LEADING CULTURAL CHANGE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT IN AN AUSTRALIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL

A Thesis submitted by

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For the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

2023

ABSTRACT

The inclusion of students with special educational needs has presented a significant challenge to education systems worldwide, requiring new approaches to teaching and learning. Current research overwhelmingly supports the inclusion of all students in the same classroom, although many schoolteachers express concerns about student participation and achievement, as well as the daily challenges of inclusive practice. This ethnographic study explores the development of inclusive practice for students with special educational needs in a secondary College where the development was a result of the impact of disruptive processes. These disruptions were brought about by leadership change, a school improvement process, and mandatory legislative requirements related to The National Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). The focus question for the study was: What can be learned to develop more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs from a school that has undergone two years of disruptive processes? The study is guided by a constructivist interpretivist paradigm, and the researcher gathered qualitative data from multiple sources, including a documentation review, participant interviews, and a reflective journal. The findings of the study reveal the complexities of creating inclusive cultural change within a large secondary College, where deeply held attitudes and beliefs, as well as the built environment, play significant roles. The study highlights that inclusive change is achievable through key organisational factors, such as leadership and improvement capacity. Specifically, the study identifies the importance of leadership with an inclusive intent focused on developing teacher-leader capacity through targeted resourcing and multiple opportunities for ongoing professional learning. The study culminates in the creation of a model to support the practice development of inclusive schooling, which emphasises the principal's role in cultivating and creating relationships with teacher leaders to prepare them for shared and collective leadership practice. The model addresses issues of equity, fairness, and accountability by providing multiple ongoing opportunities and targeted resources to support teacher capacity development for inclusive practice. The study has significant implications for school leaders embarking on a journey of improvement, highlighting opportunities to enhance inclusivity through ongoing staff professional learning for the enactment of inclusive practice. Such change can also improve the quality of the implementation of the NCCD, as school staff gain a deeper understanding and awareness of individual student needs and adjustments required for effective teaching and learning in an inclusive culture.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I, Allison McCartan, declare that the PhD Thesis entitled *Leading Cultural Change Towards Inclusive Practice Development in an Australian Secondary School* is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Date: 20th October 2023

Endorsed by:

Associate Professor Joan Conway
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Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is my great pleasure to express my sincere gratitude to all those who supported me in completing this PhD thesis.

First, major thanks to my two supervisors Associate Professor Joan Conway and Professor Dorothy Andrews, for their invaluable guidance, encouragement, and expertise throughout my research journey. Their unwavering support, insightful feedback, and patience have shaped my research and pushed me towards excellence. My appreciation to Mrs Marlene Barron of the Leadership Research International team at the University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) for her formatting and editing assistance and to Ms Leonie Sherwin, UniSQ Manager (Research and Education Liaison), for her ongoing Endnote guidance and support.

I would also like to thank my family, my sons Shannon and Riain, and my husband Gerry, for their unconditional love, support, and encouragement throughout my academic pursuit. In particular, for Gerry's sacrifices and understanding during the challenging times. Thanks also to my two dogs, Zoey, and Ms Marple, for their faithful daily presence as I worked and for helping me balance my work/life/self-care throughout the study.

Furthermore, I thank my colleagues, friends, and mentors for their invaluable support, inspiration, and camaraderie throughout my PhD journey. Their intellectual curiosity, diverse perspectives, and constructive criticism have helped me grow personally and professionally.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late parents William and Olive Ryan. At a time of growing up during "The troubles" in Northern Ireland, they instilled values of respect and tolerance for difference in me that shaped my character and made me the passionate and dedicated teacher leader that I am today.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Globally there is evidence of gradual changes in the way education systems have responded to students with special educational needs. We have witnessed shifts in practice from totally separate learning environments, to integrated systems, to the more recent trend towards placement of students with special educational needs into mainstream classrooms (Cologon, 2019). Interpretation and subsequent enactment of these changes have varied greatly from country to country and context to context.

Australia, like the rest of the world, is committed to promoting, protecting, and ensuring that students with special educational needs are given full equity under the law. The law requires schools, under The National Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) legislation, an annual collection of information about Australian school students with special educational needs, to make "reasonable adjustments" to ensure students can access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers. Specifically, classroom teachers are responsible for making and recording adjustments they are providing for students as part of their everyday practice. Teacher understanding of NCCD is varied; therefore, monitoring and measuring the effectiveness of adjustments, particularly at the secondary level, is problematic. Indeed, several researchers have concluded teachers' attitudes to inclusion in the secondary setting to be less positive than those in primary (Triviño-Amigo et al., 2022).To add to this, there are growing concerns that current education systems are failing students with special educational needs, by denying them their fundamental right to an inclusive education (Cologon, 2019). Not surprisingly, inclusive education remains a controversial issue.

Inclusion of students with special educational needs into mainstream secondary classrooms demands a major shift in school culture (McMaster, 2015). It requires the transformation of mainstream teachers in ways that will increase their capacity to respond to not just those students with special educational needs, but to a growing diversity of learners. This requires the participation of key stakeholders in ways that challenge much of the current status quo and has significant implications for principals. Particularly, those embarking on improvement in terms of building teacher capacity and leveraging a teacher leader's expertise on inclusion to facilitate and drive inclusive change.

1.1. Focus of the Research

The primary focus of this research was to explore ways to enhance the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs during and after two years of disruptions. Disruptions caused by a change in leadership, school improvement, and external policy requirements challenged practice which in turn created opportunities that positively impacted change. The overarching research question that guided this study was:

What can be learned for enabling the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs from a school that has undergone two years of disruptive processes?

Furthermore, four research-sub-questions were devised to further guide the study:

1. What structures and processes are in place and/or have been disrupted that may influence teacher practice?
2. What challenges and opportunities emerge for supporting students with special educational needs?
3. What significant enabling factors have impacted change within the school?
4. How has teacher praxis working with students who have special educational needs been implicated during the period of disruptive processes?

1.2. Methodology and Design

To investigate the phenomenon of disruptions at a secondary College and the development of inclusive practice for students with special educational needs, an ethnographic approach underpinned by a constructivist interpretivist paradigm was chosen. The researcher aimed to gather qualitative data from various sources, including participant interviews, reflective journal entries and a documentation review, to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and daily practices.

In addition to exploring the participants' perspectives, the researcher also shared her own perceptions and experiences over two years of change to illustrate how building teacher capacity to lead improvement may be an effective approach for influencing the development of inclusive practice. The researcher's personal growth and development and influence on leading inclusive change were also investigated.

Informing Literature

The past four decades have witnessed a global shift towards placing students with special educational needs in mainstream schools, leading to a significant increase in their enrolment (Hehir et al., 2016). While this move towards inclusion is supported by

international declarations, national laws, and education policies, empirical evidence on its effectiveness remains limited and variable (Haug, 2017). As a result, there is still ongoing debate about whether inclusion is a better approach than the old model of segregation and targeted programming (Maclean, 2017).

With this worldwide shift towards inclusive education, the definition of inclusion has expanded to include all those who are vulnerable to exclusion. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued General Comment 4 (GC4), Article 24, to promote opportunities for lifelong learning and ensure quality, inclusive, and equitable education for all (OHCHR, 2016). This broadened definition of inclusion was also globally defined as the right to safe, quality education and learning throughout life (Cologon, 2019).

In 2020, data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2020) revealed that 89% (338,000) of students with special educational needs aged five to fifteen years attended mainstream schools in Australia. Of these, 71% (269,000) were in regular classes, and 18% (67,000) were in special classes within mainstream schools, while the rest, 12% (45,300), were in special schools. The report suggested that the increase in students attending mainstream schools may indicate that the education system has improved in integrating students, fostering inclusion, and providing tailored supports. Conversely, it also raised concerns that resources may be directing the placement of students into mainstream schools even if appropriate support is not provided (AIHW, 2020).

In Australia, schools are encouraged to provide an inclusive environment where students with special educational needs are educated alongside their peers. While the inclusion of all students in school life is promoted, education support centres, special classes, specialist staff, and programs are also provided for those who require them. Therefore, the provision of inclusive education can differ and remains a controversial issue. Despite the NCCD expectations in Australia, there are concerns that schools are failing to provide inclusive education to students with special educational needs (Cologon, 2019).

1.3.   Significance of the Study

The concept of inclusion, which was first introduced four decades ago, remains a challenge for schools globally and in Australia, as evidenced by various studies (Fox et al., 2021; Loreman, 2014; Sagun-Ongtangco et al., 2021). These studies suggest that little success has been achieved in terms of student participation and achievement, and there are inconsistent practice and outcomes for students with special educational needs in mainstream school settings. In addition, teacher professional beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions towards

inclusion have a profound effect on its implementation, as indicated by other studies (Jury et al., 2021; Sharma & Sokal, 2016).

While teachers strive to include all students and support the principle of inclusion, concerns exist about the challenges it poses for practice, including stress and anxiety for teachers with students who have special educational needs (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Gebhardt et al., 2015). Thus, there is a need to investigate leadership and school improvement processes that can build relational trust and facilitate exploration of school culture to identify teacher concerns and support them to build capacity for inclusion (Cologon, 2019).

Kelchtermans (2011) highlights the vulnerability of teachers in the not-for-profit sector, and Dinham (2016) warns about overwhelming teachers with too much change, which he suggests can create mistrust and avoidance. However, Anderson et al. (2007) suggest that examining attitudes during the implementation of change can reveal teacher attitudes and beliefs about perceived needs at a critical time in the process. Hence, investigating the various aspects of inclusion of students with special educational needs in secondary schooling is essential, and this study aimed to shed light on this area.

Using an ethnographic approach (Davis et al., 2014) to understand the daily lives of teachers working with students with special educational needs, this study gained authenticity to its findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and highlighted the importance of social learning processes and staff relationships in influencing thinking and action needed for change towards inclusion. The study identified concerns regarding inclusion, identified barriers, and offered opportunities to address ableism essential to facilitating inclusion (Cologon, 2019).

The study explored the role of a school principal in supporting capacity development and offered structures, processes, and strategies to assist the development of leadership for inclusion. It revealed the challenges experienced by teachers in implementing change for inclusion and the importance of support structures that can help them overcome these obstacles. The findings suggest that influencing thinking and attitudes towards inclusive practice development in secondary schools is possible over time when led by strategic leadership focused on promoting equity in learning for all students. Ongoing professional learning is also necessary as a support structure to boost teachers' confidence to teach inclusively (Anderson et al., 2007; Hart et al., 2014). These findings may support preservice teachers and professional development programs in building capacity for inclusion (Atkins & Rodger, 2016; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Furthermore, this study raises awareness about teachers' responsibilities for all student learning, inadvertently improving the quality of the

NCCD implementation through increased understanding and awareness of individual student needs and adjustments required for effective teaching and learning in an inclusive culture.

1.4.   Context of the Study

The present study was conducted at a co-educational Pre-kindergarten to Year Twelve College located in a large metropolitan area in Australia where the researcher is employed. The College houses an Education Support Centre that caters to students with special educational needs, who have traditionally been integrated into mainstream classes alongside support at the Centre. The study focused on the year 7-12 College campus, where the Education Support Centre is situated. This particular College was selected as the research site because of several factors, including changes in the College's leadership, an improvement process that was initiated by the new principal, and the requirements of the NCCD legislation (NCCD, 2023). The aim of the study was to explore ways to enhance the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs considering these disruptions.

1.5.   Position of the Researcher in the Research

This research study is grounded in my personal beliefs and ideology that shape my worldview, as highlighted by Denzin and Lincoln (2008). As an insider researcher, it was essential for me to examine my own identity and the factors that influenced my focus area of study. Throughout my career, I have had various experiences working with marginalised groups. For instance, at The Ulster People's College Belfast (https://www.communityni.org/organisation/ulster-peoples-college), I facilitated community development work with multiple people from different backgrounds, including religious groups, travelling women, unemployed men, mother and toddler groups, and community groups. Additionally, I coordinated Home-start Newry and Mourne Northern Ireland (https://www.home-start.org.uk/home-start-newry-mourne), supporting vulnerable mothers with three or more children under five, and facilitated personal development workshops with disengaged teenagers as part of The Prince's Trust Program (https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/ about-us/where-we-work/northern-ireland). Moreover, I volunteered at summer schemes and youth clubs for students with special educational needs, where I gained personal satisfaction and delight in supporting them to achieve success. As a teacher with over 20 years of experience, I have also taught students with special educational needs in various educational settings.

Since moving to Australia from Ireland in 2011, I have worked at the College where this study took place. Reflecting on my experiences there, first as coordinator of the Education Support Centre (2011–2014) and then as leader of learning for Diversity Education (2015–2021), I realised that my understanding and perspective on inclusive practice had evolved over the years. For example, as the centre coordinator, my role was primarily focused on teaching within the centre, managing student timetables, organising education assistants to support students and teachers in the mainstream, and engaging with parents and external professionals. Due to these responsibilities, I had limited opportunities to interact with other staff members outside of the centre and relied on classroom assistants to keep me informed about the goings-on in the mainstream. However, since taking on the role of leader of learning for Diversity Education, I gained a different perspective. Now on the outside looking in, I realised the challenges faced by mainstream teachers and the adverse impact on teaching students with special educational needs. Teachers were overwhelmed with large class sizes, misbehaviour, full-time teaching loads, daily duties, heavy curriculum content and marking, and exam pressure from both the College and parents. Added to this, many had no experience working with students with special educational needs and lacked confidence in their ability to do so. Upon reflection, it became evident that addressing these challenges necessitated transforming the College's culture and implementing practical measures to embrace inclusive practice.

In the role of leader of learning for Diversity Education, opportunities were created that enabled me to build trusting and respectful relationships to influence attitudes towards inclusive practice development. Given the increasing pressure on schools to build improvement capacity and the lack of guidance and support at government and system levels, the ethnographic approach to this research could offer crucial organisational factors that may help increase capacity for inclusive improvement, benefiting all students, including those with special educational needs.

1.6.   Thesis Structure

Chapter One introduces the study focus and research questions which aimed to investigate whether leadership change, school improvement, and the NCCD legislation in a secondary College created opportunities to develop inclusive practices for students with special educational needs. The study's ethnographic approach, underpinned by a constructive, interpretive paradigm and qualitative research design, was presented, followed by a brief

review of the literature that informed the study, the study's significance, context, researcher's position, and the thesis structure.

In Chapter Two, essential issues related to inclusion are explored in the literature, to ascertain the extent to which they may influence or inhibit inclusive change. These include a review of the history of inclusive education globally and in the Australian context, teachers, and inclusive practices (attitudes and beliefs), leadership for inclusion, inclusive pedagogy, inclusive education, and school culture. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) developed from the literature review, which focuses and guides the study in answering the overarching research question.

Chapter Three presents an overview of the research approach and design and is divided into three sections. The first provides an overview of the theoretical paradigm, the researcher's world view that impacted the research approach, the research idea, and the focus of the study and how the research question evolved. The second section discusses the research design, including data collection, the research context, and the participants. Finally, the third section delves into the role of the researcher in the research, data analysis, trustworthiness and validity, and ethical issues.

Chapters Four and Five present the empirical findings of the study. Chapter Four focuses on my role as researcher, study participant, leader of learning for Diversity Education, and middle leader. It begins with an overview of the Special Education program's origins at the College and my previous employment. The findings are presented in two parts: the new principal's address to staff, my interactions during the review and school improvement process, and a significant staff professional learning meeting. The second part highlights the two-year study's inclusive practice development, showcasing my experiences and leadership journey.

Chapter Five uses a narrative voice created from blending interview data with journal entries to tell the participants' story. Findings are presented as vignettes, with the principal and vice-principals' voices presented first, followed by each group of participants - teachers, middle leaders, and education assistants. Several research personalities were merged to create composite characters representative of each group, and all names were changed to pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

Chapters Six and Seven present the analysis and discussion of the key findings. Chapter Six analyses the findings from Chapters Four and Five. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework was utilised for this process, providing a detailed outline of the data analysis and theme generation. The chapter includes examples of collated

data, clustered codes, and sub-themes, addressing the research-sub-questions. It further presents the broad themes from an extensive data review aligned with the overarching research question. The chapter concludes with a summary of the review process, the definition and naming of the broad themes, and a report on the final themes extracted from the data.

Chapter Seven, the final chapter, addresses the overarching research question. The overall outcomes of the study and the key findings are presented and explained through a model to support the practice development of inclusive schooling (Figure 7.1). Finally, the chapter establishes the significance of the study, explains implications for principals and others leading cultural change towards inclusion in secondary schools, makes recommendations for future practice and research, and presents the researcher's reflection on the study at the end.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.   Introduction

There has been a growing trend towards inclusive education in Australia, with increasing enrolments of students with special educational needs in mainstream schooling. This has been the experience at the study site, according to NCCD data from 2016-2018. This increase has been attributed to the school's reputation for providing an equitable and supportive environment and its flexibility with student placement between an onsite Education Support Centre and a mainstream school, as evidenced by enrolment interview data from 2015-2018. Despite this, inclusive practice has proved problematic at the College, as is the trend nationally for including students with special educational needs in secondary school environments. To gain a wider perspective on the factors that may influence or inhibit inclusive change, this chapter reviews the literature on key issues related to inclusion, including an historical and global perspective, inclusion in the Australian context, teachers, and inclusive practices (attitudes and beliefs), leadership for inclusion, inclusive pedagogy, and inclusive education and school culture. A conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) developed from the literature to guide the study is presented at the end.

2.2.   An Historical and Global Perspective

Over the past 40 years, there have been significant efforts to establish a framework for creating inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of students. Educational guidelines, policies, and ethical standards have been developed to achieve this objective (Allen & Cowdery, 2014; Garrick, 1999; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Loreman et al., 2010 as cited in Forlin et al., 2013; McLaughlin & Warren, 1992; Van Mieghem et al., 2020). The primary aim of these initiatives was to foster a sense of belonging, achievement, and independence for all students in inclusive educational settings. This goal has been reinforced by a global movement that prioritises supporting students with special educational needs in mainstream classroom settings (Forlin et al., 2013).

The global priority of promoting inclusive education has been evident for several decades. In the United States, the Children with Specific Learning Disabilities Act (1969) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 1997) were introduced to address intellectual disabilities. In the United Kingdom, inclusion legislation began with the Warnock Report (1978), followed by the Education Reform Act (1988), the Special Educational Needs

Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994), and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001). In 1994, UNESCO published the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 2000), which affirmed that students with special educational needs should have access to mainstream schools and provided guidelines for global action towards inclusive education. Foreman (2008), commenting on the significance of the Salamanca Statement, highlighted the work of Ainscow (1999), who described the statement as one of the most important documents in the special needs field, emphasising that mainstream classroom education should be the first option for all students. In April 2000, UNESCO reiterated the principles established in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Education Needs, which prompted the development of actions and initiatives in response.

Cologon (2019) argues that the key to inclusion is shifting the focus from special needs to meeting diverse needs. Her research demonstrated that students with special educational needs attain better academic and vocational outcomes in mainstream educational settings. However, inclusive learning environments benefit not only students with special educational needs. As noted by Finke et al. (2009, cited in Cologon, 2019), students without special educational needs can also develop an appreciation of differences and form friendships with others who they may not have encountered or considered otherwise.

Research consistently demonstrates the benefits of inclusive classrooms for students with special educational needs (Forlin et al., 2013). However, the empirical evidence of its implementation remains limited (Haug, 2017). Inclusive education has presented challenges for Western schools (Blackmore, 2009). According to Waitoller and Artiles (2013), these challenges stem from a limited understanding of inclusive education principles, leading to segregating students with special educational needs rather than providing opportunities for learning and social integration in mainstream settings. Additionally, Datnow and Park (2018) argue that an excessive emphasis on academic achievement compromises equity in Australian schools.

2.3.   Inclusion in the Australian Context

Australia is committed to ensuring that individuals with special needs receive equal treatment under the law, a principle shared by other countries (Department of Education, Skills, and Employment [DESE], 2018). Consequently, Australian schools have a legal obligation to cater to students with special educational needs (SEN) per the (Disability Discrimination Act (DDA),1992) which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities, including in the education sector (Australian Government, 2019). Additionally,

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Education Council, 2019) and the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2012) both emphasise the importance of inclusive education practices in Australia.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY, 2023) has noted that implementing inclusive education has been challenging in Australia. At the school level, aligning inclusive education policy with teacher and teacher education planning is crucial, as outlined in the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE) (Australian Government, 2005) and the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2008). Moreover, teachers require support to effectively implement inclusive education policy at the classroom level.

General Comment 4 (GC4), produced by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in 2016, explained Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on inclusive education (OHCHR, 2016). GC4 emphasised that rights are not optional or privileges and should be guaranteed to all individuals. However, the Australian funding model contradicts this notion of rights, as schools must categorise a student's special educational need to attract funding, potentially leading to negative consequences such as bullying and lower expectations (Anderson & Boyle, 2015). Conversely, students who require support but cannot fit into a disability category may not receive funding (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011) which Cologon (2013) suggests is a departure from the original intent of the global movement towards inclusion.

NCCD was enacted in 2015 with the aim of addressing the issue of students being categorised by disability rather than educational need. NCCD requires schools to provide "reasonable adjustments" based on the individual needs of the student. Despite this, a 2015 inquiry by the Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) expressed concerns about the current approach to education in Australia and concluded that many students with special educational needs were being denied their fundamental human rights. A subsequent report further highlighted the challenges faced by these students and their families in accessing adequate education (ALHR, 2015; Disability Royal Commission, 2020).

Historically, scholars have argued that traditional special education practices contribute to ableist assumptions about disability by segregating and categorising children based on their deficits. A lack of consensus on the definition and practice of inclusion exists due to varying interpretations (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Haug, 2017). Further, Slee (2018) contends that exclusion is attributed to the student's impairment rather than the disabling cultures and practices of education systems, which has led to a lack of commitment to

inclusion globally and in Australia. Added to this challenge are the eight educational jurisdictions within Australia, each managing and implementing inclusive education differently, despite schools operating under the same national legislative acts. This divide in policy practice may hinder the progress of inclusion. For instance, Forlin et al. (2013) suggest that measuring inclusive education's success becomes challenging and leads to inconsistent student outcomes. Anderson and Boyle (2019) propose establishing a nationally accepted understanding of inclusive education by developing an Australian Framework for Action to address this issue. Such an initiative is necessary to guide, support, and deepen the understanding of inclusion and enhance school capacity to provide inclusive education.

2.4.   Teachers and Inclusive Practices

Lately, inclusion has garnered significant attention in the field of education, aiming to establish a learning environment that caters to all students and fosters their sense of belonging and support. The successful execution of inclusive practices within the classroom largely depends on the crucial role that teachers play. Teacher attitudes and beliefs, as supported by scholarly works (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Florian & Rouse, 2010; Shevlin et al., 2013), have been identified as integral factors to the effective implementation of inclusive policies and practices. Interestingly, teacher acceptance of inclusive policies raised over 20 years ago is still reported as a concern for effective implementation of inclusive practice (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Costello & Boyle, 2013; Priyadarshini & Thangarajathi, 2017). This acceptance is fundamental to teachers' willingness to provide instruction to students with special educational needs and, consequently, the successful implementation of inclusive educational programs (Beacham & McIntosh, 2014; Priyadarshini & Thangarajathi,2017).

The connection between teacher attitudes and inclusion has been established in prior research. Specifically, Salvia and Munson's (1986) classification of teacher-child and environment-related factors was adopted in this area of study. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) conducted a critical review of the literature and determined that personal beliefs, basic demographics, and confidence in one's teaching ability are factors that impact teacher attitudes towards inclusion. Additionally, their review revealed that there is considerable variation in teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, and there is limited evidence to suggest that they support inclusion for all students. More recent studies provide further support for these conclusions (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Sandhu, 2017; Vaz et al., 2015). These studies have identified a variety of factors that influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, including

age, gender, grade level being taught, training, knowledge background, teacher efficacy, and prior experience working with individuals with special educational needs.

Numerous studies have shown that age is a potential factor affecting teacher attitudes towards inclusion, with older teachers being more likely to harbor negative attitudes (Monsen et al., 2014; Vaz et al., 2015). This phenomenon may be attributed to insufficient training in inclusive education (Monsen et al., 2014; Vaz et al., 2015). Conversely, other research has reported that attitudes towards inclusion tend to improve as teachers gain experience and acquire relevant skills (Cwirynkalo et al., 2017; Priyadarshini & Thangarajathi, 2017).

The gender of teachers can significantly influence their attitudes towards inclusion (Priyadarshini & Thangarajathi, 2017; Sandhu, 2017). For example, a previous study by Vaz et al. (2015) suggested that female teachers hold more positive attitudes towards inclusion than their male counterparts. However, this finding contradicts earlier studies which, found that male teachers were more likely to have positive attitudes towards inclusion (Ernst & Rogers, 2009).

Prior research suggests that secondary school teachers hold less favourable attitudes towards inclusion compared to those in middle or primary school settings. For example, studies on mainstream teachers in grades five to nine reported the lowest efficacy in teaching students with special educational needs, believing that inclusion negatively impacted the learning of their mainstream peers (Alquraini & Gut, 2012; Sharma & Sokal, 2016). Interestingly, a lack of teacher confidence towards inclusion is linked to these negative attitudes. However, the results of recent studies on the relationship between teacher attitudes towards inclusion and student grade or age have produced mixed findings (Priyadarshini & Thangarajathi, 2017).

The attitudes of teachers towards inclusion are influenced by individual student needs and characteristics, which can impact their implementation of inclusive practices. For instance, students with special educational needs require accommodations and support to participate fully in the classroom, which may require additional effort and resources from teachers. Behavioural challenges may also require different strategies for managing behaviour in the classroom (Chitiyo et al., 2019), and teachers may need to adjust their teaching strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of all students (Chambers & Forlin, 2021).

Studies have shown that teachers who feel responsible for each student's education engage with them at a higher cognitive level (Cologon, 2019). However, some teachers hold deterministic beliefs that limit students' learning and do not believe all students can benefit from an inclusive classroom (Amr et al., 2016; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Hart et al.

(2014) suggest that students with special educational needs are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of such beliefs, given their helplessness and immaturity, which can impact teacher confidence and ability to teach them and contribute to negative attitudes towards inclusive education.

The classroom environment also affects teachers' implementation of inclusive practices. Existing research highlights support as a critical environmental factor in developing positive attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Recent studies have found that teachers who have access to resources and support, such as professional learning and collaboration with others, are more likely to implement inclusive practices (Chitiyo et al., 2019). Conversely, inadequate support and feeling unsupported can lead to negative attitudes towards inclusion and practices (Monsen et al., 2014). Chambers and Forlin (2021) highlighted the issue of teacher professional learning for inclusion as a significant area of concern. They suggested that new more collaborative models of professional learning could support teachers in building capacity for inclusion.

Support provided by school leaders has been linked to more positive attitudes towards inclusion. Woodcock and Woolfson (2019) found that when leaders provide clear guidance, allocate resources, and promote a supportive school culture, teachers are more likely to feel empowered and supported in their inclusive practices. They further suggest that leadership support can be an effective way to improve teachers' confidence and knowledge in inclusive education, leading to more positive attitudes towards inclusion. However, achieving an inclusive environment for all students requires the implementation of specific support and services, which can be a complex task. For example, several studies have examined the efficacy of support and services in inclusive secondary classes and highlighted significant practical implications (Duncan et al., 2021; Forlin & Chambers, 2011). These implications include the rate of teacher instruction, students' ability to work autonomously, study skills, the depth of curriculum content, teacher attitudes, and the possible ramifications of high-stakes testing. Moreover, teachers face challenges posed by school structure, curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and instructing students with and without special educational needs in the same classroom. These challenges present a formidable task for those responsible for leading and promoting the development of inclusive practices (Jarvis et al., 2020).

2.5.   Leadership for Inclusion

The literature on leadership for change and inclusion is extensive and includes works from Ainscow (2014, 2020), Ainscow and Sandhill (2010), Hoppey and McLeskey (2013),

Carrington and Kimber (2020), and Carrington et al. (2022). School principals play a pivotal role in providing leadership for inclusive change, as widely acknowledged by Riehl (2000), DeMatthews and Mueller (2022), and Ainscow (2020). McMaster (2015), Andrews and Conway (2020), and Carrington et al. (2022) highlight the importance of social relationships in influencing learning and teaching. According to Northouse (2007), fostering collaboration, openness, and shared decision-making requires leaders to establish and uphold strong relationships of trust with their staff. This aligns with their perspective on leadership as a transformative process.

Effective leadership involves guiding, inspiring, and motivating others to improve their practices, as argued by Drucker (2011). One approach that has been found to respond successfully to learner diversity is collective leadership, where the principal employs a constructivist approach to sharing leadership with like-minded others (Lambert, 2002; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011). Shared leadership encourages the participation of all staff and builds collective responsibility for student learning across the whole school community (Eaker & Keating, 2008). Similarly, Conway and Andrews (2016) and Lieberman and Miller (2005) have highlighted the unique contribution of teacher leaders in influencing improvement in practice across the entire school.

According to Ainscow (2018), effective leadership can be facilitated through experience working with others in diverse social learning contexts. Ainscow posits that leadership can promote inclusive thinking through social learning processes within a school's cultural context. This aligns with the notion of shared leadership and collective responsibility, where all members of the school community are encouraged to participate in leadership and work together towards achieving a common goal of inclusivity and equity. Therefore, promoting diverse social learning contexts and building collective responsibility among staff can be instrumental in promoting effective leadership and fostering a more inclusive school environment.

Early findings reported by Riehl (2000) presented theoretical and empirical evidence based on a comprehensive integrative review of the principal's role in creating inclusive schools. Riehl concluded that effective school leaders use social learning processes to promote inclusive practices, create new meanings about diversity, and establish connections between schools and communities. This highlights the potential for school principals to engage in inclusive, transformative developments, particularly when they are committed to equity, voice, and social justice and promote inclusive cultures and practices in schools while building positive relationships (Riehl, 2000, p. 71).

Effective leaders gather, generate, and interpret information within a school to encourage thinking for change, as emphasised by Lambert's (2002) prior research. Cranston et al. (2017, as cited in Carrington & Kimber, 2020) suggest that leaders can discuss ethical dilemmas associated with inclusion in professional conversations with staff. Harris et al. (as cited in Carrington & Kimber, 2020) further posit that leaders can encourage deep reflections and promote robust debate on inclusion through such conversations. Providing intellectual stimulation is one of the key practices of influential leaders (Leithwood et al., 2020), as it can cause dissonance in thinking and allow leaders to challenge existing assumptions and create new meanings about learning and teaching (Ashby, 2012; Ashton & Arlington, 2019, as cited in Jarvis et al., 2020). Furthermore, this is a crucial step that can enable leaders to influence behaviour and change the culture to improve access to equitable learning opportunities for all students (Johnston & Hayes, 2007; Schein, 2004, as cited in Jarvis et al., 2020).

However, school change presents a significant challenge for educational systems and leaders (Ainscow &Sandill, 2010). One tough challenge is promoting diversity and inclusivity within schools. Despite these challenges, Ainscow (2014) and others (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Marsh et al., 2014) emphasise that it is never too late to learn and embrace new approaches to teaching that promote inclusivity and equity. However, creating inclusive schools requires more than just a desire to change. Desimone and Garet (2015) suggest that supporting teachers build capacity is critical to addressing the increasing diversity of students' needs. This means equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to create inclusive learning environments that support all students.

In terms of building staff capacity for improvement, recent research by Duncan et al. (2021) emphasises the importance of ongoing professional development for educators to support inclusivity in schools. They highlight the need for sustained, collaborative, and reflective learning opportunities that can help teachers develop the necessary skills and knowledge to create more inclusive learning environments.

Further, recent research indicates a positive correlation between professional learning and student learning (Jarvis et al., 2020). Leadership plays a significant, albeit indirect, role in this relationship. Studies have found that high-quality professional development programs that are relevant, engaging, and aligned with the school's objectives can positively impact student learning (Archibald et al., 2011). Actively engaged teachers tend to be more effective in their teaching practices, leading to positive student learning outcomes (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Therefore, it is crucial for school leaders to create a culture of continuous learning and provide opportunities for meaningful professional learning. The school's cultural context also

plays an essential role, as professional learning needs to address outdated teaching and learning practices (Ainscow, 2020). However, despite the evidence indicating a positive relationship between professional learning and student outcomes, establishing a direct causal link is challenging due to various factors that can impact student learning (Desimone, 2009). Therefore, school leaders must consider other factors that can influence student learning, such as the quality of instruction. Thus, highlighting the need to develop pedagogy that is not only inclusive but also effective in supporting diverse learners and improving student outcomes.

2.5.1.   *Inclusive Pedagogy*

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) describe inclusive pedagogy as the ways that courses, classroom activities, curricula, and assessments consider issues of diversity to engage all students in learning that is meaningful, relevant, and accessible. They further contend that implementing inclusive pedagogy is critical to achieving equity and social justice in the education sector and presupposes that learners with diverse learning needs can obtain appropriate instruction within a mainstream classroom setting. To achieve this, teachers need to adapt teaching strategies that enable all students to have equal access to and participate in the curriculum. The utilisation of inclusive pedagogy has been identified as a key strategy for promoting equity and social justice in education, with research demonstrating that it is linked with improved academic achievement, enhanced classroom behaviour, and heightened levels of student engagement (Florian & Beaton, 2018). A comprehensive analysis of existing literature (Morina, 2020) has established that inclusive pedagogy has the potential to result in better learning outcomes for all students, particularly those who have been historically marginalised or excluded from mainstream education.

Inclusive pedagogy is a fundamental principle that recognises the diversity and differences among students. In implementing inclusive pedagogy, teachers must be mindful and responsive to their students' cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds and needs. According to Mastropieri and Scruggs (2017), teachers who adopt inclusive pedagogy are more likely to create a positive classroom environment conducive to learning.

To cater to the diverse learning needs of students, teachers may use differentiated instruction. Siam and Al-natour (2016) have shown that differentiated instruction can improve academic outcomes for students with learning disabilities. Expanding the possibilities available to all students, as suggested by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), can be considered inclusive pedagogy. Goodall (2015) also supports this idea, citing Jordan

(2005), who believes that "getting it right for autistic children can be a way of getting it right for everyone" (p. 313).

