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**WORKING TOGETHER TO TEACH INCLUSIVELY: A study
on the development of a community of practice**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative action research project aimed to enhance teachers' knowledge and practice of inclusion in one secondary school. The study investigated how, through action research, a community of practice (CoP) contributed to the development of teacher knowledge about teaching, learning and inclusion for students with diverse learning needs. A CoP comprising of four teachers, a teacher aide and the researcher was established and began their action research with an exploration of students' perspectives of school. Student perspectives became the starting point for teachers to explore the meaning of inclusive education and its implications for teaching and learning, including the roles and responsibilities of staff. Perspectives of students also became the basis for teachers to apply the knowledge of inclusive practice gained in the CoP to their daily teaching. Teacher and student interviews, student surveys, CoP meeting minutes and informal conversation data were examined to find how within the CoP teachers responded to their students' perspectives; how teachers co-constructed knowledge about inclusive teaching practice; and how teachers changed their classroom practice as a result of knowledge sharing. Results show that through their participation in the CoP, teachers' understandings about inclusion were affirmed and developed further; teachers responded to students' comments about school by developing their teaching practice to attend to students' strengths and needs for support; teachers shared knowledge of inclusive teaching practices within the CoP and

planned to share knowledge beyond the CoP; and there was some indication of students feeling positive effects from developments in the CoP. The study indicates the importance of using school staff's shared knowledge as a resource when promoting inclusion in schools and providing teachers' time to collaborate and share knowledge as part of their professional learning.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 2015, 58 million primary age children and 63 million adolescents remain excluded from education (UNESCO, 2015). Some children are excluded from education involuntarily due to barriers such as poverty and armed conflict. Others voluntarily exclude themselves due to perceptions of irrelevance of the education they receive to their lives, and experiences of marginalisation based on factors such as ethnicity, disability and gender (Carrington, et.al, 2012). Inclusion in education is an international response to the view that all children have a right to a free, compulsory, relevant education, responsive to their needs (UNESCO, 2000). Barriers to education for such a large number of children across the globe, places responsibility on schools to explore ways to respond positively to diversity, value all students and their active participation (Carrington et.al, 2012).

What is Inclusive Education?

Inclusion is a process of reform and development in education (Carrington et.al, 2012). Inclusive education is aimed at reducing barriers for students' participation (Carrington et.al, 2012). It is also about increasing the presence, participation and achievement of all students and key adults in their lives, in education (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). In the process of inclusion, the role of the school is to centre education around concepts of social justice and equity, and to prepare students to be active participants in a

democracy (Labaree, 1997). In such a system students are taught about fairness for all, and taught to challenge the placement of value on people where some are perceived to be more valuable than others (Slee, 2011). Inclusion in education is about the commitment of schools to use inclusive values to guide their actions such as: equality, rights, participation and respect for diversity. Linking inclusive values to the curriculum, teaching, learning activities and interactions between children and adults is essential in developing inclusive practice in schools (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). The New Zealand education system views inclusion as a practice by schools to remove barriers for all students, so they are present in local schools, participating and achieving alongside their peers (Ministry of Education, 2012a).

Support for Inclusive Education in New Zealand

International human rights treaties and conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Nations Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) identify children's rights to receive a minimum standard of education, to non-discrimination, justice and participation (Smith, 2007). New Zealand is a signatory to these international conventions and has responsibilities to report on progress and developments in the area of equitable and inclusive education for all.

There is also evidence of support for inclusive education in some New Zealand policies and legislation. The New Zealand Disability Strategy (Ministry of Social

Development, 2001) is government policy and requires that government bodies, including education, report annually on progress towards meeting the Strategy's goals, for an inclusive society. In education, the Strategy states as a goal the development of ".... appropriate and effective inclusive educational settings that will meet individual educational needs" (p16). The 1989 Education Act specifies that students with special needs have the same rights to enrol and receive education at state schools as those students without special needs (Parliamentary Counsel Office, 1989). The National Education Goals (NEGs) guide all schools and state that "equality of educational opportunity for all New Zealanders" is expected (Ministry of Education, 2004). The context for schools to be inclusive is also set by The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) which has inclusion as one of its principles (Ministry of Education, 2012a).

"Success for All" is a national policy focused on the provision of supports in education for children and young people with disabilities. It identifies the purpose of education as being to "nurture, grow and realise every child's potential" (Ministry of Education, 2010a), and set a goal for a fully inclusive education system in New Zealand by 2014.

The Treaty of Waitangi acknowledges the bicultural foundations of New Zealand and through its principles of partnership, protection and participation, support the practice of inclusive education. The principle of partnership supports the use of knowledge of diverse

people who can contribute to students' learning such as families and communities in the education process. The principal of protection supports the active protection of Maori knowledge, identity, language and culture in education. The participation principle supports equal opportunities and outcomes for all students (Ministry of Education, 2012b).

Barriers to Inclusive Education

Amidst the well intentioned policies and legislations showing commitment to inclusive education, there are signs that New Zealand does not have a fully inclusive education system as yet (Selvaraj, 2015). Availability, openness, acceptability and flexibility of education services for some students are limited. This is indicated by complaints received by the Human Rights Commission for discrimination against disabled students such as the IHC class action¹, and the Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand complaint (Human Rights Commission: Disabled Children's right to Education, 2009).

The 2010 Education Review Office² (ERO) report indicates that there are barriers related to the provision of inclusive education in some schools. For example having insufficient time to plan for students with high needs, having insufficient knowledge of

¹ IHC class action is a complaint made about the discrimination experienced by students with disabilities at their local school in the matters of enrolment, access to the curriculum and participation in school life (IHC, 2008).

² ERO is the New Zealand government department that evaluates and reports on the education and care of students in schools and early childhood services (Education Review Office, 2015b).

differentiated teaching to meet the needs of students and teacher aides carrying out most of programme planning with little input from teachers were reported as needing improvement, in the development of inclusive practices in schools in 2010. Barriers to the provision of inclusive education in some schools in 2015 (ERO, 2015a) were seen to be funding, lack of timely responses from specialist services, availability of appropriate professional learning development for inclusive teaching such as how to differentiate the curriculum and meeting the needs of students with complex needs or extreme behaviour.

The Importance of the Study

Despite considerable amount of support for the concept of inclusion, there is evidence that inclusive practices are still not embedded within the day to day practice of many New Zealand schools. Schools need knowledge and support to develop inclusive cultures and approaches to teaching and learning. This study aimed to enhance teacher knowledge and practice of inclusion at one secondary school through the participation in a CoP. For the teachers, participation in the CoP involved responding to student perceptions of their school by sharing of knowledge, resources, concerns and developing effective solutions such as strategies to differentiate learning. The CoP also gave a platform for the teachers to build constructive relationships with each other to support inclusive practice in their classrooms. The study is important as it supports the development of teacher skills that are essential to the adoption of inclusive practice in schools. The study supports the

teachers' sharing of their own craft knowledge in the teaching of students' with diverse learning needs and responding to student voice as ways of developing inclusive culture and teaching practice within the school.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the concept of inclusion in education, factors that influence inclusive school development, and the use of student voice and communities of practice to support the development of teachers' knowledge and practice of inclusion in schools.

Inclusion in Education

The language used to describe the term inclusion can be confusing and contradictory because inclusion can mean different things to different people (Florian, 2008; Slee, 2001). Some identify inclusion with reference to groups of students such as those with disabilities or students from difficult financial backgrounds or students with behaviour issues (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). In some cases, the term inclusion has been inappropriately taken over and used to describe traditional special education practices that continue to exclude and marginalise learners (Ainscow, Dyson & Weiner, 2013). However, inclusion is about all students and is a process that helps to focus attention on those who may be marginalised for various reasons such as disability, ethnicity, culture, sexuality and gender (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

Critical theory and inclusive education. Critical theory can be used to examine systems of power that enable the success of one group at the expense of

others in education (Slee, 2008). Political systems that create grading of need, such as applications for resourcing, socioeconomic systems that advantage the achievement of some students at the expense of others and knowledge seen as the truth without questioning leave groups of students such as those with disabilities marginalised, if left unexamined. Such systems of power influence how people are identified, described, whose voices are heard and how people are treated (Slee, 2008). These systems contribute to ideas of 'us and them' or 'normal and abnormal' and expectations of 'who can and cannot be in the classroom' or 'should and should not teach' certain students.

Socially constructed ideas of 'normal' performance are influenced by systems of power such as knowledge seen as the truth about ability and disability (Slee, 2008), can lead to discriminating attitudes and practices for teachers. Ashby (2010) investigated the meaningful engagement of five students with disability in two schools. Results showed that teacher assumptions of what was viewed as normal performance seen as the truth, resulted in lack of support and meaningful academic engagement for the students with disability. For example, Jacob a student at one of the schools was given the task to produce a piece of writing by copying the work of a paraprofessional so that it looked similar to his classmates as an end product. However, in this process Jacob was excluded from independently carrying out the

task and using his preferred method to complete the task. The study recommended teacher examination of their beliefs about expectations of 'normal' performance of students, understanding how these impacted their expectations of learning for all students, and using their understandings to provide learning that is meaningful for all students to develop inclusive practice (Ashby, 2010).

Beliefs influenced by power systems of knowledge of ability and disability, can impact on teacher willingness to teach certain students, if left unexamined. For example, a study by Tripp and Rizzo (2006) examined teacher willingness to teach students with disabilities. The study found teachers who were unaware of student medical disability labels, responded more favourably to inclusion, than those aware of students labelled with cerebral palsy (Grenier, 2007). Thus, teachers need to be aware that their beliefs influence their willingness to teach all students.

The role of policy and legislation in supporting inclusion. Some argue that an education focused approach alone cannot address the inequalities in societies (Dyson and Raffo, 2007). In Canada, the shift to inclusive education was a result of government policy that required the closing of institutions for students with intellectual disabilities, leading all children to be taught in mainstream classrooms (Hill, 2002, cited in Mac Arthur, 2009). In 2007, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) developed a Human Rights Action Plan

that suggested educational policies promote a rights-based approach in schools. The action suggested include consistent, regular monitoring of policy implementation, providing learning environments and teaching to enable the practice of human rights values, and the education of school staff to spread human rights values (Runswick-Cole & Hodge, 2009).

Tools and practices to develop inclusive schools in New Zealand. Recent developments of auditing of inclusive practices by the ERO and providing tools for schools to evaluate their own inclusive practice (Selvaraj, 2015) support the recommendations by UNESCO in 2007. By monitoring the implementation of educational policies regularly, it is hoped New Zealand will be able to achieve an inclusive education system. Schools are required to be audited by the ERO, to ensure that inclusive educational practices are in place. Schools are also provided with tools such as the Inclusive Practices Tool (IPT), which examines the extent to which a school includes all students in all aspects of school life. IPT gives schools the opportunity to become active members in evaluating the development of inclusive education in their own school (Selvaraj, 2015).

Factors Influencing Inclusive School Development

School performance of inclusive practice in New Zealand is measured by the ERO. In 2014, the ERO evaluated inclusive practices of 152 schools and found that 78% of them

were mostly inclusive of students with special needs, which is an improvement from its evaluation in 2010. Schools with high levels of inclusive practice had leaders who set high expectations for students with special needs and ensured that staff understood their responsibility to commit to this. Such schools also identified the priority for building staff capability and allocated time for professional learning on supporting students with special education needs, and for developing inclusive practices across the school. The responsibility to teach students with special needs was shared among a team and time was allocated for regular meetings to identify needs, plan and monitor progress (ERO, 2015a). It should be noted, however, that only some schools were evaluated and the findings are therefore not representative of all New Zealand schools. In addition, the indicators selected to evaluate inclusive practice may not have been consistent with a contemporary understanding of inclusion, so the ERO findings need to be interpreted with care (McMaster, 2013). The following paragraphs discuss the factors that support the development of inclusive schools.

Teacher knowledge. Teachers are key people who are involved in the day-to-day education of students and are, therefore, key players in inclusion at school.

Limits are imposed on students' learning by teachers who associate bell curve thinking to student ability. Bell curve thinking is where most students present in a class are assumed to perform at an average level, and a very few students are assumed to perform above the average or below. Some teachers believe that all

students in the classroom should be performing at an average level and students who are performing below the average are viewed as needing specialist teaching that the teachers have not been trained to provide (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000). It has been found that even within the constraints of the curriculum and assessment demands, individual teachers can carry out inclusive practices to teach students with diverse learning needs (Ainscow, Dyson & Booth, 2006).

A study by Florian and Black Hawkins (2011) explored the knowledge and skills needed for teachers to be inclusive in their practice. Classroom observations and interviews investigated how teachers made meaning of the concept of inclusion in their daily practice in two highly inclusive Scottish primary schools. The study found that the teachers who were inclusive in their daily practice were involved in extending what was ordinarily available in the classroom as a way of providing learning for all students, reducing the need to mark learners as different. Teachers, when their students were faced with barriers to learning, viewed these as teaching challenges rather than associating such barriers with differences in students (Florian & Black Hawkins, 2011). The study demonstrates that teachers have curriculum and craft knowledge they can use to include and teach a diverse range of students. This craft knowledge can be used as a foundation for developing inclusive practice in the classroom and schools.

Teacher beliefs, experience and attitudes. Positive teacher attitudes play an important role in inclusive education. Variables such as such as experiences in teacher training, experience with inclusive education, and the severity of students' disabilities were associated with attitudes to inclusion (De Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2011). Individual teacher attitudes towards inclusion are influenced by the attitudes of teaching staff as a collective group (Dupoux, Wolman & Estrada, 2005; Urton, 2014). As inclusive education involves challenging set ways of thinking and changing cultures of thinking of the communities of educators involved (Fullan, 2000), professional development for inclusive practices in schools will need to focus on teachers' awareness of their own assumptions, attitudes and beliefs and the implications of these on their practices in the classroom.

Teacher collaboration and professional development. Adults and children connected to schools possess the knowledge to develop their schools and this knowledge can be made the most of through collaboration (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). As successful inclusion of students also depends on the ability of schools to support and include the adults involved (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010), it is important to support teachers, support staff and school management when developing inclusive schools. Research has found the use of collaborative multi-disciplinary teams to be successful in helping teachers to practice inclusion (Arthur-Kelly, Sutherland, Lyons, Macfarlane & Foreman, 2013). Where teachers have accepted the responsibility to collaborate, more effective teaching and learning for all

students is noticed (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003). Studies have also found that mentoring and collaboration with colleagues focused on pedagogical discussions promotes inclusive practices in teaching (Tjernberg, & Mattson, 2014; Pierson & Howell, 2013). Thus, it is important for schools to support teachers to establish productive collaborative relationships with their colleagues to support the development of inclusive schools.

Leadership. Leadership is important in guiding education systems towards inclusive values and bringing about sustainable change (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Riehl (2000), in a review of the literature on school administration, suggests the role of the school principal in three areas to promote inclusion in their schools. The areas include: developing new meanings about diversity; promoting inclusive practices within schools; and building connections between schools and communities. School leaders can encourage discussions to communicate new understandings and have the opportunities to do so in settings such as meetings (Strike, 1993). Leaders can help create practices within schools that address the needs of diverse students by providing opportunities for teacher collaboration and problem-solving (Riehl, 2000), allowing time for collaboration (Ainscow, 2010), buffering teachers from external pressures associated with accountability for students' academic achievement, providing quality professional development, and by letting teachers take leadership roles in the school (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). Leaders also need to understand the dynamics of

their communities and to take advantage of available resources to meet students' needs (Englert, 1993) when developing inclusive schools.

Collaboration between schools, and between schools and their communities.

Collaboration between schools, and between schools and their communities, can also help the development of inclusive schools. A project was carried out by Ainscow, (2012) to improve equity in the education system that involved a process of networking and collaborating between schools, and between schools and communities to share knowledge, and expertise. The collaboration resulted in improvements in the test and examination results of schools that served the most disadvantaged communities. Collaboration was found to be more effective where schools were aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses based on evidence and were also aware of goals (Ainscow, 2012).

Challenges to the development of inclusive practice for teachers in schools. Factors that pose challenges to the development of inclusive practice for teachers in schools include, pressure to show student achievement and the lack of teacher confidence. The lack of relevant professional development opportunities that apply to teachers' daily practice is also seen as a challenge for teachers to develop inclusive practice (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011). Pressure placed on teachers for students to achieve well in standardised testing can hinder the inclusive practice of teachers (Codd, 2005). Research highlights that teachers are anxious and are not confident about working with classes that comprise an increasingly

diverse range of learners even though they support inclusion (Blecker & Boakes, 2010).

Those teachers wishing to become more inclusive in their practice are challenged to respond to students' differences using what is available in the daily life of the classroom, which is a complicated process (Florian, 2007).

Responding to Student Voice to Enhance Teaching Practice

Children's participation in the world they live in supports belonging, inclusion and teaches children how they can bring about change (Smith, 2007). Participation of children is very important in settings where adult authority seems unquestionable (Smith, 2007) such as school. The use of student voice helps to guide learning, and provides a way for students to participate, belong and be included in their education (Messiou, 2013). The paragraphs below present research on the use of student voice to change the classroom, as a tool for teachers' professional development, as a tool to teach students to be a part of a democracy, and as a way to inform teachers about social and academic aspects of school.

Research shows listening to students' perspectives about school can help teachers change the classroom climate, teaching practice and content to support their students. For example a study by Ferguson, Hanreddy and Draxton, (2011) found exploring students' perceptions by their teachers about their classroom helped to promote conversations about learning and resulted in changes to the

classroom climate and teaching. Listening to student voice can strengthen teacher-student relationships and helps teachers to understand student relationships with their peers, thus supporting the development of a positive classroom climate (Hope, Hughes, Jones, Messiou & Shaw, 2015). Messiou, (2013) found student voice to be a powerful tool that allowed teachers' professional development of their own teaching practices, supported teachers to confront the marginalisation experienced by students, empowered students and increased teachers' confidence in being able to practice inclusion.

Using student voice in schools gives the opportunity for students to consider diverse values and attitudes, learn about inclusion and bring about change. In a study, a group ten students were given the position of researchers and policy-makers to identify key issues about their school experience, teaching, learning and the future. Students identified experiences of safety and bullying at school as a key concern for all and explored these further with their peers and teachers. Then the students worked with staff to develop the school policy with regard to safety and bullying and possible interventions. Through this process students learned that their peers and adults may have different views, were able to express their views without punishment, and played a role in creating a school environment that fitted the safety needs of students at their school (Gunter & Thompson, 2007). The study helped

students understand the democratic process of inclusion by listening to the voices of their peers and teachers.

