Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education in Nova Scotia, Canada

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Abstract

This research study aimed to answer the question 'How do elementary school teachers in the province of Nova Scotia describe their experiences with inclusive education and what does this mean for practice?' It explored the experiences and insight of classroom teachers by gathering data from twenty-two questionnaires and one focus group discussion. The data was analysed through a thematic analysis starting with preset codes based on Loreman's (2007) Seven Pillars of Support for Inclusive Education. The analysis indicated that teachers were feeling frustrated and confused with the practice of inclusive education in the province of Nova Scotia. Both frustration and confusion were evident in the areas of teachers' attitudes, inclusive education discourse, and through their sharing of experiences with teaching supports. One major finding of this research is the fragmentation in practice and discourse caused by the existence of the Nova Scotia Special Education Policy (2008) in an inclusive education system. The key recommendations from this report are policy change to support a broader definition of inclusive education, development of initial teacher education & professional development opportunities, and focusing on an inclusive pedagogical approach at the school level.

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Author's Declaration

"I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution Of others, this dissertation is the result of my worn work and has not been Submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other Institution."

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1- Introduction

This research arose from a lack of professional clarity around the concept of inclusive education. While I believed this approach to education was about building accessible schools for all students, there appeared to be practices and policies in place that contradicted this belief. In 2006, I was working in a 'special education' school for children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. The aim of this school was to educate and support students in a school-like setting, as opposed to an instructional-type setting, with the hope of these children becoming active participating members of their limited community and, ultimately, members of the overall society. After leaving this school and returning to Canada as a teacher in the public school system I started to question how inclusive education was conceptualised and why the concept appeared to cause divisiveness amongst various education stakeholders. On one hand, I had worked at a school that supported students with a specific diagnosis separately from other students. However, the aim was to support and educate in a fashion that allows for students to become valuable members of their communities in due time. Yet, on the other hand, I was now working in a system that has a clear policy mandate of inclusivity for all learners but continues to struggle to support this concept. This conflict appears to have caused significant tension surrounding, not only the concept of inclusive education, but also the practice of inclusive education.

Wanting to explore this tension between the concept and practice of inclusive education in the province of Nova Scotia. I felt it was appropriate to undertake a professional doctorate focusing on the area of inclusive education. This journey has allowed me to analyse my own beliefs, the beliefs of some other teachers in this province, and the academic discourse in the area of inclusive education. At the end of this study, my aim is to use my depth in understanding to better support both teachers practising in the public school system and students learning in the same system. Over the course of my research period, both my personal life and my professional life changed significantly. These changes further developed my understanding of the context of teaching in Nova Scotia and the practice of inclusive

education. The broadening of my perspective has allowed me to deepen my understanding of the difference in thought amongst some teachers concerning the definition and practice of inclusive education.

This initial chapter is an introduction both to the concept of inclusive education and to my research project.

1.2- Context

Over the last thirty years, two prominent trends have emerged as focal issues for the public school system in Nova Scotia, Canada; firstly, the inclusive education agenda, and secondly, the market-based neo-liberal agenda. The former seems to be driven by both policy and human rights, whereas the latter seems to be structured in standards and accountability. Through my experiences working in the public school system in Nova Scotia, it is my opinion that with the introduction of restorative justice, professional learning communities and aspects of curriculum guides focusing on play and exploration, it could be argued that communitarian and liberal educational approaches have started to emerge within the last five years. Hopkins (2002) argues that restorative justice places emphasis on relationship building and understanding. Similarly, professional learning communities focus on fostering professional relationships through collaboration (Harris & Jones, 2010) and play-based curricula focus on the development of social skills, collaborative skills, and relationship building (Ginsburg, 2007). However, the potentially competing principles of the neo-liberal framework which underpin the education system in Nova Scotia have offered challenges to the implementation of more inclusive educational experiences for young people.

In this research, I focused on how inclusive education is understood and how it is being implemented at the elementary level in the Nova Scotia public school system through an exploration of the perceptions of individual teachers. I am interested in understanding their various interpretations and practices as an initial starting point for better supporting all stakeholders in the public school system. My role, as a learning centre teacher, is to support both classroom teachers and students who

require a significant amount of additional support. The learning centre teacher is responsible for implementing specialised programming and services throughout the school community based on the individual needs of students supported through the learning centre. Support may be provided in specialist classes (Art, Music, Physical Education), classrooms, or in the learning centre for more direct support (see appendix A for more information). My aim for all students is to ensure they have fair and reasonable opportunities to become valuable and valued members of the school community. Understanding how some teachers view and interpret inclusive education within their classroom and school community provides the steppingstone for support. It is important to note that common language in Nova Scotia for students requiring significant support is 'special needs'. This term, along with 'students with exceptionalities', continue to be used provincially both in practice and in the provincial Special Education Policy (DOEECD, 2008). Despite being twelve years old, this policy continues to be an important document in shaping the education system for most students. The terminology used in Nova Scotia's education system is reflective of the special education movement in that it uses words like special needs, exceptionalities, individual programme plan, learning disability, adaptations and special education (Morse, 2015). However, as I read more international literature relating to inclusive education during my study towards the EdD at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, I realised that other countries, including Scotland, used more inclusive and broader terms in discussing student support. Nind (2018) suggests that one way in which a more inclusive approach to teaching and thinking about students can be developed is to shift terminology from focusing on child's perceived 'deficit' to focusing on all students as learners. While recognising that changing the discourse is not in itself sufficient to ensure change, it may be part of the solution. In identifying that students, for whatever reason, may require additional support for varying time frames, the Additional Support for Learning Act aims to create accessible learning environments that help all students to be participative members of the school community (Scottish Government, 2017). However, the terminology used in Nova Scotia is narrow and focuses on the disability or the deficit of the child. However, as Makoelle (2015) argues, disability language assumes that there are 'normal' or mainstream students which perpetuates the thinking that some students

need something different for education than what is ‘normal’. Rather, more inclusive approaches to policies and language assume that all students will require support at different times and aim to reduce barriers in the school system.

In 1948, Canada signed the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (Canada, 2019). The UDHR aimed to outline human rights in a general sense and bring international attention to the area of human rights (CWP, 2020). The United Nations created Covenants to outline specific rights, limitations, and roles. One such Covenant is documented in the 1976 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (OHCHR, 2020). Along with the UDHR, the ICESCR became known as the ‘International Bill of Human Rights’. This international declaration influenced the creation of a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (the ‘Charter’) (Canada, 1982) putting the rights of all Canadians (including children) onto paper. The Charter protects every Canadian’s right to be treated equally under the law. The Charter guarantees broad equality rights and other fundamental rights (CHRC, 2020). In essence, it aims to be more specific about individual rights than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Charter outlines that ‘every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit’. Despite outlining the rights of all Canadians in the Charter, it was still necessary for the international community to reconvene in 1989 and create a document that describes the human rights of all children, specifically. The United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by Canada in 1991 (OHCHR, 2014). These nationally and internationally sanctioned documents, which confirm a national and local response to global pressures for universal human rights, along with other global proclamations, such as the Salamanca Statement and Framework For Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994); UNESCO ‘Education For All’ programme (UNESCO, 1990); and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006), have guided the inclusive education model in a way that reflects global, national and local requirements. The education system in Nova Scotia is determined by policies at the provincial and school board levels as an inclusive system. The Nova Scotia Special Education Policy (DOEECD, 2008) outlines that all students are to be given an appropriate, quality education based on their individual

needs. There are, however, two noticeable streams of practice within this system: 1) mainstream (students meeting the desired provincial grade-level and participating in relevant standardised assessment) and 2) special needs (such as gifted students, or those with learning disabilities, cognitive and physical impairments, and English language learners). As the public education system progresses, the theoretical framework that informs the practice of the education system must not just continue to strive to provide an equal and appropriate education for all but provide an education that is just and equitable for all students. Despite being described as an inclusive system, there continues to be defined restrictions as to what is 'expected' or 'normal' for students, and for those students requiring specific 'supplementary' (Head, 2011) assistance which would be seen as contrary to the definition of inclusion held by many (Ainscow et al, 2006; Florian, 2007; Goransson & Nilholm, 2014).

In the early 1980's, a general movement against public debt and rising unemployment rates developed across Canada, including the province of Nova Scotia (Ungerleider & Levin, 2007, cited in Sattler, 2012). The prevalent public school systems were, to a significant extent, becoming scapegoats for this economic decline, 'because of their perceived inadequate preparation of students for the new knowledge economy' (Sattler, 2012, p5). Despite the education system falling under provincial rather than federal jurisdiction, a movement towards a market-based neo-liberal framework for education could be seen across provincial governments as one step in helping to improve the economy. In order to increase economic competitiveness and prepare students to be productive members of the workforce, school boards took an approach to education that focused on standardisation, performativity and accountability. Examples of how neo-liberalism has been shaping the educational system in Nova Scotia, as in other parts of the world, are: provincial, board & school-based assessments, individual school accreditation processes, outcome-based curriculums, and the notion of curriculum mapping across school boards (Fuller & Stevenson, 2019; Mappiasse, 2014). The commonality between the first two examples is the competition created amongst students and schools based on achievement levels in mathematics and language arts; whereas, the latter examples are strategies to increase consistency and facilitation of assessment standards (of both students and

teachers). Student progress within the system depends upon meeting or surpassing specified standard expectations. Those students who do not demonstrate acceptable understanding or performance become subjects of the special education stream in which the curriculum is modified or adapted to perceived student needs.

It should be kept in mind that this movement towards increased standardisation and measurement was happening at the same time as an inclusive approach to education was being added to the agendas of most school boards across Canada (including Nova Scotia). As a result we now have, not only an inclusive approach that strives to promote education for all students within their community regardless of language, physical or cognitive disability, race, religion, and colour (DiGiorgio, 2010), but also a standardised approach with a "one-size-fits-all" approach to the curriculum.

It is important to understand that this latter approach could well have damaging results for struggling students (Dudley-Marling & Baker, 2012). Not only does standardisation leave little room for teachers to adapt the curriculum for students with special needs, but it also causes students to internalise failures as their own, rather than as a result of the systemic failures of a one-size fits-all approach by the education system (Davis & Florian, 2004; Dudley-Marling & Baker, 2012). As inclusion and neo-liberalism have emerged as the dominant forces influencing the education system in Nova Scotia, a two-tiered system has effectively been created in order to accommodate inclusion within the neo-liberal agenda (Romstein, 2015). The first tier serves the 'normal' students who are able to achieve within the context of standardisation and measurement. A second education tier has evolved to serve those requiring the individualisation of special education.

Currently in Nova Scotia, the special education policy is written to ensure that all learners, regardless of their unique needs, are supported within the public education system from primary (age five) through graduation in grade twelve. The policy states that all students have the right to an appropriate education based on their learning needs, the right to a quality education and quality teachers, and the right to an inclusive education (DOEECD, 2008). The Nova Scotia provincial inclusive education

policy appears broad in writing and has not been revised since its inception in the 1990s. However, each provincial Centre for Education, formerly the School Board, (in Nova Scotia) uses the umbrella policy to create its own board policies. The provincial special education policy is, however, challenged by some elements of the neo-liberal framework currently shaping the topography of provincial education. Some of the challenging influences inclusive education faces today relate to globalisation and performativity (Furlong, 2013; Zajda, 2020). Both globalisation and performativity are linked to the neo-liberal agenda of increasing economic growth, free trade, and competition. Thus, education has been redefined from a public good to a method of increasing 'national and international competitiveness and meet the demands of a global economy' (Sattler, 2012, p4).

The first influence, globalisation, is affecting education systems across Canada, including Nova Scotia, by reinforcing the importance of competition and increasing the emphasis on standardisation for all students. Globalisation is not only affecting Canada but is a common major influence throughout the Western World (Donaghy & Roussel, 2018). Competition within schools is seen primarily in the area of student assessment programs, from the international level (such as Program for International Student Assessment, PISA), to provincial assessments (in mathematics and literacy), and to the school-based level (Volante & Jaafar, 2008). The neo-liberal approach presumes that competition by schools, teachers, and students will improve the overall education system, as competition has similarly revitalised the economy (Sahlberg, 2004). It is argued that the emphasis placed on competition within the school system is leading to an increase in standardisation of the curriculum, student assessment and instruction. Sahlberg (2016) suggests that when trying to create fair and comparable competition, schools operating in an atmosphere of autonomy often perform better than schools stringently following the one-size-fits-all standard approach of 'externally set standards' (p10) which have become the norm for education under what Sahlberg refers to as the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) (Sahlberg, 2004; 2016).

A poignant example of the challenge of standardising within a nominally inclusive education system is taken from one of the local school boards in Nova Scotia. When selecting participants for the Early Literacy Programme (to support struggling readers in the elementary years), schools were advised to select students determined to have been just below the expected levels for their grade, rather than those students who were significantly below grade-level. This selection process was implemented because of the general ease of moving the first group of students through the various levels and thus seeing higher results than would have naturally occurred with the latter group. Students who are working at a level significantly below the acceptable standards were moved into special education. It is in special education that adaptations and modifications are made to the curriculum to meet and support the individual needs of a student and, through individual programme planning, allow them to avoid associated standardisation and assessments. On one hand, this practice responds to a student's specific learning needs through individualisation. On the other hand, it reacts to a child's perceived deficits by providing something that is special or different. According to the Nova Scotia Special Education Policy (2008), special education is concerned with students requiring any additional support services or programmes, in other words, any student considered to have a 'special need. 'Special needs, or 'exceptionalities' as written in the document (p18) include: cognitive impairments, emotional/behavioural disorders, learning disabilities, physical disabilities and/or health impairments, speech impairments and/or communication disorders, sensory impairments (vision/hearing), multiple disabilities or giftedness.

It seems that the current Nova Scotia system is working for most, or for mainstream students (Levin, 2011); yet, those that cannot meet the prescribed outcomes, students with special needs, are put in a different stream. The emphasis placed on competition and standardisation within the school system is shrinking the opportunity for an inclusive education wherein all students are valued for what they can do and what they can be. In turn, it appears to be inflating the special education population. Students who are perceived to have a 'deficit' of some kind or are not meeting expectations, are being compensated through special education services, or other additional supports, in the mainstream schools. It is important to note that the

inclusive education policy is included as a sub-policy of the Nova Scotia Special Education Policy (2008), rather than being a foundation statement of the overall education policy. In other words, it appears that the inclusion sub-policy is written to include students with special needs into the mainstream school. Rather than including all students in the initial planning phases, students who are not achieving as expected are included through the addition of 'add-ons' to the programme. I explore this division of students in more detail in my review of literature.

The second influence, performativity, is the drive for achievement of goals in efficient and measurable ways (Burnard & White, 2008). Assessing most students against a set of standard outcomes (for each grade level) assumes that all children ought to perform at the same rate or level as other children of the same chronological age. If Nova Scotia has a special education population of fifteen per-cent (Levin, 2011), then only eighty-five per-cent of our students could be expected to perform against the outcomes. Removing any fraction of children that do not easily fit the performative requirements of education is in conflict with Nova Scotia's written commitment to inclusive education (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). In the current system, teachers in Nova Scotia adapt or modify the outcomes for students who present with challenges in accessing the curriculum. These alterations mean that students are not expected to perform in the same way as the other students, leading to a possible division in the students between those that can achieve and those that cannot. As a member of the School Planning team at an elementary school in urban Nova Scotia, I have become aware of a significant increase in the number of struggling students being brought to the School Planning Team in the month leading up to any provincial or board assessment. This is an apparent strategy to filter the struggling students into the special education stream by placing the student on an Adaptation or a, more restrictive, Individualised Programme Plan. In an inclusive education system, how can we, as educators, consciously exclude some students based on an 'unacceptable' performance? Such filtering seems at odds with my understanding of the aims of an inclusive education system.

Exploring and interpreting the experiences of teachers who are working within a public school system being shaped by the individual needs of some children and the performability of other children could yield interesting insight about the strengths and challenges being faced by the Nova Scotia public school system. When the focus of education is connected to economic growth, 'desirable "outcomes" become reduced to those which can be measured and the focus shifts from the development of means to the achievement ends (or the development of capabilities) that are presumed to be self-fulfilling' (Graham & Harwood, 2011, p2). The emphasis of the neo-liberal agenda is on improving regional economics rather than enhancing inclusivity, whereas the emphasis of an inclusive system is on the development of all children as individual learners and valued members of the community.

1.3- My Assumptions

At the beginning of my study, I needed to take some time to think about my research, the purpose, and what I assumed about the topic or the context I was researching. The old saying 'you only know what you know' applies perfectly to this situation. At the beginning of my journey, I had undeveloped and incomplete assumptions as to the concept and definition of inclusive education that were conceived from my personal experiences as an educator in conjunction with some support from academic reading. As I worked through current and historical literature relating to inclusive education, reflected on my own experiences, and examined the responses of my participants, many of my earlier assumptions were extensively altered and expanded.

Following my exploration of the literature, it became clear to me that there appears to be a significant lack of understanding of the concept or misapplication of the practice of inclusive education by many policymakers in the Nova Scotia education system. This is not to say they do not mean well or have a general idea of what inclusion is or is not, but there appears to be a disconnect amongst education policies, implementation practices and expectations. As I worked through my research, I discovered that this was not a unique situation to Nova Scotia. Rather, it seems to be a common situation in many western school systems (Florian, 2014; Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011; Head, 2011; Osberg & Biesta, 2010). From my

experience of working with teachers at different stages of their careers, prior to conducting my research, I assumed an inadequacy within teacher education for today's inclusive school system. Teacher education has been defined by O'Neill (1987) as the process of prospective and practising teachers successfully learning knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for adapting, applying, and using flexibly within their professional practice. It thus refers both to Initial teacher education (ITE), which is the process of completing entry level qualifications prior to entering the teaching profession, and to ongoing professional development, which is the process of continuing to develop skills, in which teachers are expected to engage throughout their career.

However, in the process of conducting my literature review, I began to realise that little is known about the necessary skills required to work in an inclusive school system. Rather, there is substantial research that indicates teachers have adequate training and skills to provide successful learning experiences to all students; it is the structures and policies in place, together with uncertain understandings of inclusive education that are proving to be challenging for student success (Ainscow, 2005; Ainscow et al, 2003; Florian, 2014; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2012; Pantić & Florian, 2015).

1.4- Rationale

As noted above, I became interested in embarking on a professional doctorate shortly after completing my postgraduate studies. After finishing my last course, I realised I had gained knowledge and understanding of writing lesson plans and curriculum guides, but I was no further ahead in understanding the conceptualisations of education that support our practices and how they can be successfully integrated with the realities of classroom teaching. This sentiment is echoed by Barone et al (1996) where it states that many education programmes provide courses based on applicable theory but then fail to connect it to practice. In my experience, my knowledge in educational practices was introduced to me in a mess of disconnected theory and assignments, involving little contextual understanding. The real struggle was to find out ways to present material to the students in meaningful and purposeful ways. Ben-

Peretz (1995) cautions that when ITE is 'communicated in a fragmented view of knowledge, both in course-work and in field experiences' (p546), teachers' understanding, and practice will suffer as experiences are gained and application of knowledge is attempted.

This disconnect led to significant personal frustration with the teaching experience. I was confident that education was a field of passion for me. During my initial years of teaching there was a growing gap between my expectations of professional success and the realities of experience. Exploration of my feelings of frustration with these professional expectations gap led me to embark on this academic journey. If professional doctorates are fundamental in developing scholarly professionals (Fenge, 2009) then I believed that this opportunity would support and enhance my teaching experience and allow me to better achieve my education expectations. Through the Doctor of Education programme, most specifically the dissertation component, I have had the opportunity to construct my own meanings in relation to some of the conceptualisations of education through exploring the coexistence of and interrelationship between theory and practice (with reference both to myself and to other educators). My professional practice and my personal beliefs are a major driving force behind the decisions I have made, the theoretical frameworks I have explored, and the knowledge I have constructed throughout the journey.

1.5- Purpose of the Study

Along with my personal professional development, a major purpose of this research is to add an additional layer to the ongoing discussions relative to the improvement of inclusive education in Nova Scotia. A newly formed commission, established by the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union and the provincial government, has been created to 'develop a comprehensive strategic plan that includes measurable education goals for implementing inclusive education and specific recommendations for improving teaching and learning conditions in support of the goals' (Campbell, 2017, para10) for the Nova Scotia education system. In contrast to this large-scale commission, my research is focused on exploring the experiences of the front-line teachers working to educate all students in their classes to the best of their abilities. It is a small-scale

research project that is exploring the many important perspectives and recommendations that teaching practitioners experience in relation to the implementation and consideration of inclusive education. It is the aim of this research to explore the current state of inclusion within the current Nova Scotia education system, to identify inherent challenges within that system and to provide some opportunities for improving the system.

I believe there is a conflict stemming from policy and classroom practice in an inclusive education system. As I share in Chapter 2: Literature Review, few academic researchers agree on a single definition of inclusive education. However, could this lack of consistency affect the policy in terms of interpretation and implementation? Interestingly enough, this issue arose within months of starting my data collection. The practice of inclusive education was at the forefront of an intense provincial government-teacher labour dispute. The concept of inclusivity will be further discussed in the following section, but it is important to note that my research target was set prior to the referenced 2016 labour dispute in Nova Scotia. Coincidentally, the idea of inclusive educational practices, after being instituted in the early 1990s in Nova Scotia, now requires further review at various levels to ensure acceptable improved practices as well as improved understanding of the requirements of Nova Scotians for their schools and their society. Since ending the labour dispute, a three-person Commission has been established to explore and make recommendations concerning Inclusive Education in the province of Nova Scotia. Out of the Commission, a new Inclusive Education Policy for the province of Nova Scotia was introduced to educators within the province in early 2020 with a release date of September 2020. However, despite the introduction of this policy, the provincial Special Education policy still exists and will remain in effect. The new policy is not explored in detail in this paper, though it is included in the final chapter. The current policy and the upcoming policy are very similar in aim. The new policy updates language and aims to place higher emphasis on student well-being and it provides greater detail of responsibilities.

My research aims to explore educators' perceptions of inclusive education at the elementary level within a classroom teacher's scope of practice. The unique experiences of each teacher create a foundation that shapes their underpinning assumptions and beliefs about inclusive education and how it should be implemented. It is these experiences and narratives that I explore in this paper, both individually and collectively, within the wider context of inclusive education.

1.6- Significance

The findings of this study should be of benefit to front-line teachers, administrators, parents, and stakeholders in Nova Scotia education system. As dialogue continues around educational reform in Nova Scotia, it is important to explore the ways in which different agents conceptualise inclusive education practice and write or interpret policies (Biesta, 2015; Pantić & Florian, 2015). The significance of this research is that it aims to explore the very people interacting with students and applying the 'best practices' within their understanding of a specific policy. However, equally importantly, the findings of this research study have challenged my beliefs and assumptions about inclusiveness of education in Nova Scotia. Undertaking this journey has broadened my understanding of what education can look like when you factor in the magnitude of forces shaping the field daily.

1.7- Research Method

My research is conducted following the framework of the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm was chosen based on how it aligned with my personal beliefs about the importance that individual experience plays in shaping how we interpret and implement policies in our professional practice. The methods I used to collect data were an online questionnaire and a single and small focus group. All data was interpreted and categorised through the process of a thematic analysis. For further detail and exploration of the methodology used in this research, please refer to Chapter 3: Methodology.

1.8- Conclusion

The practice of including all students in mainstream or neighbourhood schools is now the norm in most western countries due to both global proclamations and local inclusion policies (Lakkala et al, 2014; Haug, 2017). The purpose of my study is to better understand how the local policies are implemented at the grass roots level in the classroom. An understanding of some teachers' perceptions on teaching inclusively may shed light on some of the driving factors shaping current dialogue on this topic in the province. Although there is research on teacher attitudes in the context of inclusive education, little research has been conducted in the province of Nova Scotia. Due to the ongoing labour tensions, I trust that my research can act as a positive contribution to the dialogue.

Despite having a provincial definition of inclusive education, it is important to understand the debate and inconsistency in literature surrounding the definition and purpose of the practice. Creating a policy that changes a school system significantly without altering the systems and structures in the practical stages increases the chances of having systemic challenges (Darling-Hammond et al, 2019). Nova Scotia defines inclusive education as 'the basic right of all students to receive appropriate and quality educational programming and services in the company of their peers' (DOEECD, 2008, p5). However, in order to fully make sense of the individual experiences of the participants, in this introductory chapter I have explored the relationship between the two policy drivers, inclusivity and neo-liberal education, which shape the Nova Scotia public school system. In Chapter 2: Literature Review, I explore current research and literature in the area of inclusive education. I share my methodologies in Chapter 3: Methodology. In Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Data, I explore the participant responses, explain data analysis methodology through a thematic approach, and I share my findings. In Chapter 5: Discussion, I provide insight into my data and attempt to connect it to current practices. Chapter 6: Conclusion, the final chapter, allows me to answer the question 'Where can we go from here?' as a way to connect my research to my own professional practice.

My dissertation tells the story of my participants, their experiences, and the connections between each participant. However, it also tells the story of my personal and professional growth as an educator. I entered this process with a somewhat restricted view of the teaching experience, yet, I am completing the journey with a much deeper understanding of inclusive education.

In the next chapter, Literature Review, I explore and review the discourse and research in the area of inclusive education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1- Overview

In this chapter, I start by presenting issues arising from the developing concept of inclusive education. Then, I present policies and legislation in the area of inclusive education. As noted in Chapter 1, there is no single and concise definition of inclusive education. However, there are commonalities and differences amongst the definitions that it is necessary to discuss in setting the context for my research.

For this study, I used the following databases: JSTOR (digital library), EBSCO (academic search premier), and ERIC to search for relevant material in the area of inclusive education, teacher perceptions, and elementary school practice. In addition, I used articles from the United Nations and dissertations from different Canadian and American universities to search for information. The University of Glasgow online library had access to relevant academic journals relevant to this topic. I used several key words during my search: inclusion, inclusive education, teacher perception, perception and inclusion, perception and inclusive education, teacher attitudes, and teachers and inclusive education. Initially, I did not limit the scope of the reviewed literature due to the nature of the topic.

2.2- Historical Development of Inclusive Education on a Global Level

Twenty years ago, Ainscow and Booth (1998) suggested that '(i)nclusive education' was a common phrase used within many national and local education policies around the world. It can be said that this same prevalence of the notion of inclusive education can be seen in more up-to-date literature (Dreyer, 2017). The development of inclusive education continues to remain a seemingly elusive goal, as evidenced by the inclusion of inclusive education in the UNESCO (2019) global plan within Sustainable Development Goal four (SDG four) as part of their 2030 Agenda. This goal is to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNESCO, 2020, p10). Similarly, the province of Nova Scotia accepted the 'vision and promise of the Commission for Inclusive Education's report: Students First' to ensure that the school system supports the success of all Nova Scotia students (Shea, 2018). Inclusive education in Nova Scotia will be explored in

more detail throughout this chapter and the rest of the paper. However, this section focuses on inclusive education on a global platform. Despite being a concept widely included in policies, as explored in more detail throughout this chapter, inclusive education is still a concept that lacks a single, straightforward definition. This section will explore some of the historical moments shaping the inclusive education journey, some of the challenges with inclusive education, and it will consider, based on current literature, the definition, purpose and the transforming characteristics of inclusion.

As we consider the historical documents and statements which have shaped the development of inclusive education both nationally and internationally, we can identify a move from exclusion, through segregation and integration, to inclusion. According to CRPD (2016), exclusion is when students are denied, directly or indirectly, access to education. Segregation (CPRD, 2016) occurs when students are educated in separate environments that respond to specific or various student needs. A situation where all students are 'included' in mainstream or neighbourhood schools – but only so long as students with special needs can adjust to the school setting, and no structural changes are made - would be described as 'Integration' (CPRD, 2016). Unlike these three terms that are all reflective of where a student is placed, inclusion is a process of systemic change in approaches, pedagogy, structures, environment, and policies that aim to overcome barriers to education for all students and increase equitable learning opportunities (CRPD, 2016). This paper aims to focus on the impact of the latter term, inclusion, on shaping educational practices. However, it is important to understand the meaning of the earlier educational terms in order to understand how inclusive education varies from earlier models in thinking, acting, and planning.

It is widely accepted that the concept of inclusive education has its roots in the disability movement (Dreyer, 2017). Up until the mid-twentieth century, Canadian students with disabilities or 'deficits' were excluded from mainstream education in many public school systems (Towle, 2015). According to Lutfiyya & Van Walleghem (2001), prior to this time school aged children with various cognitive, physical, or

sensory disabilities were considered ineducable and placed in various institutions. In 1948, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (hereafter, UDHR) included the right to education for all (UN, 1948). The UDHR established the importance of human rights on the global stage by generally stating the basic civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of all individuals (CWP, 2020). Under this document, education is understood to be a right for all and compulsory for elementary aged children (UN, 1948). As well, the document (1948, article 26, 3) declares '[p]arents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children'. In other words, parents had the right to choose the kind of education that they wanted for their child (Schuelka & Johnstone, 2012). Despite moving away from the point of view that students with disabilities were ineducable and should be excluded from education, many educators and policy makers continued to operate under the assumption that a child should be 'diagnosed' with a disability and then educated in a specialised setting rather than the mainstream school (Jonasson, 2017). It was this shift away from exclusionary education towards education as a basic human right that led to segregated educational opportunities. Due to the broadness of the UDHR, the United Nations created Covenants to outline and define specific rights, limitations, and the role of federal governments. One such Covenant is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) which was ratified by Canada in 1976. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights commits countries to ensure all residents are provided with labour rights, healthcare, appropriate standard of living, and the right to education. This Covenant further promoted education as a basic human right for all individuals which continued with the notion of segregated special education schools, but it also introduced the concept of integrating students with disabilities into the mainstream schools (Kalantry et al, 2009). Though the term emerged in the 1960s in Canada, the term integration was commonly used to refer to education of students with special needs in the general schools by the mid 1970s (Winzer, 1993).

Other global initiatives further promoting education for all members were the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (UN, 1982); The Convention of the Rights of the Child (OHCHR, 1989); The Jomtien World Conference for Education for

All (UNESCO, 1990); Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UN, 1993); the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994); the World Education Forum in Dakar (UNESCO, 2000); and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006). All of these initiatives further defined and outlined the rights of individuals in a variety of areas, including education. However, the Salamanca Statement was especially important as it brought together several concepts to recognise the human rights of persons with disabilities (Dreyer, 2017). The Statement began with a commitment to Education for All within the regular school system (CSIE, 2021). In addition, it called upon governments to develop policies which ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities in the education system (CSIE, 2021). The Statement also called upon the international community to implement an inclusive approach to education that supported the development of special needs education (CSIE, 2021). The idea was to include students with disabilities into 'mainstream' schools through individualisation. The Salamanca Statement (discussed in more detail on pp 29-30) called on school systems to transform regular schools into schools with an inclusive approach to education (Ainscow & César, 2006) that promotes special educational services in the mainstream system (CSIE, 2021). In other words, there was a global movement from segregation towards integration of all students in the same school system. Despite moving in a more inclusive direction with a singular school system (Ainscow & César, 2006; Freire & César, 2002; Mittler, 2000), it can still be argued that many school districts continued to practise integration rather undergo the systemic reform necessary to move towards a more truly inclusive approach (Villegas, 2017).

Opertti, Walker and Zhang (2014) suggest there are four core ideas that continually transform the inclusion journey. The first is the human rights angle that stems from the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which is the foundation for education for all learners (UN, 1948). The second idea is the notion of improving the educational opportunities of children with special needs (Opertti et al, 2014). Opertti, Walker and Zhang (2014) suggest that this second core idea was largely influenced by The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO,

1994). The third idea, presented at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 (UNESCO, 2000), was to expand the focus on marginalised children and their access to education. The last idea is in the transformation of the education system for all, across all levels. Opertti, Walker and Zhang (2014) state the rationale behind these four ideas on shaping the transformation of inclusive education is that they have informed and directed policies and practices at different times over the years. At times, these four ideas come together and create a solid and cohesive inclusive system as in Finland (Halinen & Järvinen, 2008). At other times, the system created may not be cohesive and might present large gaps between policy and practice (Opertti et al, 2014). An example of this is in systems that still rely on pull out (extraction) methods for students who are 'not meeting' expectations. Inclusive education aims for a system that is supportive and reflective of all learners rather than classifying students into meeting or not meeting curricular outcomes. This disconnect can increase frustration and anxiousness around implementing and understanding inclusive practices. It is important to keep in mind that reshaping and rethinking systems takes time. Re-envisioning the education system to one that is not exclusive, but rather inclusive of all students, involves not only changes in policy and practice, but in collective and individual thinking.

The World Conference on Education for All (1990) created a global pledge to include both disabled students and other marginalised groups in education in regular schools (Ainscow, 1999). It was at this point that the global education movement started to move away from disability education and to look at inclusive education from a wider perspective. This conference highlighted the importance of meeting the basic learning needs of all children; in addition, it demonstrated a global commitment to quality education for all children. In 1994, the Salamanca Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) continued to discuss the importance of education for all. In fact, it has been described as one of the pivotal moments in outlining an international movement towards inclusive education (Ainscow, 1999) by pushing for broader education reform in order to provide all students with higher quality and appropriate learning outcomes within the same system (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) was released and signed by ninety-two countries.

The Statement presents an outline for the 'development of inclusive schools' (UNESCO, 2019) within the context of the global focus of education for all (Miles & Singal, 2010). According to The Statement, the notion of 'all' was expanded to include:

> All children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas and groups (UNESCO, 1994, p6).

The Statement brought greater attention to the practice of including all students in the same education system. The participating nations argued that creating schools which included all students learning together was the only way to support the development of an inclusive society. However, by simply outlining a framework on which to build national and local inclusive education policies, it allowed a wide spectrum of interpretation in policy creation and implementation. For example, Spurgeon (2007) says inclusion has been defined as practices within special schools; Bloom, Perlmutter, & Burrell (1999) attempt to define it as 'a philosophy that brings students, families, educators, and community members together to create schools and other social institutions based on acceptance, belonging, and community'. Whereas, Cologon (2015) argues for no segregation of students in an inclusive system regardless of the child's ability to meet the traditional curriculum, and some argue that it is a reform movement that welcomes diversity (Aisncow & Sandill, 2010). Crocket and Kauffman (1998) argue that the breadth in the definition of inclusive education is a major weakness due to the wide range of interpretation and implementation practices. Crocket and Kauffman's (1998) point clearly highlights the current challenge in inclusive education practices today as there is still no one single definition.

In 2000, at the United Nations' Millennium Summit, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were created and adopted by all 191 countries. These goals outlined eight targets, to be achieved by 2015, to help improve the lives of the world's most vulnerable populations (ILO, 2020). Of the eight goals, the second goal aimed to achieve universal primary education. The aim of goal two was that by the year 2015,

all children across the world would be able to complete a full course of primary education. The reason for this goal was the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations' argument that almost 57 million primary aged children were unable to attend school due to living in rural areas (MDG, 2019). Despite significant progress with this goal, there are still some countries that struggle with ensuring all children attend primary school or complete the program (MDG, 2019). In addition, the rush to provide education for all often resulted in poor quality in provision of establishments and resources, and more importantly, in teaching, as this policy required huge increases in teacher numbers over a very short period of time.

It was clear that many of the Millennium Development Goals were not going to be completed by the year 2015, so the United Nations General Assembly rewrote the MDGs into a new set of goals, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to be achieved by 2030. The MDGs focused on education for all by focusing on those children least likely to access education due to various barriers in developing countries (ICLEI, 2015), whereas, the SDGs apply universally to all United Nations countries. The SDGs build upon the MDGs eight targets for developing countries by expanding to seventeen goals that focus on global development (ICLEI, 2015). Interestingly, the SDGs are directly linked to inclusive education through goal four: to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Unlike past education initiatives that promote inclusive education as a means to include students with special needs in the regular classrooms, SDG four aims to equal and fair access to all levels of education for all people through a clear and consistent approach or framework. Also, SDG four works towards ensuring buildings are accessible in order to create fair and equitable learning environments (UNDESA, 2015). This goal, SDG four highlights the progression in inclusive education thought from a means to include vulnerable populations to creating fair and accessible learning opportunities for all.

2.3- Inclusive Education Today

Arguably, 'inclusive education' is a term well-known when discussing public education (Brennan et al, 2019). However, the prevalence of the phrase does not add any clarity

to its meaning. One large factor contributing to the difference in meanings is whether inclusion is considered to be an approach or a set of prescribed values within our system or whether inclusion is concerned with ensuring students with special needs are not excluded from their neighbourhood school. This disagreement in the literature and debate around the purpose of inclusive education is reflected in public school classrooms. In Chapter 5, I will explore this reflection of the tensions amongst what is inclusion, what is the purpose of inclusion and how it affects professional practice. The importance of these topics is that they frame the reasons for why we do what we do as educators in what is called an inclusive system.

There is more than just a single definition of the concept of inclusive education (Messiou, 2017). There has been ongoing debate over the definition of inclusion as it relates to education for many years (Haug, 2017) and this has impacted on the development and implementation of related policies. It has been argued (Haug, 2017) that the lack of clarity around the concept has led to challenges in implementing policy and procedures and in agreeing on what might be effective practice for educating all students in an inclusive environment. Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006) remind us that the key debate is whether inclusive education means educating all students together in the same location or whether it is about a principled approach to society, that is, ensuring that all students feel part of the school community (and beyond). The first approach aligns with CRPD's (2016) notion of integrating or putting all students together without changing the context to create equitable and fair opportunities for all. The latter approach is that inclusion is an action that requires a commitment to how one approaches society through structures, teaching approaches, thought, effective supports, systems, physical environment, and systemic reform towards equitable and fair participation of all members (CRPD, 2016). It is clear that inclusive education is, in some way, part of most education systems today, although the meaning and practice of the term is contested.

Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006, p15) identified six ways of thinking about inclusion as it relates to education in their attempt to develop consistent thinking about the concept and to explore the 'complexity of the contexts' (p14) that surround the area.

Despite a vast amount of literature on inclusive education, the concept still remains both complex and controversial, especially within the implementation of the approach or practice at the school level. Their model (2006, p15) presents the most common ways in which inclusive education can be viewed or perceived.

