Critical Engagement with Insider Accounts of Inclusive Schooling

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
2014
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Abstract

This thesis is based on the understanding that efforts to develop inclusive schooling should not be undertaken only at the technical and professional levels, but critically—from the inside, incorporating the perspectives of young people whose subjecthoods render them at risk of marginalisation. This body of work makes two contributions to disability studies in education: a reorientation of the field of disability scholarship that is centred on insider perspectives, and an insight into the nature of school inclusion as it is experienced daily by research participants. This thesis then is as much offering a possible research model for use in disability studies in education, as well as presenting a set of empirical exemplars of the type of readings of inclusive education that the methodology can achieve.

The methodological approach employed in this thesis aims to push disability studies in education forward beyond the limited scope of materialist models of disability. It relies on poststructural representation, the Foucauldian conception of subjectivity, and constructivist grounded theory to critically explore how discursive practices within (and around) secondary schools shape "included" disabled subjects. This work moves away from technical rationality about inclusive schooling by providing an opportunity to understand the entangled, multiple, and often contradictory discourses that comprise day-to-day experiences of inclusion from the perspectives of young people with impairments in different country contexts.

The multi-voiced texts produced from the data of this thesis provide an account that illustrates the unsteady nature of inclusive education for students who receive specialist support. Through narrative experiments (Gough, 2010), this work offers the accounts of insiders—those of secondary students with impairments in inclusive schools in Australia and Spain, and those of the researcher in reflection on his schooling and in post school situations. Along with the researcher, the five young people (aged 13-17 years) who participated in the Australian phase of the project each had impaired vision, and attended one setting in the State of Queensland. Twenty-three young people from six different schools in the Spanish cities of Madrid and Salamanca (aged 12-19 years) also participated in the project—among them, diagnoses of sensory, intellectual, developmental and physical impairments. Each participated in either individual or focus group interviews.

Results of the Australian phase of this research are presented through the construction of a theory grounded in data, and the implications of the actions of paraprofessionals and class teachers on student inclusion are also explored in more detail: namely their practices that either inhibited or facilitated student inclusion. Personal experiences of the researcher are provided as an addendum to the theory, forming an uncomfortable reflexivity (Pillow, 2003) from which his ideology as a scholar practicing in the field of disability studies in education draws. Collective experiences of both the researcher and student participants form the bases of further analysis of excluded subjectivities against education and United Nations policy. The data from the Spanish phase of this research are interpreted through a situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) that incorporates the students' day-to-day experiences of inclusion along with the hurried policy change regime that accompanies severe austerity measures currently plaguing the country. Through this analysis, it becomes apparent that a host of routine discursive practices within the schools were constitutive of the included subjects—the students; although this was under threat by the students' distance from normalcy and the removal of progressive inclusive policy.

The thesis advocates a negotiation of power and truth in inclusive education research, urging—
through engagement with students' perspectives, a redeployment of resources away from special education traditions. Explanations of how the subjectivities of young people with special education support are formed is an approach to reconsider the role of diversity in inclusive schools.

Acknowledgements

The production of this text has benefited much from the support—both hands on and in kind—from a number of irreplaceable mentors. First and foremost I want to thank the young people in the research settings who generously gave their time, expressed their opinions and broadened my understanding of inclusive education. My voice alone would be drowned out, but their voices unequivocally support the inclusion cause. Associate Professor Julianne Moss and Dr Joanne O'Mara provided me enormous support by shaping my critical thinking, and helping me champion various causes along the way for which I warmly thank them. I also thank Dr Cecilia Simón and Dr Gerardo Echeita from the Autonomous University of Madrid for their sustained support during fieldwork, the provision of a home away from home while spending time in Spain and giving me the chance to participate in collegiate conversations throughout.

The interruptions made in this work are both comfortable and uncomfortable, as I have studied throughout this period matters that concern me directly both personally and professionally. The text owes much to the support of my partner Carolina Obra Madrid, who has put up with a lot of distractions as we have circulated between Australia and Spain throughout the study. My eternal thanks must also go to my mother Jennifer—whose love and support has been a constant I couldn't do without. To my Uncle Desmond and god–mother of sorts Sherrie Cooke, both who flew the supportive flag for me at the beginning of my PhD but sadly succumbed to cancer in 2013. I try to draw on your strength and determination. Special thanks to good friends and colleagues from the Disability Studies and Educational Research community who share this academic journey and with whom I have had many an instructive conversation. Your input has been invaluable. Thanks to must go to William Blakeley, for his keen eye for editing the manuscripts that form this body of work. This work would not be possible without the contribution of all of you, for which I am sincerely grateful.
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Foreword

The work forming the majority of this thesis is a collection of journal papers which have been prepared for publication, and with the exception of one that is still under review, are in circulation. In all cases I am the first and only author, and I have had the largest single contribution to the development of the work, despite receiving copious relevant and editorial assistance and guidance from Joanne O'Mara and Julianne Moss. I worked on all aspects of each of the papers, including: concept creation, concept development, research methodology, analysis and writing.

While the positive valences of a doctorate by publication are considerable for a scholar attempting to secure traction in any given academic field, there is a danger that the reader of this particular body of work might misinterpret its intended coherency. I have therefore prepared this foreword as a walk through—an orientation as to what the reader might expect when proceeding through this thesis. I expand on the current outline with a more detailed rationale in the first chapter.

My objective in undertaking this project was simple. Motivated-based on personal experiences to capture insider perspectives, I wanted to learn how secondary students with special educational needs regarded the present conditions of their inclusion in schools, and how they envisaged its prospects for the future. Although a large majority of this work takes place in the Australian context, data were also collected in Spain—affording the study a useful counterpoint for comparative analysis. In conversational interviews in both country contexts aimed at gathering rich data (Charmaz, 2006), I invited the student participants to discuss their experiences with teachers, resources, peers, support personnel, school administrators, parents, community members and so on. My plan was to produce a distinctive narrative that would illustrate the positive and not-so-positive characteristics of the young people's experiences of inclusive schooling.

At the same time, I was unconvinced that existing disability theory could amply facilitate adequate explanations of the experiences of these particular insiders. I was compelled instead toward grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), for its methodical approach to data collection and analysis; but also for its facility for the use of empirical data—the voices of participants as the foundation to abstracted findings.

I turn to critical disability studies and poststructuralism for their "incitement to discourse" (Allan, 1999, p. 124) through the examination of the power relations and ethics that govern (Lather, 2013); the political domains that influence (Ball, 2013); the languages that describe (St Pierre, 2004); and the subjectivities that are constituted (Foucault, 1982) of "included" disabled students. Together these investigative tools comprise the methodology that I have developed for use in the field of disability studies in education, which I discuss—and sparingly demonstrate its application in Chapter Two. In the remainder of the thesis, I apply the methodology. I offer throughout an illustration of a particular theme: the undercurrent of precariousness that persists around inclusion as it is experienced by research participants—among whom I count myself as the researcher. In order of chapters, I apply the methodology to the students' experiences in an Australian secondary school (Chapter Three) in which they felt compelled to take particular measures to construct their own inclusion; and then to their involvement with paraprofessional support (Chapter Four) and inclusive teacher pedagogy (Chapter Five). I then turn the analytical lens around—examining the same undercurrent of uncertainty that characterised my own experiences of inclusion (Chapter Six) through a narrative of schooling, higher education, when seeking employment and interacting with some family members. I aim to provide more clarity by way of this latter chapter as to how my ideology is formed, and how it influences my research priorities and objectives.
The following two chapters are given to shared experiences, mine fuelling particular
channels of inquiry, and those of participants of the Australian phase of the study, to expand
specific themes. In Chapter Seven I demonstrate the alienating legacy of school placement
and the transport options made available to us—me at the end of the last century, and
students in the beginning of the current one. I also spend some time in this chapter to begin
to theorise the relationship formed between a researcher and participants who share much in
common. I then apply the methodology to policy enactment analysis (Chapter Eight) by
examining how specific experiences of marginalisation both within and post compulsory
school reflect neoliberalism in the policy discourses of national and international disability
rights legislation.

As a useful contrast to the work explored in Chapters Three to Eight, in Chapter Nine I
present an overview of students’ experiences from data collected in the Spanish phase of
this research. This particular aspect of the investigation works through the features of
schooling that students considered significant to their inclusion, against the backdrop of
austerity that was gripping Spain in 2013.

The project culminates in a lengthy final chapter. Here I discuss the theoretical
underpinnings that led me to formulate the research design, and synthesise the constituted
"included subjectivities" of participants against virtues of normalcy that appeared as
significant findings in both country contexts in different ways. I also discuss the implications
of educational theories, policies and practices on inclusion, by examining the ways in which
inclusive schooling might benefit from a reorientation of educational discourse by way of
governmentality (Foucault, 1991). Specifically this discussion includes—but is not limited to
student agency, accessible resources and pedagogical techniques, supportive friendships and
inclusive school cultures and policy discourses—characteristics of the underlying theme of
ambiguous inclusion that appeared relevant to the storyline of this research.

It may be evident that this work is incomplete. Indeed, all but one paper that comprises each
chapter had been published at the time of submission; the remaining chapter will likely be
modified when returned from the reviewers. Further analysis is also anticipated, which will
be tendered for peer review in similar publications. Following the design of the current
project, this work will trace the theoretical, personal and political features that characterise
inclusive schooling for participants across both phases of research.

The papers that comprise this thesis are as follows:

students: Grounding disability studies in education in embodied experience.
International Journal of Research and Method in Education. iFirst publication,
DOI:10.1080/1743727X.2014.946497.

Whitburn, B. (2014). Accessibility and autonomy preconditions to “our” inclusion: A
grounded theory study of the experiences of secondary students with vision

Whitburn, B. (2013). The Dissection of Paraprofessional Support in Inclusive Education:
‘You're in Mainstream With a Chaperone’. Australasian Journal of Special Education,
37(2) 147-161.


# Abbreviations and acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AD/HD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDS/CDT</td>
<td>Critical disability studies/critical disability theory. The academic arm of disability rights activism that comes from numerous theoretical directions (e.g. feminism, intersectionality, poststructuralism, critical race theory, crip theory, to name a few) to reach for full inclusion into multifarious social systems (Devlin &amp; Pothier, 2006; Goodley, 2011; Meekosha &amp; Shuttleworth, 2009; Shilldrick, 2012).</td>
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<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Cerebral palsy</td>
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<td>DS</td>
<td>Down syndrome</td>
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<td>DSE</td>
<td>Disability studies in education. The application of disability studies to the educational sphere, where the objective is to seek more inclusive educational systems (Bagliari, Connor, Valle &amp; Gallagher, 2011; Moore &amp; Slee, 2012).</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>Individual education plan</td>
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<td>II</td>
<td>Intellectual impairment.</td>
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<td>PDD</td>
<td>Pervasive developmental disorder</td>
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<td>SEP</td>
<td>Special education program</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Vision impairment</td>
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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is based on the understanding that efforts to research and develop inclusive schooling should not be undertaken only at the technical and professional levels, but critically—from the inside, incorporating the perspectives of young people whose subjecthoods render them at risk of marginalisation. For the past two decades, research in disability studies has identified some of the mechanisms of school exclusion. However, diversity persistently troubles inclusive schooling (Hodkinson 2012; Michalko, 2008), and the ontological commitment of disability scholarship to inclusion must be reoriented to meet the complexities of life in postmodern times (Shildrick, 2012).

In order to make material gains for students with disabilities by way of their increased inclusion in schools, it is just as important to "investigate more deeply what it is that continues to impede the evolution of equitable conditions of possibility" (Shildrick, 2012, p. 31). Researching why—by what discursive means—normativity functions in a way that excludes people with disabilities characterises a social science that critiques entrenched prejudices at work rather than simply finding gaps in structures into which they can be materially "included". This work also pushes disability scholarship beyond benign implicitness, into critical disability studies (CDS/CDT), a discipline of scholarship that supports disability advocacy.

A series of journal papers comprises this thesis that were written and submitted for publication to a number of peer-reviewed journals during my doctoral candidature at Deakin University from 2011-2014. They examine theoretical, political and personal landscapes of inclusive education discourse and are each framed in principles of DSE. These papers are centred on a study that I conducted in two phases: a small-scale project in a secondary school in the Australian state of Queensland, and a further expanse of the study in six inclusive secondary schools in the Spanish cities of Madrid and Salamanca. The purpose of the research was to explore and build theory on how young people who receive special educational support experience inclusive schooling in different contexts. I conducted the Australian phase of this project for my Masters research in 2010, to which I have spent subsequent time on analysis during my doctoral research. Ethical clearance was obtained for the first phase of the study from the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee in March 2010 (Protocol Number: EBL/72/09/HREC), and the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee for the second phase in July 2012 (Protocol Number: 2012-154).

My involvement in this discipline of scholarship emanates from my experiences as a person with severe vision impairment (VI) that has a legal classification of blindness. I was educated in so-called "inclusive" schools in the 1980s and 1990s in Queensland Australia, in which special education interventions always overshadowed my inclusion. I have also witnessed the coercive powers of the special education tradition when training and working as an educator at the secondary level. The students with VI who I was teaching—and I, were both pigeonholed as being from the special needs area of the school. Similarly, I have been "pleasantly" turned away from numerous job interviews on the way through the door—both in paid and volunteer sectors when would-be employers learned of my impairment. Any employment that I have been able to secure in Australia has only ever been tenuous—either unskilled, or short-term
contracts. All of this has occurred despite the mandate for equality in the Disability Discrimination Act (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992) and various other state, federal and international policies that legally bind organisations to the provision of non-discriminatory environments and practices to which Australia idealistically subscribes.

In preparing for my first trip overseas in 2004, I equipped myself with the customary UK Working Holiday Visa as young Australians were inclined to do at the time. I was struck by certain differences across Europe concerning the manner with which societies accepted and facilitated the inclusion of diversity. While I met the same challenges in the UK as I had done at home with respect to searching for work, Spain offered me a different perspective. Not seeking work initially, but intending to study, I was able to enrol in a language school in the Spanish capital, which supportively had the textbook transcribed into braille for me. The instructors utilised pedagogical strategies that enhanced my inclusion in lessons, and I learned the language comparatively well with my peer - developing a strong level of its use in a short time.

I never used my Working Holiday Visa in the UK, but instead easily attained employment as an English teacher in Spain, where I worked for over three years for multiple language academies. For the most part, any limitations brought on by my lack of functional vision were always considered minor; I was always provided the resources in accessible format—the same as my colleagues and I made a good living.

These experiences have led me to educational research. On one hand I was eager to find out how the inclusive experience might have changed in the 21st century in Australia for secondary students with impairments, while at the same time I was interested to learn how inclusive schooling worked in Spain, on the basis that disability appeared to be far less the bigger deal in Spanish society than it did at home. This thesis is a personal journey in which I draw on an uncomfortable reflexivity (Pillow, 2003) to contribute to the production of meaning about students' experiences of inclusive schooling in both country contexts.

I proclaim here an ideology that propels me toward critical engagement with data by drawing on poststructural theory for its productive analytical potential. However, it is clear in this body of work that I was not always attentive to the utility of poststructural theories. I have maintained an unremitting inclusionist stance, however I have at times been clearly short-changed on the post-positivist analytical tools offered by more traditional grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) that I was employing to scrutinise research data.

While I am still at odds with the impasse that occurs between including young people with disabilities into "regular" schools and needs-specific skill sets—such as Braille in my case, I have found the extant array of tools and techniques for critically analysing the nuances of inclusive education and disability experience inadequate. The bipolarity between the medical versus the social model of disability insinuates an inexorable skirmish that objectifies people with disabilities in ways that do not fittingly explain personal experiences. I realised the analytical possibilities afforded by critical disability studies (CDS) in conjunction with constructivist grounded and poststructural theories when I conducted later work (chapters Two, Six, Seven, Eight and Nine). This body of work is as much a slide show of the learning I have undertaken and grown into as a researcher, besides the presentation of a problem or series of problems that include research design, data collection, analysis and findings.
Original contributions to knowledge

This research is exploratory hence it attends to a broad question: How do secondary students who receive special educational support experience inclusive schooling? To respond to this question I offer two principal contributions to the field. First, a methodological reorientation of DSE that is centred on insider perspectives. This yields insights which form the basis for my second contribution to the field: an illustration of the precariousness of school inclusion as it is experienced by research participants—a revelation that provides a useful point of departure from which to rethink theoretical, political and practical approaches to inclusive schooling.

A reorientation of DSE methodology

Inclusive education research with specific regard to disability classically takes a rational/technical explanation to "accommodation" rather than seeking solutions in the sociocultural environments of schools. Through an engagement with poststructural theory, I problematise how disability is positioned both in research and in schools—opening an aperture through which to "think otherwise" (Ball, 2006, p. 5) about the construction of difference and its implications for inclusive education.

The methodological move that I offer DSE is aligned with what Lather (2010, 2013) calls Methodology-21, a social science that following Foucault, directs the focus of analysis onto ethics and power. Methodology-21 refers to an approach to the production of different knowledge by different means while at the same time it is imbued with a transformative agenda (Lather, 2013). It works in specific contexts with practical deliberation (Lather, 2010). It can start with (though is not limited to) poststructural investigations of language, lived experience and subjectivity (St Pierre, 2004).

When operationalized in the school setting, poststructural inquiry can be put to work to highlight the discourses of educational inclusion while at the same time pushing to "disrupt the construction of centre from which exclusion derives" (Graham & Slee, 2008, p. 279). Moreover, as Shildrick (2012) affirms, "given that none of us stand outside the discursive conventions of our specific time and place" (p. 34), the task of so doing might best be served by insiders - those positioned within different manifestations of education who can demonstrate the bodily effects of marginalization via their experiences. This is not limited to research participants, but also includes the researcher whose deployment of an awkward reflexivity is important to the production of knowledge (Pillow, 2003).

This research works through a reordering of the objects of inquiry; it provides a space in which "participants of the inclusion struggle … [operate as] practical philosophers, experimenting with and experiencing inclusion" (Allan, 2008, p. 102). Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) are drawn on for their facility of theory production on the conditions of inclusive schooling that is grounded—importantly in participants' tangible experiences.

The precariousness of school inclusion

Through the chosen methodology, I offer an insight into the precariousness of school inclusion as it is experienced by participants. The discursive and material production of disability in its multiple linguistic, embodied and affective forms are explored in
relation to the broader political and cultural domains of inclusive schooling that might ordinarily be overlooked as contributory or perpetual of exclusion. A pejorative metanarrative is generally ascribed to people with disabilities (Bolt, 2012)—propagated by the continued dominance of the expertise-driven medical model of disability (Erevelles, 2011; Mertens, Sullivan and Stace, 2011; Oliver, 2009; Shildrick, 2012; Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009). Youdell (2006) affirms that educational and social discrimination hinges upon identity categories. The subjectivities of people with disabilities are shaped via ensuing constitutive forces at play across multifarious discourses, and in schools, students so categorised tend to be marginalised from general education programs (Allan, 1999, 2008; Moore & Slee, 2012; Slee, 2011; Youdell, 2006).

The action itself of carrying out research that foregrounds the opinions of young people with impairments in schools is noteworthy. The students who participated in the project were at first reticent to express themselves in interviews, perhaps because, as Allan (1999) observes, young people's voices have generally been subsidiary to the professional discourse. Some outwardly expressed surprise at being on one hand asked for their views, and on the other to reflect on their experiences and feelings. Similarly to McLeod and Yates' (2006) documented experiences of conducting student-centred research, some participants also relished that I sought their views and not those of their teachers. By undoing the traditional power structures that often occur through educational inquiry, this research provides an opportunity to gain an understanding as to how "being included" as a young person with a potentially anomalous embodiment is experienced.

Throughout this thesis, I describe the unsettling nature of the young people's experiences as well as my own, which leads to an underlying disquiet that lingers around our collective sense of inclusion. I present how this occurs in different contexts, and I compare these experiences against written ideological policy such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006).

Poststructural theory enables this work to critically investigate the subjectivities of insiders via their experiences. The notion of subjectivity for Foucault (1982) comprises kaleidoscopic power relations that not only control subjects, but also tie them to their own identities. Individuals are therefore passively inscribed into intersecting discourses, while also having their own agentic powers within the limits of their subjectivation. “Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). The material and discursive forces that operate in schools have constitutive powers of how students' subjectivities are formed (Allan, 1999, 2008; Ball, 2013; Erevelles, 2011; Hojgaard & Sondergaard, 2011; Laws & Davies, 2000; Youdell, 2006). This is no less the case for students with disabilities. After learning how their subjectivities are formed—as either included or excluded students—then is to dismantle the discursive powers at play that legitimise marginalisation.

**Thesis Design**

Chapters Two through Nine consist of a preamble and a paper that had either been published or was under review at the time of thesis submission. The preamble of each chapter describes how the paper contributes to the research project via a brief
explanation of its purpose, design, findings and impact. The thesis concludes with a synthesis of the important issues that emerge from the chapters—concentrating on the theoretical, political and personal characteristics of schooling systems that impact the project of inclusion.

In Chapter Two I detail the methodology that I have developed within the intersection of critical disability studies and inclusive education research. The methodology is simultaneously theoretical, political and personal. It relies on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) for both its open approach to data collection and analysis, informed by poststructural theory and findings are represented through narratives (Gough, 2010). In this chapter I point out the shortcomings of the social model of disability for use in the education sphere, and instead turn to poststructural engagement with embodied experiences as a starting point from which to examine inclusive schooling. In this chapter I offer two snapshots of data that I have collected and analysed using this methodology in inclusive secondary schools in Australia and Spain. I also briefly compare findings via an examination of the subjectivated positions of the participants in both country contexts.

In Chapter Three I present a detailed analysis of the Australian phase of this research. Five secondary students with vision impairment (VI) participate in this project, aged between 13-17 years. More than twenty hours of interview data were recorded in both individual and focus group configurations that includes a final discussion in which they participated in data analysis. In this chapter I also include my own voice as an insider researcher. I outline my position and vicinity to participants drawing on my own experiences of inclusive schooling in the development of the study. I frame this work using Strauss and Corbin's contribution to grounded theory (1990), which facilitates data collection and analysis through a prescriptive series of open, axial and selective coding. I develop a theoretical interpretation of the young people's experiences of—and aspirations for—inclusive schooling that form the core categories of the theory, which are either supported or offset by the actions of members of the school including teachers, support staff, peers and the participants themselves. In the chapter I present an explanation of these actions as they emerged as conceptual components of the central theoretical explanation of the young people's experiences.

In Chapter Four I expand on two of the principal theoretical categories presented in the preceding chapter that impacted the young people's experiences of inclusion: Light and Heavy Paraprofessional Support. I position paraprofessional support within the complexities of the inclusive schooling discourse, and demonstrate how the inclusion of research participants was directly affected both academically and socially by the different roles of educators and support staff. While I define the support roles as both facilitative and inhibitive of inclusion, I point out that these are not opposite binaries, but are implicated within the cultural fabric of the school that appears to be wary of the students' diversities.

These two chapters illustrate the precariousness of research participants' inclusion via their experiences. Both of these contributions suggest that much of the underlying disquiet that lingers around the participants' inclusion in the school is caused through the actions of members of the school community (including their own). These chapters also demonstrate the beginning of the transformation I have taken in the analysis of data, as I move from a dualistic understanding of inclusive schooling to a more critically sharpened and multilayered one.
By way of contrast, in Chapter Five I present a number of inclusive pedagogical practices in use by some class teachers that some research participants identified. This again is a more detailed analysis of one of the emergent conceptual categories of this research, Appropriately Adapted Pedagogy (Chapter Three). This work is a demonstration of the important roles of general educators in inclusive schooling. The strategies detailed in this chapter facilitated the participants to access their work independently, and blend into the social environment of their classes. In this chapter I also emphasise the significance of students' opinions in school improvement, as they provide simple, useful suggestions that are not complicated for teachers to implement into their practices, and that have the added advantage of moving away from special education traditions.

In the following four chapters, I demonstrate the practical and theoretical impact of the methodology discussed in Chapter Two. I apply the research to personal and shared experiences, to policy and to a second phase of data collection with young people who attend inclusive schools in Spain.

I present an essay in Chapter Six which is based on my own experiences subsequent to losing my vision in the 1980s. I explore inclusion through schooling, higher education, the job search and when interacting with some family members. This is an addendum to my research with the student participants of the Australian phase of this project.

Drawing on Foucault's concept of normalisation (1977) together with Derrida's neologism of hauntology (1994), I explore how medical expertism championed the application of a special stamp with indelible ink to me—the diagnosed child—which enabled/enables my differences to be outwardly evident. Inclusion, for those so imprinted, is haunted. In this chapter I describe how these experiences underpin my ideology as a scholar working in the field of DSE. In so doing, I also discuss the significance of personal experience to the field of disability scholarship.

On a similar thread, in Chapter Seven I offer an account of shared experiences of both myself as the researcher and participants of the Australian phase of this research. Together we formed a trans-identity research alliance (Slee, 2011) insomuch as we shared a common familiarity with being one of few students with VI who attended an inclusive secondary school. Following principles of CDS, I present evidence in this chapter that illustrates the disaffecting legacy left to participants via the school placement and the transport options made available to us under the umbrella of special education policy categorisation. I also begin to map theoretically the research alliance formed throughout this project using Foucault's analysis of subjectivity (1982) and Bourdieu's Understanding of reflexive interviewing (1998).

In Chapter Eight, I direct CDS onto the analysis of policy enactment in the Australian context. I include a narrative that details the experiences of student participants from the Australian phase of this project of school "inclusion" that consist of social, pedagogical and policy categorisation. I also discuss my own fragmented experiences post-school in the job market. I present an analysis that draws on these experiences to demonstrate how notions of collective indifference toward people with disabilities (Slee, 2011) pervade the policy discourses of national and international disability legislation, specifically the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), and the Australian Disability Standards for education (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2005).
I argue in this Chapter that these public policy documents are implicated in their own ineffectiveness because of the linguistic othering that they confer onto people with disabilities, which reflects the hegemony of neoliberalism. I point out that despite legislating for greater inclusion of people with disabilities across diverse facets of social life, inclusion as a right is only attended to with arbitrary ideology. In the analysis, the narrative reflects a reality of voices that express important accounts of how inclusive discourse occurs in school and in the job market in spite of the policies in their current forms. It is this chapter that sets the groundwork for my study in Spain (Chapter Nine). As I discuss, having unsuccessfully sought work in Australia, I travel to the Mediterranean country and find few barriers to my gaining employment.

In Chapter Nine, I present an analysis of the Spanish phase of this research, the second country where data were generated. Twenty-three secondary students who received special educational support participated in this project, and they were invited to discuss their experiences of schooling in face-to-face interviews. Using Clarke's regeneration of grounded theory, which she terms “situational analysis” (2005), I analyse participants' subjectivities as "included" students and their aspirations for the future, alongside the austere measures that are currently gripping the country that include dramatic education policy change. For most of the young people, school inclusion was largely positive, though manifestly precarious as a result.

In Chapter Ten I offer a conclusion by way of a final narrative. It is arranged into four sections that pertain to the theoretical, practical and policy implications of inclusive education. In the first section I focus on the theoretical foundations of the design of this project by drawing on the limitations embedded within disability theory, and offer a renegotiated methodological approach in the field of inclusive schooling. In the second section I synthesise the constituted "included" subjectivities of participants through the storyline of this project, with a focus on a major theme of significance to them—normalcy. This discussion includes the particular virtues that were taken up in schools that were influential of the students’ subjectivities.

In the third section I draw on the undercurrent of uncertainty that characterises inclusive education for participants of this work through the virtues that they believed were important to their schools. I use these findings to examine the ways in which schools might benefit from a redeployment of the techniques of governmentality (Foucault, 1991) of inclusive education. I draw on Foucault's notion of governmental technique to build on Allan's (2005) ethical project of inclusive schooling. In so doing, I discuss how the governance of schools might be overhauled to divert school virtues away from normalcy to promote greater inclusion. This project starts with student agency, which must be reflected in policy, support, teacher training and pedagogy.

In the final section I identify some of the limitations of the current project and bring together some of the implications for theory, policy and educational practice that have become evident through the research narrative. I also make recommendations for further exploration in the field of inclusive education that might draw on the design of this project.
References


Chapter Two: Voice, post-structural representation and the subjectivities of “included” students

Preamble

Chapter Two comprises a journal paper, and is included in its current form as an iFirst publication in the International Journal of Research and Method in Education; DOI:10.1080/1743727X.2014.946497.

The primary motivation of this thesis was to advance an alternative way of reading inclusive education for young people with diagnosed special needs. Thus, in this chapter I offer a methodology for use in DSE that is simultaneously theoretical, political and personal. Theoretically the methodology is located in a poststructural analysis of the subjectivated position of the "included" student, notwithstanding the presence of impairment and subsequent imposition of special educational support. Politically the methodology seeks to redirect disability scholarship onto an ontological commitment to inclusion, by critically engaging with personal experience from which to analyse and readdress discursive occurrences of marginalisation in schools and policy.

The chapter consists of three parts. In the first, I point out some of the theoretical shortcomings of disability rights scholarship that has a limited impact on account of its adherence to the materialist social model of disability. I argue that the embodiment of disability must be taken into consideration, and that CDS underpinned by poststructural theories of ontology, subjectivity, power and language can offer a more appropriate theoretical base from which to start.

In the second part of this chapter I introduce the methodological tools of voice, poststructural representation, subjectivity and grounded theory – drawing on examples where appropriate. I examine the value of each to qualitative inquiry that seeks to learn about discursive elements of exclusion. I suggest that together, these tools contribute to a research methodology that is insider driven, discursively aware, and more appropriately representational of the disabled experience. Moreover, the use of grounded theory facilitates the development of theory grounded in empirical findings. This work begins to answer Slee's (2011) call to build theory on inclusive schooling that dismantles the discursive and material barriers to its full implementation.

In the final part of this chapter, I demonstrate the methodology in action, as I have developed this research in inclusive schools in Australia and Spain. I present two narratives relating the details of both phases of the study, and then compare the conditions of inclusive schooling for participants via their subjectivities as "included" students with impairments. This is important because it demonstrates the role that different levels of in-class support can have on students' inclusion, along with other markers of difference that can either aid their inclusion, or threaten to marginalise them on account of their vicinity to biological abnormality.
Voice, post-structural representation and the subjectivity of ‘included’ students

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Voice, post-structural representation and the subjectivity of ‘included’ students

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**Keywords:** disability studies in education; critical disability studies; inclusive schooling; post-structuralist research; subjectivity

Introduction

In this paper, I offer a critical research framework in the field of disability studies in education (DSE) that is simultaneously theoretical, political and personal. Theoretically the framework examines discursive formations of subjectivity (Foucault 1982) by bringing into question the identity politics of disability in education. The personal holds relevance to the framework, as the analysis rests upon the embodied experiences of both researchers and participants – expressed in narrative. Using grounded and social theory to collect and analyse data, the methodology pushes disability scholarship towards an alternative politics of inclusive schooling – one critically aligned with the post-structuralisms that demands a new ontological commitment to inclusion (Shildrick 2012; Lather 2013).

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This paper consists of three sections. In the first, I discuss some of the theoretical issues that have confounded disability rights scholarship. While the materialist social model of disability has informed key inclusive policy and practice internationally (e.g. the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006), theoretical engagement with alternative concepts of embodiment, self and agency are required in the postmodern epoch (Shildrick 2012). In the second section, I construct my argument by examining the methodological tools of post-structural representation, subjectivity and grounded theory, and sketching the productive potential that they offer DSE when the embodiment of disability is taken into account. As the post-structural framework attends politically with personal experience, the lines between method and methodology are blurred (Miller, Whalley, and Stronach 2012; Lather 2013). Finally I present an exemplar of ongoing research – in which I deploy this framework – to demonstrate the sorts of readings of inclusive education that a critical repositioning of disability scholarship can produce.

**DSE blockade**

Equipped with social constructionist underpinnings, the aim of DSE is to overturn conceptions of normative embodiment while at the same time challenging special education traditions (Gabel and Peters 2004; Connor et al. 2008; Michalko 2008; Baglieri et al. 2011; Connor, Valle, and Hale 2012; Ferguson and Nusbaum 2012). Perpetually confronting DSE is a ‘certain arbitrariness to the concept of disability’ (Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling 2012, 240) and an associated precariousness as to how best include students with impairments in schools (Allan 1999, 2010; Slee 2011; Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling 2012; Moore and Slee 2012; Whitburn 2014a). It is Shildrick’s (2012) contention that exclusion occurs because of the ‘performitivity of embodied selfhood [that] lays bare the psychosocial imaginary that sustains modernist understandings of what it is to be properly human’ (31).

Rather than to seek how to improve the conditions of inclusive education for these students, however, an exploration of the causal links of exclusion might reveal the nature of the constitutive forces at play (Youdell 2006; Shildrick 2012). Unless the kernel of inclusive schooling is broken apart – in which the normalization and subsequent dislocation of disability is counteracted – social justice for students who live with diversities will remain a farcical notion of democratization (Whitburn 2014a). However, disability scholarship is yet to subvert marginalization entirely, and its unstable theoretical foundations unknowingly contribute to this difficulty.

**Materially countering convention**

Some researchers (Oliver 2009; Barnes 2012) take a materialist perspective to the analysis of disability. Through the social model, disability (as opposed to impairment) is read as socially, politically and economically created, and therefore external to the body – thus ignoring to its detriment to any personification of the disabled subject. One of its founders, Oliver (2009) – an academic who has a spinal injury and no use of his legs – describes the cultural favouring of the simple act of walking; an act, he maintains, that is amplified further by inaccessible built environments and public transport providers.

While time and again Oliver (2009) problematizes social and political environments on account of their inaccessibility to disabled people, an analysis of the material
conditions of existence alone is not sufficient to lessen exclusionary effects in schools. Educational institutions need to be ‘assembled’ using much more than physically accessible classrooms. Nevertheless, as Gabel and Peters (2004) point out, the social model has been the driving force behind many initiatives taken by the disability rights movement throughout the world. Most higher education providers have made moves to equip pre-existing programmes such as teacher education with more socially inclusive ideals. Yet in ‘rewriting the script’ (Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009, 49), the responsibility of injecting explicit disability issues and inclusion into course curricula has tended to fall to rehabilitation and/or special education departments (Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009; Moss 2011; Slee 2011; Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling 2012; Ferguson and Nusbaum 2012; Moore and Slee 2012).

Some researchers, however, have reported on work conducted by university education faculties that both draw on social justice principles and are informed by socio-cultural theories of learning through disability studies (Rice 2006; Morton 2012). Rice (2006) responds to the pretence that the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms is merely ‘a benevolent and benign aspect of education’ (263). Pre-service teachers in Rice’s teacher education course are asked to reflect on and subsequently rebuild their epistemological beliefs with specific regard to students with disabilities in their classrooms.

In New Zealand, Morton (2012) puts DSE to work on curriculum assessment. She describes two projects that challenged traditional assessment tools both of individuals’ abilities to learn and for student learning. Both of these projects demonstrate how expertise-driven assessment instruments can be broken down, while they open up spaces in which teachers can become more acquainted with students and their families, leading to more productive relationships.

Rejecting deficit thinking on account of its tendency to pathologize students, the alternative programmes described by Rice (2006) and Morton (2012) instead aim to provide teachers and/or pre-service teachers with the skills to interrogate traditional school structures and curricula. Both authors recognize, however, the ubiquitous threat that the tragedy discourse of disability lords over the field of education. When placed in direct contrast against the medical model, research that fits within the purview of the social model does not offer a sufficient defence to guard against special education intervention for students with disabilities.

The problem, as Smith (2009) insists, is that any interpretation of disability is based on fixed, essentialist theoretical underpinnings that lean towards either the medical or social model; thus eschewing either the body and its differences or the political/physical environment. This occurs at a time in which the human body has become ‘one of the most fetishised commodities in late-capitalist societies’ (Erevelles 2011, 29), therefore stifling any effectiveness of the social model.

Similarly in disability research, a number of authors (Corker and French 1999; Youdell 2006; Allan 2010; Erevelles 2011; Goodley 2013) note that an erasure of the field of sociology of disability is that the body is removed from debates on the materialist social model. Corker and French (1999, 5) made this observation more than a decade ago. Their argument then was that following the social model would lead research to be oblivious to the discursive connection between embodied impairment and socially produced disability. ‘Much of the uneasiness that we have with the current framework of disability theory stems from its failure to conceptualize a mutually constitutive relationship between impairment and disability which is both materially and discursively (socially) produced.’
The utility of the social model to guide disability studies alone must therefore be brought into question. Gabel and Peters (2004) make the point that people with disabilities are often assigned in some way even by their own hand to the intersection of biological and social difference. Therefore, the embodiment of impairment should not be overlooked in the sociocultural analysis; however at the same time, it is ingenuous to regard disability in strictly medical terms. In order for disability studies to have theoretical and practical credibility, more emphasis should be placed on ‘bodies as belonging to thinking, doing and feeling people who exist and interact in a changing social world’ (Holmes 2010, 103).

Critically countering convention

Scholars working with critical disability theory (also known as critical disability studies) – herein referred to as CDS – take the position that disability is a sociopolitical matter. They work within situated circumstances to seek inclusion of all citizens into social systems (Devlin and Pothier 2006; Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009; Shildrick 2012; Goodley 2013). While this final task is what parallels CDS with the social model, as Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009) point out, CDS incorporates a broader conceptual terrain to include psychological, cultural, discursive, and/or carnal locations of research ‘subjects’.

Tracing the emergence of CDS, Goodley (2013) observes that as a nascent discipline it has gained theoretical assurance in the beginning of the twenty-first century. It has evolved from the social model to incorporate any number of perspectives that may include analyses of body politics, intersectionality with other types of oppression, globalization, and the scrutiny of the hegemonic binaries of self-identity and the other. Goodley notes that the development of CDS has come as a response to the complexities of the identity politics of disability, which call into question the ethics of care as well as the significance of the medical model of impairment, all in a time of economic uncertainty.

CDS rely on post-structural theories and means (Shildrick 2012). From the outset, post-structural methodologies change the construction of knowledge – casting doubt on universal truths, flattening ontology, eschewing objectivism and bringing representation into question (St. Pierre 2009, 2013; Lather 2013; Martin and Kamberelis 2013). Post-structural theories equip research with political teeth (Martin and Kamberelis 2013) that grind through the core issues that motivate exclusion. As Lather (2013, 642) writes, ‘Instead of papering over difference, otherness, and disparity, such work reflects/enacts these issues, suggesting further direction and broader possibilities of “being-acting-feeling together” through the production of new terms of belonging.’

Post-structural research is inherently ontological. When mobilized in disability rights scholarship, the project is thus reoriented to question why differently embodied people inhabit both metaphorical and physical exceptional spaces instead of merely existing within the multiplicity of life (Shildrick 2012). Post-structuralist studies also explain how people’s subjectivities are formed (St. Pierre 2009, 2013). In the view of that, the positioning of post-structural work is towards bodies – researchers and participants. ‘We are not separate from the world. Being in every sense is entangled, connected, indefinite, impersonal, shifting into different multiplicities and assemblages’ (St. Pierre 2013, 653).

Accordingly, the designs of qualitative research are also transformed. Miller, Whalley, and Stronach (2012) point out that for post-structuralist research, the
relationship between methodology and method becomes more fluid, while traditional forms of representation are inadequate. The object of knowledge – the research problem of a DSE project – is to learn the nature of the discursive forces at play that shore up educational marginalization. This task would not be properly achieved without considering the standpoints of insiders – young people with disabilities and their families (Allan 1999, 2010; Moss 2002; Slee 2011).

The objective of this contribution to DSE, then, is to explore the embodied experiences of research participants. This fulfils a commitment to ‘theoretically motivated, complex, and nuanced accounts of research endeavours’ (Martin and Kamberelis 2013, 669) – how studies are produced via the researcher’s involvement and her/his level of commitment to its theoretical and political underpinnings. A study of this nature can also open up a way to account for how the subjectivities of people with disabilities are produced in schools, which is a not often utilized way of learning about the effectiveness of inclusive schooling.

