row', I watched his face after each question he was asked, as his teammates groaned after each answer he missed, and I saw the hurt and the embarrassment that he was subjected to. No effort was made to support this boy. Minor modifications would have allowed him to participate successfully, but the teacher seemed oblivious to not only the injustice of the way the game was conducted, but also the fact that it highlighted the student's disability and set him apart from his peers.

As I reflect on my time with this class, I recognise that observing this teacher's practice had an immense impact on me. Even at that early stage in my teacher training, his practices, this negative modelling, made me aware of the impact teachers can have not only on students' academic performance but also on their morale, self-confidence and participation. It made me

[4] A strap: A strip of leather used to strike students one or more times on the palm of their hand. This action was frequently referred to by students as 'the cuts'.

conscious of the importance of observing and monitoring each of the student's faces, body language and emotional responses to situations, not just their work habits and academic results. This early classroom experience demonstrated to me that exclusion and discrimination can take many forms, and the physical presence of students in a classroom does not equate with social justice and inclusive practice. Equally importantly, my observations of my mentor teacher's practices developed my awareness of ways that teachers can be complicit in, and contribute to, the marginalisation and exclusion of students.

My classrooms

A large part of my teaching career has been spent working in small country primary schools in Victoria, Australia. During this time I have frequently worked with students whose diverse needs made them eligible for education in a special setting, a school for students with a diagnosed physical or intellectual disability, but, for differing reasons were enrolled at a regular school. Often when a student's parents realised that attendance at a specialist school would involve extensive travel, their local country school became the more favourable option (Elvey, 2017). As Elvey explains:

> some families endured pressure from a variety of support services and health professionals who promoted education in a special setting, they appreciated that attendance at the local school allowed their child to be educated and socialise within the community where they lived. (Elvey, 2017, p. 159)

Although a number of these students had complex learning and sometimes medical needs, they were embraced and supported by the staff, students and the school community and participated in all aspects of school life, including extra-curricular activities such as sports days, school camps and school concerts.

Working with these students allowed me to recognise the benefits that inclusive approaches offer, not just for individual students but also their families, classmates and teachers. Educating children within their local community provides students with opportunities to interact, socialise, play and learn from and with their peers. Opportunities for collaboration, for shared learning and for the development of understanding and acceptance of difference assisted in enriching the learning experiences of all members of the school community. While working in a variety of primary schools, I was involved in and observed other teachers planning and delivering the curriculum in creative ways to engage and cater for the differing needs of their students. I observed and supported students in the development of social skills and the valuing of

friendship groups containing diverse individuals. Through these experiences I came to recognise that when student diversity became part of everyday school life - part of the norm - fear and intolerance of difference, was replaced by understanding and acceptance.

Post graduate studies

Earlier in this chapter I discussed my reflections in relation to two special setting school placements, which I undertook when completing post graduate studies during my teaching career. I explained that I had previously believed that special educational settings frequently provided learning opportunities for students with disabilities that surpassed what regular schools and classrooms were able to offer. Consistent with concerns expressed by Danforth et al., (2005) and Foreman (2011), like many of my teaching colleagues, I was of the opinion that Special Schools, with their combination of support staff and teachers with specialised knowledge and experience and extensive resources, enhanced not only the academic development of students with disabilities, but also provided a more stimulating and supportive learning environment.

Spending time in four of the classrooms at these Special Schools, observing teachers, students and classroom teaching approaches, challenged my thinking and encouraged me to question my beliefs about the provision of specialist setting schools. Rather than provide me with demonstrations from 'experts' in the field and examples of techniques and strategies that specialist teachers employ to support diverse learners, my experiences and observations at these schools encouraged me to recognise the disadvantages of segregated settings. Students in my regular school classroom (including those with a disability diagnosis), were continually exposed to varying levels and combinations of targeted explicit instruction, collaborative group work and independent activities. Mathematics and literacy were taught each day, to *all* students, and classroom tasks were frequently adjusted to cater for differing learning needs and abilities. Picture books, junior novels, non-fiction texts, digital devices and a range of other learning resources were freely available for use in the classroom, and home reading was an entrenched part of the daily routine. During lunch and recess students had opportunities to interact and play with siblings and students from other grade levels, while in the classroom, group work, student collaboration and activity choices provided opportunities for supported social interactions and the development of friendships.

In contrast to my regular classroom, while each of the specialist setting classrooms provided some instruction in literacy and numeracy, these areas of the curriculum were less regularly timetabled. There were frequently days when there was *either* literacy or mathematics taught. I

observed some explicit teaching and shared reading being conducted, but often *all* the students worked on the same task at the same time, with little collaboration and interaction between peers. In one classroom there were very few books available for students and I saw no evidence of a home reading program or Information and Communication Technology (ICT) use. In another classroom interactions were limited (even during the lunch break), students were occasionally restrained in their seats to prevent movement within the classroom and there were no opportunities for students to make choices regarding activities. My perception that specialist setting schools offered something more educationally, and that teachers in these schools had more specialised knowledge about teaching strategies than regular teachers, was certainly challenged.

My observations in these two specialist setting schools, encouraged me to not only recognise the social and educational limitations that segregated settings can bring (Cogolon, 2014), but also developed my awareness of the importance of the provision of effective teaching practice. Regular classrooms frequently contain diverse cohorts, but catering for differing needs does not involve a separate set of strategies or specialised knowledge for *some* students (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Rouse, 2008). Instead, it requires commitment to effective teaching and learning, the implementation of inclusive practices that support everyone (Ainscow, 2007; Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Rapp & Arndt, 2012; Rouse, 2008).

Research Aims

Classroom teachers have an integral role in the education of students with diverse learning needs (Rouse, 2008), yet this role is frequently overlooked in the current educational climate that is dominated by the implementation of departmental policies and medical assessments (Gibson, 2006; Slee, 2011). Through research of teachers' experiences and classroom strategies, I seek to develop information that will encourage, support and assist classroom teachers to understand how inclusive education can be achieved through responsive teaching practices, and simultaneously challenge the beliefs, attitudes and practices that create participatory barriers and promote exclusion from and within regular primary schools. My ultimate aim is to develop an investigation into the practices and craft knowledge of a selected group of teachers that makes a positive contribution to the discourse surrounding inclusive education, particularly, understandings about teacher actions, their beliefs and practices, which assist in breaking down the barriers to learning and participation that *some* students encounter.

Conclusion

During this chapter I discussed the background to this study, and I outlined some of my experiences and concerns that encouraged me to conduct this investigation into the implementation of inclusive teaching practices. I discussed the reported negative perceptions of some teachers about their capacity to teach diverse learners (Ainscow, 1999; Carrington et. al., 2012; Danforth et al., 2005; Foreman, 2011; Mittler, 2000; Pijl et al., 1999; Slee, 2011; Vaz et al., 2015) and how teacher concerns are often compounded by the conflicting messages they receive about *how* and *where* students with disabilities and impairments should be taught (Ainscow, 2007; UNESCO, 2017). I also explained and justified what I perceive as a need for greater understanding in regard to what effective, inclusive classroom teachers *know* and *do*.

In the later part of this chapter, I provided details that relate to some of my own experiences as a pre-service teacher in training, as a practicing classroom teacher and as a post-graduate education student. I drew on and discussed my reflections relating to the progressive nature of my initial teacher education, the realities that I confronted during some of my student placements, and aspects of my teaching career, largely spent in rural schools and working with multilevel groups of students. These reflections provided insights into my personal journey as an educator, particularly with respect to the experiences that have influenced *my* beliefs, attitudes and understanding of inclusive practices and how they can be implemented.

These personal descriptions and discussions about my prior experiences also provided additional insights into the development of my awareness of the need for greater understanding in relation to the implementation of inclusive classroom practices. This includes my recognition of the importance of not only knowing about what teachers 'do' in regard to teaching diverse learners, but also understanding the influences, practices and supports that encourage regular classroom teachers to implement and embrace inclusive approaches.

In the next chapter, I review the academic literature surrounding the development of inclusive education. I draw upon and discuss the research, ideas and opinions of varying authorities in the field, and refer to theories and studies that have not only helped to further shape my attitudes, understanding and definition of inclusive practices, but have guided me during my research into the implementation of inclusive pedagogies.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature - Inclusive Classrooms

The study investigates the implementation of inclusive practices in regular primary schools; it inquires into the classroom approaches that support the participation and learning of all students. Undertaking the study requires not only a sound understanding of the methods and methodologies that will be implemented during the research, but also knowledge and awareness of current theories and research related to inclusive education and the implementation of inclusive pedagogies. In this section, I provide a review of literature that examines the philosophy and issues of social justice that underpin inclusive education. I investigate differing interpretations and common misunderstandings about what constitutes inclusion, the influence of society and medical definitions of disability on inclusive practices, and the pedagogies and practices that are likely to support students with diverse abilities and learning needs within regular classrooms. I seek out information relating to practices that focus on providing access to the curriculum and the provision of quality teaching and learning experiences, not for some or most, but for *all* students (Ainscow, 2007; Florian, Young, & Rouse, 2010; UNESCO, 2005).

What is Inclusive Education?

The concept of inclusion is complex and multilayered, and differing definitions incorporate a range of factors that relate not only to individuals, but also to communities and society. Several general principles about inclusion can be gleaned from the literature, principles that highlight both the breadth and intricacies of inclusive education. From a teaching and learning perspective, inclusive education encompasses responsive regular classrooms that seek to meet the needs of all students and the celebration and valuing of difference (Loreman et al., 2011). In another context, inclusion is about the dismantling of barriers to "educational access, participation and success" (Slee, 2007, p. 184) and is concerned with identifying and challenging the policies, practices and ideas that underpin discrimination and exclusion (Armstrong & Barton, 2007). Inclusion can be seen to be "embedded in a range of contexts-political and social, as well as psychological and educational" (Thomas & O'Hanlon, 2004. p. ix). It is influenced by the actions of educators, policy makers and societal pressures and expectations. Although various commentators emphasise different elements of inclusion, a strong commonality emerges with respect to an emphasis on valuing diversity, and the key underpinning principles of equity and

participation. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All* (2005) was created in an endeavour to draw attention to educational policies and practices that marginalise and exclude children and highlight the need to break down the barriers to learning and participation that some students encounter. In addition, these guidelines seek to "demystify the notions surrounding inclusion and demonstrate that challenges can be overcome through a willingness to change societal attitudes regarding inclusion" (p. 5). This document describes inclusion as:

> A process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. (UNESCO, 2005, p. 13)

UNESCO's (2005) *Guidelines for Inclusion* highlight four fundamental areas: diversity, participation, reducing exclusion and the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. The guidelines also reinforce the notion that inclusion involves not one but multiple factors. Developing understanding and awareness of these factors, including their intricacies and the way they link and intertwine, provides important insights into the features of an inclusive environment and the practices and strategies that schools and teachers need to embrace to cater for all students. These four fundamental areas, as identified by UNESCO, will frame the basis of an initial discussion about inclusion.

Supporting and celebrating the full diversity of learners

Within an inclusive education approach, learner diversity, differences in student backgrounds, needs, dis/abilities, interests, learning rates and styles, is recognised and embraced. Inclusive strategies do not involve one-size-fits-all solutions that involve uniformity and conformity; instead they to require teachers to listen to unfamiliar voices, be open, empower all members of the classroom community and celebrate difference (Allan, 1999). The objective of inclusive education is to provide quality teaching and learning and to recognise and cater for aspirations and diversity amongst students (Armstrong & Barton, 2007). Inclusion requires a genuine willingness, on the behalf of schools and teachers, to respond, adapt and change, a preparedness to value difference and implement flexible practices that cater for all students. (Loreman et al., 2011). Inclusive teachers accept, value, embrace and celebrate the full diversity of learners, the differences that they encounter amongst students and within the community (Griffiths, 2003).

Participation

Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (1999) define inclusive education as a "process of increasing participation of students in the mainstream" (p. 149). Providing access to not only a regular setting but also the everyday curriculum for all students (Thomas, Walker, & Webb, 2005) is a vital factor in inclusive education and sets it apart from the process of integration. Unlike integration, which often involves educating students in regular schools but providing them with a curriculum, social opportunities and a learning environment that is substantially different to that which is experienced by their peers (Loreman et al., 2011), inclusion is about *maximising* participation and learning, and requires teachers to differentiate learning by adapting tasks to allow them to cater for varying needs within the curriculum and classroom environment.

Armstrong and Barton (2007) explain that inclusive education is not about categorising students and providing select programs to cater for particular groups, it is about the sustained participation and well-being of all learners. Instead of withdrawing students with diverse needs to work on a select curriculum, inclusive schools and classrooms incorporate flexible groupings, feature tasks that suit differing academic needs and promote and provide opportunities for cooperative learning and the development of linguistic interactions, social interactions and friendships within regular classrooms. Inclusive education exposes and rejects exclusion, the practices, policies and beliefs that limit or prevent individuals from experiencing the full range of social and educational opportunities that their peers are experiencing.

Reducing exclusion and barriers to inclusion

Social perceptions, attitudes and influences have historically been a significant contributor to exclusionary practices and continue to provide barriers to inclusion. As Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou (2010) argue, social change is imperative if disabling attitudes to those with impairments in educational settings are to be overcome. These authors advocate that:

> A policy promoting inclusive education that remains constrained by the goal of assimilating those with impairments into mainstream schools without addressing the exclusionary character of a disabling society is doomed to reinforce the very exclusionary process that it seeks to overcome. (Armstrong et al., 2010, pp. 92-93)

Thomas and Loxley (2001) explain that from a critical theorist's point of view the resilience of special education might be seen "as a clear demonstration of education's inevitable *reproduction* of the existing social system" (p. 4). This view is supported by Finkelstein (2001) who claims "our society is constructed *by* people with capabilities *for* people with capabilities

and it is **this** [original emphasis] that makes people with impairments incapable of functioning" (p. 2). Despite worldwide changes in legislation advancing the case for inclusion within education systems, children who are perceived to be 'different' still have to contend with practices that label and exclude them (Ferri & Connor, 2006; Poed et al., 2017; Thomas & Loxley, 2001).

Misunderstandings and misinformation relating to inclusion is a major contributor to exclusionary practices. Loreman, Deppeler, and Harvey, teacher educators and university researchers with an interest in the education of students with diverse learning needs, explain that when called upon to speak with other educators about inclusion, they sometimes find that educators have misunderstandings and confusions about inclusion (Loreman et al., 2011.). Misconceptions of the principle of inclusion not only hinder the promotion of inclusion in education but often support exclusionary practices. Disturbed by the confusion of some educators, between the concepts of integration and inclusion, Loreman et al. (2011) endeavour to address these misunderstandings by explaining what inclusion is not:

> Educating students part time in special and part time in mainstream is not inclusion, educating students in regular classes but requiring them to follow substantially different courses of study from their peers in terms of content and learning environment is not inclusion. (Loreman et al., 2011, p. 2)

While some educators remain unable to recognise what constitutes exclusion of students, their commitment and ability to introduce changed practice is impeded and hence barrier to inclusion are more likely to remain in place.

Both educators and policy makers would benefit from further inquiries that have the capacity to increase their understanding of inclusive principles and enhance implementation. Armstrong et al. (2011) voice their concern that inclusion is frequently been seen as a minor change in language, not a move to more informed practice. Changing educational policies from integration to inclusion will only be effective if accompanied by changes in practice that are informed by a strong understanding of what constitute both exclusion and inclusion in classrooms and schools.

Administrative and departmental pressures on schools and teachers are often inherently discouraging of inclusive practice with their emphasis on diagnosis, individual education plans and support programs. Brantlinger (2006) voices concern about the current preoccupation in many societies with classification and remediation, which they describe as:

> practices that single out individual students as different and in need of specialised services rather than strategies to create inclusive classrooms that accommodate a wide range of diverse learners. (Brantlinger, 2006, p. 63)

Similarly, the pressure and accountability that is placed on contemporary schools and teachers to improve student performance related to national testing and curriculum levels, fails to acknowledge that "all children can learn but not all children can master required proficiency levels" (Harvey-Koelpin, 2006, p. 141) and creates what Armstrong and Barton (2007) describe as "an obsession with standards" (p. 12). In these externally set, summative assessments, the formal test experience, which is often foreign to students, can bring about feelings of anxiety and low self-esteem, creating barriers to successful student participation (Hayes, 2012). The publication of the norm-referenced test results, which rate students according to their ability to meet state or national benchmarks rather than inform and direct future teaching and learning, can send negative messages to lower-performing students about their capacity to learn, and thus highlight differences between students (Hayes, 2012). These practices, that compare and judge students in regard to their capacity to meet externally set 'grade level' standards, reinforce notions of conformity and normality within the school community (Brantlinger, 2006). When responses by schools and teachers to low standardised -achievement text- scores result in the implementation of withdrawal and remediation programs for some students, the regular removal of individuals from their classroom while well intentioned, risks further marginalising those students that do not meet the norm, and setting them apart from their peers (Masters, 2014).

Regular classroom teachers need access not only to professional learning and guidance to develop their knowledge, awareness and confidence in implementing inclusive approaches, but also to encouragement to recognise the skills and practices they have already developed that cater for diversity. Teacher reflection, collaboration and continuous professional training provide opportunities for regular classroom teachers to further develop practices that cater for *all* their students. Harvey-Koelpin's (2006) conducted a case study that revealed that "general education teachers voice the belief that they feel unprepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities" (p. 139), while a recent study by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission found that 62% of classroom teachers reported they were inadequately trained to teach learners with disabilities (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2017). Similarly, Rouse (2008) draws on findings from the Inclusive Practice Project (IPP), research that involved classroom teachers, to support the statement that "such wide ranging tasks require knowledge, skills and attributes that not all feel they possess" (Rouse, 2008, p. 10). Black-

Hawkins and Amrhein (2014) explain that although many teachers agree with the principles of inclusive education they are also anxious their professional competencies, their ability to provide for the learning needs of all students. The self-doubt and expressed concerns of classroom teachers described by researchers such as Harvey-Koelpin (2006), Rouse (2008) and Black-Hawkins and Amrhein (2014), highlight the importance of ensuring that educators are well equipped, that they have knowledge, skills and support to develop not only their effectiveness but also their confidence working with diverse learners (UNESCO, 2005, 2017; Foreman, 2011).

The efficiency of special classes for students with additional needs was brought into question during the 1960s. For example, Hoelke's (1966) research into the effectiveness of special classes for mentally retarded pupils, and Rubin, Senison and Retwee's (1966) study with emotionally handicapped children, concluded that the students being educated in regular classrooms "make as much or more progress in regular grades as they do in special education" (Dunn, 1968, p. 36). Subsequent studies by Madden and Slavin (1983), Staub and Peck (1994) and Manset and Semmel (1997) also indicate that differences in performance between students placed in special needs and regular schools are small, but favour regular school with regard to both educational and social outcomes.

More recently Rouse and Florian conducted a study that involved a group of secondary students designated as having special educational needs (SEN) (Rouse & Florian, 2006). These researchers explored some of the questions relating to inclusion and achievement, including concerns that the inclusion of students with disabilities and impairments will impact negatively on the achievement of other students and subsequently lower class standards (Rouse & Florian, 2006). In their summary of the research results, Rouse and Florian conclude:

> The evidence from this study suggests that, the presence of relatively large numbers of children with special educational needs in the case study schools does not have a negative impact on the achievement of children who do not have this designation. Indeed, many staff in these schools believe that the strategies used by the school for including pupils with SEN contribute to improved achievement for all. (Rouse & Florian, 2006, p. 491)

Similarly, an extensive report by Hehir et al. (2016) draws on data from over 250 studies from 25 countries. Hehir et al. (2016) conclude that there is clear evidence that inclusive educational settings are beneficial, in the long and short term and that inclusive education settings are advantageous for students with *and* without a disability. The findings of "decades of research"

(Hehir, et al., 2016) consistently indicate that educating students with disabilities in inclusive settings can yield both academic and social benefits for *all* members of a learning community (Hehir, et al., 2016; Poed et al., 2017; Rouse & Florian, 2006).

Despite the prevalence of studies that raise concerns and question the appropriateness and effectiveness of segregated educational settings, awareness of the advantages of educating diverse learners within their local school is not widespread amongst regular classroom teachers. As a result, educators still frequently question the placement of students with additional learning needs within their classrooms, believing that they can be better catered for in a segregated setting (Carrington et al., 2012; Danforth et al., 2005; Foreman, 2011; Mittler, 2000; Pijl, Pijl & van den Bos, 1999; Poed et al., 2017; Rouse & Florian, 2006; Topping & Maloney, 2007; Vaz et at., 2015).

A major contributor to teachers' questioning whether students with diverse needs should be taught in regular classrooms, and a further barrier to inclusive education, comes from within the field of special education (Armstrong, 2003; Finkelstein, 2001; Rapp & Arndt, 20012; UNESCO, 2017). Armstrong argues that the presence of special setting schools, learning institutions that are separated from the community, "has sustained the social myth that disabled people belong elsewhere and are other" (Armstrong, 2003, p. 81). The need for segregation is frequently supported by traditional special educators, whose careers and practices have developed on the premise that a segment of the student population require unique, specialised teaching procedures (Thomas et al., 2005). Slee explains that special education "is part of a confusing history of educational and social exclusion" (Slee, 2011, p .74) and that recognising the politics underpinning the practice is "an important step in building a theory of inclusive education to inform decisions about children and their education" (Slee, 2011, p. 74). Slee (2011) also advocates that special education has historically aligned itself with exclusionary practices and that it needs to embrace the change towards inclusive education.

Thomas and Loxley examine the way children are categorised out of the regular education system into special education and observe that "special education is permeated by an ideology of benevolent humanitarianism" (Thomas & Loxley, 2001, p. 60). When educators' actions are motivated by a charity discourse, leading to feelings of concern and sympathy for the 'plight' of some students, classroom practices frequently translate into low expectations and approaches that segregate and isolate individuals (Cologon & Thomas, 2014; Rapp and Arndt, 2012; Slee, 2001). Thomas and Loxley (2001) warn that although the process of classification and provision may aim at meeting individual needs, it also creates a "social categorisation of

weaker social groups" (Thomas & Loxley, 2001, p. 60). Similarly, a medical model of disability, that focuses on deficits and disorders and endeavours to 'fix', only entrenches negative societal views about difference and barriers to participation (Ballard, 2012; Cologon & Thomas, 2014; Goodley, 2017). Voicing similar concerns Finkelstein argues "it is society that disables us and disabled people are an oppressed social group" (Finkelstein, 2001, p. 2). Finkelstein advocates the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities have opportunities to articulate and draw awareness to their experiences of inequality, and actively contribute to the restructuring of society and removal of competitive and disabling environments and situations (Finkelstein, 2001). Finkelstein stresses the need to adopt a social model of disability, to actively seek to dismantle the societal barriers that are perpetuated by current interpretations of disability (Finkelstein, 2001).

The development of segregated practices has often been developed with good intent, and it is supported by a view that separate settings provide a superior learning environment for disabled students (Goodley, 2017). However, the segregation of individuals, the removal of students from their local community and subsequently limiting their scope for developing relationships with other (non-disabled) peers (Goodley, 2017), is neither beneficial nor appropriate (UNESCO, 2017). Practices where students are bussed to special setting schools effectively excludes them from interactions within their community and limits opportunities for communities to develop awareness, understanding and tolerance of diversity (Armstrong & Barton, 2007). Goodley (2017) cites reports from students graduating from specialist setting schools, which indicate that rather than creating a range of educational and employment opportunities for their students, attendance at special setting schools frequently result in limited future prospects and the continued marginalisation of individuals.

The responsibility of the regular system to educate all children

The involvement of community in schooling is central to the notion of inclusion (Armstrong, et al., 2011; Armstrong & Barton, 2007; Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011; Goodley, 2017; Loreman et al., 2011; UNESCO, 1994, 2005, 2017). Loreman et al. (2011) argue that "policies of inclusion are related to the ideological view that schools should provide for the needs of all students, whatever their level of ability or disability, in their communities" (p. 42). Catering for *all* students in regular schools with an inclusive orientation provides "the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 3). Armstrong et al. (2011) advocate that education for all "is strongest when based on the acknowledgement that both commonalities

and differences characterise all learners" (p. 36). Ainscow (1999) is also concerned about students being excluded from everyday interactions and warns that "schools for all will not be achieved by transplanting special education thinking and practice into mainstream contexts" (p. 5), and emphasises the importance of ensuring students have opportunities to interact with one another. Teaching strategies within inclusive education need to involve collaboration and shared learning, as well as the implementation of strategies that personalise and differentiate learning for everyone rather than individualise instruction for select students (Florian, 2014; Loreman et al., 2011; Tomlinson, 2014; Tomlinson, & McTighe, 2006). While inclusive education provides opportunities for the development of interactions, shared experiences, mutual respect and a valuing of student diversity (Fattig, 2008), segregating groups of students is considered to reinforce difference and marginalise them within a community (Goodley, 2017; UNESCO, 2017).

The Wisdom of Practice: Developing Teacher Craft Knowledge

During a study of inclusive practice, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) encountered variability in in the capacity and confidence of teachers working with diverse student groups, including children identified as having additional support needs. These researchers observed that some, but not all, teachers were able to effectively work with students with diverse abilities. Through their research, Florian and Black-Hawkins came to recognise the impact that craft knowledge, individual teacher's pedagogical knowledge, their everyday and personal understanding about effective practice, had on teacher capacity, particularly their ability to create an inclusive learning environment (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Recognising the complexities of classroom teaching and the daily challenges that teachers encounter; Florian and Black-Hawkins promote the importance of working in partnership with teaching practitioners to further develop craft knowledge and increase understandings about inclusion (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012). Also identifying the value of building on the foundations of what teachers already know, their wisdom of practice, and providing supported opportunities and guidance that enable educators to learn about, share with colleagues and implement new more inclusive approaches, these researchers advocate that educators' professional learning journeys, their ongoing experiences and training, play a critical role in the development of understandings about inclusive pedagogies (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Increasing teacher capacity

In identifying a need for a rethinking with regard to classroom approaches for diverse learners, Florian, Young and Rouse advocate the importance of teachers moving away from traditional thinking and strategies that focus on most or some students, and subsequently replacing them with practices that offer support for *all* (Florian et al., 2010). These researchers promote the view that "the challenge of inclusive practice is to respect and respond to human difference in ways that include rather than exclude learners in what is ordinarily available to others in the daily life of the classroom" (Florian et al., 2010, p. 712), and alert us to the need for regular teachers to develop a learning environment that maximises the participation and learning of all students (Florian et al., 2010). Similarly, Loreman et al. (2011) promote the need for regular teachers to adapt the curriculum to cater for learner diversity, stressing the need for teachers to embrace universal design to "take the curriculum they are mandated to teach, and translate that curriculum into meaningful learning activities that are relevant and accessible to all students in a class" (Loreman et al., 2011, p. 139). It is important that teachers are aware of not only departmental and school curriculum requirements, what needs to be taught, but also know about and understand the pedagogy that underpins effective teaching and learning (Loreman et al., 2011). Careful consideration must be given to the planning of teaching activities *and* their implementation to ensure that the curriculum design and pedagogical techniques support the full range of learners (Loreman et al., 2011). Tomlinson and McTighe also promote the need for classroom teachers to reject "one size fits all models" (Tomlinson, 2014; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 185), stressing the need for teachers to instead embrace the crafting of a curriculum that is accessible and ensures academic success for *all,* and the implementation of differentiated models of teaching, the adoption of teaching approaches that are responsive to student variance.

By adopting flexible teaching and learning pedagogies that relate to students' needs, interests and experiences, regular schools and teachers further develop their capacity to create positive learning environments for *all* learners (Loreman et al., 2011; Rief & Heimburge, 1996; Tomlinson, 2008, 2014; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Rief and Heimburge (1996) create a profile of what they describe as the optimum classroom. Table 2.1. Characteristics of a developmental classroom identifies what these authors perceive as key indicators of a stimulating and inclusive learning environment.

Table 2.1. Characteristics of a developmental classroom

• Instruction is relevant, meaningful and motivates students. • Students are able to achieve success and work at their own level. • Instruction is provided in a variety of ways to suit differing learning styles. • Diversity is valued and there is mutual respect between students, teachers and parents. • Students enjoy learning and are active participants in their education. • The school provides varying means of assessment (not just tests) to allow students to successfully demonstrate what they have learnt. • Parents and the school respect and support each other for the benefit of students.

(Adapted from Rief & Heimburge, 1996)

Rief and Heimburge (1996) draw parallels between features that they identify as contributing to an optimum learning environment and those of a developmental classroom, which they define as "a classroom where children develop skills at their own unique period of time" (p. 16). These authors advocate the importance of teachers using a range of inclusive techniques and approaches, that include tapping into students' knowledge and experiences and catering for a variety learning styles (Rief & Heimburge, 1996).

Similarly, Walker (2011) advocates the importance of a developmental and inclusive approach explaining that effective teaching and learning encompasses more than just academic development, it must also take into account social, emotional and cultural influences. (Walker, 2011). Walker stresses the need for learning to be meaningful and for students to be provided with experiences and teaching methods that reflect and relate to the variation within their lives and stages of development (Walker, 2011). Student-centred, developmental approaches and strategies, such as those advocated by Walker (2011) and Rief and Heimburge (1996), provide guidance and direction for teachers, assisting and encouraging them to personalise and differentiate learning for *all* students, to understand and implement approaches that support the full diversity of learner variance within their classrooms and school communities.

Inclusive education requires commitment from education authorities, individual schools and teachers about meeting the needs of all. It is both a goal and process in the movement towards democratic schooling (Slee, 2007). Schools need to teach students to value difference and

provide opportunities for them to learn how to live and work cooperatively and harmoniously (Peterson, 2011). Catering for diversity can be both difficult and complex, but the fundamental goal of schools and teachers should be the development of improved learning outcomes through exemplary practice. To achieve this, teachers need a strong understanding of effective learning and teaching strategies, informed approaches and quality practice Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Loreman et al., 2011). Although the implementation of inclusive practices presents ongoing challenges for educators, the development of more equitable learning environments, environments that embrace difference and facilitate progress for all children (Slee, 1993) is a necessary and worthwhile challenge for teachers who are committed to improving learning outcomes for their students.

The important role that regular classroom teachers play in the development of inclusive learning environments and the challenges that students encounter through a lack of teacher understanding in regard to what constitutes inclusive practice is highlighted in a study conducted by Poed, Cologon, and Jackson (2017). The study, which involved over 745 Australian families and school staff provides evidence that restrictive practices[5], that exclude and marginalise students, remain commonplace in numerous Australian Schools. Poed et al. conclude that if Australian schools are to better cater for our students with disabilities, there is a need for informed change (Poed, et al., 2017). The findings by Poed et al. highlight the need for classroom teachers to develop a solid understanding about what constitutes effective teaching and learning, and the importance of supporting and guiding teacher practitioners to ensure they are able to recognise ways in which they can develop and confidently implement skills and strategies that meet the needs of *all* their students (Ainscow & Booth, 2002, 2011; Black-Hawkins, 2010; Carrington et al. 2012; Florian, et al., 2010; Rouse, 2008; Spratt & Florian, 2015; Tomlinson, 2014; Walker, 2011).

The Index for Inclusion

In an endeavour to support the development of inclusive school communities and challenge and change the thinking and practices that exclude some students Booth and Ainscow (1999), in consultation with a group of colleagues in the United Kingdom, developed the *Index for Inclusion* (Foreman, 2011). Originally circulated by the Department of Education and Employment (UK), to all schools in England, the *Index for Inclusion* is a document that promotes

[5] Restrictive practices are defined as actions by schools and teachers that discourage the participation and/or enrolment of students with a disability in regular schools (Poed, et al., 2017).

student diversity as a rich resource for learning communities (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011). The *Index* emphasises the need for increased awareness, understanding and action relating to four key concepts: "'inclusion', 'barriers to learning and participation', 'resources to support learning and participation' and 'support for diversity'" (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 2).

Rather than focus primarily on one area or group to enact change and further implement inclusive approaches, Booth and Ainscow (2002, 2011) advocate that any plan for developing inclusive learning communities, should involve each of three interconnected key dimensions; inclusive culture, inclusive policies and inclusive practices (refer to Figure 2.1).

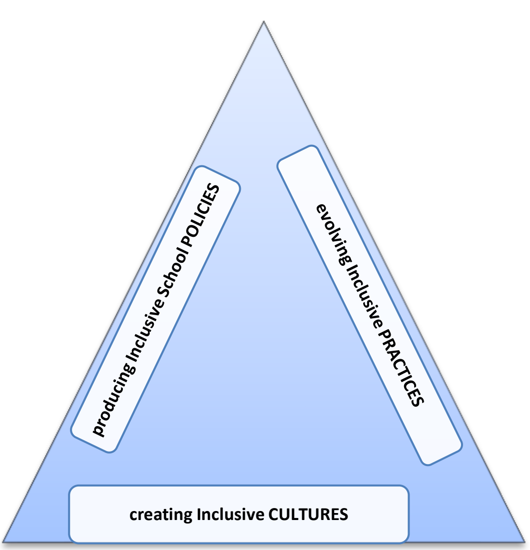

Figure 2.1: The Index for Inclusion dimensions for school improvement

(Source: Booth & Ainscow 2002, p. 7)

While *The Index for Inclusion* identifies evolving inclusive practice (what teachers do) as a critical component in the process of change and improvement to support the development of inclusive schools, Booth and Ainscow (2002, 2011) advocate that teaching practice needs be developed in conjunction with planned and sustained improvements in: the school culture; the development of shared inclusive beliefs, attitudes and values; and the development of policies that support and encourage the participation and learning of all students. Inclusive classroom practice *supports* and is *supported by* an inclusive school culture, and inclusive policies.

In the *Index for Inclusion,* Booth and Ainscow (2002, 2011) list a range of indicators for each of the three dimensions, to assist educators in identifying and monitoring the development of inclusive processes and practices (refer to Tables 2.2, 2.3 & 2.4).

Table 2.2. Creating inclusive cultures

Creating Inclusive Cultures

Building community: Indicators

- Everyone is made to feel welcome.
- Students help each other.
- Staff collaborate with each other.
- Staff and students treat one another with respect.
- There is a partnership between staff and parents/carers.
- Staff and governors work well together.
- All local communities are involved in the school.

Establishing inclusive values: Indicators

- There are high expectations for all students.
- Staff, governors, students and parents/carers share a philosophy of inclusion.
- Students are equally valued.
  Staff and students treat one another as human beings as well as occupants of a 'role'.
- Staff seek to remove barriers to learning and participation in all aspects of the school.
- The school strives to minimise discriminatory practice.

(Source: Booth and Ainscow, 2002, p. 39)

Table 2.3. Producing inclusive policies

Producing Inclusive Policies

Developing the school for all: Indicators

- Staff appointments and promotions are fair.
- All new staff are helped to settle into the school.
- The school seeks to admit all students from its locality.
- The school makes its building physically accessible to all people.
- All new students are helped to settle into the school.
- The school arranges teaching groups so that all students are valued.

Organising support for diversity: Indicators

- All forms of support are coordinated.
- Staff development activities help staff to respond to student diversity.
- 'Special education needs' policies are inclusive policies.
- The Special Education Needs Code of Practice[6] is used to reduce the barriers to learning and participation of all students.
- Support for those learning English as an additional language is co-ordinated with learning support.
- Pastoral and behavioural support policies are linked to curriculum development and learning support policies.
- Pressures for disciplinary exclusion are decreased.
- Barriers to attendance are decreased.
- Bullying is minimised.

(Source: Booth and Ainscow, 2002, p.40)

[6] Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (Department for Education and Skills, 2001)

Table 2.4 Evolving inclusive practices

Evolving Inclusive Practices

Orchestrating learning: Indicators

- Teaching is planned with the learning of all students in mind.
- Lessons encourage the participation of all students.
- Lessons develop an understanding of difference.
- Students are actively involved in their own learning.
- Students learn collaboratively.
- Assessment contributes to the achievements of all students.
- Classroom discipline is based on mutual respect.
- Teachers plan, teach and review in partnership.
- Teachers are concerned to support the learning and participation of all students.
- Teaching assistants support the learning and participation of all students.
- Homework contributes to the learning of all.
- All students take part in activities outside the classroom.

Mobilising resources: Indicators

- Student difference is used as a resource for teaching and learning.
- Staff expertise is fully utilised.
- Staff develop resources to support learning and participation.
- Community resources are known and drawn upon.
- School resources are distributed fairly so that they support inclusion.

(Source: Booth and Ainscow, 2002, p. 41)

It is almost 20 years since the *Index for Inclusion,* the framework for school improvement that Booth and Ainscow outline, was first developed. However, this resource which advocates the need for teachers and educational leaders to work together to identify areas for development, assess where their school is in terms of inclusion (or exclusion), and outline a process for planned and effective school and teacher development (Ainscow, 1999) remains relevant and provides supportive guidelines for current school communities. The view promoted in the *Index for Inclusion*, that inclusive education is not about a separate set of practices for some, but is about removal of barriers and the education of *all* young people (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011), is widely endorsed in literature on inclusive education. For example, Rouse (2008) advocates that “inclusion requires teachers to accept the responsibility for creating schools in which *all* children learn and feel they belong” (p. 6), while Black-Hawkins (2010) and Florian

(2014) consistently refer to inclusive education in relation to the importance of creating educational environments in which *all* children can learn and participate. These researchers, authorities in the field of inclusive education, advocate that inclusion is not about providing for *some* or *most,* but about providing quality teaching and learning for *everybody* (Florian, Black-Hawkins, & Rouse, 2016).

Like Booth and Ainscow (2002, 2011), Florian et al. (2016) adopt and reinforce UNESCO's (2009) stance that "'an inclusive' education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more inclusive – in other words, if they become better at educating all children in their communities" (UNESCO, 2009, p. 8). These authors emphasise that inclusive education requires teachers to identify and develop teaching practices that are more effective for *all* students (Ainscow, 1999; Black-Hawkins, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011; Florian, 2014; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian et al., 2016; Rouse, 2008).

Implementing Change Processes

The implementation of inclusive education remains a complex and ongoing quest. In recognising the multiple challenges inclusive educators confront, Slee (2011) explains that broad and varying definitions indicate the breadth and conflicts that currently exist in this field, and voices concern about the labyrinthine politics and contradictory pressures that complicate and provide barriers to the development of inclusive educational processes. Mittler (2000) also expresses concern about contradictions, arguing that "our education system [British] is anything but inclusive and the new policies are at odds with the competitive system that we have inherited" (p. 13). While there is widespread support for the notion of inclusive education amongst governments and education departments (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2017; State Government of Victoria, 2016, 2017a), the implementation of relevant policies and approaches is still hampered by a range of political and societal barriers (Goodley, 2017; Slee, 2011).

Contradictions in definitions and interpretations of policies can draw attention away from actions that need to be taken to address exclusion, they can blur teachers' understanding of inclusion and the practice change that is needed within their schools and classrooms. Ainscow (1999, 2007) warns that implementing change processes and developing new ways of thinking and responding is complex and time consuming, and so it needs to be supported by processes that "'facilitate understanding' and 'support professional development'" (Ainscow, 1999, p. 31). Improving schools' capacity to cater for student diversity involves schools and educators

adopting an inclusive mindset and embracing informed change (Ainscow, 2007; Poed et al., 2017). Student-centred teaching approaches and teaching quality are critical contributors to equity in both student learning and academic outcomes (Loreman et al., 2011). Loreman et al. highlight the vital role that classroom teachers play in the development of inclusive learning environments:

> Whatever the failings of our current techniques ... it is possible to provide instruction targeted towards the strengths and needs of the individual student, while at the same time remaining inclusive in terms of the daily curriculum and activities conducted in a classroom. (Loreman et al., 2011, p. 11)

Developing professional learning, collaboration and critical reflection among teachers is beneficial to the development of quality practices. Using shared knowledge of inclusive practices, teachers are able to support each other in their educational endeavours, allowing them to more effectively identify and break down the barriers to learning and participation that some students encounter.

Despite the challenges that surround the implementation of inclusive education, including continuing barriers from historical, political, social and special education influences, advances are occurring. Policies that support rights for all, although frequently confused and misunderstood, are being adopted (State Government of Victoria, 2016; 2017a; 2017b). Increasingly, regular classroom teachers committed to quality education and high outcomes for *all* students, are implementing practices that cater for a diverse range of learning needs (Florian, & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

The pathway to a more inclusive schooling is still a 'bumpy ride', but as Dyson and Milward (1999) explain:

> the merit of such [inclusive] schools is not only that they are capable of providing quality education to all children; their establishment is a crucial step in helping to change discriminatory attitudes, in creating welcoming communities and in developing an inclusive society (p. 159).

The quest of educational inclusion and its ultimate social justice, equity, fairness and human rights outcomes for minority groups requires commitment and action from governments, communities, educational systems and educators. The failure of one or more groups to make advances does not, however, excuse nor stop others. Classroom teachers committed to quality teaching and learning can play a vital role in not only developing and sharing knowledge of

practices that support the learning and participation of *all* students, but also developing tolerance, understanding and the valuing of diversity among an upcoming generation.

Attitudinal barriers

It is widely recognised that the practices of classroom teachers impact on the development of effective, inclusive learning environments (Ainscow, 2007; Black-Hawkins, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011; Carrington, et al., 2012; Florian, 2014; Loreman, et al. 2011; Morton, Rietveld, Guerin, McIlroy, and Duke, 2012; Poed, et al., 2017). For some educators, entrenched attitudes regarding special needs and disability, create barriers that impact on their willingness to embrace and implement more participatory and inclusive approaches (Goodley, 2017; Loreman et al., 2011; Morton et al., 2012; Slee, 1993). These attitudinal barriers are frequently created through concerns voiced by varying members of society that promote the view that regular classroom teachers lack the skills required to cater for students with a disability (Graham & de Bruin, 2017). This can lead teachers to not only question their capacity to teach some students, but also encourage them towards practices that segregate and marginalise individuals, perpetuating the barriers to inclusive education that some students encounter (Poed, et al, 2017).

If these attitudinal barriers to inclusive education are to be overcome, teachers need to become more aware of the need to seek out effective strategies that support the full diversity of learners (Black-Hawkins, 2010; Florian, et al., 2010). In some cases, embracing inclusive pedagogies will involve teachers in a process that involves rethinking and abandoning traditional, ingrained approaches and ideas (Ainscow, 2007; Florian, et al., 2010; Poed et al., 2017). For other teachers, the journey towards being a more inclusive practitioner will be less confronting, but will still require continued and informed reflection and refinement of understandings and teaching practices.

Due to variations in their professional and life experiences, teachers themselves are a diverse group, with differing skills, understanding, experiences and attitudes. However, "if the education system in Australia is to meet its commitments under national and international law and if those at every level of the education system are to realise the cultural value of a 'fair go' for all" (Poed et al., 2017, p. 27), it is imperative that *all* educators are encouraged, guided and supported in their endeavours to build an inclusive classroom culture. Change processes that involve teacher reflection and ongoing professional learning, that plan for and provide opportunities for teaching practitioners to refine their understanding of inclusive pedagogies (Poed et al., 2017) need to be embedded in *every* school and classroom.

Conclusion

In this chapter I provided a review of the literature surrounding inclusive education. I discussed the complexities that encompass not only definitions of inclusive education but also individual interpretations of inclusive policies and pedagogy. During the chapter I draw on literature about inclusive education, that raise concerns about attitudinal barriers to learning and participation, barriers that are perpetuated by both current interpretations of disability (Armstrong et al., 2010; Goodley, 2017; Finkelstein; Slee, 2011) and misinterpretations about what constitutes inclusive practice (Loreman et al., 2011).

In this chapter, I frequently make reference to an interpretation of inclusive education that focuses on *everybody* rather than *some* (Ainscow, 1999; Ainscow, 2007; Black-Hawkins, 2010; Booth & Ainscow 2002, 2011; Florian, 2010, 2014; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian, Black-Hawkins & Rouse, 2016; Loreman et al., 2011; Rouse, 2008; UNESCO, 2009, 2017). This view of inclusive education promotes the need to value and embrace diversity within classrooms and schools, and emphasises the importance of *participatory* practices. The stance I adopted throughout my study aligns with this interpretation of inclusive education.

In the later part of this chapter, I discussed *The Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011). I provided information about the *Index* framework, the three dimensions*, "*producing inclusive policies, creating inclusive cultures, and evolving inclusive practices" (Booth and Ainscow, 2002, p. 8). In Tables 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4, I listed the 'indicators' that these authors developed to assist teachers and school leaders in the identification of progress in regard to the development of an inclusive learning community (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011).

In the next chapter, Chapter Three, I elaborate on the relevance of *The Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011) to this study. I explain how Booth and Ainscow's indicators of "evolving inclusive practices" (2002, p. 41), along with 'evidence' of inclusive ways of working outlined in Florian's (2014) *The Inclusive Pedagogical Approach in Action Framework,* and Tomlinson's (2014) descriptors of differentiated classrooms, guided me throughout the data collection and analysis process.

In the following chapter, Chapter Three, I also outline the theoretical perspective, methodology and methods that I adopted for the study. I explain the links between social construction theories and the research question. I also draw on the literature on ethnography, the methodology that I employed, to justify its use and relevance to the research.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

In Chapter One, I provided the background to the study. I gave details in regard to my prior experiences, as a pre-service teacher, classroom teacher and academic. These details offered insights into ways that some of my experiences have influenced my beliefs and attitudes with regard to the importance of inclusive education and motivated me to pursue research in this area. In the previous chapter I provided a review of literature on inclusive education. I discussed the research and philosophical ideas that have influenced *my* beliefs and understandings about inclusive education, especially inclusive pedagogies. In this chapter, I will outline and justify the research design and how I went about planning and executing my investigation into the implementation of inclusive classroom practices (Heller, Pietikainen, & Pujolar, 2018; Punch & Oancea, 2014).

In the early section of this chapter, I will discuss the theoretical perspective that underpins the research. I will also explain and justify the rationale behind the adoption of a qualitative research methodology, an ethnographic study, that probes into and seeks to develop understanding about the everyday realities (Beach, 2005) of the research participants' classrooms and their efforts to implement inclusive teaching experiences.

Later in this chapter, I will explain and justify the research methods that I implemented during the study, elaborating on the tools and procedures that I employed to gather and analyse the research data. When discussing the collection and analysis of the data, I will revisit aspects from the literature on inclusive education that I discussed in Chapter Two, to explain how varying frameworks, models and definitions of inclusive practice developed by 'others', considered authorities in the field of inclusive education, provided me with clarification and guidance in regard to what does and does *not* constitute inclusive practice.

Understanding and Interrogating Everyday Practices

The research question, 'How do regular primary classroom teachers implement inclusive practices for students with diverse needs?' necessitates an investigation into everyday practice, the actions (and interactions) of classroom teachers. Subsequently, this research into the implementation of inclusive pedagogies, involves eight regular classroom teachers, and investigates their craft knowledge, their daily practices and interactions when working with

students with diverse learning needs. The study draws upon qualitative methodologies to probe into meanings, structures and thoughts associated with human interactions (Greene & Hogan, 2005). rather than hypothesis testing and analysis of statistics. The subjects of the study are people, classroom teachers, and interactions with them, along with observations of their day to day practices are central to the research. I frequently use the term research participants to refer to the eight teachers involved in the study. The term *participant* is indicative of the social and interactive nature of this study, and the positioning of each of the teachers as active contributors in the research (Heller, et al. 2018; Punch & Oancea, 2014).

By documenting and interrogating the approaches that the eight research participants employ in their endeavours to meet the learning needs of the full diversity of students, this study seeks to illuminate and develop understanding about what teachers 'do', particularly the everyday practices (Beach, 2005; Punch & Oancea, 2014) that support the participation and learning of *all* students. While the study includes data relating to strategies that teachers use to cater for the learning needs of their students that meet the criteria for funding for Students with Disabilities[7] (State Government of Victoria, 2017a), the emphasis is on investigating and understanding the implementation of inclusive strategies, as discussed in Chapter Two, strategies that are designed to support the full diversity of learners.

Theoretical Perspective and Methodology

Throughout the research I adopt an interpretive approach "looking for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). The study focuses on development of understanding and knowledge of current teacher practices and exploring the culture of schools and classrooms as individual teachers experience them. Rather than seeking to be objective, as a positivist approach would demand, the research relates to human interpretations and social constructions (Crotty, 1998) that are developed through focused investigation and interaction with classroom teachers.

The epistemology underpinning the study relates to *social construction* theories**,** constructionism and constructivism. These theories promote the view that knowledge of

[7] Criteria for funding for Students with Disabilities: "The Program for Students with Disabilities is a targeted supplementary funding program for Victorian government schools. It provides resources to schools for a defined population of students with disabilities, with high needs. Under the program, resources are provided directly to Victorian government schools to support the provision of school-based educational programs for eligible students with disabilities" (State Government of Victoria. 2018).

human practice is a construct that is developed through interaction and lived experiences (Crotty, 1988). Constructionist research focuses on the role of social interactions, the development of knowledge and understandings within a community or group of people (Crotty, 1988). In this study, I sought to collect data that exposed the knowledge and shared understandings that the participants developed through professional training and interactions with their colleagues and other education professionals. Constructivism also views knowledge as a social construct but places a higher emphasis on how individuals perceive the world and their lived realities (Lichtman, 2010). Through interactions with each of the eight teacher participants in their schools and classrooms I sought to develop understanding about not only their pedagogical decisions but also the individual and unique beliefs and experiences that influenced their choices. The research is conducted with classroom practitioners in their schools and classrooms, and the study draws upon and seeks to develop meaning in relation to the participants' accounts of their professional experiences and pedagogical influences, as well as my recorded observations of their teaching practices.

Constructivist research recognises that meaning emerges through conscious engagement (Crotty, 1998). It is an investigation of human practices and interactions and seeks to explain, understand and know "things as they exist" (Lichtman, 2010, p. 15). Spratt and Florian (2015) argue that observation alone cannot provide the understandings needed to explain teacher actions, there also needs to be interaction. Engaging *with* the participants, spending time in their classrooms and conversing with them, was central to the research and allowed me to develop insights into the experiences, culture and influences that contributed to their attitudes and understandings about inclusive education, and encouraged them towards the varying teaching practices they adopted.

Ethnographic Research in Education

Education ethnography, the research methodology that I adopted for this study, developed from traditional anthropology, the study of humans and human behaviour (Beach, 2005). It is research that seeks to know about student learning and the practices and policies that impact on its development (Beach, 2005). A combination of participatory methodologies, such as observations and interviews, and theoretical engagement provide the foundation for the development and documentation of deep understandings about day to day events in schools and classrooms (Beach, 2005; Punch & Oancea, 2014). Educational ethnography is interested is knowing about how schools

work. This includes; the formulation and implementation of educational policy, ways that instruction impacts on the development of student understanding, how meaning is negotiated in classrooms and how supportive relationships are developing in schools (Beach, 2005).

This research project, probes into what everyday teachers do. The study investigates each of the teacher participants' professional practices and experiences, and explores how these influence their attitudes, actions and the adoption of inclusive pedagogies within their classroom and school environment. It aims to identify and understand the subjective experiences (Crotty, 1998) that influence the pedagogical choices of each of the research participants. The employment of a range of ethnographic techniques, such as observing the research participants teaching in their classrooms, listening to them and asking questions during informal interviews and understanding and interpreting practices (Punch & Oancea, 2014), was central to the study.

The research participants are all classroom teachers in primary schools, and the research investigates the practices that they use to regularly achieve inclusion for students with diverse needs within their classroom. My background in education, particularly in primary schools, means that I bring to the research pre-existing influences and experience. However, rather than attempt to restrict and suppress my own experiences, in keeping with a reflexive, ethnographic methodology, I endeavoured to build upon and incorporate my background as a teacher to support my observations of classroom practice and encourage my interactions with the research participants (Beach, 2005; Crotty, 1998; Heller et al., 2018; Punch & Oancea, 2014). As a result, aspects of the study relate to "an epistemology of the situated" (Heller et al., 2018, p. 11), in that my 'ethnographic gaze', my interactions with the research participants and observations of their teaching practices, was influenced by the commonality that existed between participants and researcher, primarily my own background as a primary school teacher. My recognition of the value of incorporating reflexivity into the study, encouraged me to utilise, rather than suppress, my teacher's 'eyes and ears' (Foley, 2002). For example, during observations of the participants' teaching practices, I drew upon my awareness as a reflective teaching practitioner that not only what is said, but also variations in pitch, tone and body language, can convey messages that are likely to impact positively or negatively on students' perceptions of themselves, and whether their participation and efforts are welcomed and valued in the classroom.