There are findings in research that indicate students are more concerned with social aspects of school life than academic. For example a study found that students viewed social aspects of inclusion, such as playing games together and having friends as more important compared to the academic aspects of inclusion such as engagement with specific subjects and academic tasks (Balfe & Travers, 2011). The study indicates that for students the social aspects of school are very important, making it important that teacher time and attention is dedicated to the social context where learning is situated in inclusive practice. The importance students place on social aspects may also be due to their ability to change social aspects compared to the academic aspects of school, which they may see as being beyond their reach. Thus, it is important for teachers to gain student voice on academic aspects of the classroom such as teaching and learning and respond to these as well as the social context of where learning takes place when being inclusive.

Communities Of Practice (CoP)

CoPs can be an important tool when using teachers' craft knowledge as a foundation to be inclusive in the classroom. The following paragraphs discuss the

definition and effectiveness of CoPs, the work involved in a CoP and research on teachers' involvement in CoPs.

Definition and effectiveness. CoPs have gained value in education in recent decades (Lomos, Hofman & Bosker, 2011) and are used in business organisations, the government, the health sector and education (Wenger, 2013). A CoP involves a group of professionals across levels of expertise and experience, sharing and depending on each other for learning on a topic of interest, with common goals which are reproduced in cycles after evidence-based analysis (Pugch, 1999). A CoP can be used for successful inclusive practice in schools as it provides a platform for teacher collaboration.

The process of knowledge building in a CoP can be understood within the context of social constructivist theory, which views knowledge and meaning to be constructed socially via interactions (Mallory & New, 1994). Within educational settings, a CoP allows the building of knowledge for teachers through the sharing of expertise, experiences, ideas, resources and teaching strategies. CoPs also develops support systems and sharing of responsibility for the teaching and participation of all students in schools (Mortier, Hunt, Leroy, van de Putte & van Hove, 2010)

CoPs are defined by the aspects of domain, community and practice. The domain is the identity of the community. The domain is dependent on the shared

interest of its members (Wenger, 2013). Due to shared interest, members are expected to be committed and competent in the domain separating them from non-members. The domain may not be an area seen as requiring expertise outside of the community. In the community, relationships are developed between the members and discussions related to shared interest enables further learning. The practices or interactions taking place within the community result in resources and shared experiences (Wenger, 2013).

It is important that CoPs have good support to operate effectively.

Facilitation of a CoP is important for its effectiveness. The ability to sustain benefits from a CoP is dependent on the characteristics of: the role of the key people involved in building and facilitating a CoP, learner-focused inquiry, the use and sharing of resources, and the use of data to facilitate evidence-based teaching (Whitehead, 2010)

It is also important to understand factors that may limit the effective operation of CoPs including: issues with definition, missing products and the process to support the development of a successful CoP. There seems to be no consensus among the researchers about the definition of a CoP or how to measure the effectiveness of the methods used in a CoP (Admiraal, Lockhorst & van der Pol, 2012). With the lack of a definition, the method for planning and running a CoP will

differ from study to study, increasing the complexity of understanding the effectiveness of CoP studies (Lomos, Hofman & Bosker, 2011). Missing products are also a limitation where outcomes and products such as resources, strategies, student tasks and assessment instruments are not strongly visible in many CoP research studies. The lack of products could be associated with the lack of clarity given to groups about what they need to produce and how to produce these (Allen, 2013). Within the CoP process some teacher groups have been found to be more concerned with following the process than the substance of discussion (Little & Curry, 2008), resulting in shallow professional discussions (Curry, 2008) lacking focus on pedagogical content knowledge (Bausmith & Barry, 2011). There are also observations of trusting collegial relationships built on supportive compliments, but not enough critical analysis of action taken in teaching practice and a lack of focus on future actions (Allen, 2013). Thus, for a successful CoP it is important to begin with a contemporary understanding of CoPs, as well as knowledge of the aim, method to follow, the expected products, and a climate of support balanced with critical analysis to promote action.

How does a CoP work? According to Wenger, (2013) the work of a CoP involves four steps which are repeated in cycles to improve situations and systems. The first step is for members to examine their own skills, knowledge and

competence with regard to a setting or an issue. Then a detailed analysis of performance of the members in a professional role takes place. The next step involves exploration with other CoP members of ways to solve the issues of concern through conversation. The last step involves critical thinking about the effects of actions performed due to conversations focused around solving the issue (Wenger, 2013).

Research on teachers' involvement in CoPs. CoPs are found to enhance collaboration and sharing of responsibility to teach all, promote proactive teacher action, influence student achievement, promote trust and give the opportunity for teachers to participate in research. Teachers, parents and support staff working in a CoP on a regular basis have been found to share knowledge about the child, discuss issues related to daily teaching practice, and problem solve these issues, sharing responsibility for teaching students with diverse needs (Mortier, Hunt, Leroy, van de Putte & van Hove, 2010; Allen, 2013). CoPs have been found to encourage proactive implementation of teaching initiatives that are responsive towards students' needs (MacArthur & Higgins, 2007). Teacher participation in CoPs was found to affect student achievement positively (Lai, Wilson, McNaughton & Hsiao, 2014). CoPs were also found to create a climate of trust and safety for teachers to examine their classroom practices (Allen, 2013). Teachers have few opportunities in normal

circumstances to be reflective with support, understand, participate in and evaluate research, and CoPs provides this opportunity (Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003; MacArthur & Higgins, 2007). The studies show that CoPs can be effective in supporting the development of teacher knowledge of inclusive practices.

Reviewing literature to understand the concept of inclusion in education, factors that influence the development of inclusive schools, the use of student voice and CoPs as tools to support the development of teacher inclusive practice, shaped this research project. The project investigated how the participation in a CoP to respond to students' perceptions of school, supported the development of knowledge and practice of inclusion in teaching and support staff. The methodology section describes the processes involved in carrying out the research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Aims and Objectives

The action research project which took place in a New Zealand secondary school aimed to enhance teachers' and support staff's knowledge and practice when working with a diverse student group that included students with disabilities. A CoP comprising five staff members and the researcher was established in order to develop inclusive teaching practice through an action research cycle.

The study aimed to investigate:

1. The development of knowledge about teaching, learning and inclusion for students with diverse learning needs due to involvement in the CoP, including:
 - Understanding of inclusive education and; the implications of an inclusive approach for teaching and learning, including the roles and responsibilities of teachers and support staff in the school.
 - How students' perspectives on teaching and learning impacted on CoP members' understandings and use of inclusive approaches.
2. Teachers and support staffs' application of knowledge gained within the CoP in their daily teaching practices.

An action research approach and qualitative methodology was used to collect and analyse data to address the research questions in the project. Such an approach supported the researcher to make sense of the relevant natural phenomena using the meanings the study participants brought to the setting [school] (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Research Questions

1. How do the CoP member understandings of inclusion change or get affirmed due to the participation in the CoP?
2. How do CoP member understandings of roles and responsibilities of each other, with regards to supporting the inclusion of all students in their classrooms, change or get affirmed due to the participation in the CoP?
3. How are the members of the CoP influenced by student perspectives on relationships, teaching and learning and environment, and respond to these in their classroom practice?
4. What are the actions taken by the members of the CoP to plan and carryout teaching practices as a result of being involved in the CoP?

A Constructivist Approach

A constructivist approach informed the study. Such an approach views meaning and knowledge to be socially constructed via interactions (Macartney, 2009; Mallory & New,

1994), between a knower and a respondent (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In the research project, constructivism was seen as a useful theoretical lens to study the ways teachers' knowledge and understanding about inclusion was constructed through participation in the social process of a CoP. The researcher, as a participant, was also a part of this social process, both guiding and participating in knowledge construction. The interactions between knowers and respondents to share ideas, teaching strategies and resources, helped the researcher understand and explain how members developed their knowledge of inclusive practices. Discussion of challenges related to teaching students by the CoP members, co-construction of solutions, and discussion on the use of the solutions in daily teaching practice helped the researcher understand how the CoP supported the teachers' development of knowledge of inclusive practices.

Action Research

Action research was selected as the research methodology for this project. This type of methodology involves collaboration to learn, generate knowledge and take action (Greenwood & Levin, 2007) in schools (Mills, 2014). Action research also places emphasis on the actions and reflections taken to improve the individual practices of teachers (Cardno, 2003). Researchers are involved in a four step process in action research. These involve: planning to identify an area of focus; collecting and analysing data about the area of focus;

developing an action plan to respond; and reflection on the process of taking action and communication of results due to the actions (Mertler, 2014).

The rationale for selecting action research in this project was that it could be conducted by school staff in their own environment, with the researcher (Mills, 2014), supporting positive organisational and behavioural educational change in the school (Levin & Greenwood, 2011). Action research could be applied to teachers' context of daily practice to help teachers and the researcher to examine their own practice. Development of teacher knowledge about inclusion, understanding roles in relation to inclusion, responding to student perceptions and practice of inclusive teaching in daily actions can be investigated in depth using action research. Benefits for educators include: increased awareness of issues in the classroom such as identifying students excluded by others in group activities in the classroom, reflective teaching practice, changes in beliefs, and improvements in understanding links between theory and practice (Noffke & Zeichner, 1987 in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

The rationale for including a CoP approach within action research methodology was that both CoPs and action research respond to teachers' immediate learning needs and can help to create new areas for inquiry due to collaboration (Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003). Action research alone can lead to only temporary collaboration for the duration of

the project, however, CoPs show sustained collaboration, a wider inquiry focus due to involvement of all members in the research process and the type of inquiry resulting as a product of collaboration (Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003). Thus, by combining action research and a CoP, it was hoped that the practice of collaboration would involve a wider focus of inquiry, and the process of collaborative inquiry would continue after the termination of the study.

Research Setting

The research was carried out in one rural secondary school in the South Island of New Zealand. The school and its staff were known to the researcher in a professional capacity and the principal had informally indicated interest in the possibility of the study being conducted at the school.

The school is a co-educational facility with approximately the same numbers of male and female students. The majority of students are identified as New Zealand European and a minority of students are identified as 'Maori' and 'Other ethnicities'. According to the school charter, the school's strategic aim is to provide a safe, inclusive and innovative environment that engages all students in learning. Learners with special education needs are to be welcomed and supported. Due to a broad socio-economic range of students, financial support is offered where necessary for students to participate fully in all aspects of school

life. The 2015 ERO report, the commissioner³ and the principal identified improving staff culture to be consistently inclusive, collaborative, and focused on improving students' engagement and wellbeing as a priority. Strengthening communication with the parents of priority students, including students with high special needs, to ensure parental aspirations for their children were met in the curriculum was also identified as a priority needing improvement. Annual objectives for 2015 included reviewing the school's practices regarding inclusion using the inclusive practices tool as a start to this process.

Participants and Recruitment

The principal of the school was formally approached for permission to conduct the study with a letter, which was used to speak to the board of trustees before permission to conduct the study was given (Appendix A).

The members of the CoP. At the outset of the project a conversation took place between the principal and the researcher to identify staff who may fit the criteria for the CoP. The criteria for being involved in the CoP included: an interest in improving learning and being responsive to the learning of all students, involvement in teaching of students with varied learning needs on a daily basis, and not having too many other obligations at school or participating in parallel initiatives/studies, and a desire to be a part of the study.

Six staff members were identified as possible participants in the CoP. The researcher directly

³ In situations where the school's board of trustees is not functioning well the Minister may appoint a commissioner to replace the board to support the governance of a school (Parliamentary Counsel Office, 1989).

approached the possible participants via an e-mail, setting up a meeting to discuss possible participation. Five of the potential participants showed interest by attending the meeting and were provided information about the project. They were handed information sheets (Appendix B IV) and consent forms (Appendix C III) to consider participation.

Participants who returned completed consent forms were recruited as CoP members. The CoP was made up of a teacher aide, three teachers with varying levels of teaching experience who taught mainstream classes (two teachers with a middle management position and one with a senior management position), a teacher who taught students with disabilities in a specialised learning programme and the researcher. The principal participated in the interviews at the start and end of the study but was not directly involved in the CoP. However, he was welcome to attend any meetings.

The researcher was an experienced secondary school teacher involved in several collaborative teacher groups that worked towards improving the learning outcomes for a diverse range of students. Her role in the study was to facilitate and run the CoP meetings so the members could share experiences, ideas, views and knowledge of their inclusive practices in a safe environment. The researcher also participated by sharing ideas, resources and teaching strategies for inclusive practise with the CoP members during and outside of CoP meetings.

Student participants. Prior to the start of the study the teachers in the CoP were asked to identify one class they would like to focus on during the study. Two teachers identified year nine classes (A and B). One teacher identified a year 10 class (C), and one teacher identified a class with students ranging from year 10 to year 13 that taught students with disabilities (D). The teacher aide did not identify a particular class. The researcher visited the classes selected by the teachers to inform all students present in class about the study and invited them to take part as potential participants. The number of potential participants at this stage included 85 students. Information sheets (Appendix B III) were handed out to students present in all identified classes to take home to inform parents about the study and students' questions were answered. A parent information session for all potential participants was held following this.

After the parent information session, the researcher visited the classes and handed out parent and student information sheets (Appendix B I and B III) and consent forms, (Appendix C I and C II) with a survey attached (Appendix E) for those students volunteering. The number of student volunteers was 40 at this stage. Students were given a week to return both consent forms and a completed survey to a padlocked box placed in the school office. Students were instructed to separate the consent forms from the survey for the purpose of anonymity when returning, but indicate the class name on the survey. Once both

the consent forms and surveys were returned students were recruited to take part in the study.

Student and parent information sheets (Appendix B II, B III) and consent forms (Appendix C I, C II) were handed out to those volunteering to take part in the interviews during the researcher visits to the classrooms. The number of students volunteering equalled six. Once parent and student consent forms were returned, five students were recruited for the interview component of the study, directly by the researcher arranging interview times during the mentor class⁴.

Students with disabilities in D, were provided with the information sheet and parent consent form first. The class teacher informed parents that an information sheet and consent form would be travelling home with the students during the week. The researcher selected five students to take part from those who returned the consent forms for parents. Then the researcher directly approached the students to gain their consent during a pre-arranged time. If the students gave consent they were recruited and were supported to complete the survey by the researcher.

Twenty-eight students in total were recruited for the survey component and five students in total were recruited for the interview. The students were surveyed and interviewed at the beginning and end of the study. Six students from A, nine from B, and

⁴ The mentor class is a 10 minute period at the beginning of the day where student attendance is marked, absences are attended to and notices about coming school events are shared.

eight from C and five from D were involved in the survey component of the study. One student from each of A, C, D classes and two students from the B class were involved in the interviews. Students received a small chocolate as a token of appreciation upon the collection of the surveys or at the end of the interview.

Study Design Framework

Methods of data collection. Methods of data collection used widely in qualitative research include observations, interviews, field notes, and video and audio recordings (Hendricks, 2009; Stringer, 2004) to investigate what occurs naturally (Mills, 2014). In the study, data was collected from student interviews and surveys to inform the CoP of students' perceptions of school. Teacher interviews, records of observations in the form of minutes from CoP meetings, and records of informal conversations were used to collect data about the development of teacher knowledge about inclusion, teacher responses to students' perceptions and teacher practices as a result of participating in the CoP.

Survey. The project began and ended with a survey of students' perceptions on their experiences of school. The student survey included 30 statements about students' experiences at school adapted from Booth and Ainscow (2011). Students were asked to indicate varying levels of agreement or disagreement with the statements by circling a smiley face. The process took approximately 10-15 minutes of time outside of class.

Interviews. Interviews were carried out at the start and end of the project for both members of the CoP and students. Student interviews (Appendix DI) focused on perceptions of teaching and learning, relationships and the environment of their classrooms and took 10-20 minutes. The CoP member interviews (Appendix DII) focused on knowledge about inclusive teaching, responsiveness to students' perspectives and daily teaching practices that are inclusive and took approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.

Observations of CoP meetings. Five CoP meetings were held over a period of three months. CoP meetings were video recorded so the researcher could be a contributing member of the CoP and facilitate the meeting at the same time. The CoP meetings provided data about the teachers' development of understanding of inclusion, collaboration and responsiveness to students' perceptions and how teachers applied what they learned in the CoP in their daily practice. The recordings were then converted into minutes based on the key issues discussed. The minutes were e-mailed to members of the CoP to read and check after each meeting.

Informal conversations. Information from informal conversations between the researcher and the members of the CoP were also collected. These helped to examine the development of teachers' understandings with regard to inclusion, collaboration, sharing of expertise/information/resources, inclusive practice in daily teaching, and responsiveness to students' perspectives.

Archival records. Archival material was collected and analysed to understand the school's policy and values, with regard to inclusion. Documents examined included the school charter and the most recent ERO review.

Quality of data. In qualitative research such as action research, validity and reliability is dependent on trustworthiness (Stringer, 2004). Trustworthiness is dependent on the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Credibility involves making sure that results are believable from the perspective of the participants involved (Trochim, 2002). Credibility can be established by using triangulation techniques, such as using multiple methods to collect data to give information about a situation, and by involving participants in checking the accuracy of the collected data (Glesne, 2011). In the study, data from student interviews and surveys were triangulated to inform about students' perceptions of their classrooms to ensure trustworthiness. Teachers' development of knowledge and practice of inclusion was informed by triangulation of teacher interviews, CoP meeting minutes and informal conversations. Participants were asked to check records of observations of CoP meetings and interview transcripts to ensure their perspectives were represented correctly.

The quality in quantitative research depends on validity and reliability (Mertler, 2014). Validity is based on how the data collected measures what it is intended to measure (Mills, 2014) and reliability refers to the concept of consistency (Mertler, 2014). In the study,

one quantitative method of data collection was used in the form of a student survey. The validity of the survey was ensured by using language understood by the student, rating scales were used to support understanding with visual diagrams to encourage accurate responding, the survey contained questions directly related to classroom experience of students, surveys were anonymous so students could express their view honestly, and surveying involved students impacted by the practice of CoP members except in the case of the teacher aide. Reliability of the surveys was ensured by placing a question that was repeated twice, giving the participants identical circumstances to answer consistently.

The sequence of the processes undertaken by the CoP through action research.

The processes undertaken by the CoP involved: a collective analysis of students' perspectives of their experiences at school; development of a plan to address the students' perspectives; further development of the plan using CoP feedback; trialling of the plan and analysis of the effects of their actions due to the plan on students' perspectives. Processes undertaken by the CoP at each stage of the action research cycle are discussed in more detail in Figure 1. Refer to appendix I for the timetable of the study.