**Post-structural representation, subjectivity and grounded theory**

Centrally developed around the perspectives of research participants, this research adopts post-structural representation, subjectivity and grounded theory to tease out nuanced accounts of inclusive schooling in a way that illuminates its downfalls. In this section of the paper, these tools are considered, in conjunction with how they mesh together to form a constructive qualitative framework for use in DSE. This precedes a presentation of ongoing research in which I deploy this framework.

**Voicing embodied experiences**

This methodology uses interviews that are more like informal conversations where participants are invited to interpret their school experiences. Open-ended questions are put to young people who are at risk of marginalization in schools. According to Charmaz (2006), ‘unanticipated stories and statements can emerge’ from interviews in which the questions are unambiguously open-ended. Even though they could help to contest exclusion, the voiced experiences of students and other stakeholders with disabilities are seldom heard (Allan 1999, 2010; Byrnes and Rickards 2011; Slee 2011; Ferguson and Nusbaum 2012; Moore and Slee 2012).

Byrnes and Rickards (2011) observe that while researchers and educators commonly interview students without disabilities about various aspects of their schooling, ambivalence remains about doing likewise with those who have impairments because of perceived associated risks. This deficit thinking adversely affects the inclusion of young people with disabilities in schools. Byrnes and Rickards (2011) demonstrate, however, that students with disabilities offer practical solutions to potential systemic problems, such as access, pedagogy, the curriculum and support. They also note that on a personal level, students with disabilities who voice their wishes in research are able to overturn stereotypical notions held by others of their powerlessness and dependency.

Yet in research, the concept of ‘voice’ holds many and varied meanings (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011). St. Pierre (2009) encourages researchers to question the authority of voice – and indeed the speaker whose voice is heard – in qualitative research. A person’s voiced experience, she claims, is constituted through discursive forces. This is particularly pertinent in inclusive education research in which a plethora
of discursive practices beyond the material can affect the inclusion of students with impairments in any given milieu.

Interviews conducted in DSE are therefore more aptly focused on how students regard many of the practices that come together to champion – or fragment – their inclusion, through which a politically engaged researcher can extricate the hidden meanings left by the circulating discourses at play. To this end, the researcher’s voice in the expression of representation is also relevant because their background and ideology influences the research that they undertake (Clarke 2005; Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011).

Post-structural representation

One objective of a post-structural turn in qualitative enquiry is to ‘create a social science about human life rather than on [passive] subjects’ (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011, 124). Working with the voiced experiences of potentially marginalized insiders of education systems requires that their stories of inclusion and exclusion – and the forces that influence their schooling – are duly presented. Noting that stories are typically set from personal subjective perspectives rather than from societal standpoints, Clarke (2005) recommends the use of narrative discourse to analyse collective experience. However, post-structural theory is also wary of narrative inquiry that is ignorant to the discursive forces that constitute people and their actions. Narratives that fail to work theoretically through the discursive elements at play in schools that marginalize will also be ineffective (St. Pierre 2009).

Encouraging researchers to analyse social phenomena through engagement with stories, Gough (2010) claims that narrative experiments – essays – inspired by post-structural theory provide researchers an ancillary investigative method. Through narrative, researchers can demonstrate the pervasiveness of hegemonic powers and offer alternative readings of disciplines. As Gough (2010, 50) notes, ‘I write essays to test ideas, to “weigh” them up, to give me (and eventually, I hope, my colleagues) a sense of their worth’, which epitomizes the value of narrative inquiry.

In DSE, post-structural engagement with the accounts of insiders with diagnosed diversities are useful axis from which to study inclusion across multiple – and at times unforeseen – discourses. For instance, Moss (forthcoming) explores the photographs produced alongside the narratives of young people who live with chronic illnesses in a study aimed at obtaining their views about schooling, in-school relationships and their altered educational paths. She demonstrates that a rereading of the data – one that lays emphasis on the visuality and intrinsic material value of the produced images – yields a richer understanding of what motivates research participants to act in the way that they do. Moss points out that this type of inquiry reaches beyond the medical and psychological discourses that dominate young people’s lives when they have ongoing health conditions and instead concentrates on what is immediately important to them.

In another study, Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2012) present a narrative of a researcher’s encounter with a girl who has autism and learning difficulties. They examine this narrative through four divergent epistemological repertoires: a medically driven analysis; social model; a Nordic relational stance and a sociocultural perspective. These four readings show different ways that researchers and practitioners develop diverse understandings of intellectual disability through engagement with particular
philosophical frameworks; the sociocultural reading shows how we might rework data
to illustrate where such tensions arise (Lather 2013).

Both Moss (forthcoming) and Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2012) positioned their
studies in qualitative frameworks that facilitate insightful understandings of research
participants via explanations of their experiences; Goodley and Runswick-Cole’s
work centres both the participants’ and researchers’ experiences. These scholars call
for more engagement with insiders’ perspectives in participatory-based research that
counter the deficit discourse of disability in the educational sphere.

Researching subjectivity
Research developed centrally on insider’s experiences provides a space to study their
subjectivated positions within particular discourses. In St. Pierre’s (2009, 229)
words, subjectivity is ‘the linchpin that … topples every other supposed stable refer-
ent’. For Foucault (1982), subjectivity is multidimensional: both relations of power
exercise control on subjects and upon individuals by tying them to their own identities.
‘Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to’ (Fouca-
ult 1982, 781). In schools, for example, despite inclusive policy, students with dis-
abilities are often divided from the general population by mechanisms of special
 provision on account of their bodily differences (Allan 1999; Michalko 2008; Erevelles
2011; Sleet 2011; Ferguson and Nusbaum 2012; Moore and Sleet 2012; Whitburn
2014a). This creates a very real danger for these students, because school communities
and cultures are extremely influential in the formation of young people’s subjectivities
(McLeod and Yates 2006) and their marginalization thus becomes inextricably bound
to their biographical narratives (Youdell 2006).

Foucault stresses, however, that in spite of the pervasiveness of the individualizing
and dynamic power of subjectivation, our task – in the post-enlightenment period – is
to tussle against it. ‘These struggles are not exactly for or against the “individual”, but
rather they are struggles against the “government of individualisation”’ (Foucault 1982,
781). He contends that we might embark on this undertaking by examining forms of
opposition against relations of power: the study of insanity to comprehend sanity, illeg-
ality to understand legality and so on. He suggests that we examine these forms of
resistance in specific fields in which subjects are ‘subjected to’ particular discursive
experiences, as this will be ‘more empirical, more directly related to our present situ-
ation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice’ (Foucault 1982,
780). We might start, then, with the study of exclusion, to further understand inclusion.
This necessitates critically engaging with school insiders who are potentially
marginalized by the discursive practices that operate within (and around) them. It also
requires ‘mobilising politically around these’ (Allan 2010, 611) subjectivities to fulfil
the ethical commitment to the so-called other.

Grounded theory
Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) and situational analysis (Clarke 2005)
frame the research outlined in this paper for their practicality and openness in facilitat-
ing data collection and analysis. Both methods of grounded theory expedite the sys-
tematic yet flexible development of theory by directing inductive data collection and
analysis via ethnographic methods, interviews, field notes and so on – to find processes
that occur within the studied phenomenon. According to Clarke (2005), the
embodiment and positioning of knowledge producers – including researchers – are to be specifically acknowledged, and the analytical lens of grounded theory is turned towards the examination of localized discourses that influence the field under study.

As the researcher sets to work in the ‘studied world’ – in this case inclusive schooling from the perspectives of young people – it is important not to distort what might be found in the field with a prior search of available literature on the phenomenon. This methodological move aligns the design of this work to post-structural inquiry (Miller, Whalley, and Stronach 2012; Lather 2013). As an alternative to traditional qualitative work, all that is collected – including the various discourses that circulate within it (Clarke 2005) – are regarded as potential data, which may be adopted or omitted from the theory under development depending on their significance to the study. Young people’s experiences and subjectivities constituted within schools is a useful starting block for this work.

Clarke’s (2005) rejuvenation of grounded theory embraces the postmodern turn in qualitative enquiry and it is her important contribution that aligns the methodology with principles of CDS. Following situational analysis, she writes, ‘the goal is critically analyzing to produce “a truth” or possible “truths” – distinctive analytic understandings, interpretations, and representations of a particular social phenomenon’ (8–9). Meanwhile, Slee (2011) calls for the development of a theory of inclusion. Such a theory, he contends, should expose and dismantle structural and cultural exclusion while simultaneously explicating the nature of democratic practices. Theorizing the politics inherent in the experiences of insiders with disabilities and the restraints to their agency aligns the grounded theory methodology with CDS.

Critical DSE research in practice

In this final section, I demonstrate the methodological processes I have been using in ongoing research in Australia and Spain with students who have diagnosed special educational needs who attend secondary schools. This work is framed in grounded theory, post-structural representation and subjectivity. The objective of this work is to (re)theorize the experiences of young people with diagnosed impairments in the context of inclusive schools, aligned with the broader movement from structuralism to the post-structuralisms (St. Pierre 2009, 2013; Lather 2013). After presenting two narratives that explain this research, I discuss the similarities and differences that appear in both country contexts via the research formation of young people’s subjectivities (McLeod and Yates 2006) and their how their marginalization thus becomes inextricably bound to their biographical narratives (Youdell 2006). I also draw on my own lived experiences as a student and scholar experiencing both inclusion and exclusion in Australia.

Australian story

As a person with vision impairment (VI), I have experienced what is commonly purported as inclusion across multiple locations. In Whitburn (2014a), I discuss the medical expertise-driven view of my impairment that ‘haunted’ any pretence of inclusion in my experiences of schooling, university, in the labour market and in family interaction, on the grounds of being stamped with indelible ink as a person who has extra, special needs. I present an essay – a narrative experiment (Gough 2010) – in which I reflect on personal experiences to explore the mismatch between
inclusive and deficit discourses. This is an uncomfortable reflexivity (Pillow 2003) in which I – the researcher – explicitly acknowledge the influence of past experience in my research.

I was motivated then to undertake exploratory research with a group of five secondary students with VI – four boys and one girl, aged 13–17 years – in which I recorded their voiced experiences of their schooling (Whitburn 2014b). I conducted more than 20 h of face-to-face interviews with these young people – both one-on-one and in focus groups. I also encouraged participants to analyse findings, which I present in narrative form (Whitburn 2014c). I asked a variety of open-ended questions to participants in this phase of the research. The questions were aimed at eliciting as much data as possible that would fuel theoretical construction, based on any experiences that they might have had at the school that gave them a sense of achievement, were surprising, frustrating, satisfying and so forth, alongside their interactions with physical resources, peers, support and teaching staff. The semi-structured interviews were more like shared explorations of inclusive schooling, to which the young people generously contributed by giving detailed accounts of their embodied experiences. Repetitively coding data line by line after collection (Charmaz 2006) by reading for discursive significance (Clarke 2005), I performed axial coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990) via constant comparison of the generated concepts to locate core categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

The core categories of the emergent theory, that is, the subtexts of the young people’s explanations of their experiences, were their hopes for autonomy and seamless access to the academic and social dimensions of their schooling (see Whitburn 2014b for more details of coded categories). Both of these were continuously affected by the actions of stakeholders. For example, the young people described both light and heavy paraprofessional support, which correspondingly facilitated and inhibited their inclusion (Whitburn 2013). The impasse of this situation was that heavy paraprofessional support more often than not made up for class teacher underservicing. With that said, the young people admitted that some class teachers utilized a variety of pedagogical techniques that diminished their dependence on paraprofessional support, which had the effect of increasing their comfort in lessons. This generally translated to their feeling more included in the school (Whitburn 2014d).

In this research I had privileges associated with being an insider. Given that I shared a similar background to participants, we forged a trans-identity research alliance (Slee 2011) – a participatory group in which all members are linked by shared experience. For example, in Whitburn (2014c) I draw on referential knowledge (Baert 1998) – a shared understanding of what appears to be innocuous and familiar about having an impairment in an inappropriately defined inclusive school – to learn that participants felt ostracized in part because of their placements in the school and the transport options they were subsequently forced to take. The young people affirmed that they were ‘disabled (intended as a verb rather than an adjective) beyond the sum of their actual impairments’ (Whitburn 2014d, 2) on account of the special education provision afforded them at the school. This subjectivity imposed onto their bodies haunted their inclusion.

La Historia Española

After personally experiencing a different kind of inclusion in Spain, I developed my research into the southern European country. Having fruitlessly sought volunteer and paid work in Australia after graduating university, I had moved – temporarily – to
the Spanish capital of Madrid and easily located work as an English teacher (Whitburn 2014e). The status that disability and inclusive schooling hold in a given jurisdiction illustrate a lot about a society’s values (Barton 1997; Albrecht 2002; Youdell 2006; Slee 2011), and it occurred to me that inclusive schooling in Spain with specific reference to young people with impairments might operate differently from that which is commonly documented in other countries.

Throughout 2013, I undertook face-to-face interviews with 23 young Spanish people aged 12–19 years who had a variety of diagnosed sensory, intellectual, behavioural and physical impairments. Each participant attended an inclusive secondary school in either Salamanca or Madrid. Again the focus of the interviews was to learn from participants about their experiences of inclusive schooling. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, and a third person attended each session who could act as translator when required. I coded the transcribed interviews using initial and focus coding (Charmaz 2006) with the same intentions as per the Australian phase. On the whole, the students highlighted the school community, resources, teacher pedagogy, support and social inclusion as constitutive of their experiences of inclusion (Whitburn 2014f).

Given that I had undertaken a grounded theory study in a comparable field of inquiry previously in Australia, I took what both Charmaz (2006) and Clarke (2005) (citing Blumer) refer to as sensitizing concepts – the integration of some formerly analysed codes to the current study. For instance, some participants of the Spanish phase of the investigation spoke austerely about previous teachers underservicing at their former schools. They reported, however – unlike participants of the Australian phase of this research – that the task of compensating for this adversity fell on all stakeholders. Not becoming a problem (Michalko 2008) for a support teacher alone, but also for all teachers and students appeared to give participants confidence, and they felt as if they were at liberty to exert themselves in their work.

However some Spanish participants discussed – at their own volition – markers of difference that they felt were imposed on them due to their disabilities. For example, participants with VI regularly referred to their needs for accessible resources, the assistive technology that they used in lessons, the alternative strategies that they had to recognize others visually and the challenges of navigating the physical environments of both the school and their neighbourhoods. Students with intellectual impairments also referred to the material they studied that differed from that used by same-aged peers, the support they either received or felt that they might require, and the threat of repeating year levels. Despite recognizing their embodied differences from general student populations, however, the young people all concerned themselves principally with typical school manifestations that might worry any other student, including passing assessment, navigating the politics of group assignments and maintaining friendships with their peers.

‘Included’ subjectivities of participants in Australia and Spain: a mismatch of inclusive schooling

An analysis of participants’ embodied experiences of schooling opens up a space in which their subjectivities may be examined, and reveals how ‘inclusive’ schooling shapes them in different country contexts. Whereas participants of the Australian phase of the study constantly referred to their attempts to overcome the restrictions imposed on them by their subjectivities – their impairments and the special education support thus provided to them (Whitburn 2013, 2014b, 2014c, 2014e), participants in
Spain felt empowered by the support they received (Whitburn 2014f). The students in Spain described being well included in their school communities. Either class teachers effectively included them in their pedagogy or paraprofessional support was shared among multiple students. Some students did not so much as mention paraprofessional support at their schools; they instead maintained that class teachers were integral in providing them access to their studies.

For the young people in Spain, ‘previously disavowed discourses [were able to] function in [their] school contexts’ (Youdell 2006, 31), which for the most part, shaped their subjectivities as included students with disabilities. They undertook their studies with recourse to alternative, accessible ways of working without any backlash from others. Students from Australia, on the other hand, were not afforded this luxury. Instead, they donned invisible cloaks of competence (Edgerton 1967): a metaphorical ability to disguise their impairments, capitalize on their capabilities and gain social traction within the school (Whitburn 2014b).

With that said, in both Australia and Spain, when given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, most of the participants painted an alternative picture of inclusive schooling to that which they were familiar. They recognized that they were at constant risk of subjugation to an ‘abnormal’ identity and thus disposed to assert themselves to the greatest extent possible to a discourse of normality. This was possible through specific interactions between themselves, their peers and school staff. For the Australian participants, impairment was read as a negative construct that demarcated their identities (Whitburn 2013, 2014b, 2014c, 2014e). Similarly, the students in Spain understood that they had embodied divergences that threatened to divide them from the general school population, though this risk lay mostly dormant. Therefore, these participants tended to ‘view themselves in terms of the paradigm of ability and its “normal” distribution’ (Ball 2013, 101) through constantly succumbing to normalization (Foucault 1977), indicating that in both country contexts, inclusive schooling for these students is yet to be achieved.

Final thoughts

In this paper, I have offered a critical research framework in the field of DSE that centres on insider perspectives – myself as the researcher and students with impairments. Concentrating on the positioning of disability, I draw on the methodological tools of post-structural representation, subjectivity and constructivist grounded theory to study how discursive practices within (and around) secondary schools shape ‘included’ disabled subjects. The findings are presented by the way of narrative experiments (Gough 2010) that offer raw insider-driven accounts of phenomena constituted through discourse, from which to analyse the subjectivities of ‘included’ students. I therefore contribute and am claiming a critical research framework to DSE that is theoretical, political and personal.

As I have demonstrated, attending to ‘the potholes’ (Miller, Whalley, and Stronach 2012, 307) of disability rights scholarship with post-structural theory makes clear via nuanced narrative accounts the elements of schooling that have constitutive powers to marginalize. While Barnes (2012) rebukes the utility of a postmodern reading of disability for its lack of political thrust, his critique is ingenuous. CDS mediated by embodied experience can provide an expedient axis from which to study the material worlds of people with impairments and the discursive hegemonic powers that deflect them to the boundaries of social systems. Theorizing such a study in empirical data (Charmaz...
2006) and developing this alongside analysis of discursive practices within a given situation (Clarke 2005), this framework offers the educational realm a way of ‘viewing the present truths and forms of existence which operate within education, and their costs, from the perspective of those who bear the heaviest burden of those costs’ (Ball 2013, 151).

This framework also demands political commitment from the researcher. By challenging traditional power structures that subjectify the bodies of students with disabilities in education systems through engagement with personal experience, new forms of inclusive schooling can appear. In the words of Foucault (1980, 65), ‘If one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then this is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question.’

A biosocial understanding of disability in inclusive schooling ‘foregrounds the historical conditions that constitute the domain of possibility for the body’ (Erevelles 2011, 17) and of the included or excluded student. It also facilitates a greater understanding of how the subjectivity of a disabled student is shaped (Youdell 2006) by human and non-human discursive entities that enable him or her to be included in schools. This work builds on Allan’s (1999) and Liggett’s (1997) Foucauldian analyses of disabled lives, by tying embodied experience directly to the included or excluded subjectivities of students with impairments in schools.

Finally, this research takes up what Moore and Slee (2012) refer to as the lesson from DSE to be more aware; ‘to distinguish between experts and expertise as we seek a correction to unequal power relations’ (235). This awareness has productive potential for DSE as the use of post-structural theories become more widespread and inclusive schooling gains more ground internationally.

References


Chapter Three: Accessibility and autonomy preconditions to "our" inclusion: A grounded theory study of the experiences of secondary students with vision impairment

Preamble

Chapter Three is a journal paper that was written during candidature and published in the Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs 14(1) 2014, 3-15. This research was conducted during my Masters in Education, however I have subsequently built on the analysis. It is included as it appears in the journal.

The chapter details the research conducted for the Australian phase of this project with a group of five secondary students with VI who attended a single "inclusive" school in the Australian State of Queensland. Ethical approval to undertake this study was provided by the Griffith University Human Ethics Committee in 2010. Research participants were asked to describe and interpret their experiences of schooling in iterative face-to-face interviews in both individual and focus group sessions. Through the development of theory grounded in empirical data (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), this research demonstrates the disjuncture between rhetoric expressed in policy and personal experiences of young people with VI—indicating an undercurrent of uncertainty that characterises their experiences of inclusion.

Through the core conceptual categories, the emergent theory depicts the young people's aspirations for seamless, autonomous access to the social and academic environments of the school. At the same time, it illustrates through subsidiary categories facilitators and inhibitors to their inclusion via the actions and attitudes of teachers, support staff, peers and the participants themselves. In this chapter I present an examination of how these subsidiary conceptual categories impacted on participants' experiences of inclusion through either increasing or decreasing their access and autonomy. The two proceeding chapters tend to two of these categories in more detail: paraprofessional support and appropriate teacher pedagogy.

In the current chapter I also develop my position as a researcher with insider status, noting the impact that shared experiences with participants had had on fieldwork and data analysis. This work is important because the findings reveal factors that can both unsettle the efficacy of inclusive schooling, and render students with disabilities anomalous—casting a shadow over the effectiveness of educational inclusion.
Accessibility and autonomy preconditions to ‘our’ inclusion: a grounded theory study of the experiences of secondary students with vision impairment

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Key words: Qualitative research, grounded theory, insider research, student voice, inclusive schooling, autonomy, access.

In this paper, I report core findings of a small-scale qualitative study that I conducted with a group of young people with vision impairment who attended an inclusive secondary school in the Australian state of Queensland. My objective was to capture their voiced experiences of their schooling through face-to-face interviews and to develop a substantive theory that was grounded in the collected data. Relevant to the study was my status as an insider researcher, which impacted both data collection and analysis. Here, I develop the methodological process that I followed and present core findings of the study. These findings shed light on the practices within schools that are designed to promote inclusion yet perpetuate exclusion for students with impaired vision.

Introduction

‘You’re in mainstream with a chaperone. It’s like going to a party with your parents, or something.’
(17-year-old ‘included’ student with vision impairment, cited in Whitburn, in press).

This comment was articulated by a young person with vision impairment (VI). He was referring here to his experiences of inclusion in a public ‘inclusive’ secondary school in the Australian state of Queensland. His observation – dripping in benign resignation – tersely describes his reality of searching for equality in a school in which he felt stigmatised. Ostensibly, this appeared to be the case because the culture of the school did not cater to diverse learners appropriately. As a case in point, this participant held that the constant support mechanisms that were in place to facilitate his inclusion in lessons inhibited his autonomy. He reported that he had also endured a struggle for social inclusion in the school.

This was one response I received to a question I put to five young people who each had VI to learn about how they experienced inclusion in their school. I was motivated to form a theory grounded in qualitative data (Charmaz, 2006; 2011; Clarke, 2005; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) on lived experiences of inclusive schooling.

I – the researcher – am an insider. Like the participants of this study, I have impaired vision and had studied in a comparable setting in the 1990s. Their observations of their inclusion resonated tremendously with me. The discomfort that they experienced in relation to class pedagogy, support, human and physical resources, social interaction with peers in a school culture in which a majority of students did not have a disability, and a variety of other issues impacted not only their own, but also my experiences of schooling, despite our age differences. Throughout the fieldwork, I dared not express my accord with the young people, yet it would be imprudent of me not to recognise that my own experiences allowed me a unique insight into their circumstances and impacted on my role as the researcher.

In this paper, I develop both my position as a researcher with insider status and my justification for seeking to learn about inclusive schooling from current students. Together, these elements formed the design of this project. I also present core elements of the conceptual model that was derived from this study and demonstrate how the young people’s accounts were the building blocks of its development. This explanation is by no means exhaustive; a journal paper is hardly the forum in which a complete discussion of the formation of each and every significant theoretical concept can be staged. Rather, in this paper, I present a snapshot of themes that were particularly relevant to both the design and results of this research.

Current educational arrangements for young people with VI in Queensland

Students with VI are generally educated in inclusive settings in Australia (Foreman, 2011). In the north eastern state of Queensland, inclusive schooling for young people with VI commonly follows the special education knowledge and...
tradition. As such, considerable emphasis is placed on personal support. Children with VI are eligible to enrol in public schools, where they generally receive support from trained personnel who work in special education programs (SEPs) (Education Queensland, 2007b). Under these external support programs (Deppeler, Loreman and Sharma, 2005), students with VI are regularly pulled out of lessons to receive specialist instruction from the expanded core curriculum from which they learn VI-specific skills such as reading and writing braille, and using assistive technology (Hatlen, 1996). Students with VI may otherwise attend different types of settings, such as independent schools, where they receive individualised educational support on a less permanent basis. Regular visits from advisory teachers are common under these arrangements (Education Queensland, 2007a).

Although young people with VI typically study in inclusive schools throughout the Western world (Foreman, 2011; Tuttle and Tuttle, 2004), their inclusion is troubled because of the existence of impairment. Tuttle and Tuttle (2004) forcefully argue that for children and young people with VI specifically, ‘physical inclusion does not necessarily result in social integration’ (p. 11, my emphasis), a charge that is applicable to the education of many diverse student groups. The Australian Blindness Forum (ABF, 2008) meanwhile conveys that in the domestic context, specialist intervention in education for students with VI is at times inequitable, lacking in quality, reach and effect. As a consequence, they claim that many VI students leave compulsory schooling without the requisite skills that would enable them to gain further education qualifications, employment and/or independent living.

Significance of the study
The contention highlighted by the ABF (2008) that I refer to earlier suggests that inclusive programs as they are currently manifested are inadequate to address the needs of young people with VI. Although Brown (2009) finds that numerous studies have been undertaken that concentrate on educational provisions for VI students, particularly in inclusive settings, they are mostly entrenched in the professional discourse. They appear to be preoccupied with how teachers implement inclusive practices rather than how students experience them. It seems incongruous that despite a shift towards social justice in qualitative research (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011), few studies appear to have been undertaken that explicitly seek to know how young people with VI who attend inclusive settings experience and subsequently produce meaning from schooling as it currently operates. It is after all the experiences of those with disabilities and their advocates that count (Allan, 2010; Barnes, 2010; Slee, 2011).

Emphasising ‘search’ in inclusive education research, Slee (2011) makes the proposition that the role of inquiry in the field is to be chiefly explorative. He suggests that inquiry in the field should be conducted with the objective of understanding the complexities of exclusion. Further, Moss (2012) advances that divergent research results are produced when researchers engage participants in the collection of data.

I undertook this small-scale study chiefly to learn how young people with VI experience inclusive schooling. This research holds much significance to me, a person who is well acquainted with so-called inclusion that is purported both within schools and outside them. I find that dividing practices that have excluded me from many aspects of education, employment and family interaction are seemingly forever present, as I discuss elsewhere (Whitburn, 2013, under review). Above all, I undertook this study to learn how secondary students with VI experience and make meaning of their schooling in the present day.

VI is a low-incidence disability. ABF (2008) estimated that there are approximately 3000 school-aged children with VI who attend schools in Australia and who receive additional support to do so. Thus, following Slee’s (2011) recommendation for qualitative exploration in inclusive education research and after Ball (2006), my objective is to work within a small ethnographic research design aimed at drawing rich analytical devices from a single critical case. Ball contends that such a framework allows researchers to exhibit ‘creativity, insight and the ability to “think otherwise”’ (p. 5) in their construction of findings. I elucidate my approach in more detail later.

Methodology
I employed a qualitative, exploratory framework (Slee, 2011) to explore the voiced experiences of participants about their schooling. Here, I detail the ethnemethodological grounded theory design of the research, my reliance on student voice and participant involvement, and the research setting. I then discuss data collection instruments. Finally, I present the analysis of data, where I describe the formation of theoretical codes and one of the emergent conceptual categories that contributed to the development of the theory.

Theoretical framework
The theoretical framework of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; 2011; Clarke, 2005; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) informs this study. Engendered by the sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory is rooted in the symbolic interaction tradition. At the time of its creation, the qualitative methodology was ‘cutting edge’ (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5) because it challenged positivist quantitative paradigms that dominated intellectual discourse as it does now. The role of the grounded theory framework is to facilitate the systematic development of a formal qualitative theory through an inductive approach to data collection and analysis. It enabled me to ask wide and varied ‘grand tour’ questions to participants about their experiences of living with VI both in and out of school related to their inclusion. The output generated from the present study, which I present later in this paper, represents the relationships between factors that I identified in the young people’s accounts of their experiences.
Following Charmaz (2006; 2011) and Clarke (2005), I took an interpretivist, constructivist approach to theory generation. This contrasts somewhat from Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) original conception of the methodology. As Charmaz (2006, pp. 126–127) articulates, an interpretivist theory ‘assumes emergent, multiple realities; indeterminacy; facts and values as inextricably linked; truth as provisional; and social life as processual’. An interpretivist frame acknowledges subjectivity of the researcher in conceiving theory and is aimed at exploring researched phenomena from a social justice perspective (Charmaz, 2011). Constructivist grounded theorists therefore co-construct theory with participants from a position within the studied phenomenon. These aspects thus parallel the framework with the transformative paradigm in disability studies, which is principally aimed at addressing power and privilege that sustain oppression of diverse groups of people (Mertens, Sullivan and Stace, 2011).

Somewhat at odds with an interpretivist grounded theory framework is Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) approach, which has been criticised because it leans heavily towards post-positivism (Charmaz, 2006; 2011). Charmaz (2011) argues that Strauss and Corbin’s prescription of grounded theory is concerned more with application of the framework than emergence of theory. They offer a prescribed series of steps for data analysis, that is, open, axial and selective coding. Nevertheless, unlike objectivist grounded theory – as Glaser and Strauss (1967) first conceived it – Strauss and Corbin’s version acknowledges the importance of the concepts of fluidity, evolution, participant voice and change (Charmaz, 2006; 2011), qualifying its applicability to the current study. I discuss the coding paradigm and its application to this study in more detail later.

Student voice
One of my principal objectives of this study was to listen to the voices of participants. I wanted to learn about their experiences of inclusive schooling from their unique vantage points. Authors call for educational research that takes into account the voices of young people with disabilities (Morihua Díez, 2010), particularly in educational contexts (Ainscow, 2005; 2012; Moss, 2012). It is held that through listening to students’ voices, research is able to highlight their perspectives and enable them to be a part of solutions (Armstrong, 2005; Curtin and Clarke, 2005; Messiou, 2012; Slee, 1996; 2011). Moreover, Slee (2011) argues that listening to young people with disabilities about their needs and aspirations for schooling empowers them, as well as research itself to shift the focus of educational inclusion onto social justice.

I agree with Moss (2012), who emphasises that despite forward-looking policy and practices that aim to include marginalised others, the voiced experiences of students (and other stakeholders in education) must be heard to better interpret exclusion, both inside and outside schools. There, Moss claims that exists ‘another story, a story where the systematic recognition of the experience of participants . . . are needed’ (p. 2). Moss asserts that in effect, the term ‘student voice’ is insufficient to describe its powerful place in inclusive education research. I expected that the results of this investigation would locate inclusive practices (good, bad and/or indifferent) and offer solutions as the young people identified them. I undertook this study not as a fact finding mission to learn what was wrong with the school, rather, following Booth and Ainscow (2011), my aim was to discover the functions of current-day inclusive education and to reveal barriers to inclusion.

Participants
Four boys and one girl across year levels 8–12 and aged 13–17 years took part in the study after their parents gave written consent to their participation. Assent was also sought from participants themselves before their involvement. Although all participants were legally blind, each had divergent strains of impairment ranging from total blindness to some functional but low vision. The impairment of each had also developed at different times; one had undergone a considerable loss of functional vision after commencing secondary school. Each student had enrolled in the school from the beginning of year 8 and had studied there for at least a full term before commencing participation in this research. Finally, each had attended an inclusive primary school.

Because of the small number of participants, individuals could easily be identified by attributing views to a particular person by sex, age and level of impaired vision. Using pseudonyms would not alleviate the concern. Therefore, the comments that I include in this paper are anonymised to protect the young people’s identities.

Research setting
The participants attended one secondary school in Queensland, on whose grounds operated a SEP. The participants shared access to the special education unit (SEU) with many other students who had a variety of disabilities, in which a specialist teacher of students with VI (TVI) was permanently based.

Insider status
Studies carried out with a transformative agenda carry an epistemological assumption that researchers are grounded within the cultures that they investigate (Mertens et al., 2011). This does not mean that theory building is entirely subjective on the part of researchers. Rather, Mertens et al. (2011) contend that researchers are conscious of the limitations associated with their position, and they hence conduct inquiry in ways that are both credible and beneficial to community members.

More than a decade ago, Slee (1996) considered that research conducted by those who themselves live with disabilities can challenge school cultures that couple special educational traditions with inclusion. I have significantly impaired vision and attended a similarly appointed school in the 1990s as did study the participants. This afforded me the privilege of being a researcher with insider status. I am familiar with the implications of having VI in a school that
is predominantly attended by students without disabilities. In all, this position enabled me to pursue lines of inquiry in both data collection and analysis that others with less familiarity would either overlook altogether or inadvertently disregard their significance to the young people’s experiences of inclusion. This enabled a richer theory to emerge from the findings. Further, as I discuss later in this paper, key constructs of the theory were agreed upon by participants before completion of fieldwork, which strengthens the confirmability of the emergent theory as it was grounded in the data of this study.

**Instruments**

I collected data through semistructured focus group and individual face-to-face interviews with participants that were both iterative and intensive (Charmaz, 2006). Because of scheduling restraints, I commenced fieldwork by conducting two focus group interviews with participants split into two groups. I then conducted a total of 28 individual interviews with participants over the following 10 weeks. Interviews were held in a meeting room in the SEU away from school staff, and they lasted between 20 and 60 minutes depending on time limitations. On the final day of fieldwork, I held a focus group interview to present the theory that had emerged from analyses up to that point and to discuss the construction of conceptual categories with participants. My primary aim here was to involve the young people in the analysis of findings.

**Transcription**

With permission from the participants, I digitally recorded the audio from each interview. I then transcribed each verbatim.

**Interview questions**

Although I intended that the introductory interviews would be open-ended, the young people appeared reticent at first to speak of their experiences. As a backup plan, I had prepared the list of questions later, which I found myself having to use. My objective in asking these questions was to canvass the young people’s experiences using emotive language.

**Initial interview questions.**

Q1: Tell me about the most surprising thing you found when you first came to this school.
Q2: Tell me about the easiest/hardest thing at high school.
Q3: Describe when you’ve felt as if you have achieved well at school.
Q4: Tell me about when you may have felt frustrated at school.
Q5: Describe for me what is the most satisfying/the least satisfying thing at school.

**Further questions.** For the most part, subsequent interview questions were based on the answers that the young people gave to those listed earlier. This was often the case because as Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest, concepts emerged from analyses of previous interviews that are of significance to the phenomena under study. Subsequent questioning in this way either strengthened analytical categories or dispelled their existence altogether. For example, Although the code ‘Being bullied physically over VI’ began to grow in the first few interviews, I conducted with the young people, further questioning revealed that physical victimisation was not evident at the school, although there were certainly occurrences of intimidation that was directly related to the young people’s impaired vision. Thus, this initial code morphed into the category of ‘Peer and school culture-generated stigmatisation’. I discuss how this category developed along with key aspects of these conceptual labels in more detail later.

I also often drew the young people’s attention to other dimensions of their schooling experiences in interviews, such as the use of assistive technology, friendships, class teachers, school transport and their thoughts on receiving support. This prompted them to speak about other aspects of their education that impacted their experiences, which they had not discussed automatically.

**Coding a theory**

‘Grounded theory coding requires us to stop and ask analytic questions of the data we have gathered’ (Charmaz, 2006, p. 42). Following Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) grounded theory paradigm, data analysis of this study consisted of three phases: open, axial and selective coding.

Using this inductive process, I made connections and generated rich descriptions from the raw data, from which core themes emerged that led to the development of a theory. Here, I explain how codes that comprise the theory emerged from this study before elucidating the core findings with a narrative.

**Open coding.** According to Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) canons of grounded theory, researchers should embark on open coding immediately after collecting initial data of a study and iterate the process throughout and beyond fieldwork. Open codes are like building blocks; they form the basis of data analysis. Open coding primarily consists of applying theoretical labels to each slice of data and comparing them to other slices that have been generated from either successive or the same sources. The second objective of open coding is to repeatedly perform comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to synthesise categories from data sets.

Following Charmaz (2006), I refrained from imposing my own sensitivity to the issues discussed in interviews at this stage of analysis. I instead coded the data line by line to synthesise theoretical significance from the young people’s descriptions of their experiences. Coding line by line, as Charmaz (2006) affirms, enabled me to go beyond simple description and to identify theoretical concepts in the data. It was not until later that my own perspective played a part in producing conceptual categories from the data.

A variety of theoretical labels emerged through open coding the initial round of interview data, as shown in column 1 of
I discuss them in turn later in this paper.

categorizing factors that were derived through axial coding are grouped around the core categories, as shown in Figure 2. Other relevant explicating factors that were derived through axial coding are grouped around the core categories, as shown in Figure 2.

To gain traction within the school community, the young people sought autonomy, which itself came about through increased independent access to the academic and social elements of their schooling. As an outcome of having increased access and autonomy within the school, the young people felt genuinely included. Other relevant explicating factors that were derived through axial coding are grouped around the core categories, as shown in Figure 2. I discuss them in turn later in this paper.

Axial coding. Axial coding is the analytical phase that sets Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) coding paradigm apart from the approaches of Charmaz (2006) and Glaser and Strauss (1967). If open codes form the building blocks of a theory, axial coding is a systematic method of constructing the cornerstones upon which it rests. Strauss and Corbin provide an axial coding paradigm, which guides researchers through the identification of a particular occurrence that emerges from open coding, and examining its causes, contexts and intervening conditions, strategies (both actions and interactions), and finally its consequences or outcomes. Thus, through axial coding, I was able to construct relationships between thematic categories that eventually formed the theory.

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Presentation of the theory

Here, I present the core features of the emergent theory. As shown in Figure 2, two elements emerged that were central to the young people’s inclusion relating to student agency: having seamless access to the academic and social dimensions of the school, and being able to exercise autonomously; both of which were within an inclusive school culture. Stakeholders in the school community including class teachers, the TVI, paraprofessionals, other peers and the participants themselves both facilitated and inhibited their inclusion through day-to-day actions that impacted these core requirements. I expand these issues further, by examining facilitators and inhibitors of the students’ aspirations for agency (the core categories of the theory). But first, allow me to define what I mean by autonomy and seamless access.

The significance of autonomy

On the whole, the young people who participated in this study valued autonomy; they reported throughout fieldwork that when they were able to act autonomously, they felt more empowered and in turn, more included in the school. Crocker and Knight (2005) define autonomy as a person’s ability to exercise choice and to be the causal origin of their own behaviour. Referring specifically to participation in schools, Booth and Ainscow (2011) observe that only when people can assert their autonomy is their membership secure.
Table 1: Open codes from interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial codes</th>
<th>Building conceptualisations (contributing factors)</th>
<th>Developed categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being physically bullied over VI</td>
<td>Stigmatising comments made by peers over VI; other students don’t care; having limited sight; name calling; pinning it back to my eyesight; picking on others; others being on edge; thinking we are different</td>
<td>Peer and school culture-generated stigma****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing class tasks and research</td>
<td>Independent versus supported class tasks and research; using assistive technology; importance of subjects; support to perform tasks; getting work transcribed; couldn’t do without that support; having someone read the screen</td>
<td>Autonomy and access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Could be better’ at school</td>
<td>Frustrations over actions of teachers, support personnel and peers; I can’t see it; it gets to me because they think I can; I usually need a teacher aide; I just want to be normal; I can never drive; if I lived closer to the school it wouldn’t be such a hassle; hate catching the taxi; negative attitudes of others; you can’t change other students</td>
<td>Entrenched culture of deficit and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deriving achievement (academic and sport)</td>
<td>Importance of achieving well (both personally and in eyes of others); having achievements recognised; forming teams for competitions; proving I can; gaining more independence; making more friends; being competitive; they can see that I can do what they can do; finding school culture limiting, finding more fulfilment in activity outside of school</td>
<td>Personal ability and opportunity to exercise agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining access to school work</td>
<td>Accessible resources and verbal teaching; reading as they write on the board; uses a three-dimensional model so I can actually feel it; describing graphics in detail; giving me material on time; being available to meet outside of class time; allowing us to work independently; doing things on the spur of the moment; not adapting the way they teach</td>
<td>Teacher pedagogy (underservicing and appropriately adapted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting around</td>
<td>Travelling to and around school (supported and autonomously); having to catch a taxi; people think I’m stupid because of the taxi; wishing I could take the bus; cannot read destination boards; others think I’m an idiot; have trouble walking around school grounds; always meeting my friends at the same place every day helps; always using the same areas because they’re accessible to me; I can find it</td>
<td>Physical access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving support in classes</td>
<td>Feelings about receiving support in classes (positive and negative); preparing and disseminating resources; transcribing braille; in-class support (discrete); bringing VI-specific equipment to lessons (laptops with speech/magnification, magnifiers; textbooks in electronic format); being assigned aides automatically; embarrassing having to work with teacher aides all the time; I think I feel more isolated; I’m slacking off because the teacher aide is doing everything; not unlike having another control authority figure only for me; teacher aides overstep the boundary and take on an authority role; another confrontation I don’t like having; a younger person would be better; class teachers need to be preparing the classes properly</td>
<td>Paraprofessional support (‘lite’ and heavy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities with friends (lunch times)</td>
<td>Making friends and spending time with them; easy to make friends; having difficulties socially; sighted friends help you to fit in; playing sports at lunch time; would prefer to play just with my friends; sitting and talking; helping me to buy lunch; socialising outside of school</td>
<td>Facilitative Friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using technology at school</td>
<td>Feelings about using technology (positive and negative); have to sit in the corner away from my friends near the power outlet; the only one in lessons using a computer; all students soon to use laptops in lessons; most seniors using laptops; at least I can read it with the computer</td>
<td>VI students comparing self against ‘normalcy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbies outside school</td>
<td>Importance of out of school achievements; winning at sport; winning at chess; it feels good to be recognised; my friends think it’s normal; realising that school is very structured; proving myself as normal; other students still think you’re different</td>
<td>VI students coping (creating cloak of competence)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VI, vision impairment.
In support of these definitions, the young people believed that their inclusion in the school was effective when they could both make individual choices about their studies and complete academic tasks with minimal intervention from support staff. One participant explained, for him, having the skills to be independent was crucial ‘So that you’re prepared for real life. ’Cause there’s no one out there to help you in the world [after graduation from school]’.