Although, as discussed above, the methodology and techniques I adopted for the study relate

to ethnography, some aspects of the methodology overlap with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology, research of human experience, explores, describes and seeks to develop understanding about a lived experience, a phenomenon (Lichtman, 2010; van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological research necessitates the researcher becoming immersed in the environment being investigated, developing a deep understanding about 'how things are', particularly the lived experiences of those being studied (Greene & Hogan, 2005; Lichtman, 2010; van Manen 1990). In this study, teachers' actions, experiences and beliefs are investigated through interactions, observations and interviews in their schools and classrooms. Spending time conversing with the participants, becoming familiar with their working environment and knowing about and understanding the pedagogical supports, influences and challenges that they encountered was an integral part of the research.

Consistent with both ethnographic and phenomenological methodologies, the research involves a study of human science, of lived meanings, and seeks to develop deep understandings of the participants' professional life-worlds', their practices and experiences (Beach, 2005; Punch & Oancea, 2014; van Manen, 1990). The aim of the study is not only to record and report on what happens in the participants' classrooms, but also to develop rich interpretations, and to question *how* and *why* practices are employed by teachers within the influencing context of current society and education systems (van Manen, 1990).

The research for this study, focuses not only on recording and knowing about common practices, what the teachers do, in regard to implementing inclusive pedagogies, but also on developing understanding about the rationale behind the teaching decisions made by each of the participants. One of the objectives of the study was to develop understanding in regard to *how* each of the teacher participant's respond to the needs of *all* their students. As a result, the research documents the approaches the participants use to recognise and cater for the diverse learning needs of their students, and it also interrogates and seeks to develop understanding in regard to *what* factors impact on each teacher's choice and use of strategies.

In this study I draw upon the experiences and voices of classroom teachers, as practitioners who are required to implement and deliver inclusive practices. I investigate the background and pedagogical knowledge that underpins the teaching approaches that are adopted by each of the participants, often referred to as their 'craft knowledge' (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The manner in which the research was conducted was influenced by a 'solution focus' model (Metcalf, 1999), or, what Cosden, Koegel, Koegel, Greenwell and Klein (2006) describe as, a strengths-based approach. During the classroom

observations and participant interviews I sought to identify teacher competencies rather than their deficits (Cosden et al., 2006), predominately *how* and *why* inclusive practices are achieved. As I explore the implementation of inclusive practice, focusing on positives (or what is going well) rather than on deficits and problems, seems to be especially relevant (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012).

Participant Recruitment

Prior to the study, I sought information to identify regular schools and teachers in the Western Region of the Department of Education and Training (DET, Victoria, Australia) that are recognised as being committed to adopting inclusive educational practices. I accessed information related to effective schools and individuals that support inclusive ideologies, such as a differentiated curriculum and the Australian Developmental Curriculum (Walker, 2011), from principals, teachers, Department of Education and Training (DET) Victoria personnel, and academic staff at Federation University Australia. These were supplemented with information about school programs and priorities sourced from school and departmental websites.

Human research ethics approval

The teacher participants were recommended and invited to participate in the study on the basis of my awareness of the diverse nature of their classroom cohorts, and their willingness to implement a range of inclusive strategies to accommodate and cater for differing learning needs (Elvey, 2017). I also sought variation among the participants that would reflect the diversity that occurs between different schools and teachers. All approaches to potential participants complied with the criteria for ethical research in schools required by Human Research Ethics Committee National Guidelines (Australian Health & Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council & Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee, 2007) and the relevant organisations, namely, the University of Ballarat[8] Human Research Ethics Committee, the Victorian Department of Education and Training Research Committee and the Catholic Education Office. Approaches to the participants were only made *after* the required human research ethics approvals and permission from the relevant school principals (refer to Appendices C & D) had been granted. Consistent with the Human Research Ethics Committee National Guidelines (Australian Health & Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council & Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee, 2007) potential schools and teacher participants were neither pressured nor coerced into agreeing to be part of the study.

[8] The University of Ballarat has since been renamed Federation University Australia

Prior to agreeing to participate in this study, each of the participants received documentation in the form of a Plain Language Information Statement (PLIS) (refer to Appendices A and B) that outlined the purpose of the study, what their participation would involve and how I proposed to collect the research data. In the Plain Language Information Statement, it was explained that data collected during visits to participants and their schools would be securely stored and de-identified and that I would endeavour, but could not guarantee, to ensure confidentiality. However, once I began observing and interviewing the participants I soon realised that elements of their stories or practices provided links that could potentially lead to their identification.

Maintaining anonymity

To avoid the participants being recognised, I have heeded the advice of Ellis (2007) by using "pseudonyms or composite characters, and occasionally making minor alterations to the plot or scene" (p. 24). These changes, according to Ellis, are unlikely to impact on the validity of the data as they still allow for an accurate portrayal of the previous experiences, current experiences, background, attitudes and practices of the participants, while providing a means of disguising some distinguishing personal features to help protect the anonymity of the teacher participants in the research (Ellis, 2007). Throughout this thesis I use pseudonyms, Rob, Kate, Grace, Ellen, Jane, Anna, Matt and Debbie, and composite characters when describing each of the research participants and when presenting and interpreting the data.

Similarities and Variation between Participants

The eight research participants in this study were sourced from four primary schools within Victoria, Australia. Each of the participants was working with diverse student cohorts in regular classrooms, and in many cases their class groups included students that were eligible to enrol in a Special School. Consistent with the diversity that occurs between schools and teachers, there were variations in the sample between the grade levels the participants taught, the learning needs of their students, the sizes of their schools and school structures, their sex, and their years of teaching experience.

Table 3.1. Variations in classes, teaching experience and school size amongst research participants

This table is aggregated to preserve participant anonymity

Class Structure		Grade Levels Taught by the Participants		Years Teaching Experience per Participant		Student Population for Each Participant's School	
Straight Class[9]	2	Foundation to Grade Three (Students aging from four to nine years)	5	Less than five years	4	Less than 200 students	4
Multi-level class[10]	6	Grade Four to Grade Six (Students aging from eight to twelve years)	3	More than five years	4	200 or more students	4

(Adapted from Elvey, 2017)

Anna

Anna studied teaching as a mature-aged student. She spent a short time as a relief teacher before taking up her current position at a large primary school, two years ago. She teaches a group of 19 Grade Two students (aged between six and eight years). Within the class there is diversity of ages, maturity levels and learning needs of the students. One of the students in Anna's class has been assessed as being on the Autism Spectrum (ASD) and receives funding through *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (State Government of Victoria, 2017a). The funding is used to employ Education Support Staff (ESS), to work in the classroom, primarily with the funded student, but also with other individuals and groups, usually during Mathematics and Literacy sessions.

Anna does her weekly and term planning with other colleagues but her small classroom, which is located in one of the older wings of the 1960's vintage school, does not lend itself to team-teaching. Anna and each of the surrounding classes implement their programs in isolation. With the exception of specialist programs (Art, Physical Education and Information Technology)

[9] Straight Class: A class group that contains students of a similar age and they are placed in the same grade level, for example when all students in the class are in Grade Two.
[10] Multi-Level Class: A class group that contains students from a broader range of age groups, and consists of two or more grade levels.

where the class moves to another location, there is little movement of either teachers or students between classrooms at Anna's school.

Matt

Matt has been teaching in a small rural school since he graduated as a teacher just over 10 years ago. The majority of his teaching has involved multi-level grades in the middle and upper primary years, although for the last 18 months he has been working with a Grade One/Two group (students aged between six and eight years). Matt works in a modular portable classroom[11] which also houses a Foundation/One grade. The two grades tend to operate independently within designated zones. Their area is partly divided by large sliding doors, although there is a small degree of student movement between classes, particularly in the use of the shared wet-area[12] during creative activities such as painting and construction. Teaching and learning resources are shared between the two classes and both teachers and students regularly enter the neighbouring classroom to access equipment.

Although Matt's class of 17 students is considered relatively small, the ability range within his classroom is extremely varied. A speech therapist makes fortnightly visits to work with and advise Matt on strategies to support some of his students who have been identified as having articulation or language processing difficulties. One student in the class has been identified as having significant social-emotional issues which can lead to outbursts of challenging behaviour. Another student has a complex range of medical and developmental issues and receives funding through *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (State of Victoria, 2017a). The funding is used to employ a teaching assistant (ESS) to work in the classroom each morning, assisting during both whole-of-class tasks and small group work. The teaching assistant also provides specific support for the funded student with toileting, encouraging social interactions with other students (facilitating and encouraging the student's involvement in conversations, group games and cooperative tasks) and, after guidance from Matt, clarifying and adapting task requirements to ensure they are achievable.

Kate and Rob

Kate and Rob work in a school that is in a rapidly growing semi-rural community. Together they work with a group of 50 Grade Five and Six students in a modular portable classroom. Although

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[11]A portable classroom, also referred to as transferable or relocatable classroom, is a quickly installed temporary building.

[12] Wet-area: A separate area in the classroom that has a sink and water resistant floor coverings. It is often used by the students during art craft activities.

isolated from the main school hub, they have easy access to two neighbouring classrooms that are also located in a relocatable building.

While Kate and Rob have a designated group of students and teaching area, they work flexibly, often sharing classroom spaces. They plan together and often team-teach. Students and teachers frequently move between rooms and sometimes work in a shared area. This common space is also used for combined 'tuning in' sessions and 'share time', where students discuss ideas and demonstrate their learning to the group.

Rob, an experienced teacher, has taught in a range of schools, including working in a special setting with disengaged adolescents. Over recent years Rob has taken on a mentor role for Kate, a graduate teacher who works in the adjoining classroom. During our interviews Kate spoke appreciatively about the support and guidance she has received from Rob over the last two years. My classroom observations of Rob and Kate, teaching and working collaboratively, sharing ideas and supporting one another, was consistent with the team approach that they discussed with me during our conversations (Elvey, 2017).

One of the students in Rob's class received funding through *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (State Government of Victoria, 2017a). While this funding was used to provide additional classroom assistance from ESS, the timetable and mode of participation for this paraprofessional varies. When working in the classroom, the ESS (teaching assistant), liaises with Rob and Kate to determine where there is an identified need (with groups or individuals) and what types of support (explanations, encouragement, organisation) are required. While the majority of the teaching assistant's time is spent with the funded student, which students they work with and where they work varies according to the needs that Rob identifies prior to, and sometimes during, each learning session.

Ellen

Ellen has been teaching for four years and is working in a midsized primary school (100-200 students) situated in a low socio-economic suburb. She teaches a group of 20 Foundation and Grade One students, children that are aged from four to seven years. Two of her students received funding through *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (State Government of Victoria, 2017a) and a teaching assistant works in the classroom under Ellen's direction each morning. While the teaching assistant works with a range of students, Ellen frequently calls on them to monitor, support and calm one particular student who finds social interactions and the restrictions of school routines challenging.

Access to Ellen's classroom is via a large common area. Large glass windows and doors make her room visible from this open area. However, once the glass door is pulled over her classroom is closed off but still visible to neighbouring grades. Ellen and her class tend to work in isolation for much of the day, but she does plan with other teachers and an hour each day is spent in the common area with two other lower primary groups. During this hour, the three classes merge to implement a play and project-based curriculum based on *The Australian Developmental Curriculum* (Walker, 2011). This program provides numerous choices for the students, related to not only which activities students are involved in, but also who they interact with.

Grace

Grace is a recent teacher education graduate; this is only her second year as a teacher. She is currently working at a large primary school, in a low socio-economic area and teaches a class of 22 Foundation Grade students, aged from four to six years. Grace's classroom is situated at the end of a corridor. Her room has a large dividing door that opens onto another Foundation class, although the door is generally kept shut and both classrooms operate in isolation. Team planning is embedded within the culture of Grace's school, so she regularly consults with colleagues about teaching approaches and curriculum priorities.

While none of the students in Grace's grade are funded through *The Program for Students with Disabilitie*s (State Government of Victoria, 2017a), there are diverse academic and social abilities within the class. Her class includes two students diagnosed as having high social/emotional/behavioural needs, what Grace refers to as challenging behaviours. Although there is no support staff allocation for these students, Grace explains that the Vice Principal frequently maintains a supportive presence. Grace described the situation at the beginning of the year when a number of students were unsettled and experienced difficulties settling into the new environment. During this time the school leadership team, particularly the Vice Principal, regularly spent time in her classroom providing support and guidance to both Grace and her students.

Debbie

Debbie has worked for the last ten years in a mid-sized primary school in a low socio-economic area. Prior to this, she had worked in a small country school. While Debbie's multi-level group of 21 Grade Five and Six students (aged between 9 and 12 years) spans two school

years, the ability range of students in her class vary from curriculum levels[13] One to Eight (ACARA, 2017). Debbie's class also includes a number of students for whom interpersonal interactions and staying on task is challenging. One of these students has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and receives funding through *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (State Government of Victoria, 2017a). The school employs a teaching assistant to work in Debbie's classroom for two hours each day. Under Debbie's direction the staff member works with both individuals and groups of students. The teaching assistant's role varies according to the class timetable and individual situations, but they predominantly support students by helping them to understand task expectations and calming and reassuring students who are anxious or agitated. Their role frequently involves working with students during cooperative activities and assisting students with organisation skills, including finding resources and managing time.

A large and long corridor separates Debbie's classroom from most other classes, although one other Grade Five/Six class shares access to a large open area with Debbie's class. While Debbie explains that she spends time planning with the other staff member, she predominantly works independently within her own classroom.

Jane

Jane, an experienced teacher, works in a Grade Two/Three/Four classroom (students aged six to nine years) in a mid-sized primary school in a low socio-economic area. Ten percent of the school population is from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, many of the students are from single-parent families and there are several students in out-of-home care. Jane's students are diverse in age and academic and social skills. While none of the students in her class receive funding through *The Program for Students with Disabilities* (State Government of Victoria, 2016), the school has recently submitted funding applications for two students (new enrolments) that they believe meet the criteria outlined in the severe behaviour category (State Government of Victoria, 2016). There is also one student in the class with an Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis. During my discussions with her, Jane explained that she is teaching children that are *"working two, three and four years below [their age appropriate curriculum] level".*

[13] The Australian Curriculum "is presented as a progression of learning from Foundation-Year 10 that makes clear to teachers, parents, students and others in the wider community what is to be taught, and the quality of learning expected of young people as they progress through school" (ACARA, 2017).

Jane does not have any support staff allocated to her classroom, although this may change if one or both of her new students receives government funding. The school also runs a number of skill-based learning support programs. Two of these programs, *Multilit* (MUSEC, 2017) and *Quick Start Numeracy* (SiMERR, 2018) provide explicit one to one, needs-based teaching for students in Grades Two to Six. A number of Jane's students are involved in one or both programs for a short period each day. While these programs involve withdrawal of students from regular classroom sessions, Jane explained that the sessions are short (15-20 minutes), so time away from the classroom and peers is minimal. As Jane's school enlists support from community 'helpers' to read with students, both individuals and groups, students of differing abilities are regularly 'coming and going' from her classroom.

As an experienced teacher, Jane has taken on a mentor role for the graduate teacher in an adjoining classroom. The two teachers plan together and there is some student movement between classrooms.

The individuality of the participants

In Victoria, Australia, teaching approaches are guided by state and government policy directives, including curriculum standards (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2015). But specific methods of teaching vary not only between schools but also between teachers. My weekly visits to the participants' classrooms, and the subsequent conversations that I had with them, allowed me to become aware of similarities and differences in their prior experiences and teaching approaches. Each of the participants shared stories that provided insights into the influences underpinning their current practices and the development and implementation of inclusive pedagogies within their classrooms. Many of these insights highlighted the influence of colleagues and formative experiences during their first few years as teachers.

The participants worked in regular schools within a hundred and fifty kilometre radius of each other. Although some participants were from the same school and others taught the same grade level, there were still numerous differences in their teaching approaches and their justification for their choices. For example, some participants tended to use quiet voices when speaking to students, while others were louder. A number of the teachers worked in collaboration with their students, while others were more directive. Similarly, classroom organisation and teaching programs varied according to individual preferences, teacher personalities, school-based professional learning and the influence of both colleagues and the school leadership team.

None of the teachers involved in the study were considered to be, or considered themselves experts in the area of inclusive education, but rather everyday classroom teachers who were recommended as research participants due to what other educators recognised as a commitment to including and catering for the diverse needs of the students in their class. Booth and Ainscow (2002) explain that inclusion is "is an unending process of increasing learning and participation for all students" (p. 3)*,* an ideal that teachers need to pursue*.* During my conversations with the research participants each of them at times spoke about their endeavours to cater for the diverse learning needs of the students in their class, voicing their commitment to providing quality learning experiences for *all* students. However, differences in awareness and understanding of inclusion, coupled with variation in teaching experience and attitudes, resulted in the teacher participants having different competencies and being at varying stages in their implementation of inclusive pedagogies and classroom cultures.

Data Collection and Analysis: A Reflective Process

Silverman (2006) promotes the view that the gathering and analysis of qualitative data is a reflective meaning-making process. Effective data analysis, therefore, involves an ongoing nonlinear process of asking questions, gathering data and making meaning. Figure 3.1 sourced from Silverman (2006, p. 201) highlights the interconnection between each of these areas, it also influenced the procedure that I followed during the data collection phase. Field work provided the opportunity to for me probe into the practices of the eight research participants and gather data for this study, but each classroom visit, and each interview was supported and made more meaningful by constant reflection. This initial data analysis allowed me to review and refine aspects of my interviews with the participants, both the process I followed and the questions I asked. Similarly, refamiliarising myself with the notes in my research journal heightened my awareness of what was happening in each classroom and helped me to become more adept at identifying and documenting the range of pedagogical approaches being presented.

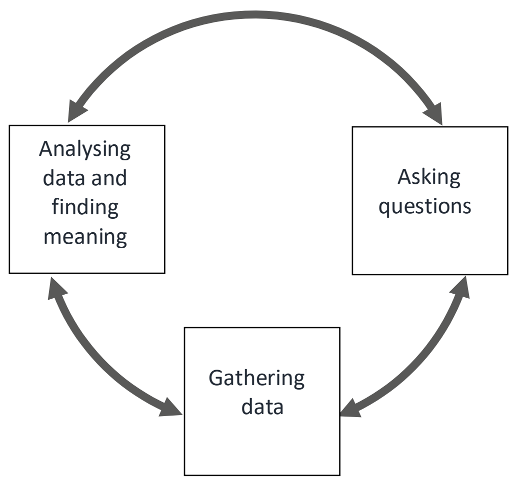

Figure 3.1: Data Collection Process (Source: Silverman, 2006, p. 201)

Conducting the Study: Data Collection

During the data collection phase I visited each of the participants weekly for a period of four weeks. Each of the visits involved me spending time, usually one hour, in each participant's classroom observing the teaching strategies being used, along with the teacher and student interactions. My observations of each of the eight teachers working in their classrooms were recorded in my research journal. These field notes provided 'thick descriptions' (Punch & Oancea, 2014) of the techniques, procedures and resources that each of the participants employed as part of their everyday teaching practices, particularly their endeavours to implement inclusive pedagogies.

Each of my observations of the research participants' classroom practices were followed by a fifteen to twenty-minute informal conversational interview. These interviews with the teachers provided opportunities for me to discuss and seek elaboration about inclusive approaches and strategies that I observed in their classrooms. They also allowed me to probe and develop a deeper understanding about individual teacher's professional backgrounds, and prior experiences, providing important insights into the attitudes and understandings that underpinned their pedagogical choices.

Spending time in each teacher's classroom also provided opportunities to develop positive relationships with each of the participants, to create trusting relationships that encouraged interaction during interviews, and provided me with knowledge and understanding related to any day-to-day challenges the teachers encountered, and factors that influenced and supported

their teaching practices. My observation notes frequently provided important prompts for conversational interviews. The interviews, the insights and responses of each participant that were recorded and transcribed, combined with the written observations and reflections in my research journal, provided the data source for the study. When visiting the participants at their schools, each of the teachers involved in the study welcomed me into their classrooms, and freely shared numerous positive and negative anecdotes about their teaching experiences.

During the period of time spent with each participant I endeavoured to immerse myself in their school environment, exploring their routines, procedures, resources, interactions and teaching strategies (van Manen, 1990) that were relevant to the research. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, my own background and experiences as a primary teacher helped provide a commonality and assisted me in developing a rapport between myself as the researcher and the participants. My prior knowledge and experience in relation to how schools operate, the pressures teachers encounter, and both positive and challenging experiences, rather than being suppressed and ignored in an attempt at impartiality, were instead utilised in my endeavours to develop insightful and in-depth conversations with participants.

When conducting the informal interviews, I recorded my conversations with each of the participants. These recordings enabled me to capture all the comments the participants made during each of the interviews, without the distraction of trying to write down or remember what was said. This resulted in discussions and interactions that flowed seamlessly and allowed me to more effectively maintain eye contact and use affirmative body language, such as nods and smiles, during my conversations with the participants. The recordings of interviews and subsequent written transcripts also allowed me to review what was said at a later date and helped ensure that I had time to accurately process comments made. Often, I would replay conversations just prior to the next visit to a participant, as they provided me with cues and questions for further elaboration, which further supported my ability to develop understanding of each teacher's perspectives on varying aspects we discussed. For example, towards the end of one interview, my discussions with the participating teacher led to an area that I was keen to explore further, their early experiences dealing with challenging behaviours, and the strategies they had found supportive. Rather than limit the time and scope of this discussion, I explained to the participant that this was something that I would like them to elaborate on at our next interview. I encouraged them, over the forthcoming week, to reflect on the strategies they had used, including how they impacted on their classroom management and relationships with students. Prior to the next interview, I reviewed the data from our previous discussion which

enabled me to engage the participant in conversations that elaborated and built on, rather than repeated, what they had already said.

Privacy during interviews also needed to be taken into consideration, especially as each of the conversational interviews took place in classrooms. There were times when the interview needed to be stopped for a moment as a child wandered over to ask a question or another teacher entered the room. Some interviews took place when children were in the classroom eating their lunch, and occasionally I would need to leave a question until we had more privacy. Because of the informal nature of the conversational interviews and the venues in which they were conducted, it was important for me to be aware of the surroundings to prevent against eavesdropping by others (Silverman, 2006) and to ensure that the confidentiality of the participant was not being compromised. The teachers themselves rarely seemed concerned about this, but nevertheless I was still conscious of the need to respect and provide opportunities for the participants to respond to questions and share their experiences in privacy.

Data Analysis

While extensive analysis was carried out on completion of the data collection, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I also undertook active and ongoing analysis throughout the research period. Before a second or subsequent visit to a participant, I would read over or listen to what had been discussed previously and refer to my reflective journal. This helped to inform and enrich subsequent interviews, provided monitoring to ensure the research question remained in focus throughout the project and provided opportunities for reflection on and refinement of the data collection process. There were some questions that I asked each of the participants. These questions related to background information about themselves and teaching strategies or advice they consider important for graduate teachers.

The data analysis focused on both individual and common experiences and teaching approaches to develop insights and understanding about the enactment of inclusive pedagogies. Participant anecdotes provided rich data in the form of teachers' stories (Beach, 2005; Lichtman, 2010; van Manen, 1990). These stories were subsequently interrogated and classified in combination with data from classroom observations.

Data analysis: Challenges and supports

In keeping with the social constructivist epistemology underpinning the research, data acquired during conversational interviews were analysed to determine not only *what* inclusive practices were evident but also *how* they had come about. Silverman (2006), stresses the importance of researchers being able to "show how interview responses are produced in the interaction between interviewer and respondent, without losing sight of the meanings produced" (p. 158). Although conversational interviews involved a less formal structure than more conventional methods, the analysis of data still needed to remain rigorous and disciplined. Methodical consideration needed to be given to not only details of conversations but the context and background behind comments and views expressed by the research participants (Silverman, 2006). When analysing the data I frequently linked notes from my reflective journal to transcripts of interviews, this allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the background behind the practices that I was observing, particularly the professional and life experiences that influenced the teaching practices and attitudes of the participants.

Once I had completed all the interviews and school visits, I embarked on a process of sorting the data according to identified commonalities and themes. I then set about writing detailed stories about each of the participants, endeavouring to include and further expose relevant themes. While I initially considered that this provided me with a valuable starting point for analysis, I came to realise that these early efforts, to make sense of the data, created a detailed account of what I observed and heard but had a limited focus. I was collating and comparing details about the participants' daily practices but developing few insights into the essence of what inclusion involves, the influences that support its development or how teacher understanding about inclusion transfers into classroom practice. Van Manen (1990) stresses the importance of data analysis explicating meaning, the need to extend beyond purely summarising and describing practices. It became evident that the process that I was following during the early stages of the data analysis were not leading to the deep understandings associated with ethnographic research (Greene & Hogan, 2005; Lichtman, 2010; van Manen, 1990), the understandings required to successfully address my research question. Recognising the need to overcome this challenge I sought out and employed a range of organisational and research tools, including frameworks and descriptors of inclusive practice created by other researchers. In the following discussions I provide examples of these tools and frameworks and explain how they supported and guided the data analysis.

Utilising a graphic organiser

Graphic organisers, such as concept maps, can provide useful schematic devices for dealing with the organizational challenges of qualitative research (Daley, 2004). Graphic organisers can assist the researcher to focus on meaning and the connections across concepts (Daley, 2004). As I sorted the data seeking out themes that captured the essence of an inclusive learning environment, I came to recognise that notes in my reflective journal, my observations of the participants' classrooms, related to the three areas, 'looks like', 'feels like' and 'sounds like' that could be plotted on a Y chart. As this schematic device was relevant to my efforts to identify and explore aspects of the differing classrooms and teaching practices, I saw merit in adopting it as an organisational and analytic research tool (refer to Figure 3.2 & 3.3).

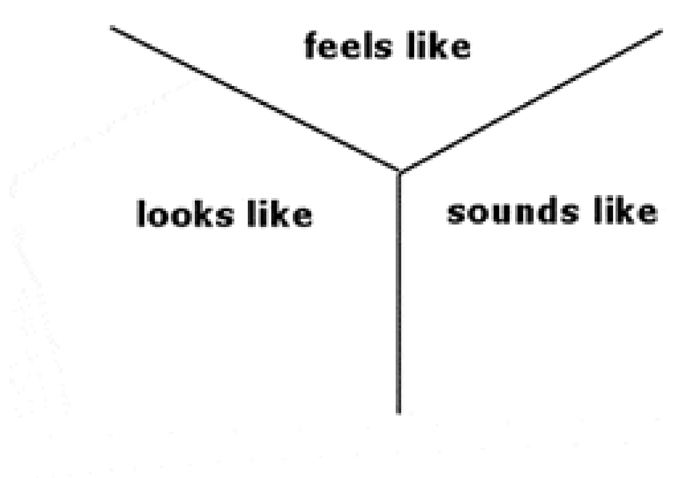

Figure 3.2: Y Chart: Looks Like, Feels Like, Sounds Like

The Y chart provided a visual prompt (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) that directed my focus and assisted me in my endeavours to link the teaching practices that the participants implemented, to the teaching learning environment that they created. The coding of data into a Y Chart also drew upon my prior experiences and the researcher reflexivity that I discussed earlier in this chapter. My background as a teacher practitioner, my teacher 'eyes and ears' (Foley, 2002), guided and supported my endeavours to identify, collect and sort the data into each of the three areas.

Looks Like (*What I 'saw' in the classrooms*)

- Students interacting ♦ Smiles ♦ Choices ♦ Games
- Children working in groups, individually and with 'buddies' ♦ Clusters of tables ♦ Rows of tables
- Individual and shared spaces ♦ Book corners ♦ Cushions ♦ Couches
- Strategy posters (both commerially produced and created by students) ♦ Displays of student work ♦ Class timetables ♦ Large whiteboards ♦ Learning intentions ♦ Learning plans
- Book cases ♦ Junior fiction ♦ Picture story books ♦ Non fiction books ♦ 'Big books' ♦ individual book boxes
- Computers ♦ Electronic devices (iPods and iPads) ♦ Interactive whiteboards ♦ Writing tools - pencils, pens, paper and workbooks ♦ Art equipment ♦ Construction toys ie Lego
- Teachers roaming ♦ Teachers interacting with students and colleagues ♦ Students moving freely between groups and activities

Sounds Like (*What I 'heard' in the classrooms*)

- Encouraging language - good try, great effort, well done, thank you, I like how ...
- Children chatting ♦ Negotiating between students ♦ Students sharing ideas and strategies ♦ Conversations between students, between students and school staff and between staff ♦ Student conferencing
- Students reading aloud to 'buddies' ♦ Students reading to teachers ♦ Teachers reading to students
- Joking and laughter - between students, between students and teacher/staff members
- Open ended questions ♦ Teachers and students asking and answering questions
- Implicit and explicit teaching
- Soft voices ♦ Excited voices ♦ Loud voices
- Music

Feels Like (*How the classrooms 'felt' during my visits to them*)

- Welcoming ♦ Warm ♦ Engaging ♦ Friendly ♦ Relaxed ♦ Inviting ♦ Harmonious
- Stimulating ♦ Organised ♦ Interactive ♦ Instructive ♦ Busy ♦ Collaborative
- Safe ♦ Accepting ♦ Respectful ♦ Calm
- Fun

Figure 3.3: Looks Like, Feels Like, Sounds Like

The Y chart assisted my efforts to identify, from my notes in my research journal, data that relates to what happens in each of the participant's classrooms, and the classroom culture of each of learning environment. However, I also recognised that a critical precursor to my collection and analysis of the data was a strong understanding in regard to what constitutes inclusive practice or what Florian (2014) calls "evidence of inclusive education" (p. 286).

Evidence of Inclusive Education

Using the transcriptions of participants' interviews and observation notes from my research journal, I began analysing the data according to themes related to what I identified as inclusive practice; the ways that the teacher participants responded to diversity within their classroom cohorts, avoided treating some students differently (Florian & Spratt, 2013,) and implemented strategies that supported the participation and learning of *all* students. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Booth and Ainscow's *Index for Inclusion* (2002) provides a comprehensive series of materials, that include indicators and questions, to assist schools in their quest to become more inclusive (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). During the data analysis process, I frequently referred to the indicators for those dimensions outlined in the *Index*, that relate to classroom practice, particularly, building community and orchestrating learning (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Similarly, in their endeavours to develop evidence of inclusion in action (Florian, 2014) and to learn from staff and students in ways that would be useful to teachers (Black-Hawkins, 2010), Florian and Black-Hawkins developed frameworks to not only assist their own research into the implementation of inclusive teaching practices, but to offer a research tool with the potential to guide and support others conducting research in this area. While, Black-Hawkins' (2010) *Framework for Participation* is adapted and extended in Florian & Black-Hawkins' (2011) Elements and Questions, F*ramework for Participation in Classrooms* (Table 3.2), and Florian's (2014) *Inclusive Pedagogical Approach in Action* (IPAA) *Framework*, the work of both these researchers, like the indicators that Booth and Ainscow (2002) present in the *Index for Inclusion* assisted in guiding this study. These sources provided prompts for reflection on the data and directed my efforts to identify features or evidence of inclusive practices in the research participants' classrooms.

Table 3.2. Elements and questions, framework for participation in classrooms.

1. **Participation and access: being there**
   - Joining the class
   - Staying in the class
   - Access to spaces and places in the class
   - Access to the curriculum
     - ➢ Who is given access and by whom? Who is denied access and by whom?
     - ➢ What are the teaching strategies and practices that promote access? What are the teaching strategies and practices that reinforce barriers to access?
     - ➢ Why within the culture (values and beliefs) of the class is greater access afforded to some individuals/groups? And, why is access withheld from some individuals/groups?

2. **Participation and collaboration: learning together**
   - Children learning together in the class
   - Members of staff learning together in the class
   - Members of staff learning with others from beyond the class
     - ➢ Who learns together? Who does not learn together?
     - ➢ What are the teaching strategies and practices that promote collaboration? What are the teaching strategies and practices that reinforce barriers to collaboration?
     - ➢ Why within the culture (values and beliefs) of the class do some individuals/groups learn together? And, why are there barriers to some individuals/groups learning together?

3. **Participation and achievement: inclusive pedagogy**
   - Members of staff using ('doing') inclusive pedagogy
   - Members of staff knowing about inclusive pedagogy
   - Members of staff believing in inclusive pedagogy. Who achieves? Who does not achieve?
     - ➢ What are the teaching strategies/practices that promote achievement for all? What are the teaching strategies/practices that reinforce barriers to achievement?
     - ➢ Why within the culture (values and beliefs) of the class do some individuals/groups achieve?
     - ➢ And, why are there barriers to the achievement of some individuals/groups?

(**Table 3.2. Continued)**

4. Participation and diversity: recognition and acceptance • Recognition and acceptance of children by staff • Recognition and acceptance of staff, by staff • Recognition and acceptance of children, by children ➢ Who is recognised and accepted as a person and by whom? Who is not recognised and accepted as a person and by whom? ➢ What are the teaching strategies and practices that promote recognition and acceptance? What are the teaching strategies and practices that form barriers to recognition and acceptance? ➢ Why within the culture (values and beliefs) of the class are some individuals/groups recognised and accepted? And, why are there barriers to the recognition and acceptance of some individuals/groups?

(Source: Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 817)

Consistent with the design and purpose of these frameworks, rather than use them as prescriptive checklists of inclusive practices, I employed them to guide my reflections and assist me to identify relevant themes in the data.

Initially, I looked for similarities in individual practices and experiences, but in some cases the differences I observed in the participants' classrooms also provided significant insights. The willingness of particular teachers to adopt collaborative and interactive approaches to classroom instruction, the commitment of some participants to teaching within open[14] classrooms and the varying degrees of student movement and interaction within participants' classrooms, are examples of differing methods of inclusive classroom management styles that became evident during the data analysis.

Documenting inclusive approaches

Florian (2014) advocates the need for researchers to document the links between theory and practice. Throughout the study, I sought out and referred to current literature on inclusive

[14] Open Classrooms: large open learning areas shared by two or more classes.

pedagogies. For example, Booth and Ainscow's *Index for Inclusion*, and what these authors promote as "indicators of evolving inclusive practices" (Booth & Ainscow, 2002 p. 41), Florian and Black-Hawkins' (2011) descriptors of inclusive pedagogy, that are outlined in the *Framework for Participation in Classrooms*, Florian's '*Inclusive Pedagogical Approach in Action Framework*' (Florian, 2014), along with Tomlinson's (2014) examples of differentiated teaching practices that support all learners, were particularly valuable in guiding my comparisons between the approaches the participants implemented in their classrooms, with what other researchers, considered authorities in the field of inclusive education, have identified as consistent with inclusive teaching.

To further support my endeavours to identify and analyse examples of inclusive teaching in the participants' classrooms, I created Table 3.3. Identifying Inclusive Classroom Practices. Table 3.3 draws on frameworks and descriptors of inclusive practice outlined by Booth and Ainscow (2001,2011), Tomlinson (2014) and Florian (2014).

Table 3.3. Identifying Inclusive Classroom Practices

	The Index for Inclusion: indicators of evolving inclusive practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2002)	Tomlinson (2014) Differentiated classrooms	IPAA Framework (Florian, 2014)
(i)	Teaching is planned with the learning of all students in mind (p. 41)	Teachers "modify the curriculum and instruction so that each learner comes away with knowledge, understanding, and skills necessary to take on the next important phase of learning" (p. 5).	Teachers differentiate the curriculum by providing choice of activity (for everyone). Ability grouping is rejected as the main or sole organisation of working groups (p. 290).
(II)	Lessons encourage the participation of all students (p. 41).	Teachers in differentiated classrooms accept and act on the premise that they must be ready to engage students in instruction through different approaches to learning, by appealing to a range of interests and by using varied rates of instruction along with varied degrees of complexity and differing support systems (pp. 4-5).	Teachers create learning environments that provide sufficient opportunities for everyone, (all learners) to be able to participate in classroom life (p. 290). They use flexible approaches that are driven by the needs of the learner, rather than 'coverage' of material. They implement strategic reflective responses to support difficulties which children encounter in their learning.
(III)	Lessons develop an understanding of difference (p. 41).	The teacher remembers to teach the whole child. The teacher understands that children have intellect, emotions, changing physical needs, cultures, languages, and family contexts (p. 54).	Teachers accept that difference is an essential part of human development. They focus on knowing what children can do rather than what they cannot. They use language to express the value of all children. They provide "opportunities for children to choose the level at which they engage with lessons" (p. 290). .

(Table 3.3. Continued)

	The Index for Inclusion: indicators of evolving inclusive practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2002)	Tomlinson (2014) Differentiated classrooms	IPAA Framework (Florian, 2014)
(iv)	Students are actively involved in their own learning (p. 41).	The teacher helps the student make their own sense of ideas: Healthy classrooms are characterized by thought, wondering, and discovery (p. 57)	Teachers use social constructivist approaches. They provide opportunities for all children to construct knowledge and learn through active participation.
(v)	Students learn collaboratively (p. 41).	Teachers ensure that students have opportunities to teach and learn from one another effectively (p. 57).	(As for iv). Teachers use social constructivist approaches. They provide opportunities for all children to construct knowledge and learn through active participation.
(vi)	Assessment contributes to the achievement of all students (p. 41).	Teachers are "diagnosticians, prescribing the best possible instruction based on both their content knowledge and their emerging understanding of students' progress in mastering critical content" (p. 4).	Teachers use formative assessment to support the learning of all students.
(vii)	Classroom discipline is based on self respect (p. 41).	In healthy classrooms, there is a clear expectation that everyone will deal respectfully and kindly with everyone else (p. 58). Teachers "engage students in conversations about class rules, schedules, and procedures, evaluating with students the effectiveness of processes and routines" (p. 57)	Teachers develop quality relationships with all their students. Teachers respect the dignity of learners as full members of the community of the classroom.
(viii)	Teachers plan, teach and review in partnership (p. 41).	Teams of teachers "work together, share ideas and materials, troubleshoot with one another, co-teach, or observe one another and provide feedback. Collegiality, not isolation, is far more nourishing to new ideas" (p. 173).	Teachers form partnerships with other adults who work alongside them and other teachers and professionals outside the classroom. Together they discuss and model creative "new ways of working to support the learning of all children" (p. 291).

(Adapted from: Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Florian, 2014; Tomlinson, 2014)

The descriptors in Table 3.3 assisted me to tease out common elements of inclusive practice that are agreed on in three seminal references: Booth and Ainscow's (2002, 2011) Indicators of evolving inclusive practice, Florian's (2014) *IPAA Framework* and Tomlinson's (2014) descriptors of differentiated, 'healthy' classrooms. Each of these references guided my efforts to develop pedagogical evidence (Florian, 2014) as I embarked on identifying and analyzing the research participants' implementation of inclusive practices. In Chapter Eight, I recreate the table, but add a column and incorporate data from some of my observations and interviews with the research participants, to demonstrate the links between inclusive pedagogies as identified by the selected theorists and the participants' classroom practices (refer to Table 8.1).

Making Connections

During the following discussion I relate some of my observations about how the participants' classrooms looked, sounded and felt (refer to Figure 3.1 & 3.2) to Table 3.3. Identifying Inclusive Classroom Practices. I demonstrate how these focused reflections expose commonalities between aspects of the participants' classrooms and elements of inclusive practice as identified by Booth and Ainscow (2002, 2011), Tomlinson (2014) and Florian (2014). In later chapters I further explore these connections, inquiring into and seeking deep understanding about the participants' pedagogical choices.

Looks Like

This section relates to data collected during my observations of the participants' classrooms. It includes details in regard to the differing physical aspects of the schools and classrooms that the teachers worked in, the learning environments that they created, varying classroom interactions and student participation.

Learning spaces

Each participant's classroom reflected the diversity of their school, their student cohort and their individual teaching styles. Classroom floorplans, arrangement of furniture and visual displays differed greatly, not only between schools but often even within the same school.

Three of the participants, Rob, Kate and Matt, worked in modular relocatable classrooms that each contained two classes. These classrooms had shared areas where students were able not only to see into the adjoining class but were also able to move between classrooms. One of

the modular classrooms had dividing doors that were partially closed, limiting noise and vision of the neighbouring class, while the other had a large open common area. The students moved freely between both the classroom and the common area. Their teachers were involved in team-teaching and student groupings were constantly changing (refer to Table 3.3, sections i & viii). There were times when these teachers brought their own group of students together within their designated classroom space, but if they needed to discuss and share ideas or explain about a school event, they more frequently gathered everyone in the common area.

One participant, Jane, who worked in a team-teaching situation, had her own designated classroom area but the room contained two classes (refer to Table 3.3, section viii). Within the one large room, specific teaching spaces were defined through the use of sheer curtains, storage units and displays of student work. Student movement between the areas was commonplace, although the staff tended to remain within their own class 'zone'. Large glass dividing doors gave both classes access to a common area that was shared with a third class. This area was equipped with computer stations and couches.

Another participant, Debbie, worked in a classroom that had a glass wall and sliding door that provided vision of, and access to an area that was shared with another class. The shared area included a large floor space where the two classes could meet. As both teachers could supervise this area from their classroom, students sometimes worked individually and in groups in the space. Class supplies and students' lockers were also stored in this area.

The remaining three participants, Grace, Ellen and Anna, worked in more traditional 'closed' classrooms. These classrooms contained a single class and had no direct access to or vision into the neighbouring room. When teaching in these classrooms, Grace, Debbie and Anna worked in isolation, with little or no interaction with other teachers or students.

Arrangement of furniture

Although furniture arrangements differed, six of the participants, Anna, Matt, Rob, Kate, Ellen and Debbie, had clusters of tables and their rooms were arranged in a manner that encouraged interaction and group work (refer to Table 3.3, section v). While each of these classes had some designated seating for students, seating options were frequently flexible. They varied according to the learning tasks being conducted and subsequently there was regular student movement between activities.

One participant, Grace, had arranged the furniture to create four rows of tables; a more traditional approach and one that is not commonly observed in a junior grade class such as this. Grace's students had been allocated permanent seats where they worked independently on class tasks. There was a large carpeted floor area that was used for large and small group work and one cluster table that was used for instructional teacher-focused groups. Whenever Grace sat with students at this table, she positioned herself so that she could easily observe everyone in the class. Students whom she had identified as being more easily distracted were seated either in the front row or at the end of a row, so there were fewer children around them. Once each individual had completed their independent work, they moved themselves down to the floor area where they were able to interact and share in small groups. The floor area was also used for targeted whole-class instruction, Grace gathered students in this area to implement modelled, shared and interactive teaching approaches.

In another classroom I observed a furniture arrangement that I was unfamiliar with. The tables were set up to create small hubs, which either faced the wall or had a large cardboard divider to block off sound from and vision of students sitting opposite. Later the teacher, Jane, explained that the organisation of the room had been influenced by what she had previously learnt about classroom settings that better cater for students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Jane recognised there was a need to provide some students with 'their own space' and limit noise and distraction from others. She elaborated, explaining that she currently has one student with an ASD[15] diagnosis in her class, but that it is not set up only for him, "it's set up for everyone". The students in Jane's class have diverse social and educational needs, Jane explained that she found that the dividers provided a support that benefited all the students; it allowed them to work within an individualised space without distraction. In contrast to the individualised 'hubs' there was also a large couch and two floor workspaces in the classroom. In an adjoining open space, there were tables where groups of children could interact and work together. Students had options and opportunities to work alone or with a partner in their hub, or to work with a larger more collaborative group elsewhere in the classroom or adjoining space (refer to Table 3.3, sections iii & v).

Seven of the participants' classrooms provided bookshelves, book corners, cushions or couches and areas where students could go to for a quiet time. When visiting these teachers in their classrooms I frequently observed students opting to spend time sitting on a couch, beanbags or cushions, reading or chatting with a friend. Occasionally students would be alone

[15] ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder

and use the area to settle and even calm themselves before rejoining a larger group (refer to Table 3.3, section iii). The eighth participant, Debbie, had set up a bookshelf and book display but did not have a designated area that students could retreat to.

Interaction and student movement

In all but one of the participants' classes, students regularly moved around the room, accessing supports such as strategy cards and word charts. I also frequently observed students reading with buddies, sharing books and technology devices, or students sitting together playing games and working on group projects (refer to Table 3.3, sections ii & iii). Each of the participants had created areas in their classrooms where students would sit together on the floor (carpet) during modelled and shared teaching approaches. While these areas were used frequently during whole class instruction, they were also commonly used during focused teaching with small groups and collaborative student groups.

Six of the participants, Rob, Kate, Jane, Ellen, Matt and Debbie, implemented programs that involved regular interaction with another class. For two of the participants, this involved the class moving to another area, a common space. The other four participants remained within their normal classroom, although their students would move between it and a neighbouring class. Sometimes this was purely to access resources, but at other times students were involved in group or individual work in the adjoining class. In two of the classes, the teachers were involved in team-teaching and student movement was both frequent and fluid between the learning spaces (refer to Table 3.3, section viii).

In each of the classrooms, student movement was commonplace. In Debbie and Grace's classrooms, this was predominantly moving between designated learning areas, floor space, teaching cluster table and individual tables according to their teacher's direction. Movement in both these classrooms was primarily teacher controlled. However, in each of the other six classrooms I observed instances of not only teacher determined groupings but students themselves making decisions regarding where in the room they worked and who they worked with (refer to Table 3.3, section ii, iv & v).

Visual displays

Mobile whiteboards were used by each of the participants; these were situated within the instruction spaces the teachers had created, often at the front but sometimes at the side of the classroom. The whiteboards were occasionally utilised during explicit teaching sessions with both small and large groups. Teachers wrote on them to clarify instructions, model strategies

being taught or provide learning prompts. In seven of the classrooms, the teacher's chair was next to a mobile whiteboard, and children regularly sat near it when they came together for group discussion or whole-of-class teaching sessions. One classroom, a Grade Five and Six class with students aged from 10 to 12, had the whiteboard placed near to clusters of tables. This whiteboard was not used as extensively as in the other classes that I visited, but it was still used to model strategies to small groups of students and learning prompts were frequently displayed on it.

Large fixed whiteboards were on the walls of each of the rooms. Some of these were situated at the front of the room but in some classes they were attached to side walls. These larger boards frequently contained information related to class tasks. In one classroom, the teacher had listed the activity choices on this board (refer to Table 3,2, sections ii & iv). In other classrooms I observed as teachers wrote or referred to learning outcomes that they listed on the board (refer to Table 3.3, section vi). More frequently, the boards contained displays of learning and strategy prompts. This included, lists of common words, letter sound patterns and punctuation symbols, CAFE[16] strategy menus (Boushey & Moser, 2009) (refer to Appendix E), posters that related to social skills (particularly school and classroom values), displays of student work and activity task groupings. While the students sought information, individually and in groups, from these boards, none of the participants created lessons that involved the generic copying of information. Instead lessons were more personalised and the boards were used to help support, extend and celebrate learning.

Examples of students' work, posters outlining supportive strategies and charts with learning prompts were displayed in each of the participant's classrooms. In some, particularly those classes that had students in the junior and middle years, the displays were mainly of student work. However, information about current learning intentions and class tasks was also prominent in each of the classrooms (refer to Table 3.3, section vii). Some participants listed learning intentions for varying lessons on whiteboards and others had laminated cards attached to the classroom walls. While each of the rooms had commercial and computer generated posters and charts that promoted both learning and social skills, their content varied according to the ages and needs of the students (refer to Table 3.3, section iii), and what each of the teachers identified as school and classroom priorities.

[16] CAFE: The Literacy CAFE Menu breaks each component, comprehension, accuracy, fluency, and expanding vocabulary, into strategies that support each goal. Displayed on the classroom wall and built on with students throughout the year, it provides a visual reminder of whole-class instruction and individual student goals. (Boushey & Moser, 2009).

In one classroom, the teacher, Jane, had made up a lanyard for each student. On the lanyard were small laminated learning prompts and visual supports for students. These included a list of common words to support reading and writing skills, passwords for computer programs that are used to support both literacy and mathematics, times table grids and the student's individual learning goals. While there were similarities in what was included on each lanyard, they differed in complexity according to each individual's needs (refer to Table 3.3, section iii). I frequently observed students refer to their lanyards during both writing and mathematics tasks. On one occasion, I watched the children play a group mathematics game that required recall of multiplication facts. Those students that were still developing their knowledge in this area had the option of using their lanyard during the game. This not only allowed all students to successfully participate in the game (refer to Table 3.3, section ii), but also reinforced and provided a scaffold for their learning.

Inquiry-learning

In two schools I observed the teacher participants implementing inquiry-learning programs based on the *Australian Developmental Curriculum*[17], (Walker, 2011). While both teachers had attended professional training that outlined the underpinning philosophy and basic structure of the approach (refer to Table 3.3, section viii), the manner in which they ran the sessions was quite different. One of the participants, Matt, conducted the sessions within his own classroom. Matt had listed on a large whiteboard a range of activity choices for the group of Grade One/Two students. This included details about each activity, such as basic guidelines and desired learning outcome. The list and accompanying details had been created by Matt after input from his students (refer to Table 3.3, section iv). Popular activities would frequently run for a number of weeks, while others changed regularly. Students selected tasks themselves but sometimes sought guidance and advice from the teacher (refer to Table 3.3, section ii). During these sessions the room looked quite chaotic, with students, individually and in groups, using varying art materials, technology equipment, ICT devices, books and writing tools and playing board and card games.

Within my reflective journal I noted that despite the mess from all the differing materials, which created a look of chaos, the students were predominantly engaged in learning throughout the session. Students frequently smiled and laughed as they worked, particularly when engaged in a collaborative task (refer to Table 3.3, section v). There was variation in

[17] *The Australian Developmental Curriculum*, also known as the *Walker Learning Approach*, (WLA) is a personalised investigative play-based pedagogy. (Walker, 2011).

concentration spans and abilities, but the students seemed to have selected groups and activities according to their individual interests. I observed one student move frequently from activity to activity while the other students stayed and worked on one task. These behaviours are consistent what Laevers (2003), describes as high levels of both wellbeing, and involvement. Teacher direction during Matt's inquiry based learning sessions was minimal; the students predominantly took responsibility for their own learning and the teacher roamed, monitored and interacted with groups and individuals. At the end of these sessions the students packed up. All the learning resources, craft materials and student creations were relocated to shelves and student lockers. The room quickly transformed from messy to orderly. Matt then brought everyone together on the floor, where individuals discussed and shared their learning experiences before heading off to write about the session.

In the other school that implemented an inquiry-learning program based on the Australian Developmental Curriculum (Walker, 2011), I observed the research participant, Ellen, taking her Foundation and Grade One students to a large open area that was shared with two other junior classes. Within this area, there were numerous activity stations set up for inquiry or creative play. These included a campsite, veterinary surgery, dinosaur table, book corner, office, art and construction activities. Children selected which area they would work in but needed to monitor the size of groups to ensure that they did not exceed the allocation number for each activity (refer to Table 3.3, sections i, ii, iv & v). While some activities had task cards giving students direction as to what was required, others were purely play, interaction and language based. At the end of the session each group returned to their room. There I watched as the three designated student reporters came to the front and shared their observations, writing and pictures with the class. All the students then went and wrote about their personal experiences, what they made or did and who they had worked with.

Information and communication technology

The incorporation of information communication technology (ICT) to support classroom learning was evident in each of the classrooms, including the use of computers and small devices (predominately iPads). In Debbie's class, all the students had their own iPad and I frequently observed these devices being used during my visits. Five of the other classes had access to class sets of iPads and each of the classrooms had laptop computers available for student use.

My observations indicated that tablets/iPads were the most utilised devices. Laptops were mainly used for word processing and researching information. Tablets by comparison were

used to access a range of educational games and provided access to and opportunities for creative activities (movie making, story prompts). Online texts were used during reading sessions and both computers and tablets were occasionally used for story writing and research. In each of the classrooms that incorporated tablets into their programs, I observed students accessing and operating these devices with confidence and noticed that there were particular students that were more settled and focused when working with them (refer to Table 3.3, section ii).

Four of the participants had Interactive Whiteboards installed in their classrooms. In one of the classrooms I observed as the teacher, Matt, utilised the board to deliver a shared reading session. However, during my visits to the participants' classes, I only observed Interactive Whiteboards being used on three other occasions.

Sounds Like

This section also relates to data collected during my observations of the participants' classrooms. However, it focuses on what I heard in the varying classroom, this includes examples of classroom management strategies that the participants used and collaboration and interactions between (and amongst) staff and students.

Respectful language

In each of the classrooms I frequently heard teachers praising and encouraging students. They spoke respectfully to students, thanking them for their cooperation, participation and ideas. Comments such as *well done, I love your hand up, thank you, would you please ... thanks for sharing that, I love how you're sitting* were frequently used. Respectful language was not only expected from students, it was actively modelled by teachers when they spoke to students and staff in the classroom (refer to Table 3.3, section vii).

Interaction

A number of the participants worked in open areas, sometimes in conjunction with another teacher. Other participants had timetabled sessions where they would move to a shared area to work with another class during specific programs such as inquiry-learning or literacy circles. Despite the large number of students participating in these programs, I was surprised that the noise levels for these groups were not excessively loud. Although the rooms were certainly not silent, and there was constant talk as students shared and negotiated with one another over use of equipment, implementation of ideas, turn taking and game rules, the noise levels did

not appear to impact on the students' ability to concentrate in the classroom.