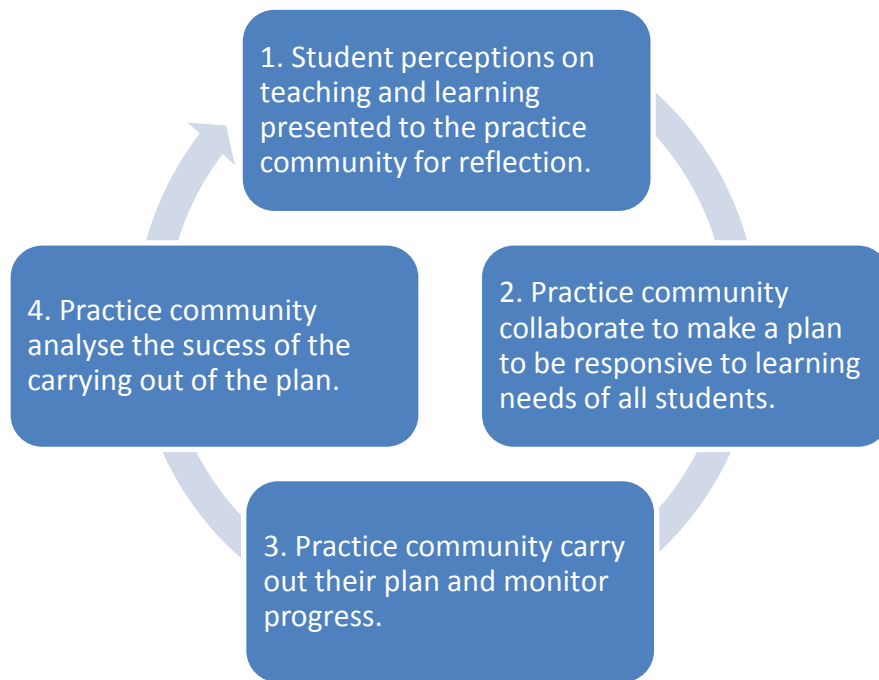


Figure 1: Sequence of processes undertaken by the CoP in their action research

Stage one. Students' perceptions of their teaching and learning experiences in their classrooms were explored via surveys and interviews. The researcher collated responses from the student surveys and interviews and presented these to the CoP. Student responses to each survey statement were collated for all student participants and presented as percentage in a bar graph. Student survey responses to each statement for individual classes were also collated and presented as a percentage in a bar graph to the teacher concerned. Interview data were collated under each interview question as a list of bullet point statements. The first CoP meeting involved collaborative analysis and a discussion of the summary of collated student perceptions from surveys and interviews. The CoP members reflected on the collated interview and survey data for all classes during the meeting, and

reflected on their individual class survey data for homework. Then, in preparation for the second CoP meeting, each member prioritised one or two areas of concern viewed as needing improvement according to student perceptions.

Stage two. In the second meeting each CoP member shared an action plan to address their identified priority area. This identified priority was called an action goal and the plan developed to address the priority was called an action plan. Other CoP members gave feedback to develop the action plan further.

Stage three. The third meeting involved discussion centred on initial trialling of the action plan designed in the previous meeting by each CoP member. Examples of practices in the classroom were shared such as students' work samples, responses and lesson plans. CoP members supported each other by complementing, sharing knowledge and resources to improve actions further.

Stage four. In the fourth meeting further developments of practice in the classroom carried out to address the action plan were shared by each of the CoP members. These included lesson plans, students' work and video recording of teaching of lessons in the classroom. CoP members supported each other by complementing, sharing knowledge, suggesting future directions and reflected on similarities of practices and how some practices due to teacher action plans of colleagues' in the CoP impacted on their own teaching practices.

Stage five. Student perceptions of their teaching and learning were collected via, surveys and interviews at the end of the study. They were then collated and organised for presentation to the CoP by the researcher in a process identical to that in Stage One. The results were provided for the members of the CoP for analysis, identify any improvements that related to the actions they took, and prioritise areas of concern that require further development in the future.

Ethical considerations

The project was reviewed by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. Procedures for recruitment, consent, and the conduct of the project were designed to meet the Committee's requirements relating to all participants' (teachers' and students') rights in research and the responsibilities of researcher to protect these. Participant rights addressed in the study included: confidentiality, anonymity, right to withdraw, autonomy, conflict of interest, justice and cultural competence.

Information and consent process. Information and consent forms were prepared for all participants, in language easy to comprehend. For students under the age of 16 and disabled students both parental consent and the consent of the child themselves was sought. Students were only recruited if both they and their parents consented.

Confidentiality and anonymity. In the study CoP members were advised to work from a position of confidentiality within the CoP and signed a focus group confidentiality

agreement (Appendix G) to do so. The person hired to transcribe student and teacher interviews also signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix H). The student surveys were anonymous. Only summarised data from student interviews and surveys were presented to the CoP, so members of the CoP were not able to connect responses with individual students.

Interview and survey data were stored securely within Massey University protocols and was only accessible to the researcher and her supervisors to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Records of audio interviews and videotaped CoP meetings were deleted, once transcribed or minutes extracted, ensuring that all visual or auditory identifying information was secured and privacy was maintained. Pseudonyms were used on all written material relating to the study removing identifying features to secure anonymity.

Right to withdraw. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage and decline to answer any questions without a reason or adverse consequence.

Autonomy. Participants were given the opportunity to read the transcripts of their interviews and gave authority to release taped transcripts (Appendix F). The researcher read these to the student participants who required support. Informal conversations records and minutes of CoP meetings were also provided to the CoP participants. Opportunity was given to view, make alterations or remove information all participants wished not to be included.

All participants were provided with a summary of the results at the end of the study. This included the students, CoP members and principal.

Conflict of interest. There was potential for a conflict of interest due to the involvement of the researcher as a participant in the study. This conflict was minimised by informing the CoP of the role and responsibilities of the researcher to support teachers to develop their practice in relation to principles of inclusion, collection and collation of student perception data. The CoP was reminded that confidentiality of information collected by the researcher was paramount, with clear boundaries and ethical guidelines relating to information gathering and storage which applied to the researcher.

Justice. There was a discussion around the inclusion of children who have a disability and, those under the age of 16 who might not be competent to give informed consent. Researcher and her supervisors were aware of the importance of allowing student voice in research and issues encountered in such research (Carrington et.al, 2009; Kay & Tisdall, 2012). Procedures for informing, gaining consent, carrying out interviews and surveys were adapted to suit the student's abilities to communicate. Adaptations to language, method of delivering information, and method of seeking replies allowed the participation of disabled students to express their perspectives.

Cultural competence. The researcher is a registered high school teacher having knowledge of both the teaching world and students from many cultures with varying

learning needs. The project included students from many cultures and may have included Maori students as participants. Thus, consultation took place with the school with regards to appropriate procedures when working with students from many cultures, including Maori students prior to the start of the study. The school suggested the addition of an information evening for parents of all possible participants, which was carried out before the researcher approached student volunteers.

Analysis of data

Data analysis in qualitative action research requires re-reading the data collected, considering the big picture and listing themes seen emerging from the data as patterns, events and key phrases that repeat themselves (Mills, 2014; Johnson, 2011). In the study, students' perception data was analysed by the CoP collaboratively and all other data was analysed by the researcher using a process of coding.

Student perception data. Student interview data and student survey data were organised by the researcher, before the first and fifth CoP meetings in a way that was easily understood by the CoP. The survey questions were originally designed to represent the themes of relationships, teaching and learning, and the classroom environment, to describe student experiences at school. The student responses to the survey questions were collated for individual classes and the whole group of student participants. This data was presented

in bar graphs as a percentage for each survey question. Graphs were then arranged under the three themes mentioned above. The student interview data were also organised under each interview question into themes of relationships, teaching and learning and the classroom environment (see Figure 2). Data was then shared with the CoP to analyse collaboratively and respond to at the beginning and the end of the study.

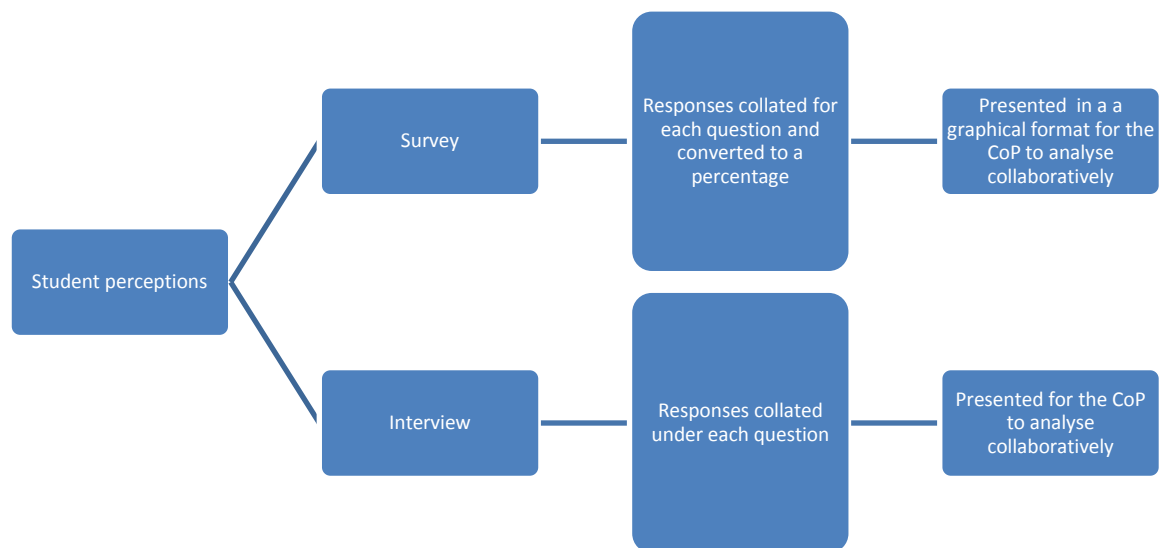


Figure 2: Student perception data analysis process

CoP data. To investigate how a CoP supported development of teacher and support staff knowledge, of inclusion and inclusive teaching practice, data from CoP meetings, informal conversations and CoP interviews were thematically analysed. Data were first read and divided into four sections according to the research questions. The data placed under each of the research questions were then coded. Coding is a data analysis technique that requires attaching labels to words and events that repeat (Mills, 2014). Responses that repeated were highlighted using the same colour then main ideas were identified and given a label. The responses with the same label were cut and pasted together (Parsons & Brown, 2002). The groups of similar responses were then given a theme to describe the overall main idea. The grouped responses were reviewed again to see their fit with the themes. Of the data that supported the theme such as quotes, the strongest example representing the theme was selected for the writing of the results (see Figure 3). The analysis of teacher data under the research questions was an inductive process to ensure that key themes emerged out of the data and were not preconceived (Mertler, 2014).

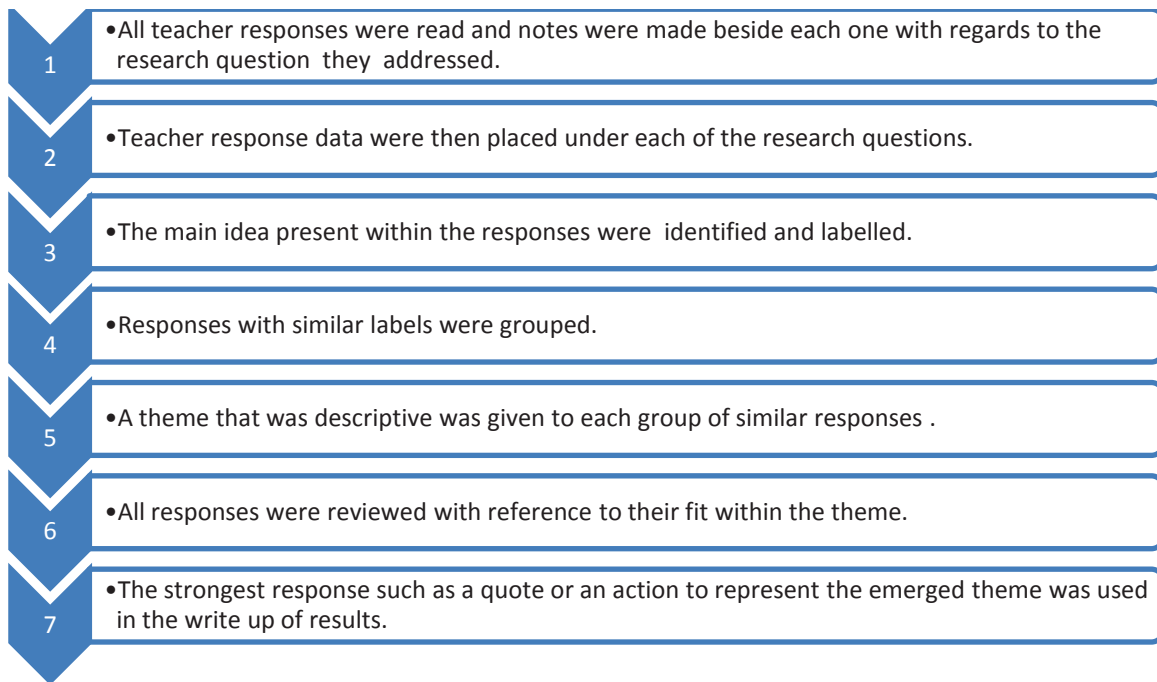


Figure 3: Thematic analysis of CoP data.

Archival data in the form of the school charter and the ERO report were only analysed to inform the context of the school.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The results chapter demonstrates teacher understandings of inclusion and its practice due to the involvement in a CoP. Data collected via student interviews and surveys, teacher interviews, CoP meetings and informal conversations were analysed thematically through a process of coding. Results are presented in four sections addressing the research questions as follows:

Part One: How do the CoP member understandings of inclusion change or get affirmed due to the participation in the CoP?

Part Two: How do CoP member understanding of roles and responsibilities of each other with regards to supporting the inclusion of all students in their classrooms change or get affirmed due to the participation in the CoP?

Part Three: How are the members of the CoP influenced by student perspectives on relationships, teaching and learning and environment and respond to these in their classroom practice?

Part Four: What are the actions taken by the members of the CoP to plan and carryout teaching practices as a result of being involved in the CoP?

Part One: How do the CoP member understandings of inclusion change or get affirmed due to the participation in the CoP?

This section discusses the development of teacher understanding of the idea of inclusion, the knowledge and training required to teach all students, understanding of students' behaviour and the use of time due to their participation in the CoP.

The idea of inclusion. Inclusion was understood in a range of ways relating to diversity, special education, students' achievement, how one's beliefs could influence teaching and as a stepping stone for student experiences after leaving school. While some teachers took a right's focus, others appeared to view inclusion as being present 'in class' but without the necessary requirement to plan and teach for all. Others indicated that ability grouping, while perhaps inconsistent with inclusion, would make things easier for teachers.

Some teachers described inclusion as celebrating diversity. One teacher used a poster to describe how inclusion is viewed as equity in the school, indicating that there may be tools available within the school to promote a vision for inclusion. For example:

We've got really cool poster floating around somewhere that's got a kiwi, a giraffe and an elephant and they've got balloons on them.... That's inclusiveness. Some students need more balloons to hold them up and I think some of our teachers struggle with that concept.

One teacher felt there was misunderstanding that inclusion was only linked with special education students in the school. The teacher said “I think, within the school there’s still skewed look of what inclusion is. I think maybe sometimes people think it’s the high needs, learning needs kids, but it’s actually way broader than that in terms of culture, gender”.

Achievement was considered important for every child by the CoP members. One teacher said “I want every kid to engage in some way – and walk away thinking ‘that I learned something I didn’t know’ and that is quite important”.

Prior to participation in the CoP, a teacher recognised an understanding of their own assumptions and beliefs around inclusion and how this could affect their role as the teacher.

The teacher said:

I need to be open to difference, I guess, you know just culturally, gender-wise, everything-wise. Like you know, I’m a female NZ European teacher so I’ve got to be aware that I don’t create the pathway that’s only through my eyes.

Some CoP members associated inclusion with student rights to be present in the classroom. One CoP member perceived that some students within the school such as students with disability were excluded from the mainstream setting and this was against their right to be present. For example she said, “I think this is the first time I’ve come into a

school where there's actually a classroom that's set aside. I remember walking in here and going 'this is not right' you know".

When asked what would makes inclusion easier a teacher suggested streaming as a solution. However, the teacher also recognised that streaming had negative effects on students. For example:

Well, the obvious one would be if the classes were streamed then they would be....that would be less of a problem if you know what I mean. You'd have a smaller spread, having said that I've seen some pretty good statistics which shows that it is better not to stream. So that would make the inclusion easier but probably not the overall teaching aspect.

A teacher viewed placing all students alongside their same-aged peers in the classroom may not be beneficial for some students if students are academically far behind or far ahead. For this teacher the idea of inclusion was based on student presence in classes. For example,

I don't think its necessarily in their interests if they are miles behind or miles ahead the social aspects certainly I can understand but the education. I mean where exactly a kid goes at any given time is about what their teachers or who handles them thinks are in their best interests. It may be a very good case saying 'being in a class is in his best interest then yes definitely but not because the right is to be in a particular place at a particular time. Their right is to get as good an education as possible.

Another CoP member viewed inclusive education as a stepping stone for experiences after leaving school. For example:

I think it sets them up for what life's like – that's what our work places are like, we're all different, we have to have empathy, we have to be patient, we have to be prepared to learn things in different ways or hear it from another point of view or explain it to someone else in another way so that someone else gets it.

For many CoP members, participation in the CoP for the duration of the study resulted in affirmation of what they understood as inclusion, helped them recognise the importance of inclusive practice and supported them in setting goals and learning techniques to practice inclusion. One teacher said after the involvement in the study their understanding of inclusion was affirmed. For example: "I think affirmation more than anything". Another teacher said taking part in the CoP "affirmed and probably strengthened my resolve to do that [inclusion]".

In the post study teacher interviews a teacher also spoke about how their participation in the CoP contributed to understanding the importance of inclusive practice in school. The teacher said "it's made it clearer that it's [inclusion's] important to do obviously, I sort of knew that intellectually but not in such a tight focus".

One teacher spoke about how the CoP helped to develop goals and techniques to be inclusive in teaching at the end of the study. For example: “I wouldn’t say my idea of what inclusion should be has changed essentially. It’s how you actually accomplish the goals and techniques which is useful”.

Knowledge and training for teaching students. Prior to the start of the study, some teachers thought that limited training provided around teaching students with special needs was a barrier to teach all students. For example:

There’s been nothing in anybody’s teacher training here about special needs. There’s been no systematic form of ongoing professional learning about this.

At the end of the study due to the participation in the CoP, some teachers recognised that, they had craft the knowledge to teach all students in their classes. The CoP also helped teachers to gain strategies to teach a diverse range of students. A teacher said the CoP helped in “.....learning different ways of differentiating, realising that my skill set isn’t as poor as I thought it was”.