However, the young people related that they had little freedom to exercise choice because teaching and support staff habitually misjudged their capabilities. The participants each had the impression that they could attend and actively participate in classes without support personnel whose presence, they reported, tended to suppress both their social and academic inclusion. Class educators rarely facilitated their access to study material, perpetuating their need for support.

**Seamlessness of access**
The young people reported that having access to the academic and social dimensions of their schooling was central to their inclusion. This meant having appropriate access to learning resources, pedagogy and friends. My attention in this paper now turns to the facilitators and inhibitors of the young people’s access in the terms that they described them.

**Facilitated academic access.** Among participants, physical access to the school was varied. Four of the five participants commuted up to 1 hour each way to the school by taxi, which was provided through the School Transport Assistance Program for Students with Disabilities (Education Queensland, 2008). The other participant was able to independently catch the local bus, as he lived within the catchment area.

Each participant attended regular classes for some (if not all) scheduled lessons and were able to study any subject of their choosing from the core curriculum regardless of the complexities that they might encounter. Because of this provision, the young people were enrolled in subjects including physical education, cooking, home economics, physics, chemistry and complex mathematics. Paraprofessionals traditionally provided the students ‘lite’ support by preparing and distributing resources to them for use in their lessons. Most of the young people reported that support staff often also accompanied them to lessons to support them directly.
The young people explained that being able to select subjects freely and to study them in regular classrooms alongside sighted peers exemplified academic inclusion in the school. One noted, ‘It means I’m no different when it comes to learning than other students’. Another participant held that studying in mainstream lessons put him on a level playing field with other students, which would enable him to compete fairly for a future university position and scholarship. ‘It’s going to give me the bump up.’

The young people also reported that being able to attend regular lessons with sighted students added significantly to their social inclusion in the school. One noted that he derived ‘pleasure’ from being ‘able to talk to friends in classes’, in stark contrast with when he withdrew from lessons to attend specialist instruction in the SEU. Another participant added that attending lessons with peers was important because he could ‘work with them as well; not just . . . by myself, or out of mainstream’. For Booth and Ainscow (2011), these findings imply full participation of the young people in the school, as they indicate that the young people were included both academically and socially.

Class teachers played a crucial role in fulfilling the young people’s access needs to learning. The participants reported that some class teachers facilitated their access to lessons by using an array of inclusive practices including: (1) appropriate communication modes (e.g., verbal class instructions and modelling), (2) providing intuitive descriptions and/or
using three-dimensional models to represent diagrammatic material, (3) making accessible resources available to them in a timely manner, and (4) being approachable outside of classes for individual consultations. The young people each reported that class teachers who utilised a combination of these strategies enabled them to autonomously gain parity with sighted peers. Referring to verbal instruction giving in particular, one participant commented, ‘I think it’s a really good teaching strategy’.

Facilitative friendships. Social interaction with sighted peers at school was important to each of the young people. However, they gave contrasting accounts of establishing friendships, which appeared to be connected to the amount of vision they had. Participants with some functional vision related that class teachers had facilitated them to make friends in lessons. One noted, ‘I suppose it was pretty easy [to make friends], because pretty much on the first day of school, you get paired up with someone’. This activity, he related, was the standard routine for all students in the school on their first day.

In contrast, other participants who had less functional sight and typically received paraprofessional support in lessons observed that teachers did not introduce them to peers through class activities. Instead, these participants failed to gain acceptance from others. One young person with severely impaired vision spoke of the considerable discomfort he had experienced at school because of apparent social isolation until late in his student career. He explained that he had faced considerable difficulty interacting with others on account of his impairment because of uneven social skills compared with sighted students. He also claimed that he had limited orientation of his physical surroundings, which impacted negatively on his social skills.

‘I guess it’s the vision . . . ’cause it’s up to them [other students]. Well, no it’s not up to them if they don’t want a friend. But for someone who has no friends, because I came to this school with no friends, to make a new friend is hard ’cause you have to engage them. And I think it’s hard to engage them when you can’t find them.’

Despite providing disparate accounts of forming friendships at school, each of the young people reported that they were friends with sighted students at the time that I conducted this research regardless of the severity of their impairments. One participant observed that his friends were ‘not one of us’, referring to our shared understanding (both his and mine) of being individuals with VI in a population dominated by sighted people. This too was important to each of the young people, as they endeavoured to detach themselves from the SEP whenever possible in an endless pursuit for normalcy. Exemplary of this, they explained that the close bonds they had with these students made them feel ‘normal’.

Aside from the connection that sighted friends appeared to provide the young people to normalcy, participants recognised inherent qualities in their friends that set them apart from other students at the school. They reported that their friends were very helpful both inside and outside of school. As one affirmed, ‘They help me more than they would if I could see I guess’. Another participant explained that his friends were able to ‘get past’ his impairment, which for him, embodied their distinction from others. He added, ‘maybe they can comprehend that the blindness isn’t so much as a definition of the person but rather something that they have’. Other characteristics of the young people’s friends were less correlated with their impairments, although each considered them traits that characterised quality friendships. These included: openness, respect, humour, an ability to share common interests, and comparable intelligence.

Educational and support staff inhibiting academic access

The young people reported that some teachers at the school did not facilitate their inclusion. For example, two participants reported that they occasionally went to classes to find that their teachers had left handwritten notes on classroom doors indicating room or schedule changes. When this occurred, not only did they lose valuable lesson time while trying to find their classes but they also had their independence compromised. They were forced to seek assistance to decipher written messages and to orientate to alternative locations. Some participants also complained that teachers often gave them written feedback on their work, which they were unable to read. As one noted, ‘Usually they write on the printed stuff I give them. So then I do need someone to read [it to me]’. Paraprofessionals usually fulfilled these roles.

Inside the classroom, some teachers also misunderstood the necessity for inclusive pedagogy. One participant noted, in contrast with those educators who effectively adapted their teaching practices to increase his inclusion in lessons, ‘Other teachers, maybe they just don’t compensate for me being in their class, they don’t do anything’. Consequently, participants were often left unable to take part in lessons independently. To this end, another participant expressed his disappointment with a teacher. He described her actions thus:

“She thinks that I can see well enough to see the stuff on the board. And she tries to write bigger, or enlarge the print on the page, but I still can’t see it, and it just gets to me, because she’s doing it in front of the class for me, but I still can’t see it.”

The awkwardness that this participant experienced increased through the teacher’s apparent inability to implement appropriate pedagogy that would increase his academic access. Moreover, she allegedly fumbled unsuccessfully for appropriate adaptations in a public way in front of sighted students, thus compromising the participant’s tenuous link to normalcy in the social environment of the school.

When the young people experienced complications in lessons such as that cited earlier, they generally approached...
the TVI for assistance. Typically, as the young people reported, the immediate response was to assign paraprofessionals to them to provide personal support. As all teachers seemed to overlook the young people’s requirements for adjusted pedagogy from time to time, paraprofessionals became a permanent fixture in lessons. One participant explained:

‘I probably do need a teacher aide [in most classes], because any notes written on the board, like [for example], . . . the teacher might write up the answer, or whatever, and do something on [the] spur of the moment, and I’m not getting that.’

However, participants reported that although paraprofessionals facilitated them to gain access to their work, many of them were heavy-handed in their approach to support (Whitburn, 2013, in press).

**Peer and school culture-generated stigmatisation**

The young people reported that they had constrained access to the social environment of the school because other students appeared to judge them negatively on account of their impaired vision. One participant related, ‘I guess, I feel that they don’t think that I’m one of them’. The participants observed that young males were the demographic more likely to discriminate against them. One noted, ‘probably the boys in year 8 are more judgmental. They judge someone by their cover, not the pages’. Others considered that immaturity pervaded all grade levels at the school and that this was causative of the students’ behaviour. One contended however that although ‘it takes maturity to accept vision impairment’, many students had yet to ‘grow up’.

The young people were under the impression that the various adjustments made to facilitate their inclusion in the school, including the provision of accessible resources, in-class support from teacher aides and organised transport, triggered much of the negative attitudes of other students towards them. Under these circumstances, participants seemed to employ tacit social comparison standards to conclude that having VI and requiring specific support were generally objectionable, leading them to undervalue themselves.

**School culture**

As shown in Figure 2, the young people sensed that the culture of the school was relevant to their experiences. Several participants explained that the school culture was not, on the whole, inclusive. Instead, it appeared that competitiveness was encouraged, and for reasons unexplained, their supposed deficits as special students in need of inexorable support were emphasised. One participant observed, ‘they may guess that we’re different some way, rather than [just being] the visually impaired. Maybe they consider us to be just different I guess’.

Additionally, when referring to the ‘authoritative’ power structure of the school, one participant explained: ‘I don’t like the school situation of being very structured. I think the people in my class, like the kids in my class, would probably be a lot less antisocial if we weren’t in such a structured environment’. This participant reasoned that the impersonal environment was at least in part responsible for his feeling socially outcast from the school community.

Carrington and Elkins (2002) define a school’s culture as the beliefs, attitudes and collective understandings of members (e.g., teachers and students) about their specific roles. These cultural concepts, they contend, contribute to how organisations operate and resolve problems. That is to say, each actor within a school environment is agonisingly aware of their position within its hierarchy and is driven to maintain it (Varenne and McDermott, 1999). ‘The properties of the cultural pattern are maintained by the activity of the people who are caught within it’ (p. 14).

Inclusive schools, argue Booth and Ainscow (2011), must foster values of respect for diversity among all of their constituents. However, in the case of this research, the school culture was not respectful towards diversity. Taking the practices of class teachers as a case in point, these educators regularly underserviced participants by encumbering their access to appropriate pedagogy. Rather than catering to diversity, an entrenched culture of deficit and support appeared to exist at the school. Educational staff appeared unable to provide the young people with access to learning without specialist intervention. Consequently, the young people’s autonomy was compromised.

Continuing the earlier thread about culture, each person appeared to accept his or her position within the cultural fabric of the school, that is, the participants appeared to accept that they were the disabled kids, the teachers were the mainstream educators, and the paraprofessionals were the principal support providers that bridged students’ access. Tuttle and Tuttle (2004) write that the perceived dependency people with VI tend to have on others can impact negatively on their general self-esteem because they continually receive assistance from others, whether or not they want it. In the present case, as the school engaged ‘heavy’ support roles of paraprofessionals to make up for the shortcomings of teachers, the students’ capacity to act autonomously was frequently inhibited. As a consequence, opportunities for the young people to enact agency and demonstrate their capabilities were haphazard. This also applied to the opportunities afforded them to interact socially with other students.

**Coping at school by creating a cloak of competence**

In his book, *The Cloak of Competence: Stigma in the Lives of the Mentally Retarded*, the anthropologist Robert Edgerton (1967) provides a detailed account of the lived realities of a group of people who have intellectual disabilities. Despite using abhorrent terminology and describing study participants as inferior beings – as opposed to the normal person without a disability – Edgerton observed that study participants felt compelled to ‘deny the implication of their public defamation’ (Goldshmidt, 1967, p. vii). They created cloaks of competence for themselves to hide their
impairments from others. This metaphorical protection mechanism provided them temporary security from the risk of being labelled inferior. But like under all sartorial dress, the wearer’s tangible features are always evident to others.

Participants of the present study created a cloak of competence (Edgerton, 1967) in an attempt to hide their impairments, capitalise on their abilities and gain social traction within the school. This occurred in response to the stigmatisation they experienced. The young people reported that they were under pressure to prove their capabilities to both staff and peers. One participant commented, ‘If I don’t prove myself then they would assume that I’m not equal to them. So I have to prove that I’m actually equal or better to get their respect’. Another participant added that having VI meant that ‘you’ve got to set yourself apart to look more as an equal’.

In an attempt to establish their identities as ‘normal’ students, the young people typically conducted themselves in one of several ways. Some tried to prove themselves by excelling academically or through conducting considerably visual tasks, such as playing cricket, tennis or chess. These participants conducted these activities either in or out of school, although they placed considerable importance on the scholastic community recognising their successes. Participants who had neither extraordinary academic nor competitive abilities generally turned to their social skills to demonstrate competency. They did so by surrounding themselves with supportive friends who were popular in the social hierarchy of the school. Whichever strategy participants used to gain social standing in the school, they each acknowledged that they could never break completely free of the seemingly negative attitudes that others perpetuated towards them. Each reported that some students continued to overlook their achievements and concentrate on their deficits, although teachers evidently did likewise.

Discussion

On a personal level, I undertook this research to explore current-day inclusive education as young people with VI experience it and to learn whether or not it might have improved since the 1990s when I had attended secondary school. Lamentably, I found that in spite of learning about the significance of autonomy and seamless access to the young people’s inclusion, schooling had barely changed. Overservicing by paraprofessionals, if anything, appeared to have increased to make up for the perpetuated shortcomings of most teachers’ pedagogical practices. Socially, the young people felt ostracised within the school by virtue of their impairments, and thus, they felt compelled to prove their capabilities in an endless competitive pursuit for normalcy. These findings indicate that although it was promoted as an inclusive school, for young people with VI at least, it failed to live up to these expectations.

But, if inclusive education is predicated on the advancement of human rights as originally envisioned by UNESCO (1994) in their formation of the Salamanca Statement, then disability still troubles this development. McDermott and Duke Raley (2009) argue that democracy – in its present manifestation – fails those with disabilities because mere lip service is paid to justice and equality both inside and outside of schools. They suggest that this comes about because ‘their bodies show less what they cannot do and more the marks put upon them by circumstances, by those seemingly not disabled at the time’ (p. 433).

At school, the young people’s subjectivities were constituted as special – in a way that extended far beyond the sum of their impairments. Youdell (2006) observes that within schools, an entanglement of discourses constitutes students’ subjectivities. Over and above having impaired vision, the discursive practices within the school branded them as abnormal or, as Youdell (2006) would have it, impossible students when compared with normal, sighted learners. But through inexorable support, their inclusion, as far as the professionals were concerned at least, was rendered actualised or, at best, more stable. On the flipside of this, however, the participants themselves reported that it also rendered them socially inferior, making them feel as if they had to create a cloak of competence (Edgerton, 1967) to attempt to gain social traction within the school.

The wider implications of these findings point to the school’s culture. For indeed as Kugelmass (2006) notes, sociocultural phenomena are central to inclusive schooling. There is, she concludes, no one specific organisational structure or particular practice that promotes inclusion; it is a whole-school commitment to inclusion that is required. Although this study highlighted the actions of stakeholders within the school’s culture that were facilitative of the young people’s inclusion, there were equal numbers of practices that inhibited it, thus constituting them as impossible students.

Further, it is incongruous that many of the practices that were aimed at increasing the young people’s inclusion had the opposite effect, that is, they limited the young people’s access as well as their autonomy. The practices that schools engender to increase student inclusion but inadvertently have the opposite effect are important factors that need to be better understood (Slee, 2012). Although this research has added the voices of young people to the inclusion debate, a more thorough exploration of how inclusive school cultures operate is required. This means seeking to learn qualitatively the discursive practices that come together to glue their cultures together, including policy mandates, and the voices of students, teachers and support staff.

Conclusion

Inhibited inclusion in schools, such as that highlighted in the current paper, can lead to further damaging effects for young people with disabilities. As McDermott and Duke Raley (2009) note, exclusion for students with disabilities in schools is perpetuated beyond the institution:

‘A popular but risky way to play nature and nurture with children comes in two parts: the first describes what they cannot do at an early age; the second
assumes that the identified limitations predict directly what they cannot do as adults.’ (p. 431)

However, the principal findings of this study suggest that by enhancing students’ access to learning and social opportunities, as well as by stepping back and giving them greater autonomy, their inclusion can be increased.

Slee (2012) also registers his concern about the fate of people with disabilities both in education and outside of it. He observes that exclusion, on account of disability, ‘has come to be seen as natural; it is a part of the order of things’ (p. 3). The overbearing dominance of the special education discourse clearly contributes to this occurrence. An open research paradigm, such as that presented here, however, enables those with disabilities in educational systems to elucidate their concerns and offer solutions. In this way, they allow us to get a greater handle on how we might ‘dismantle exclusion as it presents itself in education’ (Slee, 2012, p. 11). In light of the power of qualitative research to open channels of communication in this way, it is glaringly apparent that we must continue the project of capturing insider perspectives in order to better serve inclusion in education and beyond.

Notes on contributor
Ben Whitburn is a PhD candidate at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. His research interests are on the improvement of inclusive secondary schooling from insider perspectives. His thesis – expected in 2014 – provides a comparison between the perspectives of young people with disabilities and inclusive policy in both Australia and Spain.

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References


Chapter Four: The Dissection of Paraprofessional Support in Inclusive Education: You're in Mainstream with a Chaperone

Preamble

Chapter Four comprises a journal paper that was written and published during candidature. It is included as it appears in the Australasian Journal of Special Education 37(2) 2013, 147-161.

In this chapter I take two of the principal categories of the grounded theory study presented in the previous chapter—Light and Heavy Paraprofessional Support. I discuss the location of paraprofessional support within inclusive education discourse, and assign the terminology of light and heavy as a subversive move to describe the weight of obligation that these roles can impose on students. By presenting raw data that illustrate the experiences of research participants with paraprofessionals, I demonstrate the impact of these two roles, as well as the implications of other staff in reproducing them.

Although I define the support roles as both facilitative and inhibitive, I involve the young people's voices in this analysis to illustrate that they are not binary oppositions, but implications of a school culture that struggles to work with diversity. Instead of including the students, paraprofessional support is offered as a band-aid solution to their classroom presence. Importantly, this work challenges the support model for students with special educational needs in inclusive schools, which is typically employed in Australia.
The Dissection of Paraprofessional Support in Inclusive Education: ‘You’re in Mainstream With a Chaperone’

Ben Whitburn

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The experiences of young people with disabilities of inclusive schooling are largely underresearched. This paper reports recent findings of a small-scale Australian qualitative study, in which secondary students with vision impairment spoke about their experiences of receiving paraprofessional support. Two overarching themes emerged from this study: ‘light’ and ‘heavy’ paraprofessional support. The results presented here demonstrate that participants described that support personnel upheld the strong arm of the special education tradition, which was manifestly detrimental to their inclusion. Raw data is presented to elucidate the emergent themes, and to explain the various pedagogical and general support roles of class and special educators in eliminating the need for direct paraprofessional presence in lessons. The light and heavy model of support is also examined in terms of how it fits into the complexity of the education discourse and the young people’s own aspirations for full inclusion.

Keywords: inclusive education, secondary school, paraprofessional support, vision impairment, qualitative research, social justice

Inclusive ideals define educational policy in most developed countries (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2008). In the Australian context, approximately 3000 children and young people with vision impairment (VI) are educated with specialist support (Australian Blindness Forum, 2008) in inclusive schools (Foreman, 2011). In spite of this, as Slee (2011) points out, inclusion presents a major challenge for educators. This may be due to the fact that teacher education programs lack “‘real world” learning’ (Ryan, Carrington, Selva, & Healy, 2009, p. 156), in which preservice teachers learn to ‘experience diversity in people’s cultures, backgrounds, abilities and needs’ (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 156).

To this end, university teaching programs are pivotal to inclusive schooling. They have a responsibility to prepare preservice teachers to engage all students with inclusive practices (Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011). However, such courses tend to be aligned with the medical model of disability (Allan, 2008; Rice, 2006). Consequently, as Slee (2011, p. 153) suggests, ‘student teachers . . . [are] treated to a Grey’s Anatomy approach to inclusive education where they are instructed in the pathology of human differences and “defects”’.
In Australia, educational jurisdictions have been including children and young people with VI in mainstream classrooms since the 1930s (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2008). Education Queensland (2012), which presides over the school in which the current study was conducted, ‘is committed to providing safe, supportive, inclusive and disciplined learning environments that provide educational opportunities for all Queensland students’ (para. 1).

The Deployment of Paraprofessional Support

In an attempt to reduce the vulnerability to exclusion of young people with disabilities from mainstream classrooms, paraprofessionals are regularly employed to support them directly (Tews & Lupart, 2008; Webster et al., 2010). Students with VI are also typically accommodated in this way (Lewis & McKenzie, 2010). Teachers are generally guided by their assumptions about the difficulties associated with educating students with disabilities (Rice, 2006). Therefore, they often tether such students to the special education discourse (Florian, 2010) rather than providing them with appropriate access to the core curriculum. This may explain why paraprofessionals are employed so readily to support students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Indeed, Tews and Lupart (2008) define this era, in which inclusive education has been tied to an excess of support for students with disabilities, as the ‘paraprofessional movement’ (p. 40).

Yet the overall purpose and value of such support is disputable (Giangreco, 2009; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001). In their large-scale UK-based longitudinal study of paraprofessional support, Webster et al. (2010) found that support personnel appear to have become the principal teachers of students with special educational needs. Students who received paraprofessional support regressed academically, and tended to forego interaction with peers. These findings present a real danger to the inclusive schooling of students whom class teachers consider are difficult to teach because of their challenging support needs.

Students’ Views of Paraprofessional Support

Students with disabilities who attend inclusive schools appear not to have been consulted widely on their support needs. Although some educators may be tempted to dismiss students’ views about aspects of their schooling (Cook-Sather, 2006), such an attitude could have damaging effects on inclusive education. American philosopher John Dewey, whose progressive thinking in the 20th century was influential on educational reform and social democracy in schools, held that the primary responsibility of schools was to involve students in continual enquiry into social matters (Dewey, 1944). Following Dewey, if inclusive education is both predicated on and acts as the foreground of social justice, it would fail to exist if educators neglected to listen to the voices of students. In advancing a research agenda that is concentrated on the restoration of inclusive education onto a course of social justice, Slee (2011, p. 169) poses the pertinent question: ‘Who is better able to talk about the needs and aspirations of disabled children than the children themselves?’

In their concluding statement of a comprehensive review of relevant literature, Giangreco et al. (2001) noted the absence of student perspectives on the suitability of paraprofessional support in inclusive classrooms. More than a decade after this finding, a database search yielded a small number of published studies with methodology that included the voiced experiences of students with disabilities about the paraprofessional support that they received (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005; Mortier, Desimpel, De Schauwer, & Van Hove, 2011; Tews & Lupart, 2008), among other aspects of their inclusion (Curtin &
An assortment of noteworthy themes emerged from these studies. Students in receipt of paraprofessional support appear to constantly experience feelings of dependence on support personnel, which negatively affected their sense of autonomy (Tews & Lupart, 2008). Furthermore, the studies reported that students often felt controlled by support personnel (Broer et al., 2005; De Schauwer et al., 2009; Mortier et al., 2011; Tews & Lupart, 2008). Students who attended classes accompanied by paraprofessionals continually compared themselves against their peers who did not receive support. This invariably led to them experiencing discomfort (Broer et al., 2005; Curtin & Clarke, 2005).

Giangreco (2009) contends that issues such as those cited above are among many that are associated with paraprofessional deployment. From these findings, it appears that careless benevolence on the part of schools in providing paraprofessional support is harmful to inclusive education. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that teachers have an ‘important gate-keeping function in terms of access to general education experiences for students with disabilities in . . . schools’ (Rice, 2006, p. 254).

This paper reports key findings of a recent small-scale qualitative study conducted with a group of students with VI who attended an inclusive public secondary school in Queensland, Australia. The study was chiefly informed by the perspectives of participants about paraprofessional support in the context of their schooling. These findings are among several core aspects of the students’ experiences of educational inclusion reported elsewhere (Whitburn, 2013a). Broer et al. (2005) called for other researchers to extend on their own findings by exploring the perspectives of current students with disabilities about the support they receive from paraprofessionals. This study was designed to build on this work. Dewey held that only when those most at risk of marginalisation in schools are given opportunities to work toward social advancement would social justice be realised (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009). The current research aims to investigate the power of the methodology within Dewey’s vision for democracy within schools.

**Research Design**

This researcher conducted a small-scale qualitative study with a group of young people with VI centred on exploring their experiences of inclusion in a mainstream school. Grounded theory provided the methodological framework for analysing and reporting the findings (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The following section provides relevant details on ethical considerations, participants, research setting, the use of student voice, data collection instruments, and coding and analysis techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

**Grounded Theory.** The researcher adopted the qualitative framework of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to guide this study. Grounded theory is a set of systematic guidelines for iteratively collecting and analysing data, with the objective of developing a formative theory that is grounded in the raw findings. As generated theories are grounded in the data collected in fieldwork, they are faithful to the perspectives of those being studied — an important factor in honouring the voices of young people with disabilities who attend inclusive schools. It is therefore a qualitative framework that can be readily applied to inclusive education research (see Kugelmass, 2001; Low, 1996). A discussion of how the framework influenced data collection and analysis follows.
Ethical Considerations

A secondary school was identified where young people with VI were enrolled. The researcher developed an information and consent package for the school principal, to seek his approval to undertake this research. Once the principal’s agreement was granted, parents of the young people were sent letters through the mail that both explained the intent of the study and requested their permission for their son or daughter to participate. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee. Once parental approval was granted for their participation, assent packages were produced in accessible formats, such as braille and large print, and offered to the young people. The objective of the assent packages was to seek verbal assurance from the young people that they were willing to participate. Further, the young people were informed that they were not under any obligation to take part in the study, and could opt out at any time, or have their comments struck from the record.

Participants

A group of five young people — four boys and one girl evenly distributed across Year levels 8–12 and aged 13–17 years — participated in the study. Though all participants were legally blind, each had varying degrees of impaired sight, ranging from total blindness to low (yet outwardly functional) vision. Accordingly, they used a variety of assistive devices and alternatively formatted resources, including electronic screen readers and magnification, braille and large print. Each had also experienced a different time of onset of their VI.

Due to the low incidence of VI, combined with the heterogeneity of participants and the somewhat small geographic location of the setting, it became apparent that each could be inadvertently identified through his or her comments. Throughout this paper, participants are neither referred to by pseudonym nor identifiable characteristic, to protect their anonymity. Instead, when necessary, they are assigned letters A through E, with the researcher’s voice designated R.

Research Setting.

All participants attended a single secondary school in South East Queensland, which had a special education program (SEP). A full-time specialist teacher of vision impairment (TVI) was employed at the school. Each student had enrolled in the school from the beginning of Year 8, and had studied there for at least a full term before commencing participation in the study. Further, all participants had attended an inclusive primary school before transitioning to the research setting.

Student Voice.

In a Deweyan sense, ‘the creation of an equitable society had its genesis in democratic schools where individuals would freely engage with one another in ongoing inquiry that would inform current social practices’ (Boyles et al., 2009, p. 34). In accordance with Dewey’s ideology for social justice in education, a principal objective of this study was to call on its participants to inform its agenda. By voicing their experiences and ambitions regarding their education, it was expected that this research would elucidate students’ views of the appropriateness of inclusive practices that educators are presently using.

Despite cautioning researchers and educators alike about the risks associated with listening to students’ voices, Cook-Sather (2006) argues that the opinions of young people about their education warrant the attention of professionals. She advances that students have both a unique insight into their education, and should be afforded opportunities to shape it. Slee (2011) further advances that this is especially pertinent for students with disabilities who attend inclusive schools.
Insider Status

Along with the participants, this researcher has severe VI, and had attended a school in the 1990s with facilities similar to those of the research setting. Thus he had the potential advantage of being a researcher with insider status. Slee (1996) calls for researchers with disabilities to undertake studies of this nature to expose the confines of inclusion. Charmaz (2006) contends that the interpretative framework of grounded theory involves the voice of the researcher alongside participants. On the whole, this researcher’s familiarity with having VI in a predominantly sighted school facilitated him to pursue lines of enquiry in both data collection and analysis that outsider researchers may ordinarily either overlook altogether, or inadvertently disregard as being less significant to the students’ experiences.

Data Collection Instruments

Researchers using a grounded theory approach to their study primarily collect data through interviews, which gives them access to participants’ raw descriptions of circumstances that take place in certain contexts (Creswell, 2008). This researcher therefore conducted semistructured focus group and individual face-to-face interviews with students to collect data for this study. Three focus group and 28 one-to-one interviews were conducted with participants that varied between 20 and 60 min in duration depending on time constraints.

An advantage of grounded theory is that it calls for open-ended enquiry, with the aim of exploring how participants interpret their experiences of a particular phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher therefore devised the list of questions below for use in initial interviews, with the aim of evoking participants’ responses to emotive questions.

Initial Interview Questions

Q1: Tell me about the most surprising thing you found when you first came to this school.
Q2: Tell me about the easiest/hardest thing at high school.
Q3: Describe when you’ve felt as if you have achieved well at school.
Q4: Tell me about when you may have felt frustrated at school.
Q5: Describe for me what is satisfying/the least satisfying at school.

Subsequent interview questions emerged from those listed, based on what participants revealed that had affected their schooling experiences. Other questions were often determined from concepts that emerged from analyses of previous interviews, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The researcher audio-recorded the interviews and transcribed them verbatim.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of open, axial and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In open coding, the researcher attempts to interpret the data by analysing it line-by-line and applying theoretical codes to raw findings. It is important here to conduct comparative analysis on emergent codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), to form and strengthen theoretical categories as reflected in the raw data.

Axial coding was performed on data by taking a central theme that had emerged through open coding, and placing other relevant categories around it to examine how they interact (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Through axial coding of multiple slices of data, it became apparent that autonomy and seamless access were central themes that held relevance to
the young people's inclusion in the school. Actions of paraprofessionals impacted on these important elements. Selective coding, then, involved arranging the students' narratives to reflect the developed theory. The interpretation of data is fundamental here (Charmaz, 2006), as the researchers' intuitions must be accounted for in producing meaning from the data. Both the researcher and participants were involved in the analysis, as they discussed results in a final focus group interview.

Findings

The terms paraprofessional and teacher aide are used interchangeably throughout this paper. The term paraprofessional was found in the literature to generally identify support personnel in inclusive schools, whereas participants of this study tended to use teacher aide. From analysis of the young people's voiced experiences of their inclusion, two overarching themes emerged: 'light' and 'heavy' paraprofessional support. These descriptions of paraprofessional services refer to the actions of support personnel that were both facilitative (light) and inhibitive (heavy) to the young people's inclusion in the school. Here, these themes and their contributory subthemes are elucidated, with the young people's comments and sections of raw interview data used to draw out topical significance to their experiences. Various actions of other school staff that led to the engagement of the divergent strains of paraprofessional support are discussed. Finally, the young people's beliefs on how class teachers could eliminate heavy paraprofessional support are presented.

Mainstream? Some Sort of Stream

First, it is important to illustrate how the young people regarded the role of paraprofessionals in their inclusion in the school. Raw data from one of the focus group interviews amply represents their views:

R: We've talked about mainstream and inclusion in the classes and inclusion in the school a lot. And whenever I've asked any of you are you actually in mainstream, every one of you has responded with uncertainty. That is, [you indicated] 'I'm not sure', I know [C] you said to me, 'I wouldn't say that I'm not in mainstream'. None of you ever said, you know, 'yes I am, unequivocally in mainstream'.

A: What's mainstream?

R: Well. You guys have told me what mainstream is in your eyes, and that is . . . you're in normal classes, you're competing with others, teacher aides play a big role in that, you're with your peers studying at the same level that they are, not necessarily withdrawn from classes. Is that mainstream for you guys?

A: Yep.

B: Yeah.

D: Yeah.

C: Putting it that way I would say that I am mainstream.

A: Putting it that way . . .

B: Yeah. Putting it that way.

R: Well, that's what I've sort of gotten from all of you. So regardless if the teacher aide's there or not . . . you are still counting yourself as mainstream?

C: Yes.
In this interview each of the young people had difficulty pinpointing whether or not they were included in the school. The students appeared to reach the collective decision that they were not included per se, though they were cautious about using a simple yes or no binary paradigm. Instead, they tried out various metaphorical designations to explain how in-class paraprofessional support impacted their schooling by limiting their inclusion in it.

In the following sections of this paper, the young people’s perceptions of the varied paraprofessional roles that constituted the light and heavy themes are described.

Light Paraprofessional Support

The young people considered that convivial, unobtrusive paraprofessional support facilitated their inclusion into the mainstream classes that they attended. They spoke positively about support personnel who scaffolded their education by performing activities including (a) resource preparation and braille transcription, (b) some discreet in-class support, and (c) making specialised equipment available to them for use in lessons. Provision of these support functions enabled the students to retain seamless access to their studies with increased autonomy, which this researcher has termed ‘light paraprofessional support’.

Resource Preparation and Braille Transcription. The young people required learning resources in several accessible representations, including large print, braille, audio and tactile formats; some also used electronic copies of worksheets and PowerPoint slides. Teacher aides generally prepared and disseminated the material in the various formats specific to the students’ needs. As one of the young people explained, ‘If I need something enlarged they’ll [the paraprofessionals] go and get it for me . . . whether it’s for a subject they’re helping me with or not’. This participant considered that this aspect of support was indispensable, because it provided him access to his studies.

Paraprofessionals who were qualified in braille transcription techniques also performed a multidirectional role of preparing text and graphical content for the young people who required this format, and transcribing students’ brailled work into print for class teachers. One participant related that he ‘couldn’t do without’ this service, because through its provision, the support personnel bridged access to divergent text types.

Discreet In-class Support. Paraprofessionals also attended most lessons of four of the young people, to support them directly. This was a divisive issue, but most participants acknowledged that personal support was made necessary because class teachers regularly compromised their access to pedagogy and written material. For example, one participant observed, ‘I probably do need a teacher aide [in most classes], because . . . the teacher might
write up the answer, or whatever, and do something on [the] spur of the moment, and I’m not getting that'. Other participants complained that teachers often overlooked their requirements for increased verbal communication and accessible resources, perpetuating their reliance on teacher aides.

The students each expressed a desire for autonomy in the classroom. They appreciated paraprofessionals who tended to the support needs of other students in addition to themselves. For example, one participant described feeling liberated when paraprofessionals had to go and assist other students in his lessons: 'It gives me more independence and ... free will'.

Another participant explained that he often sat with sighted peers while a paraprofessional sat some distance away from him, and 'just writes the notes off the board for me and that’s it, and I do the work by myself'. He added that 'when I’m sitting with my friends, I feel more a part of the class'. This suggests that the young person and the paraprofessional had found the ideal balance of support based on the shared understanding that he preferred the personnel to assist him from a distance. Through this arrangement, he could enjoy both increased responsibility for his own studies and the opportunity to be with his friends. For him, this epitomised inclusion.

Provision of Specialised Equipment. Paraprofessionals provided specialist equipment to some participants in lessons. Devices cited by the young people included visual aids, such as magnifiers, and laptop computers with both adaptive software and electronic resources loaded on them. Provision of such equipment reportedly increased the young people's access to study material and their autonomy. For example, a participant who was provided a magnification device in some lessons described how, through its provision, she had autonomous access to her work, which in turn reduced her reliance on the support personnel: 'If I’m reading a book or something I just have a big sheet [that magnifies printed text], and she [the paraprofessional] basically sits there [unneeded]'.

Another participant who had been using a laptop that the paraprofessional provided to his class expressed relief that he could access electronic copies of texts: 'At least I’ve been able to see the textbook. I couldn’t see the textbook before, so I can actually see it now'.

Although other equipment that teacher aides brought to the young people’s lessons was aimed at increasing their access to study material, their autonomy was not enhanced through its use. For example, one participant described how paraprofessionals brought raised-line drawing kits to his numeracy lessons, on which they drew tactile representations of diagrams. As the young person related, he benefited from this support: 'I can feel the line that ... she or he has drawn up. And that’ll give me a rough idea of what the diagram is on the board or on the worksheet'.

Despite not gaining increased autonomy through the use of such equipment, the young people who were dependent on this type of support believed that it was essential to their inclusion in mainstream lessons. They appeared comfortable with the presence of teacher aides in their classes when using this type of equipment because the personnel had unambiguous support roles to perform that were obvious to both themselves and their peers.

Heavy Paraprofessional Support

The second overarching theme had a greater impact on the young people’s inclusion than its precursor. Both the negative social implications associated with receiving in-class assistance and the students’ perceptions of the authoritarian approach of paraprofessionals contributed to what this researcher has termed ‘heavy paraprofessional support’.
Negative Social Implications of Paraprofessional Support. The young people reported that they had been automatically assigned in-class paraprofessional support when they enrolled in the school, typically without their input on their requirements. Each reported having to become accustomed to sitting, often alone, with teacher aides in most lessons. On this issue they constantly compared themselves with sighted students, who they perceived as being able to enjoy freedom because they generally did not have to receive assistance from teacher aides, and could sit with their friends.

The young people spoke of the embarrassment that they often experienced because of their supposed dependence on the support personnel. As one junior student related, ‘At the start of the year when I got all the teacher aides in my classes, people were asking “why do you need that teacher” [aide],’ which reportedly caused her considerable humiliation.

Being in constant receipt of in-class support induced feelings of exclusion in some students. This was particularly the case for participants who were made to sit away from their peers at desks with the support personnel. As one participant observed, ‘When I’m just sitting with the teacher aide, I think I feel more isolated’. Although some believed that the benefit of in-class support to their access to study material outweighed this inevitable consequence of the presence of paraprofessionals, others affirmed that it was restrictive to their social inclusion and, in turn, their membership of the school community.

There was only one student who did not receive paraprofessional support in classes at the time that this study was conducted. He reported that he had, after one year, convinced teaching staff that he did not require in-class support. In this case, paraprofessionals had been withdrawn from his lessons to ‘see how . . . [I] go’. He remarked that after he stopped receiving direct support from teacher aides, his friends assumed their role from time to time ‘with reading the stuff I can’t read on the board’. This participant provided a noteworthy contrasting viewpoint to the study. Although he had previously experienced negative social consequences of receiving paraprofessional support, later he relished in his capacity to blend in with sighted students. He proclaimed that the new arrangement ‘brings up my morale’.

Authoritarian Approaches of Paraprofessionals. A major point of contention in relation to in-class support was the authoritarian approach of some of the support personnel to their roles. Authoritarian teacher aides reportedly disrupted the young people’s autonomy by both overcompensating for them and assuming responsibility for their learning.

Overcompensating paraprofessionals. Some participants reported that paraprofessionals undermined their autonomy through actions that overcompensated for them. For example, as one participant related, the teacher aide often supported her in classes by writing notes from the blackboard. This led to the student feeling as though ‘I’m . . . slacking off ‘cause I’m not writing, and . . . [the teacher aide is] writing everything out for me, and I’m just answering the questions’. This participant enjoyed writing tasks, and relished her capacity to write neatly by hand despite her impaired vision. Therefore being restricted in this activity through the automatic actions of the paraprofessional caused her some disappointment, as she was unable to display her skills and act independently in lessons.

