Exploring attitudes to inclusion: a case study of changes to inclusion in an independent post-primary school using thematic data analysis.

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Education (EdD)

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September 2021

Abstract

The education of pupils with different or additional learning needs in England has been in a state of change since this was first recognised as a desirable practice in the late 1970s. Changes of government meant different emphases on the purpose of education, and a variety of views on the anticipated outcomes of schooling as the global economy took on greater influence. Ideas of "inclusion" – educating all pupils in mainstream schools as far as possible – began to gain prevalence in the late 1990s, and a debate began about what this might look like for the majority of schools and pupils. It has been difficult to find consensus – even an agreed definition of the term "inclusion" is lacking.

Independent schools in England have historically been less inclusive than state-maintained schools, as they have not been subject to the legislative frameworks around Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Independent schools are also often socially and academically exclusive, with admission being constrained by entrance examinations and ability to pay fees.

This dissertation is a case study of one independent school in England, exploring how it became more inclusive and examining teacher attitudes to the changes made. It questions teacher attitudes to educational inclusion, barriers and opportunities, and suggests further steps for the case study school. Eight teachers were interviewed – all were at middle management level within the school. The interviews were analysed using thematic data analysis to create a "thematic journey" through the body of interviews collected, and the data used to explore teacher perceptions of the issues raised.

The analysis demonstrated that the interviewees held broadly positive conceptions of educational inclusion, although these had been developed more through experience and time spent teaching than through initial or subsequent training. The interviewees were able to give examples of how they had personally worked to include specific students with barriers to learning, as well as ideas for further improvements to inclusion in the case study school. The data is used to suggest improvements to professional practice in the area of inclusion for the author, for colleagues in the case study school, and for other independent schools.

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Acknowledgements

I could not have completed this work without the help and support of many groups and individuals.

My thanks and appreciation are due to the following:

- The Principal and Governors of the case study school, who allowed me to approach my then colleagues to participate.

- Those of my colleagues who agreed to be interviewed. They gave up their time, even when they were so busy with other things – particularly those who had family commitments during remote learning and yet still found time to be interviewed. All of my colleagues provided perceptive and useful comments and opinions, and I am so grateful.

- My ever-patient and supportive supervisor, Dr Georgina Wardle. Georgina was always available with advice and answers to the most basic of questions. She encouraged me to see myself as an academic, even when I doubted my own capabilities.

- And finally to my loving family, who have never doubted me. They have put up with having so much of our precious family time given over to my studies, and have always encouraged, looked after and championed me – from the small things such as endless cups of tea, to the large such as family holidays being organised around my writing. So much love and heartfelt gratitude goes to both of them.

Author's declaration

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

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Abbreviations

ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSS	Case Study School
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act 1995
DfE	Department for Education
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EBacc	English Baccalaureate
EdD	Doctorate in Education
ESTMA	Education Support for the Medically Absent
GT	Grounded Theory
INSET	In-Service Education and Training
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
NASEN	National Association for Special Educational Needs
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PLC	Personalised Learning Centre
SATs	Standardised Assessment Tests
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SpLD	Specific Learning Difficulty
SLT	School Leadership Team
SMT	School Management Team
T(D)A	Thematic (Data) Analysis
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Educational inclusion is a complex and multifaceted concept. Ever since the publication of the Warnock report (Warnock:1978) into the education of young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), many schools have been looking for different ways to include pupils with a range of barriers to their learning.

The very idea of "whom" inclusion is supposed to include is contested. Although traditionally many within the field of education might assume that inclusion relates only to those pupils who have specific learning difficulties or disabilities, a broader inclusive tradition has developed which seeks to look at many other differences that affect a child's chances in education and potentially therefore in life. These include such concepts such as socio-economic status, family circumstances, the availability of different types of schools in a specific area, membership of a minority ethnic group and, across the world, ideas of which ages and genders should be educated to certain levels.

1.1 The research context

This research was conducted in England, so although some of the ideas explored have implications outside of that geographical area and political system, much of it is specific to English education, and particularly post-primary education, in a context where a range of school types are available (e.g. academies, free schools, faith schools, independent schools – and what are termed 'mainstream' or 'specialist' settings).

Independent schools in England have been slower to make changes in their interpretations and development of inclusion than maintained state schools, as traditionally they have not been bound by all of the legislation around special educational needs and disabilities. Another reason that independent schools have often struggled to be inclusive is that many are selective on the basis of academic ability, gender, or ability to pay quite significant fees. For example, the Independent Schools Council Census for 2020 (online), lists the average cost per annum as £15,000 (Independent Schools Council (ISC) 2020:17).

The case study school is an independent post-primary school for girls situated close to London. From this short description it can be seen that the case study school might not be considered to be “inclusive” using a broad definition, as it excludes pupils who do not identify or were not born as female, and those who are unable to pay the fees or are not eligible to access a bursary. It is also academically selective, although not to the same degree as many of its local competitors, and thus could be considered exclusionary on another front. That is not to say that it does not admit pupils with a range of barriers to their learning; however, any such pupils who are admitted must also meet the gender, academic and socio-economic admissions criteria of the school.

Although it might seem that a study in such a “niche” educational setting might have little to offer to the wider debate about inclusive education, there are two issues to consider. Firstly, a dissertation that explores inclusion in such a setting makes a significant contribution to the body of knowledge, as there is little extant research on inclusion in independent single-sex secondary schools in England. This fulfils one of the requirements for doctoral study, in that it contributes new and potentially useful knowledge. Secondly, by demonstrating that inclusion can be developed in such a setting, it is hoped that other schools in similarly small sectors might realise that all schools, no matter how small a niche they fill, can explore inclusion and develop it in a way that works for their individual circumstances. The usefulness of this research and the implications for professional practice is further discussed in Chapter 22.

I have been a teacher for over 20 years and for much of that time have chosen to work with pupils who experienced particular barriers to their learning, most recently those with autistic spectrum conditions. I joined the case study school as Head of Science. After a number of years in this position I took on the role of SENCo, and set about restructuring the way that inclusion was perceived, delivered and documented in policy. After making these changes it became apparent that there was a need for research to explore the understandings of my colleagues in the case study school around the complexities of inclusion. I had based the changes that I made as SENCo on my own understandings of inclusion, which were informed by work I had done in previous Masters degree programmes, but not on any recent readings or analysis of the vast body of literature in this

area. I also had to locate the work within a reasonably narrow definition of inclusion to suit the context – if the case study school were to become more inclusive, this would be in the area of inclusion encompassing education for pupils with SEND, as many of the other areas (such as gender, type of school) were beyond my scope either to explore or to influence.

As part of my study for a Doctorate in Education, I decided to conduct case study research exploring three areas – colleagues' perceptions and understandings of inclusion in relation to education, their feelings around potential opportunities and barriers arising from such inclusion, and an exploration of potential further changes that could be made to the delivery of inclusion in the case study school.

1.2 The dissertation structure

This dissertation comprises four sections. The first (Section A: Chapters 1–7) is a literature review which explores the history and development of ideas around inclusion, the purposes of education and whether inclusion can serve a social justice function within it, the policy climate within which inclusion is located (including competing policy initiatives such as the standards agenda), the skills and qualities needed by leaders in a school if they are to bring about change, and the challenges of changing schools - including the case study school - to become more inclusive.

The second section (Section B: Chapters 8-11) explores the choice of qualitative research methods such as the use of case studies and interviews that were chosen to conduct this research, the paradigmatic perspective from which the research was conducted, and the ethical considerations of conducting research in the school in which I was working.

I chose to analyse the data produced in the research process using the thematic data analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006 and 2013) and the third section of this dissertation (Section C: Chapters 12-15) explores the rationale behind this and the process of creating themes.

The final and longest section (Section D: Chapters 16-22) uses the interviewees' comments to explore the themes in depth, to attempt to answer the research questions, to suggest ways forward for the case study school in the field of inclusion, and the implications of the research on my own and others' professional practice.

1.3 The research questions

After a period of initial reflection and reading, I decided on three questions that I wished this research to answer.

1) **How do teachers in the case study school view inclusion in education?**

2) **What do teachers in the case study school see as the benefits of and challenges to inclusion?**

3) **How could the case study school move forwards with inclusion?**

To begin to create interview questions that might generate enough data to answer these questions, I first needed to explore the literature to examine current thinking regarding inclusion: how this had been developed and why inclusion was allocated importance within an educational policy climate emphasising achievement within a global context. I also wished to explore ideas in the literature that pertained to changing policy within schools, particularly policy regarding inclusion, and whether this would look different in an independent school such as the case study school.

1.4 The dissertation title

The dissertation was thus titled “Exploring attitudes to inclusion: a case study of changes to inclusion in an independent post-primary school using thematic data analysis”. In this context, the word “attitudes” is ascribed a certain meaning. Breckler (1984) explores a psychological definition of a tripartite model of attitude, comprising three components – affect, behaviour and cognition. These, Breckler (1984:1191) maintains, sit on a continuum;

> affect can vary from pleasurable (feeling good, happy) to unpleasurable (feeling bad, unhappy). Behavior can range from favorable and supportive (e.g. keeping, protecting) to unfavorable and hostile (e.g. discarding, destroying). Likewise, cognitions or thoughts may vary from favorable to unfavorable (e.g. supporting versus derogating arguments).

Similarly, Toye et al. (2019) describe other multi-component models of attitude, and their description comes close to what I intend by the use of the word “attitudes” in the title – I explore teacher beliefs and thoughts about inclusion (cognitive), their feelings or emotions (affective) and how they actually practise inclusion (behavioural).

By exploring attitudes in this way, the research could cover many components of the interviewees’ understandings of inclusion, with the potential to develop themes which could answer the research questions.

Chapter 2 - Development of Ideas of Inclusion

2.1 The ambiguity of the concept

It could be asked whether educational inclusion in the 21st century is an uncontestably good thing. At first glance, one might assume so. In the current educational climate, who would dare to suggest that following a path to greater inclusion was the wrong thing to do? As Boyle and Topping (2012:14) would have it, 'much of the discourse of inclusion takes it for granted that inclusion is a good thing, like motherhood and apple pie'. Hodkinson (2012:6-9) concurs, indicating that inclusion is a difficult concept to criticise, and cautioning that 'operating inclusion...is complex and multifaceted'.

This has been the case for some time. Kavale and Forness (2000:280) described a conflict of educational visions, and how difficult it was at the turn of the millenium to question prevailing assumptions of inclusion as the way forward. Linking this to the difficulty of "proving" inclusion as the "right" way, they assert 'any opposition to the prevailing vision is [seen as] the result of an intellectual or moral bankruptcy, or both, and not as a different reading of complex and often inconclusive research evidence'. They argue that empirical evidence for the effectiveness of inclusion is lacking.

Gous, Eloff and Moen (2014) remind us that the majority of literature in this area relates to the global North and West, and Lindsay (2006) gives a particular critique of the UN's Salamanca Statement (UNESCO:1994), arguing that the promotion of inclusion is often compared to the challenge of moving beyond racial discrimination. Norwich (2014b:496) uses a similar comparison:

> the adoption of inclusion has been attributed to its strong, intuitive ethical appeal. Inclusion has come to be seen as self-evidently a good thing, in a similar way that democracy or human rights have come to be self-evidently good.

What this means in practice is that one must take care to explain what one means by inclusion, and to try to define the parameters within which it is being operated. Florian and Rouse (2009) discuss how the educational system in Scotland uses the term "additional support needs", and they encourage other jurisdictions to consider more inclusive language than the widely used (in England) "special

educational needs" (SEN, or SEND when disabilities are also being considered). Hope and Hall (2018b:1322) maintain that the main challenge to defining inclusive education lies in the fact that the field is complex, being 'both a statement of principle and a set of practices'. They also criticise the ambiguity of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO:1994), as it tries to negotiate the space between ideal and reality. Shaw (2017:293) also questions whether definitions of inclusive education encompass "just" SEND, or 'the concept of social inclusion of children with a variety of differences, difficulties and needs'. Shaw also questions ideas of normality, or typicality - an idea that is further elucidated by Norwich (2014a:408) when he examines the notion of "difference" - as 'othering or stigmatizing, or as the basis of enabling, and adapting provision to need'.

The United Nations in General Comment Number 4 (UN (CRPD) 2016:4) on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities maintains that inclusive education is to be understood as, among other aspects:

> A principle that values the well-being of all students, respects their inherent dignity and autonomy, acknowledges individual requirements and ability to effectively be included in and contribute to society

and

> The results of a process of continuing and pro-active commitment to eliminate barriers impeding the right to education, together with changes to culture, policy and practice of regular schools to accommodate and effectively include all students.

This document comes much closer to giving a clear, useable definition of inclusive education than previous publications such as the Salamanca Statement. However, it can be seen that the notion of inclusion, or inclusive education, is still somewhat contested - and has been so, historically, over a period of many years. My own view is, I feel, perhaps rather simplistic. I believe that all children should attend a school that can support them to achieve their optimum outcomes – academic, social, and whatever else is meaningful for them - and that as teachers it is our job to help our pupils to work towards and to be happy with those outcomes. Educational inclusion, to me, means that we do not deny these opportunities to children because of any perceived "difference". The Delors Report (Delors 1996:17) argues that education should enable young people 'to know, to do, to live together and to be', and describes the 'mission' of education as 'to enable each one of us, *without exception* [emphasis added], to develop all our talents to the full'. I feel that none of those goals are incompatible with educational

inclusion; indeed, living together – in terms of being surrounded by a diversity of others rather than an entirely homogeneous cohort - is a key component of inclusive educational environments. I will discuss this further in Chapter 3.

2.2 Some history of SEND and inclusion

In this section, a predominantly chronological analysis of some key literature may help to uncover developing ideas of what should and could constitute inclusive education. However, there is not scope here to provide a full history of the development of special or inclusive education. Messiou (2017) does provide such a history, which can be summarised as:

- A human rights perspective from 1948 onwards
- A response to children with SEN from 1990 onwards
- A response to marginalised groups from 2000 onwards
- Transforming education systems from 2005 onwards
- Ainscow's et al.'s (2006) six typologies of inclusion;
    - Inclusion as concerned with SEND
    - Inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusions
    - As about all groups vulnerable to exclusion
    - As the promotion of the school for all
    - As education for all
    - As a principled approach to education and society
- The current focus on inclusion as a tool for social justice

The last of these will be more fully discussed in Chapter 3. Hodkinson (2010:62) also provides a useful summary and valuable critique of the history of educational inclusion in the decades between the 1970s and 2010, concluding that one of the biggest problems for inclusion is that it has 'become defined and operationalised by governmental agents of accountability and standards'. This idea of competing priorities will also be addressed in a subsequent chapter.

Writing in 1995, Pugach was exploring the nascent attempts at inclusion in the US. Pugach (1995:212-3) noted the challenges that inclusion posed to the status quo on 'conventional mainstreaming' and cautioned, even then:

> More does have to change if inclusion is the goal, and the changes required are greater and more fundamental than ever before...while debates over the appropriateness of inclusion in special education policy continue to be rancorous, these are not really debates about the merits of inclusion as a basic philosophy or ethical stance. Rather, they are debates over...the capacity for the educational system to recreate itself with inclusion as a basic premise.

In the UK, Leslie and Skidmore (2007:16) produced an analysis of prevailing political ideas regarding inclusion in the preceding decade. This paper critically examined the moves between mainstream education, special education, and true inclusion as a consequence of different governments' political ideologies, and concluded 'inclusion must not be judged by which building a child is educated in, but by the standard of education they receive'.

At that point in the late 2000s, researchers and authors began to be troubled by the fact that the rhetoric and promise around inclusion was not being matched by practice in the field. Ferguson (2008), Lloyd (2008) Pijl and Frissen (2009), Ekins and Grimes (2009) and Armstrong et al. (2010) all draw attention to various problematic aspects of the situation with respect to inclusion at the time of their writing, including different policy orientations, barriers to system change and the constraints of the curriculum, accountability and testing. Nonetheless, they recognised that many schools were doing their best under trying circumstances, as they endeavoured to reconcile competing policy initiatives, with Pijl and Frissen (2009:367) claiming that 'one cannot but conclude that impressive progress has been made'. However, Paliokosta and Blandford (2010:179) contest this; writing in 2010 to summarise the development of inclusive education policy and ideology throughout the decade to 2010, they argue that 'the impact on the educational experience of children described as having SEN has not been either clear or consistent' and claim that school cultures had not changed for the better with respect to understanding and acceptance of differing needs.

Moving slightly on to the early 2010s, Tomlinson (2012:8) critiques the rise of an "industry" devoted to SEN, particularly examining the idea that education is designed to produce economically productive members of society, and how this had led to an era of parental choice of schooling being focussed on measurable outcomes and success. Tomlinson cautions that 'the idea of a knowledge economy is pointless rhetoric for those who at best will find low-level employment'. This criticism of the agendas of choice and accountability is supported by Boyle and Topping (2012:11) who maintain that the 'middle classes who could play the system' have done well for their children by getting them into "good" schools. They do, however, concede that the inclusion landscape had moved on:

> the emphasis on needs did result in a movement away from medical models of disability and towards social and educational models of understanding, which acknowledged that educational difficulties are dependent on the education context in which the child is situated, and the type and quality of teaching they received - in other words, factors outside the child as well as inside.

In 2011, it was announced in a UK government Green Paper (Department for Education:2011) that there would be a significant update to SEN legislation in the UK and there was much hope that this would lead to better provision for children and young people with SEND. Richardson (2013) suggested that the reforms might provide policy opportunities to use external agencies, define responsibilities for accountability and use greater strategic insight to develop services. Florian (2014) hoped that there would be greater focus on person-centred approaches to inclusion, and on improving school cultures to support individuals rather than wholesale school system change. However, Norwich (2014a:418-9) was already scathing about the proposed reforms, stating that they were 'silent about an interactive causal model of SEN' and 'missing guidance when most needed'. Norwich then adopted a slightly more positive tone in another paper (2014b), where he listed key themes of current attitudes to inclusion as including:

- Accepting and valuing all
- Not leaving anyone out
- Promoting fraternity
- Enhancing equal opportunities
- Active participation in school life
- Schools reorganising to become problem solving organisations
- Listening to/empowering unfamiliar voices

Norwich (2014b:496) recognised that inclusion was a 'process without end' and 'not an end in itself, but a means to an inclusive society' but continued to caution that the proposed reforms were not a panacea, and that inclusion should be about much more than SEN. Hardy and Woodcock (2015) summarised policy contexts and discourses around the historical development of ideas of inclusion in the UK, US, Canada and Australia (also covering the OECD and UNESCO), arguing that the 2015 UK reforms were occurring at a time that, while there were some similarities in approach, there was relatively little consistency in either understanding or application of inclusive practices within and across many settings, making it more difficult to analyse any benefits of changes to policy.

The new SEN Code of Practice in the UK was introduced in 2015, and Tutt and Williams (2015) produced a useful book summarising the changes from the previous code, advising SEN co-ordinators and others how to plan and prepare for the requirements of the new system. Lehane (2017:51-67) produced a timely and useful paper comparing the three "modern" SEN codes of practice (1994, 2001 and 2015). Among her criticisms of the 2015 code were that the 2011 Green Paper which preceded it referred to 'radically different overhaul or reform nine times'. Lehane argued that the 2015 code was deficient in that the pathfinder pilot schemes used to trial the reforms had been 'rushed, with no clear assessment criteria', that the new code operated in a context of 'private sector models redolent of competition and entrepreneurship', that 'SEN and inclusion policies were always of less importance than the standards agenda', and that choice of schools for pupils with SEN was complicated and 'largely illusory'. Lehane concluded that the 'overall effect of this 2015 code...is both complex and opaque'.

In 2019, the UK Government's Education Select Committee (ESC:2019) produced a broadly critical report on the impact of the 2015 reforms (House of Commons Education Committee, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities 2019). Despite conceding that there were significant issues, the report asserted 'we have not been persuaded that the 2014 reforms are anything but the right ones'. [The reforms were first introduced in 2014 but then superseded by 2015 legislation]. Nonetheless, much criticism was levied at the reformed code, including 'a serious failure of administration, policy and expenditure' (ESC 2019:12), 'a lack of ownership or responsibility being taken for paying for interventions' (ESC 2019:12), a lack of accountability and compliance, and bureaucracy that has created a 'complex, awful and unnecessarily antagonistic experience for parents' (ESC 2019:19) . The committee found that children's needs were unmet, support was rationed, and there was a 'lack of support for wider outcomes than just education and employment opportunities' (ESC 2019:21). The report concluded (ESC 2019:83) that 'there are clear and fundamental problems that need fixing now, not left waiting on the outcome of another review'.

This section shows that, while policies and practices in relation to educational inclusion have changed over the past two decades, there are still inconsistencies, a problem with a lack of clearly identified parameters for inclusion, and legislation (in the UK) that is still not fit for purpose. It would appear – as shown by, for example, the repeated reprints of Booth and Ainscow's Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow 2016), and the plethora of journals addressing the issue - that many schools do need to move further forward on their inclusion journey (as an illustration, the International Journal of Inclusive Education published four issues in 1997, and fourteen in 2020). Further questions, then, arise about the types of inclusion that exist and what schools can do to improve.

2.3 Types of inclusion; the universalist / moderate debate

There seem to be many binaries in the inclusion debate – for example, integration vs inclusion (e.g. Glazzard, 2013), universalist vs moderate inclusion, mainstream vs special schools. Beckett (2009) suggests that we need to put these aside and instead focus on addressing inequalities in education, in order to address what he calls 'disabling attitudes'.

A key proponent of the inclusive education movement is Mel Ainscow. He has produced what is referred to as six "typologies" of inclusion (referenced in section 2.2 above), which many authors use as a framework for their discussions on inclusion and how to move along the "continuum" of inclusive provision. This is no easy task, however. Hope and Hall (2018a:1197) caution that 'the theoretical framework for inclusive education is complex and contradictory'. There is a deep-seated dilemma in the task of providing an education of equal quality for all children, whilst taking heed of their differences and diversity. That this education needs to have regard to social justice, equity and empowerment only makes the task more difficult.

Woodcock and Hardy (2017:667) caution that there is a tendency to oversimplify inclusion, and that current debates have 'a tendency to reify binary notions of inclusion and exclusion' and that this reification is 'readily apparent internationally at the policy level [and] within and across national jurisdictions'. This position, that inclusion is the opposite of exclusion, is sometimes referred to

as “universalist inclusion” - the idea that every child should attend the “same” school (same in terms of locality, type etc) and that if they do not, they are being excluded. Cigman (2007:789) provides a very useful examination of the differences between universalist and “moderate” inclusion, which includes much criticism of the universalist position. Some of her arguments include the idea that all inclusionists are ‘motivated by a desire to protect children from disrespectful practices and attitudes’ and that universalists do not hold a “moral high ground” in that aspect. Cigman also questions whether all schools actually can provide a satisfactorily inclusive environment for every child, even if they should. Cigman is concerned that the universalist movement’s ‘insistence on unconditional universality’ (2007:792) risks a backlash against all inclusion, if this is seen to be an unrealisable ideal. In contrast, however, Graham and Slee (2008:277) argue that, unless we are more specific about what we expect from inclusion, using ‘vernacular terms which assume a benign commonality’ will conceal competing discourses about inclusion.

Low (2006:3) is one of the key proponents of what is known as “moderate inclusion” and provides another valuable analysis of the tensions between this and the universalist position. Low describes how, historically

> a settlement was arrived at based on a mixed economy of provision that acknowledged a decisive shift towards inclusion, with progressive re-engineering of the system to support inclusion as the goal, but with a place reserved for those whose needs cannot be met in the mainstream...but this consensus is now being challenged.

Low reserves particular criticism for the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education’s “10 reasons for inclusion” (CSIE:2008), arguing that the right to inclusion cannot be absolute when parental choice indicates that some parents wish the right to an alternative option. Low also cautions against the CSIE’s claim that effective inclusion and improved achievement are causally linked, stating that that there is no evidence to support this. According to Low, full or universal inclusionists also oppose charities and advocacy groups who wish to retain special provision: ‘they subordinate the value of self-determination to the value of inclusion’ (Low 2006:8-9). The crux of Low’s argument is that ‘a system which attempts to meet everyone’s needs together meets nobody’s’. Low’s view on this is supported to an extent by Lumby and Coleman (2016:152), who maintain that ‘specific learning needs and disabilities post challenges for leaders of

[mainstream] schools grappling with ideas of equality, equity and inclusion and how to apply them'. Boyle and Topping (2012:47) lend further weight to this argument:

> inclusive education policies and practices, with the emphasis on diagnosis and the individual allocation of resources to students, have not built the capacity of schools and teachers to develop an inclusive curriculum and pedagogy across a broad range of differences.

Boyle and Topping suggest a different term than moderate inclusion. "Optimal" inclusion, they argue, recognises the desire to balance some aspects of inclusion (placement, participation, belonging, achievement), with teachers' concerns about their ability to adequately support students, lack of resources, and the effectiveness of inclusive settings in meeting a range of needs.

To return to Ainscow, in 1999 he suggested that the movement towards more inclusive practices is 'not about making marginal adjustments to existing arrangements' (Ainscow 1999:11) but rather about fundamental organisational restructuring to result in a continual journey along the continuum from lesser to greater inclusion. Whether or not this continuum should include "special" schools is an integral part of this debate.

2.3.1 Mainstream and special schools

As discussed in the previous section, the universalist position on inclusion maintains that all children, regardless of need, should be educated in the same setting. This seems to preclude the existence of special schools, which are defined by the UK Government as those which can specialise (at age 11 and older) in one of four areas of SEN:

- Communication and interaction
- Cognition and learning
- Social, emotional and mental health
- Sensory and physical needs

Schools can further specialise within these categories, e.g. within communication and interaction, a school could focus on autism spectrum disorders, within sensory and physical needs a school could focus on supporting visual impairment.

There has been much debate about the impact of including more students with SEND in mainstream schools over the past two decades. Dyson and Farrell (2006:115-119) state that 'the idea that children with significant levels of need can successfully be included in mainstream schools continues to be met with scepticism in some quarters'. These authors researched the impact on achievement of pupils in mainstream schools of including SEND peers, and found that there is a very small, negative statistical link, i.e. 'students in more inclusive schools tend to attain at marginally lower levels' but they caution that this link is not causal. It is, they suggest, perhaps linked to the inclusion of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties in the statistics. Black (2019), thinking about what future inclusive schools might look like, conjectures that the "push" towards mainstream may have had a greater impact on secondary schools due to subject specialism, different organisational structures and a greater emphasis on outcomes. Lumby and Coleman (2016:9) ask similar questions: 'Is the same curriculum suitable for all? Can learners and staff with disabilities be treated the same as others? The same treatment may have a differential impact'.

Ainscow (1999:4) suggested that there were three options with respect to all pupils being fully included in mainstream schools:

- Continue to maintain the status quo, in the belief that those members of the class who do not respond have some problem that prevents their participation
- Make compromises by reducing expectation, in the belief that some pupils will simply never be able to achieve traditional standards
- Seek to develop new teaching responses that can stimulate and support the participation of all class members

Ainscow suggests that what is needed are 'strategies that personalise learning' and that 'the scrutiny of the practice of what we sometimes call ordinary teachers' (1999:5) can give the starting point for making classrooms more inclusive. Ainscow seems to feel that to do otherwise is an example of "deficit thinking" - the idea that some pupils have to be taught in a different way.

Another set of critiques of the special school system comes from Armstrong et al. (2010:4). Firstly, they suggest,

> Opposition to traditional systems of special education has often been led by disabled people and their supporters, who have argued that special education restricts opportunities for disabled people as citizens, because of the way it labels them as having intellectual, social and/or physical deficits.

Armstrong et al. also accuse first world countries of using special schools to 'reinforce a culture of dependency' and contributing to a lack of social diversity in mainstream schools. The authors maintain that, while legislation and teacher training have better prepared school staff to meet the needs of all pupils in inclusive classrooms, it is the 'resistance of schools and teachers to embracing inclusion' that has led to 'continuing perceptions of some groups of students as problems to be managed' (Armstrong et al. 2010:28).

However, Armstrong et al. (2010:37) concede that mainstream education

> is a system that by its very essence is centred on the average needs and abilities of the school population. Even if it were possible to individualize the delivery of education within the mainstream classroom so that all needs were engaged with, such an approach would remain less than optimally effective in terms of learning outcomes and particularly inappropriate for students at the extremes, the outliers.

Advocates of separate special schools include Hope and Hall (2018a and b) who challenge the idea that separateness is necessarily problematic. On "voluntary separation" - actively choosing a non-mainstream school - they claim that this 'provides a clear rationale for why the experiences of some communities might be enhanced by being in separate spaces' (Hope and Hall 2018a:1200), as particular groups would not need to explain or clarify their differences or needs, but by being in a named setting they would have chosen schooling that by definition was set up to accept and accommodate any particular needs. Hope and Hall encourage a 'move away from binary thinking in which practice is categorized as either inclusive or exclusive' (2018b:1324).

Bowe, Ball and Gold (2017) also discuss the importance of parental choice, as embraced by the moderate inclusionist movement, claiming that while classroom teachers - according to the 2015 Code of Practice - should be able to provide for the needs of the majority of their students through high-quality teaching, some

pupils will need more intensive intervention, and this may not be available or suitable within a particular mainstream school. Resources and expertise are a concern - Boyle and Topping (2012:11) caution that statutory assessments of SEN can be used as 'a tool to unlock [scarce] resources' but suggest that mainstream can work: 'truly inclusive classrooms exist because they do away with the concept of special learning needs - because every child has a special learning need' (2012:83).

The choice of a mainstream or special school - and indeed the position of schools on the continuum of inclusive provision - is fraught with tension. Shaw (2017) maintains that the question is not as simple as *where* children should learn, but also *what* the curriculum should be. Shaw, reviewing the existing literature, concludes that both mainstream and special schools have a place in the continuum of provision.

Alan Dyson, quoted in Allan and Slee (2008:35), decides that the inclusion question is bigger than placement, and summarises the situation thus:

> I think there are two views of inclusion that are rarely, if ever, made explicit. One view says that there is a set of practices, relationships, conditions, whatever, which are more or less inclusive and you can study them, you can intervene in them, you can change them, and there is a kind of practical task which is to make things more inclusive. I think there is another view of inclusion which is that inclusion is a state of mind or a state of the soul, it's a state of grace almost...the more you incline towards [that] view, the less relevant empirical research becomes, because it's about people, it's about thinking.

I agree with the latter of Dyson's two "views" – I have always felt that being inclusive, in my teaching, was a way of being, and it came quite naturally to me. Every child is unique and has their own learning challenges; one of the reasons that I find teaching so rewarding is that every day is different. However, I also feel that 'mainstream' education is not the best fit for *every* child, and that parents should be able to choose the provision that they feel is most appropriate for their child.

It is important to consider what this process of inclusive thinking might look like in the current educational climate.

2.4 Inclusion as a process: a journey, not a destination

Amongst the arguments about definitions, language use, and the many binaries that troubled the inclusion debate over the past two decades, consensus began to build that there was no "final destination" of inclusion - that it is not a finite state that can simply be achieved, with a school's inclusion task thus complete (Hodkinson, 2012; Glazzard, 2013; Walton and Nel, 2012; Boyle and Topping, 2012). This process of constant reflection has been urged for some time. Clark (1999:47) cautions us to be wary of 'any attempt to characterize schools as unequivocally inclusive or otherwise...fixed entities with determinant characteristics'.

Instead, attention turned to the political climate in which this inclusion journey was occurring, and the development of the necessary conditions to allow schools to make progress, whatever their starting point. Woodcock and Hardy (2017:669) maintain that this change, in schools, requires a 'politics of diversity...valuing difference and diversity within schools and communities, and fostering a micro and macro political culture to achieve such ends'. Wedell, writing in 2005, urged policymakers to include such planning for diversity in a fundamental way, rather than as an 'add-on' (2005:6), and Ferguson (2008:113) urged an examination of the 'complex interaction between the educational environment and the child's ability'. Yet Messiou (2017:152) asked 'if inclusion is about all, why do we still mostly focus on some?', reflecting that this journey is still ongoing and possibly a long way from even having a destination in sight. It is difficult to find a consensus on what the "perfect" inclusive environment would look like, but at a minimum, Mulholland (2019:240) suggests, support should be 'built in, not bolted on'.

So, are there ways of developing inclusion that are "better" than others? Tisdall and Riddell (2006) suggested that there were three policy approaches:

- Supporting or changing the child (the individualized approach)
- Making schools inclusive for all (the systems approach)
- Challenging the mainstream (an anti-discrimination, civil rights approach)

In the years since then, focus shifted away from the first of these towards changing schools' whole way of working to include all, in support of a child's right not to be excluded, regardless of need. Lindsay (2006:20) maintained that rigorous research could inform policy and practice, and take inclusion 'beyond abstraction

or ideology into the sphere of [children's] daily lives', arguing that society was beyond the point of discussing *whether* to promote inclusion, and into the arena of implementing it in practice. Low (2006:9), however, warned against the 'utopian ideal' of the 'general education system being geared up in terms of staff expertise and facilities, to cater for every kind of disability as an integral part of its provision' and cautioned 'monolithic prescriptions will not do, and nor will mechanical or ideological rules of thumb' (2006:13). Graham and Slee (2008:280) suggested that we problematize ideas of "normality" in order to arrive at a 'ground zero point' from which to build an inclusive community. Also in 2008, Ferguson advises that 'policymakers have to back off from telling schools how to become inclusive, and accept that they will develop different practices at different paces' (Ferguson 2008:374).

For nearly a decade, then, schools continued to try to improve their inclusive provision. The political climate changed (see sections 2.1 and 2.2 above), as did ideas about the desirability of exclusively mainstream provision; this continuously shifting landscape cannot have made the jobs of school leaders and SENCos any easier. Many schools used various editions of Booth and Ainscow's "Index for Inclusion" to guide them in this process; perhaps this "checklist" based process is partly what Low was warning against.

After the publication of the 2015 reforms and new code of practice, attention shifted to how successful schools' journeys had been. Boyle and Topping (2012:43) asserted that 'making inclusion work is a far more complex task than is often suggested, and much of the inclusive education enterprise is inherently flawed'. Norwich (2014b:497) reflected that 'the practical experiences of inclusion [had] presented many challenges'. De Vroey, Struyf and Petrie (2016) searched the literature (96 studies in 10 countries) for a list of common features of inclusive secondary schools, and found - among other aspects - the following:

- Inclusive cultures, policies and practices
- Supportive relationships, attitudes and perspectives
- Visibility of diverse groups of students
- Teacher agency and collaborative practice

However, they found that there were far fewer studies on policy issues at the school level than on inclusive attitudes or practices, perhaps reflecting the difficulties of individual schools making changes to policy while political goalposts were shifting so frequently.

In 2016, reflecting on Ainscow's approach and developments in inclusion up to that point, Lumby and Coleman concluded that inclusion continued to be a process, a 'never-ending search' (2016:12) to identify and remove barriers to learning, to ensure that all students could participate and achieve, but with an emphasis on those who might be at greater risk of underachievement or exclusion. They noted that this still had a political aspect; that schools needed to look beyond 'that portion of society that has been prioritised historically' to transform themselves to be 'better matched to the needs and preferences of all'. Boyle and Topping (2012:165) had earlier reached a similar conclusion about the socio-cultural and philosophical barriers to inclusion, arguing that

> public schools are based on middle-class mainstream culture, are highly inequitable, and perpetuate a different social class structure that relegates low-income, disabled and culturally diverse students to a future that largely reflects their past.

Lawrie et al. (2017:3) concurred with the idea of the unreachable end-goal, claiming that although 'absolute inclusivity can only exist in the ideal, nevertheless the significance of the goal suggests the importance of striving continually to reach it'.

Very recently, attention has begun to shift to the idea that inclusive teaching is not, in itself, sufficient to claim inclusivity. Assessment and achievement need to be re-examined to promote further inclusion, and the curriculum could also develop - the English and Welsh National Curriculum was first introduced in 1988, and although much has changed since then in education, perhaps not enough. Robertson (2019:246) suggests 'inclusive assessment could also incorporate a breadth of learning and achievement, not just core curriculum progress'. In 1999, in the introduction to the "Index for Inclusion", Mel Ainscow wrote 'there are three kinds of people: people who make things happen, people who watch things happen, and people who wonder what the hell did happen' (Ainscow 1999:16). In this, he was encouraging educators to be the people who *made* things happen, with respect to inclusion. Progress has been slow - in 2003 Sheehy et al. (2004:141)

recognised this, and gave a perhaps more realistic response to Ainscow's optimism:

> Schools and school systems are not going to be changed completely or overnight. This is neither surprising nor something we should demand. What they should change to and how they should change is open to debate. There is not a perfect system awaiting us on the shelf.

Exactly how education systems can change, and the roles that could be played by teachers, middle managers and school leaders is explored in Chapter 5. There is ongoing debate about the future of assessment and the lack of inclusivity of the current assessment formats, led by SENCos and groups such as NASEN, and Biesta (2015) also examines whether "qualification" should be the primary purpose of education (he strongly suggests that it should not).

While Florian (2014:286) maintained that 'inclusive education has been criticized as promising more than it delivers', progress has clearly been made. Although perhaps not as much progress as some might have wished, mainstream schools in the 2020s are, in my opinion, very different places for students with a range of abilities and disabilities, and from a range of backgrounds, than they were in 1999. But whether independent schools have made a similar change also needs to be considered.

2.5 Inclusion in independent schools

One cannot help but conclude that UK independent schools will never be truly inclusive, as by their nature they exclude those students whose families cannot afford to pay fees (with the small number of students on bursaries or scholarships excepted). However, this is not to say that they cannot be inclusive with respect to other aspects of education. This is undoubtedly challenging within a system that many believe perpetuates 'inequalities of social stratification' (Reay, 2006:288).

Davies and Davies (2014) caution that the body of research evidence on the operation of private schools is very small, and that on the subject of inclusive education in independent schools is smaller still. Authors who have investigated this to an extent include Martin and Dunlop (2019:727) who conclude that private (independent) schools are symptomatic of the neoliberal political landscape, and

caution that consideration of profits 'crowds out values worth caring about' in education. Henderson et al. (2020:296) examine the links between independent schools and achievement, including access to third-level education, concluding 'attending a private school gives better access to elite universities, by ensuring that students have high academic attainment'.

There are still some independent schools that are reluctant to admit students with SEN/D for a variety of reasons, not least the perceived effect that this will have on league table positions (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 2017), but since the 2015 Code of Practice places a greater responsibility on independent schools to work within the legislation, this is decreasing. Indeed, many independent schools have decided to embrace the spirit as well as the letter of the law on inclusion. Ainscow advocated this approach in 1999, suggesting 'an alternative, transformative approach to inclusion', but independent schools have traditionally been some years behind the maintained sector in doing things differently; this tradition is what drives some parents to choose the independent sector, in contrast to the personalised approach outlined above. Armstrong et al. (2010:111) describe it thus:

> For each account of schools embracing diversity and inclusion, there are more of schools that struggle or fail outright to engage with inclusion; for each teacher that effectively differentiates their curriculum and teaching practices to engage all learners, there are others that do not know how to begin this process from an inclusive perspective or who believe that it is not their job to do so; for each student that is welcomed in a classroom, there are others that are seen as problems to be got rid of; for each student that gets the additional support they need, there are others that do not.