- Inclusion as concerned with special education needs (medical or diagnosis model): perhaps the most common approach to inclusion, yet the most limiting.
- Inclusion to manage challenging behaviours: similar to the response to special education, yet it is in response to students who might be excluded due to behaviours and not medical issues.
- Inclusion as a means to support vulnerable populations: much like the first two ways of thinking about inclusion, but it is more suggestive of groups of people with higher levels of exclusion. These vulnerable groups might include: recent refugees, low socio-economic groups, and nomadic populations.
- Inclusion to support schools for all: this refers to the notion of all students attending the neighbourhood school (the school in their area) rather than being bussed to a school that might better meet their unique needs.
- Inclusion to support the notion 'Education for All': Thinking of inclusion as a means for "Education for All' is in reference to UNESCO's global agenda that promotes increasing access to and participation in schools for all students.
- Inclusion as a principled approach to education: In this approach to inclusion, diversity in society is seen as the guiding force shaping (inclusive) education. Questions such as: are students present?, are students participating?, and are students achieving? are important guiding features of this approach to inclusion (Messiou, 2017). In this approach, inclusive education is viewed as a necessary component to creating an inclusive society.

The first four ways of thinking about inclusive education are similar in nature in that they are concerned with the location of students' education despite reference to different populations in the first three. The final perspective, inclusion as a principled

approach, focuses on all students' participation, attendance and achievement. This is in contrast to the first four views, which are concerned with the inclusion of some populations in relation to attendance, but not concerned with what are they learning and how are they participating. The ethos of SDG four is to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, and, therefore, policies and practice need to go beyond aiming to include vulnerable groups into the regular school and move towards ensuring all students receive fair and appropriate learning opportunities. In the section below, I explore Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's six approaches to thinking about inclusive education in more recent literature.

Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson's (2006, p15) first three approaches: inclusion as concerned with disability and 'special educational needs'; inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusion and inclusion in relation to all groups seen as vulnerable to exclusion, highlight the common and narrow assumption that inclusive education is the practice of having to teach students with special needs in the regular class setting (Florian, 2007) and that inclusive education is concerned with including students in fear of marginalisation (Arduin, 2015; Haug, 2017). Similar to Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson's first three approaches, Goransson and Nilholm (2014) refer to these types of approaches in their levels of definitions as 'narrow' definitions. In other words, when thinking about inclusive education as a way to include historically excluded populations, a narrow definition only includes a 'single-oriented' issue (Haug, 2017). Interestingly, an analysis of relevant databases from 2012 of all entries on 'inclusion' found that the most common use of the term was in regard to special education and special needs (Norwich, 2014). The limitations of thinking about inclusive education as a practice in including students with special needs, behavioural challenges, or other marginalised groups is that focus of the difficulties can be portrayed as deficits within the individual student rather than challenges arising from the curriculum, teaching approaches, or policies (Booth & Dyssegaard, 2008).

Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson's fourth approach (2006), inclusion as the promotion of the school for all, is focused on what has come to be known as a 'full inclusion' approach to schools. In other words, all students, including those requiring significant

support, can and should be educated in the same school. In 2006, the Canadian province of New Brunswick adopted law professor Wayne MacKay's report advocating for a 'full inclusion' model for the public school system (Bennett, 2012). This same notion of a single school for all, serving 'socially diverse communities' (Ainscow et al, 2006, p21), parallels Denmark's Folkeskole tradition and the common school in the United States. The idea of the school for all, according to Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006), is to create a 'mutually sustaining relationship between schools and communities that recognises and values diversity' (p21). However, some argue (Haug, 2003) that creating a single school can lead to trying to normalise those students perceived to be different.

As discussed earlier, the fifth approach, inclusion as 'Education for All' (EFA), has its roots in the international movement coordinated by UNESCO that aimed to meet learning needs of all children by the year 2015. However, Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) argue that focusing on a global target opens the door to further exclusion of other groups locally.

The final approach that Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's list is in regard to inclusion as a principled approach to education and society. Unlike the first five approaches that view inclusion in relation to groups of excluded people, this final approach is much broader and stems from values that Ainscow, Booth and Dyson believe inclusion should embody (2006, p23). From this perspective, inclusive education is not about groups of individuals being included, but rather, it is about connecting our actions to inclusive values. Similarly, Allan (2005) refers to inclusion as an ethical project that we, as community members, must support. It is the notion that inclusion goes beyond education and into an approach on how we choose to act as individuals and groups. Similar to Allan (2005) and Porter (2008), Mittler (2000) argues that inclusion is an approach to facilitating the active learning and participation of all students. Allan (2003) encourages the view that inclusion is a transformational journey through which people reflect on how their beliefs affect their actions. Unlike Allan's personal journey, Mittler sees the approach as a school community journey. Similarly, Mittler (2000), Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) argue that inclusion is concerned with the

participation, presence, and achievement of all students and that it is 'an approach to education embodying particular values' (p5). In line with Allan's notion of inclusion as a project, Mittler's and Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's notion of inclusion as an approach, Ainscow and Booth (1998) describe inclusion as a process to increase participation and reduce exclusion of certain groups of people.

Continuing the idea that inclusion is an approach to education, Ainscow (2005) argues that four elements are necessary in developing a definition of inclusive education:

- It is a process. In other words, educators and administrators are constantly reviewing, reflecting, and aiming to find better ways to respond to diversity, reduce barriers, and increase equitable learning opportunities.
- It identifies and removes barriers to learning through the collection of evidence and problem solving.
- It is concerned with the presence, participation, and achievement of all students. Presence is the location of education and attendance; participation is the quality of their learning opportunities; and achievement is concerned with learning outcomes.
- It involves 'a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk for marginalisation, exclusion or underachievement' (p15).

Consideration of these four elements allows for ongoing discussion and reflection on the process of further developing inclusivity of school systems. Since it can be argued that inclusion requires systemic reform towards a principled approach or to one that ensures effective supports, changes to structures & processes, pedagogical approaches, effective supports & education, and changes towards thought, 'well-orchestrated debate' (Ainscow, 2005, p15) about the four elements should lead to deeper understanding and more effective systems.

For the purpose of this research, Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's (2006) different ways of viewing inclusive education are summarised into two general approaches: 1. a combination of the first few views outlined, holds that inclusive education is concerned with including historically excluded populations (for example, those with special needs and challenging behaviours); 2. an understanding of inclusive education

as a principled approach towards building an inclusive community. The first approach is founded in the initial movement away from special education towards one united system for all students, whereas the latter is a way to approach the evolution of inclusive education from including typically excluded populations to building accessible communities.

A popular aim of inclusive education is to build a community that includes all students, regardless of difference. In this sense, inclusion is the lens through which all decisions would be made. Slee (2001, p116) sums up this opinion neatly by suggesting 'inclusive education is not about special needs, but about all students. Similar to this sentiment is the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DOEECD)'s definition of inclusion. DOEECD's view is that public education is to meet the needs of all students together. However, the implied 'universality' of this view is negated by the location of the inclusion policy. It is positioned within the Nova Scotia Special Education Policy as a sub-policy. Due to this compartmentalising, in Nova Scotia 'special education' and 'inclusive education', and 'inclusion' have been used interchangeably (Shea, 2017, p5). The interchangeability of the term can lead to differences in practice and understanding of the concept.

We are reminded by Winzer (1998) that inclusion 'both in concept and in implementation … defies easy interpretation' (p230). It is easy to link this conceptualisation in theory and practice to the differences in interpretation of classroom teachers. Studies have found the same inconsistency in teachers' perceptions on inclusive education leads to inconsistency in interpretation and implementation (Ali et al, 2006; Gachocho, 2017; Mngo & Mngo, 2018; Parker, 2009; Smith, 1997; Thorpe & Azam, 2010).

Supporting the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, Thomazet (2009) argues that inclusion requires a transfer in thinking from special needs being an individual's challenge to being the responsibility of the school community. In this conceptualisation, a child would not require above and beyond what the school offers because the school would be able to support the student, indeed, all students, from

within. Referring back to Slee's referencing of ascertainment in Queensland and the practice of the DOEECD providing additional supports to students with needs, Thomazet argues it is the school's duty to include all students and meet all students' needs. A similar perspective is proposed by Laluvein (2010), who implies that inclusion is an approach to be adopted by the whole school. The emphasis of inclusion goes beyond student placement and is placed on school participation of all community members. Much like Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's (2006) concept of inclusion as a 'principled approach' to how society functions, Laluvein's notion is broad and encompasses all members of the school community.

The wide range of perspectives on how to interpret definitions, policies, and practices can be frustrating for all stakeholders. At the heart of inclusive education is ensuring all students receive an education in an 'appropriate' setting. However, it is difficult to determine if most understandings of the concept remain with inclusion as a means to include the excluded populations, as was the case in the beginning, or if conceptualisations have progressed into creating a school system where all students can be reached and brought forward. In the next section I will further explore the purpose of inclusion in the school system. Understanding the purpose of the practice is important in interpreting experiences and in making sense of individual professional practice

The disconnect between policy and practice often leads to feelings of being ineffective or lacking preparedness for educators. Research into the development of inclusive educational systems from a range of countries identifies common issues. Despite policies of inclusive practices being seen as the right thing to do, if the policy makers are not clear in the intention behind the purpose then the disconnect becomes more apparent between policy, programming and practice. Inclusive education policies can become fragmented or divided from other policies when policy makers do not fully understand the philosophy behind an inclusive education system (Amadio, 2009; Amadio & Opertti, 2011; Cedillo et al, 2009; Opertti et al, 2014).

Despite the differences, all conceptualisations of inclusive education include an expectation at some level of students being present and being members of the same education system. This is a positive attribute of all conceptualisations. However, it is important to go beyond just having students present in schools as Messiou (2017) argues that inclusive education should focus on all students and not just on specific groups of students. Unlike approaches that focus on difference and/or disability, the focus needs to be on advancing all students rather than on making allowances or compensating for certain limitations because of a specific label a student may have received. Personally, I most align my own definition with Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson's (2006) interpretation as it places the emphasis on being present, being participatory, and achieving progress. In other words, it is a principled approach where the focus is not on the location of the student learning, but on whether the child is active in their studies and if they are achieving new learning.

This same debate in difference is noted in George Head's (2014) conception of complementary pedagogy and compensatory pedagogy. A complementary approach to education holds the belief that education begins with the child, their experiences, their strengths, and their abilities (Head, 2014). This approach aims to build learning communities that value the individuality of each child within the group. On the other hand, Head (2014) explains that a compensatory approach is rooted in behaviourist principles. A compensatory approach aims to 'normalise' children who appear to have deficits in their learning and/or behaviour through additional programming or add-ons to the 'mainstream' school program. In a compensatory approach, behaviours that fall outside of the perceived norm are often referred to as inappropriate behaviours that need to be normalised or fixed (Head, 2014, p96). On the other hand, a complementary approach would view difficult behaviours as a 'condition of unknowing' to be explored from a variety of perspectives as a learning opportunity for all.

Like Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson's (2006) six ways to perceive inclusive education, Head (2014) presents two differing approaches to underpin educational practice. As with Head's compensatory approach, Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's first four

approaches continue with the aim of seeing some students as having a deficit to be fixed or to be normalised within the same area of the mainstream. On the other hand, a complementary approach is similar to Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's perspective that inclusion is an approach or a mindset, that aims to build communities that value all individuals for who they are by creating fair opportunities for all to participate, be present in the community, and to succeed. The DOEECD defines the goal of inclusive schooling is 'to facilitate the membership, participation, and learning of all students and activities' (DOEECD, 2008, p5). Though this policy will be explored more closely in section 2.7 Nova Scotia and Inclusive Education, it should be noted that the written policy closely aligns with a complementary approach and Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's (2006) notion that inclusion is a principled approach to education. The written Nova Scotia policy's goal refers to the three guiding questions that Messiou (2017) suggests are important when taking this sixth approach to inclusion. It aims to ensure all students are participative and successful members of the school community.

2.4- Challenges within the concept of Inclusive Education

Lindsay (2007) points out the challenges in establishing a single definition due to variability in disabilities, suggesting that it is a noble idea to aim to include all students in the same building and provide a single education that targets all students. However, the reality is there is a wide spectrum of needs and challenges. Not all students can, nor should, have their needs and challenges met in the same way as everyone else. In these arguments, the root of inclusive education starts with all students as a collective in order to include everyone. However, Graham and Slee (2008) caution that 'talk of 'including' can only be made by those occupying a position of privilege at the centre' (p20) because they initiate and set the policies. In other words, they warn us that inclusive education is simply a new term for special education and that those in a position of power make the rules on how to include everyone. In this situation the focus of inclusion is to not exclude typically excluded groups rather than ensuring all students are being given the opportunities to participate, be present, and to succeed.

In understanding challenges associated with the concept of inclusive education it is important to contextualise how the reform movement to governing provinces affected the education reform movement starting in the 1990's (the time most provinces in Canada introduced some form of inclusive education policy). The opening chapter presented details of the financial and neo-liberal policies shaping the education system, from which inclusion is not exempt. There is evidence that the streamlining of services and tightening of budgets in order to increase performability, accountability, and to reduce excess spending impacted special education initiatives (Philpott, 2001). Due to the increasing austerity measures in the 1990s through to the present day, criticism surrounding participation of special needs students and other marginalised groups has become more common. Some critics argued that students were simply placed in a neighbourhood school rather than a school in which they could receive a more stimulating and focused education (Gerber, 1996; Zigmond & Baker, 1995). Another common criticism is that inclusion policies superficially seem to invoke a just approach to ensuring all students receive an education. However, once policies and procedures are examined more closely, it may become evident that what gives the 'appearance of inclusiveness' (Dyson, 1999, p45) only serves to maintain the status quo in operations and procedures (Ballard, 1996; Nguyen, 2015; Slee, 1996). This argument could be applied to the Nova Scotia Special Education Policy Manual (DOEECD, 1996) outlining that all children have the right to an inclusive education. Rather than creating a singular and over-arching inclusive education policy, Nova Scotia added a section to the Special Education Manual about including all students. Not all families will access the Special Education Policy Manual and may not notice the 'right to an inclusive education' sub-policy (local policies will be explored in more detail on pp52-59).

A final argument often made against inclusion due to austerity measures is that inclusion in regular schools is a more affordable way to accommodate special needs students than specialised programming and systems (Philpott, 2001). In other words, special education and regular education would come together with one streamlined budget (Philpott, 2001; Salend, 2001). The following criticisms are much more troubling as they appear to suggest that marginalised populations of students are not

as important as ‘mainstream’ students in terms of educational focus. As troubling as the assumptions behind these criticisms are, they go beyond the scope of my research. I am focused on how teachers perceive their practice to be impacted, positively or negatively, by the concept of inclusive education.

Nguyen (2015) presents the argument that much research on inclusive education is conducted by positivist researchers who know little about the field of education, so why do we base so much on such ‘limited research evidence’ (p90). She concludes this argument by reminding us most of the research conducted on positivist assumptions often fails to ask the question: ‘inclusion into what?’ (2015, p90). A positivist paradigm would not consider historical contexts that affect policies (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995) and the financial climate of the government in power. Both of these points support the construction of educational policies and practices.

2.5- Seven Pillars of Support for Inclusive Education

The Seven Pillars of Support for Inclusive Education were created by Loreman (2007) as a way to provide structure to the wide range of literature on inclusive education and to support further discussion around how to implement inclusive educational practices (2007, p23). The notion of the seven pillars of support is that each of these concepts is a necessary foundation or component to the larger idea of inclusive education. The pillars support effective practices for inclusive education systems. In other words, they connect the ‘why’ we practise inclusive education to ‘how’ can we effectively practise inclusive education in school systems. Loreman created each of the pillars from common themes found throughout research and literature. The themes include: positive attitudes; supportive policy and leadership; school and classroom processes grounded in research-based practice; flexible curriculum and pedagogy; community involvement; meaningful reflection, and; necessary training and resources (p24). Loreman argues that with these seven pillars or characteristics a strong framework for inclusive education is built. In other words, these seven pillars support Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson’s (2006) principled approach because they help develop an inclusive approach that addresses Ainscow’s (2005) argument of ‘presence, participation, and achievement’ of all students through clear and direct guiding

'pillars' or supports. A principled approach is one that is intentionally formed through evidence and effective planning with the aim of building a supportive and inclusive education system for all students. Ainscow et al (2013) argue that a principled approach is one that: i) increases student participation & reduces barriers to learning; ii) restructures the school culture, procedures, and policies to respond to the diversity of their community; iii) focuses on the participation, presence, and achievement of all students historically marginalised. Loreman's (2007) pillars act as the guiding supports that allow for an education system to develop following a principled approach. The Seven Pillars, which are further explained in Chapter 4, are interdependent and are all necessary to develop inclusive education (2007) that is concerned with all students being learners and actively working to ensure everyone is included (Ainscow et al, 2013). Ainscow et al (2013) argue that a principled approach to inclusion is 'on the move' (p6) and requires 'ongoing vigilance' to continue to meet the needs of a diverse student community. Similar, The Pillars are made up of distinct school system components that, if considered in practice, support what Ainscow et al (2013) outline as a principled approach.

2.6- Inclusive Pedagogy

In the section above, I discussed Ainscow's (2005) framework for transforming an education system into an inclusive education system. This framework places the school at the centre of the transformation rather than the policy, professional development sessions, or initial teacher education (ITE). The reason for this is that 'inclusion should focus on increasing the capacity of local neighbourhood mainstream schools to support the participation and learning of an increasingly diverse range of learners' (p4). This shift in thinking emphasises the notion that schools need to be better developed to serve students instead of aiming 'simply' to include vulnerable populations (Ainscow, 1999; 2005). This important point raises the question, with so much debate and interpretation at the research and policy levels, of how educators and schools can transform their actions and practices to meet the requirements of all learners. Vulnerable students, those who have been identified as having a 'deficit', are highly susceptible to exclusion from mainstream 'neighbourhood schools' because of the underpinning beliefs that lay the foundation to these systems (Hart et al,

2007). Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argue that lack of clarity around the definition of inclusive education, inclusive practices, and whether it is the most appropriate approach for 'special needs' students have a troubling effect on student outcomes. Often, teachers have little input in creating the overriding policies made by school boards, such as those relating to inclusive education (Kumar & Scuderi, 2000; Hanushek, 2003). Since they may not be able to drive the direction of the provincial policy, they can seek to reflect and adjust their professional practice and the culture of practice within their schools. Due to the ongoing debate on inclusive education and how to implement an inclusive system effectively, a more focused area of educational practice has been created. The area of inclusive pedagogy aims to support all students from the grass root level rather than through a policy that works its way down to the students.

Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011) suggest that inclusive pedagogy aims to extend what is usually available to most students to all students This type of thinking is underpinned by a 'shift in pedagogical thinking' (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p826) from an approach that includes all learners by providing additional supports to identified students to an approach that provides 'rich learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for everyone' (p826). Commonly attributed to a complementary approach to education, at the heart of the concept is the notion that every child is capable and possesses the capacity to learn (Hart et al, 2004; Head, 2011). Unlike a compensatory approach, inclusive pedagogy reflects on what the teacher, the teachers, or the school can do to support the student development. Instead of limiting the child based on perceived deficit, this school-based approach aims to meet each child where they are and move them forward (Head, 2011; Mintz & Wyse, 2015; Spratt & Florian, 2013;).

Allan (2005) argues inclusive pedagogy is about developing schools as a social space, as a place to build identity and a learning institution. Instead of focusing on hitting targets, teachers focus on engagement with learning outcomes, connecting outcomes to life experiences, and making sense of the world (Kincheloe, 2008; McLaren, 2009). Inclusive pedagogy is not an approach taught thought explicit ITE; rather, it draws on

an educator's tacit or practical knowledge. In other words, inclusive pedagogy has its roots in values, assumptions, understanding, and skills and is learned through practice and experience (Daniels, 2001; Head, 2011). Hart, Drummond and McIntyre's (2007, p170) phrase 'nothing is neutral' is a strong reminder of the importance of teachers' actions on all students. Instead of focusing on what a teacher does not know, it 'empowers teachers to recognise that they do have the necessary knowledge and skills to support all learners' (Florian & Linklater, 2010, p384). It is a paradigmatic shift in thinking from viewing education as 'meeting prescribed curriculum outcomes' to conceptualising it as a means to reaching a state where everyone feels valued, and that they belong (Head, 2011), and where everyone has opportunities to engage in the learning process.

2.7- Head, Hands, Heart Model

Research suggests (Rouse, 2010; Shulman, 2004) that in order for a teacher to be inclusive three things are involved: head, hands, and heart. Shulman's three-part model (2004) requires that teachers have the cognitive knowledge and theoretical knowledge of the profession (head), they have the technical and practical skills necessary for the role (hands), and they possess the relevant ethical and moral attitudes and beliefs (heart). Rouse (2010) extends this model to support inclusion by stating 'there have to be changes in the ways inclusion is conceptualised and a realisation that it can only be achieved if all teachers are supported in the development of all aspects of knowing, doing, and believing' (p51). In other words, ITE and professional development opportunities need to give equal emphasis to developing teacher skills relating to the three areas: head, hands, and heart. Rouse (2008) argues that teacher transformation needs to address how they act, how they think, and their belief system. Long lasting change occurs when all three areas are supported and developed through learning and practice. Teachers need to recognise and understand the connection within their practice of teaching inclusively because they have to do it due to policy and teaching inclusively because they feel it is the right way to teach.

2.8- Challenges within Practice

Several studies have pointed to the challenges of enacting inclusive education (Berry, 2010; Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014; Harper, 2017; Odongo & Davidson, 2016; Sesay, 2018). One consistent criticism by classroom teachers is the struggle of trying to facilitate adequate learning for students who require significant support (Harper, 2017; McKenzie, 2015). Often teachers report feeling ill-prepared to teach students with such diverse needs due to what they feel is a lack of training (Caskey, 2008; Dupoux et al, 2007; Fuchs 2010; Harper, 2017; McKenzie, 2015). This sense of a lack of training is often related to working with students who exhibit aggressive and/or challenging behaviours within the classroom (Lopes et al, 2004). On the other hand, teachers often report that it is easy to adapt work for students who require minimal support (Harper, 2017; Reusen et al, 2000).

Another common criticism is inadequate time for collaboration (McKenzie 2015; Shea, 2017). Aliakbari and Bazyar (2012) indicate that due to the increasing diversity in today's classrooms, it is essential that effective collaboration exists as a support to both students and staff. It is argued that effective and ongoing collaboration will enhance teachers' knowledge, understanding, and ability to teach all students appropriately by combining teacher expertise to provide effective and targeted supports (Prizeman, 2015). Tzivinikou (2015) states that collaboration amongst teachers is one of the most significant components to supporting learners with special needs.

Finally, it has been found in different studies that the lack of availability of necessary resources to support an inclusive classroom is a major concern (Odongo & Davidson, 2016; Shea, 2017). Murphy (2015) states that the lack of resources is a widespread challenge faced by many educational institutions today. Cassady's (2011) findings that lack of adequate experience, resources, and supports necessary to support diverse learning needs adds additional stress to the teacher's abilities to teach in inclusive classrooms are consistent with findings in other studies (Gachocho, 2017; Lifshitz et al, 2004; Shade & Stewart, 2001; Shea, 2017).

In sum, researchers in the area of inclusive education have conducted many studies that explore the perceptions and experiences of varying grade level teachers (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014; Caskey, 2008; Dupoux et al, 2007; Fuchs, 2010; Harper, 2017; McCray & McHatton, 2011; Shea, 2017). Despite different methodologies and foci, the general consensus of all studies was that inclusion in practice is most greatly influenced by teacher attitude. While it appears that educators opine for inclusive education, certain common barriers, such as lack of collaboration, lack of resources, and lack of training or preparedness, negatively affect the perceived success of inclusive education.

2.9- Studies on Teacher Perception

Important to my research is the concern from teachers regarding the effectiveness and preparedness in implementing inclusive policies into their practice. Existing literature suggests that most teachers feel students with severe cognitive and/or physical disabilities should be educated in self-contained classrooms as it is unrealistic to educate these students in a 'regular' classroom setting (Dupoux et al, 2007; Galovic et al, 2014; Sze, 2009). The same literature suggests that teachers feel favourably about including manageable and mild disabilities in the 'regular' classroom setting. The identified reasons about inclusion for some, but not all students, are that teachers have concerns for safety, maintenance of the learning environment, and their professional ability to handle the unknown situations that may arise (Alquraini & Gut, 2012; Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Martin et al, 1995; Schwean et al, 1996) argue for the importance of collaboration in inclusive settings between all stakeholders, especially within the school.

There are concerns noted by some teachers over the social acceptance of some students from marginalised groups. Some evidence shows that students with exceptionalities were not being accepted by their peers and not gaining the confidence that had been originally hoped for with inclusive education (Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997; Sale & Carey, 1995). Much like the issue raised in the previous paragraph, these concerns are not a criticism of the concept of inclusion. Rather, they are related to the practical component of educating all students in the same

environment. As I explore my data in Chapter 4, it is important to keep these identified concerns in mind. How will Nova Scotian teachers' experiences echo the findings of teachers internationally? Also, the concerns noted in the current literature surround the inclusion of students with disabilities and those from marginalised groups; however, we know that the definition of all taken from The Salamanca Statement is meant to include not only students with disabilities or marginalisation, but students with religious differences, physical differences, life-style differences, ethnic differences, and racial differences. It seems that inclusion, as discussed in these pieces of research, is still focused on the compensatory model which assumes a child has limitations that need to be overcome (Lalvani, 2013). For example, under this model, the language challenges associated with autism spectrum disorder or the disruptive behaviour often associated with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder can be seen as limitations to overcome. This type of thinking can lead to a practice of absolving staff from any responsibility in supporting outcomes appropriate for educating a child (Byrom, 2004). Under this model, the disability is located within the child as they have a diagnosis to support the 'inappropriate' behaviour and the teacher cannot change that fact so, therefore, they do not need to alter their professional practice. This view can be problematic and highly limiting for students.

A growing body of research outlines the importance of teacher attitudes towards inclusion as a determining factor in its success or failure (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003; McGhie-Richmond et al, 2013; Sharma, Forlin & Loreman, 2008). Despite being highly varied, these attitudes are highly influential in shaping inclusive classrooms. Some researchers (Brighton, 2003; Avramadis & Norwich, 2002) argue that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education is the most challenging aspect in building successful inclusive classrooms.

Studies find that teachers who feel better prepared, better trained, and more supported tend to have a more positive outlook on inclusive education (Bean et al, 1994; Woolfson et al, 2007), whereas teachers with negative perceptions on inclusion explained their experiences differently (McGhie-Richmond et al, 2013). As noted above, teachers who feel ill-prepared, lack opportunities for collaboration, and do

not feel they have enough supports and resources often feel more negatively towards inclusive education (De Boer et al, 2011). However, some classroom teachers believe that students requiring significant supports take away from the learning of students who require less supports (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004; McGhie-Richmond et al, 2007). Others feel that students who require significant supports are beyond their teaching responsibility (McGhie-Richmond et al, 2013) despite being in contrast to the often-indicated desire for an increase in collaboration with other educators.

2.10- Canada and Inclusive Education

In the earlier part of the twentieth century, students with special needs were segregated in the Canadian school system (Schneider & Harkins, 2009). Despite some modest pushes, such as the 1966 report One Million Children (CELDIC, 1970), towards a more inclusive system (Schneider & Harkins, 2009), Porter (2008) suggests that the drive towards a single educational system started in the 1980s in Canada. Schneider and Harkins (2009) second this sentiment as they argue that the International Year of Disabled Persons, 1981, led to an increase in awareness for the rights of people with disabilities in Canada, including a singular education system. Prior to this switch, it was common practice to educate students with special needs in separate classrooms or schools. Educational thought started to change in the 1960s and 1970s from educating students separately to integrating students with special needs into the same classes and schools (Bélanger & Gougeon, 2009). As a first step in changing the practice from segregation to integration, the Canadian Government formed The Commission of Emotional and Learning Disorders in Children (CELDIC) in 1966 to address societal concerns surrounding quality education. The response was a report, One Million Children (CELDIC, 1970), that called for improvement in both integrating students and in improving educational practices based on individual needs (Smith et al, 2001). Three educational guiding points from this report can be linked as contributing factors in the development of inclusive education in Canada: first, every child has the right to be educated in order to realise their potential; secondly, providing financial aid to students is the responsibility of the department of education; and thirdly; exceptional students (those with significant needs) should remain integrated with other students as much as possible (Andrews & Lupart, 2000).

While this last caveat, as much as possible, is open to interpretation, it seems that the intention is that children of the same age should be educated together, unless the appropriate support cannot be provided in the same space. This report can be linked to the growing shift in discourse about how to include and educate all students. However, it took over two decades and a number of further reports before the first province in Canada introduced a policy to include all students in regular classrooms (Council of Ministers, 2001). In regard to these three guiding principles, the most significant issue affecting the inclusive education debate is the ultimate one. The words 'as much as possible' leave space for subjective interpretation, as mentioned above. The same concept is often repeated in Nova Scotia public schools through the wording 'only as special as necessary' (DOEECD, 2008) when it comes to including the excluded populations. In Chapter 5, I explored the impact which subjective interpretation has on current practices in some Nova Scotia public schools.

The second major shift towards inclusive education in Canada came with the introduction of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1984 (Carr, 2016). This document supported the drive for equal access to educational opportunities for all students and highlighted the notion that separating students based on disability was in violation of their human rights. Up until the establishment of The Charter, segregation amongst students based on disability, culture, and religion was a common practice. However, it took another ten to fifteen years for both policy and law to reflect the implication of educating all students in the same building.

It appears that the final push for the Canadian education systems to take on a more inclusive approach was sped up by international dialogue surrounding the rights of all children (Belanger & Gougeon, 2009). Canada ratified the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and adopted the Salamanca Statement and Framework For Action in 1994 (Joffe & Lattanzio, 2010). By the late 1990s, most Canadian provinces and territories had created inclusive education policies or policies which incorporated the principles of inclusive education. Nova Scotia followed the trend and in 1996 the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture released the first Special Education Policy Manual. The Manual states 'the goal of inclusive

schooling is to facilitate the membership, participation and learning of all students in school programs and activities' (DOEECD, 1996, p13). Interestingly enough, the only information on the policy shift to an inclusive system was found in the Manual. The most recently updated Special Education Policy (in Nova Scotia) was published in 2008 and, again, it is in this policy that all information on inclusive education is found. As of 2008, Nova Scotia continues to work within a policy framework in which inclusive education falls under the umbrella term of 'special education'. Later in this review, I explore the implication of having a policy on inclusive education which is contained within the 'Special Education Manual' rather than clearly evident as an underpinning principle of the overall education policy.

Several Canadian provinces and territories, including Nova Scotia, have explored and revised their inclusive education policies over the last decade to include the broader approach of equitable experiences and opportunities for all students, particularly for historically marginalised populations (Whitley & Hollweck, 2020). As Ainscow (2005) suggests, this process has paid closer attention to the participation, presence, and achievement of marginalised students as a way to collect meaningful data to better shape and inform policies and programming strategies for all students (Whitley & Hollweck, 2020). These provincial debates have started the shift from looking at inclusive education as something that is concerned with the placement of students with special needs to viewing inclusive education as a principled approach (Whitley & Hollweck, 2020).

Though most provinces and territories are further developing their inclusive education policies, one province in particular stands out as making great strides with the promotion of inclusion and equity (UNESCO, 2020). New Brunswick, Nova Scotia's neighbouring province to the immediate west, has been pioneering the concept of inclusive education through legislation and guidelines (Porter & Aucoin, 2012). Most recently, the province introduced Policy 322 (NBDEEC, 2013) that mandates common learning environments and teacher supports. Policy 322 provides clear requirements for pedagogy, personalised learning, inclusive graduation, and guidelines for common learning environments (UNESCO, 2020). Unlike the rest of Canada who promote

inclusive education through general policies, New Brunswick extends the policy through the addition of clear and direct guidelines to support inclusive education development. The reason for the difference between provinces, even neighbouring ones, is that education falls under the role and responsibilities of provincial governments. Unlike New Brunswick, Nova Scotia mandates inclusive education through a singular policy that outlines the right to education for all students within the public school system.

2.11- Nova Scotia and Inclusive Education

This section aims to explore the province of Nova Scotia's perspective on inclusive education by contextualising the topic within current practices and literature relevant to Nova Scotia. First, I will briefly outline basic student demographics in the province. Then, I will outline historical development of inclusive education in Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia is the largest Maritime province in eastern Canada and has a population of just under one million residents. The provincial capital is Halifax and the province has a large rural population (Statistics Canada, 2019). Approximately twenty-four percent of Nova Scotian children live in poverty, which is one of the highest proportions in the country (Whitly and Hollweck, 2020). Just under six percent of the population identify as indigenous (Province of Nova Scotia, 2014). Just under three percent of Nova Scotians identify as being of African descent, most having lived for more than three generations in the province (Province of Nova Scotia, 2014). There is a large Acadian and Francophone population throughout the province (Nova Scotia, 2014). Despite being a diverse province, it was not until recently that Nova Scotia started increasing the dialogue on inclusive education as a means to better support all students in the public school system.

As noted earlier, the Canadian report, One Million Children, released in 1966 made a plea to Canadian society to 'stop isolating and segregating children with disability from their peers and families' (Towle, 2015, p7). The report suggested improvements in teacher education and supportive student programming for students with disabilities (1970). The 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons supported the

development and implementation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 which constitutes every individual as equal under the law without discrimination (Canada, 1982). Although each province and territory have the authority to pass education legislation, all laws must support and align with The Charter (Schneider & Harkins, 2009). The release of this document led to inclusive provincial legislation across Canada throughout the 1990s (2009). Following the rest of Canada, Nova Scotia introduced the Special Education Policy Manual in 1996 that included a smaller sub-policy on inclusive education. The Special Education Policy Manual was revised in 2008 and the name was changed to the Special Education Policy (2008).

However, the Inclusive Education Policy continued to be a smaller sub-policy that focuses on 'program planning, parental involvement, and a collaborative team approach in the context of inclusive schooling' (Rich, 2001, p9). The DOEECD defines the goal of inclusive schooling as 'to facilitate the membership, participation, and learning of all students and activities' (DOEECD, 2008, p5). Thus, the DOEECD's policy appears to be similar to the sixth perspective of Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's (2006) sixth way of thinking about inclusion. On paper, then, Nova Scotia education policy is built on the notion that inclusive education is a principled approach that ensures all students are present, all students participate, and all students achieve. However, closer examination of the contents of the policy suggest that it is more closely aligned to Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's (2006) first four perspectives on inclusion, in particular to the first, where inclusion is seen as being concerned with disability and special education. As Whitley & Hollweck (2020) argue, this dichotomy is typical of education systems in that despite stated aims of equitable learning opportunities and education experiences for all students, the policies still remain tightly connected to special education policies and procedures. Despite the inclusion of an inclusive education sub-policy in the Special Education Policy (DOEECD, 2008), it can be argued that the division between the mainstream programme and special education has led to a narrowly focused understanding of inclusive education. Haug (2017) suggests that thinking about inclusive education as a means to include historically excluded populations can lead to ineffective inclusive practices.

It took the province another almost twenty years to review the education system with The Glaze report (DOEECD, 2018). This Report was the result of an investigation initiated after a labour dispute in the 2016-2017 school year raised questions around class climate, composition, and inclusive education in the province of Nova Scotia (Forbes, 2017). It sought to review how public schools are administered and respond to challenges raised throughout the labour dispute. There was a shift in the Nova Scotia education system in 2018 due to the adoption of some of these reforms stemming from the Glaze Report (Whitley & Hollweck, 2020). Some of the recommendations aimed to explore how to increase equitable learning experiences in education with a focus on Indigenous learners and African Nova Scotians (2020). A notable recommendation was the formation of the Commission on Inclusive Education in 2018 to explore re-imagining inclusive education in the province.

What has not so far been addressed, however, and remains possibly unique to Nova Scotia is that the inclusion policy for Nova Scotia remains part of the broader Special Education Policy. This policy is the direct responsibility of the Department of Student Services, commonly referred to as the Department of Special Education in other provinces and therefore removes the first responsibility for creating inclusive environments from the general overall education policy. Opertti, Walker, and Zhang (2014) argue that when inclusion becomes fragmented and the responsibility of smaller departments, implementation is often not as successful as if education is a solid cohesive unit that represents all students regardless of labels. As argued by Villegas (2017), including students with special needs in mainstream schools without systemic reform to create an inclusive system constitutes integration rather than inclusion. It could be argued that Nova Scotia is integrating students with special needs rather than creating an inclusive system since the policy and the systemic structures align with a separate policy and department. The Special Education Policy (2008) notes that elements of inclusion are ‘students are equal members of their neighbourhood schools; an individual program plan (IPP), based on a student’s strengths and needs, is developed and implemented for a student for whom the provincial curriculum outcomes are not applicable and/or attainable; a process of

identification, assessment, planning and evaluation for students with special needs is in place and documented; transition planning is part of the individual planning process for each student with special needs' (p49). The elements of inclusion outlined in the Nova Scotia Special Education Policy (2008) are indicative that inclusion is mainly concerned with disability and special needs. Currently, Nova Scotia has curriculum guides for each grade level with many prescribed outcomes covering all subjects. These outcomes are expected to be demonstrated by all children in the province in the corresponding grade. If a child enters the school system with significant needs, they may be deemed in need of an IPP from the beginning. However, more commonly, when a child does not demonstrate proficiency in their curriculum level, they will enter the programme planning process (DOEECD, 2008); a multi-step process of identifying and managing challenges in the school system. The end result of this process might be one of the following approaches in support: further exploration of the student in discussion, nothing, adaptations to the curriculum guide (additional supports to meet the outcomes), or the creation of an individual programme plan (modification to the curriculum guidelines). In other words, rather than taking a complementary approach to education, the Nova Scotia system can be viewed as compensatory. A compensatory approach to education is one that offers supplementary services to children deemed not meeting the expectations for their grade level in order to 'compensate' for the challenges (Garber, 1988; Head, 2014; Osewalt, 2018). In contrast, a complementary approach is one where school-wide practices reach all learners (Ainscow, 2005). Referring to inclusion as a principled approach (Ainscow et al, 2006) to ensure all students, regardless of difference, are present, participating, and achieving they are assuming an approach that is complementary, or one that is based on the belief that all students can succeed, be present, and be able to participate. Unlike this sixth perspective, the DOEECD approach to inclusion continues to maintain policies and practices that aim to include vulnerable populations.

Senge (1989) suggests that approaches aimed at making large changes (for example, transforming an education system) are often based on low leverage approaches. Levers can be defined as actions taken that are necessary for change (Ainscow, 2005).

