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# Contextualizing inclusion policy: views from Jordanian special education teachers

Sarah K. Benson<sup>1,2</sup>

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## Abstract

Jordan's 2017 Public Law No. 20, Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act has given rise to a renewed focus on inclusive education. Using a qualitative comparative case study design, the purpose of this study was to examine factors impacting how schools in Jordan are defining, interpreting and enacting inclusion. Four shadow teachers working in schools to promote inclusive education participated in interviews and weekly journaling prompts. Data were analyzed using cultural–historical activity theory (CHAT) and sensemaking. Results showed support for inclusion by the community when there are adequate resources and supportive administration. Additionally, the shadow teachers have taken on a progressive role as coaches to general education teachers, while promoting social inclusion. This study establishes the utility of CHAT and sensemaking in global research on inclusive practices. The results provide areas of strength in Jordanian schools that should be built on to increase inclusion of students with disabilities.

**Keywords** Inclusion · Jordan · Sensemaking · Cultural–historical activity theory

## 1 Introduction

Jordan has recently increased legislative efforts to strengthen inclusive education in the kingdom. In 2017, Public Law No. 20, Rights of Persons with Disabilities, was passed, and the companion Education Strategic Plan 2018–2022 highlights needs within the school system to increase access and opportunity for students with disabilities. However, research generally reveals multiple barriers to fully including children and adults with disabilities in educational settings (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2014; Alkhateeb et al., 2016; Hadidi & Al Khateeb, 2014). While inclusion of all students in general education has support at the policy level, stakeholders throughout the education system are involved in renegotiations of inclusion in practice and this often leaves children with disabilities in the margins (Benson, 2022). This is a common phenomenon found in many countries (e.g., Chataika et al, 2012; Hettiarachchi & Das, 2014; Srivastava et al., 2015) and requires ongoing research in

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multiple context to develop a full understanding of how the entire activity system can shift in order to become more inclusive.

Within Jordan, the legislative definition of inclusion aligns with the UN, found in Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; stating “Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live” (UN General Assembly, 2007). This definition of inclusion is rooted in an educational concept borne in Western education systems. Its philosophical roots are found in human rights (Articles, 2011), and it has been exported throughout the globe by world governing institutions. This has resulted in globalized local practices, that is, global mandates that are reinterpreted at local levels in concert with cultural and historical beliefs (Anderson-Levitt, 2004). A second definition begins to emerge within Jordan, as the concept of inclusion has been transferred through non-governmental organizations, donor bodies and global governing structures (Benson, 2022). Data from interviews with government, economic partners and implementing non-governmental organizations at the mesa-level of this larger comparative student demonstrated the malleability of inclusive education dependent on the context and vantage point of policy stakeholders (Benson, 2022). As part of a larger comparative case study that has also considered the macro (international) and mesa (national) levels; this micro-level case study aims to understand inclusion as defined, interpreted and enacted by Jordanian shadow teachers.

## 2 Jordanian inclusive education

Jordan has passed several laws specifically promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. These laws largely follow international precedent and reflect the ongoing and pervasive impact of international governing bodies, donor governments and non-governmental development agencies in Jordan (Benson, 2020). Increased inclusive efforts are encouraging, but there needs to be a richer understanding of what happens to these laws during enactment (Massouti, 2018).

In 1993, Public Law No. 12, the Welfare of Handicapped Persons, was passed and established the right of students with disabilities to access schools as well as reiterated their right to receive a free and appropriate education. Additional provisions to make public schools physically and academically accessible were included, and ministries responsible for enforcing inclusion policies were established (Public Law No. 12, 1993). This law was not updated until 2007 when Public Law No. 31 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was passed by the Parliament. In addition to re-establishing many of the non-discriminatory policies and free education provisions of Public Law No. 12, Public Law No. 31 also established the High Council for Persons with Disabilities to promote and enforce disability rights throughout the country (Public Law No. 31, 2007). Most recently in 2017, the Jordanian government passed Public Law No. 20 (PL n. 20), Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This law is supported by an extensive collection of strategy documents developed in various sectors including the Ten-Year Inclusive Education Strategy, and Educational Strategic Plan (ESP) 2018–2022; both roadmaps for the Ministry of Education (MoE). Despite the numerous international agreements, and country-specific laws and strategy documents declaring full access and support for persons with disabilities, schools and teachers are still struggling to make classrooms inclusive (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2014; Al Jabery & Zumberg, 2008; Benson, 2020). Jordan is not unique in the struggle

to create parity in practice, nor are the identified reasons for a continued lack of inclusive education, specifically teacher training, resources and community attitudes (Al Jabery & Zumberg, 2008; AlKhateeb et al., 2016; Al Natour et al., 2015; Benson, 2020). Despite the identification of these issues, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of teacher knowledge or practices of inclusion, which limits opportunity for change. The mesa-level of this comparative study in Jordan demonstrated unique ways to engage with policy stakeholders (Benson, 2022); and the micro-level replicates these data collection methods and frameworks to provide a more nuanced view of how inclusion policy is enacted in schools.