This is perhaps even more true in some independent schools who are still following a more traditional approach to inclusion and support for students with differences. There is an extent to which some independent schools have a positive role to play in providing an inclusive environment for students, with greater funding, fewer government restrictions in terms of the National Curriculum and (usually) strong parental support. Leslie and Skidmore (2007) found at that time that many parents were choosing the independent option as the only way to find the personalised education they felt their child/ren needed. Their research showed that 83% of the increase in independent school places in the preceding decade had been due to children with SEN, and that the increase in the number of children with SEN in independent schools was far above the rise in SEN places in all schools. It is debatable to what extent this is linked to issues such as smaller class sizes or

teacher experience, or whether it is a reflection of parents feeling that private schools offer more support to their children.

As with all schools, a ‘fully articulated and accepted definition of inclusive education remains elusive’ (Young, MacNamara and Coughlan, 2017:2) in independent schools just as much as in other educational contexts. However, the ‘moral imperative of inclusion’ (Florian, 2014:287) remains strong, and, to return to Ainscow (2007:3), can perhaps help independent schools to also ‘eliminate the social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity’.

Chapter 3 – What is education for?

3.1 Social justice in education today

The previous chapter discussed whether inclusion is a fundamental good, something for all schools today to strive for. And yet this raises a further, much more philosophical question: what is education for? Traditional news media, especially in the UK, with their publication of league tables and frequent references to schools' inspection ratings and popularity, may give the impression that the purpose of education is more focused on the acquisition of formal qualifications than any ideas of social justice. This is perhaps a consequence of the "marketisation" of education, where parental choice is so important. By publishing league tables of "success" – in terms of passing exams – the media perpetuates the idea that all parents want to choose a school primarily on the basis of their child's likelihood of leaving it with as many exam passes as possible. While the media, the UK government, schools and parents continue to participate in this circle of conflating success with headline exam grades, it would be difficult for any of those stakeholders to step away from that cycle and examine the purposes of education through different lenses.

The Harvard Law Review (2014:1726) neatly summarises a dichotomy:

> There are two primary schools of thought on the goals of education. One school emphasises achievement, particularly quantifiable achievement, while the other looks more broadly to notions of citizenship, and personal and community development.

This chapter will examine whether education can and should be used to develop social justice in education, by looking to the latter – and rarer - of these two "schools of thought". In this chapter, I have used the Institute of Continuing Education at Cambridge University's definition of social justice in education: 'the provision of equality of opportunity for all students irrespective of their personal characteristics or social background' (Kettley:2007) as I felt it encompassed the essence of inclusion without being overly either descriptive or prescriptive.

Glazzard (2013:183) maintains that modern inclusive education has been deemed to deliver all things to all people: 'the official scripts of inclusion have been presented as the route to equity and social justice; inclusion is intertwined with

high achievement and raising aspirations for all'. However, Gorard (2016:133) questions this in the light of ever-increasing academisation: 'conversion to academies means the social justice element is now largely ignored in favour of academic progress'. Other authors have indicated yet further roles for inclusive education - tackling discrimination (e.g. Beckett, 2009), reducing inequality (e.g. Miles and Singal, 2010) or maximising participation (e.g. Norwich, 2014b). To return to the ideals of the Delors Commission (Delors 1996:11)

> In confronting the many challenges that the future holds in store, humankind sees in education an indispensable asset in its attempt to attain the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice.

Clearly, inclusive education has a lot to live up to!

To return to the idea of academies and placement, Norwich and Black (2015) examined the differences between various types of mainstream school (e.g. academies, city technical colleges and free schools) and found that state-funded academies had far higher rates of pupils with SEN/D than those belonging to consortia. The authors allege that this 'choice diversity model' of provision actually increases social stratification and segregation. Nicaise (2012:330) agrees: 'stratified education systems generate more socially unequal outcomes'.

Liasidou and Antoniou (2015:13) have a more positive outlook on the role of current schooling, arguing that legislative developments such as the 2015 Code of Practice promote educational inclusion as a human rights and social justice issue. They refer to three types of 'justice' that can be practically implemented to further inclusion:

- Distributive justice - deploying effective, experienced teachers across schools in a range of socioeconomic contexts
- Cultural justice - addressing the 'domination of those groups that hold greater power in education'
- Associational justice - enabling students to play a greater part in decisions that affect them, and to become 'critical and engaged learners and citizens'.

Whatever the school setting, and however it is addressed, one of the major schools of thought in developing social justice in education is that this must be done by reducing inequality. One of the difficulties in doing so is a lack of clarity on what equality should look like, with 'disagreement on the definition of equality objectives [that] prevents societies from achieving truly inclusive education

systems' (Nicaise, 2012:327). Nicaise goes on to describe four sources of inequality pertaining to any particular individual:

- Unequal talents
- Unequal effort
- Unequal opportunities
- Unequal treatment or discrimination

The latter two of these, Nicaise asserts, have the greatest impact on an individual's ability to succeed in education, and mainstream schooling, with its proliferation of school types, is rife with examples of unequal opportunities of school placement, depending on what is available in a local area, and unequal treatment related to how a school treats students with SEND.

One might ask what can be done - in *all* schools - to address this.

3.1.1 Inclusive pedagogy

Inclusive pedagogy is the idea that educators and students work together to create a classroom culture whereby every student has equal access to learning opportunities. The work of Florian and her colleagues has been of key importance in this area. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011:826) describe inclusive pedagogy as focusing on every learner in a classroom, extending the learning to provide opportunities for all, rather than those who have additional or different needs. Inclusive pedagogy, they maintain, provides

> rich learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for everyone, so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life. This new approach to individual differences is distinguished from earlier notions about inclusive education and inclusive practice, which are based on the process of providing for all by differentiating for some.

Florian (2010) argues that this approach does not ignore individual differences between learners – rather, it focusses on learning as a shared activity which avoids the potentially negative effects of treating students with additional needs as being 'different'.

Lingard and Mills (2007:234) describe inclusive pedagogy as 'a central issue' with regard to social justice and inclusion, but caution us 'not to fall into the trap that teachers and pedagogy are all that matter in respect of schooling and social justice'. Inclusive pedagogy, they claim, can enhance educational outcomes but

must be considered holistically with curricula, assessment and the purpose of schooling. Nicaise (2012:238) also agrees with both aspects of Lingard's and Mills' position, that inclusive pedagogy is useful and necessary, but that 'socially just pedagogy alone cannot change rightist policies and discourses', arguing that the socio-political contexts in which education is delivered are the most important factor in determining the social justice of education delivery.

Francis and le Roux (2011:301) maintain that socially just pedagogy can address other forms of discrimination (not just educational inclusion of students with learning challenges), for example racism, sexism and a heteronormative perspective. They agree that teachers have a key role to play, but encourage a focus on increasing teacher agency through professional development to allow them to have confidence in their inclusive pedagogy. These authors assert that, like inclusion itself, social justice education is 'a process and goal' that will eventually allow for the 'full and equal participation of all groups, in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs'.

Socially just education, and the use of inclusive pedagogy to deliver it, is a laudable goal, and yet obstacles to educating in this way – such as the media/ parents/school choice cycle described earlier, as well as resourcing constraints such as money, time and training - may be assumed to be present, or it would surely be more widespread. The competing policy initiatives within education will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4, but first let us consider further whether education is deemed primarily to be for social or economic advantage (notwithstanding that there may be other purposes not discussed here).

3.2 Social vs economic advantage

It is widely agreed that it is difficult to deliver both inclusion and economic outcomes through the same education system. Rayner (2017:27-28) argues that, in a schooling system that retains elements of academic selection and competition between schools for admissions, (both in the independent sector and in some parts of state provision in England, such as grammar schools) 'considerations of social justice, if they are acknowledged at all, are seen as of secondary significance to marketing position and survival'. Rayner puts the blame for this on two decades of significant policy change in education, maintaining that the objectives of social

justice, tackling inequality more broadly, and raising achievement, have been ‘elided’ in the desire of each government to compensate for the perceived deficiencies of their predecessors. Wedell (2005) suggests that to balance all of these competing aspects of provision, schools would have to become much more flexible in the way they deliver education, examining the desired outcomes for each pupil much more closely and providing education to facilitate these outcomes.

Nicaise suggests that the knowledge economy is not in itself harmful for social cohesion or inclusion, but instead that the separation of students by school type was unhelpful. Nicaise acknowledges that ‘weak learners’, including those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, benefited more from socially mixed schools. Ball (2003:50) earlier asserted that ‘egalitarianism and educational excellence appear to be compatible goals’, but this has yet to become public perception. Harris (2013), examining transitions between primary and secondary school settings, noted that the degree of socioeconomic segregation had remained broadly static between 2003 and 2008, and Walford’s 2009 findings that approximately 7% of the student population attended private schools has changed little since then, with a figure of 6% being reported in 2019 (https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/jan/13/public-schools-david-kynaston-francis-green-engines-of-privilege). However, this separation of students is important - Harris (2012:254) found that

> Unequal financial and social resources lead to unequal opportunities to attend the highest performing schools, creating polarized school intakes, inequalities of opportunity and the reproduction of social divisions.

Harris concedes that this separation is not entirely due to parents choosing independent schools, as other “good” schools are found in more affluent areas, and parental choice perpetuates this division between schools perceived as “good” and those that are not. But Francis, Mills and Lupton (2017:10) caution against the ‘unassailable assumption that privatised provision is always negative, especially for social justice’, warning that state-provided education has also failed to deliver noticeable improvements to socially just provision.

If state education has been found wanting in the provision of socially just education, the situation regarding independent schools, parental choice and social justice requires further scrutiny, as independent education by definition is exclusionary towards certain sectors of society (based on ability to pay).

3.2.1 Reasons for choosing independent schools

There is a strong and enduring public perception that students who attend independent schools go on to do "better" in life. For example, Green, Henseke and Vignoles (2017) argue that the privately educated have improved academic attainment, go on to better jobs with better pay, and more opportunities for leadership. MacMillan, Tyler and Vignoles (2015:487) maintain that, in 2012, of the top 200 civil servants in the UK, only one in five was educated outside the private sector. They state that socioeconomically advantaged graduates (i.e. those who attended private schools) have 'higher levels of human capital' (2015: 507), and are more likely to attend "elite" universities, going on to study subjects with perceived greater value in the labour market such as medicine and law. These authors conclude that family backgrounds and social networks have measurable effects on achieving higher status positions in employment. Green and Machin (2008:385) concur, stating that education has come to be seen as the 'prime route to private economic success'.

Are there concrete, measurable reasons why education in independent schools gives one greater opportunities? Green et al. (2008 and 2011) and Davies and Davies (2014) argue that much of the effect is down to resources, and in particular, teaching staff. Davies and Davies explain that private schools will use the resources raised by their charging of fees to reduce class sizes, recruit more effective teachers and employ other, non-teaching support staff. However, they also concede that there are other factors that influence parental choice of school; they also discuss the effects of social capital, being part of a group of like-minded parents, the quality of the surroundings, and student safety.

Green and Machin (2008:402) question the "fairness" of private schools recruiting teachers after they have been trained in the state sector, at taxpayers' expense. This, they argue, means that private schools are 'a significant player in the market for scarce teaching resources', even though private schools are no longer providing

as great a difference in pay and conditions as was once the case. The same authors in 2011 then examined other factors also influencing parental choice, and indicate that this is still primarily considered to be better academic attainment, along with "soft skills' such as being 'well rounded...a confident leader' (Green and Machin 2011:659).

However, it should not be assumed that entry to an independent school automatically leads to privilege and success. Wilde and Green (2016:312) examine the pressures on independent schools to contribute to society by use of charitable status, and warn that not all private schools are academically selective. Indeed, they report a head teacher of a rural private school stating that 33% of that school's intake had an identified special educational need.

Clearly the reasons for choosing independent education are many and varied. This choice is not static or fixed, but the primary determinant does still seem to be perception of the academic and social advantage given in a competitive labour market in the current era of globalization.

3.2.2 The global context

A fuller discussion of competing policy initiatives, including neoliberalism and the impact of globalization will follow in Chapter 4, but this chapter would be incomplete without a recognition that school choice, and therefore potentially socioeconomic segregation, is impacted by the wider global context.

The 2015 SEN Code of Practice has a focus on "life outcomes", but Pearson et al. (2015:51) argue that this seems overly focussed on 'measurable employment outcomes' and that the key concepts underpinning this reform are marketization and performativity. (NB although the code of practice in question was published in 2015, a consultation paper was produced, and an early version of the new code was trialled with some "pathfinder" local authorities in 2014 – hence why Pearson et al. were able to write about it so early).

Lingard and Mills (2007:240) agree that

> In most nation states, global and market forces are undoubtedly exerting an increasing influence over educational systems. Many now recognise neoliberalism as one of the dominant forces exerting influence over identity and value formation, often via or in connection with educational processes.

Condron (2011), using PISA to compare attainment with wealth inequality, finds that economic inequality has a 'tremendous impact' on educational opportunities and outcomes across PISA nation states, and that this contributes to a gap in academic skills. Attending an independent school could arguably contribute to this inequality.

To return to the idea of inclusive education for the purposes of social justice, Armstrong et al. (2010:8) are scathing on the impact of globalization:

> The exhortations of first world aid agencies and international donors for countries to adopt inclusive education as a policy prescription to address both system failure and individual disadvantage can seem idealistic, if not patronising and victimising. On the other hand, the discourse of inclusive education can provide a political space for contesting the wider agenda of social injustice.

Inclusive education remains complex, divided by ideologies and socially stratified school systems, and school leaders are torn by the demands of successive governments to increase inclusion while improving academic attainment. Hodkinson (2012:4) laments this plethora of competing policy initiatives; 'rather than creating a Brave New World for equality and social justice, inclusive education [here] was rendered illusionary by the actors who colonized and striated this inclusionary space'.

Whether there is a place at all for inclusive education amongst these competing policies, and if so, how school leaders are to bring it about, are important issues that will be considered in the next chapters.

Chapter 4 - Competing Policy Initiatives

Whether or not one considers inclusion to be top of the education agenda, there is no doubt that schools have traditionally operated - and continue to do so - under a plethora of competing policy initiatives. According to Clark (1999), Ball (2003), Hodkinson (2012), Glazzard (2013) and others, these include neoliberalism and global marketization, the culture of performativity, and the rise of evidence-based practice.

Hodkinson (2012) discussed how inclusion had become 'illusionary' during the changes of UK government from 2000 onwards, and argued that education policies became confused, with competing priorities. As early as 1999, Clark had warned against just this situation developing, calling the situation 'dilemmatic', as schools sought to pursue liberal, inclusive policies amid internal difficulties and 'within a hostile policy environment' which resulted in less-than-liberal responses (Clark 1999:46). Later, Ball (2003:215) cautioned against

> An unstable, uneven but apparently unstoppable flood of closely interrelated reform ideas [which] is permeating and reorienting education systems in diverse social and political locations, which have very different histories.

However, more recently, Netolicky (2019:305) argues that 'schools *can* engage [emphasis added] with unfavorable policy imperatives to produce outcomes that are by no means inevitably non-inclusive'.

There are a number of these "unfavourable" policies that compete with inclusion - this chapter will consider neoliberalism, performativity / accountability, and the rise of evidence-based practice.

4.1 Neoliberalism

Although Netolicky (2019) disagrees, Glazzard (2013:183) thought that 'inclusion *cannot* [emphasis added] be entangled with neoliberal values that focus on competition and education for the purpose of economic productivity'. Alexiadou and Dovemark (2016) position themselves somewhere between these two ideas, finding that while there are positive trends towards greater inclusion, these are taking place 'in a context of economic, social and political restructuring that is

captured by the term neoliberalism' (2016:14) and going on to further explain reforms to the organisation of school systems based mostly on increased parental choice and competition between schools. In an era where schools stand or fall based on enrolment and results, it would be easy to see inclusion pushed down school leaders' agendas. And this is not confined to the UK. Wilkins (2015:1145), examining education reform in "performative" schools, warns that 'national governments across the globe have promoted neoliberal policies as being not only the most effective way of bringing about economic and social development, but the only way'. Furlong (2013:30) agrees, stating that many nations' policies on education (including teacher education) are most usefully examined through the 'lens of neoliberalism'. For the UK, Furlong cautions that there are four main concerns if we are to achieve 'global competitiveness':

- Apart from a vague determination to deliver "the best" education system, there is 'little appetite to adapt...to the needs of the 21st century global economy'
- Inequality - "pupil premium" has been offered as the main solution to this issue
- Neoconservative notions of knowledge maintenance and transmission
- Lack of devolution of day-to-day responsibility for running schools.

In these circumstances, it is little wonder that Liasidou (2015:6-14) warns against the negative effects of neoliberal ideologies on the formulation of education policy, that 'transformative action is scarce and inconsistent' and that the 'notion of the public good is blatantly denounced'. Liasidou argues that market-driven models have "failed" in education, and that we should return to exploring values instead. Countries such as Finland, Liasidou advises, have managed to achieve coveted increases in educational standards *and* more equitable outcomes.

Yet however much successive UK governments claim to wish to emulate countries such as Finland (more particularly, their high placings in PISA rankings – see, for example Weale (2019) and Clark (2021)) they remain firmly focussed on assessment and testing.

4.2 The culture of performativity

Teaching is often seen as a vocation, and many teachers go into the profession with a sense of service. For example, Chiong et al. (2017:1086) find that many long-serving teachers hold 'intrinsic and altruistic' motivations for entering and remaining in teaching, such as making a difference to society and making a difference to childrens' lives. Moran et al. (2001) reached similar conclusions in their study of student teachers' motivations to train to teach. However, many teachers are becoming dismayed and disillusioned by the move towards a culture of measuring performance. Kelchtermans (2017:971), for example, cites 'intensified work and high stakes testing, accountability procedures and pressure, the obsessive and exclusive concern with instrumental issues of effectivity and efficiency' as reasons for teachers leaving the profession. A conflation of education with output, and the consequent reduction in value of other aspects of education, has been ongoing for some time: Ball (2003:222) warned that 'caring relations have no place in the whole wide world of performativity' and Glazzard (2013:184) later concurred; 'traditional caring discourses are displaced with a performative regime which values and rewards educational output above relationships'. Ball (2003:216) also cautioned against the culture of measuring success, for example to assign positions in league tables:

> The performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of "quality" or "moments" of promotion or inspection. As such, they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement.

The issue, Ball argues, is that these measurements are only "representations", they are not a valid measure of worth - they are simplistic, and misportray themselves as objective and rational. Ball derides the 'mechanics of performativity' (2003:220-225); databases, appraisals, reviews, reports, inspections etc., how this locks teachers into a constant struggle for improvement and comparison of, rather than collaboration between peers, and concludes 'performance improvements may become the only basis for decision making - the heart of the education project is gouged out and left empty'.

Other authors such as Furlong (2013), Wilkins (2015) and Lumby and Coleman (2016) all lament the advance of performativity, how this precludes or reduces education practices driven by social justice perspectives, but that the assumption that the market can deliver an education that provides "successful outcomes" for every child is all too prevalent. These outcomes are usually measured by testing and examinations, the results of which are used to hold schools to account.

4.3 Accountability and testing

Many observers of education agree that schools rise or fall based on their position in league tables of achievement, and there seems to be no way currently to move away from this. Glazzard (2013:184) cautions that 'the current education system celebrates high achievement over the valuing of difference, which inevitably forces educators to invest more time into those learners who will produce valued outputs'. Thomas and Whitburn (2019:163) agree that the propensity of mainly Western countries to measure achievement predominantly by standardised tests is unhelpful for inclusion; it is a course of action that 'creates insurmountable barriers to practices that might facilitate education to serve all learners'. Lloyd (2008:227-228) goes further, maintaining that children with SEND are 'doomed to fail' in a competitive race for achievement and arguing that work to remove barriers to such achievement does not address the key challenge - 'the inaccessibility of the schooling system itself with its rigid norm- and standards-related measures of success'. Lloyd likens the situation to a game in which "normal" children know the rules for success, but students with SEND neither know nor can comply with these rules.

Wilkins (2015:1144) thinks that the situation is more difficult in England than elsewhere:

> Nowhere else has the marketisation and diversification of educational delivery been so extensive. Nowhere else has the formative regulatory framework become so intensive.

Wilkins (2015:1153) also criticises attempts to "close the achievement gap" being linked to a socially progressive agenda, arguing that the underlying purpose of this initiative is to 'create competitors in the knowledge economy' rather than a

genuine attempt to restore equity to a diverse school population. Wilkins (2015:1153) argues

> Pupils from 'disadvantaged' communities (generally a synonym for working class, poor and/or black) are conceptualised as being at risk of failure, a notion that suggests blame can be apportioned for any lack of success in schooling. In the neo-liberal political sphere, this blame is sometimes directed at the individual for making poor choices, sometimes to their families and communities for failing to instill positive attitudes to learning and frequently to teachers and schools for having low expectations and providing insufficient challenge.

Despite all these critiques of the performative regime prevalent in English schools, not all authors maintain that the standards agenda and enhanced inclusion are necessarily at odds. Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006:305) argue that 'the possibilities for inclusive development are inherent in *all* schools [emphasis added]'. Glazzard (2013) makes the key point that the curriculum and assessment need to change, not just teaching, for inclusion and performativity to intersect to a greater extent. One way that this can be done, Glazzard suggests, is through small-scale case studies that reflect on the meanings of inclusion as related to academic performance. Another is to examine the standards that are being promoted to ensure that they are achievable for all students.

However, the pressures to achieve in a results-driven environment affect both experienced teachers and initial teacher training.

4.3.1 The effects on teachers

Clark, writing in 1999, recognised that even then it would be difficult to 'fully realise those inclusive education ideals given the constraints and pressures under which teachers are working' (Clark 1999:44). Ball (2003:215-220) wrote about the "terrors of performativity" and cautioned that constant reform 'does not simply change what people - as educators, scholars and researchers - do, it changes who they are' (2003:215) and that 'what it means to teach, and what it means to be a teacher, are subtly but decisively changed in the processes of reform' (2003:218). Ball asks teachers to consider 'are we doing this because it is important, because we believe in it, because it is worthwhile, or is it being done ultimately because it will be measured or compared?' (2003:220).

More recently, Lumby and Coleman (2016:21) argued that the pressures of the performativity context increase the distance between teachers and students, make relationships between staff more hierarchical with less room for individuality, and make teachers subject to inspectors rather than partners in development. They maintain that 'evidence of the negative effect of public policy in England suggests that equality for both staff and learners may have suffered'. And this is not restricted to England - Furlong (2013:29) asserts that 'teachers are now seen as the key resource in ensuring the global competitiveness of each nation's education service'. The performative culture also affects the scope of the role of teachers - Wilkins (2015:1144) believes that teachers have been de-professionalised by neoliberal managerialism focussed on results, 'reducing them to classroom technicians charged with the delivery of an instrumentalist curriculum'.

If this culture of measurement by achievement has caused difficulties for practising and long-serving teachers, it has also had profound effects on teacher recruitment and training.

4.3.2 Initial teacher training

Furlong (2013) argues that globalisation and neoliberalism have both affected initial teacher training (ITT). The plethora of new routes into ITT, such as Teach First and Teach Next, give bursaries for training in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) but not for vocational subjects or social sciences, and School Direct training is in competition with university-based courses. Furlong maintains that all these routes show that government priorities are to produce flexible teachers who can adapt to local needs, but the fact that so many routes have been developed demonstrates difficulties with teacher recruitment and retention, and a bias towards content delivery.

Wilkins (2015:1144) supports Furlong's views, citing a number of studies which argue that teacher quality is the most important determinant of 'improving outcomes', and claiming that policy focus has turned to 'maximising teacher quality - attracting the best, training them in the most effective way'. Wilkins believes that this has led to the defining characteristic of recent ITT reforms being 'attempts to capture the essence of what enables school systems to come out on

top' (2015:1145). This, Wilkins cautions, leads to a 'conflict in becoming and being a teacher as individuals try to reconcile personal values' (2015:1145) with those of the profession, of their schools, and the wider education agenda. Wilkins warns that 'becoming a successful teacher is largely determined by the willingness and capacity to perform at an increasingly high level' (2015:1153). This goes against what many new teachers say they wish from the job; 'it is about teaching the children, and not only caring for the results - really knowing and paying attention to the children' (Goodall and Mackenzie, 2019:510).

Garrick Duhaney (2012:171-2) argues that

> the role of teacher training programmes should therefore be to help each teacher - not just the specialist/special education teacher - to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions that support inclusion; thereby, reinforcing the viewpoint that *all* teachers have a major responsibility for meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

This view, of ITT to support inclusion, puts teachers in the role of delivering on inclusion as well as teaching content, and adds another layer of complexity to what is required to be an 'effective' teacher.

4.4 The rise of evidence-based practice

In this culture of measurement, evidence is important. Teachers are expected to become increasingly qualified, as if the key to raising achievement was the education level of the practitioner, rather than their skill. Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) argue that evidence of national literacy and numeracy results has become a proxy for attainment, a narrow view but one which can be measured. As previously mentioned, the attainment of an individual school is deemed to be evidenced by its position in a league table, or its OFSTED grading. Governments measure the performance of their education systems by positions in rankings such as PISA. Rizvi and Lingard (2009:439) mount a strong critique of global policy shifts in education amongst members of the OECD, and argue that there is no legal mandate for the gathering of such huge quantities of educational "evidence" - they maintain that it is a form of 'peer pressure to conform or reform'. Paliokosta and Blandford (2010:185) describe the imperative to find what "works" from an educational point of view, and advise policymakers instead to 'take the time to base their recommendations on a sound conceptual framework which respects the

individuals that will receive them and the professionals that will deliver them'. Hodkinson (2010:65) exhorts those charged with producing educational policy to move away from accountability and instead towards policies that allow 'local authorities, schools, families and individual pupils to work in a partnership where mutual trust and respect, *not examination results* [emphasis added] dominate'.

Perhaps, as Liasidou (2015:9) recommends, educational change could be seen as 'a precursor for more fundamental social, economic and cultural transformation predicated on alternative values and priorities'. There is so much more to education than examination results - and so much that cannot be measured. Of course there needs to be some measure of professional accountability, but there is a difference between what Biesta (2015:83) describes as 'democratic accountability' and the erosion of teacher professionalism by 'bureaucratic accountability':

> If democratic accountability focuses on what makes education good, bureaucratic accountability has transformed the practise of providing data in order to show how education meets certain predefined standards into an aim in itself, where questions about whether the standards that are being applied or accurate and meaningful expressions of what good education is supposed to be are no longer at the centre of the process.

In order to achieve these changes, school leaders might need to embrace transformational values. The next chapter will examine some of the attributes and qualities that school leaders may need to acquire in order to bring about such transformations.

Chapter 5 - School leadership for change

If, as now seems clear, schools in the UK must continue to develop their provision of inclusion, then committed leaders are needed to drive this improvement. Opinions differ as to whether this leadership should come predominantly from head teachers/principals, or from middle leaders, including Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs).

This push for further inclusion has perhaps been made more challenging by rapid policy and legislative changes, and the pursuit of measurable results at the expense of socially-just education.

5.1 Leadership in a climate of policy change

Educational change does not just happen - it must be thought through, planned for and considered. It ought to be implemented systematically and methodically, taking into account the views of those affected. In practice, however, the time to do this is a rare commodity.

Liasidou and Svensson (2014:784-786) examined the role of educational leaders in promoting and implementing socially-just educational change, and found that while schools have been increasingly seen as the enforcers of transformative change, encouraged to question and challenge the 'host of structural and systemic dynamics which create power inequities and exclusionary regimes for disenfranchised students', such leadership is complex, moving beyond the day-to-day operation of schools into the 'critical dimensions of leadership associated with the values of equity and social justice'. Effective school leaders, as 'agents of change' should recognise but move beyond competing policy discourses.

Inclusion, Esposito et al. (2019:45) maintain, 'is not a policy that schools can choose to adopt or reject' but must be integral to the work of schools. They accept that a principal's role is 'not only complex, but ever changing, and has changed dramatically over recent years' but argue that despite the complexity and change, principals must shoulder the responsibility for knowing enough about SEND to be able to create an inclusive culture with high expectations for all.

Clearly this is a difficult balance for school leaders, and Pijl and Frissen (2009) call on policymakers to support school leaders in this endeavour, a view supported by Day et al. (2016:223) who argue for a different definition of school success that incorporates 'integrity, compassion, fairness and a love of lifelong learning'. Cowne (2003:107) recognises the inherent challenges in this:

> Policy development should trigger change, but will only do so if the relevant people are fully engaged. New procedures, documents or practice will need to be monitored and evaluated.

Finding the time, the will and the support to introduce and monitor reform is a difficult task, and school leaders need certain skills and qualities to be able to do this successfully.

5.2 Effective school leaders

Much literature exists on how to be a leader, for example, but many of these texts conflate the skills necessary to run a business with those for running a school. Of course, some schools are run as profit-making ventures, but the majority are not, and the attributes of a successful business leader are not necessarily those of a great school principal.

Woodcock and Wolfson (2019) focus on systemic changes that school leaders can make to support teachers in embracing an inclusive ethos, citing support from local authorities or school governors as one of the key challenges to be faced. Esposito et al. (2019:538) assert that 'there is convincing evidence to prove that school success is determined by a strong and motivated leader' and call for strategic, transformative leadership to challenge existing thinking. Inclusive leadership, they recommend, comprises of the following practices:

- Advocating for inclusion
- Educating participants and stakeholders about inclusion
- Developing critical consciousness
- Emphasising student learning and classroom practice
- Adopting inclusive decision and policy-making strategies
- Incorporating whole-school approaches

School leadership for inclusion, they state, is 'personal, about taking action, pragmatic, about humanity, about emotion' (2019:538). This could be seen as a demanding workload on top of leading the everyday work of a school.

5.2.1 Leading on school culture and ethos

A school's ethos is not an easy thing to develop or define, and nor should it be. Burns (2016:1) warns that a 'school's culture is not a straitjacket. It's not fixed or defined - change it if necessary' and Higham and Booth (2016:3) encourage us to see a school's values as providing a sense of direction, influencing decisions and acting as 'motives for right action' - they are expressions of a moral argument.

Defining and then standing by these expressions of positive intent is difficult work that involves constant management of tensions. Tissot (2013:35) cautions that teachers may struggle to reconcile their 'primary role as educators' in the holistic sense with an outside focus on improving exam scores, and warns that even 'robustly inclusive schools can be worn down by the increasing resource demands of new initiatives or shifting government priorities'. Attwood (2013) supports this view, arguing that school ethos is at the mercy of contradictory and complex government positions on social justice. However, Mitchell (2014) maintains that a positive school culture and ethos, which reflects shared inclusive values and beliefs, *can* be developed by strong school leaders if they commit to accepting and celebrating diversity while also setting high yet realistic standards. Farr (2019:68) also maintains that ethos and culture have to be worked at constantly, but that teachers will 'willingly go above and beyond' if they feel valued and appreciated in a happy, positive environment.

Head teachers and principals, though 'instrumental in influencing culture, policies and practices...to promote transformational change' (Liasidou and Antoniou, 2015:348), need not be solely responsible for this, or for other aspects of leading a school. Cowne (2003:13) cautions that 'whole staff opinions will also matter...it is important to think about the values system and ask if proposed innovation will imply a change of values'. Pearson et al. assert that in a vision of inclusive schools 'there is a collective responsibility for the achievement of all learners' (2015:54). A head teacher cannot do it all, so there is a vital role to play for middle leaders.

5.3 Middle leadership

Although head teachers cannot, and need not, be responsible for every single aspect of a school's functioning, there is sometimes a view that they *ought* to be. But, as Higham and Booth (2016:14) advise, 'leadership is most effective when distributed, and is not lost through sharing'. Perhaps this "have it all" attitude is associated with the conflation of business and school leadership ideas.

Hauge et al. (2014:358) examined the links between school leadership and educational change, and cautioned

> Studies of leadership have often focussed on the role and behaviour of the principal. This prevailing perspective runs the risk of overshadowing teacher teams, heads of department and other leading professionals, and the teachers who have been entrusted with leadership in their classrooms, all of whom contribute to the totality of school leadership.

This view is supported by Harris and Jones (2019) who argue that teachers as the recipients of top-down change are far less effective than at delivering outcomes and implementing reforms. Harris and Jones maintain that teacher agency and professional influence are critical in the pursuit of school improvement, and therefore should have a greater input into the process. King and Stevenson (2017:658) advocate a combination of 'change from below with support from above' as a way of allowing teachers more meaningful autonomy by avoiding hierarchical, centralised approaches to leadership. They concede, however, that this is challenging in a climate of accountability and performativity, and caution that although distributed leadership is valued in theory by principals, it is not often realised in practice.

Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer (2019:318) describe middle leaders as 'highly accomplished teachers with a predominant responsibility for classroom teaching...they build capacity among others by facilitating professional development and investing in practice'. They can connect school policy directions and initiatives to 'real-time pedagogical practices'. The authors claim that middle leaders do this by managing relationships, communicating effectively, leading teams and most importantly 'facilitating a culture of relational trust among staff'.

Other authors such as Lai and Cheung (2014), the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT, 2019), Farr (2019) and Netolicky (2019) further explore the idea of teacher middle leadership, and agree that it can be transformational in nature, supporting school development on many different levels while enhancing teacher agency. Netolicky (2019:151) argues that middle leaders are no less than 'crucial' for the implementation of principals' vision and strategy and they should be more highly valued. NAHT (2019:1) sound various notes of caution with respect to the middle leader's role as both a 'filter and a buffer' between classroom teachers and senior leadership, particularly that middle leaders have greater responsibility but less time, and that they run the risk of becoming isolated. Farr (2019) also warns that, if head teachers are to take the time and spend the money to develop middle leaders, they should then trust them to do their work.

Frequently finding themselves in a particularly undefined space when it comes to leadership are Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), who are often more than a middle leader yet not regularly part of senior leadership teams.

5.4 The role of the SENCo

The SENCo role is a complex and poorly-defined one. Statutory requirements exist in England for all schools to have a SENCo, but there are no such regulations on the scope of the role. This leaves the role of SENCo in some 'conceptual ambiguity' (Pearson et al., 2015:29) as it has some aspects of organisational culture and change agency, along with those of the delivery of SEN teaching, data collection, and the day to day management of a department.

Tissot (2013) explains how the formally mandated aspects of the role have been condensed from seven in the 1994 Code of Practice to only two in the most SEN legislation, although these two contain a number of suggested functions. Tissot is disappointed at the failure of the legislation to assign SENCos to school senior leadership teams (SLT), as this is 'stifling the vision' of the role (2013:39) and constrains the good work of SENCos within an administrative capacity, limiting their impact. Morewood (2012) also blames "the system" for the lack of support for the role, although Done et al. (2015:88) argue that making the role mandatory

in all schools, and insisting on a specified qualification, is a ‘significant strategic shift’ on the part of policymakers, and a step in the right direction.

Many other authors have views on the role of the modern SENCo, including Cowne (2003), Oldham and Radford (2011), Liasidou and Svensson (2014), Tutt and Williams (2015), Whalley (2019) and Curran and Boddison (2021). Amongst their findings are shared ideas of the many challenges facing SENCos in post. Having the status and impact to change mindsets is a key concern, and this is not helped by the ambiguity surrounding the perceived level of the role within schools’ management hierarchies. The broadening of the role to include the removal of other barriers to learning, apart from diagnosed specific learning difficulties, also provides a challenge in terms of workload and teacher attitudes. Some SENCos find the tensions between neoliberalism, free market ideology, the culture of measurement of results, and an equity and social justice perspective, to be extremely difficult to navigate, and this puts pressure on their capacity to lead change, which is only compounded by the opacity of the place of the SENCo within management structures. Other constraints frequently found include lack of time, space, funding and staff to deliver SEN support in the way that SENCos feel would most benefit their students. Curran and Boddison (2021) argue that the role of the SENCo is misunderstood, both by teachers and school leadership teams, and warn that this situation risks losing SENCos from their roles as they find the tensions too difficult to manage.

Where SENCos do have the support of other staff, parents and more senior school leaders, the role can be as rewarding as it is challenging, and the complexity and lack of legislative clarity does not stop very many dedicated SENCos from delivering transformative education and support in their schools.

It is particularly difficult to change systems within a school, from an existing way of working to a new one, and so the next chapter will address other challenges faced in schools that endeavour to make changes to deliver greater inclusion.

Chapter 6 - The challenges of changing schools to become more inclusive

The previous chapters have shown that there is work to do in many schools to develop their levels of inclusion and remove barriers to learning for many young people. One of the challenges faced is the nature of leadership and management in schools; another is the competing demands of multiple policy initiatives.

This chapter will discuss factors such as classroom teachers' concerns, structural and systemic barriers, and particular school contexts, before going on to explore some specific challenges in the case study school.

6.1 Teacher concerns around implementing inclusion

There are many concerns around the challenges faced by teachers in developing or implementing inclusion in their schools. It is becoming increasingly rare that teachers just do not "believe" in inclusion, despite Dyson and Gallanaugh (2007:474) warning that there is 'considerable ambivalence' about the desirability of the inclusion agenda when faced with so many other demands. Young et al. (2017:2) find that 'positive teacher attitudes to inclusion are conditional on the provision of adequate support and resources', and Hodkinson (2012:232) maintains that 'classroom teachers' endorsement of inclusion is still often lukewarm'. This, they and others (such as Pearce et al. (2010)) maintain, is because teachers feel under-prepared, in a context of multiple competing demands, to meet the needs of all of the pupils in their classes, and since many teachers wish to do their best by as many pupils as possible, teachers have concerns about their time and energy being spread ever more thinly. Garrick Duhaney (2012) summarises the situation thus:

> Despite the progressively complex and restructured role of teaching and administering today's inclusive classrooms, there is general support among teachers and administrators for inclusion… However, there is some trepidation, apathy and rejection for inclusion. Teachers' concerns relate to professional competence, lack of support and resources, and questions about the effectiveness of an inclusive setting.

As previously discussed, in a culture of performativity teachers are expected to support all of their students to achieve the best educational outcomes. The SEN Codes of Practice have traditionally 'put the ball of meeting needs in the court of

teachers' (Ellins and Porter, 2005:188) and made teachers responsible for the success or otherwise of government reforms around inclusion. According to Higham and Booth (2016), this results in teachers shifting position on inclusion and standards depending on their immediate context, without acknowledging the tensions and dilemmas of these possibly contradictory stances. Done and Murphy (2018:147) are highly critical of this 'responsibilization' of teachers, claiming that the 'presentation of poor or inappropriate teaching practice as the key obstacle to inclusion' places teachers in an impossible position as both problem and solution. They claim that such responsibilization allows policymakers to conflate inclusion, social justice and school transformation with a readily-available scapegoat, in the form of the teaching profession, and this results in teachers becoming cynical or sceptical. Done and Murphy (2018:148) also criticise the stance and language of the 2015 Code of Practice, as it requires teachers to 'enact discourses of social justice within a context of diminished funding, and against the wider discursive backdrop of national economic priorities dictated by a global market order'.

High quality teacher training, that pays close attention to issues of SEND and inclusion, could help teachers to feel that they have the skills to address inclusion more effectively. Lambe and Bones (2007) feel that the PGCE year and school placements are of key importance in positively influencing teacher attitudes towards inclusion, and Barber and Turner (2007) found that NQTs experienced an increase in confidence and improved levels of skill with respect to teaching students with SEND at the end of their first year. Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) maintain that, as teachers develop greater ownership and capacity within their role, their confidence and self-perception improve, although Hodkinson (2012) warns that although training and professional development have supposedly improved, by the addition of *some* attention to SEND and inclusion issues within teacher training programmes, teachers still feel that they lack skills.