Low leverage approaches to change, according to Senge, include: policy documents and professional development, in other words they are actions that focus on perception rather than actions that affect how things work. In 1996, when the DOEECD introduced the first Special Education Policy (Nova Scotia Special Education Manual) that indicated that all students in Nova Scotia had 'the right to an inclusive education', it was assumed that the education system had become an inclusive one. Ainscow (1999; 2005) argues that higher leverage approaches, ones that are more subtle, need to be considered when transforming an education system as low leverage changes tend to a limited or small contribution to change (Fullan, 2011). Unlike with low lever approaches, Ainscow (2005) introduces a framework that places schools at the centre of the transformation (p4) with the aim of moving the system forward. The reason for schools being at the centre of the transformation framework, rather than the policy, is that schools – that is, the staff within them - need to change in order to reach a wider range of learners. Ainscow argues that this framework aligns with the Salamanca Statement in that inclusive education progresses through the development of schools, rather than through policies that aim to include vulnerable students in the existing regular system. In this framework, what the school is doing or aims to do to support students is critiqued against contextual influences (community, principles that guide policy, school departments & administration and school performance evaluation (2005, p5).

In his 2013 article, Slee refers to the process of ascertainment by the Queensland Ministry of Education. In this process, students with special needs were placed in regular schools. The severity of the student's diagnosis was categorised and used to determine resources to the school. Similarly, the DOEECD uses students' diagnoses to determine additional resources to a school to support the student. Slee (2013) goes on to explain most diagnoses are categorised with the greatest severity as a means to gain the greatest supports. The practice of including students with special needs who 'come with' greater resources could be viewed as counter to a truly inclusive system- one where it is about all students. The idea of students receiving additional supports based on a medical diagnosis rather than providing supports when a child needs to be

supported can be viewed as a means to include certain students rather than building a system to support all students.

The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development explains inclusion as a 'value system' that has the aim to 'facilitate the membership, participation and learning of all students in school programs and schools' (DOEECD, 2008, p5). In this sense, the provincial policy is a holistic approach to educating all students. Yet, as mentioned previously, the sub-policy attaches itself to the student service department through the Special Education Policy. If the inclusive education policy was the over- arching policy for all other policies, it could support the notion that inclusion is an approach rather than a means to include students requiring 'special education'. As it currently stands, inclusive education appears to fall under special education which reiterates the notion by Graham and Slee (2006) that inclusive education is the new term for special education.

Inclusive practices are defined as 'social learning processes within a given workplace that influence people's actions' (Ainscow, 2005, p5). Professional practice is about what educators do in the classroom, what affects their actions, and their interpretation of context in which they are working (Ainscow, 2005; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian et al, 1998; Thousand & Villa, 1991). As noted on page 55, currently in Nova Scotia when a teacher has concerns about a student's ability to access the curriculum guide they enter that student into the programme planning process. Rather than entering into a formal process that could lead to adaptations, modifications, and a perception of the student as one that 'does not meet', greater collaboration with colleagues in order to find meaning and understanding would be beneficial. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011, p814) remind us that educating inclusively is a 'complex pedagogical endeavour'. It requires a transfer in practice from an approach that works for most in conjunction with supplemental supports and approaches for students with 'challenges' to a practice that provides learning opportunities for everyone (Florian & Linklater, 2010). Despite sounding possible in the classroom for a focused teacher or school, Hart, Drummond and McIntyre (2007) remind us that education policy often makes it difficult to think creatively due to

predetermined beliefs that are prominent in education policy (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The programme planning process in Nova Scotia provides multi-step directions for students who present with challenges outside of the prescribed norms (by not meeting grade appropriate curriculum or diagnosis). This process is individual and rarely allows for a shift in teaching pedagogy within the school community. The attention is focused on how to provide something additional or different to the identified student rather than focusing on everybody as a collective group (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Ainscow (2005) argues for schools to emphasise the social process of learning in order to contexualise situations, look for meaning, and to establish approaches for collecting information. Nova Scotia inclusion indicates students as 'equal members of neighbourhood schools' (DOEECD, 2008). However, if not all students can access the curriculum guide successfully without some form of adaptation, modification, or individualisation then it can be argued that the Nova Scotia system is a compensatory one that adjusts requirements based on deficits. Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's (2006) sixth perspective argues for a principled approach that places greater emphasis on students as participatory and achieving learners in the school. The current Nova Scotia system is still creating mechanisms to ensure vulnerable students are included, despite not having structures in place that reach all students. The Nova Scotia system appears to be consistent with what Florian (2008) refers to as a false dichotomy of inclusive education. She argues that rather than focusing on what schools and teachers can do to support all students, the inclusive education dialogue has centred on ability, inability and disability - in other words, those students who can access and succeed with the grade level curriculum, those students who cannot succeed, and students who have a diagnosis that removes them from studying the curriculum guide. Florian suggests that inclusive education is an acceptance of the differences between students as part of the human condition (2008) and, therefore, teaching is a fluid and flexible practice that sees the teacher using various strategies to support student learning. The false dichotomy of inclusive education is that everyone is, in theory, welcome, but the system and progress through it are fixed & measurable in order to meet the needs of most learners. The few students who fall outside the 'norm' or

benchmarks, receive something different or additional to the mainstream or the majority of students.

2.12- Policy and this Research

Policy is a set of guidelines that determine aims, goals, action, or expectations (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). Policy in education is important because it helps to establish consistent rules, structures, procedures, and expectations across the jurisdiction to ensure that everyone is connected and that schools function effectively. Policy is systematic (Johns & Teare, 2015), goal-oriented, and inter-connected to various activities or functions. Policy is important to inclusive education because it lays a framework or a set of expectations for the inclusive approach from which the jurisdiction will act.

In the Statement of Principles (p5) of the DOEECD's Special Education Policy (2008) an outline of the provincial inclusive education mandate can be found. This statement of principles outlines the aim of the DOEECD for following an inclusive approach to education. This document can be found in appendix B. The mandate states:

> Inclusive education embodies beliefs, attitudes, and values that promote "the basic right of all students to receive appropriate and quality educational programming and services in the company of their peers" (Inclusion, Supporting Student Success Fact Sheet).
> The goal of inclusive education is to facilitate the membership, participation, and learning of all students in school programs and activities. The support services that are designed to meet students' diverse educational needs should be co-ordinated within the neighbourhood school and to the extent possible, within grade level/subject area classrooms. (DOEECD, p5)

The DOEECD's policy sets the structures and procedures for implementing inclusive education throughout Nova Scotia. Though this study does not look specifically at policy, it is important to acknowledge it because it supports the context from which the participants developed their perceptions of inclusive education.

2.13- Conclusion

Alquraini and Gut's (2012) research showcases the benefit of inclusion for all students. In contrast, Lindsay (2007, p18) alleges that 'the evidence for the effectiveness of inclusive education is, at best, marginally in support of inclusive education'. Without a clear definition of inclusive education and the purpose for the practice, it is understandable why the current research on teachers' attitudes towards the practice is inconclusive.

The purpose of my research is to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of some elementary school teachers in Nova Scotia, Canada in order to increase my awareness of the driving factors shaping the practical implementation of inclusive education and understand how teachers experience and perceive this educational approach. Having explored current discourse in the area of inclusive education, this literature review has identified some key issues and tensions arising from the lack of a single way of understanding inclusive education and inclusive educational practices. My research explores the effect of the tension between conceptualisation and practice for some teachers. This research aims to answer the question: 'How do elementary school teachers in the province of Nova Scotia describe their experiences with inclusive education and what does this mean for practice?' The review of literature has also identified theoretical frameworks against which to analyse my data – Loreman's Seven Pillars of Support for inclusive education (2007) and Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's (2006) definitions of inclusion.

In the next chapter, I describe and discuss the methodology which I used to structure my research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1- Introduction

The way in which research studies are conducted vary greatly based on the methods used by the researcher. In addition, the beliefs and the assumptions of both the researcher and the participants affect how the research is framed and conducted. However, there are certain standards and rules that act as a guide in shaping the framework of any study. This guide, more commonly known as a research paradigm, is a 'broad view or perspective of something' (Taylor et al, 2007, p5) that is based on a commonality in beliefs, practices, and methodological choices used to regulate enquiry (Weaver & Olson, 2006). Paradigms are 'human constructions' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p97) that 'define the worldview of the researcher-as-interpretive bricoleur' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p97). In other words, as unique as each research study is, there remains a consistency in both the theoretical and practical components of the researcher's structure of enquiry for studies that subscribe to the same paradigm.

Each research paradigm is characterised by how the researcher views reality, truth and knowledge. According to Scotland (2012, p9), 'what knowledge is, and the ways of discovering it, are subjective'. In choosing a paradigm, it is important that a researcher be mindful of how their assumptions will affect their research study. Each paradigm consists of different components: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods. It is these components that create the framework (within each paradigm) that supports consistency amongst researchers in addressing their own personal assumptions, beliefs, chosen methods, and interactions with data and participants. Patton reminds us that 'paradigms are important theoretical constructs for illuminating fundamental assumptions about the nature of reality' (1990, p39). Yet, he also reminds (1990) us to make sensible decisions based on the aim of the research, the questions being asked, and the availability of resources. In other words, one ought to adhere to the guidelines of the chosen paradigm when conducting a research study. However, the researcher ought to be honest with themselves about the parameters and restrictions affecting their research process.

Denzin and Lincoln's (2018) term 'research-as-interpretive bricoleur' refers to the idea that a research paradigm is a quilt of representations woven together 'to the specifics of a complex situation' (p11). Research is directed based on the researcher's ontological, epistemological, methodological and methods choices. The choices made by a researcher are shaped by the researcher's beliefs and feelings about how the world works and how it should be understood (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Understanding a researcher's positionality in the paradigm components is a crucial part of understanding the meaning within the research. Depending on the paradigm chosen, the end quilt or the representation of the data will look different. Since each paradigm takes a different stance on how to approach research, it is important to acknowledge that each paradigm will have different implications (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Also, it is important for a researcher to be honest with themselves about their assumptions, beliefs, and reasons for doing what they do (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Before I explore the paradigm that could guide my research, I needed to explore my beliefs about knowledge acquisition, knowledge construction and reality as they related to the aim of this research. In the next two paragraphs, I will explore the impact ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods each have in shaping why and how I made certain decisions about my research framework.

Ontology and epistemology shape one's perspective on knowledge and knowledge acquisition. Ontology is the study of being and what constitutes reality (Crotty, 1998; Scotland, 2012). It is necessary to understand how our assumptions affect what we believe to be reality. I believe reality is shaped by experiences encountered by an individual; in other words, reality is a quilt of multiple truths woven together. Epistemology is the nature of knowledge and reality (Scotland, 2012) and it is concerned with how we can acquire knowledge and what it means to know. In order to make a decision about how I know what I know and how I am going to acquire more knowledge, I must understand what I assume to be reality. As I stated above, I believe reality is subjective to each individual. Now, the question becomes an epistemological one, 'what is the nature of the relationship between the would-be knower and what can be known?' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p108). It is my opinion that our individual reality is shaped through our interactions and our experiences. It is also my opinion

that what we believe to be reality and what we believe to be knowledge is subjective to our experiences, belief system, and underlying assumptions.

The third component is methodology or the plan of action for the research study that outlines choices and use of the particular methods (Crotty, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (1994, p108) explain that methodology asks the question 'how can the inquirer go about finding out whatever they believe can be known?'. As I stated above, I believe knowledge and reality to be subjective to our experiences. I am interested in how our perspectives are individually shaped and, in the commonalities and differences noticed amongst groups of people (such as elementary classroom teachers as relevant to my research). In order to answer Guba and Lincoln's question about methodology, it is imperative to create a strategic plan that explores the individual construction and interpretation of reality (through unique experiences) with the parameters of the research aim. The final component of a paradigm is the methods, or the techniques used to conduct our research (Kinash, 2010). The chosen research methods need to be sensible, naturalistic and appropriate to the aim of my research. For my study, it would only be reasonable to explore methods that allow for multiple perspectives and exploration of experiences. My study aims to understand why some teachers act in a certain way and believe in certain truths. My chosen methods needed to allow for depth and exploration in the participants' answers. Reducing data into what Eslami (2013, p192) refers to as one 'generalisable law' would be counterproductive to my ontological and epistemological stance. Rather, my data needed to open and respective to the individuality of each participant.

In setting out on this research journey, I had a general idea for my area of enquiry. As a learning centre teacher in the province of Nova Scotia, I have a lot of practical experience with the practical components of the provincial special education policy and the inclusive education practices common to some areas of Nova Scotia. My decade of teaching in this province has provided me with a wealth of experiences, some positive and some negative, that have shaped my belief system in the area of inclusion and special education. What I believe, from my own practice, is that a divisive inconsistency between individual teachers and administrators has led to

challenges for the successful and consistent implementation of the special education policy and practices that benefit all students. Obviously, this is a grand assertion that I cannot say confidently without further exploration of why I feel this way, and whether or not other teachers feel this way. In order to make sense of this personal sentiment, I decided that engaging with classroom teachers to explore their own experiences in the public school system (an 'inclusive' system) would allow me to deepen my understanding of some of the strengths and challenges of the Nova Scotia school system while drawing attention to commonalities, differences and random phenomena noted by some teachers. The aim of my research became to understand the thoughts, the feelings, and the experiences of individual elementary classroom teachers in the province of Nova Scotia.

It is my view that education is a subjective experience for all participants. People involved in education (for example: students, teachers, administrators, policy makers, and governments) bring diversity in experiences, expertise, knowledge, and understanding. As a special education trained teacher, my professional training and experiences are in the area of providing support to students with cognitive impairments, whereas a classroom teacher will tend to have a greater expertise with teaching a specific academic discipline, such as a stronger mathematics background. However, in Nova Scotia the practice of inclusive education is to keep all similar aged students together in the classroom under the directive of the classroom teacher, using a collaborative approach with learning centre teachers. To understand my own beliefs about the system and to understand how I can be of more support to our students, it is important for me to make sense of what classroom teachers' perspectives are on their own practices in relation to inclusion, and of their understanding of provincial policies. Since I want to explore other teachers' experiences and since I believe our past experiences shape what we know, how we know, and how we construct meaning from experiences I opted to explore my research interests within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. In this chapter, I outline the methodology and methods I used to gather data to answer my research question- 'How do elementary school teachers in the province of Nova Scotia describe their experiences with inclusive education and what does this mean for practice?'

3.2- Research Design

The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, according to both Denzin and Lincoln (2018) and Goldkuhl (2012), aims to understand and interpret the subjective understandings of people as they relate to their past experiences. In deciding upon the most appropriate paradigm for my research, I needed to take a bottom up approach to exploring the different paradigms; that is, I needed to be honest with my own beliefs, assumptions and research aims prior to committing to any one paradigm. It must be noted that there is no best paradigm, only the most appropriate for the objectives of my research.

In the first section of this chapter, I outlined my ontological and epistemological stance in relation to the construction of knowledge and reality. In my opinion, realities exist in multiple forms shaped by various factors and they are context dependent (Guba, 1990). To me, knowledge is constructed through our experiences, our interactions and it is shaped by our beliefs and assumptions on reality. Whereas, another approach to research, the 'scientific' approach of positivism, takes the ontological belief that objects have an independent existence (Scotland, 2012). In other words, our individual experiences do not shape or affect what is real. One assumption underlying positivism is that there is a singular reality that does not change based on our senses (Scotland, 2012; Tracy, 2013). By contrast, the constuctivist-interpretivist paradigm assumes that multiple realities exist that are constructed through life experiences (Goldkuhl, 2012; Tracy, 2013) and that a person's individual perception of reality is formed through the experiences they encounter. Teachers will have many experiences based on their general upbringing, training, student demographics, the school in which they teach, and the subjects they are teaching. Each of these various experiences will influence who and what we are individually and, ultimately, affect a teacher's perspective and performance in the chosen field of education. Aligning with the constructivist-interpretivist assumption of multiple realities, I believe that these influencing factors will support my research aim of understanding individual beliefs on what is perceived to be the 'reality' of an inclusive school system by allowing for both the participants' and the researcher's

voices to be heard and experiences to be explored together and separately.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), the epistemological position of the constructivist-interpretivist approach is subjectivism. In other words, each participant constructs or creates their reality and knowledge from their unique experiences. Understanding teachers' perceptions or why they believe what they do about their own practice, is subjective with respect to such factors as their role as a classroom teacher, years of experiences, unique training, and their personal teaching locations and assignments. This is in contrast to the positivist epistemology that is objective and absolute (Eslami, 2013). In my research I intend to seek insight concerning the feelings, understandings, thoughts, and experiences of some Nova Scotia elementary teachers. If I discounted the individuality of each teacher's response and attempted to create what Eslami (2013) refers to as a 'generalisable law', I could potentially miss out on different phenomena that shape one's belief system. I believe that these perceptions, attitudes and feelings cannot be reduced into one general truth. Rather than searching for an absolute truth, I hope to reveal common themes or unique understandings of phenomena common to a particular group of teachers. Such conclusions will arise from analysing my research findings and piecing together the multiple and subjective understandings of the educational experience of the various teacher participants. How I gather and piece this insight together is an important part of my proposal study because the research tools I choose will inform the transferability and trustworthiness of data collected and conclusions reached for future consideration and action.

A satisfactory research methodology leads the researcher to ask the question 'how the inquirer (would-be knower) could go about finding out whatever he or she believes would be known?' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p108). The answer to this question is strategic in that the way I set out to answer this question (as it relates to my research aim) must align with my research beliefs and assumptions. For example, I needed to make a decision about whether I wanted an answer that could be generalisable and absolute or transferable and trustworthy. A positivist research methodology will seek to control and identify any factors that may influence the outcome (Guba & Lincoln,

1994; Scotland, 2012) and will also look to explain relevant relationships (Scotland, 2012). Such a strategy poses challenges for my particular question since I do not have control over the particular influencing factors defining each teacher's experience. The past training and the educational experiences of the chosen teachers will likely vary greatly. Professional experience and years teaching will not usually align, with some participants having more or less experience with classroom and special education teaching. In addition, the student needs and caseloads are unique to each teacher's individual experience and cannot be generalised across the province.

My research methodology had to focus on the unique inputs from multiple participants rather than following a highly controlled positivist approach. Trying 'to understand phenomenon from an individual's perspective' (Scotland, 2012, p12) by reflecting on the construction of reality in an interactive setting (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) will better support my aim of understanding the emotions and feelings so commonly shaping our professional experiences. Positivist methodology is grounded in the 'conventional hard sciences' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p117) and focus on the scientific method that aims to reduce experiences to a singular perspective, whereas, my research aims will be better supported by a methodology that allows individual constructions to be hermeneutically refined and explored (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

To summarise, taking a bottom-up approach, I reflected on my own personal beliefs and assumptions about knowledge acquisition and creation, and on what I believe to be real and to be truth. By exploring my own ideas, and reflecting on the aims of my research, I was clear that the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm was the one with which my research was best aligned. I will now outline how I applied the constructivist-interpretivist framework to both the data collection and data analysis components of this research study. For these reasons, I used an online questionnaire and focus group as the tools to gather data from my participants. As I discuss further in 3.5 Data Collection, both of these methods of collecting data allow for participants to share their experiences by providing open-ended questions or topics to explore. Unlike a positivist approach that is looking for generalisable truths or laws, my research aims to understand a particular aspect of human nature (teaching in an

inclusive system).

3.3- Setbacks with the Ethics Approval Process

Before starting my data collection, I was required to receive ethics approval for study both from the University of Glasgow and from the school board in which I was hoping to conduct research. Despite gaining approval from the university, I did not receive approval from the largest school board in Nova Scotia. I wanted to localise my participants into a particular area of the province and I hoped I could conduct research in the area in which I worked. However, as I was putting my research proposal together, labour disputes were increasing between the government and the Teacher's Union (NSTU) which appeared to have some negative influence shaping my journey. After receiving ethical approval, in the early spring of 2016, from the University of Glasgow to conduct my research project for looking at teachers' perceptions, I applied for research approval to the school board in which I worked. However, in the spring of 2016 my request was rejected by this particular school board.

Several reasons were given for this refusal. Firstly, they felt the participant pool was too small to provide any meaningful insight from which I could generate materials or ideas to support teachers. Secondly, they felt this was not an area in which they required any staff to be carrying out research. A final reason was that they felt worried about how the questions asked or the data gathered might lead to sentiments or discussions seen to be in contradiction of the School Board's and the Province's commitment to inclusive education. Even with the further assurance that my topic was looking to understand some classroom teachers' experiences as a way to better support students and teachers I was still denied approval. After the second ethics application was declined, I connected with three of the provincial Universities' Schools of Education: Mount Saint Vincent, Saint Francis Xavier, and Mount Allison. I inquired about advice on how to proceed as I felt they would be familiar with educational research in Nova Scotia. Their suggestion was I could proceed as planned, without ethics approval from any school board, because I was looking at individual teacher's experiences with inclusive education. They noted it was important that I

make sure my participants were identified as teachers in the province of Nova Scotia and not belonging to or representing any particular school board.

3.4- Methods

This section explores different qualitative methods that can be used for research and it outlines the methods, or tools, used to collect data for this study. It is important to choose appropriate methods for the aim of the research. For this reason, having a clear research objective is important when choosing the methods (Anderson, 2010). The chosen methods need to allow for depth, description, and detail in the data opposed to quantitative data that can be reduced to a number (Anderson, 2010). As I explore in the next section, my data was collected through two primary methods: questionnaire and focus group. One one-to-one interview was conducted over the telephone following the questionnaire.

Other types of qualitative methods are:

- Observations and field notes
- Visual tools (such as photographs, film, drawing)
- Documents
- One-to-one interview
- Discussion group

Using observation as a research method allows the researcher to use their senses (sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing) to gather insight and data. Often, this method is used to examine the participants in their natural setting or to examine natural situations (Silverman, 2001). Researchers would support their observations with the field notes which is an anecdotal collection of their observations. Similar to observations, the use of visual tools draws on the use of the major senses in order to gain insight and collect data, specifically the visual sense. Similarly, visual tools provide rich insight into the everyday world of participants. However, visual methods often lack clear context and can be interpreted differently by the researchers and the participants (Glaw et al, 2017). Another qualitative tool used for data collection can be document analysis. In this approach, documents are reviewed, examined, and

interpreted to gain meaning and construct knowledge (Frey, 2018). Alternatively, using one-to-one interviews as a research tool allows the researcher to gain depth in a participant's understanding, perception, and experiences (Frances et al, 2009). This method was presented to all questionnaire participants in my student as an extension of the initial questionnaire. However, only one participant agreed to the one-to-one interview via telephone. Unlike some of the other methods, one-to-one interviews require a higher time commitment for the participant. Another example of a qualitative research method is the use of a discussion group. This method is often used to elicit knowledge and experiences to support decisions, development, and inform research (Doria et al, 2018). Qualitative research tools can be used as standalone methods to collect data or they can be used in combination. My research aim is to develop depth in understanding of the participants' perceptions, so it was necessary to pick research methods that allowed for exploration of experiences and insights. Observations, visual methods, and document analysis would not allow for me to construct an understanding of the participants' experiences and understanding of inclusive education.

My chosen data collection methods needed to allow for the participants' individual voices to be heard, understood and explored. In order to interpret meaning behind the shared experiences, I chose research tools that allow for structure through questions (in order to stay on task) and openness to explore answers (Vaughn et al, 1996). My methods of data collection included an initial online questionnaire with the possibility of a telephone conversation to act as a follow-up to the questionnaire (as noted above, only one participant requested the additional follow-up). The questionnaire allowed for participants to provide insight into their experiences following a structured approach to ensure certain themes or topics were covered. Through the questionnaire, I was able to collect both hard and soft data. Hard data such as number of participants who teach in rural vs urban schools, years teaching, and demographics were collected. Whereas, the soft data provided insight into the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Spacey, 2017). After the questionnaires, I conducted one focus group (90 minutes in length). I decided upon a focus group as my final method of research for a few simple reasons. Another

reasonable method would have been the discussion group, but for a few reasons the focus group appeared to be more aligned with my research aim. The focus group is simply a voluntary gathering of people used to discuss opinions, experiences, perceptions, and attitudes about a specific topic.

Much like a discussion group, a focus group can be useful in gaining rich insight into people's knowledge and understanding, as well, how and why they think a certain way (Kitzinger, 1995). However, a discussion group is often focused on problem solving, giving comments, and shared experiences (Payne & Payne, 2004). Unlike a discussion group, the focus group is 'a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research' (Powell et al, 1996, p499) and the focus remains on the topic rather than on solutions. The purpose of using a focus group over a discussion group in qualitative research is to collect data on knowledge, experiences, and attitudes from participants, whereas a discussion group would look to use the knowledge and experiences of the participants for decision-making or to inform parts of research (Doria et al, 2018). Focus group participants are research subjects that provide data and insight through their participation. Unlike discussion group participants that contribute insight based on preselected design criteria (Nyumba et al, 2018). Since my research aims to explore the 'heart and soul' of some teachers' inclusive education practice and not on solving issues related to inclusive education, it seemed only fitting to use a focus group that allowed for a depth and richness in the exploration of the participants' experiences with teaching in an inclusive education system.

3.5- Data Collection

Before moving forward with my data collection, I will explain who the participants are and how I accessed them. It is important to note that all participants in my study are representing themselves as individual professional educators and not as a representative of any one school board in the province of Nova Scotia.

Elementary classroom teachers were recruited via the Nova Scotia Teachers Union

monthly newsletter and via direct email to their public email accounts (see appendix C). This newsletter is sent out to all public school teachers in Nova Scotia who have registered their email with the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. As well, hard copies of the newsletter are placed in every staff room in each public school in Nova Scotia. The participants were required to be classroom teachers working in the elementary level, and to fall under the newly trained (1-5 years post Bachelor of Education) or mid-career (10-15 years post Bachelor of Education) categories. In the end, twenty-two participants expressed interest in participating in my research. All twenty-two teachers who expressed interest ended up participating in my research. Of the twenty-two, nine teachers identified themselves as a 'new teacher' and thirteen teachers identified themselves as mid-career teachers. Only two out of the twenty-two teachers identified as male based on their first name on the participant consent forms. I could only use a common sense guess as to the gender of each participant based on the first name written on the consent forms; I had no other way of identifying the participant's gender.

Once consent was signed by each participant, they were sent an email to an online questionnaire (see appendix D). The survey was a mixture of closed and open answer questions on the secure website qualtrics.com. In the participant letter (see appendix E) it was noted that the survey could be conducted via telephone call or online; all twenty-two participants chose to complete the survey online. One participant, both a classroom teacher and a mother of a child with Down's Syndrome, requested a follow-up interview via a telephone call. Due to the location of the focus group, she could not participate in it, but she wanted to discuss her experiences in more depth with me.

As I noted earlier, I started by collecting data through an online questionnaire. Though I was primarily interested in the soft data collected, my questionnaire did yield some hard data through identification of some teaching experiences. Hard data was collected by asking yes/no questions, and questions that allowed the participant to check off their response (years teacher, teaching assignment location, and initial teacher education/professional development). Soft data was collected through open-

ended questions that allows for each participant to write out their answer. The latter allows for elaboration of the participants response which can lead to a richness in the participants' representation of their experiences and perceptions (Gill et al, 2008). Greater detail of the questionnaire follows in the next chapter, Chapter 4.

As an optional extension to the online questionnaire, I asked participants to acknowledge if they were willing to follow up with a one-to-one telephone interview. Out of the twenty-two participants, only one participant committed to the telephone interview. To ensure reliability in how I followed up to the questionnaire, I conducted the telephone interview using the same discussion points and questions used in the focus group. Open-ended questions were asked to allow for depth and discussion (Gill et al, 2008; Hick et al, 1997).

The last tool used for data collection was the focus group. The general themes of the questions for the focus group were created prior to reading the answers to the questionnaires in order to ensure I remained consistent with my research aim. However, the actual questions (see appendix F) were created in response to the questionnaire questions as a means to clarify issues that arose in responses to the questionnaire and to add more depth to the research. The group consisted of four teachers from the largest urban area in Nova Scotia. The focus group acted as an extension of the initial online questionnaire. I acknowledge that I was present and as both the researcher and learning centre teacher, participants could have adjusted their answers based on my presence. Due to this possibility, it was important I remained as moderator of the discussion topics and direction and not as an active participant in the discussion. Later in this chapter, I reflect more on the concept of insider research and briefly discuss my role as both an educator and the research. It can be argued that homogeneous groups may be more willing to share their perspectives and reasons behind their opinions as the risk of clashing with the other groups is not present (Femdal & Solbjor, 2018; Grønkjær et al, 2011), whereas, the use of heterogeneous groups in a focus group can provide more diverse perspectives and experiences (Femdal & Solbjor, 2018). Due to my research looking at the experiences of elementary classroom teachers, my focus group was a homogeneous

composition of elementary school classroom teachers. Since the group was solely composed of classroom teachers and me, acting as the researcher and focus group mediator, I felt that the discussion remained authentic, respectful, and focused on the topic.

Throughout the data collection phase, I ensured I had audio recordings of the focus group and any conversations (telephone or in person). I used two different audio recorders during the focus group to ensure I had a backup recording if one malfunctioned. Since all participants opted to fill out the questionnaire online, their responses were submitted in a written format which provided me with a copy of their answers. Unlike with the focus group, I could not follow up with participants to ensure I understood their insight correctly. The one telephone follow-up conversation I conducted was recorded using a third-party application on my phone, Record Call. The responses to the questionnaire remained online in my secure qualitrics.com account and an electronic copy was saved in a password protected file on my computer's iCloud account.

Throughout the entire data collection process (leading up to data analysis), I maintained a field journal. This was an informal way for me to record thoughts, conversation details, frustrations, and questions that I referenced at different times during my research journey. These notes were important because they reminded me of decisions I made, my personal thoughts, and areas that I wanted to explore further.

3.6- Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the process of changing the collected data into meaning, understanding, and representation. Qualitative methods of analysis can be notoriously varied and complex (Holloway & Todres, 2003), and Wolcott (1994) points out that there are more than fifty types of analysis to choose from, including thematic analysis (TA), content analysis (CA), discourse analysis (DA), and grounded theory (GT). For my research, I decided to analyse the data following a TA framework. TA can be used for the process of data analysis and interpretation in qualitative research. The process involves an in-depth and powerful exploration of repeated themes and patterns

arising from the collected data. This process supports a meaningful interpretation of the gathered data (Cassell et al, 2005; Attride-Stirling, 2001), which, in my case, represents the perceptions of twenty-two Nova Scotia elementary school classroom teachers. Nowell et al (2017) suggests that thematic analysis is a method that identifies, analyses, organises, describes, and shares themes found within a data set. It can produce both perceptive and reliable vision (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, Nowell et al, 2017 warn that there is a lack of breadth of literature on thematic analysis which may lead new researchers to uncertainty about the process. It can be a supple approach for researchers that provides rich and detailed interpretation of the data gathered (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). However, this same flexibility can lead to inconsistency and misunderstanding in developing codes and themes (Holloway & Todes, 2003). Consistency can be maintained when a researcher reinforces their research with a robust epistemological foundation (Holloway & Todes, 2003).

CA involves studying and interpreting texts, documents, visual methods. It is similar to a TA in that it considers context during the analysis, as well, they both search for themes within the data. However, a CA focuses more on an in-depth report of the similarities and differences in the data (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Whereas, a TA focuses on interpretation of the data (Tracy, 2010). Similarly to CA, DA focuses on analysing written discourse, as well as, it analyses spoken and written language. DA often looks at what participants do in conversation and, often, DA focuses on language in a social context (Salkind, 2010). Lastly, GT sets out to construct a theory from the collected data rather than framing the data with a structured approach (Chun Tie et al, 2019).

3.7- The Analysis Process

Due to my professional practice as a teacher, I had some idea of what the participants would share both in the questionnaires and in the focus group. The notion of insider research will be discussed towards the end of the chapter. However, it is important to my research that I acknowledge how my professional practice may shape my interpretation and understanding of the data. In this study, my data was collected from classroom teachers that were not all familiar to me. Some of the participants

were former colleagues of mine. The questionnaires were anonymous, and I had no way of identifying the responses of those participants close to me. The focus group consisted of two past colleagues, one acquaintance, and an unfamiliar participant. Again, there will be more exploration on insider research later in this chapter.

My data was collected through two main methods. Once the data was collected, I started my analysis by reviewing and reflecting on the collected data. The first phased on a thematic analysis is becoming familiar with the data. In order to become familiar with the data, I reviewed and explored the transcribed discourse from the focus group; simultaneously, I was exploring the questionnaire responses of each participant. In order to make sense of the importance of the data, I compared and contrasted the data with current literature and context during the reflection. By doing so, I was able to identify and familiarise myself with some possible patterns and connections that supported the second phase of the TA.

i- coding

My understanding of both the data and literature was the starting point of the second phase of the TA. The initial codes for data exploration were constructed based on understanding and knowledge of the research aim (Nowell et al, 2017). Rather than creating my own codes, I decided to use preset codes from Loreman's (2007) Seven Pillars of Support for inclusive education. In agreement with Boyatzis (1998), I used preset codes from current literature to help support depth in interpretation. A priori coding is a deductive approach to analysis that can use codes adopted from the literature of the field of study (Kohn & Christiaens, 2013). One code, miscellaneous, could be viewed as a posteriori, or inductive, as it allowed for a spot to place insight that emerged and did not seem to fit into one of the predetermined codes. As Richards argues, "Coding should always be for a purpose. It is never an end in itself" (2015, p. 105). It is important to remember that the aim of this research is to support more effectively both teachers and students in an inclusive education system. Developing initial codes from common trends or words in current literature allowed me to capture the richness of the participant's outlooks on the related topic (Boyatzis, 1998). This approach to coding complemented the research questions by

allowing the focus of my research aim to be integral to the process of deductive thematic analysis while allowing for some flexibility with the data using inductive coding in miscellaneous.

Once the predetermined codes were set, it was necessary to define the parameters for each code. Since these codes became the foundation for later emerging, cross-cutting themes, it was important to ensure the parameters were clear, concise, and consistent (Komori, 2017). To ensure clarity, consistency, and conciseness, I outlined the code parameters based on Kimori's (2017) five suggestions on how to define a code.

1. Clear and concise name (see above)
2. Clear and concise definition of the code (see Chapter 4)
3. Boundaries (or parameters) for recognising the code in the data (see Chapter 4)
4. Any exclusions to the code (see Chapter 4)
5. Identify an initial example (as a model for the code)

'Codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study' (Miles et al, 2014, p71). A code attaches meaning to a piece of the data (for example: a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph). Whereas, a theme, which comes after the initial coding, looks for meaning between multiple codes (Elliott, 2018). The importance in defining each thematic code following Kimori's five elements is that they aid in ensuring richness, breadth, rigour, and applicability in the collected data. Code verification is an important step in ensuring the integrity of the codes.

The predetermined codes, taken from Loreman's Seven Pillars of Support for Inclusive Education, gave me an initial framework for sorting and analysing the responses. As discussed in Chapter 2, these seven conditions were suggested as 'essential conditions' to be used in schools or jurisdiction to support all students (2007). Use of the pillars as the codes allowed for the data to be sorted into meaningful groups for my research aim. Loreman (2007) explains that each pillar is an integral condition to

supporting an inclusive education system. Setting the parameters, for both meeting the condition or not meeting the condition, ensured the data was sorted into groups that complimented my aim. I acknowledge it would be interesting to a posteriori coding to explore emerging themes and construct meaning. However, as a new researcher I made the decision to structure the coding based on an existing framework. In addition to this coding structure, I took the advice of Braun and Clarke (2006) and added a 'miscellaneous' code that did not seem to fit the parameters of the predetermined codes. This data may prove to have meaning or provide background detail later on (Norwell et al, 2017) that will provide unique insight or meaning.

Loreman's (2007) pillars align easily with Saldaña's statement that 'a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that assigns a meaning-capturing attribute to various sections of the collected data' (2013, p4). Charts outlining the codes in detail can be found on pages 115-117 Chapter 4.

Table 3.1- Code Names

code
Positive Attitude (pa)
Policy Leadership (pl)
School & Classroom Processes (scp)
Curriculum & Pedagogy (cp)
The Community (tc)
Meaningful Reflection (mr)
Training & Resources (tr)
Miscellaneous (mis)

All data was manually coded (see appendix G). I went through each line of the questionnaires and the transcribed focus group line by line assigning colour coding to each quote. I used manual coding due to the size of the data set, the ability to detect vocabulary nuances and the open parameters of the miscellaneous code. A benefit of the manual approach is the ability to identify emerging codes (Basit, 2010).

i- themes

After sorting the data into the codes, I was ready to begin the next phase of the TA, connecting the codes and identifying emerging themes. In this next phase, all relevant coded data was sorted into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme is an abstract concept that gives meaning to recurring experiences (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000). DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) remind us that themes connect the pieces of data together as it relates to the research question. Connecting codes is the process of discovering themes and patterns in the data (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). At this point, I

explored the sorted data for similarities and differences that were emerging between the coded data.

It was important to keep in mind that while I am categorising or sorting the data, the thematic codes provided the link from the data to the themes to the research aim and to the other data. Saldaña (2013) suggests that coding is not just sorting data in themes, but it is a process of linking data to the research question and to the other data. As I continued to sort the codes into emerging themes, a 'further level of abstraction in the analytic process' (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p393) occurred when deeper connections between the responses became noticeable, thus, allowing for the construction of knowledge and meaning in the collected data. It was important for me to constantly go back to the research question and aims in order to ensure I was making interpretations based on the context of this research and not based solely on my own assumptions.

Braun and Clarke (2006) identify the start of stage four of the thematic analysis when the themes have been created and all codes have been sorted (into the themes). My initial codes, from Loreman (2007) plus the miscellaneous code, were reviewed, explored, and sorted into commonalities. Unlike with the initial coding, I allowed for the themes to emerge from patterns found within the codes. Out of the data that was sorted into the initial codes, three prominent themes emerged:

Table 3.2- Themes

Attitudes towards inclusive education or the participants' professional practice	Collaboration, community, support, & resources	Understanding of and the language of inclusive education
Attitude	Support	Discourse

Sorting the codes into the themes took a lot of time and can be viewed in Table 4.3 in Chapter 4. The back and forth process of exploring each participant's statements against the question or topic within each code allows for great depth in understanding. When sorting each statement into an initial code (or codes), I spent time reflecting on the question from the questionnaire and focus group. What was I,

the researcher, asking the participant to share and then I would compare each statement to the parameters I set for the codes. When I started the next phase of the thematic analysis, looking for emerging themes in the data, I spent a great deal of time reflecting on the connections between the codes: *why did so many experiences fit into multiple codes?* It was from these similarities that my themes emerged. To label the themes or patterns, I picked a single word that encompassed the similarities. After this stage, I moved into the final stage of the thematic analysis.