Paraprofessionals’ assumptions of responsibility. In lessons, paraprofessionals often took responsibility for the students’ learning. One participant observed that having a paraprofessional sit with him in classes was not unlike having ‘another control, authority figure [in addition to the class teacher], which is solely looking after me, most of the time, which is terrible’. This participant complained that authoritarian teacher aides frequently
demanded he concentrate on his work rather than interact with other students, and insisted he take notes as they dictated them from the blackboard. He reported that paraprofessionals would often check that he had completed his homework, often threatening him that they would have teachers intervene if he failed to produce completed work. He fervently remarked, 'Teacher aides step over their boundaries and take on that authority role trying to boss around the student too much. . . . They should be there helping the student when the student wants the help. They shouldn’t enforce anything'.

Other participants reported that paraprofessionals intruded on their independence by attempting to control the manner in which they attended to their studies. For example, one young person detailed his desire for autonomy: 'I feel that I should be able to pick whatever I want to do in my work. If we get a worksheet I’ll go straight to the end or skip a few questions, and they’re hesitant in letting me do that sometimes'. These actions led the participant to feel resentment towards the support personnel.

Another participant related that he was weary of constantly trying to regain control over his own studies from teacher aides: 'It’s another confrontation I don’t like having every day'. The only participant who paraprofessionals did not directly support in classes also reported, 'When I was having teacher aides they were more of a nuisance to me, because I could have gotten my work done a lot faster [without them]'. He continued illustrating his point, by emphatically asserting 'I’m not stupid, I’m blind', indicating that he felt paraprofessionals played down his capabilities.

**Demographic Contribution to Discomfort**

The age difference between the young people and support personnel contributed to the participants’ discomfort. Most paraprofessionals who were employed at the school were middle-aged women with children of their own. The young people reported that in addition to the negative social implications attached to working with personnel of this demographic, these paraprofessionals had an overbearing approach to their support duties. The only notable exception was a male paraprofessional, who the young people appeared to hold in higher regard than the women. In relation to this person’s approach to his support role, one participant remarked that, 'He’s not going to do our work. [He realises that] there’s no point pushing us if we don’t want to do our work'.

All participants expressed a preference for younger paraprofessionals, speculating that they could have a more productive working relationship with such personnel than those of whom were employed at the school. As one participant observed, 'A younger person would be better. Maybe just close the generation gap [by] one'. It also appeared that participants held individual preferences for support personnel who were of their own gender.

**Overreliance on Heavy Paraprofessional Support**

The young people believed that educational staff frequently, though perhaps inadvertently, left them with diminished access to classroom pedagogy, instruction, and resources. Consequently, they regularly had an awkward position of dependence imposed upon them. This accentuated the young people’s differences to other students, consequently dampening their inclusion in lessons. In addition, it appeared that, because the TVI had reportedly assumed broadened responsibilities in the SEP, much of this role had been allocated to paraprofessionals. As a result, the support personnel had become the young people’s principal liaison with the SEP. This was one reason that emerged from this study that attempted to explain why teacher aides had become explicitly authoritarian in their day-to-day interaction with the young people.
However, that the paraprofessionals lacked pedagogical skills was also apparent. They often supported the young people inappropriately in an attempt to compensate for underservicing by the TVI and class teachers. For example, one young person related that the TVI had been ‘too busy’ to attend to his needs for explicit instruction in VI-specific skills from the expanded core curriculum for students with VI and other disabilities (Hatlen, 1996).

Though this participant was proud of his independence, he recognised that he lacked the basic abilities to use a screen reader to navigate simple web pages and electronic mail. Rather, he had to rely on paraprofessionals to sit with and read content to him when the curriculum required the conduct of online research. He accepted that learning skills to increase his autonomy was of utmost importance, ‘so that you’re prepared for real life. ‘Cause there’s no one out there to help you in the world [after school]’. Nonetheless, neither the TVI nor other educators had been available to teach him such skills, which left him in a position of dependence on support personnel. In turn, his ambitions for complete, autonomous access to his studies were compromised.

**Reducing Paraprofessional Support**

Adding weight to the agitation that the young people experienced in relation to heavy paraprofessional support, they believed that, all things considered, both the TVI and class teachers could diminish their reliance on the personnel if they were more attentive to the students’ inclusion. Those who required instruction in VI-specific skills believed it was necessary that the TVI return to focus on their needs in these areas. In addition, the young people suggested that class teachers should prepare lessons with a greater focus on providing them with autonomous access to study material. As one young person proposed, ‘They [class teachers] need to be preparing the classes properly. Then we don’t need the teacher aides’.

Participants spoke of pedagogical strategies that some class teachers utilised, which both effectively included them in lessons, and eliminated their reliance on paraprofessional support. These included using appropriate communication modes, making accessible resources available to them in a timely manner, using three-dimensional modelling and actual objects to make graphical content accessible to the students, and being approachable outside of lessons for individual consultations (Whitburn, 2013b). One participant described teachers who implemented such pedagogical strategies as ‘experienced’, and added, ‘They know what they’re talking about. They teach it in a way that suits us, or suits me’.

However, it appeared that not all educators who implemented such practices did so suitably as to retain continuity in the young people’s inclusion in lessons, and others appeared not to understand the impact of the young person’s VI on learning. This left the young people uncertain about the success of their inclusion. As one participant affirmed when pressed on whether or not he was enjoying full inclusion in the school, ‘Relatively. [But] I still have a teacher aide which is with me [in] all my classes, supporting me’.

**Discussion**

Participants of this study were hesitant to characterise their inclusion in the school in accordance with a binary structure; for example, yes or no, success or failure, positive or negative. Instead, they set their sights on what they aspired to in their inclusion, namely, seamless access and autonomy. They then placed other stakeholders around these desires, and identified to what degree the actions of these others facilitated or inhibited their
inclusion. MacLure (2003) points out that oppositional binaries are noticeably abundant in the discourses of educational research in constructing how knowledge is ‘carved out and carved up’ (Edwards, as cited in MacLure, 2003, p. 10). However, MacLure indicates that this is unfortunate, given the complexities of the education discourse. Allan (2008) finds that though it is useful to pinpoint binary opposites when deconstructing educational inclusion, she recommends viewing the relationships between such oppositions in the contexts in which they are created.

By way of explication, it may appear to the casual onlooker that the themes light and heavy paraprofessional support are binary opposites themselves. However, to think that they parallel a simple yes-and-no pattern would be erroneous. Rather, they fit into the convolution of the young people’s schooling, demonstrating not only how the young people’s inclusion was affected through the paraprofessionals’ actions, but also how the actions (or inactions) of teachers and specialist staff contributed to the support personnel’s overall conduct. Therefore, light and heavy are not necessarily binary opposites at all, but are ‘nested’ (Balkin, as cited in Allan, 2008, p. 79) within the fabric of the school’s culture and teacher pedagogy.

This study revealed that its participants considered one of the major shortfalls of their inclusion as the heavy paraprofessional support that was provided to them. The culture of the school appeared to endorse practices that perpetuated the discourse of deficit and support for students with disabilities. This was evident in the way that educators relied on paraprofessionals to provide heavy support functions to recompense the students with VI for their shortcomings in noninclusive pedagogical practices. Broer et al. (2005) and Giangreco (2009) caution that underservicing by class teachers is a critical bi-product of having paraprofessionals in classrooms.

The TVI also underserviced the young people, seemingly neglecting to observe his responsibilities of instructing them in VI-specific skill areas from the expanded core curriculum. Together, these occurrences led paraprofessionals to perform invasive support functions that diminished the students’ agency. Giangreco (2009, p. 3) cautions that ‘the nature of the support [provided to students with disabilities] may be inconsistent with individual goals that are geared toward greater student independence’, which was evident in this case, to the detriment of the young people’s inclusion. These findings are consistent with other studies (Broer et al., 2005; De Schauwer et al., 2009; Mortier et al., 2011; Tews & Lupart, 2008), and show that young people with VI feel similarly towards paraprofessionals, as do those with intellectual and other impairments.

Further, the study conducted by Broer et al. (2005) revealed that participants felt ‘mothered’ (p. 425) by support personnel, on account of both the support personnel’s demographics (mostly middle-aged women) and their invasive approaches to assisting the students. The authors found that participants would prefer younger paraprofessionals that were of their own gender, and that intrusive support led the students to being socially outcast, isolated away from their peers in classes, and unable to function independently. This corresponds with how the young people with VI who participated in the present study felt about the invasive paraprofessional support that they endured.

Limitations

This study was exploratory rather than exhaustive. It relied on a sample of only five participants who attended a single school. Further, although a sufficient number of interviews were conducted to produce repetition of themes in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the overall findings cannot be extrapolated to all secondary students with VI who attend...
inclusive secondary schools. In addition, although the researcher made a conscious attempt to avoid subjectivity on account of his insider status (Merten, Sullivan, & Stace, 2011), his position may have impacted the interpretation of findings.

Conclusion

The students’ aspirations for agency is indicative of how young people with VI can function in inclusive classrooms, and indeed the world beyond the school gate, if given opportunities to do so. However, in addition to the finding by Tews and Lupart (2008) that educational inclusion was rapidly becoming a paraprofessional movement, the various themes explored in this paper indicate that support personnel are deployed in a way that perpetuates the special education tradition in inclusive education. Moreover, from students’ perspectives, it appears that class teachers are evidently grateful for the paraprofessionals’ presence in their classrooms. See (2011) argues that ‘inclusive education needs to be decoupled from special education. In this way it may be restored as a genuine platform for addressing oppression and disadvantage across a range of constituencies’ (p. 154). Until paraprofessionals are divested of primary pedagogical responsibilities in classrooms, this will not occur.

Webster et al. (2010) remind us that class teachers are trained professionals, who hold the inevitable responsibility of facilitating all students in their care to learn. The group of secondary students with VI who participated in this study evidently agreed with these sentiments. If only educators would facilitate them to shake the heavy weight of support from their backs. As teacher training programs become more focused on learner diversity and engaged with social justice, such as that described by Ryan et al. (2009), and as teacher programs are developed with an emancipatory approach as their ideology, such as that described by Rice (2006), there is a glimmer of hope for timely and crucial change.

References


Chapter Five: *A really good teaching strategy: Secondary students with vision impairment voice their experiences of inclusive teacher pedagogy*

Preamble

Chapter Five comprises a journal paper that was written and published during candidature. It is included as it appears in the British Journal of Visual Impairment 32(2) 2014, 148-156.

In this chapter, I detail a number of inclusive pedagogical practices utilised by class teachers that the participants of the Australian phase of this research identified. This is a more comprehensive analysis of one of the facilitative conceptual categories of this research, Appropriately Adapted Pedagogy (Chapter Three). The analysis is situated at a time in which students with VI are typically educated in inclusive schools in Australia (Foreman, 2011), although the reach and effectiveness of education programs is limited and teachers are seemingly at a loss as to how best to teach them (Australian Blindness Forum, 2008). The chapter begins with the premise that although paraprofessionals were employed to "support" the participants at school (Chapter Four), some—but certainly not all—class educators effortlessly included them in lessons without the need for support through the implementation of simple inclusive strategies. Moreover, this work reveals how through their practices, these educators facilitated student access and autonomy—the agentic elements that form the core categories of this grounded theory study (Chapter Three).

This analysis concludes with a discussion of the significance of students' voices in the development of inclusive schooling. The solutions offered by research participants are not technically prohibitive, nor are they situated within the limited purview of the medical model of disability. Instead, the practices discussed might provide access and autonomy to all learners in the classroom. This is important work that provides easy, practicable solutions to educators toward the advancement of inclusive schooling. It also demonstrates how the inclusion of students is contingent on the practices of teachers with comprehensive training.
"A really good teaching strategy": Secondary students with vision impairment voice their experiences of inclusive teacher pedagogy
Ben Whitburn
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‘A really good teaching strategy’: Secondary students with vision impairment voice their experiences of inclusive teacher pedagogy

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Abstract
The inclusion of students with vision impairment (VI) into regular classes is typically made possible via a raft of technical accommodations and special educational support. This article reports key findings of a small-scale qualitative Australian study conducted with a group of secondary school students with VI about teachers’ practices that increased their access and autonomy. Participants reported that a combination of (1) using appropriate communication modes, (2) making accessible resources available to students in a timely manner, (3) being able to ‘think outside the box’ about the provision of access to diagrammatic study material, and (4) being approachable outside of scheduled lessons for individual consultations increased their inclusion in the school. Raw data are presented to illustrate the value of these practices to the students. This article concludes with a discussion of the potential of students’ views to the facilitation of inclusive practices, and the broader implication of this to the teaching profession.

Keywords
Australia, inclusive practices, pedagogy, secondary school, student voice, vision impairment

Introduction
Most children and young people with vision impairment (VI) attend inclusive schools in Western countries (Foreman, 2011; Tuttle & Tuttle, 2004). To do so, they generally receive numerous adjustments to facilitate their inclusion into regular classrooms (Brown, 2009; Cox & Dykes, 2001; Hatlen, 1996; Palmer, 2005). It nevertheless seems incongruous that their education in these settings is recurrently ineffective, given that children with VI have been educated in inclusive classrooms in Australia since the 1930s (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2008). The Australian Blindness...
Forum (ABF, 2008) observes that education programmes for students with VI are habitually inequitable and lack direction, reach, and effect. In long term, this leaves young people with VI without the requisite skills to cope beyond secondary education, unable to gain and retain employment and/or live independently.

The concept of inclusive education presents a major challenge to educators (Allan, 2008; Slee, 2011). Despite a dramatic shift away from specialist pedagogy in classrooms, the special education tradition still lingers (Miles & Ainscow, 2011). Students with special needs are generally assigned paraprofessional support in mainstream classrooms, which stifles their social inclusion and generally means that teachers spend less time engaging with them directly (Tews & Lupart, 2008). However, as Miles and Ainscow (2011) caution, ‘More inclusive schools will not be achieved by transplanting special education thinking and practice into mainstream contexts’ (p. 3). Clearly then, a greater focus must be placed on the education of students with VI in inclusive schools, specifically in terms of how the practices of class teachers facilitate their learning.

What students with VI have to say

Little is known how students with VI make sense of their education in inclusive settings. Young people with disabilities generally (Allan, 2008; Slee, 2011), and with VI more specifically, have been left out of the conversation of how best to include them in schools. It is important to listen to the voices of students who are at risk of marginalisation about their experiences, in order to learn how best to enhance inclusive practices that might facilitate their learning. Cook-Sather (2006) argues that educators should pay close attention to the voices of their students. Moss (2012) extends on this argument with a suggestion that when consulted about their educational narratives, young people can reveal alternative stories that expedite a richer understanding and interpretation of inclusion and exclusion.

The author could only find four published studies conducted in the last quarter of a century that sought the perspectives of students with VI about their schooling (Higgins & Ballard, 2000; Khadka, Ryan, Margrain, Woodhouse, & Davies, 2012; O’Brien, 1989; West, Houghten, Taylor, & Ling, 2004). Whether or not the participants of these studies felt included at school was dependent on a number of factors, including social acceptance, support, teacher pedagogy, and access to resources.

The students considered class teachers’ practices indispensable to their inclusion. However, there appeared to be a fine line between pedagogical practices that effectively included the students with VI and those that excluded them. Moreover, this line could be easily crossed in two distinct directions, which led to social marginalisation. Many teachers failed to provide instructions in classes in a way that included students with VI (Higgins & Ballard, 2000; O’Brien, 1989; West et al., 2004). Often this was the case because teachers did not adapt classroom instructions, or neglected to provide them with accessible resources. In contrast, students with VI reported that they received too much support from teachers at times, which made them feel disempowered and contributed to their being socially outcast (Higgins & Ballard, 2000; Khadka et al., 2012). Across all four studies, the students felt socially marginalised at school (Higgins & Ballard, 2000; West et al., 2004), typically because of the personal support that they received from others (Khadka et al., 2012).

Clearly then, it is a delicate balance of teacher pedagogy that provides students with VI appropriate access to their work, without being prohibitively supportive or overly reliant on heavy paraprofessional services (Whitburn, 2013). Accordingly, class teachers’ practices appear to influence social inclusion in schools for VI students. It would be useful to learn from students with VI about teachers’ practices that capably hold this balance. This article discusses the findings of a recent
study that sought to do so. In particular, it focuses on the voices of secondary students with VI in relation to how educational staff contributed to their experiences of inclusion, and engaged the services of specialist support staff in so doing.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of secondary students with VI about their experiences of inclusive schooling, to reveal how in-school practices can affect their inclusion. This article concentrates on the students’ views of inclusive teacher pedagogy, which emerged as a part of the findings of the larger research project (Whitburn, 2014). Grounded theory was used to frame this study, which facilitated the development of a theoretical conception of findings (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the following section, the author describes the purpose of adopting grounded theory for this type of exploratory research. In the sections that follow, ethical considerations, sampling, participants, and the research setting are described. This precedes a discussion of the grounded theory techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) that guided data collection and analysis.

Exploratory research and the role of grounded theory

‘Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories “grounded” in the data themselves’ (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). In line with the objectives of this project, grounded theory enables researchers to narrow their focus by concentrating solely on the field under study, while openly constructing a theoretical explanation of their findings. The objective of this strategy is to look for meaning in the collected data before turning to published literature. Furthermore, grounded theory depends on simultaneous data collection and analysis, whereby concepts that emerge from scrutinising raw findings guide subsequent fieldwork, and so the process repeats until saturation is reached (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Ethical considerations, sampling, and participants

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee after a secondary school was identified with students who had VI enrolled in it. Five students (four boys and one girl) aged 13–17 years across years 8–12 participated in the study, after approval was sought from their parents and the school to do so. Assent was also sought from students throughout fieldwork to ensure they were willing to continue their participation in the study. Each attended the one secondary school in the Australian state of Queensland, which had a special education programme (SEP) that operated on school grounds.

The participants had disparate causes and varying degrees of VI, and each made use of specialised equipment such as Braille, large print, hand-held magnifiers, laptop computers with synthetic speech software, and electronic copies of textbooks. The students were enrolled in the SEP, which provided formatted resources and specialist instruction in VI-specific skills from the expanded core curriculum (Hatlen, 1996) as required. Despite this, all participants attended regular classes for most if not all of their scheduled school hours. Using a theoretical sampling technique advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1990), participants were selected on the basis that they were students of the research setting, and had been diagnosed with impaired vision. This sample represented a typical portrayal of students with visual impairments who enrolled in the school from year to year. Repeated access to the field provided this study with a small yet widely rich collection of data from multiple sources (Ball, 2006).
Data collection

More than 20 hr of face-to-face individual and focus group interviews were conducted with participants to generate the data of this study. These were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews took place in a designated meeting room, and each ranged from 20 to 60 min depending on time restraints. Participants attended interviews at different hours of the school day to avoid missing important lessons. It was believed that given the variation in ages of participants, the unique experiences of each would enrich the data, and add value to the generated theory. Moreover, repeated interviews with this sample of participants would ensure that iterative overlapping themes and patterns would emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Data analysis

Constant comparative analysis of the data as it was collected led to the development of the results, such as that presented on effective teacher pedagogy in this article. Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) formulation of grounded theory directed this process through a prescribed analytical model of open, axial, and selective coding – of which details are discussed below.

Open coding. Open coding requires the researcher to ask questions of the data and assign theoretical labels to them. Line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2006) led the researcher to draw out interpretations from individual lines of inquiry in interview transcripts, which were then compared against one another through constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The resultant conceptions derived from open coding directed subsequent interviews from a theoretical angle.

Axial coding. Following Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) canons of grounded theory, axial coding involves the selection of a particular occurrence that emerges from open coding that appears to hold theoretical significance to the study. This is then examined by way of its underlying causes, contexts and intervening conditions, strategies (both actions and interactions), and its consequences or outcomes. Axial coding then enabled the researcher to test relationships between the derived patterns, in the process of generating a plausible theory that would explain the collected data. In the case discussed in this article, the young people spoke at length about the actions of class teachers that either facilitated or inhibited their inclusion in lessons. The implications they brought to the study following this theme were that class teachers were central to their inclusion in the school, but were equally at risk of tarnishing it.

Selective coding. Selective coding – the final step in Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) analytical paradigm – involves higher level interpretation, whereby the researcher sorts the emerging theory into a comprehensible narrative. It is at the selective coding phase where raw data are matched with coded conceptual categories. The emergent theory is then developed around a set of core categories. How the researcher of this study undertook this phase of analysis is discussed below, with specific reference to the actions of teachers.

Teachers’ impact on students’ access and autonomy

Being able to function autonomously and having seamless access to the academic and social dimensions of the school comprised the two elements fundamental to the participants’ inclusion (Whitburn, 2014). These two categories are set at the centre of the emergent theory because the students continually referred to matters of access and autonomy. For example, they coveted access
to resources, teachers’ instructions, and friends. They also referred repeatedly to having autonomy – accessing these elements of their schooling without overwhelming paraprofessional support, which often arose when class teachers neglected to provide appropriate access (Whitburn, 2013).

Therefore, when class teachers appropriately adapted pedagogy to the students’ needs, they were able to study autonomously, with seamless access to learning material, to lesson instructions, and subsequently to parity with classmates. One participant spoke candidly about the value of ‘teacher support’. He noted, ‘Teachers at this school are really good with helping me outside of class and inside of class’.

For the most part, the participants believed that teachers needed to employ only minimal changes to classroom pedagogy in order to facilitate their inclusion in lessons, as exemplified by the following interview excerpt:

Researcher: The classroom teachers. How do they help? Or what is different about their approach [that helps you in particular]?

Student: I wouldn’t say much actually. They have to be more prepared, [for example] they have to have things earlier than usual so that I can get it Brailled up or put onto my laptop. But other than that. . . .

Results
Further investigation into how teachers enabled the participants to access their studies autonomously revealed a variety of effective pedagogical practices that they considered essential. These included (1) using appropriate communication modes, (2) making accessible resources available to them in a timely manner, (3) ‘think[ing] outside the box’ about the provision of access to diagrammatic material, and (4) being approachable outside of scheduled lessons for individual consultations. Each pedagogical strategy is discussed in turn.

Appropriate communication modes. The participants placed considerable importance on simple communication in lessons. Specifically they referred to the positive impact that voiced instructions and modelling activities provided them. A verbal chalk-and-talk style – whereby teachers dictated allowed written material that they either projected or transcribed onto the classroom blackboard – reportedly helped the students. Thick verbal descriptions of complex mathematical problems enabled them to follow the material autonomously. One participant stated that ‘it’s not like trying to follow a road map by yourself; you’re being talked through it’. ‘I think it’s a really good teaching strategy’. Another participant described how a teacher facilitated his access to the material in this way: ‘She can actually talk while she’s writing the problem so that I can write it down’, which he genuinely appreciated.

The major upshot of this heightened communication was that the students with VI were treated equally as their sighted peers. They reported that they much preferred to attend numeracy classes in which the teachers verbalised instructions more appropriately than in other subjects, and also did not draw unnecessary attention to their impairments in so doing. Another advantage was that these teachers could successfully circumvent the need for paraprofessionals to personally support the students in lessons, which they zealously preferred to forgo (Whitburn, 2013).

Making accessible resources available in a timely manner. Participants valued teachers who were able to provide them with learning materials such as worksheets, PowerPoint slides, and other handouts in their preferred accessible formats in a timely manner. Generally, they considered the task of formatting resources to be uncomplicated for teachers, because they simply required either enlarged
photocopies or electronic versions of the material. When more intricate resources were required, and/or they had to be transcribed into Braille or tactile formats, there was an expectation that class teachers would have them sent to the paraprofessionals in charge of this task well in advance of lessons. One participant noted,

If the teacher is prepared . . . I will have it before the lesson. They’ll get it brought over here [to the Special Education Unit] and done up. That would be a preferred way to get it, because then I’d get it on time.

Participants commented that having accessible resources provided to them concurrently with their sighted peers enhanced their experiences of inclusion considerably for two reasons. First, participants felt more included in the social context of classes; second, they felt that this enabled them to maintain parity with their peers in accessing the content of study material. One participant explained that an advantage of receiving class resources promptly was that ‘instead of studying to keep up, I’m studying to get ahead’.

‘Think[ing] outside the box’ about the provision of access to diagrammatic study material. Participants believed that class teachers who were able to ‘think outside the box’ by helping them to access diagrammatic resources substantially contributed to their learning. The intricate details of graphic material often used in numeracy subjects could be unintentionally overlooked. One participant who had some functional vision noted, ‘it’s harder for us . . . because we don’t see as much detail as what everybody else . . . [is able to see]’. Participants reported that not unlike the advantages associated with heightened communication modes (noted above), some teachers gave automatic detailed verbal descriptions of pictures, and some appeared to intuitively comprehend that students might all but certainly overlook particular details of diagrams. One participant explained that on one occasion, this strategy enabled him to complete summative assessment successfully that he felt he would otherwise fail. He reported that his teacher somehow understood that he would not be able to visually identify important details of diagrammatic material, and ‘she came in, and she told me the details that I should be able to see and do myself and helped me with that’.

For participants with less functional vision, it was more complex, although one explained that a science teacher’s use of three-dimensional (3D) modelling to represent graphic material enabled him to learn accurate representations of this information by touch:

Sometimes they have to think outside the box on how they’re going to teach me. ‘Cause they can’t just draw a diagram and go ‘here’ and point and whatever. So it’s good because in chemistry they actually have an atom model set. So they can create compounds with these plastic connectors and stuff, which gives me a good idea of what it looks like, so I can actually feel it rather than look at a complicated diagram.

Other participants reported that their teachers often brought actual real-life items that they were studying into classrooms. Overall, participants reported that class teachers who successfully included them in lessons using these strategies unlocked their potential to make use of visual material alongside their peers.

Being approachable outside of scheduled lessons for individual consultations. Academically orientated participants appreciated class teachers who were approachable outside of lessons for individual consultations. They reported that they would sometimes approach their teachers to seek further guidance and/or clarification of class and assessment work. Moreover, they considered that having the capacity to independently communicate with teachers outside of lessons was important because it built on important life skills. As one participant observed,
‘[I’ve started] going to them [teachers] after class, or, during my spares, or at lunch time for help. I’d never done that before, and it was something I have to get used to really in . . . my career’.

Although participants considered that teachers who made themselves available in this way provided a benefit to their learning, from time to time it was necessary that they follow up on class work after lessons in which they had not been given accessible resources on time. In cases when this occurred, participants would generally have to approach their teachers in their own time when they finally received these materials. The young people who found themselves being caught by this predicament indicated that they wished teachers would be more prepared, because then they could cover the work at the same time as their peers.

**Discussion**

This study provides a timely response to the problem that ‘teachers often feel at a loss and are personally distressed about the difficulties experienced by disabled children in their classrooms’ (Slee, 2011, p. 86). The students with VI who participated in this study indicated that some class teachers at a secondary school in the Australian state of Queensland employed a variety of inclusive pedagogical practices that increased their access and autonomy in lessons with minimal recourse to the SEP. This fulfils Foreman’s (2011) observation that students with diagnosed disabilities can present less of a challenge to educate than other members of the class.

Previous studies reveal that there is a delicate balance for teachers in regular classrooms between providing too little or too much support to students with VI that can have the effect of alienating them either way (Higgins & Ballard, 2000; Khadka et al., 2012; O’Brien, 1989; West et al., 2004). While this problem existed in this study for the students (Whitburn, 2013, 2014), the substance of the inclusive pedagogical practices that they cited was no more than heightened communication, intuition, resource provision, and approachability. The importance of these findings to the teaching profession is that the inclusion of students with VI in mainstream lessons can be achieved with relative ease. Of further benefit is that such practices do not draw unsolicited and sometimes embarrassing attention to students’ embodied differences to mainstream pupil populations, and can increase their social inclusion.

Teachers must learn to embrace the convenience brought by the utilisation of assistive technology. A majority of resource allocation problems are made easier as students with VI become more technically savvy. As Kelly (2009) affirms, ‘the presentation of less accessible information to students who are visually impaired is both regrettable and avoidable, given the assistive technology that exists today’ (p. 471). Communicability, intuition, and approachability, on the other hand, can only come to teachers through a greater understanding of the educational implications of VI. This would be to take a step in the direction that Slee (2011) refers to as a reframing of the field of inclusive schooling.

**Conclusion**

It should not come as a surprise to anybody that when asked about the actions of teaching staff that enriches their inclusion in schools, students with disabilities offer concrete, practical suggestions that are no more complicated than those discussed in this article. Their solutions concentrate more on human interaction rather than technical proficiency. Accordingly, they have the potential to change the social landscape of classrooms because they highlight ways in which educators can subvert mistaken assumptions that students’ impairments are automatic barriers to their inclusion.
Moreover, as exemplified here, considered discussion about the strategies that are useful to particular student groups can reveal ways in which teachers can remove barriers to all learners. Indeed, it is class teachers who are principally responsible for the education of all students (Rice, 2006) including those with VI (Sharma et al., 2010). Teachers must therefore be empowered to remove barriers of access to class pedagogy and resources, and to include students with VI in their lessons with relative ease. Teachers who can implement such pedagogical strategies into their work are not directly implicated in institutional discrimination (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) against students with VI.

General teachers are constantly bombarded with ‘expert’ advice on how best to educate students with VI. The ensuing chaos is ‘likely to entrench the sense of failure among teachers’ (Allan, 2008, p. 10). However, seeking simple solutions from students to increase their inclusion in schools is not a technically prohibitive project. Only when they are given the opportunity to speak up in this way are such unpretentious solutions offered. The conclusions that specific student groups reach about pedagogical practices that they consider beneficial to their inclusion in schools merit a central place in teacher professional development.

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References


Chapter Six: The indelible ink of the special stamp: An insider’s research essay on imprints and erasures

Preamble

Chapter Six is based on a journal paper that was written and published during candidature. It is included as it appears in Disability and Society 29(4), 2014, 624-637. At the time of submission, this contribution was included as a unit reading in the Master of Teaching program at Deakin University.

This chapter focuses on my experiences as a person living with VI. This is an addendum to my grounded theory study with secondary students. In the narrative I discuss the strength of medical expertism and its capacity to have me stamped with indelible ink as a person with special needs. I map personal experiences of attending an "inclusive" school, transitioning to higher education, seeking work, and interacting with some family members to illustrate these points.

Using Foucault's notion of normalisation (1977) and Derrida's neologism of hauntology (1994), I argue that inclusion is haunted for people with disabilities. The person whose body is so imprinted haunts a place between social and biological aberration. The remedy is specialist intervention: special education at school, special provisions at university, disability support in the job market, and special treatment from others that may include family members. The subjectivities that are culturally inscribed onto people with disabilities, then, are indicative of non-citizenship.

The significance of this work lies in its theoretical contribution to DSE. In this chapter, I demonstrate how my ideological position of inclusive schooling and research has been formed, in which the philosophical insights of poststructural thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault hold merit. It is in this chapter where I demonstrate how my own understanding of this analytical strength begins to take form. In addition, there is much to be said about the implications of researcher reflexivity in qualitative inquiry. This is particularly so for research in CDS that takes personal experience as its point of departure (Devlin & Pothier, 2006).
The indelible ink of the special stamp: an insider’s research essay on imprints and erasures

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The indelible ink of the special stamp: an insider’s research essay on imprints and erasures

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The medical profession ascribes otherness to people with disabilities through diagnosis and expertism, which sets in motion discursive powers that oversee their exclusion through schooling and beyond. In this paper, I present a narrative pieced together from personal experiences of ducking and weaving the deficit discourse in ‘inclusive’ education, when seeking employment and in day-to-day family interaction as a person with severely impaired vision. This work builds on previous qualitative research I conducted in Queensland, Australia with a group of young people with impaired vision who attended an inclusive secondary school. I frame this discussion using Foucault’s conception of normalising judgement against the hegemony of normalcy, and consider that inclusion for people with disabilities is reminiscent of a haunting. Through this analysis, I demonstrate how my ideology is formed, and how it in turn shapes a research agenda geared toward seeking greater inclusion for young people with disabilities in schools.

Keywords: inclusive education; critical disability studies; deficit discourse; narrative; normalising judgement; hauntology

Points of interest

- The author presents a personal narrative of his experiences of ‘inclusion’ in various social arenas as a person with vision impairment.
- The narrative supports a previous study on student experiences of inclusive secondary schooling.
- Borrowing concepts of normalisation and hauntology from two well-known social theorists (Foucault and Derrida), the author considers that inclusion for people with disabilities is ineffectual due to an obsession with normality, to which people with disabilities need not apply.
- The author illustrates how these experiences set a research ideology, and suggests how philosophical conceptions may help to push inclusive education and research in the field forward.

Introduction

Educational research that focuses on the interpretation of disability is recurrently contested. Calling for intellectual engagement with inclusive education, Graham and
Slee (2008, 279) suggest that research must ‘explicate the discourses of inclusion’. Oliver (2009) meanwhile suggests that researchers – who themselves have disabilities – ought to offer a subjective account of impairment in social discourse that challenges the notions of others about their lived realities. Finally, Brantlinger (2004) emphasises the necessity for researchers to account for their values and ideologies in their work. Taken together, these assertions align with recent paradigmatic shifts in qualitative educational research that have the potential to propel disability studies toward greater transparency and usefulness.

In this paper I take up this collective call to demonstrate through a reflexive narrative the influence of the deficit discourse. Deficit discourses are pervasive in the everyday lives of persons with disabilities. The narrative draws together some of my own experiences of ‘inclusion’ in school, university, in the labour market and in family interaction as a person with vision impairment (VI). I invoke poststructuralist theories of Foucault and Derrida to guide this analysis, who alongside Deleuze are considered ‘philosophers of difference’ (Allan 2008, 4).

The governance of the deficit discourse is what makes inclusion for people with disabilities rhetorical. Erevelles (2011, 72) writes that disability is constructed as a ‘human condition that has historically justified dis-location on the grounds of a pathological biology’. The bodies of people with disabilities are therefore wedged between social and biological aberration that is to be remedied through specialist intervention. It is within this confusing space between biological and social subjectivity and inclusion that Derrida’s (1994) hauntology comes into play. As I demonstrate in this paper, my own inclusion was – and often still is – neither here nor there. It instead operates within a paradoxical combination of presence and absence that ‘becomes, rather, some “thing” that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other’ (Derrida 1994, 7).

Hauntology, a term Derrida (1994) coined that combines ‘haunting’ and ‘ontology’, describes well the concurrency of presence and absence of inclusion for people with impairments, as brought about through the practices of discursive actors, from medical professionals, educators, employers, family members, friends and the people themselves who have disabilities. For Snyder and Mitchell (2007, 2), people with disabilities are defined by an ‘organic predicament’ that threatens to disrupt their presence in societies. They note that hauntology marks ‘the volatile nature of a topic [that] cannot be addressed directly and, therefore, must be interpolated from the available rhetoric, plots, and characters’ (2007, 1). Although they refer here specifically to the analysis of American poetry, their use of hauntology is similarly applicable to disability studies in education. Material rhetoric, plot and characters consistently influence the tangible experiences of social inclusion of people with disabilities.

Amassing a theory of experience

The objective in my doctoral work is to develop a folio of qualitative research that highlights inclusion for participants through their lived experiences, and to uncover ways in which they believe barriers may be overturned. I work within a small ethnographic case for its deep analytical potential (Ball 2006). Further, I am guided by the critical approach to disability studies, which sets as its main objective genuine inclusion of people with impairments rather than simple theoretical conjecture (Devlin and Pothier 2006). Studies in this paradigm are reliant on
embodied experience as a way of drawing together greater impact for an emancipatory cause.

In this paper, I turn the analytical lens on myself as an axis from which to examine my life and experiences as a person with VI. I offer this as an addendum to recent findings of a small-scale exploratory study that I conducted with a group of secondary students with VI who attended an inclusive secondary school in Queensland, Australia (Whitburn 2013a). My objective in undertaking this project was to learn how current students with VI experience inclusive schooling, and to highlight any barriers to their participation in school that they identified. I set about collecting more than 20 hours of interview data with them, and our informal, partially structured conversations led to the generation of a theory grounded in the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) facilitates the creation of a formal conceptualisation about social phenomena through systematic but flexible inquiry. It is guided by findings that hold analytical significance to the phenomenon under study. Emergent theories are grounded in data collected from the field, and are thus faithful to the perspectives of those being studied – an important factor in honouring the voices of young people with disabilities who attend inclusive schools.

The emergent theory reflected the young people’s voiced experiences of their inclusion in the school. It emphasised an unsettling trade-off that existed between their aspirations for agency, and inhibitive actions of stakeholders that excluded them by virtue of their impairments. For example, the young people described a dichotomy of light and heavy paraprofessional support. Light paraprofessional support facilitated their autonomy and access to their studies and the social environment of lessons, whereas heavy support inhibited these factors (Whitburn 2013b).

In consequence of this, and evidently a few various other concerns, the young people were driven to mask their impairments in an attempt to fit into the hegemonic ‘normal’ environment of the school. As Erevelles (2011, 72), colourfully points out: ‘maintaining a dis-stance from the “real” aberrancy of disability is amply rewarded in educational contexts’. The young people aspired greatly to the normate subject position (Garland-Thomson 1997), which put them in danger of undervaluing themselves because of their impairments. They demonstrated transgressive behaviour by donning what Edgerton (1967) called an invisible cloak of competence. That is, they played significantly risky sports, excelled academically, or misbehaved in a way that provided them the reward of temporary cover.

What I failed to do in this research was to illustrate my own experiences of inclusion alongside participants. Rather, my presence was more as a stagehand – invisible to the eye, although the audience (reader) could clearly make out my contribution through what I brought to the stage; that is, the conduct of interviews with the young people, data analysis, memoing and analysis. Clarke (2005) advances that researchers – themselves knowledge producers alongside research subjects – must be explicit about their own contributions. Further, as I have already highlighted, disability-orientated research conducted by researchers themselves who have impairments may be able to hold more relevance for and be useful to the communities that it serves (Oliver 2009).

Following Foucault’s lead in using situational analyses of discourses such as narrative may prove to be productive, to expand the relevance of grounded theory in its capacity to accurately depict social life (Clarke 2005). Recognising that there are stories embedded in all discourses, Gough (2010) encourages researchers to engage
in narrative as an ancillary research practice. Gough observes that the term ‘essay’ is both a verb and a noun in the French language. Writing then, he claims, is a powerful method of reflective inquiry. Meanwhile, Smith and Sparkes (2008) highlight the larger significance of narrative in disability studies, acknowledging that socio-cultural practices shape individuals, and consequently their stories. Thus the narratives of people with disabilities typically highlight barriers imposed on them in socio-cultural contexts.

While Clarke (2005) suggests using pre-existing narratives as data sources, here I follow Gough’s (2010) recommendation of ‘essaying’ aspects of my own experiences that concern educational and social inclusion more broadly. In the following narrative, I demonstrate how the special stamp has indelible ink, which despite constant scrubbing is impossible to remove because of the scale of disciplinary power that operates both in and out of schools (Graham and Slee 2008). Following Bolt (2012), this narrative highlights the absurdity of dominant cultural constructs of VI across multiple discourses as a way of “outing” … [their] “active silences” (Erevelles 2011, 76). Methodologically speaking, my own essay is a further data source that supports findings from my research. As this essay demonstrates, comparative with the experiences of participants of this research (Whitburn 2013a, 2013b), my own experiences of inclusion across multiple sites are equally pervasive.

Normalising control and hauntology

Normalising judgement is an interpretive technique of Foucault (1977) that examines themes poignant to the lived realities of people with disabilities. For Foucault, power within discursive practices is based on the selection of a centre, or norm, which Graham and Slee describe as a fictitious ‘man-made grid of intelligibility that attributes value to culturally specific performances and … privileges particular ways of being’ (2008, 281). Davis (1995) argues that social ontology is heavily weighted towards normalcy. The biological and social aberration that infects people with disabilities ensures that they fail to live up to this standard (Snyder and Mitchell 2007).