Amman, the capital of Jordan, is home to four million Jordanians and a large refugee population, including 1.5 million school-age children who attend a collection of private, public and United Nations Relief Works Agency schools (Jordan Ministry of Education, 2018). The average general education classroom in Amman has a 32:1 student–teacher ratio (Jordan Times, 2010), although owing to the influx of Syrian refugees this average has likely increased (there are no available data and limited reporting on these statistics). There are no statistics regarding average class size for students with disabilities or for the number of students with disabilities included in general education classrooms; the MoE does not have an accurate count of students with disabilities in need of services. There is a struggle to understand the magnitude of need due to inaccurate reporting (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2014; Al Jabery & Zumberg, 2008). The 2015 census reports 10.6% of the country experiences a disabling condition yet the ESP 2018–2022 only reports 1207 students with various sensory impairments and intellectual disabilities in public schools (p. 9), out of a total of 1.4 million students. Elsewhere, the ESP 2018–2022 claims the MoE is educating 5% of students with disabilities, with the aim of increasing that number to 20% by 2022. These numbers are disproportionate to actual potential, but with limited research into practice, current capacity is not clear. The reported 15% of students who are not being served by MoE schools are either at home due to stigma associated with disability (ESP, 2018), or are enrolled in community care centers.

To better understand how schools in Jordan are enacting inclusion based on both the policy and context, the present study focuses on “shadow teachers,” how they have developed their role identity, and what they perceive to be the most influential elements of their culture, history activity system surrounding them. The MoE employs a limited number of resource room teachers who do not necessarily have training in special education needs and are not placed in every school. To supplement and support inclusive education within Jordan, many international aid organizations and government funding agencies have diverted funds to a single international NGO that has trained and placed shadow teachers over the past several years. The previous director of the Special Education Department at the MoE states these shadow teachers, who work in 86 schools across the country, constitute the only acting special education teachers (Benson, 2022). The specific research questions investigated in this study were: (1) How do Jordanian shadow teachers make sense of their roles in relation to recent inclusion policies in Jordan? (2) How do shadow teachers define and implement inclusion?

### 3 Theoretical framework

Theoretical frameworks that explicitly incorporate culture and historicity into sensemaking reveal influencing factors beyond resource shortages, negative attitudes and lack of training opportunities affecting inclusive policy enactment. To address these complex interactions,

sensemaking theory and cultural–historical activity theory (CHAT) were applied to this study to understand the experiences of Jordanian shadow teachers. The localized definition of inclusive education is developed through sensemaking of their professional identities and influenced by the surrounding activity system.

### 3.1 Sensemaking

Sensemaking is not only an individual process of understanding one's role but also a collective process, because professional relationships and collaborations shape an individual's understanding of particular objects of study (Coburn, 2001). Many international sensemaking studies about special educators are also concerned with the historical and cultural factors that come into play during identity development (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2017; Howes et al., 2011; Thorius, 2019). School-based personnel exercise agency in interpreting and making sense of policies according to their personal and cultural histories, changing the policy in the process (Howes et al., 2011). By foregrounding the voice and experience of teachers using sensemaking theory, this study unbinds the traditional top-down view of policy (Schuelka, 2018), to extricate how teachers are shaping policy in the enactment. Globally, sensemaking research has demonstrated a strong framework to study how teachers develop their roles and provides a deep understanding of the agency teachers exercise when faced with new curricula or policy (März & Kelchtermans, 2013; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). Often when teachers hold different values or lack specific skills related to new policy they are resistant and can find ways to subvert the changes (März & Kelchtermans, 2013; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). Given this knowledge, it is increasingly relevant for inclusive scholars to study enactment at the micro-level.