The last stage of my thematic analysis started when I decided the data was organised into the themes and I was ready to begin making connections to the literature and formulating suggestions and ideas from my themes. It is possible to revise and refine the sorting of data forever, but at some point, the process has to stop (King, 2006). After consultation, it was decided that my themes were clear and comprehensive to move into synthesising and exploring the themes.

3.8- Insider Research

Insider research can be defined as research which is conducted within an organisation, group or community in which the researcher is also a member (Drake & Heath, 2008; Fleming, 2018; Mercer, 2007; Trowler, 2011). Most often, students enrolled in a professional doctorate are assumed to be engaging in insider research (Drake & Heath, 2008). By this definition and programme, I am conducting insider research due to the fact that I am both a teacher and an employee in Nova Scotia's public school system and I am completing this research for a professional doctorate. As an elementary learning centre teacher, I bring my own beliefs, experiences, and thoughts to the data collection and interpretation. Unlike some research paradigms, my personal perceptions on inclusion in the elementary school system will be the lens through which I view this undertaking. It remains important to be open-minded to all participants' points of view as well as being cognisant of my own. As Fleming (2018) highlights, as an insider researcher I have to acknowledge my bias on the subject and ensure my research design and my implementation of the methods are transparent and rigorous.

I used a number of strategies to try to avoid possible bias affecting either participant responses or my interpretation of their responses. One way I did this was by asking open-ended questions during the focus group and the telephone interview. This type of questioning allowed for answers and discussion to flow more freely, not making the participants feel that I was looking for a particular answer. Secondly, I ensured my reactions were neutral so as not to influence participants' responses by suggesting either approval or disagreement. Thirdly, I asked for further clarification or more detail if necessary, rather than assuming that my own initial interpretation was necessarily correct. Further, during the focus group and the single telephone interview I listened to the participants, paraphrased their statements, and resisted the temptation to add my own experiences and insight, remaining neutral during the discussion. My participants were aware of my professional role. However, I made it clear my objective was to learn from their experiences. By paraphrasing my participants' responses I was able to have each participant (in the focus group and the phone interview) verify that I interpreted their views in the way they intended. Finally, keeping a detailed field journal allowed me to record thoughts, responses, and insight immediately during the data collection phase which helped me to ensure I was not trying to interpret or make meaning after I collected the data (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

In agreement with Drake and Heath (2008), insider research allows me to develop a 'newness of this knowledge' (p2) that comes from mixing my understanding of the professional practice, academic studies, and doctoral research. Despite the outcome being a deeper understanding of my research aim, tensions often arose when trying to navigate the different roles. For example, ensuring that my experiences at work did not become the experiences of my participants meant that I had to make sure that I remained transparent in my actions and committed to my methodology. Another challenge was to ensure that my design was rigorous and not based on my own bias on the subject. One way I mitigated this challenge was being upfront with my participants and in my writing about my role as an educator. Smyth and Holian (2008) make a reassuring argument that observations cannot be purely objective regardless of whether the researcher is an insider or outsider. Saidin and Yaacob (2017) argue

that insider researchers have to be careful to not reveal sensitive or confidential information due to the fact that they know the issue or the focus of the research well. Due to the political context in which my data was gathered and the challenges with obtaining ethical approval, I had to ensure that I remained factual and included information that was relevant, yet not sensitive to the situation.

Fleming (2018) found that a key advantage of insider research is the understanding of the environment in which the research took place. In addition, another benefit of understanding the subject area as a professional is that there is little risk in misunderstanding acronyms, jargon, and language used (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Another benefit, especially in the analysis of the collected data, is that I did not need to spend time familiarising myself with the nuances. I understand the roles of classroom teachers, I am familiar with the Special Education Policy (2008), and the practice of teaching in the Nova Scotia public school system. A final, potential benefit of insider research is that research should have a positive impact on the researcher in terms of value, professional development and dedication (McClintock et al, 2003). Researching inclusive education is not only a strong interest of mine, but it is a professional focus and the context in which I teach. Deepening my understanding, beyond my employer's policy and procedures, will have great benefit to my professional growth.

3.9- Delimitations

The delimitations set for this research project include participant profile and the importance of plurality. For this research, it was important that the teachers share, reflect and explore their own personal experiences with inclusive education in Nova Scotia. I wanted the focus to remain on policy implementation and practice. In order to maintain this parameter, using front-line teachers was important. I wanted to ensure no full-time administrators (in the school setting) were participants in this research project. A main difference between front-line teachers and school-based administrators is that teachers are directly implementing policies through various strategies. Teachers will be able to bring a relevant practical component to their experiences navigating in an inclusive setting. Whereas, school-based administrators

act more as a bridge between school boards and frontline teachers. Another reason for the front-line teachers is that I want to explore personal experiences and perspectives about their professional journey as a teacher. It is important to remain focused on the individuality of each participant and not focus on what particular school boards outline. Lastly, it is important that I highlight the importance in plurality in definitions, experiences, and conceptualisations. In order to explore commonalities and differences in experiences, I must not assume that every participant views education, inclusion and practice the same way. We have all had different experiences and opportunities that shape how we interpret the world around us.

3.10- Measures of Rigour

Research is a process that represents a spectrum of objects or phenomena from concrete to abstract (Sperber, 1985). The research methods take a snapshot of these representations and rebrand them as data whether they are permanent and concrete or ‘ethereal ideas, beliefs, or dreams’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Knowing that the researcher follows a guide (based on their chosen paradigm), the question then becomes how the researcher does the fairly and accurately interpret and represent the participants’ representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) in the collection, analysis and conclusion sections of the research. For my purposes, I had to ensure both that I set out to extract excellent data from the participants and that I represented the data as closely as possible to the participants' representation of their experiences (or the phenomena) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Below, I have outlined the strategies I used to evaluate the rigour of my research.

Morse (2017) outlines a framework for establishing rigour in qualitative inquiry that is an updated extension to past frameworks, such as Guba and Lincoln’s (1985) techniques for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. She notes that rigour begins in the planning phase by emphasising the relationship between aim of the research or the phenomena and the data (Morse, 2017). As the researcher, I needed to be clear as to my focus and be clear about the raw data I wish to elicit from the participants. Without a clear research aim, I could not construct a plan that

would allow me to obtain consistent and applicable data (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). I started by identifying 'soft data', that is, data that is based on human observations and anecdotes (Spacey, 2017) and participants' personal retelling of their experiences and perceptions (Dalgamo, 2018). Due to the subjectivity of 'soft data' (Delgamo, 2018), I decided to increase the depth of the 'soft data' by including some questions in the survey that would collect 'hard data', that is, data that is concrete, measurable and permanent (Spacey, 2017) in order to provide some contextual and verifiable facts about the participants (Spacey, 2017; Delgamo, 2018). The online survey collected information about years of teaching experience, locations and socio-economics of teaching positions, and past professional development and education, in other words, 'hard data' that would provide concrete evidence of factors potentially shaping the participants' current situation and views. This data was gathered by checking answer boxes or providing yes/no answers. The online survey and focus group questions (including the phone interview) elicited responses that were open-ended and allowed for sharing of subjective insight that could be interpreted instead of measured (Gherardi & Turner, 1987).

Due to the scope of this research I could not saturate the participant pool. Data saturation, according to Morse (2015), is when the researcher collects many different perspectives as to build certainty into the interpretation. However, twenty-two participants provided their experiences to this research which still allowed for a logical and coherent exploration of emerging patterns and themes in concordance with other research and literature (further exploration of this can be read in Chapter 4).

Considering the goal of my research is to deepen my understanding of inclusive education practices at the elementary school level in Nova Scotia as they are experienced by classroom teachers, it is imperative to remember that the majority of the data I am interpreting is soft data and cannot be considered generalisable or permanent. The hard data I collected can be used to identify the number of participants in each category (early or mid-career), teaching locations (urban, rural, low socio economic, et cetera), and level of training and education. In relation to this

information, the ways in which the rigour of my research can be verified are through peer review, in seeking concordance with published research and literature, and audit trails. Long and Johnson (2000) state the importance of verifying data (to demonstrate rigour) by exploring the results from a different point of view as a way of cross-checking interpretations and meanings. In my case, reviewing the data, my recorded thoughts and emerging themes with my supervisor became an important component of ensuring I was interpreting meanings as appropriately as possible. Secondly, a measure of data reliability is by seeking concordance between emerging themes and published literature (Morse, 2017). Using published studies that are similar to my research on teacher's perceptions on inclusive education could provide valuable strength to my findings (if similarities are noted). A third way to ensure quality in my research is through the use of an audit trial in the form of a personal field journal to reflect on my own beliefs and actions in the same fashion I reflect on the beliefs and actions of the participants. Recording my observations, interpretations, and decisions allows for me to appreciate how the representation of the participants' experiences mixed with my interpretations and knowledge acquisition have led to my own professional growth (Agar, 1996).

Another measure of rigour in my research is the verification of the thematic codes to ensure the codes are not misrepresentative of the phenomena and they are appropriately free of my own personal bias. I acknowledge that it is not possible to be completely free of my bias that is why I included the word appropriately as a qualifying word. Since I created thematic codes based on a priori ideas or pre-existing notions (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010), it would be irresponsible to say that my own bias was not present in the code identification stage. By verifying the thematic codes with my research supervisor, I can ensure that I pick codes that accurately represent the scope of this research. Also, it is important that I connect the finalised themes to related literature. By referencing the literature in the themes, the constructed interpretations and meanings from the data have an additional layer of richness and breadth than they would without connecting it back to the current dialogue and research (Aronson, 1995).

As discussed in section 3.8, my experiences and perceptions of the research topic cannot be eliminated from the research, but similar to the participants, they need to be understood and explored as part of the research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). To support goodness in my representation of the participants' representations, it is imperative that I remain truthful about any assumptions that I hold which may shape how I interpret or construct meaning from the themes. I, too, need to be cognisant of the transformation my perspective has undergone through the research process and how this change may shape end results. As well, it is important that I am truthful with myself about the participants' perceptions of me as both a researcher and a fellow professional. The use of a field journal or audit trails will remind me of what I was thinking at certain times, why I made certain decisions or asked certain questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Understanding my thoughts at different times in the research journey allows me to be more honest with how my own assumptions and beliefs guided my interpretations, constructions, and decisions.

Lastly, I am aware that participants may, at times, adjust their responses in both the survey and the focus group. Participant bias or response bias is when participants adjust their responses based on what they think the researcher is after or in presenting a different version of their actions and beliefs (Olson, 2006). As well, I understand that the responses to the questions are based on a moment in the participant teacher's professional life. Due to the nature of online questions, I cannot explore the responses further or check for authenticity at the time of the response. Outside influences may shape the participants' mindset at the time they take the survey but using the verification strategies noted above I can check for appropriateness of the responses. A benefit to the focus group is that I could verify a response by eliciting further information through a follow-up question or prompt. For example, one participant noted a 'scholarly' response to 'what is inclusive education?', yet, when a question later in the session was inquiring about inclusive education practices it became very clear to me that the definition of inclusive education and their practice to inclusive education are very different. The participant spoke about the two groups of children in their school, children that fall under 'the mainstream umbrella' and those that fall under 'the inclusive umbrella'. I was able to

follow-up by reminding them of their earlier definition and how that relates to their reference of the two groups of students in their inclusive school. It came down to the participant wanting to demonstrate their intellect in the definition but having an increased comfort to speak about their reality of inclusive education. Due to the nature of the focus group, I was able to ask what they meant by these two groups and how did that particular participant see the groups fitting into their earlier definition of inclusive education. In other words, I need to keep in mind that some participants will use their responses to demonstrate their knowledge as a means to impress rather than to explore knowledge as it relates to experiences and praxis. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) warn against placing too much faith in respondent validation as a sole means to check rigour because we cannot assume that participants fully understand their actions or are open with their responses. They may forget what they shared, or they might be ashamed or embarrassed of their actions or experiences. Asking the participants to validate their answers does, however, provide them with ownership and accountability over their comments, and as suggested by Brink (1991), it ensures stability in the response of each participant.

3.11- Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and justified the research methodology implemented in my dissertation. Upon careful consideration of my research question and my own belief system, I decided the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm was the most appropriate framework for my research. The methods used for data collection were questionnaire and a focus group. All participants were recruited in the province of Nova Scotia as independent elementary school teachers working in the public school system. The data was analysed through a thematic analysis that was initiated with predetermined codes. The data is presented in the next chapter, Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Data. The analysis is further developed in Chapter 5: Discussion.

Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Data

4.1- Introduction

In this chapter, I shared my participants' data that were collected through various methods. All participants completed a multi-question questionnaire and some of these participants also participated in a small focus group. The aim of each question was to gain a range of data to inform my research question- 'How do elementary school teachers in the province of Nova Scotia describe their experiences with inclusive education and what does this mean for practice?' It was important to keep in mind that Nova Scotia defines inclusive education as 'the basic right of all students to receive appropriate and quality educational programming and services in the company of their peers' (DOEECD, 2008, p5) when reflecting on the participants' experiences. I asked elementary teachers to share their understanding of, and their experiences implementing inclusive education as a pedagogical approach. Understanding Nova Scotia's definition of the approach helped me to interpret their insight. The methodology for this research has been explained in detail in Chapter 3.

In exploration of my participants' experiences, I share my findings in three distinct ways. First, I present the participants' responses from both the questionnaires and the focus group, based around the questions asked. Second, I will present the data in relation to the preset codes. After familiarising myself with the data, I sorted the data based on the coding system (see section 4.4). As noted in Chapters 2 and 3, the initial codes corresponded to Loreman's (2007) Seven Pillars of Support for Inclusive Education. This framework was chosen as the underpinning for understanding and sorting the data because it provides structure 'for the range of literature and research which already exists in the field, and to promote further analysis and discussion of this area' (Loreman, 2007, p23). In other words, it provided an outline from which I connected the literature, the provincial policy, and the experiences of my participants. Loreman's Seven Pillars are: positive attitude, policy & leadership, school & classroom processes, curriculum & pedagogy, the community, meaningful reflection, and training & resources. After presenting the data relating to these

codes, I will review the data that was sorted under the miscellaneous code. Third, I demonstrate how the data from the codes was sorted into three key themes which is analysed and discussed in Chapter 5: Discussion.

4.2. Participants' responses: Questionnaire

My questionnaire (see Appendix D) consisted of seventeen questions. In order to connect the responses, I decided to consider the data based on groups of questions rather than individual questions, since that was the way in which the questionnaire had been constructed. The first three questions of the questionnaire explored the physical forces shaping a teacher's experiences: years in the profession and location of the school settings. The second group of questions explored understanding of both School Board policy and Provincial Education Policy, particularly in relation to inclusive education. Questions were then asked in relation to the implementation of inclusive education policy and practices, successes and challenges experienced in working with pupils requiring additional support, and tensions between inclusion and standardisation within education.

i. Participant Information

The first group of questions gathered information about each participant. Each was asked to self-identify as either a new teacher (one to five years of teaching) or an early to mid-career teacher (ten to fifteen years of teaching). Out of the twenty-two participants, 41% identified as a new teacher and the remaining 59% identified as an early to mid-career teacher. All participants identified, at the time of the questionnaire, as classroom teachers. However, one teacher identified also as an administrator with teaching duties. Some of the participants acknowledged that they had been in specialist roles earlier in their careers. The participants were teaching and had taught in different locations across the province. The majority of the participants, eight, had spent most of their teaching time in an urban location. Seven participants identified suburban as the main location for gaining experience and seven participants identified rural locations as where they gained most of their experience. The participants were asked to identify the location of their school in regard to social

demographics. The three categories given were: low income, middle income, and high income. Interestingly, the majority of the participants identified as having the majority of their teaching experience in low income areas (13 participants), whereas, only two participants identified as gaining the most experience in high income areas. Seven participants identified middle income areas as their main area for their experiences.

Figure 4.1- New Teachers versus Mid-career Teachers

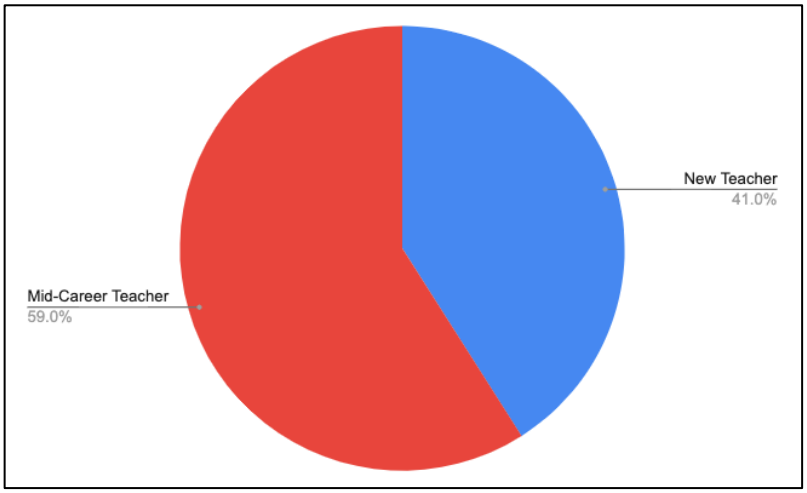


Figure 4.2- Primary Teaching Location

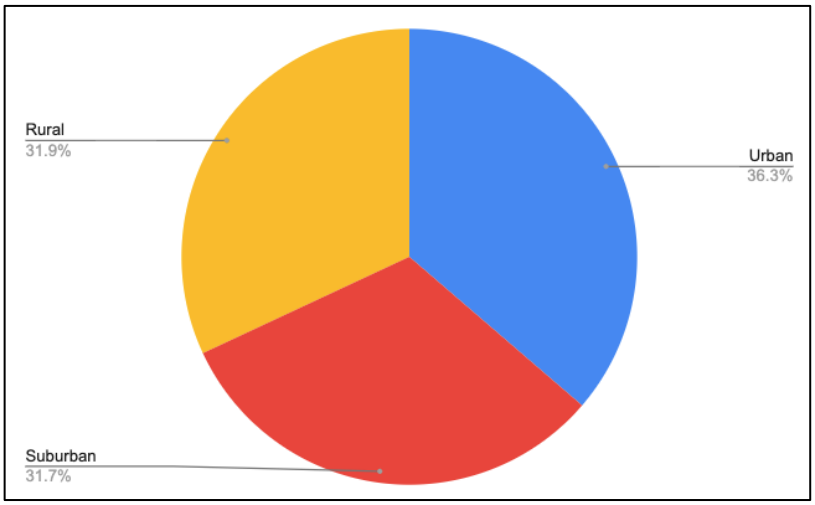
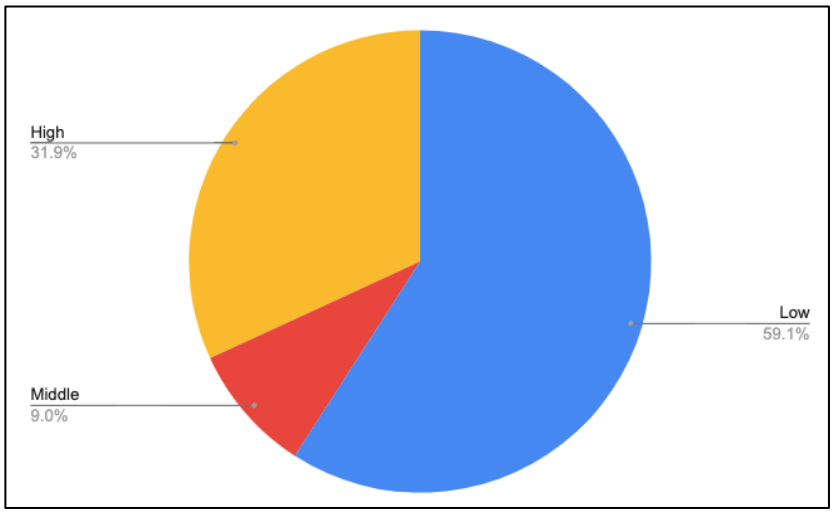


Figure 4.3- Socio-Economic Area of Teaching Location



ii. Understanding of Inclusive Education

The next set of questions was around participants' understanding of inclusive education and the Nova Scotia provincial policy. All participants gave their own personal definition of inclusive education. I consistently noted, in each of the twenty-two definitions, that the words 'all students' were used in the first two sentences of their definitions.

Despite all definitions including reference to all or everyone, some definitions included references to ability, disability, or individual needs. For example:

> *'Inclusion is allowing each student the right to learn within the classroom environment, for as long as that child can be within the classroom.'*

> *'I believe inclusion is allowing all children to learn alongside their age peers-appropriate typically developing peers. Inclusion means providing the appropriate and individually varying supports needed for a student with special needs to be successful in the regular classroom. Inclusion means that each student is valued and an integral member of the classroom community.'*

> *Including all students within the classroom, regardless of ability. Making no allowance for what makes sense of work.'*

> *'Inclusion, to me, means that all students, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities are allowed to enter and learn with their peers in the regular classroom. Additionally, all attempts will be made to support disadvantaged children with an Educational Program Assistant or an*

> *Individual Program Plan or through adaptations of how curriculum is delivered to that child.'*

This last quotation suggests a view of inclusion as integration – of students being *'allowed to enter … the regular classroom'*, fitting into what already exists, with some 'additions' as required. In addition, a sense of conditionality was present in the definition from another participant who said,

> *'Inclusion is allowing each student the right to learn within the classroom environment, for as long as that child can be within the classroom* (my emphasis)' –

suggesting that there are limitations, depending on circumstances, on who might be included, or for how long.

On the other hand, several participants focused their definition more on building classroom community-based on diversity and individuals, including the idea that inclusion involves active membership of the class and school community.

> *'Inclusion, to me, means accepting of all children no matter their needs in an educational setting.'*

> *'Inclusion is making sure all students are in a safe and comfortable place in school.'*

> *'Inclusion means that all students will be involved in the daily routines of the classroom setting.'*

Some participants placed an emphasis on both individual needs and community. For example, *'Inclusion is meeting the needs of all students in the best way possible for each individual'* and *'Inclusion is including all children in the classroom setting to their ability.'*

One participant provided a definition which summarised several key issues – community, individuality and the importance of collaboration.

> *'Inclusion to me is creating a way for all children to feel like a valuable member of a classroom community with their same age peers. It looks different for different students. It is the classroom teacher and the Learning Centre teacher's job to create an environment that supports each students' needs.'*

These definitions thus demonstrated an awareness of the variety of abilities amongst young people, but many participants noted the importance of student membership in both the class and school community. However, some participants did use the terms ‘regular classroom’, ‘special needs’, and ‘typical development’ which suggest a tendency to take an integrative rather than inclusive approach. These, and other issues of defining and understanding inclusion were picked up in the focus group and further data on this is presented in section 4.3 below.

iii. Awareness of Policy

As discussed in earlier chapters, the province of Nova Scotia has a sub-policy outlining their inclusion mandate which is contained within the Nova Scotia Special Education Policy. Though each local school board may interpret the sub-policy differently, there is only one sub-policy for the province. The next grouping of questions inquired about participant familiarity with both the school board and provincial inclusion policies. Interestingly enough, most participants acknowledged familiarity with the school board’s policies on inclusion, yet they seemed to lack confidence in their understanding of the provincial policies surrounding inclusion. However, this confusion can easily be explained by the lack of confidence and familiarity with the policy the participants acknowledged. Almost ten participants identified as being moderately familiar with their understanding of ‘board and the provincial inclusion policies’. A further three participants identified as only being slightly familiar and only one participant said they were not familiar at all. On the other side of understanding, almost twenty per-cent said they were very familiar with the policies and fifteen per-cent identified as being extremely familiar.

When asked to explain their level of familiarity of the sub-policy with an example, some participants mentioned times when they reviewed policy or others with whom they reviewed the policy. Other participants shared insight that was reflective of inconsistency of the policy. Some participants suggested that the policy was related to the student service department and not specifically to their role as a classroom teacher.

Participants who acknowledged that they were either extremely familiar or very familiar all tended to focus on additional training or their professional role as reasons for their confidence. For example:

> *'I have researched different students I have worked with as a classroom teacher, in order to understand and to work with my particular students.'* (extremely familiar)
> *'Professional development, school based expectations, administration, creating IPPs.'* (very familiar)
> *'My administration role requires that I be familiar with all board policies and regularly review these policies in collaborative learning groups.'* (very familiar)
> *'I took inclusion course* {sic} *in university. I am familiar with UDL. I also took the PANPST course when it was offered in my board. I have taken Module 14 or 13 (the one about children with ASD). We have also had multiple PD opportunities within our board that I have chosen to attend.'* (very familiar answer)

However, there was one participant who stated that they were extremely familiar with the provincial policy due to the simplicity of inclusive education as a defined term. This response was of interest as it was the only one in the 'extremely familiar' or 'very familiar' category that did not substantiate their response with training or role.

> *'It is quite simple of a concept* {sic}*. Everyone is included, unless they are truly incapable of handling a classroom situation which I have also seen.'*(extremely familiar)

The next group of responses came from teachers who felt moderately familiar or slightly familiar with the policy. Much like the above section, some answers focused on professional development as the basis for their understanding. However, their responses were less detailed with their extra training than those participants who stated they had a high level of familiarity.

> *'As a Learning Centre teacher, you are inserviced on inclusion policies.'* (moderately familiar)
> *'I have participated in school meetings, PLC's, have worked with school support staff and literacy support.'* (moderately familiar)
> *'The Learning Centre teacher shares the policy with us during programming times.'*
> (slightly familiar)

> Other responses appeared to focus more on the lack of consistency of the policy and the participants appeared to be less confident with their responses.
> *'It changes every year and with every school and with every student. There is no consistency.'* (moderately familiar)
> *'Moderately, because the policies keep changing, as new political parties are voted in. New ideas come into play and teachers are presented with them on a consistent basis.'* (moderately familiar)
> *'While I feel that I am familiar with board policies, I do not feel as confident with provincial policies.'*(moderately familiar)
> *'I am aware that there is a policy and have read it, but could use a refresher on the policy.'* (slightly familiar)
> *'I should be more familiar. I know that the board has policies on inclusion and leaving no child behind but I couldn't go into specifics.'* (slightly familiar)

Only one participant connected their understanding of the policy to responsibilities for and practice in supporting students with learning difficulties. However, they still acknowledged a lack of confidence with their understanding.

> *'I know a bit of information and mainly that student services (a department in the board) helps support programming to help students with difficulty in their learning.'* (slightly familiar)

In exploring the shared explanations of the participants' familiarity level, it appears that there is some confusion around the provincial sub-policy. One participant acknowledged their comfort level with the board policies and not the provincial, when in fact the Centres for Education (formally School Boards) defer all policies to the provincial policy documents. In addition, it appears that some participants feel the policy changes frequently or is inconsistently implemented between government appointments and school implementation. Some participants demonstrated a view that the inclusion policy related to specific departments (Student Service) or specific teachers (Student Service teachers).

iv. Implementation of Inclusive Pedagogy

The next group of questions surrounded the implementation of inclusive pedagogy within the school community. The participants were asked to outline some of the experiences and challenges they have encountered in their professional practice. Most of the participants shared their views on and their experiences with the lack of supports and resources they believe to be necessary in an inclusive classroom. However, many of the participants in the questionnaire shared their experiences of the challenges they have encountered with class composition in inclusive school settings. Due to the variety of abilities in a classroom, many of the participants shared their feelings on lacking the knowledge and understanding to support the variety of student abilities in their classrooms. It was in this grouping that my findings also showed a commonality in how teachers collaborated with one another and many participants noted the importance of increasing collaboration time.

Responses to this group of questions indicated a division in thinking about inclusive education. Unlike in the questions about defining inclusive education, when participants were asked to explore their own views and values relating to their professional practice, they started to identify students based on groups. For example:

> *'Classroom teachers will sometimes rely too heavily on Learning Centre teachers to do the bulk of the programming, when in reality it is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to create and implement inclusive programming.'*
>
> *'I would say my greatest challenge was when I had a student arrive at late registration in August with significant global delays into my grade 1/2 classroom. I felt I was on my own with this student. My LC {student service} teacher had no experience working with a child with this level of delay. I felt I was on my own with this student. As the student did not have ASD, I was unable to access many of the wonderful board resources (personnel and learning materials/toys) that would have been beneficial for this student. I felt there was not enough support at the board level to ensure classroom teachers have the appropriate background knowledge about specific special needs that are in the classroom.'*

The first comment, regarding reliance on student service teachers, was shared by a participant who had past experience in the area of learning centre. It is interesting because the comment indicates not only a division in thinking about students, but also indicates a division in who supports which 'group of students'.

This next comment indicates divisive thinking between students and programming. As well, it indicates that students may not accept and value students with special needs the same way they do mainstream students.

> *'Not enough support staff for the number of students with challenges. Not being able to notice any consequences or change in behaviour from students on special programs, not near enough support from the board in terms of extra staff and consequences. Some students on behaviour plans require much more support than available and some know that there are no to little consequences for their actions. EPA* {educational programme assistant} *support being taken from academic IPPs* {individual programme plans}. *Students not truly accepting other students with different abilities, merely tolerating them.'*

Without further explanation of the comment, it is suggestive that the participant might merely be tolerating students with special needs in the classroom rather than fully accepting their membership. This participant referenced specialised programming frequently in this comment and repeated grouped students as special needs (or something similar). This next comment provides insight into how thinking about inclusion as a means to include others can lead to negative thinking.

> *'The biggest challenge is, in my opinion, that inclusion has not worked. Most students in the 21st century cannot work independently When you add a student with special needs or an LC* {learning centre} *student to the mix, everything becomes complicated.'*

Other participants used this section to explore why inclusive education is challenging to implement. Lack of time to collaborate with others and lack of resources appeared to be a central focus for why the practice is difficult to implement.

> *'Collaborating with other teachers is difficult because of lack of time and busy schedules.'*
> *'Some of the main challenges include available resources for exceptional learners. Rural schools do not have access to some of the funding, and small town schools do not have the resources to aid in student development.'*

Other participants focused on both the challenges of supporting students with special needs compounded with the challenges associated with a lack of resources. For example:

> *'Not enough EPA support. Too many various needs of students in one class. Not enough differentiated resources to properly support students. Not enough time to make differentiated lessons or resources. Not enough*

knowledge about the various needs. Not enough time to meet with other teachers.'

'Each student is an individual and has their own special needs. No student is the same. Therefore, when implementing an inclusive community in your school and classroom many resources are needed. However, not all these resources are available making it difficult at times to provide an inclusive environment.'

'Insufficient student service support {learning centre teachers and EPAs} *to help students. Not enough time to meet with other teachers. Not enough resources or support.'*

Interestingly, only one teacher identified the lack of specialised training for classroom teachers as a challenge for implementing inclusive education.

'Not having the right supports to set up to allow for a fully inclusive system has been the biggest challenge. Regular classroom teachers are expected to have current skills and knowledge with regards to inclusion and dealing with special needs. Most support from district, administrators and the government is needed in order for a truly inclusive system to work.'

This grouping of questions around implementation of inclusive pedagogy highlighted the perceived challenges associated with the participants' practice in an inclusive education system. Many of the participants acknowledged the different streams, mainstream and special education, when explaining their challenges by using terms like 'student service teachers' or 'department', 'special needs', 'diagnosis' references, and, in one case, using the term 'exceptionalities'. Another challenge that was highlighted as a frustration was the lack of training for classroom teachers to support students with special needs. In addition, most participants provided insight into their frustrations about a lack of necessary support provided at the classroom level for inclusive education to be effective. The lack of support includes personnel, training, administrative support, and resources.

v. Successes and Challenges with Learning Opportunities for All Students

The next group of questions looks at the importance of building and maintaining successful learning opportunities for all students in the participants' classrooms. The most common experience shared in this area is the importance of students meeting their own unique outcomes and the importance of all students feeling achievement

among their peers. Many of the participants identified the importance of connecting with all their students. However, some participants identified the challenges with even welcoming some students into their classrooms; whereas other participants believed welcoming all students was a strength of theirs or their school community. A general agreement about success being different for all students was identified in this grouping. Despite this sentiment, many of the responses seemed to identify students into groups of 'meeting' and 'not meeting' grade level expectations. One questionnaire participant indicated *'I make sure they feel welcome, but it has a cost'*. This same participant went on to say it was *'important that they feel welcome'*. Yet, their wording indicated a divide between the mainstream students and students requiring individualisation. They did not explain in more detail what the 'cost' is of including students with special needs in their classroom. It appears, from patterns found in the data, that the cost might be interference with the education and learning of the mainstream students. Interestingly enough, only two of the responses included identifying whole school community approaches as a success of inclusion. One participant indicated *'Caring School Community approach has allowed for my classroom to build a community based on who we are'*.

In describing successful implementation of inclusive education, many participants acknowledged the inclusion of students with special needs in the class environment as being a positive professional experience.

> *'I have felt the most success when I have collaborated with a classroom teacher that is receptive to and experienced in including all students in their classroom.'* (success)

> *'Through inclusion, students with special needs are able to be a part of their classroom and the school community. Students can learn from one another and learning can be successful for all.'* (success)

> *'Seeing growth in children with special needs, the joy of their parents in celebrating their accomplishments.'* (success)

Some participants focused on the building of community as a positive experience with inclusive education. Few of these answers reference community and special needs, but other participants focused on just building communities.

> *'With the use of Restorative Approaches in class we have been able to create a safe learning environment through building relationships with students. This has created an open space for students to learn about each, find common interests and collaborate together.'* (success)

> *'I feel that I have been successful in creating a classroom climate that allows for all students to be valued members of the classroom. I feel that the way I treat and respond to a student leads other students in the class to respond in a similar manner. Over my years of teaching, I have always tried to include students with special needs in different activities.'* (success)

One response referenced success as the availability of resources, additional staff, and accommodations for students with special needs.

> *'There have been successes in the implementation of the programs because of Education Assistant support, Resource team meetings, and student interventions. Students with special needs and students on a specialized* {sic} *learning plan may be more adept with technology, rather than writing assignments in English. Provincial assessments are now being done in the computer lab instead of the classroom. Not everyone is included in these assessments though.'* (success)

When describing negative experiences, many of the responses highlighted behavioural challenges and/or a medical diagnosis as challenges affecting successful inclusive education. In the last comment, the participant used medical terminology and the work concern to describe negative experiences with inclusive education in regards to adequate support.

> *'The challenges are disruptive behaviours, elevated noise levels, too many special needs for one teacher (even with an EPA) to address.'* (challenge)

> *'If a student has FAS, DS, CP, Q10, or any of the any other concerns, teachers are left to solve things at the school site (unless there is a significant behaviour involved).'* (challenge)

Some participants responded that the lack of supports and resources created challenges with implementing inclusive learning opportunities.

> *'Insufficient support for classroom teachers. Teachers are not trained to meet the needs of every student. Insufficient EPA support. Physical limitations of classroom space.'* (challenge)

> *'I think everyone in my school is trying to head in this direction of helping students with special needs as much as possible, but it is hard. Without support, it just does always happen.'* (challenge)

One response highlighted a lack of empathy in mainstream students for accepting students with special needs into the classroom.

> *'The main challenge I have seen to occur incorporating inclusion students is the attitude students have towards students with different learning needs. Many students have been open and engaging within the class setting with all peers, however, some have been closed and unwilling to support other students in a community sense. Students with special needs just don't get included.'* (challenge)

In these groupings of questions, many of the experiences that were shared, both successes and challenges, continue to focus on the inclusion of students with special needs into the classroom or the challenges created by including students with special needs. Some participants highlighted the challenges created by not having the resources or supports to be effective in the classroom. Whereas, some participants felt the benefit of creating learning communities that included all students. However, one participant acknowledged that these diverse communities are not always valued by other students.

vi. Inclusive Education versus Standardisation

The last grouping requested the participants to explore their views and understanding of the relationship between inclusive education and standardisation in the school system. All participants indicated that these two practices are separate components to the education system in Nova Scotia. One participant explained this dichotomy in our current system by writing that *'one is saying to include everyone but in many different ways. The other is saying students are all the same so let's test them that way.'* The participants identified the strain between having an inclusive education system in Nova Scotia that is driven by standards and 'one-size-fits-all'.
It was also in this last grouping that the participants explored how their practice and experiences have shaped their working beliefs on the topic of inclusion. Despite the positive outlook when defining inclusive education (as noted in earlier sections), participants appeared to be upfront and honest about their own feelings of their

current experiences. Some of the participants did not answer this final question. However, the participants that did answer used words like *'inclusion is not benefitting anyone', 'inclusion is not working'*, or *'I have not found that it works'*.

The general feeling of participants in responding to this group of questions is that maintaining a set of standards or grade level benchmarks are contradictory to the principles of inclusion and, often, create challenges.

> *'Standardization, in my opinion, is sometimes not on the radar. Depending on the severity of the students' needs, standardization is useless. It is separate from inclusion.'*

> *'This is a difficult question. For many students with appropriate supports they will be able to meet the standards set forth by the curriculum or standardized tests. However, it gets muddy when you are dealing with students who are unable to obtain a certain level of academic standard due to cognitive challenges.'*

> *'Not a fan of standardization beyond the very strict use of benchmarks; which could be used for information purposes only, in conjunction with many other diverse forms of data. Inclusion in its purest form recognizes all learners as individuals.'*

> *'Unfortunately, they are not separate. Inclusion does not work with standards. It is not working'.*

Other responses identified that inclusive education does not work in the school system. Most of these responses did not respond to the standardisation aspect of the question grouping.

> *'Personally, I think that inclusion is not benefitting anyone. The disruptions affect the learning of the classroom students; the in-out/random schedule of the LC, the behaviour of the LC students, the noises such as the program assistants talking to the LC students are very distracting to the teacher and other students. Often the student with special needs is not able to participate in discussions or exploration of the grade level content. As a result, their time is being wasted. They are physically present, but their learning needs could be better addressed in the LC. Their learning needs are not the same as the learning needs of the other students. It's an impossible situation for teachers.'*

> *'In my years of teaching, I have not found that inclusion works. The students deserve better than what the board is providing them with. No one teacher, even working with LC staff, can effectively support students on an*

LC caseload. The expertise is not there, nor should it be. There used to be organizations that had specialists, trained personnel that's sole purpose was to help their students grow. Not run in 25 different directions each and every day. We are doing a disservice to many children expecting teachers to be able to do so in our present school system.'