In schools, a ‘deliberate act of dislocation (Erevelles 2011, 71) therefore forces children with impairments into the deficit discourse, because they are regarded as being already detached from the normal centre. Special education policy and practice is the apparatus that dislocates students with disabilities from the mainstream (Erevelles 2011). Disability, as Erevelles observes, has the propensity to infect everyone. Thus in Foucauldian (Foucault 1977) terms, like the plague, its ‘sufferers’ are placed in secluded spaces to protect both themselves on the inside, and others on the outside. Derrida’s (1994) hauntology therefore describes well the shaky ontological ground upon which people with disabilities stand in relation to normality. The ambiguity or spectre of inclusion that ‘haunts’ the lives of people labelled with special needs insures that inclusion is simultaneously present and absent. One is never wholly included inside, nor excluded outside, but both in chorus. I turn now to a presentation of my personal narrative, but will return to this theoretical point later in the paper.

Receiving the ‘special’ stamp

Like Oliver (2009), I have a personal stake in the various discourses that play out in relation to disability within social worlds; or perhaps it should be the other way
Following complications with the removal of a benign brain tumour, I was
diagnosed with profoundly impaired vision at the age of four in the early 1980s.
The medical wolf pack that forever lingers near to disability was considerably
ferocious at that time. Under the remedial approach to child assessment, medically
trained professionals held views that such children lacked the capacity to learn
alongside children without disabilities (Clough 2000).

Soon after my diagnosis, when visiting the neurosurgeon for a regular check-up,
he clarified – in his professional view – the implications that my medical misfortune
would purportedly have on my education and subsequent life. He sanctimoniously
advised my mother to have me enrolled into Narbethong, the special school for
blind children in Brisbane, Australia, as if it was the only solution to my newly
acquired troubles.

And so it began. My VI, the ‘aetiology of the problem’ (Bailey cited in Clough
2000, 11), would be the driving force behind my coercion into special segregated
education. On this day, the surgeon operationalised Foucault’s (1977) normalising
control as it is often cast on children with disabilities. On this day, he insisted on
exercising his power to distinguish me as a child with special needs against the
familiar backdrop of ‘normal’ children with functional vision. To him, this deficit
could clearly only be corrected through the education provided by a special school.
These of course were the 1980s, and the common belief of today is that times have
changed. But this school and many like it continue to prosper.

Many special schools in Australia have aboriginal names (Slee 2011) that depict
their ideologies. Narbethong (Narbi to the locals) is a hand-picked word from an
indigenous vernacular meaning ‘happy place’ (Nystrom in Narbethong 2011, 4). In
their mission statement, they express that the school’s natural objective is to work in
the best interests of their students. They go about doing this by pathologising chil-
dren: pitting their unique needs through Individual Education Plans against values
that encourage their inclusion into society (Narbethong 2011).

This cursory examination of Narbethong’s mission statement reveals the magni-
tude of the contradiction that hides within the ideological positions of special
schools. To start with, I side with Benjamin (2002, 52) who contends that while stu-
dents with Individual Education Plans may succeed at school, ‘Whether this success
has currency in anything other than a deficit discourse is questionable’ (emphasis
added). Second, the overall picture that Narbethong wishes to portray of children
with VI through their mission statement – that is, of young learners in need of segre-
gation – is telling about how professionals regard the futures of the ‘docile bodies’
(Foucault 1977, 138) placed in their charge. In reality, children with VI are subdued
in the real world. Their sighted counterparts who avoid diagnosis are generally able
to transition seamlessly through their schooling although of course there are always
exceptions. Meanwhile, students with VI often do not have these opportunities.
More often than not they are ‘released’ into mainstream secondary schools, or at the
end of their compulsory education into a reality in which they are expected to
emerge as highly engaged, socially accepted, included citizens. Naturally, a transi-
tion to gainful employment is assured.

**Getting included exclusively**

Of course, I make the above claim flippantly. For me, Narbethong’s contradiction
between their ideology and practice fails to conjure imagery of a happy place, where
specialist teachers facilitate children’s preparation for fulfilling, productive, included futures. Nor did it do so for my mother, who sought and fought to have me enrolled in regular primary and secondary schools that were local to our home, instead of taking the surgeon’s undignified advice. My mother did not consider the plight of either myself (i.e. a boy with VI) or the schools that I would attend (i.e. the educators of said boy with VI) as ‘unnecessary hardship’.

However, as this reflexive account of my education will illustrate, my ‘inclusion’ in the 1980s and 1990s into the schools in which I was enrolled was never completely effectual. Because I had been assessed as a child with special educational needs, I too was unable to escape the stronghold of the ubiquitous Individual Educational Plan. Both schools that I attended linked the special and mainstream schooling divide, unlike Narbethong that tracks only the so-called safe haven of special education.

It was in the second grade when I was seven years old that a tenuous link to educational inclusion was formed. This only came about because, following intensive individual instruction in Grade One, I had learned sufficient Braille reading and writing skills, and could prove my independence. The practice of proving one’s capabilities monopolises the lives of people with VI within the various discourses in which they function both at schools and beyond (Venetucci in Tuttle and Tuttle 2004). It is only through proving one’s ‘normal’ capabilities that he/she can obtain a temporary visa to the mainstream discourse, although the normalising society empowers others to have them returned to the special one instantaneously. As Allan affirms:

The child with special needs, the disaffected, and even the included child can easily be understood as having been constructed through a whole hierarchy of power and knowledge, with needs identified through a complex process of assessment which is aimed at distinguishing the abnormal from the normal; and perpetually kept under surveillance through a whole network of supervision. (2008, 87; original emphasis)

Demonstrative of this invisible power convention and its affection for the normal/abnormal binary, in primary school I was placed in classes in which teachers were confident that they could include me in their classes. However, given that I was a slightly abnormal student, they worked closely with special education staff at all times to support my integration. I made use of a Perkins Braille machine in lessons – a clunky typewriter that produces Braille dots on cardboard-like paper (see Figure 1). The incessant noise that this machine produced had me relegated to the back corner of classrooms away from my peers, where I sat in front of large shelves, erected to house the numerous text and reference books that the special educational staff had either procured or transcribed themselves.

I was certainly accommodated to participate in mainstream classrooms in primary school, and relished in it. Naturally, however, there was little use in my attending class when the rest of the students were taking a lesson on cursive; as was the custom at the time. Nor, did my teachers believe, would there be any point in having me join in on Italian lessons – the language that typified languages other than English (LOTE) instruction in my primary school. Friday afternoon sports would present untold difficulties, and grade-level school camps would allegedly create a disconcerting maze-like burden. Implicit lists of this nature amassed; thus I was frequently withdrawn from the regular education field, and placed in the special educa-
tional one to continue receiving special instruction. Rather than being included in school-run extracurricular activities, all students with VI played blind cricket and other VI-specific sports on Fridays, and attended our own yearly retreats.

However, I am not excessively critical about my inclusion in my primary school. In fact, despite constant shuffling between learning spaces and discourses, not only I, but also the other students with VI who were enrolled in the school, lauded our inclusion in primary school a success. We achieved well academically, and attended dance nights, sporting events and fêtes along with our sighted friends. To me, this epitomised generally what it means to be included.

Increasing seismic activity
Secondary school promised a world of difference, one in which I anticipated that I would experience increased social interaction with my peers, as I passed from childhood into adolescence. I swapped the Perkins machine for a compact Braille computer with synthetic speech output, as it would supposedly enhance my inclusion in classes through the speed with which I could read and type material. No more would the ceaseless thumping of the Brailler interrupt my fellow students with whom I would sit in lessons.

Indeed secondary school would prove to be entirely different. The speed in which the discourse of deficit and support swooped on me on my arrival to high school was overwhelming. The special stamp I received here was bigger; it was more refined and it had a greater social impact than that conveyed in my primary school. A new experience was having in-class support provided to me in every lesson by paraprofessionals. From my very first lesson in Year Eight, a mathematics
class, I was constantly on the hip of my ‘minder’. I was made to sit in the front row of lessons away from sighted students, from where the paraprofessional could more easily dictate notes to me from the blackboard and assist me with minimal distraction.

On more than one occasion at high school, I was struck by the idea that many class teachers seemed unaware of how to accommodate me in their lessons. Instead they either looked to the paraprofessionals who were less qualified than themselves, or they had me excluded from their lessons altogether to receive tuition in their subjects in the Special Education Unit from specialist educators. In Years 11 and 12, I was withdrawn from mathematics lessons to receive special tuition in this subject in the Special Education Unit. Ironically I topped the mathematics class for both years running, despite never attending a single lesson with my peers. Class teachers who perceive a student’s differences as being too great for their capacity to teach can be a driving power for the learner’s consignment to special education (Erevelles 2011; Florian 2010). Clearly, my mathematics teacher, a professional with many years of teaching ‘regular’, ‘homogeneous’ students under his belt, contributed to my being relegated to the Special Education Unit, as inclusive pedagogy that would enable him to accommodate students with VI in his classroom was beyond his formation and construction of education.

After several years of constant in-class support, it suddenly disappeared in my 10th grade from the English classroom only. By then, I had proven that I could work independently in this subject, and unlike the mathematics teacher his colleague from the English department had shown her capacity to include me in lessons. Of course this would be of little consolation; it was the only subject of six in which I did not receive direct support. However, the special stamp never failed to reveal itself. I was ‘allowed’ to sit at the back of the room near the power outlet where I could plug in my computer. Naturally I sat back there alone. In addition, I was often exempt from various in-class activities, thus continued social isolation was a given.

**Escaping the deficit discourse**

Mercifully I graduated high school with a reasonable overall position score, the term used in Queensland, Australia for the ranking score for university entrance. This enabled me to transition to higher education. There I shook free of any associations with disability, including the special educational provisions available to students with sufficient proof of an impairment. I was able to completely reinvent myself: I surrounded myself with friends who did not have disabilities, and moreover appeared to completely forget about my own. Much of this was to the detriment of my grade point average. I joined various social clubs including the campus Beer Appreciation Society, and spent many last minute ‘all-nighters’ with friends preparing for examinations or writing assignments. At last I was included, and the special stamp I was branded with so many years ago was fading.

**The indelible ink of the special stamp**

After several years, however, I came to realise that the special stamp is impossible to remove. I graduated from university with reasonable marks, and set forth to the next rite of passage of a young person’s life; that of employment and the generation of an income. However, after graduation, I once again found that my impaired
vision formed the basis for others to label me, and wriggle – somewhat uncomfortably – out of giving me work. I sought support from well-resourced disability employment agencies, after realising that my own prolonged efforts of selling myself to potential employers were ineffectual, in part because of my impairment. Thus I had returned, somewhat coercively, back to the realisation of an anomaly that lurks under the power of the deficit discourse for students with disabilities (Erevelles 2011); the very same convention that I had successfully placated throughout my years at university. It became apparent that the special stamp, with which I had been branded before my first day of primary school by a medical expert, had indelible ink.

I was not alone within the community of people with VI in experiencing an interminable pursuit for employment. In a survey conducted in 2007 and published in 2010, Vision Australia – Australia’s peak blindness agency – found that an astounding 63% of people with VI who are of employable age are without paid work. Instead they often languish on the Disability Support Pension. In February 2011, the Disability Discrimination Commissioner Graeme Innes, who is himself blind, supported the call from the Business Council of Australia to lower the number of Disability Support Pension recipients and have them enter the workforce. However, in response he posed a pertinent rejoinder: ‘What are you – one of the major employers of Australia – contributing to that reduction?’ (Innes cited in Metherell 2011, no page). At the time of writing, the highly anticipated response from the Business Council of Australia remains unstated.

Recently I attended a celebration in which many of my family members came together. I was astonished to find that an extended family member who is a successful business advisor typecast me in two ways that highlighted my impairment, and ‘naturally’ my shortfalls. They were the helpless and dependent stereotype and its contradictory, the heroic typecast (Tuttle and Tuttle 2004). Moreover, he fluctuated between them both indiscriminately throughout the weekend. To him, on one hand I was clearly different to the others, less significant. Yet equally, I had exceptional capabilities, not in my achievements, my qualifications and working history, but in menial tasks: walking down the street independently, having knowledge of my surroundings and route of travel, and preparing food and cleaning up – tasks that I and other family members fobbed off as evidence of my inclusion in our general, day-to-day interaction. When pressed on whether or not he could see a place for me in the business world, he babbled incoherently about paperless offices and telephony work. His patronising tone said it all, as he concentrated more on my deficits than on my capabilities, spurred on by the negative attitudes instilled in him by the medical discourse.

Haunting presence of inclusion

I now turn to a discussion of the theoretical implications uncovered in the previous pages. The inclusion of people with disabilities in schools, the workplace, and society generally is a comprehensive plan mandated by progressive policy such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006). But therein lays the rub. Although inclusion for disabilities has become the key catchphrase of policy-makers, disability groups, educators and others, the reality experienced by those on the coalface can, and often has, painted a far more sinister picture of the effectiveness of inclusion than these people are prepared to believe.
While participants of my research (Whitburn 2013a, 2013b) highlighted instances in which they felt included at school, they also provided many accounts to the contrary. I make a similar case in the above narrative.

The location of disability – and by association inclusion – within the hegemony of normality is indistinguishable. As a case in point, people with VI are unremittingly attached to cultural metanarratives of pitiable blindness (Bolt 2012). This is but one example of how disability is regarded as insidious within liberal societies possessed by normalcy (Davis 1995; Devlin and Pothier 2006; Erevelles 2011; Michalko 2008; Slee 2011; Snyder and Mitchell 2007).

Following Derrida (1994), and imitating to some extent the words of Marx and Engels (2008), a spectre of inclusion haunts the lives of people with disabilities. This occurs because of the biological and social ungainliness that is consigned to their bodies, and the distance thus created through normalisation. In Derrida’s terms, the:

logic of haunting would not be merely larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being (of the ‘to be’, assuming that it is a matter of Being in the ‘to be or not to be’, but nothing is less certain). (1994, 10)

In proposing this neologism, Derrida (1994) refers to Shakespeare’s Hamlet (1602/2009). He seeks to specifically deconstruct ‘the question (to be or not to be)’, and also the expected return of Hamlet’s father, the king, despite his being deceased. But Derrida does so to highlight the enigmatic position that sits between being and not being as a way to describe Marx’s ontology of communism in later day Europe.

Hauntology supplants the ontological confidence of being included with an uncertain absence for people with disabilities in present-day society because of the uncomfortable aberration of being biologically and socially dysfunctional. Moreover, it is this ghostly position that delineates the presence/absence of inclusion that fuels the hegemony of normality. For Derrida (1994, 38), ‘Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony’. Devlin and Pothier (2006) point to the economic ideal of productive capacity, and the subsequent deficiencies of people with disabilities to be industrious. An inevitable cost–benefit analysis overrides social discourse, one that causes Derrida (1994, 38) concern: ‘A new world disorder is attempting to install its neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism’, although nearly 20 years after making this claim, it can be said that this malady has been achieved.

Devlin and Pothier (2006) claim that the costs associated with inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace outweigh the benefits. This thread is taken up by Oliver (2009), who reproaches the political economy in its role of creating disability as a category that is subsequently disqualified from full inclusion. Furthermore, people with disabilities accept the oppression that is placed upon them, because not being able to work productively in a world obsessed with liberal individualism harmfully affects their identities (Galer 2012). This inevitably leads, in Devlin and Pothier’s view, to ‘a regime of dis-citizenship’ (2006, 1) for people with disabilities, in which their ‘inclusion’ in society lingers beneath their having genuine citizenship.

Although I demonstrate in the above narrative that medical expertism implants the first fragment of hauntology, I also illustrate that it is in the education sphere where it is able to develop. Hodkinson (2012a, 5) argues that inclusive education is a philosophical concept that ‘from its very outset was influenced by “ontological
ghosts”. For Erevelles (2011, 84), disabled bodies therefore become irrelevant: ‘Haunting these policy discourses is the existence of an absent presence’. That this again is a direct consequence of neoliberal commodification is taken up by several authors (Apple 2013; Brantlinger 2009; Hodkinson 2012a, 2012b; Slee 2011). Apple observes that neoliberal individualism has become a religion, in which ‘Education is seen as simply factories producing test scores and docile workers’ (2013, 4).

The inclusion of students – whose bodies are troubled with impairments – into regular schools causes a predicament for the neoliberal ideology, because an uncontrollable erasure is produced as a direct consequence of pitting performativity against presence, standards against segregation and ableism against absence (Hodkinson 2012a). That is to say, that mainstream schools are geared up to work within the conception of normality. The dominant cultural position is that those with disabilities are held to the metanarrative of neediness, and thus are dependent on extra support (Bolt 2012). Deviations that present themselves in this way require solutions to normalise them (Michalko 2008). Students with disabilities consequently become abnormal, whose inclusion is created only because of the technologies afforded them by the special education discourse. However, carrying heavy deficit-laden baggage, it places a stamp with indelible ink on these students. Thus begins the ghostly reality of inclusion, wherein they are included by force (Hodkinson 2012a), but are also excluded by default. This simultaneous presence/absence of inclusion continues to haunt their lives well outside the school gate.

Setting an ideologically based research agenda

The constants with which I have been, and continue to be, jostled by the deficit discourse in my daily life because of the attitudes and discordant practices of others stir me into action. My ideology is a utopian one for which I make no apologies: it is embedded in full inclusion, where people with impaired bodies are able to attain equally as those without them, in education, work, and in their social lives. While I cannot say that I always understood when and how discursive practices accentuated my differences in school and after graduation, I remember recognising from a young age that there was something out of place regarding my treatment as a special needs kid. This predicament has led me to form my ideological position.

However, my ideology detours slightly from that of renowned inclusionists, forming an inescapable erasure (Allan 2004). I recognise that for me, without having learned certain VI-specific skills such as reading and writing Braille, using assistive technology, and making use of particular orientation and mobility techniques, my inclusion – both in school and perhaps more importantly after graduation – would be even further flawed. I would have greater dependence and interdependence on others, punctuated by a lack of autonomous access to information. This in turn would have calamitous consequences for my sense of personal value, competence, capacity to achieve and self-satisfaction; my overall self-esteem (Tuttle and Tuttle 2004).

Given the link between autonomy and self-esteem (Paradise and Kernis 2002), it is imperative that children with disabilities receive instruction in specific skill sets that are clearly not mainstream, but have the objective of enhancing their autonomy. While my ultimate objective in this is to limit ableism (Hehir 2002), this does not mean that children with disabilities who receive such instruction deserve to be persecuted by the deficit discourse eternally. Rather, it means the opposite, as they learn important skills that will empower them to aid their own inclusion. Thus the
role of educators is set. Allan (2004) refers to the duties of educators to promote inclusive schooling. She argues: ‘We do not have to make a choice between singularity and plurality; rather, we face a set of dual responsibilities’ (2004, 429).

Onward bound
It is in schools, where children and young people are brought up on innumerable hours of contact with others – and their divergences – that inclusion can take root. Barton (1997) observes that systems of education are one of society’s richest resources from which stem its reproduction. It is therefore in the educational domain where I focus my exploration. I draw on my ideology of inclusion to out the various deficit discourses that propagate exclusion (Erevelles 2011). Problematising inclusive education in this way draws out political, economic and cultural constructs, which must be engaged to explain the failure of educational systems (Barton and Slee 1999).

Conclusion
The particular rendering of my personal narrative in this paper demonstrates how disciplinary powers haunt the inclusion discourse. Nevertheless, these experiences shape my epistemology. The indelible ink of the special stamp sullies the lives of people with disabilities, from medical diagnosis through schooling and beyond. Being labelled and filed under the deficit discourse from a young age is damaging to the inclusion of the subjected body, which itself is abjected to the presence and absence of a biological and social aberration. The rhetoric of ‘social justice’ in educational and other social discourses will therefore continue to be a farce until the pervasiveness of medical expertism is disrupted, and the inclusion of people with disabilities is no longer dislocated by normalising apparatus.

A suitable step forward is to break apart the kernel of inclusive education as it exists today through setting a research agenda that examines ‘how to fight the kind of discrimination for which there is no recourse enshrined in law’ (Rioux 1997, 12). On this note, philosophers of difference such as Derrida and Foucault may help us to re-envision inclusive education (Allan, 2008). Derrida (1990) maintains that injustice occurs when we travel close to the law, to a preconceived way forward. This lends itself to irresponsibility toward the other. In research, this means that we ought to explore from the personal experiences of those most at risk of repression how we might move inclusive education forward, rather than to follow prescribed channels. Similarly, looking to Foucault’s (1982, 782) analytics of power also enables us to imagine how ‘to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political “double bind”, which is the simultaneous individualisation and totalisation of modern power structures’.

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References


Chapter Seven: Inclusion of Students with Vision Impairments: Generational Perspectives in Australia

Preamble

Chapter Seven contains a journal paper that was written and published during candidature. It is included as it appears in the International Journal of Whole Schooling 10(1) 2014, 1-18.

In this chapter, I focus on a fragment of the Australian phase of this research that relates specifically to school placement and transport. I demonstrate how a trans-identity research alliance (Slee, 2011) was formed between all participants of the study—the researcher (me) and the five young people who contributed their experiences. A trans-identity research alliance is taken to describe a group that comprises members who have shared experiences, and who together coproduce meaning of a particular phenomenon in participatory investigation.

Referential knowledge (Baert 1998) linked us together—a shared familiarity of what appears discursively innocuous about attending an inclusive secondary school as one of few students with VI—me in the 1990s and the young people at the time of fieldwork in 2010. The purpose of referential knowledge is to draw on one’s experiences so as to be able to think anew, to recast a situation. “This is indeed the freedom of a subject constituted, not in advance of the world, but in material and discursive relations that always offer the possibility of transformation” (St Pierre, 2004, p. 326).

An important aspect of CDS—in which this research is framed is the shared involvement of all aspects of the research, including analysis. In this chapter I relate personal challenges associated with school travel, which led me to ask the young people about their own similar experiences. They worked through a number of alternative representations of "inclusion" to describe their schooling, via their placement in the school, the transport options available to them, and their seemingly uncomplimentary subjectivated positions as the special needs kids.

In this chapter, I also begin to theorise the trans-identity research alliance by drawing on Foucault's (1982) analysis of subjectivity, and Bourdieu's (1998) understanding of the role of reflexivity in qualitative interviews. I argue that a historical knowledge of shared circumstances opens up a space in which detailed analysis can take place. The significance of this work is its ethical action towards inclusive education (Allan, 2005, 2008). Together we examine the power relations that reinforce marginalisation in schools, concluding that via policies, discursive practices and a culture obsessed with normalcy, inclusive schooling can indeed be troubled.
The “Inclusion” of Students with Vision Impairments: 
Generational Perspectives in Australia

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Author Note
My sincere gratitude goes to the students who participated in interviews for their frank and honest contributions to this research.
Abstract

In this paper I draw upon findings of a recent qualitative project conducted in Queensland, Australia in which all actors – the researcher and 5 participants aged 13-17 years — were linked together by our shared experiences of being students with impaired vision (VI) and who were educated in inclusive secondary schools in Australia during the last two decades. The narrative demonstrates the alienating legacy of two everyday routines of schooling, the placement and the daily commute. In the paper I show how referential knowledge acquisition of a trans-identity research alliance can reveal barriers to inclusion that might be ordinarily overlooked. Theoretically I map the research relationship formed between myself and participants using both Foucault’s analysis of how human beings are made subjects (1982) and Bourdieu’s understanding of reflexive interviewing in qualitative research (1998). The empirical contribution of this paper is to demonstrate how special education discourses render subjects more “special” than the sum of their actual impairments, and methodologically to highlight the role of qualitative inquiry in the field of inclusive schooling.

*Keywords:* Vision impairment; School placement; School commute; Critical disability studies; Trans-identity research alliance; Post-structural analysis
“They may guess that we’re different some way [beyond]... visually impaired. Maybe they consider us to be just different I guess.” (17-year-old “included” student)

“I know I’ve got a problem, And that’s why you have to be in the SEP [special education program] ‘cause, you’ve got a problem. But yeah. It annoys me because I’ve got a problem. I just want to be normal.” (13-year-old “included” student)

**Introduction**

The above excerpts taken from interview data that informed a study with young people with vision impairment, who attended an inclusive secondary school in the Australian State of Queensland, form the basis of the key arguments presented in this paper. The young people – there were five in all – attended the same public school in Queensland in 2010 and each one was enrolled via a special education program (SEP) that supported students with a range of impairments to ‘integrate’ into mainstream classes. Each student attended lessons for most – if not all of the school day — and were generally supported by paraprofessionals to do so. In the remarks above, the students referred explicitly to the differences that they perceived within the school that to them, consisted of the abnormal kids with disabilities, and the normal kids without. Placing themselves on the pejorative side of this binary because of their vision loss, these students described the actions of stakeholders (teachers, specialist support staff, paraprofessionals, transport providers, friends and less acquainted peers) together with themselves to a degree that reinforced their marginalisation. The school provided the students with “heavy” paraprofessional support that undermined their autonomy and contributed to their social exclusion in classes (Whitburn, 2013a). Consequently, as affirmed in the above quotes, the young people’s perceptions of their inclusion in the school demonstrate that on the whole they felt as if they were disabled (intended as a verb rather than an adjective) beyond the sum of their actual impairments. This was the case despite the fact that the young people were positive toward their schooling. Their academic and sporting achievements, the support they received from some personnel, and the friends that they had made (Whitburn, 2013b) were all notable achievements. Nevertheless, the cloud of anomaly rendered their inclusion in the school as illusionary (Graham & Slee, 2008; Hodkinson, 2012a).

Recognising that there are stories embedded in all social discourse, Gough (2010) encourages researchers to write narrative as an ancillary research practice. In this paper I am using the term ‘trans-identity research alliance’ (Slee, 2011) to mean a participatory approach to research in which a group –including the researcher—is made up of members who have shared experiences. I conclude by theorising such an alliance using Foucault’s concepts of how human beings are made subjects (1982) and Bourdieu’s flexibility in qualitative inquiry (1998). But first it seems appropriate to situate this research.

**Being on the Inside**

Having severely impaired vision, and also having attended a similar school as the young people in the 1990s, entering the school site as the researcher bestowed me certain privileges. My experiences of ducking and weaving the deficit discourse on account of my impairment has led me to research with a transformative agenda for young people with disabilities. In short, following Moss’s (2012) suggestion, my intention is to uncover the barriers to inclusion from the
perspectives of those on the inside. Disability studies undertaken with a transformative agenda require that researchers are grounded within the cultures that they investigate (Mertens, Sullivan & Stace, 2011). With an eye on inclusive ideals, researchers with disabilities who work within education can challenge traditional special provision (Slee, 1996), which to others, may make the familiar look strange (Biesta, Allan & Edwards, 2011). I was therefore a participant in this action research study.

For my part, I related to the young people’s sense of uneasiness about inclusion in school, and indeed I carry similar anxieties outside of it (Whitburn, 2013c). My experiences of being one of the few students with VI in a school that was attended by young people who did not present with disabilities also led me to follow to some extent particular lines of questioning. This does not mean, however, that my position privileges this research in both its processes and conclusions. Nor do I hold naive notions about my ability to emancipate students with impairments in schools simply by working with them to make qualitative inquiries into the education system. Rather, I draw on referential knowledge (Baret, 1998) (both theirs and mine) – that is, a shared understanding of what we each take for granted as innocuous and familiar about having an impairment in an inclusive school, which when considered in the interview situation, allows participants to “think otherwise” (Ball, 2006 p. 5).

Through lengthy discussions about what the young people liked and did not like about their schooling, they began to define for themselves what inclusive schooling should look like, and where it had gone wrong. As Baret (1998, p. 18) suggests, “Once people become aware of the assumptions or rules upon which they have hitherto unconsciously drawn, and once they realize how radically different these were in the past, then the strength of these assumptions or rules is potentially undermined”. McWilliams (2003), who draws on this concept, explains further: “self-referential knowledge is not specifically knowledge that informs one about oneself (e.g., critical self-reflection) but, rather, asks about those taken for granted knowledges through which we produce ourselves as works of art (e.g., as 'critically self-reflective')” (ppp. 61-62).

**Generation Perspectives on the School Placement and Commute**

This study is framed by a participatory perspective— the investigation of inclusive schooling from a group of insiders with impaired vision. In particular, this paper is based on the analysis of two dominant themes that emerged out of the research, school placement and the school commute, and the alienating legacy produced through the entanglement of both. I undertook this study with a group of young people with VI because I was motivated to elucidate current students’ perspectives of their schooling in a system that we now regard as inclusive (Whitburn, 2013b). This research then is limited by my personal perspective.

In Australia, and indeed throughout the world, VI is a low-incidence disability. There are approximately 3000 students with VI who attend Australian schools and who receive support to do so (ABF, 2008). In inclusive schools moreover, experience in various projects has shown me that only a very small number of students with VI attend any one setting. I wanted to conduct my research in a single school. Thus, I was driven to work with a very small sample size. This can be advantageous, as Ball (2006) argues, because working small can provide researchers with a powerful analytical case.

Initially I framed the study using Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) formulation of grounded theory. Research that is framed in the grounded theory perspective seeks first and foremost to conceptualise only that which is found in the field. As such, existent literature, that may adversely impact the study by explaining instances external to the field, is ignored until well after
data collection and analysis so that it may be contextualized more appropriately. Thus, grounded theory offers a useful framework that can be used to genuinely learn about students’ experiences. I detail the use of this framework more in the data analysis section of this paper.

Participants

One girl and four boys participated in this study. They ranged in grades 8-12 inclusive, and were aged between 13-17 years. While two of the participants lived locally to the school, the other three lived more than 20 kilometres from it. To protect the identity of the school and participants, comments are not assigned to pseudonyms in this paper. At the time that I conducted the fieldwork, the participants were the only students enrolled in the school who had VI and were supported under the umbrella of the SEP. Each of them had VI to somewhat divergent lengths, and exemplary of our shared understanding of living with VI more generally, not once did we discuss causes, cures, nor levels of visual acuity. Instead we focused on how having VI impacted their inclusion.

As expected however, the young people spoke of a range of visual aids and assistive technology that they used at school, including laptop computers with speech output, screen magnification equipment, handheld magnifiers, Braille and large print resources. Most also received individual support from paraprofessionals in lessons. Only one of the five walked with a white cane. I, meanwhile, have very slight vision mostly in my left eye, and I make daily use of Braille and a computer with screen reading software. My white cane I use only when in unfamiliar territory, or when in adverse weather conditions which cause my auditory orientation to go askew.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data I draw on in this paper was collected through more than 20 hours of individual and focus group interviews which I recorded with the young people’s permission. I then transcribed each interview verbatim. Recognising that Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) prescription of grounded theory – which I used initially to frame this study – is ontologically and epistemologically “grounded” in postpositivist values, I look to Charmaz (2006, 2011) and Clarke (2005) for a constructivist stance on the framework. Data analysis (subsequent to the study) is thus framed in more socially relevant perspectives. I also include my own narrative with the aim of illustrating how experience influences my line of inquiry, and how I use this referential knowledge to construct this research with the young people.

In line with these objectives, Charmaz (2011) has developed the constructivist grounded theory framework so that it accounts for and introduces criticality. She contends that through broadening the scope of the grounded theory framework, more socially critical research can be produced. As she argues, “The critical stance of social justice inquiry combined with its structural focus can aid grounded theorists to locate subjective and collective experience in larger structures and increase understanding of how these structures work” (p. 362). This encapsulates the objective of analysis of the trans-identity research alliance in the current paper, which I discuss in more detail after presenting the narrative.

Analysing “Our” Inclusion

My intention was to involve participants in all phases of the research, including the analysis phase. In a focus group interview in a small meeting room on the final day of data collection, I presented abstracted findings that I had gleaned from previous interviews to the
group of young people, to verify their applicability. This discussion involved extensive dialogue about the use of accessible resources, effective and ineffective teacher pedagogy, making and interacting with friends, receiving paraprofessional support, and the students’ overall denotation of inclusive schooling. The analysis we conducted in that room on that day lead one participant who had low vision to conclude that “mainstream” school for him was like being on “A waterslide without any water. You get stuck halfway down.” In subsequent analysis of the data I often return to this students’ comment. His expression even resonated with my own schooling experiences. Thus, inclusive schooling was then, as it seemingly remains to be now, “a battle ground between absence and a forced presence” (Hodkinson, 2012b, 678).

A Matter of Placement

Concurrently, Clarke (2005) argues that researchers can follow Foucault’s lead in using situational analyses of discourses such as narrative to expand the relevance of grounded theory in capturing accurate depictions of social life. Gough (2010) encourages researchers to use narrative as a way of performing an inquiry. Here I blend my own narrative with research findings to elucidate how having to attend a particular school and in turn having to commute to it in part constituted our experiences of inclusion at high school.

The Issue of School Placement

But first, I want to foreground the issue of school placement. In Australia, the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 legislates that all students must be able to both attend and be included in their local schools. While this concept works nicely on paper, students with disabilities in Queensland are encouraged to attend public schools which have special education programs (Education Queensland, 2007), which are sparsely located throughout the state. This provides a prime example of how political and philosophical conjecture about inclusive schooling has greater reach than tangible practice (Hodkinson, 2010). While families may choose to have their children enrolled in particular schools for specific reasons in spite of their locations, for children and young people with impairments, this choice is limited.

Unless by happenstance families with children who have diagnosed impairments live within certain catchment boundaries, the schools equipped with special education provision are invariably located at some distance from their homes. In turn this means that they must commute to the schools that they attend. Again in Queensland, students can either make their way to school under their own steam (i.e. by public transport if they are able, or via another arrangement), or they may be entitled to take advantage of the School Transport Assistance Program for Students with Disabilities (Education Queensland, 2008), which ensures that through contractual obligation with the education authority, a transport company will convey them to and from their school. I turn now to a presentation of the young people’s accounts of their placement in the high school. This is followed by a short narrative about my own experiences of school placement and the commute, and that of participants, which illustrates that an entanglement of both rendered their inclusion illusory.

Transitioning to a New High School

6
That the research setting was a secondary school emphasised the matter of placement and the commute for participants in different ways, depending on where they lived. Each participant had attended a primary school that was similarly appointed to the research setting. Four of the young people had attended a primary school that was appointed with a special education unit; however it was located more than 20 kilometres away from the research setting. Three of these participants lived closer to the distant primary school. As such, they described having to start traveling up to 25 kilometres each way when they enrolled in to the research setting, because it was “apparently the only high school that has a visual education unit” nearby. One participant remarked, “If I hadn’t of [sic] gone here, I reckon I would have bugged my parents to go to [a local high school]”. He explained that all of his friends had transitioned to schools local to that area, and that he lamented the fact that “[I] can’t see any of my friends anymore from there”. Each of these young people explained that although they each had been in well-established friendship groups at primary school, they felt isolated because they did not have friends from the high school who lived nearby.

Clearly, having existing friendship networks impacted the students’ transition. But it also impacted their sense of inclusion. Participants who came to the school alone were able to eventually establish friendships with like-minded, sighted peers who shared common interests. However, they encountered some variation. They all described being subjected to negative attitudes from others, and one believed that sighted students “excluded altogether” participants from the social hierarchy within the school, when looking to form friendships. The same participant noted, “It’s just other people. [It’s] all ‘the assumption thing’ going on about blind people”. When I encouraged this participant to elaborate on his comments, he suggested that other students pigeonhole those with VI as being more disabled than their actual impairments. He further described how he had been frustrated in his attempts to make friends at the school. “When you come into a high school without any friends it’s hard especially if you’re visually impaired you can’t go socially networking as easily”.

The fifth participant coincidentally lived locally to the research setting, though she had attended the distant primary school. While she described losing friends from primary school, she had a wide social circle of friends from the local area who also attended the research setting. She lamented losing friends that she had made during her primary education; however she spoke excitedly about her transition to the high school.

Reflexive Inquiry

I want to briefly step back from this presentation of findings to consider how particular experiences of my own steered my inquiry in the area of school placement, transport options and social inclusion. Having learned about the experiences and concerns of the young people about school placement and its implications on their inclusion, I was surprised to find that they closely mirrored my own. I had attended a secondary school of which I lived well outside the catchment area, for reasons consistent with those of the participants. Living at a distance implies that lengthy hours will be spent travelling to and from school, and it is to a discussion of this theme that I now turn. I then present an analysis of the young people’s school commute and its impact on their sense of inclusion.

Arriving in Style? My School Commute
In my first year of secondary school, a luxury stretch limousine company won the tender to provide me with school travel as part of the School Transport Assistance Program for Students with Disabilities (Education Queensland, 2008). There were seven students in all whom the limousine provided passage. Given that I lived the greatest distance from the school, I was the passenger on the driver’s manifest whose driveway the empty limousine rolled into at about 7:30 a.m. each weekday morning, in front of the neighbourhood kids who were preparing to go to the local school.

Every morning, embarrassed by the presence of an enormous empty, luxury, pink vehicle in my driveway, I would dash out of my house with my head down, in the direction of the limousine. My aim was to drop into the back passenger door that the smartly suited driver had opened for me as quickly as possible, to avoid the humiliation I associated with the stares and comments of others.

At my school, the first bell sounded at 8:50 a.m., but I would need all of that time to arrive, as we would stop in to various other neighbourhoods on the way to collect the other six students who used the service. Invariably the limousine fought through heavy peak-hour traffic to arrive at students’ doors to find that they were not attending school on a particular day, though they had neglected to inform the company. Despite the early start, I would typically arrive late to school, though I welcomed this, as it meant that other students would have already gone into classes and were not there to witness the grand arrival.

In the afternoon, I would reticently jump into the limousine after the final bell sounded alongside all of the other “special” students who were availed of the service. I was then the last to alight at the end of a long day about an hour and a half after school had ended. Of course, the same neighbourhood kids were there to watch me clamber out of the back door of the limousine; they had been there for hours, playing in front of their homes. I, on the other hand, hastily disappeared inside my house and did not emerge until the following day, when I would be forced to endure the limousine trip once again.

Aside from the embarrassment that limousine travel caused me because of my sensitivity to how others viewed my apparent dependency on the service – a luxury one at that generally reserved for the rich and famous – a major indignity of its provision was that it stripped me of my autonomy, despite providing me physical access to the school. I was made to depend on a service that I found discomforting, and I had to wait for up to 3 hours per day on account of others rather than being permitted to get to school under my own steam.

The angst bequeathed me by the daily commute by limousine vehemently spurred me into action. I opted to take intensive orientation and mobility training (O&M) from the extra core curriculum (ECC) for students with VI and other disabilities (Hatlen, 1996). A mobility instructor visited the school each week to provide me with training. And after a full year of weekly instruction for which I jettisoned Wednesday afternoon sporting activities with my peers, I was granted the right to independently catch the bus for school travel only.

However, despite gaining more autonomy in commuting to and from school at least, the public bus presented me with a new set of challenges. The buses would seldom run faithfully to the schedule. I was unable therefore to use my watch as a way of predicting which bus was approaching. I would often wave down a bus to learn from its driver that it was the wrong one, invariably while the one I wanted to catch rattled by. I was typically reticent to tell drivers that I could not read the bus’s destination board, though equally embarrassed to ask for information from drivers without declaring my impairment for fear of being regarded as disabled, or even
worse, ignorant. This too presented a twice daily apprehension from which I was mercifully relieved on the odd occasion my parents would opt to drive me to school.

Bus travel did however provide me with the opportunity to blend in with my peers, as I lined up to board, pay and take a seat alongside them. Given the distance I lived from the school, I was also on the bus when they boarded in the morning and disembarked in the afternoons along the way. Though to me, it was all worth it; travel time was cut down from one and a half hours to thirty minutes, and at least I finally blended in with my peers.

**Reflexive Questioning: Let’s Talk About Transport**

Memories of my daily commute to the school in which I had been placed motivated me to inquire at some length how the young people who participated in the study physically accessed the school campus from their homes. Moreover, I was eager to learn how they felt that it impacted their inclusion. I learned that participants either travelled by taxi or the public bus, and I now turn to a discussion of these forms of transport and their social implications for participants.

The young people revealed in interviews that they had mixed feelings about the transport upon which they relied for school travel. The specific options available to them carried social ramifications that extended beyond the sum of their impairments: each available option bound them to the special education discourse that was ever-present in their school lives.