Significant tensions can arise between how teachers carry out policy directives when there is a conflict with their current practice, professional identity or personal value systems (Ketelaar et al., 2012; März & Kelchtermans, 2013; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). For example, Schmidt and Datnow (2005) trace the variety of emotions teachers have, including anxiety, frustration and uncertainty with new school and district reforms. According to previous research, the concept of disability already invokes significant anxiety among teachers and parents in Jordan owing to cultural constructs (AlKhateeb et al., 2016; Gharaibeh, 2009). Negative emotions are further heightened when policy is vague, when it does not provide clear constraints, and when teachers were not engaged in developing the reforms (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005), all of which can be said about inclusive policy in Jordan (Benson, 2022). Sensemaking underlies the overall approach and theory guiding this study, while cultural–historical activity theory (detailed below) created an organized and clear way to track the community and individual sensemaking processes.

### 3.2 Cultural–historical activity theory (CHAT)

As the above review of sensemaking demonstrates, multidimensional spheres of influence on special education teachers and so a broader scope of analysis is required. CHAT provides an analytical frame and theory that grounds this study in a specific context, attuned to the cultural and historical factors.

CHAT further constructed the complex network of factors that impact how a teacher learns, understands and makes meaning of his or her role. CHAT brings many contextual aspects of an activity system into focus, framing the sensemaking of individuals through

their social interactions, resources, and cultural and historical knowledge. Previous education studies have utilized CHAT to address the complex structure of schools and to create an explicit understanding of actions, social patterns and objects (Artiles & Dyson, 2005; Hashim & Jones, 2007). The multiple components of sensemaking can be unwieldy, as can a comparative case study, but CHAT creates a comprehensive structure that allows the researcher to focus on pertinent relations among the subject, individual or group as they work toward an object, the goal or motivation of the subject. The activity system surrounding subject and object includes the rules, mediating artifacts, community and divisions of labor (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

The intricate role negotiations special education teachers regularly engage in are often internal but influenced by external mediating artifacts, material and nonmaterial resources, and the community of practice surrounding them. These points of study are represented in a triangle diagram to show the dynamic process of interaction in the activity system (see Fig. 1). The multidimensional spheres of influence on special education teachers in Jordan require a broad scope of analysis, which includes the activity system embedded in a cultural and historical context. CHAT influenced the analytic memos and data analysis used in this study to understand the underlying cultural and historical constructs influencing Jordanian inclusive practices.

## 4 Methods

### 4.1 Participants and setting

This research is a part of a larger comparative case study (Benson, 2020, 2022) modeled after Vavrus and Bartlett's (2006, 2009, 2014) vertical case study methodology and is focused on the micro- (i.e., local) level of inclusive policy. Primary participants included four shadow teachers (See Table 1) in Jordan. The participant teachers all worked for the MoE, but their salaries and classroom materials were funding by a large international

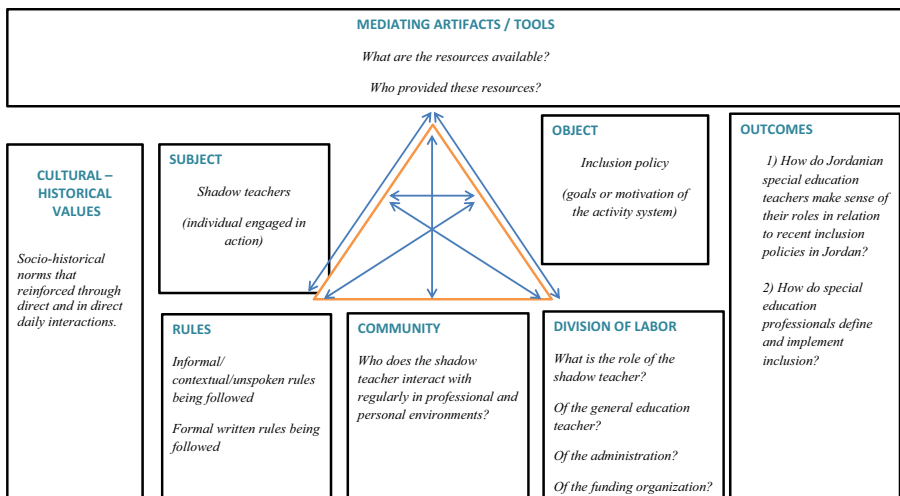


Fig. 1 CHAT diagram (Adapted from Yamagata-Lynch, 2010)

**Table 1** Participant demographic data

Name	Age	Years teaching	Student caseload	Interview 1	Interview 2	Associated interviews
ST1 (M)	24	3	12	4/9/19	9/10/19	P1, GT1
ST2 (F)	23	3	8	3/9/19	9/10/19	P2, GT2
ST3 (F)	22	2	11	2/9/19	15/10/19	P3, GT3
ST4 (F)	23	3	15	29/8/19	17/10/19	P4, GT4

All Jordanian secondary schools are segregated by gender. Girls' primary schools accommodate boys until age 11, while boys' primary schools are single sex

non-governmental organization (NGO). The researcher has no affiliation with the NGO. All four worked within the municipality of Amman, are university-trained special education teachers, who also received internal training and supervision through the NGO.