Some participants focused on the disruption caused by students with special needs in the classroom.

'The number one challenge I have experienced is classroom teachers who feel overwhelmed with the children in their classes and then feel the pressure of planning for children with additional needs.'
'The disruptions affect the learning of the classroom students.'

These next two responses explored inclusive education as it could be if stakeholders adjusted or broadened their thinking about how inclusive education could be implemented. However, both responses focus on the inclusion of students with special needs into the mainstream school system.

'In my opinion, in order for inclusion to work many teachers need to totally shift their way of thinking about education. All students come to you with varying learning needs and it is our responsibility to move each child forward, regardless of their abilities, whether that be dealing with non-verbal needs or enriching a unique math mind. More support is required for classroom teachers when dealing with the highest needs as we are not experts in exceptional learners.'

'It is my opinion that inclusion can work; however, I don't believe that all students should be automatically placed into the classroom if their needs are severe enough to disrupt the rest of the students in the class. I believe that each special needs student should be assessed by the teaching professionals and a plan of inclusion should come from their {sic}. Maybe that means the student can participate all the time, some of the time, or none of the time. I also believe the teaching of students with special needs should not be the responsibility of the classroom teacher. Collaboration is important, but learning centre teachers are trained for special needs.'

Again, much like the other groupings of questions, the insights shared by the participants highlight the challenges of including students with special needs and disruptive behaviour. Many participants expressed an understanding that standardisation and inclusion are two separate practices and most participants felt negatively towards standardisation. A smaller challenge identified by participants was the lack of resources to support teaching in inclusive settings. However, in sharing

further insight about their experiences with inclusive education most participants expressed frustration with trying to support students with special needs in their classroom.

4.3- Participants' responses: Focus Group

The focus group was made up of five all female educators who self-identified as elementary school teachers. The focus group was held in the largest city in Nova Scotia. A second focus group would have been hosted in a different region. However, I was unable to get any participants to commit in other areas. All participants self-identified as having some suburban and urban experience. All participants seemed to view inclusion in a positive fashion, and they all appeared to present concerns and thoughts in a proactive way. The focus group participants consisted equally of early career and mid-career teachers.

In applying for ethics approval, I submitted general themes I thought that I would want to cover in the focus group. These themes were extensions of the questionnaire questions. After reviewing my responses to the questionnaires, I was able to generate more focused questions to explore in the focus group. For example, one grouping of questions on the questionnaire corresponds with participant understanding of inclusive education and the Nova Scotia provincial policy. Questionnaire responses identified participants' lack of confidence in understanding the inclusion policy, lack of attention to the policy, and inconsistency in implementing the policy as areas of concern for many of the participants. From these identified concerns, I wanted to learn more through exploration of why participants identified these issues as being problematic. Participants in the focus group explored the strengths and challenges of inclusive education, how their classroom practice supports all student learning (in and out of the classroom), the impact of training on teaching inclusively, and exploring the meaning of education. However, asking participants to think in more depth about their relationship with their practice in an inclusive classroom, led to the exploration of how the participants not only interact with an inclusive approach to education, but what an inclusive approach might be and what that actually might look like for them. From that thought, I derived such questions as: is inclusive education a component of

the education system or is it the driving force of education, what is the connection between inclusion and standardisation in education, how do we measure success in an inclusive system and what are the benefits for students in an inclusive system. From the questionnaire responses, I noted that many of the participants had differences in understanding and confidence levels amongst theory, school board/provincial policy and practice. When creating questions for the focus group, I believed it to be important to explore some of the reasons that may be causing these perceived differences.

i. Understanding of Inclusive Education

The focus group discussion started off by exploring the overarching concept of inclusion. The participants shared what they believed inclusion to be and why. A lot of the conversation focused on education as a human right *'because everybody should have the opportunity to experience learning in a group setting'* (P1). All participants reiterated that inclusion was a concept that allowed all students to receive an education because it is *'a right that every person has'* (P2). However, all participants agree that mainstream education was not appropriate for every individual child, and inclusion allowed for individualisation for *'every child that you would sort of coin under inclusion comes with their own challenges and strengths'* (P3). Inclusion allows us to *'step away from what is the mainstream curriculum or what the standards are and just realise that every child has the right to just be in a group'* (P3).

As with the first question, the second question generated a common theme among the participants. When asked if they believed their practice was supporting a strong foundation for the future for all students to transition from school to beyond, the participants acknowledged the lack of resources and supports presented a large obstacle to fully realising an inclusive system. *'I feel like there is not enough support to say that we are laying a good foundation'* (P1). In describing their perspective on the current inclusive system, one participant said, *'they just want everyone to have the same and it to be a well-oiled machine, but it doesn't work like that'* (P3). *'Until everybody really understands that it is about taking a child from where they are to where they need to go, it is not going to successfully happen'* (P3). One participant

said that inclusion is *'not being practised'* (P3) in Nova Scotia. Another participant said in agreement that *'it is being poorly executed'* (P2). This same participant said everyone was trying, but *'it is survival'*. A third participant said, *'there is a point where you are just like I can't do this anymore'* (P1). Much like the final question of the questionnaire, this question appeared to allow for candid responses from the participants. Rather than exploring the concept or their training history, the teachers explored what they felt and what they believed based on their own experience. One participant said inclusion was *'such a beautiful idea and when you are actually start looking* {sic} *at the nitty gritty of what it requires to provide an inclusive environment is just, it is nearly impossible'* (P2). This comment sums up a common sentiment found in my research that inclusion is the right thing to do, but it is not as positive in its execution.

Some participants highlighted that education is a human right and that all students are entitled to receiving an education as their reasoning for using an inclusive approach to teaching.

> *'I think it is a human right that everybody is allowed to learn at their own level and their own ability, but I also think kids who need inclusion benefit.'* (P2)

> *'Receiving an education is a right that every person has - to receive an education. Some kids have mainstream education and others get something individual.'* (P3)

One participant said that inclusive education is of benefit to students with significant special needs.

> *'I do think the kids who are benefitting from inclusion are the children who have very very specific needs.'* (P1)

The general consensus from this group of questions is that, despite being a human right or entitlement for all students, inclusive education, from their perspective, is an approach that focuses on the inclusion of students with special needs. However, questions were raised around the effectiveness of inclusive education in Nova Scotia and the benefit of this approach.

ii. Teaching in an Inclusive Setting

An interesting point that came up through the exploration of being a classroom teaching in an inclusive system in regards to the educational programme assistants supporting an inclusive system when *'our front-line workers do not even have any education on how to support children'* (P3). This point led to discussion surrounding the participants sharing their feelings on teaching in today's classrooms. One teacher said, *'I feel like a fish out of water'* (P3) and another one said *'no, absolutely not'* (P2) when asked if they felt prepared and trained for their practice. Another participant said, in relation to professional development, that unlike where she grew up and was trained, she finds it *'hard to access those speakers (top leaders)'* (P1) in her current work location. One participant said when there are workshops or new initiatives, they need to have follow up support by the leaders to ensure successful and consistent implementation. Another participant said that often when the specialists attend new training *'the message does not get to us'* (P3) on the frontlines.

The comments on not feeling prepared led to the idea that inclusion is becoming a formula in the school system as a *'quick fix'* to challenges that present. One participant felt that in setting up structures or programming for students, this one-size-fits-all approach was applied for ease by specialists coming in from a centralised office and then leaving it with the teachers. Another participant felt that central office staff don't know the students and were just giving these plans because they worked for someone. Similarly, another participant said that they were *'wasting time and energy'* (P4) because they do not actually know the students and they need *'due diligence'* in ensuring appropriate strategies. They all agreed that despite how the creation of support plans, without the support in the classroom *'it just goes off the rails because it is impossible'* (P3). One participant said that you *'really need a second person for the data and a second pair of eyes'* (P2) to ensure individualised programs were being implemented in their classroom setting. Another participant agreed with this comment, however, extended it by saying that you need staff consistency in implementing the plans. Having different staff coming in and out of a classroom *'corrupts the plan because no two people run things the same way'* (P2).

A participant said *'I feel like the kids who benefit from inclusion are the kids who don't have inclusion policies put in place for them. So, I feel like it is all of the normal kids in class who learn coping strategies from experience working with children who have challenges'* (P2). A second participant backed up this point by giving an example of her daughter being bitten by a non-verbal child at day-care. This situation led the participant to have a conversation with her child about the situation. She went on to say that *'I feel like it is the kids who don't necessarily fit under the umbrella of needs'* (P3) who benefit from inclusion. A third participant stated that, in their opinion, until all the social challenges (poverty, poor parenting, abuse) can be dealt with that *'the kids who fit under the umbrella of inclusion'* (P1) will continue to display behavioural challenges. In other words, participants were using language and insight that demonstrated a different understanding of inclusive education from that which they initially stated. It appears that some participants were expressing that inclusive education is in reference to 'special needs' students rather than a term that is inclusive of all students.

Despite all acknowledging the importance in debriefing the challenging situations that arise, all said there is not time in the day to step away and reflect on the situation. Two participants admitted to not wanting to stick around at the end of the day, just wanting to *'burn out of there and forget about it'* (P2). Another participant felt that they were *'not paid enough to hang out'* (P4) and discuss challenging situations. *'What can you expect when it's minimum wage and you are working with some of the most challenging students'* (P2). I assume this last comment is about discussion with the educational program assistants due to the minimum wage comment, but I am not certain.

An interesting discussion arose about families potentially being isolated from being a part of the school community because of work, finances, child-care, and transportation. Due to this isolation, families are not talking to each other about raising children and this was perceived as having led to schools and education as the places which are relied on by parents to teach all socialisation skills and problem-solving skills (in regards to life). *'I feel like schools are constantly trying to combat*

that community piece' and that *'there is a disconnect'* because they want you (the school) to teach all these life skills, but not *'discipline my child'*. One participant supported this comment by saying *'I feel like they are now trying to be friends with their children versus having high expectations for them'*. According to the participants in this study, this shift in community structures has created challenges in the schools as parents want schools to teach their children skills outside of those traditionally taught at school without the support and consistency at home.

Other areas of concern for participants in this study was the lack of resources and support provided to teachers.

> *'I actually think that it would not necessarily be as big of an issue if our school board programming was more heavily supported. So having three behaviour specialists for one hundred thirty-six schools is absurd. If we had, you know, an in-house with three elementary schools sharing a school psychologist, behaviour specialist, you know, a program specialist, then perhaps we would actually be able to learn by doing with somebody who is trained to teach us.'* (P3)

> *'You need a second person, and you do need the second person for the data and a second pair of eyes and all of that, but a lot of the plans that are created for teachers, you need that second person as manpower to be constantly reinforcing and to be constantly double checking, and you know, because as a teacher with twenty-seven in the room, you need the second person to be safe.'* (P1)

Another concern raised was the allocation of resources to additional 'fad' areas, like coding, rather than focusing on development of more important areas, like student well-being. However, I acknowledge that some of these 'fad' areas (like coding and mindfulness) provide benefit and can be motivational to some students.

> *'They want to bring in technology coaches to help kids code and make robots. Yet, we have an epic problem of kids having tantrums and physical aggressions that we aren't dealing with.'* (P2)

Other responses highlighted the fragmented thinking of teaching students with special needs alongside mainstream students. When discussing their experiences, most of the focus group participants shared views which divided students into groups.

> *'When you have children who have special needs or are very unique to a standardised classroom, that creates even more complexities because when you are trying to have equitable experiences for this one child and everyone else can roughly function on a fair-based format, then the kids start to see the difference. So, when it's a competition of fair and equity, it creates a war.'* (P3)

Not only did this section provide insight into some of the frustrations and challenges teachers experience, but it emphasised a perceived division between student groups. A general frustration raised by many of the participants was the lack of support staff and the role of schools teaching skills historically taught at home. However, a lot of the language used in the responses spoke to differences between students as areas of tension.

iii. Education as an Inclusive System of Inclusive Education as part of Education

The next area of discussion involved looking at the notion of education as an inclusive system or inclusive education as a subset of education. All participants stated that they had not thought about it and did not think other teachers could 'pinpoint' whether inclusion is the overriding theme of education or a component of education. One comment made was *'I don't think that the average teacher thinks about that to be honest'* (P3). A follow-up point to this was *'I don't know that the average teacher, I just don't think that a lot of teachers could sit there and say this is why it's not working. I don't know that the average teacher understands inclusion. I don't truly understand what inclusion is supposed to look like, so I just do what I can to get by'* (P3). This comment reflects an earlier comment that *'that we are going to be like the hamster'* (P2) because we are just trying to get by and maintain students. One participant said the math curriculum helped to support teaching all students in an inclusive setting because *'it's creating more opportunities for students to show their learning from just paper and pencil'* (P3). However, she did go on to say, *'I don't think it is reducing the IPPs because if a student has a cognitive disability they are not going to fit under a standardised format'*. Another participant went on to say that *'IPPs were created as sort of a bridge because you don't have to assess them. Like, if they are in a social setting, if the activity isn't part of their IPP, you just include them and let them be part of the social piece'* (P2). It was noted by a

participant that the students on IPPs are not included in any of the data from provincial assessments. *'It is not encouraged but if they are on adaptations, they could still participate but they have to have someone read it to them or someone scribe for them so they can participate'* (P2). This comment about students on adaptations to the curriculum (not as altering as an IPP) led to a participant saying that '*there is usually a huge portion for adaptations before those assessments*' (P1). When I asked the participants if this type of practice was keeping inclusion as a subset of education, rather than the overriding theme, all participants agreed that it further divided the students with challenges from the majority of the students. *'I believe it comes down to public knowledge and public opinion when you look at the emphasis on standardised practices. It is the only way for the public to see 'how well the student population is doing'* (P3). One participant said if you separate inclusion from the main theme of education then *'exclusion of individuals who don't fit into your little box is acceptable'* (P4).

Similar to their responses to the previous group of questions, responses to this group continued to highlight teachers' thinking about inclusive education as being additional to classroom or mainstream teaching.

> *'We integrated all these kids into the public school system, into the regular classroom, but they're expected to change to fit the room, versus the education system to fit them.'* (P2)

> *'It makes them feel good knowing that they are at least included in that, whereas, when it is standardised test time, they come to the learning centre to, you know, do whatever floats their boat just while their peers write the test.'* (P3)

Interestingly, this participant referred to inclusion as setting where some skills can be taught.

> *'Inclusion is not the best setting to teach academic skills for children with challenges. It is the best setting to teach social skills, especially for children with behaviour challenges.'* (P3)

A general feeling that arose from this section is the additional challenges incorporated into the classroom from teaching students with special needs and/or challenging behaviours. A second feeling that was evident in this section is that

inclusive education happens when all students are in the classroom opposed to when they are pulled-out for additional support elsewhere in the building although some participants acknowledged that they didn't know what inclusion was supposed to look like as a pedagogical approach. This was supported by comments about placement, programming differences, and a focus on labelling some students.

The focus group was an interesting opportunity to dig deeper into the experiences of the participants. Despite the dialogue remaining respectful, there was one participant in particular who kept her comments quite positive and focused on the questions, unlike some of the other participants who required frequent prompts to refocus on the discussion. Along with the findings from the questionnaire, the shared and explored experiences from the focus group will be further discussed in the next section of this paper. Moving forward into the latter part of this section, I sort the data into the preset codes. The responses from the questionnaires and the focus group are brought together under the appropriate code for that piece of data.

4.4- The Codes

Having examined my data as presented above, I sorted and analysed it by coding it based on preset codes. Boyatzis (1998) reminds us that using codes based on current trends allows for a richness to be found in the data. In other words, using key and common phrases is a good starting point for analysing the data. As explained in Chapter 3, I coded the data according to the Seven Pillars of Support for Inclusive Education, adding an additional code, miscellaneous, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). By doing this, I was able to house interesting responses that did not initially appear to fall under one of defined codes, but on which I wanted to draw for future meaning.

In order to deepen my understanding of the participants' experiences with inclusive education, the coding was a necessary step in creating themes (Nowell et al, 2017) from which meaning and significance can be interpreted. In this section, I present my data in relation to the codes and demonstrate how the codes were shaped into groupings, based on similarities between the participants' experiences and their

understanding in order to give meaning to the recurring experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These groupings highlight some of the common themes woven throughout the patchwork of codes. The codes act as a way to sort the participants' experiences into clear and concise groupings (Kimori, 2017). Later, I explore the codes for commonalities and emerging themes in order to deepen my understanding through a more rigorous analysis. When I started coding, as with all sections of the TA, it was important to return to the research aim (Atride-Stirling, 2001; Saldaña, 2013) to ensure the data is linked to the question. Using Loreman's (2007) Seven Pillars helped structure the analysis around a framework that to my research aim.

My research aimed to explore elementary school teachers' perceptions of inclusive education through exploration of their experiences and insight. The Seven Pillars act as a context for effective inclusive education (Loreman, 2007). They connect how an organisation conceptualises the approach to classroom practices, strategies, and procedures (2007). In other words, it is a framework from which I explored teachers' perceptions to deepen my understanding of whether or not the conditions are right for effective inclusive education in Nova Scotia.

I started the second phase of the TA by labelling and defining the codes used for sorting. It is important for the codes used to be clear, concise and easy to define (Komori, 2017). By using Loreman's Seven Pillars of support, the codes are clearly defined and hold academic meaning in inclusive education literature. Further into this section I explore each pillar in more depth and connect the data to the pillars.

Table 4.1- Definitions of the Seven Pillars of Support for Inclusive Education as Codes plus the Miscellaneous code.

Positive Attitude (pa)	The development of positive attitudes is central to the success of developing a 'culture of inclusion'. Loreman (2007) reminds us that a number of researchers have found that teachers' daily practice is shaped by their attitudes (p24).

Policy Leadership (pl)	From international agreements to more local policies (see Chapter 2), inclusive education is supported by the governing bodies. However, there continues to be a disconnect between the 'intent of the policy, and the willingness of local educators to comply with the intent and 'spirit' of the requirements' (p25).
School & Classroom Processes (scp)	Inclusive education is a collaborative approach that requires dedication from the entire school community (p26). Schools need to consider the school community when creating organisational structures within the school.
Curriculum & Pedagogy (cp)	Often curriculum is connected to a specific grade & age group and is viewed as inflexible (p28). This type of thinking can lead to teachers & administrators focusing on teaching outcomes rather than teaching students.
The Community (tc)	Loreman (2007) presents an argument that schools have become disconnected from the community (p30). In words, community organisations & schools and parents & schools should strengthen their connections to create a more cohesive system for students.
Meaningful Reflection (mr)	Meaningful reflection is an important part of all educators' practices. It supports development and depth in understanding. However, in an inclusive approach to education reflection is critical in promotion of inclusive practices by all.
Training & Resources (tr)	Many teachers feel ill-prepared to meet the demands of an inclusive classroom (p33). Inclusive education needs to be supported and appropriate resources are necessary to the success of the approach.
Miscellaneous (mis)	Anything that does not match one of the previous codes and appeared to be of significance.

When sorting the data into the different codes (above), I looked at two different criteria of the data: does it match Loreman's notion? or does it present an opposing view? In the chart below, I outline the criteria for data being sorted into the specific categories.

Table 4.2- Parameters for each of the eight codes

code	matches	opposes

pa	• Does the data reflect a positive attitude to the concept of inclusion? • Is the comment positive?	• Does the data reflect a negative or indifferent attitude to the concept of inclusion? • Is the comment negative?
pl	• Is the data suggesting understanding of and sense of clarity with policy? • Does the participant have a positive experience with policy implementation?	• Is the data suggesting a lack of understanding of or sense of clarity with policy? • Does the participant have a negative experience with policy implementation?
scp	• Is the participant supportive of the school's approach and/or the provincial approach to inclusive education? • The participant shares insight about collaborative practices.	• Is the participant indifferent to the school's approach and/or the provincial approach to inclusive education? • Does the participant reflect a negative attitude towards the school's approach and/or provincial approach? • The participant shares insight about wanting more collaboration.
cp	• The participant shares insight into accessibility of curriculum. • The participant shares insight that reflects a supportive approach to teaching.	• The participant views the curriculum or grade level as age specific. • The participant shares insight that reflects meeting or not meeting the curriculum outcomes. • The participant discusses individualisation.
tc	• The participant discusses the need or the desire for community connections.	• The participant discusses connections to outside supports/services. • The participant discusses relationship building.
mr	• The participant expresses the desire or need for more collective or individual reflection on the current practices.	• Insight or experience is shared about personal, professional, or collective reflection.

tr	• The participant outlines training and education that feels adequate. • The participant expresses that their school or their classroom has enough resources. • The participant expresses that they use their own funding to outfit their classroom or school.	• The participant expresses a lack of confidence in their skills. • The participant expresses that they feel under prepared for their current teaching practices. • The participant expresses a need for more training. • The participant expresses a need for more resources.
mis	• Anything that does not fit into any of the codes above but seems to be of interest.	

Into the next section, I sort the data into the different codes based on the criteria set in this section and present some of the data from both the questionnaires (see appendix D) and the focus group (see appendix F) under these headings.

4.5- Coding the Data

I begin by sharing examples of the coded data. I then move towards the creation of themes arising from these initial codes.

(a) Positive Attitude (pa)

Research shows that attitudes, whether positive or negative, affect the day-to-day professional decisions made by teachers (Blazar & Kraft, 2017). Loreman (2007) explains that positive attitudes are necessary for the success of effective inclusive education, whereas, negative attitudes can lead to challenges with implementing and supporting effective inclusive education. Some participants outlined successful experiences with inclusive education in regards to building learning communities. Statements which were included within the positive side of this coding included:

> *'I have felt the most successful when I have collaborated with a classroom teacher that is receptive to and experienced in including all students in their classroom.' (Questionnaire Participant {QP})*

> *'With the use of Restorative Approaches in class we have been able to create a safe learning environment through building relationships with*

> *students. This has created an open space for students to learn about each, find common interests and collaborate together.'* (P2)

All participants expressed a positive attitude when describing their definition of inclusive education.

> *'Inclusion, to me, means accepting of all children no matter their needs in an educational setting.'*(QP)

> *'Inclusion is making sure all students are in a safe and comfortable place in school.' (QP)*

> *'Inclusion means that all students will be involved in the daily routines of the classroom setting.'* (QP)

> *'Everyone feels included, their thoughts and ideas are valued and they are welcome.'* (QP)

On the other hand, a number of statements were included in the negative side of this coding. When the participants were asked to explore their experiences teaching or provide insight into their professional practice, the attitudes often turned towards a negative perspective of inclusive education. For example, many participants acknowledged a lack of motivation in teachers, affecting the success of inclusive education.

> *'Teachers are not motivated.'* (Focus Group Participant {FGP})

> *'I think lack of the {sic} motivation for a teacher to get to know their learner is too.'* (FGP)

Some participants suggested that a lack of support and a lack of resources affected their views on the effectiveness of their practice in an inclusive system.

> *'I think teacher collaboration is also important because sometimes we feel isolated in this job.'* (QP)

> *'Lack of support from the office.'* (QP)

> *'I think everyone in my school is trying to head in this direction of helping students with special needs as much as possible, but it is hard. Without support, it just does always happen.'* (QP)

> *'Not being able to notice any consequences or change in behaviour from students on special programs, not near* {sic} *enough support from the board in terms of extra staff and consequences.'* (QP)

Another common frustration shared affecting perceptions is the feeling of not understanding or being ill-prepared to teach in an inclusive system.

> *'It changes every year with every school and with every student. There is no consistency.'* (QP)
>
> *'I don't truly understand what inclusion is supposed to look like.'* (FGP)
>
> *'It's like here's the PD, 500 people in one room, off you go.'* (FGP)
>
> *'There needs to be much more education on what inclusion should look like. I think for some teachers it is a matter of not knowing what to do or how to do it.'* (QP)
>
> *'Inclusion is not working in our system now, partly because it is not understood and the expectations are not clear.'* (FGP)

Lastly, participants highlighted how disruptions from students with special needs affect the success of learning for mainstream students, leading to a negative attitude to inclusion.

> *'The disruptions affect the learning of the classroom students.'* (QP)
> *'I feel like the kids who benefit from inclusion are the kids who don't have inclusion policies put in place for them. So, I feel like it is all of the normal kids in the class who learn coping strategies from experiencing working with children who have challenges.'* (FGP)

It appears that the participants maintain positive attitudes towards inclusive education as a conceptualisation. The inclusion of all students is important in building strong communities. However, a general feeling of frustration is implicated when the participants discussed their day-to-day practices. They referenced feelings of being ill-prepared, lacking support, lacking resources, and the disruptions from students with special needs as barriers to effective implementation.

code: Policy Leadership (pl)

An important aspect of building an effective inclusive education system is strong leadership (Billingsly et al, 2018). Leadership is broken down into different levels in regards to school systems. The government level sets the policy. The jurisdictional level interprets the policies and then institutes structures and procedures for implementation. At the school level, the administration is tasked with ensuring

classroom teachers implement teaching strategies that reflect how they interpreted the jurisdiction's interpretation. This code was used to identify data that referenced experiences with the policies, professional development, and policy implementation.

Earlier data presented on pages 94-96 demonstrated participants' sense of familiarity or expertise with policies. This code focuses on how participants viewed the relationship between leadership and policy.

Some of the responses identified not understanding inclusion or the policies as challenges with school and justification leadership. Many participants stated that they did not feel that leadership was strong in preparing them for understanding and implementing inclusive education.

> *'Inclusion is not working in our system now, partly because it is not understood and the expectations are not clear.'* (FGP)

> *'I think for some teachers it is a matter of not knowing what to do or how to do it.'* (QP)
> *'There needs to be much more education on what inclusion should look like.'* (QP)

> *'Educators are not trained to deal with the crop of cases we are seeing now. It really is like a governmental thing where medicine and justice and education need to start working together.'* (FGP)

Another challenge that arose from sorting data under the code pl is the lack of support provided from both the school and central office leadership.

> *'Not being able to notice any consequences or change in behaviour from students on special programs, not near* {sic} *enough.'* (QP)
> *'Lack of support from the office.'* (QP)

> *'I don't feel that they are reviewed at all. I feel it is left up to the learning centre teacher to review them with staff and remind them of their obligations around inclusion.'* (QP)

Other participants noted that leadership seemed to lack clarity and consistency with the policy. Both frequent changing of policy implementation and unreasonable expectations were raised as areas of concern.

> *'Including all students within the classroom, regardless of ability. Making no allowance for what makes sense or works.'* (QP)

> *'It changes every year with every school and with every student. There is no consistency.'* (QP)

The general notion presented in the data is frustration around policy support from school-based administrators and administrators working at the jurisdictional and governmental level.

code: School & Classroom Processes (scp)

Inclusive education is most effective when the entire school community or the entire school justification is committed to the approach (Loreman, 2007). In other words, it takes a collaborative approach for inclusive education to be successful. This code looked for insight shared that reflected desire for collaborative practices or experiences outlining collaboration. In addition, data that gave an insight into the participants' perceptions on their schools' approach to inclusive education were recorded under this code.

Most participants noted that increased time for collaboration would be effective for supporting students with special needs in the classroom.

> *'More time needs to be given to classroom teachers and learning centre teachers to collaborate and create programs and schedules that better serve their students with special needs.'* (QP)

> *'I have worked closely with student services, behaviour specialists and have incorporated the use of technology to help students in my class have access to a variety of tools to support their learning.'* (QP)

Some participants shared experiences of success with collaborative efforts between different team members.

> *'The team has worked diligently to have her in the classroom as much as she can be there and interacting with her peers.'* (FGP)

> *'As a team, we strive for all students to be part of the classroom setting.'* (QP)

One participant stated how they felt the student service teachers were ineffective at their role at supporting students and teachers. This next comment indicates a negative division between different teaching roles, rather than a collaborative approach.

> *'LC {learning centre}? I don't know. My experience has been that most LC teachers are teachers who couldn't handle the demands of the classroom. They are out of touch.'* (QP)

Whereas, another participant said that classroom teachers seek out student services teachers too often for support.

> *'Classroom teachers will sometimes rely too heavily on Learning Centre teachers to do the bulk of the programming, when in reality it is the responsibility of the classroom teacher.'* (QP)

Most participants acknowledged the need for more time to collaborate with other teachers and specialists. One participant felt that the student services teachers were not supportive, while a different participant acknowledged that student service teachers did too much of the programming for students with special needs. The coded data often referenced inclusive education and special needs in the same context which connects to the idea that inclusive education is concerned with including students with special needs. The insight of the participants indicates a lack of understanding of the different teaching roles. Not having clarity in job roles and responsibilities can become more evident when inclusive education is being understood differently.

code: Curriculum & Pedagogy (cp)

Jonker, Marz and Voogt (2020) outline the importance of conceptualising a flexible curriculum and pedagogy to support the needs of all students. As Loreman (2007) reminds us, most curriculums are inflexible and linear. The latter is true for the Nova Scotia Public School Programme. Data coded in under cp included insight into accessibility and reduction in barriers. In addition, data relating to individualising, benchmarks, and standards were included in this code.

Some participants highlighted the importance of all students having the opportunity to be together in a learning community.

> *'Including all students within the classroom, regardless of ability. Making no allowance for what makes sense or works.'* (QP)

> *'I feel like it is a human rights piece because everybody should have the opportunity to experience learning in a group setting.'* (FGP)

Other participants shared insight that included how different challenges, like not enough planning time and too many students with special needs, affects the ability to use an inclusive pedagogical approach.

> *'More time needs to be given to classroom teachers and learning centre teachers to collaborate and create programs and schedules that better serve their students with special needs.'* (QP)

> *'Too many various needs of students in one class.'* (QP)

Many participants outlined the challenges with accommodating individual programming or differentiated work in their classrooms.

> *'All attempts will be made to support disadvantaged children with an Educational Program Assistant or an Individual Program Plan or through adaptations of how the curriculum is delivered.'* (FGP)

> *'There's no time to sit and do it* {plan and implement individual programme plans}.' (FGP)

> *'I know, like, with building IPPs or, you know, setting up structure, it is like, well it works here, so let's try it again. I think it is paved with good intentions, but it does not work. It is just not a quick fix.'* (FGP)

> *'I think it is possible, but I think that there has to be a couple things in place. I think that there has to be differentiated instruction.'* (FGP)

One participant acknowledged how difficult it can be to adequately plan and prepare for students with special needs in the mainstream classroom.

> *'You may have read a file on him and you put him into this category in your brain and you can't walk away from that even though you have ten months with them to change that trajectory and a lot of teachers are just burnt out and don't want to do that.'* (FGP)

This code identified increasing collaboration, building community, and class composition as areas affecting effective inclusive education. Class composition appeared to be an additional challenge to teachers when planning for students who did not align with the grade level curriculum.

code: The Community (tc)

Community involvement in schools is well documented (Afridi et al, 2014). Schools should be welcoming the community in the school and schools should be a visible part of the community. In order to sort data under the code tc, I looked for references to include connections with the community and relationship building both inside and outside of the school. Unlike the other codes, this code did not gather a lot of insight from the participants.

Much like under other codes, the participants highlight the need for collaborative efforts.

> *'We also have had a lot of success when maintaining open communication with parents and fostering a team mentality.'* (FGP)

> *'I believe we have a role to play and for me it's about collaboration with all support systems.'* (QP)

> *'I think teacher and community collaboration is also important because sometimes we feel isolated in this job.'* (QP)

> *'It really is like a governmental thing where medicine and justice and education need to start working together.'* (FGP)

Some participants noted the benefit to inclusive education is commitment to community building in the school.

> *'A successful experience is one where everyone feels included, their thoughts and ideas are valued and they are welcome.'* (QP)

> *'I feel that I have been successful in creating a classroom climate that allows for all students to be valued members of the classroom. I feel that the way I treat and respond to a student leads other students in the class to respond in a similar manner. Over my years of teaching, I have always tried to include students with special needs in different activities.'* (QP)

Though there was not a lot of data sorted under this code, it did generate a common sentiment of the importance of building communities and the need for larger scale collaboration.

code: Meaningful Reflection (mr)

Reflection is an integral component of teachers' professional practice. As Loreman (2007) outlines, teachers need to reflect on both their practice and research-based practice if they want to continue to develop their skills. This code, mr, was sorted by boundaries that included references to reflection, development, and professional growth. No participants shared their views about reflecting on or development of new knowledge in the areas of research-based practices. Similar to tc code, very little data was linked to this code.

Generally, participants highlighted collaboration, as in working with other educators or specialists with a common goal, as a necessary component of professional growth.

> *'I have worked closely with student services, behaviour specialists and have incorporated the use of technology to help students in my class have access to a variety of tools to support their learning.'* (QP)

> *'More time needs to be given to classroom teachers and learning centre teachers to collaborate and create programs and schedules that better serve their students with special needs.'* (QP)

> *'Having a coach come in the classroom and assess the group as a whole and offer suggestions based on the needs of that specific dynamic would be wonderful.'* (QP)

This code reiterated the participants' perception on the importance of collaborating with others in order to better support student learning. Again, many of the responses continue to focus on supporting students with special needs through collaborative efforts with the student service department.

code: Training & Resources (tr)

McGhie-Richmond et al (2013) state the importance of adequate training and resources in education, specifically inclusive education. Loreman (2007) found most teachers are open to in-class support in order to better support students in practice.

This code, tr, looks for insight about the participant's experiences with education, professional development, and for references about resources.

Most participants felt inadequately prepared for teaching in an inclusive education system. They identified feelings of being ill-prepared to teach and support students with special needs as a frustration.

> *'There needs to be much more education on what inclusion should look like. I think for some teachers it is a matter of not knowing what to do or how to do it.'* (QP)
>
> *'It's like here's PD, 500 people in one room, off you go.'* (FGP)
>
> *'There needs to be much more education on what inclusion should look like.* (QP)
>
> *'Educators are not trained to deal with the crop of cases we are seeing now. It really is like a governmental thing where medicine and justice and education need to start working together.'* (FGP)
>
> *In response to a question about training, a participant said 'Too many various needs of students in one class.'* (QP)

One participant, who worked half day as a student service teacher and half day as a learning centre teacher, responded that they felt adequately trained because they took a course on inclusive education.

> *'As a Learning Centre teacher I was required by the Board to take a course specifically focused on inclusion.'* (QP)

Another common sentiment in this code was the lack of available resources for supporting students in an inclusive education system.

> *'I have 1 teacher assistant to all with all of these (5 significant needs) needs.'* (FGP)
>
> *'Lack of resources is a barrier to inclusion. I think lack of the {sic} motivation for a teacher to get to know their learner is too.'* (FGP)
>
> *'I actually think that it would not necessarily be as big of an issue if our school board programming was more heavily supported. So, having three behaviour specialists for one hundred thirty-six schools is absurd. If we had, you know, an in-house with three elementary schools sharing a school psychologist, behaviour specialist, you know, a program specialist, then*

> *perhaps we would actually be able to learn by doing with somebody who is trained to teach us.'* (FGP)

This code highlighted the participants' feelings of being ill-prepared to teach in an inclusive school system. The most noted reason for these feelings appeared to be the participants' sense of not being able to support students with special needs. As found in other codes, most participants shared insight that aligned with the notion that inclusion is an approach to include students with special needs or challenging behaviours. This interpretation is important to keep in mind when participants explore the notion of inclusive education because it provides the context for the participants' insight.

code: Miscellaneous (mis)

This last code acted as a holding spot for seemingly unrelated data. My intention was to place snippets of the insight shared that appeared to be significant but did not meet the parameters of the other seven codes. However, most of the data was able to be sorted into the other codes. Rather, this code was used to sort data that appeared to hold specific significance. Much of the data highlighted the notion that inclusive education is concerned with including commonly excluded groups of students was evident in the data.

> *'I feel like the kids who benefit from inclusion are the kids who don't have inclusion policies put in place for them. So, I feel like it is all of the normal kids in the class who learn coping strategies from experiencing working with children who have challenges.'* (FGP)

> *'The kids who fit under the umbrella of inclusion that have mainly behaviour issues or conditions based on inappropriate behaviour.'* (FGP)

The idea of location for students with special needs was not explored in the data collection process, but some participants still brought up the concept of students being pulled out of the classroom for support.

> *'I also believe that a wider spectrum of classroom options for special needs children would be helpful.'* (FGP)

> *'The random schedule of the Learning Centre (LC), the behaviour of LC students, the noises are very distracting. The disruptions affect the learning of the classroom students.'* (QP)

> *'All attempts will be made to support disadvantaged children with an Educational Program Assistant or an Individual Program Plan or through adaptations of how the curriculum is delivered.'* (FGP)

One participant acknowledged they revisited the policy once it had personal meaning in their life.

> *'I have read over the policy as a teacher several years ago and read it again this year as my own child with special needs prepares to enter the school system.'* (QP)

Similar to many of the codes, the data sorted into mis appears to focus heavily on diagnosis or special needs. In this code it was easy to see that participants viewed inclusive education as an approach that includes students with special needs or challenging behaviours. From this notion, the idea of students being different or normal is raised because the focus is on including the students who are different from what is expected. In addition, the concept of inclusion as concerned with location was notable in this code.

Now that I have presented the codes and the sorting of the data, I will present the themes that emerged from the eight codes. Three distinct themes were evident once the codes were explored and reviewed: attitude, support, and discourse.

4.6- From Codes to Themes

In this section, I demonstrate how I explored and established the connections amongst the codes following the collation and connection of the data. As explored above, connections and meaning are made from the initial codes in order to initiate the third step of the TA. In this section I presented the organisation of the codes into themes. In the next chapter, Chapter 5, the meaning and significance of the data is explored through connections to both my research question and to relevant literature.

In order to create themes or patterns within the codes, the codes were sorted into groupings based on similarities and connections (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in the data of each code. Some of the data was sorted under more than one code (see Table 4.3, p130). The themes bring the participants' experiences together to create meaning and

significance for the aim of my research. In other words, I need to ensure that the themes are reflective of the emotions and the experiences of my participants as I started this research as a way to better understand the 'heart and soul' of some of the teachers in the province of Nova, Scotia, Canada.