Whatever training route is taken, many authors concur that positive beliefs and attitudes towards both students with SEND, and teachers' ideas of their own agency and self-efficacy, are both crucial in developing greater inclusion in schools. Young et al. (2017:2) feel that teachers' personal positive beliefs towards inclusion 'influence openness to enacting policy regarding inclusive education

both at national and local levels', with Monsen et al. (2013) finding that a strong personal commitment to inclusion on the part of teachers led to greater likelihood of success of inclusive interventions. Pijl and Frissen (2009) felt that successful inclusion episodes as experienced by teachers would contribute greatly to teachers' positive attitudes. Goodall and Mackenzie (2019:511) agree that teacher understanding leads to a supportive teacher attitude and 'authentic' inclusion, and Woolfson and Brady (2009:222) maintained that

> If students with learning difficulties are to experience the same positive aspects of education in inclusive settings as typically-developing learners, they *need* [emphasis added] to be taught by staff who believe that they can produce positive educational outcomes for this group, and who view themselves as capable of providing an effective instructional environment to bring this about.

This theme of teachers' belief in their ability to effect change runs strongly through inclusive education literature. Paliokosta and Blandford (2010), Barberis and Buchowicz (2015), Ekins et al. (2015) and Young et al. (2017) all make explicit links between teacher self-efficacy and the capacity for change, but some also warn that teachers 'may have to implement norms they feel uncomfortable with' (Barberis and Buchowicz, 2015:64) in order to work towards competing goals and expectations. Ekins et al. (2015:239) are particularly critical of prevailing attitudes towards the perceived need for specialist knowledge and training to teach students with SEN:

> One obstacle for implementing inclusive education is that often, for SEN, the issue is narrowed to one that is centred on a deficit model of difference and diversity, focusing on the teacher's lack of specialist SEN knowledge, and highlighting the need for specialist SEN pedagogy as the only way to meet the needs of complex SEN. This simply serves to perpetuate lower levels of self-efficacy in teachers, by emphasizing the expert knowledge that they think they do not have, rather than by highlighting the wide range of inclusive skills, resources and expertise that they can draw on.

As well as testing self-efficacy, there also seems to be a view that inclusive education poses particular challenges to teacher resilience.

6.1.1 Teacher resilience

It is widely held that teaching can be a very stressful occupation. For example, McCarthy (2019:10) argues that the many demands on teachers 'take a toll, resulting in job dissatisfaction, workplace fatigue, burnout, and reduced occupational commitment'. Authors such as Brittle (2020) would maintain that teaching students with SEN is even more stressful. Mulholland et al. (2017:183) state that 'research has consistently demonstrated that the work of teachers bears many of the hallmarks of a very stressful occupation', and cite occupational hazards as including workload, motivation, time pressure, role overload, role conflict and inadequate support from school management.

Beltman et al. (2011:195) investigated the classroom, school and wider professional challenges and protective factors that lead teachers to "thrive" rather than just "survive". They describe resilience as a 'complex, idiosyncratic and cyclical construct involving dynamic processes of interaction over time, between person and environment'. They link the main challenges to classroom and school contexts, classroom management and disruptive students, meeting the needs of disadvantaged (including SEN) students, heavy workload and lack of time. Protective factors include a sense of moral purpose, perseverance, and internal locus of control and belief in one's ability to make a difference. Ekins et al. (2016:239) caution that the emotional impact of being unable to meet the needs of some children can 'undermine a teacher's sense of themselves as a professional, and from this their levels of self-efficacy'.

Brittle (2020:2) examines teacher "burnout" in particular, and finds that teachers of students with SEND have been 'recognised as most prone to high stress and burnout', with such teachers reporting higher levels of exhaustion than mainstream teachers. Role conflict, and role ambiguity, Brittle argues, are significant contributors to burnout, with support from colleagues, management and parents providing protection from higher levels of stress. Brittle links teacher exhaustion to student outcomes, through teaching quality and student engagement. Teacher resilience, then, is shown to be one of many school-level barriers to developing further inclusion.

6.2 Structural challenges to inclusion

The existing literature on inclusion seems to categorise the main challenges to inclusion as either practical aspects, or questions of ethos.

Of the practical aspects, providing more time for teachers to plan, prepare, train and collaborate is most often cited. Avramidis et al. (2000) list support, resources, training and time as teachers' key concerns. Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) argue that lack of resources and time make inclusion more challenging, and Thomas and Whitburn (2018) maintain that time is *the* key requirement. This leads Gous et al. (2014:536) to conclude that successful inclusion is more often 'a matter of expediency' rather than a deliberate choice.

Dedicated time for work to develop inclusion is highly contingent on a school's culture and ethos, as discussed in Chapter 5. Walton and Nel (2012:6-8) assert that 'if a school is inclusive it will have fundamental values, beliefs and attitudes to learners and learning, about belonging, success and co-operation' and caution that "process" approaches to inclusion, rather than ethos-led approaches, are limited in their success as inclusive education is 'messy and contradictory'. They argue that policies don't guarantee practice, but they can give guidelines and directions, if the ethos underlying the policies is inclusive. Pijl and Frissen (2009) also maintain that clear policy statements are essential prerequisites for successful inclusion. Demerath (2018) investigates the 'emotional ecology of school improvement culture' and finds that empathetic understanding, advocacy and a growth mindset are essential when understanding the challenges faced by students.

Alexiadou and Essex (2016:6) are, however, critical of the potential impacts of policy on inclusion, arguing that the widening of definitions of inclusion to embrace SEN, socio-cultural, linguistic and economic dimensions of disadvantage create ambiguous requirements, very diverse pedagogies and policy paradigms 'not all of which are conducive to an inclusive, socially just education'. Done and Murphy (2018:150-151) are also highly disparaging of a system where, they believe, teachers are 'invited to reinvent themselves and address personal deficit' in terms of their resilience, imagination and time management in order to

radically change educational cultures. This 'politics of blame', they feel, sidelines the question of what sort of educational system teachers are striving to make more inclusive.

Mitchell (2015) argues that many more aspects of a school's culture than just teaching must be adapted in order to develop full inclusion. Mitchell feels that the curriculum, access to assessment, notions of acceptance, physical access, class size, external support and leadership all require scrutiny and change in the majority of schools, and that these are all determined by a school's ethos. Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) concur, maintaining that a school's culture can be a barrier or a facilitator to inclusion. They cite time, communication and the notion of teacher responsibility as potential barriers.

Ainscow (2007) argued that one cannot 'divorce inclusion from the context within which it is developing', and certainly the context of the case study school poses particular challenges to the further development of inclusion.

6.3 Barriers in the case study school's context

Few independent mainstream schools in England are known for their inclusive practices. Walford (2009:726) describes how the traditional curriculum and pedagogy in many such schools are what many parents are looking for in their choice of the private sector, and describes how there is 'little evidence' that the private sector has led the way in curriculum development. Walford also criticises these schools for their lack of "value added" measures of achievement, as many of them use selective entry criteria. Although Walford praises independent schools for their diversity, he is describing their diversity of nationality rather than socio-economic status, and particularly whether they accept pupils with a diverse range of needs.

Of course the picture has changed since 2009, and many more independent schools now show at least some features of more inclusive schools as described by Dyson and Farrell (2006):

- Careful mixtures of provision with the precise mix customised to the characteristics of individual students
- A commitment to the principles of inclusion which is shared by a large proportion of the staff
- Strategies directed towards raising achievement more generally
- An ethos which is positive and welcoming (which may also have a strong achievement orientation)
- Accepting the task of educating most students with SEN as part of their normal responsibilities

These authors were unable to find any meaningful link between greater inclusion and negative impacts on overall attainment, and also described the difficulties of balancing the demands of the standards agenda, the needs of SEN students, resources, and the skills and capacities of teachers. A further criticism of greater inclusion in independent schools can be found in the work of Clark (1999:43) who warned that senior managers would worry about 'the impact of [the] school's reputation for being "good with special needs" on its image in the locality', and this reflects a particular assumption that there *is* a link between greater inclusivity and lower levels of achievement.

Many authors have raised questions about successfully changing a school's culture, including Higgins (2005), Dickey (2016), Sanchez et al. (2019) and Whalley (2019), and these concerns all have a place in the context of the case study school trying to move towards greater inclusion. Higgins (2005:19) advises critical examination of a school's existing processes, and warns that 'piecemeal strategies for school change' have limited success, as do changes when not all staff share the same vision. Both Higgins and Dickey advise a cycle of planning, implementing and evaluating the change. Dickey (2016:16) also reflects on the importance of trust and good communication, and recommends that leaders 'fully admit' mistakes in the process to develop this trust. Sanchez et al. (2019) acknowledge that change takes time and is complex, but also maintain that patience is not unlimited, and that effective teaching and support systems will allow for more effective change. Whalley (2019) advocates for careful, thoughtful, systematic and methodical change, and for then taking time to reflect on the impact of that change. All of these concerns and barriers played a part in the development of a new system of inclusion in the case study school.

Further concerns were reflected by the work of Paliokosta and Blandford (2010:184), such as a focus on deficiencies, inadequacies and negative characteristics rather than strengths and abilities (of both students and staff), and a risk of focusing on 'training and skills practice' rather than a change of ethos. The work of Ferguson (2008:110) raised yet another concern - that as staff change or move on 'the comfort of old ways can gradually take over the enthusiasm of innovation and change'.

Ainscow (2007:5) argues that

> The development of more inclusive processes does not arrive from a mechanical process in which any one specific organisational restructuring, or the introduction of a particular set of techniques, generates increased levels of participation.

Instead, Ainscow asserts, schools need to 'interrupt existing discourses' (2007:4), and by providing time, space, support and a common language of inclusion, change can be properly embedded.

Lumby and Coleman (2016) encourage teachers to adopt a reflective approach as they focus on the learning of the individual child, rather than on their disabilities. An inclusive ethos will encourage students and parents to see a personalized learning approach as the ideal position, where the challenge is that of making teaching appropriate for all.

The main challenges, then, for the case study school were to see inclusion as a continually ongoing process, rather than the 'pot of gold at the end of the rainbow' (Carrington and Robinson, 2004:142), and to take the time to develop, realise and review an inclusive ethos, aligned with a set of processes for managing change, that would develop inclusion and encourage further development in future years.

Chapter 7 - Developing inclusion in the case study school

In this chapter I aim to describe how inclusion in the case study school changed over the past 2 years since I was in the post of SENCo. To do this I will explain how the role became available, why I decided on a particular model of support, and the practicalities of the transition. I will then explain how the interviews I carried out as part of the case study for this dissertation were used to reflect the implementation of these changes and also as part of the review cycle to plan for future needs.

7.1 The emergence of the "PLC"

I joined the case study school in 2015 as head of science. Prior to this I had worked in Northern Ireland as a learning support mentor for students on the autism spectrum, as well as a head of year and science teacher. When I decided to move to the UK with my family in 2015, I applied for positions as either SENCo or head of science, as at that stage I was undecided about exactly which career path to follow. I was appointed to the position of head of science in the case study school, and at that stage it seems that my career would follow that trajectory.

The case study school is an independent school for girls aged 11 to 18 in the south-eastern region of the UK. When I took up my position there as head of science, ideas of inclusion seemed limited to the provision of support for students with dyslexia in a department entitled "Special Educational Needs". This was situated in a part of the campus inaccessible to any other students, apart from those who had an appointment to see the SEN teachers. There was no in-class support for students with SEN. Indeed, the department seemed to be predicated on a medical model of SEN, whereby the prevailing attitude was that students with dyslexia had a "problem" that could only be fixed by specialist teachers providing intervention and withdrawal from the classroom. However, this is by no means unusual in the independent school sector in the UK. Although this had been the norm for the case study school for many years, my previous school in Northern Ireland had operated a very different model, whereby students were largely supported in the classroom, and a more social model of inclusion had been adopted as part of the ethos of the school. Thus it seemed strange to me to be teaching within this more

traditional approach to SEN. It never sat comfortably with me, and I used to joke with friends from the school in Northern Ireland that, if the opportunity arose, I would “take over” the SEN department. In my performance appraisals in the case study school, I repeatedly indicated a desire to use the training, knowledge and skills I had developed in Northern Ireland to develop inclusion in this new setting, but it seemed like this wish would remain unfulfilled.

In 2017, much to my surprise, such an opportunity did arise. The SENCo in the case study school decided to retire, and I realised that if I did not seize the opportunity to work on inclusion and what it meant in the school, I would feel personal regret - and the school might continue to support students with SEN in a more traditional “independent school” way.

Using the 2015 Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) as a basis, I wrote a proposal for the Principal, outlining the potential for a very different approach to inclusion. This encompassed provision for the “gifted and talented” (the language used in the case study school, more correctly referred to as the “highly able”), moving the department to a new and very high profile location within the campus, training and empowering classroom teachers to feel competent to support students with a range of needs, providing a variety of strategies that could be used in the classroom to support all learners, and using the teachers from the SEN department to support students in the classroom rather than withdrawing students from class.

Although I had carried out research into inclusion as part of Masters’ degrees in both 2005 and 2012, I wrote the proposal primarily based on my experiences in Northern Ireland and the personal belief that the social model of inclusion, as described by Booth and Ainscow (2016), was and is the “right” way to support students. The Principal echoed the concerns outlined by Clark (1999) about the school being “seen to be good with special needs” - and thus potentially putting off parents in search of a more traditionally “academic” school - but by explaining the social model in greater depth, and linking the changes to the school's ethos of providing a bespoke education for each child, we were able to agree that the changes would be worthwhile, and would provide greater support for a greater range of students. The Principal agreed to let me try to bring the school towards greater inclusion. The department was to be known as “personalised learning” to

try to reflect a move away from a traditional medical model of special educational needs, and was to be housed in a building right in the centre of the campus, to be called the Personalised Learning Centre, or PLC.

This change in career trajectory for me tied in neatly with the work I was beginning to research as part of the EdD, and I decided to use my experiences as the basis of a case study. This would lead to the research previously outlined in Chapters 2 - 6, on the nature of inclusion, competing policy initiatives, and how to manage educational change. Ideally, I would have been able to carry out the research over an extended period of time and make the changes gradually, but this was not to be - I ended up making the changes to the PLC while conducting the research concurrently.

Cowne (2003:11) writes that 'change is a constant requirement of a healthy organization' but concedes that change can be unpredictable and challenging. This was certainly the case for the PLC.

7.2 The practicalities of developing the PLC

The main change in the case study school was to be a change of emphasis on the responsibility for educating students with a range of needs. As previously described, it had been the case that classroom teachers were absolved of this responsibility to an extent by the previous department, but this led to a lack of transferability of the skills that students were being taught in their withdrawal lessons. Students could not always see how to apply the strategies they had been learning to their everyday classroom contexts. The 2015 Code of Practice (DfE, 2015:95) emphasises that *high quality teaching* should be the first step in supporting students and therefore a very important and immediate part of the development of the PLC was to be training staff to feel comfortable and competent in supporting students with a range of needs. This also involved ensuring that they had the necessary information and strategies to be able to do so. Staff are now trained by a member of the PLC team at least once every half term, and are free to approach the team at other times - and they do.

One reason that staff had given for finding it challenging to support students with a range of needs in the classroom, was that they were unsure of how and where to access the required information. Another part of the development of the PLC was to create an interactive database which could be used as the school's SEN register and would allow staff to immediately identify students with SEN, those who were "gifted and talented", and those who used English as an Additional Language. The database also linked to strategies that could be used, and signposted further support. Along with this, there was a broadening of the criteria used to identify students with additional needs. Part of this social model of inclusion was the recognition that barriers to learning are not intrinsic to the child but are part of the school or classroom environment, and so we worked hard to identify barriers that students were experiencing, and to support teachers to develop strategies to overcome these barriers.

A change in staffing allowed for a further development in the support that PLC was able to provide. The previous SENCo and her two part-time staff were all specialists in supporting students with dyslexia. When the previous SENCo retired, the other two staff also took the opportunity to retire. This meant that we were able to change the staffing team in the PLC to encompass a broader range of expertise. At the time of this research, the PLC had 2 full time staff (myself included) and two part time. We had staff with experience and expertise in supporting students with dyslexia, autism, executive functioning difficulties including ADHD, and numeracy difficulties.

Improved facilities also led to the PLC becoming, in our view, an integral part of the school. The bright and airy building is a desirable location for many students to work and the open-door policy means that any student can approach any member of the team for support with their learning. As the "gifted and talented" students (also known as "academic scholars" in the case study school; girls who were expected to achieve the highest academic grades) were now also considered to be visibly supported by the team, the previous stigma associated with visiting the department diminished - and of course there was a recognition that having a specific learning difficulty does not preclude one from being highly academic, with some of the academic scholars being open about their own SpLD. We embraced

an attitude of “everyone learns differently, so let’s be open about that and celebrate it”.

The final major structural change to the practicalities of delivering support was the change to a “three wave” model of support. Prior to the opening of the PLC, support was provided by withdrawal from the classroom or not at all - and if withdrawn, a student attended the old “SEN” department for an entire academic year, regardless of progress made. We implemented a model whereby the first “wave” of support was to embed a teacher from the PLC within a student’s normal classrooms whenever possible. This allowed a student or group of students to use the strategies they had been developing immediately when they were needed, with support from the PLC staff. Only if this intervention did not lead to a student making expected progress would we then offer “wave 2”, withdrawal from the classroom - such withdrawal being time limited, with the expectation that a student would move back to in-class support only, as soon as possible. This was a big change for staff, but this collaborative way of working proved of great benefit, with most students able to make expected progress with this level of support. Wave 3 is for students with an education and health care plan (EHCP), and involves the provision of statutory support, often from outside agencies. The case study school had no pupils with this status at the time of this research taking place.

So, significant changes were made to the provision of additional support. As my research progressed, it became clear that a good deal of the work of the PLC was aligned with literature findings on developing inclusion, but as previously mentioned, these changes were concurrent with, rather than informed directly by, literature research. I therefore decided to conduct interviews as part of the case study.

7.3 Using interviews as part of the change process

Atkins and Wallace (2012:12) state that 'we carry out research into education in order to help us - and others - to a better understanding of what constitutes effective teaching and learning' and this was certainly a key reason for me choosing to interview my colleagues as part of this case study. I wished to ascertain whether the changes made had indeed led to more effective teaching and learning for the students we were supporting.

As a case study, the findings from the interviews would be difficult to generalise to other settings, but that was never the intention - instead, I intended to use the interview data for the following purposes:

- To ascertain colleagues' perceptions of the changes already made
- To see whether these perceptions match literature findings regarding some of the opportunities and challenges around educational change
- To decide what the next steps were for the PLC, to perhaps align them more in accordance with colleagues' perspectives rather than my own previous experience

Braun and Clarke (2013:24) suggest that qualitative research 'allows a far richer (fuller, multi-faceted) or deeper understanding of a phenomenon...the complexity of people's meanings or experiences is retained or revealed' and they urge us as researchers to embrace the 'messiness' of qualitative research, and so I hoped that the interviews would reflect some of this complexity - the changes had not all been straightforward or universally welcomed.

Reasons for choosing interviews and a case study approach, over other possibilities within qualitative research, will be further discussed in a subsequent chapter, along with a further analysis of the development of the interview questions, but a brief note here on how the interviews linked to literature research might be helpful. Literature on developing inclusive education seemed to fall into categories that lent themselves well to a possible interview framework:

- The nature and purpose of education
- Teacher education and training
- Barriers faced by students
- School ethos and culture
- Competing priorities
- Teacher resilience

I therefore decided to ask some questions within each of these categories to try to ascertain whether my and my colleagues' perspectives matched literature findings.

By conducting these interviews in the hope of developing some next steps, I was not dismissing my own experience and understanding. I agree with Allan and Slee (2008:11), when they state:

> As researchers designing a project we bring our own personal and intellectual histories. Research is never disinterested or objective. We receive and interpret the world in ways that are shaped by our individual biography and, naturally enough, have strong views about what a better world looks like and about the role of inclusive education, as each of understands it, in contributing to that better world'.

Reading these words brought me some comfort at times when I thought I had created the PLC entirely based on my prior experience and own thoughts of what it should be like.

7.4 Where next for the PLC?

Anderson et al. (1994:34) maintain that 'action or change in educational practice usually occurs as a result of...the conviction on the part of practitioners that an action or change is necessary' and the interviews were designed to try to ascertain what further change my colleagues would like to see. Anderson et al. also caution 'educational practitioners who are engaged in research in their schools are not necessarily welcomed with open arms by colleagues...often they may feel threatened by the potential "side effects" of practitioner research' (1994:38). I had to be ready to accept that my colleagues might not all be entirely happy with the changes made, and might not wish to see further change. Armstrong and Moore (2004:63) also warn that 'real change takes time, and the move towards an inclusive community presents many challenges for schools' and suggest the following as a way to analyse research findings:

> Summarise the process itself, draw conclusions from it, reflect on what it has meant...and state what claims to changes and improvement towards inclusive pedagogy could be made (2004:73).

I intended to keep an open mind towards my colleagues' responses and use them to construct an effective plan for the future development of the PLC. One of the

stated aims of an EdD programme is ‘to enable practitioners to participate in the analysis, critique, application and generation of educational practice, policy and research related to and impacting upon their professional contexts’ (University of Glasgow: 2021). I hoped that conducting, analysing and implementing the findings of these interviews would allow me to do just that.

Chapter 8 - Choosing to conduct a case study

Carrying out research of the nature described in the previous chapter could have been done in many ways. However, I was immediately drawn to the case study approach, as outlined below. In this chapter, I will explain why I felt that a case study was the appropriate way forward, as well as exploring some critiques of this approach. I will also reflect on issues of the generalizability of case studies, researcher subjectivity and bias, and theoretical approaches surrounding case study research. A further exploration of the place of case study research within the qualitative research tradition, and some discussion of the related ontology and epistemology, will follow in Chapter 10.

8.1 - Some key aspects of the case study approach

As a novice researcher, the choice of a case study approach was very important. Gillham (2000:1) describes a case study as a research method that investigates:

- a unit of human activity embedded in the real world
- which can only be studied or understood in context
- which exists in the here and now
- that merges in with its context so that precise boundaries are difficult to draw

There were four key aspects of the case study approach that most seemed to support the purposes of my research - flexibility, the holistic nature of case studies, their ability to collect rich, descriptive data, and the opportunity to reflect personal ideas by accepting subjectivity as a part of the process (the last of these is addressed later in this chapter).

When I began my research, I wasn't entirely sure which direction it would end up taking - although I knew that I wished to study inclusion, I had not decided whether to look at inclusion in the broadest sense, or to focus on one or more specific aspects. The flexibility of the case study approach, then, seemed very important. Mills et al. (2012:100) explain that this flexibility 'enables researchers to expose what may have contributed to the phenomenon and allows policymakers either to incorporate this into new policy or to modify existing policy' which seemed to fit neatly with the intention of researching the existence of the PLC. Mills et al. also maintain that the flexible, dynamic quality of case study research 'gives

researchers the ability to be as general or as specific as is felt appropriate in order to capture adequate detail' (2012:101). Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013), in their overview of case study research, also describe many ways in which case studies can be used to gather data, so that a case study can be put to many different uses.

In the event, my research took a fairly broad perspective on inclusion (within the limits of my school context) and so the ability of case studies to encompass a holistic picture was valuable. Stake (2011:24) asserts that this feature of case studies allows the collection of complex data with many variables, and that this data can be gathered 'at least partly by personalistic observation, and a writing style that is informal, perhaps narrative' which also suited my intention and purpose.

As the research was to cover quite a broad range of potential themes, the ability to collect rich and descriptive data would be necessary. Gillham (2000:10) argues that qualitative methods such as case studies 'are essentially descriptive and inferential in character', that they can illuminate and explain in situations where the truth is not "tidy", and that case studies can explore both individuals and organisations. Mills et al. (2012:102) agree that the complexities and realities of educational establishments 'require educational researchers to adopt a research approach that can capture the unique aspects of each situation' and assure us that 'case study research can capture the richness of data necessary'. I felt that trying to place my research within a research framework that had a more strongly prescriptive framework, such as action research, might mean that I could not combine this rich description with the flexibility I was seeking.

Further analysis of the work of Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:11) led me to categorise my research as an "intrinsic" case study. They describe this as one which 'attempts to capture the case in its entirety' with the purpose of the research being to understand that specific situation more fully. It can also be classified as "longitudinal" - carried out over an extended period of time to capture a process or project.

The choice of a case study was not straightforward. Braun and Clarke (2013:24), discussing attitudes towards qualitative research, maintain that

> qualitative is more suitable than quantitative for understanding meaning. It allows us to focus on people's own framing around issues and their own terms of reference...it allows far richer (fuller, multifaceted) or deeper understanding of a phenomenon...the complexity of people's meanings or experience is retained or revealed... it can embrace the messiness of reality, meaning and experience... it can be open-ended, exploratory, organic and flexible...it can evolve to suit the needs of the project.

All of these factors seem to be embraced by the case study approach. This, and the aspects described in this section, led to the conclusion that it was the most suitable way for me to proceed. However, the case study approach is not without criticism.

8.2 - Critiques of the case study approach

Some critiques of the case study approach relate to qualitative research in general, which is a much broader discussion than can be attempted here. However, there are some which relate more specifically to the case study approach, and closely-related techniques.

Flyvbjerg (2006:221) lists five key misunderstandings related to case study research; critiques that have been made by others as this approach developed. They are:

1. General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge
2. One cannot generalize on the basis of a single case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development
3. The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypothesis testing and theory building
4. The case study contains a bias towards verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions
5. It is often difficult to summarise and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies.

Flyvbjerg’s work does much to address these criticisms, and I will examine most of these “misunderstandings” in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Further concerns about the case study approach relate to the use of personal narratives and small samples. Griffiths and MacLeod (2008:124) raise the concern that 'personal stories can sometimes be dismissed as anecdotal' and indeed this could be a possible critique of some case studies, but not all involve narrative in this way, so it may not be seen as a valid critique of the entire genre. Travers (2011a:130) cautions against merely 'describing the world' in case study research, and encourages the researcher to engage in critique. Neusar (2014:179-180) maintains that this can be difficult: Neusar argues that humans have a tendency to create meaning from disparate data, because we are 'sense-making creatures'; they tend to 'trust the retrospective data and stories too much; even when the other data is objective, authors tend to find persuasive stories too quickly' and that 'it is easy to create a story of success or failure once we know the results'. Careful attention to researcher reflexivity should address this criticism; this is examined in a subsequent section.

Neusar (2014:179) also cautions against 'overgeneralization, especially from small samples'. However, Mills et al. (2012:100) address this argument, maintaining 'with a small sample size, the case study approach provides the logical means to complete in-depth research'. Indeed, Mills et al. believe that case studies are an entirely appropriate way of dealing with small sample sizes: 'without the flexibility of the case study approach, which allows for targeted sampling, it would otherwise be difficult to appropriately and effectively capture these phenomena'.

Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:11) argue that good case study research would employ more than one data collection tool, and more than one perspective, to triangulate the data and ensure that any conclusions drawn are 'legitimate'. This is a potentially valid critique of some case study research, including my own. However, if the absence of this triangulation is reflected and acknowledged in the researcher's work, perhaps this should be accepted, as not all case studies *can* involve such multiple perspectives.

Other critiques of the case study approach require more in-depth analyses, so are now examined in greater detail.

8.3 - Generalizing the findings of case studies

As previously described, Flyvbjerg (2006:224-226) identifies lack of generalizability as one of the main arguments against case study research: 'that one cannot generalize on the basis of a single case is usually considered to be devastating to the case study as a scientific method'. Flyvbjerg, however, goes on to argue that this is an invalid criticism, maintaining that it depends on the case. He also cautions that as the research climate changes, 'formal generalization, whether on the basis of large samples or single cases, is considerably overrated as the main source of scientific progress'. Indeed, Flyvbjerg goes further and describes case study research as being particularly useful in some situations:

> that knowledge cannot be formally generalized does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or society. A purely descriptive phenomenological case study without any attempt to generalize can certainly be of value in this process.... the case study is well suited for identifying "black swans" because of its in-depth approach... one can often generalize on the basis of a single case... the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as a supplement or alternative to other methods...formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development whereas the force of example is underestimated' (2006:227 - 228).

This view, of an over-emphasis on the importance of generalization in the qualitative field, is supported by Donmoyer (2011:45), who believes that 'social scientists' traditional restricted conception of generalizability is problematic for applied fields such as education'. Donmoyer asserts that the traditional view of the role of research - the classic hypothesis generation / verification pathway - is unsuited to education. In these situations, Donmoyer (2011:53) feels, 'all research findings are tentative'. Indeed, Donmoyer (2011:56) advocates the use of case studies in just such situations, and claims that generalizability is an unattainable goal as 'mere mortals could never consciously articulate:

> 1) the working hypotheses generated by experience in one situation
> 2) the multiple interacting characteristics at work in that situation
> 3) the multiple interacting characteristics at work in a second situation *and*
> 4) the similarities and differences between situation 1 and situation 2'.

Donmoyer (2011:61) argues that case studies can help us overcome the problem caused by the fact that 'many practitioners learn best by modelling but there are often not enough truly exceptional models to go around'. This view is supported by Anderson et al. (1994:110) who, discussing qualitative research in one's own

school, maintain that it 'does not seek to generalize one study to all other similar studies. Instead, it seeks to explain behaviour in one setting which, if it reminds the reader of his or her own setting, has been successful'.

Stake (2011:22) also believes that there has been too much focus on generalization in qualitative research. Instead of seeking to follow the "scientific induction" logic of other research approaches, Stake believes that case studies give a 'useful understanding' by providing 'a full and thorough knowledge of the particular, recognising it also in new and foreign contexts'. Stake calls this "naturalistic generalisation" - recognising the similarities of objects and issues in and out of context and...sensing the natural co-variations of happenings'. To generalize this way is, according to Stake, 'to be both intuitive and empirical' (2011:22).

It may not be possible to generalize the findings of my case study research on the development of the PLC to other settings. However, it may be possible for other settings to use it as a model (as described by Donmoyer (2011) above) or to at least prompt some thoughts about developing inclusion in other settings. In either case, whether or not there is explicit generalizability, the choice of a case study approach is supported by the literature in this regard.

8.4 - Case studies and theory

I began my case study research thinking that I ought to be conducting it from a particular theoretical perspective. However, my understanding of this changed as I investigated the work of other authors on the relationship between case studies and theory. Many authors believe that there is no such link or, if there is, it is artificial and of limited use.

Cohen et al. (2018:69) explain that 'theory is defined by its purposes'. They go on:

> How we define theory is made clear by what we want theory to do, the uses to which it is put, for example, to describe, clarify, understand (and more broadly and deeply), make sense of, make intelligible, conceptualize, interpret, explain, predict, generalize, provide answers, empower and emancipate.

I realised that I could not begin to fit my research into any theoretical framework until I decided what I wanted the theory to do or be.

Flyvbjerg (2006:224) contrasts practical knowledge with theoretical. He maintains that 'predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is therefore more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals'. Hammersley (2012) also contrasts competing ideas of "theory" in the social sciences arena, to attempt to distinguish amongst them. When I began my research, I felt that I needed to locate it within what Hammersley refers to as *theory as an approach or paradigm*. He describes this as 'involving whole philosophies, in the sense of distinctive sets of ontological, epistemological and perhaps also praxiological assumptions' (2012:396). Rather, my research fits more closely with Hammersley's description of *theory in relation to practice*. This, he writes, 'refers to ideas about how an activity of a particular type ought to be carried out, why, what it's value is' (2012:394). Hammersley argues that much case study research tries to simultaneously complete two tasks: 'to demonstrate the validity of founding assumptions, or to validate particular political or practical conclusions' (2012:397). Case studies that try to combine explaining and theorising, Hammersley suggests, fail to accept that while both of these approaches are of value, they are incompatible, and that much case study work that seeks to combine them ends with the result that 'often neither task is done well' (2012:398).

My research, then, is more closely aligned with what Armstrong and Moore (2004:9) describe as 'the *generation* of theory, in the sense that the processes and changes which emerge through your project may have an impact on the way you and others understand *other* theories, ideas, beliefs and practices' (emphases added). Stake (2011:24) also supports this view of the purpose of case study research: 'themes and hypotheses may be important but they remain subordinate to the understanding of the case'.

Similarly, Gillham (2000:2) advises that case study researchers 'do not start out with *a priori* theoretical notions, whether derived from the literature or not, because until you get in there and get hold of your data, get to understand the

context, you won't know what theories (explanations) work best or make the most sense'. Gillham also links this to generalizability, maintaining

> theory is something researchers create. Theories (explanations) derived in that way maybe the most generalizable aspect of case study research, i.e. the actual data that you find may be specific to a particular school, but your theory, rooted in what you find, may be usable by other people (2000:12).

I was less troubled by the lack of a link between my research and an explicit theory – as Hammersley et al. (2011:251) wrote, there are 'important and difficult problems still to be resolved concerning the role of case studies in producing valid theories' - as I realised that any such link (if indeed, one existed) could probably only be revealed once the data had been collected and analysed. This fits with the description of *grounded theory*, which I will explore further in a later chapter.

8.5 - Issues of subjectivity and bias

As one of the key advocates for case study research, Flyvbjerg (2006:234-235) describes 'the alleged deficiency of the case study and other qualitative methods is that they ostensibly allow more room for the researcher's subjective and arbitrary judgement than other methods' (2006:234). While Flyvberg accepts that this criticism has its use in drawing attention to subjectivity as an important issue, he feels that 'case study has its own rigor' (2006:235) and maintains that case study researchers 'typically report that their preconceived views, assumptions, concepts and hypotheses were wrong' (2006:235). Flyvbjerg also cautions that the question of subjectivity applies to all methods, not just case study.

Indeed, some authors go so far as to claim that objectivity is antithetical to the very philosophy of qualitative research. Galdas (2017:1-2) maintains that 'rigour and trustworthiness are more pertinent to the reflexive... nature of qualitative research' and that this can be achieved by openly reflecting one's own values and opinions:

> those carrying out qualitative research are an integral part of the process and final product, and separation from this is neither possible nor desirable. The concern instead should be whether the researcher has been transparent and reflexive.

Allan and Slee (2004:11) have a similar opinion:

> As researchers designing a project we bring our own personal and intellectual history. Research is never disinterested or objective - we receive and interpret the world in ways that are shaped by individual biography, and naturally enough have strong views about what a better world looks like, and about the role of inclusive education as each of us understand it in contributing to that better world.

This was a welcome finding as I had questioned my closeness to and personal feelings about my research topic. Braun and Clarke (2013:6) advocate the 'rejection of the idea of the objective scientist' in qualitative research, and exhort the researcher to 'bring their subjectivity' and even to see it as a strength. They categorise "experiential qualitative research" as distinct from the critical, more objective tradition and maintain that, by treating context as of vital importance, it 'validates the meanings, diffuse perspectives, experiences and / or practices expressed in the data' (2013:19). Toma (2000) goes so far as to say that the deep care shown by researchers towards their study area provides good data, and that by building close relationships with their research subjects, deep meaning can be found, even though bias and involvement are inevitable in such situations. Toma maintains that 'good data for subjective researchers is the product of just those strong connections between researchers and subject. These connections allow for the description of contexts and experiences that are the essence of good qualitative data' (2000:177). Toma concludes that 'because subjective qualitative research is inherently personal, researchers cannot and should not hide their attachment to the topic and persons they study' (2000:182).

Gillham (2000:7) divides case study research into categories, and within what he calls "naturalistic" case studies, one does not

> ignore the objective but...you are after the *qualitative* element, how people understand themselves or their setting - what lies behind the more objective evidence. Nor does it mean that you ignore 'results', but that you seek to find the *underlying* reasons in people's feelings or perceptions, or their experiences of what is going on. This concern with *process* (leading to the outcomes or 'results') can be key to understanding what needs to be done to change things.

Having said, then, that I should accept my own subjectivity and bias, there are aspects of my research and process that I needed to pay close attention to, in order to ensure that this was adequately recognised in and reflected in my work.

One issue was my position as an “insider” in the research, and the fact that I was interviewing participants about an aspect of the school with which I was so closely entwined.

McCorkel and Myers (2003:200), discussing positionality and privilege “in the field” warn that ‘researchers briefly acknowledge crude aspects of their identities, such as race, class and gender, without explicating how their data analysis and conclusions were shaped by their positionality’. So it would be important for me to guard against this. Thomson and Gunter (2011:17 - 18) encourage researchers to ‘be reflexive to address some of the blind spots that constitute partiality’ but that one need not assume a ‘fixed researcher identity’. Indeed, they caution that “outsider” researchers are unfamiliar with local micropolitics, and ‘often suffer from a lack of distance and perspective on everyday taken-for-granted events, mores and technologies’. Relationships between insider researchers and the researched are, they accept, ‘messy and continuously shifting’, which is in opposition to the idea that ‘education policy increasingly positions schools and those who work within then as needing to be secure, singular and fixed’ (2011:27).

Anderson et al. (1994:27) state ‘practitioner researchers insiders already know what it is like to be an insider, but because they are native to the setting they must work to see the taken-for-granted aspects of their practice from an outsider's perspective’. They advise insider researchers to make their case for a different conception of “validity”. Anderson et al. caution against merely ‘outcome validity: the extent to which actions occur that lead to a resolution of the problem under study’. This, they warn, ‘ignores the fact that most good research, rather than simply solving a problem, forces us to reframe the problem in a more complex way - often leading to a new set of questions or problems’ (1994:30). Anderson et al. are also concerned by the crossover of roles between practitioner and researcher:

> because of the essentially political nature of life in schools, educational practitioners who are engaged in research in their schools are not necessarily welcomed with open arms by colleagues. Often they may feel threatened - a potential side effect of practitioner research (1994:38).

I will address this issue further in Chapter 10, but this certainly limited the number of people who were prepared to be interviewed for my research.

8.6 - Issues of validity

Having addressed questions of generalizability, links to theory, and subjectivity, a further issue with qualitative research in general, including case studies, is conceptions of validity. Validity is the extent to which a piece of research "measures" what it purports to do, and can be applied to the design and methods of a piece of research, as well as the extent to which the data reported is a true reflection of that collected.

Validity is much harder to define and delimit in qualitative research than in quantitative. Bryman et al. (2008) caution that while it is widely assumed that quality criteria for quantitative research are well-known and widely agreed, that is not the case for qualitative research. Validity, they claim, is regarded as relevant to qualitative research by three-quarters of their sample, while only around a third of respondents regarded generalizability and replicability as relevant criteria in relation to qualitative research.

Rolfe (2006) also examined quality criteria for qualitative research, and concluded that attempts to establish a consensus were 'unlikely to succeed, for the simple reason that there is no unified body of theory, methodology or method that can collectively be described as qualitative research'. Validity, Rolfe maintains, 'is achieved through consensus on each individual study, rather than by the blanket application of predetermined criteria' (2006:305). Instead, Rolfe encourages us to look at the "trustworthiness" of each study and to challenge the notion of 'a universal set of quality criteria, whether qualitative or quantitative, rather than acquiescing to them' (2006:309). Judgement about the quality, validity and trustworthiness of research, Rolfe argues, 'can only be made from the perspective of the swampy lowlands of the practice of research, and not from the high hard ground of the Academy' (2006:309)

Nutt Williams and Morrow (2009:576) give some useful indications about how qualitative researchers can explore quality. In any research endeavour, they claim, researchers are 'obliged to justify to the research community that they have done due diligence - that they have established a rationale for the study, description of the data collection procedures and data analytic methods, and a

clear description and interpretation of the data'. I hope that Chapter 7 of this research study, this chapter, and those that follow, have done just that.

Mills et al. (2012:100) maintain that

> in education research, using the case study approach not only creates knowledge and understanding but also sets the standard for good teaching practices through two main means: development and implementation of policy, and gaining experience through exposure to a particular phenomenon.

I believe that my choice of a case study as the most appropriate approach to my research had the flexibility to achieve what Mills et al. described, in a holistic way capturing naturalistic data. I decided that I did not need to align my research with a particular theoretical standpoint before beginning, and that if I was open about my own subjectivity and position as an insider, I could produce an important piece of valid work.