Additional participants included four associated principals, and four general education teachers (See Table 1). These additional interviews were deemed necessary due to the collaborative nature of sensemaking (Coburn, 2005) and their participation in the larger activity system under study. Field notes from the mesa-level of the overall comparative case study that included discussions with the MoE, and several NGOs relevant to the overall policy-scape informed the authors' interpretation and analysis at the micro-level (Benson, 2020, 2022).

## 4.2 Data sources

Primary evidence came from 16 participant interviews and weekly journals collected over five weeks. Shadow teachers participated in two 90-min semi-structured interviews with a protocol developed and used in previous sensemaking research (Mathews, 2018), then modified to incorporate CHAT. Examples of a question in each activity system category are given in Table 2. Each teacher participated in one interview at the onset of the study and then participated in a second interview mid-way through the study. Questions in the second interview incorporated perspectives from data gathered from the initial interviews and weekly journals.

The weekly journals involved participants communicating with the researcher over WhatsApp to answer prompts that tracked their daily activities. WhatsApp was chosen as the medium for weekly reflections because it allowed immediate feedback and reminders to be sent to participants in order to maximize their participation. This type of response has been used with success in previous research (UNDP, 2018). The teachers responded to five questions (see Table 2 for samples) each week for five weeks, which focused on their daily interactions with children, teachers and leadership within their school. The final question gauged their understanding and interpretation of the policy by asking how they were enacting with it on a weekly basis. Teachers responded in writing and voice notes, which allowed for longer and more in-depth information to be collected.

For purposes of data triangulation, four general education teachers who were the shadow teachers' colleagues also participated in interviews. These teachers were chosen based on their regular contact with the shadow teacher and the presence of children with disabilities in their classes. Interviews were conducted for 45 min using a semi-structured

**Table 2** Interview protocol sample

CHAT component	Question	Format
Rules	<p>What has been easiest to figure out professionally?</p> <p>Choose one theme from the 2017 Inclusion Framework that you engaged in this week and explain what it is and how you worked toward it, including who assisted you, what resources you used and if it is an ongoing effort that is a normal part of your position</p>	<p>Interview</p> <p>WhatsApp</p>
Community	<p>Share examples formal and informal supports that are available to you as a shadow teacher?</p> <p>Describe an interaction you had with a general education teacher this week</p>	<p>Interview</p> <p>WhatsApp</p>
Division of labor	<p>Describe the process of planning and implementing lessons/activities to support students with special education needs in the general education classroom</p> <p>Describe an activity or lesson you supported in a classroom this week?</p> <p>b) Explain your level of input or knowledge of the activity / lesson prior to supporting it</p>	<p>Interview</p> <p>WhatsApp</p>
Resources	<p>Describe curriculum resources that you utilize in the classroom when working with students with disabilities, including how you accessed those or who provided them?</p> <p>Describe an activity or lesson you lead with students this week?</p> <p>b) What resources did you use to create and implement it? Who provided these resources?</p>	<p>Interview</p> <p>WhatsApp</p>
Contextual questions	<p>Could you briefly describe your role for me? What does a typical day look like?</p> <p>How do you explain inclusion to general education teachers and administration?</p>	<p>Interview</p> <p>Interview</p>



format. Additionally, the principal of each school participated in a scheduled 60-min semi-structured interview. All interviews for the study were conducted in Arabic with the use of an interpreter and audio-recorded so the accuracy of the interpretation could be verified during transcription and coding. WhatsApp messaging was also conducted in Arabic, with use of translation for accuracy.

### 4.3 Data analysis

Each data source underwent three stages of analysis, including first-cycle and second-cycle coding, which prioritized participant voice, and a third using matrix analysis (Miles et al., 2014) that encompassed the elements of CHAT (see Fig. 1) and markers of the inclusive policy and framework. First-cycle coding for all data used in vivo and descriptive coding. The initial shadow teacher interviews were coded first. After these initial codes were collected and revised, they were then applied to the general education teacher and principal interview data. Additional in vivo and descriptive codes were used to capture unique data points from interviews. Finally, the WhatsApp journals were coded using the complete set of codes developed during first-cycle interview coding. Examples of first-cycle codes that emerged across interviews were related to principal engagement and supports, social interactions and practices; conflicts or coaching with general educator, support mechanisms.