During my interviews with participants, I learnt that the teachers working in these open and shared areas had previously negotiated or set behavioural guidelines. Behaviour management was implemented in the form of verbal reminders, the reinforcing of expectations to groups prior to an activity commencing or occasionally during the session. Classroom posters relating to school or class values and cooperative strategies were displayed as passive reminders (refer to Table 3.3, section vii), but most commonly the students took responsibility for monitoring their own behaviour. Activity groups were often determined by the students themselves and they actively sought out supportive peers for cooperative tasks including project work and buddy reading.

While students worked on individual or group tasks, their teacher's voice rarely dominated the classroom. In all but one classroom, the students were not only allowed, but also encouraged, to seek support and guidance from one another when completing class activities. As a result, the students frequently collaborated with their peers to share ideas and clarify their understandings (refer to Table 3.3, section v). While the teachers' voices often became more dominant when they were explaining task requirements, or during explicit teaching sessions, they used a range of strategies to avoid having to use an unduly loud voice. By bringing students together, seating them on the floor close to the teacher and ensuring that they were able to get eye contact with everyone, each of the teachers was able to provide instructions to large groups in a calm and supportive manner.

These 'close' groups also allowed the teachers to more easily seek input from various students and ensure that their voices and ideas could be heard. Although the time the participants spent working with these teaching groups varied between grade levels, they were always relatively short. In each of the classrooms I observed situations where the teacher would explain a task to a large group and then explain again in greater detail to a few students (refer to Table 3.3, section iii). Sometimes the students would choose to stay and receive additional instructions, at other times the teacher would target a group, aware that a concept was new, or the instructions were complex, and they may need some additional explanation.

Learning from and with one another

On one occasion, I visited a class that was involved in an incursion; a visit to the school by a group that provided information, artifacts and activities related to ANZAC Day[18]. Despite there

[18] In Australia and New Zealand, ANZAC Day, 25th April commemorates the anniversary of the first major action

being a number of classes in the school gymnasium, a large and acoustically challenged working space, the students were attentive during the short presentations at the beginning and end of the incursion. The presenters spoke with the students, displayed and demonstrated a range of war artifacts and provided a slide show relating to ANZAC Day. During their presentation, they engaged the students in discussion and called upon their opinions, ideas and prior knowledge (refer to Table 3.3, sections ii & v). The largest part of the incursion involved hands on activities, where the students got to look at, touch and make. During this time students, teachers, school support staff and the visiting presenters roamed and talked freely to one another.

During the incursion I listened as one of the participant teachers drew a student into a conversation about some of the equipment on display. The teacher, Rob, was aware that the young farm boy had a lot of experience with horses. On seeing a range of artifacts related to the Light Horse Brigade, Rob initiated a conversation about various items on display. The boy, a quiet and often withdrawn student with an Intellectual Disability diagnosis, became very animated. He impressed staff, fellow students (and me) with his knowledge and understanding about various harness and saddlery items. The conversation was instigated by the teacher but provided the impetus for the student to engage and speak with confidence. By encouraging the student to draw on prior knowledge, Rob provided an opportunity for the boy to demonstrate and share his knowledge about horses and harness with others in the class.

In each of the classrooms I heard teachers interacting in positive ways with students. Conversations were fluent, not merely one way or teacher dominated. Students were seated to maximise their ability to hear what the teacher was saying, without the need for shouting or a raised voice. Teachers also endeavoured to draw students into conversations, getting them to express their ideas and reasons in response to open-ended questions, rather than just answer closed, right/wrong style questions (refer to Table 3.3, sections ii, iii & iv).

In five of the classrooms I observed students involved in buddy reading, where two or three students sat together and shared favorite books. Sometimes one student would read aloud to another, while at other times they read sections silently and then discussed what they had read. Peer editing, groups working together researching projects, students collaborating and sharing ideas during inquiry-learning, were all commonplace (refer to Table 3.3, section v). In one classroom the teacher, Kate, encouraged different students to play a mentoring role.

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fought by Australian and New Zealand military forces during the First World War (Australian War Memorial, 2018).

Students who had a strong grasp of a particular mathematics or literacy concept or strategy would nominate themselves as someone who was willing to work with and share their knowledge and understanding with other students.

Another of the participants, Matt, outlined his attitude and support for situations that encouraged students to collaborate and share knowledge and understanding (refer to Table 3.3, section v), when he explained, *"I feel that my best allies are those children in the room who know what I expect and what I want to do. So then when they've finished, they will go and continue those processes with the other children".* Matt valued and utilised the skills and strengths of students to support the development of shared understandings and peer support.

Laughter

Laughter was commonly heard within many of the classrooms; students working together sharing and laughing as they worked and teachers joking with the students, engaging in playful banter with both students and other staff. Laughter was not directed towards individuals to cause ridicule or embarrass but instead related to children enjoying learning, teachers and students having fun, and learning being presented in light-hearted ways (refer to Table 3.3, sections ii & iii). This sometimes involved teachers participating in games and craft activities with students and also involved reading (and sometimes writing) humorous texts to or with the class.

Use of voice

While I did not hear any of the participants using raised voices or shouting, pitch and volume did differ between teachers. This was highlighted when visiting those teachers who taught in teams and worked in partnership with a colleague. In each case, one teacher was more loudly spoken than the other, but the students listened attentively and responded positively to both members of staff. Louder voices sometimes drew the immediate attention of students, but quieter voices appeared to result in students listening attentively to ensure they heard what was being said. Noticeably, each of the participants consistently spoke in quiet and calming tones when speaking to individuals and small groups.

One participant, Ellen, explained:

> *I'm not one to raise my voice too much. We've had kids in the past who have had chucked tantrums when you have raised your voice at them ... so it is kind of trying to think of a different way to approach it so they don't 'lose it'*. (Ellen)

Ellen recognised that using a loud aggressive voice, not only destroyed the cooperation and harmony she endeavoured to develop within the classroom, but that it added to the anxiety levels of some students (refer to Table 3.3, section vii). By remaining calm and using a quiet voice, Ellen was able to support and reassure sensitive and anxious students rather than threaten and challenge them.

Feels Like

In the previous sections, *looks like* and *sounds like*, I refer to data collected during my observations of the participants' teaching in their classrooms. I provide some preliminarily information in regard to what varying participants were observed to do, the practices they employed to support their diverse student cohorts. In this section, I once again draw on observations recorded in my research journal, but focus on the classroom culture, my perceptions of the 'feel' of the differing learning environments that the participants teach in and develop.

Harmonious

In seven of the classrooms, I was struck by a strong sense of harmony, cooperation, calmness and respect. The participants and their students were relaxed when interacting with one another and each of the teachers endeavoured to achieve learning and behavioral outcomes through cooperation rather than domination. Three of the teachers frequently sat on couches when addressing or working with both large and small groups. Students would sit around them, some on the floor but some next to them on the couch. These teachers did not set themselves apart. Instead, they created an atmosphere that encouraged collaboration and the valuing of students' ideas and opinions (refer to Table 3.3, sections v & vii).

The following vignette draws upon on data from my research journal and outlines my 'feelings' when visiting one of the participant's, Anna's, classroom.

Calmness and Harmony (developed from notes in research journal)

Most notable though, is the calmness and harmony that underpins the way this [Anna's] classroom operates. Anna is consistently positive and encouraging during her interactions with students. Praise is linked to targeted learning intentions and behaviors with an emphasis on process rather than product (Elvey, 2017, p. 164). The ease with which the students interacted, their confidence and willingness to attempt class tasks, the absence of conflict and anxiety and the supportive and encouraging language used, indicated that the strategies that Anna was using promoted and contributed to a respectful and cooperative learning environment. (Elvey, 2017, p. 165)

This participant, Anna, achieved learning and behavioural outcomes by working *with* students, developing positive and trusting partnerships and helping students to feel safe and secure. I frequently observed other participants responding similarly, speaking to students in calm and encouraging manner. By speaking positively to students, recognising and praising effort and process not just outcomes, and conversing informally with individuals and groups, the participants created warm friendly environments that encouraged students to feel confident and at ease.

Fun

In the previous sections, *looks like* and *sounds like*, I made reference to frequently hearing laughter and seeing smiles within many of the participants' classrooms. This combined with the high levels of cooperation and mutual respect that were evident between both staff and students (individuals and groups) created what I interpreted as a feeling of warmth and sense of belonging. These classrooms presented as relaxed, friendly and enjoyable places to be. The laughter and smiles in these classrooms appeared to relate to teachers planning engaging activities, providing choices and making learning fun (refer to Table 3.3, sections i-iii). This was also the case during numerous teacher student interactions, with individuals and groups. Strong relationships between teachers and students resulted in them laughing and joking together. Sometimes the fun was evident during class games, but at other times it related to stories, experiences and learning activities.

When visiting one of the participants, Matt, he, in conjunction with another teacher, facilitated a *Bluearth*[19] (Bluearth Foundation, 2017) physical education session with two multi-level classes, a Foundation and Grade One group (students aged from 4-7 years) and a Grade One and Two group (students aged from 5-8 years). This program with an emphasis on physical activity, wellbeing and participation is run throughout the school. The enjoyment of the children during the session was obvious; they squealed with delight each time a game to be played was announced. Students jumped up and down with excitement and some hugged each other as a means of expressing their eagerness to play each game. The session was fast paced, games changed regularly (every seven to ten minutes) and the focus of each of the games was maximum participation for all students regardless of age or skills (refer to Table 3.3, sections i, ii & iii). As this large multiage group of primary school students played together, older children partnered and helped out younger students during a variety of games designed to accommodate differing levels of skill and fitness (Bluearth Foundation, n.d.). All the students were active and eager participants. There was a feeling of fun, the children smiled, laughed and cheered as they participated in this engaging, exciting and inclusive session.

Inviting-safe-supportive

Seven participants were very relaxed in the way they engaged with their students, their classroom control was through cooperation and their classrooms were cohesive and relaxed. Interactions were commonplace; students frequently conversed with staff and peers. A number of the participants made reference to teaching students that experience high levels of stress and anxiety. One participant, Ellen, explained that she needed to remain calm or one of her students would 'go off'. She understood that this student needed her to be responsive rather than reactive and recognised the importance of creating and maintaining a learning environment where her students felt safe and valued (refer to Table 3.3, sections iii & vii). Ellen, Jane and Debbie each discussed the challenging home environment that some of their students encountered and outlined the importance of school being a safe, supportive and consistent environment.

In one classroom, in contrast to the other seven, the participant, Grace, implemented a more teacher dominated management style. She explained that within the class there were students who experienced difficulties in social situations and severe behaviour problems

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[19] Bluearth: is a national health promotion charity. It provides teacher training to support schools in not only increasing physical activity, but also making physical activity inclusive and enjoyable. (Bluearth, 2017).

have previously been an issue. Grace responded by implementing an approach that involved greater monitoring of both behaviour and work habits. The students in this classroom certainly cooperated with the teacher but there was less interaction between peers and fewer opportunities for student choices. Teacher expectations were high and the students understood what was expected of them but they predominantly worked individually and had minimal opportunities for collaboration and shared learning between peers. This classroom was orderly and organised, Grace set and articulated clear and consistent boundaries and expectations, creating a safe and predictable learning environment. Students were supported by individual strategy based conferences and discussions and the provision of explicit instructions to both large and small groups, but without the friendly chatter between peers and between the teacher and students, the atmosphere in this room was less relaxed and less inviting.

Welcoming

While the room set up, programs and classroom management styles differed, the relaxed manner of the teachers, the light and airy classroom spaces, visual displays and smiles and interactions between students all contributed to create a sense of community. I felt welcome in each of the participant's classrooms. On my first visit to their school each of the teachers introduced me to their class group and support staff, and they encouraged me to move around the room and observe not only their practices but also those of their students. During subsequent visits, I would endeavour to quietly and silently enter their room, so as not to disturb their teaching, but always received a welcoming smile, nod or greeting from the participating teacher (and often their students).

The rigorous process required to obtain human ethics research consent from Federation University Australia, The Department of Education and Training (DET) Victoria, and the Catholic Education Authority (Catholic Archdiocese Australia) ensured that the teachers involved in the study were not pressured to agree to becoming participants, and my background as a primary teacher allowed me to relate to them as a colleague and not just a researcher. Nevertheless, I was prepared for the participants to feel some hesitation about the visits, especially the classroom observations, being watched by a third party. If any of them did have concerns, they certainly did not display or express it. One participant discussed with me her personal questioning regarding how inclusive a teacher she was. However, this related more to her previous experiences and self-reflection, than concerns about being observed or judged, she

spoke openly to me during our discussions and appeared relaxed each time I visited her classroom.

Although I was made welcome in each of the participants classrooms, I was aware of the many demands these teachers had on their time and liaised with the participants to ensure that our interviews were scheduled at times that were convenient for them. The participants were most accommodating; they spoke freely during our conversations and willingly shared their insights, experiences and concerns.

My observations and discussions with the participants, their openness and praise for their students and the programs they were implementing, provided me with insights into the sense of pride they each felt in regard to their class group, teaching practices and students' achievements. This was not only a possible factor in their willingness to be involved in the research, but also assisted in making me feel welcome and at ease in their classrooms. These teachers were not only committed to meeting the needs of their students, they *liked* and *cared* about them and sought to create a supportive, enjoyable classroom environment. I felt privileged to meet their students, observe their teaching and have been welcomed into their classrooms.

My experiences visiting the research participants, certainly contrasted with my first classroom experience when I was training to be a teacher, three decades ago, that I describe in Chapter One. Then, when observing I not only felt like an unwelcome intruder, I felt uneasy, uncomfortable and recognised many of the students felt the same, some would have even felt fear. The oppressive, dictatorial, inflexible classroom that was my first introduction to teaching provided a stark comparison to the positive, welcoming classroom communities that I encountered when visiting the participants.

Interpreting the Data: Creating Insightful Stories

Supported by a more methodical and focused approach to the data analysis, I revisited the teachers 'stories, that I discussed earlier in this chapter, my initial attempts to make sense of the data. Drawing on the themes that I had identified, examples of evidence of inclusive practice, I interrogated the data and replaced the lengthy stories with a series of focused vignettes. These vignettes, which I present in Chapters Four to Eight, relate to and describe aspects of the classroom environments and teaching practices along with details about the influences and experiences of each of the research participants. They provide insightful

snapshots into their professional life-worlds, including the challenges and successes they encounter in their endeavours to be inclusive educators. Consistent with an ethnographic study that seeks to develop meaning and understandings, I endeavored not only to know *about* and document the pedagogical approaches that the participants used, but also to probe into and report on *why* varying approaches are implemented, and *how* they impact on the participants' capacity to support the full diversity of students.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the theories that underpin the research methodology that I adopted for the study. I outlined how an aim to develop 'thick descriptions' and deep understanding about the participants' professional life-worlds, their craft knowledge, experiences, challenges and supports, directed me towards the adoption of a social constructivist epistemology. Similarly, I discussed the relevance to the study of an ethnographic methodology that involved interactions, observations and conversations with each of the research participants. I also explained ways in which my aims and endeavours to develop deep understandings and meanings in regard to the research participants' practices and experiences, overlap with a phenomenological methodology, research of lived experiences, and outlined the relevance to the study of an investigation into the professional life-worlds of the teacher participants. I provided details regarding the ethnographic techniques that I employed, and explained ways in which I utilised my own experiences as a teacher to support my endeavours to engage the participants in in-depth discussions, and help them feel at ease whilst I observed their teaching practices.

In the later section of this chapter I outlined the methods I adopted in regard to gathering and analysing the data, particularly the way I went about observing and recording examples of inclusive teaching practice and conducting and transcribing interviews with the research participants. I explained the ongoing process of analysis that I followed, reviewing and drawing on data from previous visits to the research participants to guide my observations, and provide direction for subsequent questions and discussions during interviews. I also outlined and justified my use of a graphic organiser as an initial data sorting tool, and discussed how frameworks that relate to inclusive pedagogies, such as those provided by Booth and Ainscow (2002, 2011) in the *Index for Inclusion*, Florian and Black-Hawkins' (2011) *Framework for Participation in Classrooms*, Florian's (2014) *The Inclusive Pedagogical Approach in Action Framework* along with Tomlinson's (2014) descriptors of differentiated classrooms, assisted

me in identifying inclusive classroom practices and guided me throughout the data collection and analysis process.

In this chapter I provided information about the recruitment of the eight research participants (including compliance with and granting of relevant human ethics research approvals), and how the teachers participated in the study. I also presented some preliminary information about the participants and how varying classrooms operate. In subsequent chapters, I elaborate on my observations and conversations about inclusive practice with each of the participants, and provide information about the participants' teaching experience, their beliefs and attitudes about learner diversity, and the classroom environments that they work in and create. In the next chapter, Chapter Four, I inquire into the practices that each of the participants employed that allowed them to *know about* and *respond* to the academic and social needs of all the students in their class.

Chapter Four: Knowing, Understanding and Connecting

In Chapter Three I discussed the strategies and tools I adopted for the collection and analysis of the research data. I referred to the literature on inclusive education, to frameworks and examples of inclusive practice developed by Booth and Ainscow (2002), Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), Florian (2014) and Tomlinson (2014) and explained how these descriptions of inclusive practice provided me with guidance in identifying relevant themes and evidence of inclusive pedagogies (refer to Table 3.3). I justified the use of a graphic organiser during the initial data sorting process, and I explained how this organisational and analytic tool assisted in capturing the essence of inclusive practices in the participants' classrooms, and framing a discussion on the relationship between teaching practices and an inclusive classroom culture.

In this and subsequent chapters, I endeavour to develop deeper understanding about the teacher participants' classroom practices, not only *what* they do, but *why* and *how* they implement varying approaches. I draw from the data, both as recorded in my research journal and the interview transcripts, to create vignettes and develop discussions that relate to indicators or evidence of inclusive practice (refer to Tables 2.4, 3.2 & 3.3).

In this chapter, I focus on interrogating the data to develop understanding about *how* the research participants build supportive and collaborative relationships with their students. The discussions and vignettes in this chapter examine and develop insights into what the teachers know and understand about each of their students' academic, social and emotional needs, and the practices they use to develop positive relationships, engage their students in learning activities, and support the participation and achievement of *everyone* in their classroom.

Booth and Ainscow (2002) explain that "Inclusion starts from a recognition of the differences between students" (p. 4) and that the "development of inclusive approaches to teaching and learning respect and build on such differences" (p. 4). When coding the data from my research, themes related to recognition of difference and approaches that build on knowledge and respect for diversity began to emerge. There were variations in *how* the participating teachers implemented inclusive approaches, but a commonality was their depth of knowledge about students in their class. The participants shared with me their understanding of the diverse backgrounds as well as the differing social, personal, physical and academic needs of their students. Knowing, understanding and responding to individuals emerged as a priority for each of the participants, and shaped the practices they adopted.

Supporting Diverse Learners

The following vignettes provide examples of how one of the participants, Anna, utilised her knowledge of a student with an Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis to support the student's classroom participation and learning.

Karla and Personal Space (developed from notes in research journal and interview transcript)

Anna had previously explained to me that early in the year the mother of one of her students, Karla, a child diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, had expressed amazement at how quickly Anna had come to understand her daughter's needs, how Anna was able to keep her calm when it had taken her mother years to achieve this. When I encouraged Anna to elaborate on the strategies that she used (her secrets to success) she explained, "*That's just giving her space, as opposed to making her do what the rest of the kids are doing."*

I later observed an example of this when Karla become visibly frustrated and unwilling to cooperate during a writing activity. I watched with interest as Karla moved herself away from everyone and sought refuge in a quiet area of the classroom. Anna acknowledged Karla's presence there but gave her time and space alone to settle herself. The rest of the children in the class continued on, either unaware or accepting of Karla's needs. A short time later a much calmer and more cooperative Karla returned to where she had been working, Anna moved closer to her, ready to provide additional support if it was needed.

Karla and the Spelling Game (developed from interview transcripts and notes in research journal):

On one of my visits to the classroom I observed the children playing a spelling game. The children stood in a circle, eager and exited to participate, while Anna reminded them how the game was played. The game involved a combination of skill and chance. Students took it in turns to spell out the next letter for the word cousin. The student after 'n' (the last letter) called out '*sparkle*' and sat down. Students would also sit down if they said an incorrect letter or said a letter out of order.

Anna had quietly placed herself directly behind Karla. As Karla's turn approached Anna gave her quiet prompts to encourage her and to ensure she could contribute confidently. Anna later explained she was also ready to support Karla when, or if, she went out, as this was always a challenging moment for her.

"Anna's quiet encouragement and prompts were in contrast to the louder voices of other students who encouraged, laughed and cheered Karla on each time it was her turn. Participation was valued, and support and encouragement for one another was commonplace throughout the game. The activity was presented to the students as a means of practicing spelling, but it also provided opportunities for social interactions. Anna modelled supportive and cooperative behaviours and the students responded by recognising and encouraging effort and participation" (Elvey, 2017, p. 165).

When I spoke with Anna about the strategies she used to ensure Karla's successful participation in the game, she explained:

> *"That's been a huge process because initially Karla wasn't even prepared to participate. So that was a huge step just to even get her to want to be part of that game, because she was just always running away and not wanting to … The first time she got to the point that she wanted to join in, and then got very upset when she went out. So then it was just a slow process of just saying, "right, now let's have a look at what the other students are doing, they're not getting upset when they go out so let's just think about that". It was just a slower process of explaining step by step what to expect the next time. It's just being very clear with communication with her. We've got to the point now where I was just able to gently support her and the class has been very good at celebrating. (Anna)"*
> (Elvey, 2017, p. 164)

During our informal meetings, Anna consistently made reference to the importance of knowing your student, the need for mutual respect that is modelled by the teacher and the importance of creating a learning environment where students feel safe and valued. She explained that "*It's getting to know the kids. You know every year you have a different cohort of students, you have different personalities, different dynamics*." During my conversations with the participants, they each, in varying contexts, discussed with me the importance of knowing their students. Debbie, for example, related some of her knowledge of students to the types of assessment she used. She explained that "*you need to have really good assessment, assessment that tells you information about how the children learn*". One of the methods of assessment Debbie discussed was student conferencing. During a student conference Debbie sought to identify current skills and understandings. She then used the information to set relevant future goals with the student.

Developing positive relationships with learners

My observations and conversations with the participating teachers led them to share examples of practices they used to learn about and relate to their students. Their efforts to know and understand the diverse needs of their students involved not only the implementation of relevant formative assessments such as student conferences, focused observations, portfolios and work samples, but also included regular interaction with students and, often, their families. By developing positive relationships with the students and having regular conversations about interests, experiences and concerns, the teachers were able to develop a deep understanding of student strengths and needs. The participants' knowledge of students provided the foundation for responsive teaching, it assisted them in the setting of appropriate and achievable learning goals, and better equipped them in their efforts to plan for and implement relevant, engaging activities.

Knowing your students

Another participant, Ellen, discussed with me the importance of knowing about students' personal experiences and their background. She explained:

> *I'm aware of kids that might have gone with their dad on the weekend, and I know that Mondays may be tough for some kids. I try to make sure that I relate to that and I do ask them a bit about it. So, I am aware that, okay, things might be a bit tough today emotionally. Sometimes they don't always see their dads or mums or whoever it is, and it can affect them. I just try to be a bit supportive ... I try to be positive, because I know they respond better to that*. (Ellen)

Ellen recognises that if she is to support her students' learning, she has to be aware of more than just their academic abilities and their interactions at school, and that there is a myriad of external experiences that can impact on and influence learning and participation. Ellen showed awareness and understanding of the challenges some of her students encountered, the underlying issues behind their behaviours, and endeavoured to respond with empathy and compassion. She seeks to develop positive relationships and connections, to allow all students to feel safe, valued and supported.

Supportive partnerships

Six of the participants, Jane, Matt, Ellen, Grace, Anna and Debbie, spoke to me about their interactions, both formally and informally, with family members and carers. This provided these teachers with additional information about their students' personal situations, health and social issues and interests. When one of the participants, Grace, spoke to me about strategies she was using to support a student in her class who exhibited challenging behaviours, she emphasised the importance of a home school partnership, and told me: "*I've worked very closely with his mum*". Grace met with the child's mother regularly and had set up a home-school communication book. Regular communication ensured that the child's parents were aware of his achievements, concerns and any forthcoming changes in the classroom or school that may impact on their child. It also allowed Grace to know how the student was responding at home and to have knowledge of issues or changes in the home environment that may have resulted in the boy being more or less settled or anxious.

Parent and teacher relationships were not used solely to learn about students; they also provided an avenue for teachers to support their students' families. Some of the participants spoke to me about parents seeking strategies for behaviour management or wanting to discuss concerns related to family breakdowns or financial hardship.

Being responsive

When observing the participants in their classrooms, I watched each of them relate to and spend time with individuals as well as groups. During my conversations with the participants, they discussed students' interests, challenges and the complexities of some students' home situations. During one of my interviews with Jane, she, like Ellen, emphasised the importance of being aware of any social or emotional challenges the students may be encountering, and discussed the need to "*identify triggers".* As an example, I had previously observed Jane working at a table with a student that had earlier appeared disengaged and uncooperative. During our conversation, Jane explained that the student had initially refused to work on the

class task. She elaborated on the circumstances that led to her intervention. The following extracts from this conversation provides insights into Jane's attempts to be responsive to the child's situation.

> *I actually brought him over to work one on one to build up his confidence. I had him talk out [his ideas] before he was writing*. (Jane)

> *The boy that was having difficulties this morning, his mother has gone to Queensland for five days to go to a family funeral and he's living with a family friend for the next few days. So even though he has done the wrong thing now, (and) it doesn't make it right … I need to be compassionate with him. I understand that. So, I know mum has gone away; what can I do to make life easier in the classroom for you?* (Jane)

> *I think for me the first thing is building a relationship with the child and working out what the triggers are; for any children too*. (Jane)

When I was conducting informal interviews all the teacher participants discussed student diversity, not only within the context of knowing individual's learning needs and being able to set appropriate and achievable goals, but also in terms of their role as the teacher. All of the participants emphasised the importance of recognising, understanding and endeavoring to address any challenges that students may face, and acknowledged the need for teachers to facilitate and support participation as well as achievement.

During a conversation with Grace, she emphasised the importance of *knowing* students' social competencies. She explained that one of her students had frequently been involved in conflict in the school yard earlier in the year. Through observing and talking with him she had come to realise that "*his Achilles heel was playtime. He loved it, [but] he just didn't know how to play".* By knowing about the student, and identifying the reason the problems were occurring, Grace was able to be responsive rather than reactive. She was able to implement strategies to support the young boy, to help him learn about cooperative play. With him, she created some simple rhymes, what she called '*his mantras*', this made the student more aware of cooperative behaviours, helped him remember what he needed to do during social interactions and allowed him to participate more successfully in play situations. Grace explains:

> *We came up with these little rhymes because at the start of the year he was very aggressive, and he wouldn't stop touching people. One of the things we had for him was, if I touch skin, I go in'. So he knew if he touched skin outside he had to go back inside and*

couldn't play. And.' if I shout I can't go out'. So if he was going to shout in people's faces and be aggressive that he couldn't go out. (Grace)

I sent it around to all the teachers, all the aides, so anyone on yard duty could ask, "What's your mantra?" And he could say it just like that. Just to get going with him. Now it is occasional, I say to him, "What's your mantra?" If I see him about to touch or getting agitated, it's "remember your mantra". (Grace)

Grace explained that she had learnt about the use of mantras during a professional development session she had attended. She recognised that this approach may be supportive for one of her students and set about not only implementing the approach herself but also introduced it to other staff. As the issues she sought to resolve were primarily in the school yard, she needed all staff to understand and support the student. Grace facilitated the implementation of a strategy to address an identified individual need, a strategy that focused on developing self-awareness and self-regulation of social skills and behaviour. The mantra's Grace spoke about, were specifically developed for one student, but the strategy could be adopted and adapted for any students.

A safe and secure learning environment

Six of the participants, including all of those that were working in schools in low socio-economic areas, discussed with me the challenging home environments that one or more of their students experienced. This included the impact of child custody arrangements, domestic violence and economic hardship on families and students. They discussed the importance of ensuring that they created an environment where students felt safe and valued, recognising that for some students, school provided the consistency and security that their home environment lacked. In response, they endeavoured to create a welcoming, supportive environment. The participants described the need to be positive and responsive rather than reactive. They outlined strategies they used such as avoiding known triggers, 'reading' their students' faces and reactions, preparing students for change and maintaining consistency in their classroom routines and interactions (Elvey, 2017).

The comments and responses of these teachers relate to what Peterson and Hittie (2003) advocate, that "some students may come from environments where they have felt unsafe and unprotected, physically and emotionally" (p. 306), and their warning that "if children are to learn, they must feel safe, secure, and cared for" (Peterson & Hittie, 2003, p. 47). These authors

promote that this can be achieved through the development of positive classroom management strategies, treating students respectfully, developing trusting relationships and encouraging and supporting participation and involvement (Peterson & Hittie, 2003).

Similarly, my discussions with each of the participants and observations of their teaching practices indicated that they recognised the importance of, and actively sought to create a supportive learning environment. Responding and relating to individuals, caring not only for, but also about their students was integral to their role as a classroom teacher. The following examples, from my conversations with Debbie, Jane and Matt demonstrate their efforts to respond to the varying challenges that their students encounter:

> *And now to me that's one of the main things I look at with all of the children. I look at, okay you're sitting there with your head on the table, why are you doing that? ... then if I'm going to get anything out of them today I need to fix that problem, because nothing is going to happen until you feel safe, you feel comfortable, you feel accepted or whatever*. (Debbie) (Elvey, 2017, p. 164)

> *I think the one thing for a young teacher to do is not think that the child's behaviour is a personal attack on you. For some children it's more of a cry out, that there's other things going on in their lives*. (Matt)

> *You learn very quickly about who can work and who can cope in different situations, so you try not to put the kids into situations where those behaviours are going to come out*. (Jane)

> *I think establishing those relationships and building and maintaining those relationships is number one*. (Jane)

> *You need to be firm and have clear, very clear boundaries and consequences. At the same time those kids need to be nurtured so that they feel valued and feel like they belong.* (Matt)

During our discussions, the research participants indicated that they endeavoured to identify the barriers to learning that their students experienced due to external or personal issues. They then sought to support and work with students, providing them with positive school experiences. Booth and Ainscow (2002) advocate that "to include any child or young person we have to be concerned with the whole person" (p. 4). Teachers need to look beyond test results or a diagnosis. Having a strong understanding of each individual, of their strengths, interests and varying challenges they encounter, provides teachers with information that can

assist them in recognising and breaking down barriers to learning and participation. My observations and conversations with the participants indicated that they sought to develop rich knowledge of each of their students. They then called upon this information, to help them understand and more effectively respond to the varying academic, social and personal needs of individuals.

Participatory Approaches to Teaching and Learning

There were links between what teachers knew and understood about their students and the teaching practices they implemented. Some practices such as 'pod' seating (areas where students could work alone and without distraction from others) or the desk with an iPod (with relaxing, calming music) and headphones, were adopted to create supportive environments that catered for specific and more individualised student needs. Other practices, especially student-centred approaches such as the *Bluearth* program (Bluearth Foundation, n.d., 2017) and inquiry-learning, student-centred investigations (Walker, 2011), were based on what schools and participants recognised as quality teaching practice. These are programs that place a strong emphasis on participation and engagement. They are teaching and learning approaches designed to maximise involvement and learning for *all* students (Bluearth, 2017; Walker, 2011).

Inquiry-learning

When Ellen reflected on the inquiry-learning program that her class was involved in, she contributed the following comments in relation to the advantages the program and the varying activity stations provide for her students:

> *It has really improved our attendance. We find that kids want to come to school on time because they know that's what they are going to be doing most mornings. They are always engaged in something out there, whether it's making or in the home corner… It is opening them up to things they haven't seen before, like a vet. Some of them might not have been to a vet before, so we have got a vet area out there. Exposing them to different things is actually widening their experiences.* (Ellen)

Matt, another participant, was implementing a similar inquiry-based program. When I discussed it with him, he emphasised the importance of providing the students with choices, allowing them to make decisions and allowing them to direct their own learning. He explains:

> *Using the kids as the vehicle to drive what their passions are, I think that is allowing the*

> *group to be so settled …. They're directing their learning. They're the ones who want to do the activity, so they will actually do it, and they will do a good job.* (Matt)

Matt explained that the range of choices the program provides has not only made learning more relevant and engaging for his students, it has also assisted him to achieve greater learning outcomes for a child in his class diagnosed with an intellectual disability.

> *If she gets to do some making, or some art, things that she really likes to do, then she's still doing her planning, and doing her writing about what she wants to make. She's getting that part of it, when really she doesn't even know she's doing it …. She's in her comfort zone and she's achieving*. (Matt)

Although they ran their inquiry-learning programs differently, both Ellen and Matt spoke about and valued the high levels of student engagement that they observed during the sessions. Their students actively participated and made choices about where they worked, what they did and who they worked with. A range of experiences and activities were made available, providing learning options that catered for diverse abilities and interests.

Developing Connections: Establishing Collaborative Relationships

The importance that the teacher participants tended to place on developing and nurturing trusting relationships came through during both the interviews and my observations of them teaching in their classroom. Respect was not just expected from the children, it was also modelled to them. For example, each of the teachers spoke calmly to their students, thanked them for their contributions and responded to and praised effort not just achievement. Mutual respect was actively developed in a number of the classes through varying social skills programs. Posters relating to *Stop Think Do* (Adderley, Peterson, & Gannoni, 1997; Peterson & Adderley, 2002), *Tribes* (Gibbs, 2006) , *You Can Do It* (Bernard, 2001; Bernard, Stammers & Willich, 1994) promoting social skills were displayed and referred to in many of the classrooms. Student discipline focused on respecting rights rather than rules (Elvey, 2017).

Mutual respect

When I spoke with Anna about the calm and harmonious atmosphere in her classroom, she explained:

> *It's about earning their respect ... if you are not showing respect to them, how can you possibly earn their respect? It's a two-way street. Ultimately, it's developing rapport, relationships, and getting to know them, so having those little conversations.* (Anna)

> *It is setting the expectation right up at the start and many times. I wouldn't say many, but semi regularly, we do have to set our classroom values and agreements …. We make an agreement at the start of the year, saying "right how are we going to respect each other? What do you expect of me? What do I expect of you?" It is just reinforcing that, and just ensuring that they are constantly conscious about being aware of how their actions might affect other people.* (Anna) (Elvey, 2017, p. 164)

Anna sought to work in partnership with her students. Her classroom management was based on cooperation and collaboration.

While discussing classroom management strategies with another participant, Rob, he expressed similar sentiments to Anna, and told me: "W*e build mutual respect. I think mutual respect is the best way to create a classroom environment*" (Elvey, 2017, p. 163). During my visits to Rob and his co-teacher Kate's classroom, I observed teachers and students working harmoniously. Cooperation and mutual respect were not only promoted to the students, but also modelled by Kate and Rob in their interactions with the students, each other and support staff. Positive language, encouragement and support for risk taking was not only valued but also consistently promoted. Rob and Kate talked freely about this during one of their conversations with me:

> *Respect is something that is earned not expected. The way you speak to someone I think is crucial*. (Kate)
>
> *I think there is always a conscious choice for that positive language.* (Rob)
>
> *I think teaching is all relationships and partnerships, if you don't have that you almost have nothing*. (Kate)

Kate and Rob consistently sought out the ideas and opinions of varying students; they modelled active listening, spoke respectfully to individuals and groups and valued cooperative and collaborative relationships.

Cooperation and collaboration

A commonality between the participating teachers was the emphasis they placed on positive teacher student interactions, and in most cases they sought to cooperate and work with students rather than dominate and control. When Ellen spoke with me about the needs of one of her students, she explained the importance of relating to him in a positive and cooperative manner.

> *I'll speak really positively and I'll try and get him with a little bit of humour or something like that, instead of being 'flappy' myself. That doesn't work for him, so I try and speak nicely to him and try and get him back on my side if that makes sense*. (Ellen) (Elvey, 2017, p. 163)

Ellen explained that this student lacked self-confidence and found some school and social activities challenging. She endeavored to develop a positive relationship with the student, and modelled to him the cooperative strategies she sought to develop.

The following vignette, based on my observations of Matt's classroom practices, provide an example of how Matt uses a positive and collaborative approach when working with his students, and how it impacts on the atmosphere and harmony within his classroom.

Praising Student Efforts (developed from notes in research journal)

The harmony within Matt's classroom goes beyond respectful interactions and turn taking; it includes laugher, smiles, encouragement and playful banter from both students and the teacher. Matt frequently acknowledges varying students' efforts, academic and social, and the students are keen to comply with his requests. At the end of one of their inquiry-learning sessions the classroom was a mess, with boxes, paper, foil, and construction equipment strewn throughout the room. After the second call of, "*Come on, we need to all be packing up*", Matt began praising individual students, "*Well done Carl*", "*Great job, Kylie*". Immediately after, the rest of the class started helping, the room was soon tidy and they were ready to begin their writing. Rather than focus on what wasn't happening, Matt looked for and acknowledged the positives, the students who were complying with his request, yet still drew attention to the task that was required and a stressful and potentially conflict prone situation was averted.

The most striking characteristic of this classroom is the close rapport that the teacher has with students. They adore him. There is a lot of playful banter between them but also a strong sense of mutual respect, cooperation and enjoyment (lots of smiling faces and laughter) throughout the classroom.

Five of the participants were frequently observed interacting with their students in an informal and relaxed manner. Conversations flowed easily between staff and students. These were the classrooms where I frequently heard students and teachers chatting and laughing together and saw lots of smiles and happy faces. These classrooms were often noisy, but there was a strong focus on cooperation, collaboration and student choice. The following vignette describes one of the ways that Kate and Rob encourage student interaction and collaboration.

Supportive Interactions (developed from notes in research journal)

During my visits to Rob and Kate's classroom I frequently observed both teachers sitting at the student's tables, on a large couch and on the floor, working with either individuals or groups. Rather than dominate the discussions they constantly sought input from the students asking questions such as "*what have I got here?*", "*what do I need to do first?*" and "*why?*" They encouraged students to express and share their understandings.

Those students that were not in a specific teaching group were also urged to support one another. As a result, students moved freely about the room seeking advice and guidance from not only teachers but also each other. Interactions and conversations between students were valued and encouraged in the classroom.

The other three classrooms presented as calm, quiet environments, the participants in these grades spoke respectfully with students. They provided opportunities for student feedback, instigated supportive conversations with students, and modelled mutual respect and cooperation. One of the participants endeavoured to create security and consistency for students by placing greater importance on organisation and routines. This was a more controlled and less interactive environment, but the teacher still spent time conversing with individuals and used positive supportive language.

The following vignette from Ellen's classroom provides an example of how she models respectful interactions and creates opportunities for students to engage in supported, respectful conversations.

Modelling Respectful Interactions (developed from notes in research journal)

The children had just returned to Ellen's classroom after an inquiry-learning session in the adjoining open area. Her class and two other classes had spent the last hour selecting activities and learning areas based on interest. Ellen was seated on a small chair and three children, the 'reporters', stood next to where she was sitting. The rest of the class was seated on the floor facing them.

One by one the reporters spoke to the class about what they worked on or observed during the sessions. One of the students had taken notes and referred to these when he presented his report, another had used an iPod to take photos which she spoke about. The third student had a plan that he had completed before the session, he used this to support his report on the robot he made.

One of the reporters began very quietly and hesitantly, but became more confident, even animated after some supportive prompts from Ellen and questions from the group. During the reports Ellen modelled attentive listening; she watched, nodded, smiled and allowed each student to speak without interruption. Then, she asked and encouraged the other students to ask questions.

Throughout the discussion Ellen was encouraging and supportive. She began by making positive comments about behaviours she had observed such as, "*Today I saw the children in the farm area, sharing and caring. Well done*." And at the conclusion of each of the reports she thanked the students for their input. During this reporting time the other students were attentive, and like Ellen, responded positively to the contributions of each of the reporters.

Teaching strategies differed between the participants, but they all interacted confidently and calmly with their students. Brady and Scully (2005) advocate that "those who are regarded as effective managers seem to be able to work with their students with an ease of manner" (p. 104). They are able to respond with "smoothness, calmness, an orderly approach, confidence and an associated expectation" (p. 104). As Morton et al. (2012) explain, "relationships are complex, but they are also at the heart of teaching, learning belonging" (p. 291). My observations of the participants' interactions with their students indicated they each felt at

ease with their students, they valued and sought to develop a strong rapport with all students and actively sought to create a harmonious supportive learning environment.

Despite the differing classroom management strategies between the teacher participants, there was a commonality in their commitment to nurturing and valuing all students. During my conversations with each of the teachers, none questioned the inclusion of a student within their classroom or suggested a child would be better catered for in a specialist setting. The research participants freely identified challenges related to catering for students with diverse needs, but responded in a positive manner, relating this to effective teaching, and what they as teachers 'need to do'. Jane, for example, commented to me on the importance of recognising and embracing diversity, "*knowing that every child is different, and that's okay*", responding to student needs *"how can you support that child. If things aren't going their way, what can you do to help?"* and creating a welcoming participatory learning environment by "*showing them that they are a valued class member".*

During our conversations, the participants consistently made comments that indicated they cared for and about individuals and sought to develop a strong rapport with each of their students, relating and responding to them as individuals. Their comments were supported by my observations of their cooperative and harmonious interactions with their students and their willingness to plan and cater for not only diverse academic needs but also student interests and social-emotional needs.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I drew on the data to provide insights into the classroom culture that each of the participants created, particularly the development of respectful interactions and relationships between teachers and students. I outlined some of the participatory classroom management strategies that I observed the participants employing, demonstrating the strong emphasis that these teachers placed on developing mutual respect, encouraging interactions and collaboration with and between their students, and developing trustful relationships. My descriptions of the supportive approaches that I observed, and the participants' comments about knowing their students, being responsive and creating a safe and secure learning environment, provide some preliminary insights into the teachers' actions and positive attitudes in regard to valuing and nurturing student diversity. The discussions in this chapter reported on the participants' efforts to develop a welcoming respectful learning environment (refer to Table

3.3, section vii) and a classroom culture that embraces and values the contributions of *all* students (refer to Table 3.3, sections ii & iii).

In the next chapter, Chapter Five, I again draw on notes in my research journal, my recorded observations of the participants' classroom practices and the interview transcripts. While the classroom culture and teacher attitudes remain relevant and have links to the discussions in the next chapter, the focus shifts from interactions and general classroom management, to approaches to teaching and learning. In Chapter Five I explore and discuss the implementation, background and influences in regard to the programs, activities and teaching strategies that the eight research participants use in their endeavours to support the participation and achievement of *all* students.

Chapter Five: Responding and Doing, Approaches to Teaching and Learning

In the previous chapter, drawing on data from the study, I discussed the importance that the participants place on knowing and understanding their students, and their attitudes and actions relating to the development of supportive and respectful student-teacher relationships, and mutual respect between all members of the classroom community. Vignettes and extracts from conversations with the participants provided insights into the practices, beliefs and attitudes of the participants, particularly their willingness to embrace and value diversity in their classrooms.

In this chapter, I explore the strategies and approaches the participant teachers employ to 'orchestrate learning' (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Once again, I draw on notes from my research journal and interview transcripts, creating vignettes and providing examples of teaching practices that the various participants implemented to support diverse learners. I also relate some of my observations and discussions to sections in Table 3.3. Identifying Inclusive Classroom Practices. While the previous chapter explored what the participants *know* and *do* in relation to their students social and emotional needs, the discussions within this chapter relate to an investigation into *how* each of the research participants cater for and responds to student diversity during their delivery of the curriculum.

When conducting research into the role of teachers in developing inclusive practice Rouse (2008) emphasises the importance of knowing about "how the participants turn knowledge into action" (p. 13), and the need for greater understanding about what classroom teachers *do.* Throughout this chapter I focus on developing understanding about the teaching approaches, strategies and resources that the participants use in their efforts to orchestrate the learning and participation of *all* students (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Variation in Delivery and Teaching Approaches

Consistent with the differences in schools, grade levels, experience and even personalities of the research participants that I outlined in Chapter Three[20], I frequently observed variation in relation to what and *how* and each of the teachers taught. This includes the activities and the

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[20] Refer to Table 3.1: Variations in classrooms, teaching experience and school size amongst research participants

areas of the curriculum the participants focused on and the techniques and teaching strategies they used to develop their students' skills and understandings.

Each of the teachers involved in the study, worked in a school that seemed to provide them with opportunities to make professional decisions and adaptations when delivering the curriculum. While each of the participants implemented the set state curriculum (VCAA, 2015), and some programs were adopted on a whole school or team basis, there was still variation in the strategies and approaches that individuals used. These reflected not only the diversity of the participants' student cohorts, but also differences in the attitudes, understandings and experiences of the teachers themselves.

Collaborative planning

The following vignette draws on notes from my research journal and transcripts from interviews with two of the participants, Kate and Rob. This data provides insights into the variation in the implementation of approaches between teachers, even when they "plan, teach and review in partnership" (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 77).

> **The Same but Different: The Impact of Collaborative Planning** (developed from notes in research journal and interview transcripts).
>
> As two of the participants, Kate and Rob, were team-teaching and planned their lessons together, there was a commonality in their interpretation of the curriculum and focus areas. However, there were noticeable differences in their delivery. When I discussed this observation with them both, Rob explained, "*we have the same learning intentions, the same focuses and we work on the same stuff and we just present it differently*".
>
> Through collaborative planning Rob and Kate sought to maintain consistency in curriculum delivery and learning intentions, but accepted that their individual personalities and the differing needs of their students resulted in variation in teaching practices. Often they organised their students into small collaborative groups, and one or both teachers would work with specific groups of students while the rest of the class would work independently. At other times I observed as one teacher conducted individualised student conferences, while the other teacher roamed the room supporting individuals or groups as required. At the end of each session it was common for Kate and Rob to bring their students together. Everyone would be seated on the floor, the large classroom couch or on a chair, and either Kate or Rob would lead a

discussion related to relevant learning behaviours processes and outcomes. Student input was actively sought by both teachers and free flowing discussions; the sharing of understandings, ideas and opinions was commonplace.

Some teaching approaches, for example inquiry-learning, and programs such as *CAFE*, *The Daily 5* (Boushey & Moser, 2009, 2014) and *You Can Do It* (Bernard, 2001; Bernard et al, 1994) were being implemented by two or more of the teacher participants. Often the participants who were implementing particular programs worked within the same school, and the approach was adopted across the school, but in other instances, especially with inquiry-learning and *CAFE* and *The Daily 5*, the approach was also being implemented by participants from differing schools. Even when the participants were working in the same school, I observed, or they discussed with me, differences in the way they implemented an approach. These variations frequently related to the teachers' knowledge and individual interpretations, the adaptations they made to the program according to their individual teaching styles and the modifications they made to cater for individuals and groups within their classrooms.

Curriculum design and delivery

When one of the participants, Debbie, discussed the implementation of whole-school programs with me, she emphasised the importance of teachers being able to modify and adapt the curriculum and school programs to ensure that they have relevance and cater for differing student needs. During one of our conversations Debbie shared her views with me.

> *Having the freedom to be able to make decisions about curriculum is really important. I feel more and more these days we are having things prescribed to us, programs prescribed, everyone has to do this. It's a whole-school approach; it all has to look the same. That sort of stuff is not helpful. And that's some of the things that I've had to negotiate with the principal and the leadership team, to say "okay that might work there, but I need to have the freedom to be able to modify this for my students".* (Debbie)

> *The children just in my grade are quite different from the other Five/Six grade, and what's going to work well in there is not necessarily going to work for me. But if I can be allowed faith in my pedagogy, knowledge and ability, and allowed that integrity to be able to just modify things and say philosophically it is the same, but this has got to be different for my group of children*. (Debbie)

Debbie's comments demonstrate that she values and seeks the freedom to make professional judgments, to respond flexibility, and for her to be allowed to modify and adapt programs to ensure that they meet the needs of differing cohorts and individuals. She expresses concerns about the constraints surrounding a prescribed and inflexible curriculum or program. Loreman et al. (2011) express similar concerns about narrow, prescriptive curriculums and advocate that *good* teaching involves teachers engaging in "universal design for learning" (p. 139). These authors explain:

> We know of no country in the world in which the regular curriculum is automatically appropriate for all students in the form in which it is published for teachers. One activity of professional teachers is to take the curriculum they are mandated to teach, and translate that curriculum into meaningful learning activities that are relevant and accessible to all students in a class. Those teachers who are able to translate the mandated curriculum in this way are said to have engaged in universal design for learning. (Loreman et al., 2011, p. 139)

My observations of the participants implementing varying areas of the curriculum and programs, and subsequent discussions with them, indicate that they each seek to make adjustments according to their own personal teaching styles *and* the learning needs, interests and experiences of their students. While there are similarities in the approaches and strategies that each of the teachers promote and use, there are differences in the ways that they organise their classrooms, deliver the curriculum and respond to the diverse learning needs of their students.

Student Input and Involvement

While there was variation between participants in the implementation of teaching approaches, my observations of their classroom practices, and comments that the teachers made during interviews, demonstrated that there was a strong focus on student-centred learning within each of the classrooms. Each of the research participants provided opportunities for their students, both in groups and individually, to be involved in personal goal setting and evaluating learning outcomes. Self-evaluation and self-reflection was encouraged during individual conferences and group discussions with students. In most cases, the participating teachers endeavoured to work in partnership with students rather than dictate expectations; they sought input from students, and often discussed learning intentions with groups at the commencement of a session, or with individuals during a student conference. The participants

all asked their students questions and encouraged input, the sharing of ideas, experiences and understandings (refer to Table 3.3, section ii). In embracing approaches that actively involving students in their own learning (Booth & Ainscow, 2011), all the teachers created important foundations for the development of inclusive learning environments, and the implementation of practices that that support the participation, collaboration and achievement of all students (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Valuing student input

In a number of the classrooms I observed the participants involving their students in decisions relating to the level of support they needed. They encouraged those students who understood what a task required to elect to move off and work independently, while others, the students that remained unsure or needed further clarification, could choose to remain with the teacher. The following vignette provides an example of a strategy that one of the participants, Ellen, used to support and empower learners within her classroom.

Select Your Level of Support: Scaffolding Learning in Ellen's Classroom (developed from notes in research journal)

Ellen had in place a card system that provided the students with opportunities to select the level of support they required during classroom tasks. Once Ellen had explained an activity to the class the students would select from the following:

Green Card: Independent learners
Off you go to write/work independently.

Orange: Students that need a little bit of help
Off you go, I will be with you in a little while.

Red: Students that are unsure or don't understand what is required
Stay on the floor with me and we will talk through the task together.

While Ellen worked on the floor with those students that sought additional support, a teaching assistant (ESS) roamed and assisted those with an orange card, the students that needed 'a little help'. Once the group on the floor was confident and understood the task, they moved to the tables and both Ellen and the teaching assistant monitored and assisted students with red or orange cards. Students were able to change cards if they found they needed more or less assistance during the

session. Rather than make assumptions about who needs help and where they should work, this strategy allowed Ellen's students to make decisions about the level of support they required. Teacher groups were flexible and based on needs that the students themselves identified.

In the participants' classrooms I frequently observed students raising their hands to demonstrate they wished to contribute ideas during group discussions, and in most of the classrooms, a more relaxed approach led to students also speaking without raising their hand, just waiting for a pause in the discussion and then sharing their response. This led to casual conversations within the class rather than the formal turn taking that the 'hands up' approach creates. Discussion was often led by teachers, but rather than maintain constant control and always decide who would speak and when, they allowed students to contribute ideas and converse in a more fluent manner. I frequently observed participants drawing quieter students into a discussion, by encouraging individuals to share their ideas or asking them a specific question. Classroom conversations and opportunities for individuals and groups to share their knowledge and ideas were commonplace.

Areas of the curriculum were frequently delivered in ways that encouraged student interaction, choices, and differing ways of demonstrating varying learning outcomes. I observed participants spending time at the start of lessons tuning their students into a topic or focus area and drawing upon their students' prior knowledge and experiences. Similarly, I frequently observed the teachers encouraging their students to reflect on and share their outcomes and understanding of process with the class at the end of lessons. For example, two of the participants, Rob and Kate, who worked collaboratively in a team-teaching situation, would often start their lessons by providing explanations to their particular teaching or class group. However, at the end of each lesson it was common for the two teachers to bring all their students together. With their students combined into one large group, Kate and Rob would facilitate a discussion that provided opportunities for their students to clarify their understanding and share their learning with one another.

Investigating and Exploring

In the previous chapter I discussed how two of the participants, Ellen and Matt, implemented an inquiry-learning approach in their classrooms. They spoke with me and provided insights

into how this approach, with its range and choices of activities helped stimulate student engagement and participation and provided opportunities for self-directed learning. Even though Matt and Ellen worked in different schools, the inquiry-learning programs that they were implementing were both influenced by the philosophy and methods outlined in the *Australian Developmental Curriculum* (Walker, 2011).