Table 4.3 below outlines the a priori codes (Loreman's Sevent Pillars of Support) and the points raised that align with the criteria outlined in Table 4.2 necessary for data to be sorted into the different codes. Then I looked for commonalities between the raised points in order to develop broader themes noted in Table 4.4. The first connection I made was between the participants' perceptions of being ill-prepared and lacking motivation professionally and the evidence from the data of these issues affecting the confidence and emotions of the participants. Then, I connected collaboration and community because I believe building a community is a collaborative effort. Lastly, I connected matters that encompassed notions of understanding of inclusive education and matters related to student groupings. I then reviewed the raised points that had not been connected: lack of support and lack of resources. Since collaboration is defined as an action of working with someone to produce something (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1999), which is similar to the purpose of different supports and resources, I opted to sort lack of support and lack of resources together with collaboration and community. From there, I was left with three groupings of raised points from the data: one group referred to attitudes towards inclusive education or the participants' professional practice, the next group referred to collaboration, community, support, & resources, and the last group referred to understanding of and the language of inclusive education. Table 4.4 outlines the three prominent themes found in the data. The three themes were identified by a single word that summed up the meaning of the sorted issues raised. In other words, The Seven Pillars (Loreman, 2007) were connected into three main themes: attitude, support, and discourse by noting distinct commonalities of the points raised under each sorted code.

Table 4.3- Highlighted subject matter raised in each code

Code	Raised Points
Positive Attitude	• community building • all students • lack of motivation • lack of support • ill-prepared
Policy Leadership	• lack of understanding • lack of support • Inconsistency
School/Classroom Procedures	• more collaboration • special needs as inclusive education • difference vs norm
Curriculum and Pedagogy	• community • increase collaboration • class composition • Challenges with individualisation • difference vs norm
The Community	• increase community • increase collaboration
Meaningful Reflection	• more collaboration • including special needs • difference vs norm
Training and Resources	• ill-prepared

	• lack of resources
Miscellaneous	• special needs focus • difference vs norm

Table 4.4- Emergence of Themes

Attitudes towards inclusive education or the participants' professional practice	Collaboration, community, support, & resources	Understanding of and the language of inclusive education
Attitude	Support	Discourse

Thus, out of the participants' data, I identified three recurring themes woven throughout their experiences: attitude, support, and discourse. As noted above, these three themes were identified by connections or shared similarities in the coded data. The attitude theme referenced the participants' insight into visceral feelings surrounding their professional practice and inclusive education as an approach. The next theme, support, included references to building community, collaborative practices, resources and additional supports. The last theme, discourse, was identified by references to inclusive education as an approach, interpretation of meaning, diagnostic language, and references to special needs. The following section explores each of the themes.

4.7- Presentation of Themes

In this section, I explore the three themes (Table 4.4) more closely through the words and experiences of my participants. The connections and patterns between my participants' experiences and their contrasting experiences provide rich insight into the perceptions of elementary school classroom teachers in Nova Scotia's public school system that will connect to my analysis later in this chapter.

Attitude

Teachers' attitude towards inclusive education affects the success of the practice. This section explores the connection between current literature in this area and the collected data. Evidence from previous research suggests attitude and perception greatly affect whether or not a learning environment will provide success for all students (Ewing et al, 2017; Loreman, 2007; Monsen et al, 2014;). Despite all my participants acknowledging that inclusive education is the 'right' thing to do, many of the actual experiences shared seem to suggest a very different sentiment. Four key areas which impacted negatively on teachers' attitudes in relation to inclusion were: low motivation levels in relation to working with pupils requiring additional support, large classes with complex combinations of students, and lack of adequate training as areas that affected their perception of inclusive education.

As noted previously, all of my participants defined inclusive education using wording that included all students. This demonstrates an awareness that inclusive education aims to support each student. However, in sharing their personal experiences of their practice it appeared that their practice is different from how they initially defined it. Comments like *'kids who don't have inclusion policies', 'the kids who fit under the umbrella of inclusion'*, and *'the crop of cases'* were used in both the questionnaire responses and the focus group. This difference in experience between how we define inclusive education and how we practice inclusive education highlights the tensions raised in Chapter 2: Literature Review. Keeping in mind the six different approaches to thinking about inclusive education (Ainscow et al, 2006), a focus group participant summarised the first three poignantly when they said they felt that *'it is all of the normal kids in the class who learn coping strategies from experiencing working with children who have challenges'*. In other words, the mainstream students are including students with 'special needs' into 'their' classes and learning strategies to deal with behaviours that are different from theirs. However, the other, principled conceptualisation of inclusive education is not suggesting that it is about learning to deal with people that are different from you (Efthymiou et al, 2017). Rather, it is about building a community based on valuing difference and developing strength from difference. Many of my participants shared insight and experiences that highlighted

the frustration with teaching students who require significant support, or as referred to in the Nova Scotia school system, students with special needs.

i. Low Motivation

Many participants acknowledged a lack of motivation within themselves and their colleagues when it comes to their professional practice. Teachers' resistance to and lack of motivation to inclusive education is one of the most challenging factors in shaping successful inclusive education systems (Avramadis & Norwich, 2012; Brighton, 2003; McGhie-Richmond et al, 2013). Some participants not only acknowledged that they lack motivation to teach, but that they lack motivation in getting to know some of their students who require additional support. When explaining why they felt challenged by supporting students with 'special needs' and exploring their experience with inclusion education, a focus group participant said, *'I think lack of the* {sic} *motivation for a teacher to get to know their learner.'* Viewing inclusive education as a means of including vulnerable students in the mainstream classroom can create a division between students who are working at the expected grade level and students who require a significant amount of support when working in the classroom with similar age peers (Darling-Hammond et al, 2019).

It can be argued that it is relatively easy to get to know students as learners if they are working at a similar curriculum level and demonstrate similar styles of engagement in the classroom (Darling-Hammond et al, 2019; Davidson et al, 2014). An example of this is when a grade five classroom teacher said, *'I always teach math this way, why should I have to change it for one student?'* This 'one student' she was referencing is a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder who is supported by an educational program assistant and the learning centre. This particular teacher was expressing their frustrations with teaching a lesson to their class. Interestingly, the teacher referenced the class as those who were working at the curriculum grade level and frustration with including a student who required something different than what the grade five mathematics curriculum outlined. The sentiment of including this child in the physical classroom, but not in the lesson, can lead to frustration and ultimately low motivation in thinking universally about lesson planning and delivery (Arthur et al,

2017). A more concerning comment demonstrating frustration with the school system was made in reference to teaching in the context of inclusive education in Nova Scotia by one particular participant, who referred to it as *'survival'*. This same defeatist sentiment was highlighted by a participant stating '(there comes a point where) *I just can't do this anymore'*. Another participant felt *'it is just nearly impossible'* to provide an inclusive system. If teachers are feeling frustrated and negative it is easy to understand why a lack of professional motivation is affecting the school system (Barrett & Schulz, 2006).

ii. Large and Complex Class Sizes

Many education researchers would agree that smaller class sizes have the greatest positive impact on student learning (Bascia & Fredua-Kwarteng, 2008; Filges et al, 2018). Counter to what research indicates, many of my participants noted that class sizes are above twenty-five students. In addition, some of the participants acknowledged that complex class compositions were providing additional stress on the teacher's ability to teach all students which is similar to the findings of Darling-Hammond at al's study (2019). One participant stated that with the support of one educational program assistant, their class had *'five children with significant needs'* out of twenty-five students. Another participant noted that they had twenty-six students, of whom five were working from individual program plans, and they felt like *'holy shit! They're all different! What am I going to do?'*. Feelings of chaos and uncertainty, and a sense of being overwhelmed due to sheer numbers and complexity of needs can lead to a lack of motivation from being overwhelmed (Blatchford et al, 2007; Wadesango & Kurebwa, 2017). Schanzenbach (2014) outlines that class size is important in student success and it is one that can be determined by policy. *'There are so many challenges within a classroom. Students with great challenges require much more support than I can often offer'*. I could not find any literature that discussed the benefit of large classes sizes, especially large class sizes in an inclusive education system. The general feeling of my participants is that class sizes are large with varying levels of complexities (in regards to student support) that frustration levels are high. As Schanzenbach states, this is an area that can be regulated and controlled by policy. One focus group participant noted that they had *'found success*

in working with small, focused groups where I am better able to assess my student's abilities and help them in the way they require' which is similar to a finding from Blatchford et al's (2007) study.

iii. Inadequate Training

Boyle, Topping and Jindal-Snape (2013) found that newly trained teachers tend to have more positive attitudes towards inclusive education then more experienced teachers. Unlike this finding, my participants all expressed positive attitudes towards inclusive education, regardless of years of teaching experience, yet they each shared frustration when it came to their professional practice. Many of my participants stated that feelings of being ill-prepared to teach in diverse settings led to frustration with the school system which is similar to the findings of McGhie-Richmond et al's (2013) research in Alberta, Canada. Aligned with Shaughnessy and Boerst's (2017) study, one participant stated their frustration with their initial teacher education program by indicating that their *'Bachelor of Education does not prepare you for today's classrooms'*. Another participant shared a similar sentiment about professional development opportunities when they indicated that *'professional development opportunities tend to focus on grade level curriculum for classroom strategies for classroom teachers and opportunities to learn more about supporting students with special needs were provided for student service teachers and not classroom teachers'*. Like in the other areas leading to low motivation, it is clear that the division between mainstream students and students with special needs is highlighted through the differences in professional development and other training opportunities for teachers. Like McGie-Richmond et al 's research (2013), most participants in this study indicated that they felt that student service teachers were more adequately trained to support students with special needs, whereas, they were trained to support mainstream students.

Many of my participants acknowledged that they felt let down by the lack of appropriate training opportunities similar to Thompson, Lyons and Timmons's findings (2015). One participant explained the challenges with some of the training being offered by their Centre of Education: *'it's like here is PD, 500 people in one room, off*

you go'. This same participant went on to say that as much as these large-scale professional development opportunities can excite you, they *'don't support you in the long run'*. They believe the lack of support to follow-through with the implementation hindered the impact of the opportunities. There appeared to be a desire by some of my participants to acquire more education or training in how to support students in their classroom. Another participant stated *'I wish I could keep refreshing my education and knowledge. I don't feel competent or confident in my skills.'* Unlike this participant, another participant had attended a training opportunity and felt that *'inclusion goes hand-in-hand with UDL,'* but unfortunately, they could not find training or support on Universal Design for Learning.

Low motivation, large & complex class compositions, and inadequate training all appear to affect the attitude toward inclusive education for my participants. Interestingly, all participants acknowledged that inclusive education is about all students learning. However, in exploring the data through the theme of attitude it appears that many of my participants continue to see students as either mainstream, that is, those students working from their respective grade level curriculum guide, or as students with special needs, those students who are not working from the grade level curriculum guide and/or require significant support. In other words, the teachers participating in my research appear to view inclusive education as an approach to including students with special needs and students with challenging behaviours. Only one participant commented on the global accessibility of inclusive education through a connection to Universal Design for Learning (UDL). However, this same participant explained that they were not trained or provided with support for how a UDL framework would support an inclusive system. Most of the participants demonstrated an approach to education that places emphasis on the diagnosis of a child. When outlining their frustrations or highlighting complexities in their classrooms, most participants would provide a number of students and then list their 'diagnosis' and note whether that student was working from an individual program. Students who presented with a diagnosis and students who are working from an individual program plan seem to have a negative effect on some teachers' attitudes.

Similarly, some of the participants would include how many students in their class that have behaviour plans due to challenging behaviours.

There seemed to be a general emphasis on the impact students with a medical diagnosis and/or challenging behaviours had on the teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Important to note, most participants were in agreement that they did not have adequate training or support from administration (both at the school level and the central office) to feel confident and prepared for teaching students who required something different than what the curriculum guide outlined for specific grades. Through exploration of the collected data, it appeared that the participants' attitudes consistently demonstrated through their actions and their descriptions of their experiences, align with Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's (2006) first two ways to think about inclusive education:

- Inclusion as concerned with special education needs (medial model)
- Inclusion to manage challenging behaviours

Unfortunately, when teachers perceive inclusive education to be an approach to include commonly excluded populations, it highlights the challenges of inclusive education as a result of students' deficits rather than the challenges being a result of the education system (Booth & Dyssegaard, 2008). The most striking examples of this can be noted when multiple participants referenced the students who fall under inclusive education, regular students, medical diagnosis, and referred to students as 'learning centre kids'. One participant went so far as to say *'when you have four of those kids in your class and twenty other kids to teach'* when sharing an example of challenges with teaching in an inclusive setting. The perception that 'inclusive education' is something which is allocated to certain students, students with 'special needs', aligns with Head's (2014) compensatory model of education. In other words, the mainstream school system requires something additional for those students who have 'special needs' or deficits. With the perception that inclusive education is in addition to mainstream teaching, it is understandable that classroom teachers feel frustrated and overwhelmed and, ultimately, these feelings can lead to lack of motivation.

Crispel and Kasperski (2019) explore the challenges general education (or classroom) teachers have in implementing teaching techniques that support students with special needs in mainstream classrooms. As with participants in my study, research (Crispel & Kasperski, 2019; Lee et al, 2015) shows teachers develop a less favourable attitude towards inclusive education when they feel ill-prepared. There tends to be an international trend of teachers feeling not prepared to meet the demands of an inclusive classroom (Chiner & Cardona, 2013; Crispel & Kasperski, 2019; Lee et al, 2015; Yada & Savolainen, 2017). Similar to my findings, De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2011) found that classroom teachers have a neutral or negative opinion about inclusive education (as an approach to including special needs). As my participants expressed, their research found that not being adequately trained and lacking confidence led to negative feelings towards inclusive education. Most of my participants expressed a desire for more meaningful training sessions or educational opportunities to expand and develop their teaching strategies for teaching in an inclusive system.

Support

Support affects the effectiveness of inclusive education (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007). In this section the connection between my participants' experiences and literature is briefly explored as a first step in analysing this theme. This section explores the connection between support and literature by looking at different issues that were raised by the study participants. Most of the participants identified a need for more support & resources, increased collaboration, and a need for more administrative support.

i. Support and Resources

Identifying the necessary support and resources in inclusive education is complex and a multi-layered process (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007). The teachers in this study mirrored this sentiment when they articulated the need for more support and more resources. Yet, rarely did participants identify what exactly the support and resources were and how they would be of benefit. For example, one questionnaire participant wrote *'Not being able to notice any consequences or change in behaviour from students on*

special programs, not near {sic} *enough support from the board in terms of extra staff and consequences.'* Despite identifying the need for extra staff and consequences, they did not acknowledge what staff are needed and why or the purpose of consequences.

Similar to Adewumi, Mosito and Agosto (2019), another questionnaire participant identified that insufficient support for teachers and not enough educational programme assistants affected the implementation of effective inclusive education: *'Insufficient support for classroom teachers. Teachers are not trained to meet the needs of every student. Insufficient EPA support. Physical limitations of classroom space.'* Loreman (2007) argues that the prioritisation of school resources can directly affect the effectiveness of inclusive education. By not identifying what the supports or resources are in the above two examples, it appears that their comments are less practical and more of a reason that inclusive education is ineffective. Whereas, another questionnaire participant stated, *'I have worked closely with student services, behaviour specialists and have incorporated the use of technology to help students in my class have access to a variety of tools to support their learning.'* In this example, there was a clear identification of the support and, ultimately, it enriched the participants teaching. This study identified that some teachers feel that supporting students with special needs in the mainstream classroom requires different supports for students with special needs. However, Florian and Linklater (2010) and Pantic and Florian (2015) would argue that the same resources and strategies can be used for all students. A questionnaire participant stated *'Not having the right supports to set up to allow for a fully inclusive system has been the biggest challenge. Regular classroom teachers are expected to have current skills and knowledge with regards to inclusion and dealing with special needs. More support from the district, administrators and the government is needed in order for a truly inclusive system to work.'* Again, this comment does not reference what the supports are, their purpose, or the intended effect for benefiting students. Despite the vagueness in identifying the need for more support and resources, most participants in this study identified lack of resources and support as a barrier to effectively implementing inclusive education.

ii. Community and Collaboration

Hansen et al (2020) argue that collaboration can be indirect or direct, but that both are based on using new knowledge and current beliefs & attitudes from various educators. From this perspective, collaboration is an important component of building inclusive learning communities. Many participants throughout both the questionnaire and the focus group stated the desire for more collaborative opportunities to better support students which aligns with most research (Kugelmass, 2001; Lund et al, 2015; Smith & Leonard, 2006). A questionnaire participant wrote that *'More time needs to be given to classroom teachers and learning centre teachers to collaborate and create programs and schedules that better serve their students with special needs.'* This sentiment is looking at the benefit of collaboration to adequately support a student with special needs in the classroom setting. Other participants acknowledged the importance of collaboration in order to feel connected to other educators: *'I think teacher and community collaboration is also important because sometimes we feel isolated in this job.'* Some participants highlighted their successes with inclusive education by acting collaboratively. A focus group participant stated *'The team has worked diligently to have her in the classroom as much as she can be there and interacting with her peers;'* and one questionnaire participant wrote *'As a team, we strive for all students to be part of the classroom setting.'* These experiences with positive collaboration in the school setting align with Hansen et al's (2020) argument that collaboration supports the transformation of inclusive education from viewing it as being concerned with special needs to a pedagogical approach that has a broader meaning than special education. Not only are inclusive learning communities built on collaboration between educators, but they can extend beyond the physical school. The importance of *'maintaining open communication with parents and fostering a team mentality'* was highlighted by a questionnaire participant when exploring how inclusive education benefits the community (Efthymiou et al, 2017; Guo, 2012). A focus group participant extended the same notion when they said *'It really is like a governmental thing where medicine and justice and education need to start working together'* in order to build inclusive communities that transcend the school boundaries.

iii. Lack of Administrative Support

Some participants acknowledged that they did not feel supported by their school administrators which is similar to what Hoeer (2015) describes in his article. A few participants felt that principals did not support them when it came to following through with consequences and expectations. One participant blatantly said *'I am often not supported in my endeavours by the principal/vice principal'* when referencing group management in the classroom. Another participant acknowledged that after receiving support from a behaviour specialist teacher, their principal would not follow through with the structured plan. Instead, the principal *'would reward the student for anything not just the agreed upon target skills.'* The same participant also acknowledged, in their experience, that the administration does not *'do enough to support a good foundation'* towards inclusive education. This teacher went on to explain that they felt as though administrative talk was *'smoke and mirrors since they would do anything to just keep kids in classrooms or the learning centre.'* This participant referenced back to the principal rewarding for anything just to keep the student *'out of the office'*. Similar to Lowe and Appleton's findings (2015), a questionnaire participant noted in the additional section that they felt a lack of support from the 'central office' meaning the main Centre of Education office. They stated that *'specialists come in and provide you with a basic plan, they provide little help, leave, and then you are left on your own.'* This is a similar sentiment to some comments in the above section, Inadequate Training, which demonstrates that participants felt they were provided with training or support, only to be left to their own devices for implementation and follow-through.

Discourse

In this next section, I explore the theme of discourse and the impact it had on my participants' experiences. Bernstein's (1999) language of description refers to each science discipline adopting specific language and terminology unique to the discipline. Inclusive education should be no different. However, as explored in Chapter 2: Literature Review, there is still great debate around defining this approach to education. Scientists need to understand a common language to ensure meaning is clearly understood. Similarly, this principle can be applied to social sciences, such as

education which could help reduce some of the challenges in the implementation phase. Ainscow, Dyson & Weiner (2014) suggest the debate about definition and implications of inclusive education is often debated, confusing, and sluggish in change. This sentiment is still quite prevalent in the research (Ainscow et al, 2006; Ainscow et al, 2014; Messiou, 2017; Opertti et al, 2014) despite UNESCO's (2009) conceptualisation of education of all learners in an inclusive society and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNDESA, 2015) which aims for accessibility and fairness in education. This tension between inclusive education interpretation and implementation versus inclusive education conceptualisation is prevalent in the experiences of my participants.

Opertti, Walker & Zhang (2014) say 'as long as the concept of inclusion remains narrow, the discussion will continually focus on accommodating specific groups of learners within existing frameworks' (p13). As noted in Chapter 2: Literature Review, the Nova Scotia Special Education Policy (2008) is the larger policy that houses the provincial Inclusive Education sub-policy. A point to note is that as the new Nova Scotia Inclusion Policy is implemented in Fall of 2020, they will maintain and continue to use the Nova Scotia Special Education Policy (2008). Maintaining the provincial Special Education Policy in an inclusive system is a challenge as you are effectively attempting to build one system out of two different educational frameworks. In Nova Scotia, the Student Service Department (at both the provincial level and the jurisdictional level) is a network of resources and specialist staff that is guided by the Special Education Policy. Whereas the Program Department (at both the provincial level and the jurisdictional level) is responsible for delivery of the Public School Program and the delivery of the special education services (as supported by the Student Service Department) (DOEECD, 2020; HRCE, 2020). This fragmented system is highlighted by one focus group participant's experience with a student service specialist:

> *'In Planning for an IPP (Individual Programme Plan), I was meeting with a Program Planning Specialist. They explained to me that the inclusion part of the planning was having the student in the class and that the IPP is the Special Education.'*

If Inclusion is simply about including students who are typically excluded and special education is the education part for these students, then, in agreement with Opertti, Walker & Zhang (2014), it is understandable why the public school system is fragmented in Nova Scotia. In the remainder of this section, I explore the theme of Understanding and Language by analysing my participants' experiences with inclusive education through the fragmented system of special education and inclusive education. I explore how some teachers' perceptions of inclusive education have led to a narrowness in conceptualisation and implementation of inclusive education.

i. Fragmentation

Many of the participants spoke about their role as a classroom teacher in contrast to the role of the learning centre teacher (student service teachers). A participant noted that they felt that their learning centre teacher was *'adopting kids into the learning centre so they could support them'* outside of the classroom and that they *'rarely spend time in the classroom'*. This experience was supported by a different participant who stated that *'the learning centre teacher does all the planning for students with special needs'*. In contrast, a questionnaire participant commented on the success of students being supported in the classroom:

> *'The more time the student spends in my classroom, the better the relationship we develop. The more academics, the more independence, and the more social the student becomes. When you get to know a student and how they work you then can move them and push them to another level. You don't develop those relationships with them if they are not in class with you.'*

These opposite experiences highlight a challenge that can happen when interpreting and understanding is subjective. On one hand, students are being pulled out, supported by, and planned for by the student service teacher. It appears the teaching responsibility is expected to shift from the classroom teacher to the student service teacher. On the other hand, one participant noted that their students requiring significant support benefitted from being a part of the class and building relationships. This difference was highlighted even more by two focus group participants. One participant noted that *'it is okay for students not to be in class or attend specialist classes if their programming does not support it'*. Whereas a follow-up comment from a participant indicated the opposite, *'P.E. and music classes are*

times where all students can engage and participate with their peers'. Thinking about Bernstein's (1999) language of description, it is important to have a clear understanding of expectations and staff roles. These examples outline a challenge in Nova Scotia's inclusive education system that can lead to inconsistency in implementation due to a lack of understanding of what is expected of both students and staff.

ii. Language

A medical model approach to inclusive education appears to be the most commonly interpreted approach by my participants. Most participants used medical descriptors to describe their experiences in teaching in an inclusive system. In describing their school composition, one participant stressed *'we don't have an autistic child, we don't have a child that can't walk. We have fourteen cases of complex ADHD. Fourteen cases of kids who are physically, verbally, and emotionally aggressive.'* Using the diagnosis as an adjective to describe the students is common in the medical model or viewing inclusive education as a way to include students with special needs. Also, using the word *'cases'* to describe groups of students alludes to medical terminology for illness outbreak. This word came up frequently by participants when they were discussing student service teachers' 'caseloads'. A caseload is defined as 'the amount of work (in terms of number of cases) with which a doctor, lawyer, or social worker is concerned at one time' (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020). Viewing or discussing students as having special needs, belonging to a medical label, or being on a caseload is a narrow approach to viewing inclusive education. It perpetuates the notion that inclusive education is only relevant to some students, as highlighted by a questionnaire participant: *'when you have a child who is under the inclusive umbrella who has behaviour issues, complex ADHD'*. Another example of language used is when one focus group participant used the word 'integrated'(page 104) to explain the move towards inclusive education from special education classes. Rodriguez and Garro-Gil (2015) found that the use of the word integration is often confused with the word inclusion. However, this is problematic in developing inclusive educational approaches as the original meaning of the word integration (for educational purposes) has its

roots in the special education movement. Using a word like integration places emphasis on the notion that inclusive education is a means to include students with special needs in the mainstream or typical school. It implies the notion that students need to adapt to their school rather than being a full member of a school that will adapt for the child (Rodriguez & Garro-Gil, 2015; Thomazet, 2009). Using a word like integration rather than a word like included demonstrates a need for discourse change from thinking about inclusive education as a deficit-based model to one that is based on a principled approach.

If not fully understood, inclusive education interpretation and implementation can become fragmented (Amadio, 2009; Amadio & Opertti, 2011; Cedillo et al, 2009; Opertti et al, 2014). In exploration of the three themes: attitude, support, and discourse, it is clear that the participants' experiences are consistent with current discourse in the area. Not only is this clear to see in the structural system of the public school system, but many of the participants shared experiences that highlight a divided school system for mainstream students and students with special needs. The collected data seemed to highlight the notion that inclusive education is an extension of special education, rather than being an approach to education. One participant summed up this idea well, *'It might not be mainstream education for every child, and that is where inclusion comes in.'* Coincidentally, this same participant said *'we are looking at each individual and what their needs are for education and so, learning to step away and feel comfortable as a system, to step away from what is the mainstream curriculum or what the standards are and just realize that every child has a the right to just be in a group and be learning'*. So, on the one hand, this participant demonstrated an understanding that inclusive education is an approach to education that builds on individuality within a community, yet the system tends to professional actions which often demonstrate a different and exclusive definition.

The results of this research revealed a single umbrella theme, explored in Chapter 5, that connected the experiences and insight shared by the participants. The umbrella theme connects the three prominent themes through similarities with understanding and insight. Participants stated that inclusive education was about building inclusive

environments that are welcoming and supportive or all. Yet, their practical experiences highlight a separation in thought between mainstream students & students with special needs and their role, as classroom teachers, & the role of student service teachers. The umbrella theme, stabilisation of the public school system, explored how the structure of the current system affects the success effective inclusive education in the province of Nova Scotia. Due to the current structure, it appears that classroom teachers lack a clear understanding of inclusive education, both in practice and policy, due to confusion between the connection and separation of the Nova Scotia Public School Program and the Provincial Special Education Policy. The idea of a divided or unstable public school system is explored and discussed in the following sections on the umbrella theme.

4.8- Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the collected data by sharing the experiences and insight of my participants. As discussed in Chapter 3: Methodology, data were collected through a questionnaire and a small focus group discussion. My data were sorted under eight codes. The codes are positive attitude, policy leadership, school & classroom processes, curriculum & pedagogy, the community, meaningful reflection, training & resources and miscellaneous. After sorting the data and reviewing the codes, three prominent themes arose from the data: attitude, support, and discourse. These three themes were discussed in greater detail leading to the introduction of the umbrella theme or single overarching theme. The presented data show a disconnect in awareness of inclusive education by the participants. This disconnect is highlighted through their experiences in practice, training, reflection, understanding, and spoken language.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1- Introduction

In this chapter, a discussion of my findings will be presented. My research aims to answer the question 'How do elementary school teachers in the province of Nova Scotia describe their experiences with inclusive education and what does this mean for practice?'. The purpose of my research is to better inform my professional practice in order to support inclusive educational practice for both teachers and students. Participants were elementary school classroom teachers in the public school system. The participants provided subjective knowledge, insight and experiences regarding inclusive education.

The research methodology was picked to allow for the participants' voices to be heard, explored, and, subsequently, analysed. Their experiences were explored by looking for similarities, differences, and, ultimately, themes that emerged from the data. In the Data Presentation and Analysis chapter, the participants' views and insights were shared, explored, and sorted into different codes and then into prominent themes arising from the coding. In this chapter, the data is further discussed in two ways. First, I use the themes, from Chapter 4, to form one large 'umbrella theme' which connects most of the participants' experiences and insight. This terminology arose from the fact that many of the participants suggested that students with special needs fall under the 'inclusive umbrella', opposed to the 'mainstream umbrella' for education. Second, a more detailed discussion of the findings in relation to the emerging themes is provided. Implications of the analysis are discussed in Chapter 6.

5.2- Significance of the Umbrella Theme

Initially my thematic analysis was going to conclude with an analysis of the themes produced from the collected data, as presented at the end of Chapter 4. However, it became clear that one significant or overarching theme was prevalent in the experiences and insight shared by the participants. Much of the data highlighted a disconnect between mainstream students and students with special needs or challenging behaviours. The participants acknowledged feelings of being *'like a fish*

out of water' to support students with special needs in the regular classroom. Some participants expressed that it was the role of the student service teachers to plan and programme for students with special needs. Participants emphasised the challenges in their classrooms by providing medical diagnoses to students who presented with challenging behaviours. In doing so, many participants expressed frustration with feelings of being ill-prepared and under supported. The term 'umbrella theme'; was specifically chosen as a reflection of the multiple times participants shared insights or referenced inclusion as an 'umbrella term' for students with special needs. One focus group participant stated, *'The kids who fit under the umbrella of inclusion that have mainly behaviour issues or conditions based on inappropriate behaviour'* and this is the premise for using the term as the overarching theme. It is my interpretation of the experiences shared that they all relate a disconnect in the public school system in Nova Scotia. The disconnect is between what inclusive education is when the public school system continues to support both a Public School Programme, with standards & curriculum guides, and a separate Special Education Policy, that focuses on medical labels & individual programmes, within which the Inclusive Education policy is contained.

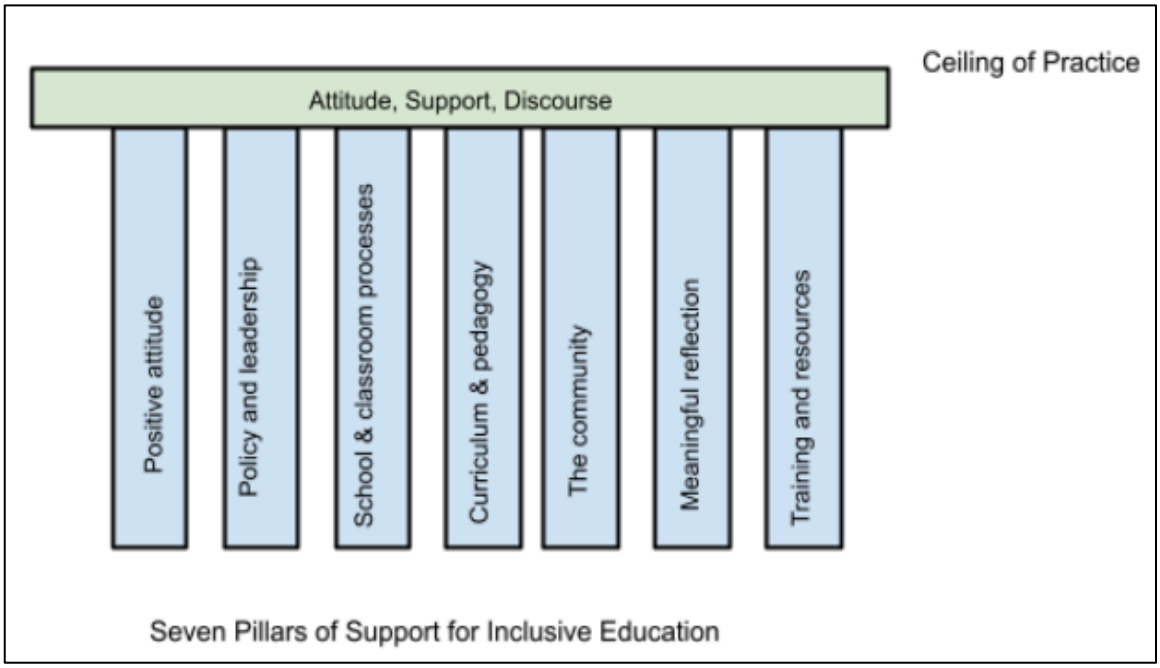
5.3- Umbrella Theme

One questionnaire participant summed up their teaching experiences in the Nova Scotia public school system as: *'There is something, there is disconnect* (between policy and practice).' In other words, they felt confident in their ability to discuss inclusive education as an educational term. However, within their professional practice they acknowledged the tension or disconnect between what they believed inclusive education to be and how they are experiencing it in their classroom and school settings. Rather than it being an approach that aims to include all students in the school community, their experiences suggest it is an approach that aims to include vulnerable students in the physical school building which aligns with Graham and Slee's (2008) argument that inclusive education can be seen simply as a way to include students with special needs in the mainstream school. It was this point that led me connect the three previously identified themes into one overarching theme, the umbrella theme. Attitude, support, and discourse play a major part in how the

participants in this study perceive inclusive education. Despite demonstrating positive attitudes for inclusive education in definition, experiences appear to have led to negative or neutral feelings towards the approach. This finding aligns with past studies that demonstrate the difficulty of inclusive education as a practice (Berry, 2010; Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014; Harper, 2017; Odongo & Davidson, 2016; Sesay, 2018) due to the difficulty of supporting students with special needs in class settings (Cassidy, 2011) with minimal resources (Odongo & Davidson, 2016; Shea, 2017). This negativity and neutrality are evident in the experiences shared by each participant and the language used to express the practice of inclusive education.

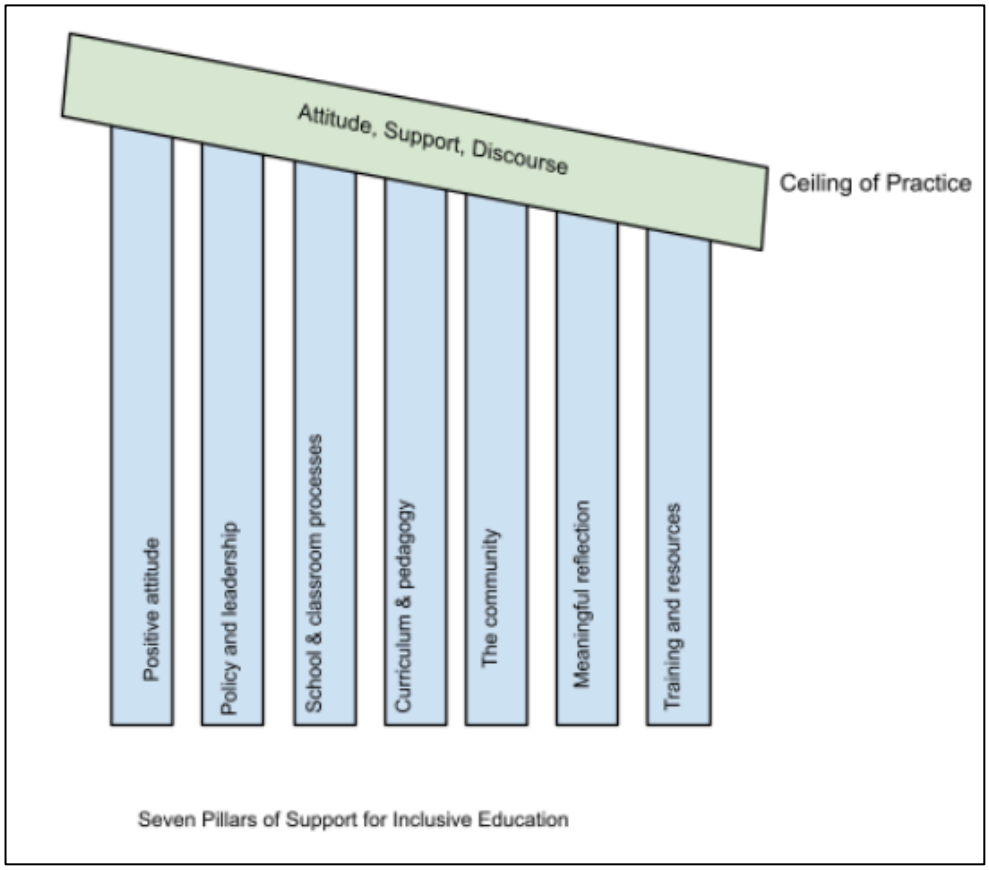
Loreman's (2007) Seven Pillars of Support for Inclusive Education outline conditions necessary to provide effective inclusive education. Each pillar represents a support that is evident in research for effective inclusive education. The pillars are reflected in the experiences of my participants. Loreman states that each pillar is interdependent and provides little in the way of support without the additional pillars. For this reason, it is easy to find common themes that weave between the different pillars and ultimately connect them to one another. Due to the interdependence of the pillars, patterns and connections were clearly visible in the collected data that allowed for the creation of three common themes: attitude, support, and discourse. These three themes appeared to shape the perceptions and experiences of classroom teachers through the strength or the weakness of the 'Pillars of Support'. In essence, the pillars determine the height of the ceiling or the effectiveness of one's professional practice. With positive perceptions, shaped by experiences, the ceiling height will be much higher and less restricting. However, with negative or indifferent perceptions, the ceiling height will be lower, uneven and, ultimately, more restricting. From the insight of my participants, the ceiling appeared to be low for creating and experiencing effective inclusive education.

Figure 5.1- Seven Pillars of Support for Inclusive education and Ceiling of Practice



As noted in Chapter 4, many of my participants shared mixed views about inclusive education. They felt it is a positive approach to teaching all students, yet they shared frustrations and challenges in supporting students with special needs and challenging behaviours. Many of the participants felt inadequately supported by school administration and most participants had minimal to some understanding of policy. Yet, when sharing their experiences, it did not appear that they clearly grasped a solid understanding of the policy. Most of my participants felt less positive towards school and classroom processes, especially when it came to class sizes and complexities. As well, participants felt inadequately trained and were not able to access necessary resources for supporting student development and learning. These experiences highlighted the common experiences shared by participants that affect the ceiling of practice. Instead of having strong pillars of support, most participants expressed unevenness or weakened pillars of support for inclusive education.