Gillham (2000:102) warns that 'not all case studies can have [this] revelatory quality, something that challenges the existing order of things' but I hoped that my research would at least justify the development of the PLC and lead to further improvements in the experience of children in need of greater inclusion.

Chapter 9 - Interviews as the data-gathering method

Brinkmann (2013:1) maintains that 'for as long as we know, human beings have used conversation as a central tool to obtain knowledge about others' and Rubin and Rubin (1995:1) describe conversations as 'as much about being in a relationship as they are a means of sharing information'. I am at ease in conversational situations, find them a productive way of gaining information, and had a good working relationship with my potential interviewees; thus I chose interviewing as my preferred data collection method. In this chapter, I will consider the types of interviews that were available to me, the challenges of carrying out interviews and some practical issues, and describe how interviewees were chosen.

9.1 Types of interviews

Interviews can be described as being on a continuum, from relatively structured to relatively unstructured (Brinkmann, 2013:18), and can be further distinguished by the kinds of information they seek, how flexible and receptive the interviewer is in response to interviewees' statements, whether they are face to face or relatively more removed, and how open-ended the questions are.
I have characterised my interviews as topical, semi-structured, individual and receptive, according to the work of Brinkmann (2013), Rubin and Rubin (2005) and Turner (2010), explained as follows:

"topical" (Rubin and Rubin, 2005:196) where 'studies explore what, when, how and why something happened'. As factual content matters in topical interviews 'the researcher has to design questions in a way to allow different renditions of the same events to be compared and woven together'.

"semi-structured" as described by Turner (2010) and Brinkmann (2013) where the researcher prepares several main questions to direct the discussion. Turner (2005:756) explains that in a semi-structured 'standardised open ended interview', participants are asked almost identical questions which are worded in order to give potentially open-ended responses; this allows the researcher to 'ask probing questions as a means of follow-up'. Turner cautions that there is difficulty

with coding open-ended data, which I needed to take into account when carrying out the analysis, but I thought I would prefer the freedom of, and rich data-gathering potential of, more open-ended data. Brinkmann (2013:21) also addresses the interpretive nature of semi-structured interviews, arguing that they can

> make better use of the knowledge producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee. [They] also give the interviewer a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge producing participant in the process itself, rather than hiding behind a pre-set interview guide.

"individual" (Turner 2010:27). Turner lists the advantages of these over group interviews as 'less lively', 'often easier… to lead the conversation in a direction that is useful in relation to the interviewer's research interests' and

> when studying aspects of people's lives that are personal, sensitive or even taboo it is preferable to make use of individual interviews that allow for more confidentiality, and often make it easier for the interview to create an atmosphere of trust and discretion.

"receptive" which Brinkmann (2013:31) describes as empowering the interviewee, and enabling them to have 'a large measure of control in the way in which they answer the relatively few, and relatively open questions, they are asked'.

I felt that these interview descriptors matched what I hoped to achieve in my dissertation, as well as allowing the interviewees to feel that they were the experts in, and owners of, their individual experiences. Brinkmann (2013:16) recommends that the interviewer 'should make clear that generally there are no right or wrong answers or examples in qualitative interviewing, and that the interviewer is interested in anything the interviewee comes up with'.

Cohen et al. (2018:509) also categorise interviews into different types. Following their advice that 'the more one wishes to acquire unique, non-standardised, personalized information about how individuals view the world, the more one veers towards qualitative, open-ended, unstructured interviews', but also bearing in mind that as a novice researcher I felt I needed *some* structure, I chose to develop quite broad questions that would allow open-ended responses. This is discussed in section 9.4.

9.2 Challenges of interviews

Interviews are not necessarily the most straightforward method of gathering qualitative data, and have been recognised as posing specific challenges. Roulston (2011:349) indicates that interviews often do not proceed as planned, and that researchers 'must continuously deal with challenges as they arise'. However, I specifically chose interviews over focus groups due to concerns that, as Roulston (2011: 354) maintains, participants might not 'feel comfortable in talking about their personal views, particularly in the presence of peers'.

Cohen et al. (2018:507) cite some key 'unavoidable features of the interview situation that would normally be regarded as problematic'. These include the idea that some factors 'inevitably differ from one interview to another, such as mutual trust, social distance and the interviewer's control'. I hope that I was able to minimise this issue as much as possible by choosing participants who were at a similar level to me within the school hierarchy; I discuss this further in a later section. Cohen et al. also cite the following potential problems with interviews:

- the respondent may well feel uneasy and adopt avoidance tactics if the questioning is too deep
- both interviewer and respondent are bound to hold back part of what is in their power to state
- many of the meanings which are clear to one will be relatively opaque to the other, even when the intention is genuine communication

By careful choice of questions, and clarifying understanding where necessary, I intended to try to avoid these potential pitfalls. However, I also wanted to steer away from seeming unemotional or uninvolved. Mallozzi (2009:1046-47) warns novice researchers such as myself against presenting as a "blank slate". Mallozzi asks 'why an interviewee should trust me, when I am not even acknowledging that I heard, much less understood her' and 'how would I feel divulging myself to a researcher who did not react to me...who stifled laughter or emotional exchange?' My interviewees were all close colleagues, and this distance would have felt artificial. Although it proved challenging when it came to transcription, I could not help but interject throughout, with comments such as "yes" and "mmm". Mallozzi (2009:1054) actively recommends such tactics; 'throughout the interview... head nodding and body positions conveyed I was paying attention and that the participant was on track with her answers' and argues 'this type of active

listening [was] like a relational energy metronome, keeping the rhythm of the interview at a steady pace'.

A challenge that only became apparent part-way through the data gathering process was that of online interviewing. The restrictions caused by the COVID-19 outbreak led to my school being closed from March to September of 2020, and this meant that I could no longer conduct face to face interviews. At this stage, I had conducted five interviews in person, and the rest had to take place by video-conferencing, using platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom.

Of course I had to amend my ethics application to reflect this, but this was a straightforward process. It proved far less straightforward to arrange the remaining interviews. While we were working together in person, it was much easier to arrange a suitably free time in our working days than when my colleagues were working from home, with the additional challenges that posed, such as caring for their own children. Further, some of the naturalistic interactions of in-person interviews were lost, as we were all perhaps somewhat more stilted and formal than we would have been face to face. One unexpected benefit, however, was that using Google Meet I could have the interviews transcribed as they happened using the captioning facility, which made transcribing a good deal quicker for those cases. Transcription was one of the practical issues that I faced in conducting interviews.

9.3 The practicalities of the interview process

I learned a lot from the interview process, including at the trial stage. Some were small practical things, like the need for a "do not disturb" sign on my office door, as even though I was clearly in a meeting, some people did still come in to deliver items or ask questions. For recording, I used both a mobile phone and a digital voice recorder, as on one occasion the voice recorder did not adequately capture the interview, which made transcription much more challenging. I also needed to ensure that interviewees were close enough to both devices so that their voices were captured clearly, which made the recording seem rather obtrusive at the beginning of each interview, until the interviewees lost their self-consciousness around the presence of both devices.

Other issues were more broadly linked to the development of my interview questions, and the conduct of the interviews themselves. I felt that the questions I used were appropriate to gathering the information that I was looking for, but after conducting the first two interviews I decided that some of the questions were a little too similar and did not elicit further useful information. Instead, I needed to clarify the meaning of some of the questions to get to a deeper understanding of the interviewees' points of view. I also wondered to what extent I should try to steer or redirect participants when they were embarking on conversational tangents not directly related to my themes. I decided that as I had intended to be a "receptive" interviewer, as discussed above, I would not do this.

I also felt that, on occasion, in trying to be receptive, I was too conversational. This might have been different if I didn't know my colleagues so well. This goes back to questions of bias and researcher reflexivity addressed in previous chapters. Chenail (2011: 257) cautions that

> the degree of affinity researchers have with the population under study, including researchers being a member of the group themselves, can introduce a question of bias...these "insider" investigations may limit their curiosities so they only discover what they think they didn't know, rather than opening up their enquiries.

Again, I hoped that careful design of sufficiently broad and open-ended questions would allow me to discover what the participants really felt about the issues, without me steering them too much. This balance between being receptive and directive was one of the more difficult aspects of the interview process.

9.4 Designing interview questions

Cohen et al. (2018:506) advise that

> the use of the interview in research marks a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulable, and data as somehow external to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations

The interview, Cohen et al. (2018: 506) maintain, is 'a social, interpersonal encounter, not merely a data collection exercise' and questions must be designed to enable participants - interviewers and interviewees - 'to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard

situations from their own point of view'. They recommend that the order of the interview questions is controlled, while still giving space for spontaneity, and the interviewer can then 'press not only for complete answers but for responses about complex and deep issues'.

One way to avoid over-directing interview participants, as mentioned above, is to design questions that are specific enough to allow the collection of the anticipated data, but also open-ended enough to encourage interviewees to discuss their views freely. Turner (2010:754) cautions that in informal, conversational interviews, spontaneous generation of questions 'off the top of your head' creates inconsistency in questions, meaning coding is difficult. I wanted to try to avoid this. Instead, Turner (2010:758) recommends the creation of identical but open-ended questions, and using follow-up questions or probing for further information if required.

Chenail (2011:255) concurs with the idea of writing bespoke questions for a particular study, asserting that for naturalistic or discovery-oriented enquiries, the creation of study-specific questions for the interviews instead of utilising pre-established questionnaires or survey instruments, allows the researcher to become 'the instrument through which the data for their studies are collected or generated'. This view of the researcher as an instrument or conduit is further developed with a discussion of the usefulness of open-ended questions;
'investigators provide openings through which interviewees can contribute their insider's perspective with little or no limitations imposed by more closed ended questions'. Chenail also examines the role of open-ended questions in insider research:

> investigators who wish to discover what is known about a particular phenomenon or situation from insider perspectives tend to structure their interviews with open-ended questions, which tend to start with words like *who, what, where, when, why* and *how*.

Chenail (2011:256) suggests that 'curiosity-driven qualitative researchers' should employ follow-up questions based upon the responses offered by the interviewee, and designed to discover more details about the respondents' particular experiences.

Mallozzi (2009:1051) describes ‘long, complicated questions, posing closed “yes or no” questions’ as communication barriers, which can lead to the enquiry being centred on big generalities, overly leading the participants, or failing to follow up on important references. Goodley and Clough (2004:337) suggest that in order to design appropriate interview questions we need to ask ourselves ‘what are our research questions? To whom do we want to talk? What information do we want to collect? How are we going to answer our research questions? Why are we doing this research?’

Following all of this advice, I decided to write my interview questions in sections, with each section designed to gather an increasing depth of information about a particular issue. This way, if a respondent spoke at length after an initial question, I would not necessarily use a subsequent question if information pertaining to it had been offered already. For example, if when asked about their initial teacher training (ITT) experience of SEND, an interviewee also discussed the skills they now felt they possessed, I would not need to ask that particular question separately.

I broke the questions down into sections, designed to move participants from broad considerations of inclusion generally, through their own experiences, to issues pertaining to the case-study school and its pupils. The questions were further designed to capture interviewees’ views on many of the issues that arose from the literature review. More than anything, though, the questions needed to reflect the purpose of my research - considering the impacts of the process of changing inclusion in the case study school, and looking ahead to potential future changes or challenges.

The original schedule of interview questions is shown overleaf.

Views on education

What is education for?

How should we / could we measure achievement?

Views on inclusion

What do you think 'inclusion' means in an educational context?

How do you feel about that?

Personal experience of inclusion

What SEND contact did you have in teacher training?

What is your experience in facilitating inclusion, since qualifying as a teacher?

Do you feel equipped with the necessary knowledge and competencies to implement inclusion?

Can you give me an example of something you have done personally which has enhanced inclusion for a particular student?

Views on the student experience

What might be the personal / intrinsic barriers to participation and learning experienced by students in this school?

What can we do to help overcome these barriers?

Do those practices facilitate improved learning outcomes?

How can these practices be encouraged and sustained?

School-wide issues

Do you feel there is systematic support for inclusion here in this school?

What are the system / structural barriers to inclusion at school and classroom level?

What types of SEN can / should we accommodate?

Can we reconcile inclusion and the standards agenda?

Does inclusion pose particular challenges to teacher resilience?

Is there anything else you would like to mention?

Table 9.1 The schedule of interview questions

9.5 Choosing participants

The case study school has a relatively small staff body, with a range of experience and expertise. This would lead to challenges in selecting a participant cohort. I decided not to speak to the entire staff body about participation. As one of the purposes of the research was to consider the future direction of inclusion in the school, I decided to approach a group of potential participants who have decision-making (or at least decision-*influencing*) capacity in the school; those referred to as Heads of Faculty. These staff members all line manage others, and one of their key functions is to represent the views of these others. Another is to consider and debate the future direction of the school. These potential participants, therefore, were ideally placed to discuss the future of inclusion. As a member of the group myself, I sat within the same hierarchical level of organisation, thus limiting (although not entirely removing) concerns about power dynamics - what Cohen et al. (2018:519) describe as 'the likely asymmetries of power in the interview'. There are challenges when using small cohorts for qualitative research; Roulston (2011:355) explores ideas around triangulation of data, and concludes that 'claims made by interviewees can be examined further by other sources of data'. This could include school policies. Roulston (2011:359) also advises careful question formulation, and defining and clarifying mutual understanding of key terms. However, Travers (2011b:10) is less concerned by small cohorts, arguing that 'from an interpretive perspective, there are no benefits in working with large data sets, since these encourage a positivist mentality' towards interviews and the data created by them.

I therefore approached the fourteen members of the Heads of Faculty group at a scheduled fortnightly meeting. I explained the purposes of my research and invited questions. I then distributed the Participant Information Sheet and consent form to the group, and agreed to contact those who expressed an interest and returned the consent form to arrange a mutually convenient time for the interview. I had to take care, in the words of King et al. (2010:88), 'to be clear from the start where the boundary lies between [your] researcher and professional roles' by assuring the potential participants that not taking part would not adversely affect our working relationships. Further details of the ethical considerations of the research follows in Chapter 11.

Of the fourteen potential participants, eight agreed to be interviewed. As mentioned above, by the time of the “lockdown” induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, I had interviewed five in person. I decided to conduct the remaining interviews online so as not to delay the data analysis part of the research process, as at that time we were unaware of when or how we would be allowed to return to school.

Toma (2000:180) maintains that ‘the give and take of interviews, sharing ideas and thoughts about the subject’ allows both participants and the interviewer to ‘make new and deeper connections between aspects of their experiences’ and this was certainly the case for my research. The next step would be to analyse the data produced, bearing in mind the theoretical position of the research.

Chapter 10 - Further aspects of methodology

In this penultimate chapter of the section that explores my research process, I will examine some of the issues around the interpretive paradigm within which the study is situated. I will also explain why I chose to conduct thematic data analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006 and 2013), including some decisions about the transcription process. Exploring the tensions between thematic analysis and the tradition of grounded theory, I consider whether my data analysis contains aspects of both.

10.1 Paradigmatic considerations

Before I became a teacher, I worked as an analytical chemist within the UK pharmaceutical and amenity chemical industries. My education and employment experiences located me firmly within the positivist tradition - I loved science because there was "an answer", a truth that could be determined, or a hypothesis confirmed, by experiment and by gathering lots of quantitative data. Moving into education research, and particularly into research about SEND and inclusion, has challenged my assumptions and I have had to learn about, and locate myself within, a very different set of research beliefs.

This is not to say that either quantitative or qualitative research is right, wrong or "better". Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:23) deplore the 'paradigm wars; the at times hostile war of words over the quality and validity of different kinds of research, commonly grouped under the qualitative or quantitative paradigm' and caution that 'there is some degree of overlap across the different stances you might take, and it is important to acknowledge the fluid nature of these and the blurring around the boundaries'.

The work of Gray (2017:19) was helpful in clearly describing the terms for me as a novice qualitative researcher. Gray's work informed the following diagram, which allowed me to locate myself and my work more accurately.

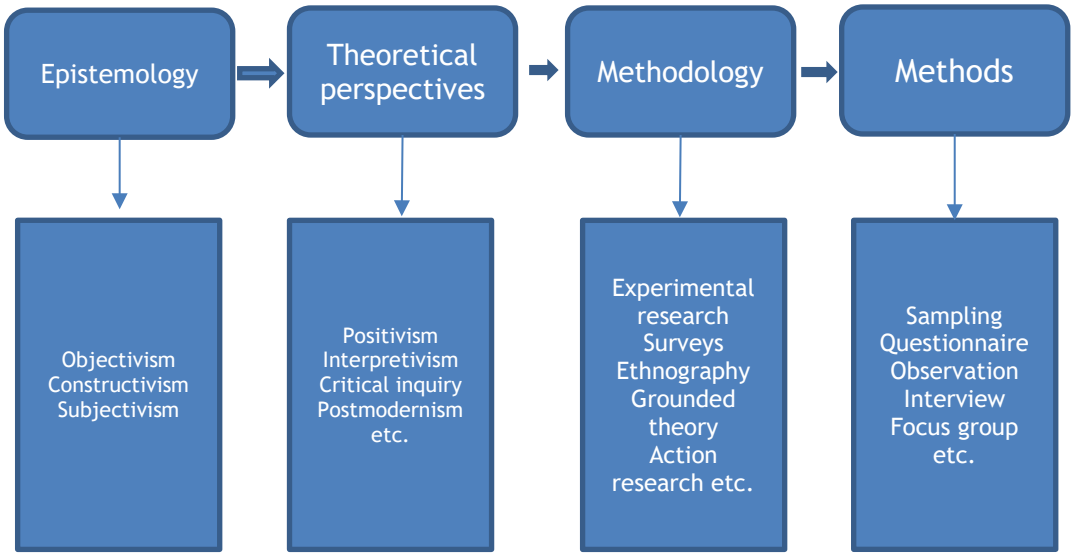

Figure 10.1 A diagrammatic illustration of the links between methodological concepts

Cohen et al. (2018:3) also helped me to understand the terminology around different perspectives on research. They write

> ontological assumptions (assumptions about the nature of reality and the nature of things) give rise to epistemological assumptions (ways of researching and enquiring into the nature of reality and the nature of things); these, in turn, give rise to methodological considerations; and these, in turn, give rise to issues of instrumentation and data collection.

I will explore each of these aspects in turn, beginning with ontology.

10.1.1 Ontology

Braun and Clarke (2013:333) define this as 'the study of being...the state/nature of the world...what exists, and what relationship exists between the world and our human understandings and interpretations'. Cohen et al. (2018:288) describe the ontology of qualitative research as understanding 'people as anticipatory meaning-making beings, who actively construct their own meanings of situations and make sense of their world and act in it through such interpretations'. This seemed to fit with my understanding of my research, as each colleague would have a different interpretation of, and response to, the developing situation of inclusion in the school, often re-constructing meanings as situations changed. Cohen et al. (2018:288) go on to describe the meanings used by participants to interpret situations as 'culture- and context-bound... there are multiple realities,

not single truths'. Cohen et al. (2018:288) summarise their description of qualitative research ontology thus:

> People, situations, events and objects are unique and have meaning conferred upon them, rather than possessing their own intrinsic meaning. Knower and known are interactive, inseparable.

10.1.2 Epistemology

Moving to epistemology, and *ways* of researching, to carry out this study I had to move away from the objectivism of science and towards the subjectivism of working with people. Braun and Clarke (2013:28) describe the central concern of epistemology as 'what counts as legitimate "knowledge": in a world where all sorts of knowledge exist, how do we know which to trust, which are meaningful?' They caution that "scientific" epistemology is the dominant position in the West, and it is true that in my earlier career I believed that true knowledge could only be determined by science. My view of epistemology - the nature of knowledge and what it is possible to know - has changed. Braun and Clarke (2013:29) describe this as 'whether we think reality is *discovered* through the process of research, or *created* [emphasis added]'. I now stand closer to the latter position, especially with regard to my own research. However, I am aware that Travers (2011b:9) argues 'every researcher brings some set of epistemological assumptions into the research process (even if you are unaware of them!)' and cautions that these influence how qualitative data is understood and interpreted. Here, Travers defines epistemology as 'different philosophical views on how, or whether, it is possible to obtain certain or objective knowledge about the world'. I feel differently about this now - Nutt Williams and Morrow (2009:577) maintain that 'moving along the continuum [from quantitative to qualitative research] researchers increasingly view truths as multiple, value the subjectivities of both researchers and participants, and engage the values of the researcher in the research process', and I would hope that my research follows this epistemology.

10.1.3 Theoretical perspectives

I would now consider my theoretical perspective to be that of an ex-positivist (not a post-positivist; that being a radically different position!) moving towards an interpretivist stance. Cohen et al. (2018:9) argue that interpretivism vs positivism is a 'false dualism that should be rejected' as it encourages a researcher to make an 'either-or choice of paradigms and thereby misrepresent the world as multiply meaningful, and both independent of and part of the researcher'. However, although Cohen et al. (2018:9) concede that aligning oneself more closely to one paradigm 'can clarify and organise the thinking about the research', they maintain that the educational world 'is a messy place, full of contradictions, richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and disjunctions' and they assert that 'it has to be studied in total, rather than in fragments, if a true understanding is to be reached' (2018:288).

Gray (2017:23) describes interpretivism as a 'major anti-positivist stance...which looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world'. Gray continues 'there is no, direct, one-to-one relationship between ourselves (subjects) and the world (object)...the world is *interpreted* [emphasis added]'. Gray explains that 'while the natural sciences are looking for consistencies in the data in order to deduce "laws" (nomothetic), the social sciences often deal with the actions of the individual (ideographic)'. Travers (2011b:14) broadens this to include groups, rather than just individuals: 'interpretivists employ qualitative methods in order to address the meaningful character of human group life' and Cohen et al. (2018:8) complicate the picture further:

> the interpretive view...while sharing the rigour of the natural sciences, and the concern of social science to describe and explain human behaviour, emphasizes how people differ from inanimate natural phenomena, and indeed from each other.

This, then is one of the main critiques of the interpretivist approach - that it is not particularly easily defined. Further critiques, described by authors such as Mack (2010) and Yanow (2014) include the idea that interpretivists aim to gain understanding and knowledge of phenomena only within a particular context, rather than generalising these results to other people and other contexts - others see this as a strength of the tradition. Another criticism is that the ontological

view of interpretivism is to be subjective rather than objective and thus the research outcomes are affected by the researcher's own interpretation; I have explained in a previous chapter why I perceive this as a benefit of my approach to the research, rather than a pitfall.

I will explore grounded theory later in this chapter, and have discussed both methodology and methods in Chapters 8 and 9.

There is no singular, "right" approach to qualitative research. Braun and Clarke (2013:33) argue that qualitative research is more than just collecting and analysing qualitative data; it refers to a cluster of different methodologies which offer frameworks for conducting research and producing valid knowledge. What a qualitative paradigm tells us is that useful knowledge can be generated by looking at meaning, with small samples, and that the researcher should not theorise themselves as absent or removed from this process. It also locates knowledge as contextual, and always partial, and as linked to particular theoretical and methodological commitments.

All of this seems to describe my approach closely - I had a small sample, who had generated rich data, and I was part of not only collecting the data, but ascribing meaning to it, and contextualising it. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:32) advocate the need for 'harmony across ontology, epistemology and methodology' and for deliberate attention to be paid to selecting and justifying these; if that is done then the research itself is situated within a sound conceptual framework.

Making these decisions was not easy for me as an "ex-positivist". Conducting the interviews was far more straightforward, but then I had to decide how to approach the large body of interesting data produced.

10.2 Thematic data analysis

As a novice qualitative researcher, I was keen to find a way to make sense of the interesting yet disparate data collected, but that did not delve too deeply into philosophical traditions such as poststructuralism, with which I was wholly unfamiliar. I also wished to do more than describe the data. Castleberry and Nolen (2018:807) describe thematic analysis (TA) as a qualitative research method which allows us to 'explore the beliefs, values and motives that explain *why* the behaviours occur [emphasis added]'. These authors and others, most notably Braun and Clarke (2006) maintain that TA is commonly used because of the wide variety of research questions and topics that it can be used to address.

Braun and Clarke (2006) were the first authors to explicitly "brand" TA as a specific method, laying out a series of steps to be followed. They lay out six main stages to be followed before writing up the findings:

1. Transcription
2. Reading and familiarisation
3. Coding
4. Searching for themes
5. Reviewing themes
6. Defining and naming themes

I will not describe these stages here (except for transcription), but rather will explain their meanings and how I went about them in the data analysis section of this dissertation.

Of course, qualitative researchers were carrying out TA in many forms before Braun and Clarke formalised their six-stage process. Aronson (1995:2) describes her 'pragmatic approach' to analysing qualitative data in this way. From the transcribed conversations, Aronson maintains that 'patterns of experiences can be listed' and then TA can be used to identify all data that relate to the already classified patterns, before related patterns are combined into sub-themes from where it is hoped that clearer patterns emerge. Aronson explains that the next step is to build a valid argument for choosing the themes; this can be done by reading and referring back to the related literature. Aronson (1995:2) then encourages researchers to 'develop a storyline...when the literature is interwoven

with the findings, the story that the interviewer constructs is one that stands with merit'.

Braun and Clarke (2006 and 2013) and Kiger and Varpio (2020) are careful to explore both the strengths and weaknesses of TA. Kiger and Varpio (2020:846) caution that 'data analysis has been described as the most complex and mysterious of all the phases of a qualitative project' and argue that the lack of clear terminology 'plagues' TA as a qualitative data analysis method. Many researchers who use TA, they maintain, 'fail to provide sufficient descriptions of the analysis process followed and of the theories or epistemological assumptions undergirding the analysis'. Braun and Clarke (2013:180) echo this concern, warning that TA has 'limited interpretive power if not used within an existing theoretical framework' - they claim that this can lead to work which claims to follow TA stages being merely a description of the data rather than a deeper interpretive analysis.

That said, both sets of authors concur that, properly done, TA has the flexibility to be used within a wide range of theoretical and epistemological frameworks, and to be applied to a wide range of research designs, data collection methods and sample sizes. It has been suggested that TA is a good first analytical method for novice qualitative researchers, as 'it is relatively easy and quick to learn, and do' (Braun and Clarke 2006:180). However, Kiger and Varpio (2020:847) argue that 'the choice to use thematic analysis should be based on the goals of the research itself, more than a desire to select an easy-to-follow method of analysis'.

While TA is recognised as an appropriate method to use when seeking to understand a set of experiences across a data set, as in my research, since it is designed to search for common or shared meanings or themes, another critique is that it is less suited for examining unique meanings or experiences from a single person or data item. Braun and Clarke (2013:180) concede that 'it cannot provide any sense of the continuity and contradictions within individual accounts'.

Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:141-2) describe a similarly iterative process of analysis in case study research, while not labelling it TA as such. This iteration, they maintain, means that data analysis is not linear but 'involves the to-ing and fro-ing across the data, reflecting critically on possible choices during the analysis

as patterns or themes and anomalies emerge'. They also encourage researchers to return to their research questions, 'to renew [your] focus. Tentative conclusion drawing begins to occur, but in order to verify the validity of [your] findings it is important to return to the data'. Finally, and importantly, they assert that researchers must ask themselves 'why is this interesting? what are the implications for practice or policy?'

Having considered the strengths and weaknesses of TA, and having decided that it was the *analysis* approach best suited to my purposes, I could begin the first of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages - transcription. I will consider this here rather than in the main body of the data analysis section, as there are practical aspects which relate to ideas of methods and methodology.

10.2.1 Transcribing the interviews

Cohen et al. (2018) describe the time-consuming nature of transcription, warning that one hour of interview might take five to six hours to transcribe. Somewhat naively, I assumed both that this was an exaggeration, and that I would "pick it up as I went along". Transcribing the first interview showed me the error of my ways - Braun and Clarke (2013:162) describe the transcription of one's first interview as a 'horrifying yet eye-opening experience' - and I took some time to reconsider the process.

Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:151) maintain that we can view transcription as a continuum 'which ranges from trying to catch only what are perceived to be the main elements, to a full transcription'. They urge researchers to 'think about the quality of your work and the trustworthiness of your interpretations if you were to try to transcribe the gist'. For this reason, I decided to carry out a full transcription of each interview. As a novice researcher, I did not want to be relying on memory or my ability to "flesh out" a partial transcription when it came to data analysis.

I recorded all of the interviews on a mobile phone and on a digital voice recorder. I then experimented with using the speech recognition function on my laptop, and found that by playing the recording into the microphone I could generate a first draft quite quickly (so one hour of interview took one hour to voice type). I then

needed to go back and do a more thorough and detailed transcription, correcting any errors and adding pauses, laughter, sighs, question marks etc. As Braun and Clarke (2013:162) maintain, 'spoken natural language is messier than written language - we hesitate when we speak, we stumble over our words, start a word or phrase and don't finish it, and say the same word or phrase a number of times'. Many of my interviewees used vocalisations such as 'um' or 'ah', which the voice typing function did not recognise, but I thought it was important to include these as they often indicated hesitance, uncertainty or confusion on the part of the interviewees.

Braun and Clarke (2013:162) explain that different styles of transcription suit different analytic methods. They describe *orthographic transcription* as an accurate record of what was said, but caution

> a transcript of an audio recording is not the same as the audio recording, making a transcript two-steps removed from the actual interview experience. With each step, information is lost or changed in some way. The transcript is the product of an interaction between the recording and the transcriber, who listens to the recording and makes choices about what to preserve and how to represent what they hear.

All of the authors quoted so far describe the importance of a consistent transcription notation system. I have listed the conventions used below, but otherwise have transcribed verbatim, using close phonetic approximations of interjections such as 'um' or 'erm' and 'ah' or 'oh'.

Transcription notation	Meaning
...	Short pause or hesitation
[ ]	Vocalisation such as a laugh or sigh
[CAPITAL LETTERS]	Where an interviewee has named a school, subject or person which could be identified, this has been replaced

Table 10.1 Transcription conventions used

Many authors, including Cohen et al. (2018) and particularly Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) count transcription as part of the data analysis process, as you begin to make sense of the data as you transcribe. This was certainly the case for me - and I then had to decide whether to use a particular theoretical perspective in which to locate my findings, or to allow themes to emerge wholly spontaneously.

10.4 Grounded theory

In Chapter 8, I described how case study research can be located within particular conceptual frameworks and theoretical perspectives, or not. I was drawn to explore aspects of Grounded Theory (GT), as some features of this qualitative methodology seemed to suit the intentions and direction of my research. Much like the development of TA, researchers had been conducting studies using what might be considered GT before it was more fully developed in the 1960s by the US sociologists Glaser and Strauss.

Glaser and Strauss used the term *grounded theory* to capture the idea of theory that is grounded in a close inspection of qualitative data, gathered from specific local settings or circumstances. GT has been described as 'an approach to qualitative research, not just an analysis method' (Braun and Clarke, 2013:185). Many different versions have been developed, with certain features in common. Braun and Clarke (2013:185) maintain that GT can successfully be used to address a number of different types of research questions; 'it is probably best suited to questions about influencing factors and the social processes that underpin a particular phenomenon'. They caution that the production of a "full" GT is a demanding process, and only possible in larger research projects not constrained by time and resource pressures, and concede that 'in practice, many researchers only complete the earlier stages of GT initial coding and concept development' - they refer to this as "GT-lite".

Initially I chose case-study research as I did not think that a particular conceptual frame could be applied until I had collected and analysed the data. This approach is supported by Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:31-32) but they maintain that even within GT methodology 'it is possible to argue for the use of a tentative

conceptual frame to help focus the study...whether your study should fit into a particular conceptual framework before you start'.

There are many different "versions" of GT. Cohen et al. (2018) and Timonen et al. (2018) both give useful descriptions of the development of the tradition, although Bakker (2019:91) cautions that although GT is well recognised today as one type of qualitative research method, 'there is considerable confusion about GT in the literature due to the several ways the word *methodology* is used...is GT a methodology, a theory, or both?' Cohen et al. (2018:714) describe GT as 'a set of relationships among data and categories that proposes a plausible and reasonable explanation of the phenomenon under study' and describe the stages in generating a grounded theory as 'theoretical sampling, coding and analysing, then collecting more data until theoretical saturation is reached'.
Timonen et al. (2018:1-3) caution that 'GT procedures are often seem as time-consuming and convoluted, involving a multitude of rules that come across as challenging and even obtuse' but argue that 'GT can be put to work, in a pragmatic way, from any perspective', and maintain that all of the different approaches or strands 'strive to approach the inquiry with openness to new findings'. They contend that the majority of researchers who use or contemplate using GT want to acknowledge their own role in the knowledge-production process, but they also concede

> the majority of contemporary researchers are engaged in knowledge-production processes that are not divorced from various practical concerns, such as the need to explain the applicability, or even the tangible impact, of their research for social, political, and economic issues and problems.

Smith (2015:579) accepts that deciding to use GT can create ambiguity on such areas as which "version" of GT to use, philosophical stances, the inclusion and degree of literature use, and 'strict adherence to a sequential approach or flexibility in application'. Timonen et al. (2018:4-6) explore some of these tensions as they deconstruct some "myths" about GT. Grounded theory need not, they maintain, 'produce fully elaborated theory...in actuality, the most common outcome from a GT study is greater conceptual clarity, or a conceptual framework''.

Another key feature of “strict” GT is that researchers' prior engagement with the literature and existing theory “spoils” GT; Timonen et al. (2018:4) argue that

> the idea of the researcher as a blank slate is no longer a realistic proposition. GT can be used to *deepen existing* theoretical insights (i.e., to “work with” extant literature). The key promise of GT is *remaining open* to the portrayals of the world as encountered and not forcing data into theoretical accounts.

Cohen et al. (2018:722-723) support this, maintaining that the idea of not conducting a literature review before commencing a study has attracted much criticism for being “artificial” as researchers will almost certainly have some knowledge of the field: ‘there is no such thing as a theory-free observation. Rather, researchers are embedded in a socio-historical, spatio-temporal and ideological world which they cannot simply set aside’. Instead, Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:139) advise, the emphasis is on a ‘strongly systematic analysis of data using inductive reasoning to help discover or uncover theory’ and this does not mean ‘there should be an absence of prior thinking and theorizing - the researcher *can* explicitly put these to one side [emphasis added]’. Staying true to the key principles of grounded theory, they argue, ‘is a result of an active and ongoing process of inductive reasoning and critical comparison as theory emerges’. If deciding to use grounded theory ‘it is important to outline in what ways you are using it, and how, if at all, it has been amended’.

Thinking through the implications of choosing to definitively claim that I was conducting a study using grounded theory, I could see that there were ways in which my study could be placed within the parameters of Braun and Clarke’s (2013) “GT-lite”, but perhaps more importantly, others where it could not.

10.5 TA, GT, both or neither?

Kiger and Varpio (2020:847-848) maintain that 'the steps of thematic analysis echo those of grounded theory' as they are both qualitative methodologies that use coding and searching datasets for themes as part of their processes. They suggest that thematic analysis is at the midpoint between two poles:

> surveys, where data is not transformed at all, and phenomenology, where deep interpretation of the data leads to considerable transformation. Through thematic analysis, the research construct seems to reframe, reinterpret and connect elements of the data.

Thematic analysis, they claim, goes further into the interpretation and data transformation processes than surveys or questionnaires, but this is generally not to the point of developing theory as it would be in grounded theory. Braun and Clarke (2006:81) also describe how TA "shades into" GT: 'a named and claimed thematic analysis means researchers need not subscribe to the implicit theoretical commitments of grounded theory'.

Bakker (2019:92) cautions that 'some researchers take GT very seriously...this involves a high degree of commitment and involves a real choice among alternatives. Yet the actual alternatives are not always clear'. There were two particular aspects of GT that concerned me with regards to my own study. The first was the idea of theoretical saturation: Bakker (2019:93) describes this as 'the idea that we know when we have done enough empirical research if we keep getting very similar kinds of responses'. I had a limited sample of potential interviewees available, and had neither the time nor the opportunity to continue interviewing until I reached theoretical saturation. Another was, as mentioned in the previous section, the idea of conducting the study whilst maintaining at least a distance from the extant literature - my work in schools, and specifically as a SENCo, meant that this would have been impossible.

One way in which GT did match my research was that a key assumption of GT is that one can start conducting empirical research without explicit hypotheses. Bakker (2019:94) maintains that 'research prompted by the GT method won't produce absolutely definitive results; nevertheless, once the information being discovered seems to have reached a "saturation point", it is possible to put forward some tentative generalizations'. Again, though, the idea of saturation

meant that even this aspect of GT was limited in its usefulness to me. Further to this, Cohen et al. (2018:723) cast doubt on the meaning and status of the word "theory" in GT: 'it is ill-defined and vague...it is epistemologically unclear...the grounds for accepting a theory are unclear; are they observation, interpretation, logic, deduction, inference or what?'

I decided, then, to accept that while there were some features of what I aimed to do - namely, the inductive processes of exploring and explaining the data - that could claim some affinity with GT, my research was much more closely aligned with TA.

Braun and Clarke (2006:78-92) claim that thematic analysis can be seen as a 'foundational method' for qualitative analysis - it is a flexible and useful research tool which can potentially provide a rich and detailed yet complex account of data by identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within that data. They assert 'what is important is that the theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher wants to know, and that they acknowledge these decisions and recognise them as decisions'. Perhaps the most enticing strength of TA as compared to GT is that 'thematic analysis offers a more accessible form of analysis, particularly for those early in a qualitative research career'.

Having thus decided that I would follow the broad schema of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006 and 2013), Castleberry and Nolen (2018) and others, I had then to consider the ethical implications of my research.

Chapter 11 - Ethical considerations of the study

All academic research ought to be conducted in adherence to certain ethical principles. The fine details of those principles vary from discipline to discipline. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:65) define ethics as 'norms of conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour', and within the sphere of education, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) states that 'all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom' (BERA 2018:5). That is not to say that all education research raises the same ethical questions. BERA (2018:1-5) goes on to say 'since few ethical dilemmas have obvious or singular solutions, researchers will take different and creative approaches to resolving them' and concede 'different cultural contexts are likely to require situated judgements'. Since no one set of ethical guidelines could possibly cover every research eventuality, BERA consider 'adherence to the spirit of the guidelines', that is to say, respecting the 'privacy, autonomy, diversity, values and dignity of individuals, groups and communities' and conducting our research with integrity, to be the "bottom line", with specific ethical concerns being addressed individually for each piece of research.

Each of the sections of my research raised its own ethical considerations, so I will explore them here in turn.

11.1 Ethics of research design

Some of the first questions that I needed to answer were linked to the purpose of my research, and therefore the choice of instrumentation and methodology, in order to clarify my thinking. The work of Zeni (2005:205-214) was useful in framing the ethical considerations in a systematic way. Where Zeni's questions are used in the text throughout this chapter, they are given in italics with the page number in brackets following.

What does your research aim to understand (207)? My research, and in particular the interviews and subsequent data analysis, were designed to explore the nature of inclusion in the context of an independent school, how to improve it, and the challenges of doing so.

What kind of data will you collect (208)? I collected qualitative interview data relating to teachers' perceptions and experiences of the nature of inclusion and how to improve it.

What does your research aim to change (208)? This was a more complex and nuanced question. My intention was to explore existing attitudes and practices relating to inclusion amongst colleagues, and only after analysing the data, to suggest possible ways to move forward.

Having explored these initial considerations, I then needed to prepare an application for ethical approval through the University's Research Ethics System. For this, I had to demonstrate that my study would contribute in a useful way to the body of academic knowledge in this area, without raising ethical concerns. As Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:78) explain, it is 'irresponsible to assume that you are the first person to have studied a particular topic or behaviour'. A thorough literature review, they advise, 'will strengthen your own study and alleviate charges of plagiarism. It also simplifies your argument that the new knowledge you generate is needed to improve the field'.