The *Australian Developmental Curriculum* promotes the importance of teachers inspiring students with a “sense of wanting to investigate, to find out to explore” (Walker, 2011, p. 45). The aim is to immerse students in “a rich range of thinking, oral language, literacy and numeracy experiences” (Walker, p. 18) and nurture their curiosity and creativity. There is a strong focus on students “learning how to learn” (Walker, 2011, p. 2), providing them with opportunities make choices, problem-solve and work collaboratively. A key feature of inquiry-learning is that it “places that child at the centre of the curriculum and provides a rich range of personalised learning opportunities” (Walker, 2011 p. 14). The approach aims to provide opportunities for student diversity, differences in learning styles, personalities, cultures, abilities, behaviours and interests to be acknowledged, valued and catered for (Peterson & Hittie, 2003; Walker, 2011). In essence, it is an approach that is designed to build on the interests and abilities of *all* students (Peterson & Hittie, 2003).

The following vignette draws upon notes in my reflective journal and interview transcriptions with two of the participants, Matt and Ellen. It highlights the similarities and differences in the strategies that their schools used in their endeavours to develop staff knowledge and understanding about inquiry-learning, a participatory, student-centred teaching approach

Implementing Inquiry-learning (developed from notes in research journal and interview transcripts)

Matt and Ellen’s schools were in the early stages of implementing an inquiry-learning approach and as a result their understandings and knowledge about the approach were still developing. They were both, however, being supported by targeted professional development and collaborated with more experienced colleagues at their schools. Ellen explained that her school was implementing a series of in-house professional development on the *Australian Developmental Curriculum*. Ellen and other staff were involved in ongoing training presented by both school-based staff and a visiting mentor to develop their understanding of

the theory behind and practical implementation of the *Australian Developmental Curriculum*. In addition to more formal instruction on the approach they also visited another school.

Matt's principal had arranged for him and two of his colleagues to visit and be involved in a professional development day at a school that had been implementing inquiry-learning for a number of years. This allowed Matt to learn about the philosophy behind the inquiry-learning, observe the program in action, and develop practical knowledge relating to how the approach can be implemented in a junior school classroom. Other teachers at Matt's school with prior experience and knowledge of inquiry-learning have also provided him with advice and guidance on program development and implementation of the approach.

When I discussed the implementation of the inquiry-learning with Matt, he provided me with some insights into how he developed his understanding of the approach and what helped him implement the program he was running. Matt explains:

> *I think having people who have done it before and getting their support and ideas. Like Ann and Steve and Sally, who as I have said, who have done the program. Then, going off to actually see it at another school, but also, using the kids to find out exactly what they like to do. Instead of me directing them all the time, finding out what they would like to do*. (Matt)

Ellen and Matt's schools provided an opportunity for staff members to visit and observe the teaching program that they were seeking to implement. Both these participants indicated that they valued having the opportunity to learn from and with others. When Matt began implementing inquiry-learning into his classroom he was supported by more experienced colleagues, teachers who already had experience using this teaching approach. Ellen, in contrast, worked with a team of teachers, and together these teachers learnt about implementing an inquiry-based approach, and supported one another. The processes that Matt and Ellen's schools used to develop teacher knowledge sometimes differed, but, the key knowledge and understandings, and the underpinning inclusive philosophy, was the same.

Implementing student-centred approaches

Consistent with a student-centred approach and the variations in the interests, experiences and abilities of their students, there were differences in the learning outcomes that Ellen and Matt sought. Subsequently, their learning focus, areas, activities and classroom set-up was also quite different. Ellen conducted an inquiry-learning program in conjunction with two other teachers. They ran the sessions in a large open space that was permanently set up. It contained numerous learning areas and equipment. Matt, by contrast, ran the program in his normal classroom and the activities and learning areas needed to be packed away at the end of each session. Despite these variations, both teachers endeavoured to develop a stimulating environment that provided opportunities for all students to "explore investigate, experiment and discover that learning is fun, productive and achievable" (Walker, 2011, p. 14). They utilised interest-based learning areas and activities to engage students, to personalise learning, maximise participation and develop relevant learning outcomes for everyone in the class (refer to Table 3.3, section i, ii, iii, iv & v).

The following vignette relates to my observations of an inquiry-learning session in Matt's classroom. It provides insights into the types of activities that the students were involved in, the opportunities for group and collaborative learning, and how Matt introduced the session to his students.

Inquiry-learning in Matt's Classroom (developed from notes in research journal)

When I observed Matt implementing inquiry-learning I watched his students engage in a range of activities in his classroom. These included: students playing games together, students sitting together weaving, individuals painting, students working collaboratively making egg carton creatures, students sitting together on a bean bag sharing a picture story book, groups of students writing letters and making cards, children individually and collaboratively using construction equipment and a group of students playing a game using the interactive whiteboard.

The session began with Matt discussing the choices, which were also listed on the class whiteboard, with his students. Some of the activities were familiar to the students, as they had been available previously, and Matt

utilised examples of student work, and explanations from students, to ensure there was a strong understanding about both choices and expectations. Some of the students began the session creating plans, writing, designing and drawing, prior to beginning an activity. Other students moved straight to their chosen activity, often they were continuing work they had begun the previous day.

I talked with Matt after observing his class during the inquiry-learning session and he explained that he found the approach and choices, not only in activities but also ways of working, encouraged greater engagement from the students. He spoke about this being particularly beneficial for one of his students, Karen, who finds staying on task and working with others challenging. He elaborated and added that Karen has developed greater self-confidence through being able to make choices based on her interests and skills and having the flexibility to decide between group and individual work. According to Matt, once Karen was provided with opportunities to be involved in self-directed learning, to assume some control over her learning, her motivation and concentration increased. Karen's increased confidence also encouraged her to interact more freely and cooperate with and support other students. As Matt explains:

> *That's the progress we have made from the start of the year till now. It gets back learning those steps and the skills to become an independent or semi-independent worker. She's really keen, she doesn't feel like she's worthless and she doesn't feel like she's stupid, but those were the traits she showed earlier in the year. Now she feels really invigorated and really proud of what she's done and she's keen to show and help other people, so that's really good.* (Matt)
>
> *... so we found what Karen really enjoys and she will actually work through.* (Matt)
>
> *She's passionate about it … she's also in control of it*. (Matt)

Matt's comments about the program and the active participation of his students, particularly those students such as Karen, who previously found concentration and collaboration challenging, were supported by my observations of the *Australian Developmental Curriculum* being implemented in his classroom. When his students were involved in inquiry-learning they appeared to be motivated, engaged and happy and as Matt explained, "*they were in control*". Matt encouraged and valued his students taking "responsibility for their own learning" (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 73).

Ellen also shared with me her some of her observations and perceptions about the inquiry-learning sessions. She related how this approach with its focus on student-directed learning had assisted in improving learning outcomes in her current school, and allowed the teachers to more effectively accommodate and support students with diverse social and academic skills:

> *We try and cater for lots of different kids. We've got Preps [Foundation Grade students] that are still in playing next to someone. We've got kids that are playing with others, and we've got kids that want to do their own individual projects*. (Ellen)

> *It's improving our oral language; it's improving their writing. The kids are interacting more with each other, and socialising across the board. They are keen to come to school. They enjoy it, it's just something that they love to do*. (Ellen)

> *Lot of choices, we just encourage, "Well maybe next time, if you didn't get to go to that area today, maybe tomorrow". And they are solving their own problems as well. The teacher is standing back and letting the kids try and work it out.* (Ellen)

The inquiry-learning approaches that Ellen and Matt were implementing were student-centred and encouraged active participation in the learning process (refer to Table 3.3, section iv). Matt articulated what he considered were the merits of a student-directed approach. This included comments such as those below.

> *They're directing their learning. They're the one who is actually wanting to do the activity, so they will actually do it and they will do a good job …. They will plan it and then they will complete the activity, and then they will reflect on it.* (Matt)

Matt and Ellen spoke positively to me about their differing inquiry-learning programs, their schools' interpretations of the *Australian Developmental Curriculum*. They both valued the high levels of student engagement and motivation that they observed during the sessions and commented on improved student outcomes relating to social skills, oral language and problem solving that they were observing. Both participants sought to link the inquiry-learning sessions to literacy, predominantly through writing. In Matt's classroom the students created written activity plans or diagrams prior to an inquiry-learning session. Supportive prompts included sentence starters such as; 'I want to investigate …' 'I will explore …' and 'I am interested in learning about …*'* but some students used mind maps, illustrations and diagrams to indicate their inquiry and activity intentions.

After an inquiry-learning session the students in both Matt and Ellen's classrooms frequently recorded details about what they did, who they worked with and what they learnt and

enjoyed. The writing that I observed varied between students in both content and complexity. Like the inquiry-learning sessions, the students writing plans and reflective responses were personalised and provided opportunities for students with diverse abilities and interests to participate and achieve in differing ways.

The stated philosophy, aims and key principals that underpin *The Australian Developmental Curriculum*, the approach that Matt and Ellen's inquiry-learning sessions are based upon, align with those of inclusive education. For example, Walker (2011) explains that "the essence of the Walker Learning Approach [also known as *Australian Developmental Curriculum*] is that we respect and acknowledge that not all children are the same" (p. 95), that the *Australian Developmental Curriculum* "takes a non-deficit approach in relation to diversity of all kinds" (p. 98). One of the stated aims of the approach is "for children to enjoy school. Not just to learn to be compliant, behave and do what they are told, but to engage deeply, to develop an authentic sense of themselves" (Walker, 2011, p. 26). This along with other aims such as "engaging students in relevant and meaningful learning" (Walker, 2011, p. 26) and for children to have their learning personalised (Walker,2011, p. 27) relate to the successful learning and participation of *all* students, encouraging, supporting and valuing student diversity (refer to Table 3.3, sections ii & iii).

Matt and Ellen spoke positively about the inquiry-learning programs they implemented and the impact the sessions and activity choices had upon the learning and engagement of their students. Ainscow (2007) promotes the need for teachers to embrace new and inclusive ways of working. During my discussions with both these teachers it became clear that targeted professional learning and collegial support encouraged Matt and Ellen to embrace the philosophy that underpins this inclusive and student-centred approach.

Supporting Students' Literacy Learning

During my visits to their classrooms, I observed each of the research participants implementing a range of strategies to engage and support their students' literacy development. A variety of approaches were used to encourage the active involvement of *all* their students, and while there were often common goals or learning intentions, provision was frequently made for differing skill levels. Generalised literacy goals, for example 'to increase our writing stamina', that were relevant for all members of the class or group were displayed or discussed with students in each of the eight classrooms I visited. More personalised goals were then set during student conferencing, group work or as the teachers roamed the classroom.

Personalising success

When visiting one school I frequently observed two of the participants, who worked with differing grade levels, explaining literacy learning intentions to their students. For example, "*we are learning to use prior knowledge, to make connections".* They also talked with their students about success criteria, how the students would know they had achieved their goal and what they would be able to do. Their goals were the same for all students, but the success criteria differed for individuals. By personalising the success criteria, the teachers ensured there was a focus on *what* needs to be taught, rather than *who* is to learn it (Florian, 2014). Subsequently, the needs of learners, rather than coverage of material became the priority. In both these classrooms the students were involved in identifying what success would 'look like', they were later asked to reflect and consider whether they had achieved their goal. These teachers presented the same curriculum to all students, but the success criteria was adapted and made relevant to the differing learning needs and skill levels of students in the class.

Personalising reading instruction

A common feature in seven of the participants' classrooms was individualised book boxes, one book box per student. In some cases the boxes were permanently stored on the students' tables but at other times they were kept on a shelf or bench and students accessed them as they needed. The contents of the boxes varied as each of them contained books selected by students. When I asked two of the participants about the individualised book boxes they explained:

> *We call them 'just right' book boxes so the books in their boxes are just right for them. In the classroom I use a huge range of texts ... we talk a lot about how to choose their just right books*. (Grace) (Elvey, 2017, p. 167)

> *I've started off with making sure they always have two of the home readers because they will definitely be at their level. So starting off, I always make sure they have two of those. So, even if they have picked ones from the classroom library where they can't technically read the words, they always had at least two they can. We talk to about reading the pictures as well as the words .... So now we are focusing on obviously picking ones that they can read, but focusing on, you know saying it doesn't have to be that you can read every single word, especially early on, tell a story using the pictures or that kind of thing*. (Grace)

> *With their 'just right book, they have books that are just right for them, depending on what their [reading] level is and their interests*. (Anna)

During my discussions with the participants I learnt that the implementation and use of individual book boxes in their classrooms related to a literacy teaching approach that was being developed it their schools*, CAFE* and *The Daily 5* (Boushey & Moser, 2009). Boushey and Moser (2009) provide guidance for teachers on the establishment of a structure and learning environment that build independence and caters for diverse literacy learning needs (Boushey & Moser. 2009). *The Daily 5* provides direction relating to how the curriculum is presented, including opportunities for student choice, self-direction and independent learning (Boushey & Moser, 2014). *CAFE* is intended to guide teachers and develop knowledge and understanding relating to "the technical expertise necessary for individual students to receive exactly what they need to improve as readers" (Boushey & Moser, 2009, p. ix). Rather than present a prescriptive, rigid program, Boushey and Moser promote the development of knowledge and understanding of foundational literacy skills through a combination of strategic, responsive and flexible instruction and learning activities (refer to Table 3.3, section i).

Boushey and Moser (2009, 2014) advocate the need for classroom literacy instruction that engages and supports the learning of *all* students. Consequently, it is not surprising that there are commonalities in the features of the learning environment, teaching approaches and classroom activities that Boushey and Moser (2009, 2014) promote, and aspects of Florian's (2014) *IPAA Framework*. This includes an emphasis on:

> Creating environments for learning with opportunities that are sufficiently made available for *everyone*, so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life.
> Extending what is ordinarily available for *all* learners (creating a rich learning community) rather than using teaching and learning strategies that are suitable for *most* alongside something 'additional' or 'different' for *some* who experience difficulties.
> Differentiation achieved through choice of activity for everyone.
> (Florian, 2014, p. 290)

A key component of *The Daily 5* involves students selecting from five reading and writing choices: read to self, work on writing, read to someone, listen to reading, and word work. Students are encouraged to work independently toward personalised goals, while the teacher supports the development of differing needs through whole-group and small-group instruction, as well as one-on-one conferring (Boushey & Moser, 2014). While *The Daily 5* involves students developing independence and making choices regarding their learning,

CAFE focuses on the development of individualised goals, and teachers work with both individuals and groups of students, monitoring progress and developing understanding of relevant strategies. They tailor instruction to meet differing needs (Boushey and Moser, 2009).

The following vignette relates to a discussion I had about *CAFE* and *The Daily 5* with one of the participants, Grace, and my observations of her classroom.

***CAFE* and *The Daily 5* in Grace's Classroom** (developed from notes in research journal and interview transcripts)

Grace spoke enthusiastically about the implementation of *CAFE* and *The Daily 5* (Boushey & Moser, 2009, Boushey & Moser, 2014) strategies in her classroom, and how they have enabled her to more effectively cater for diverse student learning needs. I was particularly interested in her explanations relating to how she has moved towards a student-focused approach, and grouping with a "*skills they need to learn*" focus, rather than the book level (ability) groups she previously used. Grace explains:

> *Rather than sitting and all reading a page together and that kind of thing, we actually focus on what the skill is that we have to focus on and they practice it with their level book and I go to each of them [as a result, sometimes a number of the students in the group are reading a different text]. So, then they go off to the classroom library or to independent reading, and during that time I have my one on one with them and we set our goal for the coming week. So it is really targeted to the kids.* (Grace) (Elvey, 2017, p. 167)

Within Grace's classroom are numerous picture story books, nonfiction texts, basal readers[21] and junior novels. Students use this collection to select material for their independent book boxes. Teacher guidance is given as to 'how' to select suitable material, but the ultimate choice is with the child. Grace explained that the book boxes are used during buddy (paired) and independent reading and that the children also select texts for home reading from them (Elvey, 2017, p. 167).

[21] Basal readers, also referred to as reading schemes, are commercial texts that are used in schools to support the sequential teaching and learning of reading skills and strategies (Tompkins, Campbell, Green & Smith, 2015)

Whilst I observed varying aspects of *The Daily 5* and *CAFE* in the participants' classrooms, their interpretations, understanding of the approach and classroom practices differed. The common elements that I most frequently observed were book boxes and students involved in one or more of *The Daily 5* areas, particularly "Read to Self" (Boushey & Moser, 2014, p. 88), "Read to Someone" (Boushey & Moser, 2014, p. 92) and "Listen to Reading" (Boushey & Moser, 2014, p. 116), as well as one-to-one student conferencing. Students' reading with peers, collaborating and supporting one another was commonplace in each of the participants' classrooms during these sessions (refer to Table 3.3, section v).

When I sought information about the implementation of CAFE and The Daily 5 in their schools and classrooms from two of the participants, Jane and Anna, they explained:

> *We have just started that this year, although we played around with it last year. It's a more formal approach this year. So first term we focused on A, for accuracy, so getting the kids the confidence to read. And this term we are working on C, for comprehension, and working through all the strategies for the understanding of what they're reading. The Daily 5 is ongoing, it happens every day*. (Jane)

> *We thought, well that's something that we will embrace. We trialled it a couple of years ago, it was trialled in one area and they said, "look it seems to be a good strategy to use". Then we had lots of PD for all the staff to come on board, so now that's something that's expected that we do. I'll have to do a lessons and I'll go, "that part worked, that didn't work, the next time I'll do it this*". (Anna)

I learnt from the participants that *CAFE* and *The Daily 5* were relatively new to their schools, and that they and other staff members were still developing and refining their understanding of these approaches. There was variation in how the differing schools and even individual teachers were implementing the strategies outlined by Boushey and Moser (2009, 2014).

Each of the seven participants implementing the *CAFE* and *The Daily 5* approaches (Boushey & Moser, 2009, 2014) had a CAFE 'menu'[22] prominently displayed in their classroom. This was a chart, often made by the participants, that listed four key literacy competencies: comprehension, accuracy, fluency and extending vocabulary. Under each heading was a basic definition, in student friendly terms. Under the heading Comprehension, was the sentence 'I understand what I read'. Under the heading Accuracy, was the sentence 'I can read the words'.

[22] *CAFE* menu: A list of strategies that relate to the development of skills in reading comprehension, accuracy, fluency and extending vocabulary. (refer to Appendix E)

Each area also had a list of relevant strategies and learning prompts, these were designed to support the students' skill development and encourage them to self-monitor. The strategies created the starting point for determining learning goals and providing responsive, strategic instruction.

When I discussed *CAFE* with the participants, Grace, Jane and Kate, they shared with me details related to the impact the implementation of this approach has had on their students' literacy development, and how it personalises learning, enabling them to better cater for student diversity. They explain:

> *We've got those really small focused groups and our kids here are put in groups based on the skills they need to learn rather than the book level they are all reading*. (Grace)
>
> *And I have found the CAFE menu in reading enables you to set goals and work on individual needs as you are going along as well. Reading conferences are vital. How you spend time one on one is crucial*. (Kate)
>
> *And they know that when they have finished that (writing task) they can just leave it here for me to correct, and they can go and get a book, and they can read to someone or read to self. Some kids choose to type up stories on the computers, it's all self-directed*. (Jane)

Jane spoke with me at length about how she conducts student conferences during the session and how she uses the *CAFE* strategies to improve learning outcomes and guide goal setting for her students.

> *We go over to the CAFE (display board with CAFE strategies) and pick a new learning goal for that child which will be reported on later in the term. I am currently keeping them on sticky notes, but they get transferred to … [Jane goes and gets her student record keeping book]. So, when I do Mitchell, he'll put his reading goal down here, which will be determined from point of need at a running record and we go to the CAFE [the 'menu', the list of strategies displayed in the classroom] and ask, "What's the next thing that you need?"* (Jane)

My observations of the participants implementing *CAFE* and *The Daily 5* indicated that the approach with its provision for student choice, flexible grouping, targeted strategy development and one-to-one conferencing encourages the teachers to identify and be responsive to the range of student needs in their classrooms. Broad goals and learning intentions that *all* students could relate to were set by the teachers, but more specific goals

and strategies were personalised and often negotiated or set *with* the students. Students with differing abilities participated and worked; sometimes together, sometimes in groups and sometimes individually, developing skills and competencies relevant to their current personal literacy goals.

Just as earlier in this chapter, I identified relationships between the key features of C*AFE* and *The Daily 5* and some of the descriptors in Florian's (2014) *IPAA Framework*, particularly the emphasis on teaching practices which include *everybody* (Florian, 2014), it is also possible to make links to Booth and Ainscow's (2002, 2011) indicators of evolving inclusive practices (refer to Table 2.4). For example, the *CAFE* and *Daily 5* approaches that I observed and that the participants spoke with me about, provide opportunities for students to: take responsibility for their own learning; understand the purpose of a lesson or group of lessons; utilise classroom displays to support independent learning; use prior knowledge and understandings as a foundation for future learning; collaborate with their peers, and make choices relating to learning content and activities. The *CAFE* system of instruction also uses formative assessment as the foundation for involving students in setting goals and identifying future learning needs. it "focuses teaching and learning on what children can do rather than what they cannot" (Florian, 2014, p. 290) and encourages the development of dialogue and shared understanding between students and teachers, in regard to what students can already do, and what they are ready to learn (refer to Table 3.3, sections iii & vi).

Catering for diverse interests and abilities

Even though each of the teachers delivered the *CAFE* and *The Daily 5* approaches slightly differently, they all involved their students in authentic, relevant tasks. When the class focus was on reading, that is what the students did, independently, with their teacher, in a small group or with a friend. Reading responses most often involved discussion and sharing, or the use of graphic organisers such as mind-maps and word webs rather than generic worksheets.

Graphic organisers are an effective way for students of differing ages and abilities to learn and remember content (Fisher & Frey, 2011). They provide students with opportunities to classify, compare, contrast, and use metaphors. The strategies they develop, the reflection and organisation of ideas and knowledge help deepen understanding and increase achievement (Bromley, 2015; Gregory & Chapman, 2007; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001; Smith 1986). By providing opportunities for and encouraging the use of thinking strategies such as graphic organisers, the participating teachers not only supported and developed strategies that

assisted their students to simplify information and develop inquiry skills, they also provided opportunities for students to develop and contribute personalised and thoughtful responses. Their students used varying combinations of words and graphics to create visual links, and as a result, their responses often differed in both content and style. Students with diverse skill levels were able to participate in the same activity, yet still access texts appropriate for their learning needs and interests (refer to Table 3.3, sections, ii & iii).

The following vignette draws on my notes from my research journal notes and transcripts from a conversation that I had with one of the teacher participants, Debbie. The vignette provides insights into a teaching approach, literature circles, that Debbie implements in conjunction with another classroom teacher, and how this approach supports her efforts to cater for and engage students with diverse abilities, learning needs and interests.

Literature Circles in Debbie's Classroom (developed from notes in research journal and interview transcripts)

Debbie had a series of nine strategy posters on reading roles displayed in her classroom. When she noticed me looking at them, she explained that they relate to the literature circles, a "*book club type set-up*" that she runs. The posters provide details of varying roles or ways of responding to a text: summariser, vocabulary extender, literacy luminary, investigator, illustrator, discussion director, travel tracker, connector and character educator. Later, Debbie elaborated on the implementation of literature circles in her classroom:

> *It's like a book club where the children come together over the two grades, and they select a book that they would like to read, and then they find like members that would also like to read that book. Working in groups of no less than four, there's four to six in a group*. (Debbie)

Debbie showed me some large bookcases in an adjoining room that contained multiple copies of a large range of junior novels that the students were able to choose from and explained *"there is also a really large library online that we've got. So they can read text* online*".* The students in her class all had access to iPads, and if a digital version was selected it would be loaded to their individual device. The students met in groups once each week to discuss their chosen text, and take

> on one of the literature circle roles. I learnt that during the literature circles sessions Debbie would join and work with a group that contained students who may need some additional support, while the teacher from the other class roamed the classrooms and monitored the participation of the other students.

The literature circles are collaborative and conducted by the students, therefore involving them in reciprocal teaching (Tompkins, Campbell, Green, & Smith, 2015), even when Debbie is with a group, rather than direct and control the conversations, she adopts a participatory role. All group members are provided with opportunities to be actively involved in the sessions and they have autonomy to manage and negotiate the operation of their group within a broad, previously agreed framework.

Literature circles provide Debbie's students with opportunities to make choices about what they read, who they work with and how they will respond to a particular text. By taking on specific roles and discussing the text, students are encouraged and guided to think deeply about what they have read (Cameron, Murray, Hull, & Cameron, 2012; Tompkins et al., 2015). This can involve them in revisiting and rereading sections of a text to ensure that they have a strong understanding of varying passages. The complexity of the task varies according to the details within a text and differing student comprehension levels. However, all students are provided with opportunities to work collaboratively with a group, choose their reading material, take on a designated or chosen role and share their understanding and enjoyment of a text with their peers (Cameron et al., 2012; Tompkins, et al., 2015). The discussions between students, their conversations during literature circles, assist in the development of their thought processes and have the potential to:

> Enhance student engagement, understanding and the internalization of the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in challenging literacy tasks they encounter on their own. (Griffo, Madda, Pearson, & Raphael, 2015, p. 51)

Debbie spoke enthusiastically about the impact the literature circles have had on her students' engagement and motivation. She indicated that they supported and improved not only classroom participation but also her students' willingness to engage in independent home reading.

> *Ah, amazing, because we had a lot of trouble with [Grade] Five and Sixes doing home reading, or seeing that as something that was relevant to them, that's what little kids do with their reader covers. But they didn't feel they were to do that, so talking about Lit Circles, these kids are reading a novel every week*. (Debbie)

Debbie and her colleague only conducted literature circles once a week, and unfortunately I did not get to observe a session. As a result, I am unable to refer to first-hand accounts of student engagement and interactions. However, the format of the sessions as Debbie described them, with varying roles, collaborative groups, student-lead discussions and book choices, indicate that these lessons have the potential to enhance learning and simultaneously engage and challenge students with differing interests and abilities (refer to Table 3.3, section ii). Debbie's statement that the literature circles had increased her students' motivation and willingness to read was supported by my observations of her students in her class during independent reading sessions, when they willingly used the time to read varying texts, online and hard copies, related to their literature circle groups. These were books that the students had chosen and were interested in.

Encouraging home reading

When discussing the introduction of literature circles in her classroom, Debbie indicated that they had brought about an increase in home reading with her students. Another participant spoke to me about a different strategy, *Reading Club,* which her school had introduced to encourage independent, particularly home reading.

> *Reading Club basically is if children don't read at home they have to read at school, and it's actually very good. Our school culture is very much we read every night, the more we read the more we know. So the kids who don't read at home will still read every day here and have to go to Reading Club. Sam [the principal] is doing a big push on independent reading and reading stamina*. (Grace)

During our discussion the participant, Grace, explained that "*If the parents haven't signed [their reading diary] they go to Reading Club*". The school was committed to ensuring that all their students read regularly, if they did not read at home, a time and space for additional reading was provided at school. Grace acknowledged that for some families reading at home can be challenging. She explained that reading club makes sure "*they don't miss out …. So even if they [the parents] won't do it, the kids will still read every day. It just will be with us*". A designated staff member listens to children read and supports and supervises students when they attend *Reading Club*.

Grace spoke positively about *Reading Club* and related the benefits it provides to the school's commitment to supporting the achievement of all students by ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to enhance their reading skills, particularly their reading stamina through regular and sustained reading. Grace's school was one of the locations that I visited that were implementing strategies outlined by Boushey and Moser in *The Daily 5* (2014) and *CAFE* (2009). Boushey and Moser stress "the power of practice" (2014, p. 31) and cite a study by Anderson Wilson and Fielding (1988) that involved a group of fifth-grade students (Anderson et al., 1988; Boushey & Moser, 2014). Based on their findings, Anderson, Wilson and Fielding (1988) advocate that time spent reading books increases vocabulary knowledge, and that it is an accurate predictor of reading achievement. Boushey and Moser refer to this study to encourage teachers to provide students with extended reading time by keeping focus lessons and teacher talk brief (Boushey and Moser, 2014) and emphasise the importance of providing students with opportunities to read (Boushey & Moser, 2014). Grace's school responded by implementing *Reading Club* to ensure that all students had an opportunity to engage and reap the benefits of additional reading either at home or at school.

The school's commitment to supporting students and overcoming one of the disadvantages of a lack of home support is certainly admirable, but it is important to also ensure that an initiative such as *Reading Club* is also viewed from the perspective of the student. During our conversation Grace emphasised that *Reading Club* was not a punishment and described it as an incentive. She explained:

> *So, its half of recess time that they have to go for so, and it's also I guess because they are missing recess time that there's the incentive to read at home*. (Grace)

If students did not wish to attend *Reading Club* they needed to read at home and have their diary signed by their parents or guardian. Unfortunately, the distinction between a negative incentive such as a requirement to attend *Reading Club*, and a punishment is blurred. The loss of recess, a consequence for not having read or having a diary signed, would frequently be viewed by students as a punishment, even if that is not the school's intention. There are numerous reasons *why* a student may not be reading at home, for example, it may be due to lack of interest, lack of skill or the nuances of their home situation. Teachers need to respond to these individual circumstances rather than through a generic approach that applies to everyone in the school. Grace explained that "*there are kids who go to Reading Club every single day*". It would therefore appear that for some students the incentive that *Reading Club*

is meant to provide is not always effective, as it is not encouraging *all* students to read at home.

While the students who attend *Reading Club* get the benefit of maintaining regular reading habits and support from an adult, the insistence that they give up part of their morning break risks alienating them and creating negative attitudes towards books and reading, or drawing attention to difficulties they may be encountering at home. Consideration also needs be given to the importance of students interacting and playing in the school yard. As MacArthur, Higgins and Quinlivan (2012) explain, social interactions such as those that occur during recess "offer a means for relaxation, fun and enjoyment; and provide opportunities for children and young people to voice frustrations, to self-disclose and to have new experiences" (2012, p. 241) *Reading Club* may, in the short term, support the development of literacy skills, but excluding students from recess, especially on a regular basis, may be at the expense of their verbal and social skills, and risks creating resentment and ill-feeling towards the program, towards books and towards reading. Grace's school's attempt to remove the barrier that is created through lack of home reading support, is effectively excluding some students from play and social interactions, it could be marginalising and stigmatising some students, and risks creating an attitudinal barrier that could be have ongoing implications on student learning.

By comparison, the provision of an *option*al *Reading Club* that is promoted positively, and is conducted in an inviting space where students can interact and select from a range of stimulating texts types, has greater potential to provide an incentive to read and encourage reading for pleasure. Providing *all* students with opportunities for shared, guided and individual reading, supported by enthusiastic staff members or volunteers who are willing to read *with* and *to* individuals and groups, is more likely to create a scenario where students can experience success and encourage them to view reading as an enjoyable activity, not a chore to be endured. If students are not regularly engaging in home reading, it is important that teachers learn about, reflect on and respond to the *differing* reasons.

Encouraging and engaging young writers

Each of the participants in the study ran daily timetabled literacy sessions. While many of their reading programs were strongly influenced by the approaches and strategies outlined by Boushey and Moser (2009) that I discussed earlier in this chapter, at varying times all of the participants also drew on other methods to support their students' literacy, particularly their writing development.

I twice visited one of the participants, Anna's classroom when her class was involved in a creative writing session, or what she and her students called 'rocket writing'. The following vignette and discussion outlines my observations of the approach this teacher was using.

Classical Music, Dim Lights and Writing Stamina (developed from notes in research journal)

On one of my visits to Anna's classroom I entered her room partway through a writing session to hear soft sounds of classical music playing. The room was otherwise very quiet as the students and Anna spoke only in hushed whispers. The classroom lights were dimmed and the on interactive whiteboard a clip of a candle flame flickering was playing.

All Anna's students were sitting in groups at their tables and were writing independently. Anna and a teacher aide roamed the classroom, quietly encouraging and supporting students. I heard them make comments such as "*just have a try, okay*" and "*say the word and just have a try".* On the students' tables were boxes with word lists (the 100 most used words) and 'have-a-go' cards (the instruction was; try three times) to support the students use of strategies. Fifteen minutes later the music stopped, and Anna congratulated the students on their writing stamina and told them "now *we are going to do our editing".*

By the time I entered the room Anna had already completed the lead in and explained the writing task to her students. But the previous week I had observed her beginning a similar lesson by stimulating the students to think about a topic. In that case it had been "*think of five things about a skinny, tall kangaroo that never smiles".* The topic prompt was followed by oral discussions between students and then a request from Anna, "*write as much as you can about a skinny, tall or short, fat kangaroo that never smiles*". She explained that the students could change things if they wanted. When a student sought confirmation and asked, "*Do we have to do, never smile*s?" Anna responded by repeating, *"You can change anything. This is just an idea",* making it clear that the students had the freedom to adapt and change the topic if they wanted. She sought to stimulate their thinking but not dominate. She reminded the students of the learning intention she had discussed earlier *"we are writing a narrative, a made up story",* and I observed as all the children eagerly got out their books and commenced writing.

On this occasion Anna tried to set up some classical music to play in the background (she later explained to me that it created a calming and stimulating environment), but due to technical difficulties on this particular day it did not work. The children had been keen to hear the music,

but accepted that Anna was not able to access it, and worked quietly and independently on the writing task. The writing samples that I observed differed in length but Anna's focus was not on the word count, instead she emphasised the importance of students expressing their ideas, being willing to 'have-a-go' at unknown words and persevering, trying to staying on task for an extended period of time.

When the students were writing, Anna moved around the room, monitoring, talking to and sometimes sitting with students. I watched as she approached one student and asked them to read their writing to her. Afterwards, the young boy began illustrating his sentence while others in the class kept writing. Anna quietly negotiated and adapted the task requirements to allow the boy to complete the activity according to his skill level and concentration span. The modifications encouraged the student to remain engaged throughout the session and as the boy eagerly showed Anna his work, it was clear that he was personally pleased with his achievements. I also observed another student dictating a sentence for Anna to write, this student then copied it into his book. Anna had noticed that the child was becoming frustrated by wanting to write a sentence that was more complex than his current writing and word attack skills allowed. By dictating the sentence to Anna as the scribe, the student was able to draw on his prior knowledge and oral language skills to express his ideas. After Anna's intervention, and no longer frustrated, the child resumed writing independently. Anna had urged her students to 'have-a-go' and write for themselves, yet she continually monitored her students as they wrote, and recognised and intervened when this task became problematic or was beyond a student's ability. During the writing session, Anna's monitoring of students, and her willingness to adapt tasks for individuals, assisted her in the identification and removal of the learning barriers that two of her students were encountering.

Learning Intentions and Explicit Instruction

During writing sessions Anna set and discussed the learning intentions with her students. She explained the tasks clearly and encouraged her student to articulate and share their ideas. Everyone in the class participated in these sessions, but Anna modified and adjusted her expectations according to differing needs and abilities. By making these modifications, Anna was able to ensure that all the students were able to contribute, stay on task, and successfully complete the learning activity (refer to Table 3.3, section, ii).

When visiting other participants during writing sessions I observed them implementing similar strategies. For example, I also observed Jane presenting a lesson and providing explicit

instruction[23] to her students on narrative writing. She sought to further develop their abilities and understanding of content and structure by discussing 'sizzling starters', sentences that engage the reader and add interest to the story. Like Anna, Jane provided an example, a prompt, but then encouraged the students to discuss and share their ideas. In other classrooms I observed as the teacher participants provided students with opportunities to express their ideas orally and to discuss and seek support from their peers, not only prior to commencing writing, also as part of the writing process. During these lessons the teacher participants implemented a range of instructional strategies. These include: relating the writing tasks to their students' experiences and interests; providing explicit instruction to groups and individuals on the use of strategies particularly self corrections and spelling; emphasising the need to take risks and 'have-a-go'; and encouraging students to focus on *their* best, rather than compare them to others. Explicit instruction was provided on the mechanics of writing but each of the participants sought primarily to develop their students' ability to express and convey their ideas through print. The skills and strategy use of students in each of the classrooms differed, as did the teachers' modified expectations for individuals, but the primary goal, the learning intention, was consistent and designed to be achievable for *all* their students (refer to Table 3.3, sections i & ii).

Approaches to Teaching Mathematics

While there was variation in the way the participants interacted with their students and implemented the curriculum, I observed numerous commonalities in the approaches, strategies and content surrounding literacy instruction in the participant teachers' classrooms. Many of the sessions were student focused, and they provided opportunities for individualised interpretations, choice and self-expression. Teachers provided explicit instruction by modeling, discussing and guiding the use of strategies with individuals and groups. A combination of collaborative and independent tasks was commonplace, and students willingly supported one another during activities such as buddy reading and peer editing.

Mathematics sessions, by comparison, were more structured and less student focused. Unlike literacy and inquiry-learning where the teacher participants spoke to me about specific approaches that they were implementing, or discussed training and knowledge they have of the approach being used, the mathematics lessons that I observed related more directly to the

[23] Explicit Instruction: "teacher-centred instruction that is focused on clear behaviour and cognitive goals" (Luke, 2014, p. 1) that are clearly conveyed to learners.

required curriculum (ACARA, 2017) for the grade level or age of the students. While seven of the participants did provide some opportunities for interaction and group work during mathematics sessions, many of the lessons I observed involved greater teacher direction, were more outcome driven and less flexible than the literacy lessons they offered. The mathematics lessons that I observed often involved students being required to solve a set number of mathematical problems from a worksheet or the class whiteboard.

During my visits to the participants' classrooms, I frequently observed them providing explicit instruction to both the whole class and small groups. Each of the teachers introduced their mathematics lessons by explaining and discussing a targeted mathematical concept with the class, and set class tasks were also explained to the group. After the whole class introduction the teachers frequently worked with specific groups but sometimes individuals, they spent time reinforcing the relevant mathematics strategies or explaining more clearly the task requirements. In contrast to the participants' literacy sessions that were based on new student-centred approaches, such as *CAFE* (Boushey & Moser, 2009), *The Daily 5* (Boushey & Moser, 2014) and *Big Write* (Andrell Education, 2018), the mathematics lessons, although designed by the teachers, focused more directly on sequentially delivering the required curriculum in accordance with their students' grade levels.

Developing metacognition

On a few of my visits to the participants' classrooms, I observed teachers implementing mathematics lessons that differentiated instruction and encouraged metacognition to support the participation, learning and engagement of all students (refer to Table 3.3, sections i, & iv)). The following vignette provides details of a lesson I observed in Jane's classroom. During the session, Jane promotes, models and teachers her students a range of supportive mathematics strategies. Unlike some of the more traditional outcome driven mathematics lessons that I observed in other classes, Jane consistently emphasises the need for her students to understand 'process' and to be able to select and utilise relevant strategies.

Solving Mathematics Problems in Jane's Classroom (developed from notes in research journal)

Jane was seated on a small couch surrounded by her students. Two children also sat on the couch, others sat close by on the floor and three

children sat on chairs nearby. She had with her four A3 sheets of paper; each contained a series of mathematics questions. Jane read and discussed a few of the mathematics problems with the students. She prompted them to consider, what each question was asking and what the students needed to do to be able to solve each problem. Nearby on a whiteboard was a list of strategies that she drew their attention to:

Search: Read the problem. Think about what it's asking. Underline the question part of the problem.
Sort: What information is important? Highlight the key words.
See: Draw and visualise. Use concrete materials such as counters or MAB blocks. Use a table or graph to record your results.
Select: What actions are necessary to solve this problem?
Solve: Use your number facts to work out the answer.
Sense: Does it make sense? Does it look right?

Jane encouraged her students to consider and discuss which strategy would be the most helpful and best support them in answering a specific question. She also urged them to talk about and share the strategies they most frequently use, or those they personally find supportive.

Just before the splitting the class into groups Jane asked a student what the time was. When the student responded "*15 minutes past twelve"*, Jane smiled, nodded and then asked, "*what's another way you can say that?*" Jane not only sought to reinforce her students' knowledge of time, but also help them to understand that with some mathematical problems, there may be more than one way of conveying the answer.

The mathematics lesson that Jane conducted, focused on developing problem solving skills and enhancing her students understanding of supportive strategies. The students had access to a range of concrete materials and some students used counters and drawings to support them. When the students worked in their groups they discussed, shared and modelled their knowledge and understanding of varying strategies with each other. The task Jane set required her students to collaborate, to not only answer questions and solve problems, but to also consider how they know the answer. Jane roamed the room spending time with differing groups and individuals, she asked questions and made comments such as "which *strategy did*

you use?" or *"*it's *important to read all the information"* and "*always look for a key*". Jane continually encouraged her students to stay on task, to discuss and share their understandings of the processes they were using and to justify and explain their choice of strategies.

While each of Jane's mathematics groups were provided with a list of predetermined problems, the students chose which ones they would answer. As a result, there were differences in the questions that each group answered and the processes that they followed to solve each problem. At the end of the session Jane brought the class back together. Two students were asked to be 'presenters'. They sat with her on the couch, facing the rest of the students, and shared some of their questions, explained the strategies they had chosen and provided details about how they solved the problem. The session was interactive and student directed.

Throughout the session Jane provided her students with opportunities to explore, share and collaborate to solve mathematical problems. Rather than just present one way of working, she sought to develop their awareness of and ability to select and utilise a range of strategies. She focused on developing her students' understanding of relevant processes and problem solving skills rather just seek answers. The students in Jane's class had diverse mathematics skills, but through the provision of modelled and shared teaching and collaborative group work, Jane provided opportunities for students to contribute and learn from one another (refer to Table 3.3, sections ii, iv & v), as they explored and developed understanding of a range of mathematical strategies.

When visiting another classroom, I observed the participating teacher, Kate, engaging her students in a mathematics lessons that also emphasised and developed awareness of process rather than just outcome. During the lesson Kate provided choices, differentiated the curriculum to cater for learner diversity, and encouraged peer tutoring and student interactions. The following vignette draws on notes from my research journal and provides an account of Kate's lesson on fractions. It offers insights into the emphasis she placed on developing her students understanding of mathematical processes.

Teaching Fractions (developed from notes in research journal).

Kate used a combination of whole group, small group and individualised instruction to develop understanding of fractions. She prompted student thinking by asking questions such as "*Okay, what have I got here?*" and "*What do I need to do* first?" The students sat close by her on the floor while she modelled each of the steps needed to complete a set fraction problem. Kate constantly drew on varying students' knowledge and language, engaging them and involving them in the process. She presented her students with options as to which of the problems on the large classroom whiteboard they would solve and where they would work. The students were able to choose between working independently, with her in a teacher group, or with a peer supported group.

During the lesson Kate referred to two students with strong skills and knowledge of fractions algorithms, as 'the class experts', and other students had the option of seeking advice and guidance about the process from them. During the session Kate's students moved between varying groups, those that worked with the teacher sometimes moved off once confident to work alone. Students also moved freely from and to the group with the 'class experts'.

At the end of the session Kate brought her students back together as a class group. She sought feedback from the students and encouraged self-reflection by asking "*What did you learn today?*" The students' responses related to their understanding of process, of the steps they took to solve the varying problems.

The students in this class had differing levels of knowledge about fractions, but Kate facilitated a discussion that encouraged them to clarify and share their understandings with one another (refer to Table 3.3, section v). During the session some students completed a number of complex fractions problems, others had worked on more basic operations, but the shared focus of the lessons had been identifying the steps and process needed to complete their chosen algorithms, and this was relevant and made achievable for everyone in the class.

When observing Jane and Kate teaching mathematics, and later when we discussed their lessons, they conveyed their interest and confidence in this area. While they, like the other participants had a strong focus on meeting the curriculum requirements, their main emphasis was on teaching processes and strategies. Both these teachers catered for and supported

variation in abilities through different combinations of individual and group work, teacher led instruction and student collaboration, including peer teaching (refer to Table 3.3, sections i, iv & v). While the basic tasks or focus area that Kate and Jane presented to their students were the same for everyone, the students were able to make choices in regard to who they worked with, the complexity of tasks and the use of supportive resources.

Engaging Students in Learning by Embracing Digital Technologies

The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was commonplace in each of the participants' classrooms. There was however, wide variation in not only the way that the participants and the students used varying digital devices but also the extent that they were employed. Interactive whiteboards were present in four of the participants' classrooms, but they were only used spasmodically during my visits. I did observe one participant, Matt, use his whiteboard to engage the class in a shared reading session. Matt was using an electronic book from a commercial reading scheme. The book was projected onto the whiteboard, and as the narrator read the text, relevant words were highlighted. Once the story had been read, Matt accessed a link from the website which displayed related comprehension questions. Matt encouraged his students to share and discuss their responses to a range of literal and inferred questions. Then, together they played an online interactive game, that called upon and developed knowledge relating to words and letter patterns that were prevalent in the electronic book.

During the story reading the students' remained quiet with their eyes focused on the screen, and they appeared to find the illustrations, narration and interactive elements engaging. The volume was loud enough to ensure that all students could hear clearly, and by sitting close to the elevated screen, the words, especially those that were highlighted as the narrator read, were clearly visible. The comprehension responses involved a range of choices, and the teacher drew the students into a conversation about each question before inviting various students to come and click on their chosen response. Any student who had been unsure of an answer had an opportunity to listen to the ideas of others before selecting a response.

Even though this activity was conducted with a large group the students remained engaged throughout the session. The strong visual and auditory supports and the variations between narrated reading, comprehension and the word game kept the students motivated and interested. Students with differing abilities listened to, enjoyed and responded to the story. The subsequent discussion, questions and games allowed students to interact and share their

knowledge and ideas with each other. The electronic book provided an engaging alternative to the large format books that are more commonly used during shared reading sessions.

Accessing ICT devices

Laptop computers were used by students in each of the classrooms I visited. I observed teachers providing opportunities for students to research areas of interest or use a word processor to record their writing and complete projects. However, much more commonly used, and the device the students most commonly sought, were small digital devices such as iPads. These devices were frequently used during literacy sessions, when students individually or in groups accessed applications that linked to electronic books, word games and story writing software. They were occasionally used during mathematics sessions. Again, individuals or groups would access varying 'apps' and games, these related to developing number skills, problem solving and spatial relations. Unlike literacy sessions where the use of a device was often integrated into the session, in mathematics I observed devices more often being used as a supplement. Students were directed to them once they had completed the set group or class task.

While most of the participants' classes had classroom sets of iPads or iPods, Debbie's upper school class, had one device per student. The school had in place a payment scheme to support and encourage families to purchase an iPad loaded with educational software, for their child. As a result, the majority of the students had their own device for use at school and home. Children that did not own a device were not marginalised, as they were able to access one of the school's devices throughout the day.

When I spoke with Debbie about her students' use of iPads, she outlined what she considers to be some of the advantages and disadvantages of the devices. In the following extracts from one of my conversations with Debbie, she explains:

> *I think it is very handy for them to be able to find information straight away, immediately. They are doing a lot of experimentation with different apps and learning how to work different apps*. (Debbie)
>
> *We encourage them to make movies and planners. We had some ripper trailers last term on cyber bullying which was just wonderful. They were really, really good*. (Debbie)
>
> There are limitations to the iPad. We've found it very difficult to connect to our printers, to be able to print things out .... Also, the distraction quality is just, you know children that are into gadgets and it's there on the table. Ooh, something shiny, they just can't

> get off it. There are a lot of characters that have really obsessive personalities that find that really difficult. (Debbie)

Using and creating multimodal texts

Although Debbie used iPads extensively to support learning in her classroom, she also stressed the importance of not just relying on technology, that it was just another tool and explained, "*I think they [students] need to source things in a variety of different ways*". Debbie's students read electronic texts at school and home, they used web browsers to access information for projects, they made movies, created stories and played mathematics and literacy games on their iPads, but Debbie still ensured that their classroom contained a range of stimulating novels and nonfiction texts, that some tasks involved a degree of handwriting and that even when the students were using devices there were opportunities for interaction and conversations.

ICT, in the form of varying combinations of laptop computers, interactive whiteboards, iPads and IPods were frequently used to engage and support learning during inquiry-learning sessions. Students used applications to access literacy, mathematics and problem solving games but also created small movies and took photographs. These photographs provided a record of what the students had done during the session. This was sometimes a picture of a student engaged in an activity, but also included photographs of varying 'creations', especially those made of materials such as playdough[24] that were fragile or needed to be packed away. As well as providing a prompt for subsequent discussion and writing, the photographs were a memento for the students. It was something they could keep, paste into a book, take home, and share with others, encouraging them to recognise and value their efforts during the session.

Providing ICT options

During my discussions with Debbie she expressed concern that some students become obsessed with technology and explained that she needs to take care to avoid devices becoming a distraction. Often, and particularly in the junior classes, I observed teachers monitoring the use of devices, and ensuring that relevant applications were being used. Some students certainly gravitated to the devices and as a result their teachers limited their use. Matt for example, provided ICT as one of his options during inquiry-learning, but students were limited to one session per week. In a couple of classrooms, I observed participants using electronic devices to assist in calming and settling students. By using a device with headphones, students were able to block out noise and distractions in the room. Music, visual stimulation, or an

[24] Playdough: A flour and salt based modelling compound.

opportunity to engage in a game or area of interest helped to relax and refocus some students. ICT was also used as a learning support or alternative form of expression for students who found spelling and writing challenging (refer to Table 3.3, section ii).

As Debbie explained, a preoccupation with ICT and the distraction that it can present can create a barrier for participation for some students. However, during my visits to the participants' classrooms I observed many instances where ICT seemed to engage student in learning, motivated them to complete tasks, provided a valuable and extensive source for obtaining information, provided opportunities to practice and refine skills and was used to relax and calm students. Unlike when they used laptops, where the students tended to work independently and in isolation from others when using them, iPad use was frequently social. I often observed students willingly sharing a device, talking and problem solving together, developing social as well as academic skills.

Promoting Physical Activity: Active and Engaged

Seven of the eight participants worked in schools where physical education was conducted by a specialist teacher. As a result, most of the participant teachers had little input or involvement in their students' physical education program. One participant, Matt, however, had a strong interest and training in this area. Matt's skills and knowledge were recognised and valued by the school leadership team, so in conjunction with his role as classroom teacher Matt was also involved in organising and teaching physical education. During one of my visits, I observed Matt working with another teacher to conduct a session with two junior school grades, a combined group of 35 children from three differing grade levels, Foundation, Grade One and Grade Two. The session was fast paced with lots of short active games. Although many of the games involved teams and partners, they focused on participation and active engagement rather than competitive scores and winning teams.

During the various games Matt allotted each of the students a number to determine which team they were in, and the students wore coloured bands to allow them to identify fellow or opposing team members. This was a routine that had previously been established by Matt and his colleague, and the students readily accepted their grouping without jostling to try and be with particular friends or seeking out students with strong skill levels. Each new game involved the formation of new teams, providing opportunities for the children to collaborate and cooperate with different combinations of classmates.

The following vignette relates to my observations of one of the games, Key Tag, that involved students of varying ages and abilities. Despite differing fitness and skill levels, all the students were able to successfully participate. Students of differing ages and abilities worked cooperatively, discussing, planning and implementing tactics and encouraging one another (refer to Table 3.3, sections i, ii, iii, v). The focus of the game was on active participation and enjoyment rather than winning.

Key Tag (developed from notes in research journal).

The two classes and their teachers were working on the school oval, a grassy area with plenty of room for children to run about. A cluster of water bottles belonging to the students was situated at one end of the oval, and the children were encouraged to relax a get a drink between games.

When the teachers required the students' attention to explain an activity or new game, they asked the students to sit on the concrete cricket pitch in the centre of the oval. This ensured that the students were grouped in one area and that the teachers could be seen and heard by everyone. Once the teachers explained that the next game would be the Key Game, numerous students squealed with excitement. This was obviously a game many of the students had played before, but one of the teachers still provided a short explanation, which included input from one of the younger students, to ensure that everyone understood how the game was played.

The students were then divided into two multi-age teams that gathered at opposite ends of the school oval. A teacher went with one of the teams, and as the students huddled around him, he quietly handed one student 'the key'. The aim of the game was for the student with the key to reach the opposite end of the oval, the home base, without being tagged. At the other end of the oval, the opposing side was unable to see who had the key but gathered together to discuss tactics. Nobody in the opposing team knew who had the key, so the team with the key would endeavour to provide decoys and distractions to allow the student with the key to reach 'home'.

When the teacher blew his whistle, the students from the 'key team' set off across the oval. Some students ran really fast and were pursued by numerous students from the opposing team, as they dodged and weaved across the oval. Other students ran in groups, some jogging or walking until an opponent came close to them, then they would speed up. This was the tactic for the student with the key, one of the younger students in the game. Moving with a group of students from their team, they were

less noticeable and managed to get close to the other side before being tagged. Once the student was tagged, one of the teachers blew a whistle to indicate the game had ended and the teams returned to their original positions at each end of the oval. The key was handed to a member of the other team and another game began.