Figure 5.2- Uneven experiences with pillars of support and ceiling of practice



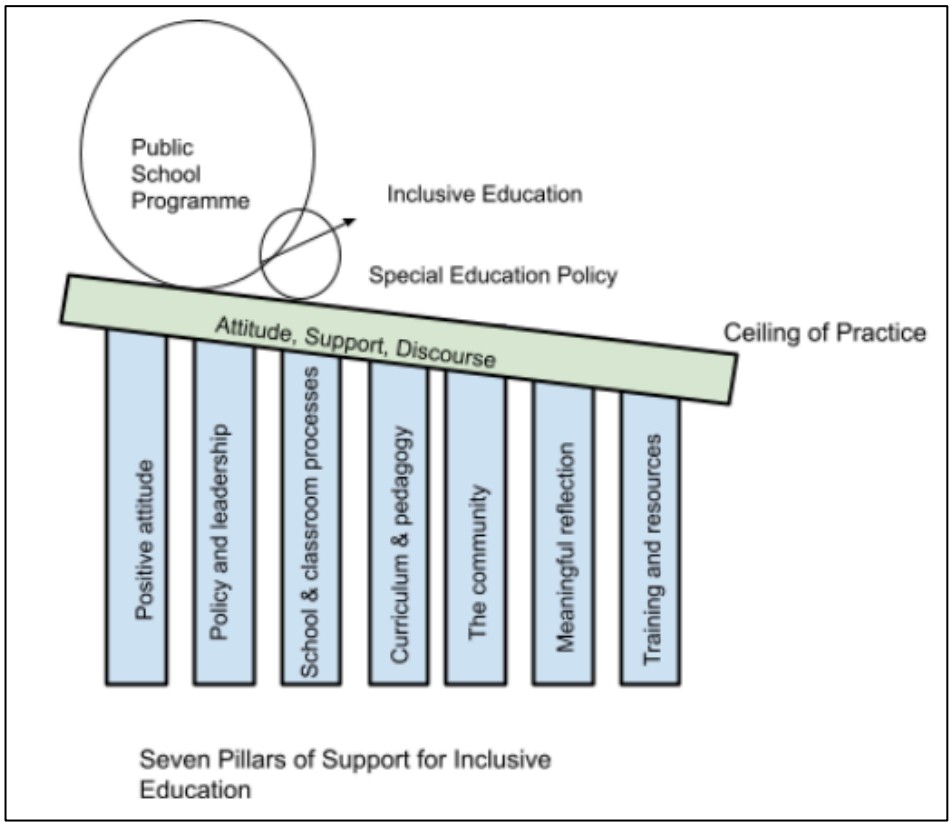
In doing so, the attitude of the participants became, at times, frustrated and negative. Attitudes changed from motivated and positive to insecure and frustrated. This change in attitude was visible when the participants were asked to share their understanding of inclusive education and then when they were asked to explore their own experiences. Participants explained a positive approach for all students to frustration with including students with special needs. Similarly, participants expressed a positive attitude for collaboration as part of successful inclusive education. However, they also expressed a frustration with inclusive education because there is not enough time to collaborate with other teachers. It is extremely difficult to change a negative mindset about inclusive education to one that is more favourable (Murphy, 1996). Research in the area has demonstrated that teachers' attitudes are shaped by such areas as: feelings of preparedness (Caskey, 2008; Dupoux et al, 2007; Fuchs 2010; Harper, 2017; McKenzie, 2015); collaborative efforts (Aliakbari & Bazyar, 2012; McKenzie 2015; Tzivinkou, 2015; Shea, 2017); and available resources and supports (Cassady, 2011; Murphy, 2015; Odongo & Davidson, 2016;

Shea, 2017). Lopes, Monteiro and Sil (2004) found the majority of teachers were not receptive towards inclusive education because they did not know how to provide appropriate support to students with special needs. From the experiences shared by participants, it appeared that some classroom teachers in Nova Scotia felt validated with these sentiments because the chosen discourse was divisive in language. Despite using language that included all students, fairness, and equity for all, their understanding appeared to be splintered between the medical model and the more modern approach to inclusive education, as a principled approach. Educating inclusively requires dedication as it is a 'complex pedagogical endeavour' (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p814) that requires commitment to changing one's belief system away from thinking about students as normal or having deficits (Head, 2011, Lalvani, 2013; Mintz & Wyse, 2015; Spratt & Florian, 2013) towards a complementary approach where all students feel that they belong and are valued (Hart et al, 2004; Head, 2011). This fragmented view is demonstrated through experiences and insight that focused on inclusion as the new special education and the reliance on using medical terminology.

Loreman's Pillars (2007) can be further reduced to three larger themes: attitude, support, and discourse as this study demonstrated through the TA (see section 4.6 From Codes to Themes p128). These three themes can be connected to form one global theme, the umbrella theme. This theme would be a stabilising feature to the pillars and ceiling of practice. Currently, the Nova Scotia education system is an inclusive system that houses two separate, yet connected, systems: Public School System for students working at grade level and Special Education System for students who require significant support. These two systems are connected by inclusive education in the province because it is 'the basic right of all students to receive appropriate and quality educational programming and services in the company of their peers' (DOEECD, 2008, p5), despite the only reference to inclusive education being found in the provincial Special Education Policy. (Nova Scotia will launch an Inclusive Education Policy in the Fall of 2020 while maintaining the Special Education Policy). The Public School Programme (PSP) has roughly 89% of students following the laid out Principles of Learning (PSP, 2013), whereas, roughly 11% of students follow

the Guiding Principles of the Special Education Policy (Levin, 2011). The disconnect that the participant acknowledged is attributed to the confusion caused by a policy outlining inclusion as a 'value system' that aims to 'facilitate the membership, participation and learning of all students in school programs and schools' (DOEECD, 2008, p5), yet, students are separated into different streams based on their perceived abilities. Most students can follow PSP, but some students will require additional or different programming to be a part of the school program.

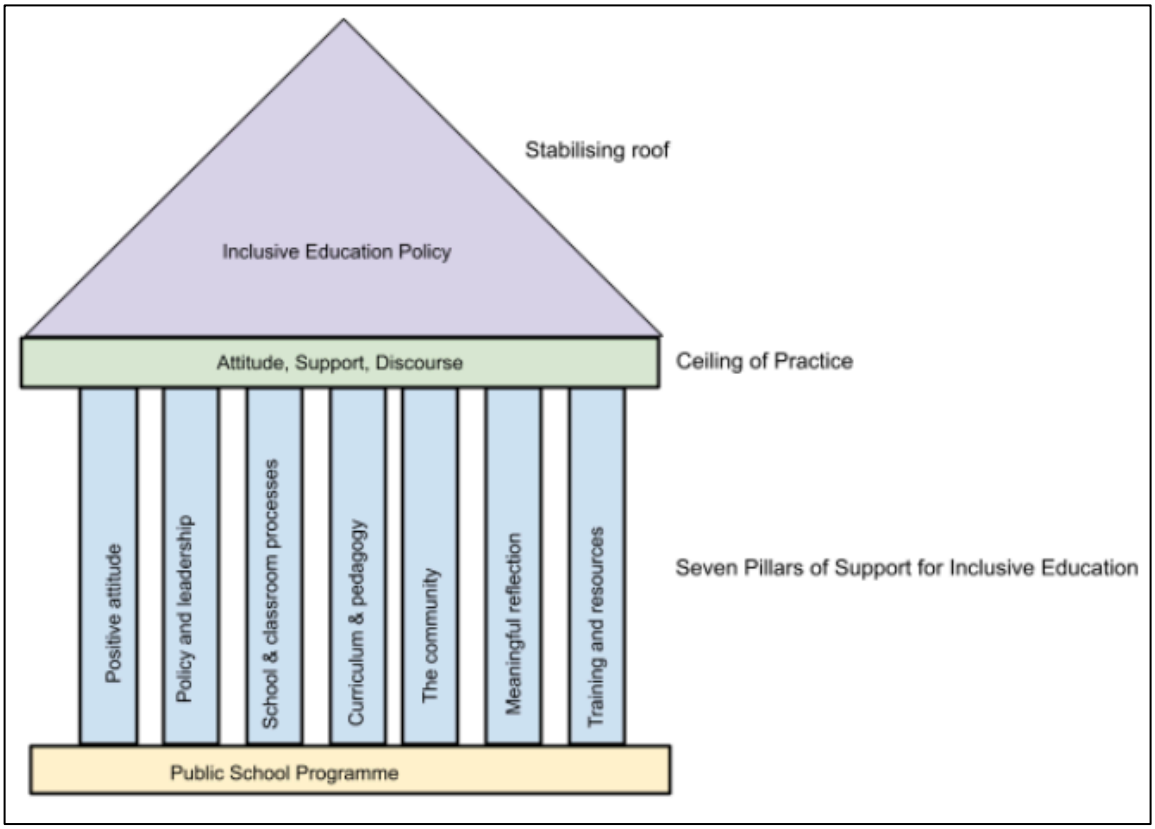
Figure 5.3- Current System in Nova Scotia



The feeling of disconnect in the Nova Scotia school system was also identified when one participant shared that they should not have to change how they teach mathematics for one student. The teacher taught the PSP and felt that something additional could be done in another location for this student. This example aligns with inclusion as a means to include students with special needs in the mainstream school (Ainscow et al, 2006). The student is included in the school community, but their membership is not extended to class activities. On the other hand, one focus group

participant said, ‘I believe inclusion is creating an environment that includes all students no matter the race, religion, sexual orientation, or abilities. Adapting and accommodating to fit the needs of your students to create an environment that strives for equity instead of equality.’ Unlike the example at the beginning of this paragraph, teachers need to adapt in order to support all their students. As explored above, much of my data is aligned with this tension found in current inclusive education discourse. The missing piece that sums up the overall theme noted throughout my participants’ experiences is the confusion around how inclusive education fits in the current system. For inclusive education to be a ‘value system’ that aims for participation of all students, presence of all students, and achievement for all students (DOEECD, 2008), there needs to be a stabilising roof added to the education system that ensures all actions, policies, and practices align with the provincial definition. A stabilising roof would support a shift in pedagogy (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011) that allows for development of a system that aims to serve all students, rather than including vulnerable students in the mainstream schools (Ainscow, 1999). Again, a provincial inclusive education policy will be released later this year and could act as the stabilising feature. However, as noted earlier, the provincial Special Education Policy will remain which may perpetuate the same ‘disconnect’ noted now.

Figure 5.4- Adding Inclusive education roof as stabilising feature



5.4- The Findings

This research study aimed to answer the question- 'How do elementary school teachers in the province of Nova Scotia describe their experiences with inclusive education and what does this mean for practice?' It explored the experiences and insight of classroom teachers by gathering data from twenty-two questionnaires and one focus group discussion. The data was analysed through a thematic analysis starting with preset codes based on Loreman's (2007) Seven Pillars of Support for Inclusive Education. Firstly, the analysis indicated that teachers are feeling frustrated and confused with the practice of inclusive education in the province of Nova Scotia and that these negative feelings have impacted their practice. Secondly, this study found that elementary teachers feel that large and complex classrooms create challenges with supporting all students effectively. Thirdly, this study indicated that the lack of time to collaborate with other educators creates a barrier to implementing inclusive educational approaches. Fourthly, a major finding of this research is the fragmentation in practice and discourse caused by the existence of the

Nova Scotia Special Education Policy (2008) in an inclusive education system. Despite acknowledging that inclusive education is an approach to support all students, practical experience indicates that elementary teachers in Nova Scotia are still approaching inclusive education as something additional to the public school programme. Lastly, this study has indicated that both frustration and confusion are evident in the areas of teachers' attitudes and inclusive education discourse.

5.5- Discussion of Findings

In the Nova Scotia public school system, classrooms consist of mainstream students, students with special needs, and students with challenging behaviours. All classrooms are assigned one classroom teacher, at the elementary level, and students who require additional support (of varying levels) are assigned to different practitioner's caseloads. The aim of this study was to examine the perceptions, insight, and understanding of the participants based on the structure of the provincial public school system. Researchers have shown that various factors affect effective inclusive education practice (Boyle et al, 2013; Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014; Alfaro et al, 2015). The findings of my research closely align with that found in existing literature. Inadequate training, lack of support, large and complex class sizes have affected the motivation of classroom teachers, and ultimately, these factors have negatively affected how teachers view inclusive education (Aliakbari & Bazyar, 2012; Caskey, 2008; Cassady, 2011; Dupoux et al, 2007; Fuchs 2010; Harper, 2017; McKenzie, 2015; Murphy, 2015; Odongo & Davidson, 2016; Shea, 2017; Tzivinkou, 2015). Some literature refers to these factors as peripheral factors (Berry, 2010), yet other researchers refer to them with different names such as Loreman's (2007) Seven Pillars, which refer to factors required to support effective inclusive education. The identified factors do not all directly match the Pillars, but they can be easily connected to Loreman's pillars through his discussion of each pillar. For example, class size and composition is connected to the school and classroom processes pillar in that how classes are defined for each school year is part of an established school process. Much like some of my participants, Cox (2016), found that classroom teachers struggled with behaviour management in large classes, providing adequate support to students with special needs (in the form of accommodations or

individualisation), and monitoring progress. Another similarity between my findings and research (Caskey, 2008; McKenzie, 2015) is the classroom teachers' frustration with the lack of time to collaborate with student service teachers. Few participants in my study acknowledged challenges with behaviour management, but many acknowledged a lack of support with follow through from administrators in the area. Though none of my participants acknowledged monitoring of student progress as a challenge, some participants did reference their lack of training and education in the area of programming for students with special needs. Dupoux, Wolman and Estrada (2007) outline class composition as a challenge for classroom teachers. The ratio of students with special needs to mainstream students, class sizes, and programming for different students were all raised as concerns by participants in my study which align with other researchers' findings (Dupoux et al, 2007; Harper, 2017). Similar to other research (Caskey, 2008; Fuchs, 2010; Harper 2017), my participants acknowledged administrative support as a factor affecting their perception of inclusive education. My research highlights how perceptions were negatively affected as they felt there was a lack of support from school-based administrators and the main office. Scruggs, Mastropieri and McDuffie (2007) found that a lack of administrative support negatively affected attitudes and perceptions of teachers and other staff members, teacher conditions necessary for effective inclusive education, affected planning and collaboration, professional development, and class composition. Though my participants did not connect training opportunities directly to administrative support, they did state that they felt there was a lack of effective training opportunities offered to support inclusive education. Administration, at both levels, plans and implements the professional development. Scruggs, Mastropieri and McDuffie (2007) found that professional development offered in the area of supporting students with special needs in the classroom affects perceived administrative support. However, Harper (2017) found that some teachers do not feel a lack of support from administration in the area of professional development. Administrative support for teachers is important in building a school community that encompasses all members through planning, professional development, resources, and pedagogy (Laluvein, 2010; Thomazet, 2009).

Two other factors noted in this study that affected teachers' perceptions of inclusive education were the fragmentation within the system and the deficit/medical model thinking about inclusive education. Similar to many researchers (Allan, 2005; Porter, 2008; Mittler, 2000; Slee, 2001), I found that all of my participants acknowledged that inclusive education was an approach to education that concerned itself with all students. However, when asked to explore their practice most participants commented on the roles of student service teachers versus the roles of classroom teachers. They also commented on the challenges of teaching students with special needs by placing emphasis on the diagnosis of the student or their deficit in learning at their respective grade level. This difference in thinking about inclusion as a concept versus practical implementation can be explained by the lack of clarity around the concept (Haug, 2017, Winzer, 1998) and the challenges of implementing policy and school procedures on how to effectively support and implement inclusive education (Ali et al, 2006; Gachocho, 2017; Haug, 2017; Mngo & Mngo, 2018). Inclusive education raises many complex questions, especially around the knowledge that informs the policy and the practices that shape it. Graham and Slee (2008) argue that there is a need to question and explore the normative assumptions that exist in the mainstream or normal group. Hart, Drummond, and McIntyre (2007) remind us that the underpinning assumptions that lay the foundation for public school systems are based on the notion of most students being 'normal' and vulnerable students having 'deficits'. Graham and Slee (2008) argue the importance of looking more closely at what we are including others into in terms of schooling and exploring what the role of 'normal' is in inclusion. Watson (2016) states that an understanding of 'normal' in the classroom is based on the medical understanding of children. This understanding of the 'normal student' is a construction that is, for the most part, uncontested in the school system (Harwood & Rasmussen, 2004; Watson, 2016). This argument aligns with my participants' understanding of inclusive education as it relates to their professional practice. Most participants highlighted the differences in students' abilities by outlining their medical diagnosis as a limitation or a shortcoming in their professional practice. Some participants stated students with diagnosis were not their responsibility to teach because it was beyond the scope of their training. Rather, student service teachers were responsible for the programming of these

students. This argument of normal students and students with special needs raises an interesting point about inclusive education and different streams of students.

This study's findings indicate that having an inclusive education system that maintains both a mainstream programme and special education, opposed to an accessible system for all, creates confusion, frustration, and a lack of understanding of effective inclusive education. When an education system breaks up responsibility for student planning between smaller departments, inclusive education is not as effective or successful as it would be with cohesiveness (Opertti et al, 2014). The findings of this study are similar to a large-scale study conducted in another Canadian province, Alberta, where they undertook the process of reviewing the special education reform in order to move towards more inclusive ways of supporting students with special needs (Williamson & Gilham, 2017). The continuing tendency towards the deficit thinking about students creates divisive practices and policy understanding. Language used by the participants in this study highlights fragmented understanding, and, subsequently, the fragmented professional practice noted in the Nova Scotia System.

In this last part of the discussion, I explore the Umbrella Theme of stabilisation in the school system and the impact it can have on professional practice. Drawing on the work of Head (2011), it can be argued that the current Nova Scotia public school system is based on a compensatory system wherein students are broadly categorised as mainstream or special needs (inclusive of all vulnerable students). Those students who can work with minimal support are considered to be part of the Public School Programme, whereas, students with special needs are programmed individually based on their perceived learning deficits as outlined by the Provincial Special Education Policy. It is under this policy that the Guiding Principle or a sub-policy acknowledges inclusive education. In the Fall 2020, a new separate Provincial Inclusive Education Policy will be launched. However, it is my belief that these findings are still relevant as the Special Education Policy will still co-exist. By maintaining a policy for special education, potentially clear inclusive education directives, focusing on 'all', can be blurred by the continuation of a compensatory system.

This study demonstrated that some teachers divide students into groups: mainstream versus special needs, regular versus inclusion, and diagnosis versus typical. From this study, this divisive thinking is most notable in language, insight, and knowledge construction of inclusive education. Many of my participants acknowledged that they not only felt inadequate to teach students with special needs, but they felt as though students with special needs are not their responsibility to teach. Erkilic and Durak (2013) argue that the lack of clarity, understanding of inclusive education, and physical structure limits its effective implementation. In terms of the Nova Scotia school system, this argument compounded by the Special Education Policy has created confusion for classroom teachers as evidenced by their experiences and insight. Despite having a mandate for inclusive education, there continues to be uncertainties surrounding the approach, the inadequacies of resources, programming, and effective training (Erkilic & Durak, 2013). Implementation of inclusive practices appear to be disjointed as practitioners tend to focus on supporting mainstream students as one group and view students with special needs as something separate or additional to their teaching (Florian & Linklater, 2010). Rather than trying to compensate for students' deficits, accessibility for all students could be improved through an understanding that teaching strategies that benefit students with special needs also benefit mainstream students (Florian & Linklater, 2010).

Hegarty (2007) argues that what works in a special education environment also works in a mainstream environment and what works in a mainstream environment also works in a special education environment. Despite the participants in this study identifying insight that says they are not specially trained to support students with special needs, there is research (Florian & Linklater, 2010; Hegarty 2007; Lewis & Norwich, 2005) that argues students with special needs do not require teaching methods that are pedagogically different from mainstream students. On a similar note, Messiou (2017) argues that there are three questions to consider when considering inclusive education as a principled approach (Ainscow et al, 2006) to education:

- Are students present?
- Are students participative?
- Can students achieve?

The hope of inclusive education as a principled approach is to build a community that underpins all actions based on a set of inclusive values that includes consideration of the three questions (Ainscow et al, 2006). In this approach, Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson explain that 'inclusion and exclusion are linked together such that inclusion involves the active combating of exclusion; and inclusion is seen as a never-ending process' (2006, p27). Loreman's (2007) pillar of Meaningful Reflection is essential in supporting an effective system that is built on complementing students rather than compensating students for their special needs. Unlike an approach that is concerned with including excluded groups (Ainscow et al, 2006), this complementary approach aims to support all learners through accessibility of the school programme and it is constantly reflecting back on the three questions. This study identified the difficulty created through the continuation of a Provincial Special Education Policy on building an effective and stable inclusive education system in the province of Nova Scotia. Teachers reported low motivation which can be attributed to lack of administrative support, large and complex classrooms, and a feeling of inadequate training. As well, teachers' understanding of inclusive education lacks clarity as demonstrated through the use of the deficit/medical model language and insight that highlights fragmented perceptions of student streams.

An argument can be made that the current system in Nova Scotia is a modern take on integration as an educational practice. Integration has been defined as the placement of a student with special needs in the mainstream school without changing the teaching methods (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2010; Winzer, 2000). It is the practice of grouping students based on learning needs (Winzer, 2000) and the end result is often students with special needs are expected to learn in an environment full of barriers for their learning (Winzer, 2000). This study highlights the frustration caused by students with special needs in the Nova Scotia system not being able to adapt to the mainstream classroom setting or teaching methods. Ainscow (2002, p148) argues that 'integration tends to be used to describe a process of assimilation within which individual children are supported so that they can participate in the existing (and largely unchanged) programme of the school whereas inclusion suggests a process of

transformation such that schools are developed in response to the diversity of pupils who attend'. To transform from an inclusive system that is concerned with special needs to one that is based on a principled approach, schools must move beyond special education and mainstream (Erkilic & Durak, 2013) and start to focus on building structures that embody the values that underpin their beliefs about inclusive education (Ainscow et al, 2006). Values are basic beliefs that underlie our attitudes, actions, and practice (Mashlah, 2015).

Further developing inclusive education involves practitioners understanding how their values connect to attitudes, actions, and practice, and learning to relate actions to inclusive values (Ainscow et al, 2006). However, it is important to keep in mind that inclusive values are based on fair treatment of all students and not equal treatment (Leicester, 2008). Some participants in this study felt that the way they teach should not have to be adjusted to include students with special needs. This sentiment aligns with Topping and Maloney's (2005) argument that treating all students the same reinforces difference. Rather, some researchers (Ainscow et al, 2006; Hick et al, 2009) argue that effective inclusive education requires students to be welcome and participative in the school and community. Diversity in learners should be considered a benefit to the fabric or the school community and be welcomed and not seen as something that should fit in with an already established system. As Erkilic and Durak (2013) argue inclusive education is different from integration in that it encourages full contribution of all students through the commitment to creating accessible learning communities that allows for participation of all students.

5.6- Conclusion

The analysis of my data clearly highlights the tensions found in the inclusive education discourse. On one hand, participants collectively defined inclusive education as an approach that includes all students and aims to support all students. However, the experiences shared by the participants about their beliefs and their practices highlight a different definition. Some teachers are feeling frustrated and defeated within their professional practice. It seems to me that teachers are trying to teach what they perceive as two different groups within one class environment:

mainstream and special needs. The data I collected explores practices that continue to perceive inclusive education as a way to teach students with sometimes complex needs in parallel to their mainstream peers. The negative attitude displayed by my participants can be connected to fragmentation of thought coming from policies, administrators, and jurisdictions. The fragmented control of student service departments leads to an understanding that inclusive education practice is about including excluded populations rather than inclusive education being the driving force behind all education policies, practice and protocols. The language used in the province of Nova Scotia, with regard to inclusive education, is confusing. Continuing to refer to students as students 'with special needs', students 'having special needs', or using diagnostic information is confusing and perpetuates the sentiment that there are two streams to the education system. Despite a seeming understanding that inclusive education is about all and for everyone, the current context suggests something different is actually the case.

In Chapter 6, I will consider the implications for policy and practice, both at a personal level and at a system level.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

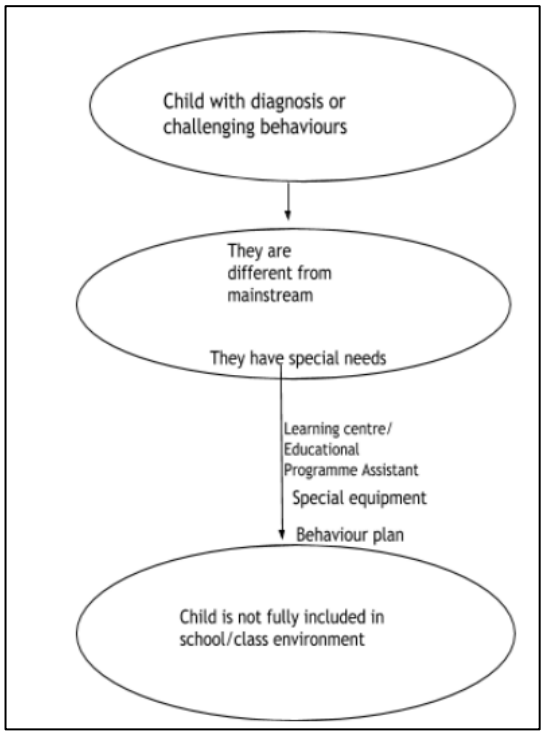
6.1- Where Do We Go From Here?

In this chapter, I explore the themes from the perspective that inclusive education is a principled approach (Ainscow et al, 2006). I provide meaningful suggestions to support further transformation of the Nova Scotia public school system.

Policy

As explored in the section, Umbrella Theme, the most significant change which would support a move to this way of understanding inclusive education would be the removal of the fragmentation between the 'Public School Programme' and the 'Special Education Programme'. Currently, both programmes outline the importance of including all students fairly, yet they function as two different systems in the public school system. Though this goes beyond the scope of my research, I believe questioning the importance and effectiveness of the Nova Scotia Special Education Policy is necessary in further promoting a public education system that is shaped by one common force, inclusive education. Ainscow (2005) suggests that policy changes are low levers for change and will have very little effect on school level practices. However, I would suggest that it is necessary to remove 'special education' as a policy in itself in order to further promote inclusive education as an overall approach to the education of all learners. The continuation of 'special education' perpetuates the cycle of viewing inclusive education through the lens of the medical model, which places the deficit of the child at the centre of the planning.

Figure 6.1- Medical Model point of view. Adapted from Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All (UNESCO, 2005, p27).



Rather, through the removal of the provincial Special Education Policy and using inclusive education as the driving force behind all educational decisions, the deficit is placed on the school system. Rather than doing something special or additional to the public school programme, the public school programme would change itself to become accessible (UNESCO, 2005). In explaining the differences between compensatory and complementary approaches to education, Head (2014) highlights the importance of a complementary system that builds its learning opportunities through what children need, starting from what they can do, unlike a compensatory system that decides what all students require and then compensates for those who cannot meet those preset standards through additional and different 'special education'.

In using a principled approach to inclusive education as a guiding force to shape the education system, a stabilising roof is added (see Figure 5.4) to the pillars and the ceiling. Rather than planning or programming for students (with special needs or challenging behaviours) separately through special education, the public school

programme plans for all students through accessible and fair opportunities. I would argue that removing the Special Education Policy would have two potential and positive side effects: (a) removal of the focus on standards and set benchmarks and (b) a change in the training for both pre-service and service teachers. Other changes in language, support and accessibility would happen, but I believe that these changes can occur, at the school level, without policy change. These areas will be explored later in this section.

Similar to other research (McGhie-Richmond et al, 2013), my data highlighted feelings of being overwhelmed, frustrated and feeling ill-prepared to meet the demands of an inclusive school system, despite other research indicating that teaching methods between mainstream students and students with special needs are interchangeable (Florian & Linklater, 2010; Hegarty 2007). Teachers expressed feeling challenged with meeting the curricular outcomes and trying to navigate individual programme plans. Taking away standards and preset benchmarks from the curriculum guides (at the elementary level), could shift the focus from the skill level of each grade to exploration of each concept. The expectation would be for teachers to plan for all students to learn about certain concepts each school year and offer different access points and supports in navigating the concept. Rather than separate programming for students with special needs, planning for all students through an accessible curriculum would not only help promote inclusive education as the stabilising feature of the Nova Scotia school system, but it would help alleviate teachers' sense of feeling ill-prepared. Teachers are not all trained on programming for medical needs, but they are well trained on planning effective lesson plans. Inclusive pedagogy is an approach to teaching that aims to increase accessibility of lessons by breaking down barriers in order to reduce the marginalisation that can occur with individualisation (Florian & Beaton, 2017).

In this study, teachers expressed frustration with the additional responsibility of planning for individual students when they, also, need to plan whole class lessons. They identified the tension caused by interpreting inclusive education as an approach to include historically excluded students. On the other hand, interpreting inclusive

education as a principled approach allows for teachers to plan lessons that aim for all students to participate and be present. Inclusive pedagogy or the inclusive pedagogical approach aims to ensure all students can participate meaningfully in class lessons (2017) while receiving the support they require to be successful (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Slee (2010) argues that individualisation, such as IPPs, repeats the process of exclusion from being able to participate in class activities because the work they are given is differentiated from the majority of the class. Inclusive pedagogy would benefit all students, especially the most vulnerable students, however, it is important to note that teachers' instructional choices and how they implement them (Florian et al, 2017; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). As Nova Scotia implements a provincial Inclusion Policy later this year, they will continue to defer to the Special Education Policy for students with special needs. The process of exclusion (Slee, 2010) will continue for students requiring significant support. However, using an inclusive pedagogical approach in planning lessons and classroom environments will support the transformation towards inclusion as a principled approach.

Training opportunities both at the pre-service level and as professional development should focus on building accessible lessons to allow for all students to participate meaningfully in collaborative and class activities. As noted above, some teachers feel inadequately informed and ill-prepared to teach students who require significant support. However, if preservice training and professional development opportunities focused on building school lessons through an inclusive pedagogical approach or Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, teachers' attitudes would start to shift from fragmented thinking to thinking about teaching and supporting all students (McGhie-Richmond, et al, 2013). Similar to inclusive pedagogy, UDL supports students' academic and social participation, supports all students in being present, and supports student achievement by reducing barriers to the environment and learning opportunities (McGhie-Richmond et al, 2013; McGhie-Richmond & Sung, 2013). As another proactive inclusive framework, UDL maximises a flexible curriculum and instruction design through multiple means of knowledge presentation, representation, and engagement (Scott & Bruno, 2018).

One way initial teacher education (ITE) and professional development can support the development of inclusive education is by teaching the importance of critiquing the teaching rather than critiquing the students (Berry & Loughran, 2000). In doing so, preservice teachers and practising teachers learn to reflect on and adjust their practice instead of blaming the student's perceived deficit. This approach to professional skill development aligns with both UDL and inclusive pedagogy in that it looks to reduce barriers to student learning by changing what the practitioner can control. Currently, the focus appears to be on teaching expected learning outcomes for each grade level and students with special needs who cannot meet these expected outcomes and are supported through individualisation created based on their perceived deficits which make it challenging to move away from a content-focused teaching approach to a more inclusive approach. As this study found, practising teachers do not feel prepared to support students with special needs in the regular classroom. However, Rix and Sheehy (2014) argue that practitioners do not require specialist training or a deep understanding of medical diagnoses in order to teach students. Teachers often adapt and adjust teaching strategies to support students, but when a student is identified as having special needs teachers start to feel inadequately trained to meet those students' needs (Brennan et al, 2019; Florian 2014), despite research showing that all children can learn from the same pedagogical approaches when provided with appropriate support (Lewis & Norwich, 2004; Rix & Sheehy, 2014). In supporting the development of critical reflection in both preservice and current teachers and inclusive approaches to education (inclusive pedagogy and UDL), teachers will start to view their teaching as a potential barrier for some students' learning success.

A principled approach to inclusive education, with removal of the provincial Special Education Policy, would provide the public school system with a stabilising roof (see Figure 5.4) that would drive all supports, teaching approaches, and training opportunities. With the continuation of the Special Education Policy, supporting teacher development in the area of inclusive pedagogical approaches and/or UDL would support teachers in development of inclusive teaching strategies, but it would

start to shape positive experiences with inclusive education (Florian et al, 2017; Scott & Bruno, 2018).

In section 3.3, I refer to the rejection of my ethical approval request to conduct my research in a particular school board in Nova Scotia. As noted earlier, several reasons were provided for the rejection.

> *You are seeking to gain insight into teacher perspective on inclusion. The problem with this in a province where inclusion is mandated, is that regardless of opinion about it, inclusion is our reality. Thus, a research program that seeks to delve into teacher perspective on the question of inclusion is viewed as both contra to our policies and political agenda and could be seen as provoking or stirring up negative feelings and opinions about something that cannot be changed.* (Anonymous, 2016)

As a system that mandates 'appropriate and high-quality educational programming' (DOEECD, 2008) to all students, exploration of current experiences and practices could help to ensure all students were receiving the necessary supports to be present, to achieve, and to be participative. A teacher's experience, whether it is positive or negative, has the potential to shape students' experiences. Despite the conflict between the provincial government and the teacher's union intensifying, the aim of my research question was to explore teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and the impact it has on practice. The reason for the rejection was provided because the school board felt it was not appropriate to explore teachers' perceptions of inclusive education because it may lead to negative or uncomfortable conversations about the approach to teaching. The refusal of my research due to concerns around the discussion of inclusive education raises a few issues. First, silencing discussion on policy can be viewed as a denial or refusal to explore current practices or opinions in favour of preserving identity and social image (Savenije & Goldberg, 2019; Zerubavel, 2010). In this case, the school board may have felt anxious that the participants would share insight or experiences that do promote their image or dedication to their inclusive education framework. The second issue raised is the notion of not wanting to discuss the practice while, at the same time, not wanting to learn more about it (Zerubavel, 2006, 2010). When institutions silence discussion of policies and, in turn, practice, it allows for systemic issues to be obscured and, ultimately, continue as part of the status quo (Fine, 1987). A challenge with the email (2016) that was sent is the

acknowledgment that ‘inclusion is our reality’ and it cannot be changed because of negative feelings or opinions. The purpose of inclusive education is one that is built on a foundation of positivity for all members of the learning community. As discussed throughout this paper, inclusive education is no longer a narrowly focused means to include historically excluded students. Rather, inclusive education is a principled approach (Ainscow et al, 2006) that reduces barriers to ensure all members can participate, be present, and achieve new learning. Inclusive education has changed from its conception in the 1990s with the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) where the focus was on building schools where all students, both mainstream and special needs, could learn together. Without allowing for discussions and exploration, there is a strong risk that inclusive education may continue to focus on including ‘special needs’ students in mainstream schools, instead of developing a broader approach to inclusive education. This stagnation is evident in Nova Scotia’s public school system with continuation of the Special Education Policy (DOEECD, 2008) while implementing a new Inclusive Education Policy.

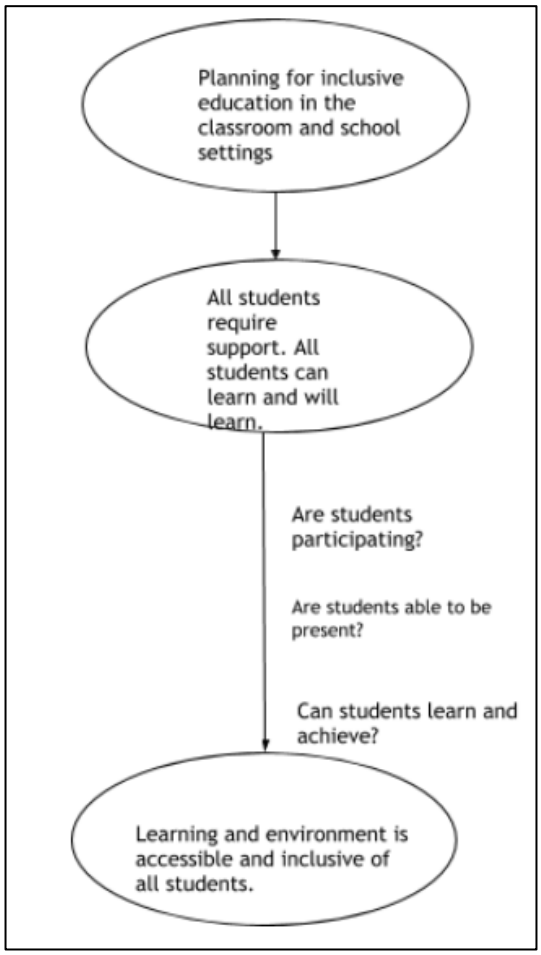
It is important to note that the main reason for the rejection is the fear of what could happen (‘stirring up negative feelings’) in questioning policies, practices, and the connections between the two as they relate to the area of inclusive education. It is important to state that as a teacher and as a parent of school-aged children, I believe the insight and the experiences of all stakeholders is important in developing a richer picture of both the strengths and the challenges of a system.

Practice

Though I can advocate for these changes, my professional position does not give me the opportunity to change provincial or jurisdictional policies. As a learning centre teacher and a school-based teacher, the changes I can make and support stem from Messiou’s (2017) three questions:

- Are students present?
- Are students participating?
- Are students achieving?

Figure 6.2- Inclusive education as a principled approach to the school system. (Messiou, 2017; Ainscow, Booth, Dyson, 2006).



The importance of reflecting on these three questions as a classroom teacher or as a learning centre teacher is that they keep the focus on increasing accessibility and reducing barriers for all students. Circling back to participation, achievement, and being present for all students as driving features in school systems and structures it keeps the focus on all students as welcome and valuable members in the school rather than focusing on what has always been done and expecting all to fit into an existing system. The provincial curriculum guides are based on preset benchmarks for each grade level. However, at the school level the focus could be less on the benchmark, but more about creating a lesson that allows all students to participate, be a part of the lesson, and to learn from the lesson. In agreement with Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006), inclusive education at the school level can focus on three areas: reducing barriers an exclusion from the curriculum, culture, & school community, restructure

the policies & procedures to increase all student participation & response to student diversity, and increase participation, presence, & achievement of vulnerable populations through reflective planning. As discussed in the previous section, Policy, using an inclusive pedagogical approach (Florian et al, 2017; Florian-Black-Hawkins, 2011) or a UDL framework (McGhie-Richmond et al, 2013; McGhie-Richmond & Sung, 2013; Scott & Bruno, 2018) would change the focus of lesson planning from meeting prescribed outcomes, either expected grade level or individual, to creating meaningful opportunities for all students to participate in group activities, be present in the class and school community, and achieve new learning.