**Taxi Travel**

The young people who relied on the taxi service were uneasy about its provision. Most reported that it was a “vehicle” through which their differences from the normal, sighted student were accentuated, which gave peers grounds to cast negative attitudes towards them. As one participant observed “I actually really hate catching the taxi. I don’t like it at all.” She went on to explain that when she had first started attending the school by taxi, other students habitually taunted her, saying that she was stupid. This was, she reported, because all students at the school recognised that the taxi service was reserved for students who were in the special education program. “[Other students] know that the only people who catch the taxis are the SEU-ers [special education unit students], so more people know that I’m in the SEU”. Her reliance on the taxi thus linked her in a public way to the deficit discourse that encircled SEP, of which it was apparently accepted that all members were inferior. Consequently, as she exclaimed “I feel really embarrassed. Really, really embarrassed with the taxi.”

The others who relied on taxis for school travel lived more than 20 kilometres from the campus. All of these participants observed that it was “tedious” having to get out of bed early each morning to travel such a long distance to school. They also indicated that there were negative ramifications associated with living at a distance from school on their social lives. Despite having made friends at the research setting, those reliant on taxis lamented that they were unable to travel with them after school, in a similar way to local, sighted students who they acknowledged could typically travel by bus, bicycle or by foot. Further, older participants were concerned that that they could not attend social events with friends without extensive preparation with their parents or guardians. While this assertion was not related to taxis and school travel per se, this was one avenue through which the young people understood a tacit divide that existed between themselves and sighted students.

On the whole, having to travel 20 km each way in order to be “included” in a community demonstrates the paradox of their inclusion. For the young people in this predicament, having to
attend a distant school meant having fewer opportunities to make friends from their home neighbourhoods, and the special provision afforded them at school ensured that socialisation during contact hours was also difficult.

**Bus Travel**

Only one participant relied on the public bus service for school travel. His story about living locally and using the bus provided a useful juxtaposition for this analysis. This participant had some functional vision, and noted that people “can’t really tell that I’ve got a vision problem because I don’t use a cane or anything. And so, I think they act more normally around me”. The confidence afforded him through passing as a “normal” person who did not present with a disability, however, unraveled when he went to catch a bus.

Notwithstanding his use of some limited vision, his comprehensive understanding of the bus network, and knowledge of the local geography, the school commute presented obstacles. He described in some detail the difficulties that he often encountered in reading bus destination boards unless the vehicles were stationary. This resulted in a sense of discomfort for him, as he related. “I wouldn’t feel comfortable asking a ... bus, like, stopping a ... bus and then asking what bus it is, because I’d feel kind of bad if it wasn’t the bus I wanted to catch.”

It emerged in further interviews that this participant was anxious about bus travel for multiple reasons. First, his inability to identify visual information without difficulty adversely impacted his sense of autonomy. That his VI was not outwardly apparent added considerably to his sense of uneasiness, as it was this that placed him in a position of dependence on potentially insensitive bus drivers, and it meant he could no longer hide his vulnerability. Therefore, although he autonomously travelled to school, he was unable to conduct each journey with absolute independence. As he noted:

Not looking visually impaired … [bus drivers] would probably think I’m having a go at them for stopping them and then not wanting to get on the bus. Because they’d probably think that, ‘oh, he’d be able to see, why did he stop the bus if he didn’t want to get on it’. They probably think I’m an idiot or something.

For him, the real danger revolved around his difference – his impaired vision as opposed to the able-bodied normal student. However, it transcended a fear of being identified as having VI, to being labelled “an idiot” because of his difficulty reading bus destination boards. When this difficulty arose, i.e. when a bus was too far away or in motion, his apparent idiocy was clarified, and he could no longer hide his vulnerability by blending in as a “normal” student.

**What About Alternatives?**

It appeared then, that the young people had realised the impasse of their situation, or as one participant had described it previously, they found themselves stuck halfway down the waterless waterslide. When I asked them how they might prefer things to be, all of the participants who relied on taxis affirmed that they would prefer to live locally to the school so that they could be closer to their friends, and could travel independently; one participant even spoke candidly about his family’s plans to move to the neighbourhood. The other participant who lived locally was unsure that his situation could be improved.
How Did We Get Here?

Notwithstanding unprecedented moves toward social justice in qualitative inquiry in education (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011), research that focuses specifically on the inclusion of students with disabilities in schools has been reticent to embrace these ideals. Research that is aimed at improving the conditions of inclusive schooling has instead remained entrenched in the deficit discourse. The medical expertise-driven theory of tragedy that is ascribed to specific population groups whose members identify as disabled has continued to proliferate (Goodley, 2011; Oliver, 2009; Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

By this I refer specifically to the prolongation of unheard voices; the voices of the young people with disabilities who are pushed to the fringes of the “inclusive” school under the guise of inclusion. In the words of Ferri (2009, p. 421), “Because students are positioned as objects of study—as problems to correct or remediate—their voices and perspectives remain silenced and devalued just as their bodies remained segregated and marginalized.” Therefore, the alternate conceptions of inclusive schooling as young people with disabilities produce them remain ignored, despite the fact that they can elucidate new ways of thinking about inclusion.

Critical Disability Studies Meets Educational Research

Reaction in both the academic and political spheres to the dominance of the medical and individual models of disability have prompted the conception of critical disability studies (CDS). CDS are principally aimed at overturning the ways in which disability is perceived as a negative construct within society (Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Goodley, 2011; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009; Mertens et al., 2011). CDS have an agenda to go beyond mere attainment of intangible rights for people with disabilities, to their genuine inclusion into social discourse.

Emphasis is placed on the constructs of power (and/or powerlessness) and context in CDS. The lived experiences of people with disabilities fuel research, which chiefly demonstrate real or perceived incapacities to exist on a level playing field with others from the standpoint of societal norms. Moreover, as Meekosha and Shuttleworth Point out, CDS moves away from the dominant social versus medical binary of disability. Some authors who practice in inclusive education research recognise the importance of greater intellectual engagement with (as opposed to on) marginalised groups in inclusive settings (Ainscow, 2005; Allan, 2008, 2010; Curt & Clarke, 2005; Ferri, 2009; Hodkinson, 2012ab; Moss, 2012; Slee, 2011).

However, therein lays the paradox: apart from research conducted by authors including those cited above whom actively seek to advance social development for people with (and without) disabilities, few studies appear to have been undertaken that explicitly seek to know how students with impairments who attend inclusive settings experience and hence produce meaning of inclusive schooling. It must not be forgotten that research is a social act (Barton, 2005). Further, despite the existence of progressive policy and practices that aim to include marginalised students, the voiced experiences of students (and other stakeholders in education) must be heard to better interpret exclusion, both inside and outside schools (Moss, 2012).

The Restorative Task of a Trans-identity Research Alliance

When foregrounding his concerns about the questionability of inclusive education in its current manifestation, Slee (2011) advances a series of restorative tasks of research in the field,
aimed at evolving social justice through honouring voice and insider perspectives with participatory research. One of them is to form trans-identity research alliances. Here I take this term to mean a union of members of a group of people who have experienced marginalization in a similar way. Such an alliance, as Slee claims, can be used to examine institutional repression through collective experience. Slee argues that this allows for the reframing of inclusive education as a political project that accounts for identity differences, experiences of oppression and disadvantage. This work builds on Allan’s argument (2008) that the central focus of educational research should be to examine values and power. She notes that the views of children with disabilities and their families are an appropriate starting point to direct such inquiries.

**Constituted Subjectivities and Inclusion at School**

My objective now is to begin to theorise the trans-identity research alliance that formed between me – the researcher – and the young people who participated in this study. The young people’s accounts in which they elucidated how the school placement and the daily commute constituted their subjectivities as “included” students resonated loudly with my own experiences, and even surpassed them in some instances. This research revealed many wide and varied stories such as the ones presented here that described various factors that impacted the young people’s experiences of inclusion in the school in which they were placed. My own experiences, moreover, led me to draw these details out in more detail in discussions with the participants.

**Conceptualising the Terrain of the Trans-identity Research Alliance**

The underlying epistemology at work in this study is shared understanding among both myself – the researcher – and participants constituted through our collective histories. Referential knowledge acquisition – that is, an examination of the unfamiliar to access the generally taken for granted (Baret, 1998) enabled participants to reach their own conclusions about their schooling. Foucault (1982) offers two points of departure from which we can check that we are able to conceptualise relations of power and how they objectivise us as subjects: (i) from having a historical awareness of our circumstances, and (ii) being on familiar terms with the type of reality that is being interpreted. In the following sections, I examine these points and their relevance to the research.

1. **A Historical Awareness of Circumstance**

The young people and I had much in common. Ontologically we shared an understanding of what it is like to live with VI, along with the socially mandated effects of various aspects of our “inclusion” such as the commute to school, teacher and support practices, and socialisation. This familiarity is the catalyst that elicits more profundity from a trans-identity research alliance. My own history enabled me to put questions to research participants based on my own experiences. Bourdieu (1998, p. 610) argues that close proximity and shared familiarity between researchers and study participants can enhance the role of interviews, not least because:

someone sharing virtually all the characteristics capable of operating as major explanatory factors of that person's practices and representations, and linked to them by close familiarity, [means that] their questions spring from their dispositions, objectively attuned to those of the respondent.
My awareness then is what moved me to question the young people about school placement and transport to such a degree that their embodied experiences demonstrate how it in part constituted their inclusion, and their position within the normal and abnormal dichotomy that evidently existed in their lives.

2. Being on Familiar Terms with the Type of Reality that is Being Interpreted

Another feature of the familiarity between researcher and participants is the way in which interpretation is directed. Bourdieu (1998) explains that in an ideological sense, “researchers who are socially very close to their respondents provide them with guarantees against the threat of having subjective reasoning reduced to objective causes, and having choices experienced as free turned into objective determinisms uncovered by analysis.” (p. 609). Whether or not this was important to the young people, it was to me in employing a participatory research paradigm. I pledged loyalty to the young people, and assured them I was interested in their conception of inclusion rather than that of educators. This ethical action towards inclusion (Allan, 2008) is derived from personal experiences of marginalisation, and as Foucault (1988, p. 321) insists, it is born from “a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way.”

To conduct research with people who are located at too far a distance from the social position occupied by the researcher runs the risk of inadvertently turning participants into objects of study and not independent subjects. For as Bourdieu (1998, p. 608) holds, “asymmetry is reinforced by a social symmetry every time the investigator occupies a higher place in the social hierarchy of different types of capital, cultural capital in particular.” Bourdieu calls this “symbolic violence” (ibid), which would almost certainly interfere with a participatory research paradigm.

Set by a shared ideology that exists in everything we experience (Zizek, 1994) as people with VI, the interviews that comprised data collection of this study presented a forum in which frank, open discussions about social phenomena – both in and out of school – and the discursive practices that shape them ensued. This, as Oliver (2009) contends, is a move toward emancipation, as I attempted to flatten the generally accepted hierarchy of the researcher and participant relationship (Allan, 2008) to try and control the power property that inevitably exists in research.

Thus Constituted Subjectivities at School

Neither the participants nor I explicitly framed our discussions in Foucauldian terms of power relations during fieldwork. However, when provided the opportunity to think about their particular experiences of inclusion, what became apparent to the young people was that having an impairment was negative within the culture of the school. This negative construct rendered them less than the other, normal student, and thus in need of intervention. Consequently, they recognised that they were singled out in the school because of their impaired vision, and that all stakeholders at the school from teachers, administration, other students and even themselves – also acknowledged and thus defined their identities by their differences.

In Foucauldian terms, the power that operated within the school thus individualised the young people. Power of this type “categorizes the individual, marks him [sic] by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him” (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). Within the
school’s culture, having VI presented a danger of being further objectivized as inane — far more toxic than the sum of vision impairment. The young people were compelled therefore to measure themselves against normality, which led them to understand that the particular transport options available to them mired their own attempts to be “normal”.

However, through the “self-referential concept of social scientific knowledge” (Baret, 1998, p. 124) that became available to the young people through their participation in this project, they arrived at a new set of conclusions: they began to draw a picture of what inclusive schooling might look like for them, which contained within an overall more open, convivial culture. This change in the young people’s understanding of the familiar – inclusive schooling – is what Baret (ibid) describes as the “emancipatory potential” of referential knowledge, because it can facilitate them to “liberate themselves from culturally induced constraints.”

Conclusion

Foucault recognised that pastoral power – a modern form of the powers of the ecclesiastical institution that have spilled out into other facets of society (e.g. education, prisons and the state more broadly) – permit the individualisation of all social members. “Individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that the individual would be shaped in a new form, and submitted to a set of very specific patterns.” (Foucault, 1982, p.783). The Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 legislates that all students must be able to attend and be included in their local schools in Australia. Were this to fully occur for students with disabilities, this would mean that the choices available to them for school placement and the commute could at least widen, along with their social circles. On the surface, this would certainly point to greater inclusive schooling.

However, the example I provide here of young people having to travel long distances to attend a school by transport that highlights their inferiority because of their social ramifications within the student community frames the paradoxical nature of inclusive schooling. Irrespective of the location of a school campus, it is apparent that if students find that the culture of a school is predicated on the dichotomy of normality and abnormality, and that special education provision spontaneously labels learners as second-rate, damage is already done to inclusive schooling. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) suggest, “Social advantages or disadvantages weigh so heavily on educational careers and, more generally, on all cultural life, because, perceived or unperceived, they are always cumulative” (p. 24).

As I have demonstrated in this paper, the transport option that students with VI are compelled to take to school therefore becomes irrelevant, as their subjectivities as special students – as more than the sum of their impairments – are already constituted by association. If, on the other hand, students with VI are able to attend their local neighbourhood schools, and receive the appropriate training to take public transport, their interpretations of their schooling experiences might well be more positive.

Yet inclusive education research has been disinclined to take a critical line against the patterning of the disabled subject. Rather, the professional position it takes is ignorant to conversion, leading it to accept the deficit model as ordinary. The proposition of research in this way is to therefore fail inclusion, rather than to restore it.

A trans-identity research alliance can reveal institutional repression, and make some gains as Slee (2011) proposes to restore inclusive education onto a path of social justice. Moreover, as I have mapped both pragmatically and theoretically in this paper, conversations about collective experience provide a vehicle through which referential knowledge about taken-
for-granted assumptions of structural barriers can be analysed. Moreover, a small critical case (Ball, 2006) such as the one introduced in this paper can provide a useful example of the dangers of special educational needs being over catered to in the pursuit for inclusion. Instead of including, the cultural position adopted by all members of a school (and indeed those outside them) can inadvertently lead to institutional discrimination (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Slee, 2011). Once discovered, it becomes appropriate to work to rid schools of this burden.
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Chapter Eight: National and international disability rights legislation: a qualitative account of its enactment in Australia

Preamble

Chapter Eight comprises a journal paper, and is included in its current form which is in press at the International Journal of Inclusive Education; DOI 10.1080/13603116.2014.954640.

In this chapter, I turn the methodology to the analysis of policy enactment in Australia, specifically the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), and the Australian Standards for Disability in Education (2005). I use a narrative of the collective experiences of student participants and myself to illustrate this gap, presenting examples of marginalisation that include but are certainly not limited to maltreatment from school peers, special educational provision, and systemic discrimination both at the education and employment levels. I argue that the policy discourses of both documents perpetuate the collective indifference towards people with disabilities (Slee, 2011) and reflect neoliberal notions of individualism.

I draw on instances of shortcomings in the language used in the policy documents, and refer to the enactment of these policies in Australia with examples from the narrative. I highlight the contrast that appears in the language of the CRPD between abled-bodied and disabled people. The binary oppositions produce a dichotomy that suggests people with disabilities must be incorporated into general society. The collective difference is palpable: the blatant disregard for the inclusion of people with disabilities continues in practice in Australia, while disability policy remains ineffective. This is a critical disabilities study of policy enactment. The major contribution of this work is its redeployment of policy sociology onto the tangible experiences of people with disabilities of marginalisation in the Australian context, using empirical evidence of its inadequacies.
National and international disability rights legislation: a qualitative account of its enactment in Australia

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National and international disability rights legislation: a qualitative account of its enactment in Australia

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Keywords: critical disability studies; policy enactment; collective indifference; linguistic othering

Introduction

In this paper, lived and shared experiences of marginalisation are documented. The storyline begins with schooling for a group of five students with vision impairment (VI who participated in a recent study. The narrative raises the issue of employment post school for me as the researcher (also with VI). These lived experiences are deployed to both foreground and analyse the enactment of public policy on multiple scales both internationally and in Australia. Specifically two policy documents are highlighted – the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006) and the Australian Disability Standards for Education (Australian Department of Education, Science and Training 2006).

From widely differing policy contexts, both pieces of legislation explicitly state that people with disabilities must be able to gain and access education in inclusive schools and successfully transition to work. However, my analysis demonstrates that policies are contingent and context-based and that policy discourse can easily be fraught with contradiction (Ball 2006; Honig 2006). Theoretically, this study is framed in a critical disability studies (CDS) perspective and aims for social, political and/or economic change through the analysis of culture, socio-political discourse and materiality

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This project starts with embodied experiences and are read and revised through a poststructural theory of discourse and power. Concerned with experiences of marginalisation in the Australian education and employment ‘marketplaces’, this paper illustrates through the overarching narrative how the discursive construction of current national and international disability legislation is dominated by neoliberalism and reinscribes indifference and exclusion (Ball 2006, 2012; Slee 2011, 2013; Youdell 2006).

To this end, I develop my argument around two interrelated concepts that together limit the implementation of these policies: the collective indifference to the detached other (Slee 2011, 2013) that is evident in the linguistic construction of people with disabilities (Devlin and Pothier 2006) within the policy problems. Each of these elements is derivative of neoliberal principles that cause tensions and contradictions for people with disabilities (Slee 2011; Soldatic and Meekosha 2012).

Discourses of inclusion in international policy

The UN policy ensemble, which consists of the agenda for education for all (UNESCO 1994); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994) and the CRPD (2006), mandates educational and social inclusion for all citizens regardless of age, race, gender or ability. Many countries have drawn on the UN policies to form their own legislation to engender inclusion, and much of it deals with inclusive schooling in particular (e.g. The Australian Disability Standards for Education 2005 and the UK Equality Act 2010).

While the values of these policy positions are considerable for the implications that they carry for inclusion, ‘landmark civil rights achievements will not in and of themselves rid us of exclusion’ (Slee 2013, 895). A study of the enactment of the policies, under local conditions and with certain people, however demonstrates a new wave in policy implementation studies (Honig 2006) that is important to the task of CDS. New policy studies can provide ‘a window through which to observe larger political and social relations’ (Slee 2011, 148) at work in particular localised contexts that contribute to marginalisation.

It also facilitates an examination of what Hunt (2011) refers to as ‘possibilities of practice’ (464) – the potential for inclusion conveyed through the linguistic implications of policies. Putting CDS to work in the policy enactment arena, I argue that an exploration of discursive manifestations of exclusion can reveal the nature of constitutive forces that exist within policy discourse. As Shildrick (2012) states, such an analysis necessarily deconstructs both discourse and practice.

A neoliberal doctrine has been adopted in many western countries including Australia, and its principles have entered the policy discourses of these countries, particularly in education (see Hodkinson 2012; Slee 2011; Youdell 2006). Neoliberalism is a political theory of economic practice that promotes the free market as its fundamental tenet. Individuals are responsible for their wealth management as autonomous agents, and state welfare is reduced (Harvey 2005). Neoliberalism unmistakably affronts the inclusion of people with disabilities for a raft of reasons that pertain to their inability to participate fittingly in the neoliberal itinerary (Devlin and Pothier 2006; Slee 2011; Soldatic and Meekosha 2012). Apple (2013) describes its iniquitous affects in the USA; while other authors (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012; Hodkinson 2012; Youdell 2006) demonstrate how inequalities develop and persist in the UK under neoliberalism. Each author demonstrates that the policies that support greater
accountability tend to reproduce existing imbalances, and open new fissures into which the marginalised can fall.

Participants, setting and methods
The students’ story emerge from recent findings of a small-scale exploratory study (Whitburn 2014a) conducted with five young people with VI aged 13–17 years, and in grades 8–12 in a secondary school in Queensland, Australia. The four boys and one girl were enrolled through a special education programme. Their vision loss varied from total blindness to some functional vision, but each was classified as legally blind. These young people comprised the only group of VI students enrolled in the school under these conditions at the time of fieldwork. To protect their identities, comments collected and presented as raw data are not assigned pseudonyms in this paper.

I also have VI, and was educated in a similarly appointed school in the 1990s. I conducted more than 20 hours of interviews with the young people, both in one-on-one and focus group conditions. I also invited the young people to participate in a final analysis of the data, an important step for research undertaken within the discipline of CDS.

Theoretical framework
Framed in principles of CDS, the objective of this project is to explore tangible experiences of marginalisation against disability policy discourse. Despite three decades of international mandates for inclusion from the UN, disabilities scholars working within CDS disciplines have identified the continuation of marginalisation of people with disabilities across divergent social systems (Devlin and Pothier 2006; Erevelles 2011; Goodley 2013; Roulstone 2012; Slee 2011; Soldatic and Meekosha 2012).

Studies undertaken within a critical disability framework are driven to go beyond mere attainment of intangible rights for people with disabilities, to genuine inclusion of all citizens into the various social systems in which they live. Devlin and Pothier (2006) emphasise the significance of context in CDS. The task is to foreground lived experiences of people with disabilities across various discourses rather than to offer external intellectual conjecture. This suggests that CDS is best applied within a post-structuralist framework, which is suspicious of universal truths and undifferentiated, generalised effects (Lather 2013).

The goals and strategies of CDS resonate with those of policy implementation research. Contemporary policy implementation studies are concerned with the variation within the dimensions that interplay within policy discourse under contingent conditions (Bacchi 2000; Ball 2006, 2008; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012; Honig 2006; McLaughlin 2006). As ‘Policy . . . is about moving from the inadequacies of the present to some future state of perfection where everything works well and works as it should’ (Ball 2008, 6), an analysis of the policy discourse is to identify how the language used within policy sets limits on what can be achieved (Bacchi 2000). With an eye on inclusive ideals, the language contained in policy defines the possibilities of inclusive practice (Hunt 2011).

However, social and educational exclusion is operationalised on particular identity categories (Youdell 2006). A common logic aims to deny ‘disability as a viable identity’ (Slee 2011, 52) and so the marginalisation of disabled people is inevitably associated with the embodiment of their impairments (Whitburn, forthcoming). Slee (2011,
2013) finds that collective indifference towards the detached other is also the result of globalisation and competitive pressure. He cites two relevant factors to the marginalisation of others in particular: bestowed understanding – common uncomplimentary perceptions of disability, professional knowledge and language control, and the active protection of accepted norms. Together, these elements cause a ‘depleted spirit in ... society’ (Slee 2013, 895). People are licensed to ascribe otherness to those with disabilities. Dominant cultural preoccupations link physical, sensory or intellectual impairments with principles of tragedy (Erevelles 2011; Oliver 2009; Slee 2011; Titchkosky 2007).

In her book entitled *Reading and Writing Disability Differently: The Textured Life of Embodiment*, Titchkosky (2007) exemplifies these points well. She provides a detailed analysis of the ways in which disability is constituted in social discourse, taking particular note of day-to-day media depictions of impairment. She demonstrates that impaired bodies retain their status as a pejorative object often through everyday media representations of people either with or without disabilities. Again, the language used to describe people with disabilities should be recognised for its role in denigrating people with disabilities. The ‘language sanitizes and it shields us from recognition of the enormity of events and from our complicity’ (Slee 2011, 61) in the act of othering.

At this point, I want to pause this discussion to present a narrative that describes experiences of marginalisation across two social institutions: secondary schools and the twenty-first century workplace. These experiences substantiate the collective indifferences that disrupt the discourses of disability policy in the Australian context. I will return to a more focused analysis of some of its underlying discursive interruptions – linguistic othering expressed in the policies – later in this paper in relation to participants’ experiences of exclusion.

**Experiences of marginalisation at school: the secondary school students**

The secondary school students with VI who attended an ‘inclusive’ school in the Australian state of Queensland felt that they were pigeonholed as different by others. ‘Different bad; I’m right in saying that.’ ‘I don’t accept the way people act because I’m blind.’ Made to feel ‘other’ by peers as the special needs kids, the students were ‘included’ in a school that had a raft of special educational provision that supported their presence in regular classes, but in so doing, accentuated their ‘specialness’. In a sense, they were ‘mainstreamed’. ‘I don’t exactly feel mainstreamed. I mean, I am in mainstream, I do normal classes and stuff, good work and everything, but I don’t know. [Other] people the problem is, people around me say stuff.’

Distinctive modes of transport were organised to ensure that the students with VI could travel, often a considerable distance, to school each day (Whitburn 2014b). Para-professionals sat with them in classes and provided them a ‘heavy’ level of support (Whitburn 2013). More often than not, the students needed this level of paraprofessional attention because class teachers underserviced their requirements; there ‘quite simple’ requirements to be included in the teachers’ pedagogy.

They each were friends with sighted students, although forming bonds had been challenging. They held that immaturity among the student population on the whole was at least partly to blame. ‘All the [negative] assumption thing going on about blind people.’ Those who did not appear outwardly impaired felt that they could slip under the disabled radar; these students believed that they had a social advantage over those who appeared more disabled. ‘They [peers] can’t really tell that I’ve got a
vision problem because I don’t use a cane or anything. And so, I think they act more normally around me.’ With that said, as the students moved through grade levels, they acknowledged that making and spending time with peers generally became easier as others had begun ‘recognizing that they are not the centre of the universe, and I’m [the student with VI] not the boundary of it’.

The students wanted to count in the school. They coveted access to teachers’ pedagogy, usable resources and approachable staff, through which they could work autonomously and sit with their friends in lessons (Whitburn 2014d). After all, it was simple; ‘I’m [only] blind – not stupid.’ However, these pedagogical moments were haphazard at best, causing the endless succession of personal paraprofessional support.

They were exempt from taking the Queensland Core Skills Test – the final examination that will determine a students’ ranking for university entrance (required by the Queensland Studies Authority 2012). Some were agitated by being excluded in this way. ‘They won’t let me do it. And that kind of stirs the pot.’ To them, the system ‘discriminates between visually impaired, hearing impaired, [and] students that have no disabilities’. ‘They make the visually impaired and hearing impaired students exempt so that, I don’t know they’re not counted as part of the student body on the results that the school gets.’ To that end, these students questioned the substance of their schooling. ‘Why should schools be discriminating against students affecting the students’ marks and the individual school?’

All of the young people felt that they had to stand out (Whitburn 2014a, 2014b) because ‘you’ve got to set yourself apart to look more as an equal’. They each carried a cloak of competence (Edgerton 1967) that they could pull on, which would parade their skills and above all, hide their impaired vision, their abnormalities.

On the whole, they each placed considerable weight on the anomaly that they felt towards their embodied impairments; they considered that it was this – and not the special education tradition that overshadowed their inclusion, drawing them away from the position of normalcy that was favoured at the school. All the same, if they could access their studies, take the entrance exam to university and break into the social environment of the school a bit more, they would consider their inclusion a success. In the meantime, however, this appeared to be a distant possibility. ‘The situation that I’m put into mainstream [today] is not mainstream.’

Experiences of marginalisation post school: the (older) researcher

If the above passage had incorporated some of my own experiences of ‘inclusive’ schooling in the 1990s as a person who also has VI, it would have read almost identically. I attended a similar school to the young people in the 1990s, and related to their stories of multiple exclusions. Elsewhere, I discuss how the deficit discourse associated with the special education services I received at primary school and especially secondary school always prevailed over the mainstream one, branding me with a stamp with indelible ink as a student with extra needs that was visible to all – class educators, specialist staff and other students (Whitburn 2014c). However, here I take the baton from the study participants, and push the narrative forward into tertiary education and employment, based on my post school experiences.

Despite also receiving exemption from the Queensland Core Skills Test, I graduated high school and transitioned to a Bachelor of Arts at a nearby university. There I threw off the shackles restraining me to the deficit discourse, and realised inclusion in its actual sense for the first time. I blended in with other students, had near limitless
access to resources – with thanks to the recent upsurge of electronic database subscriptions – and for the first time, gained entry to the social environment of my surroundings without constant reference to my disability. I made certain that my performance was marked against my peers independent of special educational provision, and I was awarded my degree based on my grades.

On completion of a Master’s degree, however, I re-experienced my ‘disability’. The search for employment was gruelling. Despite having postgraduate tertiary qualifications, I was unable to find employment. Eventually, I found work in telemarketing – collecting money for a local charity. While I acknowledge that the job search for all young people in a competitive marketplace is one thing, for those with impairments it is quite another. In a biographical account of having both impaired vision and a mental illness, Collinsworth and Winebrenner (1993, 318) muse that ‘The tragedy of the blind in America is that we’re all dressed up and have no place to go.’ Many people with VI are unemployed in spite of their qualifications at the Master’s and doctoral level. Australia is not immune to this calamity. The country’s peak blindness agency – Vision Australia – found in a 2007 survey that was published in 2010 (Vision Australia 2010) that 63% of people with VI of employable age are without paid work.

Not wanting to add to this statistic, I decided to reskill myself. I undertook further studies to attain certification in teaching English to speakers of other languages. However, I was astounded to find that the job search in the volunteer sector – let alone the paid one – was equally difficult. The organisers of state-wide volunteer programmes aimed at tutoring refugees in English were disinclined to take me on. Instead, they fabricated unscaleable barriers by way of excuses. I would be unable to write instructions on a whiteboard; because of students’ low English communication skills, they would need to make eye contact with the teacher; hours would be scant and the classes large.

Looking elsewhere, I applied for work overseas. I received numerous positive responses to job applications in Spain, and relocated to Madrid, where I worked for several language academies over three and a half years. Here, my impaired vision was always regarded as secondary to my capacity to teach, and the language academies with which I worked were always able to provide me with accessible resources. Having taught well over 100 students over this period, I only ever encountered two who asked for a change of teacher, ostensibly because they were uncomfortable with my having a print disability. In both of these cases, my employers sourced me alternative classes with different students, and we simply got on with the job at hand.

The imposition of multiple exclusions through the policy discourses

The collective experiences translated through educational and workplace practices within Australia and shared in the above narrative signal exclusion in policy discourses. This has occurred despite localised commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities. Australia was one of the original signatories to the CRPD (United Nations 2013), and was also among the first 30 countries to formally ratify it on 17 July 2008 (Human Rights for People with a Disability no date). The CRPD explicitly addresses inclusion into schools and workplaces for people with disabilities – among other areas of social life. Disability legislation has also been in place in Australia for a long time (e.g. the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, and the Disability Standards for Education 2005).

In the face of political commitment to inclusion, the tangible experiences of marginalisation reported above compel us to return to the ‘acquired condition’ (Slee 2011, 38)
of collective indifference towards the detached other. People with disabilities fall into descriptive and closed categories. ‘Policy is written onto bodies and produces particular subject positions’ (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 3), and while the purpose of the CRPD for the UN is to take an ideologically driven reaction to the marginalisation of people with disabilities, their inclusion is not assured. Marginalisation was unquestionably apparent to the participants of the current project.

The student participants were each othered in particular ways through the imposition of rigid special education provision, that connoted their divergences – ‘different bad’ separations that set them apart from the normal students. This affected them both in the social environment of the school and with class teachers, who apparently left the bulk of their instruction to paraprofessionals. Some students also recognised that they were discriminated against by having exemption from taking the core skills test – a policy that would further concrete their differences from other students. Similarly, I was also othered in the paid and not-for-profit job markets. Having to take unskilled work despite my holding postgraduate qualifications, I went overseas to pursue an occupation after local prospective employers repetitively kept me away from their organisations. While in Australia they focused considerably on presupposed deficits that I had — seeking to categorise me in order to reject my solicitation for work — in Spain I experienced few obstacles directly associated with my impairment.

This alone exemplifies the ‘interpretative latitude’ (Slee 2011, 113) within different country contexts of disability policy. For participants of this study, otherness in Australian institutions was the default position, while in Spain, less emphasis was placed on ability – or disability – categorisation. While UN policy may set the inclusion agenda in education, employment and social discourses more broadly, at the same time, it is almost powerless in its capacity to oversee implementation in specific country contexts (Mittler 2009). However as I argue in more detail below, through the linguistic construction of disability in the policy documents, their spirit is easily subverted (Slee 2011).

**Linguistic othering – the policy problem of disability**

The CRPD and national disability legislation in Australia appear to exist as little more than a token gesture to social inclusion in Australia. However, I argue that the policy problem expressed through the language used contributes to its inadequacies. There are two points of importance here. First, as McLaughlin points out, ‘how a policy problem is framed – what a policy concern is assumed to be a “problem of” – arguably is the most important decision made as a policy is developed’ (2006, 210). Second, in the same volume Honig suggests that the ways in which ‘various groups are named or labelled in policy designs sends signals about the targets’ value in ways that significantly influence policy outcomes’ (2006, 15). Therefore, much can be deduced from the ways in which people with disabilities are constructed as policy problems in these pieces of inclusive legislation.

The policy problems of these documents are to equalise the rights of people with disabilities alongside those without disabilities to greater societal participation. In so doing, however, both policies also delineate a contrast between abled-bodied and disabled people, which is suggestive that people with disabilities must be incorporated into the social system of the non-disabled body. This dichotomy explicitly produced in the policy discourse ‘engenders a process of “othering” and categorization’ (Devlin and Pothier 2006, 5) in which the construction of the disabled person in the policies comprise their – our – limitations.
Let me demonstrate this point. The preamble of the CRPD (2006) offers much to anticipate for the inclusion of people with disabilities. It opens with a clear vision towards democratic peace, justice and freedom for ‘all members of the human family’ (CRPD, 2006, Preamble, para. A), however this inclusive position soon shifts to the ubiquitous able versus disabled dichotomy; and it appears to stay there. It draws a distinction between people with and without disabilities from para. E of the preamble onwards. Para. E reads: ‘Recognizing that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’ (my emphasis).

This distinction as outlined early in the policy through the language contained in it is what contributes to its ineffectiveness. This thread is continued throughout the policy, where there is constant mention of ‘equal opportunities’ for people with disabilities, in contrast to those who do not have disabilities. The truth claims that the discursive frame of the policy rests upon is a notion of the encumbering, impaired individual who ought to be slotted into the operations of member states’ able-bodied social systems through various mechanisms of legal binding.

The construction of meanings from policies is heavily dependent on the words used to denote points within them (Hill 2006). The choice of language to describe people with disabilities is therefore a powerful way of forming their social construction (Priestley 1999). The problem here is, as Hodkinson (2012) points out, the most simple lexical ontology afforded to the term inclusion – a singular noun that insinuates that a particular ‘other’ is to be included into the whole. While policy discourses may have been adjusted slightly to reflect a more inclusive attitude, ‘the “system of rationality”, or the way we think, is remarkably static’ (Slee 2011, 107) as made evident in its language.

As the policy informs inclusive practice, educators might be forgiven for the functionalist system of inclusive schooling reported by student participants of this research. These young people endured a kind of inclusion that was underpinned by special education traditions, which reinforced their otherness to the normal students. Similarly, recruitment agencies and volunteer sector supervisors constantly rejected my willingness to work in Australia, and instead kept me at arm’s length by focusing on the untold difficulties I would present their organisations. As policy targets, participants of this project were othered by definition, in spite of – though I would argue alongside – the inclusive policy.

I want to further illustrate my point about the misappropriation of the policy problem by examining The Australian Disability Standards for Education 2005 (2006). After the formation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, over a decade of consultation with education, training and disability groups along with the body which would later be called the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HRIOC) led to the implementation of The Disability Standards. The objective of these standards was to prioritise the rights of people with disabilities to educational provision, and to obligate education providers to assure this ideal.

The ‘objects’ of the legislation, as Standard 1.3 stipulates, is

(a) to eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination against persons on the ground of disability in the area of education and training;

(b) to ensure, as far as practicable, that persons with disabilities have the same rights to equality before the law in the area of education and training as the rest of the community; and
to promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle that persons with disabilities have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the community.

The ‘opt out’ that has been retained in the Standards through the use of such abhorrent terminology is unsettling to inclusion. Eliminating discrimination insofar that it is ‘possible’; ensuring as far as it is ‘practicable’ that persons who have disabilities have the same rights as other community members; and like in the CRPD, maintaining an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality through constant reference to the rights of persons with disabilities compared with the ‘rest of the community’. By no means are education providers buoyed by this language to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities after these Standards, nor are they expected to uphold any notion of equality.

In 2010, the Australian government initiated the first review of the Standards, which was made public in August 2012 (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2012). The report detracted even further from the notion of inclusive education, though it suggested that tighter guidelines were required for the standards to be effective. Specifically, the review found that there were concerns about how the Standards had been applied in practice, the clarity of some key terms, and the interpretation and adherence to their requirements.

The points raised about the clarity of terms is what makes this review a mockery of the Australian legislation that protects the rights of people with disabilities to education in inclusive settings. With these linguistic impasses, there is little wonder that the policy might be interpreted in ways that are adverse to the inclusion of students with disabilities. The possibilities of practice afforded by the language in these policies ensure that otherness via their divergences from the norm is definitive. Moreover, as signalled in the storyline of this research, this continues to occur in practice.

Conclusion

Participants of the recent project recognised that they were marginalised in a variety of ways. They were made to travel considerable distances to a school in which they were ‘placed’; they were overwhelmed by paraprofessional support; and they were exempted from taking their final examinations alongside their ‘normal’ peers. Under special education conditions, they were ‘not in mainstream’ principally because of the pejorative attitudes of others towards disability. They tried to act ‘normal’ – they felt compelled to – but the threat of otherness was constant. These tangible experiences indicate that they were categorised through policy and practice as other. Similarly, this categorisation appeared to permeate would-be employers in the local market – frustrating my own attempts at pursuing voluntary and paid work.

Despite the propagation of a policy ensemble explicitly aimed at increasing inclusion for all diverse populations across various domains, citizens with disabilities are still treated with suspicion. Depicted as ‘other’ through the employment of particular linguistic tropes and squeezed out of the competitive marketplace, they embody a policy problem that has still not been addressed appropriately. This paper demonstrates through the account of secondary school students with VI and the personal experiences of the author how national and international disability policies are ‘infected with extant ontological ghosts’ (Hodkinson 2012, 5). Though disability policies are in place to retrofit exclusionary social systems, neoliberal ideals permeate the discourse through the...
use of inappropriate language that echoes the collective indifference towards people with disabilities and perpetuates their marginalisation.

By naming those with disabilities as ‘others’ who are in need of including, policies such as the CRPD are implicit in their own discursive impasse. Further, a neoliberal mantra affixes a market efficiency directive to policy discourse (Apple 2013; Ball 2006, 2008, 2012; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012; Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Slee 2011) in which disability policy is inscribed. As a consequence, otherness suffuses the tangible experiences of people with disabilities because their value (in human capital terms) is considerably lessened.

The failure of inclusion policies, argues Hodkinson (2012), is that they are not radical enough. Instead, disability policies have enabled users to ‘reduce inclusion to an illusionary concept which appeared convincing to some, but in reality was “of the order of sorcery”’ (Hodkinson 2012, 5). By naming the person with a disability as a singular entity that must be included into the whole, policy-makers shirk their responsibilities to drastically change the landscape of the inclusive argument. The possibilities of practice, then, are to continue as we were. No longer will current approaches to the legislation of inclusion suffice.

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References


Chapter Nine: The perspectives of secondary school students with special needs in Spain during the crisis

Preamble

Chapter Nine is based on a journal paper, and it is included in its current form which was under review in Research in Comparative and International Education at the time of submission.

In this chapter I present an analysis of the Spanish phase of this research, the second country where data were generated for this project. Ethical approval to undertake this study was provided by the Deakin University Human Ethics Committee in 2012, and colleagues from the Autonomous University of Madrid generously facilitated support, participant recruitment, assistance with data collection and some language translation.

Twenty-three secondary students who received special educational support on account of a physical, sensory, intellectual or behavioural impairment participated in this project. They were invited to discuss their experiences of schooling in face-to-face interviews. The young people highlighted the school community, resources, teacher pedagogy, support and social inclusion as germane aspects of their inclusion.