However, other teachers still thought specialist knowledge was required to teach some groups of students. One teacher described barriers to inclusive teacher practice at the school to be “... lack of knowledge, particularly of specific special educational needs”.

The principal reported a noticeable increase in teacher understanding of inclusive teaching in the classrooms due to the collaboration and sharing of ideas in the CoP.

Prior to the work with you I think they were aware of differentiation in concept and have probably tried to an extent, but certainly not over such a great range of curriculum levels and from talking to them now I think most of them have grown confidence and see differentiation is something that can be done.

The principal also stated that inclusive teaching in the classroom and planning tasks to teach all students was expected of his teachers who participated in the CoP. For example: “I feel confident that that can be expected of teachers”.

Understanding student behaviour. Prior to participation in the CoP meetings, difficult behaviours and stress created from such behaviours were described as barriers to inclusion by the CoP members, and the principal. For example:

There are some behaviours that aren't palatable – we were just talking about one before where, as a result of some form of special needs say, the student either is seen as a verbal or physical violence, neither of which are acceptable in the mainstream setting, and both of which set harmful examples, and that creates an obstacle to teaching in the mainstream class.

Due to the behaviours the members reported,

..the students around them show signs of stress and we've sometimes had a parent concern raised about that, that the students have felt unsafe, and I guess my fear for them then is that the wrong parts of their brains are operating, that the students are operating in the fight or flight mode and they're not learning effectively.

At the end of the study, the principal reported being influenced by what he understood the CoP to be doing, to understand and investigate factors that may have contributed to the behaviour of a student with disability. The principal said the way the student was treated was more inclusive and in a way that understood their disability and did not limit access to learning or place blame. He said,

For me a bit of a knock-on effect in terms of how I view students with special educational needs in terms of their schooling. I was just talking this morning about an incident last week when we had really, interrogate the reasoning behind before making any decisions. This was round a disciplinary issue. So I think it does add to my decision making.

Time. Some teachers reported that time restricted the practice of inclusion, before and after the participation in the CoP. Prior to the start of the study the teachers and the principal reported that teachers were already working long hours and were overloaded and that this was a barrier to inclusion. It was also reported that this influenced negatively on the time needed to learn about and teach new students well. For example:

The great majority of the staff here work really hard, many of them working six day weeks, and nobody creates time for them to say 'OK, you've got a new student whose going to take an additional four hours work of your life to support properly. Nobody says 'I'm going to take four hours a week off you from somewhere else'. So you are basically saying to somebody 'OK you're going from 50 hours a week to 54 to take a student in.

At the end of the study some teachers were reflective of using time to look at the needs of students in the class prior to the lesson. A teacher said "I have definitely spent more time prior to a lesson looking at how I can scaffold differently for different learners" and "I made that time to do the planning and have a go".

Other teachers at the end of the study still viewed time and teacher workload as barrier to inclusive teaching practice. One teacher said,

I think that the problem we have as a profession right now is that good practice would say focus on one thing at a time but reality would say that there are quite a few different things that need to be attended to.

Part one summary. Due to their participation in the CoP, the teachers and the teacher aide reported their ideas about inclusion being affirmed, and knowledge of inclusive teaching and views of student behaviour were positively influenced. For some teachers there was a shift from understanding inclusion as the placement of students physically in

certain classrooms to understanding inclusion as being aware of student needs and attending to these in their classroom planning and teaching practice.

Part Two: How do CoP members understanding of roles and responsibilities of each other with regards to supporting the inclusion of all students in their classrooms change or get affirmed, due to the participation in the CoP?

This section demonstrates the influence of membership of the CoP on CoP members' perceptions of the role of the teacher, role of the teacher aide and the role of management in inclusive practice.

Teacher. The role of the teacher in inclusive education was viewed in various ways prior to the study. The CoP members and the principal felt that teaching inclusively was a difficult task given to experts. One teacher said "in some cases I guess there's will, [or an] attitude where some people would say this isn't what I trained for. I trained to teach this middle group of kids". This shows that inclusion was not seen to be everybody's job.

One teacher felt teachers as experts in their own subjects should be experts at teaching all students. The teacher said,

I think they think it's hard to teach inclusively but if you're an expert in your field you should be - at primary school you're not an expert in your field, you are just a teacher and you teach everything to the best of your ability, but if you are an expert in your field you should be

able to break it down into simpler steps or more complex because you are, supposedly, subject specific so you should be able to go ..'OK, so this child can't read, how am I going to make it so that they can achieve within English... you know, things like that. He can't write, he can't read. So how's he going to achieve in English.

Some teachers' viewed their role was to make learning accessible, enjoyable and relevant. One teacher said,

I think that's my role, to make it enjoyable and that it hits what needs to be hit for those children, so even in assisted learning so that they can leave school and they can be independent and they can go out into the community and get a job [and], as long as you've set them up with that feeling of success, of being a valued person within our culture and society.

One CoP teacher recognised that talking with students in class about behaviour and how to support each other was an important role of a teacher. She spoke about how this was carried out in her class.

We discuss quite often about appropriate behaviour, we talk about how to be good friends, use the words 'I don't like it when you do that, it hurts my feelings', using the 'I' statements. And, yes, we often use examples of appropriate and inappropriate and just showing them what- telling them exactly what it is that's good or bad about that behaviour or their friendship.

Some CoP members said that their role was to make students feel successful. For example: “Everyone has a potential and we just need to make sure that we set them up for achievement instead of feeling like they’re failing even though they could be making huge steps towards being a good person.”

Due to the participation in the CoP, teachers reported being more aware of the secondary school system and of including students. One CoP teacher reported that “It also opened my eyes up to the school system a little bit more being new to it”.

The CoP also helped some members to be more inclusive in their role by increasing their awareness of who is being included and who is not. For example one teacher said,

little bit more aware around me of who is not being included to make sure that it can be worked for them too so that they can be included in all sorts of things. I think in a way, when I do the gaming at lunch time it’s not just for the students that are socially I won’t say inadequate but don’t do so well socially, it’s not just for them, it’s for everybody.

Teacher aide. Data collected prior to the study showed that teachers had some understanding of the role of the teacher aide and the difficulties experienced by the teacher aides to support all students. One teacher spoke about how they used the teacher aide in the following manner:

I've been looking at anxiety and anger and friendship and things like that so I have grouped the kids, students, according to what needs they have and I found that during that grouping the TA's [teacher aides] were working with them and I was supporting, and working with the group at the same time. Again I think it's about enabling students to access the curriculum, supporting the teacher I should say.

Views shared by the teacher aide in the CoP indicated the difficulty for them in helping all students.

...most of the students are accepting of the help but if you can sort of – depending on who they've seen you working with you can be labelled as a 'special needs teacher aide' and then the mainstream students don't want you're your help because they've already labelled you, that kind of thing. Makes it a little bit difficult

The difficulties experienced by the teacher aides were sometimes not helped by teachers, due to teacher's lack of understanding of the role of the teacher aide. For example some teachers said: "I talked more to the teacher aide than I talked to the student basically" and "there was some stuff that was through the teacher aide pretty much entirely".

Participation in the CoP developed clarity of the role for the teacher and the teacher aide. By the end of the study, teacher aide reported being more proactive in their role. One teacher described how they had an increased awareness of the appropriate use of the teacher aides as a resource:

Hadn't really thought about the teacher aide role in the class....pretty much. I assumed it was more or less centred around the individual student which, it turns out is not particularly true and I probably would have figured it out eventually but it wouldn't have been particularly obvious if I hadn't had that.

Participation in the CoP helped the teacher aide to be proactive in their role of helping all students. The teacher aide said "I've made sure that the teachers know that I am actually there for them".

Leadership and management. Prior to the start of the study some CoP members recognised that the drive for inclusion needed to come from the leadership team. Also noted at the beginning of the study was recognition by leadership of their role in driving inclusion, however, some CoP members were unsure of what they had to do to support inclusion. One teacher said:

It needs to be a senior management team. It needs to be department leaders.... and it has to be in an approached change. And it needs to be really pushed at the moment. I know that the school's got it within its targets but it's really slow and we need to start management changes now. We need someone really proactive at the head of our department pushing and pushing and pushing and not blaming. We need someone to be going 'Right, this is what we need to do. Are you OK with this', or 'if you're not OK with it's

happening anyway. You've got to cope because this is not OK. This is against – this, what is happening is against human rights.

The leadership of the school recognised the key role they played in inclusion. The principal said,

In terms of my direct role, it has to be with the teachers so my role with the students is a role model for the values we need to see in the school, but my role with the teachers is role model of those values and directly leading them, in terms of the pedagogy, the curricula of the school [and] tone setting.

Some teachers felt unclear about the direction they were to take to support inclusion. One teacher said “I think that everybody is just left to their own devices. Once it's all set up and running and everybody just hopes it runs smoothly”.

At the end of the study, the teachers viewed leadership as an important driver of inclusion but, recognised how the culture of teachers also influenced inclusive practice in school. One teacher said:

I think it would be really good idea to start with maybe the HoD⁵'s having an action group that they are looking at themselves, how they are supporting, maybe looking at supporting of differentiation within their department and seeing how that could be passes down, how they could maybe do collaborative planning to make sure that they are getting lots more

⁵ Head of Department teachers that are responsible in running a subject department

inclusive practice and looking at the variations.(.....) well I think we're going to kind of turn it on it's head and get the teachers culture changed so then the trickle down will be that it's part of being inclusive, our school is inclusive and this is how we are doing it!

Part two summary. Teachers perceived the CoP had helped them become more aware of the role of the teacher in the secondary system and more aware of the roles of other adults such as teacher aides in the classroom. While recognising that those in leadership roles were key drivers of inclusive education the CoP members thought it was important that teachers also played a role in being inclusive.

Part Three: How are the members of` the CoP influenced by student perspectives on relationships, teaching and learning and the environment, and respond to these in their classroom practice?

Use of student perceptions to inform classroom prior to the start of the study. At the beginning of the study CoP members viewed student voice, parent voice and student achievement to be important in their teaching. One member said they used student voice in the following way.

I try to use their opinions as much as possible. If it's not feasible or reasonable then you just sort of have a bit of a giggle and say 'look that's not quite going to work but let's see what else we can come up with' because I think they need to have a part in what and how they learn and things like that because if they're not enjoying it they're just not going to learn

anyway” [and] “I’ve said “hey, I’ve noticed – and I’m open to negotiation as to how and when is the bit we need to figure out”.

Management also reported using student voice by carrying out class surveys as a part of teacher appraisals and walkthroughs to improve teaching. The principal said:

I like to spend a part of every day, if possible, going round classes interacting with students about their learning, asking them what they’re learning and how, and how things are going in the school, modelling the values that I want to see so being prepared to listen if they’re not happy about something.

One teacher noticed that her students with held their voice in fear of identification, in the surveys run by the teacher used to gain student perspectives. The comment “in reality I think the kids know that I know their handwriting so they are not completely truthful”. This suggests that students may be worried about saying what they think indicative of a not very open culture in relation to student perspective.

Another member spoke about using student voice in the assessment of their own learning previously but not in the context of the current school. For example:

At the previous school that I was at there was a lot of feedback and feed forward from the kids to us of what they have achieved, and how they feel about school, and us feeding back to them what we felt was good about them and what they’ve achieved.

Respecting the parent voice in their aspirations for students was also a theme in some members' comments. For example:

I'm thinking of a student with cerebral palsy who can't do titrations in chemistry and will never be able to, but it is important to him and his family that he spends time with kids of his age and I believe that needs to be able to happen.

One member reflected that they were not using student voice as much as they should be. They said:

Probably not as much as I should. I probably don't ask the students 'well, what do you think we should be doing', that type of thing in their learning. 'Where do you think you are' and 'how do you think can get from this point'. That's something I have yet to let go of is the control – some of the control stuff so that 'I am the teacher – I know best.

The principal also said that that student representation and voice need to have more of a presence within the decision making of the school. For example:

I'd like to see more growth, particularly at departmental level, and any other decision making committee, so ...have a student rep. I think you need more than one. Every other decision making group in the school needs to have student, active student voice as part of that to ensure that students feel more and more a part of the decision making in the school.

Use of student perceptions to inform classroom practice during the study. The CoP collaboratively analysed student perceptions from surveys and interviews, in the first CoP meeting. Student perception data was used to prioritise a concern for each teacher to develop an action plan and implement this for the duration of the CoP. All teachers selected survey data connected to their own classes to respond to while the teacher aide selected survey data from all student participants. Only perceptions of students, related teacher action plans are presented in this section. The results are presented in the following format:

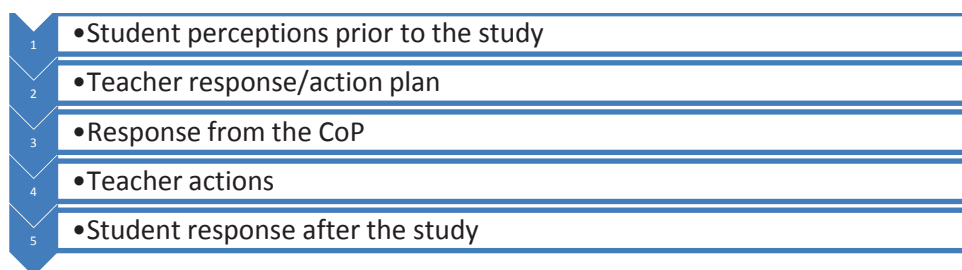


Figure 4: The process for reporting results on how the CoP responded to student perceptions in their planning and teaching.

1. *Students are able to do the work given in class.* This statement refers to the student survey and interview questions about students being able to attempt and complete the learning tasks given in their classrooms. This focus was picked as a priority by one teacher to respond to.

Students' perceptions on ability to do class work prior to the study for class D.

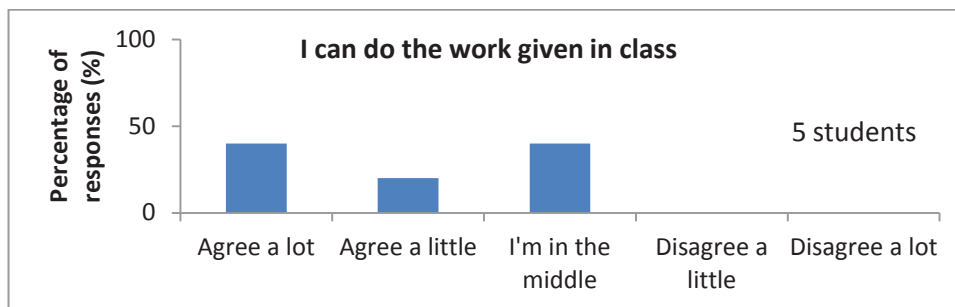


Figure 5.1: The graph shows that of the five students from D, 40% agree a lot, 20% agree a little and 40% were in the middle about being able to do the work given in class prior to the start of the study.

Some students in the pre-study interviews said that work was “quite easy at the moment”, “Oh, it’s really good” and “I find it not too hard or not too easy”. However, other students were not sure if the work was doable for all. For example one student said “Not sure if kids get different work or if the work is do able for all”.

Teachers' response to the student perceptions of ability to do class work. Students' perceptions about being able to do the work in class influenced a teacher to take action to set tasks that students are able to do. The teacher shared a plan to do this in the second CoP meeting. The plan involved investigating students' prior knowledge and prior skills on the topic of 'money'. Obtaining prior knowledge from students who were non-verbal; students who answered 'yes' without actually thinking; and teacher aides who helped with their own

knowledge rather than waiting for students to show their knowledge, were all identified as challenges in putting this plan into action.

Response of the CoP to support the class teacher with setting work that is doable.

The CoP members were influenced by the teachers plan and suggested various ways to support the actions of their colleague. One teacher suggested looking for resources in the “dungeon cupboard” of the maths department. Resources such as South Australian Down Syndrome Association Maths Book, Financial Literacy website containing lesson plans and suggested activities for different curriculum levels, Digital Learning Objectives from the New Zealand Maths Website to make a portfolio folder for each student and Assessment Resource Banks were also suggested. Another teacher suggested setting up a test for students using digital media such as “Google Forms” to find out student prior knowledge of money. Using parent understanding of their young people’s knowledge of ‘money’ was also discussed by the CoP. The teacher goal to make the work do able due to student perceptions allowed sharing of ideas and resources to achieve this goal due to the CoP.

Teacher actions to set do able class work. Student perceptions influenced the teacher to take action and these actions influenced on the teachers understanding of their own assumptions of student performance. In the third and fourth CoP meetings the teacher discussed the trialling of their action plans. The teacher initially carried out simple testing. Reflections on student performance challenged assumptions held by the teacher of their

students and those assumptions the teacher understood parents of the students to have of their young people's knowledge of money. Talking to parents about realistic expectations of dealing with money was very important at this point. The teacher questioned "if students have learned about money from primary school as the parents claim, then where is the knowledge?". The teacher planned to use real money as a resource and teach about the use of money practically based on their findings.

In responding to students perceptions the teacher changed the way they taught. From their previous actions the teacher divided the students into three groups based on student knowledge of money. Students in each group were asked to make amounts of money using three systems suggested by the South Australian Down Syndrome Association Mathematics Book suggested by the CoP as a resource. The teacher noted their actions to influence the students in the following way.

Kids don't notice that they are doing something different as long as they are engaged, advanced students are not bored [in the past were often bored], those who are not as able are not noticing they are not, because they are doing work.

Responding to student perceptions allowed the teachers to understand how their actions influenced other adults in the classroom and resulted in teacher reflections of how to use other adults in the classroom to teach all students. For example the teacher aides were confused due to the teacher forgetting to share knowledge. As a result of teacher aide

confusion the teacher set the teacher aides to work with the more able students and they themselves worked with the less able students in the class. The teacher said “TA’s [teacher aides] being set up with higher working students and teacher working with difficult kids is a concept I would like to spread” due to influence from this experience.

Making work doable for students in response to their perceptions made the teacher take action to organise work in a routine.

I’ve broken down the tasks more so when I’m teaching something it takes a little bit more time then it becomes part of the routine for that lesson and so the students that I teach become masters at that and over time it just becomes another part of the routine. So that’s something that I’ve discovered through doing this.

Student responses to teachers' actions of making work do able at the end of the study for class D.

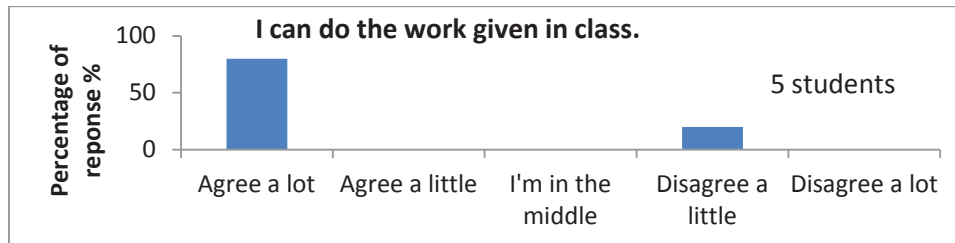


Figure 5.2: The graph shows the percentage of students from D that strongly agreed they are able to do the work given in class increased from 40% at the beginning of the study to 80% at the end of the study.