A second area to support teacher development with inclusive practice is through the development of collaboration between staff members. Teacher change literature acknowledges the difficulty of changing both beliefs and practice for various reasons. Some of these reasons include: lack of motivation (Hunzicker, 2004), lack of knowledge (Beck et al, 2000), avoidance of contradictory practices (Little, 2003), and conflict avoidance (Little, 2003). However, not only did the participants in this study express a desire for greater collaboration, but research indicates that collaboration is imperative in making lasting change (Tam, 2015). Collaboration through the use of effective professional learning communities (PLC) supports development in professionalism and interdependency (Tam, 2015). In other words, teachers work together for a shared goal by learning and developing collectively. Philips (2003) argues that PLCs provide powerful learning experiences for teachers to transform their beliefs and practice through supportive discourse with colleagues. By focusing on a clear purpose of the PLC, reducing learning barriers or developing inclusive pedagogy, teachers can share experiences and insight through conversation and collective learning. Tam's (2015) study found that effective PLCs alter teachers' beliefs and practice through collaboration with colleagues. As a starting point, Nova Scotia teachers could focus on the three questions outlined in Figure 6.2 as a means to start critically reflecting on what it means to think about inclusive education as a principled approach. Something as simple as focusing on the discourse we choose to use during PLCs or collective learning opportunities could start to alter the beliefs we hold about the current system. Changing the language from students with special

needs to students requiring support would impact teacher perception around supporting students' learning. As discussed in the previous section, research shows that students with special needs do not require different teaching strategies than mainstream students (Brennan et al, 2019; Florian 2014; Florian & Linklater, 2010). Research (Brennan et al, 2019) also shows that teachers' attitudes change to feeling ill-prepared when they perceive a student to have special needs. By changing the discourse used in practice to more inclusive discourse, teachers would start to see students for the support they require and not for medical needs or deficits.

6.2- Professional Connection

In the previous chapter, I explored and analysed the themes from Chapter 4 by connecting current literature and the experiences of my participants. It is important to share how the 'umbrella theme' has impacted my own professional journey. When starting out on my dissertation journey, I knew it was important for me to look at inclusive education in the province of Nova Scotia. As a learning centre (student services teacher), typically I support students who have special needs or require a significant amount of support. At the beginning of my journey, my work was often disconnected from my students' teachers. Despite being allocated to a classroom teacher, I felt as if it were my responsibility to plan for the students on my 'caseload'. I would write their reports, I would connect with families, I would supervise the educational program assistant, and I would prepare for each student's school day- often spending most of the day in the learning centre. As I engaged more with inclusive education discourse, I started to reflect and question my practice, my beliefs, and my own perceptions. Why was I taking over the responsibility? How was I ensuring the child was being included? Was I supporting the child as part of the school or class community? And I began to recognise the 'exclusive' discourse involved in terminology such as 'caseload' (etc).

As my awareness of these tensions grew, I was faced with a significant obstacle in my research when I was denied ethics approval to conduct my research in the School Board in which I work in the winter of 2016. As noted in Chapter 3, the reason given was that my research had little value to the Board (now Centre of Education) and the

topic was, apparently, too controversial. Fortunately, I was able to conduct my research without changing much. Rather than getting participants in one Board, I could recruit across the province for teachers. This slight change meant teachers were representing themselves rather than a particular school board. However, I was still left wondering why a school board would not want to find out how teachers felt about inclusive education as my belief was and still is that by understanding the experiences of those working in a system, we can better support them when necessary. My feelings of confusion and uncertainty surrounding this situation were somewhat explained in the fall of 2016. As noted in Chapter 2, disagreements between the teachers' Union and the Government came to a head, ultimately resulting in strike action. At the heart of the issue, which many described as 'the elephant in the room' (Starr, 2017), was inclusive education in the province of Nova Scotia. Feelings of frustration with inclusive education emanating from teachers as a collective group were driving the negotiations between the two parties. I cannot be sure if my ethics approval was rejected because the School Board sensed the underlying issue in negotiations came down to inclusive education. I am not sure whether it was coincidental in timing, or whether the student service department (at that time) truly felt it did not matter what teachers felt about inclusive education. What I do know is that this experience added an additional layer to my exploration of inclusive education in practice. All of my data collection was conducted during the time leading up to the job action taken by the teachers in December 2016. It is fair to assume that some of the participants' answers reflected their frustrations with the current context.

The government and the teacher's union agreed to conduct a thorough exploration of inclusive education in the province of Nova Scotia (DOEECD, 2017). In March of 2017, a Commission was appointed by the government and the teacher's union to provide a 'research-based overview of the current practice and policy of inclusive education' (Shea, 2018, p3) in the province of Nova Scotia. Ultimately, The Commission recommended a new model of inclusive education that follows a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework. Their report led to a change to the provincial inclusive education policy. Unlike the current reference to inclusive education in the Special

Education Policy (2008), the new Inclusive Education Policy places an emphasis on 'culturally and linguistically responsive and equitable education to support the well-being and achievement of every student' (DOEECD, 2020, p1). Currently the province defines the purpose of inclusive education as 'to facilitate the membership, participation, and learning of all students and activities' (DOEECD, 2008, p5). The new policy extends this explanation to highlight the importance of student well-being and supporting student success for students who have been 'historically marginalised and racialised (African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw students) or who come from other groups that have been traditionally under-represented and under-served, including, but not limited to, students with special needs and those struggling with poverty' (p1).

The purpose of the current sub-policy (2008) is much broader and it does not specify a policy objective, directives, or responsibilities like the new policy (2020). However, the new policy uses the term students with special needs twice (in the Introduction and Guiding Principles). Continuing with the language of 'students with special needs' and continuing to use the provincial Special Education Policy could maintain divisive thought between mainstream students and students with special needs. During the 2019-2020 school year, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development conducted a 'soft launch' of the new policy, starting to introduce the policy with a top down approach. Administrators at the provincial Centres of Education were first introduced to the policy and the changes. They, subsequently, introduced the principals and vice-principals to the new Inclusive Education policy. Despite being a positive effort to transform inclusive education, policy changes are often viewed as low levels for change (Ainscow, 2005) and policies are often designed to be difficult to change as a way to encourage continuity between stakeholders (Cerna, 2013).

This is important to my context and my research because my whole aim was to understand some of the driving forces shaping the practices and beliefs of teachers. Though rewriting or revising policy can change the way things look or are presented on paper, very often it leads to minimal change in practice (Ainscow, 2005; Fullan,

1991; Senge, 1989). Despite the good intention of both the government and the teacher's union to investigate and support the development of inclusive education in Nova Scotia, is it enough to change policy, but without changing how the province approaches inclusive education? As noted in the previous chapter, all the participants stated that inclusive education is about all students, yet when they shared their experiences, many of the participants expressed them based around different groups of students (mainstream & special needs, diagnosis, or 'those who fall under the inclusion umbrella'). My research was collected in a time when frustrations were coming to a head and a time when the provincial policy and practice highlighted the tensions in inclusive education discourse. The participants know in their heads that the concept of inclusion is about all and everyone; yet, the Nova Scotia approach to inclusive education is still that inclusion is a means to include vulnerable populations (Ainscow et al, 2006). However, are the changes to the policy (September 2020) going to be enough to transform inclusive education to a principled approach to education (Ainscow et al, 2006)?

One approach to transformation, as discussed in the Literature Review, is the Head, Hands, Heart model that argues lasting change requires learners to change their values, perception and active participation (Singleton, 2015, p3). Shulman (2004) also refers to these three elements as necessary components for change through education and training. He argues that in order to develop teachers need to gain both knowledge and theory of this profession (head); they need to refine both technical and practical skills to support learning (hands); and teachers need to develop attitudes and beliefs that are reflective of the transformational system (heart). In other words, educational transformation is a multi-dimensional process that requires a clear understanding, critical reflection & 'translation of passion and values into behaviours' (Sipos et al, 2008), and active participation (Singleton, 2015). Florian (2007) identified three areas that are necessary for inclusive education transformation at the school level: clearer thinking about education rights, change views about student ability, and move towards a perspective of learning for all students. From this perspective, education transformation is less about the policy change and more about what the staff can do at the school level. Like Florian (2007)

and Rouse (2008), Ainscow (2005) argues that inclusive education transformation happens at the school level with the development and influence of thinking and teaching pedagogy. For this new policy to have the intended changes to the Nova Scotia public school system, the schools and the teachers need to be at the centre of the transformation (Ainscow, 2005). Rouse (2008) argues that in order for transformation to occur teachers need to think and act differently, as well, they need to consider changing their attitudes and beliefs about the profession.

Connecting to the Head, Hands, Heart model for transformation, education practitioners need to continue to develop their understanding of education and educational theory through both ITE and professional development. Despite knowledge content being important, alone it does very little to support transformation (Rouse, 2008). To bridge this gap, it is important to develop and practice inclusive pedagogies in both development of school programming and implementation of school programming. Teachers need practice and develop an understanding of how to teach and support all students in the school community through collaborative teaching experiences. In my opinion this last area of focus is the most important to develop, but also the hardest the change. It is important to ensure that teaching staff develop an inclusive attitude and belief system that stems from the point of view that ‘all children can learn’ and ‘all children are worth educating’ (Rouse, 2008, p14). By focusing on the Head, Hands, Heart model for educational transformation, I believe that the school system will start to adopt inclusive education as a principle approach rather than continuing to perceive inclusive education as a means to include historically excluded populations. The new policy is a step in the right direction. However, the change towards inclusive education as the driving force will take a whole staff transformation through education, training, collaboration, and personal development. Florian’s (2007) and Rouse’s (2008) research focuses on development of teachers. However, like Ainscow (2005), I argue that because of the influence of support staff and administrators it is imperative that transformation be inclusive of all staff in the Nova Scotia Centres for Education, despite the largest impact being the teachers that work most closely with the students.

Without a clear plan, it is my opinion that this new policy will change very little in terms of attitude, support, and discourse. However, with a clear plan of action that is driven from inclusive education (stabilising roof) and includes proactive strategies and commitment, I believe a transformation towards a principled approach is possible. For a stronger transformation, such things as removal of medical or diagnostic language and removal of the provincial Special Education Policy are necessary.

6.3- Limitations of this Research

As with any research, it is important for me to acknowledge the limitations of my study. Due to the chosen paradigm and the small participant population, my research is not generalisable to contexts outside of this study. However, this was not the aim of the study. It can be argued that the ideas, views and practices identified from the data in this study do relate strongly to similar data and findings in other educational contexts and therefore add to the existing body of evidence around the relationship between policy and practice in the area of inclusive education. Another limitation was the difficulty in recruiting participants for the focus group. Most participants opted to fill out the personal questions, but only a few agreed to participate in the focus group. However, I gained a range of valuable information from these volunteers. A third limitation of my research is the complex relationship between the study and my professional practice. Despite supporting my professional growth, if my employer sees no value in this research then there are potential restrictions on the level to which I can draw on it in my professional practice to support the professional development of others, or collaborative efforts in practice. However, despite this limitation, the journey through the process of researching and exploring an area of importance to my professional practice has been of enormous benefit both personally and professionally. Connecting my practice and research to current literature has allowed me to explore and challenge my own perceptions in the area of inclusive education leading to greater depth, rigour, and breadth of understanding.

6.4- Reflection on the Research Process

Pickard (2013) defines rigour as '{the} degree to which research methods are scrupulously and meticulously carried out in order to recognise important influences occurring in an experiment' (p326). Throughout the research process, it was important that I remained diligent in ensuring that I interpreted and represented my participants' insight following the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. In other words, it was imperative that I captured the subjectiveness and uniqueness of each piece of data and reflected on it as it related to the socially constructed reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Goldkuhl, 2012). Due to being an insider of this research, I shared some commonalities in membership status with participants that made it essential for me to gather my data with neutrality (Asselin, 2003; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). However, I am not a part of the classroom teacher subculture and I needed to ensure I mitigated my own preconceptions of inclusive education to ensure I could accurately interpret and represent the experiences and insight of the participants. However, as Rose (1985) argues, 'There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases' (p77). From this point of view, it was imperative that I acknowledged my own assumptions and that I was upfront with my own position as an insider (Fleming, 2018) to increase the dependability of my findings. Being open about my role as a Learning Centre teacher and my role as doctoral student with my participants in both the questionnaire and the focus group was important.

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) suggest that research methods take a snapshot of the participants' perceptions and present them as data from which we can start to develop an answer for our research question. In the case of this research, I explored experiences and insight with the aim of answering, 'how do elementary school teachers in the province of Nova Scotia describe their experiences with inclusive education and what does this mean for practice?' I am aware that in creating the focus group questions, I still, in sticking with the pre-decided themes, asked questions that focused on areas that could lead to discussions of frustration and challenge. I controlled the direction of the focus group to ensure exploration of certain areas in order to ensure depth of discussion (Ross, 2017). The reality of researcher as research instrument (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) can allow for the

production of rich data through the sharing of experiences and insight (Poggenpeol & Myburgh, 2003). However, it can lead to missed opportunities to follow up with 'potentially important statements or ideas, or alternatively, time spent exploring in depth issues or topics that were not particularly pertinent to the research question' (Ross, 2017, p330). Though one of the reasons provided to me in regards to rejecting my ethics approval in the school board was the worry that my research may lead to negative conversations about inclusive education, using the questions to gain insight into teachers' experiences and perceptions created depth in conversation around what was going well, what could go well, and where teachers are feeling challenged or frustrated.

Another potential influencing factor that may have affected participant responses was the ongoing labour disputes between the teachers' Union and the provincial government. The Nova Scotia Teachers Union and the Province of Nova Scotia were working through contract negotiations. A Tentative Agreement was reached on November 12, 2015. This agreement was rejected by the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU). A second Tentative Agreement was reached on September 2, 2016 that was rejected by the NSTU members. In between the two Tentative Agreements there was bargaining and conciliation between the NSTU and the Province of Nova Scotia. During this time, dialogue was growing between NSTU members and was focusing on class climate and inclusive education.

After I collected my data in the late spring of 2016 and the second Tentative Agreement was rejected, the negative sentiments among NSTU members continued to increase. On October 25, 2016, NSTU members opted to strike with a percentage of 96%. On December 5, 2016 NTSU members started a work-to-rule job action. This strike mandate lasted through until the introduction of Bill 75 by the majority government on February 21, 2017. During this time a third Tentative Agreement was rejected, and all talks broke off. NSTU member frustration came to a head on February 17, 2017 when teachers walked off the job for a one-day picket strike. The importance of these happenings to my research relates to the timing of when I collected the data from Nova Scotia teacher participants. I collected the teacher

input during the labour dispute, but after work action was taken. Involvement and the experience of the dispute may have influenced the participants' thinking and interpretation of their own experiences (due to the growing disconnect between the NSTU and the government). As well my interpretations of their experiences may have been influenced from my own bias during this tumultuous time in the public school system of Nova Scotia. For this reason, it was important to remain neutral and to listen to my participants' experiences.

The largest challenge for me during this research process was the lack of perceived support from the school board in which I work. Leonard, Becker and Coate (2005) suggest that personal development and intellectual stimulation outweighed the professional concerns surrounding a professional doctorate. However, not being able to complete my research in my local area was a frustrating experience that led to feelings of professional doubt and confusion over the benefit of this journey. Scott et al (2004) and Wellington & Sikes (2006) reported that some teachers found being involved in doctoral studies to have a negative impact on their career prospects. Though I may not have been professionally supported through my school board for the research component, I have developed understanding in the area of inclusive education and I have developed my abilities for critical reflection and analysis (Wellington & Sikes, 2006). This personal growth resonates with Scott et al (2004) in that professional doctorates are viewed as being of more benefit to the individual rather than to the employer.

6.5- Conclusion

To say I know specifically what professional changes will happen at the completion of this journey is difficult and would only lead to time consuming speculation. I would like to think that my current employer would embrace the application of my research and findings to my professional practice or to reference it at any possible professional development I support (see section 1.8 for further detail). Time will tell in that regard. I do know that from this journey, I have further developed and enhanced my perspectives and goals relative to my involvement in the education system. I am more aware of the underpinning assumptions that shape my perspective, comprehension

and goals for my professional future. I would very much enjoy the opportunity to apply my findings to assist in correcting the perceived weaknesses in our regional education system. Two of the benefits to my professional development are described by Lester (2004) as consolidation and structuring of knowledge and the second benefit is the ability to apply and maintain high level thinking and action around my professional practice. Consolidating and structuring my experiences, my personal beliefs, my understanding of theories, and my understanding of current policies into 'high-level frameworks that result in, or have the potential for creating, significant change' (Lester, 2004, p4) adds a level of expertise and demonstration of my ability that I am an effective practitioner who can 'develop practice, produce ideas and lead change' (Lester, 2004, p4) in my scope of practice.

My research aimed to explore elementary school teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in the province of Nova Scotia, Canada by answering the question- 'How do elementary school teachers in the province of Nova Scotia describe their experiences with inclusive education and what does this mean for practice?'

My intention was to explore the participants' understanding and their insight about teaching inclusively in order to inform my professional practice as a learning centre teacher. The Doctorate of Education gave me the opportunity to focus on researching an area of interest that was relevant and practical to my professional practice (Burgess & Wellington, 2010). In starting this professional doctorate, I hoped that the journey would open my mind to new knowledge, facilitate career growth, and provide meaningful and relevant learning (Fenge, 2009). Throughout this process, my career path has not changed, but I have developed a much deeper understanding of the complexity of inclusive education as both a concept and a teaching approach. As well, my experiences gained throughout this process have provided me with rich insight into the education system of Nova Scotia. According to Boud et al (2018), Doctorates of Education focus on preparation for administrative or leadership positions in the field of Education.

As a mid-career teacher, this programme has supported my professional development in the areas of critical reflection, breadth of understanding, and leadership. Though my role may or may not change because of this degree, it has provided me with the tool of new knowledge to bring to my practice and challenged my intellect. Mount (2003) and Boud (2018) suggest that professional doctorates reinvent your professional reality introducing you to a world of new knowledge and understanding. I believed that I understood inclusive education at the beginning of this journey. What I did not understand was the complexity of the ongoing transformation of inclusive education from its origin in the 1990's. One important understanding I have gained from this process is that inclusive education is not something you do in the classroom or school system, rather, it is a belief or value system that you bring to your teaching pedagogy that focuses on all students meaningfully participating in all aspects of the school community. Although, Wadham and Parkin (2017) argue that there is little evidence showing the impact of this type of degree on one's workplace, I do feel that I can share my new understandings with my colleagues through effective PLCs and other collective learning opportunities to help support their dedication to inclusive education as a principled approach.

Wellington and Sikes (2006) found that Doctorate of Education programmes have little impact on the field of education, but they have a profound impact on the lives of the individuals through the intellectual stimulation of the study. However, Fox and Slade (2014) found that these types of programmes can have an impact on organisations by the doctoral student's abilities to challenge, question, and disrupt current practices and discourse. When I was refused ethics approval at the start of this research from the Centre of Education, I believe it was for two reasons: one being the way I presented my application as someone who was not fully aware of the complexity of inclusive education and, the second reason, was to avoid any disruption to the provincial discourse and current practices. Fox and Slade's research (2014) found that senior administrators were not appreciative of doctoral students and graduates' criticality, boldness to question, and ability to challenge current practices.

My research findings showed me that what I was experiencing as a teacher was similar to other teachers in this province and beyond. Not only did my findings align with current research in the area of inclusive education, but my findings highlighted that most of the participants had similar experiences and insight in this area. Like me, all participants understood that inclusive education is about all students being participating members of school communities. Like me, all participants expressed insight and experiences that highlighted inclusive education as a modern special education approach. This notion was most notable in the areas of teachers' attitudes and teachers' discourse. There were many references made to students' medical diagnosis, behavioural challenges, and the perceived associated challenges. This four-year journey opened my mind to the importance in critically questioning professional practice and reflection of professional practice. Through this process of challenge and intellectual stimulation, I have become more aware of the need for a more robust understanding of inclusive education and how to support inclusive pedagogies in the public school system. The most important understanding I will take away from this journey is the impact my learning will have on students. My role is about supporting students either directly or indirectly through collaboration with classroom teachers. In developing a robust understanding of inclusive education as a concept and inclusive education in the province of Nova Scotia, I can bring a level of professional knowledge to my role to support all students as meaningfully participative members of the school community. I may not change policies or have much effect on procedures, but I can lead by example to ensure all students are valued for who they are as learners. To answer my research question, teachers are feeling frustrated and confused about what inclusive education is as an approach to education and how to support the approach through pedagogy. My findings have provided me with a rich understanding of the challenges teachers are feeling and the driving forces that have shaped these challenges. Using the knowledge I gained through this process, I can support teachers in developing broader understandings of inclusive education as a principled approach through inclusive pedagogies (like inclusive pedagogical framework and/or UDL) in order to support meaningful learning for all students.

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Appendix A: Learning Centre Teacher Job Description

Halifax
Regional Centre for Education

JOB DESCRIPTION #183

LEARNING CENTRE TEACHER PROGRAM

Title
Learning Centre Teacher – Program

Scope of Responsibilities

The Learning Centre Teacher is responsible for ensuring the Public Schools Program and curricula are implemented in a way that maximizes student learning experiences. The Learning Centre Teacher will have an understanding and commitment to inclusive education in the delivery of instruction and evaluation of all students within his/her teaching assignment. Consistent with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Special Education policies and Halifax Regional Centre for Education policies, the Learning Centre Teacher will work within an established framework for the delivery of specialized services to students. Working collaboratively in a team environment, the Learning Centre Teacher will demonstrate a strong commitment to the planning for improvement process in support of student learning reports directly to the School Principal.

Competencies Required

The Learning Centre Teacher shall have the following competencies:

(a) The ability to work as a contributing team member;
(b) The ability to assess and analyze student behaviour in a school setting;
(c) The ability to contribute to the development of behaviour programming for individuals and groups of students;
(d) The ability to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention strategies;
(e) The ability to utilize effective problem-solving and communication techniques;
(f) The ability to employ non-violent crises intervention techniques;
(g) A demonstrated understanding and commitment to inclusive education;
(h) The ability to design instruction based on the adaptive skills of students with developmental disabilities;
(i) Possess knowledge of the medical, psychological and social-emotional aspects of students with developmental disabilities;
(j) The ability to utilize current technologies;
(k) Demonstrate fair and ethical judgements in accordance with NSTU guidelines and Professional Governing body;
(l) Possess knowledge of provincial and Halifax Regional Centre for Education policies, guidelines and procedures and the rights and responsibilities of parents, students, teachers and schools as they relate to individuals with special needs;
(m) The ability to work and communicate effectively within the Halifax Regional Centre for Education, with students, parents, community members and external groups;
(n) The ability to apply knowledge, experience and commitment in the areas of race relations, culturally relevant pedagogy, cross cultural understanding, human rights and diversity;
(o) The desire and ability to engage in continuing education and professional development;
(p) The ability to maintain and promote confidentiality.

Revised February 12, 2020

Qualifications

(a) A valid Nova Scotia Teacher's Certificate;

(b) Master's Degree in the area of special education (e.g. Inclusive Education, Special Education, Supporting Learners with Diverse Needs and Exceptionalities) OR equivalent as follows:

(i) Relevant Master's Degree (e.g. Literacy, Mathematics) with recent graduate level coursework directly related to supporting students with special needs and/or HRCE programming and various topics workshops; OR

(ii) 1) Special Education Designation from another province (e.g. Ontario Additional Qualifications {AQ} – must have completed Part 1, Part 2, and Specialist courses);
2) Recent (within 3 years) successful full-year Learning Centre Teaching experience; OR

(iii) 1) Minimum twelve (12) credit hours of Masters coursework directly related to supporting students with special needs (e.g. developmental disabilities, behavioural programming, alternative and augmentative communication systems, diverse student needs - courses will not be counted if deemed equivalent to one another);
2) Recent (within 3 years) successful full-year Learning Centre Teaching experience;
3) HRCE programming and various topics workshops;

(c) Minimum two (2) years successful teaching experience;

(d) Willingness to be trained in non-violent crisis intervention.

Specific Job Components

The Learning Centre Teacher shall perform tasks as are assigned by the School Principal. These tasks may vary from time to time with the evolution of the organization and may include, but are not limited to the following:

(a) Provide direct instruction based on identified student needs as outlined in the program plan, in collaboration with the classroom teacher;

(b) Participate on school teams to assist in problem solving and program planning, as needed;

(c) Share the responsibility with other team members of interpreting and reporting assessment results and other pertinent information with parents, administrators and other professionals;

(d) Work collaboratively with administrators, teachers, parents and students in the design, implementation and review of comprehensive individualized program plans;

(e) Design, implement and evaluate instructional and behavioural programs that enhance the student's social participation in family, school and community activities;

(f) Use appropriate assessment instruments such as adaptive skills assessments and developmental screening assessments;

(g) Adapt and modify existing assessment tools and methods to accommodate the unique abilities and needs of students with developmental disabilities including ecological inventories, portfolio assessments, functional assessments and future-based assessments;

(h) Teach and assist students in the use of alternative and augmentative communication systems;

(i) Assist parents and other professionals in planning appropriate transitions for students with developmental disabilities, including job placement, school-to-work and independent living;

(j) Promote and maintain confidentiality regarding records and documentation;

(k) Maintain ongoing collegial support through professional support sessions;

(l) Other duties as assigned.

Appendix B: Nova Scotia Special Education Policy

Contents

Preface

The purpose of this document is to outline Department of Education policy with regard to the education of Nova Scotia students with special needs in the primary, elementary, and secondary school system in the Province of Nova Scotia. It is intended to assist school boards in the development of policies that direct the delivery of programs and services to students with special needs.

Each section is preceded by background information that provides the rationale for the policies. Guidelines and procedures follow to further elucidate the policy. The policy may be a legislated or regulatory requirement or an expectation of school boards, or it may identify the need for the development of policy. Each policy is referenced to a legislative authority where applicable and cross-referenced to relevant documents that may assist school boards in developing and/or reviewing policies. Unless otherwise specified, the term "regulations" is used in this document to refer to the regulations made by the Governor in Council or the Minister.

Note: Parent under the *Education Act* 3(1)(t) includes guardian and in this policy means a parent or guardian who is legally responsible for the care and custody of a student.

Overview

The Nova Scotia Department of Education recognizes and endorses the basic right of all students to full and equal participation in education.

> Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.
>
> *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom*, 15(1)

This right is reflected in the Regulations of the Governor in Council pursuant to the *Education Act* and is supported from a programming perspective in the *Public School Programs* (PSP) document produced annually by the Department of Education. In preparing all students for lifelong learning, the Department of Education states:

> All children in Nova Scotia need a broad-based, quality education. Quality in education is demonstrated by the excellence of individual courses, programs, and shared experiences. Quality is also demonstrated by the diversity of educational experiences in which students are actively involved and by the extent to which individual students needs are met.
>
> *Public School Programs: 2003–2004*

This quality education is characterized by six essential graduation learnings, which all students are expected to strive to achieve. These broad outcomes can be reached through many avenues using a wide variety of strategies and resources.

Essential learnings form the foundation for lifelong learning and provide parents, school communities, and the general public with general expectations that all students work toward. It is our responsibility as educators to ensure that students receive the necessary support, encouragement, and guidance to achieve goals within these broad outcome areas.

Appendix C: Recruitment of Participants

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

TEACHER PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY!!!!

I am recruiting teacher participants as part of my data collection for my Dissertation project as part of the EdD program on which I am studying with the University of Glasgow, Scotland. My study aims to explore how teachers' experiences shape their understanding and perception of inclusive practices during the foundational elementary school years. It is my hope that this research will provide valuable insight into how teachers' experiences can alter their perceptions of inclusive practice and their own practice.

Participant Criteria:

- Elementary Teacher with 1-5 years experience
- Elementary Teacher with 10-15 years experience

Involvement:

- Online questionnaire OR phone interview
- Discussion group (in HRM and Truro locations)*

For more information, please contact:

Heather Cumming at

*Optional (decision can be made at a later time).

Appendix D: Questionnaire

University of Glasgow
College of Social Sciences

Perceptions of Inclusion

Q1. Please select what best describes your years of experience as an elementary classroom teacher. Do not worry about percentages or status (term, permanent, et cetera).

- ○ New teacher (1-5 years)
- ○ Early-Mid career teacher (10-15 years)

Q2. As a new teacher, please briefly outline your classroom assignments (upper or lower elementary, change in school or board, include any major professional changes). Do NOT name your schools or boards.

Q3. As an early/mid career teacher, please briefly outline your classroom assignments (upper or lower elementary, change in school or board, include any major professional changes). Do NOT name your schools or boards.

Q4. Background information on your school locations and demographics.

ROW 1: Please identify the predominant location of the schools in which you have worked. By clicking all that apply to that location, identify the socio-economic demographics in column 2.

ROW 2: If possible, please identify if you have experience in another school area. By clicking all that apply to that location, identify the socio-economic demographics in column 2.

	Location of Schools			**School Demographics** (click all that apply to the respective location in column 1)		
	urban	rural	suburban	low	middle	high
Majority of teaching spent in:	○	○	○	☐	☐	☐
Some teaching experience in:	○	○	○	☐	☐	☐

Q5. *As a learning centre teacher, I understand the complexity of many of our classrooms in Nova Scotia. Also, I understand classroom teachers are constantly striving to meet each child's needs in every lesson. Please know I am asking you to explore and explain your experiences because I want to provide better in-class support to both teachers and students. Your insight is so important in understanding the needs of the inclusive school system to ensure it continues to strive for and deliver high quality education for all. Thank you for taking the time to honestly and thoughtfully answer the*

following questions.

In your own words, please explain what you believe inclusion to be. ***Please use your own words and answer honestly. There is no right or wrong- this is for you to tell me what you believe inclusion to be.***

Q6. What is your familiarity level with both your board and the provincial inclusion policies?

- ○ Extremely Familiar. Please explain your answer (how did you become so familiar?).
- ○ Very familiar. Please explain your answer.
- ○ Moderately familiar. Please explain your answer.
- ○ Slightly familiar. Please explain your answer.
- ○ Not familiar at all. Please explain your answer (why do you think you not familiar with the policies?).

Q7. In your experience, how are board and provincial inclusion policies reviewed with staff? (for example, staff meetings, PD, memos)

Q8. What opportunities have you had to develop your understanding of inclusion and beneficial strategies to support all students? Please take the time to outline any of your undergraduate, graduate, PD, mentoring and/or conference experiences.

Q9. Please outline the main challenge(s) you have encountered in successfully implementing an inclusive community in your class/school. Please explain why you believe these experiences to be challenges.

Q10. Please outline the main successes you have had in your inclusive classroom/school. Please explain your answer with as much detail as possible.

Q11. In questions 8 & 9, you explain some of the successes and challenges you have experienced, as a classroom teacher, with inclusion. However difficult it can be to meet a variety of needs in one class, there are still many successes. In your opinion, what indicates a successful experience over a negative one (in relation to implementing inclusive practices)? Please explain.

Q12. What do you think can be done to better facilitate successful experiences with inclusive education in the elementary school years? (for example, university courses, PD, teacher collaboration, mentoring, co-teaching). Please explain your answer.

Q13. How do you view your role, as a classroom teacher, in educating all students inclusively? Please explain.

Q14. In your experience, how are students supported by student service teachers (LC, Resource, EAL)?

Q15. In your opinion, what is the role of student service teachers in supporting inclusive education? Please explain.

Q16. What is the relationship between the educational practices of inclusion and standardization? Does one practice affect the other or are they two

separate practices? Please explain.

Q17. Please add any additional information or comments about your experiences with inclusion. *THANK YOU*

Block 1

Appendix E: Participant Consent & Participant Letter

College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Consent Form

Title of Project: Building capabilities for all: Elementary teachers' perspectives on inclusive practices in the province of Nova Scotia

Name of Researcher: Heather Cumming

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I consent to interviews being audio-recorded.
(I acknowledge that copies of transcripts will be returned to participants for verification.)

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

I understand that the data collected from this research will be stored securely with my personal details removed and agree for it to be held as set out in the Plain Language Statement.

I agree to take part in the above study.

☐ I agree to take part in the group discussion (details to be provided).

Name of Participant ..... Signature .....

Date .....

Name of Researcher: Heather Cumming Signature . .....

Date ..... May 18, 2016 .....

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Plain Language Statement

Study title and Researcher Details

Building capabilities for all: Elementary teachers' perspectives on inclusive practices in the province of Nova Scotia

Heather Cumming, Doctorate of Education student at the University of Glasgow

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to read and consider my request!

Details of the project

The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers' experiences shape their understanding and perception of inclusive practices during the foundational elementary school years. As an educator in Nova Scotia, you are aware of the educational reform discussions taking place both provincially and locally. One of the aims of these discussions is to continue to provide high quality education to all students. It is my hope that this research will provide valuable insight into how teachers' experiences can alter their perceptions of inclusive practice. Through an exploration of your experiences as a classroom teacher in an inclusive school system, different supports and strategies may be identified and implemented to target some of the identified challenges.

You have been selected as a possible participant (dependent on your consent) because you are either a newly trained classroom teacher or early/mid-career classroom teacher at the elementary level in Nova Scotia. Your experiences are rich, valuable, and full of insight into the opportunities and challenges of teaching in today's classrooms. I am hoping you are willing to share your first-hand insight with me.

As a participant, I will be asking you to volunteer your personal time in one or two research sessions. In the first session, all participants will be emailed a set of standard, open ended questions to complete in their own home. This session will take approximately 30-60 minutes to complete. The questions will focus around educational background and experiences with inclusive practices. The second session is a discussion group taking place within one month of receiving the emailed questions. This session involves some of the participants and will take up 60-90 minutes. Willing participants should select the necessary box on the consent form indicating interest in the discussion group. The aim of the discussion group is to delve into greater depth of your individual experiences in collaboration with other classroom teachers. The focus group will be audio recorded.

As a wrap up to both sessions, I will email follow-up questions that can be responded to in person or on the phone (audio recorded) or through email. All participants will receive a small token of my appreciation at the completion of their commitment.

Participation is completely voluntary and you are welcome to stop your involvement at any time. If you have concerns or would like further clarity, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher immediately.

All data will be stored in a locked cabinet or in a locked file on my computer and will be dealt with confidentially. Information gathered from interviews will be confidential between yourself and myself; information from the focus groups should remain confidential to the group. Neither you nor your place of work will be identified by name in any assignment or publication arising from the project. Participants may be referred to by a pseudonym. All electronic or paper copies of data will be destroyed when the project is complete. Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as it possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm; I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

The study, *Building capabilities for all. Elementary teachers' perspectives on inclusive practices in the province of Nova Scotia,* has been reviewed by my supervisor, Dr. Margaret McCulloch. Additionally, this research project has been considered and approved by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Glasgow.

For further information, please contact Heather Cumming at

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer Dr Muir Houston, email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix F: Focus Group Questions

1. Thinking about inclusive education and what it means to you, what do you see as the core purpose of the approach?
2. Do you think what you do in the classroom and the school is laying a foundation for all students to be successful in the wider community? Explain.
3. What is the purpose of education?
4. What makes something educational?
5. How does inclusion fit into education? Is it a component of education or is it education?
6. What do you see as the main strengths of inclusive education?
7. What do you see as the largest barriers to inclusive education?
8. What does success look like?
9. Do you think teachers are being appropriately trained to support inclusive education? What is your experience?
10. In your opinion, how does training affect one's perspective?
11. How does inclusive education provide opportunities for students to develop social skills and academic skills for all students?
12. Who benefits? Explain.
13. What is a one-size-fits all approach to inclusive education? How does inclusive education fit in with standards and benchmarks?
14. Is inclusive education a part of education or is inclusive education the education system?
15. Why are there still standards and benchmarks in an inclusive setting? Are they effective?
16. How can we strengthen or further develop our understanding of inclusive education?
17. Final thoughts and insight.

Appendix G: Sample of Manual Coding

Please outline the main challenge(s) you have encountered in successfully i...
The main challenge I have seen to occur when incorporating inclusive communities in my experiences is the attitude students have towards students with different learning needs. Many students have been open and engaging within the class setting with all peers, however some have been closed and unwilling to support other students in a community sense.
The lack of resources and supports in our board. Most of the time the allotment for schools and students are lacking therefore most students are either have 2 to 4 students for one support person (EPA) and sometimes don't even see the classroom on a daily basis. The consistency of having a person work with the student is crucial to their learning. We as teachers talking about making and developing relationships with students in order to help them grow and develop, but when it comes to special needs students, I feel we sacrifice their learning needs because of our lack of resources, which in actual fact they should be the ones we should worry most about because of their special circumstances.
-Insufficient support staff (EPAs) to help students (particularly with academic support) -Physical limitations on classroom space - not enough room to create a comfortable and safe environment that accommodates all my learners needs (cubicles, learning stations, comfort zones)
I would say my greatest challenge was when I had a student arrive at late registration in August with significant global delays into my grade 1/2 classroom. I felt I was on my own with this student. My LC teacher had no experience working with a child with this level of delay. As the student did not have ASD I was unable to access many of the wonderful board resources (personnel and learning materials/toys) that would have been beneficial for this student. I used my personal knowledge of teaching strategies for students with Down syndrome to craft appropriate teaching methods. I feel that there are not enough supports at the board level to ensure classroom teachers have the appropriate background knowledge about the specific special needs that are in their classroom. If a student has ASD there are supports. If a student has FAS, DS, CP, Q10, or any of the many other concerns, teachers are left to solve things at the school site (unless there is significant behavior involved).

Please outline the main challenge(s) you have encountered in successfully i...
The number one challenge I have experienced is classroom teachers who feel overwhelmed with the children in their classes and then to feel the pressure of planning for children with additional needs in their room. Another challenge I experience regularly is when a teacher places the student in a desk away from the other students. Helping them understand that because the student is in the room does not mean that they are included.
The main challenge is lack of support in the classroom to adequately focus on the individual needs of each student. I can plan lessons catering to the different needs but when the class sizes are large and the needs so varied it is difficult to give the appropriate attention to all students and ensure everyone is included appropriately in the lesson.
Not having the right supports set up to allow for a fully inclusive system has been the biggest challenge. Regular classroom teachers are expected to have current skills and knowledge with regards to inclusion and dealing with special needs, setting up PLPs and this is not the case. More support from district, administrators and government is needed in order for a truly inclusive education system to work.
Inclusion, in my experience, has not worked. The challenges are disruptive behaviour, elevated noise levels, too many needs for one teacher (even with an aid) to address. Most elementary students in the 21st century can not work independently and are frequently off task. They need constant monitoring and redirecting. Needs are not being adequately met. When you add a LC student to the mix, everything becomes even more complicated.

Blue: pa
Green: tr
Yellow: tc
Pink: mis
Grey: scp
Red: cp
Purple: mr
Khaki: pl