The most frequently recurring codes from all datasets were then grouped into common themes and CHAT categories, and used in second-cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014). During data analysis, second-cycle coding focused on how the in vivo codes reify the interactions between CHAT elements and how those have impacted the sensemaking of each teacher. In practice this meant the codes about principal engagement and support were coded community principal, while codes about money, funding or materials were grouped together as resource codes. Analytical memos were used to highlight cultural–historical elements and activity systems interactions. Analytical memos allowed the researcher to begin tying the results into a larger discussion of how sociocultural and historical factors were impacting Jordanian inclusion.

The different themes that emerged were placed in a CHAT matrix (similar to Fig. 1) to present a visualization of these connections. The decision-making process of placing codes within the matrix required codes to be deconstructed ensuring they were correctly analyzed within the context of the activity system and cultural–historical factors. For instance, codes about how to implement inclusion demonstrated informal rules around social practices, and formal rules of rights-based education in addition to the divisions of labor. Second-cycle codes shape the following results section, while the analysis from the CHAT matrix is presented in the discussion section.

### 4.4 Trustworthiness

The researcher considered trustworthiness throughout the study. From the outset, ethics approval was sought and granted. All participants gave verbal consent in both English and Arabic, while the primary informants also provided written consent. The researcher spent a prolonged time within Jordan both prior to this study and during the duration of the larger comparative study; data were gathered over a year for all three levels of study. Field notes and reflexive journals were kept throughout the year, then utilized during data analysis.

Interview data were collected in Arabic, with English translation. In addition to member-checking completed on all interview transcripts, the interpreter provided secondary checks on audio material to ensure accuracy of the translation. The interpreter and Jordanian peer academics provided contextual or cultural interpretations to ensure validation of the data. Finally, additional interviews with the principals and general classroom teachers provided triangulation of the data gathered from shadow teachers.

## 5 Results

Analysis revealed three significant themes that answered both how shadow teachers made sense of their professional roles and how they and others were implementing and defining inclusion in schools. The first research question (1) How do Jordanian shadow teachers make sense of their roles in relation to recent inclusion policies in Jordan? was answered through the teacher's limited knowledge or engagement with the 2017 Public Law 20, Rights of Persons with Disabilities and resulting Education Strategic Plan. Instead, the shadow teacher sensemaking process was highly influenced by those around them and their interpretation of inclusion was more in line with their school context than national policy. Thus, the following results and discussion are focused on how teachers make sense of their roles in relation to the elements of CHAT. The emergent themes reflected a contextualized definition of inclusion, individuals as drivers for inclusion and the role of shadow teachers as experts. The impact of historical and cultural factors will be further addressed in the discussion section. Please refer to Table 1 for participant data and interview dates.

### 5.1 Defining inclusion

The results from this study find a locally defined version of inclusion is being implemented that more closely meets the needs of the school context. The shadow teachers, principals and general education teachers interviewed all were able to articulate rights-based definitions of inclusion, "it is their right, so it has to be done" (ST2\_P2, 9/10) or "I explained to the first-grade teachers the importance of getting their right to education like their peers" (ST1, WhatsApp). Most participants felt academic inclusion was not an appropriate or reasonable goal for Jordanian schools. Instead, interviewees collectively operationally defined successful inclusion as students with disabilities being socially included and receiving their primary education in specialized classrooms or through resource rooms. Examples of inclusion as a social operation included; "The students need to feel like he is in a safe space"(ST3, 2/9) and "helping others to accept him" (ST1\_4/9) or explicitly stating, "the main aim is the social inclusion for the student they keep him most of the time in the regular classroom"(ST4, 17/10).

In all four schools, students with disabilities attended general education classes for a portion of their days, then pulled into the resource room for supported academics by a shadow teacher. There were several justifications for this organization. Among the schools the participants worked in, the average class size was 30 students, with several classrooms reaching upward of 40. The classroom teachers feel overwhelmed: "[...] they already have a large number of students in their regular classes and it's adding to their regular workload" (ST4, 29/8). Within such crowded classrooms, teachers struggle to provide individual support or attention to any of the students, limiting their perceived efficacy on academic achievement.