The teacher reflected on their actions in response to students' perceptions, to cause "change in a positive way" and "students can do the work more and only a little disagree with this" in the final CoP meeting with reference to student survey results of the class.

2. Providing students opportunity to select activities dependent on challenge

level. Students were asked about having the opportunity to select their learning tasks, record their learning and showing their learning using different methods in the surveys and interviews. The statement above refers to one teachers' interpretation of the way students could pick their learning activities based on challenge levels which was selected as a priority to respond to during the study.

Students' perceptions prior to the study for class B.

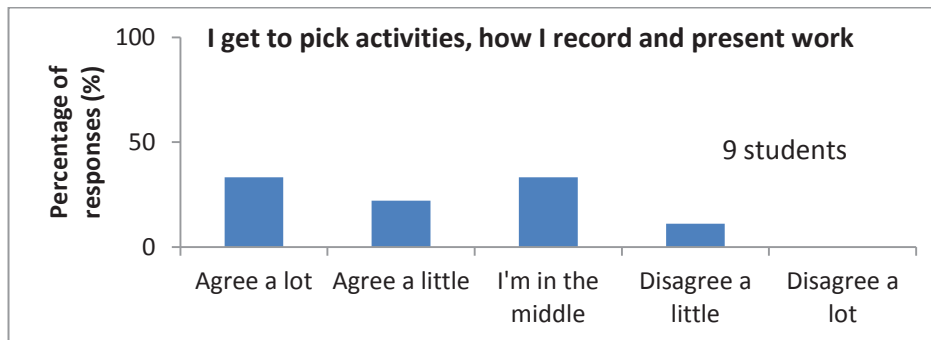


Figure 6.1: The graph indicates that of the nine students in class B, 33% agreed a lot, 23% agreed a little, 33% were in the middle and 11% disagreed a little about getting to pick activities, and how to record and present work.

In the interviews prior to the start of the study a student said the following with regard to getting the opportunity to choose learning tasks:

Interviewer: Do you get to pick different activities often?

Student: Not really. No. No. (...) In maths and stuff we usually get the exact same work. The teachers do set slightly higher or lower standards to people sometimes. That's because they know the student could achieve more or the student can't achieve quite as much.

Interviewer: Could you give me an example of getting different work?

Student: Yes. It was in Class A and my teacher she said everybody needs to do say 15 sentences or something and this boy who's not so good at understanding things and is a bit

slower and she went I want you to do as many as you can but you need to have at least 10.

And so the rest of us we had to do 15.

Teacher response to students having opportunity to select learning activities. In the first CoP meeting two teachers were influenced by students' perceptions of having the choice to select work. The teachers interpreted the survey and interview results to indicate that students had limited opportunity to pick activities and present work in their classrooms. The students' perceptions influenced one teacher to take action to set tasks at different challenge levels and give students choice in selecting the task. The teacher felt that if they gave different levels of work to students, depending on their ability, that may stigmatise students. The action plan of the teacher involved grouping activities for graphing into three levels according to the scaffolds offered (easy-Batman and Robin, medium-Spider Man and difficult-Superman) and then providing students opportunity to select the activity. The teacher planned to have feedback and feed forward conversations with students based on the challenge levels selected and their performance. The action plan was developed with the support from the facilitator through e-mail contact.

Response from the CoP to support the teacher with providing students opportunity to select learning activities. One teacher suggested the use of characters to describe challenge levels, to be based on current student interest. These included suggestions of Thor for the difficult level, Iron man for moderate difficult and Black Widow or Hawk for easy levels of

activities. The teachers' individual response to student perceptions was influenced by CoP member perceptions of student interest and the suggestions of the use of student interest in teaching practice to be inclusive.

Actions carried out by the CoP member with providing students opportunity to select learning activities. The student perceptions influenced the teacher actions to plan and teach, and their understandings of how to make learning tasks that includes all students easier. The CoP member initially trialled the graphing activity mentioned earlier in this section. They then designed a science investigation write up with different levels of scaffolding offered. Upon reflection of carrying this out, the teacher found starting with the most supported version of work made making the resources manageable. The teacher found it interesting that only a few students picked the most challenging activity and found that conversations with students were based on picking an activity that fits best. Student response was found to be lukewarm at the start, many students reported that the activity was "so gay" but, then they engaged and the member perceived that students liked it. The teacher also found it was easier to move around the classroom and noticed students were not selecting activities based on the choices of those sitting on the same table.

The teacher then investigated ways of "breaking down writing"/scaffolding using a similar concept to tailor learning in their new topic. She carried this out for a student research topic. For the new topic the member also provided students opportunity to analyse

their own achievement for each learning objective. The teacher felt most students were able to put the ideas in their own words rather than cut and paste chunks of information in the task due to the scaffolding.

Student response to teacher actions of providing opportunity to select learning activities for class B at the end of the study.

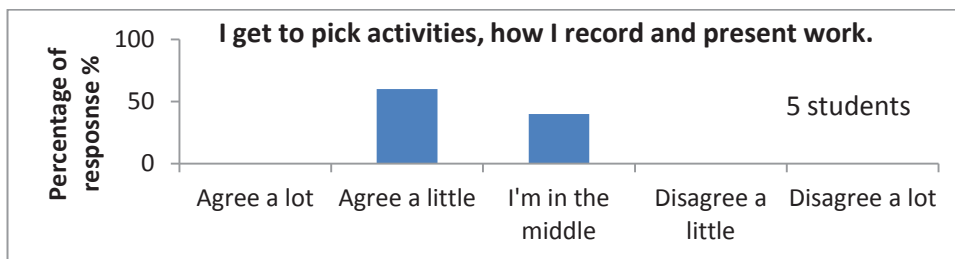


Figure 6.2: At the end of the study, all B students agreed or were in the middle about having opportunity to pick activities, in the way they presented work and recorded work, compared to the 11% disagreeing at the beginning. However, the percentage of students agreeing a lot decreased from 33% to 0%.

One student spoke about some teachers setting tasks where students have a choice in picking an activity in the following way at the end of the study:

Interviewer: What would you do if you were given different work to other students in the class?

Student: I feel like it's upsetting because if I don't know what to do then other people can't help me because they've got another sheet.

Interviewer: Would it make a difference if you got to choose what you wanted to do?

Student: Yes. It would make a change because then I'd know what I am doing.

Interviewer: So would you pick something easier or harder – how would you go about it?

Student: Probably medium (...)

Interviewer: Do you have a chance in some of the classes to do that?

Student: Yes.

The teacher was not present at the final CoP meeting to comment on the student responses. However, in a video presentation to the CoP the teacher reported the following perceptions of the effects of their actions to the group. She said that a high engagement level was perceived by a critical friend's observations of classroom practice, when tasks had scaffolding and choice was offered. The teacher also perceived that seeking feedback from students on the level of challenge they chose made students realise that they needed to "keep pushing harder than cruising" in class work.

3. *Students having choice in the way they get to present work and teachers knowing how students like to learn.* Having choice in selecting ways to present their work and the teacher of the classroom being aware of the methods of learning students prefer

such as drawing, writing or speaking were questions asked of students in the interviews and surveys. One teacher prioritised these as an area needing focus.

Students' perceptions at the beginning of the study for class C.

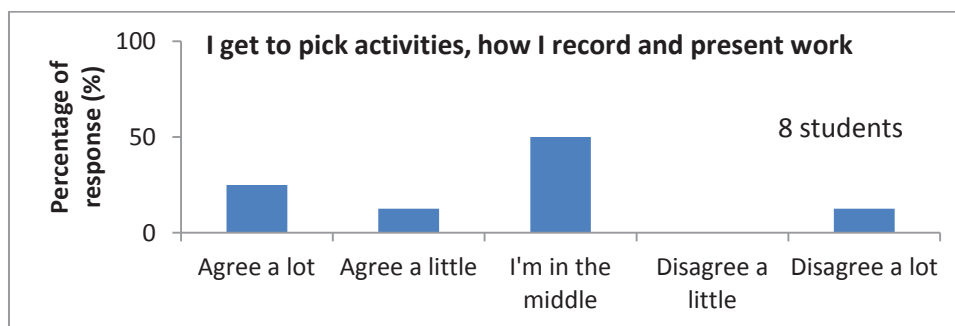


Figure 7.1: The graph shows that of eight students in class C, 25% agree a lot, 12.5% agree a little, 50% are in the middle and 12.5% disagree a lot, about getting to pick activities, recording and presenting work.

In the interviews, one student said about the opportunity to pick activities “Not so far, I would like to have that”.

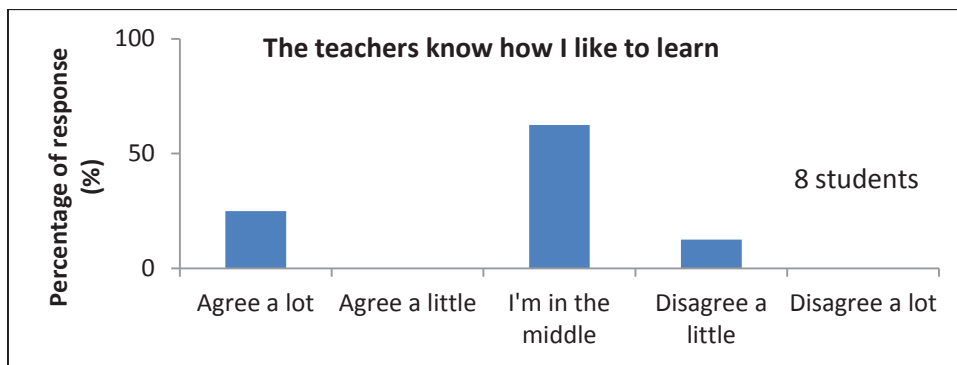


Figure 7.2: The graph shows that of the eight students from class C, 25% of students taking part in the survey agree a lot, 62.5% are in the middle, and 12.5% disagree a little about their teachers knowing how they like to learn prior to the start of the study.

One student spoke about the importance of their teachers knowing how they like to learn:

To me teaching isn't going to do this, this and this. It's to understand how a student copes with things and how they learn best. To learn how they like to learn. Rather than telling them to do something you should find out what works for them. And help them with that.

The student elaborated about how one teacher uses their knowledge of how students like to learn:

Sometimes it's small things. The teacher came up and said "I know you might not get this one or this one, and I'm going to let you choose which one to do". It was the same kind of thing, just a different format. And he said you can do that. And sometimes he says I just want you to think about it. And of course I, personally, have trouble thinking. I have to write

all my thoughts down. He lets me do that rather than not letting me write anything down and just try to think about it.

Teachers' response to student choice in presenting work and knowing the way

students like to learn. The students' perceptions above influenced a teacher to take action by developing a plan to provide students with the choice to express learning and observe the way they liked to learn. The teacher planned to do this by carrying out of a survey of how students like to learn initially, and by giving them a question without explaining how to answer and to observe whether they like writing an answer, drawing, practically showing an answer or expressing it using words.

Response from the CoP to support the teacher respond to student choice in

presenting work and knowing the way students like to learn. The CoP teachers complimented the teacher on their action plan. The facilitator provided the teacher with a website link to the universal design for learning approach to further support to them in carrying out their plan and the teacher reported using resources to plan learning.

Teacher actions in response to student choice in presenting work and knowing the

way students like to learn. Influenced by the student perspectives the CoP teacher gave students a choice to present their work and observed the student response a number of times during the study. This occurred in two classes one of which was not involved in the study and it was found that these actions supported understanding of how students in the

class liked to learn. It was perceived by the teacher that the classroom engagement was better when choice was given. In the first task, the teacher gave students a choice in answering a simple question. This was in preparation for a topic test and involved writing a paragraph or drawing a cartoon or telling a friend. The teacher found that when given a choice, students preferred drawing, telling a friend or demonstrating rather than writing.

In the second task the teacher gave students a choice in accessing and presenting information in a research assignment about a system in the body such as the visual system. The teacher found the students accessed similar sources such as websites and books, but a lot of students copied and pasted information as a way to present their learning, with a large amount of information copied verbatim from websites. For example one student copied 60 words which were not their own, to describe the position of the eye in the body instead of drawing a picture and an arrow. The CoP identified this as an important point to focus future action on and suggested the teacher teach students to answer questions appropriately using different methods in the future. The facilitator suggested a strategy which may help students summarise written text in a meaningful way to trial, which was to help students identify keywords in the text, define their meanings, draw key points, then summarise the key concepts in the text in a limited number of sentences by using all three activities carried out previously.

Students' response at the end of the study for class C.

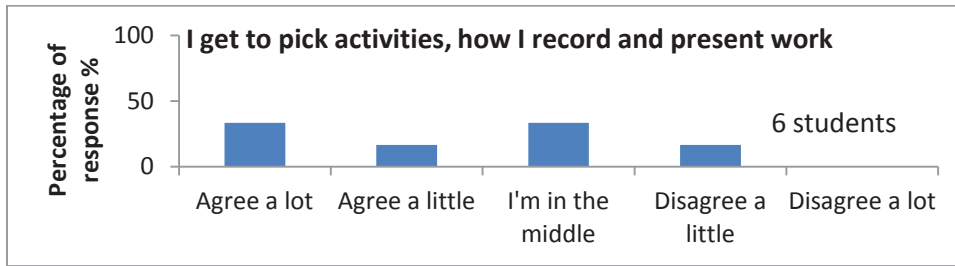


Figure 7.3: The percentage of students from C strongly agreeing that they get choice in the way they present their work has increased from 25% at the beginning of the study to 33% at the end of the study.

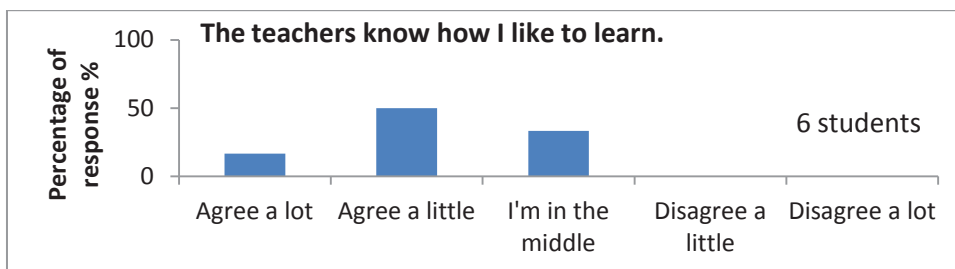


Figure 7.4: The percentage of students from C who perceived that teachers know how they like to learn made a shift towards the agreement end. Students slightly disagreeing that the teachers know how they like to learn moved from 12.5% to 0% at the end of the study.

Students' comments at the end of the study interviews show the opportunity to choose activities and awareness by some teachers of how students like to learn. One

student said, “they tell us different ways to solve out the things – to choose which one’s easier or which one best suits you”.

The teacher reflected on the positive influence of their actions. For example: “[survey question] Q18 – pick activities and [survey question] Q22 – teachers know how I like to learn moved towards the positive end”. The teacher said using the inclusive approach of providing students with a choice in the way they show the learning to answer a question, allowed students to express their understanding at the end of the study. For example:

It’s not that they know anything more, it’s just that it’s coming out. And actually some of them probably think more in that way. They can put together in pictures what they can’t put together as words, whatever it is we’re doing.

Allowing students to use different ways to express their learning resulted in better understanding of how students liked to learn in their classroom for the teacher. For example:

The drawing one is – quite a few kids prefer that ... better than writing ... ones who don’t like to write large chunks of text which I sympathise with.

4. *Teacher aide helps everyone.* This title refers to the survey statement related to the role of the teacher aide in the classroom as a helper of all students to support the teacher with the delivery of the curriculum and the interview questions about the roles

of the adults in the classroom. This was an area of focus selected by the teacher aide to respond to.

Students' perceptions of the teacher aide helping all prior to the study for all participant students.

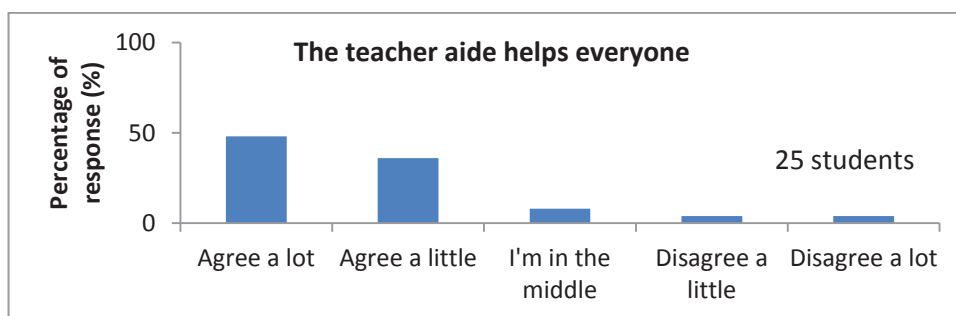


Figure 8.1: The graph shows that of the 25 students from four classes surveyed, 48% agreed a lot, 37% agreed a little, 8% were in the middle, 4% disagreed a little and 4% disagreed a lot that teacher aides helped all students in the classroom.

Students' views on teacher aides from their interviews were varied. One student reported they had a teacher aide "in English and maths for a kid in the class, they help if you ask". Another said teacher aides "just stay with the student".

Teacher aide response. The teacher aide and the teachers found the comments about the teacher aide staying with the student interesting. The teacher aide made it their focus to help more students in the classroom and be more supportive of the teacher to help

a wide number of students in the classroom as a result of the students' response. They made this decision as they perceived the survey statement "the teacher aide helps everyone" as the only one applicable to their practice.

Students' perceptions influenced on both the teachers and the teacher aides to think about their roles, reflect on current practice, and understand barriers to working effectively together. The teachers discussed their role in the use of a teacher aide to help all students. For example one teacher said "it's about the education of the teachers as well as the teacher aide". Another teacher reflected on how they were not using teacher aides to their potential. There was also a discussion among all CoP members about the difficulty of developing a relationship with teacher aides/teachers to share an understanding of the needs of the class as they change classes often. Even though the teacher aide was happy to work with many students, they perceived that students did not want to work with a teacher aide. The teachers and the teacher aide spoke about the strong social aspect to accepting help from a teacher aide, who some students associated with special needs. The CoP perceived that accepting help from a teacher aide for some students meant that they were also seen as students with special needs.