While inclusive pedagogy is considered a solution to educational inequality, it has faced criticism for its perceived vagueness and lack of concrete implementation strategies. Florian and Linklater (2010) argue that teachers can effectively implement inclusive pedagogy in their classrooms with specific guidance and training. Consequently, the development of inclusive pedagogical practices remains an ongoing challenge. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) and Goodall (2015) identified teacher attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, and practices as contributing factors to this challenge. Therefore, initiating pedagogical development at the individual teacher level is crucial, as teachers' belief systems influence their perceptions, judgments, and behaviours. In support of this, Conway, and Andrews (2016) suggest that teachers reflect on their pedagogies before a school undertakes the task of negotiating a school-wide pedagogy for successful school improvement.

Goodall (2015) proposed that to determine the effectiveness of inclusive pedagogy in promoting a student's sense of belonging, participation, and achievement, it is necessary to engage with and listen to students to understand their perspective of the school environment. Drawing on a student with Asperger's syndrome, he argued that the environment needs to cater to students' needs for them to thrive. Walton et al. (2022) extended this research and found that developing inclusive teaching practices in different contexts requires professional learning that recognises the complex nature of the context. The research emphasises the need for supportive networks, internal and external expertise, and professional learning that promotes collaboration to develop social and inclusive cultures in schools.

Previous research conducted in New Zealand (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020) identified successful pedagogical practices adopted by teachers in inclusive classrooms. For example, quality teaching, focusing on student achievement, effective links between schools and other cultural contexts, and providing scaffolding, feedback, personalising learning, and modification to support learning and goal-oriented assessment. Other strategies were peer tutoring, large and small group instruction, individual instruction, cooperative learning, and team teaching with a special educator teacher. Moreover, similar strategies have been identified in Australian classrooms. Examples of such strategies include alternative curricula, assistive and adaptive technology, universal design for learning principles (Forlin et al., 2013), and multi-tiered support systems, such as flexible, timely distribution of resources to support students based on their level of need (Sailor, 2017, as cited in Jarvis et al., 2020).

Teachers who have been successful in including students with special educational needs have been found to collaborate with colleagues, parents, and other students to deliver a differentiated curriculum (Walton et al., 2022). Such collaboration involves the use of new pedagogical language, reflecting practice changes that enable teachers to communicate and share practice with students with diverse learning needs in more meaningful and inclusive ways (Ainscow, 2020).

Added to this the use of education assistants to support teachers in creating an inclusive classroom environment is a commonly employed strategy. Conboy (2021) argues that education assistants can provide targeted support to individual students, allowing teachers to focus on the needs of the wider classroom. Additionally, education assistants can provide a valuable source of emotional and practical support to students with special educational needs, helping to foster positive relationships and a sense of belonging. Conversely, some critics argue that the use of education assistants may perpetuate a "separate but equal" approach to education, rather than promoting full inclusion for all students. Additionally, the reliance on education assistants may lead to a lack of training and development for teachers in developing inclusive pedagogical practices (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2017). While these arguments provide a critical perspective, Sharma and Salend (2016) research has demonstrated that the use of education assistants can be an effective tool in supporting inclusive pedagogical practices in the classroom, particularly when combined with ongoing teacher training and professional development.

Research indicates a gap between the knowledge and implementation of effective pedagogical practices, highlighting the necessity for improved quality in pedagogical approaches (Grima-Farrell et al., 2011). However, Morina (2020) identified numerous barriers to implementing inclusive pedagogy in the classroom these include a lack of time for planning and working with students, modifying resources, understanding what to do, and insufficient training. In addition, Morina identified organisational factors such as a poorly communicated rationale, an overly ambitious scope of change, insufficient resourcing, and a lack of long-term commitment and key staff to promote inclusion as significant barriers to inclusive pedagogy. As Ainscow (2020) argues, teachers need support from their schools/systems to enhance their pedagogical skills in reflection, instruction, classroom management, and learning strategies.

In Australia, there is a need for more data to identify local barriers to inclusion (Cologon, 2019). Evidence indicates that a lack of effective professional development in best practices (Florian, 2019) and inadequate program evaluation and design hinder

responsiveness to student needs (Walton et al., 2022). It is essential that professional development on inclusive education is theoretically grounded and embraces a unified approach to addressing differences and exclusion (ARACY, 2013). Additionally, when planning for inclusive pedagogical change, a school's cultural context must be considered (Conway & Andrews, 2016; McMaster, 2015).

That said, inclusive pedagogy is not without its potential drawbacks and limitations. One of the main limitations is the challenge of implementing it in resource-poor contexts. For example, schools in low-income areas may lack the funding or resources needed to provide the necessary accommodations for students with special educational needs or to create a culturally responsive curriculum. In addition, teachers in these settings may not have received the necessary training to implement inclusive pedagogy effectively (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Another potential drawback of inclusive pedagogy is the potential for reinforcing existing power imbalances. Some critics, (Spratt & Florian, 2015) argue that the focus on diversity and inclusion may inadvertently perpetuate the marginalisation of certain groups by reinforcing existing power structures. For example, an emphasis on cultural sensitivity may lead to a superficial appreciation of diversity rather than a true understanding of and respect for difference.

Additionally, the implementation of inclusive pedagogy requires ongoing professional learning for teachers. Many may not have received adequate training in special educational needs, and it can be difficult to find the time and resources to attend professional learning workshops or courses (O'Gorman & Drudy, 2011). Despite these challenges, there is evidence that inclusive pedagogy can be effective in promoting equity and improving academic outcomes for all students (Kumashiro, 2015). By addressing the needs of all learners and fostering a culture of inclusivity in the learning environment, teachers can help ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed (Hehir et al.,2016).

2.5.2. *Inclusive Education and School Culture*

The concept of inclusive education recognises the diverse student population and aims to foster a school culture that meets the needs of all learners. Inclusive education is characterised by a pedagogical approach that promotes a sense of belonging, embraces diversity and equity, and cultivates a culture of respect for every student (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Florian, 2008). As McMaster (2015) reports, to effectively implement inclusive education, it is essential to establish a school culture that values diversity, ensures

equity, and promotes inclusion. The school culture significantly influences the quality of education students receive; therefore, it should embrace and celebrate each student's unique strengths and differences (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Nevertheless, school culture, like inclusion, is a complex concept that is challenging to define and can vary depending on the context (McMaster, 2015; Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010). As Alborno & Gaad (2014) and Schein (2016) suggest, there are several layers to consider, some of which may not be visible to the human eye. Their profound insights remind us of the complexity of this issue and the need for careful consideration of all relevant factors. For example, in the education system, school culture has been closely linked to inclusion and is defined by Schein (2016) as "A pattern of shared assumptions learned by a group or a product of joint learning" (p. 2). Consequently, fostering an inclusive culture in education has posed an ongoing challenge for educators worldwide.

Research has indicated that developing an inclusive culture in education requires the participation of all stakeholders, including students, educators, and parents. Frey and Fisher's (2021) study demonstrated that student involvement in decision-making processes and promoting students' voices are crucial components in fostering an inclusive culture in education. Additionally, Guo-Brennan and Guo-Brennan (2019) highlighted the significance of the wider community involvement in creating an inclusive culture. The authors suggested that educators must engage with parents and the community to comprehend their perspectives and values and integrate them into the classroom environment.

Furthermore, research by Conway and Andrews (2016) has revealed that developing an inclusive culture in education requires a commitment to continuous learning and professional development. Earlier, Waitoller and Artiles (2013) also emphasised the need for ongoing professional development to support educators in implementing inclusive practices. The authors suggested that professional development should concentrate on enhancing educators' knowledge and skills regarding cultural responsiveness, inclusion, and social justice.

Mangope et al. (2013) previously explored the relationship between school culture and inclusive education in South African schools. The study's findings revealed that a positive school culture that values diversity and inclusion was associated with improved academic outcomes for students with special educational needs. Additionally, the study found that a positive school culture was linked to improved teacher attitudes towards inclusive education. Similarly, Hodge and Elliott (2013) conducted a study to examine the relationship between school culture and the inclusion of all students in mainstream schools. The research

revealed that a positive school culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusion was linked to the successful inclusion of students with special educational needs. Moreover, teachers who supported inclusive education positively impacted school culture and the inclusion of all students.

Further evidence presented in the findings of a meta-analysis of studies on inclusive education and school culture (Ainscow, 2020) highlighted that school culture was a critical factor in the success of inclusive education. The findings revealed that a positive school culture that values diversity and inclusion was associated with improved learning outcomes for all students, including those with special educational needs. Harris et al. (2020) also investigated the relationship between school culture and implementing inclusive practices in schools, finding that a positive school culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusion was associated with the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Both studies noted that school leaders are crucial in creating a positive school culture that supports inclusive education.

Despite the growing body of research on developing inclusive culture in schools, there are still challenges to address. One critical challenge is confronting systemic biases and inequalities that can perpetuate exclusionary practices (Cologon, 2019). Thus, highlighting the importance of addressing these biases and the need for teachers to be trained to recognise and challenge them. Moreover, research indicates that changing the school culture is a crucial step towards making schools more responsive to differences and promoting the success of all students (Ainscow, 2020). Several factors have been identified to impact this change, including staff relationships (McMaster, 2015), school policies, allocation of students (mixed-ability or streaming), and the principal's attitude and support (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Recognising that school change is a gradual process is crucial, as is contextual, collaborative learning for fostering the development of inclusive cultures in schools (Walton et al., 2022).

Changing the school culture can lead to dissonance (McMaster, 2015), allowing students, teachers, and schools to challenge their existing values and beliefs and adopt more inclusive ones through shared negotiation (Jarvis et al., 2020). Hargreaves (2019) emphasises the importance of viewing teaching as a cultural practice to develop effective strategies for enhancing teaching and learning. However, changing behaviour and convincing people to act in new ways pose significant challenges in altering the school culture. Woodcock and Woolfson (2019), building on previous research by Alborno and Gaad (2014), McMaster (2015), and Paliokosta and Blandford (2010), identified limited resources, inadequate professional development opportunities, time constraints, and a lack of staff collaboration as

the main barriers to achieving inclusive cultural change. Nonetheless, research suggests that collaboration (Eaker & Keating, 2008), supported by school leaders who prioritise building and maintaining positive relationships (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013), value diversity, and provide professional learning and support for staff (Fullan & Quinn, 2015), is fundamental (Carrington et al., 2022) to develop an inclusive school culture. By addressing the needs of all learners and fostering a culture of inclusivity in the learning environment, teachers can help ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

2.6.   Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the concept of inclusive education and the challenges and benefits associated with its implementation. While policies and standards have been developed globally to promote inclusive learning environments, empirical evidence of implementation is still being determined. There are still challenges to address, such as confronting systemic biases and inequalities that can perpetuate exclusionary practices. The literature highlights the critical role of teacher attitudes, effective contextually based leadership, and inclusive culture in promoting inclusivity in schools. It provides an overview of strategies that can be used to implement inclusive pedagogy, including quality scaffolding, personalising learning, and alternative curricula to support learning. Overall, the review emphasises the need for ongoing professional development, staff relationships, school policies, and principal support to foster inclusive cultures in schools.

The significance of factors regarding leadership, teachers, school system, policy, and legislation in influencing the development of inclusive practice is well established in the literature. To guide the study's focus towards answering the overarching research question, a conceptual framework was developed based on these concepts (see Figure 2.1). The goal was to illuminate insights from a College that had undergone disruptive processes including changes in leadership, school improvement, and legislative requirements, and investigate how these processes could enable the development of more inclusive practice for students with special educational needs.

The outermost circle of the conceptual framework represents the external policy and legislative requirements that impose mandatory commitments and create challenges for school systems, leaders, and teachers. The inner orange circle depicts the disruptive processes that were observed at the College due to a change in principal and improvement processes. The three inner light blue circles illustrate the impact of these disruptive processes on cultural changes to the College's systems, leadership, and teachers. Finally, the grey arrow at the

centre of the framework demonstrates how these concepts are interconnected and can lead to contextual changes in practice for students with special educational needs who are represented by the inner most circle coloured white, with orange dots.

Through its visual representation and its embedded theoretical constructs, the framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the contextual changes in educational settings that can effect practices for students with special educational needs. Furthermore, the framework's emphasis on the interlinked components allows for a holistic approach to addressing the challenges that school systems, leaders, and teachers encounter in meeting their mandatory commitments.

Figure 2.1

Conceptual Framework
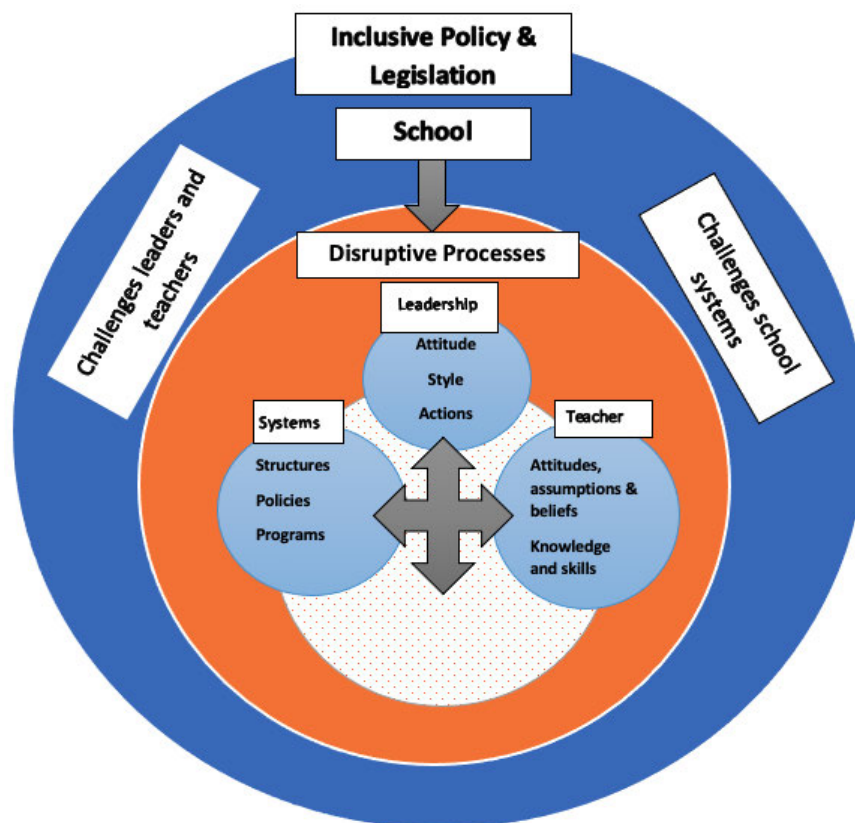
The study's research approach and design were informed by the conceptual framework, with the aim of utilising a qualitative, ethnographic approach to investigate the contextual factors that affect the development of inclusive practices at the College in response to the overarching research question. A detailed description of the research methodology is presented in the next chapter, Chapter Three.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

Chapter Three provides an overview of the research approach and design. The chapter is structured into three sections. The initial section presents a comprehensive view of the theoretical paradigm, the researcher's world view that impacted the research approach, the research idea, and the focus of the study, along with an explanation of how the research question evolved. The subsequent section examines the research design, which details the data collection methods, research context, and participants involved in the study. The final segment of the chapter highlights the researcher's role in the research, data analysis procedures, and ethical issues that emerged during the study to ensure its trustworthiness and validity.

3.1.1. Theoretical Overview

Willis (2007) defines paradigms as frameworks that guide research and practice in a particular field. For the purpose of this study, the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm (Creswell, 2014) was selected to investigate teacher practice during and two years after the selected College experienced disruption caused by leadership change, school improvement, and external policy requirements. According to Creswell (2014), social constructivists hold the belief that individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work and develop personalised meanings of their experiences based on social interactions with others. This approach allowed for the examination of culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social-life world, as noted by Crotty (1998). However, the description of this socially constructed reality was multi-layered and complex because participant behaviour was not always clearly understood, resulting in the need for interpretation, analysis, or construal of meaning (Schwandt, 2004, as cited in Freeman, 2011).

Within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, there exist several theoretical orientations. For this qualitative study, a holistic outlook was adopted, utilising the tools of ethnographic research to pay close attention to specific aspects of the study (Wills, 2007). These aspects included the research site, participants, primary and complimentary data collection methods, and the process for data collection. This model, adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994) and presented in Table 3.1, facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the problem, enabled rich descriptive findings, and allowed for the answering of the overarching research question.

Table 3.1

Aspects Included in this Qualitative Study

Number	Aspects	Description specific to this study
1	The setting	This research took place in a mainstream secondary College setting.
2	The actors	The participants were purposefully chosen and consisted of teachers with middle leader roles, some teachers and teaching assistants who had taught/worked in the College during the time of disruption; had experience of having and/or working with students who had special needs in their class. The College principal, deputy principal of teaching and learning and the coordinator of the education support. Additionally, some parent communication was included.
3	The events	College document review. Interviews (Conducted over a two-week period towards the end of the improvement process. Transcribed and returned to participants the following week for approval then analysed). Compiling of a reflective journal (during and after the disruptions when time allowed).
4	The process	School documentation was reviewed. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The transcripts were returned to the interviewees and checked for correctness. A reflective journal was kept by the researcher throughout the study.

Note. Adapted from Miles & Huberman, 1994, as cited in *Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.), by J. W. Creswell, 2014, p. 224. Copyright 2014 by Sage Publications.

This research question, as proposed by Merriam (1998), resonated with my worldview, as it emphasises the importance of understanding the significant aspects of the study and promoting interaction with individuals in their natural secondary College environment. The study aims to purposefully collect data and provide contextualised information by employing an ethnographic research design grounded in fieldwork. This approach aligns with my belief that a meaningful understanding of others' behaviour can be achieved through in-depth immersion and exploration of their lived realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

3.1.2. The Researchers World View that Impacted the Research Approach

College documents evidence a history of supporting marginalised students, with a particular focus on those with special educational needs. However, it has been my experience that transitioning students with special educational needs from the primary to the secondary setting poses challenges in implementing inclusive practices (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). For instance, parents tend to have high expectations that their child with special educational needs will access the same academic and social environment as their peers, despite the complexities of mainstream secondary schooling (Shevlin et al., 2009). As the Education Support Centre coordinator and leader of learning for Diversity Education, I observed that students with special educational needs were being excluded from mainstream classrooms and College events, despite efforts to support teachers to include them. With increasing enrolment of students with special educational needs, concerns arose about meeting their needs equitably in mainstream settings in line with policy and funding requirements.

Achieving inclusive practices requires a shift in mindset, which is a complex process (Ainscow, 2018; Forlin et al., 2020). The cyclic review report created an opportunity for me to investigate the College's culture and identify ways to transform it so that every student, including those with special educational needs, could be included and experience success. This marked the commencement of my role as an insider researcher and study participant, engaging in the collection and presentation of data to address the overarching research question that emerged:

What can be learned for enabling the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs from a school that has undergone two years of disruptive processes?

And the four sub-questions that were devised to answer this overarching research question and guide the study:

1. What structures and processes are in place and/or have been disrupted that may influence teacher practice?
2. What challenges and opportunities emerge for supporting students with special educational needs?
3. What significant enabling factors have impacted change within the school?
4. How has teacher praxis working with students who have special educational needs been implicated during the period of disruptive processes?

3.1.3. Research Design

The aim of this research is to explore ways, based on one researcher's experience, to enhance the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs during and after two years of disruptions caused by a change in leadership, school improvement, and external policy requirements. To achieve this, a qualitative research methodology was employed, underpinned by the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, and framed by an ethnographic approach. This approach facilitated the exploration of the cultural context of the College and enabled comprehensive insights into participant thinking and behaviours. Ethnographic research is distinguished by several features that differentiate it from other qualitative research methods (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Coffey, 2021). In the present study, these features include:

1. The research takes place in the field and as insider researcher I was actively involved within the context. People's behaviour and actions are studied within their natural environment instead of pre-set conditions. All participants in this research were staff and were studied within the natural context of the College. The advantage for me as a staff member, was the opportunity to participate in the unfolding of events as they happened and share in the community experience. Thus, gain a deeper insight the impact of the changes had on both mine and participant practice.

2. Data are obtained from various sources. Access to College documents (policies, procedures, plans, reports, curriculum programs, individual teacher planning, individual student plans and reports, enrolment interviews, and NCCD data), together with data gathered from interviews, observations, and informal conversations with staff, provided me with a holistic and comprehensive, picture of emerging changes in practice.

3. Data collection is relatively unstructured as ethnographic researchers do not follow a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start. Furthermore, interpretation is made through analysis rather than being built into the data collection, such as in questionnaires used in other methods. This gave me flexibility to explore and make sense of the impact of change at the College in various ways. For example, often informal conversations would clarify a behaviour or action that I had noted during participant observation.

4. Ethnographic research focuses on a few cases, a single setting, or a group of people, often over a prolonged period. The purpose is to facilitate in-depth study. This research was conducted at one site during and after two years of disruptions and focused on the impact of changes to one group of participants' practice specific to one group of students. This timeframe enabled me to gain a detailed understanding, a real sense of the "then and now" that would have been difficult to achieve using snapshot research methods (such as surveys or one-time interviews).

5. In data analysis, meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and behaviour are interpreted in relation to local and perhaps even broader social contexts. Verbal descriptions, explanations, and theories are created, while quantitative and statistical analyses are less critical. Ethnographic presentation methods allowed me to present empirical findings in a meaningful and creative way. For example, I created vignettes by weaving together all the data, which depicted both mine and the participants authentic, lived experiences. From which, a model (see Figure 7.1) to support the practice development of inclusive schooling emerged from the study findings.

3.1.4. Research Context

This study was conducted at a religious co-educational Pre-kindergarten to Year Twelve College located in a large metropolitan area in Australia, which offers an integrated model of inclusion. Specifically, the study took place on the secondary campus where an Education Support Centre is situated. The College has a history of significant organisational changes since its establishment as a single-sex girls' school in the 1950s. It has since merged with two other schools to become a co-educational institution providing education from Pre-kindergarten to Year Twelve. In 1989-1990, an Education Support Centre was established on site, which impacted the development of inclusive practices. Students with special educational needs attend the Education Support Centre for Numeracy, Literacy and Life skills, while mainstream classes are attended for Pastoral Care groups, Religion, Sport, and Electives. Despite this approach being contrary to the inclusive principles of teaching all students together in the same classroom (Cologon, 2019), it remains highly sought after by parents, as evidenced by the increase in enrolments.

The study site's focus was specifically on the year seven to twelve campus, where the Education Support Centre is located. As of 2016, the College had 1,900 students enrolled,

with a considerable number of students coming from surrounding areas with high socio-economic status. The College had 237 staff members at that time, including 135 teachers and 102 non-teaching staff. In 2015, the College underwent significant changes, including the retirement of the principal who had been "at the helm" for a considerable time and the appointment of a new principal with successful experience in transitioning his previous school to a co-educational Year Seven to Twelve campus.

Following a cyclic review commissioned in 2016, the potential risk factors that could impact the provision of education at the College were identified, including a "comfort culture" regarding teaching and learning. As a result, a recommendation was made to investigate the learning culture with the aim of ensuring all students had the opportunity to become successful learners. Interestingly, the cyclic review found that the Education Support Centre was "student-centred and caring" and provided evidence of tailored learning programs and opportunities for individual students to reach their full potential (information shared confidentially through communication with the College).

In response to the cyclic review, the new principal initiated a process for improvement, forming a partnership with the University of Southern Queensland's Leadership Research International (LRI) group to adopt the Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools (IDEAS) project. IDEAS, a school revitalisation initiative was developed by the University of Southern Queensland Leadership Research International (LRI) group initially in conjunction with the Queensland Department of Education in 1997 (Crowther et al., 2008). The project is designed for school leaders who wish to improve schools through enhancing and sustaining success in teacher professionalism, in community support, and in student achievement (Conway, 2015). This intent is underpinned in the IDEAS team vision: "To inspire schools to engage in journeys of self-discovery which will ensure that they achieve sustainable excellence in teaching and learning" (https://lri.usq.edu.au/work-with-us/school-improvement-model-ideas/). To date it has been successfully implemented in over 470 schools across Australia and internationally with only a few not following through with the whole process. Significantly, recognition of the success of IDEAS has been received from "Chesterton and Duignan (2004), Ng and Chew (2008), Robson, Lock and Pilkington (2009), and Andrews and the USQ-LRI Research Team (2009)" (as cited in Conway, 2015, p. 30). The IDEAS project is built on five principles of practice:

- Teachers are the key

- Professional learning is the key to professional revitalisation

- Success breeds success

- No blame

- Alignment of school successes is a collective responsibility

and four constructs:

- A five-phase, three- to four-year revitalization processes *[ideas – initiating, discovering, envisioning, actioning, and sustaining*], supported by . . . [resource materials].

- A construction of parallel leadership roles and functions that recognises meta strategic principalship and teacher leadership.

- An established framework for organisational alignment; and

- A three-dimensional framework for expert pedagogical practice. (Crowther, 2011, p. 19, as cited in Conway, 2015, pp. 30-31)

A process for the development of a framework for school improvement at the College was embarked upon in April 2016.

Additionally, the College had to meet accountability legislative requirements (NCCD, 2023) which involved providing evidence of personalised learning experiences for students with special educational needs. Given the proposed shift in NCCD data to inform funding and the possibility of the data being included in future College audits, meeting these requirements was critical.

3.1.5. *Participants*

In keeping with a qualitative, ethnographic approach participants were purposely selected to help me understand the research problem and answer the research question (Creswell, 2014) and who would provide multiple perspectives and represent a broad range of staff from across the College. In addition, they had all experienced the disruptions and had responsibility for meeting students individual needs which left them accountable for personalising learning under NCCD legislation. This was the given background of the study.

The process for choosing teachers some of whom were also middle leaders and teaching assistants was carried out using the following criteria:

Teachers / Middle leaders who:

- Had taught in the College during the time of disruption.

- Had a student with a diagnosed special need in their class.
- We're willing to share their classroom teaching experiences whilst teaching the student with special needs.

Teaching assistants who:

- Had worked in the College during the time of disruption.
- Supported a student with a diagnosed special need.
- We're willing to share their classroom experiences supporting a student with Special needs.

Other key participants in the study included the principal, the vice principal, and the coordinator of the Education Support Centre (also middle leader). The principal being new to the school was part of the disruption and brought about further disruption having identified a need for change and instigating improvement. Therefore, gaining an insight into the strategic direction of the College and plan for improvement was crucial for me in determining leadership support for inclusion.

The vice-principal (formerly deputy principal teaching and learning) had been at the College for four months prior to the new principal's arrival. She led the improvement process (IDEAS), in conjunction with a newly appointed improvement team who represented a broad range of staff from across the College. The purpose of the process was to develop a framework for improvement. To this end, the team worked collaboratively with the whole staff to build capacity to achieve this. A College vision and pedagogical framework for learning was created and embedded across the whole College community - Pre-kindergarten to Year Twelve. As such it was crucial that I explored her thinking in terms of leadership of improvement and development of teaching and learning.

The coordinator of the Education Support Centre had a wealth of knowledge and experience supporting staff and teaching students with special educational needs. She advocated tirelessly for them to be included, constantly offering her guidance and support to her mainstream colleagues. Given this her interpretations of teacher practice offered a unique perspective from a specialist teacher. The characteristics and number of the research participants are set out in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Staff Participant Characteristics

Role	Subject/Department area	Number of teachers	Number of teachers being interviewed	Years working at school	Years teaching
Principal	English	1	1	2	30
Deputy principal	Science	2	1	2.5	25
*ESC coordinator / teacher	Special needs	3	1	15	30
Teacher	Religion	8	2	5 – 30	5 - 30
*Teacher	Sport	8	2	2 – 10	3- 30
*Teacher	Pastoral care Group	8	2	2 – 30	5- 30
*Teacher	Design and Technology	4	2	5 -7	10 - 15
Teacher	Food Technology	3	1	6 -10	5 - 30
Teacher	Art / Dance / Drama	6	3	2- 10	2 - 20
Teacher assistants	N/A	14	4	2 -10	N/A

* Includes teachers with middle leader roles.

3.1.6. *Data Collection*

The study utilised an ethnographic research approach, which involved conducting a close examination of the participants within their natural work environment at the College to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As a participant observer, I was able to collect data from various sources while maintaining a professional distance as recommended in the literature (Bickman & Rog, 2008). The primary data sources consisted of interview audio recordings and transcripts and observations and informal conversations recorded in my reflective journal, considered by Hoey (2014) as an integral aspect of ethnographic research. Additionally, College documents such as policies and procedures, plans and reports, curriculum programs, individual teacher planning, student individual plans and reports, enrolment interviews, and NCCD data were also examined to provide insight into the College social practices and environment (Wood et al. 2020). Notably, when time allowed data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection, as advocated in the literature (Merriam, 1998), facilitating immediate reflection, and ensuring the credibility of interpretations. The utilisation of an ethnographic approach facilitated the

in-depth exploration of the contextual factors influencing inclusive practice at the College, offering valuable insights into the experiences of the participants.

3.1.7   College Documents

Recent studies have emphasised the importance of rigorously analysing qualitative data to ensure trustworthiness and credibility in research (Braun & Clarke, 2021; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). This study employed a rigorous approach recommended by Wood et al. (2020) to ensure reliability in the research process. For example, I began the analysis by selecting documents based on broad topic areas relevant to the study and their potential to answer the overarching research question. These documents included College policies and procedures, annual College improvement plans and reports, curriculum programs, individual teacher planning, student individual plans and reports, enrolment interviews, and NCCD data. The information provided by these documents enabled me to gain a holistic view of the College's social practice and environment over time.

Despite the sheer volume of documents chosen, the process of analysing them proved to be worthwhile as it provided me with a holistic and complete picture of the emerging changes in practice at the College. To gain a deeper understanding of the College documents, I repeatedly read them and made notes on the patterns found in the data in relation to the research-sub-questions. Emerging themes from the data were identified, such as leadership commitment to change and an inclusive intent which were reflected in the language used in the documents. I drew on specific issues that evolved from the documents and used them to inform and guide the interviews, which, in turn, helped me to answer the research-sub-questions.

During the subsequent analysis, I matched words and phrases from the College documents to those found in the interview transcripts, anecdotal notes, and reflective journal entries. This matching process helped me form initial codes and collate data related to each research-sub-question. By identifying common themes across the codes and generating sub-themes, I was able to organise the data and facilitate the emergence of two overall themes. To ensure accuracy and completeness, I performed a final review by carefully rereading all the data, including the relevant College documents, and cross-checking them to the sub-themes.

The College documents analysed in this study provided a rich and diverse source of material that offered insights into the College context in which the participants worked. The approach used to analyse the College documents provided a comprehensive and nuanced

understanding of the emerging changes in practice at the College, as supported by Wood et al. (2020).

3.1.8. Participant Interviews

One of the most important data-gathering techniques for ethnographers is the interview (Bickman & Rog, 2008). As an insider researcher, I recognised the advantage of having established trust and rapport with the staff. I acknowledged my potential biases and delimited them by using semi-structured interviews that were adapted according to the different roles and statuses of each participant (Appendix A). For instance, the questions for the principal and vice principal were different from those of other staff members. This approach allowed me to interact naturally with participants and gain a better understanding of their beliefs, motivations, and behaviours than any other methodology (Hammersley, 1992; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

To further reduce my biases, the interviews took on an interactive mode where participants reconstructed the past, interpreted the present, and predicted the future (Merriam, 1998). This approach allowed for discussions to address specific issues that had evolved from written documents. For example, participant responses helped me to better understand their perceptions and interpretations of the world, which put into a larger context what I had observed and experienced in practice (Creswell & Poth, 2016). According to Flick (2014), interviews are intentionally designed to enable both interviewer and participant to discuss topics that interest the interviewer. Leveraging my insider perspective and understanding of the community (Bickman & Rog, 2008), enabled me to effectively address the research question (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Scott et al., 2007).

Nineteen staff members were individually interviewed over a two week period towards the end of the improvement process at a time and place of their choosing within the College and were offered relief cover to participate in a forty-five-minute interview. Prior to the interviews, I provided participants with a clear understanding of the research aims and objectives, as well as an overview of the intended framework for the interviews. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and then returned to participants the following week to review, amend, or withdraw as desired after which they were analysed. While some participants initially appeared cautious with their responses (McCracken, 1998), none of them made any edits to their transcripts. However, some participants admitted to experiencing intellectual and emotional challenges (Sikes, 2005), while others found the process to be stressful (Creswell, 2014).

3.1.9. Reflective Journal

As an ethnographic researcher, I recognise the importance of reflection in the research process. Human beings have the capacity for self-reflection, allowing them to examine their actions and thoughts. In the context of insider research, reflection is considered a central concept and a valuable tool for processing data and reflecting on one's thinking, as noted by Davis et al. (2014).

In my fieldwork, I utilised a reflective journal to record observations of events and settings, informal conversations, emails, and phone calls including some parent communication. These reflections served as data in their own right, forming an essential part of the interpretative process (Braun & Clarke, 2019). By documenting my reflections on identities, roles, and relationships, I was able to work towards trustworthiness and authentic inquiry (Morrow, 2005). Further, it is important to acknowledge that subjectivity plays a role in the reflection process, both for the researcher and those being studied (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

During and after the disruptions, when time allowed I recorded observations and results, drawing tentative conclusions that were revisited and refined over time. The reflective journal helped me to discover new insights, develop preliminary understandings, and eventually reach conclusions (Hoey, 2014). In doing so, I was able to maintain a reflexive and critical stance towards my research and address any potential biases that may have arisen in the analysis.

This study aimed to investigate the influence of disruptive processes on participants' practices through the application of constructivist and ethnographic approaches. As such, the Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase thematic analysis framework was employed to facilitate the analysis process (see Table 3.3). The framework was then adapted in Chapter Six for the analysis. The adaption (see Table 6.1) involved adding a third column to describe the data analysis process and reworded parts of Braun and Clarke's description to accurately reflect what I had done. This approach enabled me to break down the analysis into manageable steps, leading to the emergence of themes that were firmly grounded in the data. By using the framework, the credibility and dependability of the findings were ensured (Kuckartz, 2013).