Further hindering academic progress in general education classrooms, there are no learning support assistants in classrooms, and only a single shadow teacher per school. This is in addition to *all* resources being limited in the general education classrooms and faced with these realities, general education teachers reported struggling to provide basic education to students. In contrast, shadow teachers operated in classrooms supplied by the resource rich NGO, with plentiful books, iPads, individual whiteboards for students and manipulatives for all subjects. Many of the teachers interviewed noted these materials were part of their initial learning curve when entering a new school:

I studied special education needs, so I am familiar with the topics, but I like working with the resources. This is a new thing I learned with [NGO]. I didn't learn this in university. (ST1, 4/9)

Shadow teachers see their classrooms as a place where learning can occur not only because of the resources but because of the one-on-one attention. This reality makes pulling students out of a general classroom a necessity, to create equal or in many cases better learning opportunities.

The shadow teachers demonstrated a collective commitment to academic progress, while recognizing the limitations of a general education setting for many of their students and the pressure from parents to demonstrate immediate academic results for students. The reported relationships between shadow teachers and parents was highly variable, but a common theme was the high expectations parents had for their children;

For parents of students with disabilities, they have high expectations, they understand inclusion as their kids should be very close to normal students which is a difficulty in itself for the teacher. (ST4, 29/8)

At the beginning the parents were ashamed of their disabled students, they wouldn't even come to the school to ask about entering them, so we only had 3-4, then 5 students. But now with awareness sessions, people started to learn, we have students from Sweifeh, Naur, etc (P3\_ST3, 15/10)

All interviewees noted parents were grateful to have a placement for their students, and principals noted how quickly enrollments increased as knowledge of the inclusive schools spread.

Given the large class sizes and difficulty in teaching and learning throughout classrooms in Jordan, social inclusion has become the primary objective for many shadow teachers. In initial interviews, teachers were asked to share how they explain inclusion to parents or new general education teachers. Their responses demonstrated the focus on social inclusion:

The student needs to feel like he is in a safe space and a part of the classroom, teachers need to be easy with him, playing with him and use different ways of communicating with him to understand his needs. (ST3, 2/9)

All participants reported on awareness-raising activities within the school and community as a part of their WhatsApp journaling that contributed to social acceptance and inclusion. This activity is financially and administratively supported by the NGO. The shadow teachers reflected on how beneficial social inclusion was to demonstrate the normalcy of difference and emphasized how accepting children were of others in the classroom. They felt this was the first step to making progress toward a more tolerant community in the country.

## 5.2 Individual drivers of inclusion

The school personnel participating in this research revealed the power of the activity system—especially community—in driving and defining inclusion at a local level. Sensemaking theory recognizes that professionals make sense of their roles based on internal dialogues and external influences of colleagues and their daily interactions. Initial interviews indicated the importance of community and external interactions, specifically a supportive principal, in creating a school environment that allowed the shadow teachers to develop strong inclusive programs.

The presence of the shadow teacher program is in direct response to PL n. 20 (2017), the ESP, and the Human Resources Development Strategy. These plans are the most recent push by the Jordanian government and international stakeholders to create more inclusive schools. The pillars of the plan informed the final question of the WhatsApp protocol to measure how engaged teachers were with policy. These documents represent the formal rules that should be influencing the implementation of inclusion in schools; however, when asked about the new law, no teacher was able to identify the policy pillars, and was unable to identify ways in which they were supporting them. Instead, teachers spoke most often of how their principal, the NGO or other teachers informed their practice.

Initial interviews with all four teachers highlighted the principal as the gatekeeper for inclusion, and their willingness to accept students with disabilities. Principals did not see inclusion policy as being absolute:

*<You have stated students must have an education, that it's law but you have said you would not accept more than 50 students, what happens then?>* “I know it is her right to be educated and these things but there are still other students who need their rights, so if the student is impacting the other 35 students I would prefer to take care of the other 35.” (P4\_ST4, 9/10)

This viewpoint was held by two principals; however, other principals were more accepting, and engaged in creating inclusive environments.

My principal understands our job because she comes here and observes us while we are working. (ST4, 17/10)

For many, principals they spoke about the journey inherent in this attitude;

At the beginning I wasn't convinced these students could be in a normal school, but after I taught and worked with a student who had a disability, and I saw how they were affected by, and affected other students, I saw how their attitude, skills and everything improved. So I felt like we had to interact and include them in the regular classes, and we should be even be including them in the streets (P1\_ST1, 9/10)

Second-round interviews plus WhatsApp journals confirmed principals being the gatekeepers for schools;

I [ST4] communicated with my administration regarding the inclusion of some new students, because some cases suffer from severe disabilities and there are multiple difficulties to include them and including health problems, I asked the administration to reconsider regarding these students (ST4\_WhatsApp)

These significant data points support the conclusion that individuals in the Jordanian education system are more influential in inclusion enactment than new policies or official government channels, which is not always beneficial for students.

