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**The inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools: The voices of 20 North Queensland teachers**

**Thesis submitted by**

**Susan KUHL (MEd JCU)**

**in April, 2010**

**for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**in the School of Education**

**James Cook University**

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### ***Declaration on Ethics***

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Human* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics. Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee (approval number H 1800).

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Susan Kuhl

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Date

## *Acknowledgements*

The support, guidance and patience of my supervisor Associate Professor Paul Pagliano at the School of Education, James Cook University is gratefully acknowledged. Paul, your tireless reading and re-reading of my work together with your constructive advice has been invaluable throughout the entire duration of this study. Without your support this work would not have been possible.

Dr Helen Boon as my second supervisor and a former secondary school teacher, you asked the challenging questions which forced me to clarify what I was investigating.

I would also like to acknowledge the support I have received from Education Queensland in allowing me to conduct my research with their staff. The teachers who have participated have each made an important contribution to this study. I thank each of you for your time and openness during our discussions and interviews.

I would like to especially acknowledge my critical friend Jenny Smith for her wise counsel, encouragement and support.

My thanks go particularly to my husband Ian for his love, understanding and unfailing support at all times, to Naomi for her practical computer help and enthusiasm, to Tim for teaching me about disabilities and to Joshua who kept reminding me that there is a life besides work and study.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the support of staff and postgraduate students at the School of Education, James Cook University. The support gained from the Faculty during the long years of part time study has been immeasurable for which I am truly appreciative.

## *Abstract*

This qualitative study examines the issues 20 North Queensland secondary teachers face when students with disabilities are included in the school. Current educational policy in Australia has placed a strong emphasis on including students with disabilities in their neighbourhood schools. What began with primary schooling has now flowed on to secondary. Consequently all teachers now play a role in helping students with and without disabilities to develop and learn. This change makes it especially critical to investigate the viewpoints of teachers working with students with disabilities in secondary schools.

Three questions helped guide the inquiry. The first relates to the attitudes and professional beliefs of the teachers. The second focuses on the challenges faced by these teachers when including students with disabilities. The third explores whether the perceived challenges when working with students with disabilities add to perceived stress levels.

During the study the researcher was both a secondary school special education teacher and the mother of a son with disabilities. This made her an insider researcher. To assist authentic inquiry while working as an insider researcher, the researcher kept a journal for systematic reflection on identities, roles and relationships. The 20 mainstream and special education teachers in the study worked in one of two urban or two rural schools. Data collection began with a short written questionnaire to obtain personal biographical information. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted in order to gather information on the teachers' experiences when including students with disabilities. The themes, which emerged from the analysis of the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, were correlated with the reflective journal and the personal experience of the researcher.

The results of the study revealed that the majority of teachers interviewed were supportive of the philosophical ideals of an inclusive approach. However, they had mixed feelings about including students with disabilities in secondary school classrooms. It was obvious that the teachers were strongly influenced by the nature of the disabilities, the educational problems they would encounter and their teaching area. In spite of their unease, there was recognition of the potential for social, academic and professional benefits for students with and without disabilities as well as for staff.

The concerns expressed by the teachers focused on structural, curricular, instructional, professional efficiency and expectancy factors. The culture of the secondary school often meant there was a clash of expectations between the mainstream teachers and the special education teachers, which centered on the nature of teaching and learning within the classroom. There was a dissonance between a collectivist focus on standards and individualist focus on needs. Increasing workloads, the multiplicity of work roles and the restrictions of the school timetable were especially identified as hindering teacher collaboration. Access to ongoing professional development contributed to the challenge as a number of the teachers in the study had limited pre-service knowledge of the impact of different disabilities on learning.

The teachers in the study believed that inclusion in the secondary school environment continues to be complex and challenging; highlighting what appeared to be a large gap between rhetoric and reality. There were conflicting views about whether the challenges involved in the inclusion of students with disabilities added to existing stress levels. However the words ‘frustrated’, ‘discouraged’, ‘overwhelmed’, ‘anxious’, ‘tired’ and ‘exhausted’ were repeated often in the interviews. Analysis of transcripts revealed that the changes attributed to the inclusion process, the socially unacceptable behaviour of specific students with disabilities and the lack of support, particularly in rural areas, had caused a considerable impact on the teachers in the study personally and on their teaching practices.

While it is not possible to generalise from the qualitative results of interviews of this small sample of teachers, a range of cautious observations can be made about the teacher’s role in the inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary schools. Responsibility for students with disabilities remains a complicated professional issue with mainstream and special education teachers. The difficulties with collaboration and support meant that when students with disabilities were included in the classroom, many teachers in this study expressed serious concern at the ever-increasing demands of their work.

The study concludes with a number of recommendations for practice and future research with regards to successfully including students with disabilities in secondary schools and for the preparation of secondary school teachers for inclusive schooling.



## *Publications*

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To whom it may concern

**Re: Join authorship of conference paper and journal article**

During Susan Kuhl's enrolment in the Doctor of Philosophy I joint authored the following papers with her:

Kuhl, S., & Pagliano, P. (2009) *Changes in the Secondary School: the transition of students with special needs from the primary school to the secondary school classroom*. Paper presented at the AASE/PASS Conference Transitions Facilitating Change for Students with Special Needs, Melbourne Victoria. Retrieved April 9, 2010 from [http://www.aase.edu.au/AASE/index.php?option=com\\_rokdownloads&view=file&Itemid=196&id=348:changes-in-the-secondary-school](http://www.aase.edu.au/AASE/index.php?option=com_rokdownloads&view=file&Itemid=196&id=348:changes-in-the-secondary-school)

Kuhl, S., & Pagliano, P. (in press). Attitudes of secondary and special education teachers to inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*.

My involvement in each paper was less than 20%.

Yours sincerely

Paul Pagliano PhD  
Associate Professor, Education

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## *Chapter One*

### *Setting the Scene*

Change comes from small initiatives which work, initiatives which, imitated, become the fashion. We cannot wait for great visions from great people, for they are in short supply at the end of history. It is up to us to light our own small fires in the darkness. (Handy, 1994, p. 271)

#### **1.0 Introduction**

Teachers working in secondary schools are accountable for providing all students in their classrooms with the knowledge and skills demanded by governments, tertiary education, the business sector and the general public. Within these classrooms are enrolled an ever increasing number of students with complex academic, emotional and social needs (Brownell, Sindelar, Bishop, Langley & Seo, 2002). Combined with a positive attitude to this diverse group, schools require “changes to conceptualisations of the role of professionals, to classroom structure and to programming and instructional approaches” (Spedding, 2008, p. 391). The aim is to implement learning experiences which are applicable and valuable (Thomas & Loxley, 2001) for all students regardless of their ability or disability. The meeting of these diverse expectations and needs continues to be an escalating challenge particularly for the teachers employed in secondary schools.

Working as a special education teacher in a secondary school, I am aware of the increase in challenges which teachers face each day. However, as Handy (1994) suggests, I believe, that teachers cannot wait for others to make changes to this challenging environment, but should be the ones to start searching for “small initiatives which work” (p. 271). The focus, therefore, of this thesis “The inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools: The voices of 20 North Queensland teachers” is to light my own small fire in the darkness which surrounds the inclusion of an increasing number of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Many of these students exhibit complex academic, emotional and social needs. The specific focus of the study is to investigate a range of teachers’ perspectives as they include these students in the secondary schools. In taking this direction, the research will become an extension of a previous study at a North Queensland secondary school which I undertook to complete a Master of Education.

Each section within the introductory chapter provides an explanation for the choice and development of this study. Presented in ten parts, the chapter starts with an exploration of the life experiences and accumulated skills of the researcher that led to a decision to research this topic. The second part investigates the present situation for students with disabilities. The third and fourth parts respectively consider the problems associated with inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary school with a specific focus on the area that will be covered by this research. A rationale incorporating possible benefits of the study is contained in the subsequent parts. The definitions of terms used throughout the study are followed by a detailed plan for the thesis.

### ***1.1 Background to the Research***

The subject matter for this research is firmly linked to my background. The relevant experiences can be traced back to when, on completion of secondary school, I was given the opportunity to train and work as a primary school teacher. Upon graduation, my first appointment as a government employee was at a primary school in a country town. This was followed by transfers to an isolated rural school and a large urban primary school. My teaching experiences were further extended by work at a Catholic primary school and employment in Papua New Guinea. Although, within each of the schools, I met many students of different cultural background, religious beliefs and socioeconomic circumstances, I rarely taught students with disabilities. As a consequence, in the initial stage of my teaching career, I like many of my colleagues of this period had little contact with students with disabilities (Foreman, 2008). This resulted in limited knowledge or experience of the effects of disabilities on students in the classroom, on the teacher and on the family.

The birth of my second child who was born with cerebral palsy, led to a 'sea change'. No longer was disability an unknown element because I was coming into daily contact with children with a range of disabilities as well as having contact with their families. As a parent of a baby with disabilities, I soon discovered that there were many medical and educational obstacles for him to overcome making my daily program a series of medical appointments. Frequently, the appointments resulted in hospitalisations or visits to various health and education services. During this period, I became very skilful in seeking out someone to listen to what I was saying about the effects of disability on the family including his sister and younger brother.

Amongst the people with whom I had contact were many medical and educational professionals. The majority of them listened to my concerns with the ability of a listener who could create “a communication environment that is conducive to sharing information, demonstrating emotions, clarifying issues and discussing options for resolution” (Keefe, 2007b, p. 189). Their empathy provided much needed support in this new and sometimes frightening environment. My appreciation of the value of active listening skills within the medical and educational fields continued to grow as I worked to ensure that my son was valued as a person and had quality learning experiences.

Unfortunately I was also meeting people who were making medical and educational decisions with little knowledge or understanding of the effects of disability on the child and on family dynamics. Instead, I was confronted with the presumptions of professionals who believed they were in the best position to make decisions. These decisions were often made without consultation with parents (Zaretsky, 2004) and informed from an academic perspective. Many of my experiences during this period could be described as a struggle for recognition of the values and views of the family. As a result, I frequently found myself upset and even angry by the apparent lack of respect for parental knowledge or insights. The suggestions I made were either ignored or given less status than comments from academic experts. My quest for answers led to further university training and a change in teaching career to that of a teacher of special education.

On re-entering full time employment, it soon became apparent that my knowledge and experiences were readily acknowledged by parents and colleagues. Appointments at three special schools were followed by a transfer to a secondary special education unit. In each of these schools, I worked with students with a range of abilities and disabilities as well as meeting many parents who had had similar experiences to mine with medical and educational staff. In each of these work settings, I used my knowledge and experience to assist in providing an effective education to all students; an education designed to enable them to reach their potential (Abbott, 2006). However, it was teaching within the last setting that activated a keen interest in the education of students with disabilities when included in a secondary school environment.

Working as a special education teacher in a secondary school, I discovered that it was often necessary to practice the skills of active listening that I had experienced during the traumatic early years of my son’s life. I learnt to listen, without judgment as I became the recipient of



information, often confidential, about the experiences of colleagues and parents concerning students with disabilities and the education system. At the same time, I was given the opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding about which values, beliefs and concerns motivated their life as a teacher (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005) and, on many occasions, as a parent. I was also provided with the opportunity to view the situation from a different perspective as a lecturer of pre-service teachers at university.

The experiences that I bring to this study have been accumulated over a long period of time due to a lifestyle which offered the opportunity to work and socialise with a diverse range of colleagues and friends. The knowledge and understanding gained as a mainstream teacher, a special education teacher and as the parent of a child with disabilities provides different points of view to the issue of inclusion. In order to investigate the concerns raised during previous research to complete a Master of Education, I made the decision to begin research on what teachers thought about the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools. I believe that there are social, educational and practical issues behind the study which will make it a story worth telling. With the birth of my son I began a journey to expand my knowledge and understanding of the positive and negative effects of disabilities on individuals and their families. The journey will continue even with the completion of this thesis.

## ***1.2 The Present Situation***

Internationally, there has been a considerable increase in the frequency with which students with disabilities are included in the mainstream classroom (Cook, Cameron & Tankersley, 2007; Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart & Eloff, 2003). Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank and Leal, (1999, p.116) describe the special education of today as “a service, not a place to which students are sent”. With inclusion comes acceptance of students with disabilities and other marginalised students (British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, 2008; Bunch & Valeo, 2004; Elkins, 2009; Ferguson, 2008; Idol, 2006; Turnbull et al., 1999). To assist involvement in all class activities, it is often necessary to redesign the physical layout of the mainstream school as well as introduce changes in the curriculum (Elkins, 2009). Thus, inclusion has the potential to assist in providing a comprehensive education not only for students with disabilities but also for the needs of other educationally disadvantaged/ marginalised students within each classroom.

Education of students with disabilities in Australia has followed the trends set by other

Western countries. By 2003, children and young people with disabilities were more likely to be attending school than at any time over the previous two decades (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2008b). Data provided by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) show almost all children with disabilities aged between 5-14 years attend school (97%), either in a mainstream (89%) or special school (9%). Legislation in the form of the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992* has made discrimination on the grounds of disability, whether direct or indirect, unlawful. This means that schools are now required to make reasonable adjustments to ensure students with disabilities have equal access and opportunities to participate in the mainstream classroom.

At the same time, many parents and advocacy groups have actively campaigned for their children to attend the local neighbourhood secondary schools. Naylor (2005) reports on a journey which for parents and their advocates has been long and problematic. However, over the years, they have continued to campaign for their children to have the same experiences and opportunities afforded to students without disabilities (Zaretsky, 2004). Evidence from the Vinson Inquiry (2002) claims parents and advocacy groups expect secondary schools will continue the inclusion experience available in primary schools. In spite of the challenges of mainstream secondary school classrooms, many parents and carers now envision their children with disabilities having an opportunity to access the academic and social environment of their peers and being exposed to the same behaviours and work ethic.

In Queensland, the aim is to improve the quality of educational experiences for all students. Research linked to key initiatives has enabled Education Queensland to identify and dismantle barriers to achieving an inclusive approach to school. For example, the document *Queensland State Education 2010* provides objectives and strategies which endeavour to improve the experiences, participation and achievement for students whatever their background or circumstances (The State of Queensland [Department of Education and Training], 2000). Specifically, an Education Adjustment Program (EAP) has been introduced to identify and respond to the educational needs of students with disabilities. Through this program, “adjustments are made for students with disabilities to enable them to access the curriculum, achieve curriculum outcomes and participate in school life” (The State of Queensland [Department of Education and Training], 2004, p. 1).

### ***1.3 Statement of Problem***

The education policy of inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary school has caused a significant change in the environment of the mainstream classrooms. Inclusive education is not a matter of linear progression from the practices of special education needs to education in the mainstream classroom. Instead, because it is a social movement against structural, cultural and educational exclusion, it requires a fundamental paradigm shift (Benjamin, 2002b; Carrington, 1999; Slee & Allan, 2001; Snelgrove, 2005; Zoniou-Sideri, Deropoulou-Derou, Karagianni, & Spandagou, 2006). Thus, the vast majority of concerns about inclusion reflect the changes required for inclusion of students with disabilities in the classroom together with the additional roles required of the teacher.

In particular, the effect on staff is of concern to teachers, policy makers and researchers making inclusive education an important issue within modern schooling, particularly in the secondary sector. A number of staff at secondary schools do not always understand and support the inclusion of students with disabilities, which relate to the emphasis on academic content and the necessary pace of teaching (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001; Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, & Liebert, 2006). They maintain that the academic and social expectations of secondary schools are very different when compared with primary schools. Due to the more traditional culture, there is often an emphasis on subject content rather than the needs of the student. This results in a situation where adaptations and accommodations for students with disabilities are usually not a high priority for a number of secondary school teachers and administration staff (Tralli, Colombo, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1996).