Table 3.3

Thematic Analysis Framework

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarisation yourself with the data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and Rereading all the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systemic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, Gathering data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Note: Using thematic analysis in psychology by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 2006, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 87. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

As this study aimed to capture the meanings, interpretations, and experiences of the research participants. I considered framework analysis, proposed by Lather (1986), as an appropriate system to guide this investigation. The primary objective of this research was to describe and interpret the effects of changes to practice within the cultural context of the College. To achieve this objective, the current study employed the key features of framework analysis, as outlined in the broad overview provided by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983). These features were used to guide the analysis process and included:

1. A clear structure and repeatable process to interpret and analyse the data.
2. Flexibility inherent in the framework allowed me to simultaneously investigate a range of rich data and undertake ongoing reflection and make additions and amendments between and within collection stages.
3. A comprehensive view of all data which was organised and labelled, and the various existing relationships and themes used to present accounts of participant perspectives on the changes and impact on practice.

4. Collated data was coded, and it enabled me to be reflexive and include my role within the research focus. Hence, I was then able to produce and justify my account of the impact of changes to practice.

5. This process further led to the identification of emergent themes and the development of a model aimed at supporting the practice development of inclusive schooling.

3.2. The Application of the Framework Analysis Approach

3.2.1. Phase One Familiarisation with the Data

This phase aimed to identify patterns in the data that were relevant to answering the research-sub-questions. As an insider researcher, I was actively involved within the College context, which allowed me to closely observe the participants in their natural work environment and become familiar with the data as I collected it. I recorded my observations and informal conversations in my reflective journal and listened to individual participant experiences during interviews. In addition, I read College documents (policies and procedures, plans and reports, curriculum programs, individual teacher planning, student individual plans and reports, enrolment interviews, and NCCD data). Consequently, I approached the analysis with prior knowledge of the qualitative data and initial analytic thoughts in relation to the research-sub-questions.

However, an inductive approach was used for the formal analysis to ensure that the findings emerged from the ethnographic data. First, I transcribed interviews that were read repeatedly (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and checked for accuracy several times against the audio recordings. Second, I wrote my anecdotal analytical thoughts and points of interest over the interview transcripts. Third, I repeatedly read the observations and informal conversations recorded in my reflective journal, and fourth, I repeatedly read the information gleaned from the College documents.

3.2.2. Phase Two Generating Initial Codes

The purpose of this phase was to systematically analyse the significant features of the patterned data observed in phase one and generate initial codes from various data sources. To achieve this objective, a comprehensive search was conducted to identify meanings that were relevant to the experiences of both the participants and the researcher regarding the perceived impact of disruptions on practice. The initial analysis involved scrutinising the interview transcripts, anecdotal notes, and reflective journal entries for keywords and phrases that

reflected the development of inclusive practices and were pertinent to answering the research-sub-questions. These relevant words and phrases were then highlighted in yellow and outlined in red pen and matched with similar phrases and words from other qualitative data sets.

3.2.3. *Phase Three Searching for Themes*

Next, the analysis shifted to searching for common themes across the codes. I began this process by collating the codes and coded data generated in phase two as they related to each research-sub-question. This enabled me to review all the data relevant to each research-sub-question and identify areas where codes appeared to cluster or overlap to generate potential sub-themes.

3.2.4. *Phase Four Reviewing the Themes*

In this phase, the generated sub-themes were re-examined to ensure they accurately reflected the meaning of the coded data and the entire data set. This involved a repetitive process of carefully re-reading all the data and cross checking it to the sub-themes. Findings from this process enabled me to formulate distinctive and coherent sub-themes and themes that captured the overall tone of the data in relation to the overarching research question.

3.2.5. *Phase Five Defining and Naming the Themes*

This phase focused on the continual refinement of each theme to capture the overall story the analysis tells and generating clear definitions and names for each theme. This involved organising the collated data extracts for each theme into a coherent and consistent account with an accompanying narrative.

3.2.6. *Phase Six Producing the Report*

This final phase of the analysis aimed to find compelling extract examples to evidence the themes within the data. This involved identifying extracts that would provide evidence of the themes and make an argument to the analysis of the overarching research question:

What can be learned for enabling the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs from a school that has undergone two years of disruptive processes?

3.2.7. *Insider Researcher in the Research*

As an insider researcher in this study, I was part of the group that I was studying. This provided me with social and cultural knowledge that enabled me to understand the group's

values and practices, and to belong to the group (Charmaz, 2014). Being an insider researcher gave me a unique perspective that an outsider researcher would not have. I had access to the group and was able to observe behaviours and interactions that would not have been visible to an outsider (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Being an insider researcher was crucial in this qualitative study as it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the group under study. I was able to use my knowledge and understanding of the group to ask more nuanced questions and to interpret the data in a more meaningful way. My insider status also provided valuable insights into the group's culture, practice, and values, which informed the research process and enhanced the validity and reliability of the research findings (Rooney, 2005).

Research has shown that being an insider researcher has advantages in building rapport and trust with participants, resulting in the collection of rich data. For example, Salmons (2015) found that an insider researcher's personal experience in the group under study allowed them to build rapport with participants quickly. Similarly, Labaree (2002) found that insider researchers' shared experiences and cultural understanding facilitated access and trust with participants.

In this study, my insider status as a staff member at the College provided me with access, entry, and common ground to begin the research. Being an insider allowed me to develop trust and rapport with the participants, resulting in the collection of rich and detailed data. As an insider, participants viewed me as one of them, which enhanced their willingness to share their experiences with me, resulting in data that was immediate and tangible.

However, being an insider researcher also had its challenges. Conflicting interactions with colleagues or group members could have affected my relationship with participants (Hodkinson, 2005), and my insider status could have made it difficult to remain objective. Additionally, I could have faced ethical dilemmas if I had uncovered sensitive or confidential information that could compromise my relationship with the group.

Although there were some challenges, my status as an insider researcher proved advantageous for this study. With my shared experiences and cultural understanding, I was able to establish rapport and gain trust with the participants quickly, resulting in the collection of valuable data. Additionally, my personal involvement in the group under study allowed me to access the participants more easily and establish a deeper level of trust with them.

3.2.8. *Validity in Qualitative Research*

Validity is a crucial factor in successful qualitative research. It is defined as the extent to which an account accurately represents social phenomena (Hammersley, 1992). Without validity, research is judged worthless (Cohen et al., 2017). However, not all accounts of qualitative research are equally helpful, credible, or legitimate (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Total validity is impossible to achieve for any research model (Lecompte & Schensul, 2010), and the validity of insider research, particularly in qualitative studies, has come under much scrutiny, with the insider researcher's biases and assumptions thought to threaten the validity of findings (Rooney, 2005).

On the other hand, some scholars view researcher subjectivity as a strength and an expected part of research analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Ethnography, a valid research method, can accommodate the researcher's subjectivity in the routines of a social environment to discover its specific and unpredictable patterns. Ethnographers' close and prolonged interactions with people in their daily lives empower them to understand participants' beliefs, motivations, and behaviours more than any other methodology (Davis et al., 2014).

As an insider researcher, my contribution was valuable in gaining insight and meaning from observations and interactions with others. However, I also made an effort to respect and understand the participants by immersing myself in the culture and bracketing my personal biases. To reduce threats to the research validity, I employed several strategies, these included:

1. I prioritised recording observations and interactions with others. I made short notes in the field and expanded upon them soon after, checking the clarity of my interpretations with participants as necessary. Recording observations in a journal enabled me to reread entries and make ongoing reflections. Through these reflections, I thought about identities, roles, and relationships, which helped me work towards credible and authentic inquiry.

2. I derived educational and historical contextual data from the documentation review, which contributed to evidence of changes to practice during and after the two years of disruptions, adding authenticity to the findings.

3. I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants who were familiar with me, and they appeared comfortable and talked openly during the interviews. I audio-recorded the interviews and then transcribed them. The recordings allowed me to listen to participant voices repeatedly and record them verbatim. Transcripts were returned to the participants to check for accuracy and to amend or withdraw from the process as desired. Diverse

viewpoints were then combined and analysed in the context of the research study question (Kuckartz, 2013). Thus, contributing to the authenticity of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and redressing any perceived imbalance in power that may have existed between me, the researcher, and the participants.

4. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) argue that the validity or invalidity of data can never be determined; what matters are the inferences drawn from them. Therefore, I constructed meaning from observations, participant accounts, and other data through a systematic process of sifting, charting, and sorting materials according to critical issues and themes. This process helped to establish the credibility of my research and was crucial for ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings (O'Brien et al., 2014).

3.2.9. *Delimitations*

To answer the research question, I utilised delimitations in this ethnographic study. Delimitations involve setting boundaries on research by deciding what to include and exclude. For instance, the study site had many students with diverse needs, but my past experiences working at the site and concerns that current education systems are failing students with special educational needs (Cologon, 2019) informed the decision to focus on one group of students with special educational needs and who were known to me.

In addition, the participants included only teachers who had worked at the College during the disruptions and had a student with special needs in their class, as well as teaching assistants who had also worked at the College during the disruptions and had supported students with special educational needs. It was assumed that these participants would openly share their experiences about the changes and the impact on their practice, and that the information shared would be an honest recollection of their experiences.

While acknowledging that the participants and students were unrepresentative of the entire staff and student body, their inclusion narrowed the research focus and made answering the research question more manageable and relevant. Delimitations allowed me to put boundaries on the study and ensure that the research question was answered in a clear and concise manner.

3.3. Ethics and Political Stance

A primary consideration in any study is to be aware of the ethical and political aspects of the participants and setting. As an insider, I was a recognised staff member and research participant. During interviews, barriers came down, and everyday experiences and

understandings between the participants and me were shared freely. Bickman and Rog (2008) draw attention to the sensitivity of the information ethnographers may obtain from work colleagues during such situations and the code of ethics specifying "First and foremost that the ethnographer does no harm to the people or the community under study" (pp. 44-45). Similarly, Seidman (1998) highlighted the need to protect the vulnerability of the participants. Hence, the research had to be conducted in a responsible and morally just manner (Gray, 2009). As such, I was careful not to appear surprised or offended by participants' responses so as not to hurt their feelings.

In addition, as an insider, I was also privy to certain participants' successes, failures, and foibles (Edwards, 2002; Lee & Baskerville, 2013). I was committed to safeguarding their welfare and protection and ensured all collateral information was excluded to prevent them or the College from being identified. Apart from the principal and vice principal, participant narrative voices were merged to create composite characters representing each group and pseudonyms used throughout. Furthermore, all participants had the opportunity to check, amend or withdraw their interview transcripts without repercussion.

Ethical clearance for the proposed study was obtained from the University of Southern Queensland (Appendix B), research approval sought from the College principal, and consent gained from interview participants and some parents to include their communication that was relevant to the study. Prior to consent being gained information was shared with potential participants and included the purpose and aims of the research, how the research was to be conducted, the participants' rights and the researcher's responsibilities. Potential risks were identified and how these would be managed. The potential benefit of the research was highlighted in terms of potential contribution and knowledge, to the development of inclusive practices within the College. The University of Southern Queensland values and principles of respect, trust, integrity, and fairness were upheld throughout. In addition, as required by the University, primary data from the study is stored for a minimum of five years in my personal one drive account. Secondary data gleaned from a review of College documents is stored on my single access, password protected computer and backed up to my apple iCloud account stored on an external hard drive which is password protected. As researcher, I will be the only one who has access to this information. This will ensure I meet the security obligations I have as a researcher, under the Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research (The National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018).

3.4. Summary

Chapter Three outlined the research approach and design that was employed to guide the investigation. The research was grounded in qualitative methods and underpinned by the Constructivist/Interpretivist paradigm, using an ethnographic approach to frame the study. This approach facilitated a comprehensive exploration of participant thinking and behaviours and illustrated changes in the cultural context of the College in response to the research question, which focused on the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs in a school that has undergone two years of disruptive processes.

Chapters Four and Five present the empirical findings of the study, using vignettes to portray my experience as researcher, study participant, leader of learning for Diversity Education and middle leader also the everyday lived experiences of the participants during the two years of disruptions. This approach allows for a detailed and nuanced understanding of the impact of the disruptions on the development of inclusive practices and provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by educational leaders and teachers in creating an inclusive educational environment.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1.   Introduction

This study investigated the impact on the development of inclusive practice for students with special educational needs during disruptions in a secondary College influenced by leadership change, a school improvement process, and legislative requirements of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD). In the true spirit of ethnography, the empirical findings of this study have been crafted into a meaningful ethnographic narrative by weaving journal entries and interview data into vignettes. Explanatory texts and excerpts from participants have been seamlessly integrated throughout the narrative to provide further depth and understanding. In addition to the empirical findings, data from College documents have been implicitly utilised to complement the insights gained from the primary data sources, enhancing the overall richness and depth of the study. Chapters Four and Five focus on my experience as researcher, study participant, leader of Diversity Education, and middle leader and the experiences of the other research participants.

To put the story into context, the chapter begins with a prologue outlining the origins of the Special Education Program at the College and details of my employment there before the disruptions started. My story is then told in two parts. The first part focuses on the arrival of the new principal, the researcher's social interactions with staff during the College review and the improvement process, and distributive leadership in action at a typical staff professional learning community meeting where from a College vision and learning framework would later emerge.

Part two outlines the developments in inclusive practice over the two-year study. My lived experience and leadership journey is then portrayed through a series of encounters with people and involvement in events while pursuing inclusive improvement. Figure 4.1 serves as a guide to the story using a chronological sequence of before, during, and after the disruptive processes took place. Significant core threads in the story are indicated by the broken lines on the figure.

Figure 4.1

Chronological Sequence of Events Before, During, and After the Disruptive Processes
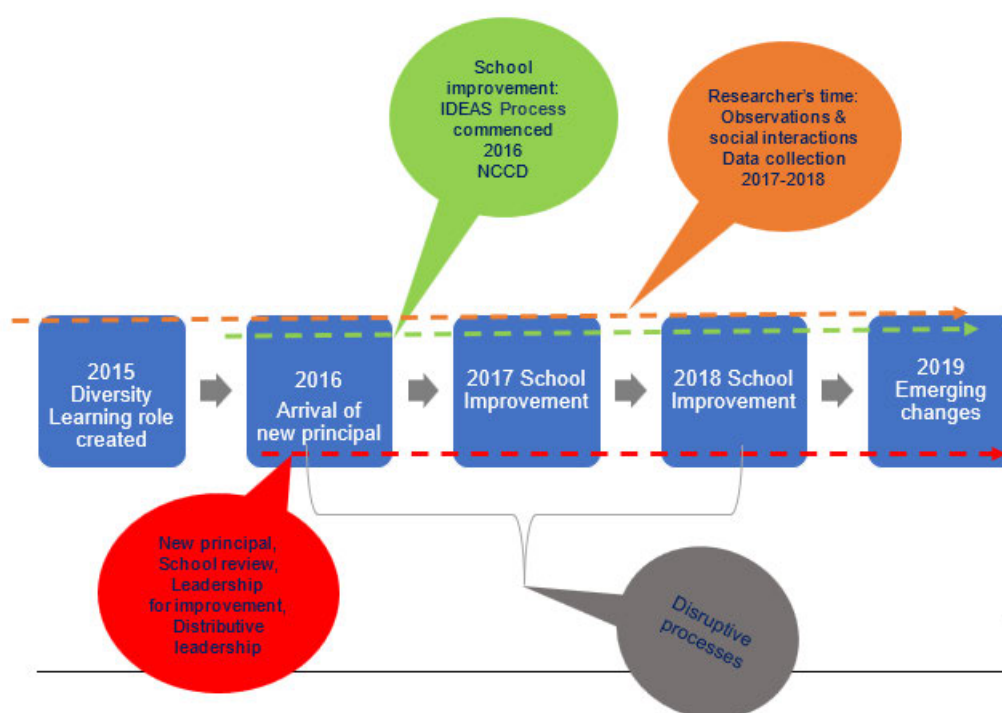
4.2. Prologue

In 2005, three schools amalgamated under the leadership of one principal to form a Prekindergarten - Year Twelve co-educational College. Each school brought a history which was shaped and influenced by the founding efforts of their religious orders. A program for students with special educational needs established by one of the orders was later to be adopted by the new College.

Six years on, in 2011, as an Irish immigrant, specialist teacher, and the researcher in this study, I gained employment at the College as coordinator of the Education Support Centre for students with special educational needs. Passionate about improving students' educational experiences, I worked tirelessly to build the program. Student enrolments and staffing increased year on year in the centre, the result of the College's growing reputation for providing an excellent special education program. Despite this, the inclusion of students with special educational needs into the mainstream classrooms was a constant struggle, and I quickly realised that much more work needed to be done.

In term four, 2014, a new role position, "Head of Diversity Education", became available at the College to be introduced in the following year. The successful candidate would have to oversee three programs, Special Education, Learning Support, and Gifted and

Talented. It attracted much attention and after scanning the job description, I decided it was not for me as I was very content working in the Education Support Centre. In contrast, Mary, my colleague, and learning support coordinator, was keen on a change and applied. Due to a lack of applicants, the position was readvertised, and I was persuaded by senior management to apply. I did so reluctantly and was shocked when I got it and felt guilty that Mary, who wanted the job, was unsuccessful.

With the new role came a new office. What a disappointment! Hidden away at the back end of the College, it was commonly referred to by staff as "the cupboard". It was dull and dreary compared to my bustling, bright and airy Education Support Centre office. I shared this office with my colleague Mary who was reluctant in the beginning but soon came round and spent that year teaching me all about the Learning Support program. Together we set up processes and structures to ensure the College would be compliant under the Government's new emerging legislation NCCD. At the end of that year, the principal of 12 years announced his retirement. Rumour had it a younger principal was taking over and was on a mission to give the College a "shake-up to bring it into the twenty-first century".

4.3. Part One: Enter the New Principal

4.3.1. *Explanatory Text*

The story begins with a vignette that describes the new principal's first formal address to the staff. Staff had been told this principal had done wonderful things at his previous school, and the hope was he would do the same at the College. Unlike the last principal, who was older, set in his ways and a more traditional leader, this new principal was younger and appeared to be more energetic, forward-thinking, and highly enthusiastic. Apparently, he was going to remodel the College into a flagship for twenty-first century schooling.

4.3.2. *Vignette*

Day one, term one, 28th of January 2016, nine o'clock in the morning and some 200 plus staff are packed into a dark, cool auditorium waiting in anticipation for the new principal's first official staff address. Dressed in summer attire, staff look relaxed as they drink tea and coffee and catch up with colleagues after the long summer break. Frances, the vice-principal at the College for over four months, is dressed formally in a black skirt and top, stockings and court shoes contrasted with a fitted grey jacket. She makes her way to the front of the room and stands in silence, facing the staff. Table by table, the talking stops. After welcoming everyone back, she begins the day with the traditional College prayer, then runs

quickly through the program of events. That done, she beckons Frank, the new principal, to the floor and everyone claps.

He is just over six-foot-tall of slender build with light brown neatly cut hair. Well-polished, he is wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt, and blue tie. With an air of confidence about him, he walks behind the podium, picks up the cordless microphone in one hand and overhead screen remote control in the other and begins to speak. His voice is strong and loud as he quotes from the gospel of Mark 4: 21-25. "*For there is nothing hidden except to be made visible; nothing is secret except to come to light.*"

Getting right down to business, he poses three rhetorical questions: what has brought him to the College? why is he here? and what are his hopes? Looking from left to right around the room and smiling, he says Faith, Youth, and the Community. Eyes wide, he questions what the future expectations of teachers will be and what challenges and opportunities lie ahead. The College, he states, is centred around two things, Faith, and Learning, and to ensure it is "future-ready" his intention is to critically examine them and then act. Gesturing with his right hand towards the screen behind him, his voice gets louder, and his speech quickens as he shares his educational vision to develop a whole school pedagogy to challenge and inspire all students. Loosening his tie and moving out from behind the podium, he shares his plan of action to animate teaching, learning and wellbeing through innovative, creative, and rigorous programs. Moving closer to his audience, he reveals he will introduce a new learning framework to develop contemporary and relevant teacher practice. Also tailored, personalised learning pathways for all students.

I sit bolt upright in my seat. The phrase "tailoring personalised learning pathways" has struck a chord with me. After all, supporting teachers to do this for students with special educational needs was what I had envisaged the Head of Diversity Education role would entail, not working in isolation in a cupboard dotting the I's and crossing T's so that the College would be compliant under the NCCD. I was excited and couldn't wait for the challenge. Suddenly Frank's voice deepens. He is no longer smiling. He firmly reminds the staff of their obligations as teachers, highlighting the importance of how they teach and how students learn. Standing in the wings, Frances is busy nodding her head with him in agreement. He then produces the plan that he intends to use for the College's journey ahead through changes. Based on the work of Robinson (2011), student-centred leadership, it encompasses five main areas, goals and expectations, strategic resourcing, professional learning, quality teaching, and a settled environment. Gesturing towards the staff, then poking himself in the chest, he tells them developing their capacity to work through changes will be

his focus. Hardly stopping to draw breath, he suggests student success is based on three things, good leadership, quality teaching, and professional learning. He is animated and now feverishly pacing up and down. He draws attention to the unique connection between the physical learning space, consistent classroom procedures, positive behaviour, creative learning environments, and respectful relationships between the teacher and the student. He asserts that having all this in place will contribute to a culture of learning in the classroom. He assures staff that his plans are in line with mandatory requirements. Furthermore, he will create a focused College plan for improvement and set up a professional learning community for staff. He stops and turns to a table beside him, lifts a water bottle, opens the lid, and takes a drink. He turns his back on the audience and walks over to Frances, who is smiling reassuringly at him. He folds his arms as he chats to her while at the same time cautiously monitoring what is happening around him.

The room is abuzz with staff talking. I look around and notice some sitting silently and looking a bit shell-shocked. Others are poker-faced and deep in conversation. Heads are nodding and shaking, and hands gesturing. They have come to life. I wonder how all this information has been received. Was it intended to shock? Has it gone down like a lead balloon? Not from my perspective. It is like music to my ears. I am thrilled. My mind already racing ahead, thinking about how these changes might be implemented and the opportunities they could create for me to work with staff to improve practice. It would seem Frank's new educational vision hit a nerve as my thoughts were abruptly interrupted by a teacher from the table next to her: *"Great just back and here we go again reinventing the wheel, more work and when are we getting the time to do all this?"*

Either oblivious or deliberately ignoring the rumblings of staff, Frank takes the floor for a second time. For me, this is the grand finale of the whole morning's event. Reaffirming his commitment to implement his educational vision and asserting his authority as leader, speaking firmly, he says, *"At the end of the day, you are either with me, or you're not; you're either on the bus or off the bus, it's your choice. I make no apologies for saying this; the choice is yours!"* Responding sarcastically to this, a voice shouts out from the back of the room, *"And welcome back to you too!"* Unperturbed, Frank standing tall, eyeballs the staff and invites those concerned about the proposed changes to come and discuss them personally with him. Frank didn't wait for staff to come knocking on his door. In keeping with his personality and work ethic, he was on the front foot and, following his presentation, sent optional invites out to all the staff to meet with him.

Not surprisingly, I was delighted and accepted his offer without hesitation. I found him very welcoming, and his informal, friendly approach soon put me at ease. He was keen to hear my thoughts on his presentation and any proposed changes. I talked, and he listened while scribbling notes onto a small yellow notepad on the table beside him. I told him how excited I was about the changes. I suggested ways my role could be utilised to bring staff on board to support the development of his educational vision. Afterwards, it occurred to me that not once had she been allowed to sit down with the previous principal to discuss my role, let alone my thoughts for the future. Instead, it was a case of him directing me via the vice-principal. Like the faithful servant, she obeyed without question. For once, I felt someone was interested in what she had to say. I was listened to and felt optimistic that positive things would eventuate from this meeting as indeed they did.

After stumbling upon my office by chance while doing a tour of the College, Frank was shocked and promised to get me moved out of "the cupboard" to a more central location. Sure enough, shortly after that visit, there was a reshuffle and refurbishment of learning spaces and office areas. I was overjoyed to learn that she was to be relocated to an area known as A31. It was conveniently situated on the fourth floor above the student services building. It was central to most of the other regions of the school. It consisted of one big, bright, and airy classroom and, importantly for me, had five other smaller rooms attached. She wasted no time converting them into offices for herself and the learning support coordinator, a meeting room, a withdrawal room for students and a storage room for confidential files.

The establishment of this Diversity Education space was a significant milestone for me. For the first time, I felt as though I existed and had a presence within the College. Parents, students, staff, and outside agencies had a central, physical welcoming area that they could access quickly and discreetly. However, it was bittersweet as Mary, the learning support coordinator, and my colleague and friend left the College just before the relocation. She never witnessed the move, or the leadership responsibility bestowed on me because of Frank's first leadership restructure or the impact on the drill-down work into teacher practice.

4.4.   The College Review

4.4.1.   *Explanatory Text*

Two months into the job, Frank, as promised in his first address to the staff, commissioned a review of the College putting everyone on high alert. The findings were to be the catalyst for major disruptions and changes that followed.

I enter the staffroom to have a quick lunch. It's a beautiful day, and the Autumn sunshine is streaming in through the large glass windows. I'm early, and it is quiet except for the sound of the administration and IT staff chattering around two tables at the top half of the room. They are deep in conversation and don't notice me enter. I open the microwave to heat my soup, and the noise gets their attention. The chattering suddenly stops, and all heads turn to see who has come in. *"Oh, it's you"*, Joanne, the human resource lady, says. *"How did you manage to escape from the centre?"* I remove my soup from the microwave and explain that I have just had my interview with the review team in Frank's office (down the corridor from the staffroom) and thought I'd grab my lunch quickly as I was on duty at Lego club in A31. *"That club is great for your kids; they'd be lost at lunchtime without it"*. I quickly respond, *"Actually, it's for all students, part of our strategy to help with year seven transition by developing friendships and building social skills*". At that, I find a table on the opposite side of the room and sit down. The first bell goes for lunch, and the staff get up to leave. A few make their way over to my table. Keen to find out about the review team, they ask me what they were like. Before I have a chance to respond, another one butts in, *"It's a peculiar looking sight, them roaming freely through the College with their fancy cameras and clipboards tucked under their arms. I hear they're stopping students and staff at random. Is that true?"* At that, the second bell goes signalling the start of lunch, and the ladies scurry out.

I am then joined by Sean, a teacher at the College for over 30 years and close to retirement. *"How did your interview go with the review team?"* he asks. Smiling, I tell him they wanted to know about the Education Support Centre, resourcing and how I felt the College catered for students with special educational needs. Sean's face suddenly lights up. *"Well, I wish they'd speak to me, cos I'll not be long telling them most of my time is taken up with admin and dealing with parents, I can just about manage with the mainstream students"*. He gestures towards me with his hand and says, *"No offence, but expectations are growing, and nothing has actually been taken off us"*. Jane, a younger teacher, recently returned from maternity leave, joins the table just as Sean finishes speaking and is quick to throw in her ten cents worth, *"I couldn't agree more. What about staff well-being? I have five classes of thirty students each day. It's killing me"*. I nodded my head, conscious that teachers were constantly under the pump, and let her continue:

My hands and mind are busy controlling twenty-eight, twenty-nine kids. And I want to spend time with the ed support kids, but I don't have the time because I am so busy trying to keep everyone else on task. It's frustrating; I just let the EA's get on with it.

News of the review results spread like wildfire amongst the staff. The results were confronting. Areas of the College were deemed to be underperforming, and the College was described as at risk of developing a "comfort culture" regarding Learning and Teaching. Some furious staff blamed the comfort culture on students, and it was said they were not as bright as they used to be. However, Frank was having none of it and acting swiftly to remedy the situation triggered a chain of events that the College had never experienced in its 50-year history.

4.5.   Let the Mayhem Begin

4.5.1. *Explanatory Text*

Following the review report, Frank initiated an improvement process to support and guide the College through change. He formed a partnership with the University of Southern Queensland's Leadership Research International group (LRI) with the adoption of the Innovative Design for Enhancing Achievements in Schools (IDEAS) project. The project aim was to create a vision and pedagogical learning framework that would align faith and learning across the College to ensure successful outcomes for all students. An IDEAS team was formed from a range of staff across each campus, including all middle leaders. Led by Frances, the Vice-principal, the team supported staff to implement and embed pedagogical change across the College.

4.5.2. *Vignette*

The IDEAS team had come to the end of their initial workshops with USQ facilitators. Feeling exhausted, I watched on with interest as the two facilitators adorned the wooden walls of the dance studio with large sheets of flipchart paper. *"Okay, everyone, the final task for today we want you to list all the things you feel need improving at the College".* In a frenzied attack, people scrambled to grab markers and get their thoughts on the wall. The room came alive as markers were set down, then picked up again for a second and third time as more things in need of improvement sprung into people's minds. However, I remained steadfast to the floor, wholly absorbed with the scene in front of me. As they finished, one by one, they formed a semi-circle facing the display. Moving forward, I scanned the writing. Not surprisingly, inclusive practice never got a mention, so she lifted a black marker and added it

in big, bold capital letters to the middle sheet. Responding to this, Martin, a senior leader, raised his arm in the air and, grinning at me, said:

> *Come on, inclusive practice, it's taken as a given. It's somewhere up there in the ether. I don't think it needs to be made explicit in a learning framework. We're a religious College everybody knows we just do it.*

Tension filled the air as I took a deep breath. I knew what to say as I had rehearsed it in preparation for such a moment many times before and confidently and calmly said, *"I beg to differ; that's a myth. Students continually get sent back to the centre because teachers have prepared no work for them. Do you consider that to be inclusive practice?"* I recalled the notes in my journal at the time of such an incident, "*So sorry this is last minute, but the year 8s are doing a Sports test in B12. The special ed boys do not need to come to class today".* There was an awkward silence, and Frances stepped in to suggest inclusive practice remain on the list for further discussion with the whole staff. Feeling so excited by the prospect of inclusive change, I remained behind after the team left to talk to the USQ facilitators about it. Significantly, the conversation I had with them was to be the driver for my future research.

4.6.   Growing Middle Leaders, Engaging Staff

4.6.1.   *Explanatory Text*

Frank and Frances concentrated all their efforts on developing middle leaders' capacities for improvement. To this end, they created opportunities for them to facilitate professional learning and engage staff in the improvement process.

4.6.2.   *Vignette*

As I made my way to the afternoon's professional learning community meeting, I could hear the high-pitch sound of laughter coming from the Sports Centre where the meeting was being held. Once inside, it soon became clear why. The centre was bright and airy, and full-length windows gave way to the immaculately kept College ovals below. Fifty years' worth of memorabilia, such as plaques with the names of the winners of past Cricket and Footy games, along with a selection of framed Guild Sports shirts, took pride of place on the surrounding walls. The room smelt musty. Hardly surprising, I thought, given it was 50-plus years old. Dining like tables and chairs covered the entire floor space. There were coloured streamers, balloons, lollies, popsicle sticks, and pink and white marshmallows placed neatly on each table.

The room had a festive appearance rather than that of a meeting room. Puzzled staff members were assigned to tables with colleagues they were unfamiliar with and instructed not to handle anything. I found myself on a table of administration, canteen, and teaching assistant staff from the kindy and primary campuses. Frances led prayer, after which Frank stood up and welcomed all the staff and thanked them for being there. He then handed over to the selected middle leaders' members facilitating this afternoon's staff meeting. Each table had to construct a house out of the popsicle sticks and marshmallows on their table. They were given ten minutes to complete the activity, and the winning team received chocolates. There was a competitive vibe in the room as each table worked together, frantically trying to complete the task. Balloons burst and streamers popped as table by table they finished. My table's house fell apart, but no one seemed too bothered. They enjoyed getting to know one another so much that some hung around after the meeting to chat.

Through subsequent professional learning sessions, the team supported staff to review values and beliefs and renegotiate practice. They successfully reached a collective agreement with staff on practice for improvement. This was encapsulated in a whole school vision and a pedagogical learning framework underpinned by fundamental College values.

4.7. Part Two: Developments in Practice

4.7.1. Explanatory Text

The IDEAS teamwork with the staff proceeded better than expected. A lot of time and effort went into organisation and staff engagement, evidenced in my interactions with staff. Based on teachers' experiences, they would usually have viewed such school improvement initiatives as another thing to do and expect things to change again in a few years. However, this time was different, and staff seemed motivated with the new leadership's energy and commitment to reinvigorating teacher learning and development. Harnessing this positive vibe, Frank and Frances swung into action and created a three-year strategic plan. The key foci were to embed the vision and learning framework to steer the College through improvement. Highlighted in the plan was a commitment to the acceptance of diversity, empowerment of students and sustainable provision for students with special educational needs. Several factors contributed to the success of this plan. First, there was increased staff and student awareness around expectation and participation. As a staff member said to me, *"Wherever you are at, you can't really become complacent, can you?"*

The increase in expectation around participation manifested in many ways. Crucially all staff were expected to attend whole of school weekly briefings and professional learning.

Previously, the Education Support Centre had held its own briefings and professional learning, and in the beginning, staff resisted the changes, *"I'm not attending, they don't care about us anyway, I can read the information on the internet"*. Others appeared to feel out of place, *"When we went down last time we were interrogated by the mainstream staff. They wanted to know why we were there and who was looking after our students"*. However, with time this changed. Proof of this came in an email the centre coordinator sent to me. In it she apologised for having to miss the Monday morning briefing and asked me to remind the staff that teaching assistants would be using the main staff room for lunch and for them to make them welcome.

All students, including those with special needs, were expected to participate in College events such as assemblies, guild activities, camps, and award ceremonies. Previously it was not an expectation that students with special educational needs would attend. In addition, Frank and Frances encouraged staff to experiment with practice, team-teach, and observe others' practices, share knowledge and skills and learning spaces in a newly established "no blame environment".

Second, the restructuring of the middle leader team across Pre-kindergarten to Year Twelve increased the College's leadership capacity for improvement. For example, during an interview a teacher told me a story about a time when she panicked because a student in her class with special needs was acting erratically around a hot stove. She had no support and the student refused to follow her instructions. She recalled how she automatically contacted me for help. A classroom assistant arrived in her classroom within minutes. The teacher observed the assistant manage that students' behaviour and had learnt from that experience. In the past she noted there was no clear process or lead person to turn to for help but with the onset of improvement said she felt support had increased and was more organised.