Field notes of principal engagement during the interview process exemplified the difference in principal attitude. Two principals spent over 90 min with the researcher discussing inclusion and its importance. Further analysis of field notes and the interview transcripts led to the conclusion that these teachers and principals shared an unusually close relationship and mutual respect.

Inclusion was new for me, but I attended the events that highlighted achievements of people with disabilities and who have studied to be engineers or doctors. And I saw my teachers of disabilities and they motivated me, that I felt I should do something, shame on me as the principal that I don't know the problem and how to help them. (P3\_ST3, 15/10)

Neither principal spoke extensively about inclusive policy, but referred to their personal development, connection with shadow teachers, parents and students as drivers for inclusion in their school.

In contrast, P2 did not welcome her shadow teacher into the office, nor remember her name during the interview. Several tradesmen, parents and other school personnel interrupted the interview beyond what is culturally standard in Jordan. Throughout, the principal openly disagreed with inclusion:

Well, I don't have that belief [that students with disabilities should be included]. It is not suitable to be here, there is no availability for them, we don't make anything available for them, we just give them the room and put these students in it. This is their right, his human right to live a normal life, his right to exist, but there is no qualifications for the teachers, they don't know how to deal with the students. If the shadow teacher isn't here, she can't teach them—so if the ministry doesn't prepare, the school doesn't prepare the teacher, there is no program. (P2\_ST2, 9/10)

In less direct ways, P2 undermined inclusive efforts by devaluing the shadow teacher and her work. This was evident in the control she placed on how the shadow teacher could work, “I give them [shadow teacher] the permission to enter the general classroom whenever they want, and the time they want but in which they do not disturb the class time” (P2\_ST2, 9/10). The result of this adversarial relationship was triangulated by this shadow teacher expressing the most difficulty with general education teachers. Of the four general education teacher interviews conducted, this school had the only reluctant general education teacher. ST2 was the only participant to report conflicts with the general education teachers, in multiple WhatsApp responses, she regularly replied to the prompt “What was the most negative or challenging aspect to your week?” with “The classroom teachers are not capable or willing to deal with inclusion students” (ST2\_WhatsApp).

The role principals play in developing inclusive schools was apparent in these contrasting approaches. Despite the same personnel and classroom resources provided by the NGO, identical training opportunities and similar socioeconomic populations, it was the schools with the most supportive principals that had the most robust inclusion programming.

### 5.3 Shadow teacher as expert

Shadow teachers served as coaches, mentors and community-trainers which contributed to their identity development. Due to regular trainings provided by the NGO, their link to a foreign funding agency and leadership position in the community during family outreach efforts many were seen and saw themselves as experts in inclusive pedagogy.

The shadow teachers each had large and growing caseloads and with limited spaces in the resource rooms, which meant they had to be discriminating with their time. As a result, each constructed an expert consultant role when working with general classroom teachers. Their university degrees and the professional development provided by the NGO, equipped shadow teachers with professional and practical knowledge needed, but they did not receive specific coaching development, yet still displayed effective coaching stances;

The most important thing is the way you introduce things to them. For example, I don't give teachers instructions to do this or that with students, I ask them, "What do you think if we try this?" For example, if I see a student with a disability sitting at the back of the class, I don't tell the teacher you have to move the student to the front, I ask them if they have tried the student in the front, they might be less distracted and benefit from being closer to you. (ST4, 29/8)

General education teachers confirmed the view of shadow teachers as the experts in disability; many made reference to asking for help and observations:

I ask the shadow teacher to provide learning plans for the students, so I can follow up on the progress they have made. Then the shadow teachers do observations and give me feedback to help change the way I am teaching and adapt inclusion. (General classroom teacher, GT3\_ST3, 15/10)

From conducting trainings on behalf of the NGO to being an assessor, observer and coach, supportive principals relied on shadow teachers more as experts in their buildings than as auxiliary members of staff.

Consistent in the interviews with shadow teachers and principals was how the work with parents and the larger school community shaped their roles. Journaling data supported these findings, as all teachers reported working with parents or holding a training session for community members at least once over the five weeks. The results of this are evident in increasing enrollments, "The most positive part of my week was helping the parents with children with disabilities with their enrollment" (ST1\_WhatsApp). The visible role in the community further developed the shadow teachers' strong identity as experts in the field of inclusive education. The NGO provides materials and supports the shadow teachers in these efforts, and in principal interviews, it was noted several times that without this external support there would be less ability to conduct these key sessions. The knowledge that outreach work is contributing to significant changes in Jordan develops confidence and continues to cement the shadow teacher's role as expert and integral to the success of the school.