I found the ethics application process reasonably straightforward and it certainly encouraged me to consider many different aspects of research ethics. However, Braun and Clarke (2013:62) caution that one of the 'unintended and unfortunate consequences' of using an institution's existing ethical code is that

> ethics can be seen as a hoop to jump through - a specific stage of research or even a barrier to research, rather than something that should permeate our whole research practice. Ethics codes should be seen as the lowest level of ethical standard required, not the pinnacle to aspire to.

Cohen et al (2018:119) also warn that ethical codes can be something of a 'straightjacket' and that they exist to protect the institution rather than the researcher or the participants:

> ethical issues are complex. Ethical answers cannot simply be cranked out mechanistically or algorithmically, but are framed in specific contexts. Researchers should have their autonomy respected. Researchers themselves, and not ethics committees, have the responsibility for the ethical conduct of research, and such responsibility cannot and should not be passed to a committee.

Institutional research ethics systems, Cohen et al. (2018:119) believe, create ‘undesirable consequences of bureaucracy, time and effort’. Nonetheless, as a novice researcher, I found the systematic process of applying through the University gave me the structure I needed to ensure that I considered all aspects of the ethics of my study.

11.2 Consent and permissions

BERA (2018) advise that research participants are usually considered free from ethical risk if they are informed of the general nature of the study, and what is expected of them is explained. I gave a presentation when inviting colleagues to participate, and followed this with a Participant Information Sheet. This document explained to colleagues that by participating, they gave informed consent for their data to be used, but also that they could refuse to participate, and they could withdraw without penalty at any time.

I explained that anonymity would be offered, within the constraints of the research taking place in a small school with a small sample, which meant that if a reader was so inclined, they could make “educated guesses” about the identity of the school and therefore the staff. Braun and Clarke (2013:63) maintain the importance of the rationale around anonymity and confidentiality. They encourage researchers to use the Participant Information Sheet to discuss this with participants, and to tell participants about the limits of anonymity. I also assured potential participants that confidentiality of their data was protected. Again, the University Research Ethics System process was helpful in ensuring that I addressed all aspects of these issues.

As I was conducting my research in a school, I also needed to gain permission from the Principal. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) describe those who need to grant access to participants as ‘gatekeepers’. Cohen et al. (2018:134) warn ‘investigators cannot expect access as a matter of right. They have to demonstrate that they are worthy as researchers of being recorded the facilities needed to carry out their investigations’ and in order to do this, I had to clarify in my own mind most of the nature and scope of my research.

I used more of Zeni's (2005) questions to assist me with considering these issues, again given below in italics.

How does your school administration review your work (209)? My Principal and the Board of Governors were supportive of the study. They are keen to see improvements in inclusion, but that brings about its own tensions, which I will discuss in the section below on reporting. BERA (2018:16) suggests 'participants' trust in the wider value of the research beyond the researcher's personal interest might be gained by including an endorsement from a senior leader within the institution' and having this before I sought participants gave, I felt, more weight to my request.

Which of the research participants have read your proposal, which know some of the details and which know little or nothing of this project (212)? As previously described, as part of my request to staff to take part in the interview stage of the research, I made available a presentation of my proposal so that they could make informed decisions about how and whether to participate.

When I began the study, staff indicated a willingness to work with me. However, I needed to ensure that I was not burdening them with an over-onerous demand on their already full schedules (and my own!) I needed to take care to reassure staff of anonymity so that they felt able to speak openly about any challenges. In the next section, I address the conflict between my roles as researcher and teacher in charge of developing inclusion.

11.3 Conducting the research

Braun and Clarke (2013:65) caution that

> managing dual relationships - knowing those who take part in our research - is potentially more complex in qualitative than quantitative research, due to the extent of contact and the often deeply personal and sensitive nature of the stories participants tell us.

However, I have explained in an earlier chapter how I view my "insider" status as vital to the relationships which would give me good data. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:76) agree, but note that in interviews, because a high level of trust must be established in order to get truthful answers to one's research questions

'it is not uncommon for participants to feel so comfortable that they share information you may not be prepared to deal with'. The University Research Ethics System application ensured that I had to consider this possibility, as well as examining the power dynamics between me and the interviewees.

Again, I used questions from Zeni (2005) to explore this area of potential tension.

Are you the researcher also a participant in the setting where this research will take place? Specify your role (212). As head of personalised learning it is my role to bring about the development of greater inclusion within the school.

Which of these people [interviewees] do you have some power over, and which have power over you (212)? I have no direct power over other staff - all of my interviewees were in the same position within the middle management structure of the school - but I do carry out staff training and write policy, so my attitude and thinking has an impact on the way staff are expected to carry out their jobs.

What shared understanding do you have with these people? Do you have personal bonds or professional commitments (212)? Of course we have professional duties towards one another as colleagues. Part of my research is to explore and develop any shared understandings. The University ethics application ensured that I considered any negative impacts on myself or colleagues. Cohen et al. (2018:136) also encouraged me to consider power relationships. Researchers, they maintain, may have more power than interviewees:

> be this by status position, knowledge or whatever. The researcher typically determines the agenda, the timing and duration of the research, and for example in interviews, what counts as acceptable and useful...who might or might not be identifiable and so on.

By adhering to two guiding ethical principles, *respect* and *responsibility* (BERA, 2018) I would be able to respect my interviewees and uphold my responsibility to produce high-quality educational research, whilst maintaining my academic freedom. However, I also needed to analyse and report my data ethically and responsibly.

11.4 Data analysis

Braun and Clarke (2013:64) advise that research participants can only give consent to our 'broad interests/approach' in qualitative research, as it is 'open-ended and iterative. We often don't know in advance *exactly* how we're going to analyse our data, or the sorts of claims we will make about them'. They also caution that, in the interests of preserving anonymity, we do not change our data so much that it alters the meaning.

Cohen et al. (2018:138) also examine the ethics of data analysis. This can manifest in many ways, they suggest: the researcher must not misrepresent their findings or the phenomenon itself, should not be unfairly selective with regard to the data used (ignoring meanings or concealing data that do not fit what the researcher wishes to show), overstate or understate what the data is showing, project one's own values onto the data, make false claims of causality, or fail to consider rival interpretations and explanations of the findings.

Zeni (2005) asks:

How will you protect yourself from the temptation to see what you want to see (212)? One of the purposes of carrying out doctoral research was to develop my skills of critical analysis. I would need to ensure that I was reflexive throughout the data analysis, acknowledging possible bias and my own thoughts and feelings where appropriate.

You will inevitably gather more data than you need. Consider why do you choose to report some to a wider audience and keep some for yourself (212)? Some of the data would not directly answer my research questions. Part of the process of thematic data analysis following Braun and Clarke (2013) would be the intention of reporting all themes initially emerging. Stake (1994:459) cautions that, in case study research, ethical concerns may arise with regard to what is not disclosed, and I would need to consider this in my conclusions.

11.5 Writing and reporting

Braun and Clarke (2013:61) remind us that 'ethics covers our relationships with participants, with academic communities and with the wider world in which we conduct research, as well as our research practice'. This meant that I would need to consider the ethical implications of the finished study, how I wrote it and with whom it would be shared. Both Braun and Clarke (2013) and Cohen et al. (2018) caution that the choice of research topic and design, and the interpretation and reporting thereof, may be political, or at the least viewed through particular subjective, theoretical or political lenses. Cohen et al. (2018:139) argue that, in reporting and disseminating data analysis

> the researcher has an ethical duty to ensure that the results of the research are reported fairly, credibly and accurately, without misrepresentation, unfair selectivity... plagiarism, untenable claims, exaggeration or understatement, misinterpretation, bias and under-reporting or over-reporting certain findings to the detriment of a more balanced and fair view…attention must also be given to confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability...will an external, internal or local audience to be able to identify the participants and institutions in the research.

This gave me much to consider, and again I used questions from Zeni (2005) to assist my thinking and planning:

What negative or embarrassing data can you anticipate emerging from this research? Who might be harmed, personally or professionally (212)? Although changes to inclusion had already been made prior to beginning the study, this research might show that the school is not yet fully meeting its obligations with regards to inclusive practice. This might have negative impacts on me and my colleagues.

What steps have you taken to protect these people (212)? My research would hopefully show that improvements were being made, that the attitude and actions/behaviours to developing inclusion were moving in the "right direction". Furthermore, all participants would be anonymised, and their data used to develop themes for considering a future direction.

Will other stakeholders view your report (212)? Yes. I have a responsibility to share it with them. This is one of the aspects of ethical qualitative research, that prior to publication, participants can agree that the report contains a fair

reflection of their comments. I would also be expected to share my findings with those who had given permission for the research to take place, i.e. the Principal and Governors.

Will this compromise your candour (212)? BERA (2018:76) state that 'in some circumstances research findings will be regarded as sensitive information by sponsors. Researchers should aim to inform stakeholders prior to publication and negotiate a fair publication strategy that takes into account public interest in the findings, the researchers need to publish, and stakeholders' concerns'. Although my research was not sponsored by the school, there is a potential conflict between my research findings and the school strategy for development. What I believe is the best way forward for inclusion within the school might not be the direction they wish to take. Nevertheless, the school might reasonably expect to be portrayed positively. I would need to maintain my integrity as a researcher and try to reconcile any possible tensions.

Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:78-79) specifically address the ethics of case study research. Ethical behaviour, they maintain, is essential when conducting a case study and 'should permeate all stages of [your] study'.

> Approaching the study with full knowledge of requirements for permissions and content will provide a solid foundation for success and aid in developing relationships based on trust and respect. Sensitivity to issues of confidentiality and privacy will help your observations, interviews and other methodological activities to proceed positively… ethical dilemmas may arise at any point in the research, including during the writing and dissemination of your results, and they must be recognised and addressed as they occur…

This chapter has shown how I have examined each of these aspects and addressed the ethical concerns thus raised.

Chapter 12 - First analytic steps

Braun and Clarke (2013:201) suggest that 'it's tempting to view analytic guidelines as *recipes* that have to be *precisely* followed, as if adhering to these will ensure a successful outcome'. However, they urge researchers to have an 'analytic sensibility' rather than slavishly 'following the rules'. Nonetheless, as a novice researcher, my intention was to follow the steps outlined in their version of thematic analysis (both in their 2006 paper and 2013 book) relatively closely.

I have discussed the transcription process in Chapter 10. While of course I was familiarising myself with the data while I transcribed, I was more focussed on the process than the content. There were instances where I found myself thinking "that will be useful", and I was able to gain a broad flavour of each interviewee's perspective, but I deliberately chose not to analyse or code the data as I transcribed. I interviewed eight participants, and between them that gave me 85 pages of transcribed data. This was not evenly spread between the participants - some were more voluble than others. Two colleagues spoke for only approximately fifteen minutes each, while another spent well over an hour talking with me.

I assigned pseudonyms to each interviewee, using names that indicated the gender of each participant but that bore no other relationship to their identity. None of the teachers in the case study school shared names with the pseudonymic identities allocated. The first five interviews were conducted in person, with the final three taking place online due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Although the interviewees were given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity, I do wish to give some details of the range of backgrounds and perspectives that they brought, in order to demonstrate that they were not an entirely homogenous group - although all were white European, which is reflective of the staff body in the case study school. Two interviewees were male and six were female. Their teaching experience ranged from over thirty years to just three years. Some have been teachers for all of their careers, others came into teaching after careers in other spheres, and one is not qualified as a teacher (this is a feature of UK independent schools; they are able to employ staff who do not hold Qualified Teacher Status). Some had trained by doing a PGCE, and others by following a

Bachelor of Education programme. They had worked in a range of schools across the UK, although none had taught outside the UK. This broad range of backgrounds - at least in terms of teacher education and work experience - gave a valuable range of responses to the interview questions.

My first step was to conduct an initial read-through of the data, during which I underlined anything that met one of the four criteria below:

- Important ideas
- Key words
- Suggestions for possible future themes
- Quotes that might be of use

Braun and Clarke (2013:205) refer to these as 'noticings', and suggest that they be 'observational and casual, rather than systematic and precise'. They also advise that researchers need not 'be overly concerned at this point about the theoretical coherence' of the noticings, but rather use them to begin to develop an 'analytic sensibility' by asking questions, such as:

- How does a participant make sense of their experiences?
- What assumptions do they make in talking about the world?
- How would I feel if I was in that situation?

I have summarised my initial 'noticings' for each interviewee in the table below. I was conscious of not starting to "code" at this stage, so really only focussed on words, ideas or sentences that really "jumped out" at me. I do not intend to explain them here, or use quotes to support them (except for occasional instances of language that I considered noteworthy), as any subsequent analysis will be described in later chapters.

Interviewee	Noticings
Gwen	Clarifying choice of words in regard to education Education as broader than curriculum Social interactions Considers views of parents Has a range of school setting experiences Links inclusion to behaviour Apologises a lot for 'talking too much' Very little initial teacher training (ITT) on inclusion Including the whole person rather than just the need Considers pupil perspectives Self-deprecating Optimistic Refers to time and class size as barriers Finds being inclusive to be intrinsically rewarding
Nell	Thinks about education beyond school Uses quite formal language - not comfortable with being interviewed Value of each person Case study school as selective Many years of experience in different settings Little focus on inclusion in ITT Lots of suggestions for inclusive strategies Class sizes Training is valuable Kindness is important Contradiction between inclusion and exam results Has personal experience of family member with SEND
Paul	Life beyond school, transferable skills Much of discussion was subject based Measuring inclusion by progress Focus on the individual Putting the right curriculum and support structures in place Little focus on inclusion in ITT Much more since, particularly in previous school Feels own inclusion strategies are innate due to experience Changing a school strategy needs to be slow and considered Links inclusion to behaviour Need to think about needs of other pupils not just those with SEND Feels exam success and inclusion can be reconciled Would like more support in class
Tess	Education to "feed the soul" Questions the nature and purpose of assessment Somewhat uncomfortable being interviewed - lots of reassurance and follow up questions needed Thinks about exclusion as well as inclusion Feels that there was no focus on inclusion in ITT However, lots of experience since then Focuses on own subject quite a lot Enjoys being inclusive Discusses case study school at length, with strategies for improvement Reference to value-added Encouraging independence and skills

Ella	Broad range of ideas about the purpose of education Doesn't like idea of exams, but has no solution Very comfortable being interviewed Invests a lot of self in being inclusive - sees this as part of identity Lots of support for inclusion in ITT Keen to elaborate on strategies for specific pupils in case study school Wants much more time and training Discipline and confidence (of pupils) Feels senior management don't know what's happening in classrooms Bombarded with new initiatives Case-study school shouldn't be selective Inclusion and exam results "mutually supportive"
Kath	Well rounded individuals Current exam system not satisfactory - "many ways a child can cheat the system" Spoke about own subject at length Inclusion as opportunity for all Everyone has "unique learning requirements" Hardly any inclusion focus in ITT - contrasts that with staff who have qualified more recently Discusses how inclusion has changed in case study school Time constraints Squeeze on staff Accessibility of buildings Older staff need to update their thinking
Ruth	Obligations under National Curriculum Functional futures in the adult world, with examples Full inclusion will never be achieved for all Has had inclusion training at various points in career (didn't have ITT) Case-study school training is "generic" and "knee-jerk" Discusses LGBTQ inclusion Case-study school with regard to economic diversity Case-study school is more inclusive than others, with a way to go Has experience of a family member with SEND Inclusion in mainstream life, employment - is not achieving this a failure? Case-study school has broken down the idea that SEN is a place or a teaching group Range of abilities within a class is a challenge for staff Secondary teachers are more interested in their subject than child development and have "inherent bias towards the brilliant" Variegated pay scales to encourage staff to be good at different things Easy to look at the problems of what doesn't happen "The perfect is the enemy of the good"
Liam	Education as empowerment and opportunity Exam focus should be on progress from starting point Inclusion is easier said than done and can "slip" as terms go on Worked with SEND team in large state school as part of ITT Feels more equipped with strategies now Cultural and language barriers at case-study school Need to share successful strategies between staff SEN does not equal low grade Too many things to do in too little time, inclusion is just one

Table 12.1 Initial 'noticings' from transcription

Having thus recorded my initial observations, and read through the transcripts as a body three times, I was ready to begin the process of coding.

I chose to conduct my data analysis using the Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS package) "NVivo". In considering the strengths and weaknesses of using software (such as Braun and Clarke, 2013:219) I initially thought that I would not be capable of learning a new way of working at that stage of my research, having little faith in my technological competence and being comfortable using pen and paper. However, I then decided to experiment with the two shorter transcripts (Nell and Liam), and code them using annotated hard copies *and* with a trial version of NVivo. I found NVivo surprisingly intuitive, and much "neater" than using pen and paper, in that I could code one sentence or phrase in multiple ways without obscuring the data or rendering it confusing in any way. Subsequently, I therefore decided to use NVivo for the rest of my data coding.

Chapter 13 – Initial coding by interviewee

Braun and Clarke (2013:206) describe coding as 'a process of identifying aspects of the data that relate to your research question'. To begin the coding process, I therefore had to ensure that I had framed my research question in a way that would allow me to code aspects of the data adequately to answer it. I had framed my interview questions to examine the interviewees' perspectives on "areas" related to inclusion, such as their personal experiences of inclusion, their understandings of the term, and whether they felt the case study school supported the principle of inclusion. To code the data, I decided to keep the "research question" very broad – *what were each teacher's thoughts on each issue?* – although I knew this would make coding more difficult.

I conducted what Braun and Clarke (2013:206) refer to as 'complete coding…[to] identify *anything* and *everything* of interest or relevance' within the entire data set, and intended then to become more selective, aligning the codes with a more specific iteration of the research question, at the stage of theme development.

I used 'researcher-derived codes' (Braun and Clarke 2013:207), which 'invoke the researcher's conceptual and theoretical frameworks to identify *implicit* meanings within the data'. At this first stage of coding, I did not try to "understand" the codes that I had derived on any deep level, but rather more instinctively coded the data according to what I "saw" and "felt" in the data. Cohen et al. (2018:669) describe just this response to and emergence from data in the process of coding, although they later raise concerns (2018:674) around coding in this way in case it could be considered 'superficial'.

On commencing my data analysis, I had decided that I would code each interviewee's transcript separately, and then combine them into themes. Using NVivo, it became apparent that I had created not only a lot of codes, but that there wasn't a great deal of coherence between the codes in each interview; there was some, but perhaps not enough for me to go straight into theme development.

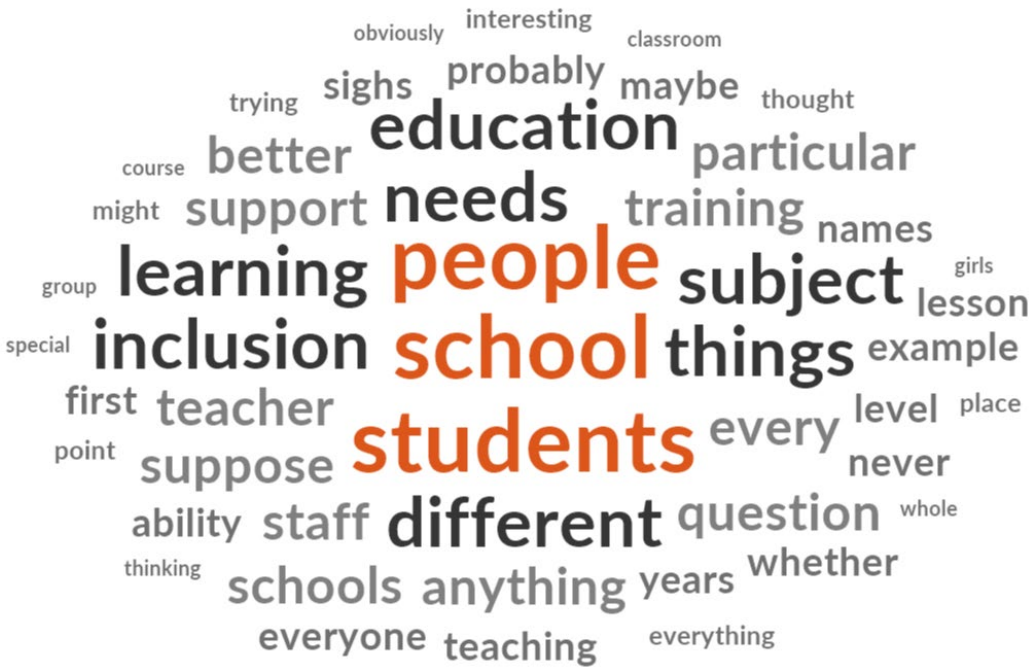

Figure 13.1 **A word cloud of the fifty most commonly occurring words across the eight interview transcripts.**

I used NVivo to produce a word cloud of the fifty most commonly occurring words across the eight interviews (using a minimum word length to exclude “and”, “the” and the various versions of vocal hesitations such as “erm”). The results are shown in Figure 13.1 above. I realised that this analysis gave little insight into the codes I had developed, or the direction that I might take any potential creation of themes. Not only this, but the word cloud shown above seemed to show few links to the codes that I had created. This is another concern raised by Cohen et al. (2018:673) who caution that ‘coding can swamp the researcher with too many codes and may not reduce the data very much’, so I would need to use the word cloud carefully to judge the relevance of each word compared to my initial codes.

Name	Files	References
Acceptance of difference	7	22
Access	6	15
Barriers	8	46
Behaviour and discipline	4	10
Class size	3	8
Colleagues	4	12
Dyslexia	3	4
Education as good in itself	5	7
Empowerment	4	6
Expectations of others	6	11
Experience of facilitating inclusion	7	37
Inclusion and standards	7	19
Inclusion competence	8	29
Inclusion difficulties	7	31
Inclusion of specific students	7	22
ITT	7	11
Language used to describe SEND	7	20
Meaning of inclusion	8	26
Measuring achievement	8	29
Opportunity	6	10
Participation	5	9
Personal experience family members etc	3	6
Personalised learning	5	14
[redacted]previously	5	12
Relationships with others	4	5
SLT support	7	23
Social class differences	4	14
Strategies	6	28
Teacher priorities	5	16
Teacher resilience	8	18
Training	7	23
Types of SEND	7	16
Value added	4	8
What is education for	8	16
Workload	7	32

Figure 13.2 The alphabetical list of initial codes produced when analysing by interviewee

The figure on the previous page shows the list of initial codes created, the number of files (or interviews) that each appeared in, and the number of references to each code across the eight sets of interview data.

The redaction is the initial letter of the case study school, where I had coded data that referred to the situation regarding inclusion prior to the creation of the PLC.

I realised, on looking at this alphabetised list, that as a novice researcher I had made a number of assumptions or errors which rendered this first coding less useful than it might otherwise have been:

- Some single words used for coding were perhaps too ambiguous to be genuinely useful, such as “access” – sometimes I meant access to education, and at other times physical access to premises.
- Some codes were too similar and I ended up coding data into both of them as I could not decide at the time which to use – for example, “workload” and “teacher priorities”.
- Some codes were very broad and would potentially need further ‘sub-coding’, such as ITT (initial teacher training) and ‘measuring achievement’.

The next step was to sort this list of codes in other ways, which was easy to do using NVivo. Firstly, I sorted the list by the number of interviews each code had appeared in. This allowed me to create one list of those codes which had appeared in more than half of the interviews. This was followed by a second, shorter list of those codes which had appeared in half or fewer of the interviews.

Name	Files	References
Measuring achievement	8	29
What is education for	8	16
Meaning of inclusion	8	26
Barriers	8	46
Inclusion competence	8	29
Teacher resilience	8	18
Acceptance of difference	7	22
Inclusion difficulties	7	31
Workload	7	32
ITT	7	11
Language used to describe SEND	7	20
Experience of facilitating inclusion	7	37
Inclusion of specific students	7	22
SLT support	7	23
Training	7	23
Types of SEND	7	16
Inclusion and standards	7	19
Opportunity	6	10
Expectations of others	6	11
Access	6	15
Strategies	6	28
Participation	5	9
Personalised learning	5	14
Teacher priorities	5	16
[redacted]previously	5	12
Education as good in itself	5	7

Figure 13.3 List of codes that appeared in more than half of the interviews

Empowerment	4
Relationships with others	4
Value added	4
Colleagues	4
Behaviour and discipline	4
Social class differences	4
Dyslexia	3
Personal experience family members etc	3
Class size	3

Figure 13.4 List of codes that appeared in half or fewer of the interviews

This was not intended to portray that set of codes as necessarily less important, but rather perhaps to focus on the first set initially.

Finally, for this set of codes created by interviewee, I listed them by the number of pieces of data (called “references” in NVivo) that I had coded to each. With the greatest number of references coded to ‘barriers’ (with 46 instances), I again subdivided this into an approximate “top two thirds” and “bottom third”.

Name	Files	References
Barriers	8	46
Experience of facilitating inclusion	7	37
Workload	7	32
Inclusion difficulties	7	31
Measuring achievement	8	29
Inclusion competence	8	29
Strategies	6	28
Meaning of inclusion	8	26
SLT support	7	23
Training	7	23
Acceptance of difference	7	22
Inclusion of specific students	7	22
Language used to describe SEND	7	20
Inclusion and standards	7	19
Teacher resilience	8	18
What is education for	8	16
Teacher priorities	5	16
Types of SEND	7	16

Figure 13.5 Top two thirds of references

Access	6	15
Personalised learning	5	14
Social class differences	4	14
[redacted]previously	5	12
Colleagues	4	12
Expectations of others	6	11
ITT	7	11
Opportunity	6	10
Behaviour and discipline	4	10
Participation	5	9
Value added	4	8
Class size	3	8
Education as good in itself	5	7
Empowerment	4	6
Personal experience family members etc	3	6
Relationships with others	4	5
Dyslexia	3	4

Figure 13.6 Bottom third of references

This was useful work, as it helped me to narrow down aspects that I might look to develop into themes. However, I felt that I still did not have a clear enough picture of what the data was trying to tell me within each question, or set of questions.

I therefore decided to re-code the data, but by examining each *question* as a data set (rather than each interviewee). Thus, I combined all of the answers to each question into a single document for that question, which I then coded afresh.

Chapter 14 – Coding by interview question

The process of combining the answers to each interview question into a single document was useful work, as it gave me a fresh perspective on the data and allowed me to begin to identify some emerging patterns. St. Pierre and Jackson (2014:716) warn against using coding to 'feed the fallacy' of seeing patterns where none exist, but I felt that this second coding was more responsive to the data. I also realised that I had perhaps slipped back into "scientific", positivist thinking by aligning frequency of occurrence with importance of a code, and so a second coding might provide something of a corrective to this tendency. Cohen et al. (2018:679) support this view, cautioning 'frequency does not equal importance'.

I then had to decide whether to completely ignore the first set of codes I had created, or to re-use some of them. I decided on the latter approach, not only because I felt I had created some useful codes – and to abandon them would feel artificial – but because 'coding is an organic and evolving process' (Braun and Clarke 2013:211) and the second set of codes felt like an evolution of the first.

With the same caveats as in Chapter 13 (that the word clouds and codes do not necessarily correlate closely) and above (that frequency of occurrence does not ascribe particular importance of a code), I created word clouds for each interview section, followed by lists of number of files in which each code occurred and number of data items coded to that description (termed "references" in NVivo).

The responses to 'interview questions' were split into five files, to reflect the areas covered:

- Interviewees' perspectives on the purpose of education
- Interviewees' understandings of the meanings of inclusion
- How we measure achievement and whether this can be reconciled with the standards agenda
- Interviewees' personal experiences of inclusion
- Views on support for inclusion within the case study school

In the next section I have highlighted a few important words from each word cloud, bearing in mind that "school", "students" and "needs" were prioritised in each cloud due to the phrasing of questions and responses.

14.1 Word clouds

14.1.1 The purpose of education

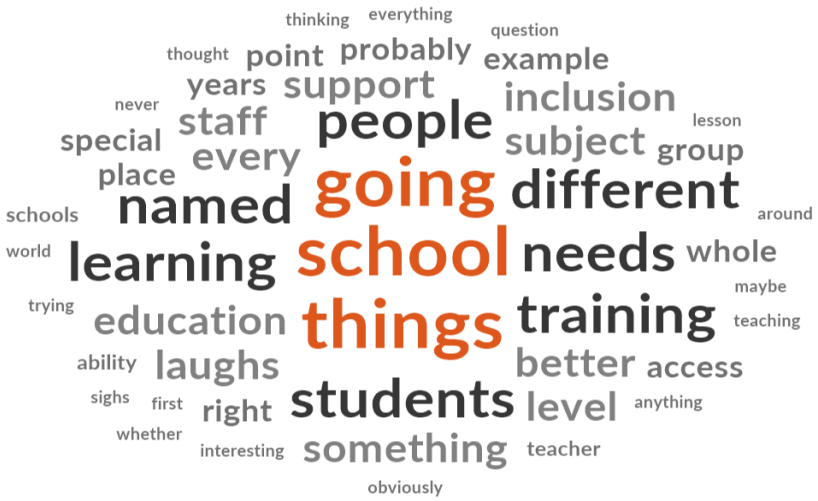

Figure 14.1 Word cloud of responses to the question 'what is education for?'

Notable here were the words "different" and "training".

14.1.2 Meanings of inclusion

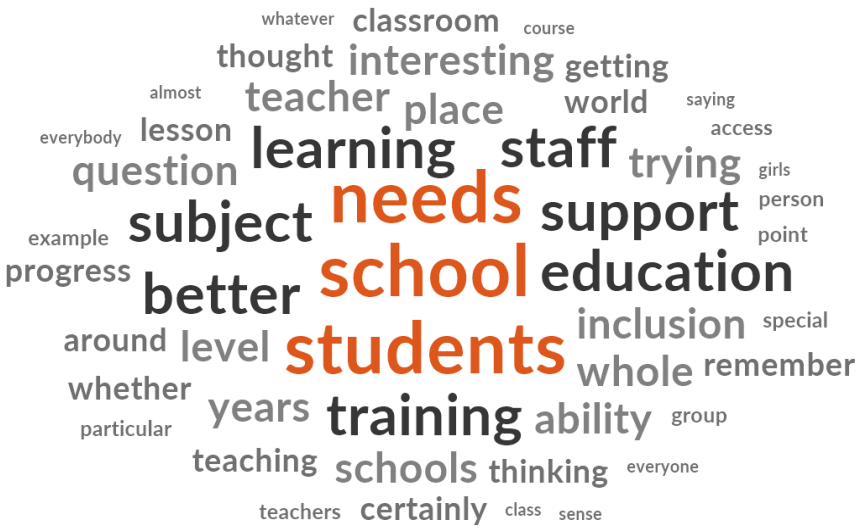

Figure 14.2 Word cloud of responses to questions about meanings and understandings of inclusion

I found the word "support" to be of interest here.

14.1.3 Achievement and standards

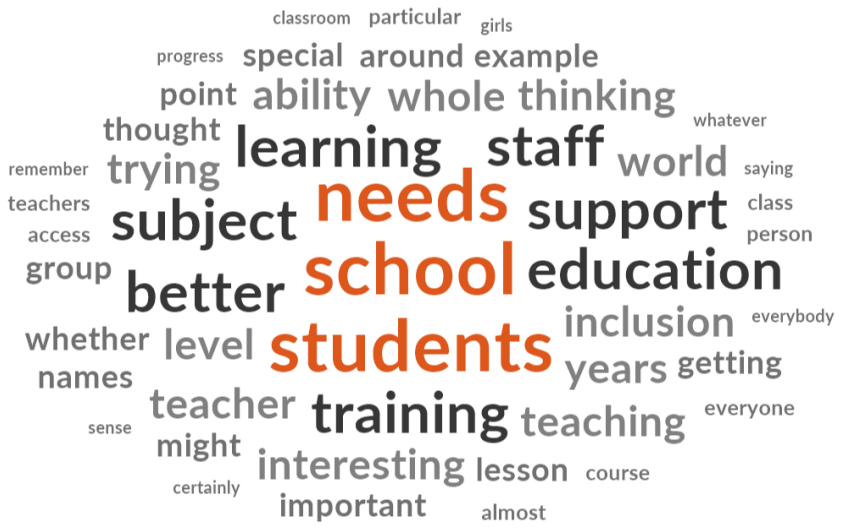

Figure 14.3 **Word cloud of responses to questions on measuring achievement, and reconciling inclusion with the standards agenda**

The words “subject” and “world” drew my attention in this word cloud.

14.1.4 Personal experiences and support for inclusion

Figure 14.4 **Word cloud of responses to questions about interviewees’ personal experiences of inclusion, including teacher training**

The words “support” and “trying” piqued my interest in this cloud. The word cloud for the question of colleagues’ support for inclusion resulted in exactly the same key words – they seemed to entirely summarise the contents of the interviews.

14.2 Analysis of ‘number of files’ containing each code

This list showed that life skills, social inclusion and how education differed by age were seen as important by the interviewees, who were also concerned about their workload and how achievement was measured.

Name	Files
Difference in education by age	4
Education in life skills	4
Inclusion re social interactions	4
Value added	4
Workload…time pressures	4
Personalised learning	4
Differences in definitions of education	3
ITT	3
Differentiation	3
CSS previously	3
Behaviour	3
Inclusion challenges	3
Social class differences	2
Qualifications	2
Employment…economic productivity	2
Inclusion and the standards agenda	2
Subject teaching	2
Inclusion meaning	2
Experience of inclusion	2
Access	2
Language and types of SEND	2
EAL	2
Empowerment	1
Education as good in itself	1
Class sizes	1

Figure 14.5 List of number of files containing at least one instance of specified code

CSS = case study school

14.3 Number of instances of each code

Name	Files	References
Experience of inclusion	2	37
Education in life skills	4	29
Inclusion challenges	3	27
ITT	3	20
Personalised learning	4	19
Workload...time pressures	4	17
Access	2	17
Differences in definitions of education	3	16
Differentiation	3	16
Language and types of SEND	2	16
Difference in education by age	4	15
Qualifications	2	15
Inclusion re social interactions	4	13
Inclusion meaning	2	13
Value added	4	12
Inclusion and the standards agenda	2	12
CSS previously	3	9
Behaviour	3	7
Employment...economic productivity	2	5
Social class differences	2	4
Subject teaching	2	4
Class sizes	1	4
EAL	2	3
Empowerment	1	1
Education as good in itself	1	1

Figure 14.6 Number of times data has been allocated to each code

This showed that codes and themes relating to experiences of inclusion, challenges, workload and initial teacher training *might* be potential areas for more in-depth exploration as they had been referred to multiple times (second column of numbers).

14.4 A brief analysis of the second coding

As discussed at the start of this chapter, I used several codes that I had previously assigned when coding by interviewee, such as “personalised learning” and “ITT” (initial teacher training). However, I also created a number of new ones such as “subject teaching” and “differentiation”.

I had thought that “class sizes” had been a more important emerging theme than it turned out to be – it was only contained in one set of responses, but had been quite forcefully referenced. For example, Liam stated:

> **Classes are getting larger, which means that girls do not get the same personalised approach as they can in classes of twelve or so**

This demonstrated the usefulness of sorting the codes by frequency, as it allowed a somewhat more objective overview of use of codes. This would prove valuable when developing themes – I would try to use a combination of my own views of the importance of a data item, gained by my actual experiences of the interviews and how passionately an interviewee responded, and how often I had coded data to that code using later, more detached readings of the transcripts.

The next step would be to try to develop a potential set of themes, by comparing and examining the sets of codes, combining some and perhaps discarding others.

Chapter 15 – Developing themes

After coding the entire dataset twice (once by interviewee, as outlined in Chapter 13, and once by question area as explained in Chapter 14), I began to think about organising the codes into themes.

Braun and Clarke (2013:224) describe a theme as capturing 'something important about the data in relation to the research question', and explain the difference between a code and a theme thus: 'a good code will capture an idea; a theme has a **central organising concept**, but will contain lots of different ideas or aspects'. They describe the practice of developing themes from codes as 'an *active* process: the researcher examines the codes and coded data and starts to create potential patterns; they do not "discover" them' (2013:225), and the authors use the analogy of sculpting to describe the way in which themes "take shape" from the data and codes.

The first step in my theme development process was to use NVivo to "autocode" both sets of data to give a visual representation of the prevalence of certain codes, and the subcodes within them, to see whether this gave any suggestions of potential themes and whether the codes suggested by NVivo bore any relationship to the ones I had used myself.

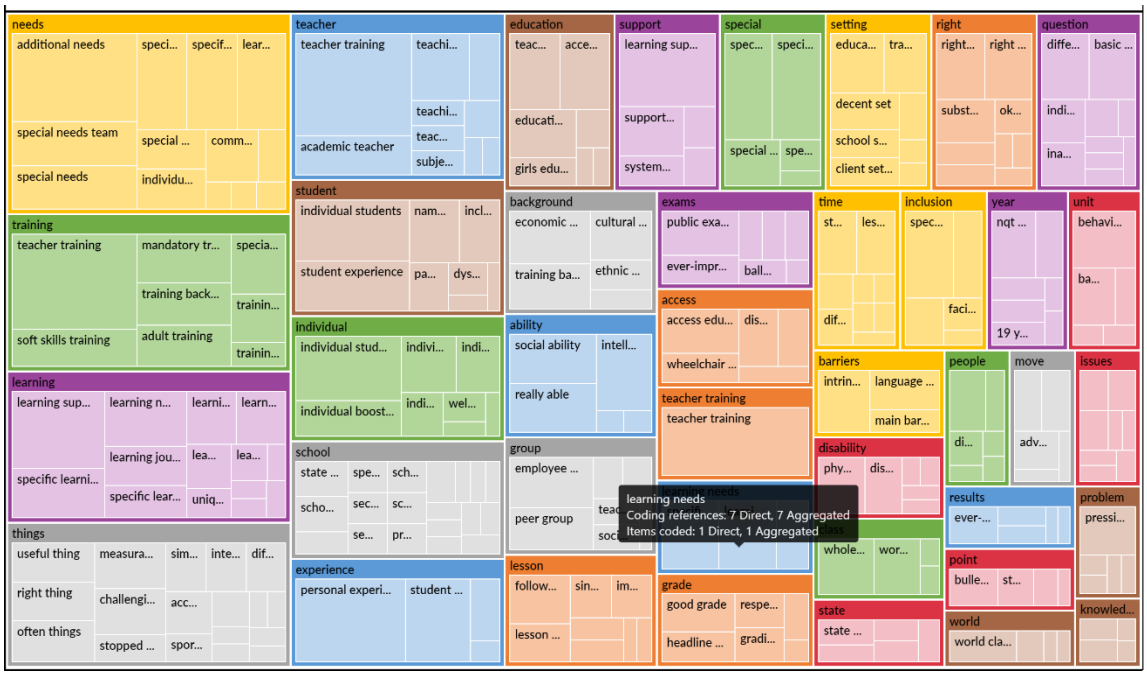

Figure 15.1 NVivo autocode by interviewee

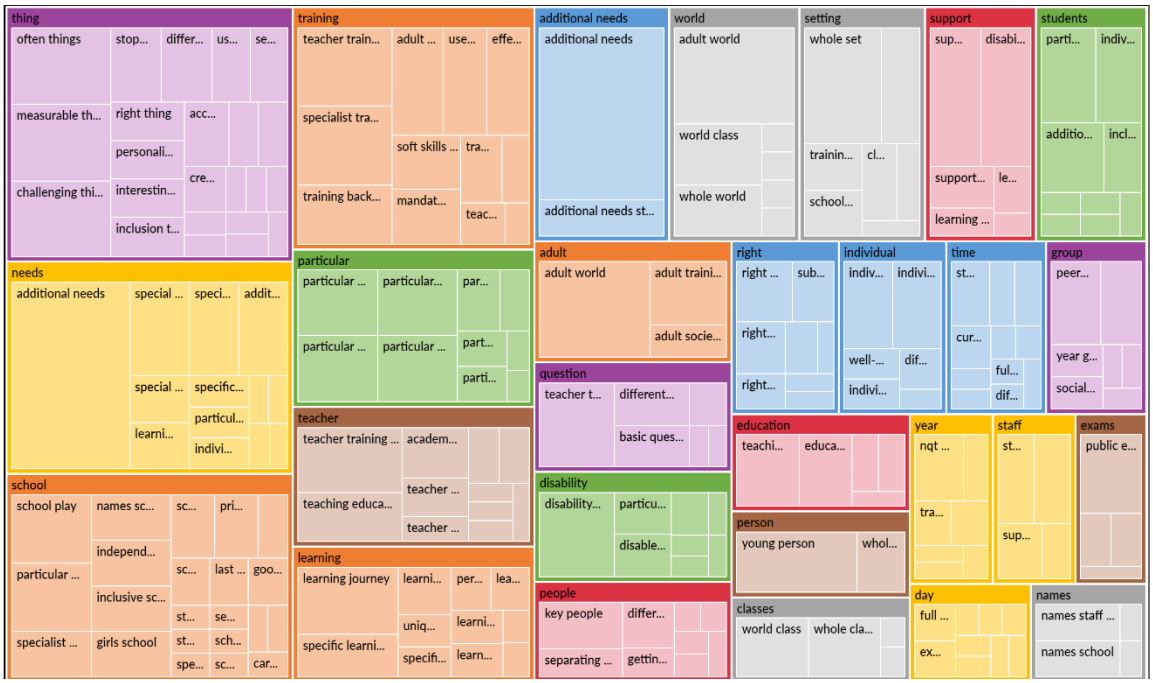

Figure 15.2 NVivo autocode by question area

I found this process much less useful than I had anticipated, as the CAQDAS program coded literally everything, using word frequencies, and this led to a large number of codes which addressed neither a useful topic (e.g. “thing” in Fig. 15.2) nor my research questions.