Third, middle leaders produced a learning cycle process that helped guide and support teacher capacity for improvement. For example, the process provided clear expectations for classroom practice and student participation, ensuring equity and consistency in practice across the College. Teachers mentioned the benefits to students, particularly the feedback and targeted teaching and assessment. Others felt the expectations on staff were too high and had left some feeling burnt out and disinterested in trying anything new.

I seized this as an opportunity to penetrate deeper into the College system and gradually introduced changes to influence practice. For example, professional staff learning was made available on the NCCD, positive behaviour management, differentiated teaching

and assessment, and student plans. While teachers attended professional learning, many freely disclosed to me their knowledge around NCCD was limited.

The College software management system was adapted to include students with special educational needs information. Allowing teachers to develop capacity for improvement by increasing their knowledge and understanding of students' special needs and accessing support strategies for teaching and learning. *"Well, it is all on the system. I mean, you have got the green dots, all the students"*. Teachers took responsibility for student learning. *"It is a bit of responsibility on me to just hit a button and read the information"*. Staff were grateful for the support, particularly the structures and processes for individual student plans. My team and I were acknowledged by teachers for the support we provided, *"You can't do any more. If it is there, it's there."*

Course offerings were expanded, and mainstream courses were converted. This offered students with special educational needs increased opportunities to access and participate in the mainstream curriculum. *"There are also a lot more programs and initiatives running through the school"*. However, the increase in opportunities for students was attributed to the College's busier schedule and higher demands placed on staff.

Inequalities with the College wellbeing system were identified and addressed. This allowed students with special educational needs to access and participate more fully in their respective guilds. Duty rosters were changed, and for the first time, mainstream staff did duties in the Education Support Centre. Partnerships were established with external professionals, and their support was utilised within the College to manage student behaviour and engage students in personalised learning. Learning walks were conducted to monitor and guide teacher practice, and teachers were supported to create growth plans aligned to the strategic plan and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2017).

Furthermore, Frank and Frances actively promoted inclusive practice. For example, they constantly reminded staff that all students were students "of" and "belonged" to the College and simply followed different pathways commensurate to their needs, that is, Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR), General and Life skills. They agreed to the Special Education Program being included [for the first time] as part of the curriculum offered by the College on the new website. They continually modelled inclusive language using the term "Diversity Education" when discussing student needs and named it in the College strategic plan. Yet, students with special educational needs continued to be viewed as

different and belonging to the centre. *"But in the learning centre, our kids [mainstream students] get to sit around with them [students with special educational needs], and it makes them understand that we are not all the same, that we are all a bit different"*. Also, while staff openly voiced support for more inclusive practice, *"I think there could be a lot more interaction"*. Language in use did not reflect this thinking and was more aligned with tradition from the past. *"I love the fact that we've got a big group of learning enrichment kids in the special – I am sorry I don't like using the words "special ed" – it is a bit passé"*. Significantly, Frank and France's support of middle leaders empowered me to challenge practice and influence thinking for inclusive cultural change.

4.8.   The Researcher's Lived Experience and Leadership Journey

4.8.1.   *Explanatory Text*

In testimony to Frank and Frances commitment to building teacher leader capacity, they dedicated Monday afternoon meetings to personally mentoring and coaching the IDEAS team. The team created personal growth plans aligned to the strategic plan and the Australian Professional Standards for Teacher Leaders (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2018). Frank and Frances focused on empowering this group of middle leaders to lead pedagogical development. Moreover, they viewed this as their primary leadership role, as Frances commented, *"Your vision is great, but unless you have got a middle leadership team that can support the processes around developing the vision, it is not going to go anywhere."*

4.8.2.   *Vignette 1 – Developing Teacher Leadership*

Monday afternoon, 3:30pm and the middle leaders gather in the auditorium for their scheduled weekly meeting. As I enter the room, Frank and Frances are already there and welcome me. There are eight rectangular tables with four chairs each scattered around the room. A4 paper is placed neatly in a pile on the middle of each table alongside a bowl of sweets. I take a seat at an empty table and check over my notes for the short power-point I have prepared to present to my colleagues. Middle leaders drift in, in twos and threes, happily chatting as an impatient looking Frank checks the time on his phone and says, *"It's 3:40pm; let's make a start"*. At that, Frances stands to attention and leads the group in afternoon prayer. She then goes through the afternoon's agenda, taken up with middle leader feedback about how their respective departments are implementing data literacy skills.

Mike takes the floor first to speak about the English department. He quickly connects his laptop to the big screen and begins. Full of enthusiasm, he presents chart after chart of past testing results and demonstrates how his team uses the new online software program to create student learning profiles from the data. Furthermore, he shows how the software program can pinpoint a student's area of weakness and recommend activities and strategies for improvement. Frank and Frances are smiling and busy, nodding their head at Mike in approval. The timer goes, and it is my turn to speak.

Feeling nervous after Mike's very comprehensive presentation, I take the floor and makes a joke about the first act being hard to follow and everyone laughs. Confidently I introduce the state Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES) assessment tool for students with special educational needs. I then demonstrate how specialist teachers use the tool to gauge a student's developmental age and how they subsequently plan targeted learning experiences from this. When finished, I invite questions. Joseph from the Religion department is waving his hand to speak, *"This is brilliant. I never knew it existed",* he says, *"And I don't think the teachers know either. This would really help us with planning and teaching".* I thank him then remind everyone that student profiles with their developmental age and recommended teaching and behaviour management strategies have been available since term two on the College software system. Moreover, for each student's name on teacher registers, there is a coloured dot that indicates they have a plan. Teachers just need to click on the dot, and the plan will open. Leah from the PE department raises her hand, *"I can vouch for that. I've been working with the ladies upstairs and together, we are creating practical resources for the health program for the special ed kids, it's great!"*

4:45pm and the meeting is over; Frank thanks everyone for their contribution and reminds them of their role to develop the collective efficacy of staff for improvement. Looking exhausted, they rush out. I hurry out to catch up with Joseph as he walks ahead of me to the car park. I offer to carry out learning walks in his department and help teachers with planning and teaching. He's delighted and says he'll check with the staff and let me know.

A few days later, I was in the staff room before school when a teacher from Joseph's department came in. Full of enthusiasm, I plucked up the courage to broach the subject of doing a learning walk in her class to support her with planning and teaching students with special educational needs. This usually calm and gentle teacher suddenly grew red in the face, pointed her finger at me and angrily said, *"Do you know how difficult it is trying to teach ATAR to general students and at the same time have to teach preliminary units to students with special educational needs?"* At that she walked towards the door then quickly spun

around to face me again and added, *"They can keep their new learning framework. I don't care. I'll be gone soon anyway"*. Taken aback but undeterred by this encounter, I continued as planned with learning walks across other departments.

4.9.   Supporting Practice

4.9.1.   *Explanatory Text*

Middle leaders were encouraged to carry out learning walks to build confidence in practice. The aim was to visit classrooms and foster conversations with teachers about teaching and learning to promote and embed the College vision and new pedagogical framework. Importantly, this allowed me to observe first-hand classroom practice and sensitively offer guidance and support to teachers. While at the same time, continue to build trusting relationships for improvement.

4.9.2.   *Vignette 2 – Learning Walk Performing Arts*

Grace enters the classroom, head facing downwards and looking a bit dishevelled. She's late, and the class is half empty. The teacher spots her and smiles; he extends a warm, friendly welcome and explains what is happening in today's lesson, *"Grace, you will work in your group practising your lines from 'The weather girls' script, collect your script and go meet your group in the auditorium. They are waiting for you"*. Grace promptly follows the teachers' instructions, bends down, and picks a script up from the pile on the floor. She then leaves the room and heads towards the auditorium. The girls are waiting for her. *"Good morning, Grace; we've been waiting for you. Can you go and grab us another desk?"*. Grace turns on her heel and returns to the classroom. Once there, she explains to the teacher that her group need a second desk. She navigates it out through the classroom door across the walkway and into the auditorium. *"Thanks, Grace, well done"*, the girls say in chorus. Grace is directed behind one of the desks as another girl takes up position beside her, one sits on a chair between the desks, and the fourth member stands facing them. The practice begins, and Grace is guided from her desk by one of the girls. *"Now, Grace, we'll walk in together"*. Grace walks alongside and follows her direction taking up position behind the desks again. In turn, they begin to read their lines. *"You next, Grace"*, the girl beside her says. On cue, Grace starts to read from the sheet while at the same time pretending to brush the other girl's hair. Suddenly without warning, the teacher enters, *"Well, does this group all know your lines?"* Excitedly Grace responds, *"Yes, can we show you, our scene?"* *"Okay"*, the teacher says and watches as they begin. *"Just a little bit louder"*, he advises. Grace responds by reading

louder, *"Good, great work, Grace, keep it up!"* When it's Grace's turn to speak again, she momentarily forgets*, "Grace, your turn, honey",* the teacher says, and Grace begins to read from her script.

I am so pleased with what I have just observed and wish that I could have videoed it as an example of inclusive practice to show the staff. I share my thoughts with the teacher, who generously offers to let other staff come in and observe him teaching. I make a mental note to share this fantastic resource at the next middle leaders meeting.

4.9.3. *Vignette 3 – Learning Walk Food Technology*

Paula pushes the door open and makes her way into the classroom, closely followed by her education assistant; she charges past the teacher towards one of the eight kitchen work areas at the front left-hand side of the room. There is no one else sitting there. Students drift into the class in small groups, then a student enters alone, and Paula jumps up and fetches another chair and puts it beside her. The student automatically walks over, thanks Paula and sits down. The teacher takes the register and tells the class that today's lesson is theory, and they will be learning about the caramelisation process. For this, they would be heating sugar and timing how long it takes to burn. Due to time limits, the teacher told the class that she would be doing the experiment on their behalf at her workbench. While this was happening, she wanted them to watch a video on the overhead screen. As you can imagine, this did not go down very well with the students, most of whom were male and very lively. They opened and closed kitchen cupboard doors, messed about with utensils and walked freely around the classroom, all while the teacher was talking. As the noise got louder, so too did the teacher's voice. Paula and her partner were the only two students who sat contently watching the video clip as instructed. When the experiment was complete, the teacher invited the students to her workbench to observe, showing them a before and after sample. They were so well behaved [in her opinion] that she said she would make them some toffee to sample if they sat quietly and watched the next part of the video. Needless to say, Paula and her partner did precisely as instructed by the teacher, but the others did not. When the toffee was ready, the teacher broke it into pieces and shared it amongst the students. There was some leftover, so she walked around the room, asking who wanted some more. When she came to Paula, her hand went out like a flash, and she smiled at the teacher and said thank you but never received a response!

In speaking with the teacher after the lesson, I was disappointed to learn that the previous teacher has left no handover notes regarding Paula's learning needs. Furthermore, the department staff advised her that the education assistant would usually take responsibility

for Paula in the class. Thus, reinforcing thinking that students with special educational needs are the responsibility of specialist staff.

4.10. De privatising Learning Spaces

4.10.1. Explanatory Text

To support staff collaboration and student participation, learning spaces at the College were de-privatised. Some of the more traditional classrooms were revamped. Significantly, walls were taken down and replaced with glass, furniture was updated, and teacher desks were removed. Some staff were apprehensive about the changes:

> *I am fearful of having glass walls. My kids might be working – the kid next door running around [kid with special needs]. I don't want my kids seeing that, so I am a little fearful of glass walls and distractions.*

I challenged this thinking. I suggested a group of students with special educational needs use a vacant food technology room [glass panels part-separated these rooms] for a cooking lesson instead of using the kitchen inside the centre.

4.10.2. Vignette 4 – Sharing Classrooms

Feeling nervous, the specialist teacher picks up the phone and calls the Food Technology office to plan for herself and a small group of students with special educational needs to use one of the spare cooking rooms. *"I am assuming that the kitchen in Ed Support is not big enough or suitable for your lesson",* said the teacher's voice on the other end of the phone. *"Make sure you bring down all your own food and whatever else you need"*. The next day, the teacher and six students arrive at the cooking room for their lesson after lunch. The cooking room is empty. The stainless-steel workbenches are gleaming, and there is a row of pots hung neatly above each bench. A class of senior students can be heard next door and are visible through large glass panels that separate the two rooms. The teacher directs the students to a work area at the back of the room and places a plastic box containing cooking ingredients in the middle of the bench. The students' hands are washed and dried, aprons on, and the lesson begins. They are making cookies and have forgotten to bring down the dough cutters. They rummage through the drawers below the bench and find some. Suddenly the door opens, and the food technology education assistant enters the room. The students freeze. *"Oh, I just came to see what all the noise was. I didn't realise there was a lesson going on",* she says apologetically to the teacher. Her eyes then quickly dart from the workbench to the spilt flour on the floor, and, with a disapproving look, she sighs loudly and says, *"It's just*

taken me an hour cleaning this room for the next class". "We will leave the room the way we found it, won't we, boys and girls". The teacher reassures her, *"and if you prefer, we can always bake the cookies upstairs in the centre oven".* At that, the education assistant storms out of the room and bangs the door.

4.10.3. Explanatory Text

Mainstream teachers, especially those with a student with special needs, were encouraged to hold classes in the Education Support Centre. The coordinator was delighted when she received a request to bring a mainstream class into the centre from a very enthused Pastoral Care Group teacher.

4.10.4. Vignette 5 – Staff Collaboration

I am emailing you [centre coordinator] about the possibility of having one of my pastoral care group lessons in the Ed Support classroom. I thought this would be a good opportunity for Janice [student with special need] to feel more comfortable in Pastoral Care Group and for her peers to understand Janice's perspective as well.

Staff collaboration for inclusive practice began to develop, evident in the coordinator's response. *"What a wonderful idea. You are most welcome to bring your class into the centre for the Pastoral Care Group. Our doors are always open. Happy to support with your lesson"*. Collaboration for inclusive practice continued to grow and was particularly noticeable in planning for College events.

4.11. Participation in College Events

4.11.1. Explanatory Text

Traditionally, College events such as graduation, dinner dances, fete days, swimming carnivals and guild activities caused tension between mainstream and specialist staff. Often, miscommunication and a lack of collaboration contributed to this. Specialist staff felt mainstream teachers put students with special educational needs into the "Too hard basket" and just forgot about them. Overwhelmed with organising such events, mainstream teachers relied on specialist staff to oversee the arrangements for the participation of students with special educational needs. However, the onset in improvement and leadership expectation around staff and student participation triggered a shift in teacher thinking, and many began to take on responsibility for all students. This was visible in the increase in opportunities for students with special educational needs to access and participation in College events.

4.11.2. Vignette 6 – Year Twelve Graduation

I stood nervously with the centre coordinator at the side of the stage in the College auditorium, proudly waiting as two year twelve students with special educational needs sat amongst their peers about to graduate. I watched as peers prompted and guided the students to shake hands with Frank, receive their certificates, take a photograph with him, and then return to their seats for the speeches. I was ready to step in with heart thumping and palms sweating should the students or staff need assistance. None was needed; the students performed precisely as they had been taught in the rehearsals. Overcome with emotion, I shed a tear or two when they received a standing ovation from their peers, prompting a sudden flashback to how it used to be. Previously, these students would have had a quick photograph with the principal before the main event, and parents would then have been expected to bring them home. Wow! How times had changed. A delighted parent emailed the next day to say,

> *J was amazing last night, and to receive the sister Elizabeth award, along with L, was unbelievable, one of the proudest moments of my life, probably along with the day he was born. You can all be proud of the young man you have helped on his way to achieving his full potential. One proud father*

This change in practice did not go unnoticed, "*As a prospective parent and visitor to the award ceremony last night, it was so lovely to see that students with special educational needs were included in the ceremony and the College*". Changes like this continued as two students with special educational needs participated in the year 11 dinner dance.

On Monday morning at 7am, I was in my office checking through my calendar for the busy day ahead. John, the year eleven leader of well-being, walks in. He looks worried with coffee in one hand and a brown leather satchel hanging from his shoulder. "*Look, I'm concerned about Mark and Lorcan, you know our special needs kids and the dinner dance. I feel a bit awkward about it. Can they go? Who will support them?*" I reassure him they can and will go and explain the process, then direct him to the coordinator in the centre to discuss the arrangements. John had hoped to call into the centre and speak with the coordinator directly that day during his lunch. However, he got a lunch duty and was unable to. That evening I was delighted to be included in his email correspondence to the coordinator. "*Would you like Mark and Lorcan to be seated with the other students at a table? Do you need to sit with them, or can I split them and spread them with other students?*" The coordinator, as usual, was quick to respond.

Yes, mixed would be good, please, at a table with other sympathetic students if possible. Education assistants do not have to sit at the table, but I would suggest the table next to the education assistants table for support if needed. Thanks!

After the year 11 dinner dance, the next event was fete day, one of the most significant calendar events of the year. Students worked in guilds to set up stalls and events, raise money for charity, and compete against each other to raise the most money. Traditionally, students with special educational needs set a separate stall up for the centre to sell the cards they made as part of a business and enterprise program; therefore, they did not mix with peers in their respective guild groups. Remarkably teacher thinking around student participation began to change, and there was a shift away from this tradition.

As you [specialist teacher] are aware, next Friday is fete day, and as a part of fete day, we [guild coordinators] have students cooking food to sell. This year we are getting the year twelve class which Jane, Pat, and Maddie (students with special educational needs) are a part of, to cook. Students will be preparing their meals on Thursday during class time and then coming to Food Tech at 10:30am after mass to finalise their meal and set up for the Fete Day stalls. We hope Jane, Pat and Maddie will be available to join us.

Collaboration between teachers and specialist staff gained momentum as sports teachers prepared for the yearly swimming carnival event.

I've tried calling the centre a couple of times, but you must be very busy up there. I just wanted to let you know what plans I have for your students on the day. They will be able to enter any event, just in the last couple of heats, as the swimmers will be slower. I can supply any flotation aids such as life jackets, pool noodles, and kickboards, and staff can also have access to these as the depth of the pool will be too deep. I have a couple of spaces that students can move to if the noise is too much for them. If there is anything else you need to accommodate your staff or students, please let me know.

What a turnaround this was. Historically students with special educational needs did not have the opportunity to enter any races. Instead, a lane would be cordoned off to use throughout the day. When the event was over, a race for students with special educational needs only would then be held, by which stage many had already gone home.

As relationships developed, so too did opportunities for improvement. Project-based learning was a new initiative introduced to challenge staff and year 7-10 students with the

integration of the College vision and learning framework into practice. At the end of term 4 each year, timetabled classes were collapsed to facilitate this initiative. Last year students with special educational needs could not participate due to clashes with programming and abstract concepts being presented, therefore missing out on the opportunity to work in their guilds to solve problems and present solutions. However, this year, the pedagogy leader approached me and the centre coordinator in term 3 to discuss the upcoming project. The coordinator collaborated with the specialist staff to get their thoughts on the plan and communicated back to the pedagogy leader.

> *Discussed project-based learning with the diversity team this afternoon. They thought the ideas were great, nothing more really to add. As you know, despite all our effort, students were unable to participate last year. We believe these changes will help, and please know we are all willing to support in any way we can.*

Unfortunately for me though, not all new initiatives were as readily embraced. These experiences are presented in the following vignettes.

4.12.   Balancing Relationships

4.12.1. Explanatory Text

I worked closely with many people to build relationships for change. As such, she became the link between mainstream and specialist staff, external professionals, and parents to foster inclusive ways of working. This complex role often involved balancing student needs with building relationships:

4.12.2. Vignette Gone AWOL (Middle Leader Email)

> *Hi*
>
> *Just emailing to let you know that during my first lesson, one of your EA's "WIGGED OUT" because although the other EA [who has been outstanding in our area since he has started coming to us and is a real asset in our workshop] was working with David and Michael in the machine room on the bandsaw, he was left with Colin and was paranoid that he was going to go in and cut his hand off! I organised work for him and Colin on a workbench away from machinery as I could tell that he was not coping with the environment. Today at one point, he disappeared with Colin from the workshop early in the lesson. I asked the other EA, but he had no idea where they had gone, so I searched the hallways to no avail. Eventually, they just reappeared [perhaps Colin had to go to the bathroom . . . I have no idea].*

4.12.3. Feeling Invisible (Conversation with an Education Assistant)

We had a relief teacher in Religion today. She totally ignored Peter and me, admittingly we were a bit late, but it's easy to say good morning, right? I wouldn't mind, but there wasn't even a spare desk or chairs for us. I had to leave Peter standing and go next door and fetch a table and chairs myself. Then we had to wait until she'd finished talking to find out what she wanted Peter to do. Surprise, surprise, the teacher left no work for the relief to give me for Peter. He became agitated so I suggested bringing him back to the centre, which put a smile on her face. She even opened the door and waved to us as we left.

4.12.4. Student Leadership (Email from Parent of a Student with Special Educational Needs)

Dear teachers

I understand that the College is going through a change process. I wanted to suggest improvement about the process you follow to assign leadership positions to students. Firstly, I'd like to start by complimenting the school on its thorough process. It seems the staff put in many hours of work reading applications and then ensuring the leaders are trained well. My idea is that you should allow students with special educational needs, such as my son and other students from the centre, to participate in the process without doing so much paperwork. My son would not have had the literacy skills to make it through step 1 of the application. I wonder if many students with special educational needs who attend your College would be in the same boat. Please be assured that I am not looking for him to be given a leadership position as a token gesture. I would, however, be prepared to give up my time to help develop a more inclusive process so it could be ready to run when next year's leaders are chosen. Thanks for your time.

4.12.5. Personalising Learning (Email from Parent of a Student with Special Educational Needs)

Hi

I am not sure who the science teacher is, but I just wanted to pass on that Paul (student with special needs) was very happy yesterday when I picked him up from school because he got to do mainstream science. This is the first time I have ever seen Paul happy and enthusiastic about school. Well, done!

4.12.6. National Disability Week (Middle Leader Collaboration)

Sally, the year ten coordinator, bursts into my office with a group of students trailing behind her, *"Hey, the girls have an idea they would like to share with you for National Disability Week"*. She then stands back, ushering them forward and beckoning them to speak. In chorus, they excitedly explain, *"We want to befriend the special ed students, spend our lunchtimes that week in the centre and try and encourage them to play games with us"*. Delighted I tell the students to wait while I phone the centre to run it by the staff. Feeling embarrassed with the response, *"We're sick of these one-off approaches, unless it's ongoing we're not interested"*. I quickly hang up the phone and tell the students I will discuss it with the centre staff over lunch and get back to them later.

I knew staff were anxious about the changes, and stress levels had increased. So, I was not at all surprised by the response on the phone from the centre staff. Indeed, I was preparing for the fallout when the next phase of changes were to be introduced involving upgrading classrooms and the Special Education Centre.

4.13. Capital Development Plan

Towards the end of 2019, Frank announced a capital development plan. The initial goal was to develop what was described in the earlier review report as "dysfunctional and inflexible spaces" into spaces more aligned with the College vision and learning framework. Panic set in quickly when word got out that the Education Support Centre was on the "hit list". The coordinator and I had several meetings with Frank, Frances, and the architects to plan for the redevelopment. However, the rumour mill went into overdrive. It was suggested that Frank and Frances didn't want students with special educational needs at the College, that there was no money in the budget to build a new centre and that the Education Support Centre would inevitably close. *"It's talked about [inclusion] but he [Frank] doesn't do the walk. He just sees it as another part of the school"*. Frank met parents and staff to end the rumour mongering and explained that the centre would close for refurbishment as part of the College capital development plan at the end of the year. A usually confident Frank made his way straight over to me before addressing the anxious group, wanting to know how they took the news. When Frances arrived, he looked relieved and started to speak. He reassured everyone that this was a temporary measure, *"A short pain for a long-term gain"* and that the Special Education Program would continue with as minimum disruptions as possible in the mainstream setting. Speech over Frances exited him out quickly, claiming he had another meeting to attend and advised parents and staff to contact either of them with concerns.

Tempers were frayed; when asked by a mainstream teacher where she would go when the centre closed, an education assistant sarcastically responded, *"Don't know; my guess is as good as yours, maybe down at the cricket nets, who knows."*

As a result, at the start of the year staff and students were separated into two groups for the first time and left fully exposed to the mainstream environment. Middle College students and half the staff were grouped together in a spare room opposite the music centre at one end of the school, while senior students and the remaining staff were located beside me in A31. The coordinator was beside herself. She was given an office away from both sets of students and staff. *"They have taken away my role",* One morning she said*, "There is nothing for me to do. I might as well retire now".* I tried hard to reassure her that, that was not the case. Rather, her role as middle leader had evolved to embedding the College vision and learning framework by supporting staff to develop inclusive practice. Thankfully for me, she eventually succumb to the idea. She ventured out into mainstream classrooms and helped teachers establish and convert programs and resources for students with special educational needs. Thus, following my lead influencing thinking and practice towards inclusive improvement.

4.13.1. A Reflection on the Changes

This chapter told the story of change from the researcher's perspective. The findings revealed several challenges existed that influenced a change in the culture towards inclusive education. The underlying challenge was teacher attitudes and beliefs to inclusion, which were reinforced by onsite special education provision and resourcing, leading to confusion around roles and responsibilities, and some teachers negating responsibility for student learning to the education assistants. In addition, a complexity of structural, organisational, and human resourcing put pressure on teachers, impacting their ability to teach inclusively. Despite this, several significant enabling factors emerged, impacting inclusive cultural change within the College.

First leadership with an inclusive mindset. The principal and vice-principal supported inclusive education evident in the College vision and framework for learning, the resourcing of a dedicated Leader for Diverse Learning, and their support and promotion of inclusion in both the language they used and on the College website.

Second, leadership practices focused on developing quality teaching and learning and student achievement. The new principal initiated a review process that identified a need for

change and was the catalyst for engaging in the IDEAS project for improvement. A College vision and learning framework emerged and guided practice for improvement.

Third, building teacher leader capacity for improvement. A restructuring of leadership included middle leaders expanding improvement capacity across the College. The principal and the vice-principal mentored the team and created opportunities to build skills and share leadership. While each had their focus for leadership, they shared responsibility for improvement and collaborated to influence change across the College. For example, they facilitated contextualised professional learning in a newly established learning community. Practice was reviewed and renegotiated. Fundamental values and practices were agreed upon and encompassed in a College vision and inclusive pedagogical framework for learning. The staff collectively committed to using this framework which aligned practice across the College and importantly provided a new common language to improve. Furthermore, middle leaders developed and used a learning cycle process to support teachers use of the learning framework in classroom practice. Thus, supporting teachers to personalise learning and build personal capacity for collective improvement.

Fourth, developing inclusive ways of working. The College vision and learning framework increased leadership expectation for staff and student participation for improvement. A contextually based professional learning program supported staff develop knowledge and skills for improvement. Interestingly, professional trust and a collegial culture developed over time through participation in this program. Teachers became open and keener to meet with me for guidance and support. Through collaboration, professional exchange, visiting classrooms and providing feedback, mentoring, and networking, she supported teachers understanding and implementation of the College vision and learning framework. She was explicit, focussing on developing practice for students with special educational needs and meeting the mandatory requirements of NCCD. Subsequently, structures and processes were created for student profiles and plans, courses expanded and converted, and education assistants strategically deployed to support teachers in the mainstream. Some teachers' confidence grew as personal and professional knowledge, and skills developed, raising awareness of inclusion. There was an increase in students with special educational needs accessing the mainstream curriculum, particularly participation in College events which contributed to the College's collective capacity building for inclusive improvement.

4.14. Chapter Summary

While this chapter presented my researcher and study participant lived experiences of a change in leadership and an improvement process and my own subsequent leadership journey to influence cultural change towards inclusive practice development, Chapter Five uses narrative voice created from blending interview data with journal entries to tell the participants' stories. Findings are presented as vignettes Frank, the principal, and vice-principal Frances' voices are first followed by each group of participant teachers, middle leaders, and education assistants. Several research personalities were merged to protect their anonymity, and composite characters represented each group.

CHAPTER 5: PARTICIPANT VOICE

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter intended to retell the story of change at the College from my perspective as researcher, study participant and leader. In essence, it identified teacher attitudes and beliefs as the underlying challenge to inclusion. Leadership with an inclusive mindset focussed on developing quality teaching and learning and student achievement and building teacher leader capacity through inclusive ways of working emerged as significant factors for influencing inclusive cultural change.

Chapter Five tells the participant's story. Frank and France's narrative voices are presented first, and excerpts from the other participant interviews have been used to support Frank and France's thinking (inserted in boxes throughout). Interestingly, after carrying out interviews, I soon became aware that although many staff publicly appeared to support Frank and Frances's commitment to providing an education for all students, privately, their views were often very different. This presented me with an ethical problem. To represent these contrasting public and private stories, I needed to express the opinions of individuals but also maintain their anonymity. I did this by weaving ethnographic interview data with observations and notes from my reflective journal. I carefully merged several research personalities to create composite characters representative of each group. Therefore, each character's voice (Brian, Patricia, and Gail) is a composite of the group of middle leaders, teachers, and education assistants. The narrative voices are presented as vignettes alongside extracts taken directly from the summaries of the interviews. In addition to the empirical findings, data from College documents were implicitly utilised to complement the insights gained from the primary data sources, enhancing the overall richness and depth of the study.

5.2. Introduction to the Principal's Voice

Frank, the principal, has had many senior leadership roles within education, the church, and the Catholic Not for Profit sector. Clearly, a man of deep faith, he states the core of his educational philosophy is, "*The transformational mission of Jesus Christ and enlivening this mission of bringing life to the gospel*". (Staff address January 2016)

In 2016 he took up the challenge to bring the College into the 21st Century. He is a "down to earth" man who, in his own words, "*calls a spade a shovel*" and is quick to tell you, "*I only know what I know.*" The following vignette reflects Frank's thinking two years post

taking up the new principalship position at the College and provides an insight into his understanding of the impact improvement had on change at the College.

5.2.1. Vignette

Feeling nervous, I arrive early for my interview with Frank. His personal assistant, working at her desk outside his office, jumps up from her seat when she sees me, *"He's expecting you. I'll just let him know you're here, have a seat"*. Frank, as usual, is professionally dressed in a grey suit, pink shirt, and grey tie. Smiling widely, he welcomes me into his office. He beckons me towards a small round table and chairs to the left of his desk. There is a smell of fresh coffee in the air, and he offers me one, but I politely refuse. He makes himself one using the coffee machine on the workbench at the back of the room. Looking around the room, I can see it has had a bit of a makeover since the previous principal. In his day, it was used as the boardroom, and his office, which is now used by Frances, the vice-principal, is right next door. The room has been recently painted in pastel grey and white shades and has had a brand-new kitchen fitted to the back. It is bright and airy and looks out onto a courtyard area, where students gather for recess and lunch. A large, oval-shaped wooden table with ten chairs takes centre position in the middle of the room. One white frame containing a family portrait, a laptop and a phone are the only items on Frank's office desk, overlooked by a wooden crucifix hanging on the wall behind. A large screen is fixed to the wall alongside portraits of previous principals. Rubbing his hands together, he says to me, *"Okay, let's get this done"*. His eyes dart quickly towards the glass entrance doors to his office, then at his mobile phone sitting on the table.

Frank appears animated when the subject of leadership is raised. Clearly passionate about this, he uses his hands as he speaks. Twisting and turning in his chair, he tells me he is focused on empowering the people he is leading and the teachers who are part of the community with students at the centre. Explaining this, he tells me he inherited a traditional, congregational, independent school whose cultures and practices had become tired and dated. *"It [College in previous years] was undoubtedly a lot more relaxed. There seemed to be a lot more emphasis on staff welfare. I would say life was a little bit slower."*

As the leader, he explains he had to *"Re-energise the base and not just teachers, but it was students, and it was families"*. He frowned as he recalled the challenges saying, *"There may have been some block and tackling on, mainly as people who wanted to get off the bus got off the bus, but in the main, people were pretty good"*. School improvement, he believes, led to improved teacher practice.

Commenting on this one interviewee said: *Yes, I think there has been a shift definitely. I think all teachers have been encouraged and challenged to push harder and to create opportunities for all students and not just settle on "here is a worksheet that is different" and stop at that.*

Furthermore, he explains how having an inclusive strategic plan with explicit intents enabled leadership to develop shared goals and ownership to improve the student experience. By having these common goals as an agreement through the Vision for Learning, developing personal efficacy, he asserts, became easier: *"People's perspectives and minds were opened to the capacity for individual improvement, which has invariably led to school improvement".*

This view was echoed by other participants: *Can I just say I think as a result of all of that [school improvement/vision for learning], we probably have a better understanding of students' individual needs than what we would have had when I first came to the school, better awareness and understanding.*

"So inclusive practice has improved?" I ask. Frank nods and sits up straight in his seat, *"Look, I believe the intent of every school is to be inclusive".* Appearing flustered, he suggests inclusion is problematic at the College. He gives two reasons. First, it's seen as an institution with a model from the past, particularly around classroom spaces and timetables. Learning, he tells me, had been geared to the middle. So, when presented with a student who has a different ability or is not at what we call standard, they [teachers]simply don't know what to do. Second, teachers are constantly at load, so they have little time.

Several participants explicitly referred to curriculum content and time as factors that impacted on inclusion:

> *In a classroom with mainstream students have heavy content to cover, which happens from year 10 onwards particularly. I know that we are meant to give them [students with special educational needs] equal amounts of time, but that doesn't work from a practical point of view.*

For inclusion to really gain traction, he suggests we must revisit the curriculum and revisit the content and the over-reliance on content and standardised testing. He smiles as he glances towards the entrance doors and says*, "Look, as a school, I think we are moving in the right direction".* He argues the College is very much governed by the curriculum. Either

through the 7-10 curriculum through School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA), through national curriculum or otherwise the year eleven and twelve curricula, and that, that really guides because of results and that guides the mindset of what teachers want to do and then they end up chasing their tail.