Response from the CoP to support the teacher aide. The students' perceptions of teacher aide support enabled collaborative problem-solving. For example as a solution to help all students, the CoP suggested that the teacher aide could speak to the principal about

getting time to sit and plan with teachers about the actions required by the teacher aide during a lesson. The CoP thought if the start was small and successful, such a practice would have the potential to grow for other teacher aides in the school. The facilitator provided a reading about the role of the teacher aide in supporting students' enablement as a resource to the teacher aide. One member suggested to the teachers in the CoP who were teaching students with disabilities to share the plan for teaching with the teacher aide at the start of the week, so they are clear about what is needed and which students to work with.

Teacher aide actions. The student perceptions influenced teacher aide action. The teacher aide spoke about their actions to support teachers in teaching all students. For example:

I've made sure that the teachers know that I am actually there for them – if they've got to go off and do something like photocopying I offer 'can I do that for you' and that's not a problem - 'Oh yes please. Didn't think of that'. That's my job.

The teacher aide also spoke about the influence of their actions on students in the classroom and teachers, motivated by the participation in the CoP. For example, "I have found that as I attend more classes with my student/s teachers are beginning to utilise, my time with other students they consider needing help as well".

Some students were perceived to be more accepting of help. The teacher aide said “I am also finding that the students are more accepting of my help when it is offered” in the final CoP meeting.

The teacher aide also spoke about how helping all students in the class had impacted students they were assigned to support positively. For example:

I think that they are dealing with having a teacher aide in the classroom quite well rather than think that they've been selected, like it's just them. They are starting to learn that OK yes I do go and work with them but I do work with other students as well in the classroom if they need it.

Student response about the teacher aide helping all at the end of the study

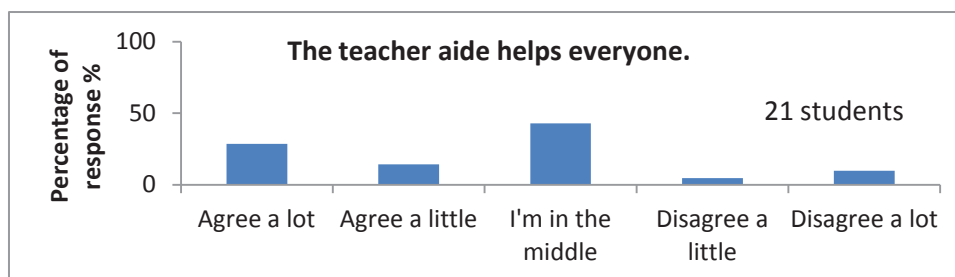


Figure 8.2: The graph shows that 29% of student agreed a lot, 14% agreed a little, 43% were in the middle, 4 % disagreed a little and 10% disagreed a lot that the teacher aide helped everyone in the class. This perception shows a negative change to the start of the study where 48% of students agreed a lot that the teacher aide helped everyone.

One student spoke about teacher aides helping all students at the end of the study,

Interviewer: And is the teacher aide helping everyone?

Student: No. She just helps that boy. She helps if you need help I guess but I've never seen her work with any other students at the moment.

End of the study student perceptions of the teacher aides helping all students were unexpected and were perceived to be a concern by the teacher aide and some teachers. One teacher related this to the environment of their own class and the practice of the adults in the class. For example: "With my class it could be how one particular teacher aide interacts with the students. But, they should feel that these guys are ready to help, so I am concerned".

A teacher suggested increased student awareness of the role of the teacher aide resulting in the negative change of student perceptions. For example: "maybe in their subjects they are more aware of what a teacher aide should do?"

5. Prior Knowledge. The statement addresses the survey and interview questions of opportunities to share things they already know about a subject or topic with the class.

Students' perception prior to the study for class A.

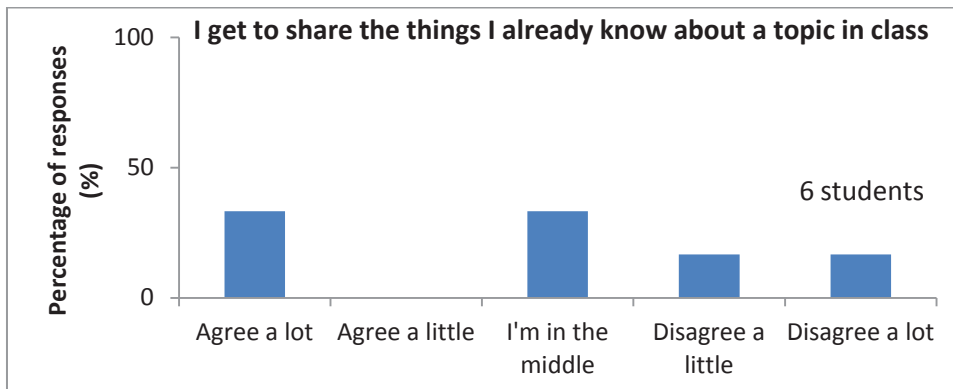


Figure 9.1: The graph shows that of the six students from A, 33% agree a lot, 33% are in the middle, 17% disagree a little and 17% disagree a lot about sharing things they already know about a topic in class.

Teachers' response to opportunity to share prior knowledge. Examining students' perceptions influenced a teacher to confront their own assumptions about these perceptions. One teacher was surprised about students' perceptions of opportunities to share what they know in class because the teacher perceived that students were given opportunities to express their prior knowledge in the teachers' daily classroom teaching. Thus, this teacher decided to be to be mindful and aware of students' prior knowledge and get them to share about what they already know about a topic.

Response from the CoP to support the teacher to provide students with opportunity to share prior knowledge. The CoP members collaborated to suggest strategies to support

the action plan. For example using a KWL chart at the beginning of a topic (what I know, what I want to know and what I've learnt), and the use of PAR diagrams, bus stop activities, X and Y charts, brainstorm and mind maps were suggested as tools for providing opportunities to share prior knowledge.

Students' responses at the end of the study for class A.

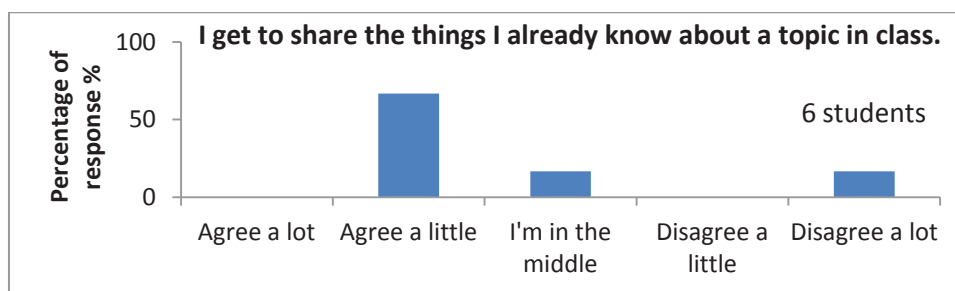


Figure 9.2: At the end of the study 66% students agreed a little, 17% were in the middle and 17% disagreed a lot that they got share what they already knew about a topic.

The teacher reflected that there was little change to students' perceptions from the survey results. She said the results "do not really show that much change for the particular goal but slight improvement, doubling in the middle though". The teacher related this to the ability to commit time to implement the plan and irregular participation in the community of practice around their action goal. Even though students' perceptions influenced on

teachers' understanding of their own practice with regard to including students' prior knowledge in daily teaching, the use of inclusive approaches was restricted due to time.

CoP reflections on using student perceptions after the study. The involvement in the CoP gave teachers the opportunity to use student perceptions to change their practice, affirmed their beliefs of student perceptions to be important, and provided opportunities for teachers to respond to student perceptions and change their practices resulting in better student engagement. One teacher found the surveys identified areas of teacher practice that needed to be changed.

... survey of all of our core class was good. That's kind of the first lot I've got from the secondary environment. So I have already started looking at the areas, I guess, where people didn't think there was much of it happening and you can start to think.

Use of student perceptions was affirmed as important practice for some teachers influenced by their participation in the CoP. For example:

I will make sure that I'm re-focussing more often and making sure that I'm doing what I'm actually doing. So maybe gaining student voice more often, having discussions with students, not just accepting that what I'm doing is the best thing. It might not be, and allowing them to say well no this isn't working for me. Just a bit aware of what they need. "I like to think that I just sort of do it more routinely now.

Some teachers perceived that responding to student perspectives resulted in better student engagement. One teacher said “I probably notice for some specific students they are more noticeably performing in the way you want them to or better than they were before”.

Teachers found that when they were active in responding to the original concerns of students, there were some improvements in the way students perceived how the teacher was teaching. The process of action research in the CoP was perceived to allow the teachers to find evidence of their actions. For example:

In some ways it's affirming so some of the stuff that you've been spending time doing getting survey results that say 'actually that matters' means that 'I can still keep doing it'. Like, you know, it's evidenced in something. Because you don't always see it in a test mark but it's always other interactions and somehow recording them down which is really hard.

Teachers perceived the collective analysis of collated results for all classes and interviews of student perceptions was less threatening to their self-concept and of their practice. One teacher said:

I liked the way, and it may happen like that I'm not sure, that it's done kind of collectively so it lowers the stakes a little bit. Obviously if there was someone who had a concern in the class I think I would be open to it; yes I would be even though it's hard to hear - I like critically constructive feedback so even though it challenges me and I might have a moment

of – ‘that’s actually what it’s all about’ so I think that’s really good...’ which is probably why I joined this group in the first place.

Part three summary. Student perspectives informed the formation of the action plans for all participants in the CoP. The sharing of the plan in the CoP resulted in feedback in the form of strategies, compliments, ideas and resources which helped some teachers to develop their plans further to be responsive to student perceptions. Through the process of being responsive to student perceptions teachers became more aware and reflective of the strengths and needs of their students, their own assumptions of student ability and the influences of their actions on students and other adults present in the classroom. For some areas of focus by the CoP members there was a positive effect on student perceptions. The participation in action research in a CoP gave an opportunity for the teachers to co-construct knowledge about inclusion and apply this knowledge to classroom practice.

Part Four: What are the actions taken by the members of the CoP to plan and carryout teaching practices as a result of being involved in the CoP?

Teacher application of knowledge gained due to the participation in the CoP action research to be inclusive in their daily practice including; teaching practices to be inclusive, planning and reflective practice are described below.

Teaching practices to be inclusive. The participation in the CoP gave opportunity for some teachers to put the theory they had learned previously into action, to be exposed to good teaching practice and to learn strategies for teaching all students. It also helped to develop a willingness to continue using the teaching strategies gained in the CoP.

One teacher spoke about getting an opportunity to practice the theory about inclusive practice they had learned previously due to the CoP. Expanding understanding about the use of strategies for curriculum differentiation and adaptation when planning learning for students was also perceived to be a benefit from the participation in the CoP.

For example:

I think I got more clear about differentiation and adaptation and how they can support each other but being really mindful of having a variety of ways to access the curriculum and the learning and yes the whole universal design. I've done the theory and I've done the assignments around it and it's nice to kind of apply it.

The same teacher also reported the structure of CoP meetings modelled good practice. The teacher said,

...structure of them was really good and that seemed to be really important because you were modelling what would be great to see in our classes too as far as 'do nows' and using the same language with us as to what we would use in our classes.

The teacher also said they would like to continue with the teaching strategies gained in the CoP at the end of the study. For example:

I'm just going to keep exploring, keep bringing in more strategies little bit by little bit and just monitor. I'd like to incorporate a bit more of the variety, kind of like the Tic Tac Toe thing like you had, maybe a bit more of that choice-type stuff.

Planning and being reflective of teaching practice. At the end of the study some teachers planned their lessons to be inclusive of all their students and were more aware of student needs.

One teacher said "I have definitely spent more time prior to a lesson looking at how I can scaffold differently for different learners". The same teacher reflected on the changes in the classroom observed as a result of planning. For example:

There has probably been a lot more work that's gone on [in planning] at that time which has actually freed me up in the classroom because, I'm wanting them to do more of the thinking, and can then roam and exactly see what's happening.

One teacher also spoke about increased awareness of individual student needs due to influences from the study and this influencing the planning and teaching practice. The teacher said:

It's made me more aware of somebody like R who has particular needs. It's made me focus more on individual needs of individual students. I've always been about individuals but it has helped me re-focus on that which is good.

Communication and collaboration within the school. The teachers perceived that the collaboration in the CoP within the school gave an opportunity for teachers to share ideas, to be exposed to teachers in different subjects and roles, to discuss common issues to support the development of daily teaching practices, and to support inclusion of students with disability in the classrooms. Some teachers also noted that the CoP provided them with constructive feedback.

The opportunity to share ideas, learn from each other and discuss issues was appreciated. One teacher said "specific ideas like the one you said about dividing into four and having individual parts that was quite useful" and "I got some good stuff from other people, which I probably wouldn't have otherwise".

Teachers' found working with their colleagues in different subjects and in different roles was useful. One teacher said, "It's been a great experience. It's been good being able to work with a group of people throughout the school instead of it just being with the three people in my department".

One teacher spoke about how the CoP allowed discussion of common issues that applies to teacher daily practice. The teacher said “It was good to be able to discuss and clarify things with a different group as well, like around teacher aide support and things like that”.

The same teacher felt that the connections they had made in the CoP would help the inclusion of the students with disability in the mainstream classes of their colleagues who participated in the CoP. For example:

The exclusion of the group of kids that I have. That’s a part of the system of the school, trying to break down those barriers for that, but I already knew that it would be a struggle within this environment but the others that were a part of the CoP are more happy to have one of my students as going back out into the inclusive classroom.

For one teacher, the CoP also provided an opportunity for collaboration and feedback. In an interview at the end of the study, this teacher said “The feedback was good obviously, particularly from particular people. In general even the fact of what I had to put into it so I could explain it to other people makes you develop your thinking a bit more”.

Collaboration beyond the school community. Participation in the CoP gave the opportunity for some teachers to think about the benefits of collaboration with other schools and staff to help them to develop inclusive practices within their school. Shortly

after the first community of practice meeting one teacher, in an informal discussion with the CoP facilitator, discussed the possibility of setting up a CoP with staff from other schools.

The teacher said that “maybe teachers from other schools, I’d like to tap into that more”, “it would be good talk with other [Special Education Needs Co-ordinators] SENCO’s⁶...High Schools and “bounce ideas and supervise each other’s work”.

Improvements to the CoP and action research process. Improvements to the action research process were suggested by the CoP participants at the end of the study. The suggestions included increasing collaboration and time for action, looking at teacher perceptions of inclusion in a CoP via an action research cycle, the CoP working on one class and adding classroom observations to the process.

The CoP participants recognised having limited opportunity to talk with teachers beyond the CoP. The teachers felt such collaboration could broaden the shared understanding of inclusion among other colleagues. For example:

There hasn’t been opportunity to talk with other class teachers within my class for instance. So we’ve talked as a professional Community of Practice but, how to then expand that out. That would be another thing for me and help to broaden the shared understanding of what inclusion is”.

⁶ SENCO’s are involved in working with parents or families to develop a suitable learning programme for students with moderate learning or behaviour needs (Ministry of Education, 2010b).

CoP teachers thought more informal conversations with each other around teaching practice could have improved the CoP. One teacher said:

..probably having to schedule in little slots, even if they are only short 15 minute snap shots, a little bit more often, might have helped build the momentum up in between times whereas the time flew in between and I don't know how much collaboration had gone between - like they were really good when we were in the meetings.

Another teacher said that the short time frame for the action research needed to be increased to improve the sustainability of the practices and processes involved in the CoP.

I think it's a relatively short time frame so we're not going to see sustained change until it becomes embedded.

One teacher reported having limited time between meetings to trial their action goals. They said "I tried one or two things in my class which isn't that much really because I didn't have that much to say. I suspect others had the same problem (...) It was just that time frame to action" and said a longer time between the meetings to take action and report back formally at the CoP meeting could be beneficial.

In the future to broaden the understanding of inclusion within the school a teacher suggested an action research cycle to look at teacher perceptions of inclusion and planning actions to address those perceptions. The process involved:

...go[ing] through the same process but maybe perhaps instead of looking at student research, you know how we looked at student perceptions, maybe looking at teacher perception, of how they feel about inclusion and how ready they feel, and then address those goals. Because maybe what we doing is from, you know the students are at the top down, well I think we're going to kind of turn it on its head and get the teachers' culture changed so then the trickle down will be that it's part of being inclusive, our school is inclusive and this is how we are doing it. Maybe by having that collaborative planning actually once every term we actually have four periods together where we find relievers and we do collaborative planning for the next term and we look at the classes that we've got and the kids that we've got going through and how we are going to plan.

One teacher suggested looking at student perceptions in core classes where different teachers of the same class could meet to carry out action research. They said:

Four or five teachers.....do it across a core class so we're dealing with the same class. We could talk more about individual students. If I'm talking to.....'you don't know my class' whereas if I say to the other teachers in my class 'J is doing this, J didn't like this.....more of what I'm saying. Plus you are passively sharing more information about your students which is never a bad thing.

The consideration of future CoP based on core classes were also thought to result in "teacher consistency. Like, if that teacher does something that works for that class and I teach that class too I can wrap it off more easily. And also the kids are halfway used to it".

Critical reflections, by way of observations, were also suggested as a way to improve the action research process. One teacher said “I’d probably schedule in some observation time. I do that with my critical friend so I’d bring it across into that”.

Part four summary. The knowledge gained in the CoP was applied in the daily practice by the CoP participants. The CoP participants applied the knowledge gained in their teaching practice to plan and be reflective, collaborate within the school and plan collaboration beyond the school. Involvement in the action research process also provided insight into how the teachers could improve the CoP process to suit the needs of their school.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The discussion chapter presents the key findings from the results. The findings address how a CoP supported development of teacher understanding of inclusion and teaching practices to teach to a diverse range of students. How a CoP helped to co-construct knowledge about roles and responsibilities of teachers and other adults in school to teach a diverse range of students is addressed. The findings, support for the findings from literature, what the findings mean to the process of developing inclusive practice in schools and the next steps for the CoP are discussed under each research question.

1. How do the CoP member understandings of inclusion change or get affirmed due to the participation in the CoP?

Involvement in the CoP resulted in affirmation of having skills to teach a diverse range of students for some teachers, gaining strategies to teach a range of students and affirmation of beliefs about inclusion. At the beginning of the study, many teachers thought that specialist knowledge and training was required to teach groups of students such as those with special needs. For teachers, participation in the CoP resulted in gaining knowledge of inclusive teaching practices from their

colleagues and even the principal expected the participant teachers in the CoP to have knowledge to teach all students in their classes at the end of the study. These findings are supported by the work of Booth and Ainscow (2011) and Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) where teachers were found to have craft knowledge to teach all students. Thus, in developing schools that are inclusive it is important to support teachers to collaborate and share knowledge about their craft. A teacher in the CoP suggested sharing of knowledge gained with teachers who did not participate in the study (but who share teaching of the same classes) as a next step to develop inclusive practice within their school.