In spite of the concerns of teachers, policy makers and researchers, students with disabilities have continued to be included in the secondary school. Yet research indicates that supporting students with disabilities in the secondary school impacts negatively on teachers as they do not have the time or resources to make adaptations for students with significant individual needs (McLeskey & Waldron, 2000; Shaddock, 2007; Wasburn-Moses, 2006). At the same time, teachers are facing increasing demands to be more accountable, which intensifies pressure upon work practices (Forlin, 1997; Hargreaves, 1994) resulting in teachers who may find it difficult to operate successfully in the modern classroom. Overall, the policies of inclusion have resulted in a situation which demands teachers add an extra dimension to their classroom practice to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities.

Many students with disabilities have social and emotional needs that go beyond their educational difficulties. Essentially, it is difficult to run a successful inclusion program if the students with disabilities are simply placed in a secondary school without addressing the needs of the teachers as well as students with and without disabilities (Robinson, 2002). Any mismatch between inclusion policies and the reality of implementation in schools can result in unmet student needs, an unacceptably high workload for teachers and teacher stress (Naylor, 2002). The attitudes of secondary teachers to inclusion, therefore, will continue to be influenced by the availability of support and their own perceived proficiency in teaching students with disabilities.

Teachers often make decisions by relying on their attitudes towards students with disabilities rather than logically analysing different potential courses of action. As such, finding that teachers rated themselves as significantly more concerned, indifferent and rejecting toward included students with disabilities may have important implications for inclusive policy and practice (Cook et al., 2007). According to Stanovich and Jordan (2002), when students with disabilities are included in mainstream classrooms, teachers are asked to commit to a model of service delivery that may increase their workload. Recent research by Connor and Ferri (2007) also suggests that mainstream classrooms and particularly the teachers managing these classrooms are not always perceived as adequately prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners. If this situation is not ameliorated, there is a danger that the challenges associated with inclusion of students with disabilities might work against a successful inclusion program in secondary schools.

#### ***1.4 The Research Focus***

An increasing number of students with disabilities are now moving through the North Queensland secondary school system. The focus of this qualitative study which will involve 20 teachers working in secondary schools will be to gain an insight into their attitudes and professional beliefs and the challenges faced by these teachers as the students with disabilities are included in the secondary school classrooms. Teachers play a vital role in helping students to develop and learn. Carrington (2007a, pp.42-43) claims that it is “what teachers think, what teachers believe and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning experience young people have in our schools.” If inclusive practices in secondary schools are to effectively meet the needs of all students, then research on the viewpoints of teachers within these schools is crucial.

Although research questions may emerge in unexpected ways (Green, 2002), the questions in this study are born out of practice. As a special education teacher and a parent of a child with disabilities, my experiences led me to the following three questions which will guide the inquiry.

- In what way do the 20 teachers in North Queensland describe their attitude to the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools?
- In what way do the 20 teachers in North Queensland describe the perceived challenges when including students with disabilities in the secondary schools?
- In what way do the perceived challenges when working with students with disabilities add to existing stress levels of these 20 teachers?

Inclusion is a policy framework with the interpretation and implementation dependent on the school administration and the teachers in the classroom. A primary goal of inclusion should be to allow teachers to meet the needs of all students with and without disabilities. At the same time, the attitudes and professional beliefs of teachers can play a critical role in determining the outcomes of inclusion in the mainstream classroom for students with disabilities (Forlin & Hopewell, 2006; Hemill & Dever, 1998; Spedding, 2008). Their acceptance of policy will affect their commitment to implementing it. As teachers are on the frontline of this inclusion process, they are in a position to provide an insight into what is happening within the classrooms.

### ***1.5 Rationale for this Study***

The changes in society which occurred during the latter half of the last century are well documented. Amongst these changes has been the movement of students with disabilities from a segregated education system to inclusion in the mainstream classrooms in their neighbourhood school. The philosophical ideals and practicalities behind this inclusion continue to be a significant topic of discussion and debate amongst educators, researchers and the local community. From the literature (Ellins & Porter, 2005; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Sparling, 2002), it is evident that teacher professional beliefs, attitudes and perceptions regarding inclusion profoundly affect the degree to which an

inclusive education program can be successfully implemented. Thus, the inclusion of the students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom continues to be a complicated professional issue.

There is considerable evidence of mainstream teacher support for the philosophy of inclusion. However, such support is matched with the concern for the challenges which must be overcome if the changing educational focus will be beneficial to all students. With the trend towards greater opportunities for students with disabilities to be included in mainstream classrooms, it has become very important to explore the current situation in order to provide optimal conditions for success (Forlin, Keen & Barrett, 2008). Anderson, Klassen and Georgiou (2007, p. 132) suggest that:

examining teacher attitudes while an inclusion program is being implemented highlights teachers' attitudes and beliefs about their perceived needs at a most critical time in the process – at the point when ideology and classroom realities intersect.

The identification of issues, arising from inclusive practices in secondary schools, is a complex and highly contextualised problem requiring a detailed examination of individual experiences. Research into inclusion in primary schools has highlighted the importance of individual teacher's interpretations of inclusion of students with disabilities in the classroom (Horne & Timmons, 2009; Subban & Sharma, 2006). Because of the nature of the curriculum and age of the students, there is evidence showing primary schools seem to be managing better with inclusion than secondary schools (Thousand, Rosenberg, Bishop & Villa, 1997). It is at the level of secondary schools, though, that many of the difficulties with inclusion are being experienced (Carrington & Elkins, 2002b; Ellins & Porter, 2005; Washburn-Moses, 2006) making the examination of teachers' perceptions of inclusion at the secondary level extremely important.

Teachers believe it is their responsibility to address the educational needs of all students in the classroom. For them, "teaching is about passing on knowledge – it is about providing someone with an education, the tools to equip them for life and experiences (Joseph, 2000, p. 97). Inclusive education is founded on the philosophy that all students regardless of their

ability or disability have a right to an education that is free from discrimination in their own communities (Foreman, 2008; Zundans, 2006). However, as the structure of the school, curriculum and teaching methods determine the way in which teaching and learning occurs, there are occasions when many of the approaches used in secondary schools do not help students who have difficulty with academic work (Pearce & Forlin, 2005). Secondary school teachers are therefore often faced with the expectation that they will make the changes in their teaching and learning strategies which will include all students regardless of their abilities and disabilities.

Any changes within the classroom are often accompanied by an increase in pressure felt by teachers. As Cronis and Ellis (2000) point out, working with students with disabilities is teaching in a field of change. At the same time, there is agreement that teachers are one the most vulnerable of employees who work in the not-for-profit sector (Robertson, 2007). Simultaneously, the retention of quality teachers is a key issue in the education industry (Howe, 2004). Research indicates that change has the potential to be stressful (Adams, 1999; Cartwright & Cooper, 1997), making it crucial that if quality teachers are to be retained, then strategies must be investigated and implemented to lessen the stress caused by the pressures of change. This makes it even more vital that there be an investigation into the changes and resulting increase in stress that the inclusion process has brought to the secondary school.

Internationally and in Australia, there have been slow increases in the number of qualitative and quantitative studies which have investigated the process of inclusion of students with disabilities. Amongst this research, a number of studies have investigated the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools. However, to date there has been few studies into inclusion in secondary schools in North Queensland. To this end, a study employing qualitative methodologies such as this one which examines secondary school inclusion in North Queensland from the perspectives of teachers is both timely and important. As a special education teacher, I believe it will go part of the way in shedding light on a significant educational problem or as Handy (1994, p. 271) suggests for “us to light our own small fires in the darkness.”

### ***1.6 Possible Benefits of the Research***

Secondary school teachers and special education teachers are professionals with specific training and expertise. As such, they are aware of their own strengths and limitations. Their

perceptions and expectations of students and their academic and social success can influence judgements and decisions about how they will teach students. Amongst these teachers, there is an acceptance that economic, political and social changes have brought corresponding changes to the school populations, curriculum and teaching methods. Pearce and Forlin (2005) found, nevertheless, that the inclusion of students with disabilities can involve additional substantial changes educationally, socially and financially to the schools that are involved in the process.

Information through international and Australian research, which focuses on the inclusion of students with disabilities in primary schools, has produced a range of potentially useful information. However, the inclusion process is substantially different in secondary schools and presents significant challenges. In comparison to research on inclusion in primary schools, fewer studies have been conducted in this area. As well as adding to existing research on inclusion, this study will also provide information that is specific to the culture of North Queensland secondary schools. As practising teachers will be providing their perspective on inclusion, the resulting information will reflect the actual everyday environment of these North Queensland secondary school classrooms.

This study will be conducted while I am working as a special education teacher in a secondary school similar to the four research sites. Lincoln and Guba (2007) in their discussion of naturalistic evaluation highlight the importance of prolonged engagement and persistent observation to enhance the credibility of findings. In my role as a special education teacher, it will be possible to notice any changes in the attitude of teachers towards inclusion as well as record the concerns they express regarding the gap between the rhetoric of inclusion and the actuality of implementation. It will not be possible to generalise using the findings from this small study but the stories of the participating teachers from other secondary schools as well as my own experiences may provide a valuable guide in the inclusion process of students with disabilities in the secondary schools.

Within teacher research is the common purpose of investigating ways to improve practice and thus students' learning and life chances. Given the wide-ranging population within the classroom and the push for accountability, teachers are under incredible pressure to "create highly effective instructional environments" (Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2004, p. 175). Knowledge and understanding of the conditions which are likely to be challenging for



teachers during the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary mainstream classrooms will assist in indentifying the appropriate support for teachers and students with and without disabilities. Inclusive education is not a seamless process (Slee & Allan, 2001) from the segregated special school to inclusive classroom but will require changes and improvements to teacher practice.

Therefore, this study has significance for special education teachers and secondary school teachers. It will provide insights into the inclusion of students with disabilities in North Queensland secondary schools and how the challenges of the process can impact on the teachers. The Vinson Inquiry (2002) notes the high levels of anxiety amongst teachers with little or no background or knowledge of teaching principles and practice for teaching students with disabilities when asked to include students with disabilities in their classrooms. This suggests that the information from this small study may assist those involved in teacher training in tertiary institutions as well as the content of teaching professional development (Lindsay, 2004).

Inclusive practices have been largely add-on in nature with attempts to implement inclusive practices within an existing framework. This has consequently led to increases in the complexity of teaching and stress for teachers. The literature clearly highlights the need for further research to investigate the sources of stress, especially stress that is caused by any difficult and excessive demands on the teacher (Kyriacou, 2001). A benefit of this research will be to provide a greater insight into the challenges present in an inclusive secondary school classroom and whether these challenges add to the existing stress levels of teachers.

### ***1.7 Definitions***

Many of the major terms used in this study have been widely discussed resulting in a variety of definitions. Fontana and Frey (2008, p. 139) argue that the use of language, particularly the use of specific terms, is very important as it “creates a ‘sharedness of meanings’ in which both the interviewer and the respondent understand the contextual nature of specific referents.” Thus, with the use of specific definitions, a framework is provided enabling the reader to understand why a particular approach has been adopted, how the results were attained as well as any relative strengths and weaknesses of the research (Cooper, Dewe & O’Driscoll, 2001). In order to avoid confusion or misunderstanding as well as facilitate more

focused reading, the following definitions are used in this study to differentiate between key terms and concepts used throughout the thesis.

### ***Disability***

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises disability as an evolving concept.

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'. (United Nations, 2006, p. 1)

A more recent definition from Ashman and Merrotsky (2009, p. 64) is that:

disability is defined no longer as a result of impairment but encompasses limitations that are imposed by a loss or significant deviation in body structure or function, by difficulties executing activities or by problems that a person may have in engaging in life situations.

Schooling is a vital aspect of life for most children and a child's disability might be described in terms of both core activity limitation and 'schooling restriction'. Schooling restriction is often associated with a need for special assistance and/or equipment to participate in a mainstream class, or attendance at special classes or a special school (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008a).

### ***Inclusion***

Defining the term inclusion poses a challenge because practices described as inclusive differ markedly from school setting to setting. In 2001 Foreman (p. 16) explained that:

the concept of inclusion is based on the notion that schools should, without question, provide for the needs of all the

children in their communities, whatever the level of their ability or disability. The essential difference between integration or mainstreaming and inclusion is that, with integration, the school asks ‘Can *we* provide for the needs of this student?’ With inclusion, the school asks ‘*How will we* provide for the needs of this student?’

In a more recent clarification, Munro (2009, p. 96) describes a school operating in an inclusive learning culture as exhibiting the following characteristics:

- students learn collaboratively, share their knowledge, and help each other;
- staff and students treat one another with respect;
- staff and parents/guardians develop cooperative partnerships that show mutual respect for the school; and
- each participant is valued for the unique knowledge and perspectives they contribute.

### ***Secondary Schools***

Within Australia and internationally, there is a range of systems available for the education of adolescent students. Throughout this thesis, therefore, the term secondary schools will refer to the education environment whose primary focus is “for students who have completed their primary education, usually attended by children in grades 7 to 12”. (Encarta Dictionary, 2009). In Queensland, the setting of this research, students are enrolled in secondary schools from grade 8 to grade 12.

### ***Teacher Stress***

Kyriacou (2001, p. 28) described teacher stress as

the experience by the teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or

depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher.

In order to understand health and safety requirements the State of Queensland, Department of Justice and Attorney-General (2009) explains that occupational stress:

can be defined as the physiological and emotional responses that occur when workers perceive an imbalance between their work demands and their capability and/or resources to meet these demands. Importantly, stress responses occur when the imbalance is such that the worker perceives they are not coping in situations where it is important to them that they cope.

### *Attitudes*

Ashman (2009, p. 19) describes attitudes as:

learned predispositions to react consistently in a particular way toward certain persons, events, objects, or concepts. Attitudes have cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components.

In the words of Van Reusen, Shoho and Barker (2000, p. 8), the attitude of a person “is thought to affect that person’s behaviours, actions and efficacy.”

### *Perceptions*

The Encarta Dictionary (2009) defines perception as “an attitude or understanding based on what is observed or thought”. Peshkin (2001a, p. 242) expands on this definition by explaining that “we are never free of lenses through which to perceive ...researchers are replete with shaping if not determining values, attitudes, preferences and experiences – all lenses of a sort – through which they apprehend the world around them.”

## **1.8     *The Plan***

This study is designed to explore the issues for twenty teachers working with students with disabilities in four secondary schools in North Queensland. Because the focus will be on the personal, subjective and emotional understandings of the teachers (Lawson, Parker, & Sikes, 2006), it was decided that the methods of qualitative research would provide the necessary framework for the investigation. Short questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and a reflective journal will be used within this approach. Throughout the study, I will be informed by my professional reading, dialogue with teaching colleagues, work as a teacher educator and experiences as the parent of a son with disabilities.

Identification of issues and the formulation of recommendations are expected outcomes of the investigation. It is expected that the information from this study can provide assistance for teachers and has the potential to influence the experiences of the students with whom they work (Carrington, 1999). As there is widespread recognition that teacher quality is amongst the most influential factors in determining student achievement (OCED, 2005), there is a clear need to establish environmental and intrinsic job factors (Jepson & Forrest, 2006) in order to keep the classroom as conducive to learning as possible.

Having identified a method which would appropriately address the general features of the research problem, ways of addressing more specific features will be selected. In order to have access to teachers who are working with students with disabilities and willing to participate, a purposive sampling method will be used. These teachers will be the ones who “take the knowledge base as it is presented in ... [the] school curriculums, and who chart the course for learning success of their students” (Lupart, 2000, p. 10). They will be the teachers who are presently experiencing the challenges of inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary schools in North Queensland.

## **1.9     *Conclusion***

Teachers wish to run a successful classroom where students benefit from their experiences and the teacher feels confident in successfully addressing student needs. At the same time, physical inclusion in mainstream classrooms has become an accepted model of education in western countries and is a reality for a majority of students with disabilities (Heiman, 2004; Lindsay, 2004). For teachers working in secondary schools, these changes mean that they are

faced with the challenges of putting into practice an effective education program for students with disabilities which will “enable all students to learn and demonstrate:

- what they know;
- what they can do with what they know.”