Taking a drink of water and turning again in his seat, he suggests that some teachers don't have a strong understanding of what inclusion means, *"Sometimes, they think inclusion means that we have a program that invites a child in who may have a need, be it educational support or diverse learning".*

> This reminded me of a participant response when asked about inclusion at the College:
>
> *I think they [students with special educational needs] get a pretty broad exposure to education in terms of academic, physical, emotional, social. They get out and about, do a paper round and things like that. They go shopping, catch buses, it's a practical program. It's a nice environment, they are treated very well by their peers.*

She then asks him directly what he thinks inclusion means. He looks slightly uncomfortable as he tells me he doesn't know where to take it because it's a bit of a global question. He stops for a moment. Then running his hands through his hair and shifting in his seat says,

> *Inclusion is about how we seek to differentiate learning dependent on the prior learning or the ability of the child, be they with a special need or those who are in support or those who are gifted and talented or those in the mainstream.*

He firmly believes that as a sector we have a way to go to understand the nuances of it. He pauses then adds that the building environment is critical and provides flexibility for students with special educational needs. He continues triumphantly citing my role as leader of learning for Diversity Education to prove the College's intent to be inclusive. Laying it on the line, he says we must be much more robust in the space. *"I think Special education is still excluded from the school. People are afraid to go in [Education Support Centre]".*

> I recalled a similar comment she had overheard from another participant: *"I think there is a phobia about the Education Support Centre. It's not a welcoming environment. The doors should be open more so that people can come in."*

Frank expresses his view that he doesn't believe we are providing enough professional learning for staff around inclusion: *"I think it has got to be front, centre and*

back of what we do but on the flip of that, I think those in it must have the same view". He then clarifies his thoughts:

> *I suppose I think that there will always be a need for an Ed Support centre, personal care, toilets, maybe specialised teaching, life skills and stuff like that, that maybe aren't getting taught in mainstream. But I would like to see us as one school. That we would be just supporting students in mainstream, but then how do they go to English and stuff like th*at.

Strategically, he warns we must understand the global and the Australian frame around Special Education. Pointing towards the window, he suggests we need to be meeting the needs of our parent community and be offering the same as the school up the road. He feels confident that our learning cycle process will guide teachers use of the learning framework enabling them to understand data, which will allow them to plan learning experiences that will meet the individual needs of every student. Again, he repeats his feeling that the College is getting better in this space. The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data topic appeared to make Frank a little uneasy. He told me that he expected teachers to know what it was and why we were doing it. He argued that as a College and a receptor of government funding, we need to work with families on discerning the needs of all students and then make the necessary adjustments to enable them to access the curriculum.

Some participants agreed with this. For example, after attending NCCD professional learning one stated:

> *I think it is wonderful [NCCD] nowadays that kids are diagnosed. So, I think it is great for kids that we now have this identified, and I think we must recognise, and we must modify our assessment programs for a start. So that these kids are not disadvantaged because they read a bit slower or write a bit slower. We've got to give them extra time. So, I think that is great.*

When asked why the College should be a school of choice for a parent of a child with a special need, Frank sits forward in his seat and talks passionately about the rich history the College has in working with families. Gesturing with both hands, he highlights values of family, presence and simplicity and explains how they underpin the College community to develop relationships. Relationships he tells me are critical to any success – be it a child without a special need or one with a special need. Excitedly, he draws attention to how in his opinion, the College now provides appropriate strategic resourcing in terms of support staff,

plans, programming, fluid timetabling and collaboration with outside professionals to support teachers to meet individual student needs.

> Similarly, one interviewee stated: "*I think it is obviously going to take time [inclusive practice], but given the support and opportunities and experiences, and talking with the most staff, they are certainly willing to be open to the change and try*".

He stops for a moment then adds, *"Look, as far as I'm concerned, every single student in this College could have an individual education plan".* Beaming with pride, he stands up as he ends the interview and says, *"Students at this College are given learning experiences that prepare them to be in the world commensurate with their ability, their capacity and opportunities that will be afforded to them".* He then moves towards the door, opens it and, gesturing towards Frances's office, says, *"Speaking of opportunities, Frances has just gone into her office; you're seeing her next, right?"* I nod and politely thank him for his time as I walk out.

5.3.   Introduction to the Vice-Principal's Voice

Frances started working at the College just four months before Frank. She came from a similar College 30 minutes away and held a middle leadership role. Initially employed as head of the curriculum at the College, she was in an office in student services, well away from the previous principal. She appeared to work in his shadow, often seen on the sidelines as he addressed the staff. When Frank took over, this all changed. Her role position was elevated to deputy principal teaching and learning and then to vice-principal. She was given a new office next door to Frank, and her presence was very much felt amongst the staff.

5.3.1. Vignette

Frances is a hardworking, capable, friendly character who could be described as a mother-hen to all who work with her. This is because she is constantly looking out for everyone else. She never seems to leave the school; in before 7.00am each morning and frequently there until 9.00pm in the evening. She often arrives at the College with two coffees in hand, one for her and another for Frank. Many formal and informal meetings occur in her office long before school begins and well after school has closed for the day. She offers me a seat at the small round table to the left as she enters the room. A big whiteboard covers the wall behind it, there are various things written on it in blue and red pen with arrows going in all directions. Like Frank's office, this office is bright and airy, and the walls are painted in

the same shades of pastel grey and white. Frances's desk is facing the door as you enter the room. A laptop and screen monitor are on top. A side cabinet with a pink pot plant and a large black handbag is set against the back wall. This office looks out onto the main driveway into the College, just above the swimming pool, giving Frances a clear view of people entering and leaving the main administration area. A door at the back is often used as an escape route or sneaky entry should the occasion arise.

Frances humbly describes herself as an accidental school leader. At her previous College, she led within the student wellbeing space and in her own words had to adapt to her current role, which is about leading learning: *"My role in terms of my leadership has been building teacher capacity and developing the pedagogy of teachers".* This reminded me of a comment Frank once made affirming growth in Frances's leadership capabilities, *"Make no mistake, Frances is sailing this ship".*

In the same spirit, Frances acknowledges the development of the middle leadership team, saying they had been significant in supporting teachers to improve practice under the guise of the new vision for learning framework. Most participants agreed with this, *"It's my perception that it's you guys [middle leaders], what you guys do and your own input into making sure that we are doing what's right for the kids in the mainstream."*

She has great faith in the intent of teachers and firmly believes that most come to work with the same purpose as herself, to work for the best outcome for the student. Furthermore, they would be willing to adapt to any disruptions and challenges they may experience in the College to achieve this *"It [Vision for Learning] has definitely made me[teacher] rethink and review and reflect at times about what I do and whether it can be improved."*

She considers the improvement process to have spotlighted teachers and made them more aware of their responsibility to renew and invigorate their own pedagogy to be a professional "*It has changed a lot and I think teachers are most probably aware now of all students in their teaching practice".* Speaking candidly, she says, *"Gone are the days of doing the same thing year after year".* When asked about her views on professional learning, she perks up in her seat and, with delight, tells me that there has been a shift in how teachers access the growth of professional learning. She proudly puts forward the notion of professional learning coming from within the College or between schools as becoming the dominant motive for professional learning, *"Gone are the days of buying programs or attending for a one-off day. I think it really is how we come together to have a shared understanding and a common language around improving".*

> This view was shared by other participants as one revealed: *"We do professional development work now within the school as a whole school, we have more conversations with staff members. I think because of all of that we probably have a better understanding now about students' individual needs."*

Excitably she shares her vision for the school's professional culture to be one where there is an acceptance that people must adapt and be agile and that teachers really take ownership of their own professional growth and learning. Looking a bit deflated, she admits that while teachers are very good at being mildly open to feedback, they often do not respond to it. This she finds challenging, *"They will often appear to have taken the feedback on, but then they don't do anything about it"*.

> As a participant comment illustrates: *"Generally, I don't see the need for me missing classes to do professional learning about something that I think I can do quite easily."*

She lights up as I mention future enrolments. Over time, she believes the College enrolment demographic has changed, resulting in a growing number of students with diverse needs presenting together in the classroom. This, she suggests, will have implications on what future professional development teachers do as student needs will always dictate.

> This view was shared by other participants: *"I think our numbers have increased and the needs have been a wider variety of needs that are coming through now."*

Education she feels for students with diverse needs is more about learning growth over and above attainment. Smiling widely, she tells me the College has done exceptionally well in developing a shared understanding and a common language around how we seek to improve. She stops to think for a moment, then continues confessing that keeping the momentum will be challenging.

> Illustrated in the participant comment:
>> *As much as possible, we need to include them [students with special educational needs]. Particularly in areas that are in normal modern life, e.g., in a play situation, PCG, in games, in sport and in subjects where there's a lot of discussion. We should be able to modify subjects like RE. However, my concern is that there are sometimes where we can't. And it is just not possible.*

When asked why she thinks the College should be a school of choice for parents of students with special educational needs, she clasps her hands together and says:

Well, I think what we do very well here is cater to the kid's individual needs, our capacity to be creative in approaching student learning outcomes is beyond anything that I have ever experienced in my career to date. I think we have got a hardworking team of professionals. We have called highly qualified people or very committed people, which other schools have too. Still, I think when it all comes together, the experience for our kids, particularly those with special needs, is so comprehensive and so holistic. It really sets the mark to being independent beyond school.

When asked this same question participants were unanimous in the view that the College provide an excellent learning environment for students with special educational needs. As one participant remarked:

There are so many avenues in terms of resourcing, recording, and establishing of programs for IEPs that make it a lot more user friendly for us to use and so I think that compared to now and back then, it is more prevalent it is more structured and probably more successful.

NCCD is a topic close to Frances's heart. Smiling, she affirms the development and growth the diversity team and I have established in that area. She is of the view that NCCD empowers teachers around their own understanding of what the need is for special needs students. Recounting the many times that she has spoken to the staff about quality teaching and teacher practice, she says, "*It is very easy to default to the Learning Support coordinator and special Education Support coordinators if you are in a school with them and really negate your responsibility as the teacher*".

This reminded me of concerns expressed by other participants: "*I do think some of the mainstream teachers need to be more accountable.*"

Summarising her thoughts, she tells me she thinks the NCCD has the potential to recalibrate teaching stating it is the responsibility of the teacher and that it is what they all should be doing. She admits that there may be a need, but as the professionals in the room, teachers need to meet that need and support that need.

The time factor involved in this process was highlighted by others:

> *I think it is a slow process [inclusion]. I think it is something that is taking some time to get traction but as it is further promoted, and they [students with special educational needs] are further involved in mainstream they have more of a role in class if we could have just instead of being a little bit invisible. If teachers can start to include them as much as possible, I think that's where we are starting but it is something that is slowly progressing.*

5.4. Introduction to the Teacher Voices

Teacher participants came from various subject areas that students with special educational needs attended. They had varying years of teaching experience and overall supported the philosophy of inclusive education. They associated inclusive practice at the College with students who had special needs attending the Education Support Centre and being cared for by specialist staff. The voice of the character Brian is a composite representing the whole group of teacher participants.

5.4.1. Vignette

Out of breath, Brian, a veteran teacher at the College, opens my office door and apologises for being late for his interview. Red-faced and beads of water dripping from his thinning grey hair, he complains that he got a last-minute relief lunch duty on the oval in the thirty-degree heat. He sits down, grabs a sheet of paper from my desk and frantically fans himself. Once cooled down, he composes himself, takes a drink from his water bottle and a bite from an apple which he announces is lunch. He grins as he says he's probably annoyed people over the years, including me with his outspoken views on teaching students with special educational needs: *"It's no secret – I have said this before. Personally, I think I have more opportunities to develop their skills when I have them as an individual cohort than in a mainstream class".* That said, he happily admits he is very comfortable teaching students with special educational needs. He puts this down to the many years he has spent helping run an outside school sports club for them. His face lights up as he explains having them together as a group enabled him to have his entire focus on them, which he believes was good in terms of safety and developing their skills. *"So, what about our mainstream colleagues. Do you think they are comfortable teaching students with special educational needs?"* I ask. Shaking his head as he responds, Brian says, *"I think it provides challenges for the regular frontline classroom teacher".* Although it was evident that he was passionate about spending time with students with special educational needs, Brian admits this did not always eventuate in practice.

My intention is always to include kids with issues; however, because I have got so many others I have to supervise and teach, I don't feel I can give them time to learn or achieve at their level. I rely on your guys, [education assistants] to work with them in my classes.

Becoming more reflective, he talks about his experiences working under four previous principals as I listen on with interest. He recalls that there was a great deal of structure about the hierarchy of the College back then. The leadership was, in his words, *"Quite firm" from the top-down. Anything about changes had to go to "the people at the top". Life was easier back then".* Continuing the topic of leadership, he quickly gets to Frank and his different style of leadership. *"He has challenged teachers to try new things and look more at the individual rather than the classroom as a base".* He points out that Frank did what he said he would do and implemented many changes. Listing some changes, he says, *"He restructured the curricula and leadership and introduced new roles, timetable changes and revamped buildings".* In his opinion, there really was not much that had not changed. Appearing to admire these actions, he continues:

Frank made no bones about the fact that he was going to do that, so hats off to him. He prepared us well, though in talking to other staff, I guess the significance is the rate of change and the amount of change in such a very, very short time.

Consequently, Brian has found the last two years hectic and the most arduous in his time at the College. Despite this, he acknowledges the long-overdue need for change. In his view, Frank and Frances have given learning a much-needed push through the new vision and focus on pedagogical framework for learning. He likes that and, with delight, tells me there is much more freedom and motivation for teachers to be creative with practice. Also, a much bigger focus on their involvement in the whole school community decision making.

"Would you say our colleagues understand their roles and responsibilities as teachers?" I ask to which Brian responds:

Well, they [Frank and Frances] certainly laid down the law around compliance, didn't they and made clear rules about appropriate teacher performance and procedures. So, I think the message has got across. There is an expectation to be – this ongoing learner and continually improve your practice so that all students can achieve.

Brian reveals he has learned to manage students with special educational needs by observing the education assistants work with them in his classroom. He is in awe of the fantastic work they do, particularly in the confines of the Education Support Centre, declaring:

All you need to do is walk past the centre to see that it is a nurturing and caring environment. By the time they [students with special educational needs] get out to us in the mainstream classes, strategies and processes are already in place to help us.

"Would you say the staff know who to go to for help?" I enquire. Pointing towards the door he says, *"Yes there is a team of people we can go to for help with all students who have needs".* He pauses momentarily, then adds, *"I think it is well communicated to everybody else as well. It just takes a quick email or a quick phone call to get that help."*

Talking about new programs and initiatives running at the College triggers an emotional response from Brian.

Look, it's a much busier place than it used to be. Yes, there are many more opportunities for your students to join mainstream courses and do Preliminary units and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network courses. However, On the flip of that, it has put a lot more demands on our staff.

"How so?" I ask, and he responds by questioning the validity of students with special educational needs engaging in preliminary unit courses. This puts pressure on teachers who are expected to teach a general course to the remainder of the class. Having heavier content to cover, bigger classes with varying ranges of ability and a fuller teaching load is overwhelming for teachers. Shifting awkwardly in his seat, he recalls how he found himself working 14-hour days just to keep up at one stage. His stress levels went through the roof, which made him quite ill, and he had to take time off from work.

According to Brian, introducing specific targets and profiles for "*our students*" (students with special educational needs) has been good. From an administration point of view, having student plans on the College software system is quick, efficient, and less laborious than the old paper copy system. From an academic point of view, it gives teachers something to focus on. In the past, the focus was mainly placed on the social aspects of development. But now, with increased expectations on practice, focus can be on developing other skills, whether they be cognitive or physical skills. He ponders momentarily then states how he has had to rely on "*our guys*" (education assistants) to teach the students with special educational needs in his class. Having them in the classroom with him has been a lifesaver. Though apparently not always, as he declares some were less energetic than others and some too quick to judge teachers' practice. This Reminded me of a recent conversation, I had with an education assistant:

Some teachers are unsure how to deal with specific students, so they just block them out as if they are not even in the room, or they rely heavily on the support staff to get students through their classes and coursework.

The timer on my phone indicates the end of the interview, and Brian gets in one last comment before rushing off to class:

Look, I have to say the support and guidance for teachers working with students who have needs has most definitely increased and improved over the past few years, particularly for that big group in the middle em…. You know, like Dean and Wil, the learning support kids. I'm not sure if um…. Leadership have enabled this, or whether it's down to you and your team. It's a pity, though, not all the staff have that inclusivity with education support students in their classrooms. This really, really frustrates me.

5.5.   Introduction to the Middle Leader Voices

Middle leaders were representative of a broad range of staff from across the College. They all held teaching roles and had varying years of middle management experience. Like teachers, they supported the philosophy of inclusive education and associated inclusive practice at the College with students who had special needs attending the Education Support Centre and being cared for by specialist staff. The voice of the character Patricia is a composite representing the whole group of middle-leader participants.

5.5.1.   Vignette

Patricia shifts about in her seat as she waits for me to sit down and begin the interview. In her early thirties, she is tall, athletic-looking, and has long dark hair tied up in a ponytail. She is a popular teacher with staff and students alike. Since graduating from university some eight years ago, this has been her first job. She has quickly worked her way through the ranks of the beginning teacher, coordinator and two years ago, when Frank took over, she was promoted to a middle leader position.

Patricia asks, *"Em, before we start what I say, this is only between you and me, right?"*. *"Of course,"* I reply. Nervously, she continues, *"It's just, I don't want to get in trouble for saying em... the wrong thing"*. The door in the next office closes, and she whispers to me, *"No one can hear us. It's just you and me".* I reassure her again, and we begin.

Recounting her time at the College, Patricia tells me it has gone through phases of good learning: *"I think the process Frank introduced two years ago around the IDEAS, and*

the way that worked with the staff went better than expected". With a wide grin, she boasts, she was part of the team that played a significant role in facilitating IDEAS workshops with staff and that they really had got them involved. Shaking her head, she says, *"Well, to be honest, actually not all the staff. Some whinged and protested that it was just another thing to do and would be replaced with something else in two years".* However, this did not seem to faze Patricia. Gesturing with her hand, she continues, *"You know, that thinking is nothing new for anyone who has been in education or at this College for a while. We all know that that happens. You kind of expect it".*

Patricia associates the improvement process with creating opportunities for staff at all levels. As a middle leader, she enjoyed the freedom and autonomy entrusted to her by Frank and Frances to lead the changes in her department. Shrieking with laughter and pushing her wrists tightly together, she says, *"I haven't had a lot of shackles put on – that's been excellent".* Clarifying this, she says:

> *This was good from my position; making changes to courses and things like that, I didn't have to go through other people to get that approval. I could make some decisions myself, and Frances and Frank supported me and encouraged me to make those decisions.*

Suddenly frown lines appear across her forehead as she relates the struggles, she had in the early days with having higher-level responsibilities.

> *So, I don't know about you, but um… I felt pretty needy at times for people above me – either Frances or Frank– I'd go, look what do we do, how do we go through this, and so that was great for a very steep learning curve for me.*

Sitting comfortably back in her seat, she tells me what sticks in her mind now is Frank and Frances constantly encouraging staff to try something new and not be afraid to make mistakes. *"If it does not work, it does not work!"* She felt that was really drilled into everyone, particularly middle leaders. Over time, this encouragement and support from fellow middle leaders helped develop her confidence.

Describing some of the experiences she believes helped transform her from a teacher to a leader, she talks specifically about the learning cycle process. This process helped her to understand and appreciate data literacy. She used this to reflect on her own practice. She recalls explicitly how her interactions with staff and students during lunch duty in the centre helped her develop relationships. She really got to know the students and became more comfortable amongst them. This made it easier for her to create individual student plans and focus on personalising learning with the diversity team. Significantly this focus extended

beyond the students from the centre to mainstream students with learning disabilities such as Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Attention Deficit Disorder, and the like. She really came to grips with the national curriculum and aligned this with the College's pedagogical pillars and vision for learning. This guided her work with staff to create programs to meet all student needs and ensure consistent curriculum delivery. Carrying out learning walks allowed her to observe, share and guide others practice. Yet, she felt challenged by this.

> *I guess the thing is, I'm not sure that some teachers, like just your regular classroom teachers, are comfortable or aware of the vision for learning, and I'm not sure if it's affecting everybody's teaching practice. I guess that's the difficulty for me in my current role as a middle leader, which is trying to help other teachers understand what it is about and implement its philosophies.*

Despite this, she quickly mentioned that teacher practice had changed, telling me that there had been a shift:

> *Teachers have been encouraged and challenged to push harder and to create opportunities for all students. They are more aware of their practice. It has been reinvigorating. Their capacity to plan for and teach students with needs has grown heaps.*

Going into detail, she declared they had to adapt to the changes and soon realised that they needed to work at different levels to personalise learning in line with the College pedagogical pillars and learning framework. Some teachers she recalls were way out of their depth and, as a result, happily let education assistants take responsibility for students with needs in their classes. In fact, she had her suspicions that some education assistants were doing the work for the students. Glancing toward the door and folding her arms, she lowers her voice, leans closer to me and, spilling the beans, says:

> *Look, I really think we need to look at the staff that we are putting in working alongside those students [students with special educational needs], em and are we doing the best for that staff and those students. If I've got a staff member who's fully loaded, who's extremely stressed, no, I'm not going to get the best for the students or from the staff. So yeah, I think that's something else that can be worked upon looking at those staff members who have the skills, the passion, and the ability to really work with your student's em… in terms of diversity.*

That said, Patricia unfolds her arms and sits back in her seat. Her body relaxes as if a huge weight has just been lifted from her shoulders. *"And what about the support available to those teachers? Do you think they are aware of that?"* I ask. Patricia quickly rattles off the

avenues regarding resourcing particularly modified programs and student plans. She tells me that there are more transparent and more user-friendly processes for teachers to use before the onset of school improvement compared to now and then. They are more prevalent, more structured and, in her view, more successful. She stops for a moment then adds:

> *There's no denying, you [me, researcher] do a great job with your students in the centre. The staff in your area are dedicated and interested in ed support. Teachers at the College are loving. I can't think of any teacher who is not loving. It doesn't matter what a school building is like, doesn't matter how old or new the furniture is. It all comes down to who the person is that is in front of them.*

Getting more reflective, she confides in me, *"There is a culture within the College where either a teacher says, "well I don't work with those students" or where people say, "that's not possible - that's part of the model, that needs to go".* Animated, she continues:

> *Rather than a teacher saying remove that child, they are disturbing the rest of the class or playing with puzzles in the corner or whatever because that way you are in the room, but I don't have to worry about it. That is the culture we need to smash.*

On a roll, Patricia tells me she knows that I have often impressed the need for the development of practice more inclusive for students with special educational needs. However, continues by explaining that teachers feel it is unfair that not all departments have to teach Ed Support students and because of this teaching them for some has sadly kind of lost its punch. She pauses momentarily and then says:

> *I understand there is a policy of inclusivity, but thus far, I have found it challenging to adhere to the teaching and learning process with the other twenty-five odd students in the room due to the boys different learning needs. If I am correct, their learning cycle in the mainstream is "exclusive" to RE. is this correct? For example, they are not doing general Science, Math's, English classes, etcetera.*

Looking exhausted after her rant, Patricia ends the interview on a positive note.

> *Truth be told, I think em…we are actually a flagship for special needs. Over the last couple of years, it has changed massively [inclusive practice] since I have been at the College, and it will change even further. . .so it is undoubtedly heading in the right direction. Still, like anything when you are looking at a shift in the culture of any big organisation, it just takes time em… and it is not just one thing, and it is all the little things added together.*

5.6. Introduction to Education Assistant Voices

Education assistants had a range of experience from one to 30 years and were predominantly a female team. Some had worked at the College long before I started and had been there ever since. They felt uninformed about many of the changes, which left them feeling uneasy and vulnerable. Some feared for their jobs given the temporary closure of the centre, and leadership increased expectations around student participation. Most believed students with special educational needs thrived much better inside the Education Support Centre than in the mainstream College. The voice of the character Gail is a composite representing the whole group of education assistant participants.

5.6.1. Vignette

Gail is an education assistant who has worked at the College for more than 12 years; her husband was a past pupil there. She has seen many staff and students come and go and was only too delighted to share her experiences with me. She begins the interview by giving me a brief history of how the centre used to operate. Originally there were five education assistants and two teachers working with five or six students. She describes the students as low functioning, with most not reading or writing. Some spent all their time in the centre having what she called "*downtime*", while others went to full mainstream classes. She believed the students probably had more behavioural issues back then than the ones now. She stops for a moment then adds, *"I think that we made it a hundred times worse"*. Curious, I enquire how. Gail responds:

> *Because we basically sat there nothing; nothing was changed to their ability. The ones that were street smart just swore at us for being there. And what they would do is put them together with one of us, and so it didn't really work.*

Shuddering, she related her experience of her first week working at the College. In desperation, she went to the coordinator and told her that she did not think she did well. Shaking her head, she recalls her response, *"Oh, no, we actually thought you were doing an okay job"*. *"Can you imagine my frustration?"* she says to me. *"I had just told her the students, and I basically sat at the back of the classroom and did nothing, and she thought that was okay"*. She stops momentarily then adds, *"Anyway, after year ten, they all got put back into the centre full-time because they couldn't do any of the classes."*

Reminiscing further she tells me that things have changed. More so, over the past couple of years. One of the most positive things she claims to have witnessed is the growth in learning support. *"The school have recognised that not everybody is academic and that*

learning support, as much as the Education Support Centre, is essential. I think the new learning space in A31 is excellent". Before this, Gail reports that those [learning support] students just got lost in the mainstream: *"You were either in special needs, Education Support Centre or nothing"*. She believes Frank has spread his leadership significantly, contributing to these changes. Explaining this, she tells me that her work has raised awareness and focus on students with diverse needs, and this has made inroads into getting teachers in touch with all students in their classes. Excitedly she reveals that she has seen a change within the staff, filtering through on a day-to-day level. Moving in her seat and moving her hands as she speaks, she gives an example of this:

> *Some teachers are trying. Sport, Woodwork, Cooking……. They engage with them [students with special educational needs]. They always make sure they have a partner. You know, it is like they pre-empt what is going to happen. That everyone is going to go off. It's excellent.*

Smiling, she continues, *"Mainstream teachers doing lunch duty in the Education Support Centre has been a bonus. They actually got to see students for who they really are, not just their disability"*. Talking fondly about students with special educational needs, her eyes well up as she recalls two who recently graduated and how they got a standing ovation on the night. Yet, she is skeptical about mainstream staff's complete understanding of this achievement, and the work specialist staff had to put in to make this happen. While they appear to appreciate it, she argues the reality is responsibility always falls to the specialist team. Reflecting on that evening, I recall a teacher's comment clarifying this thinking:

> *I know what struck me – I went to the year twelve graduation and saw L up there being awarded his award, and that has happened over several years. They are recognised for their achievement, and I think that it's wonderful to think that they've been given opportunities and they have been able to take grasp of them. Even the fact that I heard L has got some employment this year, which is certainly a great achievement when our students do finally leave the College.*

Gail believes that many mainstream teachers don't have high aspirations for students with special educational needs: *"They are a bit reluctant; some bury their heads in the sand, but I think it is because they are not 100% sure how to go about it"*. She quickly counteracts this, acknowledging that some staff have come up to the centre to get help planning for students with special educational needs learning. She really admires their effort, especially as she believes many are afraid to come in. I suggest perhaps specialist teachers need to get out more and go into the mainstream and work with teachers. Laughing loudly at this suggestion,

Gail says, *"I don't reckon the ed support teachers would want to go into the mainstream and teach class, do you?"*. Slumping back into her seat and looking sympathetically at me, she says:

> *Sometimes em… it doesn't work. It can just be too hard like, say teachers set the work and it is all quiet, and then we have to re-explain or talk and um…. you can't talk, so someone just must sit and listen to the teacher, whereas really it is not at their level. So, a lot of time, our kids do a lot of waiting and um…a lot of sitting around.*

She stops momentarily, then remarked:

> *Some staff's favourite saying is I've got nothing prepared. What do you think you could do? Or they can just go on their laptop. It's then left to us to find things for our students to do at the very last minute.*

With a puzzled look on her face, she tells me that she is unsure of these teachers' reasons for acting like this. She does not know if it is fear of the students, if they are not qualified in changing the work for students with special educational needs, or if they simply look upon it as the specialist teachers and education assistant's responsibility.

However, in support of the teachers, she finds expectations for student participation in some courses unrealistic. This, she believes, can give them a false sense of reality. Using a first aid course as an example, she says:

> *Some students with special educational needs would never ever administer first aid. And some of the other students in there too. They have been hand-fed the work, but really, they are going to walk away with a first-aid certificate, and they would never ever be able to administer first aid.*

Looking uncomfortable and tapping her fingers on the arm of her chair, she discloses:

> *I find that the students I work with, work better in a unit. I don't know whether it is the environment or the topic, but they feel more comfortable. I find you get more output from them workwise when they are in the centre. They are safe, and they are not competing with the mainstream students; they can be themselves. They are more accepted, with less chance of ridicule in the centre than in the mainstream.*

It is Gail's opinion that Frank and Frances are oblivious to what really goes on in the centre: "*They stop at the gate. They need to press that green button and come through, see what we do, see what we're about, make connections with our kids and with the staff*". There is an awkward silence before Gail begins to speak again. Her voice drops to a whisper as she glances towards the window and says,

Look, I only do what I do; I'm not privy to classified information, but when they revealed the plans for the new learning spaces, the centre was completely ignored. To the point that for the first time ever, I saw our coordinator stand up and say, 'well, will there be a lift or is there a ramp'? Maybe there could have been a misunderstanding ...but the fact that she was so animated made all of us think that really, we had not been considered.

That said, Gail firmly believes Frank and Frances have really promoted the College as a learning environment suitable for all student needs. They have done this through the new vision, clearly defined learning pathways, and showcasing diversity on the College website. These things, she is convinced, have contributed to the College's good name in the broader community for supporting students with diverse needs. Despite this, Gail is somewhat discontented. Looking confused and referring to mainstream teachers, she describes her ambivalence about their classroom practice, *"Listen, there is always good intentions. However, I want to see more than intention. I want to see action".* She tells me what has come out of the improvement process is my role in developing teacher confidence to work with diverse learners. She coughs then tells me that I cannot do it alone, and she wishes that somehow my voice could be heard more than it is because the special kids at the College are just as important as the more able ones. On this note, the interview ends.

5.6.2. *Reflections on the Findings*

This chapter told the story of change from the participant perspective. Challenges to inclusive cultural change was a theme that emerged throughout the data, namely, influencing teacher attitudes and beliefs about inclusion, the built environment, and complexities associated with secondary schooling. Leadership acknowledged these challenges and argued that the education sector, in general, had a way to go in understanding inclusion and supporting schools with enactment.

The findings highlight that the new principal's arrival disrupted the College and impacted change. For example, he challenged current practice and encouraged teachers to think differently about teaching and learning from an individual student needs perspective. Significantly, participants agreed there was a need for change and liked the new leadership way of working. For example, staff were given autonomy and encouraged to experiment with practice and not to be afraid of making mistakes. While at the same time opportunities were created for their personal learning. However, most importantly, they were happy to be included in decisions about the College improvement.

Middle leaders supported staff through improvement. They were motivated, inspired, and appreciative of the opportunity to share in leadership and influence change. They enjoyed the freedom to make decisions about practice and attributed collaboration with fellow middle leaders and mentoring from the principal and vice-principal with helping them to build confidence to lead and embed change across the College.

A common view amongst participants was that having a middle leader focused on Diversity Education had enabled them to improve practice. For example, participants noted that I had raised awareness of student needs and teacher roles and responsibilities, making them rethink and reflect on their practice and how accessible it was for students with special educational needs. Staff felt reassured, knowing they had me as a point of contact should support be needed. The introduction of flexible learning environments, structures, and processes for creating student profiles and plans, new courses, and education assistant resourcing supported teacher improvement capacity. This was evident in the increased opportunities for students with special educational needs to access and participate in the mainstream curriculum and College events, as well as having external professionals onsite to support staff and student access to a withdrawal room for down time.

Significantly, working through an improvement process created opportunities for staff to come together as a professional community and talk about practice. Relationships developed and staff confidence grew, gradually impacting thinking towards more inclusive working methods. Inclusive principles underpinned the new College vision and learning framework, and staff used the new language in the framework to talk about their practice, student success and improvement. Furthermore, the introduction of a learning cycle process supported teacher understanding and implementation of the pedagogical principles in the learning framework into classroom practice; thus, promoting consistency in practice and equity and fairness in teaching and learning for all students and meeting leadership expectations for improvement in teacher and student participation.

5.7.   Chapter Summary

The presentation of the summarised ethnographic data in Chapter Five adds a layer of richness that infuses depth and context into the study's findings. This enhancement contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the shifts in practice towards including students with special educational needs, which will be the focus of Chapter Six.

CHAPTER 6: INTERPRETING THE FINDINGS

6.1.   Introduction

This research aimed to explore the influence of leadership changes, school improvement processes, and mandatory legislative requirements of NCCD on the development of inclusive practices for students with special educational needs. An investigation into the broader changes within the College environment was conducted to assess the impact of these disruptions.

Chapters Four and Five detailed my personal experiences as researcher, study participant, leader of learning for Diversity Education, and middle leader, alongside the experiences of other participants. Building upon these insights, Chapters Six and Seven present the analysis and discussion of the key findings. A thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was utilised for the analysis. This systematic method facilitated the identification of emergent patterns and themes, addressing the research-sub-questions that guided the study:

1. What structures and processes are in place and/or have been disrupted that may influence teacher practice?
2. What challenges and opportunities emerge for supporting students with special educational needs?
3. What significant enabling factors have impacted change within the school?
4. How has teacher praxis working with students who have special educational needs been implicated during the period of disruptive processes?

Chapter Six outlines this process. First, the presentation and explanation of examples of collated data, clustered codes, and sub-themes are provided, addressing the research-sub-questions. Then, the broad themes generated from a review of all the data, aligned with the sub-themes, are presented, and explained in response to the overarching research question. A visual summary illustrates this process, followed by an explanation of how the broad themes were defined and named. Finally, a report substantiates the presence of these themes within the data.

6.2.   Analysis

In conducting the analysis, an adapted version of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework was utilised. To enhance the applicability of the framework to my specific research context, I made modifications that are outlined in Table 6.1. These

adaptations included the addition of a third column to provide a detailed description of the data analysis process. Furthermore, certain sections of Braun and Clarke's original description were rephrased to accurately depict the analytical procedures employed.