Prior to the start of the study, inclusion was understood as placement of student's physically in certain classrooms by some CoP members. Through the study teachers became more aware of being inclusive of students, aware of student needs, reasons for student behaviours and of the effects of their teaching practice on students. Inclusion was viewed by some with reference to the planning of teaching and responding to student needs/perceptions after the participation in the CoP. This change could have been influenced by the examining attitudes, beliefs and individual classroom practice relating to inclusion, in a climate of trust (Allen, 2013) within the CoP. Teachers' change in understanding of inclusion beyond the concept of physical

placement of students shows the key role CoPs can play in shifting teacher beliefs of inclusion when developing inclusive schools.

2. How do CoP member understanding of roles and responsibilities of each other with regards to supporting the inclusion of all students in their classrooms change or get affirmed due to the participation in a CoP?

The CoP supported members in examining staff roles and responsibilities for inclusive practice. The results show that for some teachers understanding of their own role and the roles of other adults in the school such as teacher aides were extended. Some teachers while recognising leadership as an important driver of inclusion (Ainscow & Sandill 2010), also recognised the role of the teachers, as a collective group in promoting inclusion. Work of Dupoux, Wolman and Estrada, (2005) and Urton, (2014) shows that collective positive teacher attitude towards inclusion influences individual teacher attitudes to be inclusive. In developing inclusive schools, attention needs to be paid to addressing teachers' assumptions of their roles and responsibilities of themselves and other adults present in the classroom to teach all students. Similarly, attention needs to be paid to the importance of supporting the development of positive attitudes in all staff towards inclusion.

3. How are the members of` the CoP influenced by student perspectives on relationships, teaching and learning and environment and respond to these in their classroom practice?

Student perspectives informed the formation of action plans and actions of most CoP members with a focus on being inclusive. Listening and responding to student views to improve teaching practice in settings where adult authority seems absolute supports the rights of children in education (Smith, 2007). Some areas focused on by the CoP members at the start of the study showed a positive change and growth at the end of the study. These positive effects of student perceptions need to be interpreted with care, as their perceptions may also have been influenced by the practice of teachers who did not participate in the CoP. The findings support work by Ferguson, Hanreddy and Draxton, (2011), Hope, Hughes, Jones, Messiou and Shaw, (2015) and Messiou, (2013) where listening to student perspectives resulted in a change of teacher actions, classroom climate and practice to confront the marginalisation experienced by some students. The study demonstrates that the use of students' perceptions can be a valuable tool for developing inclusive practice in schools and one that will continue to be used by some CoP teachers in their future teaching practices according to the end of the study interviews.

Social aspects of school compared to academic aspects were found to be more important to students (Balfe & Travers, 2011) in previous studies, perhaps due to students

having no opportunity to share their perceptions of academic learning. The current study provided the opportunity for students to share their perspectives about academic learning and motivated some teachers to change their actions to respond to these. For example one teacher focused on making work doable for all students. The study has implications for developing inclusive practice in schools by providing students with the opportunity to give their perceptions on academic aspects of school and for teachers to respond to these in their daily practice.

Responding to students' perceptions was a basis to share ideas and feedback in the form of strategies, compliments, ideas and resources. This helped some teachers in the CoP to develop their plans further to be responsive to students' perceptions. The process of knowledge building within the CoP supports social constructivist theory views of knowledge construction via interactions (Mallory & New, 1994). Participation in action research process in a CoP gave an opportunity for the teachers to co-construct knowledge about inclusive education and the roles of adults in the classroom, and apply this knowledge to teach a diverse range of students in the classroom. Through the process of being responsive to student perceptions in a CoP, teachers became more aware and reflective of the strengths and needs of their students and their own assumptions of student ability. This is supported by the work of Wenger (2013). The study demonstrates the importance of allowing

teachers to collaborate, co-construct knowledge and explore their assumptions and awareness of students when developing inclusive schools.

4. What are the actions taken by the members of the CoP to plan and carryout teaching practices, as a result of being involved in the CoP?

The CoP allowed teachers to collaborate, to be proactive about using the knowledge gained in the CoP in their teaching practice and to be inclusive. It also allowed some teachers to be more accepting of students with disability in their classes, to think about collaboration beyond the school to improve inclusive teaching practice, and to suggest ways to improve the processes used in the CoP to fit the setting of their school.

Barriers to inclusion, according to previous research, include professional development opportunities lacking focus on pedagogical content knowledge and relating to teachers' daily practice (e.g. Bausmith & Barry, 2011). The action research in the CoP focused on teachers' daily teaching practice and gave teachers the opportunity to collaborate and be proactive about using their craft knowledge. Teachers reported that through collaboration in the CoP, they were able to gain knowledge from each other in the form of strategies and resources that were applicable to their classroom practice. They also reported that they were able to use these to be inclusive and proactive about inclusion. The feedback on actions performed using knowledge gained in the CoP was also found to be

positive and the process of sharing information with the CoP of classroom practice was reported to allow deeper thinking of teaching practices. The findings are supported by work of Tjernberg and Mattson, (2014) and Pierson and Howell, (2013) who found mentoring and collaboration with colleagues that focused on pedagogical discussions, promoted inclusive practices in teaching. It is also supported by findings of Allen, (2013) and MacArthur and Higgins, (2007) where CoPs were found to enhance collaboration, lead to proactive teacher action, promoted trust and increased teachers' acceptance to teach all. Thus, the results support CoPs as a useful tool in the development of inclusive schools.

The study found that relationships made in the CoP via communication and collaboration by sharing ideas, interacting with staff in different subject areas with different roles and discussion of common issues allowed a more positive attitude towards inclusion. This finding is supported by Arthur-Kelly, Sutherland, Lyons, Macfarlane, and Foreman, (2013). One teacher spoke at the end of the study about the positive attitude of CoP teachers to include students with disability in their classes. Time to collaborate allows teachers to communicate and share understandings which may lead to teacher willingness to teach students with diverse needs.

Involvement in the CoP allowed one teacher to ponder the possibility of having a CoP that extends to other schools in the region so as to develop knowledge to further promote inclusion. The teacher suggested a network of SENCO's to share ideas and learn

from practice of others to promote inclusive practice in schools. This idea of accessing knowledge from beyond the school such as community resources and expert teachers of other schools to improve the learning of all students is supported by Ainscow, (2012). Thus, collaboration with expert teachers from other schools, parents and the community in CoP to support the development of inclusive practices of the teachers in the school could be a logical next step for the CoP.

Participation in the CoP and the application of knowledge gained within the CoP lead some teachers to think about how to improve the process further and make it fitted to their school. For example one teacher spoke about adding an observation component while another suggested a CoP to focus on teachers' perceptions of inclusion and taking action to change these. The findings show that there were critical analysis and reflections of teacher pedagogical actions that took place within the CoP and a focus on future action throughout the study required for an effective CoP (Allen, 2013). The study indicates that the CoP was a valuable tool in developing inclusive practice of the teachers involved and could benefit from teachers' perceptions of needed adaptations to fit the setting of the school.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Exclusion of children in education prompts schools to develop more responsive ways to attend to student diversity in education. This study demonstrates that involvement in action research within a CoP can help teachers develop their understandings of inclusion, and of their roles and responsibilities with regards to inclusion. The study also demonstrates that action research within a CoP can help teachers to develop teaching practices to teach students with diverse needs: to co-construct knowledge to gain new learning; and to collaborate to improve knowledge and practice of inclusion in their classrooms. Responding to student perceptions allowed some teachers to recognise the value of using student perceptions to inform their teaching practice. CoPs and students' perceptions are useful tools that support teacher professional development to practice inclusively, in the development of inclusive schools.

As a footnote to the project it is worth noting the collateral benefits that have occurred in the area of collaborative teamwork. The researcher has been asked by teaching staff to extend her role in the school by providing professional development for teachers in the area of curriculum differentiation and adaptation; to offer support to some individual teachers with their teaching practice; and to support the school with the positive behaviour for learning tier two initiative. The

principal also asked the researcher to support a group of teachers with the planning stages of an inquiry learning process and the evaluation of this process after its completion.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Letter to the board of trustees and principal requesting access to the school.

APPENDIX B: Information Sheets:

- i) Student survey*
- ii) Student interview*
- iii) Parents of students*
- iv) Potential CoP members*

APPENDIX C: Consent Forms

- i) Students*
- ii) Parents*
- iii) Potential CoP members*

APPENDIX D: Interview Schedule Guidelines:

- i) Students*
- ii) COP participants and principal*

APPENDIX E: Student Survey

APPENDIX F: Authority to release tape transcripts

APPENDIX G: Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement

APPENDIX H: Transcribers Confidentiality Agreement

APPENDIX I: Timetable for conducting the study

APPENDIX A: Letter requesting permission to carry out project to the board of trustees chairperson and the principal



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LETTER FOR BOARD OF TRUSTEES/PRINCIPAL

(The following is a guideline of the information that will be provided for the school principal or the board of trustees' chairperson and may be modified further for the purposes of presentation and comprehension)

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Sneha Padmasiri, I am a Special Education Advisor and I currently work with some of the staff at Greymouth High School.

As a part of a Masters in Educational Psychology study program, I am interested in undertaking a small research project at your school to look at the development of a community of practice with four teachers to look at ways to develop teaching practices that support a diverse group of students in the classroom. I have a particular interest in how teachers can include and teach students with disabilities well. The project is a response to Ministry of Education policy that encourages schools to develop the variation in the integration of inclusive practice in planning and reporting across New Zealand schools, with schools highly effective in inclusive practice at only 10% (Ministry of Education, Success for All, 2013). I hope that the research will support teachers at Greymouth High to develop inclusive teaching approaches that support the learning of all students.

My research involves working with teachers in a small "community of practice" to look at ways in which teachers can work with the diverse range of students in their classrooms so that everyone is included and learns well. I am interested in finding out how the community of practice can contribute to the development of teacher knowledge about teaching, learning and inclusion, and how teachers can apply what they learn in the community of practice in their daily teaching.

I would be using an action research cycle which means I will work with the teachers as a colleague. We would start by looking at what the students themselves say about their school experience, we would then use that information to plan for teaching practice that is concerned with meeting the needs of all students well. Teachers would then put the plan into practice in their classroom and we would evaluate how well the plan worked.

The data would include:

- a student survey with 51 volunteer students across the age ranges
- interviews with six volunteer focus students
- observations in our community of practice meetings
- interviews with the four teachers, teacher aide and the school principal
- informal conversations with the teachers in the research.

I would also look at the school's charter and special needs policy.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. All data collected is confidential and anonymous. The results from this research may be used in conference presentations, teacher professional development and written publications, and principles of confidentiality apply to all forms of dissemination. The school and participants will not be identified. Because my name will be published in research

publications, it may be possible for some readers, particularly local ones, to make assumptions as to the identity of the school.

All data collected will be kept confidential by the researcher and will not be shared with school management. The collected data will be stored securely away from the school. Names of participants will be changed in all written material. If there are situations identified as compromising the safety of students or staff members participating the researcher will consult with her supervisor and involve appropriate channels. At the end of the project information will be destroyed as per the University research policy after ten years. The school will have access to the final written thesis and I will provide the school and all participants with a summary of the findings upon request.

I have enclosed copies of Information Sheets and Consent Forms for the potential participants in the project. If you have any questions regarding this project please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you for taking your time in considering this proposal. I look forward to your response.

If you have any further questions please contact:

Researcher: Sneha Padmasiri 03 768 2012 or 027 8362395 or snehapadmasiri@gmail.com
Supervisors: Jude MacArthur 027 7415413
Alison Kearney 06 3569099 ext 84416

Yours sincerely,

Sneha Padmasiri.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application ___/___ (*insert application number*). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 84459, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B (I): Information sheet for student survey



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INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDENT SURVEY

(The following is a guideline of the information that will be provided for the students who will be participating in the survey or the interview process. Language maybe simplified further to enable comprehension of the participant students. The information adapted to aid comprehension will be read to the students who needs support before they take part in the interview)

Hello,

My name is Sneha Padmasiri and I am doing a project at your school. I would like you to read or listen to the information given to you carefully and decide if you want to take part.

What am I planning to do?

I'm going to look at how teachers listen to what students think about their learning and work together to teach, include and help all students in the classroom to learn.

Who will be in the project?

I am inviting you to be in the study if you would like to. I'm interested in what school is like for you and if you agree to be in the study that is what the survey will be about.

The principal, a few teachers and teacher aides will be invited to take part in the teacher section of the project. I will also be a part of the teacher section.

How can you help?

You can help by completing a survey about what it is like to be in your classroom and what the teaching and learning is like for you at the school. This will take about 10-20 minutes. You will need to do this twice during the study if you volunteer. If you choose to do the survey you will need to sign the Informed Consent Form which will tell me that you have read/listened to this letter carefully, that you understand what the project is about and want to take part.

If you do want to take part, and you are under 16, or would like me to help you with completing the survey by reading out the questions please make sure you get your parent's permission and signature on the Parent Informed Consent Form before completing and returning your survey.

What will happen if you decide to take part?

- First of all you will complete the survey. It will take about 10 minutes and you will answer some questions about what school is like for you.
- I will summarize all information collected from the surveys and the teachers who are involved in the project will look at this.

- Remember that your survey won't have your name on it so teachers will not know what you have said in the survey about school. If I help you with the survey, I will know the answers you provided for each question, but no one else will know what you have said. No names of students will be used.
- If during the survey you feel uncomfortable you can decide to stop answering, and skip questions without anything bad happening to you.

I will keep all the information collected in a safe place which will be locked and only be available to me and my supervisor. After the project is finished a copy of your answers will be kept at the university. I will give you a copy of what I found out at the end of the project.

Your rights

You can decide not to take part in the project within three weeks of completing the survey.

You can ask questions about the project.

You can see what I found out after I finish.

You can choose not to answer some questions.

Your name will not be used in the project.

You can change or correct what is written down in the survey answers if I am helping you, if it is not what you meant to say.

Thank you very much for taking your time to think about taking part.

If you would like to know more you can contact me or my supervisors using the contact information below.

Researcher: Sneha Padmasiri 03 768 2012 or 027 8362395 or snehapadmasiri@gmail.com

Supervisor: Jude MacArthur 027 7415413

Alison Kearney 06 3569099 ext 84416

Yours faithfully,

Sneha Padmasiri.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application ___/___ (*insert application number*). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 84459, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz.

APPENDIX B (II): Information sheet for student interview



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INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDENT INTERVIEW

(The following is a guideline of the information that will be provided for the students who will be participating in the survey or the interview process. Language maybe simplified further to enable comprehension of the participant students. The information adapted to aid comprehension will be read to the students who need support before they take part in the interview)

Hello,

My name is Sneha Padmasiri and I am doing a project at your school. I would like you to read or listen to the information given to you carefully and decide if you want to take part.

What am I planning to do?

I'm going to look at how teachers listen to what students think about their learning and work together to teach, include and help all students in the classroom to learn.

Who will be in the project?

I am inviting you to be in the study if you would like to. I'm interested in what school is like for you and if you agree to be in the study that is what we will be talking about.

The principal, a few teachers and teacher aides will be invited to take part in the teacher section of the project. I will also be a part of the teacher section.

How can you help?

You can help by doing an interview about what it is like to be in your classroom and what the teaching and learning is like for you at the school. This will take about 10-20 minutes. You will need to do this twice during the study if you volunteer. If you choose to do the interview you will need to sign the Informed Consent Form which will tell me that you have read/listened to this letter carefully, that you understand what the project is about and want to take part.

If you do want to take part please make sure you get your parent's permission and signature on the Parent Informed Consent Form before the interview.

What will happen if you decide to take part?

I will record your interview on a digital recorder. I will get someone to write down the answers you give recorded on the tape and summarise all the information collected from the interviews and teachers involved in the project will look at this. As I will be interviewing you, I will know the answers you provided for each question, but no one else will know what you have said. No names of students will be used so teachers will not know what you have said in the interview about their classes or school. The person writing down the answers you give recorded on the digital recorder will not know who you are. If during the interview you feel uncomfortable you can decide to stop answering, ask the voice recorder to be turned off and skip questions without anything bad happening to you. Make sure that you don't give anything like your name, class or teachers that could give away who you are.

I will keep all the information collected in a safe place which will be locked and only available to me and my supervisor. After the project is finished a copy of your answers will be kept at the university. I will give you a copy of what I found out at the end of the project.

Your rights

- You can decide not to take part in the project within three weeks of completing the interview.
- You can ask questions about the project.
- You can see what I found out after I finish.
- You can choose not to answer some questions.
- Your name will not be used in the project.
- You can ask the tape recorder to be turned off during any time when we are talking.
- You can correct or change the information written down in the interview if that is not what you meant to say.

Thank you very much for taking your time to think about taking part.

If you would like to know more you can contact me or my supervisors using the contact information below.

Researcher: Sneha Padmasiri 03 768 2012 or 027 8362395 or snehapadmasiri@gmail.com
Supervisor: Jude MacArthur 027 7415413
Alison Kearney 06 3569099 ext 84416

Yours faithfully,

Sneha Padmasiri.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application ___/___ (*insert application number*). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 84459, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz.

APPENDIX B (III): Information sheet for parents for the student survey and interviews



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INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS

(The following is a guideline of the information that will be provided for the parents of students under the age of 16 and students with disability who will be participating in the survey and interview. It may be further modified to enable comprehension)

Researcher Introduction

My name is Sneha Padmasiri. As a part of a Masters in Educational Psychology program, I am undertaking a small research project at your child's school.

Project Description and Invitation

The project looks at how teachers can work together to make sure that every student in their class learns well. I will be working with the teachers and together we will be looking at what students themselves think about school. We will use what students say to action and plan ways to be responsive in teaching. The project is a positive one that concentrates on the use of students' views on school, and teachers sharing their skills and ideas about good teaching approaches to benefit your child's learning in their classroom.

Your child has indicated that they would like to be part of this research project. I would like to invite you to participate in this research by giving your child permission to do so. This following Information Sheet explains the project, so please read this carefully before you make a decision about your child's participation.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

Some students attending your child's school will take part in the project. Your son/daughter has indicated that they would like to be in the project. Other people in the project include the principal, four teachers and teacher aides, and my-self.

If you agree to your child participating in this project, you will be asked to sign a Consent Form which shows that you understand the study and give consent for your child to be involved. I would also like to ask you to discuss this project with your child using the Information Sheet provided. I will also provide them with an Information Sheet and discuss what being involved in the project would mean for them as I hand out the sheets to the volunteer students as well as before the volunteer students with consent take part in the survey or the interview. I would only proceed if your child also provides consent.