Using Clarke's regeneration of grounded theory—situational analysis (2005) to interpret findings, I analyse participants' subjectivities as "included" students and their aspirations for the future alongside the austere measures that are currently gripping the country that include dramatic education policy change. While most of the young people report positive experiences of inclusion in their schools, some are knowingly at risk of being characterised as "abnormal", due to their perceived biological distance from the dominant normative discourse. Students with diagnosed special needs in Spain appear to be even more susceptible to this occurrence on account of abrupt policy changes to education and a youth employment crisis that accompanies fiscal difficulty (López & Mengual, 2014).

The significance of this work is located in the analysis of the situation—inclusive schooling for young people who receive special education support, their aspirations for full inclusion, and the forces at work that subjectivate students to a disempowered position. This chapter illustrates the experiences of inclusive schooling in Australia (Chapter 3), in contrast with those in Spain. It highlights in particular that while the Spanish students experienced a greater level of inclusion, a set of similar discursive practices can intimidate both cohorts of students, though they are more prevalent in Australia. In the final chapter I offer a more thorough analysis of the students' inclusion along these lines.
The perspectives of secondary school students with special needs in Spain during the crisis

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Abstract

This paper presents an overview of a study conducted with 23 secondary students in Spain who received special educational support in inclusive schools. The purpose of this work was to learn how they collectively considered their experiences of school inclusion. The participants—aged 12-19 years who attended 6 different settings–highlighted the school community, resources, teacher pedagogy, support and social inclusion as germane aspects of their experiences. Through these characteristics, the principal focus of this analysis is to demonstrate how schools can effectively fulfil the core requirement of teaching and supporting diversity in their classrooms, and in so doing, can incite the included subjectivities of differently abled students. This analysis is positioned within the climate of economic crisis in Spain, that coupled with policy change threatens to derail the headway made towards inclusive schooling.

Keywords

Inclusive schooling; Spain; Insider perspectives; special educational needs; austerity; situational analysis.
Introduction

This paper is principally about the lived experiences of 23 jóvenes: young men and women aged 12-19 years who attended 6 different inclusive secondary schools in Salamanca and Madrid, Spain. Each of the young people experienced impairment or other diversity, and they were provided special education support. They – some more than others – located their experiences of inclusion at their local “ordinary” schools as successful. “Centro ordinario” (ordinary school) is the term generally assigned to mainstream schools in Spain. It refers to schools that support the integration of students with disabilities (Echeita et al. 2009; Verdugo & Rodríguez, 2012).

This research is framed by concerns about how the subjectivities of young people with impairments or other diversities are shaped through interactions with school administrators, teachers, support personnel and peers, which together set the trajectory of the included or excluded subject (Allan, 1999; Youdell, 2006). Since 2008, Spain has endured economic recession. The government has implemented severe austerity measures to try and counter the crisis and recovery is slowly being realised (Boudreaux & Bjork, 23 September, 2013). This analysis is situated within the current economic and policy climate, where large funding cuts are consequently being made to inclusive schooling (López & Mengual, 2014) and young people generally are finding it increasingly difficult to find work (Pallisera, Vilá & Fullana, 2012; Vallejo & Dooly, 2013).

Invoking principles of critical disability studies (CDS) and disability studies in education (DSE), this research draws on the accounts of insiders—individuals who are at risk of marginalisation because they receive special educational services (Allan, 1999, 2006; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Connor Valle & Hail, 2012; Messiou, 2012; Shildrick, 2012). The objective of this research is to expose the discourses that enable exclusion in schools. Special needs labelling typically does “not hold a positive connotation in education contexts” (Messiou, 2012, p. 11). Instead, “students who are assigned labels are often seen as learners who present potential challenges for school contexts” (ibid).

These children’s rights to be educated in inclusive schools often go unheeded (UNICEF, 2011)—an issue that is further emphasised in economic instability when normative discourses overrule disability rights (Biel, 2012). In the search for solutions to this
discrepancy, students so categorised can contribute perceptively to the inclusive schooling debate (Allan, 1999, 2006; Author, 2013, 2014ab; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Connor et al., 2012; Messiou, 2012; Slee, 2011).

The stories told in this paper foreground the themes that participants considered cogent to their experiences of schooling. The supporting arguments provide a reading into how the subjectivities of students with particular diagnoses are shaped in such settings via a multitude of general practices. A description of lived experience alone does not fulfil the commitment to learning about what works to promote inclusion. Rather, scrutinising the effects of practices within schools that are “constitutive of the student, constitutions whose cumulative effects coagulate to [either extend or] limit ‘who’ a student can be” (Youdell, 2006, p. 13) can yield a greater understanding of the inclusion discourse for young people with diverse abilities.

Seeking to investigate how inclusive schooling operates across transnational borders fulfils a commitment to learning the intricacies of exclusion in different settings. Marginalisation in schools is convoluted and messy, and demands scrutiny under particular circumstances (Messiou, 2012). However at the same time, critical educational inquiry that recognises the complexities of particular cultural assemblages must also take a universally relevant perspective both in its politics and in the subject matter with which it deals (Apple, 2010). Inclusion is a universal matter, and segregation regrettably creeps into the experiences of children and young people with special needs globally (Barton & Armstrong, 2008). A study of this nature, then, provides insight into the complexities faced by a group of students in inclusive schooling in a country that has been deeply effected by economic crisis.

The Policy Terrain of Inclusive Schooling in Spain

Although inclusive schooling focuses on the right of all students to be educated (Booth and Ainscow, 2011), the focus of this discussion is the schooling of students in Spain who are deemed to require special education support due to the presence of an impairment or other diversity. A study of a country’s inclusive education system is incomplete without at least some understanding of its political approach to inclusion (D’Alessio & Watkins, 2009).

Spain has a very diverse population coupled with a high degree of success in the enactment of inclusive schooling (Chiner & Cardona, 2013). This also befalls students with SEN. Being one of the poorer countries before European Union membership, Spain did not traditionally
have a culture of special education compared to many other countries in the region (NESSE, 2012). Today, there are approximately 0.4% of the students with diagnosed special needs enrolled in segregated special educational centres, while the remaining population attend regular settings (López & Mengual, 2014; Pallisera et al., 2012).

Notwithstanding, the trajectory of inclusive education in Spain with specific reference to students with SEN has followed a pattern of segregation, through to normalisation, integration and inclusion (López & Mengual, 2014). With severe austerity measures currently in place as a drastic response to counter economic downturn, “the profile of Inclusive Education has become blurred on the hazy horizon of … educational policy” (Parrilla, 2008, p. 19). This is particularly the case as the incumbent conservative government introduced a new Organic Law for Improving Educational Quality (LOMCE) in the summer of 2013 that drastically cuts funding to education, but also aims to address Spain’s falling representation on the OECD’s PISA tables and early dropout rates. Under the new legislation, external evaluations are increased, and students are funneled into particular streams early—academic or vocational (Vallejo & Dooly, 2013).

The latest adjustment follows a particularly dramatic policy change regime. Under both sides of politics Spain has endured hurried and continuous changes in education, with six radical policy shifts having been achieved in three decades (Vallejo & Dooly, 2013). Education policy in the 1970s concentrated on special segregated education provision to disabled, low achieving and culturally diverse students (Cardona, 2009; Chiner & Cardona, 2013; López & Mengual, 2014; Parilla, 2008), but gradually moved toward more inclusive ideals for all students more recently (Chiner & Cardona; Verdugo & Rodríguez, 2012).

Parrilla (2008) describes the 1990s as an encouraging decade for inclusive education in Spain, though she laments that it has deteriorated more recently. Entrenched conservatism in policy encourages the act of labelling children with special educational needs more often, which leads to their being treated differently to "mainstream" students. The circular motion of policy discourse depletes the headway made toward inclusive education in favour of a neoliberal agenda (López & Mengual, 2014; Vallejo & Dooly, 2013). Exemplary of this point, “Where unique equipment or professional specialisation is called for to effectively respond to the needs of certain pupils, all of the Autonomous Communities contemplate the possibility of enrolling them in a separate school” (Egido, 2005, p. 60). This is typically the case for students with diagnoses of autism and severe behavioural conditions, and others with
multiple disabilities (Cardona, 2009). However the law recognises the desires of parents regarding their children’s education, and as such, tries to implement inclusive schooling whenever specifically drawn to do so (López & Mengual, 2014).

In practice, despite the wavering political commitment to inclusive schooling, students who present a wide variety of diversities are enrolled in inclusive settings, and have been for over two decades (Cardona, 2009; Chiner & Cardona, 2013; López & Mengual, 2014; Verdugo & Rodríguez, 2012). However, the risk of marginalisation in schools occurs upon specific student groups for a variety of divergent reasons including disability, gender, socio-economic status and/or cultural background (Echeida et al., 2009; Moriña, 2010; Parrilla, 2008; Rojas, Susinos & Calvo, 2013; Susinos, 2007; Susinos & Parilla, 2008; Verdugo & Rodríguez, 2012).

Research conducted by Chiner and Cardona (2013) has shown that while class teachers genuinely hold strong ideologies of full inclusion, in practice they have reservations about the skills required and the availability of appropriate resources and support to ensure its full implementation. This finding is supported by Marchesi, Martín, Echeita and Pérez (2005) whose research revealed that secondary teachers were the most critical about inclusive schooling with specific regard to students with disabilities. Moliner, Sales, Ferrández & Traver (2011) have found similarly, noting that teachers’ functionalist perspectives lead them to believe that students’ disabilities, social or family backgrounds explain their inability to learn.

Inclusive schooling in Spain then, appears to be threatened by the discourse of normality and political/economic tension. “Inclusive education implies that all schools will include a diverse pupil population, and it is very difficult to achieve this outcome within systems which are driven by the market rather than social justice concerns” (NESSE, 2012, p. 26). This occurs despite the country’s commitment to inclusive schooling as a right for all students regardless of their background, as enshrined in the Convention for the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006) to which Spain is a signatory. With recent policy amendments again modifying the educational landscape in Spain away from inclusive ideals, however, it is imperative that the current facilitators and/or barriers to the inclusion of potentially at risk students are identified, as they might reveal practices that are sympathetic to the cause and yet do not generate financial hardship to implement.
Research design

This study is framed using situational analysis – Adele Clarke’s (2005) regeneration of grounded theory that reaches beyond the empirical to analyse the effects of discursive practices. The research builds on similarly designed work conducted in the Australian context (Author, 2013, 2014a) by concentrating on how inclusive schooling is experienced by students with special needs in Spain.

Twenty-three young people with diverse diagnoses aged twelve to nineteen years informed this qualitative study into how the included subjectivity of a differently abled person is created in schools. Following principles of critical disability studies (CDS), the focus of this research is on how school interactions with human and non-human variables—people places and things—in inclusive settings shaped their subjectivities as included students. CDS embraces the postmodern turn in social theory, and opens a broad array of possibilities for exploring how and why exclusion exists in discourse and in practice (Shildrick, 2012).

Students’ voiced experiences provide a close inspection from an insider’s perspective of how "included" subjects are formed in schools. In Allan's' (2006, p. 129) terms, others –policy makers, educators and people generally “could be entertained with a demonstration of some of the possibilities of inclusion, to see it in its bodily effects.” In the following sections, details are provided of the situational analysis design. This precedes a description of participants and the research settings, which is then followed by a discussion of some ethical considerations that arose from this research. Data collection instruments and analysis are then discussed before the presentation of findings.

Grounded Theory and situational analysis

Constructivist grounded theory is a qualitative framework that guides both data collection and analysis, with the objective of developing abstracted theory on a particular social phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). With that said, grounded theory traditionally leans toward positivist conceptions of social incidents, whereas situational analysis enables it to be “actively pulled away” from this inclination by embracing the postmodern turn in social theory (Clarke, 2005). Situational analysis recognises the localisation of knowledge; it accounts for researcher reflexivity in them development of theory; and it expedites flexible research designs that cross multiple sites. Consistent with traditional grounded theory principles, researchers are discouraged from reviewing published literature before entering the field to be studied. Instead, they are to consider everything as data that might impact the
particularities of an investigation and therefore must be included in findings if deemed relevant to a field. Hayhoe (2012) describes grounded theory as “a mode of discovery [that] is most appropriate in esoteric, nonmainstream studies where a body of knowledge does not exist or where the literature is inconsistent with the story of what is being observed” (p. 184).

Applying grounded theory to the study of discourse, Clarke (2005) scrutinises the constitutive forces within materials and practices that “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Situational analysis permits the collection of data about both human and non-human entities, and following traditional grounded theory, it allows for open and focused coding to analyse findings. To this end, situational analysis is a useful framework that enables the collection of students’ voiced experiences about what human and non-human materials and discourses either facilitate or hinder their inclusion at school and prepared them for the future. This analysis moves away from “expert” understandings of what works in inclusive schooling to a detailed account of what students with diverse abilities regarded appropriate and/or inappropriate to their inclusion.

**Student participants**
Consent was given for 23 young people aged 12-19 years to participate in this project. Each attended secondary education at either a compulsory or non-compulsory year level in accordance with the Spanish education system in six different schools. Secondary education in Spain consists of two phases: compulsory and non-compulsory (Egido, 2005). Compulsory learning spans the ages 12-16 years, and after completion students may go onto undertake a non-compulsory Bachellerato (academic) or Ciclo formativo de grado medio (vocational) course from the ages 16-18 years. Subsequent university entrance and/or transition to a trade are dependent on the completion of this non-compulsory phase of learning.

Table I displays specific details about each participant, including sex, age, year level and diagnosis—vision (VI), Down’s syndrome (DS), pervasive developmental disorder (PDD), cerebral palsy (CP), attention deficit/hyperactive disorder (AD/HD) and mild to moderate intellectual impairments (II). Such a diverse sample population provides this study a multiplicity of angles from which to view how schools create included subjectivities of differently-abled students. This takes up one of the main tasks of CDS—to recognise that there exists no such thing as a fixed category of person (Shildrick, 2012).

In this paper the participants’ comments translated to English are presented in the text anonymously, though the age, sex and diagnosis of each is provided to enable readers to
contextualise responses from the diverse sample of participants. This is important to the current research so as to limit the probability of participants’ being “discovered”, while at the same time recognising that while a diagnosis of impairment or special educational need defines merely a part of the whole child, it also importantly shapes their embodied experiences (Author 2014c).

Table I: Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Identifier</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Course level (compulsory secondary education &quot;ESO&quot; or non-compulsory &quot;Bachellerato&quot;)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mild intellectual impairment (II)</td>
<td>3º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Vision impairment (VI)</td>
<td>2º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Down's syndrome (DS)</td>
<td>4º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mild intellectual impairment (II)</td>
<td>4º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Moderate intellectual impairment (II)</td>
<td>1º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Down's syndrome (DS)</td>
<td>2º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Vision impairment (VI)</td>
<td>1º Bachellerato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Cerebral palsy (CP)</td>
<td>4º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Down's syndrome (DS)</td>
<td>1º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Attention deficit/hyperactive disorder (AD/HD)</td>
<td>1º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>(ED)</td>
<td>4º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mild intellectual impairment (II)</td>
<td>3º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Mild intellectual impairment (II)</td>
<td>2º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mild intellectual impairment (II)</td>
<td>3º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Identifier</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td>Course level (compulsory secondary education &quot;ESO&quot; or non-compulsory &quot;Bachellerato&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pervasive developmental disorder (PDD)</td>
<td>3º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Moderate intellectual impairment (II)</td>
<td>3º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Attention deficit/hyperactive disorder (AD/HD)</td>
<td>2º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Moderate intellectual impairment (II)</td>
<td>2º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mild intellectual impairment (II)</td>
<td>2º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Attention deficit/hyperactive disorder (AD/HD)</td>
<td>2º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Mild intellectual impairment (II)</td>
<td>1º ESO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Vision impairment (VI)</td>
<td>1º Ciclo formativo de grado medio (1st year vocational training)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Vision impairment (VI)</td>
<td>2º Bachellerato</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Settings**

There were six schools across the sample of students in two Spanish cities (Madrid and Salamanca). Both schools in Salamanca were public and were located respectively in an urban and rural setting. These two schools received only enrolments of secondary students in the compulsory or non-compulsory phases of education. The four semi-private schools in Madrid—that exclusively received public funding from the education administration—had enrolments of students from the infant to post-compulsory secondary levels. Two of these schools were located in affluent, inner-city neighbourhoods, while the remaining two shared low-economic settings in Madrid’s outer suburbs.
Ethical Considerations and Sampling
With the assistance of colleagues from a Spanish University, the sample of six inclusive secondary schools was identified as settings in which there were known to be enrolments of students with impairments or other diagnoses. Ethical clearance was sought from the (masked) University Human Research Ethical Committee, and letters of introduction were sent to school principals. Letters of consent were also passed through these schools to parents of potential participants to seek approval for their son or daughter to take part in interviews. The parents of 20 students returned signed forms to the research team, while the remaining 3 were above the age of consent and were able to provide their own signatures. One item of the consent letter notified the addition of a third person in interviews – a person who could act as translator in the case that neither party could comprehend each other’s verbal communication; given that the researcher’s native tongue is English. Colleagues from the university generously fulfilled this role in interviews.

Data Collection Instruments
The young people were asked to participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher and the invited translator, though some also were able to meet on two occasions. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each interview took place over 20 to 65 minutes. The research team encouraged the participants to talk about their experiences at school, and any facilitators and/or barriers to their inclusion, not dissimilar to the interviews conducted in the prior phase of this research in the Australian context (Author, 2013, 14abc). The questions put to the participants were aimed at motivating them to provide details about past experiences at school with peers, teaching staff, support and pedagogy, and many follow-up questions referred to their emotional reactions to different circumstances surrounding the experiences that they had related.

Member Checking
CDS relies on the co-production of knowledge about the disabled experience. To facilitate this process, the research team returned to five of the six schools to enable participants to view and comment on their transcripts. School timetabling did not allow for one school to be re-visited. We presented the transcriptions to participants in either print or electronic format, and read them to students who were unable to follow the written material. The research team were surprised to observe the level of engagement with which participants absorbed their transcripts. They each commented on errors or misinterpretations in the language as
appropriate. The research team made the recommended changes to each participant’s transcript in their presence as requested.

**Data Analysis**

Researchers working with the grounded theory framework can attend to data analysis by openly coding the collected material line by line (Charmaz, 2006); constantly comparing slices of analysed data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); and then performing a more focused scrutiny of the material while acknowledging their own memos taken during fieldwork (Charmaz, 2006). Situational analysis does not stray from this protocol (Clarke, 2005), however, divergent “actions, situated perspectives, symbolism(s), and the heterogeneity of discursive positions and their relations can be discerned and creatively grasped” (p. 8). Through increased emphasis on researcher reflexivity, situational analysis recognises that different readings of data may occur to different people. It therefore demands that researchers explain how they reached particular positions in their analyses. Therefore, “the goal is critically analyzing to produce ‘a truth’ or possible ‘truths’—distinctive analytic understandings, interpretations, and representations of a particular social phenomenon” (Clarke, 2005, pp. 8-9).

On verification of each transcript, the researcher coded the data line by line as suggested by Charmaz (2006) following principles of CDS. Specifically this meant combing the participants’ dialogues about matters that concerned them, such as the circumstances that they believed marked out their differences to other students and their emotional reactions to these. The researcher also referred to the extensive memos taken throughout fieldwork in which were included notations about the schools, participants’ views, and other information that seemed relevant to the situation. In addition, the situated variances and discursive practices that impacted the students’ experiences were taken into account. In particular this referred to the diversity of participant experiences from different school settings, which included the variances in gender, diagnosed SEN, ethnicity and/or age in regard to the discursive practices within the schools. The data collected from all participants was then compared (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Following grounded theory, the task is then to take to focused coding (Charmaz, 2006), which in a sense is the writing up of the analysed material, which led to the construction of the following codes (Table 2).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Codes</th>
<th>Comparative Analyses</th>
<th>Focused Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attending school</td>
<td>Locally to home. Included in in-class pedagogy. Having friends (micro/macro friendships); receiving help from friends when class is going at a fast rhythm. Familiarity (built quickly or over time); acceptance (from all stakeholders); flexibility of school. Being able to use assistive tech: wanting same level as class mates (to achieve greater inclusion). Comparing old and current school: being different at old school; having to overcome previous underservicing; climbing up and jumping off a precipice (changing school). Considering impact of impairment on learning: staying positive about abilities; accepting “algunas” (some) limitations.</td>
<td>Being included: school communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing studies (via different means as general student population)</td>
<td>Complete flexibility. Visual aids, enlargement. ICT/adapted technology; alternative/adapted exams; in-class support/external support (school or classroom); making up for teacher underservicing; using different books to class mates (necessary/exclusionary).</td>
<td>Using Specific Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion by teaching</td>
<td>Pedagogy: familiarity with teachers; teacher's understanding specific requirements; access to teachers; asserting self/exerting self. Expert teachers: teachers knowing more about impairment than student. Receiving teacher support: to form close circle of friends; verbalising work; simplifying work/not receiving attention from teachers because of lower level material. Being included spatially: seat assignment; group work; school excursions/travel.</td>
<td>Being included in teacher pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Codes</td>
<td>Comparative Analyses</td>
<td>Focused Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving Support</td>
<td>&quot;Each thing has its advantages and inconveniences&quot;. Having to receive support: Realising need for support after having to repeat course; learning to be more assertive; valuable life skills training. Internal: in-class paraprofessional support (positively received because is shared); in-school “workshop of autonomy” support for certain subjects with specialist teacher. External support: visiting specialist teacher: to negotiate with staff; increase skills in impairment-specific area; therapy (speech, physical).</td>
<td>Supported inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having friendships</td>
<td>“We are a close group” close friendship circle at school. Peers wanting to be friends despite own diversities: being teased at old school. Friendships that cross outside school. Friends being a whole second world. Receiving help from friends: in-class, outside of class. Helping friends: emotional support; group work; school work. Recreation: “hanging out”. Friendships defining inclusion over studies. Resolving disputes with friends.</td>
<td>Being included socially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Codes</td>
<td>Comparative Analyses</td>
<td>Focused Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locating Self (as secondary student)</td>
<td>Being spatially subjected through impairment: movement; recognition; independence. Comparing experiences: exclusion in old school versus inclusion in current. Being concerned about achieving: exams; dealing with heavy workloads. Gaining courage: asserting self; interacting with others; invoking strategies to clear up doubts; invoking strategies to deflect teasing. Building normality: general hobbies (art, I/T, being with friends); considering impact of crisis on (future) self: opportunities and constraints; having to repeat/not having to repeat courses (leading to support needs/pride in self). Being proud of achievements. Reflecting positively on own diversities (against general school population); considering normality.</td>
<td>Formation of subjectivity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Findings**

The analysis of the data is presented along five interconnected tracks: school communities, resources, teacher pedagogy, support services, and social inclusion. The variety of positions that each of these aspects denotes (e.g. facilitators and/or barriers to participants’ inclusion) incites a greater awareness of how the included subjectivities of students who present with diversities are formed in schools. But first, it is important to discuss a noteworthy point that emerged from this study in relation to the juxtaposition of participants’ experiences of school placement and inclusion. This contrast offers a useful starting point of the analysis of the young people's observations of their schooling.

Almost two thirds of the sample of participants (N=15) had either logically transitioned to different schools—primary to secondary—as they progressed through their education, or had attended the same k-12 equivalent setting during the course. It was these participants who contributed the least to interviews about their experiences at school, perhaps because they had nothing to contrast positive inclusion against. To them, everything was “normal”; they studied in classes—engaging as they did so with other students either with or without
support; they were in wide friendship circles with these students, which extended outside the school gate; and they achieved their goals – experiencing the pressure of living up to high personal objectives, the strain of examinations, and the everyday tensions that often arose with their parents, siblings and friends.

The rest of the sample (N=8) had moved from another school to their present setting on account of the deprivation they had experienced. They reported that at their previous schools they had been left – for the most part – to do “nothing” (male, 12, AD/HD). These students expressed unease. “I didn’t know anything, neither how to read, I couldn’t understand anything, nor to spell” (female, 14, II). Each of these participants described underservicing class teachers who had generally ignored them, overpowering special educational support that had discouraged them from mixing socially with other students at recreation, as well as maltreatment from peers. These students recognised that this was unreasonable. “When I realised that other kids were studying, [could] write their names and dates [etc.] … I knew that it wasn’t fair. What am I doing here [at school], if I’m not doing anything?” (Female, 14, II).

Each of these participants had consulted with his or her parents about changing schools, and it was not until transferring into the research setting that they realised how being included in a school was different. “I thought that it was normal that they push me around, normal that they frightened me, that they rejected me; but no” (Female, 19, VI). “Here I feel good and they treat me well, and this is different from how they treated me [at my old school]” (Male, 12, AD/HD). The compassionate approach of teachers and support staff in the research settings buoyed these students to study harder, especially those who attended all classes with their peers.

**School Communities**
Participants described their schools as small communities: places where school leaders, teachers, support staff, students and parents melded together to form productive, supportive environments. “This school is small and familiar” (female, 19, VI). Directors of the schools were accessible to the students, and some taught them directly in scheduled lessons. “All of them whom have control [of the school] I have as teachers” (ibid). Comparing this closeness of school leadership to the students led one to observe that in her previous school, speaking with the director was like “asking to meet with the pope” (ibid). Teachers, too, were easily
accessible. “The treatment of teachers towards students is different, closer, less cold … [the school environment overall], it’s more cosy” (ibid).

The schools appeared to be supportive of flexibility. Individual needs that arose (i.e. speech/physical therapy, or academic support to be provided either in or out of house) were easily facilitated. Some participants reported that they periodically skipped classes to attend external support from advisory visiting teachers. Others often withdrew from subjects to take alternative courses with a specialist support teacher; and some reported attending regular sessions during school hours with tutors individually to advance their studies. Some participants also described having adapted delivery of the course material, and/or having the opportunity to split year levels into longer time periods. “I decided to divide the two-year subjects into three years, so it would be easier, because in addition my personal situation [health-wise] is very unstable – I never know if tomorrow I might need to rest” (female, 19, VI).

**Material Resources**

Accessible resources and the use of specific locations in classrooms was commonplace among participants. For example, some with VI sat in particular locations in classrooms where they could make best use of their residual vision, and/or equipment and resources including magnifying miniscopes, braille, large print and/or laptops with accessible software and electronic books on them. There was initial apprehension among participants who used laptops in lessons. “I thought my schoolmates weren’t going to accept the computer well, but they have accepted it quite well” (male, 13, VI). Other students in classes reportedly made use of different equipment besides traditional books and pens, which was reassuring to participants. “So now it’s normal I go to classes with a computer” (female, 19, VI). All participants had access to electronic mail, and learned computer skills at school; many referred to the importance of these resources for entertainment, communication with friends and family, and for study purposes. Some stressed, however, that they would prefer to learn more technical skills with computers at school, such as production of multimedia including videos and web pages, and E-commerce.

Not all participants were reassured, however, by the alternative resources they had to use. For example, some participants invariably studied from a different curriculum, and therefore from unrelated material to the general student population in lessons. Some lamented they could not “go at the same rhythm as the class” (female, 16, II), and consequently “[teachers] can’t help
you like they do [the other students]” (ibid). These participants were divided on whether or not the use of different materials to class mates mattered: some stressed that they felt excluded as a consequence; others acknowledged that their base level of knowledge was lower than that of their same-aged peers, and they accepted without fuss having to learn from more simplified resources. “I wanted to do it [study] with the same books that my class has, but I can’t, because I’m not so much like other people. And I know it” (female, 14, II).

Teacher Pedagogy

Aside from this, class teachers generally made participants feel included in lessons, though this depended on an understood classification of normalcy. “What I want [from teachers] is the most normality possible” (Female, 19, VI). “Normality for me is that they treat me equally as my class mates; or [at least] to the extent that they can” (ibid). For participants with VI, for example, this generally meant providing accessible resources on time, and verbalising their actions when modelling on the blackboard. “For me, the teachers who go speaking when they go writing on the board I appreciate a lot” (Male, 18, VI). Each of the participants described being included in rotating seating assignments in classrooms, and they actively participated in group work.

Other participants explained that teachers were above all very patient, and they allowed for flexibility in courses. “The teachers who help us in those classes say ‘if I find it a little difficult, they’ll make it a little easier’” (female, 16, II). Teachers also compensated for previous educator underservicing to participants who had transferred to the research settings. A majority of participants pointed out that having teachers explain thoroughly the concepts of lessons heightened their sense of inclusion. These participants subsequently felt as though they were encouraged to exert themselves in their work, and they placed much emphasis on studying for, and passing their exams. “You have to study a lot, [here] but I put up with it. Also the teachers are kind” (Male, 12, ADHD).

Conversely, however, some participants felt uncomfortable toward teachers who did not explain concepts to an appropriate extent. Maintaining parity with peers for the entirety of lessons was not always possible. “When he speaks quickly, I can’t [always] understand him” (male, 14, DS). There was, however, some disparity between participants as to whether or not they utilised strategies to clear up any doubts that arose during lessons. While a majority asked for teachers to repeat instructions without concern—“I just say, or put up my hand” (male, 12, DS)—some were anxious about interrupting teachers. These participants tended to
let opportunities to seek help pass. “There are times I don’t want to interrupt, or sometimes I’m a little shy” (female, 16, II).” Others would turn to their friends for help. “You have to turn to your people” (female, 15, II).

Receiving Special Educational Support
How the students received support differed across the sample. Some attended all lessons with their peers without special education provision. “I am inside the classroom all the time with my classmates” (female, 19, VI). All participants depended on the support of classmates when required to read work from the board, or to clear up any doubts that arose. Other participants sat with a paraprofessional at all times in the regular classroom. “She sits next to me and explains the things” (Male, 12, ADHD). Unlike the students with VI who participated in the Australian phase of this research (Author, 2013, 2014ab), the paraprofessional support provided to the Spanish participants did not concern them. They reported that they always shared this support with others in their classes. Other participants were withdrawn from various classes to attend “workshops” with a special education instructor, but received no support in lessons. “I think it’s [support] appropriate to the requirements of each one [student], because there are different types. The same classes but different types of support depending on your necessities” (female, 16, II).

The students had mixed feelings about the support provided at their schools. Most who either received in-class support, or withdrew from lessons to take specialist instruction regarded it as unquestionably “normal”, as it did not interrupt their social inclusion and helped them to focus on their studies. “The truth is that I think [the special class] helps you a lot if you have some sort of a problem” (female, 16, II). Others, though, recognised that by receiving academic support in alternative classrooms means that they were unable to graduate from secondary school and receive a formal qualification for their efforts. Instead they were channelled into vocational education where they would try to achieve certified qualifications in a trade. Other students were compelled to work from specialist resources, even when they were sitting with their peers in their classrooms. “Man, I would want to [do] more the subjects a little more like my class mates. Each thing has its advantage and inconvenience” (female, 16, II). The few students who were not comfortable with the amount of support that they received also recognised a need to be more assertive about their wants and needs, and for the most part, they felt comfortable about talking these matters over with the teaching staff at their schools.
Social Inclusion

All participants described being socially included at school. Participants who had moved to the research settings were both surprised and relieved how easily they made friends. “When I came [here] people wanted to be friends with me” (male, 12, ADHD). In breaks they often played sport and/or chatted with their friends. Most participants emphasised the social environment of their schools as being definitive of their inclusion.

I always say that the friends at school are like a second world inside the world where we live. I consider that all of the … gossip that goes on among the students at school; they’re like a second life (male, 15, CP).

Participants related that the support they received from friends was indispensable.

For me they’re huge support. … To have support from your friend, you know that you can go on. You know that they’re going to help you. I think that that is the most important [thing], more than your studies … it’s a vital function, we need to have contact, you can’t live in isolation (female, 19, VI).

Some students recognised the value of the community and the efforts of teachers toward fostering friendships. “They try to make us a close circle. They try to reinforce our relationships inside the classroom and you can notice it. And, we are a close circle” (female, 19, VI). Most of the students lived locally to their schools, and spent time with their classmates outside of contact hours, unlike participants in the Australian phase of this study (Author 2014b).

The Included Subjectivities of Participants

Some participants spoke of being teased at school for being different to others. However at the same time they recognised that this occurred rarely. “I like it more when they [peers] are friendly and nice, they are understanding of how I am, and we are playing [together]” (female, 16, DS). Other participants commented that their individual diagnoses did not in any way affect neither their social nor academic inclusion in their schools. “People know me; they accept me the way I am. I’m not alone [nor] isolated (male, 15, CP).

Participants were contented that they fit well into the life of their school communities, and some recognised that this contributed to their positive dispositions. “Some friends from La ONCE [the national blindness foundation] … in their schools they are not as well accepted as I am here. I feel fortunate for that” (male, 13, VI). “I feel very comfortable [here]” (female,
Participants who had moved to the research settings from other schools acknowledged the positive impact of the inclusive environments that they had encountered. “[Everyone] tells me that I’ve changed and that I talk a lot. I used to be a mute. Everyone tells me how much I’ve changed” (female, 13, II).

This suggests that the students learned a new way of seeing themselves alongside their peers who did not receive special educational support. “We’re all human, we’re not defects” (male, 13, VI). Each valued his or her autonomy, and they all believed that it was fostered at their schools. “Independence is very important” (Male, 18, VI). With that said, they internalised certain limitations to their independence in consequence of their diagnoses. They were forever bound to an impaired subjectivity, despite being well included at school. “You’re [always] going to be more or less independent. Simply you have to look to be independent in the way that you can be” (Female, 17, VI).

**Post School Plans and the Impact of Economic Crisis**

With regard to post-school plans, most participants had only tentative ideas about a vocation or study path. Irrespective of the current employment crisis troubling the nation—particularly for young people (Vallejo & Dooly, 2013) — some participants believed that they could transition into their chosen professions; they conceded however that they would have to rely on the support of others such as parents or disability organisations to find work. “I suppose it [finding work] would be more difficult than for a normal person” (Female, 17, VI). This problem was further emphasised by the current economic crisis. “You’re not a normal person … and I think that [particularly nowadays] generally a business person looks for someone who is the quickest and most effective [at their job]” (Male, 18, VI).

Above all, however, participants recognised the necessity to find work similar to other people, because of the sense of normality that it would carry. It’s not easy, but in that is merit” (Female, 17, VI). These students’ comments indicate the strength of normative discourses and their capacity to subjectivate the lives of people with disabilities. This creates a gridlock, for when placed against economic downturn, people with disabilities have been cornered out of the labour market (Biel, 2012; NESSE, 2012; Pallisera et al. 2012) – an issue that will potentially lead to problems for these students in the future.


**Discussion and conclusion**

From the outset, inclusion, as participants of this study have experienced it in their schools, was revealed via a host of routine discursive practices that were altogether constitutive of the included—however diverse—subject. For the most part, this empowered the students to defy “the greater social task of concealing their differences” (Mitchell & Snyder, 2012, p. 43) in order to fit in. Instead they relished the inclusion experience—concentrating as they did so on successfully navigating their studies and fostering supportive—sometimes challenging—friendships.

However, to conceive that the students were included simply on the basis that the schools had secured the means (material resources) to cater to their particular support needs would be naive. Rather, participants described schools that effectively worked with the disorderly nature of diversity. While special education intervention was commonplace, each school provided individual support to students on the basis that it was required, or rather left the pedagogical task to teaching staff; in many cases the young people felt empowered to seek support for themselves from peers.

Participants indicated that the schools fortified social, supportive connections between all students and other school stakeholders including parents, peers and staff—effectively creating communities, and fulfilling the educative role of “recognizing the silhouettes” (Slee, 2011, p. 166) of potentially marginalised students. The schools secured the students' inclusion through a general response to diversity that included the seamless incorporation of specialist equipment and pedagogical techniques as required. These findings suggest that these schools—regardless of socioeconomic and/or rural/urban setting—effectively employed the concept of transformability (Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre, 2004)—a recognition that an unbreakable symbiotic link exists between learning, teaching and students’ outcomes. Transformability is a way of thinking that facilitates schools to “understand and engage with difference in constructive and valued ways” (Barton, 2003, p. 13) to form inclusion through practical pedagogical techniques that can only occur through strong participatory relationships within communities (Hart et al., 2004). Being active participants of these communities led students to exert themselves in their studies when combined with the inclusive pedagogical practices of teachers. These students' rights were being recognised: exclusionary values and inequalities were challenged (Barton, 2003)—activities that are cited in the CRPD (2006) as goals to be achieved in education.
With specific regard to the students’ concepts of themselves, they perceived that at their schools they were treated as whole persons rather than labelled deficiencies (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Florian & Linklater, 2010). At the same time for some participants, there was a constant risk that their biological differences, and/or their learning from a different curriculum to general class populations might expose their inherent abnormalities. This tended to jeopardise their social inclusion rather than the academic, for which they felt appropriately supported. Nonetheless, these students recognised a need to be more assertive about their needs and wants, in order to gain social and academic authority over their personal circumstances and/or perceived detachments from normality.

The findings of this analysis of the inclusion situation for young people demonstrate that despite the unsteady policy terrain of the Spanish inclusive schooling system, young people with diagnosed impairments were effectually included in what Slee (2011) refers to as irregular schools: exceptions to the exclusionary rule; “beacons of hope” (Knight in Slee 2011, p. X) that facilitated the formation of included subjects despite their diversities. This is in stark contrast with the descriptions provided by young people with VI of their inclusion in a secondary school in the Australian state of Queensland, with whom prior research was conducted (Author, 2013, 2014ab). These students related that the inhibitive actions of stakeholders – teachers, paraprofessionals and special educators—excluded them by virtue of their impairments, in spite of their aspirations for agency. The discursive practices within the school left an alienating legacy; the students were held to an excluded subjectivity that constantly referred them and others to their deficiencies (Author 2014b).

Nevertheless, with severe austerity measures being implemented in Spain aimed at countering rising unemployment among Spanish citizens, the government is withdrawing crucial funding from education coupled with the introduction of the LOMCE policy that shifts focus onto individualised competitiveness (López & Mengual, 2014; Vallejo & Dooley, 2013). Those currently included might therefore become imminently excluded.

Foregrounding the voices of students with impairments in inclusive schools, as demonstrated in this study, enables research to disrupt professional discourses around inclusive education (Allan, 1999, 2006; Messiou, 2012; Parrilla, 2008; Slee, 2011), by emphasising how the included subjectivity of diverse students are shaped (Youdell, 2006) via human and non-human practices and resources that mobilise in given situations. Further, studying inclusion across diverse cultural borders offers a transnational-sized deposit into the global, “inclusive
education knowledge bank” (Parrilla, 2008, p. 34) that is crucial to informing policy and practice from the situated and embodied experiences of insiders across multiple constituencies. The project presented in this paper demonstrates that inclusive schooling, and moreover the included subjectivities of young people with disabilities can be achieved via a variety of mechanisms, but a constant danger of their marginalisation persistently lingers.

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References


Chapter Ten: Discussion and Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I offer a final narrative in which I discuss the theoretical foundations of the research design; synthesise the constituted "included subjectivities" of participants through the storyline of the project; and discuss the implications of school practices in this area, examining the ways in which inclusive schooling might benefit in alternative formations of subjecthood via their governmentality (Foucault, 1991). Here I draw on issues that appeared to stand out in particular to me as I undertook fieldwork and analysis, including (but not presented in any particular order) theoretical and policy discourses, special education support and resources, social inclusion and pedagogy. Each of these factors impacts differently on insiders' experiences of inclusive schooling, and contributes in ways that keep some of them curiously absent from full inclusion. This conclusion is organized under four main headings: Theoretical underpinnings of the research design; the "included" subjectivity/s of impaired students; the alternative (dis)course of inclusion and research limitations and recommendations.

Theoretical underpinnings of the research design

In this research I set out to answer a broad question: How do secondary students who receive special educational support experience inclusive schooling? Countless publications orate from the professional discourse the application of a myriad of rational/technical interventions that might benefit inclusive schooling, though few engage critically with insider perspectives; especially of students with impairments. Those researchers who have explored the lived experiences of young people with impairments observe that their participants have valuable insights to share about their schooling; that they can confront categorisation, and that they can offer practical suggestions to school improvement based on collaboration and appropriate support (Allan, 1999; Byrnes & Rickards, 2011; Peters, 2010; Sagers, Hwang & Mercer, 2011). But they can also highlight the sombre side of inclusive schooling that indicates its failings (Moriña, 2010; Slee, 2011; Solis & Connor, 2006).