The transition from pursued to purser occurred swiftly and students happily changed roles and negotiated and implemented new tactics with their team. Both games of Key Tag were fast paced and lasted only a few minutes before a new activity was introduced. Throughout the session children were constantly laughing, smiling and encouraging one another.

After the lesson I spoke at length with Matt about the activities, student participation and the *Bluearth Approach* (Bluearth Foundation, 2017) that the session and the school physical education program is based upon. Matt explained:

> *It doesn't really matter what your skill set is in this game [Key Tag] you can still participate. You can still have maximum participation so it's really good*. (Matt)
>
> *Our games, as I said, they are not based on ability level. For example, if you were to play a game that involved hitting or kicking a ball or something like that then generally the kids who have those really good skills in that area will dominate the games. In the games we play you don't have to be a fast runner, it doesn't matter if you are a slow runner, and it doesn't matter if you don't have great skills in evasion and those types of things. Everyone has the feeling of participation because there is no real dominant skill set in these game*s. (Matt)
>
> *It's a great culture to have when it's not all just about winning, and that's the basis of the Bluearth philosophy as well, it's maximum participation with not much out time*. (Matt)
>
> *The kids really look forward to it every time*. (Matt)

The Bluearth philosophy

The *Bluearth Program* that Matt implements is based on a philosophy that promotes the use of a psycho-social approach, advocating that "research consistently shows that lifelong choices to participate in health-promoting physical activities are dependent upon perceptions of competence, enjoyment, and satisfaction in physical experiences" (Bluearth Foundation, n.d.,

p. 7). The Bluearth Foundation warns that “a basic principle is that people wish to gain success and to avoid failure” (Bluearth Foundation, n.d., p. 22), and that this is reinforced by our society’s tendency to honour high achievers (in sport and school) while dismissing the efforts of those that are less accomplished. Unfortunately, this tendency frequently acts to discourage participation from those that are less able (Bluearth Foundation, n.d., 2017) and leads to situations that cater for some but not all students.

The *Bluearth Approach* emphasises the need for students “to feel they are capable of being involved in a meaningful way” (Bluearth Foundation, n.d., p. 22), and for expectations to be based on individual experience and personal achievement to ensure that “everyone can achieve, and perceived competence can be widespread” (Bluearth Foundation, n.d., p. 22). The activities they promote are centred around the provision of physical activities that motivate and encourage active lifestyles. They are designed to further enhance not only physical competencies but also social skills and cater for a spectrum of abilities (Bluearth Foundation, n.d., 2017).

Having fun

Matt values the benefits that an active lifestyle provides and was supportive of the expressed purpose of *Bluearth,* “of improving health and preventing diseases of sedentary living through an approach that develop and integrates body, mind and spirit through participation in physical activity” (Bluearth Foundation, n.d., p. 4). His own experiences had been those of a high achiever in varying competitive sports and he still engaged in an active lifestyle. Despite his own success, he did however recognise that games that focus on winning and selective skill sets can disengage and exclude some students, and discussed ways that the *Bluearth Approach* motivated, engaged and provided opportunities for the active participation of all students. He explains:

> *The activities are fantastic and that’s why the kids like them, because they are so multi-dimensional there’s some of the game have stories that go with them and characters and you become the character or where it’s set*. (Matt)

> *There is an element of out, but there is always a way to come back into the game. So you do teach those skills of being able to cope with, “oh I’m out”, but there is also the ability to come back into the game. So you are never out for too long. You know, ten or fifteen seconds you might be out, and then you are back in.* (Matt)

> *That also transfers into what they play at playtime and lunchtimes. Lots of the kids*

> *are out playing chasey games. They look after each other as well, so they don't try and bash and crash into each other*. (Matt)
>
> *The Prep*[25] *to Two [the combination of three grade levels] is a very inclusive game style program, building on skills as the year goes along ... but in Grades Three to Six, sessions are broken down into movement and challenge games, then strength and flexibility activities, where you teach the kids about core strength, and those types of things. So, you are teaching them more about a healthy lifestyle, instead of just doing game-based activities.* (Matt)

The lessons that I observed Matt and his colleague conduct provided their large and diverse group of students with opportunities to: successfully participate in all activities; develop fitness and gross motor skills that are relevant to their current abilities; interact socially; and engage in and *enjoy* physical activity. In keeping with the *Bluearth* philosophy, Matt and his co-teacher

endeavoured to make the session accessible and fun for all the students, not just those with strong sporting prowess (Bluearth Foundation, n.d., 2017). The students' active participation, laughter, smiles and eagerness to play each of the games that I observed, indicate that they enjoyed the experiences and interactions that the session presented.

Like the *Australian Developmental Curriculum* (Walker, 2011) that I discussed earlier in this chapter, *Bluearth* promotes the importance of providing meaningful experiences, supporting the holistic development of individuals and contributing to pathways that promote the participation of *all* students (Bluearth Foundation, n.d.). The Bluearth Foundation advocates the need to provide relevant teaching to support, encourage, enable and challenge the physical development of students. It strongly encourages teachers to "promote an environment of acceptance and inclusion" (Bluearth Foundation, n.d., p. 34). The *Bluearth* lesson that I observed Matt and his colleague conducting, demonstrated their commitment and efforts to achieving these outcomes.

Conclusion

In this chapter I outlined the varying approaches, programs and strategies that the participant teachers, and often their schools, adopted in their endeavours to enhance the learning experiences of *all* students. The discussions and vignettes in the chapter focused on what the

[25] Prep is a term that some of the participant used when referring to students in the Foundation Grade, to students in their first year of compulsory schooling.

teachers involved in the study *do*. I drew on the data, my interview transcriptions and notes in my research journal to outline some of the teaching programs and approaches such as inquiry-learning, *CAFE (*Boushey and Moser, 2009*)* and *Bluearth (*Bluearth Foundation, 2017*)* that the research participants were implementing. I also discussed the inclusive philosophies that underpin these approaches and how they have impacted positively on the teachers' attitudes, understandings and capacity to cater for learning diversity. While I did draw on the research data to provide some preliminarily information that related to factors such as teacher collaboration, teacher professional learning and the decisions of the school leadership team, that have impacted on or influenced the participants' pedagogical choices, these are areas that I investigate in greater depth in a later chapter, Chapter Seven.

In the next chapter, Chapter Six, I move the focus from delivery of the curriculum, to the classroom management strategies that support the development of an inclusive classroom culture. I extend on the discussions in Chapter Four that relate to the participants' beliefs, attitudes and actions in regard to valuing and nurturing student diversity, and investigate and further discuss approaches to classroom management, the *strategies* the participants use to create an inclusive classroom culture. The discussions in Chapter Six relate to ways that teacher influences, attitudes and practices can impact on the learning environment.

Chapter Six: Getting Along Together; Developing a Learning Community

In Chapter Four I probed into the methods the teacher participants used to develop and nurture trusting relationships with their students, and how they utilised their background knowledge of students to allow them to more effectively understand and respond to varying needs. I discussed how the use of proactive classroom management strategies which focus on mutual respect rather than domination, and valuing and providing opportunities for the development of social skills, particularly cooperative and collaborative interactions, enhanced the development of strong teacher student relationships. Then, in Chapter Five I discussed the strategies and approaches used by the research participants when implementing the curriculum. I explored the variation and similarities in their teaching practices, and ways that the participants endeavoured to cater for diversity amongst their class cohorts. I also inquired into the inclusive philosophies that underpin the collaborative student-centred approaches that I observed being implemented and drew on the data to provide examples of how targeted teacher professional learning impacted positively on the teachers' pedagogical choices.

In this chapter, Chapter Six, I revisit, elaborate on and interrogate the approaches and strategies that the participants' implement in regard to classroom and behaviour management, areas that I discussed in Chapter Four. I once again draw on the data generated in this study to provide evidence of the teacher participants' endeavours to establish supportive learning communities, learning environments that nurture and value all students. Unlike Chapter Four, where I primarily reported on the collaborative practices and approaches that the teachers involved in the study implement, the discussions in this chapter probe into the supports, challenges and influences that the teachers encounter in their everyday practice, and how these impact on their capacity to create an inclusive classroom culture.

Respond Rather Than React

When I discussed, with each of the research participants, the strategies that they use to support behaviour management in their classrooms, they initially recounted details that relate to their endeavours to create positive and supportive classroom environments, particularly the implementation and benefits of social skills programs. Gradually, and as each of the participants became more at ease during our conversations, they also shared with me information relating to

their previous and current classroom experiences. These more personal teacher reflections provide valuable insights into the factors that have supported and influenced the participants' adoption of classroom management approaches.

A number of the participants spoke freely about challenging behaviours by students that teachers encounter, and the importance of being able to identify and respond to the reasons behind the behaviour. When I asked one of the participants, Matt, if he had any behaviour management tips that he would offer graduate teachers, he stressed the importance of teachers not viewing challenging behaviours as a personal affront. Matt emphasised the need to reflect on the contributing factors behind the behaviour, especially any specific difficulties, academic, physical or personal, that students may be dealing with, and the importance of a considered, rather than reactive, response. Matt explained:

> *The other thing is, it's very easy to do, and I've done it, is to get very angry, very angry and upset. I think you need to develop your own strategies of coping. If something goes wrong or something happens, to be able to think clearly through it and be really calm. For some of these kids, the way they survive is in a world of chaos, but if you can be stable, and you can show that, if you can keep a look on your face that is really calm, then there is no confrontation and it can be sorted out very quickly*. (Matt)

Matt's reflections are consistent with those of Hayes (2012) who stresses the importance of teachers developing strategies to allow them to maintain and model self-control, explaining that angry, explosive outbursts are likely to escalate rather than diffuse a problem or conflict. Like Matt, Hayes (2012) advocates that teachers need to avoid 'being rattled' by situations; they need to remain calm and ensure that their voice and facial expressions are used in ways that will assist them to reassure and settle students. My observations of Matt and the comments he made during our discussions, indicate that he was aware of the impact his actions can have on the classroom climate, in that they can create or remove barriers to student participation and learning.

The importance of teachers remaining calm, diffusing conflict and being proactive when dealing with challenging behaviours was also stressed by another participant, Jane. The following vignette is developed from one of my conversations with Jane that provides insights into her beliefs and actions in regard to understanding and responding to students.

Diffusing Conflict (developed from notes in research journal and interview transcripts)

Jane spoke with me about a situation I had observed in her classroom earlier that day where a student had refused to complete a task she had set. Rather than respond forcefully or angrily, Jane went and worked with the student and later spent time discussing the reason for the refusal with them. During our discussion Jane was keen to provide me with details about the approach she adopts when faced with student refusal or lack of compliance. She explained:

> *It's not asking them, "Can I help you?"' It's," I'll help you get started; this is what I will do for you". It's just different ways of phrasing your assistance to those children. So, they don't see it as if you're impeding their territory, if that makes sense*. (Jane)

> *So, you are not going to get a pen out, you are not going to get a book out .… I'll help you find your pen. Let's open up your tub; I'll find it for you.* (Jane)

> *It's not telling them to get their pens out because they are going to say "No!" It's, "Oh I'll give you a hand, let's get started. What can I help you with here?" So, it's all that sort of stuff*. (Jane)

Jane's comments aligned with my observations of her classroom practices. She endeavoured to respond rather than react to behavioural issues. She sought compliance from her students but aimed to provide relevant supports to ensure that her expectations were achievable.

On a later visit to Jane's classroom I observed her using a similar proactive approach to refocus a distracted student. The student was playing with a lanyard, swinging it around when they should have been listening to another student during 'share-time'. Rather than chastise the child and make a negative statement by saying 'don't', Jane quietly spoke to the student, saying "*put it around your neck*". This direct and clear instruction ensured that the student understood where the lanyard should be. The student then placed it around their neck and the distraction and the swinging stopped. The interaction between Jane and the student had been quiet, positive and effective. I later learnt that Jane's composed approach to behaviour management had been influenced by a publication for teachers, *Calmer classrooms*: A guide to

working with traumatised children (Downey, 2007). This teacher resource provides information relating to understanding traumatised children and developing relationship-based skills to help them. Jane spoke particularly highly of the *Calmer Classrooms* approach (Downey, 2007) explaining that it *"was sort of a turning point for me in turning the conversation around. It's just different ways of phrasing your assistance to those children".*

The publication that Jane referred to provides guidance and strategies to support teachers dealing with traumatised children. It identifies 11 key classroom practices (refer to Table 6.1).

Table 6.1. Classroom practices for dealing with traumatised children

Classroom practices for dealing with traumatised children
• Understand the child • Manage your own reactions • I see you need help with ... *(Help children to comply with requests)* • Structure and consistency • Time in, not timeout • Connect • Consequences, not punishment • Structure choices to remain in control *(and avoid power battles)* • Acknowledge good decisions and choices • Support parents and carers • Maintain your role *(These children need caring and competent teachers)*

(Source: Downey, 2007)

Teacher reflection, knowledge and understanding of students and the reasons behind their behaviour, and the development of positive teacher student relationships are central to the approach that is advocated in *Calmer Classrooms* (Downey, 2007).

Jane elaborated on how becoming familiar with the strategies promoted in *Calmer Classrooms* (Downey, 2007) has impacted positively on her beliefs, confidence and classroom practices when dealing with challenging behaviours. She discussed a situation that I had observed where she had dealt with oppositional behaviour when a child refused to engage in a class activity. Jane explained, "*What I try and do is have that conversation with the kids in a very calm tone and a way that I can support them".* When she outlined her response to the behavioural issue I had observed, she commented, "*so again it was a conversation, it's not me using authority over him*." Jane endeavoured to develop a cooperative and collaborative classroom

environment. Behavioural issues were discussed with students and they were provided with opportunities to not only disclose contributing factors and barriers they were confronting, but also to reflect on alternate actions that could be taken by both student and teacher.

Positive Behaviour Management Strategies

Other participants also discussed the importance of remaining and responding calmly to challenging situations and behaviours, the benefits of focusing on positive behaviours, and the benefits of affirmative language in the classroom. The following vignette draws on the data, a transcript of a conversation I had with Ellen about the behaviour management strategies that she uses in her classroom, and provide insights into Ellen's attitudes, beliefs and interactions with students in her class.

Keeping it Positive (developed from interview transcripts)

Ellen explained that she found all her students responded well to a positive approach, one that focused on 'good choices', but that this was especially so for one student who was particularly sensitive, explaining:

> *if I say the things he's done well he doesn't get upset, he doesn't get angry, he doesn't do that whole explosion where he thinks he's the worst in the world.* (Ellen)

During my discussions with Ellen, she elaborated on the approach she adopts to create a calm and supportive learning environment.

> *I'm trying to be positive about the things they are doing well so they'll keep doing those things. Well, instead of … like if they do something wrong you have to say it's not a good choice. I look at what they have done that is a good choice*. (Ellen)

> *I praise him for every good choice …. I try and keep it as positive as I can. I don't just growl at him. I think of, well what has he done that's good*. (Ellen)

Ellen recognised that her actions, or reactions, had the potential to escalate or diffuse a situation and sought to implement an approach that would calm students and encourage them to make 'good choices'.

Like Jane and Matt, Ellen was aware that her actions had the capacity to enhance or detract from her students' learning and participation (Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre, 2004; Spratt & Florian, 2015) and to reinforce or remove participatory barriers. Each of these teachers recognised the need to be assertive, rather than angry, and sought to develop and maintain quality relationships with their students (refer to Table 3.3, section vii). Jane, Matt and Ellen avoided the use of strategies that demonise and blame students and endeavoured to work and problem solve *with* their students (refer to Table 3.3, section vii).

When I spoke with Matt about classroom management, he talked freely about some of the challenges that he has confronted during his career, particularly those relating to students' behavioural issues. He explained that he has worked with a number of aggressive students, students on the autism spectrum and some ADD and ADHD children who were very active. The following vignette draws on the research data and interview transcripts to provide insights into one of the programs that influenced Matt's attitudes and pedagogical choices in regard to classroom management.

Matt and *Tribes* (developed from interview transcripts)

When I pressed Matt for information on what guided him in his approach to classroom management and the strategies that he uses, he provided information about his school's social skills program, *Tribes* (Gibbs, 2006). I learnt that *Tribes* focuses on cooperative learning and the implementation of classroom agreements and expectations based on mutual respect. Matt then explained how implementing this program impacted on his teaching.

> *I guess it made me more aware of how you can give the children strategies and ways to actually think about other people, people other than themselves …. With the agreements, they're not rules, 'you do not do' and those types of things. They are actually more guidelines and agreements where you work on them. You teach them what they are, and then you encourage the children to follow them*. (Matt)

> *The big one for them was to be able to have a mutual respect for each other. That they could say good things about their friends and*

not feel embarrassed. (Matt)

I learnt that early in Matt's teaching career, he and other staff from his school attended a series of training sessions where they learnt about the process and philosophy that *Tribes* is based upon. The *Tribes* process prioritises the nurturing of "social, emotional, physical and spiritual assets and wholeness of children" (Gibbs, 2006, p. 6) and provides direction and guidance for the development of positive, cooperative learning communities rather than "a myopic focus on narrowed down curriculum, high stakes testing" and a "one size fits all' approach" (Gibbs, 2006, p. x). Four community agreements underpin *Tribes* Learning Communities: "attentive listening, appreciations and no put downs, the right to pass/the right to participate and mutual respect" (Gibbs, 2006, p. 9). These agreements were displayed in Matt's classroom and I frequently heard him refer to them or remind students about a particular agreement. He discussed with me the impact that their implementation and adoption of the *Tribes* principles had within his classroom and school. Matt explained:

> *In my first, second and maybe even in my third year we had a lot of interesting and challenging kids within the school. This program gave them some sort of structure in the way they behaved in the classroom, and then outside. So, then when something did happen, we were able then to talk about showing mutual respect to that person. And if they didn't want to play, then they had the option to opt out, they didn't have to be involved*. (Matt)

> *Everybody does it, and that's right down from the principal down to further staff and those types of things. And we [the staff] also have the agreements. We have the agreements up in the staffroom and same sorts of things. We try and follow them*. (Matt)

> *It's just the underlying tone of, if someone's speaking then you need to listen and pay attention to them, and show that you are listening and being…, you know, respecting them because when it's your turn to share and talk that you listen, they listen to you*. (Matt)

In Chapters Four and Five, I drew upon notes in my research journal, and made reference to the strong sense of harmony and cooperation that was evident, not only in Matt's interactions with his students, but also between individuals and groups in his class. Mutual respect was an integral part of the culture of Matt's classroom (refer to Table 3.3, section vii). During our discussions and through my observations I learnt that the *Tribes* values, the agreements that Matt had on display in his classroom were not part of an occasional program, but were embedded in his and his students' everyday interactions. Adoption of the *Tribes* agreements, particularly mutual respect, was expected of and modelled by staff and students in Matt's classroom and school.

During my interviews with Matt I became aware of the influence the *Tribes* principles had on his classroom management strategies and was able to relate this to my observations of his classroom practices. Working and cooperating with his students, ensuring that everyone was able to participate in all activities, providing praise, encouragement and actively showing appreciation by thanking students, acknowledging their efforts, and modeling attentive listening and respectful interactions, developed the foundations for this cohesive classroom environment. Participating in *Tribes* training to develop his personal understanding, and then embracing the *Tribes* philosophy and principles, focusing on building relationships and valuing and including all students (Gibbs, 2006), assisted Matt in the development of a positive classroom culture, a safe, inclusive and caring learning environment.

Developing a cohesive learning community

While Matt was the only participant that spoke about and displayed in his classroom posters and prompts related to *Tribes*, when visiting three other research participants, Jane, Kate and Rob, I did see evidence of other social skills programs influencing their classroom practice. For example, Kate and Rob displayed in their classrooms a range of posters that related to the social skills program, *You Can Do It* (*YCDI)* (Bernard, 2001; Bernard et al., 1994; You Can Do It Education, 2018), which was promoted throughout their school (refer to Figure 6.1).

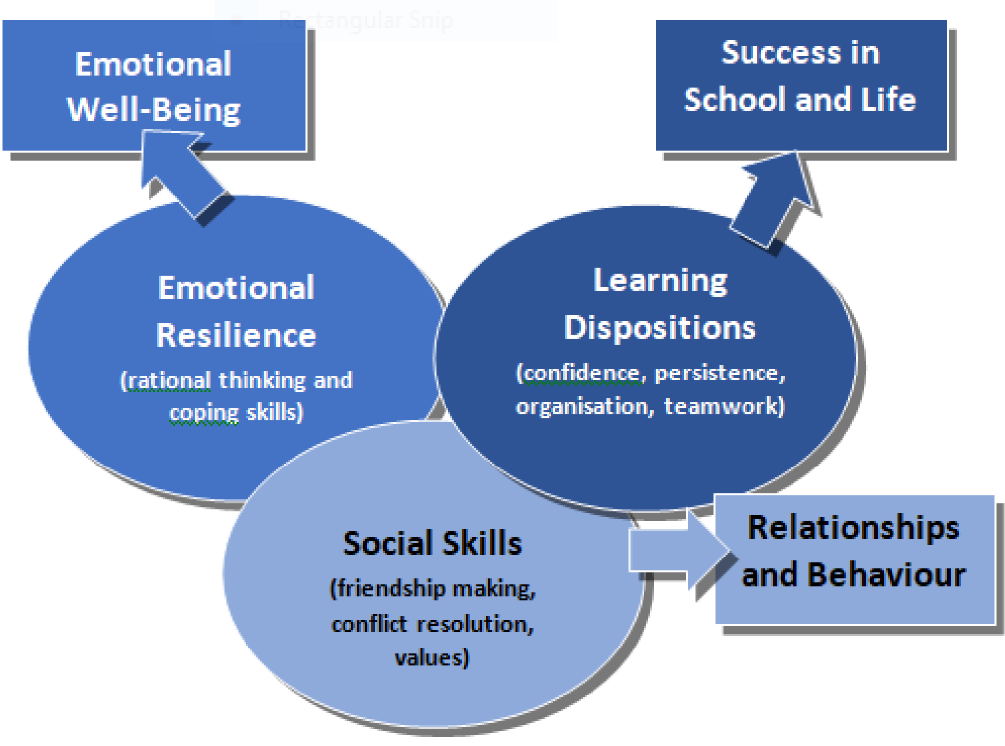

Figure 6.1: Social, Emotional and Learning Skills Taught in You Can Do It! Education

(Source: Bernard, 2018, p. 8)

The headings on the large posters, resilience, getting along, confidence, organisation and persistence that Kate and Rob had on display in their teaching areas, related to the five foundation areas in *YCDI* (Bernard et al.,1994; You Can Do It Education, 2018). Below the large posters were 12 smaller charts that the teachers referred to as 'habits of mind': being socially responsible, playing by the rules, thinking first, being tolerant of others, planning my time, setting goals, working tough, giving effort, I can do it, being independent, taking risks and accepting myself (Bernard, 2001; Bernard, 2018; Bernard et al., 1994).

The *YCDI* posters with their behavioural prompts were frequently referred to by Kate and Rob during their discussions with students. Both of these teachers also actively promoted the 'habits of mind' as desirable ways of operating in the classroom and verbally acknowledged students when they observed them exhibiting these behaviours. Affirmative language and cooperation were consistently modelled by both Kate and Rob and were sought from students. During one of my visits I observed Kate conducting a lesson that directly related to one of the *YCDI* areas, 'getting along'. The following vignette relates to that lesson.

Getting Along (developed from notes in research journal)

All the students were seated at their tables and Kate explained that they were going to explore one of their *You Can Do It* areas, getting along. Kate began by encouraging students to try to identify the actions and behaviours of people who are 'good' at getting along with others. What do they do? What does getting along involve?

While the students brainstormed and shared their ideas, Kate listed on a large whiteboard their varying responses, such as: they resolve conflict without fighting, control their temper, they listen to others, they give compliments, they work well during group work and they help others with their work. After a short discussion the students were asked to select one or more of the listed responses and outline and write to explain how the actions or behaviour they selected helps people to get along.

Kate roamed, talked with her students and encouraged their efforts while they completed the task. She then brought everyone together in a large open area in the classroom. Here they shared their responses and discussed the qualities and behaviours of friends. One student remarked that Julius Caesar had a friend that went and killed him. While this led away from Kate's initial focus on getting along, she encouraged the lively discussion about loyalty and betrayal that the statement stimulated.

During the session Kate consistently modelled and encouraged the cooperative behaviours that she was seeking from her students. She acknowledged and thanked students for not interrupting and for waiting to speak. She listened and responded to the students' ideas and opinions. While she directed the discussion, she did not dominate and instead encouraged the students to contribute and respond to one another.

During the session Kate did not just seek to develop knowledge about 'getting along' she also modelled the behaviours she sought from her students. When varying individuals' language and actions demonstrated that they understood related strategies, Kate acknowledged and praised their comments and behaviour.

Kate's lesson focused on the development and awareness of social skills, rather than just academic achievement. Sharing ideas, listening to others and reflecting on behaviours and actions were integral to the lessons. Student input was actively sought throughout the session. When I talked with Kate and her colleague Rob, another research participant, about how the

YCDI program impacts on their classroom environment they explained:

> *That's a big culture as well in here, that we are constantly reassuring and reminding students that being, I guess, academically minded isn't the be all and end all of life. There are lots of different facets and people can be good at lots of different things*. (Kate)

> *'You Can Do' It is a fantastic program to feel like you are included, that your voice is heard … and that you don't have to worry about stuff you can't control.* (Rob)

> *We found out through our 'You Can Do It Program' that confidence and risk taking was really down. So we created a catastrophe scale or a 'how bad is that' scale, and just put certain things in perspective*. (Rob)

Kate and Rob indicated that the *YCDI* program helped to enhance interactions, and develop student motivation and confidence, within their classrooms. *You Can Do It Education* advocates the need for classroom teachers to focus "on building social, emotional, and motivational capacity of young people rather than on their problems" (Bernard, 2001, p. 1). In Kate and Rob's classroom, social and emotional capacity was developed through the use of encouraging language, interactive classroom activities that involved collaborations and cooperation, targeted conversations that encouraged self-reflection and consideration of others, such and those relating to the *YCDI* foundations and '*the* h*abits of mind'* (Bernard, 2001; Bernard et al., 1994), and specific *YCDI* lessons.

Kate and Rob implement the *YCDI* program in an endeavour to encourage mutual respect and support the development of diverse social and cooperative skills within their classrooms. However, they also recognise that while the *YCDI* program is a support that helps develop social skills, strategies and positive attitudes, it doesn't resolve all issues. As a result, Kate and Rob constantly evaluate the social-emotional needs of individuals and reflect on their own actions to support them.

> *We still have issues though, and I've been down a path myself just recently where I felt like my classroom just wasn't working properly, the kids were not performing. I just wasn't happy, and I stepped back and thought are the kids feeling valued?* (Kate)

> *I try really hard to constantly be positive with students and especially that one student today. It takes him a long time to get on task …, so especially with him. As soon as I see he is on task I try and jump on that and build that up*. (Kate)

> *This whole process is about us meeting you half way and you meeting us half way and without that .... Sometimes it doesn't work, sometimes we have to go to seventy or we can pull back a bit and have kids working really well independently, so you pull back.* (Rob)

Respecting and supporting student diversity

Rob also spoke with me about students in his class who are prone to anxiety, explaining, "*these guys sitting down here, they are very nervous. Just by nature, some kids are. It's okay to feel like that*." He recognised that "*support is crucial*" and advocated that teachers need to respect differing personality traits; that children should be able to express their feelings without fear of being judged by teachers or peers. Similar comments were also expressed by another participant, Jane. During one of our conversations Jane made the following comments that provide insights into her attitudes and understandings about the social emotional needs of students:

> *This is what they don't teach you at uni, coming out [when graduating], how to read a child, I'm not talking read to a child, read a child's reaction and anxiety, dealing with anxious children*. (Jane)

> *That little cherub that's just gone out there, he's got massive anxiety issues, and we know that. But asking his permission first is important cos I don't want him to get into a heightened emotional state. So if he wasn't comfortable in doing it I wasn't going to push it, we might have come around it another way.* (Jane)

Like Rob, Jane stressed the need for teachers to not only identify differing emotions, but also to respect the rights of students by acknowledging "*the comfort level of that child, always asking their permission to do stuff*" and "*knowing that every child is different and that's okay*". As Peterson and Hittie explain:

> Some students come from environments where they have felt unsafe and unprotected physically and emotionally .... Some students deal with stress and emotional problems. They may have difficulty maintaining relationships with others … Our classrooms should allow students to deal with their emotions in different ways. (Peterson & Hittie, 2003, p. 306)

Rob, Kate, Matt and Jane emphasised the need for teachers to be aware of and respect the diverse emotional needs and life experiences of their students. They modelled acceptance and valuing of others to their students through their everyday interactions: the language they

used, their encouragement and praise for effort not just achievements, and their actions, their listening to, supporting and collaborating with students. Each of these teachers implemented inclusive strategies that support the development of cohesive, safe learning communities, where students feel they can take risks and learn from their mistakes. They created classroom communities that valued and promoted security, safety and acceptance, critical components of an effective learning environment (Hayes, 2012).

Enhancing student wellbeing

Matt, Kate and Rob worked in schools that promoted the implementation of values based, social skills programs, *Tribes* and *YCDI*. Jane by contrast, did not implement any dominant approach to support the development of understanding and use of social skills, instead she drew from a range of sources. During my first visit to Jane's classroom I immediately noticed a prominent display of motivational and social skills posters on the wall. Some of the posters on topics such as kindness, cooperation, perseverance and tolerance, she had purchased. Other posters that related to emotions, such as stay happy, be safe and enjoy learning, had been made with her students. These posters provided prompts to support students during their interactions and indicated that Jane valued and sought to develop her students' social skills and emotional wellbeing.

During my conversations with Jane about student wellbeing she made reference to a number of publications and social skills programs that have influenced her approach to classroom management. These include *Bounce Back,* a classroom resilience program (Noble & MGrath, 2003), *Stop Think Do,* a social skills and behaviour management program (Petersen & Adderley, 2002) and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, *Calmer Classrooms,* a guide to understanding traumatised children and developing relationship based skills to support students (Downey, 2007). Jane implements strategies she has learnt from these programs to assist her efforts to support all her students. While these strategies and approaches are particularly supportive for *some* students, Jane recognised and promoted them as being beneficial for everyone. Jane strives to identify and respond to the social challenges that individuals in her class encounter, and her professional learning, the knowledge she has acquired about effective classroom management, has directed her towards the implementation of supportive inclusive strategies that neither marginalise nor exclude students.

Looking beyond the surface

The focus in Matt, Kate, Rob and Jane's classrooms is on a cognitive behavioural approach, where children are taught to solve problems positively (Noble, 2006). In each of these

classrooms the teachers, Matt, Kate, Rob and Jane, seek to actively develop awareness of cooperative behaviours amongst their students, develop understanding about what uncooperative oppositional "behaviours communicate about a student's needs, and to help students to meet their needs in a socially acceptable way" (Petersen & Hittie, 2003, p, 356).

These four participants, Matt, Kate, Rob and Jane, give consideration to the reasons behind certain behaviours and the communications between teacher and student focuses on care, concern and partnerships, rather than negativity and conflict. In their effort to seek and implement strategies to support their students, to enable everyone in their class to more effectively participant and learn, these teachers are continually reflecting on and refining the approaches they use and actively seeking to remove barriers and implement approaches that empower rather than marginalise students. Many of the strategies that I observed these four teachers using relate to evidence of inclusive practice as outlined in Table 3.3 Identifying Inclusive Classroom Practices*,* particularly, sections ii, iii and vii. Matt, Rob, Kate and Jane seek to implement strategic reflective responses to support difficulties which their children encounter (Florian, 2014). They recognise the need for teachers to understand and respond to their students differing emotional contexts (Tomlinson, 2014), use self-respect as the basis for classroom discipline (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) and endeavour to develop quality relationships with all their students (Florian, 2014).

Expectations and Routines

During my discussions with the research participants the teachers frequently spoke about the importance of classroom routines and the setting of clear, consistent expectations for both behaviour and learning outcomes.

One participant, Jane, explained that students respond well to the "*structure and the comfort of knowing what's coming next and just that stability*", elaborating and commenting that "*for some people this is the only stability they get*". The vignettes below draw on data from my interviews with two other participants, Matt and Anna, who like Jane, recognised and shared with me examples of how using consistent classroom management approaches supported their students' learning.

Building Routines in Matt's Classroom (developed from interview transcripts)

During one of my interviews with Matt, I commented on his students' engagement and cooperation during the inquiry-learning session that I had just observed. Matt explained that when one of the students arrived in his class, the child was frequently uncooperative and found interactions with other students challenging, but he was gradually becoming more engaged and confident, especially during inquiry-learning sessions. Matt reflected on this and commented:

> *Once we established those really clear boundaries and consequences then his effort, his work, his social interaction with the other kids completely changed*. (Matt)

> *I think it comes back to building those routines, so that he becomes confident, so that he knows what he is doing*. (Matt)

Matt also reflected on the format of the inquiry-learning program and how knowing the boundaries and routines provides opportunities for students make choices and decisions, to become more independent.

> *... it became so much more directed by the kids and they just really run with it, and also too they know the boundaries on what they can and can't do and how long they can do things for*. (Matt)

Building Routines In Anna's Classroom (developed from interview transcripts)

When I spoke with Anna about the harmony and cooperation that I observed in her classroom, she reflected on the teaching approaches that she uses and explained that many of the classroom routines she adopts are consistent with what other teachers in her school use. Anna explains:

> *So, I just continue purposely knowing that's what they are familiar with opposed to teaching them something different again.* (Anna)

Anna also stressed the importance of "*setting the expectation right up at the start*" of having "*classroom values and agreements*" and involving the students in conversation about showing mutual respect and conveying expectations (Elvey, 2017).

> *Right, how are we going to respect each other? What do you expect of me, what do I expect of you?* (Anna) (Elvey, 2017, p. 164)

> *Because we've done it very regularly now they just know the routine. So, they just know what to do, they know what's expected*. (Anna)

Anna considered that her efforts reinforcing routines and expectations, and ensuring that students are conscious of how their actions might affect other people, contributed towards her students' sense of wellbeing.

The value of relevant and consistent boundaries, routines and expectations is supported by numerous authoritative sources. Booth and Ainscow state that classroom routines need to be "consistent and explicit" (2002, p. 76), Rapp and Arndt believe "that all good classroom management includes clear routines and expectations" (2012, p. 115), Loreman et al. recommend that classroom teachers "implement strong, predictable routines" (2011, p. 221), while Wood (2009) promotes that "providing boundaries for students facilitates a risk-free environment and allows students the freedom to relax in class, knowing what is and is not expected" (pp. 52-53). Similarly, Downey (2007) advocates certain approaches for children whose lives seem to have little internal structure. As Downey explains, such children often respond well to consistent rules and boundaries:

> Regular routines in the classroom; warning the children of changes to routine; and supporting the child's anxiety when there are transitions and other changes will help the child to develop internal structure; and will assist in the development of a strong relationships with the teacher. (Downey, 2007, p. 19)

Students that have experienced trauma or who are prone to anxiety, are likely to find the establishment of routines, consistency and clear expectations particularly supportive (Downey, 2009). These are not isolated strategies that should be implemented for select students but relate to effective teaching practice for all. The sense of security and safety that fair and

consistent expectations, routines and boundaries create is beneficial for *all* students. (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Loreman et al., 2011; Rapp & Arndt, 2012).

When I discussed the impact that unexpected change can have on student behaviour with Kate and Rob, they described a scenario from earlier in the year when there had been a lot of disruption and change in Rob's classroom. Rob explained that due to illness, he had frequently been absent, and that his class had been "*going right off*". Kate agreed with Rob's description of the situation but added, "*Yes, only because you weren't here*". Kate explained that the students had missed Rob, as they had a strong relationship with him and knew what he expected of them. This is consistent with Hayes' (2012) warning, that "unacceptable behaviour is sometimes due to uncertainty in children's minds about where the boundaries lie" (p. 369). Rob's students missed the structure and stability that he and the relationships he had with them brought to the classroom, and this impacted negatively on their behaviour. The impact of teacher absence, such as that described by Kate and Rob, can have on students is also recognised by Rapp and Arndt (2012). These authors urge teachers to prepare students for unexpected situations and ensure supportive procedures are in place, for example, leaving a detailed folder to ensure that substitute teachers are aware of class routines and expectations (Rapp & Arndt, 2012).

During my weekly visits I became aware of the differing routines that each of the participants established in their classrooms, in their attempts to provide students with stability and consistency. I observed a range of visual class timetables, both daily and weekly. These were most often displayed at the front of the class, where students could easily refer to them. In one junior school classroom, the participating teacher, Ellen, had created a timetable train. The progression of carriages followed the sequence of sessions for the day, creating a timeline that the students could refer to. It conveyed the information clearly, and the train format provided a visual and engaging prompt.

During one of my visits to a school involved in the study, I attended two classes where the participants prepared their students for a change of routine. I listened as the teachers, Kate and Rob, explained to their students what they would be doing. They prepared them for the change and gave them an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification, ensuring their students knew what to expect. Kate and Rob recognised that *some* students may find an unexpected change stressful, and that preparing *all* students beforehand allowed them to discuss and alleviate any concerns. Similarly, when I first entered each of the research participants' classrooms, I found that each teacher had already explained that there would be

a visitor joining the class during the morning. Often my arrival was acknowledged by a warm greeting from the teacher, but when the class or teacher was engaged in a task I was able to slip in quietly without disrupting the lesson. Because the participants' students knew that a person was coming to spend time in their classroom, my initial appearance was less distracting and my weekly visits became part of an accepted routine.

In Chapter Six, I explained that Ellen implemented inquiry-learning in conjunction with two other junior school teachers. Ellen and her colleagues ran the sessions in a large open space that was permanently set up. The three classes moved to a designated part of the school for each of the sessions. The following vignette relates to a strategy involving routines and expectations that Ellen and her colleagues implemented to ensure that the inquiry-learning activity stations were not overcrowded, and that equipment and classroom spaces were left appropriately at the end of each session.

Activity Stations: Routines and Expectations (developed from notes in research journal)

During the inquiry-learning session, the students in Ellen's class and two other junior school classes selected and then worked at varying learning stations. There were 18 activity choices available to the students.

As I observed the students as they worked at varying stations, I noticed large laminated numeral cards in each of the areas. These, Ellen explained, related to the number of students that could work at a particular station. For example, only two students at a time could work in the 'farm area', but six students could work in the 'bug area'. All the children understood and accepted this rule.

I watched as two students, who had been unable to work at their first area of choice, moved to a different activity station. One student asked those at their preferred activity to let them know once there was a place available. The other student just moved away and chose another activity. Although the three teachers roamed and monitored participation and interactions during the session, the students themselves monitored the numbers at each station. The large numerals made it clear how many students could be in an area and this strategy was implemented during every inquiry-learning session. There were no arguments or behavioural incidents due to students wanting to work in another area. All the students knew and accepted the routine.

As well as a numeral card, each area had a photograph on the table or wall. Initially, I thought the photograph, which was of the equipment, was just a visual image to help explain what each area involved. When a bell rang, the signal that the session was about to end and that the students should pack-up the equipment, I learnt the photograph had a much more specific purpose. I observed the three students in the area nearest to me, studying the photograph and meticulously placing the toys and books on the table. The image was provided to give the students direction as to how their area should look at the end of the session.

Students at other activities were doing the same, as they packed-up they checked their photograph to make sure everything was correctly placed. For example, the scissors, glue and sticky tape in the 'making and creating area' were put in the exact spot they had been when the session began.

Despite having been very engaged in the varying activities, I was surprised not only by how quickly all the students responded to the signal to pack-up, but also the care that they took organising the equipment. The routines, the bell to signal the session was ending, and the photographs that showed students how their area should look, ensured that everyone understood what they were required to do. During my visits I observed students encouraging and collaborating to ensure their area matched the photograph. The teachers had a physical presence during 'pack-up time', but the process was primarily regulated by the students themselves, *everyone* knew exactly what was expected.

During inquiry-learning, Ellen and her colleagues implemented relevant supportive routines and then encouraged the students to self-regulate. Once the students knew and understood what was expected they were able to monitor and to take responsibility for their own actions. They were able to use the numeral card to determine whether there were too many people at an activity, and they understood exactly how their area should look at the end of a session. These established routines and expectations assisted in the prevention of power struggles, children pushing the boundaries to see if one more student could join a group, and ensured that the packing-up was done efficiently, collaboratively and with minimal intervention from the teachers. Ellen and the other teachers involved in the sessions, implemented strategies that relate to setting consistent routines and expectations, involving students in monitoring and resolving classroom difficulties, and encouraging self-discipline (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Partners in Learning

In their "framework for participation in classrooms", Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011, p. 817) advocate the importance of "participation and collaboration: learning together" (p. 817). They stress the need for teachers to teach strategies and practices that promote collaboration and the importance of recognising and removing practices that reinforce barriers to collaboration (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). When visiting seven of the eight participants' classrooms, I frequently observed students working with partners or in supportive groups. Teachers often facilitated situations such as inquiry-learning, group tasks and learning partners that encouraged students to interact with one another and share their knowledge and understandings. During my discussion with Matt and Anna, they shared information relating to ways that they implemented this strategy and reflected on the impact that 'buddy work' (as partnership work was frequently referred to) has on student participation, learning and their classroom culture.

> *So it's just like having another, a little teacher in the room, a peer leading another peer.* (Matt)

> *It depends on the task. If it is for example a numeracy activity then I will say, this is your partner, you are going to be working on this. In something like this [literacy task], I would prefer it being mixed ability.* (Anna)

When I talked with Anna about buddy work she explained that depending on the task, her students would select their own partners or they would be determined by her. She encouraged students to make informed choices about who they are going to work with, to seek out supportive partnerships and take responsibility for their learning and classroom behaviour. In the following vignette Anna explains the process she followed to establish buddy work, in her classroom.

Buddy Work (developed from interview transcripts and notes in research journal)

> *Beforehand I'd say "right you pick someone that either you know you are going to work well with or someone that you know is going to help you with your learning", You know they usually have that in the back of their mind, they are usually pretty good at picking someone who will help them. It's really just setting that up right from the start*. (Anna)

After observing Anna's classroom organisation during a writing lesson, I asked her about the

buddy editing that the session involved. Anna explained that at the start of the year she had explicitly demonstrated the cooperative behaviours she was seeking from her students, such as sitting side by side. She also developed a checklist the students could refer to, to support them during the editing process.

> *The very first lessons I went right, this is how we are going to buddy edit. So, it was just explicitly demonstrating how we go about it .... We came up with the main things that we were looking for during editing. They have got like an editing checklist bookmark. They know it now off by heart, and I've got sort of a little copy up there on the board.* (Anna)

By developing collaborative partnerships between students, Anna was able to spend time providing one-to-one conferencing during the session, and as I observed during my visit to the classroom, the students enjoyed the interactions and support that accompanied buddy work.

Another participant, Kate, also developed collaborative partnerships in her classroom. She established what she called 'class experts' in her class. These were students that had a strong knowledge and understanding of a particular area or topic. They had elected to make themselves available to support others within the class. On one occasion I observed two 'class experts' work with and support a small group of students who sought clarification about a mathematics strategy. I also observed other student 'experts' working independently at their tables but stopping and providing guidance to individuals as required. Kate outlined how the approach was implemented:

> *We talk in our class about "you don't know something until you can teach someone else that skill or that thing". So, if you are an expert then you are 'the expert', like you need to be able to teach other people and explain it so they understand it.* (Kate)

> *We have a lot of experts for writing. I would say we have about six or seven in our room and it depends on what the thing is as well. It could be we are focusing on using visual literacy, so you have to have different experts for that.* (Kate)

Kate indicated that the class had responded well to this strategy. The class experts varied according to class topics, they nominated themselves, but before becoming an 'expert' they needed to demonstrate to Kate that they had the ability to explain their understanding of an area or concept. Kate explained that two of her students had more complex needs and were less confident seeking help, but that they would approach and willingly worked with students

that they knew closely. Cooperation and collaboration, the sharing of knowledge and understanding between students was actively encouraged in the classroom (refer to Table 3.3, section v).

> *So, if someone on their table is an expert, then they will seek their help…. Depending on what we are doing I will pair them up with someone who I know will be able to help them*. (Kate)

Loreman et al. (2011) emphasise the value of collaborative learning arrangements that involve cooperative learning, peer support, peer tutoring and reciprocal teaching. These authors advocate that "along with pedagogy, curriculum, and differentiation, collaborative learning is a way of providing appropriate learning experiences for *all* students" (p. 161). Collaboration and effective classroom communication, assist in creating connectedness, developing respect, acceptance of difference and help to develop a sense of community (McGraw & Stanley, 2006; Noble, 2006), and is critical to the development of an inclusive learning environment (Loreman et al., 2011; Saggers, Macartney & Guerin, 2012).

When teachers actively develop cooperative strategies with both small and large groups, they provide opportunities for students to practice the social skills and values of a caring community (Noble, 2006). "All these strategies foster positive student-student interactions that help them to build empathy and to experience both being cared for and caring for others" (Noble, 2006, p. 72). The buddy work that Anna, and other participants incorporate into their programs, the peer tutoring that Kate has implemented in her classrooms and the collaboration and shared learning that Matt and Ellen's inquiry-learning programs encourage, all provide opportunities for students to learn *about* and *with* others (refer to Table 3.3, section v). In their analysis of the value of cooperative learning approaches Johnson, Johnson, and Stann (2000) argue:

> Markedly different theoretical perspectives (social interdependence, cognitive-developmental, and behavioral learning) provide a clear rationale as to why cooperative efforts are essential for maximizing learning and ensuring healthy cognitive and social development as well as many other important instructional outcomes. Hundreds of research studies demonstrate that cooperative efforts result in higher individual achievement than do competitive or individualistic efforts. (Johnson et al., 2000, p. 14)

The use of cooperative learning strategies not only creates opportunities for improved academic outcomes through shared learning, but also assists in the development students'

intrapersonal skills, such as self-esteem, self-control and positive attitudes, and the development and awareness of social skills, including the acceptance of diversity (Johnson et al., 2000; Noble, 2006).

Developing Independent Learners

During my discussions with Anna about buddy work, she also related the strategy to her efforts to develop greater independence in her students. Rather than constantly seek guidance from a teacher, Anna encouraged her student to recognise who else in the class, and what else, such as charts, checklists and technology, had the potential to provide learning support. The following vignette and subsequent discussion relate to my observations of Anna's classroom practices and one of my conversations with her.

Buddy Work in Anna's Classroom (developed from interview transcripts and notes in research journal)

When I asked Anna about the 'buddy work' activity that I had just observed during one of her literacy lessons, she explained:

> *I have been experimenting with that a little bit as well …. That's the model of slow ... of I can't even remember the terminology, but the, the release of … Oh, I can't think of it now, but in terms of the amount of instruction. Hopefully by the end of the year, Term Four, that most of those expectations are established, and they should know what is expected*. (Anna)

> *When you have a class that wants to learn and they are all at different levels you can establish those rules and you can just leave them to it …. I'm not saying 'leave them to their own devices' but let them have the time to be independent and be responsible and you just go around making sure they are on track or that they are that they are, you know, challenging themselves*. (Anna)

> *We always talk about that, always continually talking about being responsible for your own learning. We made, like in the first week of school this year, we made up a classroom agreement, and now and*

then we will revisit that. (Anna)

During our interview Anna had been unsure of the terminology for the approach she was trying to describe, but as our discussion continued it became clear that she was endeavouring to implement *The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model* (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), to move from an emphasis on teacher-centred instruction, to more student-centred, collaborative and independent approaches.

When visiting her classroom, I observed Anna implement focus lessons to the class, provide guided instruction to individuals and small groups, and encourage student collaboration. When they were engaged in group work, students were encouraged to share their skills and understandings with each other and cooperatively problem solve, rather than always seek direction from Anna. Anna still provided explicit instruction to individuals and groups, but utilised strategies that also allowed her students to assume greater responsibility for their learning, and to become less dependent on teacher direction. She sought to develop collaborative skills, particularly shared problem solving, as part of the process of gradually reducing her students' reliance on teacher direction.

Anna endeavoured to empower students by providing them with opportunities to direct and control their learning, to become self-reliant. This was not a strategy that she limited to a few high achievers, but one that she implemented for *all* her students. The use of strategies and degree of support provided varied between individuals, but the value of collaboration and the goal of independent learning was conveyed to everyone. While Anna's individual conferences with students focused on what they needed to learn, what *she* needed to do to support them, they also provided opportunities for her students to reflect on what *they* needed to do and the actions that individuals could take to improve in a specific area (refer to Table 3.3, section iv). Anna sought to work in partnership with her students, to provide them with opportunities to direct and make relevant decisions about their learning.

Elements of the approach that Anna outlined to me, her efforts and the strategies she used to gradually release responsibility to her students, were also evident in other classrooms. I observed participants implementing varying combinations of modelled[26], shared[27] and

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[26] In modelled reading, the teacher "reads aloud to the class from a range of text types... The purpose is for children to engage with texts pitched at a more complex level than they can read" (Hill, 2013, p. 83).

[27] "In shared reading the teacher reads and enlarged text to and with students, involving them in the process of unlocking the text's meaning" (Winch, Ross Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2014, p. 118).

guided[28] reading to introduce and explicitly teach new or challenging concepts to both large and small groups. The use of strategies such as these, to scaffold the learning of both groups and individuals, was particularly evident during literacy and mathematics sessions. At the beginning of lessons the support provided by the teacher was initially high, but it reduced during the session to allow the students to increasingly take control (Hill, 2013; Tompkins et al., 2015; Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl, & Holliday, 2014). I also observed students participating in buddy work, interacting, working with and supporting each other (Tompkins et al., 2015), and independent work, where the teachers' monitored student progress through conferencing, observations and discussion, but encouraged the students to assume responsibly, make decisions and apply the strategies and knowledge that they have acquired (Tompkins, et al., 2015).

The following vignette draws from a discussion I had with Matt, where he spoke about developing and valuing self-directed, autonomous learners.

Going Fishing with Matt (developed from interview transcripts)

During one of my interviews with Matt we discussed strategies he used to foster cooperation and independence in the classroom. I learnt that Matt frequently provides his students with explicit instruction and examples, because: *"for some kids that's the best way to do it*". But, Matt also recognised that at other times [or with other students] "*once you've given them that instruction, they will run with it*" and provides opportunities for students to work independently, make decisions about their learning needs, and support one another. When I questioned him about this, Matt elaborated:

> *At the start of the year there was lots of that instruction. I had to do lots of examples and things, and that's fine, but now the kids can be …. They are very self-sufficient, and that allows them then to help other children as well. Then, if they are stuck and completely bamboozled and do need help, then I am always there to help them. But yeah, I like to be able to show them and teach them how to do*

[28] In guided reading the teacher works with a small group of students, "prompting and questioning to help them to draw on and integrate their semantic, grammatical and phonological-graphological knowledge "(Winch et al., 2014, p. 119).

things and then they can be doing them themselves. (Matt)

Matt finished our conversation by relating his teaching philosophy to an old proverb "*give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime*", making it clear that he viewed himself as a learning facilitator, and sought to foster and cater for active and independent learners.

The implementation of collaborative groups, shared goal setting during student conferences and the provision of opportunities for student choice and decision-making, are examples of ways that participants such as Matt sought to develop and encourage cooperative, independent and self-regulated learners (refer to Table 3.3, sections i-vi) These are strategies that relate to effective classroom practice, inclusive strategies that support and enhance the life-long learning of *all* students (Hayes, 2012; Loughran, 2010; Rapp & Arndt, 2012)

The Dilemma of Challenging Behaviours

Five of the participants, implemented a 'traffic light' or warnings management plan to deal with more extreme behaviour issues. They were using approaches similar to, or based upon, *1-2-3 Magic* (Phelan & Schonour, 2004). The authors of this approach purport that many teachers feel "unprepared to address challenging behaviour" (Phelan & Schonour, 2004, p. 8) and outline what they describe as a "decisive and calm strategy for behaviour management" (2004, p. 8) based on a few basic principles and the implementation of a series of steps (Phelan & Schonour, 2004).

One of the aims of the *1-2-3 Magic* approach is to remove emotion and conflict from teacher interactions when dealing with challenging behaviour and to ensure that all students are aware of expectations and consequences (Phelan & Schonour, 2004). Phelan and Schonour (2004) promote the importance of developing positive relationships with students and parents, encouraging desired behaviours through praise and positive reinforcement and controlling undesirable behaviours. They claim that the process they outline promotes the development of an authoritative management style, the implementation of responsive considered strategies, and assists teacher to avoid the traps of an "authoritarian approach or a Talk-Persuade-Argue-Yell Syndrome" (Phelan & Schonour, 2004, p. 17) that can alienate and further disengage students.