Table 6.1

Thematic Analysis Framework

Phase	Description of the process	Data analysis process
1. Familiarisation with the data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading all the data, noting down initial ideas.	Identifying patterns in the data content relevant to answering the sub RQ.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systemic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.	Looking for patterns in words and phrases that reflected the researcher and participant experiences and that were relevant to answering the sub RQ.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into emerging sub-themes, related to the sub RQ. Gathering data relevant to each emerging sub-theme.	Reviewing the data relevant to the sub RQ to identify areas where codes appeared to cluster or overlap to form emergent sub-themes.
4. Reviewing themes	Re-reading all the data and cross-checking it to the sub-themes to ensure they reflect meaning.	Re-examining all the data to generate broad themes from the sub-themes that accurately capture the overall meaning of the data.
5. Defining and naming generated broad themes	Ongoing analysis to refine specifics of each broad themes, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each broad theme.	Organising the collated data extracts for each broad theme into a coherent and consistent account, with accompanying narrative.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.	Identifying selected extracts that provide evidence of the broad themes and make an argument in relation to the analysis of the overarching research question and literature.

Note. Adapted from "Using thematic analysis in psychology" by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 2006, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), p. 87 (https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa).

The next section offers a detailed account of the systematic progression through each phase of the framework, illustrating the rigorous process employed to analyse the data. The primary data sources encompassed audio recordings and transcripts of interviews, as well as

recorded observations and informal conversations documented in the reflective journal. To complement the primary data and foster a deeper understanding of the research context, College documents such as policies and procedures, plans and reports, curriculum programs, individual teacher planning, student individual plans and reports, enrolment interviews, and NCCD data were also examined. By adopting this comprehensive approach, additional perspectives and contextual insights were garnered, which might have otherwise eluded direct participant interactions or observations (Wood et al., 2020). The incorporation of these diverse data sources facilitated a more holistic and nuanced analysis, augmenting the overall findings of the study.

6.2.1. *Phase One – Familiarisation with the Data*

During this analysis phase, the collected data were meticulously examined to identify patterns that would address the research-sub-questions. As an insider researcher, I strategically positioned myself within the College context, actively engaging with and closely observing the participants in their natural work environment. This immersion approach allowed me to familiarise myself with the data as it was gathered. For instance, observations and informal conversations were recorded in my reflective journal, interviews were conducted to gather individual participant experiences, and College documents such as policies, procedures, plans, reports, curriculum programs, individual teacher planning, individual student plans and reports, enrolment interviews, and NCCD data were thoroughly reviewed.

Consequently, the analysis phase was approached with prior knowledge of the data and initial analytic thoughts related to the research-sub-questions. However, an inductive approach to the formal analysis ensured that the findings emerged organically from the ethnographic data minimising my selective bias. This involved transcribing interviews, carefully comparing them to the audio recordings for accuracy and annotating them with anecdotal, analytical thoughts and points of interest. Also, the observations and informal conversations recorded in my reflective journal and the information gleaned from the various College documents were repeatedly reviewed.

Through this rigorous process patterns were identified in the data relevant to answering the research-sub-questions. Firstly, there seemed to be an increase in opportunities for students with special educational needs to access and participate in mainstream curriculum and events; secondly, influencing teacher attitudes towards change proved to be a challenging task; thirdly, there were opportunities in place to support teachers build capacity

for improvement; fourthly, the improvement processes appeared to have opened up avenues for whole-school discussions on practice including responses to students with special educational needs; and finally, the language used in College documents reflected inclusive intent of the College leadership. These observations provided valuable insights that guided me in determining the type of evidence on which to focus during the subsequent analysis phase - Generating codes.

6.2.2. Phase Two – Generating Codes

In this phase, the objective was to assign codes to the observed patterned data from phase one across all the data sources. To accomplish this the underlying meaning behind both my own experiences and the participants' experiences regarding the perceived impact of disruptions to practice was investigated.

To begin, the interview transcripts and entries in my reflective journal were carefully examined, specifically looking for words and phrases that indicated the development of inclusive practice and that were relevant to addressing the research-sub-questions. For instance, attention was paid to recurring terms like "Whole school", "Increased support", "More programs", "New leadership focus on learning", "Shared responsibility" and "Heightened expectations". Working through the data, initial codes were assigned to significant words and phrases which were then highlighted yellow and outlined in red pen, to enable me to locate and track them easily within the data.

Next, relevant words and phrases identified were matched to words and phrases with similar meanings extracted from the College documents and again they were assigned initial codes, highlighted in yellow and outlined them in red pen, to locate and track them easily within the data (see Figure 6.1). This process aimed to establish connections and alignments between the evidence gathered from the interviews, my reflective journal entries, and the information contained within the College documents. For instance, phrases in the College documents such as "Opportunities to learn in different ways", "Focus on developing teacher knowledge and skills", and "Targeted allocation of resources to meet student needs" were indicative of leadership commitment to inclusive change and also resonated with my own experiences and those of the participants and were evident in the interview transcripts and my reflective journal entries.

Figure 6.1

Example of Matching Words and Phrases Across the Data that Were Relevant to the Research-Sub-Questions and Used to Generate Initial Codes

Analytical thoughts and points of interest
■ Protecting anonymity

Highlighted words and phrases with similar meaning across the data

Interview transcript

Reflective journal

College documents
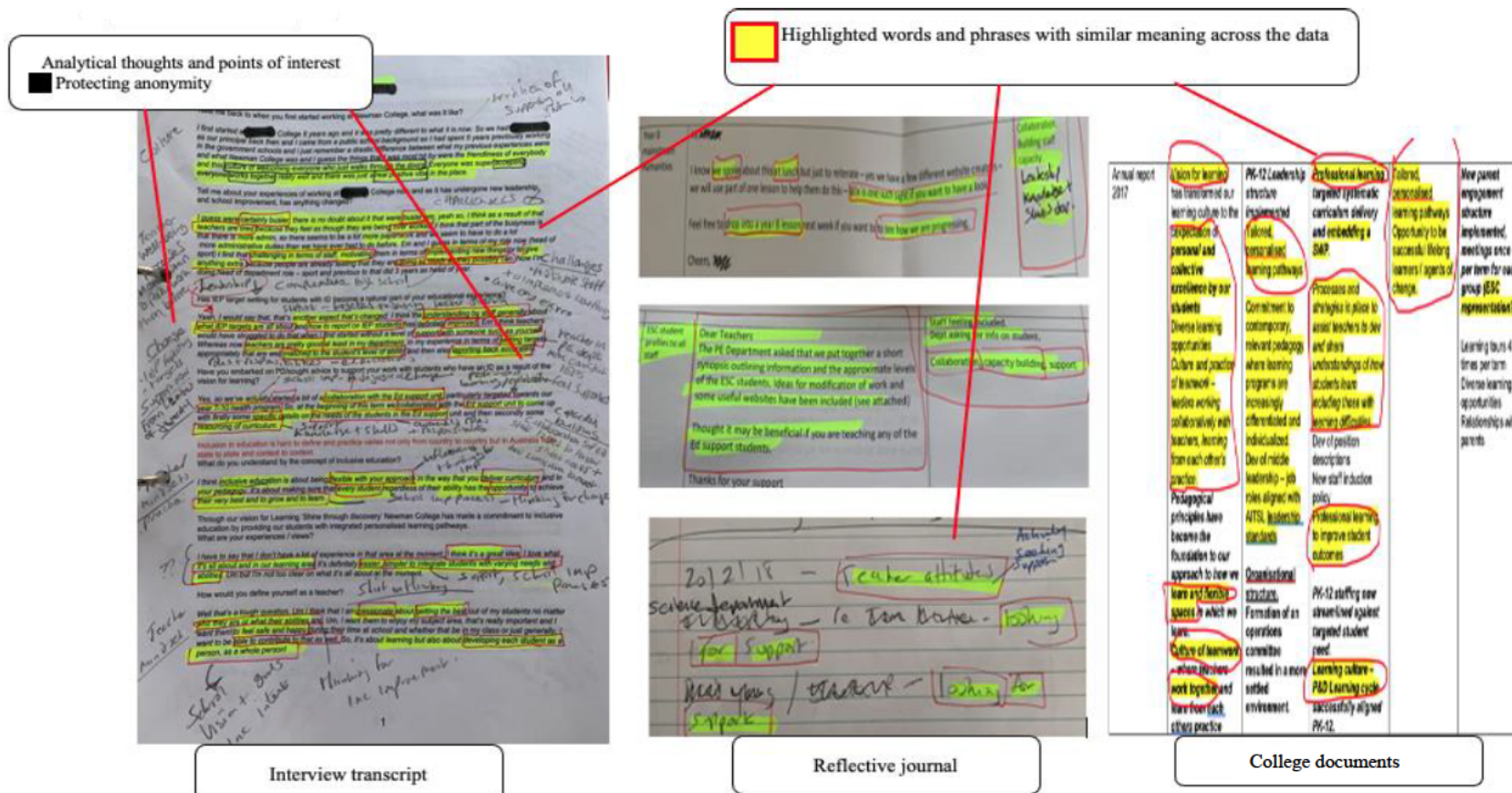
Making these connections strengthened the foundation of evidence and affirmed the consistency of the patterns identified across all the data sources. Figure 6.2 provides two examples of the process used to validate the alignment between the observed experiences and the information gleaned from the College documents with the initial codes assigned - "focus on learning and "supported staff".

Figure 6.2

Example of Codes Generated from the Collated Data

Data evidence	Data source	Code	Data evidence	Data source	Code
'Shared online examples of Punit resources with staff today.'	Reflective journal		'Support strategies', 'modifications made to programs / resources', 'I'm available to help.'	Reflective journal	
'Goal - Provide appropriate professional learning programs'	College documents	**Focus on learning**	'Embed a culture of support for staff'	College documents	**Supported staff**
'We do whole school PD. We have more conversations, and you get ideas about strategies for practice.'	Interview transcripts		'I feel supported, people are constantly offering support'	Interview transcripts	

In total, 49 initial codes were generated from the data using this process and are presented in Table 6.2. As codes were assigned to the data, they were grouped them into sets to facilitate easy identification of meaningful connections between them in preparation for the next phase of the analysis – searching for themes.

Table 6.2

Codes Generated from the Collated Data

Set one	Set two	Set three	Set four	Set five
Commitment to change	Initiated improvement	Leading improvement	Empowerment	Capacity building
Collaboration	Fostering a culture of inclusion	Challenges to change	Pedagogical development	Teacher learning for student achievement
Thinking and attitudinal change	Ingrained culture of inclusion	Physical environment	Roles and responsibilities	Lack of knowledge and skills
Differentiating learning	Complexities of secondary curriculum	Hard to motivate staff	Teacher well being impacted by change	Leading learning
Productive relationships	Engaging staff in involvement	Influence thinking	Raised expectations	Supported staff
Support – structures and processes	Focus on staff learning	Identified staff learning needs	Inclusive vision impacted on leading change	Risk taking
Introduced multiple changes	Stimulated thinking for change	Shared leadership for improvement	Reflective processes – development of a vision/framework for learning	Aligned practice
Ongoing changes	Increase in diversity of student needs	Impact on staff	School busier – increased opportunities	Compliance /accountability NCCD
Barriers to improvement	Professional learning	Raised awareness	Development of knowledge and skills	

6.2.3. *Phase Three – Searching for Themes*

In phase three of the analysis, the aim was to compile the codes and coded data obtained during phase two, specifically in relation to each research-sub-question. This step facilitated a comprehensive examination of all the relevant data for each research-sub-question, enabling the identification of patterns and overlaps among the codes. These patterns and overlaps were further analysed, and sub-themes emerged. The process is visually presented in Tables 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, and 6.6, accompanied by written explanations of the findings for each research-sub-question. Table 6.7 provides a summary of the emergent sub-

themes and serves as a transition to phase four of the analysis, where the emergent sub-themes are thoroughly reviewed against all the data towards the generation of broad themes.

      6.2.3.1. Research-Sub-Question One. This question aimed to identify structures and processes that were in place or had been disrupted that may have influenced the development of inclusive practice for students with special educational needs. Table 6.3 exemplifies collated data related to RQ1, codes clustered around areas of interest in the data and sub-themes that emerged from the clustered codes. Seven sub-themes emerged from this process, "Timetable & Physical structures", "Leadership structures", "Supportive environment", "Reflective processes", "Professional community", "Capacity building processes", and "Teaching & Learning processes". Overlapping codes such as, "Productive relationships" were collapsed into the sub-themes and are highlighted with an * in the table.

Table 6.3

Example of Collated Data, Clustered Codes, and Emergent Sub-Themes for RQ1 - What Structures and Processes Are in Place and/or Have Been Disrupted that May Influence Teacher Practice?

Collated data					
Teacher (middle) leaders, teachers & education assistants	Leaders' extracts (Principal & Vice-principal)	College documents	Ethnographer's journal extracts	Codes clustered around areas of interest	Emergent sub-themes
Everything has changed - The whole restructuring of the curricula. Leadership roles, timetable changes, this building. There really has not been much that hasn't changed.	A traditional congregational independent school. Cultures and practices of the school had become tired. We had to re-energise the base and not just teachers, but it was students, and it was families	Significant changes to the College structure and organisational model to enable more collaborative and inclusive learning experiences.	Some staff looking shell-shocked at proposed changes. Wonder if they have, gone down like a lead balloon? My mind is racing thinking ahead	Influencing thinking Stimulated thinking Risk taking Introduced multiple change Ongoing change Commitment to change Structures and processes Physical environment *Raised expectations	Timetable & Physical structures Leadership structures
Your role has developed (diversity leader). You have been able to work with teachers to create an understanding about diverse learners.	My leadership role has been to build teacher leader capacity	Dev and consolidate the model of shared and distributive PK-12 Leadership	Restructured leadership Revised middle leadership roles (job descriptions) New PreK -12 roles created	Sharing leadership Empowerment *Roles and responsibilities *Productive relationships Promoting inclusion Raised awareness /expectations *Supportive environment *Collaboration	Supportive environment Reflective processes

		Collated data			
Teacher (middle) leaders, teachers & education assistants	Leaders' extracts (Principal & Vice-principal)	College documents	Ethnographer's journal extracts	Codes clustered around areas of interest	Emergent sub-themes
We do whole school PD. We have more conversations, and you get ideas about strategies for practice.	Teachers can't keep doing what they have always done, and the culture is that we can learn from each other as co-learners with the kids as they navigate, as we navigate change.	Processes and strategies are in place to assist teachers to dev and share understandings of how students learn including those with learning difficulties.	Attended middle leaders PD today, ongoing dev of our growth plans - focus on leading learning	*Engaging staff in improvement Leading learning Personal and collective learning *Collaboration *Productive relationships Dev of knowledge &skills *Raised expectations *Engaging staff in improvement *Supportive environment *Roles and responsibilities	Professional community Capacity building processes Teaching & learning processes

Note: *overlapping codes

6.2.3.1.1. Explanation of the Findings. The new principal's commitment to improvement was clearly evident through numerous changes made to existing arrangements within the College. Additionally, new structures and processes were introduced to enhance the College's capacity for improvement. First, the timetable structure underwent organisational changes that involved adjustments to the scheduling and duration of classes throughout the day. Notably, the Pastoral Care Group was shifted from the first lesson to the third, accompanied by an extended time allocation on Wednesdays for the pastoral care session to accommodate assemblies and other extracurricular activities. Although the timetable restructure caused disruptions to lessons, over time it appeared to have fostered a more settled learning environment by allowing students to spend increased time in the classroom with their teachers. As a result, teachers had more opportunities to build relationships with students, especially those with special educational needs, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of their individual requirements. Explaining the influence, this had on practice, an Art teacher said: *"It always takes a bit of time [to get to know the student]. Especially with kids that are on the spectrum. Timetable changes have given us a bit more time to do that especially during Pastoral Care Group"*.

Second, the teaching and learning processes underwent significant changes aimed at encouraging teachers to take risks and experiment with their practices. These changes had a clear objective of enhancing individual students' learning experiences and had an impact on various aspects of instruction, including lesson planning, classroom management techniques, formative and summative assessments, and feedback mechanisms. Initially, these modifications disrupted the established teaching practices, but they gradually influenced teachers' thinking that fostered pedagogical growth and development. Explaining this a Food Technology teacher said: *"By understanding the individual needs of our students and recognising their diverse learning styles, we were able to develop more effective learning programs for them"*. Additionally, these changes created a classroom environment that was more supportive of students' needs. As a Music teacher noted: *"We are providing students with special educational needs with increasing opportunities to learn in different ways"*.

Third, significant changes were implemented in the physical structure of the College, specifically focusing on the layout and design of classrooms, the library, and outdoor spaces. The purpose of these modifications was to encourage creativity in practice and promote visible learning. Introducing new open-plan learning areas caused disruptions to traditional classroom practices. However, they also facilitated increased interaction, collaboration, and shared learning experiences among teachers and students. Consequently, these changes

helped foster a culture of inclusion, particularly benefiting students with special educational needs. An English teacher expressed this sentiment: "*These new learning spaces have provided all students with improved opportunities to be a part of and feel included in an environment of inclusivity*". Additionally, teacher awareness regarding their roles and responsibilities for all students learning was inadvertently heightened. As a Special Needs teacher aptly said: "*With no more closed doors, there is greater accountability, which is truly beneficial*".

In conjunction with the changes made to existing organisational arrangements, new administrative structures were introduced. This involved a reorganisation of roles and responsibilities within the College administration, marking a departure from the previous hierarchical leadership model with a single principal. Instead, a new leadership team was formed, where the principal shared the leadership of improvement processes with the vice-principal and middle leaders. Additionally, new teacher (middle) leadership roles were created, and processes put in place to develop and support teacher leaders' influence and enhance pedagogical development across the College. This enabled me as a leader of learning for Diversity Education to utilise my knowledge, skills, and experience to create a supportive environment for teachers who had students with special educational needs in their class. For example, structures were put in place for them to access support and for the placement of education assistants in mainstream classes. Processes were established to support curriculum development, teaching and learning, ongoing improvement and to meet teacher professional learning needs. Support was well received by teachers. A Design and Technology teacher provided evidence of this positive impact, stating:

> *There is a team of people we can go to for help with all students who have needs. I think it is well communicated to everybody else as well. It just takes a quick email or a quick phone call to get that help.*

And a Pastoral Care Group teacher declared: "*There are so many avenues in terms of resourcing, recording, and establishing of programs for IEPs that make it a lot more user friendly for us to use*". Moreover, a Sport teacher provided compelling evidence indicating that this support had a significant impact on influencing practice:

> *I try and focus in on [IEP targets]and it can be difficult at times and challenging when you have got a class of 32 students, and you are trying to – behaviour management comes into it and there's also safety aspects in PE – doing ball sports and stuff. But certainly, it is something that I keep an eye on. It's very helpful to have that*

framework and that goal guide to keep in the back of my head for each lesson and refer to when need be. What their priorities are, what their individual needs are and what their specific goals are, which obviously differ from the rest of the students.

The adoption of a whole-school improvement process provided leadership with support structures and strategies to actively engage staff in culture-building processes for improvement. For example, dedicated time and a safe space was provided for middle leaders to employ collaborative processes, fostering stronger relationships, and facilitating the review, reflection, and renegotiation of practices with staff. Through these collaborative efforts, new perspectives on teaching and learning for all students emerged, subsequently becoming embedded in a College vision and pedagogical framework. This framework guided and aligned practice throughout the College, influencing thinking and attitudes towards improving learning outcomes for all students. A Sport teacher's comment evidenced this:

Sport presents opportunities for students with special educational needs to get involved. For example, assisting as managers or umpires. If we can incorporate them as scorers and get them upskilled in learning how to score using Apps and stuff these are all initiatives that we can think and talk about.

New structures and processes for staff learning were aimed at building teacher capacity to enact the College vision and embed the new learning framework into classroom practice. In response to this goal, a dedicated professional learning program facilitated whole-school, collective learning within a professional community. Simultaneously, opportunities were created for personal learning through access to on-going, job-embedded learning. Over time, teachers willingly participated by sharing ideas, and providing mutual support, which enhanced pedagogical knowledge and practice for teaching students with special educational needs. Describing this a Food Technology teacher said: *"We do professional development work now within the school as a whole school, we have more conversations with staff members. I think because of all of that we probably have a better understanding now about students' individual needs".*

Reflecting on the value of job-embedded learning, a Religion teacher stated:

I think sometimes I have never really known am I being too harsh or am I being too like where does the discipline come in and where's the line. So, I think having such wonderful education assistants in with my classes I am constantly learning from them.

Most staff embraced the new professional learning opportunities which positively influenced teacher thinking and attitudes towards improvement.

6.2.3.1.2. Summary of the Findings. In response to research-sub-question one, What structures and processes are in place and have been disrupted that may influence teacher practice?, the new principal made several changes to existing structures and processes and introduced new ones that positively influenced teacher attitudes towards inclusive practice development. For instance, the College timetable and physical environment underwent initial structural changes that impacted adjustments to teaching and learning processes and raised expectations for practice. This led to disruptions in established practices and sparked a shift in thinking towards improvement.

Simultaneously, the administrative structure underwent reform, resulting in the establishment of a new leadership team. This team consisted of the principal, vice-principal, and teacher leaders from across the College. Particularly relevant to this study, a specialist teacher was appointed as leader of learning for Diversity Education. The new principal adopted a process for improvement to manage and guide the College on its journey through change. The process provided leadership with support structures and effective strategies for engaging teachers in improvement. For example, leadership facilitated reflective processes that encouraged collaboration resulting in a staff agreement and commitment to an inclusive vision and a school-wide pedagogical learning framework that guided and aligned practice across the College.

Consequently, new structures and processes were established to build staff capacity to enact the new vision and learning framework into classroom practice. This was facilitated through ongoing, context-based personal and collective learning opportunities within a professional community from which productive staff relationships developed that enabled the leader of learning for Diversity Education to identify and respond to individual teacher learning needs. For example, she utilised her expertise to create a supportive environment: specifically, setting up structures for teachers to access professional learning and ongoing support. This impacted the establishment of processes to support curriculum development, teaching and learning, and ongoing improvement for teaching students with special educational needs. A Drama teacher's comment captured the impact changes to structures and processes had on influencing attitudes towards inclusive practice: *"I think it is obviously going to take time [to implement inclusive practices], but given the opportunities and experiences, talking with most staff, they are certainly willing to be open to the change and try".*

6.2.3.2. Research-Sub-Question Two. This question aimed to identify challenges and opportunities that emerged from the disruptive processes for supporting students with special educational needs. Table 6.4 exemplifies collated data related to RQ2, codes clustered around areas of interest in the data and sub-themes that emerged from the clustered codes. Two sub-themes emerged from this process, "Challenges to inclusive cultural change" and "Opportunities for inclusive improvement". Overlapping codes such as, "Attitudinal change" were collapsed into the sub-themes and are highlighted with an * in the table.

Table 6.4

Example of Collated Data, Clustered Codes, and Emergent Sub-Themes for RQ2 - What Challenges and Opportunities Emerge for Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs?

(Teacher (middle) leaders, teachers & education assistants)	Leaders' extracts (Principal & Vice-principal)	College documents	Ethnographer's journal extracts	Codes clustered around areas of interest	Emergent sub-themes
Culture within the school where people say 'well I don't work with those students' or 'that's not possible' Teachers have got so much accountability now, and the demands in terms of differentiating curriculum. The average teacher has no training for special needs.	Some teachers go "Oh, that's what education support do, I don't do that." We are not providing enough professional learning Teachers at load have little time, Over reliance on curriculum content. Centre is physically excluded from the College	Development of SWP and consistent approaches to teaching and learning Promote a culture of teamwork	Diversity PD – seem to always be competing against other professional learning priorities EA told to take student with special needs back to the centre- no work for them to do Teacher complaints too many adults with EAs in room.	Raised expectations Compliance / accountability NCCD *Roles and responsibilities Physical environment Barrier to change Ingrained culture of inclusion Complexities of secondary curriculum Hard to motivate Lack of knowledge and skills Teacher wellbeing impacted by change Increase in diversity of student needs *Attitudinal change *Influence change	Challenges to inclusive cultural change

(Teacher (middle) leaders, teachers & education assistants)	Leaders' extracts (Principal & Vice-principal)	College documents	Ethnographer's journal extracts	Codes clustered around areas of interest	Emergent sub-themes
Improvement has created opportunities for your role (Diversity leader) opportunity to learn from each other and try different things. More opportunities for students to do things	Stronger opportunity and provision for students to be successful Spotlight on teachers to renew and invigorate their own pedagogy To learn from each other as co-learners Created time and space for improvement	Programs designed to meet the needs and capabilities of students Engage all students in learning pathways that enable them to pursue careers that are commensurate to their personal attributes.	Excited, can't believe at long last an opportunity has presented that may help me make a real difference to practice for students with special educational needs	Productive relationships Personal and collective learning Engaging staff in improvement Collaboration Leading learning Focus on learning. Promote inclusion Align practice Pedagogical development Supportive environment *Roles and responsibilities Raise awareness *Influence change *Attitudinal change	Opportunities for inclusive improvement

Note. *Overlapping codes

6.2.3.2.1. Explanation of the Findings – Challenges. Outdated Practice. The
College had experienced relatively minimal changes to practice over the years as was evident
in a Special Needs teacher's description of how the College used to be: "*It was certainly
more relaxed*", "*It was less stressful*", and in a Design and Technology teacher's description
of the present day College: "*It's a business - they get their pound of flesh!*" So, the arrival of
a new principal with strong values, beliefs, and a vision to transform the College into a more
inclusive environment came as a shock to many staff. As a Religion teacher said: "*Suppose
we've gone through a lot of change very quickly at times it's been shocking at times it's been
exciting at times it's worrying*". The identification of the need for change justified
improvement. However, it was met with mixed reactions and some angry staff felt that the
calibre of students the College enrolled needed changing, not their teaching practice. For
example, an English teacher said: "*It's the clientele we're getting. We are just not getting the
cream anymore and I've said that before. Other schools just cream the top and then we have
to take the leftovers*".

6.2.3.2.2. Challenges – Attitudes and Beliefs. One of the most obvious challenges
appeared to have stemmed from an ingrained culture of inclusion associated with the physical
environment of the Education Support Centre. In particular, challenging the way things were
done at the College in relation to students with special educational needs. Thus, echoing the
principal's thoughts: "*The College had a model very much from the past*". Two Religion
teachers' comments evidenced this: one said, "*Special ed is growing, the centre has always
been a flagship for disability in the College since it started because it was really pushed by
all the older principals years ago*". And another commented, "*The College does a great job
in the centre*". This understanding led to confusion around roles and responsibilities. This
was explained in a Design and Technology teacher's remark about practice:

> *If I have got someone with special needs in my class and they start making a lot of
> racket it is up to them [education assistant] to tap them on the shoulder or just say
> "stop" I'm too busy with the rest of the class to deal with it.*

Unsurprisingly, this seemed to have negatively impacted teacher attitudes toward
inclusion. Evidencing this, a Food Technology teacher said: "*I didn't realise students with
special educational needs didn't go into some classes, so those teachers have been getting
away lightly (Math / English / Italian / Science and Humanities) haven't they?*"

While publicly, most agreed and made a collective commitment to the College vision
and pedagogical learning framework for all student learning, the data revealed that privately,

many believed they lacked the skills, ability, and training to teach students with special educational needs. This was echoed in the voice of a Drama teacher who said: *"We're not trained to teach students with special educational needs or make primary level resources"*.

6.2.3.2.3. Challenges – The Complex Secondary Environment.

The principal acknowledged the lack of training provided for staff regarding inclusion and emphasised the need for targeted professional learning: "*We need to provide more professional learning for staff around it [inclusion]. I think it has to be front, centre and back of what we do"*. This lack of training was attributed to various factors, including the competing demands on secondary professional learning and the complexities of secondary schooling, which had overwhelmed teachers. Highlighting this a Science teacher said: "*I think the curriculum in high school very much governs us [it might be a mindset]"*: thus, demonstrating how the curriculum limits the flexibility and implementation of practice for inclusion.

In addition, time constraints further hindered teachers' abilities to upskill and provide targeted support. Expressing her concern about time a Sports teacher said:

> *For me to find the time to upskill on strategies that are effective for this kid, just finding out more information about his particular difficulty or disability and how do I target that with an IEP effectively, it takes time, and we are just so short on time.*

Moreover, the increase in expectations for improvement had negatively impacted teacher well-being as reflected in a Pastoral Care Group teacher's comment:

> *The increase in teacher expectations is a double-edged sword because teachers work pretty hard if they have got five classes of 30 students. With the extra work we are meant to be doing for a whole lot of reasons, their well-being has gone down. They feel overwhelmed, and there is increased tension and stress during the working week, negatively impacting staff well-being.*

As such, engaging all teachers in improvement became a significant challenge and was evidenced in an Art teacher's response to the new principal's proposed changes: *"Great, just back and here we go again reinventing the wheel, more work, and when are we getting the time to do all this"?* This reaction highlighted the resistance and concerns among teachers regarding additional workload and limited time for implementation.

6.2.3.2.4. Opportunities – Sharing Leadership.

The new principal demonstrated his capacity for improvement by implementing cultural changes to, "*The way we do things around here*". These changes encompassed restructuring the leadership team, modifying

personnel, and redefining responsibilities. The shift from the previous hierarchical leadership structure to a new leadership team resulted in a significant change in practice.

Inspired by the principal's vision, teachers enthusiastically volunteered their efforts to support the improvement process. This created valuable opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership for change. As a specialist teacher and middle leader, I actively participated in this transformative journey. Through these collaborative efforts productive relationships developed with teachers, enabling me to support pedagogical development. For instance, I leveraged my knowledge, skills, and experience to facilitate whole-school learning processes that raised awareness of individual student needs. This collaborative approach was highly appreciated by the staff. Describing this a Science teacher said:

> *Diversity is doing a great job in informing staff about the reasons behind students' unique characteristics. For example, understanding whether a student with dyslexia needs reading assistance or written notes due to dysgraphia. It's important for us to have this knowledge so that we can provide every student with equal opportunities.*

Furthermore, it resulted in an increased understanding of student needs evidenced by a Food Technology teacher's comment about professional learning:

> *One of the things you [me, researcher] mentioned the other day, that little clip you showed when you were doing PD with the staff... that was really powerful. Where the student with special needs was saying "don't underestimate me" and "don't use me as a model, don't take pity on me." That's really a very important thing for teachers to take stock of.*

This appeared to promote inclusive pedagogical development. Explaining this, an Art teacher said: *"I took a closer look at his student plan. Since then, I've moved him to his own area away from distractions and offered him access to the chill-out room, which he declined"*.

Working collaboratively with teachers created opportunities for me to identify personal learning needs, and to put effective support in place. This support built teacher confidence and competence and positively influenced teacher attitudes towards inclusive practice development. This was echoed in the voice of a Sport teacher who said:

> *The introduction of IEP targets has been a good thing because it gives us something to focus on. We used to focus on the social aspects of the child's development, but now we can focus on their cognitive or physical skills.*

This increased awareness of teacher roles, responsibilities, and expectations for practice was evident in a Religion teacher's comment:

> *It's all on SEQTA [student plans]. I mean, you have got the green dots, all the students. It is up to me to press it and read it. You [me, researcher] can't do any more. If I got upset with a student and I didn't bother to read the plan, and you [me, researcher] say it has been there for three months, and you haven't even realised that this person is autistic, that's my problem. It is a bit of responsibility on me and just touching base.*

Consequently, there was a noticeable shift in teacher thinking and attitudes, leading to increased opportunities for students with special educational needs. Capturing this shift a Design and Technology teacher said:

> *We are probably getting better at looking at building opportunities for students with special educational needs. The more often that you do that, teachers see the students in a different light and realise that it is okay to challenge them or that there are things you can achieve rather than just going 'this is not possible.*

6.2.3.2.5. Summary of the Findings. In response to research-sub-question two, What challenges and opportunities emerge for supporting students with special educational needs?, the data provided insights into the most significant challenge that influenced change: challenging outdated practices deeply embedded in the College's teaching culture for students with special educational needs. The situation was further exacerbated by the built environment of the Education Support Centre, which reinforced traditional understandings of inclusion and negatively impacted teacher attitudes toward change.

Moreover, teachers believed they required more knowledge, skills, and training to teach inclusively. The structure of the secondary system, curriculum complexities, high expectations for improvement, and the newly built open-plan classroom environment had overwhelmed teachers, adversely affecting their well-being, and making their engagement in improvement efforts challenging.

Despite these challenges, the findings indicate that challenging existing practices creates opportunities for change. One significant opportunity was the shared leadership for improvement, which allowed a specialist teacher like me to promote and foster a culture of inclusion. This role enabled me to leverage my knowledge, skills, and experience to lead collaborative learning processes that cultivate productive relationships among staff members. As a result, teacher awareness and understanding of student needs had increased, individual learning needs had been identified, and effective support systems had been implemented. These initiatives enhanced staff competence and confidence in teaching inclusively and

raised awareness of roles and responsibilities, influenced the development of inclusive pedagogy, and positively shifted thinking and attitudes towards inclusive change.

6.2.3.3. Research-Sub-Question Three. This question aimed to identify significant enabling factors that may have impacted change within the College. Table 6.5 exemplifies collated data related to RQ3, codes clustered around areas of interest in the data and sub-themes that emerged from the clustered codes. Ten sub-themes emerged from this process, "Initiated improvement", "A plan for change", "Goals for improvement", "Prioritising", "Shared philosophy", "High expectations", Consistency", "Leveraging teacher leaders", "Collaborative ways of working", and "Investing in staff". Overlapping codes such as, "Raised expectations" were collapsed into the sub-themes and are highlighted with an * in the table.

Table 6.5

Example of Collated Data, Clustered Codes, and Emergent Sub-Themes for RQ3 – What Significant Enabling Factors Impacted Change Within the College?