(The State of Queensland [Department of Education and Training], 2008, p. 1).

Ultimately, teachers are one of the most important factors in the process of successful inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. They are responsible for creating an instructive environment by removing barriers to learning and encouraging participation in the classroom activities. However, despite the stated benefits of inclusion and regardless of the teachers’ commitment and positive attitudes, research has indicated that there are teachers concerned about the academic, social and behavioural adjustment for students with disabilities in inclusive classes (Heiman, 2004). Thus, the changes inherent in the inclusion of students with disabilities into the mainstream classrooms and the impact on teachers continues to be examined (McLeskey & Waldron, 2000; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Wasburn-Moses 2006).

Inclusion in secondary schools is complex and there is often a need to rethink the classroom program in several areas including the physical needs of the students with disabilities, the content of the subject, the teaching strategies and the types of assessment. At the same time, teachers in today’s schools are working in classrooms where there is a wide diversity of students (Foreman, 2008). This can lead to teachers becoming confused and overwhelmed about their changing roles and responsibilities (Lupart, 2000). Even though the inclusion of students with disabilities represents a significant challenge at the secondary level, to date there have been few studies into secondary school inclusion particularly in North Queensland.

As a researcher, secondary special education teacher, a teacher educator and parent, I am interested in the concerns of the teachers. There are few jobs that are more demanding than teaching. My background as a teacher and a parent means that I am primarily interested in the experiences of these individual teachers rather than large groups of teachers. I am interested in learning more about inclusion and the teachers involved in the process. Horne and Timmons (2009) have suggested that when the complexities of providing inclusive education for all students are better understood, the more likely all students will be effectively served.

This small-scale study involves people who are uniquely located in relation to the focus of the research in terms of time, place and work experience. It will attempt to capture something of the multiple realities and visions which contribute to the realization and enactment of inclusion in the schools (Lawson et al., 2006) together with the perceptions of teacher stress within this environment. It is, I believe, an area of relevant concern in the present educational climate because it will provide the teachers with an opportunity to describe what is presently happening in their classrooms. At the same time, I am very conscious that I can only light a small fire in the darkness (Handy, 1994). Alone I cannot affect change in the inclusion of students with disabilities into the secondary school environment but I can be a facilitator of change. Through the information gained in this study, it will be possible to indentify a number of challenges in the inclusion process within these schools as well as highlight strategies which have assisted teachers to successfully include students with disabilities.

### ***1.10 Organisation of the Thesis***

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes and professional beliefs of the teachers together with the challenges they face when involved in including students with disabilities in the secondary school. As this information will be gained through listening to their experiences of the inclusion program in their secondary school, the thesis is presented in the following seven distinct but interconnected chapters.

***Chapter One*** provides an insight into my life experiences and the issues that led to investigate the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools from the perspective of teachers. A brief description of the evolving nature of inclusion of students with disabilities is followed by an explanation of the research focus, the rationale and possible benefits of the research. The chapter concludes with a list of definitions of words used in the thesis and a description of the thesis structure as it investigates inclusion in the secondary school from the perspective of the teachers.

***Chapter Two*** presents a comprehensive review of the important issues in the literature that are pertinent to the research. Knowing what previously happened to “is critical for grasping the meaning of what is currently going on” (Peshkin, 2001a, p. 243). This historical understanding is particularly important when explaining the inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms. The chapter begins with a section on the history of access to education for students with disabilities. Information on research which investigates

teacher stress is followed by a description of secondary school education. Finally, the results of research on the challenges inherent in the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools are identified. Within each section, wherever possible, reference is made to research conducted in Australia particularly in regards to investigation of the process of inclusion from the perspective of teachers.

*Chapter Three* explores the theory, methodology and methods used to collect and analyse the teachers' perspectives. The issues of working as an insider researcher with the opportunity to observe the inclusion process in a secondary school similar to the four research sites are explored. As this chapter underpins the research, it highlights the process and principles of qualitative research. Included in this chapter are details of the use of a short questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and reflective journal. Ethical issues, political considerations, assumptions, researcher bias and limitations of the research are also considered.

*Chapter Four* begins the analysis of the study. Besides providing information on the settings and participants, it focuses on the attitudes and professional beliefs of the teachers which emerged from the semi-structured interviews. The 20 teachers were eager to use personal experiences to highlight their perceptions of inclusion in the secondary schools. Included in the chapter are also excerpts from my reflective journal as I reflect on the teachers' stories and relate them to my own experiences.

*Chapter Five* continues the analysis of the study. It is an extension of the stories within the lived experiences of the teachers as well as my own lived experiences. However, the particular focus is on incidents that are perceived as challenges and whether these challenges add to the existing stress levels of the 20 teachers.

*Chapter Six* is a reflective chapter and continues to include extracts from the teachers' interviews as well as my reflective journal. This chapter supports the notion that the research process is a reflective one (Kock, 1998) and as such the method should be clearly visible. Furthermore, Kock argues that the signposting of the research process in a reflective account permits the reader to travel the world of the writer and the participants allowing it to be a legitimate research account.



*Chapter Seven* presents a summary of the study and discusses the strengths and significance. Suggestions are made for future research in the area and implications for improving the process of inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools from the perspectives of the teachers.

This thesis is structured so that the teachers' perspective on the inclusion of students with disabilities in four North Queensland secondary schools is told through their experiences. Before beginning the collection of data from the participants, a literature review was conducted in order to identify international and Australian research on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream schools, teacher stress and the challenges faced for teachers within the inclusion process. Chapter Two will present the literature review.

## *Chapter Two*

### *Literature Review*

#### **2.0 Introduction**

Inclusive models of education which were originally implemented in primary schools are beginning to seriously impact on the professional lives of teachers in the secondary schools. Fundamental to the concept of inclusion is the idea that “schools should, without question, provide for the needs of all the children in their communities, whatever the level of their ability or disability” (Foreman, 2008, p. 14). As a result, many students with disabilities who would have previously been educated in a segregated school system are now enrolled in their neighbourhood secondary schools. The expectation from parents and the community is that they will participate in the same educational program as their peers but with appropriate modifications and adjustments.

At the same time, it is evident that teaching and learning in secondary school has seen many changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century mainly due to the rapid changes in politics, technology and the economy. These adjustments can be a messy and unpredictable experience (Moss, 2006). Achieving teaching and learning outcomes has become extremely taxing for teachers as they attempt to adapt to the ever increasing demands. Additionally, there is now a firmly held belief that secondary schools will provide age appropriate role models, peer interaction and an environment conducive to learning (O’Rourke & Houghton, 2008) for students with disabilities. There is the danger that these additional changes will add to the stress levels of teachers who are already coping with multiple expectations.

Internationally and in Australia, researchers have studied the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Although the majority of research has been in primary schools, to a lesser extent there has been similar studies in secondary schools. The main focus of the following chapter will be on studies which investigate inclusion in secondary schools and on the teachers who work in these schools. Whenever possible, the studies which will be included will be Australian and, in a number of cases, from Queensland which is the setting of this study. To provide structure to this search of the literature, Chapter Two is divided into interrelating sections. Beginning with an investigation of inclusion of students with disabilities, the review then looks at teacher stress. As the setting for this research is the secondary school, a description of secondary school education is followed by the final section

which links inclusion of students with disabilities, secondary school education and teacher stress.

### **2.1 *Inclusion of students with disabilities***

Opportunities for students with disabilities to access comprehensive systems of education are part of relatively recent trends in education. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people with disabilities had been segregated from society or, due to their particular disability, given access to only selected services. Discrimination against individuals with disabilities was widespread resulting in “segregation, isolation, exclusion, exploitation, neglect and abuse” (Vinson Inquiry, 2002, p. 248). As a result, students with disabilities were either educated in a separate school system set up by religious or philanthropic organisations or denied access to an education system (Ainscow, 1999; Foreman, 2008). This parallel school system was eventually adopted by national governments and extended to include students with severe and profound disabilities. Amongst administrators and mainstream teachers, there was a belief that students with disabilities would benefit educationally from attending a separate school where they would be taught by appropriately trained teachers.

Internationally, the last quarter of a century has witnessed a remarkable development in legislation and practices aimed at changing society’s view of the education of students with disabilities. These changing attitudes to disability follow a widespread acceptance that minority or disadvantaged groups have the same right to participate in their community (Foreman, 2008) as all other members of the community. Moss (2006, p. 8) points out that with these changes in community values has come “a radical shift away from segregated education”. Acceptance of students with disabilities as contributing members of a school community has provided the opportunity for these students to participate in many educational experiences to which they had previously been denied access.

These attitudinal changes to people with disabilities have been accompanied by the responsibility for documentation of the optimal practices for students with disabilities. In 1994 representatives of 25 international organisations and 88 national governments met in Spain under the auspices of UNESCO. At this meeting, the future direction of education for students with special needs was considered as a result of international efforts to ensure that all children receive a basic education (Ainscow, 1997). Together, the representatives wrote the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education. The

following five principles were proclaimed to issue from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). They were:

- every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,
- every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs;
- education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs,
- those with special education needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs,
- regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

(UNESCO, 1994, pp. Vii-vi).

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education played an important role in responding to the diversity of all learners. Ainscow (1999, p. 74) described this statement as “arguably the most significant document that has ever appeared in the special needs field”. Specifically, it defined the underlying principles on which inclusive education is based as well as reinforcing the view that all students should have, as their first option, education in a mainstream classroom (Foreman, 2008). These principles were again reinforced at the World Education Forum at Dakar in April, 2000 (Forlin et al., 2008). Thus, the movement that began as a result of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Education Needs has resulted in increasing diversity in mainstream classrooms and a shift in the culture of the schools (Slee, 2007).

By the mid 70s, most school systems in the Western world had made provisions for all students with disabilities. However, these provisions were still usually in the form of

segregated placements (Elkins, 2009). Such placements were often in schools or classrooms physically removed from the mainstream classrooms attended by the majority of students. Gradually, however, education systems began to consider other ways of meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities which might involve less segregated educational placements (Werts, Culatta & Tompkins, 2007). In spite of the changes in educational policy and practice, the trend towards inclusion did not develop without considerable resistance from some sectors of the educational and wider community. Consequently, the opportunity for inclusion was not universally applied to all students with disabilities particularly those students with severe and profound disabilities.

Even though Australia did not sign the Salamanca Statement, it has followed a similar path to the international community. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, students with sense impairments attended special schools outside the state education system (Elkins, 2005). Additionally, the influence of parents and advocacy groups led to an increase in educational opportunities for students with physical impairments and intellectual impairments. In the 50's, a move to gain access to education for all students regardless of disabilities, saw students with severe disabilities also enrolled in specific special schools which were usually organised by parents and concerned citizens (Elkins, 2005). Two separate educational systems were created with teachers trained to work in either a mainstream classroom or teaching students with disabilities in a variety of separate settings. Rouse (2000) describes teaching in this system as working parallel to the mainstream school system but with a separate career structure and methods of teaching. What often eventuated was a separate, different, sometimes inferior education for students with disabilities.

Attempts to transfer students with disabilities from the separate school system and include them in their neighbourhood school can be traced back more than a quarter of a century. In the 70's, attitudes to people with disabilities in Australia began to change. By the 80's there was a shift in emphasis by Commonwealth and State Government departments from a financial focus to service quality. Parents who were often the primary advocates for their children (Rainforth & England, 1997; Yssel, Engelbrecht, Oswald, Eloff, & Swart, 2007) and advocacy groups used these changes together with the Disability Services Act 1986 as a means to challenge the segregation of students with disabilities in a separate school system (Carrington & Elkins, 2002b). The focus of their fight was the rights of students with

disabilities to receive an education which catered for their needs and that each student be accepted as welcome members of a non-segregated society.

Policy and practice regarding the education of students with disabilities in non-segregated schools have evolved considerably over the past twenty years. A number of government initiatives have been enacted to guard the rights of several minority and disadvantaged groups including students with disabilities (Foreman, 2008). The Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (D.D.A.) provides protection for everyone in Australia against discrimination based on disability. Students with disabilities must be offered the same educational opportunities as everyone else. This means that if a student with a disability meets the necessary entry requirements of a school then he or she should have the chance to study there (Education Queensland, 2007). Essentially, assumptions must not be made about what a person can or cannot do because of a disability.

Related to the Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992 is the Disability Standards for Education 2005. The main purpose of this policy is to clarify the obligations of education and training service providers and the rights of people with disabilities. Although these standards were developed in consultation with education, training and disability groups and the Australian Human Rights Commission, under the Australian constitution, each state and territory has responsibility for education with associated different interpretations of the federal perspective on the rights of students with disabilities. A significant fact about Australian inclusion policies in education however is that they are not law, in contrast to approaches in other countries such as the USA (Lindsay, 2004). Ultimately, although the inclusive practices are defined by legislation, they are interpreted by principals in schools through management practices and school policies (Keeffe-Martin, 2001).

Queensland has continued to respond to the particular needs of students with disabilities. Education Queensland (2005, p. 2), in an Inclusive Education Statement, has a commitment to make as a focal point, at all levels of the system, the understandings, policies and practices of inclusive education. To achieve this assurance, the aim of Education Queensland is that it:

1. Responds optimistically and constructively to the needs of educationally disadvantaged/marginalized students.

2. Uses diversity as a rich resource for building a connected and intellectually challenging curriculum in the classroom.
3. Ensures that students, teachers and community members from diverse groups feel safe and free from discrimination, bias and harassment.
4. Respects student voice and ensures that all students learn *through* democratic processes.
5. Promotes locally negotiated responses to student, family and community needs through effective community engagement processes and cross-agency collaboration.
6. Ensures that all Education Queensland policies and initiatives recognize the centrality of inclusive education practices to quality education.

In line with the Disability Services Act 2006, the Department of Education, Training and the Arts also released the Disability Service Plan 2007-2010 which outlines a host of initiatives including a review of early childhood development programs and services for children with disabilities. The same principles are reflected in the Department's Education Adjustment Program which supports the needs of students with a diagnosed disability by identifying and providing educational adjustments to enable access and participation at school. Additionally, this program calls for an increase in the skills of staff working with students with disabilities.

The majority of students with disabilities in Australia are now included in mainstream classrooms. Dempsey and Conway (2005, p. 160) believe that this push towards inclusive education has been driven by "legislation, economic rationalism, lobbying by parents and educators and educational research." Evidence from the Vinson Inquiry (2002) reveals that choice of placement now depends on the knowledge parents have of the potential advantages and disadvantages of each inclusion program. Ultimately, there continues to be a consistent and substantial increase of students with disabilities enrolling in their neighbourhood secondary school (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001).

### ***2.1.1 Advantages to Inclusion***

The advantages of including students with disabilities into the mainstream school system have been advocated by parents, educators and educational researchers. As an educational philosophy, inclusion states that students with disabilities should be included not excluded from the mainstream education classroom (Kirk, Gallagher, Anastasiow, & Coleman, 2006). Ferguson (2008) argues that research has confirmed the ability of inclusion to offer better educational results for students with disabilities. Thus, the philosophy and practice of inclusion is based on a belief that for students with disabilities there can be an improvement in the quality of social and academic development through daily contact with their peers within the classroom.

With inclusion, students with disabilities have the opportunity to become a welcome member of their neighbourhood school. They are offered the chance to be part of their community and social support which includes support from students without disabilities (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2008) and a range of staff. The stigma attached to being disabled is reduced and the inclusive practice fosters personal achievement and self-realisation. Students with disabilities are seen as contributing members of the classroom, not just visitors. Thus, as Turnbull et al. (1999) point out, the policy of placing students with disabilities alongside their peers in their neighbourhood schools provides an opportunity for all students to be participants in activities within and outside the classroom.