The *1-2-3 Magic* procedure involves a series of warnings, for example, 'that's one', delivered in a calm and unemotional manner for undesirable behaviour such as teasing, aggression or shouting. If the behaviour continues the child is warned, 'that's two', and if that is not effective the child is told 'that's three', and is required to have time-out, generally "one minute per year of the child" (Phelan & Schonour, 2004, p. 33). Each of the participants that I visited that implemented strategies based on this approach had created a small, but defined, time-out area in their classroom.

Three of the participants, Matt, Debbie and Jane were employed in locations where the implementation of the warning-based approach related to a school-wide behaviour management strategy. The other two participants, Anna and Grace, had adopted the procedure, the series of warnings leading to time-out, through personal choice. Anna explained that she had learnt about the approach as a result of observation and interaction with another teacher at her school.

> *When I started here I was filling in for a maternity leave and that's what the previous teacher had already established. So, I came in halfway through and I thought, oh, working beautifully, they know that, so I'm just going to continue on with that. And I've sort of kept it going*. (Anna)

During one of our interviews I spoke at length with Grace about the implementation of the *1-2-3 Magic Approach* (Phelan & Schonour, 2004) in her classroom. Grace spoke positively about the program and how it provided strategies that supported her endeavours to manage challenging behaviours. The following draws on my conversation with Grace about *1-2-3 Magic* and provides insights into her interpretation and implementation of the approach.

Grace and Warnings (developed from interview transcripts)

Grace was introduced to *1-2-3 Magic* (Phelan & Schonour, 2004) by a specialist teacher who had conducted a series of sessions on behaviour management at her school. She adopted the approach in response to specific challenges and concerns she was encountering with two of her students. Grace explains:

> *I'd always had my warnings, I'd always had those, but I introduced the 'One Two Three Magic' back in Term Two. So, because with (Child A) and (Child B) they could be very disruptive … I found with them it was*

really good. (Grace)

Often now I'll only get to one, I don't have to go to two or to three. But, if I do get to three they have to move their name and they have their time out. So, if they are five [years old], it's five minutes, six it's six minutes. Then they get their three warnings again. That's one, that's two, that's three and then their name is moved, and time out again. If it gets to the point that they get their three warnings again, then that's it, they are out of the room. They are exited, and that's a detention if they are exited. (Grace)

Once you've told them one, you don't often see the behaviour again. So it's sort of nipping it in the bud without having to go through time out and all of that. They sit on that mat … It's sort of a calming spot for them to go to. If they do get quite worked up, which (Child A) can. I found at the start of the year he would have massive tantrums, go right off, throw boxes and kick chairs and all that sort of stuff. Now if he does have to have a time out, he's straight over to the mat. I set the timer and they know that when the bell goes, that's their time, and up they hop and off they go. (Grace)

It doesn't ever go back during the day because they have made those choices,but at the end of the day all the names go back once they have left the classroom. So it is always a fresh start. (Grace)

Although Grace indicated that she had found the series of warnings assisted her to modify the behaviours of one particular child, she made it clear that the approach was classroom based and not targeted at individuals.

It's really consistent through the whole class. For any kid in the class, it's really clear, what, what will happen as a consequence. (Grace)

Grace was particularly committed to the use of the *1-2-3 Magic Approach*, and it was in her classroom that I observed the system of warnings leading to time-out being implemented. During my discussions with Grace, and the other participants that were using warning-based approaches, it became clear that they found that the series of steps to alert students to undesirable behaviours, and use of a time-out area for continued discretions, was an effective

strategy for ensuring that students understood and complied with behavioural expectations in the classroom. Each of the participants using the warning process spoke positively about its implementation and indicated it assisted in not only alerting students to behaviours that needed to be modified but also encouraged self-regulation.

> *It has gone through the whole school and it's all a common language and it's all the same thing, so it doesn't matter who has them. They understand that if they are not doing the right things they will get a verbal warning. What the first step means, what the second step means, and that the third step means they've got time out. So they know exactly. It's a fairly simple process and any new students that we have pick it up very quickly*. (Debbie)

> *I think that has been a really important tool, particularly for consistency across the whole school. That everyone is using the same language, and everyone is using the same things*. (Debbie)

> *You might have heard me say, step one or step two, and that's using our behaviour management program here at school …. So, that's a whole school behaviour management, including classroom and specialist teachers as well. And the children know that if they've got onto a step that they've got to adjust their behaviour, and then work from there*. (Jane)

When I talked with each of the five participants using a 'steps' warning approach, they stressed that the aim was to alert children to the need to adjust their behaviour. The teachers explained that the warnings were quietly conveyed to individuals, not announced to the class and that the routines and consistency underpinning the approach ensured that all students were aware of the consequences of reaching 'three'. As Anna explains:

> *I often remind them if they are starting to muck up … It's that whole expectation, so don't make me follow up on it, and I'm putting the onus back on them. They're that little bit older, they know now*. (Anna)

Each of the five research participants using a warnings approach had a time-out area in their classroom, but during my visits I only saw it being regularly utilised by one of the participants. The approach, the warnings, time-out and exiting, was usually reserved for more challenging behaviours and proactive approaches that focused on supporting and developing relationships and social skills were the more prominent form of classroom behaviour management. While two of the participants spoke about children having been exited during the year, they stressed that this was rare, especially as the year had progressed.

> *It's your choice I would rather not have to, so this is your warning. If you make the wrong choice them this is what I will have to do. But the onus is entirely up to them. It's just reminding them …. Every now and then I just have to use it*. (Anna)

During my discussions with the participants I became aware of some problems and traps associated with the warnings approach. One of these was teacher consistency, as Debbie explained, "*the difficulty really is just in remaining consistent, as to what behaviours warrant you going on the steps*". Debbie was concerned that some teachers that dealt with her students, such as specialist art or physical education teachers, interpreted or responded to behaviours differently or even inappropriately, and explained:

> *There are things that we do because we know the children so well. That we might say, that that behaviour in you is tolerated, where it might not be by another teacher*.
> (Debbie)

Although other participants had claimed consistent expectations was one of the positive factors of a warnings based approach, my conversations with Debbie indicated that this could also have negative consequences. Debbie was concerned on two accounts: the first, that expectations differed between staff members at her school, causing confusion and stress for students; and the second, that there *does* need to be flexibility in dealing with behaviours. The importance of flexibility in teacher response to student behaviour is also advocated by Thompson and Carpenter (2014). These authors stress:

> the need to individualise classroom management so that the specific needs of students are taken into account when planning for the behaviour adaptations and accommodations for challenging behaviours. (Thompson & Carpenter, 2014, p. 171)

Like Debbie, Thompson and Carpenter advocate the need for teachers to know about and be able to respond to individuals, rather than a predetermined list of behaviours. They also warn that "the punitive nature of time-out can inflame rather than calm irritated students" (Thompson & Carpenter, 2014, p. 160), further highlighting problems that some students might encounter with the warnings and time-out approach.

Beware of the Messages You Give to Students

> Label a child a troublemaker and watch him become one. (Kohn, 1996, p. 7)

My discussions with one participant, Grace, alerted me to another trap an individual

interpretation of the warning time-out approach could lead to. I was surprised and concerned when the participant explained that rather than use traffic light colours or numerical steps to alert students to the need to regulate their behaviour she had character cards.

> *So this is basically like a traffic light system but I've used the Mr Men[29] characters. So everyone starts the day on Mr Happy. I think it's kind of a bit of a fun way, rather than saying, "you're on red". Red automatically gets them grumpy and all that sort of stuff. Whereas it's like, "oh you're on Little Miss Naughty", that kind of thing.* (Grace)

> *We sort of say, if you're on Mr Grumpy it's because, you know, you're grumpy, or I'm grumpy. You know when you're there that the behaviour you've done has made people grumpy, the classmates even*. (Grace)

Grace commented that she found students responded negatively to being 'on red'. She was able to identify that some children may develop an emotional response to being on a colour she related to anger. However, notwithstanding the gender stereotypes, two of the characters that Grace chose to use instead of a colour, Mr Grumpy and Little Miss Naughty, had the potential to elicit an even greater reaction. By relating a student's behaviour to these characters, the strategy became more than just a warning to students about the need to regulate their actions, it labelled them. The message that students could interpret is that *they* are grumpy or 'naughty' children. The character links that this teacher developed as fun, may have appealed to *some* of her students, and brought about some initial laughter, but they have the potential to embarrass and negatively impact on the self-image and ongoing behaviour of others.

Early in my own teaching career I was aware of some junior school teachers who had what was known as the naughty chair. Children who did not comply with the classroom or teacher's rules would be required to go and sit on the chair. This strategy, like Grace's Miss Naughty, was often introduced in a light hearted way, and was considered 'a bit of fun'. But, the message to students in the classroom was that this was a place for naughty children. If you were sent there, *you* were naughty. The naughty chair labeled students, especially those that were required to visit it regularly. When other students observed a child spending time there, they too came to identify the student as a 'naughty' student.

Grace spoke to me about two of her students who were still learning to modify their behaviour and comply with the social demands of schools, explaining that she often found their

[29] Mr Men: Mr Happy, Mr Grumpy and Little Miss Naughty are characters from a series of children's books by author, illustrator Roger Hargreaves.

behaviours challenging and subsequently they more frequently had time-out. The process Grace used may have helped her to establish her expectations and develop greater compliance with her students, but the character labels risk these students and others in the class, identifying these boys as naughty children. Graham and Macartney (2012) warn that the language teachers use has a powerful influence on who is included and who is excluded. These authors warn about stigmatising students through the use of deficit language. Grace's use of the word naughty may have been done with a sense of fun and was not intended to label or stigmatise, but she was unable to recognise that teacher language such as this is not inductive to a respectful classroom culture.

The way in which Grace implemented the warning, time-out approach highlights some of the pitfalls that can occur when teachers use this strategy. In particular, how easily the focus can move from alerting and supporting students to regulate their behaviour, to a teacher imposed punitive consequence. Time-out rather than a 'cooling down' and reflecting time, can all too easily become an isolating experience, especially for children who are already dealing with social and emotional issues (Downey, 2007). The warning and time-out approach may have assisted *some* children to regulate their behaviour, but as Downey, (2007) warns, it also has the potential to impact negatively on students' self-esteem and self-image and alienate them from their peers.

An Alternative to Warnings: Empowering Students

When I visited one of the participants, Ellen, I observed and she later spoke about a time-out strategy that she and other teachers in her school used that did not incorporate warnings or teacher direction, it was a strategy *for* students. Like the classrooms where the participants implemented a behaviour warning system, Ellen had a time-out area in the classroom, but this was a place that students *chose* to go to. Ellen implemented a strategy that placed greater focus on students *knowing* and *responding* to their own emotions, rather than imposed teacher consequences.

During one of my visits to Ellen's classroom, I observed a student sitting on a small mat away from his peers. Initially, I had assumed that he had located himself there after receiving three warnings, but I later learnt this was not the case, and that it was the student's decision to have some time-out. Ellen explained:

> *that is the place where you go when you are feeling sad or frustrated or angry. That's*

> *his timeout and he's actually choosing to go there. He's not being sent there, we don't send the kids there. It has to be part of their choice.* (Ellen*)*

> *I'll give them some time and then I'll come over and chat with them about how they're feeling, and why they're feeling like that.* (Ellen)

When Ellen observes a student move to the time-out area she waits, often after a few minutes the student has settled and moves back to the group, but if they are looking particularly anxious or remain in the time-out area, Ellen attempts to find out about and respond to their concerns. Students in Ellen's classroom are given space and time to relax and calm themselves, but Ellen also endeavours to learn, understand and respond to the situations that trigger emotional, and sometimes negative, behavioural responses.

The time out strategy that Ellen implements differs greatly from the teacher imposed warning then time-out approach that some of the other participants outlined to me. The process Ellen has adopted aligns with what Thompson and Carpenter (2014) describe as 'a chill out zone' an "effective way giving students space to collect their thoughts and emotions without losing face" (p. 160). Two of the participants using the warning and time-out process, indicated that they considered this was an approach well suited to their younger students as it provided a clear structure and expectations. Ellen's students are also very young, just five and six year olds, most in their first year at school, but Ellen endeavors to develop her students 'abilities to self-regulate and accept responsibility for their behaviour by using proactive strategies such as the use of 'a chill out zone' and the teaching of social skills (refer to Table 3.3, sections iii, iv & vii).

One strategy that Ellen implements to develop social awareness amongst her students is social stories. These stories, often introduced to support students with autism, "aim to achieve behavioural change by presenting a social situation that discusses appropriate social responses and models for the student what is socially acceptable behaviour" (Carpenter, 2014, p. 289). The children in Ellen's class were initially introduced to a turtle story, what turtles do when they feel, threatened or uncomfortable and the importance of being able to retreat to a safe and secure place. Ellen explained that *all* the students had learnt that "*when you are feeling upset, you do the turtle*". And that she and other teachers continually revisit and reinforce the strategy with their class, "*we do it often throughout the year to remind them of how to do it*".

Ellen endeavours to implement behaviour management strategies that actively develop her students' capacity to self-regulate their behaviour. These are approaches that provide

opportunities for students to understand and learn to respond appropriately to not only classroom expectations, but also their varying emotions and anxiety levels. The classroom use of social stories to develop self-awareness, the reinforcement of students' 'good' choices through positive teacher language, the scaffolding of classroom discussions, and a preparedness to listen and reflect on behaviours *with* students, assists in creating a classroom environment that supports the learning of those children that find conforming to the social interactions, routines and regulations of school challenging (Thompson & Carpenter, 2014). While these strategies are particularly supportive for *some* children, they also develop skills and understandings that are beneficial for *all* students.

Individual Management Plans

In one of the participant's classes, I observed the teacher, Jane, implementing an individual behaviour management plan with one of her students. The vignette below provides an outline of my observations and subsequent discussion with Jane about the management plan and the process surrounding its implementation.

Making Choices: (developed from interview transcripts and notes in research journal)

At the end of my third visit to Jane's classroom I observed a student quietly walk over to her while the other students were leaving the classroom to go to lunch. The boy was calm and relaxed as he chatted briefly with Jane and she was smiling and nodding at him. I only caught snippets of the conversation between them, but did hear Jane make the comment "*then what do you need to remember for next session*". After the boy's response, which I was unable to hear, Jane replied, "*well done*".

This short interaction only took a few minutes and once the child left the room Jane explained to me that this student has for some time found the behavioural demands of school challenging. She has been meeting regularly to discuss issues and strategies his mother and after consulting with her decided to implement a behaviour management plan (refer to Appendix F)

The management plan Jane was using focuses on choices. The sheet is simple, three faces, happy, okay, and sad, for each of the learning blocks during the day. At the end of a session the student would come and chat with Jane to reflect on

how he was feeling and to discuss his behaviour, both successes and challenges.

During my subsequent interview with Jane I encouraged her to elaborate on the management plan she was using with the student, seeking details on how it is implemented and the background behind its use. Jane explained:

> *He is currently on a behaviour plan where we sit down and talk about his choices …. It's very visual, but it needs to be very simple, very quick. We negotiate together what his choices have been like for every session … and overall "how did your day go?"* (Jane)
>
> *I've used these with other kids before. I've been looking for patterns and trends. Ah, is it a certain day or a certain class that he goes off? Is it he's had a bad weekend when he comes in on a Monday? Or, it might be by the end of the week we notice he's getting tired*. (Jane)
>
> *It could be one of the specialist classes that triggers his behaviours. So, that's what we are looking for. So, all of these ones are negotiated. He's had some good days, and had some bad days, and whatnot. So, now we're just working on trying to get them [positive].* (Jane)
>
> *And I said to the student that if you can have a whole week of smiley faces then we can stop this. And that's what he's working towards at the moment.*
>
> *This morning he got a smiley face. I said, "What did you do differently today? How do you know that you got a smiley face?" And he said, "Oh, I was concentrating, and I did my work and I sat away from the silly people" …. So he's recognising now what he needs to do*. (Jane)

During my discussion with Jane about the management plan she was using with the student, she frequently spoke in terms of we, stressing that the plan and its implementation were negotiated *with* the child. The student's input was a critical part of the process and Jane endeavoured to work in partnership with him, to support the student and help him reflect on the impact of the actions and choices *he* made. Together they celebrated 'good' choices. Jane had explained to the student that once he had achieved a week of smiley faces he would no longer need to meet with her, it would indicate that he was developing skills to allow him to self-regulate. However, the ultimate reward for the student, was the sense of wellbeing,

through positive experiences and empowerment, that the ability to monitor and regulate his behaviour would provide.

When I observed Jane and the student during their short meeting, both were calm, they listened to each other. It was not Jane imposing her opinions on the student, they both had input into the discussions and there was no sign of anger or frustration. The meeting was organised to support and work with the student, and Jane's attitude and behaviour during it allowed her to develop her relationship with the student, to demonstrate that she *cared* about him. The meetings were not organised to be punitive but to support and understand the student.

> *He needs something very clear. And you can just see, oh, good day today*. (Jane)
>
> *It focuses on the positive. It doesn't focus on the negative*. (Jane)
>
> If you do get a smiley face, "*oh, I noticed that*". It's not, "*what did you do this morning?*" Or, that you were naughty. It's, "*oh, what would you need to do to get an okay or a good face?*" (Jane)
>
> *No other kids know what is going on. We just have a quick chat, you know, it only takes a minute ... and no other child knows that he has this with me. He comes to me, he keeps it [his chart] in his tub, and I give him, he chooses the stickers .... I have a whole range to choose from*. (Jane)

The management plan was not a strategy that Jane used with all her students; it was implemented to meet the needs of one individual. However, the simplicity of the chart, and the collaboration that ensured that both the student and the teacher were involved in monitoring and understanding the reasons behind challenges and successes, meant that this was a strategy that Jane could implement for *any* student experiencing academic, emotional or behavioural challenges. When she implemented the strategy, Jane respected the privacy of the student, other students did not know about the plan or meetings. As she explained "*it's just between him and me*". Jane provided an opportunity for the student to self-monitor and self-regulate his behaviour, but put in place a strategy, a plan, to support him during the process.

Loreman et al. (2011) suggest that ongoing misbehavior of individuals is "best tackled in a positive, but also structured and planned way" (p. 212). They advocate the implementation of a strategy similar to what Jane was using, the development of an action plan, a social contract

between the student and teacher, a process where the teacher and student work together to identify behaviours, reasons, solutions and consequences and rewards (Loreman et al., 2011). The message that Jane conveyed to her student was that she cared about him, that she valued their input, and that *together* they would work to address the challenges. Rather than alienate and isolate, the strategy Jane used assisted her to build her relationship with the student and provided both guidance and support.

Conclusion

In this chapter I drew on the data, my observations and interviews with the participants to investigate the classroom management strategies they use and how effectively they break down the barriers to learning and participation that some students encounter. During the chapter I discussed the similarities in the way that some participants such as Matt, Kate, Rob and Jane, developed their students' social awareness and competencies through the implementation of targeted lessons and discussions. I also extended on the discussions from Chapter Four about knowing, understanding and connecting with students. Extracts from interview transcripts and notes from my research journal are utilised to provide insights into the importance the participants placed on valuing and developing respectful interactions and positive relationships.

In this chapter, I once again referred to the literature on inclusive education to support my efforts to identify and reflect on whether the teaching approaches I had observed aligned with other authors interpretations and examples of inclusive practice. Drawing on notes in my research journal, I provided examples of strategies that the participants adopted, such as: listening *to* students, providing opportunities for individuals and groups to collaborate and cooperate within the classroom and teacher modelling of mutual respect, that supported the development of participatory, student-centred learning environments and a respectful inclusive classroom culture (refer to Table 3.3, sections ii, iv, v & vii).

In this chapter, I also drew on transcripts from my interviews with the participants, the experiences and reflections that they shared with me about challenging behaviours and their discussions about the strategies they employ to address behavioural issues. This data, combined with classroom observations recorded in my research journal, provided insights into the variation between participants in regard to their attitudes, interpretations and use of warnings and time-out as a behaviour management strategy. The data presented in this chapter highlight the impact that school based behaviour management procedures, and

individual interpretations of approaches, had on *what* and *how* varying practices were implemented in the research participants' classrooms and schools. These influences and interpretations frequently contributed to the implementation of teaching approaches that support an inclusive classroom culture. However, there were also instances where a lack of understanding about inclusion, and the promotion by others (including specialist staff and health professionals) of exclusionary practices, occasionally led participants towards the adoption of practices that marginalised and excluded some individuals.

In the next chapter, Chapter Seven, I again draw on the interview transcripts, the voices of the teachers involved in the study to explore the differences in their experiences, collegial supports and professional training. I endeavour to develop insights into the factors that support, challenge and influence the research participants' attitudes, beliefs and pedagogical choices. This includes the awareness and capacity of the teacher participants to embrace the development of inclusive cultures, policies and practices.

Chapter Seven: Sink or Swim, Supporting Teachers

In this chapter, Chapter Seven, I extend on the discussions in Chapters Four to Six, about the research participants' inclusive teaching practices. However, in this chapter I focus on the factors that influenced the participants' pedagogical choices, interrogating the reasons why these teachers adopted (or sometimes did not adopt) inclusive teaching approaches.

In Chapter Five I scrutinised the teaching practices of the teacher research participants, the differing ways they interpreted and implemented the curriculum, their efforts to recognise and cater for the learning needs of *all* students. In Chapter Four and further in Chapter Six, I investigated the classroom management strategies that each of the participants used. This included teacher-student and student to student interactions, strategies for dealing with the challenging behaviours of their students and the establishment of an inclusive classroom culture. I interrogated and discussed variations in the participants' decisions in regard to teaching strategies and the emphasis that they placed on the creation of cooperative respectful learning communities, classrooms that embrace, support and value student diversity.

During the interviews that I conducted with the teacher participants and my observation of their practices, I became aware of the similarities and differences in how they sought to accommodate and meet the diverse needs of their students. Each of the participants had been invited to participate in the research, based on recommendations from education professionals. The participants were all identified as teachers who implemented practices that accommodate and cater for diverse learning needs; teachers committed to inclusive practices. While I expected differences in attitudes and teaching practices amongst the participants, once I commenced the research the extent of and impact of this variation became more evident. Just as the participants had differing backgrounds, experiences and pedagogical knowledge, the practices that they implemented in their classrooms, and efforts to create an inclusive learning environment, varied in delivery and effectiveness according to the individual school and classroom context.

During the data collection process my focus was primarily directed towards uncovering strategies that teachers use that support inclusive education, what they do to ensure that their students are supported, valued and able to successfully participate in all aspects, social and

academic, of school life. My focus was on documenting each participant's endeavours to create inclusive learning environments, particularly, *what* works well and *how* inclusive teaching approaches were developed in their classrooms. However, after spending time with the participants and interrogating the data collected during conversations and observations with these teachers, I came to recognise that there were important insights and understanding to be gained by also examining some of the misunderstandings and challenges that the participants either described to me, or that I observed during my visits to their classrooms.

In this chapter, I explore the implementation of inclusive education from my interpretations of the perspectives of the teacher research participants and examine differences in the participants' background experiences and professional training. I draw on the data, the notes in my research journal and interview transcripts, as I endeavour to develop greater understanding regarding the variation in their beliefs, attitudes and classroom practices. This includes identifying instances where the research participants appeared to have misunderstood or misinterpreted what constitutes inclusive education and exploring the reasons or influences behind their pedagogical choices. Data collected during interviews with the participants and from observations of approaches they use in their classrooms, provide insights into the challenges that they encountered in their efforts to implement strategies that cater for the full diversity of students in their classrooms, as well as the factors that influenced, encouraged and assisted them to understand and implement inclusive pedagogies.

Understanding and Implementing Inclusive Pedagogies

Definitions of inclusion in education vary in complexity and scope. Thomas and Loxley explain that "inclusion is about comprehensive education, equity and collective being" (2001, p. 118). Inclusion has been described as an ideology (Slee, 2011), "a movement and a philosophy" (Foreman, 2011, p. 16), and a process (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). Increasingly, views that promote that inclusive education is about all children, regardless of ability, gender or cultural origin, being "valued equally, treated with respect and provided with real opportunities at school" (Thomas & Loxley, 2001, p. 119) are being embraced by academics and educators. This view of inclusion is promoted In the *Index for Inclusion*, a resource developed by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow "to support the inclusive development of schools" (Booth and Ainscow, 2002, p. 1), as discussed in Chapter Two. In the *Index for Inclusion* Ainscow and Booth describe inclusion in terms of reducing barriers to learning and participation and providing access to quality education for *all* students (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011).

Given the variation and the complexity in definitions of inclusion and inclusive education (Cologon, 2014; Loreman et al., 2011; Young, 2010), it is not surprising that there were instances where one or more participant seemed to misunderstand or misinterpret what constitutes inclusive practice. While none of the teacher participants made reference to definitions of inclusion or disability, their teaching practices and some of the comments they made during our conversations reflected their perceptions of what constitutes inclusion in education, and their knowledge and understanding of teaching approaches that *include* or *exclude* students.

Before becoming involved in this study, as I discussed in Chapter Three, all potential participants were provided with a Plain Language Information Statement that invited them to participate in research about inclusive education (refer to Appendices A and B). The Plain Language Information Statement explained that the research project sought to investigate the approaches and practices that teachers use to enable students with diverse needs to be included within their everyday classroom environment and curriculum. Involvement in the research was not reliant on the participants having an understanding of complex definitions of inclusion that relate inclusion to an ideology and political process (Corbett & Slee, 2000; Foreman, 2011; Slee, 2011), but rather an understanding and commitment to participatory approaches that support the engagement and active learning of all students, practices that align with a social justice framework that relates to the right to participate and the right to learn (UNESCO, 2009).

When reviewing the data, my interview transcripts and observation notes, it became evident that differing understandings and beliefs about inclusion and disability were reflected in the approaches and attitudes of the participants. Six of the eight participants consistently demonstrated teaching and classroom management practices and understandings in keeping with a social model of disability, a model that involves "accommodations within the environment or curriculum" (Cologon & Thomas, 2014, p. 30), breaking down barriers to ensure that all students can participate and achieve. In these six teachers' classrooms, collaboration, active participation and shared learning experiences were commonplace. Although these participants did not engage with me in a discourse about definitions of disability and inclusion, my observations of their classroom culture and discussions with them provided examples of inclusive practices that related to valuing students equally, respectful interactions and the provision of authentic and engaging learning experiences (Thomas & Loxley, 2001). During my visits to the participants' classrooms I was able to identify a number of approaches and

strategies that relate to what Booth and Ainscow (2002; 2011) describe to as 'evolving inclusive practices' (refer to Table 2.4). These include the use of strategies that: develop an understanding of difference and encourage the participation of all students, provide opportunities for students to learn collaboratively and be actively involved in their own learning, and support the implementation of classroom management approaches (and a classroom culture) that develops social values and mutual respect (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011).

Responsive teaching

During my discussions with each of the eight research participants, they all emphasised the importance of being responsive not only to the academic, but also to the social and emotional needs of their students. Six of the participants discussed their efforts to provide flexible, welcoming classroom environments, opportunities for students to collaborate and work cooperatively, and differentiate the curriculum and classroom tasks. They reflected on and talked about their endeavours to create a learning environment that encourages the participation of all students. When I visited their schools, these six teachers did not present model classrooms or as perfect teachers, they were still developing and refining practices. However, each of these participants sought to know about and respond to student diversity, not by trying to *fix* and *solve*, but by implementing approaches and strategies that allowed all class members to be active and valued participants.

Well-Meaning but Misguided: Misconceptions About Inclusion

There were two participants, Debbie and Grace, who adopted *some* of these practices; they did *seek* to know about, accommodate and cater for the diverse needs of their students. At times, they provided choices for their students and they both frequently differentiated their teaching, providing opportunities for students to engage at differing levels and in different ways. However, Debbie and Grace also frequently implemented teacher dominant approaches that focused on what they needed to do *for* individual students, either by constantly controlling situations, or attempting to identify and *fix* problems and deficits. These examples offer a contrast and comparison to the adopted inclusive practices that have already been discussed in this thesis.

The following vignette, developed from notes in my research journal and interview transcripts, provides insights into the attitudes and beliefs that influence Debbie's responses to students with diverse social and emotional needs.

Understanding Student Behaviours (developed from interview transcripts and notes in research journal)

During my interviews, one of the participants, Debbie, frequently expressed her keenness to know about, understand and respond to her students' emotional wellbeing. Although Debbie talked about challenges within her class, particularly behaviour management, she spoke passionately about teaching her current, upper primary, class and explained: "*I really love teaching the older students".* During our conversation it became clear that Debbie cared about her students, and she was particularly concerned about those children in her in her class who experienced social and emotional challenges.

During one particular interview, Debbie outlined how having an opportunity to attend counselling sessions with one of her students encouraged her to develop an interest in psychology. Debbie explained:

> *I discovered that I was very interested in the psychology behind why people did things that they did. Why children did the things that they did and how I could make a difference using the psychology behind it … I don't really know if it [psychology] was something I have always been interested in or, just developed… And now that's one of the main things I look at with all of the children*. (Debbie)

During my subsequent interviews with Debbie she frequently reaffirmed her commitment to understanding the challenging emotional situations that many of her students encountered. I also learnt that her interest in psychology encouraged her to seek reports from health professionals, such as psychologists in her quest to develop knowledge that would help to "*explain the behaviour"* of individuals.

When I visited Debbie's classroom and observed her teaching practices, I became aware that a number of her students were frequently restless, and others often left tasks incomplete and seemed disengaged. I also often observed a lack of cohesiveness and cooperation between students. This included hearing students make derogatory remarks to one another. Even though Debbie would intervene and chastise those making the comments, teasing and negative comments remained commonplace. Unlike other participants' classrooms, where social skills were modelled and actively taught to all students, and classroom expectations

were negotiated with and understood by the students, Debbie was more likely to raise her voice to seek compliance, classroom expectations were more fluid and less consistent, and her responses to students tended to be reactive.

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) advocate, that inclusive educators view difficulties in learning as "professional challenges for teachers, rather than deficits in learners" (p. 819), a stance also promoted by UNESCO (2017). Debbie however, focused on 'blaming' the external factors that influenced her students' behaviours and frequently expressed lower expectations for some of her students. During my conversations with Debbie about the teaching approaches she employed, rather than reflect on her own practices and her efforts to develop a positive and supportive culture, she shared with me information about her students' 'problems' and expressed her sympathy for the plight of particular individuals. For example, when Debbie spoke about one of her students, she explained that she did her own "*research on the internet to find out more about the condition*". Similarly, when discussing a report for a student from a health professional, Debbie spoke critically of the lack of detail they provided. Debbie wanted them to "*be more specific*" and tell her exactly what she needed to do to for the child.

Debbie's beliefs about her student's abilities and efforts to care *for* individuals, was influenced by her focus on problems and difficulties, and resulted in her feeling sorry for and limiting her expectations for some students. When discussing her current class, Debbie explained "*the general scheme of what we are working at is lower*". These "deterministic views of ability" (Florian, 2014, p. 290) contributed to the development of a classroom culture that suppressed inclusive values, such as the notion of high expectations for all, or the belief that *everyone* could achieve (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Florian, 2014; Rouse, 2008). Rather than reflect on, identify and implement inclusive strategies, strategies that remove barriers to support the learning and participation of *everyone* in her class, Debbie tended to focus on what she needed to do to fix individual problems.

The medical model of disability

My discussions with Debbie and my observations of her classroom interactions with her students indicate that her attitude and practices frequently related to that of a medical model of disability, where students are seen as suffering from defects (Ballard, 2012; Cologon & Thomas, 2014; Goodley, 2017). This was evidenced by Debbie's preoccupation with diagnosis, disorders and the lack of ability of some students (Rapp & Arndt, 2012). By focusing on individuals' difficulties and seeking to *solve* her students' problems, Debbie conveyed messages to students that highlighted their difficulties and differences. Instead of embracing

practices that focused on developing skills and competencies and the removal of physical and attitudinal barriers to learning and participation (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), Debbie adopted a charity discourse that involved feeling sorry for individuals, seeking ways to care for and protect them, but also lowering her expectation for *some* students (Cologon & Thomas, 2014; Rapp and Arndt, 2012; Slee, 2001).

During my discussions with Debbie, she indicated that she was proud of her efforts to look after and care for particular students. She commented that she thought she had "*good skills in this area*". Debbie explained that at times she has sought out information from health professionals and the internet about disabilities and emotional problems and has developed an interest in psychology, but she appeared unaware of strategies she uses that set students apart or limits their expectations and participation. Rather than look inwardly, and reflect on and seek to refine and further develop her own practices, Debbie attributed difficulties she encountered in her classroom to her students' impairments and problems.

As an experienced teacher, Debbie has developed her practices over an extended period of time. During our interviews she spoke confidently to me about her knowledge of students, their academic and social emotional needs, and the implementation of formative assessments to direct learning (refer to Table 3.3, section vi). However, during our conversations it became evident that a number of her beliefs and strategies have been influenced by information from medical rather than educational sources. Medical reports and recommendations from a psychologist directed her towards the development of a classroom culture that is caring and sympathetic, but one that is frequently at odds with inclusive approaches. The influence of medical model of disability and the adoption of a charity discourse (Cologon & Thomas, 2014) impacts on Debbie's attitude towards student diversity, particularly on her ability to recognise and break down not only physical barriers, but also the attitudes, beliefs and classroom practices that limit the participation and achievement of some of her students.

Traditional teaching approaches

Grace, a less experienced teacher, interpreted her teaching responsibilities differently to Debbie, but her beliefs and understandings also directed her towards approaches that sometimes marginalised and excluded students. During our discussions, Grace consistently conveyed her commitment to achieving high standards for all learners (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). However, her endeavours to achieve these standards frequently involved the implementation of a traditional behaviourist approach. The following vignette outlines aspects of Grace's classroom and behaviour management strategies.

The Influence of a Traditional Model of Teaching (developed from notes in research journal)

Grace frequently spoke to me about strategies that she used to differentiate learning These include the variations she made to class tasks to allow students with differing competencies to participate and complete activities, and the creation of flexible skill-based rather than ‘levelled’ ability groups. For example, during a reading session when the focus for the guided reading[30] group was comprehension, students of differing abilities worked on the same skills using different texts. However, my observations indicated that Grace’s classroom groups were predominantly teacher determined, and that the students had few opportunities to make choices about where, how or who they work with.

When visiting her classroom, I noticed that Grace consistently maintained high levels of teacher control. When Grace’s students were grouped, they worked with her in a teacher group, while the other students were required to work independently. She positioned herself so that she could observe *all* the students at *all* times and the layout of her classroom, rows of desks reduced opportunities for student movement and collaboration.

Grace recognises that her teaching skills are still developing; she draws upon and appreciates the support and advice she receives from colleagues, particularly more experienced members of staff, and enjoys having opportunities to be involved in professional learning and refining her teaching practices. She sets high expectations for her students, but has been drawn towards a more traditional model of teaching, one that equates quality learning with teacher control, an approach that is content and compliance driven and subsequently less responsive to student diversity.

My observations and discussions indicate that Grace places a strong focuses on student outcomes, the skills and strategies her students need to develop, that she strives to implement strategies to ensure that she effectively delivers the required curriculum. However, she places

[30] Guided reading: Teachers scaffold the learning of a small group of students as they read a teacher-selected instructional level text (a book they are able to read with 90% accuracy). The approach involves teachers prompting the students on the use of problem-solving strategies that will support the students while they read silently or quietly to themselves (Hill, 2012; Tompkins et al., 2015).

less emphasis on self-reflection relating to the development of positive attitudes to learning and teaching, or the development of collaborative student relationships. Grace interprets inclusive practices in terms of ensuring that all students achieve high standards. She follows curriculum and school guidelines and implements a range of explicit teaching strategies to achieve this. Nevertheless, Grace's lack of awareness of the need to provide students with opportunities for collaboration and active learning indicate that she would benefit from guidance and support concerning the further development of her knowledge and understanding about inclusive pedagogies and participatory, constructivist models of teaching and learning. Grace's eagerness to further her professional learning and participate in school-based mentoring and coaching to enhance her skills, does however provide a valuable foundation for the future development of her teaching skills, particularly her knowledge and understanding of inclusive pedagogies.

Identifying participatory barriers

Grace and Debbie support the notion of inclusion in that they welcome 'all comers', know and care about each of their students and use formative assessments to direct learning within their classrooms. However, their personal interpretations of their professional responsibility to meet their students' needs relate more to care, or compliance and achievement of standards, rather than participation and active learning, which demonstrates to me their misunderstandings and misconceptions about inclusive pedagogies and quality teaching and learning. Subsequently, a number of the practices that these two teachers adopt are more isolating and inadvertently create, rather than dismantle, barriers to student participation and achievement.

Rather than recognise the practices that they adopted that marginalise certain students, Debbie and Grace justified the approaches they used in relation to their professional responsibility to address behaviours and provide for the developmental needs of individuals. This was evident in some of the comments that these participants made during my conversations with them. For example, their references to top and bottom groups, and seating students alone on tables to "*minimise the disruption*" (Grace), demonstrated that rather than implementing inclusive constructivist approaches that engage students as partners in the learning process and provide opportunities for them to co-construct knowledge (Loughran, 2010; Florian, 2014), Debbie and Grace's classroom practices and beliefs were at times influenced by teacher-dominated approaches that limited opportunities for active participation, and set some students apart (Moore, 2012, Poed et al., 2017).

Teacher Self-Reflection

While Grace and Debbie appeared unaware of practices that they used that marginalised and stigmatised students, in contrast, another of the research participants, Anna, was particularly reflective about her teaching skills. During one of our discussions Anna shared with me her concerns about her teaching abilities, particularly her competence as an inclusive educator. The following vignette provides insights into Anna's concerns about her efficacy as an inclusive educator.

Self-Reflection: (developed from interview transcripts and notes in research journal)

On my second visit to Anna's classroom, she inquired into the purpose of the research project and my motivation for the study. I related to her my background as a primary teacher, some of the frustrations and concerns I had encountered in my efforts to create an inclusive learning environment, and what I perceived as a need for greater understanding as to 'what it is like' to be a classroom teacher.

Anna nodded in agreement, then shared with me details of a recent discussion she had with a colleague, who made the point "*that often advice is provided that is difficult to implement and/or doesn't work*", and that this can be "*extremely frustrating*". Anna then became more pensive and explained that the year before she had a child in her class who had significant behavioural issues. While she explained that she had worked really hard on strategies, particularly maintaining strong relationships with her students, and received a lot of support from other staff at her school, she considered it to have been "a *very difficult year*".

Anna again became contemplative, she explained that the challenges she encountered dealing with this situation left her feeling unsure about her skills. She expressed concern that she had not been successful in developing an inclusive environment, and that maybe she would not be a suitable a research participant.

I explained to Anna that I was not looking for the 'model' teacher, but instead sought to develop understanding about how inclusion can be achieved in everyday classrooms. When I commented that I had observed numerous inclusive aspects in her classroom and teaching approaches, and that I would value her reflections on the challenges she had encountered, Anna expressed relief, and became more relaxed in her manner.

My observations of Anna's classroom, her interactions with her students and collaborative teaching approach, indicated she was a responsive teacher who sought to include and support *all* of her students. She developed strong relationships *with* and cared *about* all members of the class, she adapted the curriculum, encouraged student input and interactions, provided choices and would scaffold instruction and classroom tasks to ensure that *everyone* was able to participate and learn (refer to Table 3.3, sections i, ii, iii & vii). Anna's classroom was harmonious and welcoming, seating was arranged to allow for collaboration between students (refer to Table 3.3, section v) and Anna encouraged and modeled respectful interactions (refer to Table 3.3, section vii). I was surprised at the depth of Anna's concern about her competence as an inclusive educator, and the impact that her earlier experience dealing with challenging behaviour seemed to have had upon her confidence, and beliefs about her teaching abilities.

During my discussion with Anna about the challenges that she had confronted the previous year, the behaviour issues that she considered she had not been able to successfully resolve, she did not seek to blame others (the student, their family or lack of support from other staff) but looked critically at herself and questioned her teaching skills. Unlike Debbie and Grace, who linked their classroom challenges to specific students, Anna focused on her competency as a teacher and judged herself harshly, but her willingness to reflect on her practice provided a valuable foundation for continued professional learning, and the refinement of her teaching skills and strategies (Loreman et al., 2011).

Teachers Have Bad Days Too

During a later discussion about her 'journey' as a teacher, Anna reflected on the challenges she had encountered the previous year, describing them as a learning experience that has assisted her in becoming a more informed teacher:

> *Now I can actually use what I have learnt from that and absolutely I have learnt so much from that experience. So at the time when I was thinking it was horrendous and horrible, um, I think it has made me a better teacher as a result of that.* (Anna) (Elvey, 2017, p. 168)

While Anna was able to link the challenges she encountered to a learning process that has made her "*a better teacher*", I remained concerned by the degree of self-doubt that she revealed when she first spoke to me about her experiences the previous year. Anna made the point that she had "*come through this*" and has learnt from the experience. However, given the 'sink or swim' situation that she was encountering, there was a risk that the outcomes, for Anna

and her student, may not have been as positive. Anna's reflections highlight the importance of providing timely and quality professional support for teachers confronting challenging situations.

The impact of challenging behaviours on a teacher's morale, and the importance of schools providing a range of supports for classroom teachers, especially those that are less experienced or skilled, was also raised during my discussions with four other of the participants, Matt, Debbie, Grace and Ellen. The vignette below, draws on data from one of my interviews with Matt. It provides insights into some of the classroom management challenges that Matt encountered early in his career, the support he received from colleagues and how his early experiences have impacted on his current teaching practice.

Sink or Swim: Matt's Experience (developed from interview transcripts)

Matt discussed with me his experiences with both general classroom management and challenging behaviour, stemming right back to his first year as a teacher. He explains that initially he had a few students with differing behavioural issues, but the challenge was compounded with the arrival of two new students.

> *I had probably about 5 or 6 boys who had different behavioural problems. Then about half way through the year a couple of new boys. That created different dynamics and they had their own sorts of issues … "All up there was about 8 to 10 kids in the grade of 28 with different behavioural problems. Some were violent, some were learning, some were friendship, social issues and those types of things. But, yeah, it was interesting*. (Matt)" (Elvey, 2017, p. 168)

Throughout our conversation, Matt talked about this experience in positive terms and frequently stated that it gave him a good grounding. He explained:

> *I think that also having had those children straight away in my first grade has probably given me very good grounding*. (Matt)

> *It was a very good grounding, you know ... well you either sink or swim don't you. So you have got to sort of try and develop different types of strategies, and also I had very good mentors as well to be able to give me*

some advice and help. (Matt)

I was concerned by the comment that Matt made indicating that it was a 'sink or swim' situation. However, as our discussion continued, it became clear that eventually additional support was provided through collegial advice, classroom assistance and professional development; support that helped 'keep him afloat' while he developed and refined his skills.

In Chapter Seven, I discussed the *Tribes* social skills program that Matt has implemented in his classroom. Attending training for this program was one of the measures that the school principal took to support Matt when he found the behaviour of some students challenging and confronting. The knowledge and skills Matt developed from the training and ongoing support from his school principal helped him develop proactive strategies. Matt learnt about and implemented strategies that involved working *with* his students, collaborative strategies that support the development of a respectful and inclusive classroom culture (refer to Table 3.3, section viii)

Additional support and guidance in classroom management, early in his career, impacted on Matt's current teaching practices and encouraged him to work towards developing a classroom community that actively values and respects all students. Matt models collaboration to his students, he provides opportunities for students to share their knowledge and understandings (refer to Table 3.3, sections i & v) not only with him, but also each other, and has developed classroom agreements that focus on mutual respect, valuing diversity and respecting the rights of all members of the classroom and school community (refer to Table 3.3, sections iii & vii).

Guidance and support from colleagues

When Debbie discussed with me her experiences dealing with challenging behaviours during her first year as a teacher, I learnt that unlike what Matt had experienced, the level of support and guidance she encountered was quite limited. The following vignette provides insights into one of Debbie's early teaching experiences, and the impact that a lack of effective professional support and guidance can have on the development of inclusive strategies.

Sink or Swim: Debbie's Experience (developed from interview transcripts and notes in research journal)

During one of our interviews Debbie spoke with me about her initial teaching experiences; she recalled the dilemma she faced when dealing with challenging behaviours. While Debbie was able to access some advice from an external health professional and mentor teacher, she felt that the support and guidance she received was otherwise limited.

> *I taught a child with severe conduct disorder who used to stab people in the belly with a pencil to get closer to me in the line and, [sighs] I couldn't do any reading groups at all*. (Debbie)
>
> *And it was sort of up to me to make those decisions with, my mentor teacher, to really put into play any sort of tricks that would work.* (Debbie)
>
> *When I first started it was very much, just work it out… In that first year, I remember feeling quite overwhelmed*. (Debbie)
>
> *The behaviour was an issue ... I don't ever remember it being suggested that I had PD [professional development training] or anything like that*. (Debbie)

Even now, as an experienced teacher Debbie recognises that behaviour management remains challenging in her classroom. She explains, "*I think the biggest problem for me is the behaviours of some of the children*". Her comments fitted with my observations of her interactions with her students, this classroom was less harmonious than others I visited. Voices (including Debbie's) in this classroom were more frequently raised, students occasionally made negative comments about and to one another. While Debbie did implement cooperative and collaborative groups, she frequently needed to intervene due to friction between students who found negotiating with others challenging.

During my interviews with Debbie, I learnt that she hadn't had opportunities early in her career, to learn and develop strategies from and with colleagues, or have the benefit of attending targeted training on supportive approaches. Receiving little early guidance with classroom and behaviour management strategies, and being left to 'work it out', resulted in Debbie relying on trial and error and seeking out 'tricks'.

At the beginning of their teaching careers, both Debbie and Matt encountered difficulties dealing with challenging behaviours. Intervention and support for Matt during this period, allowed him to learn about and work towards the implementation of collaborative strategies and the development of an inclusive and supportive classroom culture. While for Debbie, lack of guidance in regard to classroom management resulted in her developing reactive rather than informed and inclusive approaches to behaviour management. Limited knowledge and understanding of inclusive classroom management strategies, continues to impact on Debbie's ability to successfully incorporate high levels of mutual respect and self-regulation into the classroom culture.

Feeling overwhelmed

Two other participants, Grace and Ellen, also described scenarios and shared with me their reflections on 'sink or swim' experiences that they had encountered as beginning teachers. They explained how beginning teachers can feel unprepared and even overwhelmed by the situations and challenges they can encounter in diverse classrooms.

> *In my first year I had Jed, I remember, he's got autism. We came, like at the end of the year before, to meet them {the new students] and all he did was sit and cry. And I had no idea what to do. I didn't know at that point that he had autism. So, he sat and cried. And I'm like, I don't know what's going on! It was a struggle for him to get used to how I worked, and that kind of thing. By the end of it [fourth term] we had such a fantastic year. And now he still comes up to me in the yard. And he is "Oh, Mrs Brown!" I just look at him and I think, god you've come such a long way. I remember the first few weeks of that year, it was tough. You know it was really tough, but we got there. And I look at Jed, and I just think 'wow', we've come so far*. (Grace)

> *There was one day last term, because things got constant, it was all the time he was doing something. And one day I think he must have hit someone fairly hard, hard enough for them to be really upset about it. And I just … [paused and took a breath]. He was sitting on the red dot, he took himself to the red dot and I sighed. I can't deal with it, I've had enough. So I just called the deputy principal, and he came and got him*. (Ellen)

Grace and Ellen's accounts of confronting and challenging teaching experiences, like those earlier by Matt, Debbie and Anna, highlight the importance of importance of all teachers, but especially less experienced teachers, being mentored and supported by more experienced and informed colleagues. These emotive recollections demonstrate the need for inclusive school

leaders being available to identify and support teachers under duress. All of the participants, at some stage, spoke with me specifically about challenges they have encountered catering for students with high emotional needs, particularly those that exhibit challenging behaviour. Seven participants recalled their initial concerns as graduate teachers about their practice knowledge, about their ability, or lack of, to deal with specific behaviours. The one participant, Rob, that did not articulate these concerns, had prior to becoming a teacher acquired a range of skills and strategies through his experiences working with and supporting disengaged youth. Later in this chapter I outline the active role this participant, Rob, took in guiding, supporting and modelling proactive classroom management strategies to colleagues and students.

Each of the research participants indicated that the behavioural challenges they had encountered were character building and that they had learnt a lot from these experiences. However, the accounts of five participants reveal stressful situations for not only the teacher involved but also their students, particularly the non-compliant student or students. In these challenging situations it was not only the teachers that were left to 'sink or swim'; a lack of effective strategies also impacted on the participation and learning of students in their class (Poed, et al., 2017).

Supporting teachers

My discussions with the participants, and their accounts of their own learning journeys in regard to managing challenging behaviours, align with Rouse's (2008) findings that "many surveys have found that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are not particularly positive" (p. 12) but that as their awareness of effective teaching strategies grow they gradually become more confident (Rouse, 2008). When faced with new and challenging situations some teachers, like Anna, Matt, Debbie, Grace and Ellen, may fear that they do not have the knowledge and skills to adequately cater for diverse student needs, and have concerns about their personal coping skills. However, targeted support and guidance from school leaders and more experienced colleagues can provide teachers with valuable opportunities to reappraise current approaches and further develop their understanding and use of effective strategies, enabling them to become more confident and inclusive educators (Ainscow, 2007; Rouse, 2008).

The research participants' accounts of their early teaching experiences draw attention to the importance of schools and school leaders having in place quality procedures and processes to mentor the provision of effective and inclusive teaching strategies, and the need to provide ongoing guidance and collegial support for teaching staff, especially recent graduates (Robinson & Carrington, 2002; UNESCO, 2017; Young, 2010). The supportive interventions Matt encountered from his principal and colleagues, and the targeted professional training he

attended, helped him to refine his teaching skills, boosted his confidence and enhanced his capacity to create a positive learning environment. Over time graduate teachers may become more confident and develop a greater repertoire of strategies (Rouse, 2008) to allow them to more effectively meet the diverse needs of their students. As Matt outlined, the skills and confidence of teachers can be enhanced and accelerated by relevant and timely intervention and support from more experienced and informed colleagues.

Matt's supported experiences contrast with the challenges described by Anna, exposing the importance of experienced staff and members of the school leadership team, identifying, mentoring and responding to the challenges that teachers encounter. No teachers, inexperienced or experienced, should be left to sink, to deal with stressful and challenging situations unsupported (Robinson & Carrington, 2002; Young, 2010). As Anna's comments revealed, being left alone to deal with concerns and situations where they are unable to cope, puts the confidence, health and wellbeing of teachers at risk. While, Debbie and Grace's experiences demonstrated that unsupported challenging situations, combined with a lack of understanding about inclusive pedagogies, can lead to reactive and sometimes misguided teacher responses that exclude or marginalise individuals within the classroom and school community (Poed et al., 2017).

Don't be a Lone Ranger

> Collaborative teaching involves making important changes as we decide to move beyond being a "lone ranger" and to work with others. In effective inclusive schools, teachers have choices regarding collaboration and professional supports. (Peterson & Hittie, 2003, p. 135)

When the participants discussed dealing with challenging students and stressful situations with me, the value of collegial support and guidance frequently arose. A number of the participants spoke about how they valued opportunities to work collaboratively with colleagues. These included members of the school leadership team, mentors, coaches, colleagues teaching similar grade levels and teachers in adjoining classrooms. The following extracts from my interviews with Ellen and Grace provides insights into experiences that have led them to value and seek out collegial support.

> *At this school it's very supportive. Whereas, I've had previous schools where it hasn't been like that so much, you've kind of been on your own. That's when you just talk to other teachers as well and get some support from them .... It might be a small school, but you*

just talk to them [colleagues] about how they manage certain behaviours, and just have chats about certain kids. (Ellen)

In most cases, the other teachers you are talking to are more experienced, so they've had kids like that before, maybe even taught those kids before, so you can ask them for some advice. (Ellen)

Garry is like our welfare as well as our assistant principal so he will quite often help and he's been really supportive. (Ellen)

And I like how it's not seen as Belinda is 'my kid'. She's in my grade but she's everyone's, and everyone sort of takes that responsibility. (Grace)

Someone here who has been really good is Judy our assistant principal. She is sort of in charge of welfare. If we have student support group meetings, she arranges them and she organises them and she takes the notes and gets everyone together. I feel like I can always go to her, if there is anything that sort of comes up at school. (Grace)

Collegial support, team teaching, mentors and critical friends

Three of the participants, Jane, Rob and Kate, were involved in team-teaching situations, and spoke positively about the impact it has had on their teaching practice, indicating they valued the mutual support, interaction and shared reflection that team-teaching provided for them. Each of these teachers had a designated class group and 'home' teaching area, but both students and teachers interacted and moved freely between classroom spaces, and student groupings were fluid. Kate made the remark that *"it's not just a student in my class, it's a student in ours",* while Jane explained that it is common for staff and students to "*float between rooms*" and that there is a "*lot of communication*" between teachers. Collaboration and the sharing of ideas and strategies was commonplace in these teachers' classrooms.