At this point, I decided to return to a more traditional method and prepared some handwritten lists. In order to compare those codes which had come up most frequently, in the hope of finding codes which recurred in both sets (by interviewee and by question), I created two tables. Braun and Clarke (2013:223) suggest that looking for patterns in this way ‘rests on the presumption that ideas which recur *across* a dataset capture something psychologically or socially meaningful’. I then used coloured highlighters to indicate items which occurred on both lists, and which might cohere to begin the creation of a theme. I was, however, careful to bear in mind advice from Braun and Clarke (2013:230) that

> Determining the importance of a theme is not about counting (e.g. frequency overall, frequency within each data item); it’s about determining whether this pattern tells us something meaningful and important for answering our research question.

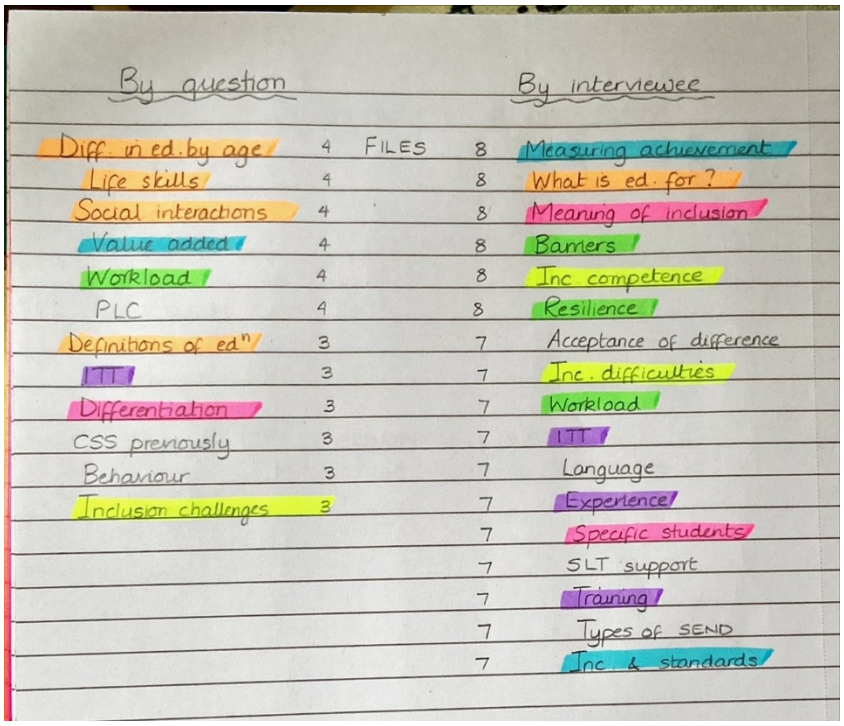

Figure 15.3 Comparison of both sets of codes by the number of files in which they occurred

This table led to the following list of groups of codes as potential themes:

Colour	Idea for potential theme
Orange	Ideas around the purpose of education
Blue	Standards, achievement
Yellow	Challenges to practising inclusion
Pink	Factors associated with practising inclusion
Purple	Training and experience

Table 15.1 Potential themes by colour code (number of files)

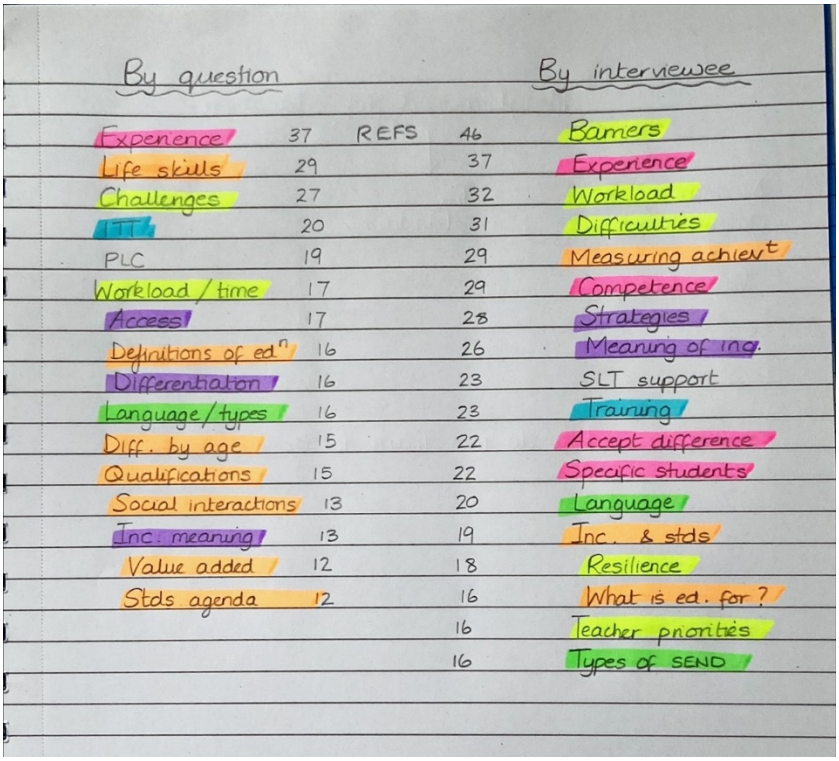

Figure 15.4 Comparison of both sets of codes by the number of pieces of data coded to them ("references")

Colour	Idea for potential theme
Orange	Ideas around the purpose of education
Blue	Training
Yellow	Challenges to practising inclusion
Pink	Factors associated with practising inclusion
Purple	Meanings of inclusion

Table 15.2 Potential themes by colour code (references)

Braun and Clarke (2013:227) advise that 'themes identified at this point in the process are provisional; they are *candidate* themes' and also suggest a list of 'useful questions' to ask when considering a theme (2013:226):

- Is this a theme (is it just a code or a subtheme?)
- Is there a *central organising concept* that unifies the data extracts?
- What is the quality of this theme? Does the central organising concept tell me something meaningful about a pattern in the data, in relation to my research question?

At this stage, I could not honestly describe these groups of codes as themes by answering these questions in the affirmative. My next step was to use these groupings to take each of the codes generated and to see whether it could fit into one of the code groupings or needed a different one. Again, I did this manually by allocating a number or letter to each generated code (numbers 1 – 35 for codes generated by interviewee, and letters a-y for those created by question) and then creating a mind map where I wrote the number next to a potential theme.

Potential theme	Codes that might be contained within that theme
Purpose of education	2, 18, 19, 26, 27, 32, b, h, k, l, s, t, y
Standards / achievement	1, 17, 29, o, p
Challenges of inclusion	4, 6, 8, 9, 14, 19, 24, 31, c, f, r, v
Practising inclusion	6, 7, 11, 16, 20, 21, 33, 35, g, i, j, u
Training / experience	5, 10, 12, 13, 15, 34, a, d
Meanings of inclusion	3, 22, 27, m, n, x
Other	23, 25, 28, 30, e, q, w

Table 15.3 Potential themes, with letters and numbers to identify codes

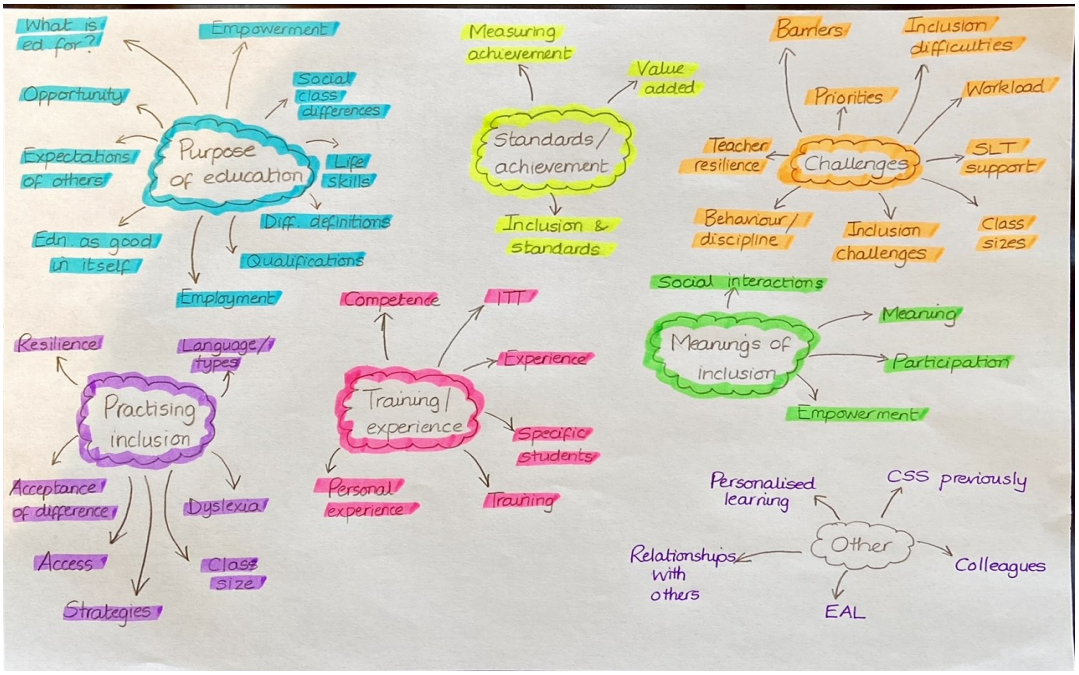

Figure 15.5 Mind map of potential themes and codes

I then used a black pen to add some links between codes and themes:

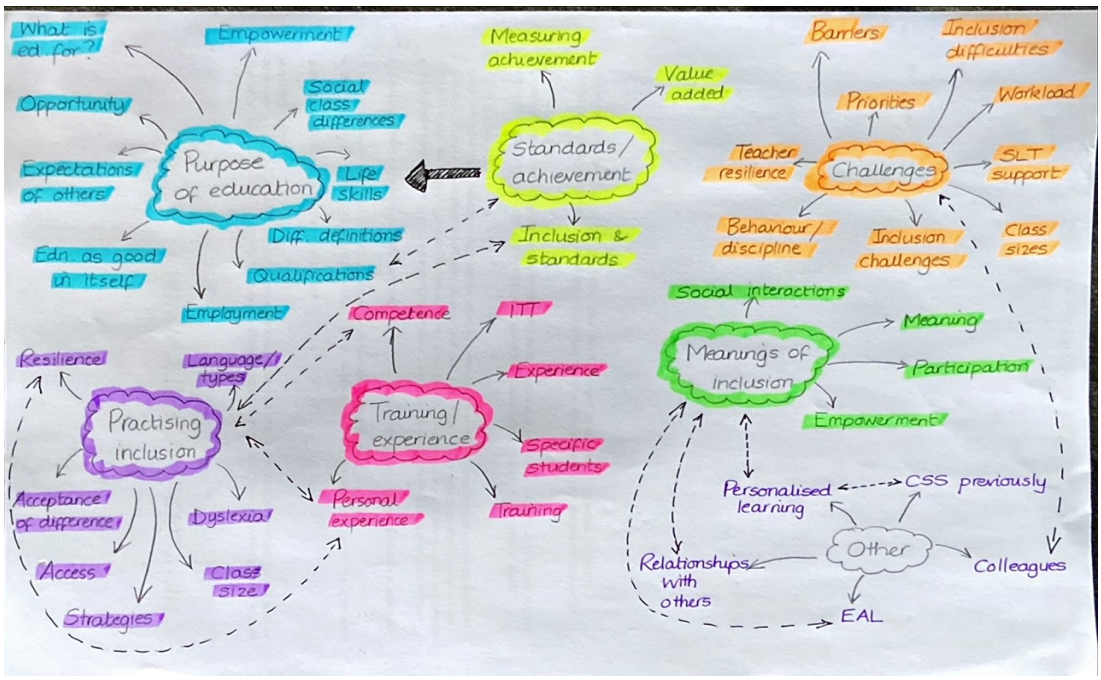

Figure 15.6 Mind map with links

At this point, I could see a way in which I could create a "thematic journey" from these candidate themes, using further questions, recommendations and advice from Braun and Clarke (2013:226-230):

- Are there enough (meaningful) data to support this theme? Is the theme too 'thin'?
- Themes don't have to cover everything in the data – they should be about addressing the *research question*
- [Your] task in analysing the data is a *selective* one. It's about telling a *particular* story about the data, a story that answers your research question. It isn't to represent *everything* that was said in the data.

Braun and Clarke (2013:231) use the analogy of creating a patchwork quilt to explain that 'good themes are distinctive and need to make sense on their own; at the same time, good themes need to fit together to form the overall analysis'. They advise the researcher to ask themselves 'what's the overall story of my analysis? How does this theme contribute to that overall story?'. They also suggest that the researcher question whether the central organising concept is reflected in the title given to the theme. This advice is supported by Cohen et al. (2018:685) who caution against theme titles being ambiguous, as readers will no doubt make inferences from the theme title.

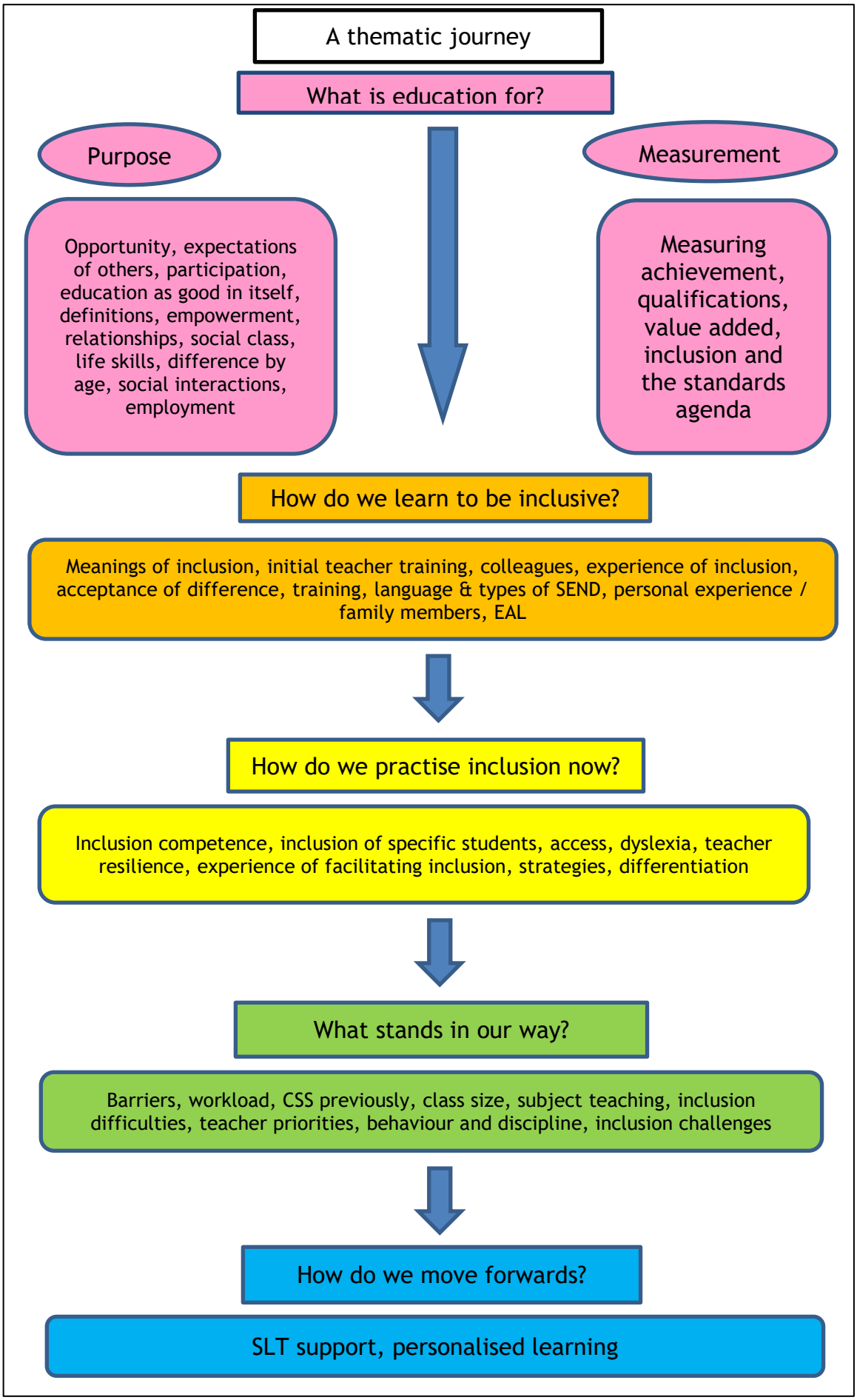

Figure 15.7 A visual representation of my "thematic journey"

With this in mind, I created a "thematic journey", where each theme linked to the next. I then began to use these themes to answer my original interview questions, by pulling together responses and analysing how they supported each other and the themes.

I believed that this treatment of the codes and themes would tell a 'believable story' about the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013:233), bearing in mind that the authors advise that there is no such thing as '*one true story*' – just one which is faithful to the data.

The next step, then, was to analyse the data within each theme and to tell its story in relation to the research questions. Aronson (1995:2) discusses the interweaving of themes with literature and findings to 'develop a story line' – the story thus constructed, Aronson maintains, is 'one that stands with merit'.

As I began the data analysis, reviewing codes, and looking for such a storyline, I decided that some codes either did not fit where I had originally placed them into the thematic journey, or were a distraction from the overall picture. I therefore re-drew the thematic journey taking these issues into consideration, and using the metaphor of roads and road signs to illustrate the journey.

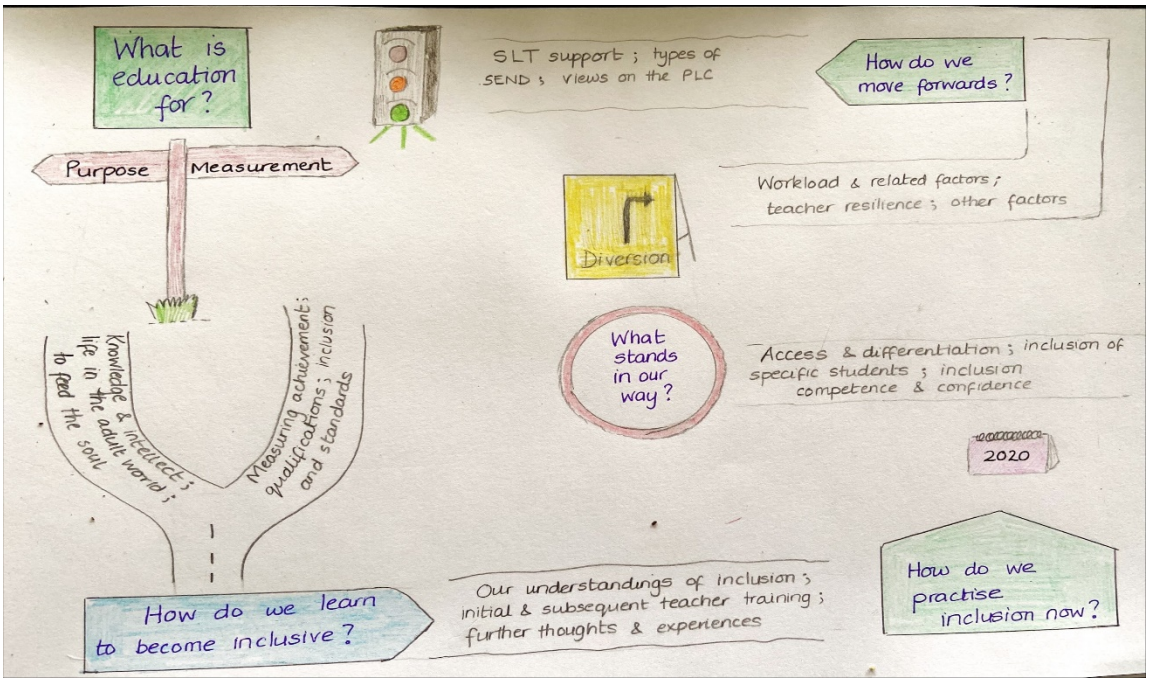

Figure 15.9 The final thematic journey

Chapter 16 – "Step One" on the thematic journey; the purpose of education

This chapter and the subsequent one are together intended to explore the first of my research questions: **how do teachers in the case study school view inclusion in education?** In order to unravel what teachers in the case study school understand by "inclusion" in education, I felt it was important first to explore their perceptions of the *purpose* of education. If we are to define what we mean by inclusion in education, it would be helpful to gain an understanding of what education means to us, to be able to describe why including students within it is so important.

I divided responses to this first step on the thematic journey into two – an initial section examining broader understandings of the purposes of education, followed by a section on measuring achievement, and the standards agenda.

16.1 What is education for?

In the interviews, this was my opening question. I did not clarify it unless participants asked me to (very few did). The responses fell into three main categories: those related to knowledge and intellect; responses about life beyond school and the skills needed to succeed in the adult world; and those related to a broader philosophical view of education's values. I was not expecting this to be an easy or straightforward question to answer; as Schuelka and Engsig (2020:2) maintain, this is 'a multidimensional question with multidimensional answers'. Biesta (2015:77) discusses the 'threefold question of purpose', and argues that education is for 'qualification, socialisation and subjectification' (by which Biesta means how children come to exist as subjects or individuals). It would be interesting to see whether the participants in my research agreed with this view.

16.1.1 Knowledge and intellect

A portion of the responses reflected a view of education that might perhaps be expected from a group of secondary school teachers – ideas connected with knowledge and skills, often (although not always) connected to a particular academic subject.

Kath summarised it thus:

> **to develop the students intellectually… hopefully through specific subjects, depending on which subject teacher you are. That's sort of like a common goal for the teacher…**

Gwen discussed how the meaning of education varies with age and moves away from "broader" skills towards narrower outcomes:

> **when you're small, say pre-school, you're looking at how you interact with others probably as being the most important, and then the acquisition of things like colours, how to hold a knife and fork…but as you get older the interaction with others and those sort of skills…how you work with people and socially interact, they become much much smaller don't they? and then we go almost completely curriculum based by the time we get to university, or just beyond.**

Ella seemed almost disappointed in her own view of the prevailing purpose of education in her subject:

> **I suppose [sighs] it's teaching them the obvious skills like reading and writing, but also how to use language to express themselves effectively, both in spoken and written form.**

And Nell discussed the concept of stimulating pupils' intellect by

> **Introducing them to new experiences and ideas they would otherwise not encounter.**

These responses would seem to broadly agree with Biesta's (2015:77) description of educational 'qualification' as 'the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions'. However, a much greater proportion of the responses reflected purposes of education that related to life beyond school. Slee (2012:42) asks us to pose the question '*what work is inclusive education doing?*' and, whatever view one has of the inclusiveness of the case study school, the interviewees' comments show that part of that task is to prepare students for life.

16.1.2 Life in the adult world

Each of the interviewees had much more to say on how education could and should prepare young people for life outside the classroom. Biesta (2015:79) articulates the idea that although at times we DO need to focus on particular knowledge or

skills, at other times ‘we can judge that what matters most for a particular student…is their formation as human beings’.

Ella, who had seemed so disappointed by her initial feelings, became more positive as she developed her answer:

> **I see [**education**] as a way to build the skills that help people … navigate … the world. I think it’s less about the content they’re learning … and more about teaching them how to see things from other people’s perspective as well.**

This could be linked to Tatto’s (1998) discussion of teaching as a way to improve equality and justice, by teachers reflecting their own beliefs and ideas, as Ella has a strong sense of identity and considers herself something of a champion for those who struggle with theirs. Mitchell (2014:302) maintains that inclusive education requires not only a commitment to the principles of inclusion, but also a willingness to implement them, and Ella frequently stated both of these factors in her comments.

Paul framed his answer in terms of his subject, but also referenced important life skills:

> **to me it would be… about preparing students for life beyond school, especially in [NAMES SUBJECT]… I always get asked the question ‘why are we doing this, why do I need it?’…I always try to answer that question in terms of ‘this is giving you skills that will be transferable’…for me that's what education in a nutshell is, equipping students to deal with life beyond school learning.**

Round et al. (2016) found that many subject teachers feel that their job is *only* to teach their subject (as in Biesta’s (2015) idea of qualification), so it was encouraging to hear Paul – and others – speak of broader purposes that could be served, even within the narrower contexts of one curriculum area.

Ruth was extremely voluble on the purpose of education as related to life skills:

> **developing young people … in order to be ready for their place in the adult world, and adult society, and to help them develop some of the … skills and abilities that will enable them to achieve their best in the adult world**

She then developed her answer, using specific examples for how English and Maths might be used in the real world. This quote appears in Appendix 1 as Extract 1.

The responses above show that the interviewees were seriously thinking about secondary school education being only one step on life's journey. Tatto (1998:66) argues that the purposes of education 'may shape teachers' beliefs about what is appropriate in teaching', and these responses indicate that the interviewees had reflected on this difficult question and were able to look beyond academic achievement.

Some of the respondents were even more aspirational and gave answers which were deeply felt and inspiring.

16.1.3 'to feed the soul'

Part of Tess's answer to the question 'what is education for?' was this:

> **it's providing them with the ability to cope with a rapidly changing world and to feed the soul.**

When asked to develop this further, Tess explained:

> **I'm the kind of person who likes to do a lot of research and I think it's very good to... finding things out, to stretch your brain, you know...erm, make you feel better, reassured…**

Nell had a similarly positive view:

> **Education is also purposeful activity, which is a good thing in itself - necessary for good mental wellbeing. It's stimulating and opens doors to unexpected places. Education is about helping people lead a richer, fuller life. Finding out who they are, who other people are, what the world is like and how they can navigate their life in it.**

And this aspirational view of the potential of education was echoed to an extent by Liam:

> **To me, education is all about empowerment and opportunity.**

When probed further to explain this, Liam developed his response:

> **Empowerment...in that it enables those who participate to understand the world more fully, and to engage with others to discuss the many important questions facing humanity. Opportunity in the sense that it allows that person to then think about how they would like to alter the world, and to begin to follow a path that will allow them to do so.**

I found these responses truly encouraging, and especially the fact that so much more of each response was based on a picture of education that was open and

forward looking. It was also very encouraging that none of my colleagues mentioned, when interviewed, factors related to what Green et al. (2017:7) describe as the perceived 'social and economic advantage' of an independent school education, despite many of them having worked in independent schools for the majority of their careers. Indeed, responses relating to employment or any economic advantage were notable for their scarcity.

16.2 Measuring achievement

After the discussion on the purpose of education, the next question that I asked was 'how do we measure achievement?', and this was developed later in the interview into exploring whether interviewees felt that inclusion could be reconciled with a demand for ever-improving exam results. Responses could be categorised as those that discussed measuring achievement by potential to lead a successful life, those that referenced examinations and gaining qualifications, and those about the tensions between inclusion and the standards agenda.

16.2.1 How and why we measure; life in the real world

There were a range of responses related to measuring achievement by success – or potential for success – beyond school.

Gwen felt that exams were of little importance, and that social inclusion was key:

> **Knowing how to fit in, in any situation is so much more important really, because that's all you notice when you meet people isn't it?**

Paul, Tess and Ella all gave comments relating to life beyond school:

> **can you do the [NAMES SUBJECT] skills and then can you apply it to a real-world situation? (Paul)**
>
> **by assessing the ability to problem solve in new situations independently, through the application of knowledge and skills (Tess)**
>
> **we can teach structures of how to answer essays, but how is that actually helping them in the real world? in real life, it's about applying the knowledge you have, it's not about how *much* of the knowledge you have…[**passing exams is**] not really teaching them … how to succeed in the real world? (Ella)**

Again, this somewhat contradicts Round et al.'s (2016) findings that secondary subject teachers are primarily concerned with subject content.

The initial part of Ruth's answer was about life beyond school:

> **I would say the ability for a young person to move on, into … the adult world, and achieve a functional future for themselves, that's really … for any child, that must be the maximum goal**

The final part of Ruth's response to this part of the interview is in the next section on examinations.

16.2.2 Qualifications

Ruth continued:

> **the issue we've got in the UK [**here, Ruth means England and Wales**] is that we have obligations under the National Curriculum…we train the children and the families in very early on… to think that measurement is about the attainment … of certain *measured* goals and standards. The vast majority of which are currently, uh … fairly narrowly defined, I would say?**

Ruth's views are supported by Biesta (2016:78) who argues that the 'one-sided emphasis' (on qualification) has a negative impact on the development of young people as 'subjects' and their socialisation.

Gwen referred to the idea of 'letters after one's name' as a proxy measure of success:

> **to get lots of certificates and more and more letters…you've got the whole alphabet after your name ... but that's become more and more or what education is about isn't it?**

Kath was also scathing about whether examination results were a valid way of measuring achievement:

> **one would question whether it's a measure of what the children have done, or what has been taught by the teacher.**

Ella was similarly sceptical about exams:

> **I actually don't really like the system of … sitting them in a room for an hour and a half … and sort of testing their *memory* in that way.**

In contrast, Nell thought that we *should* measure achievement in some quantifiable way:

> **achievement is rewarding in itself; it's good to have something to show for effort. One reason we need to do it is because there are a finite number of places on further/higher education courses and in employment.**

This reference to having 'something to show for effort' led into a discussion of whether, if we are focussed on exam results, we can also be inclusive.

16.2.3 Inclusion and standards

Ruth began by exploring what a successful outcome of schooling might look like:

> **if you look at children that have got additional needs of any kind ... sometimes those measurable things [**exams**] are ... a big priority for them, but very often... what their families are worried about, are much more often things around inclusion, around relationships, around the ability to navigate the world they're in, which, in many cases, is a much more ... pressing problem than whether you got a good grade in chemistry, or English, or something.**

It is interesting to note that Ruth used the term 'additional needs' whereas some other colleagues used SEN or 'special needs'. Ruth's experiences outside education perhaps have given her a slightly broader (and potentially more up-to-date) view of inclusion challenges and terminology.

Ruth went on to think about whether teachers felt the same way, and in particular in the secondary sector:

> **[**secondary teaching has**] an inherent bias towards the brilliant, so if you are a Music teacher...the day that a potentially world-class violinist is in your class, they're irresistible. Similarly, if you adore English, the kid that's read the complete works of Shakespeare by the age of 13 ... and is clearly going to be an Oxford English student, your bias is towards ... that one. And I think that's one of the problems of a secondary environment, is that we have specialists who love their subject, rather than people who are trying to bring young people into adulthood.**

Round et al. (2016) discuss just this issue, and conclude that many secondary teachers have attitudes somewhat similar to those that Ruth describes.

Tess had much to say on the subject of how achievement is measured, what parents view as 'success', and the impact of this on inclusion:

> **..while the government continues to measure the quality of skills using simplistic methods based on academic attainment of pupils like SATs, EBacc and Progress 8, and fails to take into account other qualities that education aims to develop in children, then inclusion and the standards agenda will never truly be reconciled... (Tess)**

Biesta (2015:75) decries 'narrow views about what education is supposed to "produce"' (in the way that Kath describes) and exhorts us to examine what "good" education, rather than effective education, should look like. Biesta (2015:79) feels that

> The current emphasis in many countries and settings on just enhancing academic achievement – i.e. performance in the domain of qualification – comes at a very high and potentially too high price.

Here Tess, Ruth and Biesta (2015) seem to have similar feelings about the problematic nature of the current focus on academic achievement. There are so many other aspects to be considered about what success looks like, and how education can contribute to it; far more than there is scope for in this dissertation. Quinn (2016:603) discusses teachers' views of life's purposes, and offers the helpful conclusion that because teachers themselves hold such disparate views, 'it may be most appropriate for teachers to think about developing purposeful mindsets' in their students rather than having a defined goal for the end of an individual's educational journey.

Chapter 17 – how do we learn to become inclusive?

Having considered what education is for, the next step of my thematic journey was to examine how we learn to become inclusive teachers. In this chapter, I will explore how the group of teachers in the case study school understand inclusion, what it means to them, and how they reached that point through initial and further teacher training, and prior experience.

17.1 Our understandings of inclusion

Each of the interviewees were asked directly what they understood by the term 'educational inclusion'. Their answers varied in length and intensity; some needed further exploration and probing. Some differences were linked to the training and experiences that colleagues had – I will explore this in later sections of this chapter. Woodcock and Hardy (2017) argue that the concept of inclusion has become conflated around ideas of SEND, and that certainly seemed to be the case in these interviews, but this is perhaps to be expected in a school which is structurally exclusive in many ways (as discussed in the introduction).

Gwen had had a lot of experience of different settings, and this was reflected in her response:

> **every child in the country of school age is found an educational establishment that is the best possible one to suit the needs that they have, within what the local authority can offer them...**

Gwen clearly felt that inclusion could have a different practical outcome for different children, but that this was the right way to approach it. She also touched on ideas of the challenges of finding – and maintaining – the right placement.

Nell was also a very experienced teacher, and this was one of the questions on which she was most expansive

> **All people are valuable and all should benefit from appropriate education. Schools are often places with quite rigid and narrow expectations - especially state schools, in my experience. [NAMES CASE STUDY SCHOOL] is pretty inclusive: we accept a wide range of girls and try to cater for their individual needs and preferences.**

Similarly to Gwen, Nell felt that inclusion was open to interpretation for individuals. Paul's answer was rather more subject and curriculum focussed, but he also accepted that the meaning of educational inclusion could be quite context-dependant:

> **what we put in place for students allows everybody to access the material whatever level they are and…that the students are making progress, judging themselves against where *they* are rather than against an average student…you've got to think about where *you* are, what *you* do to improve.**

Tess gave an answer that was broader than reference to her own subject, which did require some prompting for her to expand on. She then went on to discuss one of the difficulties of such a broad interpretation of inclusion:

> **equal access for all students at all levels, whether it's early years, primary secondary or further education**
>
> **equal access to what is termed 'mainstream education' and that's having the majority of people with you [**physically located on one site**]**
>
> **mainstream education is almost kind of…it got to the stage where we were including everybody, but then by increasing class sizes then you're *excluding* somebody and I think it's become more difficult to actually include everybody…**

Ella would regard herself as working hard to be inclusive, and felt that inclusion was about achieving the best of what each child is capable of. She questioned the term 'low ability' as used by some teachers to equate with SEND:

> ***everyone*, regardless of whatever challenges they have in their life, should have the same opportunities, and the same [sighs] ability to achieve their potential. I feel really strongly that is such a massive part of our job, making sure that *everybody* can access …the lessons**
>
> **ability, it's so *malleable*, it's just not fixed, and I feel like that's [**using the term low ability**] almost an admission that you're not doing your job as a teacher.**

Kath found the question of what inclusion means in education quite difficult to answer, although she was the only respondent who referenced students of higher ability as needing to be specifically included:

> **… I would understand that to mean including students of all abilities, with all learning needs, um … yeah? That's what I would think you *mean*.**

> **…the best should also have an opportunity to be challenged further…**

Ruth gave a much longer and deeper answer, which – similarly to Gwen and Nell - reflected the idea that inclusion is different for every child. The full text of this quote appears in Appendix 1 as Extract 2, but Ruth's main point was that

> **there will be some young people for whom it's never actually going to be possible to be included in absolutely everything…**

This links very obviously to the universalist vs. moderate inclusion debate discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.3), and particularly Cigman's (2007) assertion that universal inclusion may not be "right" for every child. Ruth's answer - especially the penultimate sentence "**the best level of involvement and attainment for *that child*** [emphasis added]**, given their situation**" was quite close to my own belief on the meaning of educational inclusion, although Liam's short answer also came close:

> **Ensuring that everybody has the opportunity to access education to the best of their ability regardless of any characteristics or barriers that may prevent them from doing so.**

Liam's final point about inclusion was also extremely important:

> **I think it is easier said than done!**

I will explore these tensions between describing and actually practising inclusion in a later chapter.

17.2 Initial and subsequent teacher training

Each interviewee was then asked to describe their initial teacher training (where appropriate), and any training they had received on inclusion since then. It became quite clear that those colleagues who had qualified as teachers more than a decade ago had received much less training. Pearson (2007) discussed the different experiences and attitudes towards inclusion demonstrated by pre-service teachers in a range of contexts and found that they were highly variable – this is borne out by the comments of my colleagues.

Gwen had trained over 20 years ago by completing a PGCE and then an initial placement:

> **No [**to the question of whether she had received much ITT**]... so I did it at [NAMED HIGH-STATUS UNIVERSITY]...and then I went to an independent school for the next section which was very, very high achieving**

She had then had a range of experiences before joining the case study school:

> **I wanted to be fairly flexible, so I went to work in the behaviour unit, an independent school, a primary school teaching year 1 and year 2...and a hearing impaired unit...the hearing impaired unit and the behavioural unit, were obviously straight away very different establishments than I'd been to before, so I had those...[**experiences**]**

Gwen had thus developed much of her understanding and wide experience through practice, rather than teacher training.