Collated data				Codes clustered around areas of interest	Emergent sub-themes
(Teacher (middle) leaders, teachers & education assistants)	Leaders' extracts (Principal & Vice-principal)	College documents	Ethnographer's journal extracts		
The principal has challenged us with a growth mindset,	We have a focused inclusive strategic plan.	Commitment to contemporary, relevant pedagogy where learning programs are increasingly differentiated and individualised		Influence thinking Stimulated thinking for change Commitment to change *Raised expectations	Disruption & Influence A plan for change Goals for improvement Prioritising
Leadership have pushed learning	We have a common goal to improve student experiences				
There is a clear role about appropriate teacher performance.	Gone are the days of buying programs or attending for a one-off day.	Expectation of personal and collective excellence		*Roles and responsibilities *Raised awareness /expectations *Compliance /accountability NCCD *Thinking and attitudinal change	High expectations Consistency
There is an expectation to be – this ongoing learner,	Developed a common learning frame with the Vision for Learning				

Collated data					
(Teacher (middle) leaders, teachers & education assistants)	Leaders' extracts (Principal & Vice-principal)	College documents	Ethnographer's journal extracts	Codes clustered around areas of interest	Emergent sub-themes
I feel really supported working with students with disabilities. We have more conversations with colleagues. We have a better understanding now about student needs.	My approach is very much around leveraging the gifts and talents that those other leaders have. We provide appropriate strategic resourcing for staff.	Processes and strategies in place to support teachers Build the capacity of staff through internal professional learning	Daily meetings with Frances are great for solving problems and getting things done.	Reflective processes Leading learning Personal and collective learning *Collaboration *Productive relationships	Leveraging teacher leaders Collaborative ways of working
Vision for Learning has made me rethink and review and reflect on practice.	Support is comprehensive and so holistic. Time and space created for improvement and was key to building individual capacity to a collective intent	Staff professional learning to improve student outcomes Programs designed to meet the needs and capabilities of students Culture of teamwork promoted	IEP's and student info now online for staff to access – staff happy!	Dev of knowledge &skills *Engaging staff in improvement *Supportive environment Pedagogical development *Thinking and attitudinal change	Investing in staff Shared philosophy

Note. *Overlapping codes

6.2.3.3.1. Explanation of the Findings - Initiating Change. A new and animated principal with strong, inclusive values driven by an aspirational vision to "*Develop a school-wide pedagogy that would challenge and inspire all students*" and a strategic plan for improvement was a lever for change at the College. This was evident in his description of the College he inherited as: *"A traditional, congregational independent school that was very static in its approach to school improvement",* and in his identified need to: *"Re-energise the base".*

Courageously, he initiated change by challenging outdated practices and taking risks by setting goals for high expectations to build good leadership, quality teaching, and professional learning to improve educational outcomes for all students. Simultaneously, he introduced multiple changes to the College timetable, curriculum, and physical environment. A Sport teachers comment put the scale of change into perspective: "*So, change certainly has been significant part of the College in the last few years. From my perspective it is changing, every aspect of the College".* A Religion teacher explained the impact change had on staff:

> *There's a really big dynamic of change here at the moment. I think the rate of change and the amount of change in such a very, very short time has left teachers feeling tired. They feel as though they are being over worked.*

However, driven by a strong moral purpose, the new principal remained highly motivated and committed to change. As an English teacher remarked, *"The new principal certainly is energetic and a go-getter".* This was evident in his persistence and actions to build teacher capacity for improvement. For instance, he was transparent and honest in his communication about change. Confirming this a Drama teacher said:

> *One thing that Frank has done, and he said he was going to do that and hats off to him, he has implemented a lot of change. He made no bones about the fact that he was going to do that, so he prepared us well for that.*

He was highly influential, and his values, beliefs, and actions directly affected the expectations of the staff. As such, he asserted his authority for change: *"At the end of the day, you are either with me, or you're not, you're either on the bus or off the bus, it's your choice. I make no apologies for saying this; the choice is yours!".* This commitment was critical to establishing and modelling a standard of behaviour that promoted the development of inclusion. Moreover, it set the stage for the principal's expectations of staff for improvement. Describing this, a Special Needs teacher said: *"Well, they [Frank and Frances] certainly laid down the law around compliance, didn't they and made clear rules about appropriate teacher*

performance and procedures", and influenced staff thinking and attitudes for change evidenced in a Science teacher's comment:

> *It [structural changes / timetabling] was a challenge at first. In any change it is pretty uncomfortable but then you get used to the routine and the little bugs tend to get ironed out from there, so I have found it positive.*

As such, opportunities were opened up for leadership to act.

6.2.3.3.2. Leadership Influence and Support.
The inclusive leadership approach adopted by the new principal focused on the empowerment of like-minded others and leveraging their gifts and talents to lead and embed pedagogical change. The data suggested this was a significant factor impacting the College capacity for inclusive improvement. Most significant was the new principal's trust and belief in the vice principal's capabilities and empowerment of her to lead the College through improvement. She shared his inclusive philosophy and was equally driven in her quest for improvement and commitment to change. Moreover, she trusted and had faith in teachers:

> *I come to work, knowing that most teachers come to work with the same intent, that is to work for the best outcome for the student, that they would be adaptable to any of the disruptions and challenges that we experience in the school.*

This provided the foundation for developing good relationships which was significant given her role and responsibility for building middle leader capacity to lead and embed pedagogical change. She competently nurtured their development. As one middle leader declared: *"My experiences with Frances have been incredible. She is so supportive and understanding"*. In particular, she invested time working closely with me (leader of learning for Diversity Education). We shared an inclusive philosophy and met daily to discuss my ideas and concerns. Her interest and care helped me work through challenges and importantly she valued my work and respected my opinion: *"I have a great Leader of Diversity that teaches me across all things"*. Furthermore, her ongoing support of middle leaders, for example, through structured weekly meetings was crucial to fostering a positive, collaborative work environment where I felt safe and supported to lead learning amongst my middle-leader peers. A journal extract described one such experience:

> *Journal extract –Middle leaders support meeting.*
> *Weekly middle leaders meeting – NCCD presentation to middle leaders re new funding arrangements – mandatory requirements of staff in terms of curriculum and physical classroom adjustment levels.*

Used NCCD website, tried to put myself in staff shoes, make it interactive. Middle leaders were very supportive thanked me, enjoyed the presentation found it, very informative.

This support was key to building my confidence and capacity to lead learning within the whole school community. Consequently, I grew naturally into the leader of Diversity Education role under the vice-principal's influence and my leadership in turn, appeared to have significantly impacted teacher attitudes towards inclusive practice development. This was evident in teacher conversations about practice. For example, a Science teacher said: "*It has changed a lot and I think teachers are most probably more aware of their teaching practice and the need to include all students now",* and in conversations about support. As a Food Technology teacher explained:

I feel really supported working with students with special educational needs. It's just about knowing who to go to and who to ask because every time I've gone to ask for help, I get a quick response and support every time.

She further explained how support structures and processes helped develop teacher knowledge and skills and focused attention on student achievement:

IEP target setting and assessment and reporting has become a natural part of my practice particularly early on in the year you want to know exactly what they [students with special educational needs] are capable of so that you can set realistic IEP goals. I think it is essential really to be able to have that time to focus for the year ahead and also it pre-warns you to the difficulties that you may have.

Teachers attributed my leadership to the development of inclusive practice for students with special educational needs. This was summed up in an Art teacher's comment: *"Your work has created more and more opportunities for them [students with special educational needs] to be included".* However, most importantly my leadership appeared to impact a broader view of inclusion. As a teaching assistant put it:

The school have recognised that not everybody is academic and that learning support as much as the Education Support Centre, is essential. In particular, that big group in the middle that previously just got lost in the mainstream when it used to be you were either in special needs, Education Support Centre, or nothing.

6.2.3.3.3. Engaging in Improvement. The analysis of the interview data confirmed the importance of adopting a whole-school approach to influencing attitudes and thinking towards inclusive change. Confirming this a Religion teacher said: *"I think it [school*

improvement] opened up avenues for discussion. It challenged us and created opportunities for us to come together to learn and improve". Therefore, the adoption of an improvement process was crucial to supporting leadership for engagement of teachers in collaborative, culture-building processes to influence change. As the principal suggested, these processes: *"Invariably led to school improvement".* For example, Science teachers noted improvement processes enabled them to: *"Review what we do and what we do well and what we don't do so well".* As a consequence, they viewed teaching and learning through a more ethical lens: *"School improvement has enabled us to think about and gain a better understanding about students' individual needs".* And significantly, a collective staff agreement and commitment was reached to an inclusive vision and school-wide pedagogical learning framework that guided and aligned practice across the College. Explaining the significance of this on practice a Religion teacher said:

> *I suppose in a way it [VFL] has shaped my classroom practice because it has definitely made me rethink and review and reflect at times about what I do and whether it can be improved. It's really been a good framework and structure for that, and I think that challenge, create, collaborate, celebrate has been a really good marker, em and I think it's also been a good reflection tool as well.*

The learning framework gave teachers a new language to talk about and share practice in a more meaningful, inclusive way. Describing this a Music teacher said: *"We challenge, collaborate, create, and celebrate with them [students with special educational needs] through our Vision for Learning and are involving them much more",* and as a Food Technology teacher noted, it raised expectations for student achievement:

> *Em, yes in away its I suppose it's [improvement] opened up that discovery and it's really endless em and they [students]can do anything that they set their mind to em that yeah, I suppose it's another tool. I suppose it's another tool to help us help them grow and achieve and be successful.*

This in turn, raised awareness of roles and responsibilities. Explaining this an English teacher stated: *"There's very clearly a shared responsibility now and that is promoted. It's not just Education Support Centre responsible for those kids",* and as the new principal put it: *"Opened people's perspective and minds to building capacity for individual improvement".* As a result, teachers were motivated to learn and to do new things which was crucial for pedagogical development. This is summed up in a Special Needs teacher's comment about practice:

The new learning framework has given a lot more freedom and motivation for teachers to be creative with what they do both in the classroom and with extra curricula activities and involvement. There's a lot more focus on that.

6.2.3.3.4. Building Teacher Capacity For Change. The data suggested that building teacher knowledge and skills were critical to influencing attitudes, behaviours, and ongoing commitment to change. This was a key leadership focus as the vice-principal confirmed: *"My leadership has been how to build teacher capacity and develop the pedagogy of teachers".* Changes made to structures and processes for professional learning and the establishment of a context-based program made clear leadership expectations for improvement. Significantly, this impacted pedagogical development echoed in the voice of an English teacher who said: *"There has been a lot more focus on pedagogy in the last few years all the staff meetings that I go to, and they are all talking about pedagogy".* And in a Science teacher's comment:

The tricky thing is not one strategy is going to obviously suit every student, so you have to be able to be adaptable and I think that flexibility is important. If you go with a mindset that they will all fit that model it doesn't work.

Opportunities created for job embedded learning encouraged collaboration amongst staff. Describing this, a Dance teacher said: *"When you look now, we are to observe other teachers in their classrooms, we are being observed, the idea is to share practice".* A Sport teacher clearly articulated the impact of this on his practice: "*In Phys ed we are teaching as a group in the pool and out on the track every day. We are always coming up with new ideas and learn off each other which is quite cool".* Collective learning further encouraged staff collaboration from which opportunities emerged for the development of teacher knowledge and skills. Commenting on this a Design and Technology teacher said:

I feel talking to each other is essential. You can go through professional development, and you might see some nice, neat power point but it's about bringing it back to your school, how do you do that. If you talk to other teachers, you can get ideas about different approaches [strategies for working with students who have needs] which may help with practice.

Moreover, working collaboratively appeared to positively impact teacher confidence and staff relational development. This was evident in the number of teachers that reached out for guidance and support. For example, a Religion teacher stated: *"If I have got a question, I might be walking past you [Leader of Diversity] in the corridor and say, 'by the way, I've just been thinking about so and so can you help?'"* and in the number of teachers that openly

welcomed and appreciated the new support structures and processes. For instance, an Art teacher attributed support to building capacity for inclusive improvement:

> *I think the understanding by staff generally about what IEP targets are all about and how to report on IEP students has definitely improved. Em I think teachers would have struggled to do that when I first started without this new level of support.*

6.2.3.3.5. Summary of the Findings. In response to research-sub-question three, What significant enabling factors have impacted change within the school?, four key factors emerged from the findings. First, a changeover in leadership to a strong principal committed to an inclusive vision, strategic plan and goals for improvement was a lever for change at the College. His courageous actions, addressing outdated methods and openly preparing for change, disrupted norms and paved the way for transforming teacher attitudes. These actions created opportunities for positively influencing inclusive practice development.

Second, empowering others who shared an inclusive philosophy [specific to this study a specialist teacher to Diversity Education] to lead learning, enabled me to leverage my knowledge, skills, and experience to promote and foster a culture of inclusion. As a result, productive staff relationships developed that enabled me to exert influence for inclusive change. From which, teacher learning needs were identified, and systems and processes were implemented that effectively supported teacher's pedagogical development. Over time, this built teacher confidence and capacity and raised awareness of roles and responsibilities, positively impacting thinking, and attitudes towards inclusive change.

Third, engaging in improvement provided leadership with structure, processes, and strategies to engage all staff in improvement and to manage and guide change. As a result, a collective agreement and commitment were reached to an inclusive vision and school-wide pedagogical framework for learning. This gave teachers a new language to talk about and share practice in a more meaningful, inclusive way. It also guided and aligned practice across the College, ensuring equity and consistency in teaching and learning and reinforced heightened leadership expectations for personal and collective excellence, clarifying the College direction for inclusive change.

Fourth, opportunities created for context-based, whole-school learning illustrated the principal's investment in staff and supported leadership to meet the College's priority goal of successful outcomes for all students. This occurred as they led collaborative learning within a professional community and purposefully focused teacher learning on student achievement. Through facilitating these processes, personal learning needs were identified and met by

creating opportunities and experiences for job-embedded learning. Significantly, these changes to structures and processes for professional learning raised expectations for continuous improvement, which prompted and encouraged teachers to seek specialist support. As a result, teacher understanding of students' special needs improved and impacted attitudes towards inclusive practice development, visible in increased student access and participation in the mainstream curriculum and events.

6.2.3.4. Research-Sub-Question Four. This question aimed to identify how teacher praxis working with students who have special educational needs was implicated during the period of disruptive processes. Table 6.6 exemplifies collated data related to RQ4, codes clustered around areas of interest in the data and sub-themes that emerged from the clustered codes. Eight sub-themes emerged from this process, "Increased opportunities for students", "Flexible and adaptable", "Heightened expectations", "Differentiation – improvement", "Clear roles and responsibilities", "Ongoing learning", "Personal learning" and "Whole school responsibility for student learning". Overlapping codes such as, "Roles and responsibilities" were collapsed into the sub-themes and are highlighted with an * in the table.

Table 6.6

Example of Collated Data, Clustered Codes, and Emergent Sub-Themes for RQ4 – How Has Teacher Praxis Working with Students Who Have Special Educational Needs Been Implicated During the Period of Disruptive Processes?

Collated data				Codes clustered around areas of interest	Emergent sub-themes
Teacher (middle) leaders, teachers & education assistants)	Leaders' extracts (Principal & Vice-principal)	College documents No data	Ethnographer's journal extracts No data		
School is a lot busier probably a lot more opportunities for students to do things but a lot more demands to a degree on staff. The workload is still very intense We have to be able to adapt and be flexible.	The process of school improvement has put the spotlight on teachers and that they have a responsibility to renew and invigorate their own pedagogy People have to adapt and be agile Teachers at load have little time, Over reliance on curriculum content.			Increase in diversity of student need *Raised awareness expectations Complexities of secondary schooling *Compliance /accountability NCCD Ongoing change	Increased opportunities for student Flexible and adaptable
There is a clear role about appropriate teacher performance and procedures I think the expectations are much greater.	The demographic of the College enrolment over time has changed and will continue to change. We need to be continually improving ourselves to provide learning			*Roles and responsibilities Teacher wellbeing impacted by change	Heightened expectations

	Collated data				
Teacher (middle) leaders, teachers & education assistants)	Leaders' extracts (Principal & Vice-principal)	College documents	Ethnographer's journal extracts	Codes clustered around areas of interest	Emergent sub-themes
		No data	No data		
As much as possible, we need to include all students. You take them where they are at and support them to be successful.	experiences to meet individual student needs. Teachers have a responsibility to renew and invigorate their own pedagogy			*Raised awareness /expectations *Compliance /accountability NCCD *Thinking and attitudinal change	Differentiation – improvement Clear roles and responsibilities
Greater emphasis on staff learning since the vision for learning. Improvement has helped us help students grow and achieve and be successful There is this expectation to be this ongoing learner.	It is very easy to default to specialist staff if you are in a school that has them and really to negate your responsibility as the teacher.			Personal and collective learning Collaboration Capacity building Dev of knowledge &skills Pedagogical development *Roles& responsibilities *Compliance /accountability NCCD *Thinking and attitudinal change	Ongoing learning Personal learning Whole school responsibility for student learning

Note. *Overlapping codes

6.2.3.4.1. Explanation of the Findings - Continuous Improvement. Schools are committed to compliance under NCCD legislation, and as per the Disability Standards for Education, teachers must differentiate learning to facilitate the inclusion of all students. Indeed, differentiating teaching and learning is expected as a foundation for all teaching. Acknowledging this need for compliance, the principal said: *"We are actually part of a national imperative around capabilities that we expect of students, we expect of staff"*. The vice-principal echoed the principal's expectation for continuous improvement: *"My vision for the culture is that there is an acceptance that people have to adapt and be agile. They can't keep doing what they have always done, and they need to be improving continually"*.

Moreover, as she further explained: *"I think the school improvement process has put the spotlight on teachers and that they have a responsibility to renew and invigorate their pedagogy, to be a professional, to be at the cusp of best practice"*. This has implications for teacher roles and responsibilities and general classroom practice in proactively seeking out opportunities and experiences to build personal capacity to meet individual student needs. This also has implications for leadership in creating opportunities for teachers to access professional learning and support to build capacity for improvement.

Professional learning. The data suggested that teachers generally believe they need to gain the knowledge, skills, and training to teach inclusively. Declaring this, a Sport teacher stated:

> *From my point of view, where we need to get to rather than a teacher saying, could you take that child outside because they are disturbing the rest of the class. Or I can't handle that can you do that. Or can you just sit in the corner and play with puzzles. Or whatever' because that way you are in the room, but I don't have to worry about it. And that is the culture we need to smash.*

However, many teachers reported feeling shocked by ongoing improvement changes over what they perceived to be a relatively short time. They were tired of the busyness of College life, which they put down to increased opportunities for students. This has implications for teachers as the study found that professional learning is needed for pedagogical development to build capacity for inclusive improvement. This also has leadership implications in influencing teachers to engage in professional learning in the complex secondary school environment.

A supportive environment. Teachers were feeling overburdened with the complexities of the secondary environment and had little time to spare. Therefore, it was

unsurprising that expecting them to engage in improvement takes a lot of time and effort. A middle leader's remark evidenced this:

> *I think the expectations of staff at the moment as I've said are already really high.*
> *Morale is pretty low, people are feeling burnt out so, it's really hard to get staff to*
> *take on new things and to want to learn new things.*

As the new principal pointed out this had implications for education at the wider system level:

> *Teachers are at load, and they have only got this much time, inclusion is problematic.*
> *I think the issue for inclusion is for it to really gain traction is we have got to revisit*
> *the curriculum and revisit content and the over reliance on content, the over reliance*
> *on standardized testing.*

However, teachers unanimously agreed that support had increased and improved with the onset of school change. A Religion teacher's comment confirmed this: *"I think that compared to now and back then, support is more prevalent, it is more structured [online] and probably more successful"*. In particular, they attributed the support of a leader of learning for Diversity Education as having raised their awareness of individual student needs, expectations for practice and roles, and understanding of responsibilities regarding accountability and compliance for NCCD. Summoning this up, a Design and Technology teacher said: *"I think the work that you do, in making sure that we are doing what's right for the kids has positively impacted practice in the mainstream"*. He continued explaining how he believed my leadership had encouraged and influenced teacher thinking and attitudes toward inclusive change. A Music teacher's practice development evidenced this:

> *So, I try to structure the activities now that students of high ability can expand upon,*
> *and students of low ability can work towards, rather than having completely different*
> *exercises. I want everyone to feel like they are involved in the same outcome.*

This has implications for teachers in terms of utilising specialist support in schools that provide it to build personal capacity for inclusive practice development. This also has implications for leaders embarking on improvement. In particular, strategically targeting a specialist teacher to lead learning of Diversity Education can create a supportive environment to influence teacher thinking and attitudes towards inclusive change.

6.2.3.4.2. Summary of the Findings. In response to research-sub-question four, How has teacher praxis working with students with special educational needs been implicated during disruptive processes?, the findings have highlighted the need for continuous

improvement in teacher practice to meet a growing diversity of student needs and ensure compliance under NCCD legislation. This has implications for teacher roles and responsibilities and general classroom practice in proactively seeking out opportunities and experiences to build personal capacity to meet individual student needs. This also has implications for leadership in creating opportunities for teachers to access professional learning and support to build a school's collective capacity for improvement.

The findings suggest that professional learning is crucial in promoting inclusive pedagogical development. However, teachers often encounter challenges due to heightened expectations for improvement, which can overwhelm them and impact their engagement in professional learning activities. These challenges affect teachers' abilities to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and training for implementing inclusive teaching practices. Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of leadership in establishing dedicated learning programs, structures, and processes that effectively engage teachers in capacity-building for improvement within the complex secondary school environment.

Teachers experience a heavy workload due to the complexities of the secondary environment, leaving them with limited spare time. Consequently, it requires significant time and effort to encourage their engagement in improvement efforts. However, as the research suggested, strategically targeting resourcing of a specialist teacher to lead Diversity Education can help to create a supportive environment and foster a culture of inclusion. This has implications for teachers in terms of utilising specialist support in schools that provide it to build personal capacity for inclusive teaching. This also has implications for principals embarking on improvement in terms of committing to support teachers and utilising the expertise of a teacher with expertise in inclusion to support and influence change.

6.2.3.4.3. Summary of Sub-Themes Emerging Across the Research-Sub-Questions.
This analysis phase involved collating the codes and coded data generated in phase two as they related to each research-sub-question. This enabled me to review all the data relevant to each research-sub-question and identify areas of interest where codes clustered and overlapped to form emergent sub-themes. In total, 27 sub-themes emerged from this process and led into phase four of the analysis - Reviewing the themes. They are presented in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7

Summary of Sub-Themes that Emerged from Codes Clustered Around Areas of Interest in the Data Related to the Research-Sub-Questions

RQ:1	Emergent sub-themes	RQ:2	Emergent sub-themes	RQ:3	Emergent sub-themes	RQ:4	Emergent sub-themes
1	Professional community	1	Challenges to inclusive cultural change	1	Disruption & Influence	1	Increased opportunities for students
2	Leadership structures	2	Opportunities for inclusive improvement	2	A plan for change	2	Flexible & adaptable
3	Timetable & Physical structures			3	Goals for improvement	3	Heightened expectations
4	Supportive environment			4	Prioritising	4	Differentiation - improvement
5	Reflective processes			5	Shared philosophy	5	Clear roles & responsibilities
6	Capacity building			6	High expectations	6	Ongoing learning
7	Teaching & Learning processes			7	Consistency	7	Personal learning
				8	Leveraging teacher leaders	8	Whole school responsibility for student learning
				9	Collaborative ways of working		
				10	Investing in staff		

6.2.4. *Phase Four - Reviewing the Themes*

In this phase, the 27 sub-themes were re-examined to ensure they accurately reflected the meaning of the coded data and the entire data set. This involved a repetitive process of carefully re-reading all the data and cross checking it to the sub-themes. Findings from this

process enabled me to generate two distinctive and coherent broad themes that captured the overall tone of the data in relation to the overarching research question:

What can be learned for enabling the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs from a school that has undergone two years of disruptive processes?

6.2.4.1. Findings from the Review Process. The new principal's inclusive values significantly impacted his actions and practices. The data indicated that these actions resulted in disruptions, creating opportunities to influence teacher attitudes towards inclusive practice development. The principal actively challenged outdated practices and recognised the need for change. He effectively communicated his educational vision, strategic plan, and improvement goals while acknowledging the challenges of change. He also reminded teachers of their roles and responsibilities in meeting the learning needs of all students. Although this caused tension among the staff, it allowed the principal to engage them in improvement efforts and exert further influence to steer the College towards inclusive change.

Implementing changes in structures and processes for shared leadership presented valuable opportunities to enhance leadership capacity and extend the impact of leadership for inclusive change throughout the College. For example, leveraging my specialist knowledge and skills enabled me to build productive relationships with teachers, exerting influence and promoting inclusion while contributing to the collective College leadership objectives for improvement. The data analysis demonstrated an enhanced understanding among teachers of student individual needs and a heightened awareness of their roles and responsibilities. These findings indicate that the changes to facilitate shared leadership positively influenced teacher attitudes towards inclusive practice development.

The adoption of an improvement process helped leadership structure and guide change. This process provided collaborative and culture-building opportunities for leadership to engage teachers in improvement and influence thinking for change. For example, it enabled them to work with staff to reflect on, review, and renegotiate the College's values and practices, creating tension crucial for staff development and commitment to an inclusive vision and pedagogical framework for learning. This raised expectations for excellence in teaching and learning and aligned and guided practice, fostering a culture of inclusion across the College.

Changes to structures and processes for professional learning allowed leadership to support the capacity building of teachers for improvement. These changes involved context-based, whole-school, collaborative learning and provided ongoing, personal learning experiences. As a result, teachers' knowledge and skills were enriched, leading to increased competence and confidence in inclusive teaching. These changes also reinforced leadership expectations for teachers to continuously develop their teaching practices to promote student achievement.

Five sub-themes emerged from the review process: "A plan for change," "Goals for improvement," "Structures and processes," "Capacity building," and "A supportive environment." These sub-themes led to two broad themes: "Reenergising the base" and "There's all the support". Additionally, the sub-theme related to "Improvement challenges and opportunities" was prevalent throughout the entire dataset and was integrated into the two broad themes to enhance the overall coherence and alignment with the overarching research question. Table 6.8 shows the broad themes generated from the review process.

Table 6.8

Broad Themes Generated from the Review Process

Summarised example of data evidence	Sub-themes collapsed into other sub-themes	Sub-themes contained within the broad themes	Generated broad themes
"The new principal has encouraged us to try new things and look more at the individual rather than the classroom as a base."	Disruption & Influence Leadership structures Prioritising Timetable & physical structures	A plan for change	Reenergising the base
"Your work has created more and more opportunities for them [students with special educational needs] to be included."	Leveraging teacher leaders Collaborative ways of working Reflective processes Shared philosophy Professional community	Goals for improvement Structures & Processes	
"Improvement has definitely made me rethink and review and reflect at times about what I do and whether it can be improved to help students grow and achieve and be successful."	Reflective processes Teaching & Learning processes Differentiation – improvement Flexible & adaptable Professional community Collaborative ways of working		
"We do whole school PD. We have more conversations, and you get ideas about strategies for practice."			
"There's very clearly a shared responsibility now and that is promoted. It's not just ESC responsible for those kids."	Leadership structures Personal learning Collective learning Collaborative ways of working Investing in staff	Structures & Processes	
"There is a team of people we can go to for help with all students who have needs. I think it is well communicated to everybody else as well. It just takes a quick email or a quick phone call to get that help."	Heightened expectations Clear roles & responsibilities Whole school responsibility for student learning Consistency	Capacity building	There's all the support
	Reflective processes Collaborative ways of working Supportive environment Investing in staff Collaborative ways of working Professional community	A supportive environment	

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The final broad themes are summarised in Figure 6.3, and complement the analysis presented. Then, Figure 6.4 provides an overall visual representation of the coding process, highlighting the progression towards sub-themes and themes. This visual serves as a guide, leading into phase five of the analysis – Defining and naming the themes. In this phase, great care was taken to accurately define the essence of each broad theme and choose appropriate names that captured their core meaning.

Figure 6.3

Summary of the Sub-Themes and Final Broad Themes Generated Through the Review Process

Figure 6.4
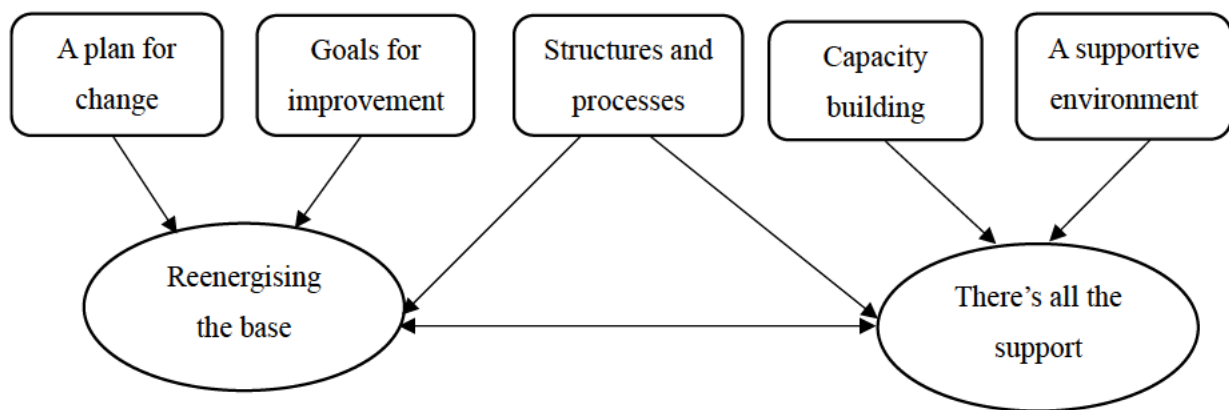
A Summary of the Coding Process Towards the Generation of Sub-Themes and Themes

6.2.5. *Phase Five - Defining and Naming the Themes*

This phase focused on the continual refinement of each theme to capture the overall story as portrayed through the analysis process generating clear definitions and names that gave a sense of what each theme was about. This involved organising the collated data extracts for each theme into a coherent and consistent account with an accompanying narrative.

6.2.5.1.Theme One Name. The first theme, *Reenergising the base,* was derived from a quote in the principal's interview transcript. Later, it was renamed *Disruption and Influence* to encompass the principal's characteristics, actions, and practices that unsettled staff, impacted the status quo, stimulated, and influenced thinking, and initiated improvement. As a result, the College was set on a path of cultural change towards inclusion.

6.2.5.2. Theme Two Name. The second theme, *There's all the support* was derived from a teacher's interview transcript. It was later renamed *Evolving praxis* to capture the impact of leadership, improvement, and capacity-building structures and processes on influencing attitudes towards inclusive practice development. With the two themes now clearly defined and named, the final phase of the analysis began - Producing the report.

6.2.6. *Phase Six - Producing the Report*

This final phase of the analysis aimed to identify compelling extract examples from the key findings of the summarised ethnographic data in Chapters Four and Five. These examples served as evidence for the identified themes within the data. The process involved selecting extracts that justified the themes and made an argument in response to the overarching research question:

> What can be learned for enabling the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs from a school that has undergone two years of disruptive processes?

Each theme is now presented in a separate report, including data from interviews with middle leaders, teachers, and education assistants. These extracts are dispersed throughout the reports to illustrate the themes effectively. This culminates in the final chapter, Chapter Seven, where the overall outcomes and significant findings of the study are discussed in response to the overarching research question.

6.2.6.1. Theme One Report. Theme one, *Disruption and Influence* provides a sense of the scale of change that was required to transform the College culture towards inclusion.

Consequently, the data encapsulates the new principal's traits, as well as the actions and practices he employed to meet this intent.

> *Extract one: I've had five principals here and naturally each one brings change. Though with the previous principal who was here ten years we had a pretty good stabilisation period. It has certainly moved beyond a stabilisation period now. It's like a new frontier the last few years in particular have been the most hectic and arduous in my time at the College. Everything has changed the whole Pre-K to Twelve processes, the links between primary and secondary. The whole restructuring of the curricula. Leadership roles, timetable changes, the buildings. The new principal brought a different style of leadership. He came in with a clear vision and clear direction where he wanted us to be and is committed to that. He has challenged us with a growth mindset, to try new things and also to try to look more at the individual in the classroom than a classroom base. He has laid down the law around compliance and made clear rules about appropriate teacher performance and procedures. Personally, I really quite like some of the changes but talking with other teachers they are feeling overwhelmed. I guess the significance is the rate of change and the amount of change in such a very, very short time. It seems to have caused more tension and stress during the working week.*

The findings of the study indicate that teachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion set the context in which students with special educational needs must learn. Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers must feel supported and challenged in their responsibility to be continually learning, to adapt and be responsive to students with special educational needs. Developing such practice requires teachers to challenge their taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs regarding these students. However, this is not an easy task, especially in a complex secondary school environment where teachers tend to be subject focused and are feeling overburdened with curriculum demands and time constraints. This finding has been reported by Pearce et al. (2010) and as Ainscow and Sandill (2010) found the principal's attitude is crucial to supporting change for the development of inclusive practice.

Echoing Riehl (2000) a significant finding from this study is the crucial role of the principal in providing leadership of structures and processes for improvement. It takes strong, principal leadership committed to inclusive values to step up and lead cultural change towards inclusion. Moreover, as Hallinger (2010) found having a vision and goals gives identity to their work and shapes their leadership and can be a significant avenue to impact

practice. Indeed, my study revealed the motivational power of leading through a vision and goals. For example, the new principal had a deep moral conviction to improve practice for all students. He articulated this in his aspirational vision to "Develop a school-wide pedagogy that would challenge and inspire all students" during his first official address to staff. He then introduced a strategic plan to achieve the vision, setting goals for high expectations to build good leadership, quality teaching, and professional learning. These actions had two significant impacts.

First, teachers were confronted with the proposed changes, which caused, what McMaster (2015) called dissonance in thinking. The new principal knew the value of causing dissonance to the learning process for change and effectively utilised it to engage teachers in dialogue. Thus, initiating improvement. This finding, as also reported by Kotter and Cohen (2002) adds value to research that suggests causing dissonance is a necessary step that can enable leaders to influence behaviour for cultural change.

> *Extract two: What has come out of improvement is that your role has developed as leader of Diversity Education. You have been able to work with teachers to create an understanding about diverse learners. I think having that support and working with teachers is the main thing that has led to success. There has been a lot of growth in that area in terms of resourcing, recording, and establishing of programs for IEPs that make it a lot more user friendly for us to use. I think teachers struggled when I first started without a level of support with someone such as yourself.*

Second, as a specialist teacher, I was inspired by the vision and goals to volunteer my efforts to support change. Consequently, the principal invited me to share in leadership for improvement. Research suggests that providing leadership with specialist knowledge is needed to guide and support the development of inclusive practice (Northouse, 2007; Pearce et al., 2010). This study shows that building leadership capacity that pools professional expertise in collaborative processes is crucial to influencing teacher attitudes towards inclusive practice development. For example, as part of the collective effort for improvement, I realised new aspirations that impacted my confidence and relationships with teachers. From this, I identified teacher learning needs and in response developed support structures and processes that built teacher confidence and capacity for inclusive teaching. This finding aligns with the findings of previous research conducted by Conway and Andrews (2016), Donohoo (2017), and Hattie (2015) that emphasised teacher leaders' distinct role in influencing improvement in practice throughout an entire school.