The least experienced practitioner involved in the study, Kate, was one of the participants involved in team-teaching. During my discussions with her she frequently reflected on the impact that team-teaching and the collegial support that accompanies it, has had on her development as a teacher. The following vignette provides insights into the supportive professional partnership that Rob and Kate developed and modelled to their students.

An Amazing Mentor (developed from interview transcripts)

During one visit to Kate and Rob's school I discussed their team approach with them. Kate in Rob's presence described him as "an amazing mentor" and explained:

> *In the early days I "looked to Rob a lot for how he was teaching, his teaching style and his teaching strategies, but now I really look to Rob for how he manages students, how he manages behaviour, how he talks to kids, how he treats them*"(Elvey, 2017, p. 170). *It's been absolutely, I cannot yeah ... I'm not thankful enough I think.* (Kate)

Rob was moved by Kate's comments. His response emphasised his commitment to making sure that Kate, a less experienced teacher, was supported and not left to flounder. But it also demonstrated his willingness to ease back on the amount of direction he provides, to allow Kate to increasingly assume responsibility, and for them to work as a team.

> *You don't have to. It's not a case of having to be thankful. We've all had people who influence what you do in teaching … But I felt a responsibility to make sure that your transition into this school has been comfortable. And I can tell you now, I've backed right off .... This year it's been more where we delegate and allocate roles*. (Rob)

Mutual respect is an integral part of Rob and Kate's team-teaching, the value they place on it, not only with each other but also their students, was noticeable when they were working in the classroom. They both discussed with me and modelled in their classrooms the use of positive and respectful language. During one of our interviews Rob commented that "*I think the non-negotiable with working with kids is respect. If you don't respect them don't ever expect it back*". When I made a remark to Kate about her use of positive language in the classroom, she explained that "*it's language I've taken from him [Rob]".* By working with Kate, as a mentor and in a team-teaching situation, Rob was able to share knowledge and understanding that he has developed during his career, model teaching strategies and support and guide Kate during shared classroom planning.

Rob and Kate's teaching is visible, they can constantly see and hear each other working with students. They also frequently reflect on their practices together, discussing their teaching strengths, and identifying areas for development. The following comments are extracts from a conversation I had with Rob and Kate during one of my visits to their school, they demonstrate Kate's willingness to reflect on her classroom management and learn *from* and *with* Rob.

> *We still have issues though, and I've been down a path myself just recently where I felt like my classroom just wasn't working properly, the kids were not performing. I just wasn't happy, and I stepped back and thought are the kids feeling valued? I've one student who is inherently disrespectful. I'm constantly feeling like I'm walking down that path anyway. Am I showing them respect? Am I giving them enough of my time?* (Kate)

> *And Kate spoke to me about it and I .... We just spoke about it and support each other. I've been down that road as well this year, where we make sure that we search for the answers within ourselves .... It could be something about our teaching practice that would be questionable. Kate is only new to the job, I've been teaching this grade level for 14 to 15 years*. (Rob)

Together Rob and Kate explore and question their practices; they seek to identify actions they can take to improve their relationships with students, their classroom management and the learning outcomes of students. When they discussed their teaching strategies with me, Rob and Kate spoke in terms of *we* and *us*. They explained:

> *We team teach practically everything*. (Kate)

> *I suppose we set the environment of inclusion by making sure that we can see each other and communicate with each other throughout the day so that the students see that it's not just one teacher, it's two teachers on the same page. That's sort of why we never wanted a doorway*. (Rob)

> *We work together a lot for our writing, and we treat them as a whole grade*. (Kate)

> *We try and make the groupings fluid based on ... it's not always based on need. It's not always ... you know it's very fluid and that way they are not over analysing what they are working on either.* (Rob)

The value that Rob placed on "*partnerships and relationships*" with his students and his colleagues equipped him well for the mentoring and team-teaching role he took with Kate. His previous experiences as a teacher and prior to that working with disengaged youth left him

committed to making sure all student feel "*part of the class*", that no one is excluded "*for who they are or what they have done [in the past]"* that "*everyone's very equal and fair*". Working closely together, Rob and Kate create a team culture; students and staff move between classrooms and frequently worked together in a shared learning space. The cooperation and collaboration between the two teachers allow them to promote mutual respect, and the valuing of the ideas, opinions and participation in their classrooms, and model it to their students through their interactions with each other (refer to Table 3.3, sections vii & viii).

Unlike some of the other participants who spoke freely of challenging students and stressful situations, in the early stages of their career, Kate was able to identify challenges but indicated that she felt that she was supported and guided. Not only is Kate able to learn about teaching from and with Rob, their shared reflections and collaborative planning provides opportunities for them to identify areas for improvement, refine their practices, and improve outcomes for *all* their students.

The collaboration and teamwork that Rob and Kate engage in, that I observed and they spoke with me about, provided opportunities that align with one of Booth and Ainscow's (2002, 2011) indicators of evolving inclusive practice, teachers planning, teaching and reviewing in partnership. By creating a cooperative learning space where they shared ideas and resources, planned together and had "opportunities to observe one another working" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 36), Rob and Kate engaged in practices that are conducive to the development of new and inclusive 'ways of working' (Ainscow, 2007; UNESCO, 2017).

Teacher Professional Learning

During my interviews with the participants, each of them at some point made reference to their involvement in professional learning and the positive impact it has on the development of their understanding and implementation of strategies that respond to and support student diversity. For example, Anna spoke highly of the professional development opportunities that her school provided, she explained that it "*is catering to our needs specifically"* that she valued "*having the training there to support you*". When my discussions with Anna explored influences and supports that related to developing an inclusive classroom, she quickly acknowledged the guidance she had received while teaching at her current school. This included coaching, extensive in-house professional development, team approaches to planning and sharing of ideas and strategies, and ongoing support from the school leadership.

In Chapters Four, Five and Six, I discussed and provided details about a number of programs such as the *Australian Developmental Curriculum* (Walker, 2011), *CAFE* and *The Daily 5* (Boushey & Moser, 2009; 2014), *Bluearth* (Bluearth Foundation, 2017) *Tribes* (Gibbs, 2006) and *You Can Do It* (Bernard, 2001) that specific participants implemented as result of their professional learning. Professional learning that they had been directed towards or received through their school. Noticeably, none of these approaches focused on a lack of ability or remediation for *some* students, they were programs and approaches designed to increase the participation and learning of *all* students. Subsequently, the practices that the participants predominantly discussed with me and implemented through these programs, related to inclusive strategies; strategies that prioritise student participation, collaboration and engagement (refer to Table 3.3, sections i-v); that support and embrace student diversity through differentiated teaching and learning.

The participation, learning and engagement of *all* students underpin the philosophy behind the *Australian Developmental Curriculum* (Walker, 2011), the major influence behind the inquiry-learning programs that Matt and Ellen implemented and spoke with me about (refer to Chapters Six and Seven). Prior to, and during the implementation of their inquiry-learning programs, Matt and Ellen had both been involved in targeted professional learning that provided them with an understanding about theory the *Australian Developmental Curriculum* (Walker, 2011) is based upon, along with information about how to implement the approach in their classrooms and schools. Matt had attended a facilitated training session on the *Australian Developmental Curriculum* (Walker, 2011) that involved teachers from differing schools. He also received ongoing guidance from other staff members at his school, teachers that had prior experience and training in developing an inquiry-learning approach.

The following vignettes are developed from transcripts of my conversations with Matt and Ellen. The reflections of these two participants provide insights into the differing ways that professional learning assisted Matt and Ellen in the implementation of a new and inclusive teaching approach.

Teacher Professional Learning: Matt's Reflections (developed from interview transcripts)

When I spoke with Matt about the implementation of inquiry-learning in his classroom and the factors he found supportive, he emphasised the value of seeing the approach in action and being able to seek guidance and learn from other teachers. He explained:

> *I think having people who have done it before and getting their support and ideas.* (Matt)
>
> *The way that the Smith Street classes were set up … Some of them [classrooms] have boards, or calendars on the board or daily planners, so that they, that the kids can then see what is happening. Also, the way they use the space within their room and use different things to set up little pockets, and little areas of the room where different activities can be done. And that's what I've done.* (Matt)
>
> *I just watched the way they did it. And then obviously with my kids being different to the classes that they'd had, then the way that I've set it up is so that it's accessible for them*. (Matt)

Teacher Professional Learning: Ellen's reflections (developed from interview transcripts)

Ellen's school provided school-based training and engaged an *Australian Developmental Curriculum* consultant to inform and guide staff in the implementation of the program, but like Matt she had also visited a school that adopted an inquiry-learning approach, and valued being able to observe other teachers implementing the program. She explained:

> So, we are doing PD, like across the whole school and getting mentored. Every five weeks I think it is we have the mentors come and talk to us about what we want to try and improve on. (Ellen)

We have been lucky enough ... at the start of the year we went and had a look at a school that do it quite well. They are a Kathy Walker [implement the *Australian Developmental Curriculum*] school, and we got to see how they do it and we got lots of ideas and we brought it back here. (Ellen)

While Ellen and Matt's professional training about the implementation of an inquiry-learning approach differed slightly in style and delivery, both of them were provided with opportunities to learn about the underpinning philosophies relating to engagement, motivation and the need for teachers to reflect on the whole child, to recognise and cater for their students' social, emotional and cultural development and influences not just their academic abilities (Walker, 2011). Attending training on the *Australian Developmental Curriculum,* observing the program in action, combined with guidance from other staff at their schools, provided Ellen and Matt with opportunities to develop knowledge of strategies that support student engagement, active participation and diverse interests. Supported by colleagues, these teachers developed an understanding of the importance of catering for diverse interests, abilities and cultures (Walker, 2011). The professional training that Ellen and Matt engaged in was related to a particular program, but it also provided them with an opportunity to observe and learn about the implementation of inclusive teaching strategies.

Implementing new ways of working

During my discussions with each of the participants it became evident that the professional learning they engaged in impacted not only on their classroom practices, but also their beliefs and understandings about their role as a teacher. The following comments from Matt relate to his reflections on training he had participated in and valued:

> *I guess it made me more aware of how you can give the children strategies and ways to actually think about other people.* (Matt discussing the *Tribes* program)

> *Doing the 'Bluearth' training was really positive for me. To see how to break down sessions and … to give you an activity bank and things to use. And then to be immersed actually in the session, and see and be a participant, and see what the activities are like*. (Matt, discussing Bluearth)

An eagerness to further develop their teaching practices and the valuing of professional learning opportunities was voiced by a number of the participants indicating their willingness to embrace 'new ways of working' (Ainscow, 2007; Florian, 2014; UNESCO, 2017). Anna, for example, was complimentary of the manner in which professional learning was organised within her school. She explained that due to financial limitations a lot of their professional training was done 'in house' rather than externally, but explained that she considered this to be an excellent decision because it ensured that the professional development was tailored to the needs of the staff and students and helped develop common understandings and goals within the school (refer to Table 3.3, section viii).

The focus for professional training that the participants spoke with me about was not student inclusion, but rather effective teaching. However, my discussions with Ellen and Matt, and my observations of their inquiry-learning program, indicated that their professional development training for that approach helped develop their knowledge and awareness of inclusive learning strategies. Similarly, other programs that the participants learnt about (as discussed in Chapters Six and Seven) such as *CAFE* and *The Daily 5* (Boushey & Moser,2009; 2014) *Tribes* (Gibbs, 2006), *You Can Do It* (Bernard et al., 1994) and *Bluearth* (Bluearth Foundation, 2017) are also based on inclusive and constructivist ideologies, on student-centred, participatory approaches. Each of the teachers involved in the study was directed towards these programs because their school leaders sought to develop knowledge and strategies related to 'best' and 'effective' practice amongst members of their teaching staff.

During my conversations with the participants it became clear that greater awareness of student-centred programs and the theories underpinning them, encouraged them to reflect on and make changes to their teaching practices, changes aimed at creating more responsive and more effective learning environments. Through their involvement in professional learning activities, the teacher participants learnt about classroom management and delivery of the curriculum, but they also learnt about developing supportive learning cultures through the implementation of inclusive strategies such as personalised student conferences, engaging classroom organisation, differentiating tasks outcomes, responses and stimulus (Moore, 2012; Tomlinson, 2014), and providing flexible collaborative groupings (Hayes, 2012). Targetted teacher professional learning and collegial support helped each of the participants develop, at varying levels, the confidence and ability to plan for and provide opportunities for student input and choice, to adopt more participatory and collaborative practices, and to model and promote mutual respect and the valuing of diversity (refer to Table 3.3, sections i-vii). Professional learning provided a pathway for the participants to develop strategies and understanding related to effective, inclusive teaching approaches.

Classroom Support

Six of the participants taught students with a disability who were eligible for funding through the Program for Students with Disabilities (State Government of Victoria, 2017a, 2018). For each of these students this school-based funding was used to employ Education Support Staff (ESS), a teaching assistant to work in the classroom with the teacher. When I was speaking with the participants, each of them commonly referred to this person as an aide. All six of the

participants spoke highly of the support that this aide time provided for them as a classroom teacher, the funded student and other children in the classroom.

Although each of the participants made comments that indicated that they valued the provision of a teaching assistant, and extra classroom support would appear to be beneficial, the provision of teaching assistants for funded students can present difficulties and disadvantages (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Rutherford, 2012). The distinction between support that facilitates participation and learning, and support that inhibits interaction and independence is easily blurred (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Goodley, 2017; Rutherford, 2012). When teaching assistants constantly shadow, patrol and monitor students, and seek to provide "wrap around support" (Goodley, 2017, p. 182), the interactions and social participation of students can be stifled and compromised (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Goodley, 2017; Rutherford, 2012). It is imperative that teachers and teaching assistants are "acutely aware of the delicate balance of being invisibly present in response to students' comfort levels regarding extra assistance" (Rutherford, 2012, p. 324). Similarly, rather than leave paraprofessionals to make decisions about the participation and learning of individuals, teachers and teaching assistants need to work in partnership, constantly communicating and collaborating for the good of all members of the class (Loreman, et al., 2011; Rutherford, 2012). This team approach, where teacher and teaching assistant support not only students, but also each other (Loreman, et al., 2011), was what I most frequently observed in the research participants' classrooms.

The following vignette relates to my observations and subsequent conversation with one of the participants, Anna, about the way she utilises the support of a teaching assistant in her classroom. It provides insights into the rapport that exists between Anna, her students and the paraprofessional, and their agreed focus on providing flexible and responsive support for not only the funded student, but also other individuals and groups in the class.

Supporting Karla (developed from notes in research journal)

Even though Karla received support from a teaching assistant each morning, when I first visited Anna's room it was not immediately obvious who the supported student was. Rather than constantly shadow the student as is sometimes commonplace, the teaching assistant initially monitored Karla's engagement and understanding and then roamed throughout the grade, sometimes working with differing individuals and groups. This provided Karla with opportunities to work collaboratively with other classmates and develop some independence in her work habits. When Karla become agitated or her engagement start to wane, Anna or the teaching assistant were quick to respond, supporting calming and refocusing Karla. Anna and the teaching assistant rarely communicated while I was observing in the classroom, but constantly moved to and from various students. Anna later spoke about the role of the teaching assistant in the classroom. She explained:

> *She {teaching assistant] is fantastic, she just understands, once she has got Karla sorted and established and Karla is quite happy doing her thing, and really it is just 'reading' Karla, the mood that she's in, her body language, as do I .... She will just go and roam once Karla's settled and on task and happy. She'll just go from group to group, individual to individual so it's handy having that extra person in the cla*ss. (Anna)

Anna works in partnership with the teaching assistant. At times she provides specific direction to the teaching assistant, requesting that she provide support in particular ways such as sitting with and reading to Karla or acting as a scribe, but more often she encourages her to monitor and support Karla's engagement and understanding. Together, Anna and the teaching assistant endeavour to support Karla's learning, but also develop her independence. As a result, the teaching assistant frequently moves and works with other groups and individuals, but constantly remains alert and ready to return to Karla should she become agitated or disengaged.

During my discussions with two other participants, Rob and Kate, they like Anna, stressed how they valued having an additional support person in the classroom, someone who was able to work flexibly with *all* students (rather than assigned to a specific child). The vignette below is developed from my observations of a paraprofessional working in Rob and Kate's classroom, and my subsequent conversation with both these teachers. It provides insights into Rob and Kate's beliefs about the value of teaching assistants and their commitment to a team approach.

Additional Classroom Support: A Team Approach (developed from notes in research journal)

The team approach that Rob and Kate created in their shared learning environment was particularly conducive to the presence of a teaching assistant (ESS). Like Debbie, Rob and Kate valued the support of an extra person, a paraprofessional, in their classroom. While ESS time was provided due to one of their students receiving funding through the Program for Student with Disabilities (State Government of Victoria, 2017a. 2018), they utilised the support flexibly, as a support for all members of the class, not just one student.

When I discussed my observations of the teaching assistant roaming and chatting with numerous students Rob explained "*that's part of her job that we were really interested in, because everyone at some stage will need that little extra assistance from somebody*". He elaborated and added that some students occasionally "need *it [support] a bit more intensely*". Because the teaching assistant roams and responds to varying students' needs, both he and Kate are have more time available to support and provide explicit instruction to groups and individuals, knowing that all their students have access to assistance if they require it.

While Rob and Kate valued the additional support that the teaching assistant was able to provide for their students, particularly those with what Rob described as "*higher needs*", Rob acknowledged that he and Kate need to take care that students don't become over-dependent on support from the teaching assistant. He explained, "*you don't want to rely on just one person either for those high needs. It chops and changes so much as far as employment*". The team approach and the frequent movement of both students and staff in Rob and Kate's shared learning environment created a situation where the teachers and teaching assistant worked together to monitor, respond to and support the varying needs of students. The three of them, Rob, Kate and the teaching assistant, endeavoured to develop supportive, but not dependent, relationships with their students.

During my observations of the teaching assistant interacting in the classroom, and my discussions with Kate and Rob, it was clear while that the teaching assistant predominantly supported what they described as their high needs students, roaming, and working with varying students and groups in the class, was encouraged and valued. Rob and Kate worked in partnership with the teaching assistant, welcoming her into their team and shared learning environment.

When utilising classroom support, Rob and Kate implement a collaborative model (Loreman et al., 2011). They welcome and embrace the teaching assistant as part of their team, acknowledging her presence and involving her in class discussions. At the start and end of a session or learning block Rob allocates time to speak with her, to clarify key issues or discuss and share observations and concerns. When a situation changes or they needed the teaching assistant to focus her attention on another area or student, Rob most frequently, but sometimes Kate, provides the teaching assistant with more explicit direction. Both teachers frequently laugh and joke with this staff member, just as they do with each other and their students, welcoming and acknowledging her as a valued member of the class.

Each of the other participants also spoke with me about valuing additional classroom support. For example, Debbie perceives that she is frequently unable to adequately meet the needs of all of her students. When she shared with me her concerns about feeling 'stretched' and frustrated due to conflicting demands on her time, she also discussed valuing having not only teaching assistants but also parent helpers in her classroom. Debbie explains:

> *Having an extra person in the room whether that's an aide or a parent or anybody, just having another person in the room makes a huge difference, because especially if you have a lot of kids with learning difficulties because they then feel that they have a better chance of getting help .... And it helps classroom management, every aspect in the classroom. So that's really helpful*. (Debbie)

Debbie values having additional adults within her classroom, as it allows her to move between individuals and groups knowing that any students with question or concerns are not left waiting for her to have time for them, that there is another person available to clarify, support and guide students.

When speaking with another of the participants, Grace, she reflected on her experiences as a young graduate, and how the provision of a teaching assistant allowed a situation that was initially daunting to seem more manageable.

> *I've had students who have aides, who are funded. So that was really good for me, sort of as a teacher coming out, because I had the extra support too. It was a bit daunting, I was thinking, I had these kids that had these extra needs. But now I think you just realise that that is how it is. Like you are going to have kids, funded or not that always have those additional needs*. (Grace)

Grace indicated that she still appreciates having support from a teaching assistant when it is available. However, she also stressed that funded students are not the only ones with diverse learning needs, and that provision of an aide for students with additional learning or behavioural needs, could not be relied upon. Grace was aware that the current funding model (State Government of Victoria, 2017a) is based on students meeting specific criteria that define the degree or severity of their impairment. Subsequently, a student may be encountering social, emotional, physical or academic challenges, and not qualify for funding through the Program for Students with Disabilities (State Government of Victoria, 2017a, 2018).

While each of the research participants indicated that they valued the provision of a teacher assistant, the time allocations for support staff differed and were dependent on the level of (or lack of) funding students received. Limitations or discrepancies with the funding model resulted in two participants, Grace and Jane, receiving no additional classroom support (despite working with students who they perceived as having significant learning needs), while other participants received support from teacher assistants for significant periods throughout the day. Those classrooms, such as Matt's, Rob's and Kate's, that received some, but not extensive teacher assistant time, utilised the support person predominantly for those curriculum areas and activities such as English and Mathematics that frequently involved explicit teaching, and required more concentrated student application. In each of the participants' classrooms where teacher assistants were employed, the teachers utilised the paraprofessionals flexibly, encouraging or even directing them to roam and interact with individuals and groups. Although the teacher assistants were employed as a result of additional funding for an individual or individuals in the class, none of the teacher assistants worked exclusively with one student. Instead, under the direction of the participant teacher, they responded to the learning, social and personal needs of varying students within the classroom. Explicit instruction was provided to individuals and groups by the classroom teachers, while the teacher assistant monitored engagement, helped to clarify key points and task requirements, and encouraged positive work behaviours and interactions. Each of the participating teachers willingly collaborated and worked in partnership with teaching assistants (refer to Table 3.3, section viii), and they appreciated the extra assistance that these paraprofessionals were able to provide for various students in their class.

Classroom helpers

Regular assistance in the classroom from teaching assistants is one of the ways that teachers with diverse cohorts of students receive additional classroom support. Parent-helpers, parents

who volunteer their time to help in the classroom, often during specific areas of the curriculum such as reading, writing and mathematics, are another support available to teachers. Three participants, Jane, Ellen and Grace, spoke positively about the role that parent-helpers played in supporting student in their classroom. In some cases, parent-helpers were involved in specific programs, such as *Multilit*[31] that the teachers organised and supervised, and at other times they sat and read to and with students. Parental help, like that of teacher assistants, was seen by Jane, Ellen and Grace to 'ease the load', as it allowed these teachers to spend more time involved in explicit teaching with groups and individuals, knowing that other students in their class were still being supported.

Teacher-student ratios

The need to 'ease the load' was an area that Matt, elaborated on during our discussions. Like other participants who expressed concern about feeling 'stretched' due to varying classroom and behavioural demands. Matt identified three major aspects that supported him with his current diverse cohort of students. The first of these was the provision of a teacher assistant as outlined earlier in this chapter, but the two other factors, small class size and the allocation an additional teacher during the reading session, were also he explained, important in allowing him to have time *for* and *with* individuals and groups within his class. Matt's experiences with not only his current class but also previous class groups led to his concerns surrounding the challenges of *large*, diverse classes. The following vignette relates to a discussion I had with Matt about the impact that low student to teacher ratio had upon his ability to cater for the diverse needs within his classroom.

Class Size and Student to Teacher Ratios (developed from notes in research journal and interview transcripts)

Recognising the diversity within the school, the leadership team at Matt's school had chosen to keep student numbers in the classrooms low. Concerned about the low literacy levels of some of the children, they also opted to provide Matt and his students with support from an additional teacher during timetable reading sessions.

Matt indicated that the low student to teacher ratio allowed him to more easily monitor and respond to his students' learning needs. He found a smaller class was much more manageable. He perceived that it impacted positively on the quality of the program that he was able to

[31] Multilit: A one to one reading intervention program for children in the middle and upper years of primary school, developed by Macquarie University (MUSEC).

deliver, including his ability to calm and reassure anxious students and deal with any behavioural issues. Matt explains:

> *If your attention is everywhere else, how can you then deliver a good program to those that are there, for those who can't cope in that environment?* (Matt)
>
> *Because your teaching isn't just coming into the room and the children all sitting beautifully on the floor. If you had that then you're very lucky …. There could be issues that happen at playtime, or before school, or on the weekend*. (Matt)

Matt sought to develop positive relationships with and respond to his students' social, emotional and academic needs. He explained that when he had a large class size and diverse student cohort, he found this challenging. As a result, he appreciated it when the school leaders at his school intervened and provided additional classroom support and smaller class sizes. He perceived that this allowed him to be a more effective teacher.

Leading the Way: Influence and Impact of the School Leadership

Each of the participants indicated that support from teacher assistants had a positive impact on the learning environment. Many of them stressed that the provision of teacher assistants helped eased the pressures of classroom behaviour management and allowed the teachers to more successfully monitor and support the diverse learning needs of their students. Similarly, a number of the participants spoke highly of the guidance and support they received from members of their school leadership team. In some cases it related to principals and deputy principals identifying and organising relevant and supportive professional development, the professional learning that I discussed earlier in this chapter. Often participants also referred to appreciating the daily support and regular physical presence of principals and deputy principals. Jane, Grace, Ellen and Matt, for example, all spoke about valuing the ongoing support and guidance that members of their school leadership team provided. They cited examples, such as deputy principals regularly visiting their classrooms and helping to settle and work with students, particularly those exhibiting challenging behaviours.

> *She's been a mentor for me and still is. So we have a great relationship.* (Jane, discussing the influence her principal has had on the teaching strategies she used with her diverse cohort of students.)
>
> *Someone here who has been really good is Janet, our assistant principal. She is sort of*

> *in charge of welfare. If we have student support group meetings, she arranges them and she organises them and she takes the notes and gets everyone together. I can always go to her if there is anything that sort of comes up*. (Grace, discussing the support she receives from her assistant principal.)

> *Sandra is like our welfare as well as our assistant principal, so she will quite often help and she's been really supportive with trying to get the funding. We've been going through hoops just to get the funding for him [student with challenging behaviour]. So she's done all that process for him and she knows how hard it is [for the student and teacher]. You know she's been a part of it all the way.* (Ellen, discussing the support she has received from her assistant principal.)

> *There was no stable male role model in his life, and then all of a sudden he had three. He had myself, he had Chris [principal] and also he had Mark [aide]. All totally, you know, completely different people, but they could all bring something to help and support him*. (Matt, discussing the involvement of his principal in supporting a student experiencing social and emotional difficulties.)

These four research participants appreciated that their school leaders did not just direct the teachers in their school; they actively modelled the strategies they advocated. As a result, the school leaders were not viewed by the participants purely as an administrative or supervisory group, but as active and supportive members of the teaching team. By spending time working with both teachers and their students, providing physical and emotional support, the educational leaders in these participants' schools had opportunities to develop awareness and understanding about the challenges that individual teachers (and students) were encountering (Specht & Young, 2010). This frequently transferred into targeted support, in the form of professional development opportunities, staff mentoring and the creation of collaborative teaching teams (refer to Table 3.3, section viii). In some cases, it transferred into the leadership consulting with staff and when making decisions about size or structure of classes within their school. By working with teachers, in their classrooms and during school based professional training, these school leaders were able to encourage, support and model inclusive practices to their staff (Macmillan, 2010).

Specht and Young (2010) advocate that "for a school to have a culture based on the principals of inclusion, teachers need to feel supported and they have to have the trust of the principal" (p. 79). As I have just outlined, several of the research participants discussed the benefits of a strong working relationships with a member or members of their school's leadership team. Some participants, such as Matt and Jane, spoke about the guidance and support they received

from their school principal, but more commonly the participants discussed ways that the assistant principal mentored and worked with them, and guided their teaching practices.

During my discussions with the participating teachers, it became apparent that support and guidance from members of the leadership team was provided in differing ways and levels, but that it was universally valued. However, two participants shared with me a concern in regard to nationwide standardised testing, an issue that they felt their school leadership did not, or were not able, to address. One of the participants even indicted that the attitudes of the school's leaders, and her own feelings on being judged compounded her concern.

The Dilemma of Standardised Testing: Mixed Messages about Diversity for Teachers and Students

When I visited two of the participants, Jane and Debbie, I observed them taking lessons preparing students for the forthcoming nationwide standardised test. The tests they were preparing for are part of a National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN[32]) and are developed and managed by The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

> NAPLAN is an annual assessment for all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. It tests the types of skills that are essential for every child to progress through school and life. The tests cover skills in reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy. The assessments are undertaken every year in the second full week in May. (National Assessment Program, 2018)

The National Assessment Program and ACARA advocate that these tests are compatible with current teaching and assessment approaches, "that teachers and students are familiar with the format" (NAP, 2018), and that it is neither necessary or useful to provide students with excessive practice tests (NAP, 2018). However, just as I observed in Jane and Debbie's classrooms, it remains common for teachers to spend time preparing students for these tests. Criticism of standardised tests such as NAPLAN, frequently relate to concerns that the format and process does not correspond with current practice, the teaching and learning approaches normally implemented within the school or classroom (O'Mara, 2012).

The concerns that the Jane and Debbie expressed about the forthcoming standardised tests

[32] NAPLAN: National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy, an annual assessment for all students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

were consistent with those that O'Mara uncovered when interrogating the data from a submission by the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) to the Australian Federal Senate Inquiry into "unintended consequences of NAPLAN" (O'Mara, 2012, p. 18). After analysis of the 88 teacher surveys O'Mara (2012) concluded that a significant number of teachers and schools were experiencing negative impacts from the testing and publication regime surrounding the NAPLAN tests.

O'Mara's (2012) critique on the NAPLAN testing process enquires into teacher concerns that include: lack of consideration for not only diversity academic ability but also the cultural and social aspect of schooling; the pressures that are being applied to schools and teachers to achieve 'good' results; and the lack of relevance of the tests for the students' lives and the way that they are currently taught. O'Mara refers to survey comments such as:

> Many students at our school are lucky to have breakfast, lucky to have been asleep by midnight, lucky to have a pen and lucky to have ever read a book in their lives and yet they are being taught to achieve better data in a test that they won't even take seriously to begin with. (O'Mara, 2012, p. 19)
>
> NAPLAN preparation time is definitely biting into large chunks of class time that should be used for ordinary teaching and learning, that is to say meaningful teaching and learning …. Despite repeated reminders that we 'do not prepare for NAPLAN' voiced in official settings, we certainly do. (O'Mara, 2012, p. 22)
>
> Pressure to perform is placed on staff, who then spend a large amount of time preparing students, when this time would be better spent teaching in real life contexts. (O'Mara, 2012, p. 22)

The following extracts from my interviews with Jane and Debbie, the two research participants that were involved in NAPLAN testing (NAP, 2016, are consistent with teacher concerns that O'Mara's (2012) study uncovered. For example, Jane and Debbie, expressed apprehension regarding the format of particular tests, and the effect of the testing program (implementation and results) on some students, especially those who for varying reasons are not achieving grade level standards.

> *I don't like teaching it [NAPLAN] when they [the students] have to structure their writing according to a process, when we are trying to get children [pause], and the ethos of the school I suppose is that we are trying to build into children's interests, getting them to write about things that they like writing about. Whereas for this one we have to say, "No,*

that is the topic today and you have to write to that topic". And, as you can see this morning, it doesn't motivate all writers. (Jane)

When my children do NAPLAN … and this one's dyslexic, and this one's got learning difficulties and some have got working memory problems, which impact their learning, my results are going to be low. And I am judged by that. That really gets at me, because I want to celebrate that that child has moved up from where they were at the start of the year, and that they have done a great job. (Debbie)

Jane's concerns about NAPLAN relate to the artificial nature of the testing process and the tests lack of relevance for her students. When teaching in her classroom Jane spends large amounts of time motivating and engaging her students, and a number of children in her grade are from disadvantaged backgrounds or experience social and emotional challenges. The NAPLAN tests with their allotted subject and a time frame that is based on the expectation that all students can stay on task during the session, does not fit with Jane's diverse student cohort and the manner in which her classroom normally runs. Jane is concerned that many of her students will find the inflexibility of the tests and their limited motivation challenging. As a result, the test scores of some individuals will not be a true indicator of their abilities.

Jane is also worried that the rigidity of the NAPLAN testing formal will impact negatively on a number of her students, both the test experience itself and the results. Her previous experiences administering the tests revealed that many students from diverse cultural backgrounds, or students that have learning and concentration difficulties, found the testing process challenging. As NAPLAN results are published many months after the tests are administered (NAP, 2018) they provide limited guidance for Jane or her students in regard to future learning needs and relevant goal setting. These externally set, standardised tests contrast with the student focused conferencing and goal setting approach (refer to Table 3.3, section vi) that Jane normally uses in her classroom.

Debbie's concerns relate to the problems 'one test for all' can present. For some of her students the test will be extremely challenging, and their results will be quite low. Debbie is concerned that she as a teacher will be judged by her students' results, as low performing schools and teachers are identified as part of the process. This was a teacher concern that O'Mara (2012) also exposed, a concern by teachers that they would be personally accountable for poor results and that other influencing factors would not be taken into consideration (O'Mara, 2012).

Debbie's comments, as with those in the examples cited by O'Mara (2012), raise questions relating to how the test results impact on teachers' attitudes to students with learning disabilities, and whether concern about being judged because of the scores of lower performing students can create an incentive for teachers and schools to encourage parents to educate their children in segregated special schools. O'Mara's study also indicates that the NAPLAN preparation and testing process effectively marginalises some lower performing students, with reports that some students were "being 'moved on' from schools, or at least told to stay away" (O'Mara, 2012, p. 21). Neither of the two participants involved in my study implementing the mandated standardised tests indicated that NAPLAN brought about physical exclusion and marginalisation of students in their schools, but they did share with me concerns in regard to the teaching time that NAPLAN impedes upon, the lack of relevance of both the test format and results, and that the rigid process does not adequately cater for or take into account student diversity.

Debbie also expressed concern about the messages that the NAPLAN results may convey to those students in her class who are not high achievers, especially those who will find aspects of the testing process challenging. Rather than focus on progress, what students have learnt and areas where they have improved, the NAPLAN results for students that are not at grade standard frequently highlight problems, weakness and lack of ability. Debbie is of the opinion that the publication of the NAPLAN results may be stressful for some of her students and impact negatively upon their self-esteem.

Masters (2014) outlines the limitations of an approach such as NAPLAN that focuses on standardised year level test scores, and sends negative messages to students about lack of achievement or even cause them to conclude that they have a lack of capacity to learn (Masters, 2014). Masters warns that "such demotivating messages undermine students' beliefs in the relationship between effort and success and frequently lead to disengagement" (p.5) and advocates that there needs to be a change in thinking;

> from a belief that there are 'good learners' who meet year-level expectations year after year, and 'poor learners' who perform below standard year after year, to a belief that, although students may be at different points in their learning and may be progressing at different rates, all are capable of good learning progress. (Masters, 2014, p. 7)

Implementing meaningful assessment procedures

When I spoke with Jane and Debbie about student assessment and observed the approaches such as student conferencing, collection of work samples and ongoing monitoring that they

used in their classrooms, it was clear that the less personalised and more rigid format of the NAPLAN tests contrasted ideologically with the methods that these teachers and their schools normally used. Jane and Debbie, normally seek to implement personalised assessment methods and consider NAPLAN an unwelcome diversion from their normal approaches to not only assessment, but also teaching and learning in their classrooms. Both these research participants advocate that NAPLAN is not an approach that is advantageous for, or suits, all learners. Instead, it creates a barrier to the successful participation of some students within their classrooms.

Just as Jane and Debbie are obliged to implement the NAPLAN tests on a prescribed date and follow the rigid time allocation and format, members of their schools' leadership teams are also mandated to ensure that the tests are carried out according government guidelines. Applications can be made to the testing authority to allow particular students to access assistive devices, sit the test(s) away from other students or be provided with additional time to complete tasks (NAP, 2018). While these adaptations may assist particular students, Debbie and Jane are concerned that the rigidity of the process will create barriers that will make completion of the tests challenging for some of their students. Constrained by the education department regulations, the school leadership is able to do little to alleviate concerns that teachers, such as Jane and Debbie, express about implementing the NAPLAN tests. Students either participate in NAPLAN according to the format outlined by the testing authority, or their parents can request an exemption and have their child excluded from the testing process. Neither of these options align with the flexible, participatory practices and formative assessment strategies that underpin an inclusive approach (refer to Table 3.3, sections iii & vi). Instead they create a barrier for the successful participation of some students and can be a source of both pressure and frustration for teachers (O'Mara, 2012; Masters, 2014).

Feedback from Parents and Carers

While the participants occasionally identified challenges they had encountered in their endeavours to meet the diverse needs of particular students, they more frequently spoke with pride about their teaching experiences and their students' achievements. For example, one of the teachers, Jane, was keen to pass on a positive response she had recently received during a parent meeting. The mother of one of Jane's students had remarked, "*that they felt wonderfully supported*" and that they appreciated how much Jane had done to help their child (Elvey, 2017). The parent's feedback was valued by Jane who valued the affirmation of her

efforts to support the student. Another participant, Anna, shared with me a similar anecdote: the mother of one of her students had expressed surprise at how quickly she had got to know her daughter (a student with autism) when it had taken her years to understand how to meet her child's needs and keep her calm. Anna, like Jane, was encouraged by this positive feedback and proudly relayed this comment to me. Positive feedback from parents reaffirmed to Jane and Anna that they have the skills and strategies to support these students, that they are 'doing a good job'.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I drew on the notes in my research journal and interview transcripts to interrogate the factors that have supported, influenced or impeded the participants in their interpretation and implementation of inclusive pedagogies. I inquired into ways that the participants' understanding and awareness of the skills and strategies that underpin an inclusive classroom culture have developed. Teacher anecdotes provided insights into the participants' prior teaching experiences, and exposed the difficulties, negative attitudes and misunderstandings that can be developed when inexperienced teachers are left unsupported, and their potential to bring about classroom practices that stigmatise and marginalise some students.

The discussion in this chapter drew on the data to develop insights into the development of the research participants' teaching and classroom management skills. I reported on accounts that the participants shared with me regarding ways that professional training supported or encouraged them towards the implementation of more collaborative, participatory teaching practices and encouraged the participants to embrace the implementation of 'new' and inclusive programs and strategies. I also exposed how learning from and with colleagues, along with support and effective guidance from school leaders, provided opportunities for the teachers to reflect on and refine their skills, subsequently increasing their confidence and capacity to cater for the full variance of learners.

In this chapter I interrogated the misunderstandings and misconceptions of two participants, about what constitutes inclusive practice. I inquired into, and uncovered, how aligning with traditional behaviourist teaching practices and a medical model of disability (Cologon & Thomas, 2014; Goodley, 2017) influenced and negatively impacted on both these participants' beliefs and attitudes about student diversity, on their classroom practices, and subsequently on their capacity to develop an inclusive classroom culture.

While the discussions in this chapter continued to explore *when* and *how* the teachers implemented inclusive approaches, the main focus for discussions were the reasons and influences behind the research participants' pedagogical choices. In the next chapter, Chapter Eight, I continue to inquire into the participants' teacher craft knowledge and the factors that influence their implementation of inclusive teaching practices. However, in Chapter Eight, I also probe into the links between 'effective' teaching, as interpreted by the research participants, and inclusive pedagogies.

Chapter Eight: Effective and Inclusive: The Meeting of Pedagogies

In the previous chapter, Chapter Seven, I interrogated the research data, my classroom observation notes and interview transcripts, in an endeavour to make sense of the reasons, the supports and influences, behind the eight teacher participants' pedagogical choices. I exposed some of the ways that the participants' beliefs, attitudes and understanding about inclusion impacted on their classroom practices. Drawing on the data, I provided examples that demonstrated how targeted professional learning, team approaches and guidance from informed and inclusive school leaders had enhanced the participants' confidence and capacity, and provided them with support and guidance in the implementation of 'new' inclusive approaches.

In this chapter, Chapter Eight, I extend on the discussions from Chapter Seven interrogating not only *when, what* and *how* particular practices are implemented, but also *why.* To support this deeper analysis of teacher practice I frequently refer to the literature on inclusive education, comparing approaches that the participants adopted to 'indicators' or 'evidence' of inclusive and effective practice (refer to Table 3.3). Once again, I draw on the data, particularly interview transcripts, to provide insights into the influences that support, and sometimes hinder the development of inclusive pedagogies.

Teacher Craft Knowledge

When I reflect on the practices that I observed within the participants' classrooms and my discussions with them, I recognise the strong emphasis that they placed on responsive teaching approaches. There was not an expectation that all students would achieve the same thing, at the same time, in the same way. Instead, the teachers involved in the study frequently utilised classroom teaching approaches and activities that provided flexibility, that involved choices for students and provided opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of knowledge and skills between class members (refer to Table 3.3, sections ii-v).

In Chapter Four, I provided evidence that each of the teachers involved in the research sought to know about and understand the academic, social and emotional needs of their students. They used varying combinations of informal and formal observations and assessments that included checklists recording skills demonstrated during class activities, individual student conferencing, and analysis of student work samples. These formative assessments and

interactions with students, supported the teachers in their endeavours to develop rich knowledge about each of their student's strengths, interests and learning needs (refer to Table 3.3, section vi). While the research participants occasionally made reference to an individual student's specific needs, the implementation of an Individual Education Plan/Individual Learning Plan[33] or a Student Support Group[34] (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2017a; State Government of Victoria, 2017b, 2018) their focus was predominantly directed towards effective classroom teaching strategies. Rather than concentrate on strategies for *some* individuals and on 'one-to-one' or 'pull out' programs, the strategies and approaches that I most frequently observed were ones that the participants, and often other members of staff at their school, had adopted to support and nurture diversity amongst learners in their classrooms.

The participants implemented and spoke with me about class programs and strategies that personalised learning and differentiated instruction for *all* students, rather than individualised 'special needs' approaches. Student-centred programs such as *CAFE* and *Daily 5* (Boushey & Moser, 2009; 2014) , inquiry-learning (Walker, 2011) , social skills training (Gibbs, 2006) *You Can Do It* (Bernard et al., 1994) and *Bluearth* (Bluearth Foundation, 2017), that I discussed in Chapters Six and Seven; approaches that are participatory, flexible and provide opportunities for *all* students to make choices and be actively engaged were frequently implemented by the participants, often in partnership with other teachers at their schools (refer to Table 3.3, sections i- v & viii). During my observations and discussions with the participants it became clear that they were not prioritising programs that had have been designed for individuals or a select special needs group, but instead sought out and adopted approaches that promote the engagement, participation and learning of *everyone* in the class. The teacher participants, often in conjunction with their school leaders and teaching colleagues, were frequently selecting and implementing inclusive programs to enhance their capacity to cater for their students' diverse abilities, learning needs, interests and backgrounds (refer to Table 3.3, section i).

My observations of the participants' classroom teaching and subsequent discussions with them about approaches they used, their prior experiences, attitudes, concerns and successes in relation to student diversity, indicated that their focus was effective practice rather than the implementation of select strategies for *some* students. The teaching approaches and strategies that the participants discussed with me, and that I observed being implemented, were at

[33] Individual Education Plan/Individual Learning Plan: Individualised learning goals designed to build on a student's current strengths and identify future learning needs,

[34] Student Support Group: a cooperative partnership between the parent/guardian/carer(s), school representatives and professionals to ensure coordinated support for the student's educational needs (DET, Vic, 2018).

varying levels of development within their classrooms. Some, such as *Tribes* (Gibbs, 2006), and *You Can Do It* (Bernard et al., 1994), that emphasised the importance of mutual respect and focused on developing cooperative classroom communities (refer to Table 3.3, section vii), and *CAFE* (Boushey & Moser, 2009, 2017) a whole grade literacy approach that involves student choices, flexible grouping, formative assessments and student input into targeted strategy development (refer to Table 3.3, sections i-vi), were entrenched not only within individual participant's classrooms but also in their schools. Other learning approaches such as *Bluearth* (Bluearth Foundation, 2017) with its focus on student wellbeing through active engagement, the implementation of participatory physical activities that are designed to provide opportunities for *all* students to be involved, succeed and have fun (refer to Tables 3.2, sections ii-iv), and inquiry-learning (Walker, 2011) with its emphasis on student-directed learning, choices, creativity and problem solving (refer to Table 3.3, sections ii, iv & v), had only recently been introduced.

During my discussions with the participants it became clear that while many of the teachers recognised and valued the inclusive nature of newly implemented programs and strategies, they initially adopted these teaching approaches because they aligned with what they, their school leaders or their mentors identified as 'effective' practice. Commitment to being 'good' teachers and achieving positive outcomes for everyone in their class provided the incentive for teacher reflection, the introduction of more flexible and responsive practices, and movement away from generic level based approaches to an increased emphasis on ensuring that *all* students were active, engaged and productive members of their classroom community.

In striving to improve their teaching skills, to more effectively respond to the both the learning and social emotional needs of their students, these educators embarked on what Booth and Ainscow describe as the "unending process of increasing learning and participation for all students" (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 3). Through a combination of teacher professional training that directed them towards a range of participatory constructivist approaches and their own reflections on their efficacy as a teacher, the participants' understanding and implementation of inclusive pedagogies is gradually developing. Already some of the participants are more adept at this than others, but this is consistent with the differing experiences, training and influences that they have each encountered. As each participant's knowledge and understanding of strategies that support the full diversity of students within their classrooms has grown, so too, has their ability to break down barriers to learning and participation (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), to implement relevant supportive practices and to

create positive learning environments that ensure that *all* the students in their class are active valued members of the classroom community.

> My observations and discussions with the research participants revealed that they saw inclusive teaching, not as an elusive 'holy grail' that involved a separate set of strategies and programs (Loreman et al., 2011), but as being entwined in the 'essential ingredients' of 'best' practice and 'quality' teaching (Forlin et al., 2013). (Elvey, 2017, p. 171)

The teacher participants interpreted inclusive practice within the context of their own responsibility to provide not only relevant and effective instruction but also a nurturing and safe environment that caters for *every* student.

Effective Teaching, Inclusive Teaching: The Essential Ingredients

Promoting the implementation of practices such as universal design for learning, and differentiated instruction that allow teachers to more successfully plan and cater for the full diversity of their students, Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) draw attention to the links between effective practice and inclusive practice. As these authors explain, "simply put, quality classrooms evolve around powerful knowledge that works for each student. That is, they require quality curriculum and quality instruction" (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 3). Stressing the importance of skillful instruction "to bring curriculum to life for young learners" (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. vi) and flexible instruction "to make the curriculum work for academically diverse populations" (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. vi) Tomlinson and McTighe highlight the links between the knowledge and skills, the craft knowledge of 'effective' teachers, and the implementation of inclusive practices. This notion is also widely supported by proponents of inclusive pedagogies. For example, Loreman et al. (2011), align inclusive teaching with effective teaching arguing that:

> The perception that significantly different, more effective strategies exist for teaching a diverse range of learners is essentially false. Importantly, a good inclusive teacher is an engaged one, who can respond to the needs of all learners in the class, and who plans in advance for this. **(**Loreman et al., 2011, p. 150)

Clearly, the development of inclusive classrooms requires "teachers who are knowledgeable, and who are able to employ a range of effective pedagogies that meet the needs of diverse student populations" (Carrington et al., 2012 p. 11). The skills and strategies that effective teachers use, their ability to respond to differing abilities, interests and backgrounds and maximise the learning of all their students, also relate to the strategies that support inclusive

classrooms. These are learning environments that maximise the participation and achievement of *all* students (UNESCO, 2009, 2017).

In the following table, Identifying and Enacting Inclusive Classroom Practices (Table 8.1), I draw on a range of sources to further explore the relationships between inclusive teaching and the classroom practices of the research participants. Like Table 3.3, that I presented and referred to earlier in this thesis, Table 8.1 includes information relating to indicators of evolving inclusive practices – orchestrating learning, outlined by Booth and Ainscow in the *Index for Inclusion* (2002), Tomlinson's (2014) descriptions of a differentiated classroom, where "what is learned and the learning environment are shaped to support the learner and learning" (Tomlinson, 2014, p.5); and Florian's *IPAA Framework* (Florian, 2014); a framework designed to assist educators in identifying inclusive teaching practice (Florian, 2014). However, Table 8.1 also includes data from some of my observations and interviews with the research participants, it exposes connections between aspects of the research participants' practices and descriptions of 'inclusive ways of working' (Ainscow, 2007, Florian, 2014, UNESCO, 2017) as outlined in the literature.

Table 8.1 Identifying and enacting inclusive classroom practices

	The Index for Inclusion: indicators of evolving inclusive practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2002)	Tomlinson (2014) Differentiated classrooms	IPAA Framework (Florian, 2014)	Research participants' classroom practices.
(i)	Teaching is planned with the learning of all students in mind. (p. 41)	Teachers "modify the curriculum and instruction so that each learner comes away with knowledge, understanding, and skills necessary to take on the next important phase of learning" (p. 5).	Teachers differentiate the curriculum by providing choice of activity (*for everyone*). "Ability grouping is rejected as the main or sole organisation of working groups" (p. 290).	I observed and participants discussed setting learning goals *with* students. Class tasks, for example inquiry-learning and literacy activities, were planned to provide the flexibility that would allow students with differing abilities to engage and experience success. Sometimes this involved providing opportunities for students to access supportive resources or work with a learning buddy, at other times it involved teachers differentiating the curriculum and modifying the learning goals.
(ii)	Lessons encourage the participation of all students (p.41).	Teachers in differentiated classrooms accept and act on the premise that they must be ready to engage students in instruction through different approaches to learning, by appealing to a range of interests and by using varied rates of instruction along with varied degrees of complexity and differing support systems.(pp. 4-5)	Teachers create learning environments that provide sufficient opportunities for everyone, (all learners) to be able to participate in classroom life. They use flexible approaches that are driven by the needs of the learner, rather than coverage of material. "They implement strategic reflective responses to support difficulties which children encounter in their learning" (p. 291).	I observed and teachers discussed strategies that involved providing students with learning choices. The choices related to areas of interest, use of and selection of resources and ways of demonstrating understanding. Flexible student groupings were commonplace in the participants' classrooms. They were sometimes determined by the teacher, at other times by the students. Teachers used combinations of explicit and implicit teaching strategies, such as modelled shared and guided reading for developing content knowledge.

Table 8.1 (Continued).

	The Index for Inclusion: indicators of evolving inclusive practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2002)	Tomlinson (2014) Differentiated classrooms	IPAA Framework (Florian, 2014)	Research participants' classroom practices.
(iii)	Lessons develop an understanding of difference (p. 41).	"The teacher remembers to teach the whole child. The teacher understands that children have intellect, emotions, changing physical needs, cultures, languages, and family contexts" (p. 54).	Teachers accept that difference is an essential part of human development. They focus "teaching and learning on what children can do rather than what they cannot" (p. 290). They use language to expresses the value of all children. They provide "opportunities for children to choose (rather than pre-determine) the level at which they engage with lessons" (p. 290). .	The participants provided opportunities for students to collaborate and share their knowledge, understandings and interests with one another. Differing ideas, creative thinking and different ways of demonstrating understanding was encouraged in each of the classrooms. The development of social skills, the ability to respond to, value and interact with others, was incorporated into the curriculum in five of the classrooms.
(iv)	Students are actively involved in their own learning (p. 41).	"The teacher helps the student make their own sense of ideas: Healthy classrooms are characterized by thought, wondering, and discovery" (p. 57).	Teachers use social constructivist approaches. They provide opportunities for all children to construct knowledge and learn through active participation.	The participants provided opportunities for students to interact and share their knowledge and understanding, with the teacher and peers. Inquiry-learning, as observed in two classrooms, provided numerous opportunities for students to investigate, explore, create and direct their own learning.

Table 8.1 (Continued)

	The Index for Inclusion: indicators of evolving inclusive practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2002)	Tomlinson (2014) Differentiated classrooms	IPAA Framework (Florian, 2014)	Research participants' classroom practices.
(v)	Students learn collaboratively (p. 41).	Teachers ensure that students "have opportunities to teach and learn from one another effectively" (p. 57).	(As for iv) Teachers use social constructivist approaches. They provide opportunities for all children to construct knowledge and learn through active participation.	The furniture arrangements in all but one of the participants' classrooms encouraged group work and dialogue between students. All the participants provided opportunities for students to work with their peers in flexible groups.
(vi)	Assessment contributes to the achievement of all students (p. 41).	Teachers are "diagnosticians, prescribing the best possible instruction based on both their content knowledge and their emerging understanding of students' progress in mastering critical content" (p. 4).	Teachers use formative assessment to support the learning of all students.	Participants spoke about knowing their students. They discussed and provided examples of formative assessment, such as student conferences, focused observations, portfolios and work samples. They also shared with me knowledge and understanding that they developed through daily interactions with students and their families/carers.