Nell had also been a teacher for more than 20 years, and felt that she had had little ITT on inclusion:

> **Gosh, I can't remember - it was so long ago! I can remember having talks/lectures about individual needs, but I don't remember any details.**

However, Nell also felt that her experiences since then had given her a broader range of experiences:

> **From 1994-2013 I worked in comprehensive schools, with completely inclusive admissions policies. I also worked for ESTMA for several years, tutoring a range of students who were out of school.**

Paul had joined the case study school relatively recently, after training as a teacher around 15 years ago. He felt that he had received a lot of experience and training on inclusion in his previous settings, after having little during his ITT:

> **Little, I would say. It was 15 years ago now. We had a training on autism [**in his previous school**] and we had two trainers come in who were autistic and they simulated situations to show what they felt like in real life...that's quite eye-opening**

Tess's lack of inclusive ITT seems to have been similar to that of Paul, and similarly she felt that practical, in-service experience had been much more useful:

> **Absolutely none [**ITT about inclusion**]...in those days. Only sort of direct contact with students but very little instruction on how to identify and care for those with specific learning needs, although that must have come into it somewhere. I think I learnt more in that NQT year...**

Kath had the longest teaching experience, with a similarly poor view of her ITT, but she felt that, as she had mentored a number of younger staff through their PGCE since then, she had learnt much more about inclusion through them:

> **I did a 4 year BEd, we would be lucky if we had maybe a *week* in that four years, looking at learning difficulties?**

Kath also referenced changes to inclusion terminology since she had qualified:

> **An awful lot of the titles, the names we have now, weren't in place either... learning support was that ... lovely warm, cozy classroom, at the end of the corridor that had beanbags ... I mean, it was called special needs, in my day.**

Kath went on to say that mentoring trainee teachers through the PGCE process had allowed her to experience changes in thinking on inclusion year on year, albeit 'second-hand', and she felt that more long-serving staff would benefit from this experience:

> **All...teachers would benefit from taking students through PGCEs, because that would keep them up to date with...current thinking.**
> **It changes *so* much, year in, year out - every time, progress has been made. More and more information is available, and it's forcing you to address it...because you're mentoring someone who is also addressing it.**

In contrast to all of the above, Ella had trained as a teacher within the past five years, and her experience of ITT had been very different:

> **One of the leaders of our course had spent her career as a SENCO...so we had nine days of intensive lectures, and every day we had at least one lecture or one workshop on inclusion. There were workshops on how to support ... um, specific *types* of educational needs. I've done quite a lot of CPD - and I think that's all really helping...**

Green et al. (2017) discuss the importance of the 'soul' of teacher education, and it appears that Ella may have been fortunate enough to avoid what Green et al. describe as 'a consumerist view of teacher education that values rapid outcomes over longer-term processes' (2017:45); Ella certainly felt that her job was to educate young people, rather than solely to deliver curriculum content, and she believed that CPD was a key part of that.

Liam had also trained to teach much more recently, but through a direct entry into teaching programme:

> **I did a few full days working with the SEND team at a large state secondary school that had an above average number of SEND pupils. That along with textbook and tutorial learning.**

Liam was the colleague who had mentioned that inclusion is "easier said than done", and I wondered whether this related to his different experience of training and of inclusion since qualifying.

Ruth had a totally different point of view, as she had not qualified as a teacher. However, it transpired that she believed this had made her more inclusive, rather than less:

> **I found being in a private sector, for profit employer, I had far more training and development than I've had since I came into the education setting**

Garrick Duhaney (2012:172) suggests teacher training programmes should ensure that

> Teachers should have knowledge of what inclusion is, and of how to work with students with diverse learning needs, modify curriculum, use various instructional strategies, collaborate, communicate effectively, problem solve, design individual education plans, differentiate curriculum and pedagogy, and monitor students' programmes.

This is quite a list, and it would appear that few, if any, of my colleagues thought that their training programmes had even come close to delivering this.

17.3 Further thoughts and experiences

Many of the interviewees reflected on how things had changed, both in the case study school since the PLC had been set up, and with regards to inclusion over their careers.

Kath had spent most of her teaching career in the case study school, and pondered on the development of inclusion since she had joined:

> **Having been here *so long* … I've almost forgotten … what your average student looks like. It's - I mean, this is 22 years in, and I would say that there's a real mixed ability *here*, and that every year I'm constantly amazed … by the fact that … no individual is the same as one that's gone before...**

Paul, having joined the case study school quite recently, reflected on his experience of the work that the PLC staff had done, and how he needed to modify his subject curriculum to make it more inclusive. Extract 3 in Appendix 1 gives this quote in full.

> **before trying to crowbar stuff on top of that and then watch the whole thing crumble, I felt like I needed a solid foundation and then I can start building the pieces on top, the way I want them to be….**

Both Nell and Ruth had personal experience of inclusion, having family members with SEND. Nell felt that this helped her to be more understanding, and therefore more inclusive. Ruth used this personal experience to reference the models of inclusion that the case study school had used, previously and now:

> **you've started breaking down this idea that special needs is [laughs] a place and a teaching group where you *send* students. Because certainly, at the beginning, when I was very first in [NAMES CASE STUDY SCHOOL], it was still that old model, almost like, you know, uh … the machine's slightly broken so I'll send it to the repair lab –**

Ruth explains this more fully in Extract 4, Appendix 1.

Brant and Vincent (2017:171) maintain that

> teaching at its best is a highly skilled, dynamic and creative process that involves utilizing a whole range of different types of knowledge and acquired professional expertise. The demands made by society for our education system are not easy for teachers to fulfil.

This is no less true for teachers who are trying to be inclusive, and my colleagues' diverse training experiences showed that they had indeed used a range of different knowledge and expertise to arrive at their current understandings and practices. Most had, I would argue, arrived at what Brant and Vincent (2017:172) describe as 'a special category of teacher knowledge that exists between subject knowledge and effective teaching', and were now trying to balance the demands of teaching inclusively with all of the other day-to-day demands of a teacher's life.

Chapter 18 – how do we practise inclusion now?

Following this reflection on how we had all reached an understanding of inclusion based on our histories and experiences, focus shifted to the next step in the thematic journey – how we currently practice inclusion in the case study school.

This chapter and the one that follows are intended to respond to the second research question: ***what do teachers in the case study school see as the benefits of and challenges to inclusion?***

As described in the previous two chapters, all of the interviewees had views on inclusion, and all had at least some degree of training in becoming inclusive practitioners. I was interested to find out how they felt they were practising inclusion now, in the case study school. I asked questions about how my colleagues were including specific students, and whether they felt confident in practising inclusion. Round et al. (2016:187) report that while most secondary teachers 'support the philosophy of inclusion', many had concerns about how they implemented it, so it was important to explore whether the interviewees held similar views.

18.1 Access and differentiation

It was noticeable that many answers related either to making lessons 'accessible', or to practising differentiation in the classroom. Deng (2010:208) is sceptical that differentiation in itself is inclusive, arguing that 'modifying or adapting the curriculum usually means a reduction in the content to be taught to some students' which goes against ideas of equity and social justice. Conversely, Mitchell (2015:15) feels that 'making appropriate adaptations or modifications to the curriculum is central to inclusive education'.

Ella felt that she was working hard to make lesson material accessible:

> **You plan one lesson, you just make sure that everyone can access that lesson…This year especially, I feel like it's become a bit more second nature, I think during my training year … I was definitely falling into that trap of having, you know, one worksheet for *these* kinds of students, and another worksheet for those kinds …**

Ella shows here that she is working to avoid the pitfall that Deng (2010) mentioned, cited above.

Liam felt that he was practising inclusion by:

> **ensuring that everybody has the opportunity to access education to the best of their ability**

He went on to discuss how he does this with specific students, which I will describe in a later section of this chapter. Paul also felt that much of how he practises inclusion related to access to the curriculum, and differentiation:

> **to try and make sure in September the curriculum will be put in place, will allow everybody to access it at whatever level they are…**

This seems to fit with Mitchell's (2015:15) idea that 'an inclusive classroom is likely to contain students who are functioning at two or three levels of the curriculum', so by differentiating in this way Paul feels that he is supporting inclusion.

Tess felt that her subject lends itself naturally to differentiation:

> **With the nature of [NAMES SUBJECT] there are so many different activities sometimes it is not necessary to provide overt differentiation, across the course of a year you'll be doing so many different activities**

Ruth examined not only access to the curriculum, but physical access to the campus, in her response:

> **What we should aim for is that they can access and participate in all the things that would be helpful and relevant to them, and to a large extent, that they *want* to opt into as well.**
>
> **Watching [STUDENT NAME], I thought she had a pretty *awful* experience at [NAMES CASE STUDY SCHOOL], a lot of the time, *because* she was an electric wheelchair user … And the reality is that our site is *not* properly adapted for wheelchair users.**

Shevlin (2010:105) discusses these physical access issues and concludes that this has 'a profound impact on curricular access and peer relationships'. This is an area where the case study school must do more; this is common to older schools, as described in, for example, Pearce et al. (2010), and is an issue which I shall discuss in the penultimate chapter.

18.2 Inclusion of specific students

The interviews then lead on to a discussion about how the interviewees had worked to include specific students, or groups of students, in the case study school.

Gwen first referenced how she had worked to enforce behavioural boundaries with a Year 7 student with a diagnosis of ASD:

> **There is a certain line that she needs to make sure that she doesn't cross…. and therefore she has to fit in with some sort of social norms within the classroom... but there are also ways that to treat her the same as everybody else would be unfair...**

She then spoke about groups of students in Years 10 and 11, passionately and with great humour, about how she helps them to participate in a subject that many of them find challenging. This comment is given in Extract 5, Appendix 1.

Tess, teaching a practically-based subject, spoke about how she support one of the students particularly, within a group of students with SEND:

> **[NAMED STUDENT] is actually struggling to read instructions so, ... a lot of my job also is demonstrating which I think helps**

Tess made the point that this student, like others, has limitations in some areas of her work in Tess's subject, but is better in others:

> **On the theory side she's going to struggle but actually she's well away with the practical work, been working on her own, and that's where it really shows up in my subject, you know these little sort of nuggets and pockets of ability**

Both Nell and Kath (who teaches a performance-based subject) referenced the same student, a sixth form girl with diagnoses of multiple specific learning difficulties:

> **I facilitated [NAMED STUDENT] moving into my teaching group for sixth form, as I had taught her at GCSE and understood some of her issues. At times I scribed for her. I flexed deadlines and expectations for her. I included her in discussions in ways that I hoped would support her confidence. (Nell)**

> **[NAMED STUDENT], for example, who has *many* complex needs, is one of our greatest performers, you know, she's fantastic…There's been lots of girls like that. (Kath)**

As mentioned in the previous section, Liam felt that he made his lessons accessible:

> **The most common issue that arises in my classroom is a struggle to structure work properly. I find this is a particular issue with dyslexic students. For these students I will provide a framework document which will give them hints as to the shape an answer should take. This will allow those who have dyslexia to work at a similar pace to those who do not, and this hopefully allows the student to feel more included in the class. Over the course of the A Level, I will try to gradually remove this support to prepare pupils for the exam.**

Paul referenced a group of students from a previous school he had worked at:

> **There was a year 9 group when I got there who had a really bad background in [NAMED SUBJECT]…I had to start from… what I want to get through, done in the lesson, how can I make sure everyone does it, how can I make sure everyone is doing what I want them do, and given no opportunity to go outside of that, and make progress…and as time went on then I could take away some of that scaffolding and they were able to do it on their own.**

Clearly Liam and Paul had both thought about how support evolves over time and can be gradually reduced as pupils gain confidence and skills.

Ella had much to say on specific strategies, and referred to two students (one in the oldest year group, and one of the youngest) that she felt she had made a significant difference to. Extract 6 in Appendix 1 gives details of Ella's comments.

These comments from colleagues reflect the fact that they had considered how they adapted their teaching to deliver something *different*, but not *less* – and important aspect of what Deng (2010) would describe as successful inclusion.

Each of the interviewees could give clear examples of how they had been inclusive in their teaching, so I asked them whether they felt competent and confident in teaching in an inclusive way.

18.3 Inclusion competence and confidence

The answers to this question revealed a wide range of feelings about competence and confidence. Some colleagues were slightly more negative than others:

> **I now know, and accept, I must do *more* (Kath)**
>
> **I feel like I do what I can. No, I'm always looking for new ways to help them. I feel like … maybe this is a bit [NAMES CASE STUDY SCHOOL] specific … I would like INSET to … cover … like, inclusion a lot more (Ella)**
>
> **I try, as I suspect most do. One of the first things I do when I get my new classes each year is have a look on the register to try and see who has specific needs I may need to cater for. Some schools are better at providing this information than others. The most useful thing I find, which can sometimes be lacking, like in [NAMES CASE STUDY SCHOOL] under the previous regime is the provision of strategies to help with specific inclusion needs. To me, this is the most useful thing, as even if I know a certain pupil has a specific need, I'm not always 100% sure what I can do to help! (Liam)**
>
> **Well, no one can ever be fully qualified to cater perfectly for every individual; we can only do our best. I have gained quite a lot of experience, but every student is different (Nell)**

Liam's concern around the finding and use of information is one of the concerns reflected in the study carried out by Pearce et al. (2010), but it was encouraging that Liam felt this had improved since the PLC came into being.

Other colleagues were more positive about their own levels of competence and confidence, reflecting on their experience:

> **I think as I'm an experienced teacher I'm able to read just a few simple notes and think, right that I have to do XYZ with that student and as I say I like researching so I will actually go out and find out how it can be done in my subject...the [NAMES SUBJECT] teachers' Facebook group is very active and that's a good source of "what have you tried in another school"…(Tess)**
>
> **the main thing is, you are constantly optimistic… (Gwen)**
>
> **I think the new curriculum has really helped with that in [NAMES SUBJECT] the big change has been to…bring in that wider context and it's made a massive difference to how I teach, in the last two years the way I've taught [NAMES SUBJECT] has completely transformed (Paul)**

Interestingly, although much of the literature (for example Pearce et al. (2010) Boyle et al. (2013) and Monsen et al. (2014)) finds that many secondary teachers feel that it is the job of others such as SENCos to deliver 'inclusive teaching', none of the interviewees expressed similar thoughts. Returning to Garrick Duhaney's (2012:171-2) argument,

> the role of teacher training programmes should therefore be to help each teacher - not just the specialist/special education teacher - to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions that support inclusion; thereby, reinforcing the viewpoint that *all* teachers have a major responsibility for meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Clearly, my colleagues had arrived at a similar view regarding the importance of inclusion for all teachers, even if it hadn't been their initial teacher training that brought them to that point. I found this very encouraging, and hoped that it was reflective of the ethos that the PLC had begun to inculcate within the school.

Following this reflection on broadly positive experiences of inclusion, the interviews moved to focus on what colleagues perceived as challenges to inclusion in the case study school.

Chapter 19 – what stands in our way?

Having investigated colleagues' ideas and understandings of inclusion, the interviewees were invited to describe some of the challenges they perceived in teaching inclusively, or developing inclusion further in the case study school.

The majority of these responses covered practical issues such as workload, time pressures and class sizes, although a range of other factors were also considered, such as teacher resilience. There is a wealth of literature in this area, as described in Chapters 6 and 18. Much of this literature finds that the majority of teachers are broadly supportive of inclusion in general terms, but that they have specific concerns about particular challenges; often structural factors such as time and training. Ainscow (2016:44) maintains that

> Barriers to learning can occur in interaction with any aspect of a school: its buildings and grounds, the way it is organised, the relationship amongst and between children and adults and in approaches to teaching and learning.

The comments given below reflect many of the barriers that Ainscow describes, but it would appear that much can be related to the way that the case study school is organised.

19.1 Workload and related factors

Many of the interviewees had comments to make about workload and time pressures. For Liam, one of the more reticent of the interviewees, this was where he became most animated:

> **with the relentless march of workload in our profession, it becomes harder and harder to ensure that you are catering to the needs of each individual pupil in every lesson you teach…The huge workload a lot of us struggle under during term times means sadly some things are allowed to slip, and I suspect thinking about inclusion is probably one of those things…**

Liam went on:

> **I think lack of time is the key issue…I would say for most staff, two things, training and time [**are the greatest challenges to teaching inclusively**]… Staff require more training on understanding inclusion and strategies to help those with inclusion needs…they need time to go away and implement those strategies…with so many competing calls on teacher time, it is hard to implement these ideas properly even if you have understood them and thought about them.**

Ella similarly went on to describe further pressures related to workload and time:

> **I think workload…doesn't help any of this, because I find that my lesson planning…just goes further and further down the priority list, because all the other *stuff* just gets in the way. And… because we've always got something else to be thinking about**

Kath, as a teacher of a performance-based subject, has a lot of commitments outside of normal timetabled classes, and feels that this is a real barrier to her inclusive teaching:

> **Within the busy, hecticness of the day, I've got one eye on the clock… That we might, god forbid, have extra time in our timetables to cope with this [**supporting students with inclusion**]**

> **So I think … it [**being more inclusive**] can be done, it just needs factoring in when it comes to timetabling. We just need the time to do it well. And I think it is hard if you have to do everything else …**

These comments are all supported by the literature. For example, Monsen et al. (2014:115) find that many teachers are willing to embrace inclusion 'given that adequate additional support' (including time) is available, and Boyle et al. (2013) similarly report resource provision (including time) as a positive influence on teacher attitudes towards inclusion.

19.2 Teacher resilience

Colleagues were then asked directly whether they thought being more inclusive in the classroom posed particular challenges for teacher resilience.

Kath linked this to her previous answer on workload:

> **[laughs] Uh … it doesn't *have* to be [**more challenging**], if it's built into the foundations. So going back to timetabling… I've seen pressures on my timetable increase, as well as the co-curricular pressures increase. Well, if we're then going to have *more* girls who need much *more* support, something somewhere … needs to allow for that.**

And Liam linked his answer to his previous comments too:

> **I think catering for SEN needs is a time issue for most teachers. It is no more pressing than any other time issue. The problem is we have too many things to do in a limited amount of time.**

However, Tess was much more optimistic:

> **It's never made my life any harder! But I think that's the nature of my subject isn't it?...personally, I've always sort of worked that way [**inclusively**] - the range of skills and abilities doesn't stress me but then again it comes down to my subject doesn't it?**

Gwen also felt that she was personally resilient, and that being an inclusive teacher, although tiring, was an essential part of her job:

> **well I suppose if you take it back to time, and the idea of feeling achievement, it is more tiring having [NAMED STUDENT] isn't it?... it may be harder physically but then it's almost saying as if it's less rewarding, and again I think that that will be the wrong way to go, because it can be *very* rewarding...**

These comments support the findings of both Brittle (2020), who described teachers of pupils with SEND as being more prone to "burnout", and Done and Murphy (2018) who argued that teachers were expected to find greater resilience as a way to improve pupil outcomes. However, personally I agree with Gwen that although teaching inclusively can be more demanding, it is also more rewarding, and that it is our moral obligation to teach the pupils we have in front of us according to *their* needs, not ours.

19.3 Other factors

When invited to describe other factors that challenged the provision of inclusion, either for themselves, structurally within the school, or factors affecting students, there were a broad range of responses.

19.3.1 Class sizes

Two interviewees felt that class sizes were an important factor. Nell's response was short and to the point:

> **Classes are getting larger, which means that girls do not get the same personalised approach as they can in classes of twelve or so.**

Gwen gave a longer and more considered response, with examples, and linked this to a desire for more in-class support:

> **The problem is I suppose we are taking more and more people that need support aren't we? and you as a department are massively overstretched... the classes are getting bigger and the needs are getting greater on the whole...**

Class size could be considered as a "resource" factor in the same way as teacher time – indeed, the smaller the class, the more time a teacher can spend with a pupil, whether or not they have inclusion needs. Mitchell (2014:267) argues that, although 'it is a complex matter', evidence suggests benefits to inclusion for class sizes of fifteen or fewer students. Class size, then, is a similar influencing factor as time on teacher attitudes as reported in the literature, with smaller classes being associated with a more inclusive environment.

19.3.2 Lack of knowledge and training

A number of colleagues felt that they, or others in their departments, did not feel sufficiently knowledgeable or adequately trained to support students with inclusion needs.

> **lack of knowledge by the teacher on how strategies for enabling learning might be specifically applied to their subject, because every subject is different.... and general ignorance about the full range of SEN (Tess)**
>
> **even if I know a certain pupil has a specific need, I'm not always 100% sure what I can do to help! (Liam)**
>
> **I don't think I've ever - apart from the stuff that you delivered - I don't think since I've been at [NAMES CASE STUDY SCHOOL] we've had anything like that [**training on inclusion**] ... I don't feel competent, and I don't feel sufficiently trained, but it is something I would like to be. [nods]...(Ella)**
>
> **I think we...through the training that we get weekly, I think that's certainly in place. I think there could be, erm, wider focus on particular areas that need to be improved (Paul)**
>
> **I don't think we've particularly catered for, in terms of training, INSET, here at [NAMES CASE STUDY SCHOOL]...we have had, over the years, *external* speakers come in and give us INSET on dyslexia, or dyspraxia, etc, but going back to my point, 'every year I get new students with a unique approach' ... (Kath)**

Pearce et al. (2010) found that many teachers in their study felt that they lacked both the training and pedagogical knowledge to make the curriculum accessible for students with SEND. Monsen et al. (2014:115) also found that 'teachers reported insufficient training and practical support', which is reflected in some of the comments from my colleagues. This disappointed me, as delivery of such training had been one of the cornerstones of the PLC programme, and I felt that we had tried very hard to support staff in this way. Indeed, Boyle (2012:108) reports that 'teachers supporting teachers seems to be the most powerful resources' in promoting positive staff attitudes to inclusion, and motivating them to continue working on this. This would be something that I would need to consider when developing a way forward for the PLC.

19.3.3 Student-centred factors

Some colleagues made reference to factors that they felt were related more to students themselves than to structural features of the school system. One of these was student anxiety and issues with self-esteem.

Gwen felt strongly that this limited her ability to be supportive. Gwen's longer explanation is given as Extract 7 in Appendix 1.

> **they [students] don't want to be singled out in any way and they don't want to be different and therefore I think it's quite hard because you're trying to help them in a way that *is* different but that will help everybody else.**

Recognising that student needs are not always related to SEND, and can be more context-dependent, shows that Gwen has a deeper understanding of inclusion and considers how she can adapt her teaching to the needs of more of her students.

Conversely, Ella had a rather more negative point of view on what she referred to as student "neediness" but that others might consider to be low-level behavioural challenges:

> **They're so *demanding*...they just kind of wander in... and that means that every lesson, we lose five minutes at the beginning, and then when I'm explaining things they're shouting over me, I need to explain ... do the instructions three or four or five times, which means by the time I'm fielding the questions, I'm forgetting to write it on the board, you know, for those students who need it**

Ella also really wants to help her students, but feels frustrated that she is not able to do as much as she would wish to, because of behavioural issues. Pearce et al. (2010) acknowledge this as a factor that influences teachers' ability to be inclusive, but the general behaviour of students, and the anxiety described by Gwen, could be seen as broader, systemic feature of a school, or an education system, rather than one intrinsic to students, as my colleagues seem to feel.

19.3.4 Structural features of the case study school

Finally, a number of interviewees referenced features of systems and attitudes within the case study school that they felt were unhelpful with regard to inclusion.

Ella developed her earlier comments about individual student "neediness" by exploring student behaviour beyond her own classroom. She felt that lack of a coherent strategy with regard to discipline was hindering her ability to teach effectively:

> **I think discipline in school is a *disaster…*whenever I have tried to implement … *methods* to get them in, in their seats, with their books out, ready to start learning … because *nobody* else does that, they just completely disengage.**

Ella also felt that 'initiative overload' meant that inclusion got 'lost':

> **we are *constantly* bombarded with new initiatives… it doesn't seem like at any point that anybody said, has asked the question "how is this affecting … differentiation in the classroom?"**

Paul strongly supported this view, and suggested a different way of working to improve inclusion:

> **so I think…at [NAMES PREVIOUS SCHOOL] I really enjoyed working under the head I worked under there, he was really good at making a school-wide focus on something and then everything drives towards that focus…every INSET day had to be based around that and that's when we saw significant improvement in particular areas, and it was slow, because only particular areas changed at a time but it did make a really significant difference to particular areas and the way people taught.**

This gave me further valuable food for thought in deciding where to go next with the work of the PLC, as it linked to and reflected Liam's earlier comments that there was simply not enough time in a teacher's day to consider all of the issues that were expected of them.

Ruth raised the challenging point that some teacher attitudes were not inclusive, and gave two examples which are given in full as Extract 8 in Appendix 1. These were that assistive technology is only really useful if it is appropriate and works well, and that teachers question the value of including the highly able far less than they do for pupils with SEND.

> **So if somebody with a disability is not using the adaptations you're providing, it's probably because those adaptations don't work very well for them**
>
> **My challenge back to the teacher would be 'you don't complain about those who do it in half the time and get it twice as quick, why are you complaining about those who take twice the time and get it half as quick?'**

Ruth's last sentence, about teachers having fewer concerns about "inclusion" for the highly able, really struck a chord with me. I wondered how I could use this to explore further how to make an inclusive ethos more desirable, and less challenging, for teachers.

Boyle et al. (2013:538) maintain that 'it is factors such as support from management, from colleagues and resource provision that influence inclusion. Therefore, it is these areas that need to be addressed and strengthened in order to foster robust inclusion practices'. In the preceding comments, my colleagues considered a range of factors that could be considered as obstacles or challenges to greater inclusion in the case study school; attention could then be turned to the search for a way forward.

Chapter 20 – how do we move forwards?

The final step in this thematic journey through the data collected was to consider perspectives on how we might do things differently in the case study school, or move forwards with inclusion. This is to examine the last of my three research questions – ***how could the case study school move forwards with inclusion?***

Responses to questions in this area encompassed issues such as Senior Leadership Team (SLT) support for the PLC – and inclusion in general – manifested in ideas of academic selection, and how achievement is measured and celebrated. This section also contains interviewees' views on how the PLC compares to the previous systems in place to support inclusion in the case study school, and ideas around what types of SEND might be supported.

20.1 SLT support

Woodcock and Woolfson (2019:234) argue

> while the inclusive environment is undoubtedly influenced by teachers' attitudes, beliefs and actions, in order for these to be developed effectively, teachers also need to feel supported by the education systems that they work within.

Many interviewees were reluctant to directly answer questions related to whether they felt there was systematic support for inclusion within the school. However, those that did answer were voluble – although they had differing opinions!

Tess thought that the school *was* supportive of inclusion and used an example of a student with SEND:

> **I think the Head does, I think she wants to include it [**personalised learning**]. It's got to be a selling point of this school because we are not highly selective - and you know, well [NAMES STUDENT with ASD] has come in [**gained admission to the school**] and I spoke to her mum and she was over the moon and actually there's nothing wrong with her, she's exceptionally bright, she remembers things, but she just need that extra bit of nurturing to bring it out...**

Ella, on the other hand, was extremely sceptical about whether SLT were aware of the challenges facing some pupils, and therefore teachers:

> **'No' because they are not providing the training that they should be providing … 'no' because they don't actually seem to know what's going on … in the lessons … or *ask.* The focus is on the show, rather than the substance of what's going on, I think.**

Ella's point was that the school was focussed more on good behaviour rather than whether individual pupils were succeeding.

Ruth gave a long, thoughtful and balanced answer. She compared the case study school to others that she had knowledge of, in a quote given as Extract 9 in Appendix 1:

> **I think every teacher here would know that it's not okay for them to completely disregard the special needs register, that if they don't look at it, they're at fault, rather than 'somebody else should have done something' …and I think they also know that it's also not alright to disregard … a child's special needs.**

Ruth then explained ways in which she felt the case study school was not systematically supportive of inclusion, referring in part to changes that would need to be made when schools re-opened after the COVID-19 closures. This quote is lengthy, so is included in its entirety as Extract 10 in Appendix 1:

> **So, for example… so the head of the personalised learning environment *isn't* either a member of the Senior Management Team or the Senior Leadership Team, so when key decisions are being made…**
>
> **when you look at the representation on our top bodies - so when the doors are closed, and only the top team's there, is there anybody who is tasked with that inclusion as part of that top team? And I don't … think there is.**

Ruth then summarised her arguments and showed that she had considered both sides of the debate:

> **Do I think in principle there's a lot of good will in the school? Yes. So I think on the one hand, we can pat ourselves on the back, what we're doing is actually a lot better than what a lot of other schools can offer … but on the other hand, what we say - or what we promote - is how personalised our style of learning is… I think there are some key ways, particularly relating to the top of the organisation, that perhaps, you know, we're not quite as world class as we could be.**

Woodcock and Woolfson (2019:239) find that teachers have both positive and negative perceptions of school leadership support, and reflect on a growing concern around the adequacy of such support in helping teachers to be inclusive. Such ambiguity is shown by my colleagues' comments, where they were prepared to address this question directly.

Other respondents answered questions about structural, systematic support more obliquely, by referring either to academic selection, or to academic achievement. Some of the interviewees referred to in this section (20.1) also developed their answers in these contexts.

20.1.1 Academic selection

> **I guess we *don't* [support inclusion] because we have ... entrance tests - there will be an expectation that ... the child will perform to a certain level... we will support students who have specific learning needs, *as long as* you're as good as this. (Paul)**

> **No way. No. Never. Like - look, I appreciate it's an independent school, and we're *allowed* to be selective, but I don't think we *should* be [laughs] because ...it's got nothing to do with somebody's ability ... and ultimately, we're in the business of getting good grades ... there is *nothing* to say that anybody with any kind of ... need ... is any less capable of getting good grades than anybody else. (Gwen)**

Here, Gwen and Paul are reflecting broader concerns about independent schools and reasons for parents choosing to pay for their child's education, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.1). As Green et al. (2017:7) discuss, independent schools have to rationalise their place in the educational marketplace by giving their alumni a 'private school premium'.

20.1.2 Value-added

Liam felt that the school needed to reflect more on the value that was added to each student's achievement, if it was to fully reflect an inclusive ethos:

> **Consider the starting point...for some, an A grade in an A level might be considered a basic expectation, for others, a C grade might be the culmination of years of dedicated study.**

Linked to this, Ella felt that the school had spent many years focussing on "headline grades", only to switch to publicising value-added after a year in which a particular cohort had achieved what could be considered "poor" headline grades, even though the value-added was relatively strong:

> **Well, they're [**SLT and the marketing department**] now on the back foot, they're saying that their ethos is one thing and then they're going out in public and selling a different message, and apologising for the lack of headline grades, whereas, you know, I think they should be going out there and absolutely blasting with trumpets [**that value added was strong**].**

Ruth was also concerned about the school's focus on "headline grades", and used an anecdote about a now-retired colleague being judged on her grades, to illustrate this point (Extract 11, Appendix 1).

> **basically, the mock results for her GCSE group and the mock results for her A-level group were not good. She was really scared … of a one-to-one she was going to have with the Academic Head … that she might get early retired, because her results weren't good enough.**

The comments in the previous two sections reflect wider concerns discussed in Chapter 16, about the purpose of education. If the case study school really feels that choosing pupils by ability, and then celebrating only one kind of achievement, is their ethos, then this entirely contradicts the ethos of inclusion that the PLC had tried to bring about. Biesta (2015:83) describes the 'predicament' of whether 'we are measuring or assessing what we consider valuable, or whether bureaucratic accountability systems have created a system in which we are valuing what is being measured'. I will consider this further in the penultimate chapter.

20.2 Types of SEND

Other respondents felt more comfortable answering the question about whether the school systematically supports inclusion, by focussing on the types of SEND it was, or should be, able to provide for – and those it could not, or might not, accommodate. These comments seemed to fall into two "camps" – those who felt that we should be as inclusive as possible, and those who felt that there were definite limits to how inclusive the case study school could be.

Nell and Gwen appeared to believe that the school could support inclusion by taking a broad range of pupils, including those with learning challenges:

> **I worked for many years in comprehensive schools and have taught students with many different challenges; I will teach anyone you put in front of me and will help them learn. (Nell)**

> **I think to a certain extent we should try and do all we can, as long as it's not at the detriment of others, because we're not defining people just by their special educational need, no way - so I would say that any sort of drawing the line…. anywhere would be wrong, because then it's a slippery slope, everyone should be taken on their own merit…(Gwen)**

Gwen reflected a concern – "as long as it's not at the detriment of others" - that has been raised in the literature, such as Roffey (2010): some teachers worry that the education of other students may be affected by the behaviour of pupils with specific SEND.

Liam echoed this concern in his comment below.

> **I think as a mainstream education provider, we should try to accommodate as many SEN needs as we can if those SEN needs do not disrupt the education of others…which most do not. If SEN needs are of the type that will cause significant disruption to the learning of others, I would argue that we would be doing a disservice to both the pupil in question and others by trying to accommodate those needs.**

This is an interesting point, and one which also links to ideas of teachers feeling competent to address varying needs in their classroom, but not one that I have room to explore further here. It should be noted that, at the time of carrying out the interviews, the case study school had no pupils with SEND that also gave rise to behavioural challenges, and so the comments of Gwen and Liam may have reflected concerns for the future of the case study school if it were to have an "open door" admissions policy.

Tess and Ruth were concerned about the physical accessibility of the campus, and felt that this limited the ability of the case study school to be more inclusive, with Tess also commenting on possible behavioural concerns:

> **We currently cannot accommodate students with severe physical impairment for example… the school also has a responsibility to ensure the student's success, of all students, being fee-paying. So where the type of SEN such as severe behaviour problems might impede the learning of other students this might preclude them from being accommodated. (Tess)**

> **I think there is a level of cognition below which I'm not sure it's right for the student to be here, and actually, in a school that is competing to offer … A-levels, GCSEs, a mainstream curriculum, we are a mainstream school, we're not a specialist school, I'm not sure we should change that, but the one I do think is - for physical special needs, we are currently really poorly adapted. (Ruth)**

The comments in this section were given in response to the question "do you feel that there is systematic support for inclusion within the school", and their varying nature shows that my colleagues had equally varying views about how inclusive the school was, and could be. The broad picture seemed to be that the school was more inclusive than it had been in the past, and that perspective was echoed in comments about how the school had changed since the PLC had come into existence.

20.3 Views on the PLC

Some interviewees felt that both the way forward for the case study school, and a reflection of the support for inclusion throughout the school, was demonstrated by the existence of the PLC and a comparison of what had gone before it:

> **raising the profile through that way has been highly successful... I felt very much that kind of it [**SEND support**] did exist and yes, we got information but it didn't feel coherent or extensive enough. I think now, you've actually got a dedicated space that students can come to and it's a recognised department in its own right rather than an add-on, I think that's really helpful…(Tess)**

> **I think the PLC at [NAMES CASE STUDY SCHOOL] has been a vast improvement on what we had before. What could sometimes be lacking - under the previous regime - was the provision of strategies (Liam)**

> **In that era [**before the PLC**], you, you would only really get a booklet the day of Parents' Evening, 'don't forget this girl has that [**SEND or SpLD**], off you go'. But never strategies. (Kath)**

> **The PLC has … made a huge and fantastic difference. So actually, I do think that if you come in in Year 7, with an ASD or with a hearing problem, or with dyscalculia, or a cognitive impairment, or social anxiety, you know, we're quite good at… understanding those needs, and looking at that in quite a [gestures] holistic way. So I think we're doing a very *good* job on that now (Ruth)**

It was encouraging to note both that colleagues felt supported by the PLC, and that they felt it reflected a commitment to inclusion on the part of the SLT in the case study school. However, personally I was beginning to have concerns about whether it was the school as a whole that was committed to inclusion, or whether it was me and the staff in my department who had the commitment – with SLT passively acquiescing as long as it did not create consequent difficulties.

20.4 The way forward

Both Tess and Ruth felt that they had advice to give on how the school could move forwards and deliver even more in the way of inclusion:

> **My suggestion is that you do actually have, within each department, an SEN designated lead - in larger departments you've got somebody designated to key stage 3 and you've done it by key stage but why not by abilities? I'm sure that there's always somebody who is designated [**to support**] gifted and talented but you know, that includes SEN (Tess)**

Curran and Boddison (2021:46) support this idea when they argue for 'department SEN champions' as part of a 'team around the SENCo' to move the role forwards.

> **So, supposing, uh … there was a real drive from SLT or SMT … to really make the achievement of their SEN cohort … the best it could be? If you're in a lot of environments, you've got the ability through … variegated pay scales and bonusing, to target the things you want people to work on. But…if you were to ask a different question, which is 'how is ours a high-performance culture?'… even assuming that what SLT wanted to target teachers on was how much value they added to the SEN contingent, what would that look like? (Ruth)**

Curran and Boddison (2021:46) also support the idea of exploring SENCo status and position within the school hierarchy, affording 'the necessary status and seniority to influence school policy at strategic level'.

Ruth indicated that she wanted to make a further comment, and it was typically long, thoughtful and interesting. It is given in full in Extract 12, Appendix 1, but reflected the progress that had been made in the PLC and encouraged me to accept how far we had come:

> **the *difference* that has been made, in really a small period of time has been amazing… even if you can't change the whole world immediately, what's interesting is, if you can get a few, key people to be determined not to accept the status quo? Yeah. That's what I'm trying to say - what do they say? "The perfect is the enemy of the good"?**

This final statement, that 'the perfect is the enemy of the good', led me to reflect on just how much the PLC had accomplished since it came into being, and that if the case study school wished to move even further forwards with inclusion, it would not be a case of "reinventing the wheel" but of making minor changes to an already improved system. Cowne (2003:21) emphasises the importance of recognising success and 'being able to register it as a marker for future work'.

There are obvious challenges to inclusion, such as resources and time, but the majority of colleagues interviewed are in favour of inclusion – in principle, with caveats. My findings are more positive than those reported by Pearce et al. (2010) Boyle et al. (2013) and Monsen et al. (2014), and I hope that this is because my colleagues felt supported by the PLC to deliver inclusion with fewer impacts on their time and resources than teachers in other settings might have done. Nonetheless, there are still barriers to the case study school becoming more inclusive, as well as questions to answer about what broader inclusion might look like in a setting that selects by academic ability, gender and ability to pay.

Chapter 21 – Conclusions and final thoughts

Having examined the themes and drawn out comments from my colleagues which seemed to cohere around those themes, I was finally able to begin to develop some answers to my original research questions.

This chapter will attempt to suggest answers to each of the questions, before concluding with some broader thoughts around the entirety of the research project, and possibilities for the future.

21.1 Question 1: How do teachers in the case study school view inclusion?

It is important to remember that my colleagues work in an independent, single-sex school in an affluent area of the UK. For many of them, much of their teaching experience has been in this or similar settings, and so their comments and perspectives should be approached with an understanding of this position, which could be seen by some as relatively privileged and Western-centric.

A variety of experiences brought us to our understandings of inclusion, which are constantly evolving. Despite this evident evolution, I feel that the case study school is perhaps only on the first "steps of the ladder" with regards to inclusion. If we look back to the work of Ainscow et al.(2006) and their six typologies of inclusion, the interviewees primarily discuss inclusion in the context of these authors' first typology, "inclusion as concerned with SEND". Messiou's 2017 history of the development of inclusion (Messiou:2017) would probably also position the case study school in the earlier stages of inclusion, around the 1990s, as the school responds to children with SEND. When Shaw (2017:293) questions whether inclusive education encompasses "just" SEND, or 'the concept of social inclusion of children with a variety of differences, difficulties and needs', it would seem that the majority of the interviewees are only beginning to move towards examining a broader notion of inclusion.

My colleagues clearly felt that one of the key purposes of education is to prepare young people for their life beyond school, with qualifications having importance but not being the primary motivator. They seemed to agree that *how* and *what*

we measure needs to be examined in relation to how we define achievement. This argument is supported by Thomas and Whitburn (2019) when they maintain that standardised testing is creating barriers to inclusive practice, but this discussion was a side-issue in the bigger picture of the purpose of education.

Ruth's comments in particular showed that understandings of inclusion had moved, or were moving, towards a social rather than medical model of inclusion as the PLC became more established. If we return to Norwich's (2014b) key themes of current attitudes to inclusion across the UK more broadly, it could be considered that the case study school has made progress with *accepting and valuing all, not leaving anyone out*, and *schools becoming a problem- solving organisation*.