According to international research, teachers are aware of the benefits of inclusion. For example, Idol (2006) used mixed methods to examine the degree of inclusion of students with disabilities in four elementary and four secondary schools in the United States. Amongst the findings was evidence that teachers were positive about educating students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom. They believed that best choice was to include students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom with adults providing assistance. Except when serious behaviour problems were involved, the majority of teachers reported that the students without disabilities remained unaffected by the presence of students with disabilities in their classroom.

Amongst the prominent benefits of inclusion for students with and without disabilities is the opportunity to extend social skills. Research by Naylor (2002) in British Columbia showed that initially when the two groups interacted, neither group knew what to expect from the



other. A later study in Australia by Anderson et al. (2007) confirmed the favourable impressions of research by Idol (2006) when they found evidence of a positive change in attitude and social skills of students with and without disabilities. Roland and Galloway (2004) considered students are influenced by the social climate in which they live and in particular by the behaviours they see modeled. With inclusion comes the potential for increased acceptance, understanding and tolerance of individual difference (Salend & Duhaney, 1999) together with positive social opportunities not just for students with disabilities but also for students without disabilities. All students have the potential to become more confident about diversity which will prepare them for citizenship in the modern world.

Additionally with inclusion comes the opportunity for students with disabilities who are included in the mainstream classroom to add to their academic achievement. Research indicates that the students with disabilities can produce academic work at a higher level due to the opportunity to take more responsibility for their work, to complete tasks and to collaborate with the mainstream students (Keefe & Moore, 2004). With students with disabilities gaining access to the mainstream educational curriculum (Vinson Inquiry, 2002) comes exposure to teachers who are skilled in their subject area and in the techniques used in modern teaching. Even though some secondary school teachers may have difficulty adjusting the content of their subject to the ability of the students with disabilities, O'Rourke and Houghton (2008) recommend that what matters most is the quality of instruction for each student in the classroom.

Professionally, inclusion offers benefits for all involved as teachers are forced to re-examine their methods of instruction. For McLeskey and Waldron (1996) the primary goal of inclusion should be to promote strategies that will better meet the needs of all students in the classroom. Thousand, Rosenberg, Bishop, and Villa (1997, p. 279) noted, "the presence of youth with disabilities in secondary classrooms, in fact, represents a gift to school restructuring. Their presence requires and pushes implementation of educational goals, theories and best practices". These authors go on to state that teaching practice improves: teachers may work more collaboratively and many of the adaptations and accommodations developed for inclusion of students with disabilities can be used to benefit other groups of students within in the classroom. As the large majority of teachers in a qualitative study conducted by Scott, Jellison, Chappell, and Standridge (2007) suggested, there was the opportunity to learn about

the capabilities of different students. To substantiate this, a previous action research project in the United States (Frederico, Herrold, & Venn, 1999) involving a fifth-grade inclusion class had already shown that inclusion gave teachers new insights into their abilities as teachers.

A positive force in the inclusion of students with disabilities continues to be the voice of parents and their involvement in the child's education. To investigate the role played by these advocates, Yssel et al. (2007) used focus groups in South Africa and the United States to interview parents about their experiences regarding the inclusion of their child with disabilities. Although the parents in the study had concerns about the process of inclusion they were still strong in the belief that their child to be included in a mainstream classroom. In all focus groups, after venting their frustration, the parents expressed appreciation for the ongoing support given by administrators and teachers.

### ***2.1.2 Challenges to Inclusion***

The inclusion of students with disabilities into the mainstream school setting is not without challenges. In answer to the inclusion movement, the aim was for a redistribution of human and physical resources in an attempt to provide services for the students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. In situations where this redistribution of human and physical resources did not happen, there was a corresponding negative impact on teachers and on their attitude to inclusion of students with disabilities (Avramidis, Bayless, & Burden, 2000; British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2008). For that reason, results from international and Australian research provide evidence of teacher beliefs which do not always reflect a commitment to the policies of inclusion.

Research conducted with Western Australian teachers showed an appreciation of the appeal of including students with disabilities in the classroom. However, they worried about the challenges they faced on a daily basis. Evidence of this was found by Anderson et al. (2007) using mixed methods to collect data from 162 primary school teachers. The aim was to assess the teachers' confidence about inclusion, attitude to inclusion, current level of support for inclusion and perceived needs for additional support. A benefit of using this method of research was the opportunity for teachers to speak about the cost and value of inclusive education policies. The majority of teachers noted that there were disadvantages when teaching in inclusive classrooms. The four main categories listed by the teachers included

time constraints imposed on teachers, time constraints imposed on non-disabled students, behavioural difficulties and disadvantages relating to learning.

In particular, there can be challenges when providing an effective teaching and learning program for students with disabilities. In a survey of 378 high school special education teachers (USA), Wasburn-Moses (2006) examined program effectiveness. Two themes which emerged from the results focused on the lack of program coherence and the lack of options for students with disabilities. The participants pointed to a need to improve organisation and co-ordination of the curriculum for the students with disabilities. They felt students with disabilities were in danger of being disadvantaged by this lack of organisation and co-ordination.

Secondary school teachers in academic core subjects are particularly aware of the challenges associated with the teaching program. They are confronted by the necessary changes to planning, practice and assessment when historically they see themselves as trained and therefore competent to teach only students without disabilities. A case study conducted by Ellins and Porter (2005) gave a detailed picture of one secondary school in England. Teachers of core subjects were more negative with science teachers, in particular, feeling that the technical subject's language and abstract concepts posed difficulties for students with disabilities. Additionally, there was a fear among teachers that examination results of students with disabilities may adversely affect the standing of the school.

Faced with the academic demands of a diverse group of students, mainstream teachers are not always willing to add the extra challenge of taking responsibility for students with disabilities. When conducting case studies at two secondary schools in Queensland, Carrington and Elkins (2002b) established that students with disabilities can be accepted into the mainstream classroom but if the classroom teachers did not believe it was their responsibility to teach all students in the classroom, the learning needs of the students with disabilities may not be effectively met. A similar sentiment was noted in Canada by Bunch and Valeo (2004, p. 61) who indicated that instead of taking responsibility for students with disabilities in their classroom, mainstream teachers may look to the special education teacher to "assume functional ownership".

Outcomes for students and teachers when co-teaching are also contentious issues in inclusion. A qualitative study of mainstream and special education teachers co-teaching in a suburban high school in south western United States of America was conducted by Keefe and Moore (2004). Critical issues which emerged from the semi-structured interviews included the nature of collaboration, roles and responsibilities and outcomes for students and teachers. The teachers' experiences indicate that there were a number of challenges associated with co-teaching in a high school. These challenges included the need for better preparation in special education teachers' knowledge of subject content as well as mainstream teachers' knowledge about disabilities and the need for modifications. Teachers were also concerned with their roles and responsibilities within the co-teaching relationship.

Inclusion in the mainstream classroom does not necessarily mean that students with disabilities are automatically included in the social activities. A recent quantitative study (Piji, Frostad, & Flem, 2008) conducted in Norway involving 989 students found that physical inclusion is only a basic condition. Piji et al. discovered students with disabilities may have significant difficulty in social interactions with their peers. To become part of the group, these students may need extra support from those involved in the inclusion process. Often the necessity for staff to provide effective support can become a challenge. This is particularly the case in the secondary school where teachers are working with large numbers of students.

Many of the teachers working with students with disabilities believe that administrators do not have a clear understanding of the challenges involved in inclusion. To investigate the sustainability of inclusive reform Sindelar et al. (2006) used a case study approach to investigate a middle school in the United States of America. They found that inclusion reform was not sustained due to leadership change, shifting district/state policy and teacher turnover. These factors also resulted in diminished philosophical and financial commitment to the reform. Previously, Kaff (2004) used data from 341 questionnaires to identify the factors that influence special education teachers in the United States of America who were considering leaving their profession. Nearly half of the teachers in the survey reported that they planned to leave the field citing lack of administration support for special education and classroom concerns.

Research has made known that there are students with disabilities who are not successful in an inclusive environment. The results from 122 questionnaires completed by Australian

primary school teachers in Victoria provided Subban and Sharma (2006) with data which indicated teachers were concerned about implementing an inclusion program in the mainstream classroom. In particular, the teachers had a less favourable attitude to including students with behavioural and emotional disorders. According to McLeskey and Waldron (1996), placing students with severe behavioural problems in a mainstream classroom not only does not meet their needs but can seriously disrupt the education of other students and contributes greatly to the stress of teaching. Benjamin (2002a) agrees that it may be very difficult to include students with severe behavior problems as they will often prevent anyone else from learning. In her Canadian qualitative study on parent advocates and principals' perceptions related to the problems in special education, Zaretsky (2004, p. 281) found that the participants "steadfastly maintained that regular education classrooms and schools cannot possibly be an 'all service provider' for every student."

Overall, a gap can exist between what is demanded of the teacher and the support provided for successful inclusion. Teachers begin to feel guilty about failing to reach the school and personal expectations which, in turn, can heighten their level of stress. Talmor, Reiter and Feign (2005) used questionnaires with 330 primary school teachers in Israel to identify any correlation between environmental factors that relate to inclusion of students with disabilities and teacher burnout. They found three environmental factors had negative correlation with burnout. These included the organisational factor, the psychological factor and the social factor. Teachers who had problems with planning for social and academic inclusion, difficulty coping with the heavy workload and received little assistance in the classrooms felt a greater sense of burnout. However, the more organisational factors, psychological factors and social factors were conducive to inclusion, the less burnout was experienced.

Teachers are aware of the challenges associated with the inclusion of students with disabilities and the diverse group of abilities and disabilities in the secondary school classroom. Pearce and Forlin (2005, p. 96) suggest that "teachers seem to be under intense pressures from two major and seemingly contrasting pushes from education systems – equity verses excellence." To achieve an effective inclusive education setting, teachers must continue to display effective teaching skills including structure, clarity, redundancy, enthusiasm, appropriate pace and maximized engagement (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). Yet, teachers who endeavour to meet the multiple expectations when students with disabilities are included in the classroom may find it difficult to be effective teachers (Overland, 2001). Depending upon how the

teacher perceives and interprets the challenges related to inclusion of students with disabilities, there exists the danger that the presence of these students in the mainstream classroom will increase the level of teacher stress.

## **2.2 *Teacher Stress***

In the modern world, most workers including teachers are exposed to challenging situations and the accompanying physical and psychological problems. However, workers in the service sector which includes education, health, hotels, entertainment and transport are often employed in a challenging workplace where they encounter higher levels of verbal and physical violence. This is mainly due to their direct contact between workers and the general public. They often risk abuse should they need to delay or deny a desired service (Fleming & Harvey, 2002). There is an overriding expectation among members of the public that people working in the service industry have the ability and resources to provide the required goods or services on demand.

Teachers, as recognised members of the service workforce, are exposed to similar problems as other members of this industry. They work in the not-for-profit sector and many are balancing paid work and family responsibilities (Robertson, 2002). Additionally, they must contend with the stress-producing aspects inherent in the bureaucratic structure under which they work. There is almost constant interaction with students (Lovey, 2002; Naring Briet & Brouwers, 2006) as well as parental demands and expectations (Forbes, 2007) and episodes of vacuous media coverage. In Australia, this has led to a situation where, as Guthrie (2006) discovered, teachers are statistically more prone to stress claims than other workers.

Amongst teachers, nevertheless, there is a wide range of meanings attributed to the term stress and when accepting or denying the existence of stress in themselves or in their colleagues. Ho (1996) believes some teachers may define stress as anxiety, fear, inability to cope, frustration and unhappiness while other teachers associate stress with personal weakness and professional incompetence. As stress is a complex phenomenon, the source of any stress can be different for each individual depending upon the complex interaction between personality, values, skills and circumstances (Adams, 1999; Kyriacou, 2001). Accordingly, sources of stress might be connected to teaching, individual personality characteristics, the school organisation or an amalgam of all these factors.

### ***2.2.1 Factors that directly concern the teaching profession***

Teachers appear to be under increasing levels of stress from disruption and harassment by students. Most teachers endeavour to interact in a positive manner with their students and maintain discipline within the classroom. However, there are problems. Positive interaction and maintaining discipline can be exceedingly difficult in classrooms where students can be disruptive, inattentive, impertinent, disparaging, indifferent or lacking motivation. As Hargreaves (2003) points out, it is extremely demanding for teachers to be authentically optimistic and enthusiastic when faced with these students within the modern classroom.

Internationally, a number of research studies have investigated the sources of teacher stress. Pines (2002) used quantitative and qualitative measures to demonstrate the psychodynamic existential perspective to the understanding of teacher burnout. A sample of 97 Israeli teachers and 614 American teachers were involved in the study. Results showed that the most frequently mentioned cause of stress was discipline problems. The results from a questionnaire on the specific sources of stress given to 493 primary and secondary Greek teachers by Antoniou, Polychronis and Vlachakis (2006) echoed these findings with the main sources of teacher stress related to problems with the behaviour of students. A study conducted by the Teachers' Union of Ireland to establish teachers' perceptions of student disruption in schools in 2006 again linked student behaviour, in particular threatening or intimidating behaviour, to teacher stress.

Adding to the stress resulting from the difficulties in maintaining discipline is the heterogeneity of the mainstream classroom. Within each classroom are students with diverse academic abilities as well as students from a range of social and economic environments. Senge et al. (2000, p. 39) argue that individual teachers cannot possibly accommodate the variety of learners with whom they are confronted. Yet, it is still expected that teachers in secondary schools will "build the learning communities, create the knowledge society and develop the capacities for innovation, flexibility and commitment to change that are essential to economic prosperity" (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 1).

Consequently, work overload has become a common additional stress as the diversity and quantity of roles for each individual teacher continues to grow. Teachers are held accountable for each role because they must perform to the satisfaction of the school administration, the parents and the students. This means in the competitive climate of the classroom, teachers are

expected to “perform multiple tasks, learn new skills and self-manage” (Dollard, 2003, p. 3) leading to a common theme within research literature of a workload that has increased beyond a reasonable level (Engelbrecht et al., 2003; Robertson, 2007; Thomas, Clarke & Lavery, 2003). It follows that teachers feel they are in a constant rush to meet excessive demands imposed by administration staff detached from the realities of the contemporary classroom.

Specific evidence of the poor working conditions which continue to be found in schools can be found in a number of studies. Larwood and Paje (2004) conducted a descriptive evaluation study to measure perceived levels of burnout. They use a survey questionnaire with 51 teachers working with Deaf students in self-contained classrooms within California. Results from the study indicated that emotional exhaustion mainly due to paperwork and dissatisfaction with administration support were among the most troublesome stressors for these teachers of the Deaf. Similarly, an exploratory pilot study with 50 high school teachers in the United States of America using four individual standardized questionnaires conducted by Austin, Shah, and Muncer (2005) found the most prevalent work stress identified by individual teachers to be work overload.

### ***2.2.2 Differences that influence teachers’ vulnerability to stress***

Differences within individual teachers have the potential to influence their vulnerability to stress when faced with the challenges of the modern classroom. For example, the individual personality characteristics of the teacher may encourage equating student academic success or failure with personal success and failure. Forlin’s (1997) Australian research observes that failure to maintain a perceived level of efficiency and commitment is likely to increase the level of psychological distress in staff. This is particularly evident when evaluating students’ work as teachers are implicitly evaluating their own performance. The feeling of failure is not helped when individual teachers and not the school are seen as the instrument in any difference in student learning between classes (Moss, 2006). Thus, any cognitive vulnerability to stress will lead a teacher to self-blame for the academic failure of the students.