Table 8.1 (Continued)

	The Index for Inclusion: indicators of evolving inclusive practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2002)	Tomlinson (2014) Differentiated classrooms	IPAA Framework (Florian, 2014)	Research participants' classroom practices.
(Vii)	Classroom discipline is based on self respect (p. 41).	"In healthy classrooms, there is a clear expectation that everyone will deal respectfully and kindly with everyone else"(p. 58). Teachers "engage students in conversations about class rules, schedules, and procedures, evaluating with students the effectiveness of processes and routine" (p. 57).	Teachers develop quality relationships with all their students. Teachers respect the dignity of learners as full members of the community of the classroom.	A frequent topic that participants discussed with me was mutual respect. They each sought to develop it within their classroom by modelling strategies relating to the use of respectful language and behaviours. Four participants sought to further develop awareness in this area by implementing social skills programs that provided opportunities to practice and develop cooperative skills and awareness of mutual respect. Each of the participants spoke positively *about* students and respectfully *to* them. In the classroom, the participants' actions (smiles and nods) and language (encouragement. praise, friendly banter) indicated that they valued the participation of each of their students.
(Viii)	Teachers plan, teach and review in partnership (p. 41).	Teams of teachers "work together, share ideas and materials, troubleshoot with one another, co-teach, or observe one another and provide feedback. Collegiality, not isolation, is far more nourishing to new ideas" (p. 173).	Teachers form partnerships with other adults who work alongside them and other teachers and professionals outside the classroom. Together they discuss and model creative "new ways of working to support the learning of all children" (p. 291).	The participants all experienced opportunities to work in partnership with fellow teachers. For three of the participants, team-teaching was entrenched in their daily practice. Each of the research participants commented on valuing opportunities to plan and review their programs with colleagues.

(Adapted from: Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011; Tomlinson, 2014; Florian, 2014; Research data, notes in research journal and interview transcripts)

Healthy classrooms

Tomlinson advocates that "Classrooms grounded in best-practice education and modified to be responsive to student differences, benefit virtually all students" (2014, p. 24). Many of the participants' teaching practices that I observed, and that they discussed with me, were developed through processes of self-reflection, collegial support and school based professional learning, they relate to their efforts to develop effective teaching strategies. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is also a relationship between their classroom practices and Tomlinson's indicators of differentiated, 'healthy' classrooms, learning environments where the "goal is student learning and satisfaction in learning" (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 24), where standardised, generic lesson are replaced by powerful, relevant curriculum and engaging instruction (Tomlinson, 2014). The implementation of student-directed learning, choices and personalised goal setting in the participants' classrooms, has come about through their efforts to more effectively respond to diverse learning needs and styles, to be more effective teachers. Similarly, as discussed in Chapter Seven, the frustration and concern that two of the participants shared with me about a state wide standardised testing program, that they were obliged to implement, demonstrated their awareness of the barriers a 'one approach for all' assessment schedule presents to some students.

At differing levels and with varying efficacy, the research participants sought to develop and refine their teaching practices, not just to better meet the needs of specific students in their classrooms, but to create more harmonious, engaging and collaborative learning environments for all the children in their class. Although none of my interviews with the participants included a specific discussion on learning theories and theorists, my observations of their teaching and the comments they made during interviews did indicate that their teaching practices were often influenced by a constructivist approach to education.

Student engagement

The participants sought to provide their students with engaging experiences, opportunities for them to construct their own knowledge" (Tompkins et al., 2015). I observed and the participants discussed, learning environments that provided opportunities for students to: engage in active learning by participating and 'doing'. They drew upon their students' background knowledge and experiences to build individual meaning, provided opportunities for them to self-monitor, self-assess and have input into goal setting and encouraged collaboration, group and buddy work that provided opportunities for "learning with and from others" (Loughran, 2010, p. 35). Each of the participants worked *with* students, in groups and

individually, and used combinations of implicit and explicit instruction to progressively develop relevant skills and strategies. For example, when I observed one of the participants, Jane, engaging her students in a mathematics game with a focus on number facts, she provided supportive resources; lanyards with multiplication fact cards that students could utilise during the game. Individual students decided whether to use their lanyard during the session. There were students that took the opportunity to test their knowledge and not use the resource, students that referred to the lanyard to confirm their responses, and students that used the lanyard to help them find, know and learn about number facts. By making the lanyards available, Jane ensured that *all* her students had an opportunity to build upon their current skills and successfully participate in the game.

Social constructivist approaches

Within the *IPPA Framework*, Florian (2014) cites the implementation of social constructivist approaches, the provision of opportunities for children to co-construct knowledge and learn through active participation as evidence of teaching practices which include all children. While the participants did not make direct statements about using social constructivist approaches I frequently observed and they discussed with me teaching activities and strategies they used to create a learning community, one that involved collaboration, teamwork and shared understandings(refer to Table 8.1, sections iv & v). In five of the classrooms there was a strong emphasis on the development of social skills, and the research participants were involved in implementing programs such as *Tribes* (Gibbs, 2006), *You Can Do It* (Bernard et al., 1994), inquiry or investigative learning (Walker, 2011) and *Bluearth* (Bluearth Foundation, 2017) that are based upon social constructivist theories.

The collaboration, teamwork and provision for active learning that underpin these approaches were evident in other aspects of the curriculum and learning environment. For example, during literacy sessions student interactions, flexible groups and buddy activities were commonplace in the participants' classrooms. Teaching practices that relate to social constructivism were embraced by the participants and their schools, in their endeavours to: increase student engagement; develop creative thinking; develop understanding and use of strategies rather than just skills and facts, and to create collaborative, participatory, learning communities.

Ongoing teacher professional learning

Just as I observed variation in the participants' skills and understanding in regard to inclusive pedagogy, it was also apparent their practices, and their use of inclusive strategies, were still developing. The less experienced teacher participants spoke positively about and cited

examples of ways that colleagues, members of the school leadership team, innovative school programs and professional learning were helping them to refine their skills and understanding of teaching approaches that support learner diversity. By contrast, the more experienced participants worked *with* the school leaders, identifying and implementing responsive student-directed teaching approaches and promoting, modelling and sharing strategies and programs with their colleagues.

Two of the participants explained that they played a key role in mentoring new teachers at their school. This involved them reflecting and refining their own skills, and working in partnership, team-teaching, with a graduate teacher. My observations and discussions with these teachers indicated that they both had a strong understanding about and commitment to, participatory, responsive approaches that embrace learner diversity. They played an important role not only in their own classrooms, but also in supporting their colleague to know about, understand and implement inclusive pedagogies. As discussed in Chapter Eight, one participant, Kate, who was involved in team-teaching, commented, on how team-teaching had supported her development as a teacher. She explained that it had helped her refine not only her knowledge of the curriculum and teaching strategies, her understanding of 'what' and 'how' to teach, but also her classroom management skills, 'how to talk to kids' and the importance of collaboration and mutual respect (refer to Table 8.1, sections vii & viii).

Booth and Ainscow (2002) promote the view that the development of inclusive practices is enhanced by practitioners planning, reviewing and teaching in partnership. They also note that understanding and implementation of inclusive pedagogies are enhanced by shared planning, collegial feedback and supportive partnerships (Ainscow, 2007; Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Similarly, Florian's (2014) *IPAA Framework* includes teachers working in partnership with others and "modelling (creative new) ways of working" (p. 292) as examples of actions that support the enactment of inclusive pedagogies. In outlining strategies that support the development of differentiated, healthy classrooms that are conductive to effective learning for all students Tomlinson (2014) advocates the following:

> Begin with teachers who have the skill and will to change. These teachers are already reflective about their practice, sensitive to their students, flexible in their instructional patterns, and ready to learn. This will yield early successes, strategies for dealing with inevitable problems, and a cadre of teachers who can become staff developers as the process expands. Then, create teams of teachers who can work together, share ideas and materials, troubleshoot with one another, co-teach, or

> observe one another and provide feedback. Collegiality, not isolation, is far more nourishing to new ideas. (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 173)

The physical set up of classrooms and schools impacted on the opportunities that the participant had to be involved in co-teaching. The three participants that worked in open adjoining rooms were constantly involved in team-teaching situations, they spoke positively about the benefits that this offered to both teachers and students. They appreciated being able to see, hear and work closely with a colleague. However, as discussed Chapter Seven, even those participants who worked in more isolated classrooms, or only co-taught for specific subjects, indicated that they valued being able to share, reflect and plan with other teachers (refer to Table 8.1, section viii).

Although my discussions with the participants indicated that the focus for their professional training (development) was primarily on refining skills and understandings of both content and teaching strategies, knowing what, when and how to teach varying areas of the curriculum, there was also a strong emphasis on the implementation of participatory approaches that catered for the diverse needs of their student cohorts. I observed, and some of the participants discussed with me, teaching approaches that involved lessons such as those based on the *CAFE* approach to literacy (Boushey and Moser, 2009, 2017), that provided choices and were planned with all students in mind (refer to Table 8.1, sections i-iii). While there were differences in the strategies that the participants utilised, each of them gave consideration to the provision of differing starting points, learning styles and prior experiences (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Similarly, I frequently observed participants planning and providing opportunities for students to work collaboratively, to support and learn from one another (refer to Chapters Four & Six) Within the participants classrooms I observed, with differing efficacy, teaching strategies that acknowledge, respond to and value student diversity. These practices provide the foundation for the development of an inclusive classroom culture, a learning environment that supports the participation of *all* students.

Teacher Attitudes, Beliefs and Interpretations of Inclusion

Consistent with the inquiries I made prior to inviting the participants to be involved in the study, my discussions with each of the teachers indicated that they supported the principles of inclusive education, they acknowledged the rights of all students to a quality education and valued diversity in their classrooms. Their attitudes towards inclusion were uniformly positive

and despite their differing ages, gender, teaching experience and even confidence, all the participants spoke proudly and sometimes with passion, about their efforts to include all students, to cater for the full diversity of learners. While some participants discussed with me current and past concerns relating to their abilities to support some students (refer to Chapter Seven), especially those exhibiting challenging behaviours, these discussions frequently focused on the participants' efforts to increase their own knowledge and skills, to become more effective teachers, rather than seeking to blame or exclude particular students.

During my visits to the participants' classrooms I observed numerous instances of participatory flexible approaches that involved collaboration and student choice. However, there were some instances, for example the practices of Debbie and Grace, outlined in Chapter Seven, where differing interpretations and ideas about what constitutes inclusion, and the influences of allied health professionals, special education advisors, or traditional behaviourist theories, impacted negatively on the enactment of inclusive classroom practices and the self-efficacy of teachers (Vaz et al., 2015).

Embracing change

Encouragingly, during my interviews with one of the participants, Grace, who implemented classroom management strategies that were based on traditional teacher dominant approaches, I did uncover that in response to recent professional training and mentoring she was beginning to implement new ideas and strategies. During literacy sessions Grace had recently begun: replacing ability groups based on text levels with more flexible skills based groups (as discussed in Chapter Five); involving students in goal setting and learning reflections; teaching students how to make informed choices in regard to text selection; and allowing her students to select for themselves books for independent reading. The influence of other colleagues, including members of the school leadership team and mentors, professional development training and Grace's commitment to improve and extend her teaching skills, was assisting her to make more informed decisions about her current practices. The recent changes Grace has made to her teaching demonstrate the role that ongoing teacher professional learning can play in increasing knowledge and awareness of inclusive 'ways of working' (Ainscow, 2007; Florian, 2014; UNESCO, 2017). Grace's endeavors to develop her understanding and skills, to become a more effective practitioner, along with collaboration and guidance from informed colleagues, including mentors and members of the school leadership team, will be instrumental in further exposing her to theories and pedagogies relating to 'quality' teaching and learning, especially examples of inclusive strategies.

School Structures That Support Classroom Diversity: Multi-Age Classes

Six of the participants were working with multi-age classes. These teachers worked with two and sometimes three different grade levels. While one participant worked in a small school where multi-age classes were necessitated by small student numbers and the subsequent need to combine classes, the other five participants worked in schools that deliberately chose to mix students from varying age groups into one class.

None of the participants discussed with me the reasons that their schools chose to create multi-age groups. In hindsight, I realise that conversations about class structure may have provided some additional insights into the attitudes of the participants and their school leaders regarding classroom diversity. As a result, I can only speculate that the decision to develop multi-age groups throughout these schools was based on a combination of factors that would include reference to current research and discussion with staff regarding the perceived benefits for teachers and students of these diverse classroom environments.

The diversity of multi-age learning environments requires a philosophical shift from curriculum-centred to child-centred approaches (Stone, 2010; Cornish, 2009; Lieler, 2009), including teacher awareness and implementation of inclusive social constructivist approaches such as those promoted by Booth and Ainscow (2010), Florian (2014) and Tomlinson (2008, 2014) that I outline in Tables 3.3 and 8.1. Cornish (2009) argues that "with no assumptions of homogeneity, especially based on age, a mixed-grade teacher must adopt strategies for coping with diversity" (Cornish, 2009, p. 13). Similarly, when outlining effective strategies for multi-age classrooms the Queensland Government advocate that teachers: use varying combinations of group learning experiences; concentrate on what their students can do, their skills and strengths; develop skills and strategies that encourage student collaboration, peer teaching and independence; provide their students with opportunities to make choices, explore and respond creatively**;** nurture and encourage cooperative skills; and plan and provide opportunities for supportive interactions between students of differing ages. (Queensland Government, 2006). Given the diverse nature of multi-age classrooms, it is not surprising that there are the links between the proposed strategies for effective teaching in these environments and those that Booth & Ainscow (2002), Florian (2014) and Tomlinson (2014) promote as indicators of inclusive, 'healthy' learning environments.

Each of the participants that worked with multi-aged groups spoke with confidence about diversity in their class and during my observations appeared at ease working with students of

varying ages. Student variation, particularly social and academic skills, levels of development, differing learning rates, interests and maturity were an entrenched part of their everyday classrooms and subsequently were viewed by the participants as the norm. The inclusion of students with disabilities were accepted by these participants as part of the general student variance that existed within their class, and their 'everyday' participation in the class activities was sought and valued.

As well as creating a more diverse learning environment, one that embraces difference rather than seeks uniformity (Cornish, 2009), another perceived benefit of multi-age classrooms is that there is greater flexibility when organising classes and allocating students to groups (Stone, 2010). "Instead of 'fitting the children to the school' and its predetermined, linear curriculum, the school changes its approach and it begins 'fitting the school to the children'" (Stone, 2010, p. 15). Multi-age classrooms, such as those that I observed during the study, presented options for student placement that are often unavailable in single grade models (Leier, 2008). Instead of age related curriculum levels being the predominant determiner as to which class a student is placed in, multi-level classes provide a range of alternatives. Friendships, not only within, but also across grade levels, are able to be taken into account when placing students, personality clashes are often able to be avoided, and students are sometimes matched to teachers. Two of the participants, experienced teachers, had been allocated students with more challenging behaviours, but they then modelled and shared supportive strategies with less experienced colleagues. There were also students that had been placed with, or even remained with, a teacher with whom they had developed a strong and supportive relationship.

While all of the participants involved in the study worked with diverse cohorts, those teaching in multi-age classrooms worked in environments that made it even more difficult to "sustain notions of homogeneity based on age" (Cornish, 2009, p. 13) thus further encouraging them to learn about and embrace inclusive participatory approaches that cater for *all* students. Leier (2008) claims "multiage teachers become skilled at managing dynamic, flexible groupings for instruction and offer students choices in their independent work" (p. 9). My observations and discussions with those participants that taught multi-age groups indicated that they worked in environments where the differing learning rates, maturity and interests of their students were conducive for the development of inclusive teaching strategies. Decisions by members of school leadership teams in particular schools, to provide staff training that develops knowledge and understanding of participatory, social constructivist approaches and to create and maintain multi-age rather than linear class groupings, also demonstrates their commitment and positive

attitudes towards developing and supporting diverse inclusive classroom communities. Working in multi-age classrooms provided an additional stimulus for teacher participants to develop knowledge, skills and strategies relating to learner diversity. Reflection, supportive mentors and ongoing professional training all contributed to their ability to implement inclusive approaches, and supported them in their endeavours to provide quality teaching and learning for *all* students.

Conclusion

In this chapter I revisited and discussed many of the teacher practices outlined in earlier chapters. Once again, I inquired into the research participants' craft knowledge. However, in this chapter I more frequently interrogated ways in which the participants' classroom practices compared and contrasted with examples and indicators of inclusive pedagogies and effective practice, as outlined in the literature. Comparing what the research participants 'do' to indicators and 'evidence' of inclusive 'ways of working' allowed me to link the inclusive constructivist teaching approaches advocated by Booth and Ainscow (2002), Florian (2014) and Tomlinson (2014) (refer to Table 3.3), to some of the practices that I either observed or the participants discussed with me. Table 8.1 Identifying and Enacting Inclusive Classroom Practices, which I presented in this chapter, includes the references to the literature from Table 3.3, but also incorporates examples from the research data. By creating Table 8.1, I was able to further demonstrate ways in which the teaching approaches I observed the participants implementing align with current theories and understandings about strategies that underpin inclusive teaching and learning.

As I did in Chapter Seven, I inquired into and discussed the factors, that encourage, influence and support teachers in the adoption of inclusive practices. I discussed the impact of teacher attitudes and beliefs, school structures, and the promotion by school leaders and teaching colleagues of social constructivist approaches. The discussions in this chapter highlighted the critical role that school leaders (with a strong understanding of the principles of inclusive education), colleagues and targeted teacher professional learning play in enhancing the confidence and capacity of teachers.

In this chapter I exposed how ongoing professional learning, opportunities to develop and learn about new and creative ways of working (Ainscow, 2007; Florian, 2014; UNESCO, 2017), encouraged the participants to reflect on and make informed changes to their practices. I outlined how opportunities to learn about and implement approaches such as *Bluearth*

(Bluearth Foundation, 2017), inquiry-learning (Walker, 2011), *CAFE* (Boushey and Moser, 2009, 2017) and *Tribes* (Gibbs, 2006) developed the participants' understanding of the inclusive philosophies that underpin each of these approaches. I referred to the data to demonstrate how working and learning with colleagues and school leaders provided the teacher participants with important guidance and support as they learnt about and implemented new, inclusive strategies and approaches. I reported on how each of the participants each spoke positively about the practice changes they had made, and about how they perceived that the implementation of student-centred programs allowed them to engage and to more effectively cater for *all* of their students.

Throughout Chapters Three to Eight I presented and interrogated the data, what I saw and what teachers said, to develop insights relating to the research question, 'how do regular primary classroom teachers implement inclusive practices for students with diverse learning needs, and what strategies do they use to support these practices?' In the next chapter, the last chapter, I provide a summary of my findings, revisiting and addressing the research question and the aims that underpin this study.

Chapter Nine: An Ongoing Journey: Conclusion and Implications

> Many factors can work either to facilitate or inhibit inclusive and equitable practices within education systems. Some of those factors are teacher skills and attitudes, infrastructure, pedagogical strategies and the curriculum. (UNESCO, 2017, p. 29)

Recognising the critical role that classroom teachers play in the development of inclusive schools, this study inquired into the teaching experiences, beliefs and everyday practices of eight regular primary school teachers. Utilising an ethnographic methodology, the study probed into the professional life-worlds and craft knowledge of each of the research participants, developing insights into the supports and influences that encouraged, or occasionally discouraged, the teacher participants to learn about and enact classroom approaches that cater for the full diversity of learners.

During this study I felt privileged to have been allowed, for a brief period, to be part of the participants' classrooms; to view and experience the learning environments that they created, to see ways that the input and learning of all students was valued and celebrated and to observe the joy and excitement of students and staff during some of their interactions. My visits to the participants in their schools and classrooms provided me with an opportunity to know about ways that classroom practice impacts on, not only educational outcomes, but also social acceptance, the embracing and valuing of diversity within learning communities.

The Research Findings

Interrogation of the research data exposed factors that encourage regular classroom teacher to develop positive attitudes about not only their ability to cater for students with disabilities and diverse needs, but also the principles of inclusive education. The examples of inclusive teaching that the participants discussed with me and that I observed in their classrooms, were teaching approaches that were designed, promoted and implemented to cater for 'everyone' rather than specific groups or individuals. These were strategies that relate to participatory social constructivist theories, often they came about as a result of ongoing teacher professional learning, this included teacher mentoring, 'team' approaches that provided collegial support and guidance, the adoption of school based programs that were accompanied by professional training, and individual teacher reflection leading to refinement of skills and strategies.

The study uncovered clear links between the research participants' understanding of practices promoted as part of 'effective' teaching and learning, the everyday approaches that they were learning about and refining, and their ability to create an inclusive classroom culture. Regular classroom teachers routinely encounter students of differing ages, physical and cognitive abilities, social skills and cultural backgrounds. This study provided evidence that students with disabilities are not an isolated group that requires specialised skills; they are part of the diversity that surrounds vibrant learning communities. The pedagogical knowledge and strategies identified in this study, that the participant teachers use to effectively support diverse student cohorts, relate to current constructivist theories about effective, quality and inclusive teaching and learning, such as those promoted by Tomlinson (2014), Hayes (2012), Loughran (2010), Florian and Black Hawkins (2011) and Booth and Ainscow (2002, 2011), that involve collaboration, mutual respect and student-centred teaching approaches.

Barriers to inclusion

Rather than focus on lack of action in regard to the implementation of inclusive education, the study sought to develop understanding about 'what works', to identify and interrogate, *how* inclusive practices are enacted. However, during my discussions with the participants I became aware that there were also valuable insights to be gleaned from some of the challenges they had encountered. As a result, the study also includes research data that exposes ways that physical, social and attitudinal barriers can be created. These include misunderstandings and misinterpretations about inclusion, insufficient support and guidance from colleagues and school leaders and lack of awareness about effective and inclusive 'ways of working'.

There were situations that I observed, in two of the eight classrooms, where the knowledge base for classroom teachers was founded on traditional behaviorist theories, on uniformity and teacher dominated approaches, or on a medical model of disability which places emphasis on the need for remediation and intervention to 'fix' disorders (UNESCO, 2017). When I discussed these practices with the participants, I learnt that the approaches they adopted came about through their efforts to respond to 'special needs' and the influence and promotion of approaches that individualise rather than differentiate instruction. These two teachers sought to implement intervention strategies promoted by health professionals and authorities in 'special needs' rather than those advocated by inclusive educators. This led them to perceive, develop, or compound their beliefs, that due to varying difficulties their students needed to be directed and controlled. Subsequently, despite caring about their students and having 'good' intentions, both these teachers sometimes implemented strategies that stigmatised and

marginalised students, practices that are at odds with participatory, inclusive approaches. Their experiences highlight the importance of members of the school leadership team knowing about and responding to their teachers' needs, providing their staff, individually and groups, with relevant and timely mentoring, support and guidance.

Professional learning

My discussions with each of the participants exposed the important role that school leaders, members of the leadership team and mentors can play in exposing, guiding and even directing classroom teachers towards approaches that meet the learning needs of *all* students. All of the participants provided me with examples of ways that professional learning had supported the development of their teaching skills and helped them to "learn new ideas or ways of working" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 20), enhancing their capacity to cater for learner diversity. Each of the participants spoke about ways that targeted school professional learning provided opportunities for staff members to learn from and with one another, encouraging and supporting them in the implementation of inclusive programs and teaching approaches, such as *Bluearth* (Bluearth Foundation, 2017) and *the Australian Developmental Curriculum* (Walker, 2011) that were new to either the school or specific teachers. The less experienced teacher participants frequently spoke with me about the benefits of mentors, team-teaching and team planning. Guidance, support and modelling from colleagues was integral in helping these teachers develop greater confidence and encouraging them to embrace collaborative and participatory approaches.

Collegial support

The positive support and influence that can come about through team-teaching approaches was exposed during my discussion with one of the less experienced teachers Kate. Kate worked closely with another research participant, Rob, a teacher with extensive experience who took on a mentoring role. During my discussions with both these teachers, Rob frequently stressed the importance of valuing students and creating a classroom culture that is founded on mutual respect. While Kate made similar comments, the influence that Rob has had upon her attitude to classroom management and the strategies she adopts was highlighted by her frequent remarks about how much she appreciated Rob as a mentor. I learnt that when Kate was a recent graduate from teacher education, Rob modelled and helped her to learn about teaching strategies and classroom organisation. However, as Kate's competencies and experience increased she came to especially value ways that Rob helped her to learn about and refine her classroom management skills. Kate explained *"now I really look to Rob for how he manages*

students, how he manages behaviour, how he talks to kids, how he treats them".

During my discussions with the research participants it was clear that they *all* appreciated additional classroom support. Often this was through the provision of a teaching assistant, but sometimes the participants involved parents, and occasionally another teacher was timetabled to assist in their classroom. Two of the participants, spoke about feeling 'stretched', and explained that support from another adult allowed them to more effectively move between groups and individuals. Each of the participants utilised support from teaching assistants flexibly, working collaboratively with them and encouraging them to spend time with and assist differing students, rather than shadow one child. Teaching assistants were valued for what they contributed to the classroom learning community, their efforts to support any, or all students, rather than select individuals.

During field work, I observed, and the participants spoke about ways that the organisation and physical features their schools and classrooms enhanced their ability to meet the diverse learning needs of their students. The layout of furniture, access to adjoining rooms and format of classes, including the provision of multi-age groups, frequently enhanced their ability to meet the diverse learning needs of their students. My observations of the participants who worked in multi-age classrooms and some comments they made during our conversations support claims by other researchers that once teachers gain experience working with diverse cohorts they are more likely to feel positive about their teaching practices (Rouse, 2008). Open classrooms, and team-teaching, situations where teachers could 'see' and 'hear' and 'share', encouraged the participants towards the use of flexible, participatory strategies that involved student choices, and collaboration. Reflecting and planning with others allowed the teacher participants to extend their pedagogical knowledge and practices. These shared sessions provided valuable opportunities for the participants to learn from and with colleagues, to develop their skills and awareness of strategies that support all learners.

Teacher professional confidence

Just as there was variation in the pedagogical knowledge and skills of the participants and their efficacy teaching diverse cohorts, so too was there variation in their confidence as inclusive educators. While teacher confidence is frequently cited as a contributor to teachers' unwillingness to embrace inclusive approaches (Forlin, 2001), my interactions with the participants, particularly with one of the teachers, Anna, provided examples of ways that self-doubt, can lead teachers towards increased reflection and refinement of teaching strategies. Teacher self-doubt is often considered a negative, but as Anna demonstrated when combined

with self-reflection and collegial support, it can create opportunities for teachers to grow professionally: to further develop their understandings of students in their class, and to refine and adapt their teaching skills. Similarly, teacher confidence may provide a supportive foundation for the development of inclusive strategies and a willingness to work with diverse cohorts, but as Booth and Ainscow (2002, 2011) explain, educational inclusion is an ongoing process; it requires constant teacher reflection. It is important that confidence does not transfer into complacency and static teaching practices.

Embracing inclusive teaching approaches

This study demonstrated that to successfully support the diverse needs of students in their classroom, teachers need to have a strong knowledge of teaching and learning strategies. However, these are not the specialised, intervention strategies that medical models of disability and traditional behaviourist approaches present, and that two of the participants were drawn towards. Instead they are strategies that incorporate and build upon teachers' knowledge of their students' differing social and academic strengths and learning needs. The implementation of collaborative approaches and strategies, such as those that Matt, Jane, Rob and Kate used in their classrooms to develop their students' social skills, supported the development of a classroom culture that welcomed, nurtured, and valued all members of the learning community.

When teachers adopt an inclusive pedagogical approach and assume responsibility for teaching *everyone* (Florian & Spratt, 2013) they are also embracing effective practices that align with quality teaching and learning for *all* members of the classroom community (UNESCO, 2009, 2017). Rather than teaching practices that are implemented for *some* students, inclusive strategies and approaches respect and respond to the learning needs of *all* the students in the class or school. In this study, targeted professional learning, and informed guidance from their school leaders and colleagues, provided the research participants with opportunities to learn about and implement new student-centred teaching practices. Professional learning, as explained by the participants, played a key role in the implementation of inclusive approaches such as inquiry-learning that engaged students, provided choices and created opportunities for all members of the class to collaborate and actively participate in learning and social activities. A strong commitment to ongoing learning, including reflection and refinement played a key role in supporting and directing each of the participants towards inclusive, participatory approaches.

Consistent with their differing backgrounds and the location of their schools, the research participants were a diverse group. There were differences in gender, age, teaching experience,

life experience and teaching skills. While each of the participants sought to develop positive teacher-student relationships, differing personalities and approaches meant that not only were some teachers more adept in this area, but also, that student connectedness took on differing forms. Sometimes classrooms were calm and cooperative. In other instances, there was a greater emphasis on fun, the students were more active, voices were sometimes louder, and laughter was commonplace. Student engagement was sought by all participants, but again there were differences in the strategies they used and their capacity to achieve this. I observed, and participants spoke to me about: students making active choices in regard to their learning; setting learning goals with groups and individuals; providing opportunities for students to build on interests and skills; and classroom collaboration between students, between students and teachers, and between teachers.

Each of the participants spoke about valuing opportunities to share their knowledge and understandings through varying combinations of team planning, opening their classrooms to colleagues, including coaches, mentors and members of the school leadership team. They discussed and I observed examples of the positive influence that professional learning has brought to both the curriculum they offer and their classroom management. None of the participants made reference to breaking down barriers, the language often used by proponents of inclusive education such as Booth and Ainscow (2002, 2011), and Slee (1993, 2007, 2011), but each of the teachers endeavoured, with varying efficacy, to cater for student diversity within their classroom rather than have students removed, excluded or marginalised due to academic or behaviour differences. In the small number of instances that participants spoke about a student having been excluded due to challenging behaviours, the removal of the child was seen neither as desirable nor a ‘first step’. The participants frequently shared with me examples of how support from other colleagues, the school leadership team, teacher professional learning and the implementation of social skills programs assisted in increasing their capacity to minimise challenging behaviours and better support students.

The participants discussed their knowledge of and commitment to differentiated teaching strategies, including differentiation by outcome and by task (Moore, 2012), and the adjustments that hey made to task requirements and learning goals to ensure that all their students could successfully participate. By providing choices and encouraging input into decision-making and goal setting the participating teachers endeavoured to provide all of their students with access to a learning environment that caters for both needs and interests.

The ways that the participants implemented inclusive strategies, the emphasis that they placed on them and their teacher efficacy differed, but as Booth and Ainscow explain, the development of inclusive education is a process (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). What I observed were teachers who were at differing points in their development as inclusive educators. During the study I exposed ways that relevant and informed support and guidance for classroom teachers impacts on their skills and awareness of inclusive approaches, their ability embrace inclusion as part of an ongoing process of pedagogical refinement.

Dispelling the Myth

In the introductory chapter I expressed my concern about a common societal myth, one sometimes expressed by politicians, health professionals, parents and even teachers based on a belief that regular teachers do not have the skills, the training or expertise to cater for students with additional learning needs (Ainscow, 1999; Danforth et al., 2005; Mittler, 2000). While beliefs such as these can lead some teachers to conclude that students with disabilities require educators with specialised knowledge, and that their needs are better met in segregated settings (UNESCO, 2017), the research findings from this study, developed from observations and discussions with eight everyday classroom teachers working with diverse cohorts, provides evidence that supports those who argue otherwise. Consistent with claims by UNESCO (2017) and studies by Hehir et al. (2016), Poed et al. (2017) and Rouse and Florian, that the implementation of inclusive practices are advantageous for *all* students, I observed and the participants spoke positively about participatory and collaborative approaches, teaching practices such as buddy work, differentiation and student conferencing, that maximised the achievement of all their students. Participants, such as Jane, Anna, Matt and Ellen, recounted with pride their successes engaging in class activities and supporting the learning of students with more complex social and academic learning needs, and shared with me positive feedback they had received from the parents of students in their classes.

The importance of strong student teacher relationships, the need to develop a classroom culture that builds mutual respect and trust underpinned many of the strategies that I observed and that the teachers discussed with me. As Anna explained when discussing the strong rapport she has with her students "*if you are not showing respect to them, how can you possibly earn their respect?*". Anna's view that "*Ultimately it's developing rapport, relationships, and getting to know them*" was, echoed in my conversations with each of the other participants. Their

commitment to developing respectful relationships was reflected in their use of encouraging, appreciative and respectful language and the sense of friendliness, harmony and well-being that I felt when visiting their classrooms.

An Ongoing Journey

Booth and Ainscow describe inclusive education as both a goal and an ongoing process (2002, 2011). This is consistent with my observations of the teacher participants; they were each at varying points in their journey towards becoming inclusive educators. However, their desire to become 'better' teachers, combined with support from colleagues and members of their school leadership that directed them towards participatory student-centred approaches and responsive teaching, paved the way for further refinement of their understandings, attitudes and enactment of inclusive approaches. The teachers involved in this study demonstrated that inclusive practices are neither an elusive goal, nor specialised set of procedures and practices, and that inclusive education and quality teaching and learning are intertwined (UNESCO, 2009). They both require the implementation of effective strategies that cater for *everyone* and involve responsive and reflective practice, and ongoing, supported teacher learning. Rather than separate inclusive education as something *different* or *additional*, this study demonstrates and concludes that inclusion needs to be viewed as an *integral* part of what teachers do, part of their everyday practice.

> Ensuring that all learners have access to quality education also acknowledges the intrinsic value of diversity and respect for human dignity. (UNESCO, 2017 p. 18)

When teachers, policy makers and teacher educators recognise that inclusive education and quality education are not separate entities, and that catering for student diversity does not require the implementation and mastering of a different set of skills and practices, the pathway to making schools more inclusive becomes clearer. Respect for diversity, the valuing of *all* students, opportunities for collaboration and active learning, combined with the setting of high standards for *all* learners; underpin not only inclusive pedagogies, but effective, participatory 21st Century teaching approaches. The provision of *quality* education for *all*, is an ongoing, ever changing, and sometimes challenging quest, but the rewards, inclusion *and* improved outcomes for *all* students, are immense and achievable.

Concluding Comments

This study, into the inclusive practices of eight primary school teachers, includes no revelations about previously unrecognised teaching practices or specialised procedures for developing inclusive classrooms. Instead, it demonstrates that inclusive teaching is not an elusive 'holy grail' or 'secret business' that can only be achieved by trained specialist teachers, but directly relates to the enactment of effective instruction, and 'quality' teaching and learning by informed and well supported educators. The ultimate conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that rather than a separate set of special needs practices, the skills and strategies that support inclusion in regular classrooms relate to effective teaching and learning, to what informed and responsive educators seek to do (UNESCO, 2009, 2017). As my observations and discussions with the participants demonstrated, teacher reflection, ongoing professional learning, guidance and support from colleagues and schools leaders, combined with knowledge and understanding about the social constructivist strategies that underpin effective teaching and learning, provide the foundation for 'everyday' teachers to develop and maintain inclusive classrooms. It is these foundations that support the development of both the pedagogical efficacy and professional confidence that lead to positive teacher attitudes in regard to catering for student diversity, and the creation of student-centred inclusive learning environments.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Plain Language Information Statement (for potential teacher participants)

Plain Language Information Statement

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

PROJECT TITLE:	Implementing Inclusion: Classroom Journeys
PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER:	Dr Jenene Burke
OTHER/STUDENT RESEARCHERS:	Dr Genee Marks, Moya Elvey (PhD student)

Invitation

Dear ,

As a primary teacher currently teaching students with diverse learning needs you are invited to participate in research related to educational inclusion. The research project will investigate the practices that teachers use to enable students with additional needs to be included within their everyday classroom environment and curriculum.

This Plain Language Statement contains details about the research project and explains what your participation would involve, allowing you to make an informed decision as to whether you choose to participate.

Should you agree to participate in the research, please complete the attached Consent Form and return it to Moya Elvey in the enclosed envelope.

Background

As part of its commitment to improving the learning outcomes of all students, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development expects schools in Victoria to make adjustments to offer inclusive education and cater for diverse student needs (ABLES, DEECD, 2011). This includes an emphasis on strategies 'that ensure inclusive practices are in place in schools' (Program for Students with Disabilities, DEECD, 2013). Nonetheless, traditional education programs often involving withdrawal and generic teaching methods that are counter to inclusive practice are still prevalent in many primary schools.

This research aims to study the experiences of six to eight primary teachers who are currently working with diverse student groups in an endeavour to develop greater understanding of how effective inclusion can be achieved through responsive mainstream teaching. The research will focus on each teacher's current teaching methods, and explore approaches that encourage

Plain Language Information Statement

and support the participation and learning of students with diverse and specialised needs within the classroom environment.

Invitations to participate have been sent to teachers that have been recommended by principals, regional staff (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development) and other relevant educators, on the basis that each is reputed to be implementing practices conducive to inclusive learning.

Please note that although you have been recommended as a potential participant you are under no obligation to participate.

What will participation involve?
If you agree to participate in the research you will be visited in your school by the researcher once a week for a period of four to five weeks. During these visits the researcher will observe you working in your classroom (for 1-2 hrs) and will conduct an informal (conversational) interview that relates to your teaching approaches and experiences. Some interviews will be audio taped although permission will be sought from you prior to each recording.
Visits to your school will be by mutual arrangement. Conversational interviews will take place in the school environment during your breaks, time release or after school (for approximately 10-15 min). The timing of visits and interviews will remain flexible to best fit your school and personal commitments.

Once data from each of the participating teachers has been collected and analysed a final visit may be scheduled to provide an opportunity for you to further elaborate on your experiences. At the completion of the research project you will also be given the option to attend an informal discussion relating to the results of the research.

Privacy, Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information

Only the research team (Moya, Jenene and Genee) will have access to your responses in the early data collection phase. All data derived from your interviews will be de-identified (your identity will be totally removed and pseudonyms used) during the data analysis phase. Interview responses will be analysed and interpreted for insights that have the potential to aid understanding of how inclusion might be achieved.

The results of the research will be used in the publication of a doctoral thesis and other appropriate media such as research journals and conferences. All data will be kept in locked files and be held for a minimum of five years with the principal researcher at a location at the Mt Helen Campus of Federation University, before being professionally shredded or permanently deleted. No identifying information will be used in any publication arising from the research.

Appendix A: Continued

Plain Language Information Statement

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will ensure that your identity is not disclosed or connected to the information you give us. Although your responses will be de-identified, due to the small number of participating teachers, we cannot ensure complete confidentiality. Furthermore, confidentiality of data is subject to legal limitations such as mandatory reporting that may, in some extreme instances, result in the necessity to disclose the identity of participants.

POTENTIAL RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS

A risk assessment on this research methodology suggests that there are minimal to no potential risks for participants. However, if at any stage during the research any participant feels uncomfortable with the topics under discussion, the researchers encourage the participants to contact DEECD Employee Assistance Program (ph 1800 337 068), Lifeline (ph 131114) or Beyond Blue (ph 1300 22 4636 or email www.beyondblue.org.au). Any information derived from the data that is considered highly personal or private will not be used.

Participation is Voluntary

Participation in this research is voluntary. There is no obligation to participate. If you agree to take part but later change your mind, you can withdraw from the project at any stage. Any information obtained can be withdrawn at any stage prior to the final aggregation of data.

Further Information

Moya Elvey can be contacted if you have any questions or require further information about this research (ph 0417549719 or email moya.elvey@federation.edu.au). Alternatively you can contact the Principal Researcher, Dr Jenene Burke (details below).

Thank-you for taking the time to consider participating in this research project.

Kind Regards, Moya Elvey, Jenene Burke, and Genee Marks.

If you have any questions, or you would like further information regarding the project titled Implementing Inclusion: Classroom Journeys, please contact the Principal Researcher, Dr Jenene Burke of the School of Education and Arts. Ph: 53279332.
EMAIL: js.burke@federation.edu.au

Should you (i.e. the participant) have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research project, please contact the Federation University Ethics Officer, Research Services, Federation University Australia, PO Box 663, Mt Helen VIC 3353. Telephone: (03) 5327 9765, Email: research.ethics@federation.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Number 00103D

Appendix B: Participant consent form

Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE:	Implementing Inclusion: Classroom Journeys
RESEARCHERS:	Dr Jenene Burke, Dr Genee Marks, Moya Elvey

Consent – Please complete the following information:

I, ... of . . . .
. . . .
hereby consent to participate as a subject in the above research study.

The research program in which I am being asked to participate has been explained fully to me, verbally and in writing, and any matters on which I have sought information have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that:

- all information I provide will be treated with the strictest confidence and data will be stored separately from any listing that includes my name and contact details.
- confidentiality of data is subject to legal limitations such as mandatory reporting that may, in some extreme instances, result in the necessity to disclose the identity of participants.
- aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific or academic journals.
- interviews may be audio taped, and consent will be sought prior to recordings taking place.
- participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me prior to the final aggregation of data will not be used.

SIGNATURE: . . . . **DATE**: . . . . . . …….. . .

Appendix C: Plain Language Information Statement (for school principals)

Plain Language
Information Statement

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

PROJECT TITLE:	Implementing Inclusion: Classroom Journeys
PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER:	Dr Jenene Burke
OTHER/STUDENT RESEARCHERS:	Dr Genee Marks, Moya Elvey (PhD student)

Invitation

Dear ,

We are seeking permission to approach a member(s) of staff at your school to participate in research related to the educational inclusion of students with diverse learning needs. The research project will investigate the practices teachers use to enable students with additional needs to be included within their everyday classroom environment and curriculum.

This Plain Language Statement contains details about the research project and explains what participation would involve for your staff and school, allowing you to make an informed decision as to whether you will allow us to conduct research in your school.

Should you agree to a staff member(s) participating in the research please complete the attached Consent Form and return it to Moya Elvey in the enclosed envelope. Letters of invitation including a plain language information statement and informed consent form will then be forwarded to the relevant staff member(s) to allow them to make their own decision on participation.

Background

As part of its commitment to improving the learning outcomes of all students the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development expects schools in Victoria to make adjustments to offer inclusive education and cater for diverse student needs (ABLES, DEECD, 2011). This includes an emphasis on strategies 'that ensure inclusive practices are in place in schools' (Program for Students with Disabilities, DEECD, 2013). Nonetheless, traditional education programs often involving withdrawal and generic teaching methods that are counter to inclusive practise are still prevalent in many primary schools.

This research aims to study the experiences of six to eight primary teachers who are currently working with diverse student groups in an endeavour to develop greater understanding of how effective inclusion can be achieved through responsive mainstream teaching. The research will focus on each teacher's current teaching methods, and explore approaches that encourage

Plain Language Information Statement

and support the participation and learning of students with diverse and specialised needs within the classroom environment.

Invitations to participate have been sent to teachers that have been recommended by principals, regional staff (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development) and other relevant educators, on the basis that each is reputed to be implementing practices conducive to inclusive learning.

Please note that although a member of your staff has been recommended as a potential participant they are under no obligation to participate.

What will participation involve?
Participating teachers will be visited in your school by the researcher once a week for a period of four to five weeks. During these visits the researcher will observe the teacher working in their classroom (for 1-2 hrs) and conduct an informal (conversational) interview that relates to their teaching approaches and experiences. Some interviews will be audio taped although permission will be sought from participating teachers prior to each recording.
Dates and times of visits to your school will be by mutual arrangement, to suit the participating teacher, school principal and researcher. Conversational interviews will take place in the school environment during teacher's breaks, time release or after school (for approximately 10-15 min). The timing of visits and interviews will remain flexible to best fit the participant's school and personal commitments.

Once data from each of the participating teachers has been collected and analysed a final contact may be offered to provide them with an opportunity to further elaborate on their experiences. At the completion of the research project participants will also be given the option to attend an informal discussion relating to the results of the research.

Privacy, Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information

Only the research team (Moya, Jenene and Genee) will have access to participants responses in the early data collection phase. All data derived from the interviews will be de-identified (participants and the schools identity will be totally removed and pseudonyms used) during the data analysis phase. Interview responses will be analysed and interpreted for insights that have the potential to contribute to societies understanding of how inclusion might be achieved.

The results of the research will be used in the publication of a doctoral thesis and other appropriate media such as research journals and conferences. All data will be kept in locked files and be held for a minimum of five years with the principal researcher at a location at the Mt Helen Campus of the University of Ballarat, before being professionally shredded or permanently deleted. No identifying information will be used in any publication arising from the research.

Plain Language Information Statement

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will ensure that the identity of the school and its teachers is not disclosed or connected to the information participants give us. Although all responses will be de-identified, due to the small number of participating teachers, we cannot ensure complete confidentiality. Furthermore, confidentiality of data is subject to legal limitations such as mandatory reporting that may, in some extreme instances, result in the necessity to disclose the identity of participants.

POTENTIAL RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS

A risk assessment on this research methodology suggests that there are minimal to no potential risks for participants. However, if at any stage during the research any participant feels uncomfortable with the topics under discussion, the researchers will encourage the participants to seek support, including contacting DEECD Employee Assistance program (ph 1800 337 068), Lifeline (ph 131114) or Beyond Blue (ph 1300 22 4636) www.beyondblue.org.au and the observation/interviews will be ceased. Any information derived from the data that is considered highly personal or private will not be used.

Participation is Voluntary

Participation for both your school and individual teachers in this research is voluntary. There is no obligation to participate. If a member of your staff agrees to take part but later changes their mind, they can withdraw from the project at any stage. Any information obtained can also be withdrawn at any stage prior to the final aggregation of data.

Further Information

Moya Elvey can be contacted if you have any questions or require further information about this research (ph 04175497 or email moya.elvey@federation.edu.au). Alternatively you can contact the Principal Researcher, Dr Jenene Burke (details below).

Thank-you for taking the time to consider participating in this research project.

Kind Regards, Moya Elvey, Jenene Burke, and Genee Marks.

If you have any questions, or you would like further information regarding the project titled Implementing Inclusion: Classroom Journeys, please contact the Principal Researcher, Dr Jenene Burke of the School of Education and Arts. Ph: 53279332.
EMAIL: js.burke@federation.edu.au

Should you (i.e. the participant) have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research project, please contact the Federation University Ethics Officer, Research Services, Federation University Australia, PO Box 663, Mt Helen VIC 3353. Telephone: (03) 5327 9765, Email: research.ethics@federation.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Number 00103D

Appendix D: School principal consent form

Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE:	Implementing Inclusion: Classroom Journeys
RESEARCHERS:	Dr Jenene Burke, Dr Genee Marks, Moya Elvey

Consent – Please complete the following information:

I, ... of . . . .
. . . .
hereby consent to the participation of a staff member(s) at my school to the above research study.

The research program in which I am being asked to allow staff members to participate in has been explained fully to me, verbally and in writing, and any matters on which I have sought information have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that:

- all information provided by participating teachers will be treated with the strictest confidence and data will be stored separately from any listing that includes their name and contact details.
- all data derived from interviews will be de-identified (the identity of participants and schools will be totally removed and pseudonyms used).
- confidentiality of data is subject to legal limitations such as mandatory reporting that may, in some extreme instances, result in the necessity to disclose the identity of participants.
- aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific or academic journals.
- interviews may be audio taped, and consent will be sought prior to recordings taking place.
- participation is voluntary and free from coercion.
- teachers involved in the research will be free to withdraw their consent at any time during the study, in which event their participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from them prior to the final aggregation of data will not be used.
- staff at my school will not be invited to participate until consent from me has been received by the above researchers.

SIGNATURE: . . . . **DATE**: . . . .

Appendix E: The CAFE Menu

The CAFE Menu

Comprehension *I understand what I read*	Accuracy *I can read the words*	Fluency *I can read accurately, with expression, and understand what I read*	Expand Vocabulary *I know, find, and use interesting words*
STRATEGIES	**STRATEGIES**	**STRATEGIES**	**STRATEGIES**
Check for understanding	Abundant easy reading	Voracious reading	Voracious reading
Back up and reread	Look carefully at letters and words	Read appropriate-level texts that are a good fit	Tune in to interesting words and use new vocabulary in speaking and writing
Use prior knowledge to connect with text	Cross checking... Do the pictures and/or words look right? Do they sound right? Do they make sense?	Reread text	Use prior knowledge and context to predict and confirm meaning
Make and adjust predictions; use text to confirm	Flip the sound	Practice common sight words and high-frequency words	Use pictures, illustrations, and diagrams
Infer and support with evidence	Use the pictures...Do the words and pictures match?	Adjust and apply different reading rates to match text	Use word parts to determine the meaning of words (prefixes, suffixes, origins, abbreviations, etc.)
Make a picture or mental image	Use beginning and ending sounds	Use punctuation to enhance phrasing and prosody (end marks, commas, etc.)	Ask someone to define the word for you
Monitor and fix up	Blend sounds; stretch and reread	Read text as the author would say it, conveying the meaning or feeling	Use dictionaries, thesauruses, and glossaries as tools
Ask questions throughout the reading process	Chunk letters and sounds together		
Use text features (titles, headings, captions, graphic features)	Skip the word, then come back		
Summarize text; include sequence of main events	Trade a word/guess a word that makes sense		
Use main idea and supporting details to determine importance	Recognize words at sight		
Determine and analyze author's purpose and support with text			
Recognize literary elements (genre, plot, character, setting, problem/resolution, theme)			
Recognize and explain cause-and-effect relationships			
Compare and contrast within and between text			

BEHAVIORS THAT SUPPORT READING

Get started right away | Stay in one spot | Work quietly | Read the whole time | Increase stamina | Select and read good-fit books

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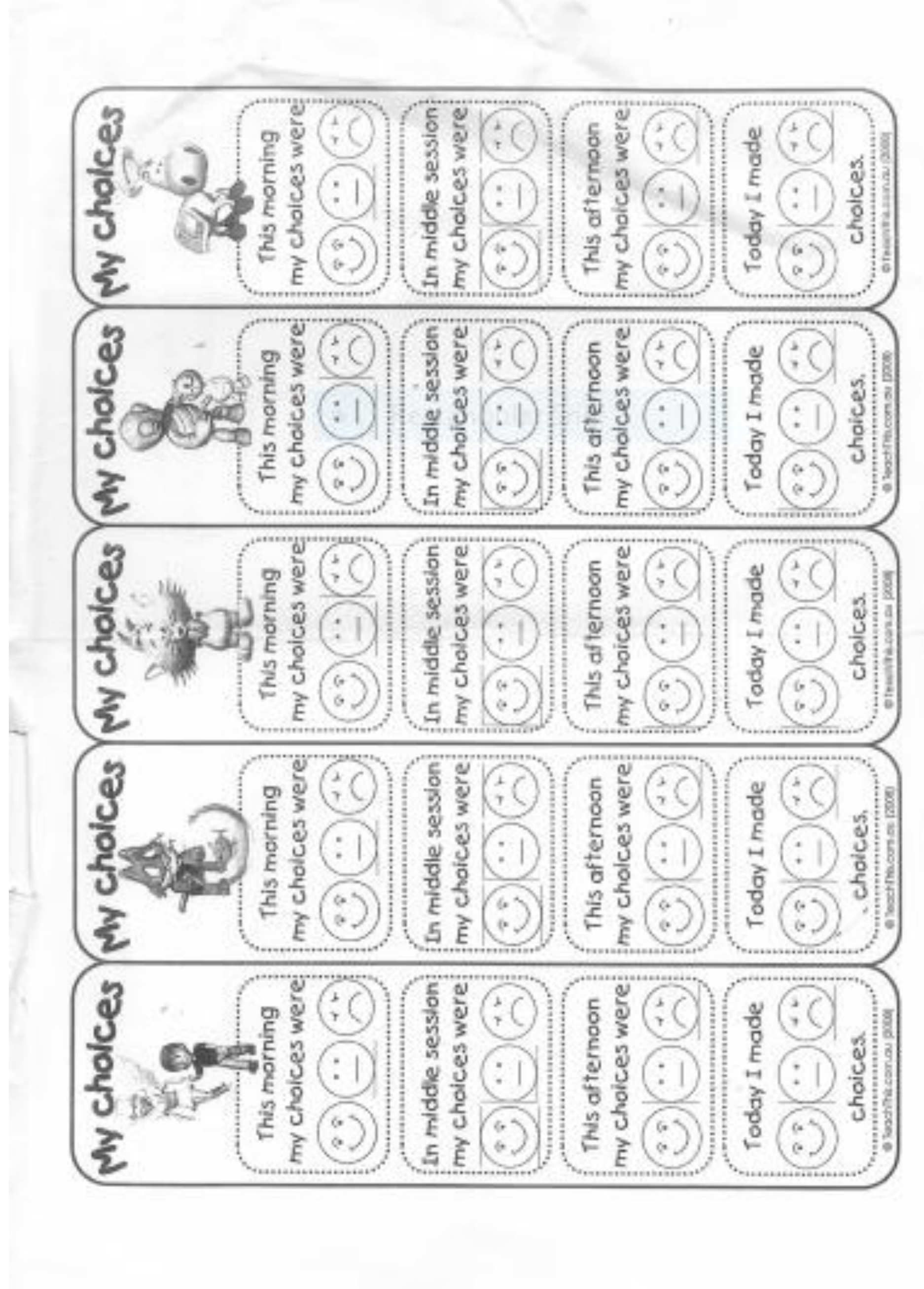
Appendix F: Student Management Plan, My Choices



(Source: Research participant, Jane)

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