It is also clear that the interviewees have considered the universalist vs. moderate or 'optimal' inclusion debate, as described by Boyle and Topping (2012), Low (2006) and the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education, among others, and acknowledge that universalist inclusion is not the right option in every circumstance. Perhaps we can conclude, then, that the case study school is the optimally inclusive setting for *some* pupils.

It can be seen from the interviews that my colleagues hold what Demerath (2018:494) would describe as 'empathetic understandings of the challenges facing students', and have optimistic beliefs in pupils' capabilities. Nonetheless, despite the benefits that they feel are brought about by inclusion, they acknowledge that there are many complex challenges.

21.2 Question 2: What do teachers in the case study school see as the benefits of and challenges to inclusion?

It is important to remember that inclusion as an idea or practice does not sit in isolation within the life of a school. There are many competing policies and practices, in a climate of uncertainty regarding the core purposes of education and its relationship to social justice. Robertson (2019:245) maintains 'England has historically seen the dominance in recent times of consumerism, marketisation and managerialism' and concludes this leads to a 'dilution of the commitment to inclusion'.

Woodcock and Hardy (2017:683) argue that 'simply describing teachers as being "against" or "for" inclusion does not seem to capture the nuances that attend their understandings of inclusion more broadly' and this was certainly shown in the interview comments, with my colleagues being broadly supportive of what they perceived inclusion to be in the case study school, but demonstrating nuanced views of what this meant and the degree to which they felt it had been successful. In their comments, the interviewees showed a clear recognition that inclusion cannot be "all things to all people", even if the case study school were less selective on academic, gender or economic grounds. In a school that remains selective, inclusion will always have limits. The interviewees held mixed views on whether the case study school should be selective, but ultimately this is not their decision to make. O'Brien (2020:304) asserts that 'in a market-defined system of exceptionalism there are no prizes for being inclusive', and while the school continues to need to fill places, it needs to demonstrate how it works to deliver such 'exceptionalism' by focussing on measurable outcomes.

There was, however, a recognition that inclusive pedagogy helps more students than just those with identified SEND. Colleagues referred to "everyone" being able to access the curriculum, and were able to give examples of where they had personally developed inclusive practices for certain students, building confidence in the students and thus gaining a sense of satisfaction and reward for the teachers.

The main challenges to greater inclusion were seen to be practical, tangible ones rather than particular intrinsic concerns about inclusion *per se*. Adequate time and training to consider and deliver particular strategies were frequently referenced, and there were many comments about the lack of physical access to the campus. There were mixed views on whether being more inclusive posed challenges to teacher resilience, with this idea also being linked to the altruistic purposes of teaching.

Concerns were also raised that some of the changes made had yet to be fully embedded, reflecting Higgins' (2005:19) warning against 'piecemeal strategies' in themselves contributing to significant school change. Shirley (2017:261) advocates for 'educators to be agile and conscientious in navigating change while holding on to the core values that brought [us] all into the profession in the first place' and there is much evidence in the interviews that my colleagues were striving towards such an ideal.

My own view echoes that of Woodcock and Hardy (2017:683) who argue that 'there is a distinct need to cultivate a much more equitable and socially just approach to inclusion, to help teachers better understand what such practices might look like, and to challenge entrenched and embedded practices', and the PLC was established to do just that. For it to continue to do so, I needed to explore what the future of inclusion in the case study school might look like.

21.3 Question 3: How can the case study school move forwards with inclusion?

When considering how to use this research to further develop inclusion in the case study school, concerns about the generalizability of single-case studies must be acknowledged. Donmoyer (2011) argues that case studies can be used as "models" of particular circumstances, and that readers of such case studies need not find multiple similarities between a case study setting and their own in order to gain useful knowledge. In this respect, I would hope that my case study might serve as a useful model to other independent schools, illustrating one way that inclusion might be developed and the benefits and challenges of such a process, even if not every circumstance is similar or applicable.

Returning to De Vroey, Struyf and Petrie's (2016) list of common features of inclusive secondary schools, and examining Black's (2019) views of 'future secondary schools for diversity', the following list could give a useful indication of some of the areas that need to be addressed, and that the interviewees referred to in their comments:

- Inclusive cultures, policies and practices
- Supportive relationships, attitudes and perspectives
- Visibility of diverse groups of students
- Teacher agency and collaborative practice
- The nature and purpose of the curriculum and assessment

The interviews showed that the case study school has developed a more inclusive culture than existed previously, but that before making further changes, this needs more time to embed. Colleagues are supportive of each other and of pupils, and want the best for them. Students with diverse needs are now much more visible, and the school is much more open about such diversity, whilst acknowledging that teaching diverse students presents pedagogical challenges.

Harris and Jones (2019:124) recognise 'three key dimensions of teacher leadership' in the journey towards greater inclusion. They argue that *influence* can be used, rather than a specific role or a formal responsibility, that action goes beyond assigned roles to initiate change by sharing good practice, and that teacher leaders are instrumental in developing pedagogical excellence within classroom and beyond. The situation in the case study school would seem to show a mixture of these teacher leadership dimensions; good inclusive practice is developed, celebrated and shared, but it does still seem to be driven by the SENCo and the PLC team. Some of the interviewees have shown individual agency in driving forward inclusion for some students, but others see this as a less important part of their role than delivering the curriculum in the service of assessment. For the case study school to move forwards with inclusion, these tensions would need to be further explored and navigated.

This is one reason why the nature and purpose of the curriculum and assessment need to be examined in the light of competing policy initiatives and frequently shifting policy climates. Although the 2015 SEND reforms were significant, there has been little sign of change in the service of inclusion to date, in either the English National Curriculum or the systems of assessment and examinations. As a

SENCo I question the utility of the current 'one size fits all' approach to formal examinations, rather than a radical rethink of how and why we assess at the end of educational stages. It is very interesting that this debate is starting to regain traction in the current news media as a consequence of the disruption to schooling caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (see for example McConville et al. (2020) and Richardson (2021)).

The interviews show that the role of the SENCo continues to be complex, as there is a balance to be struck between supporting colleagues and initiating change, while not being seen as the only person with the expertise to develop inclusive practices.

Using the comments from my colleagues to develop ideas for ways forward for the PLC was so useful, particularly in that they demonstrated such a wide range of perspectives on inclusion. For some, perhaps exemplified by Liam, inclusion was only one item on a long list that he felt he needed to address every day in his teaching, and while supportive in principle he did not appear to assign inclusion a higher priority than anything else. For others, most notably Ella, Ruth and Gwen, inclusion was one of their *raisons d'être* and a strong part of their identity as educators. This is true of me as well, and from this standpoint I will explore some ideas for the future of the PLC, putting inclusion at the heart of the school, in the penultimate section of this chapter (21.5), but first some other aspects of the research process need to be considered.

21.4 Further considerations

21.4.1 Critiques of the research

Although the research process was both informative and rewarding, as a novice researcher I could not assume that I had created a perfect piece of work that provided concrete answers to the research questions.

As Flyvbjerg (2006:221) explains, one of the key critiques of a case study approach is that it 'contains a bias towards verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions'. I felt that I didn't have such preconceived notions when I began the research process – indeed, one of the reasons for

conducting the study was to gather *others'* perceptions of inclusion to inform the work of the PLC – but with hindsight I obviously placed greater weight on the work of researchers who are firmly "in the inclusion camp", such as Ainscow and Norwich, when synthesising views from the literature. I honestly did not know what I would find when I began the interviews, and it was fascinating to experience my colleagues' explorations of what inclusion meant to them and how they saw it developing over time. However, I concede that there has been no triangulation of the data, and the themes that I have taken from the data, and the narrative that I have built around the findings, may have had very different interpretations if other researchers had been involved. As I wrote in Chapter 8, Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013:11) argue that good case study research would employ more than one perspective – but although my data involves multiple perspectives, the conclusions drawn from it could only ever be my own using this research design. This is a criticism that I am prepared to accept, although I maintain that I have drawn *appropriate* conclusions from the data and not misused or given unfair interpretations of any of my colleagues' comments. In discussing the use of individual school cases to explore inclusion, Ainscow (1999:110) argues that any lesson learned from such cases has 'to be respected for its own qualities'. Ainscow maintains:

> Essentially, it [single case research] is a form of learning that arises as a result of using new experiences to reflect on current understandings rather than a means of providing prescriptions that can be transposed from one context to another.

Another limitation of this research in developing a way forward for the PLC is the lack of pupil voice. Dimitrellou and Male (2020:95) argue that

> pupils with SEND have perceptive ideas about what makes a positive school experience for them and if schools and teachers acted upon more of their suggestions, enhancement of inclusive practice would be possible.

I agree with this perspective, and would be fascinated to research the views of pupils in the case study school, but ethical and time constraints meant that this was not possible within the scope of this project.

Although I might have used slightly different interview questions, and if repeating the data analysis might have created different codes and themes, ultimately there are no fundamental changes that I would have made if I were to begin this project

afresh. Even the personal challenges of working within an interpretive paradigm were enlightening!

21.4.2 The interpretivist nature of this research

I did not come to this project with an interpretivist mindset, and when I began the EdD programme I was uncomfortably aware of how little I knew about qualitative research, and approaches other than positivism. My feelings are echoed by Rapley (2018:199) who writes about a similar transition from a positivist to interpretivist mindset, and tells us 'as a novice researcher, the journey…was inherently difficult and intellectually testing'. Doctoral study, however, is not intended to be a journey through one's comfort zone! Rapley (2018:185) acknowledges the tension of testing oneself in this way, and concludes 'arguably an essential element of a doctoral study is to establish and acknowledge a philosophical worldview'.

Interviewing my colleagues about a subject that is close to my heart (inclusion) but that would have been challenging to explore from a positivist perspective, opened my eyes to the idea that reality does not have to be objective or fixed but can be subjective, and constructed by those who experience it. "Inclusion" meant something different to each of the participants and so there could not be a fixed, singular reality which we all understood and interpreted in the same way. We would also not have a shared perspective, or reality, on what it meant to be "more inclusive". This resulted in me using my colleagues' understandings to contribute to my own, and to build a more shared picture of the nature and meaning of inclusion in the case study school. At some point in the process, I stopped thinking in a positivist way – that there would be "an answer" to my research questions – and began to realise that together we would be able to build a representation of the journey we were on together. This led to the metaphorical "thematic journey" outlined in Chapter 15; interpreting inclusion in a particular setting at a particular time, using shared ideas and experiences to construct a theory of how we had arrived at where we were, and how we might move forwards.

21.4.3 Is there a theory to explain my research findings?

In Chapter 8, I wrote about the links between case study research and theory, and how many researchers, including Flyvbjerg (2006) and Hammersley (2012), encourage case study researchers to move beyond "traditional" ideas of theory and towards using research findings to explain new phenomena or to create new understandings. Theory is a contested concept in qualitative research, with Cohen et al. (2018) listing many examples of theories and theoretical perspectives, and Flyvbjerg (2006) questioning whether case study research even needs to be underpinned by theory. As such, I will refer to the list of bullet points produced below as my "theory", using inverted commas to distinguish it from other concepts of theory as outlined in literature.

By using this interpretation of theory, as something which 'may have an impact on the way you and others understand other theories, ideas, beliefs and practices' (Armstrong and Moore:2004:9), I feel that I have used the interview comments and themes to help staff in the case study school to explore and understand what inclusion means to them, and how it is and could be practised. All of this has been done from an interpretivist viewpoint, acknowledging that there is no singular "reality" but that understanding of this situation has been created in context.

Developing inclusion in a relatively unusual way for independent schools (i.e. the creation of the PLC) is quite a new phenomenon. There are, to my knowledge, only a small number of English independent schools doing similar work, but every situation is unique and must be interpreted in light of specific school contexts. With this in mind, the following points could be said to outline my "theory", insofar as this case study can create one:

- Inclusion (in the case study school and others) is an ongoing process, rather than a finish-line that can be crossed
- Many teachers differ in their understanding and interpretation of inclusion, due to their different experiences and training
- Some independent schools are beginning to explore how they can develop inclusion
- Inclusion is the responsibility of all teachers in a school, not just the SENCo
- However, practising inclusion can be challenging in a climate of multiple competing priorities

- Greater inclusion is a goal that can be aspired to, but there are challenges to achieving it
- The case study school has approached the development of inclusion in an unusual way, which has the potential to serve as a model for similar schools

Although this list may appear rather simple, it fits with some parts of the description of a theory as given by Hammersley's description of *theory in relation to practice*: 'ideas about how an activity of a particular type ought to be carried out, why, what it's value is' (2012:394). Summarising the research in this way also helped me to clarify my own thoughts on a broad body of data – as Cohen et al. (2018:77) describe:

> [Theories] articulate and organize ways of approaching a problem or phenomenon. They assemble and clarify key concepts and their relationships, principles and abstractions, explanations and propositions.

The list of bullet points given as my "theory" above, suggest ideas of practising inclusion in the case study school, aligned to the value of doing so, and clarifies the key concepts and relationships.

Although this "theory" arises from the data, it still cannot be considered grounded theory, in that it neither 'explains the phenomenon under study' nor was produced using grounded theory "rules" (Cohen et al.2018:714). Taking each point of the "theory" in turn, I will show here how it arises from the data.

21.4.4 "Theory" arising from the research data

- Inclusion (in the case study school and others) is an ongoing process, rather than a finish-line that can be crossed

Many of the interviewees commented on the ongoing nature of the development of inclusion in the case study school. For example, in 18.1 Paul discusses how he will continue adapting the curriculum in the next academic year, and in 18.3 both Kath and Ella reflect on the need to do "more" with regards to inclusion. In 20.1 and 20.4, Tess and Ruth both discuss the need for ongoing work, from the SLT downwards, to continue to embed personalised learning within the case study school, and Ruth's comment about 'the perfect being the enemy of the good' encapsulates not only an encouragement to think positively about the changes

made so far, but also an acceptance that inclusion is *not* yet 'perfect' in the case study school.

- Many teachers differ in their understanding and interpretation of inclusion, due to their different experiences and training

Chapter 17 is a revealing reflection on the different experiences of a cohort of teachers who, on the surface, have in common only their place within the management structure of the case study school. From Gwen's and Tess's lengthy careers in a variety of educational placements, to Liam's and Ella's much shorter teaching experiences in only the case study school and similar settings, each has a different experience of being an educator and thus different attitudes towards inclusion. The data suggests something of a continuum, from Ella perceiving her teaching to be 'all about inclusion', to Liam seeing inclusion as just another item on the list of requirements in his day-to-day teaching.

- Some independent schools are beginning to explore how they can develop inclusion

Not only does my own experience in the case study school – and the one in which I am now working - reflect this exploration, but Paul also discussed how his previous settings (also independent schools) were addressing issues around inclusion (in 19.3.4) and Ruth discussed how her son's independent school was also working towards greater inclusion (Extract 9, Appendix 1).

- Inclusion is the responsibility of all teachers in a school, not just the SENCo

In Chapter 18, my colleagues addressed how they personally were practising inclusion, both overall and for specific students. In 18.3, Liam discussed how the provision of strategies meant that he was able to take responsibility for inclusion in his own classes, and Tess described how she felt her experience allowed her to research and deliver additional support to her students. Paul mentioned how his teaching had 'transformed' to be more inclusive over the past few years. In 19.3.2, Ella and others argued for the delivery of more training so that teachers could be even more inclusive – these were not the comments of teachers who felt it was 'someone else's' job to teach inclusively.

- However, practising inclusion can be challenging in a climate of multiple competing priorities

Chapter 16, in particular, addresses the competing priorities facing education in the case study school. There are different perspectives on the purposes of education – from Gwen's 'social interaction' through Ella's and Paul's 'preparation for adult life' to Liam's 'empowerment and opportunity'. The interviewees reflected on issues around examination success and qualifications, with Ruth exploring in 16.2.3 how 'success' can look very different for pupils with additional needs. Chapter 20 also examines issues around academic selection and marketing, and how the case study school needs to navigate a way through the complexities of how to be inclusive in these areas, particularly with regards to physical access to the campus.

- Greater inclusion is a goal that can be aspired to, but there are challenges to achieving it

Chapters 19 and 20 reflect on some of the challenges to further inclusion in the case study school, from the issues of class sizes and teacher resilience, to timetabling, and the inclusion of as many different 'types' of SEND as possible. Gwen, Ruth and Liam all note that the case study school should aspire to be as inclusive as it can, but with caveats around behavioural issues, levels of ability and physical access.

- The case study school has approached the development of inclusion in an unusual way, which has the potential to serve as a model for similar schools

Section 20.3 discusses the success of the PLC, the difference that it has made to inclusion in the case study school, and how it has improved on what went before. Chapter 7 also described how the "academic scholars" were a part of the inclusion effort which, in my experience, is somewhat unusual for independent schools, many of which have a separate provision for the highly able. Chapter 22 further explores how this might be create useful signposts for other schools serving smaller sectors.

The "theory" thus created is supported by the views of Mulholland (2019:239) who believes that 'SEND provision and practice cannot be the preserve of "specialists"

where ‘teachers can pass struggling learners to their special needs coordinator’ but recognises tensions when she writes

> the challenge of SEND reforms for English education has been the expectation to be both “drivers” of this culture shift and activators of bottom-up, practical implementation. Whilst ethically indisputable as being the “right thing to do” in respect of a policy approach, the schools themselves are struggling to address this aspiration.

It is hoped that this gives a clear articulation of the thoughts underpinning my “theory”.

21.5 The future of the PLC

The fascinating and enlightening process of interviewing my colleagues, collating and analysing their comments and creating themes was intended to suggest some possibilities for the PLC in terms of developing inclusion even further in the case study school. O’Brien (2020:301) reminds us that ‘inclusion is a process – it is not an outcome or a fixed state’ and so I felt that it was important for the case study school not only to reflect on the changes made, but to continue moving forwards. I wanted to be the first of Ainscow’s three kinds of people, ‘people who make things happen’ (Ainscow 1999:16) and so felt a personal need to keep working towards greater inclusion, and supporting colleagues to do the same.

The comments from my colleagues, brought together in this “thematic journey”, seemed to indicate that the immediate future of the PLC could be described as follows:

- Continue with the status quo, allowing time for the changes to embed
- Continue supporting colleagues by providing information and training
- Support students by promoting inclusion and acknowledging diversity
- Celebrate “value added” and other achievements
- Share good practice in collaboration with others
- Examine issues around physical access to the campus

In order to try to keep inclusion at the forefront of the case study school’s work, I explored whether, as SENCo, there might be an opportunity for me to contribute to the leadership of the school, as I felt that I had much expertise to offer and a willingness to use what I had learned to develop inclusive policies and practices. However, there were no plans to do this, or to make any further changes to either

policy or practice. Mulholland (2019:240) maintains that 'revisiting inclusion through the lens of the Code of Practice requires schools to see SEND as built-in, rather than a bolt-on afterthought or incidental appendage' and I had begun to feel that, although the PLC had become "built-in" to the work of the case study school, the trajectory of the further development of inclusion might be more static than I was prepared to accept.

21.6 The present

I left the case study school in July 2020 and moved to a different school. I felt driven by a need to do more, and although I *could* have waited until the completion of my doctorate, I believed that there were opportunities for me to develop inclusion for other pupils in other schools. A paper by Black (2019) on "future schools for diversity" was instrumental in leading me to look for schools that were more inclusive than the case study school, and that wished to move forwards as I did.

I now work in another independent school that opened in 2020. I was given the opportunity to create an inclusion department from scratch, using best practice and the latest ideas from research to inform the work of the department. Although independent, the school is co-educational and uses interviews and portfolios in the admissions process, aiming to recruit pupils who will create a diverse student body who can learn from each other. The school is very much values-led, and embraces "neurodiversity first teaching", with all staff expected to teach lessons that support neurodiverse students to fulfil their potential.

This may not be my final career move. I have a firm belief that educational inclusion, in terms of celebrating diversity and supporting every student, is the "right thing to do". Returning to the work of the Delors Commission (1996:17) and its description of the "mission" of education as 'to enable each one of us, *without exception* [emphasis added], to develop all our talents to the full', this is what I see as the purpose of teaching, for me. Completing this research has not only confirmed my commitment to inclusion, but given me the urge to keep moving forwards, on my own journey towards understanding and developing inclusive practice in myself and others.

Chapter 22 Implications for professional practice

The EdD programme at the University of Glasgow has three stated aims (University of Glasgow:2021):

> **To enhance critically reflective approaches to the analysis, evaluation, synthesis and application of relevant theories, principles and concepts affecting education.**
>
> **·To enhance understandings of professional practice, policy development and analysis, educational futures and research activity.**
>
> **·To enable practitioners to participate in the analysis, critique, application and generation of educational practice, policy and research related to and impacting upon their professional contexts.**

In order to *apply* my research (aim 1), *enhance understandings* (aim 2) and examine the *impact on my professional context* (aim 3), in this chapter I explore the potential meaning and application of this project for myself and others.

22.1 My professional practice

As I wrote in Chapter 21 (21.6), conducting this research has confirmed my own commitment to the idea of inclusive education, as I understand it. I left the case study school in a position of greater inclusivity than when I established the PLC. Although I wondered whether the impact made would be sustained, I needed to move forwards and to allow others to bring their ideas about inclusion to bear.

Conducting this research, and developing the PLC, have shown me three main areas in which my work will have an impact on my own professional practice as I continue my career in education.

Firstly, I have developed my understanding of how evidence can be used to influence, develop and enact policy on a school-wide scale. Independent schools in England operate both within and without the legislative framework for SEND, and so they can choose to ignore many of the policy imperatives of the 2015 Code of Practice. However, this project demonstrated that the moral imperatives of inclusion can be applied to the case study school even if they do not need to be – obeying the spirit, rather than the letter of the law. I was able to use qualitative evidence, robustly gathered and analysed, to demonstrate that my colleagues

believe in inclusion and – in different ways – are teaching inclusively. I will be able to use these and similar qualitative methods in future if I wish to make or suggest policy changes in any setting in which I might work. I have also gained a new perspective on what counts as "evidence", moving from my previously positivist viewpoint towards a greater understanding and appreciation of the interpretivist paradigm.

I have also realised the importance of the pace of change. My colleagues' comments led me to understand that if I had been able to make changes more slowly, teachers might have felt less overwhelmed; less of the opinion that developing inclusion was just one more item on their "to do" list. The rapid establishment and deployment of the PLC was done with the best of intentions, on my part, but on reflection I can see how challenging this was for some colleagues.

This leads to the last major area in which I will develop my future practice – looking to build a team in support of any changes that might need to be made. Literature research on school leadership (see Chapter 5) as well as the experience of setting up the PLC showed me that any change to policy and practice needs to be collaborative if it is to persist beyond the absence of the instigator of such change. Good leadership, as I now see it, is distributive rather than dictatorial. I do not feel that I dictated the developments to inclusion in the case study school to my colleagues *per se*, but neither did I invite them to develop policy along with me, and I regretted this when I realised how challenging some of them were finding it.

22.2 The impact on others

This leads to a consideration of the impact of this research on others, both in the case study school and more broadly in independent schools in England and elsewhere.

22.2.1 In the case study school

As discussed, I have now left the case study school. I am aware, through conversations with colleagues who are still there, is that the broad values and practices of the PLC are still in operation. The school now considers inclusion to a greater extent when making admissions offers, for example by asking for educational psychology reports and SEND information from feeder primary schools, and pupils are supported in the classroom in much the same way. The PLC continues to be a valuable marketing tool for the school, as parents are reassured that their child's education will be supportive of their individual needs.

It is not for me to say whether the ideas of inclusion will continue to be important in the case study school, but further embedding of the processes and practices may mean that they become an established part of the school's way of working, with teachers seeing that inclusion is a matter of course and everyone's responsibility. Further time before any more changes are made may help to allay staff concerns over the pace of change. At the very least, I would hope that the provision of training, and strategies to support individual student needs, will make it easier than it once was for teachers in the case study school to continue on their inclusion journey.

22.2.2 More broadly

In 2020, I attended a conference for SENCos who worked in schools that were members of one of the independent schools' associations. The keynote speaker at that conference discussed the idea that inclusion, in terms of personalising learning, was a key opportunity for independent schools to move into the future of education, rather than remaining "traditional".

This, I would hope, would be one of the main implications of my research. I have shown that there are ways – the PLC being one – of independent schools becoming more inclusive, exploring what inclusion means in that context and how it can be developed.

As many before me have recognised, inclusion is a journey rather than a destination, and although this is a context-dependent single case study, the supporting literature and principles have shown that even academically selective independent schools can take steps along the road. As the old proverb would have it "a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step", and my research has shown that not only are there good reasons to begin such a journey, but I firmly believe that it is one which schools *must* take. Perhaps this research can serve as a guide for the beginning steps.

22.3 Future research possibilities

As I described in Chapter 3, research on inclusion in independent schools is noticeably scarce. A number of areas for possible further exploration have arisen in the course of this project which might be fruitful for study by me or others.

It would be interesting to explore the impact on achievement of being more inclusive, in independent schools. This might encourage, as discussed in the previous section, other independent schools to consider greater inclusion – it might also encompass examining the views of parents to ascertain their expectations of an inclusive independent education.

Other areas of interest include the scope of the role of the SENCo in independent schools, a comparison of initial teacher training programmes to explore their delivery of ideas about inclusion, and how independent schools assess and manage examination access arrangements in a climate of gradually increasing inclusivity.

All of these might be useful future additions to this work, in beginning discussions about inclusion in other independent schools, so that my research has ongoing useful impacts. I went into teaching to make a difference, and I would like my work to continue to do so.

Appendix 1: Interview extracts

Extracts from interviewee comments, from which shorter sections have been used in Section D

Extract 1 (Ruth, referred to on page 145)

So, for example, I would say, if you look at English, getting kids who can't … functionally read or write … so that they can go out into an adult world … and really understand … the correspondence that comes to them … you know, if they learn to drive a car, and they get sent one of those awful - and I've had one - two-page, you know, parking notice fines, but are actually - as I've noticed - not legally fair, being able to read it well enough to understand that you don't have to accept it and pay £80, you could appeal, and understanding on what grounds you can appeal, and how you do it, is a really important life skill. Well, if you're not functionally literate, you're not going to get there. Arguably, that's probably more important than what grade at GCSE … the average student got. But do our teachers of English language think about that? … You know? In the same way with Maths skills, do the Maths department think that the ability to understand why online betting will lead you to debt and misery … is probably more important than whether you got a 6 or a 7 at Maths GCSE for most students?

Extract 2 (Ruth, referred to on page 152)

I would say - or what I have heard said a lot - is that it's about full participation … but I think, actually, that does depend on the young person. I think it's about … maximising or optimising … what they *can* and *should* be able to attain…there will be some young people for whom it's never actually going to be possible to be included in absolutely everything…I suppose what I'm leading onto is that, in many ways, the difficulty with inclusion [laughs] is that it kind of depends on the young person, doesn't it? It's a different thing depending on the issues that the young person has, so if there's huge social anxiety, then one of the things that's going to be really, really important to them in inclusion is … accessing involvement in a way that allows them not to be hyper-anxious all the time. Well, that's different to a child who maybe has a hearing problem or a cognitive deficit, where access for them would be different. So, I suppose what I'm saying is that it's personalised, but it needs to be … the best level of involvement and attainment for that child, given their situation, whatever it is. Which is what makes it hard, because it's different…

Extract 3 (Paul, referred to on page 156)

Having just joined it's really interesting to see the approach that you decided to take here… I think ...I think the thing that's clashing at the moment is ...having the right structure in place to then be able to hang anything else on, because coming in I realised that the programme of study that was in place it was a little outdated and had been modified as new bits of the curriculum came in, and ended up a bit of a...mush...and I thought it ...and then I decided well actually before trying to crowbar stuff on top of that and then watch the whole thing crumble, I felt like I needed a solid foundation and then I can start building the pieces on top, the way I want them to be…. So, I think looking forward once I've got that structure really clear in my mind, I'll be able to put more stuff on top and then use the [PLC] resources you have here to support that bit better…

Extract 4 (Ruth, referred to on page 156)

What I think you have introduced is a much more integrated model, which says, you know 'there are some times and some things where some individual students may need an individual booster … training and help on some things, but the majority of what the majority of students need is in their classroom, with their teachers, with their peer group', so actually, the model where one of the special needs team goes out into the classroom, looks at what's going on, and then looks at what that teacher - customise what they're doing, you know, seems a much stronger model, and much more potentially helpful to the student, because, in a sense, what you're fixing is the teaching, you're not [laughs], you're not fixing the broken machine, sort of thing.

Extract 5 (Gwen, referred to on page 159)

If they've read something out loud and even it hasn't got very difficult words but they've struggled, then I'll say 'oh gosh that was the difficult passage of the day wasn't it? Oh dear, thanks ever so much for persevering with that one, I should have taken that one myself' you know, whereas actually you've already gone ahead and seen that you're going to have those two lines... and of course the other thing I do, if I realise it's got round to them with the reading and I, I always say, if people don't feel like reading that day, I always choose randomly because 'I don't want to hear my voice all day', so everyone's going to be asked something and if you just you... you've "got a sore throat" or "it's just one of those days" just, just say 'pass'...

Extract 6 (Gwen, referred to on page 160)

Oh, [NAMED STUDENT], last year…she was … seemed completely incapable of changing any of the methods she had in place, and as a result she wasn't able to access any of, anything we were doing … because she *really* didn't understand … inference or subtext or … like, any kind of metaphor, she, she just couldn't, um, couldn't understand it, so therefore she couldn't apply it to the questions, um … and so I [sighs], for her I abandoned the idea of trying to … make her understand what this metaphor meant, and I started getting her to almost … so, what I used, what I would do with her, is I tried to make everything quite, um, I tried to make things quite *visual*, so I tried, um, images to see if, to, to try and trigger different memories… Um … I mean it was quite labour intensive, and I, I'm not sure that you could do it with much bigger class sizes, but it seemed helpful

I think maybe lower down the school … um … oh, [NAMED STUDENT]. Yeah, I think that [NAMED STUDENT]'s got to, got to be a good example of this, 'cus she … she struggles *so much* with [NAMED SUBJECT], and she is *so* determined to carry on with it, it's quite, it's quite sweet… Um, but what I'm doing - I know she's using her iPad in class now, so I let her, whenever they're doing, working through a passage, um, there's a function on the website (and I don't let them all use this, but I do let her do it) that where, you can just click on the word, instead of, like, looking up every word in the dictionary, because one of [NAMED STUDENT]'s problems is that she, she's looking at the sentence, she looks at the word she wants to look up, but by the time she's got to the back of the book, she's forgotten what the word is - and then she looks back and she's lost her place in the sentence, so she's just - it's just a nightmare. So I, I let her use the, um, click dictionary, so that she doesn't lose her place, and she can just. So that seems to have really helped, um, her speed of things. … So really, [NAMED STUDENT]'s not doing any work that's different from anybody else, she's - I'm just letting her approach it in a slightly different way.

Extract 7 (Gwen, referred to on page 167)

I would say probably well if I'm thinking...I'm thinking of two in my year 10 class and using them across the board, that the older that you get the more worried you are about getting it wrong..... and therefore they [anxious students**] always almost apologise before they start. With any answer there's always that caveat of 'I might be wrong but'... or 'I don't know, someone's probably said this' or you know, there's some sort of get out of jail card that's being used straight off...**

Extract 8 (Ruth, referred to on page 169)

I think it's better now - but certainly for a couple of years, at least, the number of staff briefings where I was in, where it was being discussed, where it [a piece of assistive technology**] wasn't working, and I would say, 70% of the time, the answer was 'it's [NAMED STUDENT]'s fault, she's not wearing the thing properly' [**referencing the student and their assistive technology**]. Now there was a lot that was said to me … if you've got a disability, and you're being offered something that really makes it work well, so that it's like it is for everybody else, you're not going to refuse to have that, um, it's a bit like - you know, if you go out to the theatre, and you're in a wheelchair, and there's a proper wheelchair access toilet, I've never seen a wheelchair user attempt to go through the normal doors to the ladies, and try to use an able bodied person's toilet, because it's horrendous, they don't do it. So if somebody with a disability is not using the adaptations you're providing, it's probably because those adaptations don't work very well for them, and what I heard for a couple of years *wasn't* 'we're looking at whether we're doing everything we can, we're doing the best', it *was* 'it's her fault because she's not doing it properly'.**

It's just as hard [inclusion], with those who are brilliant at the top end, and actually I, I've noticed in classes, I would say, it's as hard keeping those who are really able, who can do things in a third of the time of some of the others, who become bored very quickly, it's as hard keeping them engaged and involved as it is the bottom end … I've never yet heard an academic teacher complain about their Oxbridge cohort. I've never heard them complain that it's too difficult because they finish too quickly, they ask too many questions, they're too brilliant, and they haven't prepared enough for them. But actually, my observation, having come from the classes I've done, is they're just as difficult, "difficult" [gestures], to include as the ones who are taking things very slowly. So actually, what I suppose I'm saying to you is that I *agree* that having to teach at top, middle, bottom, and everywhere in between, is tough, but I suppose the bit of me is that I imagine that's what [laughs] PGCE and teacher training is for, and I supposed, my challenge back to the teacher would be 'you don't complain about those who do it in half the time and get it twice as quick, why are you complaining about those who take twice the time and get it half as quick?'

Extract 9 (Ruth, referred to on page 171)

Uh. Hmm. I'm thinking about how to answer that. I think it depends what benchmark you're comparing against. So, if you look at the school overall, if I compare it to … other schools that I have experience of, in … our local system, if you like, - so if I compare it to … my daughter's school, my son's school, uh, what I know of the two local state schools of the school where I'm a governor - *actually,* I think there *is* more structured, um, and integrated support here at [NAMES CASE STUDY SCHOOL]. I think every teacher here would know that it's not okay for them to completely disregard the special needs register, that if they don't look at it, they're at fault, rather than 'somebody else should have done something' … um, and I think they also know that it's also not alright to disregard … a child's special needs. And I suspect most classroom teachers would think that if they did, were any complaint to be made by the parent or the child, that they would be found to be at fault, rather than the family being blamed. So in that sense, I think - I suppose what I'm saying is - we do *better* than many schools do …

Extract 10 (Ruth, referred to on page 171)

If you go round the other way, and say a big part of what we say is the school's unique proposition is personalised learning - then I'd ask some questions. So, for example… so the head of the personalised learning environment *isn't* either a member of the Senior Management Team or the Senior Leadership Team, so when key decisions are being made - so a good example would be: we just heard this morning at the staff meeting that SLT are looking at how all the pupils return to school in September.

What we're gonna do, what the arrangements are gonna be, and apparently SLT all walked around the grounds thinking about how it was going to be, with measuring tapes, working it all out. If we were r*eally* doing this in a world class way, what you'd say would be "well, where was the voice that was representing all those who've got additional needs, in terms of what that's going to look like?"
In a highly stressful time, school's going to change completely, uh, things are going to be different and difficult, potentially everybody's going to be wearing weird kit and masks, and hiding their faces, and separating people out - is anybody thinking about, at the top table, what does that do for our special needs children? What does that do for children who already find school intimidating and difficult? *Or*, what does that do for special needs pupils, who, for the first time, have had learning delivered to them at home, in peace, in their own time? [laughs] And have become quite comfortable with learning remotely, when they're suddenly being told that they've got to come back in. So, I suppose - and you and I have had this conversation before - what we say on the tin is that [inclusion**] is an absolutely core part of who we are and what we do as a school, but when you look at the representation on our top bodies - so when the doors are closed, and only the top team's there, is there anybody who is tasked with that inclusion as part of that top team? And I don't … think there is.**

Extract 11 (Ruth, referred to on page 173)

I really remember when, at the first year when I was at, you know, [NAMES MEMBER OF STAFF], had my job before me, and so I ended up asking her about a few things, and she was often talking about things in her world, and there was one week where she was really, really stressed, um, and I was like '[NAME], why are you so stressed?' and she was like 'oh, we've just had the mocks back in, and if I look across, I've only got three doing A-level [NAMES SUBJECT]', and she'd only got a relatively low ability cohort … and basically, the mock results for her GCSE group and the mock results for her A-level group were not good. She was really scared … of a one-to-one she was going to have with the Academic Head … basically, because she kind of thought, almost, even, that she might get early retired, because her results weren't good enough. And I remember saying to her 'but this is ridiculous, what, what starting point did you have for the kids who are doing GCSE [NAMES SUBJECT] and the kids who are doing A-level?' And actually, the truth is, when you looked at it, in most schools, the three she had for A-level probably wouldn't have been allowed to do A-level, but achieved good results *for them*…

Extract 12 (Gwen, referred to on page 176)

When I first came to the school, and was talking to [NAMES STAFF MEMBER previously in charge of SEND at case study school**], [shakes head] I mean, I was really … saddened by how backward looking a lot of her approach was. The other side of that is, since you came in, revamped it, changed the team, changed how we did things, and fought for … the importance of personalised learning, the *difference* that has been made, in really a small period of time has been amazing. So I think the other side of things is it's easy to look at the problems of what doesn't happen. What your tenure at [NAMES CASE STUDY SCHOOL] has shown me is actually, with the combination of skill, ability and drive, you can make a huge change - in a short time. If you did another study, which is where we *were* and where we *are* - you can make a heck of a lot of difference and if I look at some of our additional needs students, who are now swimming and succeeding, I think that without the environment that you and your team have provided, they wouldn't have been. So it's worth that effort…it's lightyears different. So the positive thing is, with the right - even with the system that isn't totally getting it, and isn't totally behind it - the *ability* to make a huge difference, um … so I suppose, I think what I would want to reflect is, even if you can't change the whole world immediately, what's interesting is, if you can get a few, key people to be determined not to accept the status quo? Yeah. That's what I'm trying to say - what do they say? "The perfect is the enemy of the good"?**

Appendix 2: Participant information sheet

University of Glasgow
College of Social Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

Changing the landscape – a case study exploring attitudes to inclusion in an independent school in England

Nicola Grant-Stevenson

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. Ask 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 for reading this.

- The study will involve a one-to-one interview for approximately one hour, to explore your attitudes to inclusion and the changes made in the Personalised Learning Centre
- The research will be used to help me to understand what has been successful (as far as staff are concerned) and what may need to be revisited
- The interviews will be audio-recorded if you give permission for me to do so
- The results will be used to fulfil the requirements of the dissertation for the Doctorate of Education award from the University of Glasgow.
- You will be free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you choose to withdraw, your data will not be included in the research project.
- Your personal details will be kept confidential and you will be allocated a pseudonym when the study is reported.
- Your personal data and the research data will be stored separately, and in accordance with all relevant guidance and legislation.
- Your employer will not be identified and neither will your name, age or gender be disclosed. However, due to the subject matter, the small sample size and the nature of your employment, it is possible that your identity could be deduced.
- I may use direct quotes from your interview (anonymised) if you give specific permission for me to do so.
- A summary of the results of the project would be made available to you on request following its conclusion.

Confidentiality will be respected unless there are compelling and legitimate reasons for this to be breached. If this was the case we would inform you of any decisions that might limit your confidentiality. As mentioned above, your complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

The data will be used to explore emerging themes concerning the research question. It will be securely stored in a password-protected file, and deleted once the study is complete.

This project has been considered and approved by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow.

For further information, and with any complaint, you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Consent form

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Consent Form

Title of Project: **Changing the landscape - a case study exploring attitudes to inclusion in an independent school in England**

Name of Researcher: Nicola Grant-Stevenson

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet 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 / do not consent (delete as applicable) to interviews being audio-recorded.

I consent / do not consent (delete as applicable) to direct quotes being used if anonymised.

I acknowledge that copies of transcripts will be returned to participants for verification.

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym, but that my identity could be deduced.

I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my employment arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

- All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.
- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.
- I understand that other authenticated researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant …… Signature ……..

Date ……

Name of Researcher …… Signature ……..

Date ……

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