A teacher’s vulnerability to stress is also influenced by the level of teaching experience. Studies have found high levels of emotional exhaustion in teachers at the beginning of their career. These teachers often invest all their energy in their work in order to achieve their initial objectives. De Noble and McCormick (2007) using quantitative methods collected data relating to a number of biographical variables from 356 staff in New South Wales primary



schools. The data showed that younger staff members reported more occupational stress than older colleagues. In contrast, international research findings point to older teachers being more susceptible to negative stress and its related symptoms (Holmes, 2005). Factors that could contribute to these differences, suggests Holmes (2005), include the increasing workload which is now required of teachers together with the loss of work focused dedication associated with beginning teachers. Similarly, international research has indicated that there may be a connection between gender and the cognitive vulnerability of individual teachers to stress. Evidence of this was found in a study conducted by Antoniou et al. (2006) where female teachers in Greece presented higher levels of emotional exhaustion compared to their male counterparts. It was believed that higher level of stress may stem from conditions in the classroom and a workload which often encroaches on family life.

Although individual differences in teaching experience, age and gender may influence a teacher's vulnerability to stress, there are a number of other factors that must be taken into consideration. According to Dorman (2003), previous research on stress and burnout focused on the personality of the individual teacher without including the organizational and managerial processes. Wiley (2000) argued however, that the causes of stress are often rooted, not in the permanent traits of the teacher but in the nature and organization of the school systems. If this is the case, then the school organization and administration play a particularly important role in the work environment of the teacher.

### ***2.2.3 Factors related to the school organisation and administration***

Research has identified educational change and the pace of that change will determine and contribute to teachers' stress levels. Teachers are expected to have the ability to anticipate and to successfully adapt to each change as it arises. Failure to successfully adapt with a corresponding lack of control in the workplace has been shown to influence the level of stress of the worker. Thus, the less control teachers have over events in their workplace, the more intense is the stress (Adams, 1999; Cartwright & Cooper, 1996; Margolis & Nagel, 2006).

Politically driven systematic change through reform and restructuring can be particularly stressful as it can leave many teachers feeling guilty and defensive. Dinham (2000) suggests that Australian teachers can become stressed not by the change but by the methods used by hierarchical bureaucracies to effect the change. Many of the changes are introduced without understanding the knowledge, skills, time and resources available within the classroom.

Teachers' lack of time, professional development opportunities and funding may mean they "get little opportunity to work with colleagues and must grapple with change alone" (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 60).

Adding to the stress caused by constant change can be the role played by the school administration. Roland and Galloway (2004) in their quantitative research into bullying and professional culture in 22 Norwegian primary schools discovered a very high correlation between teacher stress and lack of leadership by the head teacher. A later quantitative study conducted by Lazuras (2006) with 70 mainstream and special education teachers from a large Greek city led to similar responses. In particular, in this study, job stress scores for special education teachers were higher than mainstream teachers mainly in the area of organisational issues. Likewise, Margolis and Nagel (2006) in their qualitative study in an American charter school of 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades discovered that validation and support from the administration was the greatest determinant of whether teachers would stay or leave the school.

In spite of demands placed on them by the school organisation and administration, teachers are required to present a positive image to members of the public, particularly to the parents of students. However, there are situations where teachers may have difficulties interacting with parents (Travers & Cooper, 1997; Forlin, 2001). Engelbrecht et al. (2003) used mixed methods with 55 teachers in South Africa to investigate inclusion of students with disabilities. Their results showed limited contact with the parents of students with disabilities was identified as a source of stress. The socio-economic disadvantage of the parents included in this study was felt to be the main contributor to parents' lack of involvement. Senge et al. (2000) points out parents may also associate the school with their own negative school life. When teachers are physically and emotionally exhausted, the time spent repeatedly attempting to speak to parents who may intentionally or unintentionally be very difficult to contact can sometimes be viewed as one more burden-some task in an already overloaded workday.

### **2.3     *Consequences of Teacher Stress***

The increasing frequency of reported incidents of teachers experiencing negative stress and the resulting consequences is of particular concern for all departments of education. In Australia and internationally, a substantial body of literature exists which describes teachers as working in a stressful occupation with further suggestions that the problem is escalating (Brown, Ralph & Brember, 2002; Cosgrove, 2000; DeNobile & McCormick, 2007; Guthrie,

2006; Munt, 2004; Overland, 2000). According to Holmes (2005), many teachers working in Australian classrooms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would have a reasonable understanding of negative stress gained through personal experience.

While there is a responsibility to cater for the needs of all students in the classroom, high levels of stress may also affect the degree of care. Thus, teachers with high levels of stress are often working in a situation where the educational requirements of the students become of secondary importance because all energies are directed to the basic survival needs of the teacher. When teachers become unproductive, the quality of education becomes sub-standard leading to a situation that can eventually affect a country's economy (Van Der Linde, 2000). Students who are taught by teachers debilitated by stress and unable to give their best are thus at an educational disadvantage through no fault of their own.

The consequences to teaching and learning outcomes as a result of teacher stress and burnout can be linked to the teacher's perception of stress. Griffith, Steptoe and Cropley (1999) who conducted a survey questionnaire of 780 primary and secondary school teachers in London reported that the presence of social support and use of coping behaviour can affect their perception of stress. Kyriacou (2001) believes these findings highlight the importance of recognising that a teacher's perception of demands within the workplace is influenced, in turn, by the degree of stress being experienced. The teacher who lacks support and an ability to use coping behaviours will perceive the workplace as stressful and will not be in the position to provide the appropriate level of teaching expertise for the students.

Besides impacting on the learning of the students, the damage from stress faced by teachers when working in the modern classroom can be connected with substantial losses in individual worker satisfaction. The frequency, intensity and duration of perceived stress can cause havoc with a teacher's life (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Margolis and Nagle (2006) describe a situation where stressful experiences which accumulate over time without opportunities to reformulate beliefs can create a pessimistic teacher outlook and impact on staff morale. There is a sense of professional disillusionment as teachers lose their purpose and idealism. Research has already found a clear association between professional competence, performance and job satisfaction (Chiu & Kosinski, 1997; Ma & MacMillan, 1999).

When stress interferes with this job satisfaction there is a corresponding negative impact on the worker. They are working in a job which often leaves them feeling physically and emotionally exhausted. Teachers who are experiencing high levels of stress frequently lose the motivation to follow predictable stages of a career path and focus on merely coping (Troman & Woods, 2000). According to Winzelberg and Luskin (1999), one indication of the stress facing teachers and corresponding loss of job satisfaction is the number of teachers leaving the profession. Of particular concern are the early career teachers who leave after only one or two years of teaching. Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff and Harniss (2001) conducted a survey of 887 special education teachers and found that an employer's awareness of increased job stress for new teachers and the provision of support to these teachers by principals or mentor teachers had the potential to reduce stress and increase retention. Overall, there continues to be ongoing anxiety about the rate of early career teachers and experienced teachers leaving the profession with the corresponding consequence of disruption to student learning through teacher absence and turnover.

Professional burnout for teachers who continue teaching is a recurring topic in the professional education literature. For these teachers, the ultimate response to frequent and extended periods of stress is the state of emotional, physical and attitudinal exhaustion known as occupational burnout. In terms of teacher stress, it appears there are specific parts of their job that cause them more concern, stress and eventually lead to burnout. For example, Kokkinos (2007) using quantitative methods with 447 primary school teachers from Cyprus established that the management of student misbehaviour and time constraints were two sources of stress which had the potential to predict dimensions of burnout. The study suggested intervention strategies which focus on job engagement may assist to combat stress within the classroom.

As teachers move towards burnout, they withdraw from the students and their work with a corresponding increase in absenteeism rates. Friedman (2000) listed the main components of burnout amongst teachers as exhaustion, lack of professional fulfilment and an attitude of de-personalization which is expressed by blaming the students. Greenglass and Burke (2003, p. 217) extend this description by describing teachers in England at this level of stress as "likely to be less sympathetic toward students, have a lower tolerance for classroom disruption, are less apt to prepare adequately for class, and feel less committed to their work". The teachers feel hopeless about the future and do not have the energy to improve the situation. At the most

severe level of burnout, teachers usually sever all contact with the classroom and leave the teaching profession.

Initiating methods to prevent stress in the classroom is in the best interests of the employer as it will assist in keeping productive teachers in the profession. The consequences of teacher stress can have lasting effects on all involved in the school. Guthrie (2006) claims stress can be quite costly to schools in financial terms, with teachers having one of the highest levels of stress-related claims of all professions in most Australian States and Territories. Additionally, he argues that statistical figures provided on workers' compensation for stress related illness could be higher as many teachers use their sick leave due to the complex nature of stress claims.

#### **2.4     *Secondary Schools***

Many people who have attended or taught in an Australian secondary school in the past 25 years would find very few structural and organisational changes in the modern secondary school. Pring (2000) portrays an environment where the central focus is to enable students to learn what is valuable and significant. Although there has been a rapid increase in the breadth of the curricula to be covered, teachers still usually work alone in their subject area using a lockstep, grade-by grade curriculum. Within the school, there is an emphasis on individualistic and competitive student output and grading (Thousand et al., 1997) with classes scheduled by a rigid timetable. Brown and Kennedy (2001, p. 29) depict secondary schools as a place where "procedures and structures can dominate the school instead of teachers' and students' needs dominating". A similar situation can be found in many secondary schools in North Queensland.

Although procedure and structures dominate the secondary schools, the environment could still be described as lively if not chaotic where many things happen at once. As an institution designed explicitly for the cognitive development of young people, there is an expectation that teachers will be able to educate "students in academic and skill areas, provide enrichment activities, meet the individual needs of all students with wide range of abilities and encourage moral and ethical development" (Della Rocca & Kostanski, 2001, p. 2). It is in the secondary school that skills and knowledge cultivated during the primary school years are refined and developed. Secondary schools are places where students work towards their futures (Monk,

2001) and the teachers are expected to build on skills and knowledge previously learnt to enable students to be successfully included in modern society on leaving school.

The completion of secondary school has become a necessary condition both for access to higher education and entrance into working life. This has brought a number of changes to the structure of secondary school education. Referring to the Australian education system, Carrington and Robinson (2004) point out that the movement of Australia into the global economy as well as the rate of technological change within our society has both contributed to making education more complex as well as challenging the schools to become more effective. According to Dollard (2003), an outcome of globalisation has been a shift from manufacturing to economies based on knowledge and service. There is an emphasis on learning activities that will be effective in assuring all students will learn a wide range of skills required for successful and productive independent living in a complex society (Cole & McLeskey, 1997; Turnbull et al., 1999; Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker, 2000). Curriculum and teaching methods no longer focus on academic content but on acquiring skills to access and use the information required for life in a turbulent, uncertain world.

Adjustments in the knowledge and skills required by the workplace means a growing number of students are staying longer at school. By the 1980's it had become apparent that many more students were continuing their education rather than entering the workforce (Easthope & Easthope, 2007). These students are unable or unwilling to work towards tertiary study but find it increasingly difficult to gain employment without basic qualifications. The manual jobs for students unable to cope with schooling are no longer available (Jackson, 2005). As Senge et al. (2002) explain, a large percentage of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs have either transferred to developing nations where the rate of pay is lower or the jobs have simply disappeared. Wallace (2007) describes a workplace where, as the numbers of unskilled jobs dwindle and competition increases, there is a continuous demand for higher skill levels particularly in literacy. A solution to these challenging changes has been to create additional space within the range of secondary school subjects for employment related programs (Teese & Polesel, 2003). The original subjects within these programs were implemented throughout Australia in the late 1970's. These subjects were later linked to TAFE which has resulted in a selection of vocation-oriented subjects catering for students about to enter the workforce.

With the development of these vocation-oriented subjects has come the need to cater for a range of student abilities and levels of motivation usually by adjustments in teaching methods. Students within these subjects may not see the relevance of subject content and would rather gain employment. At the same time, teachers are faced with the challenge of developing and implementing units of work relevant to students who must have the knowledge and skills to obtain employment in an ever changing job market. Research in Queensland by Carrington and Elkins (2002a) found that planning and preparation time has increased as teachers attempt to provide educational activities that focus not just on subject content but on the requirements of a diverse and demanding group of students.

Amongst this diverse and demanding group of students are unenthusiastic students with persistent and consistent socially unacceptable behaviour. Some students come to classes more intent on their own amusement which usually involves irritating the teacher (Brennan, 2007). Teachers working in secondary schools can be particularly vulnerable to stress especially when encountering these students. Yet, teachers must still ensure the classroom is a place where everyone can learn in spite of students who have no desire to cooperate (Lovey, 2002). In a study of teachers' perceptions of discipline in secondary schools in Ireland (Teachers' Union of Ireland, 2006), the numerous disruptive behaviours encountered by teachers on a daily basis was felt to constitute bullying. Many teachers reported that student behaviour left them stressed and affected their morale. When teachers are forced to battle "the consequences of low motivation, disenfranchisement and belligerence" (Holmes, 2005, p. 53), they face one of the biggest obstacles to personal well being. In contrast, Chiu and Kosinski (1997) referred to workers who feel more satisfied at work tending to be more positive about life and thus feeling less stress.

As the political and economic environment of the Australian secondary school has changed there has been a corresponding change in attitudes to similarity and difference. Amongst professionals involved in education, there is recognition that all students can learn, even though they may not achieve an equal performance (Monk, 2001). This movement towards recognising the value of all students and providing equal opportunities has also assisted in the inclusion of students with disabilities into the secondary school. The consequence has been a slow acceptance of the academic and social potential of students with disabilities and a growing population of these students included in mainstream secondary classrooms. This has

resulted in secondary schools reflecting the complexity of society and becoming increasingly multifaceted educational environments.

## **2.5 *Secondary School Inclusion***

Inclusion of students with disabilities into the secondary school environment has the potential to impact substantially on the staff and students with and without disabilities. The current Australian vision of an inclusive school is a “place where everyone belongs, is accepted and where special education needs students are supported and cared for by their peers and other members of the school community” (Forbes, 2007, p. 67). At the same time, secondary schools in Australia are extremely hectic places with many diverse activities and many demands placed on the teachers and students.

In spite of the hectic pace and diversity of the secondary school, there continues to be an expectation that students with disabilities can be included in the mainstream classroom. According to Dukes and Lamar-Dukes (2007, p. 420), inclusive education is based on the notion that, in most cases, the mainstream classroom can supply an environment in which students with disabilities are able to receive appropriate services and supports. The result is the same or better outcomes than if these students received their education in environments isolated from students without disabilities. However, Mastropieri and Scruggs (2001) have identified the complexity of schooling at the secondary level as a serious impediment to inclusion. To achieve a successful inclusion process, the teachers must overcome many challenges including the structure of the school, curriculum, teaching methods, students with and without disabilities and support for the inclusion process.

### **2.5.1 *School Structure***

In the environment of the secondary school, all students are expected to conform to the structure and organisation of the institution. Yet, the organisation of many secondary schools is frequently governed not by individual needs but by political and economic factors (Di Martino et al., 2002). Instead of being built on developing the abilities of the students in a positive way, there are “relentless drives for increased, measurable achievement and batteries of subject-based standards” (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 47). In this environment, many of the individual needs of students become of secondary importance to the visible success of the school and the needs of the majority of the student population.



The individual needs of the students with disabilities within this environment are immense. They have left the caring and flexibility of the primary school classroom to be confronted by the extremely challenging constraints inherent in the organisation of the secondary school (Maras & Aveling, 2006; Pearce & Forlin, 2005). Usually the policy of inclusive classes in the secondary school has not meant a change in practices but rather a niche of special provision has been created for the students with disabilities (Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2006). However, Carrington and Elkins (2002b) remind us that there is more involved in inclusive education than simply placing students with disabilities in the classrooms. Teachers are the key to successful inclusion within the mainstream classroom because they are responsible for creating learning opportunities and removing barriers to learning and participation in the classrooms.