To answer the research question I turn the analytical lens inward and upward (Brantlinger 2003). I critically examine the tangible experiences of inclusive secondary schooling of young people with impairments in the country contexts in which I have lived, have been educated and have also worked as an educator. I also train the inward gaze on my own experiences of "inclusion" alongside participants, as a person with severely impaired vision who received a special stamp that branded me as a person with extra needs, and that carries its own set of implications for my work. Ascending the line of investigation, I analyse the situation (Clarke, 2005) of the inclusion experience—looking up and around by examining the discursive constructions of contributory elements—disability theory, policy discourse, teachers' practices, resources, and special education knowledge traditions—focusing in particular on their impact on participants' inclusion.

As I describe in the introductory chapter and again in more detail in Chapters Six and Eight, discrepancies in my own experiences of social "inclusion" as a person who is legally blind have motivated me to learn how current students with impairments encounter inclusive schooling, and how they think it might be advanced. However, I
was cognizant of my reflexive position as a researcher with certain insider privileges. I also considered that extant disability theory was unable to comprehensively explain the experiences of participants—including my own—of inclusive schooling.

On one hand, as Bagliari, Valle, Connor and Gallagher (2011) point out, the development of theory, research methods, pedagogy and policy have been inhibited by traditional understandings of disability and education. As a consequence, sociological representations of the disabled experience in research have scarcely existed, while rational/technical approaches still recurrently blemish the inclusion of students characterised as having special educational needs.

On the other hand, the social model of disability has been tendered as a tool that might explain collective experiences of disablement (Oliver, 2009). It has been increasingly drawn on more recently in the education and rehabilitation disciplines. However it swings wildly away from intellectual engagement with the embodiment of impairment, and instead decries disablement as the root cause of inaccessible material factors, in particular the economy. An explicit disablement/impairment binary opposition thus emerges, which seems less relevant to the inclusive education debate. Advancement of inclusive schooling relies on much more than an analysis of the material objects of possibility and an extraction of embodied impairment from disability.

My unease towards the social model stems from my reading of its theoretical and political grounding. It is here where I consider that the potholes (Miller, Whaley & Stronach, 2011) of disability scholarship hamper its progress. The social model starts from a theoretical basis of structural oppression to analyse the mostly oppressive position of disability in association with marginalisation. Consequently, any less than positive experiences of school inclusion that a research project that follows the social model might report would appear caustic and shallow, from the marginalised other. While this might be useful, in this work I have sought to provide a broader understanding of the discursive and material factors that influence students' experiences of inclusion, grounded in their explanations.

Working with student participants through their reflections of their experiences, I also anticipated that this project might reveal how they considered their own actions were implicated in their inclusion. After all, as Foucault (1982) indicates, we are each actively involved in the power relations that constitute our subjectivities. Power can only be found "acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action" (Foucault, 1982, p. 789).

I have therefore developed a methodology for use in the field of disability studies in education (DSE) that is aligned with the broader movement from structuralism to the poststructuralism (Lather, 2013; Miller et al. 2011; St Pierre, 2009, 2013). The framework relies principally on embodied experiences of inclusion, together with my own story as both participant and researcher, which is critically examined using the Foucauldian conception of subjectivity (Foucault, 1982). Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) are used to build theory on these experiences. This work begins to answer Slee's (2011) call to develop a theory of social justice for inclusive education that both exposes and dismantles entrenched forms of marginalisation that subsist in the field.

My objective in undertaking this work is to explore the discursive and material field of inclusive education rather than to undertake experiments within it. I therefore
employ a methodology that is informed by poststructural theory, and is open-ended rather than fixed. I use it to engage politically with embodied experiences of marginalisation. While Barnes (2012) critiques the poststructural approach to the theorisation of disability for being "politically benign" (p. 22) through an unnatural emphasis on culture and language, the methodology I employ exposes tangible experiences of exclusion through both schooling and policy discourses. Poststructural representation affords research with political teeth (Martin & Kamberlis, 2013), and as Allan remarks, an "Incitement to discourse … necessarily involves subversive research practices" (1999, p.124).

A methodological precaution of this research was the location of insiders' voices, including my own. I wanted to foreground them in a way that would substantiate empirically the findings of this work. The experiences of students, particularly those deemed as having special educational needs, offer insights into inclusion that are seldom heard. Moreover, the disclosure of their experiences might depict what Foucault (1980, p. 81) referred to as an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges"; the revelation of information that has been buried within the functionalist discourse, but yet provides "a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it" (p. 82).

Too often I have observed the term 'student voice' being used to indicate a baseless leap toward democratic ideals both in education and research, when structuralist notions of the purpose and value of young people's opinions tend to obfuscate the terms of the debate (see Byrnes and Rickards, 2011). However the stories of students' tangible experiences do not often position inclusive schooling as a problem to be fixed, but instead offer insightful interpretations of how the actions of all members of schooling systems impact on their inclusion. This aspect of the project is important to DSE. As Bagliari et al. (2011) convey, research of this kind illustrates how young people discredit the impact of special educational labels placed upon them. Carlson (2005), who describes the Foucauldian genealogical project very well, states that it presents a way of bringing to light subjugated knowledge from within, rather than from above.

I employ constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) to guide data collection, analysis and representation. Grounded theory facilitates the theorising of a phenomenon under study by seeking social processes that occur within data. Informal, semi-structured interviews with participants allow them to reflect on and to speak honestly about their experiences. The data are drawn on heavily to provide empirical support to analysed results. Moreover, all actors—human and non-human, that impact on the topic under study are placed under scrutiny (Clarke, 2005). These include policy discourses, along with the actions of other school members that have implications on participants' experiences. This is an extension of inquiry "beyond 'the knowing subject' to also analyze [sic] what else is there in social life—materially and discursively. Going beyond 'the knowing subject' constitutes both theoretical and methodological innovation" (Clarke, 2005, p. 177).

The embodied experiences of participants are presented through narrative - imaginative inquiry practices that generate new understandings through investigation (Gough, 2010). Behind the young people's voiced experiences and - for what it is worth my interpretations of their accounts exist detailed material and discursive explanations to their exclusion. Narrative facilitates a demonstration of how these
interact for multiple constituents. As Foucault offers in the Archaeology of Knowledge:

We must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes (1972, p. 28).

Through an examination of statements and contributory statements - the narratives produced through this research are "new texts that break boundaries; that move from the center to the margins to comment on and decenter the center; [and] that forgo closed, bounded worlds for those more open-ended and less conveniently encompassed" (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p. 124). I am drawn to narrative because it is facilitive of work within a social science that produces interpretations of social life rather than to attempt to fix research subjects. It is the raw accounts of research participants that drive this methodology, strengthening its significance to the project of DSE.

I have developed this methodology into two not dissimilar research contexts: a secondary school in the Australian State of Queensland with a small group of young people with VI; and six secondary schools in the Spanish cities of Madrid and Salamanca with 23 participants who had diverse diagnoses of special education needs. A sample of this configuration might ordinarily provide the opportunity to perform a comparative analysis, notwithstanding the inconsistencies of participants' diagnosed impairments, ages and types of schools, not to mention their being low in numbers. However, the intention is not to compare findings, but rather to both analyse my interpretations of the discursive and material aspects that constituted the young people's subjectivities, and to examine the differences between the issues that were important to participants of each group.

The "included" subjectivity/s of impaired students

An analysis of the accounts of insiders of their experiences of inclusive education is conducive to understanding how their subjectivities are discursively constituted. The intersection of inclusive schooling and the constituted subjectivities of students with diagnosed special needs is a field of research that has not commonly been explored. Several exceptions have been Allan (1999), Laws and Davies (2000) and Youdell (2006) whose studies probe the effects of discursive practices in schools that constitute particular types of students' subjectivities in “the search for new modes and spaces and players in and rules for 'the game of truth'” (Ball, 2013, p. 146) about who or what differently abled students can "naturally" and/or "legitimately" become.

Students with special needs who attend inclusive schools actively seek inclusion (Allan, 1999) by manoeuvring through the discursive and material practices of their peers, families, teaching and support staff in ways that either subvert and/or escalate disablement. Students with impairments are often entangled within special education discourses, and can either elicit an antagonising or facilitative response from school staff through their interpretation of the young people’s subjectivities (Laws & Davies, 2000; Youdell, 2006).
Where the current project differs from this prior work, which will become more apparent in this and the succeeding section, is in my reading of certain aspects of students' "included" subjectivities through the everyday functions of schools that produce and maintain marginalisation that can be unperceptively damaging to inclusive education. This research, then, provides a more contextualised understanding of the sociocultural contribution of schools to the marginalisation of students with impairments. On a methodological note, like Allan (1999), I also attempt to make sense of participants' subjectivities by engaging with them directly in interviews about their experiences, rather than observing their behaviour.

It might be presupposed that students with impairments who attend inclusive schools are included by definition. However, subtle and not so subtle practices within schools can impact on their experiences and constitute their subjectivities. As St Pierre (2004) suggests, different patterns, events, practices and conventions created within different cultures can be constitutive. Nevertheless, as Foucault points out, such an analysis ought not to be conducted to pronounce that "everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do" (1983, p. 230-231). The task of this project might be to discover how students' subjectivated positions can be drawn upon in order to understand the impact of circulating discourses within inclusive education, with the aim of increasing understanding as to how the field should be adapted to meet the demands of greater participation.

Before discussing the empirical findings to this end, it is appropriate to outline the theory. Central to this thesis is a reading of discourse as the underlying rules that come into play in a particular situation that "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). According to Foucault, multiple discourses are cited and inscribed through discursive practices, and they each interrelate through the exercise of power which in turn produces knowledge. This knowledge then reconstructs new forms of power.

This multidimensional interaction between power and knowledge is what forms the subjectivities of individuals. The concept of subjectivity for Foucault (1982) refers to the effect of power relations, as they control and produce subjects, and simultaneously tie them to their own individualities. “Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). Passively inscribed into intersecting discourses, actors do have their own agentic power, however they have utility only within the limits of the individual's subjectivation. Accordingly, "individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

Multiple discursive forces are inscribed within schools that can have constitutive power over students' subjectivities (Allan, 1999, 2005, 2008; Ball, 2013; Erevelles, 2011; Hojgaard & Søndergaard, 2011; Laws & Davies, 2000; Youdell, 2006). This is particularly the case for students with disabilities who often receive special provision in schools and are so labelled (Ball, 2013; Erevelles, 2011; Slee, 2011). Typically, the special education deficit discourse centres on these students because they disrupt the routines that exist within regular schooling. This occurs through what Foucault (1977) refers to as normalising judgment: the corrective disciplining of bodies through an "artificial' order, explicitly laid down by a law, a programme, a set of regulations" (p. 179). A disciplinary "function of reducing gaps" (p. 179) that "operates a
differentiation that is not one of acts, but of individuals themselves, of their nature, their potentialities, their level or their value" (p. 181).

There are also other forces that coerce the subjectivities of young people with impairments in schools. For Hojgaard and Sondergaard (2011) materiality has constitutive power as well as discourse, and both interrelate to subjectivate individuals. A study of subjectivation, then, must take both discursive and material factors into account. These students generally make use of material objects, such as assistive technology and accessible resources. They also abide discursive practices—either related or not to these material objects, including special education training and support, and wary assumptions from other members of the schooling community as a result (Allan, 1999). These constitutive forces work together to mark out students’ differences to others.

The constituted subjectivities of young people with diagnosed special needs are not exterior to discourse and requiring further pathological discovery (knowledge). Rather, they are demarcated within the discourses that operate in schools, and can become particular types of problems under specific conditions. Though they can transgress (Allan, 1999), students with impairments have agency; however they are confined within the prevailing knowledge that circulates in the schooling discourse about them. Moreover, if these subjectivated positions are linked, as Youdell (2006) argues, to increased inclusion or exclusion within schools, then an examination of the effects of power that facilitate these occurrences merits more attention.

The power of normativity

As I discuss in Chapter Six, while medical expertism generally unseats a diagnosed individual's presupposed attachment to normalcy, it is within the education sphere where this distance seemingly develops. As I document through my own experiences of becoming a special education recipient, under the hegemony of scientific discourse “the normalizing practices of bio-power define the normal in advance and then proceed to isolate and deal with anomalies given that definition” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 258).

A topic close to the hearts of all participants of this research that fits well into the analysis of their subjectivities was that of 'normalcy'. Allan (1999) has observed that the term ‘normal’ is a key fragment of the discourse of inclusive schooling for students with impairments, which was also a word that the young people constantly placed upon the table in interviews in the current project.

The actions of young people with diverse impairments often appear to be aimed at propelling them toward the normative discourse (Jessup, Bundy & Cornell, 2013; Solis & Connor, 2006), however this seems ironic given that it is the fabricated notion of a normal centre that marginalises and excludes people with disabilities (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009). Solis and Connor (2006) express unease toward what they refer to as the centrifugal force of disability that limits students with impairments from normalcy, in spite of their seeming to aspire towards it. However, as Laws and Davies (2000) point out, not all young people embrace the concept of normality. "Children do not necessarily take up 'normality' through some benign process of osmosis" (p. 208). Certain power relations must therefore circulate within schools that accentuate the normative discourse for some young people with impairments and not others.

The storyline of this research indicates to different extents a disquieting ambiguity that hovers over the school inclusion of student participants in both country contexts
and across age groups. A majority of participants portrayed an inconspicuous presence/absence in their experiences of inclusion in their schools that is suggestive of what Derrida (1994) terms hauntology: a variant on the neologism of ontology, a simultaneous state of being and not being. For all participants, the presence of impairment carried with it implications of having to receive special education intervention, though they each occupied multiple positions within the spectrum of need and utilised their impairment in the outward expression of their identities to different degrees.

The role of the normative discourse in Australia

All of the research participants in Australia had experienced apprehension because of their distance from the norm; the regular student without special educational needs. Their placement in the school and the provision of particular transport options irrepressibly tied them to the special education program that operated in the school (Chapter Seven). They were also exempt from the senior state-wide testing regime because of their association with the program (Chapter Eight), however this appeared to concern those more academically oriented students. Heavy personal support isolated the young people from their peers both discursively and materially, while light support roles facilitated their inclusion from a respectable distance through the provision of access (Chapter Four). Only some class teachers competently included the participants in lessons by utilising inclusive pedagogical strategies (Chapter Five), while others encumbered their access to their work.

The young people reported that they were socially outcast on the whole because of their close vicinity to the special education program (Chapter Three) which had contributed to the difficulties that they encountered in forming friendships. Notwithstanding, having some sighted friends carried for these participants a sense of normality. While there were some positive aspects to their experiences of schooling, this cohort of students contended overall that their inclusion was unsuccessful because they were made to feel more “special” than the sum of their actual impairments (Chapters Three, Seven and Eight).

The concerns that these young people raise speak to matters of exclusion in policy discourse, pedagogical practices and support, social marginalisation and an acculturated emphasis on a binary of the abled-normal student versus the pathologised, disabled other, whose subjectivity is inextricably tethered to special education. Policy categorisation through their enrolment in the special education program bestowed upon them special education traditions that kept a tight leash on their level of inclusion in a couple of interconnected ways.

For one, the restrictions that they endured were imposed on their impaired subjectivities; restrictions they continuously attempted to overcome. For example, they would don a cloak of competence (Edgerton, 1967) by attempting to conform to one of the virtue discourses that evidently circulated within the school (Halse, Honey & Boughtwood, 2007) of academic competitiveness, participation in potentially risky sports such as cricket, football or tennis, or membership in the "cool" group of kids (Chapter Three). Those participants who wanted to take the final examinations felt restricted by the policy of exemption, and intended to take it up with school administration on the grounds that they were being discriminated against through "unfair" school rules (Chapter Eight). Thus, the virtue of competitivism was inextricably linked to that of normalcy.

One participant's comment summarises well his feelings in this regard: "I'm [only] blind—not stupid."
The dominant ideology of this school was suggestive of a meritocracy. Brantlinger (2009) notes that meritocratic schools play an undeniably damaging role in the formation of disabled identities, as was evident in the current project. The competitive ethos destabilised any pretence of inclusion for participants on account of their impairments. It ensured that they were compelled to participate alongside the "mainstream" students in competition. As one of the participants related, having impaired vision meant that "if you’re even more of just an average student, you’ll just be looked at even more as just a nobody or a nothing. You know, [it] does not register when they look at you, [they would] just go, Oh...ignore him."

Therefore, each of the virtues once attained was perceived to separate participants from their abnormalities associated with having impaired vision and receiving special education support. Moreover, competing against others and achieving success provided a temporary cover of normalcy. But they were diverted away from the examination room door when they wanted to participate in the competitive end of school testing regime.

These students were forever bound to their impaired subjectivities, the individualising treatment that constantly kept them in check with the "truth" of their conditions that formed the basis of their marginalisation. A discursive change—(Chapters Three, Seven and Eight), a constant in the landscape of the secondary school environment as they moved from class to class and/or interacted with different personnel repetitively triggered a reconnection with their apparent abnormalities. These students were constantly subjected to a deficit subjecthood via these discursive changes alone is indicative of a school culture that emphasises normalcy to an unhealthy degree.

Mediated through the school virtues of competitivism and normalcy, the students' abilities were overshadowed by their disabilities when they were unable to either act with agentic intent, or to blend into the environment of normalcy. For instance, participants who had some functional vision felt that they were closer to the accepted norm than others who did not. As one commented: “They [peers] can’t really tell that I’ve got a vision problem because I don’t use a cane or anything. And so, I think they act more normally around me”. However, as another who was totally blind noted, "[At school] you are always pushing shit uphill [to try and fit in], except for when it comes to out of school." And “The people in my class... would probably be a lot less antisocial if we weren’t in such a structured environment."

This participant pointed to the culture of the school, in which all students were forced to toe the line from the "authoritative" figures (teachers), instead of being afforded agentic expression. This evidently gave the student a noteworthy contrast through which he interpreted his experiences. He declared that he was not well included at school. However, he acknowledged that in a local youth program in which he participated, "they think of me as being an equal.” He believed there was a fundamental difference between his school and youth program that underlined this difference. At school, widespread conformity with a highly structured environment increased his marginalisation, whereas in the youth program, members had agentic expression. "[In the youth program] since everything is my control, I could say who I’m going to walk with, or who I’m going to hang around [with]". He maintained that having agency here was generative of his inclusion.

The virtues of competitivism and normalcy at school, which he claimed all students adhered to, overshadowed his experiences of school inclusion. However in his youth
program, these matters held little currency. While a technical-rational framework might suggest that the actions of research participants indicate straightforward attempts to fit in at school, a poststructural account unravels the discursive elements at play that lead to their marginalisation; their "excluded" subjectivities.

The role of the normative discourse in Spain

As discussed in Chapter Nine, in Spain all participants attended schools that they described as "small communities" that were local to their homes. Teachers generally included these participants through inclusive pedagogical practices, except for some students who were forced to work from different level resources to other class members; these students reported being generally ignored in lessons. This was a concern to some of these participants, however most tried to ignore its deleterious effects.

Other participants reported that they were empowered by the provision of support when it was required, as it was either shared across students; deemed necessary for their intellectual advancement; or essential to make up for previous underservicing in prior schools. Social inclusion was unequivocally the main indicator of inclusion to these participants, and each reported being in supportive, and sometimes challenging friendships.

Like in Australia, participants of the Spanish phase of this project drew on the normative discourse extensively in their interpretations of their inclusion. They emphasised the equality that they experienced alongside their peers. This provides a useful contrast to the Australian sample. In Australia the normative discourse was a virtue to be achieved, whereas in Spain the virtue discourse of normativity appeared to be symbolic of equality for all. A majority of these participants constantly cited their relationships with parents, peers and teachers, the stress of examinations and their participation in the everyday life of the school—matters that any other student who is not labelled with special educational needs might discuss.

A simple comparison of how participants of both phases of this research engaged with interview questions is illustrative of this point. Whereas all participants in Australia vehemently registered their concerns about a number of issues that impacted their inclusion, in Spain, less than half of the sample engaged to any real extent with the questions I asked them. As it happened, only the verbose students in both country contexts had attended other schools, settings to which they had felt included to divergent levels.

There is only so much that a researcher can glean from interviews with young people who have attended a single school throughout their education, and to whom everything is "good", "normal" and consequently "just like what everyone else" is doing and accustomed to. But of course my task was not to liberate the young people from any misled notions of self-consciousness, but to learn about how they interpreted their experiences of inclusion. For these participants, difference was unmarked and subsequently silent. Diversity was virtuous.

With that said, as Miller et al. (2011) argue, through the analysis of power, which inherently exists in all forms of exchange, poststructural theory facilitates the study of the tacit implications of silences. These young people knew no different, whereas the rest of the Spanish sample, as well as those in Australia, either were experiencing, or had been subjected to marginalisation from their schools to some extent. The
conclusions that I draw from this reflection of fieldwork are that having nothing to compare positive experiences of inclusion against leaves little to crow about.

This is not to say, of course, that these students would always experience positive school inclusion. As the situational analysis I offer in Chapter Nine explains, the fiscal crisis and enormous youth unemployment, combined with the increased focus on school competitiveness—was leading their future inclusion into a precarious position. In the staff dining hall at one of the schools that I visited and conducted interviews in, just to the south of Madrid, some of the teachers voiced their concerns to me in this vein over lunch. They recognised that the competitive ethos creeping into the Spanish education system would not do favours for some of their students.

However, the power of the normative discourse impacted on the inclusion of some participants in Spain in a particular way—not dissimilar to its effects in the Australian sample. As I discuss in chapters Two and Nine, some students acknowledged that they were also at risk of having their biological abnormalities discovered in the present. While coercive powers that might draw the young people away from the normal discourse lay mostly dormant in the schools in Spain on account of the appropriate support, resources, pedagogy and acceptance from others that they experienced, their subjectivities were at risk of being linked to an abnormal identity—similarly to the pressures faced by participants in Australia. Some students in Spain discussed that they were always connected to their impairments through their biological differences to others, which by default meant receiving special education support. Consequently some students felt compelled to attempt to attain normality.

One young woman from the Spanish sample with a mild intellectual impairment recognised that she was unhappy having to study from different resources to her classmates; and wanted to assert her wishes more strongly to her teachers and peers, (even at the risk of receiving lower grades) because it would increase her sense of inclusion. "I would like to be able to understand [the work] of my classmates, but it's like you work in a different way. It's not like you are invisible, but... After trailing off, she also stated:

If I had the same books as my classmates, I would like school much more. I'd study more, and it wouldn't be important to me if I received lower marks [because of the harder material. I think that if I had the same level as my class mates, it would be easier to speak with them, if we all had the same level and I could ask them for help, I think I would much prefer that. Because [now] in class, I don't speak; never, never, never. I would change my manner [with others]."

This student indicated her desire to attain greater inclusion both in and through teacher pedagogy and social interaction. And, although she was reticent to suggest that she was regarded as invisible in classrooms, her comments suggest that nor was she visible on account of the different study material that she used compared to others. Another young woman with impaired vision commented when I asked her to expand on her explanation of normality - that is, being treated equally to her classmates to the greatest extent possible: "normality is really something you are creating day after day."

These participants' comments demonstrate "the incredible reach of [the] conventions of normative bodily practice" (Youdell, 2006, p. 128). But they are also indicative of how young people recognise the implications of their own actions on their inclusion. While these students were not seeking normality through the denial of their
impairments (like in Australia), they cited interaction with others—including peers and teachers and equality of study material as virtues to be achieved. Under a Foucauldian conception of power, individual subjects are always situated in relation to others and are constantly negotiating with the power relations that circulate through the discourses in which they are located. As Allan (1999) also found, while special education discourses generally frame students as passive, they are also active agents, who challenge the boundaries of their subjectivated positions. Moreover, as the young women's observations suggest, insofar that they are able, achieving normalcy by way of being included with their peers might make it possible to form "included" subjectivities of students with impairments.

The work that research participants took on their inclusion, donning a cloak of competence in order to compete in Australia and trying to create normalcy in Spain in association with the actions of others—illustrates that their subjectivities constituted in practice are “not … the condition[s] of being but of becoming” (Erevelles, 2011, p. 26). Although for seemingly different reasons, these students were under precarious guard to mask their detachment from the normal centre, and in so doing, to actively pursue inclusion (Allan, 1999). An "included" Subjectivity articulates a desire to take up an alternative subjection within the discourse of the inclusive school mediated by biological difference.

The alternative (dis)course of inclusion

The methodological framework that I have employed in this project has facilitated a demonstration of the undercurrent of uncertainty that characterises inclusive schooling for secondary students with diagnosed special needs in both the Australian and Spanish contexts. Before leaving Spain to return to Australia, I invited the collaborators—the student participants and their families, the school teachers and administrators, along with academics from the university that I was fortunate to call basecamp during fieldwork to attend a meeting in the centre of Madrid. Around 40 people attended, among them three of the student participants. I presented preliminary findings of this phase of the research, providing detailed explanations of each of the five themes of inclusive schooling tied to students' comments from interviews (Chapter Nine) and drawing some comparisons with the Australian data.

Nearing the end of my discussion, I presented a slide or two on the participants' identities (or subjectivities) derived through school interactions, and I pointed out the fragile connections to inclusion that had appeared in the data for some students in particular through their subjecthoods. I also drew the audience's attention to how, as this work had led me to think about, schools could inadvertently damage students' sometimes tenuous links with inclusion through the formation of abnormal identity positions. I then offered the floor to the rather large "focus group" who sat before me. One young woman with a mild intellectual impairment who participated in interviews stood up and offered her support to these ideas in particular; while although reticent to speak in front of a large group of people, another participant sitting alongside who had Down syndrome nodded her approval.

However, identifying the hazards is only the beginning. A more difficult task is to use this knowledge to explore alternative courses of inclusive schooling. This project necessarily involves challenging the "strict adherence to certain normative concepts that are narrowly defined" (Èrevelles, 2011, p. 152). Yet, as noted in the prior section,
these concepts are deployed in different ways in their construction of young people's subjectivities as included students. They often haunt students' experiences of inclusion in ways that might ordinarily be overlooked as contributory or perpetual to exclusion. Schools are sociocultural contexts in which an entanglement of circulating discourses can produce and continually reinscribe an emphasis on normalcy. I want to suggest that Foucault's work on governmentality (1991, 2004) is key to addressing the regulation of the discourses at play that account for the constituted subjectivities of students with impairments in inclusive education.

In his later work, Foucault was interested in the power relations that simultaneously facilitate individual and total regulation. He demonstrated through an analysis of historical governmental practice the development of social organisation from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that became a form of democracy from the eighteenth century onward through the control of populations (Foucault, 1980, 1991, 2004). The "art of government" (Foucault, 1991, p. 87) signalled a change from a behemoth sovereign who retained absolute power to one whose task was not only to govern a state or institution—as in modern political techniques but also to ensure that through a sense of freedom, ordinary citizens endorsed that particular form of government and conducted themselves accordingly.

Foucault's notion of governmentality is interwoven with his concepts of subjectivity and power (1982) insofar that it is the government—or regulation—of power relations through biopolitical techniques that constitute people as particular subjects with specific freedoms. Governmentality is thus "the conduct of conduct" (Foucault cited in Gordon, 1991, p. 2) that shapes the "multiple forms of subjugation that have a place and function within the social organism" (Foucault, 1980, p. 96). The governmentality of an institution necessarily engages the technologies through which subjects are both dominated by and relate to others (Foucault, 1988).

In schools, power relations exist through knowledge. For Popkewitz (2001) all knowledge in the educational field is political. Through privileged knowledge, then, about and conveyed through students, governmental techniques engage certain "principles for qualifying and disqualifying, for inclusion and exclusions of individuals for participation and action" (Popkewitz, 2001, p. 180). In short, the governmental rationality of schools refers to the ways in which particular virtues are instilled within the subjectivities of students through constitutive power relations.

The premise of inclusive education is the removal of barriers that deny certain individuals to participate in schools (Allan, 2005, 2008; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Brantlinger, 2003, 2009; Slee, 2011; Youdell, 2006). Schools are sites of political struggle. Yet, recoding the techniques of governmentality of inclusive schooling—that is, "the reasoned way of governing best" (Foucault, 2004, p. 2) might be productive. Schools could be governed differently, with the understanding that schools have multiple members, each with an interest in the performance of inclusion.

The body of work by Simons and Masschellein (2005, 2008) and Masschelein and Simons (2005) is instructive here. They urge us to regard discourse on school inclusion in terms of a governmentality—finding that in neoliberal times, inclusive education is geared toward exclusive students. The government of education in particular has morphed into economic rationalisation, and as such school communities comprise populations of entrepreneurial individuals rather than members of social educational institutions. When students' "abnormalities" are defined by their
diagnosed special needs, their exclusion from this entrepreneurship is seemingly a given; whereas normal students are those who have entrepreneurial flair.

It is crucial, however, that "schools … have some awareness of the part they play in constituting the self of their students" (Besley, 2007, p. 68). Masschelein and Simons (2005, p. 136) contend also that "To give education a chance, maybe we should not try to liberate the student, but liberate ourselves from the (entrepreneurial and exclusive) student". Similarly, Ball (2013) suggests that we might draw on the production of subjectivity to stimulate change. "If power acts upon us in and through our subjectivity, then that is where our resistance and struggle to be free should be focused" (p. 126).

Alongside other commentators (Allan, 1999; Jessup et al. 2013; Laws & Davies, 2000; Solis & Connor, 2006; Youdell, 2006), I have shown how the normative discourse appears to arbitrate the inclusion experiences of students with diagnosed special needs in inclusive schools. That it does for other students whose differences are also intricately connected to race and class (Apple, 2013; Artiles, 2011; Connor, 2009), sexuality (McrUer, 2006; Youdell, 2006), and refugee status (Smyth, MacBride, Paton & Sheridan, 2012) is not altogether surprising. "The exercise of power [that enables this to occur] only remains tolerable by hiding itself within the everyday, the mundane and the intimate" (Ball, 2013, p. 145), but it unmistakably contributes to the constituted subjectivities of "included" students.

Being normal, and/or behaving normally provides people within schools a sense of comfort. In demonstrating the normal/special (abnormal) dichotomy at play in an Australian high school, Youdell (2006) notes how along with young people, teachers—who are above students in the school hierarchy—also incite tacit understandings of normativity. Within schools, there is pressure to "do normal" (Laws & Davies, 2000, p. 215) from multiple levels, which can have the opposite effect of causing students with impairments to be constituted as different, both biologically and in their actions. A redeployment of a school's governmentality necessarily incorporates Allan's (2005) ethical project of inclusive education. "The concept of governmentality makes it possible to bring out the freedom of the subject and its relationship to others which constitutes the very stuff of ethics" (Foucault cited in Rabinow, 1997, p. xvii). It demands that all members of the educational institution, including students with impairments, both "recognize the exclusionary nature of existing practices" (Allan, 2005, p. 283) and "see themselves as the main source of transformation, rather than as passive subjects waiting for a more substantial structural or material change (Allan, 2005, p. 284). Repositioning the governmentality of inclusive schooling, however, goes beyond self-improvement by drawing on individuals' ethical actions in governing the virtue discourses that flow throughout schools in a way that accentuates inclusion, obviates normativity and creates familiarity.

As we have seen, various discourses can be cited in schools, either intentionally or unintentionally that enable the performance of the special needs student. It is important to reiterate that participants in Australia were overwhelmed by the virtues of competitivism and normalcy, whereas in Spain, virtues of equality were evident—biological differences appeared to discolour the inclusion experiences of only some young people; for most, their distance from the norm was more of a threat than a tangible experience. Nevertheless, moving away from what Halse et al. (2007) term paradoxical virtues, these key vectors of exclusion might be subverted through
alternative techniques of governmentality. Engaging directly with the politics of inclusive schooling (Slee, 2011), the objective is to revision the cultures of schools so that they can become sites of counter discourses, whereby the mutual obligation of inclusion no longer creates the virtues of normativity and competitivism, but participation for all.

Rethinking inclusive discourse in this way removes pressure from individuals to perform ethical work alone, which by definition could perpetuate otherness if not taken up as intended by all members and instead focuses on the governmentality of whole communities. Moreover, the community is not caught up in seeking rational/technical solutions to the inclusion of some students, but to the inclusion of all individual members, staff, parents, students, administrators and policy makers. Ethical responsibility of each remains key. However, the modified techniques of government require reassurance that agentive individuals can convey the public virtues away from standardised exclusionary practices.

Overhauling the rational government of schools to be more inclusive necessarily requires an examination of many of the broad contours of the education system, that include policy and practice; particularly those which produce exclusion through tacit categorisation. I take up some of the concrete causes of marginalisation to this end as explored in the research narrative in the following section.

**Research limitations and implications**

In the final part of this essay, I identify some of the limitations of the current project and bring together some of the implications for theory, policy and educational practice that have become evident through the research narrative. I also make recommendations for further exploration in the field of inclusive education that might draw on the research design that I have contributed. In some ways I have drawn on some of these tasks throughout the sections above, but it is also important to return the ideas of this essay to the overall body of work.

The title of this thesis, *Critical engagement with Insider accounts of inclusive schooling for students with impairments*, identifies a body of work that assembles and explores the perspectives of young people with diagnosed special educational needs in inclusive schooling in Australia and Spain. I have included my own story alongside student participants, in order to contextualise my concerns and research priorities. The objective of this work has not been to positively identify and resolve the problems associated with including students with diagnosed special educational needs into schools, but to learn from young people's perspectives in different contexts about the triumphs and tribulations of inclusive education in the present day. As Slee (2011, p.84) comments, "positivist research that focuses upon the perceived defects of individuals obstructs the inclusive education agenda".

In addition, recent emphasis on performance, competitive pressures and individualism further stifle the inclusive education debate (Ball, 2013; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Slee, 2011; Youdell, 2006), and “more voices than ever before can be heard challenging the very idea [of inclusive schooling]" (Allan, 2010, p. 603). Moreover, "the history of social research in general and disability research in particular is not notable for its success in resolving the problems it has investigated" (Oliver, 2009, p. 115), because, as Slee (2011) insists, too often investigations in the field are constrained by the
particular discourses that support the status quo of educational and social marginalisation.

It is important to point out that by exploring students' embodied experiences of inclusive schooling across two different cultures, I have not set out to start providing universal solutions to problems of inequality. Instead, I am motivated to produce a picture of inclusive schooling within the cultural contexts in which I have personal experience. This picture, moreover, is restricted to the viewpoints of young people whom it might be said have the largest stake in the realisation of inclusion. "That things may be done differently elsewhere invites new possibilities, or it may suggest warnings" (Slee, 2011, p. 88). My argument is that the experiences and concerns of young people uncovered through this research enable us to do both; and they might prove useful to guide our thinking as to how to 'do' inclusion better.

The young people's stories implicated a raft of material factors tied to the special education discourse such as constraining personal support, inaccessible resources, underservicing teachers, social instability and division by policy. They also pointed out other problematic issues within their schooling including virtues of normalcy and competitive pressures—aspects of current-day education that ostensibly propagate exclusionary inertia. The young people revealed their own techniques to produce inclusion, typically by trying to overcome or to insinuate themselves with these contradictory virtuous restrictions. But student participants also highlighted the importance of individual agency, autonomy, accessible resources and pedagogical techniques, supportive friendships and inclusive school cultures—manifestations of educational systems that might remove the emphasis from normalcy and generate the bedrock of significant educational reform.

The lingering disquiet in participants' stories (including my own) of our experiences of "inclusive" education indicate instead tangible experiences of exclusion. Both policy and practice within disability discourse are implicated. Education and disability policy more broadly typically disservices the inclusion of people with disabilities. As I have noted previously, educational policy in Queensland, Australia, coerces the placement of students with impairments into particular schools in which they are provided innumerable special educational provisions (Education Queensland, no date). Similarly, in Spain, the uneven policy terrain opts for special educational labelling of students with disabilities (Parrilla, 2008), and there is renewed vigour toward competitive pressure within schools to leverage the country's OECD PISA table rankings (López & Mengual, 2014). Other influential legislation such as the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the Australian Disability Standards for Education (2005) are steadfast to equality, though they too reflect the collective indifference toward disabled people (Chapter Eight).

Indeed these concerns are not new. The current project merely provides further exemplars of the inconsistencies between policy impositions and student inclusion. That some students recognised the inequality that they faced because of these "rules", however, is telling about the iniquitous effects policy can have on so-called inclusive schooling. Policy such as those cited above fail because they are not radical enough (Hodkinson, 2012). They instead are complicit within "the system of rationality' that ventilates exclusion (Slee, 2011, p. 106).

However, to rethink the role of policy in the governmentality of the inclusion discourse might require explicit attention to student agency, actioning the process
whereby students can express their support, pedagogical and curricula desires and needs as an inherent goal of the inclusion ethic (Allan, 2005). Such a policy shift would also be sensitive to the role of teachers and support staff in this endeavour—again pointing to the ethical position of school community members—by endorsing agentic expression. Moreover, the linguistic trope of education policy would not distinguish between students within a school culture, but speak to the educational value of all. This should moreover not be limited to legislation concerned with education alone.

Through an alternative governmentality of the inclusion discourse, school practices might also be realigned. Teachers often can and do employ inclusive pedagogical strategies that appropriately involve students with varied impairments in classroom activities. Recognising that all preservice teachers have at least some knowledge about teaching to diversity, Florian and Linklater (2010) report a teacher training program that harnesses their skills for guiding their classroom practices. Drawing on the concepts of coagency and an ethic of care through mutual trust, their students have expressed surprise and pleasure that they were able to include seemingly problematic students into their lessons. The point that I am trying to make and I am also following the guidance of participants of the current project, is that teaching diverse students does not have to be taxing for teachers.

Again drawing on the telling silences of poststructural inquiry (Miller et al. 2011), it is noteworthy that student participants infrequently referred to the curriculum, or their being fundamentally able to access it, as causal of their exclusion. This indicates that at least in part, inclusive education was being achieved. However what emerged as problematic for many students in this study, was the ways in which they were supported in their access to the curriculum. Special education provision was drawn on heavily to instruct the students through complex school subjects, but this support also made "a down payment on [the] collective indifference" (Slee, 2011, p. 103) of many teachers and students within the schools towards them. Though teacher aides provided the students the necessary access that they required to resources, this was often overshadowed by their provision of explicit -and often authoritarian instruction.

Light, external support was key to the young people's inclusion. Backroom support provided necessary access, while at the same time it enabled the students to mix freely and learn together with their peers. This was moreover facilitated through inclusive teacher pedagogy. Returning to the governmentality of the inclusion discourse, teachers and support staff have an ethical responsibility to uphold their nominated roles. Teacher education and teacher aide programs are implicated to this end. Special education discourse needs to converge with social justice in the higher education sector, to circumvent the typical approach of conflation between inclusive education and scientific rationality about disability that currently dominates the field (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012; Florian & Linklater, 2010; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009; Moore & Slee, 2012; Moss, 2011; Slee 2011). An obvious benefit of such an ethical approach to teacher education would be the disembodiment of the injurious concept of normalcy that circulates about impairment and is clearly manifested in schools (Allan, 1999; Jessup et al. 2013; Laws & Davies, 2000; Solis & Connor, 2006; Youdell, 2006).

It is intended that school virtues might be reshaped through the propositions advanced here. This thesis does not make inconceivably large suggestions, nor does it call for the improbable allocation of more funding to improve school inclusion. It simply
contends the subjecthoods of students with diagnosed special needs through the
discursive and material practices within schools can be injurious to their inclusion. In
so doing, the thesis proposes that members of education communities "exercise an
alternative set of decisions" (Slee, 2011, p. 87) about how to govern their acts so as to
constitute students' subjectivities differently.

Another objective of revisioning the techniques of governmentality of schooling is to
draw on research findings in order to re-rationalise the education system. The current
project, however, has been limited in its scope. Genuine attempts must be made to
push the type of inquiry demonstrated in the current thesis further to seek and
critically engage with the views of other insiders - teachers, administrators, parents
and policy makers. Such a methodological move might enable us to "stumble across
surprises" (Slee, 2011, p. 157) about the impacts and prospects of inclusive education.

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