6.2.6.2. Theme Two Report. Theme Two, *Evolving Praxis* provides insight into the new principal's commitment to enhancing teacher capacity for improvement and teachers' willingness to accept support. As a result, the data captured the enabling structures and processes employed by leadership to foster teacher knowledge, skills, and confidence while influencing attitudes towards practice development for all students, including those with special needs.

> *Extract one: Our vision for learning has definitely made me rethink and review and reflect at times about what I do and whether it can be improved. I think because of this we are getting much better at focusing on individual student needs. We are creating multiple individual pathways for them to choose options and courses and study what they want at their level as opposed to being more rigidly focused on the traditional curriculum and the traditional subject areas.*

Similar to Forlin and Chambers (2023) the findings show a whole-school approach to improvement promotes the development of a collaborative learning culture which is crucial to engaging teachers in reflective processes for inclusive change. For example, this approach enabled me to work with teachers and reflect on and review existing values and practices, which was central to identifying the need for inclusive change. It also allowed for the encouragement of the use of different practices to facilitate the participation of all students, including those with special educational needs. Significant to this collaboration was the development of trusting relationships (Andrews, 2008; Bryk & Schneider, 2002) from which a collective staff agreement and commitment to an inclusive vision and school-wide learning framework emerged. This guided and aligned practice and gave teachers a new pedagogical language which not only reflected changes to practice but also enabled teachers to talk about and share practice in a more meaningful, inclusive way: thus, helping to promote and foster a culture of inclusion.

> *Extract two: We do professional development work now within the school as a whole school and have more conversations with staff members, all they talk about is pedagogy. When you look now, we are to observe other teachers in their classrooms, we are being observed, the idea is to share practice. I think because of all of that we probably have a better understanding now about students' individual needs and awareness of the expectation for ongoing learning and improvement.*

The findings indicate that teacher knowledge and skills are key to understanding students' special needs and building confidence and capacity that influence attitudes towards

inclusive practice development. Therefore, supporting teachers through professional learning must be a significant improvement initiative. For instance, whole-school, teacher-led, context-based learning within a professional community encouraged collaboration and collective learning. Creating ongoing job-embedded learning opportunities met personal learning needs. These strategies are supported by research on effective professional learning for inclusion (Atkins & Rodger, 2016; De Vroey et al., 2023; Walker et al., 2018) and, as evidenced, enhanced the College's capacity for improvement.

6.3   Chapter Summary

In summary, changing teacher attitudes and beliefs is crucial to inclusive practice development for students with special educational needs. However, this is challenging in the complex, secondary environment. Nonetheless, this research found that socially just principal leadership committed to an inclusive vision and strategic improvement plan impacted changes to structures, processes, and strategies that supported the development of inclusive practice at the College. For example, leadership restructuring created opportunities for a teacher with expertise in inclusion to share leadership and influence pedagogical change. This occurred through whole-school, collaborative, culture-building activities that engaged teachers in reflective and context-based professional learning processes, from which relationships developed and impacted effective support for strengthening teacher confidence and capability for inclusive change.

These findings highlight the interconnectedness of contextual leadership, improvement, support, and professional learning structures, processes, and strategies. They demonstrate how these factors contribute to the development of productive relationships, which in turn significantly influence teacher attitudes towards cultural change for inclusive practice development.

The final chapter in this thesis, Chapter Seven, addresses the overall outcomes and major findings of the study in response to the overarching research question.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

7.1.   Introduction

This final chapter addresses the overarching research question: "What can be learned to develop more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs from a school that has experienced two years of disruptive processes?" It is important to note that this study unfolded during leadership changes, school improvement initiatives, and the demands of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) all of which profoundly impacted the outcomes.

The culmination of this research is a dynamic model that vividly illustrates the practice development of inclusive schooling, accompanied by a concise written explanation. The true significance of this research lies in its implications for principals and others tasked with implementing policy into practice to impact cultural change for inclusion in secondary schools. Furthermore, this chapter presents recommendations for future practice and research within this domain, complemented by the researcher's reflections, shared in the closing section.

7.2.   Review of the Methodology

This study was framed within a constructivist, interpretivist paradigm, guided by an ethnographic approach. This methodology was chosen because it allowed the insider researcher to deeply investigate the phenomenon. By prioritising participant views and experiences, this qualitative methodological approach provided valuable insights into the factors that influenced the development of inclusive practice for students with special educational needs in a secondary context. This was particularly significant, as previous research has given limited attention to this phenomenon (Round et al., 2016).

The data collection took place during and after disruptions influenced by a change in leadership personnel and direction, the adoption of a school improvement process, and the legislative requirements of the NCCD. To gather a comprehensive understanding, primary data were collected through individual participant interviews, researcher observations, and recorded informal conversations, emails, phone calls and parent responses in a reflective journal. College documents such as policies, procedures, plans, reports, curriculum programs, individual teacher planning, individual student plans and reports, enrolment interviews, and

NCCD data were also reviewed. This holistic approach aimed to enhance the richness and diversity of the data, contributing to a nuanced and comprehensive analysis.

Participants in the study included the principal, vice-principal, middle leaders, some teachers, and teaching assistants of the research site. This range of participant roles allowed the researcher to explore the phenomena from multiple perspectives, representing specific staff members across the College. Moreover, this approach facilitated the collection of ethnographic data, enabling readers to understand what it was like working in the College during disruptions. The data were creatively woven together to form meaningful narratives, interspersed with vivid vignettes that portrayed events, characters, and practices, bringing the stories of the participants and the researcher's experiences to life.

7.3.   A Model to Support the Development of Inclusive Practices

The foundation was laid through meticulous data collection and robust research methods for constructing a resolute and tangible model for guiding inclusive practice development (See Figure 7.1). Rooted in the rich tapestry of ethnographic data, this model is anchored by two prominent themes: "Disruption and Influence" and "Evolving Praxis," as elucidated in the preceding chapter.

At its core, this model reinforces the pivotal role of leadership. In particular, the importance of the principal's commitment to change followed by enabling processes and strategic thinking and action. Together, the principal and leader of learning for Diversity Education wielded a profound influence in nurturing trust-based relationships, a linchpin in fostering effective communication and creating a secure environment where teachers dared to innovate and embrace change as an integral part of the cultural improvement process.

The model itself assumes a vivid metaphorical form: that of a firecracker. This firecracker symbolises the dynamic potency of principal leadership, akin to an ignition sparking cultural transformation through Disruption and Influence. This concept is embodied by a sweeping arrow, enshrining three interlinked contextual factors within a Venn diagram: the Leadership of Others, Reflective Processes, and Capacity Building. The overlap within this diagram visually captures these factors' collective impact on developing relationships.

Furthermore, this model demonstrates how these relationships catalyse transformative change, symbolised by a sweeping arrow that transcends boundaries. It represents the transformation of cultural norms, signifying a shift over time in "The way we do things around here" through Evolving Praxis towards inclusive practice development.

Figure 7.1

A Model to Support the Development of Inclusive Practices in Schooling
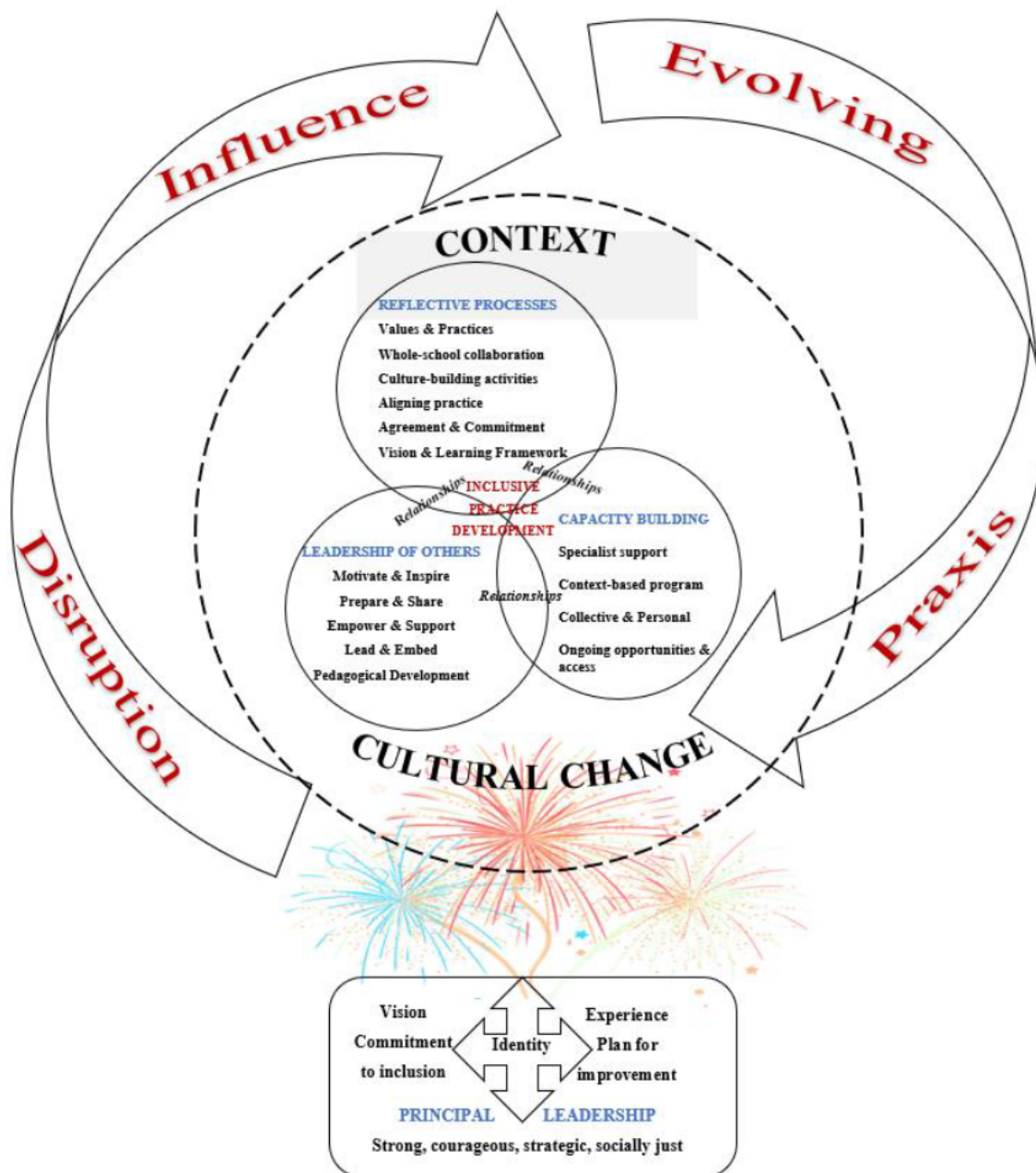
7.3.1. *Deeper Explanation of the Model*

The concept of inclusive education, as highlighted in the literature, acknowledges the diverse student population, and strives to cultivate a school culture that caters to the needs of all learners. However, effecting this shift in schools poses a considerable challenge for educational systems and leaders, particularly challenging assumptions around teaching students with special educational needs. The overriding themes in this model are "Disruption and Influence" and "Evolving Praxis". Hence, principals need guidance and support in fostering school change that can effectively promote the development of inclusive practices.

Disruption and Influence: This model based on the current study, outlines whole school actions that can foster change. These actions included a change in the school's narrative by first introducing new ideas (the disruption) and then initiating a change process by providing an opportunity for engaging staff in dialogue for improvement. Having established a change process the principal was able to advocate for inclusion by clearly communicating the collaboratively developed aspirational vision and the development of a schoolwide pedagogy. This "vision for learning" would challenge and inspire all students and set goals that raised expectations for effective leadership, quality teaching, and relevant professional learning to meet this intent. These actions challenged deeply held assumptions about teaching and learning, which led to further disruptions in thinking, and as such created an opportunity for the principal to review the College's existing policies and practices that as a result needed to change. These changes became embedded in the strategic improvement plan. The plan involved adopting an evidence-based, whole-school re-culturing framework to engage staff in collaborative review processes to reflect on and renegotiate College values and practices, for example, timetable structure, teaching and learning processes, and the design and layout of the physical learning environment. This plan supported the principal in managing and guiding the change process, serving as a roadmap to improvement.

While these actions disrupted established practice, they influenced the actions of others. Teacher experimentation and innovation was encouraged, impacting pedagogical development, and bringing about change. These actions demonstrated the principal's commitment to change, which influenced others to support improvement and resulted in a restructure of leadership, enabling like-minded individuals, such as the leader of learning for Diversity Education, who had expertise in inclusion, to share leadership responsibility for change. Distributing leadership in this way enabled others to act, for example, the leader of

learning for Diversity Education was able to challenge existing norms and practices for teaching students with special educational needs, influencing change across the College.

Evolving Praxis: The change meant that teachers needed access to resources and support to build confidence and capacity to teach inclusively. The leader of learning for Diversity Education, empowered to meet this need, facilitated context-based, collective learning within the College's professional community. These processes fostered collaboration and professional exchange and enabled the leader of learning for Diversity Education to build trust and respectful relationships with teachers. Strategies employed during these processes, as advocated for by McMaster (2015), Andrews and Conway (2020), and Carrington et al. (2022), were crucial to identifying and supporting teachers' personal learning needs and engaging them in reflection for improvement. This impacted a whole school agreement and commitment to an inclusive vision and pedagogical framework for learning, which was significant in guiding and aligning practice across the College.

Following the development of the inclusive vision, the leader of learning for Diversity Education continued to drive change by supporting teachers in integrating the pedagogical learning framework into classroom practice. This entailed providing access to ongoing, targeted professional learning, where teachers learned from experienced colleagues through observation, collaboration, and practice. This consistent mentoring approach stimulated creativity and cultivated an encouraging and empowering environment wherein teacher understanding of roles and responsibilities, as well as student needs grew, influencing program adjustments and the creation of new teaching resources. Over time, this led to the development of classroom practices that promoted inclusivity, allowing students with special educational needs to access and engage with the curriculum and participate in College events alongside their mainstream peers.

The theoretical foundations of leadership and transformational learning, as outlined by Argyris (2004) and Schein (2016), serve as the underpinning for the two core themes within this model: "Disruption and Influence" and "Evolving Praxis". These foundations are vital elements that ensure transparency, consistency, and a seamless flow throughout the model.

This model highlights the imperative role of principal leadership, aligned with the evidence in this study, in establishing inclusive schools; moreover, their experience in school change and commitment to equity in learning create the conditions necessary to drive improvement. This involves fostering a shared vision that motivates and inspires others to achieve beyond their expectations, encouraging innovation, and creating a positive and

empowering school culture. Within this culture, the principal strategically shares leadership with others committed to the shared vision, namely a leader with expertise in inclusion – as in this study, the leader of learning for Diversity Education. Ultimately, the leader of learning for Diversity Education's leadership influences transformational learning towards inclusive practice development.

Transformational learning occurs through social processes where the leader of learning for Diversity Education encourages collective responsibility for student learning across the whole school community (Ainscow, 2018). They use their expertise to empower teachers to challenge established norms and address inclusion-related concerns. In doing so, they encourage and support the creation of an environment of openness, ongoing dialogue, and diverse perspective embracement enabling them to nurture a culture of continuous growth by identifying teacher learning needs within an understanding of the school context. This deliberate and focused approach creates opportunities for the leader of learning for Diversity Education to facilitate professional learning focused on inclusive practices, provide specialised support and resources, and establish collaborative platforms with teachers to exchange experiences, insights, and best practices. Further, teachers develop an increased understanding of mandatory obligations and students' special educational needs. Within this environment, the leader of learning for Diversity Education builds trust and relationships that influence teacher ownership and involvement in pedagogical enhancement crucial to fostering cultural change towards a whole-school commitment to inclusive practice development.

7.4.   Theoretical Implications

Globally (OHCHR, 2016) and more recently in Australia with the report of the Royal Commission on Disability (2023)advocating for the closure of all special schools in favour of integrating inclusive education for students with special needs into mainstream schools, the move for inclusion has gained momentum.

My contribution to theory from this study presented in Figure 7.1 is a model for leaders to enable the development of inclusive practice in schools. However, in reaching these findings, theoretical implications for leadership and for teachers who encounter students with special educational needs in their classes emerged. Particularly, principal leadership influences the school change process and enables other leaders to support the development of inclusive practices for all students, including those with special educational needs.

Building on prior studies (Carlson et al., 2012; Shevlin et al., 2013), this research underscores the premise that teachers' attitudes and beliefs are crucial for changing practice, and pedagogical development necessitates relevant professional learning to build capacity for inclusive practices. Whilst acknowledging limitations, it can be concluded that teachers must feel supported and challenged in a way that they openly accept and embrace their responsibility for teaching and the learning of students with special educational needs.

Reflecting on the findings of this study it is paramount that principals possess strong, inclusive values and beliefs, read the context in which they operate, act strategically, be persistent in their message and overall enact their leadership accordingly. Further, this study suggests that principals who enable and facilitate a leadership of shared responsibility with knowledgeable others can effectively influence thinking for change. Such action helps build a school's capacity to develop inclusive practice, however, as Zbar et al. (2010) stated, improvement takes time, often years, and this statement resonated with experience at this College. While immediate changes had occurred to the College structures and the physical environment, the principal and leadership team worked on their strategic approach to improvement and change over several years. This aligns with Dinham's (2007) research findings that transforming a school's performance can take six to seven years and requires a cultural shift at the school leadership level, with principals stepping aside and trusting others to lead improvement.

School principals must be well-prepared for the challenging and evolving school leadership role. Drawing from Fullan's (2007) work, the findings of this study suggest that principals be equipped with the knowledge and skills to change school culture. Principals must inspire others to embrace change, encourage innovative teaching methods, be strategic, and collaborate with teachers towards developing a shared vision of educational excellence and successful outcomes for all students. These findings indicate that those responsible for selecting new principals should consider the applicants' views on inclusive practice(s) and their capacity to lead in a participatory manner. Moreover, their experience, knowledge, skills, and personality to provide collaborative leadership with respect and support for the school staff should be considered before being selected to lead cultural change towards inclusion. If this occurs, it might be surmised that schools will meet legislative requirements and be accountable in addressing the growing diversity of student needs.

### 7.5.	Practical Implications

The findings of this study highlight the practical implications for schools aiming to advance inclusive practices and have informed recommendations that emphasise the pivotal role of the principal in influencing a school's strategic direction for change, establishing the actions, and prioritising resources that can significantly impact improvement towards inclusive practice development. Four recommendations from this study are the selection of new principals for leading cultural change, sharing leadership responsibility, adopting a process for change, and focusing on staff professional learning.

Recommendation 1: The selection of new principals should prioritise those committed to ensuring inclusive practices exist and are continually enhanced.

The findings of this study demonstrate the feasibility of a shift in thinking and attitudes toward inclusive practices in secondary schools. However, achieving this transformation requires a confident and strategic approach propelled by principal leadership. At the core of this necessity lies an explicit commitment to a vision for inclusion and the willingness to share leadership with those possessing expertise and skills in this domain. This approach fosters and cultivates the essential contextual conditions to develop inclusive practices.

Recommendation 2: Leadership responsibility should be shared with others knowledgeable about inclusion and disposition towards action.

This study highlights the pivotal role of leadership in driving school improvement. Many teachers have expressed the desire for heightened confidence in their professional expertise and skills when educating students with special educational needs. Thus, a leader dedicated to Diversity Education becomes paramount, serving as a crucial bridge that connects principals and teachers in supporting the enhancement of teachers' capacities for inclusive practice improvement.

Recommendation 3: Principals should be supported by school systems to adopt, if necessary, a process for change in line with expectations for inclusive improvement.

Embracing an evidence-based framework for school change empowers and enables leadership to involve teachers in collaborative, reflective learning processes crucial to fostering a culture of inclusivity.

Recommendation 4: Leadership of cultural change for inclusion should focus on staff professional learning and support aligned to the contextual needs of the school.

Enhancing teacher knowledge and capabilities through targeted professional learning and ongoing access to specialist support promotes collaboration. It fosters productive

relationships to engage staff in improvement and influence inclusive pedagogical development.

7.5.1. Further Research

While this research has provided valuable insights into the impact of sharing leadership with an experienced teacher leader specialising in inclusion, certain limitations are worth acknowledging, as they form the scope of future research. For instance, a broader investigation of schools with similar contextual characteristics could assess the effectiveness of current support mechanisms in addressing individual needs and influencing instructional practices. Such research has the potential to provide valuable insights into the broader applicability and effectiveness of these interventions, thereby contributing to the enhancement of inclusive education practices across diverse educational settings.

In addition, the findings revealed that teachers experience feelings of being time-constrained and overwhelmed, mainly due to heightened expectations aligned with their obligations under NCCD. This highlights the need for investigating strategies to integrate NCCD recommended practices and principles into a school's professional learning program. Such an inquiry can alleviate teachers' concerns about increased expectations being perceived as additional work. Furthermore, it can enhance the school's capacity to develop inclusive practices. This research initiative has the potential to provide valuable insights, leading to the optimisation of professional learning approaches while fostering a culture of inclusivity within the school environment.

7.6. Limitations

Examining the limitations encountered during this study is crucial to building upon the necessity for future research—the limitations encountered during this study primarily pertain to contextual and inside researcher factors.

First, the research occurred in a single co-educational Pre-kindergarten to Year Twelve College in a metropolitan Australian city, limiting the study's scope to this specific site. Second, 19 staff members, approximately 8% of the total College staff, participated and provided valuable insights. While these insights are valuable, a broader sample might have yielded more diverse findings, enhancing the generalisability of the results. Third, conducting this ethnographic investigation as an insider researcher provided a deep understanding of the cultural context and participant perspectives. However, it also introduced certain constraints, including potential biases, challenges in maintaining objectivity, the risk of over-

involvement, ethical considerations related to power dynamics among participants, resource limitations, and difficulties in ensuring participant confidentiality.

Despite these challenges, being an insider researcher allowed a unique and nuanced exploration of the culture under investigation. This enhanced the overall depth of understanding while also recognising the inherent limitations of this approach, laying the foundations for understanding the broader significance of this study.

7.7.   Significance of the Study

As the literature review revealed, a significant challenge facing educational systems globally and in Australia is finding ways of including all students in schools. Faced with these challenges, the Education Council released the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, setting goals for the education of young Australians (Education Council, 2019). The declaration aimed to build on the success of the Ministerial Council on Education & Youth (2008) goals for young Australians by promoting excellence and equity for all Australian children emphasising the importance of meeting individual needs of all learners and the role of education in supporting this. Further, the coincidental release in Australia of the recent recommendations in the report of the Royal Commission on Disability (2023) highlights the crucial need for schools to have clarification about the actions needed to move practice forward.

The model in Figure 7.1 of this study provides leadership with a model grounded in empirical evidence in a large Pre-kindergarten to Year Twelve secondary school in Australia. In particular, the model provides structures, processes, and strategies informed by evidence regarding the impact of leadership, whole-school improvement, and the NCCD requirements on inclusive practice development for students with special educational needs. Given that there is currently no single model of what an inclusive school looks like (Ainscow, 2020), the model has the potential to support those in secondary and other educational settings who wish to lead schools in an inclusive direction.

7.8.   Researcher's Reflection

As I reach the end of this thesis, I am reflecting on my pathway through this study. My beliefs and ideation that everyone has a right to learn and should be taught in a way they can understand shaped my worldview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) and were laid out in the introduction. These beliefs were reinforced during my tenure as the Education Support Centre coordinator and later as the leader of learning Diversity Education. Consequently, it

intensified my aspiration to transform the culture and implement the practical measures needed for the College's transition towards inclusion.

Upon reflection, I recognised that my journey in leadership commenced with the arrival of the new principal at the College. As highlighted in the vignette, he articulated a more comprehensive perspective of inclusion, extending from special educational needs to a diversity-focused lens. Furthermore, he acknowledged the challenges of inclusive education and the paradigm shifts required to rethink and enact relevant pedagogical practices. This stirred deep emotions within me and fostered the belief that the College could become a more inclusive space for students with special educational needs. Nevertheless, I held onto that thought for a while as I grappled with processing the new information and needed time to comprehend the plan for change while building trust in the new principal's vision (Hall, 1990). Moreover, I was aware of the prevailing apprehension among staff regarding potential changes to existing practices at the College (Schein, 2013), and I was cautious not to be seen as the first to deviate from established protocols.

My experience as an insider researcher illuminated the strength of my beliefs in equity and fairness. This realisation helped me overcome my anxiety about taking on a leadership role. I learned that others' perspectives significantly influence their actions. Engaging in conflicting interactions (Hodkinson, 2005) with others taught me that I could not effect change in every individual, and I came to accept that. However, as someone who values efficiency and promptness, I frequently became frustrated when I sensed reluctance in others. This prompted me to be more mindful of my enthusiasm and its impact on others including those that might find it overwhelming. I realised the value of patience, became attuned to others' responses, and adapted my approach accordingly. For instance, when I encountered delays in tasks, I would engage my researcher side, seeking to understand the underlying behaviour and pausing to question why things might be unfolding that way. I consistently struggled with distinguishing between my roles as a researcher and a teacher leader, as these roles did not exist in isolation nor possess clear boundaries. These roles intertwined, allowing me to be fully immersed in all aspects of the study providing a deeper comprehension of how disruptions affected the development of practices for students with special educational needs. Crucially, my interactions with the principal and vice-principal played a significant role. Their equitable and empowering approach allowed me to confidently take on a leadership role. They imparted the wisdom of frequenting the staffroom, participating in social events, and engaging with colleagues to build the relationships essential for fostering change. During informal interactions, staff often felt more

at ease, enabling them to share concerns. In turn, I provided unwavering support to address these concerns.

As I conclude this thesis, it is important to note that I am no longer employed at the College, and the principal and other leaders who initially participated in this research have since moved on. This leads to a crucial question: Does the incoming leadership possess the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience in organisational culture to effectively enhance the College's capacity for sustainable, inclusive practice development?

7.9.   Conclusion

In conclusion, this ethnographic study has shed light on the intricate interplay of disruptions and leadership in fostering inclusive practices for students with special educational needs. Leadership changes, school improvement processes, and mandatory legislative requirements of NCCD instigated these disruptions. Guided by a constructivist, interpretivist paradigm, qualitative data were collected and presented in a descriptive narrative format, effectively capturing the researcher's and study participants' lived experiences.

The study revealed valuable empirical insights into the factors that challenge and create opportunities for shaping teacher attitudes and fostering inclusive schooling for all students, particularly those with special educational needs. The findings highlight the transformative potential of strong and strategic principal leadership in driving cultural change. Yet, the true driving force emerged in the role of the leader of learning for Diversity Education. Over time, their expert knowledge of inclusion, sensitive interpersonal skills, and collaborative abilities sparked a seismic shift in teacher attitudes, catalysing evident cultural change towards inclusive practice development.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Overarching research question: What can be learned for enabling the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs from a school that has undergone two years of disruptive processes?					
RSQ	Principal	Vice-principal	Teachers/Middle leaders	Teaching assistants	Prompts
1. What structures and processes are in place and/or have been disrupted that may influence teacher practice?	How are things going? How would you define yourself as a school leader? What shapes your approach to leading others? Take me back to when you first started working at The College what was it like? What are your experiences and considerations leading a school through change.	How are things going? How would you define yourself as a school leader? What shapes your approach to leading others? What have been your experiences leading The College through school improvement? What are your experiences and considerations as a leader of professional learning?	How are things going? Tell me about your experiences of working at The College now and as it has undergone new leadership, and school improvement, has anything changed? Middle leaders - What have been your experiences leading The College through school improvement?	How are things going? Tell me about your experiences of working at The College now and as it has undergone new leadership, and school improvement, has anything changed?	Leadership restructure Staffing Roles & Responsibilities Curriculum changes Timetable restructure Change to the physical environment Changes to professional learning Support structures Planning processes Learning framework

Overarching research question: What can be learned for enabling the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs from a school that has undergone two years of disruptive processes?					
RSQ	Principal	Vice-principal	Teachers / Middle leaders	Teaching assistants	Prompts
2.What challenges and opportunities emerge for supporting students with special educational needs because of going through disruptive processes?	What are your views on inclusive education? What kinds of strategic considerations factor into your development of inclusive practices for the College? From a leadership perspective have the changes posed challenges and/or created opportunities for the development of teacher practice? What have been your own most powerful experiences of professional learning?	What are your views on inclusive education? What kinds of strategic considerations factor into your development of inclusive practices for the College? From a leadership perspective have the changes posed challenges and/or created opportunities for the development of teacher practice? What have been your own most powerful experiences of professional learning?	What are your views on inclusive education? Tell me about your current teaching practices, what shapes your approach to teaching? As a teacher has the changes posed challenges and/or created opportunities for the development of your practice? What have been your own most powerful experiences of professional learning?	What are your views on inclusive education? As a teaching assistant has the changes posed challenges and/or created opportunities for the development of your practice? What have been your own most powerful experiences of professional learning?	Fixed mindsets Culture NCCD Mandatory obligations New learning pathways Expectations Assessment and reporting Secondary environment / curriculum Subject knowledge Pedagogical enhancement Student diversity Knowledge & Skills – Opportunities for development and experience or lack of

Overarching research question: What can be learned for enabling the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs from a school that has undergone two years of disruptive processes?					
RSQ	Principal	Vice-principal	Teachers / Middle leaders	Teaching assistants	Prompts
3. What significant enabling factors have impacted change within the school?	From your leadership perspective tell me about the things that have enabled/ influenced change at the College	From your leadership perspective tell me about the things that have enabled/ influenced change at the College	From a teacher/middle perspective what things have enabled change to take place at the College? Can you tell me what has had the biggest impact to your practice and why? How do you see your teaching identity as linked to, or not linked to, The College and your place within it?	From a teaching assistant perspective what things have enabled change to take place at the College? Can you tell me what has had the biggest impact to your practice and why?	New vision Learning framework Whole school collaborative learning Professional learning and support for working with students who have special needs.

| Overarching research question: |||||| |
| What can be learned for enabling the development of more inclusive practices for students with special educational needs from a school that has undergone two years of disruptive processes? |||||| |
RSQ	Principal	Vice-principal	Teachers / Middle leaders	Teaching assistants	Prompts
4. What are the implications for teacher praxis working with students of Intellectual disabilities?	How do you perceive your role as school leader in ensuring that The College meets the requirements of NCCD? In your opinion should the College be a 'school of choice' for parents of students with special educational needs? Can you explain why / why not? I would like to finish up the interview by getting an overall summary of your experiences over the past two years working at the College in relation to the development of inclusive practice. Is there anything else you would like to add?	How do you perceive your role in supporting teachers to meet their obligations of NCCD? How can NCCD promote effective teaching and learning practices and ensure that all students that require additional support are provided with reasonable adjustments? In your opinion should the College be a 'school of choice' for parents of students with special educational needs? Can you explain why / why not? I would like to finish up the interview by getting an overall summary of your experiences over the past two years working at the College in relation to the development of inclusive practice.	What is your understanding of NCCD? How do you promote effective teaching and learning to meet a diverse range of student needs? Have you embarked on PD/sought advice to support your work with students who have special needs as a result of the vision for learning/school improvement process? In your opinion should the College be a 'school of choice' for parents of students with special educational needs? Can you explain why / why not? I would like to finish up the interview by getting an overall summary of your experiences over the past two years working at the College in relation to the development of inclusive practice.	What is your understanding of NCCD? Have you embarked on PD/sought advice to support your work with students who have special needs as a result of the vision for learning/school improvement process? In your opinion should the College be a 'school of choice' for parents of students with special educational needs? Can you explain why / why not? I would like to finish up the interview by getting an overall summary of your experiences over the past two years working at the College in relation to the development of inclusive practice.	Fixed mindsets Culture NCCD Mandatory obligations New learning pathways Expectations Assessment and reporting Secondary environment / curriculum Subject knowledge Pedagogical enhancement Student diversity Knowledge & Skills – Opportunities for development and experience or lack of

APPENDIX B: ETHICS APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

Human Ethics

To: ███████████████████████

Joan Conway / Dorothy Andrews

Wed 12/09/2018 2:02 PM

Dear Allison

I am pleased to confirm your Human Research Ethics (HRE) application has now been reviewed by the University's Expedited Review process. As your research proposal has been deemed to meet the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), ethical approval is granted as follows.

Project Title: H18REA210 - Shifting the mindset for educating students with intellectual disabilities: Individual teachers' experiences during a time of change.

Approval date: 12/09/2018

Expiry date: 12/09/2021

USQ HREC status: Approved with conditions

(a)   responsibly conduct the project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments made to the proposal;

(b)   advise the University (email: ResearchIntegrity@usq.edu.au) immediately of any complaint pertaining to the conduct of the research or any other issues in relation to this project which may warrant review of the ethical approval of this project;

(c)   promptly report any adverse events or unexpected outcomes to the University (email: ResearchIntegrity@usq.edu.au) and take prompt action to deal with any unexpected risks;

(d)   make submission for any amendments to the project and obtain approval prior to implementing such changes;

(e)   provide a progress 'milestone report' when requested and at least for every year of approval;

(f)   provide a final 'milestone report' when the project is complete.

(g)   promptly advise the University if the project has been discontinued, using a final 'milestone report'.

Additional conditionals of approval for this project are:

(a)   Nil.

Please note that failure to comply with the conditions of this approval or requirements of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018, and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007 may result in withdrawal of approval for the project.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to make contact with an Ethics Officer.

Congratulations on your ethical approval! Wishing you all the best for success!

Kind regards,

Human Research Ethics

University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba – Queensland – 4350 – Australia
Ph: 07 4687 5703 – Ph: 07 4631 2690 – Email: human.ethics@usq.edu.au