### **2.5.2 *The Teachers***

Inclusion of students with disabilities into the mainstream classroom is only one of the many social, political and economic changes faced by teachers in secondary schools. They are already under pressure to be “continually engaged in pursuing, upgrading, self-monitoring and reviewing their own professional learning” (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 16). At the same time, they are under strain to cover a complex curriculum at a rapid pace. Teachers must therefore operate within a unique set of pressures unknown to many other organisations (Senge et al., 2000).

Each school day, secondary teachers as subject specialists provide a curriculum to a diverse range of students usually within different year levels. Owing to the number of students taught by each subject specialist they can find it difficult to design, deliver and monitor a learning program tailored to the specific needs of every student. As Dukes and Lamar-Dukes (2007) point out, teachers are faced with the challenge of reaching a successful standard of achievement in their classrooms while assisting an increasing number of students who find it difficult to complete many of the set tasks. Additionally, secondary school teachers must include students with disabilities in their learning program as they are no longer able to assume that someone else is responsible for the education of these students (Robinson & Riddle Buly, 2007).

While many secondary school teachers support the right of all students to be educated in mainstream classrooms, some lack confidence in their ability to meet the needs of students

with disabilities students. They often find the required changes to planning, practice and assessment overwhelming. For example, Forlin (2001) investigated 571 Australian classroom teachers to find the potential stressors when including students with moderate to severe disabilities. The quantitative study revealed that teachers' perceived professional competence was the most stressful issue. The teachers were "particularly stressed by concern that the education of the majority of children is not affected by their need to focus on the child with a disability" (p. 242). Forlin also found that teachers were worried about being held accountable for the educational needs of students with disabilities.

Given a lack of requisite expertise, training and resources reported by secondary school teachers, special education teachers are often sought as experts to take responsibility for the day-to-day implementation of inclusion. Washburn-Moses (2005, p. 151) describe special education teachers as "often overburdened with multiple and sometimes competing responsibilities" as they implement current best practices without adequate institutional support and the necessary resources. The job of the special education teacher is becoming more complex and many special education teachers experience stress due to the heavy workloads and tedious administration tasks (Antoniou, Polychroni, & Walters, 2000; Gersten et al., 2001).

In spite of a workload that makes it vital that special education teachers and secondary school teachers work together, there continues to be multiple obstacles. Special education teachers may have knowledge of "the impact of various disabilities on learning, and how engagement in learning can be enhanced and supported" (Palmer, 2006, p. 5) but at the same time lack the core subject knowledge and feel intimidated by the secondary school subject teachers. Additionally, in the Australian research conducted by Hay and Winn (2005) secondary school teachers reported they are not always comfortable or knowledgeable about collaborating or co-working with special education teachers and special education teacher aides. This qualitative study also highlighted the difficulties which can be associated with assigning responsibility for the teaching and learning of students with disabilities.

### **2.5.3 *The Students***

Research indicates peer acceptance is one of the most significant factors during the inclusion of students with disabilities. Effective inclusion and widespread social acceptance of students with disabilities can be inhibited by the attitude of students without disabilities. For example,

in a quantitative study involving 397 students in 11 different schools in England, Frederickson, Simmonds, Evans, and Soulsby (2007) detected a higher acceptance of former special school students than other students with disabilities. With the former group, the students without disabilities tended to take on the caring role. However, there were also reports of bullying with a trend for the students with disabilities to become victims. In Canada, an earlier qualitative investigation by Bunch and Valeo (2004) established that social and academic interaction between students with disabilities and their peers was influenced by the structure of the school. Students in schools which were inclusive reported the development of friendships and lower degrees of abusive behaviour in contrast to students attending schools where the majority of students with disabilities were segregated from their peers.

Students with and without disabilities would agree that the social world of the secondary school can be a daunting place. The Australian research conducted by Hay and Winn (2005) substantiated this belief with the special education students perceiving the secondary school to be a demanding and complex academic and social environment. Each day in secondary schools, students with and without disabilities are faced with multiple teachers. Gaps in student social skills are more pronounced in secondary schools. Added to this are the more complex webs of friendship and the need to develop new levels of social competency (Senge et al., 2000). To survive in this environment requires an extensive range of social skills for students with and without disabilities.

The development of these social skills can be very difficult for a number of students with disabilities. This is particularly evident in secondary schools where students with disabilities may have noticeably different behaviours from other students as well as having fewer friends to protect them from bullying. Humphrey (2008) points to the relationships students with disabilities may have with their peers which can be supportive or a barrier when including them in the secondary school. Depending on their personality and the environment of the school, a number of students with disabilities may be supported by their peers. However, students with disabilities who are without the support which was enjoyed in the primary school, often find the environment of the secondary school to be a particularly unfriendly place (Humphrey, 2008).

Ultimately, students with and without disabilities work best when they share praise, comfort, happiness and humour with people they like and respect. As Seyle (1976) suggests, learning to live with other people is one of the most stressful aspects of life. Students with disabilities can face many challenges in secondary school. Recently, O'Rourke and Houghton (2008, p. 235) found in their research in Western Australian secondary schools that students with disabilities appear to be caught between their desire to "find academic success within a curriculum invariably mismatched with their skill repertoire and their need to be accepted and respected by peers."

#### **2.5.4 Curriculum**

The secondary school and the classroom teachers rely on the curriculum of a respective subject when preparing work for students in the academic or vocational streams. A curriculum can thus be described as a hierarchical ordering used to direct student access to knowledge (Moss, 2006). When referring to the Australian secondary school curriculum, Teese and Polesel (2002, pp. 12-13) describe it as a "system of production, consuming physical and symbolic resources and producing outcomes in the form of access to jobs, careers and further education". Evaluation of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment provides evidence that the interests, skills, knowledge and experiences of diverse groups are central features in the design of learning (Education Queensland, 2005, p. 3). As a result, the secondary school curriculum becomes a map that will guide the teacher and students through a number of examinations which often determine available career options.

Due to their identified disability, it is often the secondary students with disabilities who find it difficult to successfully complete each stage of the curriculum. The pace of instruction required to cover the syllabus objectives in an academic year has continued to increase (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001) particularly when it is related to national testing. However, according to Foreman (2008, p. 26) there is "no school system which mandates that all students should follow the same curriculum or achieve the same outcomes." The responsibility is on mainstream secondary teachers to accept this and use their time and skills to modify a very complex curriculum. Failure to accept this necessity for adjustments and modification may mean that teachers are unable to maintain a perceived level of commitment to the educational growth of every student in the classroom.

For special education teachers working in the secondary school, knowledge of the curriculum is a persistent concern. The expectation is special education teachers will support students in a range of subjects and year levels. To accomplish this objective, they require the content knowledge and skills to assist the mainstream teacher in adapting work for the included student. As well as having a working knowledge of the mainstream curriculum, they are also expected to work with the life and vocational skills curriculum (Washburn-Moses, 2006). Special education teachers want the inclusion process to be successful but find that often stress “comes from the incongruence of the teacher’s expectations and beliefs” (Scheib, 2003, p. 135) and trying to work with the curricula of multiple subjects.

### ***2.5.5 Teaching Approaches***

Under the pressure of state wide assessment, the teaching approaches used by secondary teachers often focus on delivering the content of the curriculum in their specific subject. There is an expectation that they will move quickly through voluminous amounts of complex curricular material within an academic year. However, secondary teachers may find that there is a mismatch between the traditional theories of secondary teaching which emphasizes content-area knowledge and the demands placed on them by the diversity of abilities in the modern classroom (Carrington & Elkins, 2002b; Harry, 2005). In spite of the limitations in current teaching programs, many universities still continue to operate under a dual system of general and special education programs (Carroll, Forling & Jobling, 2003). Secondary school teachers, for that reason, may find they do not have the knowledge and skills to apply academic accommodations as well as individualise instruction for students with disabilities.

Many students with disabilities are unable to cope with the traditional transmissive teaching approach that can be dominant in secondary schools. According to Lane et al. (2004, p. 174), “secondary students with deficient academic, social and behavioural skills or whose skill levels differ markedly from normative levels are at risk for short and long-term negative outcomes.” Without the necessary support, many students with disabilities are unable to achieve academically at the same level as their peers. In a culture where successful completion of tasks is expected of all students, students with disabilities may find the situation extremely stressful.

Compounding the problem is the vast number of students seen by secondary school teachers, every day. Most teachers have only limited daily contact with the students as classes are

scheduled in set blocks of time (Sparling, 2002; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). Martinez and Humphreys (2006) portray an environment ruled by a timetable which makes it especially difficult to get to know the strengths and needs of individual students. As the design, selection and use of particular teaching approaches arise from the perceptions and knowledge of learning and learners (Ainscow & Kaplan, 2005), many secondary teachers are more likely to apply general accommodations rather than individual adjustments.

In order to provide individual accommodations and differentiate instruction, secondary school teachers and special education teachers require an opportunity to discuss programs, assessment practices, resources and the organisation of activities. Pearce and Forlin (2005) described collaboration between secondary school teachers and special education teachers as an essential part of an inclusion program. Secondary schools must endeavour to develop “collaborative partnerships of teachers who bring a range of expertise to these endeavours” (Cole & McLeskey, 1997, p. 14). Additionally, secondary school teachers are obliged to come to grips with exposure of personal and professional vulnerabilities that can occur when team work is involved (Federico et al., 1999). Without this opportunity to engage in co-teaching and planning, Carpenter and Dyal (2007) identified special education teachers as often being relegated to the role of teacher aide.

To engineer a supportive atmosphere of collaboration does take diligence, effort and training. Robinson and Riddle Buly (2007) argue that although teachers should learn these skills before entering the profession, teacher education programs have not always successfully modelled the skills. In a study using their own university departments in the United States of America, the researchers found mainstream educators and special education educators believed that there were differences in pedagogy, learning theories and assessment between the two departments. However, semi-structured dialogue during informal meetings showed that there were actually misunderstandings around language used within each discipline. According to Robinson and Riddle Buly, these language differences highlight the need for ongoing dialogue between mainstream teachers and special education teachers.

Fundamentally, the teaching approaches used by secondary school teachers and special education teachers are a critical component of any classroom. Teachers who hold the belief that they are an important factor in improving student outcomes are “more likely to deliver a connected curriculum, with high intellectual quality and high levels of student engagement”

(Education Queensland, 2005, p. 4). The positive performance of students will increase teaching self-confidence thus making any stressful incidents less threatening (Edwards, Guppy, & Cockerton, 2007). However, when students fail to achieve success, there is a danger the teacher will believe that it is a personal failure because they have not maintained the optimal level of efficiency and commitment. Greenglass and Burke (2003, p. 215) advise that “low student success may lead to feelings of diminished personal accomplishment because the teachers perceive themselves as ineffective in helping students to learn”. Teachers question their teaching approaches and, believing they are not competent; begin to find the management of the classroom very stressful.

Inclusion has meant mainstream teachers and special education teachers require an increased knowledge and understanding of appropriate curricular and instructional modification. Robinson (2002) found in research there was a shared belief that all students are capable of learning. In Queensland, Education Queensland recognizes there is a responsibility to “make adjustments for students with disabilities to enable them to access the curriculum, achieve curriculum outcomes and participate in school life (The State of Queensland, Department of Education and Training, 2010).” Inclusion of students without adopting these appropriate instructional strategies and providing resources would be a failure to acknowledge the environment of a secondary school classroom in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Additionally, failure to adopt the appropriate instructional strategies and resources may impact on the behaviour of students with disabilities who, unable to achieve success in the classroom, may seek to gain attention through negative behaviour.

### ***2.5.6 Behaviour Management***

The behaviour of the majority of students in the secondary school is linked to the characteristics of adolescence. As pointed out by Klein (1997), adolescent students are going through a period of transition which is characterised by the accelerated change in cognition, social and psychological functioning. Added to this change is the marked physical restructuring of puberty. With the students being a major factor in contributing to the challenges of secondary schools (Pearce & Forlin, 2005), the changes experienced by adolescence play an important role. In the years between entering and leaving secondary school, the impact of these changes on the teachers and the students can be extremely noticeable.

The personal transition through adolescence can affect the emotional, social, sexual, physical and academic development of the student. Even under the best of circumstances, academics tend not to be of primary interest with many of these adolescents. Teachers are placed in a position where, in spite of unenthusiastic responses, they are obliged to capture and hold the attention of the students. The students must be persuaded to complete the set work as well as develop the skills to work constructively together (Lovey, 2002). Abel and Sewell (1999, p. 295) concluded that “effective delivery of a productive education requires that teachers meet demands and cope with potential threats to their psychological and physical well-being, whatever the source.”

In the modern secondary classroom, management and discipline are major concerns for most teachers, especially beginning teachers. Kokkinos (2007) described effective classroom management as providing an order that is necessary for the instruction of students. The ability to effectively manage the classroom is critical to student success and to personal professional accomplishments. When teachers are unable to effectively manage classrooms, student behaviour becomes a frequently acknowledged stressor. For example, in 2006 the Teachers Union of Ireland used data from 1121 questionnaires completed by teachers in vocational, community and comprehensive schools and colleges to capture the state of student discipline as experienced by teachers. Forty-four percent of the teachers described discipline among students as leaving them either “quite stressed” or “completely stressed” (Teachers Union of Ireland, 2006, p. 26).

The teaching of students with disabilities in the teenage years is known to be especially challenging. As adolescents they are already experiencing the natural physiological and hormonal changes that occur in early adolescence and these can add to the potential for an increase in behavioural concerns (Brackenreed & Barrett, 2006). Forlin (2001) in her Australian research confirmed this potential for high levels of stress particularly when teaching teenage students with disabilities who present with challenging behaviours. As well as experiencing the range of adolescent emotions, some students with disabilities will also find it extremely difficult to express their feelings at the changes in their bodies and lives. Another obstacle when teaching students with disabilities which was highlighted by Mastropieri and Scruggs (2001) is the inconsistent success with strategies formally used effectively for management and discipline in the primary school.



Teachers are responsible for the teaching and learning within their classrooms. They “are expected to ensure the orderly conduct of classes” (Naring et al., 2006, p. 303) and to provide learning tasks related to their subject area. Special Education teachers because of their skills in “proactive, prosocial and positive skill building profile of consistency and technical competence” (Bryer et al., 2005, p. 32) are often assigned teaching tasks associated with students who frequently exhibit socially unacceptable behaviours. At the same time, Dorman (2003) found that there can be a strong relationship with the classroom environment and emotional exhaustion. Even though some teachers can be involved in major incidents, many more are involved in insidious day-to-day classroom incidents (Axup & Gersch, 2008). Over a period of time, these insidious day-to-day classroom incidents can lead to the cumulative stress. Usually, the teachers do not snap at being consistently challenged and abused but internalize which, in turn, can lead to burnout.

### ***2.5.7 Administrative Support for inclusion***

The administrative leadership and support provided for students with disabilities has become a vital component in any inclusion process in the secondary school. Roland and Galloway (2004, p. 244) point out that the importance of leadership has been recognized in many studies and “lies partly in its direct relationship to teachers’ experience of job satisfaction and stress at work and partly in its probable indirect impact, via teachers, on pupils’ behaviour and progress.” Administrators can set the tone of the school culture to including students with disabilities by how the special education program is viewed (Gersten et al., 2000). Thus, the administration that is committed to supporting inclusion will make it an integral part of a school’s vision, ethos, values, culture and policy.

The principal as leader of the administration team is the key stakeholder in supporting the implementation of strategies which assist students with disabilities. Martinez and Humphreys (2006, p. 15) suggest that “principals can be especially effective in setting a climate of responsibility, concern and willingness to provide students with appropriate accommodation.” Yet, this process is not always adequately understood by school administration (Sindelar et al., 2006) with support, interest and knowledge of the administration for students with disabilities varying from school to school (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000).