Project Procedures

Students in the classes of the four participating teachers have been invited to complete a survey and return it to the researcher via a box placed at the front of the school. Some students will also talk with me about what it is like to learn in their classroom. The survey or the interview will take approximately twenty minutes of a time. It will be done at a time that does not disrupt learning. If your child is in the project, they will complete a survey and/or interview twice this year, at the beginning and at the end of the project. Students under the age of 16 and some students with disabilities need parental consent to participate.

The survey contains questions about teaching and learning in the classroom, students are asked to indicate if they agree, disagree or are not sure about a statement. Interview questions are semi-structured discussions about experiences in the classroom. I have guidelines for questions I might ask, but other questions will come up during the conversation. Your child will be informed they can stop the discussion at any time, they do not need to answer any questions they do not want to and if they want to withdraw from the project within three weeks of completing the survey or the interview, they may do so without any disadvantage. Upon participation the students will receive a small chocolate as a token of appreciation.

Data management

The researcher will record students' interviews on an audio tape recorder. Students will see a transcript of their interview and they can edit the information if they wish to, to make sure the interview represents what they want to say. If the researcher helps with the survey or interview, she will know the answers provided for each question by the students. However the researcher will summarize all the results from the students taking part before she shows the results to the six teachers in the project. Names of students will not be used and teachers will not know the information given by each individual student in a way that could reveal their identity. In interviews of smaller classes there is a possibility that the teachers may link the student answers to their identity. In this case the researcher will first check with the student before using the information and withdraw information that might cause harm to the student if revealed using her judgement.

The names of participants, the school site and any identifying features will be removed or changed in the before use in project writing. The original answer script for the interviews will be given a pseudonym and stored will be stored away in a secure place with access available only to the researcher and supervisor. Copies of the interview transcripts and the survey data will be kept securely locked up for ten years and then destroyed according to the protocol of the Massey University. If requested a summary of the findings can be provided for you at the end of the project.

Participant rights

You and your child are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide give consent for your child to participate, your child has the right to:

- Choose to withdraw from the study within three weeks of completing the survey or the interview.
- Ask questions about the study at any time.
- Choose not to answer particular questions or ask the tape recorder to be turned off during questions.
- View the transcript of their interview and correct any information they wish not to have included in the project.
- Name not be used in and written information presented or discussion taking place in the study unless they give permission to do so.
- Give access to a summary of the project findings at the end of the study if requested.

Thank you for taking time to consider the participation of your child in this project.

If you have any further questions please contact:

Researcher: Sneha Padmasiri 03 768 2012 or 027 8362395 or snehapadmasiri@gmail.com

Supervisor: Jude MacArthur 027 7415413

Alison Kearney 06 3569099 ext 84416

Yours faithfully,

Sneha Padmasiri.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application ___/___ (*insert application number*). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 84459, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz.

APPENDIX B (IV): Information sheet for the potential CoP members



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
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Working together to teach inclusively: A study on the development of a practice community.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PRINCIPAL AND COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE PARTICIPANTS

(The following is a guideline of the information that will be provided for the practice community participants, and language may be modified further to ease comprehension of the participants)

Researchers Introduction

My name is Sneha Padmasiri. As a part of a Masters in Educational Psychology study program, I am undertaking a small research project at your school to look at teacher communities of practice, and how they can support teachers to meet the learning and social needs of a diverse student group.

Project Description and Invitation

The proposed project involves a qualitative study of the development of a community of practice (COP) for teachers with a common focus on being inclusive of and responsive to the learning needs of all students in a secondary mainstream classroom to support the development of highly effective inclusive practice. A COP involves a group of professionals with varying expertise, sharing learning in an interdependent system, focusing on a common goal that is reproduced in cycles. The study focuses on how the community of practice can contribute to the development of teacher knowledge about teaching, learning and inclusion for students with diverse learning needs and how teachers apply the knowledge gained from the COP in their daily teaching.

I anticipate carrying out this project during term one and two in 2015 and would like to invite you to participate in this research. Please read the information that follows explaining the project carefully before making a decision about participation. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a Consent Form which shows that you understand the study and have chosen to participate.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

My-self the researcher, the principal as a peripheral subject, four teachers with varied experience including a teacher of students with special needs, teacher with a management unit and one teacher aide volunteer will take part in the teacher section of the project. Fifty-one students attending the classes of the teacher volunteers involved in the project will also be invited to take part to voice their experiences of teaching and learning in the classroom.

Project Procedures

I would like to interview you at the beginning and end of the study (approximately ¾ hour each time). You would then participate in a community of practice with five other teachers and my-self. Make sure not to give any personal details such as names or places during the interviews that could to reveal your identity. Together we would attend five meetings of approximately an hour. In the meetings we will look at students' perspectives on school and use these to develop, implement and monitor a plan for teaching approaches that support teachers to teach all students in their classroom well. This includes students with disabilities. The meetings would take place during term one and two in 2015.

Data collected from you in the project will involve interviews, observations in COP meetings and informal conversations. Interviews will be semi-structured with guidelines. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by an assistant employed by the researcher to carry out this task. The assistant employed to transcribe will not be informed of your identity and a pseudonym will be used for each digital audio record. The practice community meetings will be video recorded and key points extracted in minute format. Informal chats will also be recorded with relation to teaching and learning in the classroom. Once transcribed, the recordings will be deleted, the transcriptions and minutes will be provided for you to edit. If you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you have the right to decline to answer particular questions. You also have the right to withdraw from the project during the first three weeks of the start of project without disadvantage. Archival data will also be collected that include the School's Charter and mission statement, school rules, behaviour management policy, professional development schedule, ERO Review, Self-Review and the Board of Trustees' policies.

It is possible that information of sensitive nature such as student names, behaviour of particular students and feelings of failure felt by other COP members will be shared in the COP meetings. Thus information discussed in the COP needs to be kept confidential as it may have harmful effects if shared. If you would like to share particular information such as successful strategies or examples of teaching discussed in the COP make sure you have permission from those concerned to do so.

Data Management

All data collected will be kept confidential and will be stored securely away from the school and researcher's work. Transcriptions will be coded with pseudonyms and the codes will be stored at a separate location to the transcripts. No information arising as a result of the study will be shared with the school management or the work organization of the researcher. The project is a positive one aimed at supporting teachers to teach more effectively. It is not anticipated that there will be negative consequences, however should the safety of students or staff members be a concern for any reason, the researcher will consult first with her supervisor then follow the appropriate procedures required to resolve the issue.

Names of participants and other details that might indicate participant identity will be removed in any written material. In publications and presentations it may be possible for some reader's especially local ones to identify the school due to the researcher's name. It is important to know that complete anonymity and confidentiality cannot be promised in this regard.

At the end of the project any information collected will be stored securely for ten years and destroyed as per the requirements of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

Participant rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer questions.
- Withdraw from the study within three weeks from the start of the study without any disadvantage.
- Ask any questions about the study during anytime.
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- Edit own transcripts of interview.
- Withdraw information in the transcripts or written material.
- Ask the recorder to be turned off during certain parts of the interviews or practice community meetings.
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher.

Thank you for taking time to read the information and considering participation in the project.

If you have any further questions please contact:

Researcher: Sneha Padmasiri 03 768 2012 or 027 8362395 or snehapadmasiri@gmail.com
 Supervisor: Jude MacArthur 027 7415413
 Alison Kearney 06 3569099 ext 84416

Yours faithfully,

Sneha Padmasiri.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application __/__ (*insert application number*). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 84459, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz.

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C (I): Student consent form for the survey or the interview



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STUDENT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet, and Sneha has answered my questions about taking part in the project.

I understand what the project is about.

I am happy to be in the project.

I know my rights and I know I can ask questions about the project.

I can change my mind about wanting to take part in the study within three weeks after completing the survey or interview.

Signature:

Date:

.....

**Name and
 Class**

.....

APPENDIX C (II): Consent form for parents of student participants



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PARENT CONSENT FORM

I understand the details of the project. The questions I had about taking part were explained to me by the researcher or I found the information I needed to know before giving consent for my child to take part by reading the Information Sheet.

I am happy for my child to be in the project.

I know my rights involving my child in the study, I know I can ask questions about the project and can withdraw my child from participation anytime during the project.

Signature:

.....

Date:

.....

Name of parent:

.....

Name and class of student:

.....

APPENDIX C (III): Consent form for the CoP participants and principal



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COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE PARTICIPANT/PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.

My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I know that I have the right to remove myself from the study within the first three weeks from the start without any disadvantage.

I will keep information discussed in the COP confidential.

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name – printed:

.....

APPENDIX D: Interview Schedule Guidelines

APPENDIX D (I): Student interview

STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE GUIDELINE

The following interview questions are a guide only. The interviews will be semi-structured, additional questions may be asked in response to points that come up during the interview and language of the questions may be modified further for easy comprehension of the student participants.

Before the start of the interviewing process for students will be read the information sheet verbally to ensure they understand the procedures and requirements of the project. The script used will be similar to the one below.

Thank you for volunteering to take part in the study. I hope you have read/listened to the Information Sheet and understand what the project involves. I am going to ask you some questions about your school and the learning that happens in your classroom. I am going to record your answers on a tape, so I can remember what you say. I am also going to talk to some of your teachers, teacher aides, principal and some other students in your class. I will use the information collected to talk to your teachers about how yourself and other students taking part in the study feel about their teaching and learning. I will then write a report which will help improve learning for all students in the classroom. If you decide to do the interview I will know who you are and the answers you give. But I will not share your answers in a way that teachers can find out who you are. I will give you the information you gave in the interview to read or read your answers back to you to make sure you are happy with what I have written down. If you are not happy to talk to me now we can arrange another time. If you do not want to talk to me by yourself you can bring an adult or a friend to support you. Are you happy to talk to me now?

Thank you for volunteering to take part in the study. I hope you have read the Information Sheet and understand what the project involves. I am going to ask you some questions about your school and the learning that happens in your classroom. I am also going to talk to some of your teachers, teacher aides, principal and some other students in your class. I will use the information collected to write a report which will help improve learning for all students in the classroom. I am going to record your answers, so I can remember what you say. If you are not happy to talk to me now we can arrange another time. If you do not want to talk to me by yourself you can bring an adult or a friend to support you. Are you happy to talk to me now?

STUDENT INTERVIEW PRIOR TO THE STUDY

1. What are the good things done in your classes that help you learn?
2. What needs to be changed to help you learn better in class?
3. What stops you from learning in class? What do you do and how do you behave when you don't like or don't understand work given in class? How do adults and students react to your behaviour? Give examples.
4. How do you feel about getting work that is different to others or working in a different place to other students? Can you give examples of how you felt when this has happened or when you have seen this happen?
5. Tell me about your favourite class. Why do you like the class? How does this class and the teacher help you learn? (The participant may be asked to elaborate on their answer under the following themes and give examples).
 - The relationships (teacher, student and student, student)
 - The role and responsibilities of those present in class (teacher, teacher aides and students) in teaching, learning and managing behaviour.
 - The work.
 - The learning environment.

STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE POST-STUDY

1. What are the good things done in your classes that help you learn?
2. What needs to be changed to help you learn better in class?
3. What stops you from learning in class? What do you do and how do you behave when you don't like or don't understand work given in class? How do adults and students react to your behaviour? Give examples.

4. How do you feel about getting work that is different to others or working in a different place to other students? Can you give examples of how you felt when this has happened or when you have seen this happen?
5. Tell me about your favourite class. Why do you like the class? How does this class and the teacher help you learn? (The participant may be asked to elaborate on their answer under the following themes and give examples).
 - The relationships (teacher, student and student, student)
 - The role and responsibilities of those present in class (teacher, teacher aides and students) in teaching, learning and managing behaviour.
 - The work.
 - The learning environment.
6. From the last time I spoke to you what sorts of things have changed in your classrooms?

APPENDIX D (II): Teacher interview

TEACHER/PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

The following interview questions are a guide only. The interviews will be semi-structured and additional questions may be added in response to points that come up during the interview. The same interview schedule will be used for the practice community participants as well as the principal.

TEACHER/PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE PRIOR TO THE STUDY

1. Tell me about your background in teaching and how you came into the profession?
2. What do you view to be the purpose of education? How did this the view develop and who/what influenced it?
3. How does your view compare to the view of the students, other staff, school and parents view of the purpose of education?
4. As a teacher what do you perceive to be your role and responsibility in the teaching and learning of all students? What do the school, parents and students expect from you in this role? Are these expectations different to what you see as your role?
5. Can you tell me how you carry out your role and responsibilities as a teacher of all students? Give examples from your practice.
6. What do you see as the roles of the teacher aide, SEA, SENCO and principal in educating students with diverse needs? Give examples of how you use them to assist you in your teaching practice.
7. Tell me about what you understand inclusion to be? Describe what it should look like in the classroom and in the school grounds? What does it mean to you to teach inclusively?
8. Tell me about how you teach so that all students are participating and learning in your classroom? Can you give examples of this?
 - a. How do you plan and attend to diverse learning needs in your classroom tasks?
 - b. How do you make the classroom environment or the culture responsive to the needs of all students?
 - c. How do you promote good relationships with/between students with diverse learning needs in your classroom?
 - d. What are the things that make it difficult for you to reach and teach every student in your classroom?
9. How does your inclusive practice compare to the views, values, goals and actions of management and fellow colleagues at your school?
10. How do you use student perspectives on teaching and learning to inform your teaching practice? Give examples.
11. What are the implications for students when teaching inclusively (advantages and disadvantages)? What are the implications for you as the teacher (advantages and disadvantages)? Give examples.
12. What are the barriers that you have come across when teaching inclusively? Can you give examples? How have you worked to overcome these?
13. How prepared do you feel to teach inclusively? Who/what prepared you? Who supports you within the school to understand and practice inclusion? How is this done? What would you like to change in order to be more inclusive in your teaching? Give examples.
14. Imagine you are informed that three new students are to be placed in your class next term. One who has a significant learning challenges, one student who was placed in the gifted and talented programme at their previous school, and one student who is reported to be 'average'. How do you feel about each student coming to your class, how would you prepare, what could be the challenges associated and how would you address these in your classroom planning and practice? Who would you ask for support? You may use examples from past experience to answer this question.

TEACHER AND PRINCLPAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE POST-STUDY

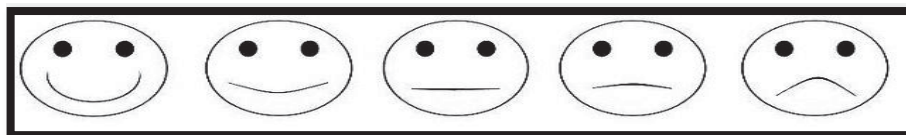
1. What were the positives/benefits about being involved in this study?
2. What did you learn about inclusion?
3. Now that you have been involved in the study do you think differently about how to include students with different learning needs in the classroom? Or how has being involved in the study affirmed what you already know about inclusion?
4. How will what you learned change the way you teach students in the future?
5. What were the difficulties you faced when carrying out the goals you set for your students as a result of the study?
6. What would you change about the study?

APPENDIX E: Student Survey

Class

STUDENT SURVEY

Please answer the questions in this survey as honestly as possible by circling the smiley face. The key below tells you what each smiley face means.



Agree a lot Agree a little I'm in the middle Disagree a little Disagree a lot

1. My teachers like me.



2. The teachers help everyone.



3. The teacher aide helps everyone.



4. I feel safe in the classroom.



5. I feel I am a part of my classes.



6. Everyone in the class is respected regardless of ability or background.



7. The students, teachers and teacher aides get on well together.



8. Teachers use many ways to teach.



9. Teachers use technology to teach.



10. We use many ways to learn in class.



11. We use technology to learn.



12. I learn in class.



13. Things taught in class are interesting.



14. Things taught in class are important to me.



15. I get to share the things I already know about a topic in class.



16. The work I do in class makes me feel good.



17. I can do the work given in class.



18. I get to pick activities, how I record and present work.



19. The teacher lets me have more time to finish work when I need it.



20. Teachers give different activities to different students.



21. I understand the language the teacher uses.



22. The teachers know how I like to learn.



23. The teachers lets me know how well I did in my work and how I can improve.



24. I get to know and work with a lot of students in my classes.



25. We learn in many different places and spaces.



26. My teachers praise me for doing class work.



27. My teachers tell me off a lot for being misbehaving.



28. My teachers tell me off a lot for not doing my class work.



29. Teachers know how to stop students from misbehaving in class.



30. The environment in the classroom helps me learn.



The above survey questions are adapted from the "Inclusion Index: My school survey" (Booth & Aniscom, 2011)

APPENDIX F: Authority for the release of transcripts for student and teacher interviews.



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AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview(s) conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature:

Date:

Full Name – printed

APPENDIX G: Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement



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FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I understand that some details discussed in the community of practice may be of sensitive nature that involve students and staff and can be harmful if shared.

I agree not to disclose anything discussed in the Focus Group.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name – printed

.....

APPENDIX H: Transcribers Confidentiality Agreement



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TRANSCRIBER’S CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I (Full Name – printed) agree to transcribe the recordings provided to me.

I agree to keep confidential all the information provided to me.

I will not make any copies of the transcripts or keep any record of them, other than those required for the project.

Signature:

.....

Date:

.....

APPENDIX I: Timetable for the study

Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
Feb 2	3	4 Initial teacher meeting 4.00-4.30pm to inform about study	5 Information letters for parents about the study sent home	6
9	10	11	12 Parent meeting in Library 5.00-5.30pm	13 Researcher speaks to students about the project and hands out information sheets to read and decide to take part
16 Students are given parent, student consent forms and surveys to return to the office throughout the week.	17 Pre-study student interviews	18	19	20 Survey collection
23	24	25	26	27
March 2 Teacher interviews	3	4	5	6
9	10 First CoP teacher meeting 3.30-4.30pm	11	12	13
16	17	18	19	20
23	24	25	26 Second CoP teacher meeting 3.30-4.30pm	27
30	31	1	2	3
Term 1 Holidays				
Term 2 April 20	21	22	23 Third CoP teacher meeting 3.30-4.30pm	24
27	28	29	30	1
May 4	5	6	7	8
11	12	13	14	15

18	19	20	21	22
25	26	27	28 Fourth CoP teacher meeting 3.30-4.30pm	29
June 1 Post-study student surveys	2	3	4	5
8 Post study-student interviews	9	10	11	12
15	16	17	18 Fifth and final CoP teacher meeting 3.30-4.30pm	19
22 Post-study teacher interviews	23	24	25	26
29	30	1	2	3
Term 2 Holidays				