## 6 Discussion

The purpose of this micro-level case study was to understand the way Jordanian shadow teachers define, interpret and enact inclusion. This study's results are significant because they demonstrate the capacity of Jordanian schools to create inclusive schools in contextually appropriate ways. Additionally, through the application of sensemaking and CHAT in this study, the emergent themes have wider implications for how to study inclusion and the complex systems influencing policy enactment. Inclusion is being shaped in Jordan by the mediating artifacts and available resources, by the educational community surrounding shadow teachers and both formal and informal rules of policy and culture.

By redefining inclusion as a primarily social act, shadow teachers and their principals are recognizing the outsized influence that mediating artifacts, or resources have on a shadow teacher's ability to create inclusive spaces in overcrowded and under-resourced classrooms. Resourcing issues are widespread and historical in Jordanian schools, and a source of ongoing frustrations by teachers, many of whom went on strike for three weeks in the fall of 2019. The shadow teachers had increased resources due to the sponsoring NGO, which made it possible for inclusive practices to take hold in their school buildings; however, without these there would be more reasons for principals to deny students with disabilities admission. Frequently cited as a barrier to inclusive education, limited resources—both personnel and material—can seem insurmountable, which is the appeal of NGOs providing material assistance (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Franck & Joshi, 2017; Srivastava et al., 2015).

In schools where the NGO has provided materials and personnel, there is an increase in enrollment, which disrupts the historical narrative that parents do not want their children with disabilities enrolled in schools due to shame and stigma cited in both research and by policy-makers (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2014; Alkhateeb et al., 2016). The attitudinal barriers do not persist when provisions to support students with disabilities are in place. Increasing enrollment in the schools demonstrates high support and desire for services, with many participating schools drawing from villages beyond their boundaries. The participants in this study have revealed that if these immediate concerns over material goods and personnel support are overcome, the traditional barriers of community resistance and prejudice will fall away. This places the onus on policy-makers to appropriate resources for inclusive education and removes their blame on culture for exclusionary practices (Benson, 2020).

The pressure parents are placing on teachers to ensure their children with disabilities are making academic progress demonstrates a desire for more educational opportunities. Cultural understanding can explain this further, as the same construct of family honor that contributes to a sense of shame in Jordanian society toward disability (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2014; Alkhateeb et al., 2016; Benson, 2022) now pushes the once segregated students to academically achieve for their families. The concepts of honor and shame are deeply rooted in Levantine cultures, and it is important for children to carry their family's honor (Zeinoun et al., 2018). School achievement contributes to increased honor and dignity for students and their families (Zeinoun et al., 2018), this research demonstrates that this extends to children with disabilities. These family expectations demonstrate a culturally sensitive path to promoting the inclusion of students with disabilities.

It has been demonstrated in research globally that supportive leadership for inclusion is instrumental to success (Allan, 2016; Lyons et al., 2016). Similarly, this study found that principals played key roles in cultivating inclusive attitudes in schools and developing the

shadow teacher role. While much of NGO development efforts focus on parent and teacher knowledge, skills and development, very few projects address principal readiness. Principals in this study could cite human rights and education policies; however, it was their individual judgment that led to greater inclusion. This indicates a need for stricter enforcement of policy, but also additional professional development for leadership.

Principals acted as gatekeepers for inclusion in these four schools, but they also played a notable role in shaping the identity of shadow teachers. There are ongoing international efforts to reshape the role of special education teachers (Florian, 2010; Gregory, 2018; Slee, 2019) and the expert identity developed by shadow teachers presents alternatives to exclusionary stances. By acting as coaches and mentors to the general education teachers and being respected by their principals, these shadow teachers are poised to be able to provide more inclusive environments. Given the appropriate resources, general classroom teachers would be able to learn from and develop their specialist knowledge, pedagogy and skills to better include students with disabilities.

## 7 Conclusion

While inclusive education in Jordanian schools is inconsistent with policy objectives at national and international levels, there are many positive outcomes at the micro-level. It is important the inclusive education field recognizes shadow or special education teachers as key policy actors. Their influence and understanding of complex systems of interaction in the community are key to progress. There are competing barriers to inclusion of students with disabilities throughout the world; however, if these barriers are understood through a cultural and historic lens there is a greater capacity for change. This study demonstrated the impact whole activity systems had on sensemaking of professional roles and policy directives. Moving forward throughout developing education systems, it is important to address all education professionals as policy actors and consider their context in order to evaluate inclusion.

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