Consequently, school administrators have a critical role to play in the inclusion process particularly in the provision of human and materials resources. Research has focused mainly

on the roles and responsibilities of mainstream and special education teachers (Spedding, 2008). However, teachers need to know that they have support from administration to do their job, know what is expected of them and have opportunities to learn about the students as well as improve their skills (Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999). Research indicates that schools where the administration supports the inclusion process by providing in-service opportunities and time for collaboration between teachers are more likely to have committed teachers (Sindelar et al., 2006; Turnbull et al., 1999). In contrast, the results of a perceived lack of support from the school administration were highlighted by Roland and Galloway (2004) in a qualitative study in Norwegian primary schools when they discovered a noticeable link between poor leadership and teacher stress.

A positive attitude to the inclusion of students with disabilities is usually a reflection of the administrative support characterised by the availability of human and material resources. These positive attitudes 'shrink' in keeping with diminishing resources (Avramidis et al., 2000; Vlachou, 1997). Inclusion of students in secondary schools can claim a noticeable percentage of a school's resources. However, strategic and equitable use of available resources to enhance inclusive practice (Munro, 2009) can be achieved by effective leadership from administrators and the continuing support of parents.

### **2.5.8 *The Parents***

When families are involved in their children's education, the students achieve more, stay in school longer and engage in school more completely. Thus, the active involvement of parents in the learning process of their children is central to effective learning and development (Engelbrecht et al., 2003). According to Murray, Curran, and Zellers (2008), the value of parent/ teacher partnerships in education is reflected in the laws, policies and professional guidelines for teachers. Similarly, there is documented evidence from research studies that focus on the benefits of a collaborative relationship between school and home (Yssel et al., 2007). However, establishing an effective parent/ teacher partnership can be extremely difficult to achieve in secondary schools where increased levels of student independence is the norm.

In forming a partnership between parents and teachers, teachers need to acknowledge that some parents are not totally involved in the children's education. As Ashman (2009) explains, parental involvement appears linked to a perspective of school which was often formed

during a parent's own school days. A number of parents would not have happy memories of their own schooling or, based on their own experiences, find it difficult to comprehend the inclusion of students with disabilities into the secondary classrooms of their youth. Parents may also be facing financial and family commitments which can impact on their ability to be actively involved in the learning process of their child.

All parents whether involved or not bring a wide variety of cultural and economic experiences into the school environment. Aware of this, Carrington (2007a, p. 29) recommends "respect for differences and diversity in values and actions in families." As a result, teachers must be aware that misunderstanding, miscommunication and a lack of knowledge and skills can hinder relationships between teachers and parents (Keyes, 2000). This challenge is particularly apparent when working with parents of students with disabilities.

Among parents of students with disabilities, inclusion into the secondary school has become an accepted procedure for their children. Conner and Ferri (2007) believe many parents are aware of the low academic expectations associated with special schools. These parents are convinced of the benefits of inclusion and view placement in the mainstream classroom as an entitlement. According to Forbes (2007), there is also a perception that 'inclusion' as a descriptor avoids negative status and therefore the child's educational needs will be met. The expectation on entering secondary school is that the student will continue to experience, with the child's peers, the same quality and quantity of educational opportunities and social experiences that were available within the primary school.

In practice, the inclusion of students with disabilities into secondary schools can create difficulties for parents and teachers. Hay and Winn (2005) in their case study of one Queensland secondary school found that many of the comments in their data sets suggested some level of communication and collaboration difficulty between parents and teachers. Similarly, Bryer, Grimbeek, Beamish, and Stanley (2004, p. 104) put forward situations where there can be conflicting views in different areas including the "appropriateness of education services ... [and] social context for learning." For example, teachers may question the appropriateness of including a specific student with disabilities in the secondary school mainstream classroom and not in a special school.

In order to counter the difficulties of inclusion, there is a need for ongoing communication between parents and teachers. Angell, Stoner, and Sheldon (2008, p. 161) described interactions of parents of children with disabilities with teachers as being “more frequent, more intense and of a different nature” than interactions between parents of students without disabilities. For almost all parents, it is an ordeal to sit in a meeting to discuss the problems of their child (Lovey, 2002) particularly when the student has a disability. The meeting may be an everyday event for many of the school staff but for parents it can present as a major threat to their self-esteem as parents.

Parents of students with disabilities may also feel threatened by the authority of the school. Often, the parents are unfamiliar with special education procedures and relevant language. Feeling disenfranchised in meetings (Yssel et al., 2007), they believe the teachers have ‘expert power’ (Turnbull et al., 1999) and are reluctant to question school personnel about the education of their child. As a result, Murray et al. (2008) emphasize the vital necessity of parents and professionals having parity in educational decisions with each contribution of equal value.

The important role which teachers play in making sure parents have parity in educational decisions must be highlighted. Teachers will continue to play a very central role in involving parents in the education of their child. Ainscow (1999, p. 218) defined inclusion as the process whereby emphasis is placed on increasing the participation of students with disabilities and reducing any exclusion from “the cultures, curricula and communities of their local school not forgetting that education involves many processes that occur outside of schools.” By involving the parents, teachers can work towards providing an education that engages all aspects of the student’s daily activities. Communication with the parents can also ensure that the school is providing specific support related to the impact of the individual student’s disability on learning (Maras & Aveling, 2006).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

For teachers working in secondary schools, changes in their work environment has led to teaching a diverse and demanding range of student abilities. At the same time, they are faced with an unreasonable workload as well as the multiple roles associated with teaching adolescents. They continue to be held accountable by school administration, parents, students and community members as they build on skills and knowledge previously learnt in primary

schools. Hargreaves (2003) argues that teachers are in a position where they must prepare students for a changing world which can have many opportunities for economic improvement but is also a world characterised by growing social instability.

This changing world has brought many differences to the education of students with disabilities. Changes in community values have meant that many of these students are no longer educated in a segregated school system but have joined their peers in the mainstream classrooms. However, there has been mixed reactions to the implementation of inclusive practices in the classrooms of the secondary schools from teachers working in this environment. Although most teachers would agree with this philosophy of inclusion, there are concerns about implementing and evaluating effective programs for students with disabilities (Vinson Inquiry, 2002) and the challenges that must be faced on a daily basis. Therefore, in this study, the attitude of the teachers to inclusion, the perceived challenges involved in the process together with possible connections between what is perceived as challenging and teacher stress will be investigated.

The next chapter will seek an appropriate research methodology in order to explore these questions. It is acknowledged that in a qualitative study the provision of a thorough account of the methods used is particularly important. The authenticity of the study and the degree, to which its findings may be considered truthful and consistent representation of the participants' realities, will depend largely on the quality of the methods to be used to obtain and analyse the data. Therefore, a decision will be made on the method of data gathering and data analysis as well as reference made to the constructs and issues which may become problematic.

## *Chapter Three*

### *The Research Design and Methods*

#### **3.0 Introduction**

...our task as inquirers in the human sciences is that of understanding the other. The 'other' may be another person, a practice, a culture, a text, a tradition, an event and so on, all of which have in common that they appear to us as in need of being understood. That is, when we ask ourselves 'what am I to make of that? (some action, event, practice etc) the answer is not forthcoming, for the action, event, practice or person appears unfamiliar to us, the meaning is cloudy and the import of what is seen or heard is not particularly clear. Thus, we must resort to some kind of interpretation, some kind of reading, analysis or construal of meaning. (Schwandt, 2004, p. 31)

As Schwandt indicates, we must use interpretation if we wish to gain some understanding of the teachers' perspective of inclusion of students with disabilities into the secondary school environment. Thus, my research success will build on how effectively I can formulate, comprehend and represent the data I have obtained (Peshkin, 2001a). Using qualitative research, the focus will be on learning the meaning (Creswell, 2009) that the teachers hold about inclusion, not the meaning of the researcher or that expressed in the research literature. It becomes vital therefore, to offer an explanation of the methods used to obtain meaning from the stories told by the teachers.

The thrust of this chapter is to present an overview of the research philosophy, methodology and methods which will be used in this study. I plan to use the traditions of qualitative research to 'uncover the meanings of events in individual' lives" (Janesick, 2003, p. 217). As will be shown in the following sections, the methods of this naturalistic approach enable the researcher to investigate phenomena within its own context specific setting (Gray, 2009). Working with students with disabilities in a secondary school, I intend to combine several strategies within qualitative research to investigate the perspective of other teachers working in similar situations.

In order to present an explanation, this chapter has been separated into five connecting sections. Initially, I will provide an account of the experiences that have shaped how I see the world and, invariably, how these experiences influence my research. The second section will provide an explanation of the philosophical beliefs that formed the basis of the thesis design. In section three there will be an outline of the methodology used. Section four will focus on the particular research methods utilized. These methods will be described along with information on selection of the participants and the processes that were used for gathering data. Finally, the issues of ethics, political considerations, assumptions, bias and limitations will be considered.

### ***3.1 Knowing Myself and My Research Interests***

When conducting qualitative research, at the beginning of the research process it is essential to examine theoretical aspects. Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 31) argue that research is “guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feeling about the world and how it should be understood and studied”. Therefore, in order to better know myself and my interests, it is of value to reflect on the influences on my identity as a researcher and why I have made the choice to focus on this area of research.

#### ***3.1.1 Theoretical Perspective***

Within the different theoretical perspectives available when conducting research are the various strands of interpretivism. Interpretivism looks for “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Cotty, 1998, p. 67) where reality can be “viewed in terms of multiple constructions” (Green, 2002, p. 6). Gray (2009) explains the use of interpretivism as claiming there are differences between natural reality and social reality and therefore a need to use different types of research methods. The goal of interpretivists is to provide an “understanding of direct ‘lived experiences’ instead of abstract generalizations” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 19). Human action becomes meaningful as the researcher attempts to make sense of the social world of the participants in the study.

Amongst the various strands located within interpretivism is that of naturalistic inquiry. It is a culturally-driven approach to social research focusing on an explanation of the social events and processes within the research location (Green, 2002), which has a strong influence on the meanings within the gathered data. To gain these meanings using naturalistic inquiry, it is

essential to focus on the everyday non-contrived situation within which the events take place emphasising the importance of researcher-as-instrument (Anzul et al., 2001). Value-bound by the perspective of the researcher, the inquiry “develops an ideographic body of knowledge that describes individual cases (Gray, 2009, p. 25). As I believe in the concept of multiple, constructed realities and an approach which highlights “the voice of the individual within the complexities of a dynamic context located in time and place” (Green, 2002, p. 5), the use of naturalistic inquiry situated in the framework of theoretical perspective of interpretivism will be compatible with the strong human component of the study.

### ***3.1.2 Personal Perspective***

Ultimately, my view of the world is filtered by who I am, where I come from and what I believe in. As a working mother, my belief system and view of the world is influenced by members within my family and by experiences in the workplace. According to Scheurich (1994, p. 17) “how I see shapes, frames, determines and even creates what I see.” Crotty (1998, p. 66) extends this idea by suggesting that “different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world”. At the same time, our interactions with the world cause us to have certain beliefs (Avis, 2003). In view of this, the methods I use for the research become of secondary importance to answering questions about a personal basic belief system or view of the world. To gain that knowledge, I needed to bring forth my autobiographical past and reflect on the specific events and the sequence of events (Richardson, 1995) that had led me to begin this study.

At the time when I enrolled in the Doctoral program at James Cook University, I decided that it was time to surrender the fight to keep my middle child in school. The effects of birth complications and a life threatening case of meningitis had left him with physical and intellectual disabilities. At sixteen, he had spent his schooling in a series of special schools and special education units and in spite of the efforts of our family and the schools, his dislike of the different situations was reflected in his increasing socially unacceptable behaviour. As a special education teacher, I could empathise with the teachers but as a parent, I was aware of the frustrations felt by my son and other family members.

What changes needed to be made to the school system so that my son could be successfully included in a mainstream school? Why was his behaviour causing such stress to his teachers and to his family? At the many meetings with school personnel, my husband and I would



negotiate different approaches which the teachers appeared to be willing to try. We would leave the meeting feeling that a solution had been found but, inevitably, the result would be a telephone call from the school during which I would find myself offering professional reassurance to the teacher and agreeing as a parent that there would be consequences for my son's socially inappropriate behaviour. We believed that we were a supportive family and, in a number of cases, I had worked professionally with the teachers who were involved in his education. However, once he entered secondary school, it became even more apparent that a school system that promoted inclusion of students with disabilities was just not equipped to deal with my son's education. The human and physical resources necessary to modify his inappropriate social behaviour were present in the special school but not in the secondary school, which, in turn could provide the academic stimulation that, is often absent in a special school.

Professionally, I was discovering that there were also issues with the process of inclusion of students with disabilities into the secondary school environment. Students who had previously been taught in a separate school system were now part of the secondary school environment. In the early nineties, I had been transferred, as a special education teacher, from the special school to the secondary school Special Education Unit. I found there was limited integration and the students with disabilities spent the majority of their day in the self-contained classroom. By 2008, my role had changed in that I was expected to include and support the students with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms for the majority of their school day. The frequent comments of my colleagues upheld my belief that the increase of students with disabilities into the secondary school classrooms continues to have an impact on the human and physical resources of the school.

Mainstream teachers who had previously had little contact with the students enrolled in the Special Education Unit are now responsible for the educational outcomes of students with disabilities. It is expected that the "curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are aligned and meet the needs" (Education Queensland, 2005, p. 3) of a very diverse group of students. The self contained classrooms are still in use but mainly for small groups of students working on modified work from the mainstream classes and a small group of students with complex support needs. This has resulted in a situation where it is often difficult to stretch the human and physical support between the mainstream classrooms and the Special Education Unit.

Unfortunately, it is often the teachers from the Special Education Unit who must 'be in two places at one time'.

Personally, I found the method used to facilitate the inclusion process into the secondary school was causing health problems. The increasing deficiency in human and physical resources impacted negatively on my ability to function effectively as a special education teacher. At a medical appointment, I was diagnosed with a stress related illness. It was suggested that I take leave and begin a process of investigating, with professional assistance, the reasons why I was not coping as a special education teacher in a secondary school. This time away from the classroom provided an opportunity to examine my commitments to my family and to teaching. A year of part-time teaching as well as university tutoring which followed provided a welcome break from the constant physical and mental demands of working with students with disabilities.

The break from full time teaching coincided with my daughter gaining a postgraduate degree at James Cook University and the completion of grade 12 by my youngest son. They had reacted differently to the change in family dynamics due to the demands of their brother. My daughter had moved out of the family home to a series of share houses but still kept in close contact. The schooling of my youngest son had involved a number of school transfers until my husband and I found a small government primary school which understood the family dynamics and could provide a supportive environment. His secondary schooling in a private secondary college had continued in this tradition resulting in the completion of grade 12.

I returned to full time teaching with an awareness of the dangers of over commitment either at home or at school. The personal health experiences, considered with hindsight, have enhanced, in a number of ways, my professional and personal development. I have become a teacher educator as well as teaching students with challenging behaviours. Additionally, my adult son with disabilities still lives at home. However, I now know the dangers of allowing my family life or my professional life to consume my personal life. Should the symptoms of stress appear, I know that it is time to reassess the importance of my daily activities and to revise the skill of saying 'no'.

It was increasingly evident that my view of the world was filtered by my life experiences. In the process of relating my personal history, I became more conscious of my own situation and

its connection to how I would monitor the way in which I intended to deal with the research process (Koch, 1998). As a parent and as a teacher, I have been a witness to the positives and negatives of the inclusion process so it was a natural consequence that my selection and work in this area of research would be influenced by these experiences.

### **3.2 *Insider Research***

When a researcher works in an organisation while researching that organisation, it is known as insider research (Coghlan, 2001). In these circumstances, the researcher operates as a member of an organisational system with knowledge of “body language, semiotics and slogan systems operating within the cultural norms of the organisation” (Edwards, 2002, p. 71). The researcher possesses insight of the system (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) and is in the position to achieve “understanding in use” rather than “reconstituted understanding” (Coghlan, 2003, p. 465). With this pre-understanding as well as full membership of the organisation, there is often access to a depth and richness of data which may not be available to a researcher outside the organisation.

Working as a special education teacher at a government school while gathering data from my colleagues in other schools who were also employees of the government system, I am considered an insider researcher. I have chosen to do this research while remaining a member within my desired career path inside the organisation (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). At the same time, working as a classroom teacher, I am not too much of an insider. According to Humphrey (2007), researchers working in official positions run the risk of simply reflecting upon the phenomena which that person produced in the first place. As a researcher I am interested in the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary school but as a staff member, I am only one part of this inclusion process.

After many years of teaching special education in a secondary school, I know and understand the system. I possess the “knowledge, insights and experience ... not only to theoretical understanding of organizational dynamics, but also to the lived experience [of the organisation]” (Coghlan, 2001, p. 51). I know the jargon, who to ask for information or who to avoid and can list many of the teachers who will agree to be involved. My knowledge includes the behaviour and attitudes of individual teachers (Edwards, 2002) especially teachers working in special education. Holding a degree of insider status will have implications for the productive interactions with the teachers (Hodkinson, 2005) as because of

my own personal experiences, I will have empathy with the teachers as I listen to the retelling of their experiences in the interviews.

An important part of the work in this research, though, will be negotiating the challenges of researching within the organisation. One danger is that of conflict in roles or the chance of overwork. As Coghlan (2001) implies, defining the role of employee and the role of researcher when applying to one person can be difficult, awkward and may even become confusing. I may find it difficult to stand back from my role as employee in order to assess and critique the organisation (Coghlan, 2007). Added to this danger is the risk that being involved in two roles may affect work and social relationships with fellow employees as the researcher is no longer simply a colleague (Edwards, 2002) and can be accused of ‘spying’ on the colleagues. Ultimately, there is a danger of being in the situation where, once the research has been completed, the researcher is unable to continue working in what has been shown as inefficient operation of the organisation.

In spite of the difficulties, this type of research can be feasible particularly when doing part time research in conjunction with full time employment. Gray (2009) argues that working internally within the organisation can be beneficial as there will be easier access to human resources. As an employee of the organisation, I will only be constrained by responsibilities related to my employment. At the same time, as an insider researcher, I will be a necessary part of my own research (DeLyser, 2001). Insider research is a reflective process so it is essential that I study not only the participants in the research but also myself. I need to look at the ways my own experiences influence the way in which I investigate this topic by abstractly hypothesising in a more detached way the focus of my research and how the gathered data including my reflective journal might affect my interpretation. I am part of the system, yet I need to “stand back” so I can investigate that same system.

As an insider researcher, I will need to explore a number of issues even before I begin the research. These include:

- the practical problems of conducting research as an insider within the framework of a state government education system;

- the danger of assuming I know all the information about the situation and not continuing to ask probing questions to expose the current thinking;
- my access to information, sometimes sensitive, when conducting the interviews and the ‘danger’ that I could, without realising, make that information public or use it in my own teaching area;
- the difficulties of managing friendships with teachers particularly when socialising after work hours if they are also participating in the research;
- my personal subjectivity due to being the parent of a child with disabilities who has tried and failed an inclusion program during his secondary education;
- my professional subjectivity as a survivor of work related stress who has subsequently established a claim for work related stress which, in itself, is a complex task (Guthrie, 2006). The claim was later accepted as legitimate by WorkCover, Queensland;
- the degree of independence I will be given when working as an insider researcher and
- the future utilisation of insider research particularly when I wish to publish the results of my research as journal articles.

There can be disadvantages in working so closely to the collection and analysis of data. Undertaking a research project in one’s own workplace has the potential to become political and may even be considered subversive (Coghlan, 2001) Therefore, I must be continually aware of the impact of organisational politics on my research. Previous incidents as a special education teacher have shown me the power of certain individuals in the organisation and the threat of punitive action against anyone who questions the system. From these experiences, I know it is important to be vigilant in handling the politics of the organization as well as balancing my future career against my actions as a researcher (Coghlan, 2007; Coghlan & Holian, 2007). I must be constantly cautious about what I say and to whom when I move from my research role to the role of special education teacher. Therefore, I have decided to always

take into careful consideration the relative importance of the data should I want to make public any opposing points of view.

As an insider researcher, I am by definition both a researcher and part of the organisation. Although I do not have a comprehensive knowledge of the four secondary schools, as a special education teacher working in a secondary school, I am in a position to share knowledge with other special education teachers within my network. At the same time, my insider status will help me understand the personalities, interactions and responses of the secondary school teachers and special education teachers (Ravitch & Wirth, 2007). As a researcher working as an insider, Macartney (2005) reveals that access to the intricacies of the participants' experiences will be more open and available. It is therefore appropriate and necessary to use a research approach that draws heavily upon my personal experience as an insider within the organisation.

### **3.3 *Choosing a Methodology***

When beginning this educational research, I was alerted to the continuing debate between proponents of qualitative and quantitative research. Sikes (2004, p. 18) referred to the broad distinctions between the two paradigms as “the scientific, positive, objective, quantitative paradigm and the interpretative, naturalistic, subjective, qualitative paradigm”. Where quantitative researchers seek statistical association, prediction and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers seek instead illumination, understanding and extrapolation to similar situations. Although both quantitative and qualitative researchers are concerned with the participant's point of view, qualitative researchers argue that they can get closer to the participant's perspective. Qualitative research “is about – the understanding of someone else's world – and where the researcher is concerned with *discovery* (his original italics)” (Gillham, 2005, p. 45).

Researchers usually look for a research paradigm that caters for their beliefs and values and with which they felt comfortable. The nature of the subject matter under study and its fit to the research methodology and inherent methods usually determines the relevant research approach (Flick, 2002; Green, 2002; Pring, 2000). Strongly influenced by my own experiences as a special education teacher and as a parent, I am interested in discovering other teachers' perspectives on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary school. Thus, the method of inquiry which I use must be capable of coping with subjective human

experiences. I want to keep the teachers whole in documenting their experiences in including students with disabilities. As a result of these factors, the study will be undertaken using the qualitative approach.

Although the term qualitative is a generic term for a variety of research approaches, there are common characteristics. Mason (2002, p. 3) defines qualitative research in the following manner:

- Grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly ‘interpretivist’ in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted.
- Based on methods of data generation which are both flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced.
- Based on methods of analysis, explanation and argument building which involve understandings of complexity, detail and context.

Creswell’s definition conveys comparable ideas:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (1998, p. 15)

Qualitative research typically involves an emergent design. The purpose is to “to reveal both the processes by which people construct meaning about their worlds and to report what those meanings are” (Hull, 1997, p. 3). It seeks depth over breadth and attempts to learn the subtle nuances of life experiences. Thus, my focus is on understanding the everyday subjective experiences of the teachers as they encounter and are given responsibility for the educational outcomes of students with disabilities.

Qualitative can also involve a confusing number of different categories and descriptive headings. Gray (2009) stresses the strategies and data collection methods which are used in qualitative research can be highly flexible. He points to an ability to combine several strategies and methods within a research design. How it is done depends on the research paradigm adopted. Working in the naturalistic tradition, I will use elements from qualitative research and narrative inquiry. The strategies will include a short written questionnaire, semi structured interviews where the emphasis will be on stories of incidents involving students with disabilities and ongoing observations of the inclusion process in my secondary school which will be recorded in a reflective journal. Rich data will also be gathered on the setting for each interview namely the specific secondary school.

At the beginning of this study, I have a number of preconceived impressions based on my own experiences. These impressions will continue to evolve due to the influence of the research literature. As the design of the study develops, I will be able to base the inquiry, not only on my personal knowledge of teaching students with disabilities in a secondary school and the corresponding research literature but also on the viewpoints of the teachers who participate in the research. Overall, I aim to bring a humanistic perspective and an interest in the experiences of the participants (Anzul, Evans, King & Tellier-Robinson, 2001) to the study of the inclusion process in secondary schools.

### **3.4 *Guidelines for the Gathering of Data***

A research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry and second to methods for collecting empirical material. A research design situates the researcher in the empirical world and connects him or her to specific sites, persons, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material including documents and archives. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 34)

In recent years there has been increasing interest in teachers and the work they do in school. This interest usually relates to the desire to improve the learning outcomes of students through creating an environment that will assist in recruiting and maintaining a skilled and motivated teaching force (Day, 2001). Cortazzi (1993, p. 35) recommends:



to improve educational systems, curriculum reforms and classroom practice, ...we need to know more about teachers' perspectives. We need to know how teachers themselves see their situation, what their experience is like, what they believe and how they think.

The thoughts, perceptions, beliefs and experience of teachers, for that reason, are key factors when researching the complex aspects of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

There is an opportunity for research to make contributions towards changes in educational practice. Often meaning is constructed through story and, by encouraging teachers to talk about their teaching lives, it is possible to broaden the knowledge base of the educational process. To add to this knowledge base in the area of inclusion of students with disabilities, the following specific guidelines were set for the gathering of data.

### **3.5 *Choosing and Describing the Setting***

Regional North Queensland has been chosen for this study. Cho and Trent (2006, p. 329) propose that understanding of the participants' worldviews may be incomplete "without situating meanings in context". According to Green (2002), it is possible to place the voice of the individual within a context located in time and place. Therefore, when choosing and describing the setting for this study, reference must be made to the role which weather plays on the lifestyle in the tropical north. In this part of Australia, there is usually only two seasons – the wet season and the dry season. Although the weather during the majority of the year is pleasant, the summer months or wet season when the temperature is in the mid thirties (degrees Celsius) together with high humidity can negatively impact on the population. The lifestyle of people living in this area is very relaxed in comparison to the large cities of the south particularly during the hot summer months. Once this relaxed lifestyle has been experienced, a decision to settle in the region is made by many people resulting in a steady population growth and a growing cultural diversity.

Besides nominating the region for a study, the selection of the actual sites is another important aspect of any research design. Four specific North Queensland secondary schools are to be selected with each of these schools including a special education unit or a special education class. The schools are not meant to represent all secondary schools in North Queensland.

Secondary schools are not homogenous; they vary greatly in their social mix, academic achievement and behavioural ethos. Thus, the choice of these four specific schools assists in controlling environmental variations (Eisenhardt, 2002) between the secondary schools particularly in relation to dynamics and variations of the school population.

A further control to environmental variations is the choice of two secondary schools in the city and two secondary schools situated in separate large country towns. Although there are a total of seven government secondary schools in the city, the large country towns are each serviced by a single government secondary school. In both the city and the rural areas, a considerable percentage of the student population attends private secondary schools. Even though I do not work at any of the four nominated schools, working as a special education teacher, I can easily gain physical access to each of these sites. They are all within the same education region and in easy driving distance from the secondary school in which I am employed.

### **3.6**     *Participants*

Secondary school teachers work in noisy classrooms where diversity is the rule rather than the exception. They are under constant pressure to move quickly through voluminous amounts of complex curricular material with limited daily student contact (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001; Sparling, 2002). It is anticipated that they will supply quality learning opportunities for students who have a wide range of academic and social abilities in settings where instruction is often directed to large groups. At the same time, they are expected to deal with the accompanying accountability paperwork.

Added to the demands placed upon the teacher is the obligation to provide an appropriate educational program for students with disabilities. Teachers are expected to provide all students “with the explicit and scaffolded teaching they need for success in schooling and beyond” (Education Queensland, 2005, p. 3). Included in many of the secondary school classrooms in which they teach are students with intellectual impairments, physical impairments, hearing impairments, visual impairments, speech language impairments or autistic spectrum disorder as well as students with a mixture of disabilities and learning styles. These students continue to add to the challenge of providing an appropriate educational program.

To increase the range of interpretations obtained from the teachers, I will use purposive and directed sampling. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 210) recommends that “the object of the game is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavour”. Using this type of sampling, I am in a position to select 20 specific teachers who have the experience of teaching students with recognised disabilities in a secondary school and are willing to participate in the research process.

The selected teachers will be employed in or visit four secondary schools in North Queensland. At each of the four secondary schools, I will interview:

- a teacher whose major area of teaching is in the academic subjects
- a teacher whose major area of teaching is in non academic subjects
- a special education teacher and
- a teacher whose administrative duties include supervision of teachers working with students with disabilities.

Additionally, four advisory visiting teachers who work with students with disabilities at a number of the secondary schools will be interviewed during the period of data collection. These teachers are often observers of the inclusion process in the secondary schools as well as taking on the role of ensuring that the inclusion of students with disabilities is a positive process for each individual student and staff member. Although I will select teachers who are involved with students with disabilities, I am aware that research can be an interactive process. Therefore, each interview will be shaped by the personal history, gender and ethnicity of teachers involved as well as the setting in which the interview takes place (Koch, 1998).

### **3.7 Data Collection Methods**

Data collection methods matter because the analysis can be built from or limited by the available data. There are a number of different approaches to gathering data in qualitative research. Flick (2002) highlights the importance of choosing an approach which fits the

research questions, the character of the material required and the target group. It is also essential that the selected method suits the procedure to be used for interpreting the data.

I will use three data collection methods in this study. At each meeting, I will ask the teachers in this study to engage in two activities. Before beginning the actual interview, they will be given a very short written questionnaire to complete. This activity will be followed by the semi-structured interview. As I am working as an insider researcher, it is vital to continue to examine any personal and professional beliefs and to check if they are affecting the collecting of data. As a result, a reflective journal will also be used to help locate my identity, roles and relationships in the research process (Koch, 1998; Ravitch & Wirth, 2007).

### ***3.7.1 Questionnaires***

Questionnaires can be employed to gather information as well as establishing rapport and assisting in explaining the purpose of a research project. Wolf (1998) describes questionnaires as self-reporting instruments used for gathering information about variables of interest to a researcher. They can be long and detailed or concentrate on only gaining essential information (Best & Kahn, 1998). Answers to a set list of questions help the interviewer locate the interviewee in relation to people within similar environments (Patton, 2002).

At the beginning of the face-to-face interviews for this study, the teachers will complete a short written questionnaire. The five types of personal biographical information requested will include gender, age category, educational background and training, years of teaching experience, subject/ work area and special education qualifications (see Appendix A for a sample of the questionnaire). It is information that I will later use when analysing the data as I am very aware that each teacher comes to the interview with different life experiences. Being a visitor to each interview location, I will use the time required by the teachers to answer the written questions to prepare the recording equipment for the interview. At the same time, comments on completing the questions can be used to assist in establishing rapport and trust with the teachers which will be a priority (Vidovich, 2003). I can use the information from the questionnaire to help establish rapport and trust by encouraging the teachers to engage in a short conversation about their specialized teaching area. References to teachers we know and similar experiences with study would also be included in the discussion.

### 3.7.2 *Interviews*

What people present in the interviews is but the results of their perceptions, their interpretation of the world which is of extreme value to the researcher because one may assume that it is the same perceptions that inform their actions. (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 49)

Given that the aim of qualitative research is to understand the area under study from the perspective of those involved, interviewing is a frequent method of gaining access to these understandings. Interviews are deliberately created opportunities for interviewers and participants to talk about something of interest to the interviewer (Dingwall, 1997). According to Fontana and Frey (2008, p. 118), the interview is “one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow humans”. Brown and Dowling (1998) believe the use of interviews enables the researcher to investigate complex issues in detail, encourages the personal participation in the collection of data and provides an opportunity for the researcher to clarify, to probe and to prompt. Using a semi-structured interview allows for comparisons, provides the opportunity to move back and forth in time, to reconstruct the past, to interpret the present and to predict the future as well as keep the teachers focused on the topic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Scott et al., 2007).

Most people like to talk about themselves; they enjoy the sociability of a long discussion and are pleased that somebody is interested in them. The researcher provides a conversational partner who will give both attention and recognition. Teachers, in particular, want to share what they know. For some, it may be a novel experience as not many people outside the profession want to listen to teachers talk. The stories they tell are close to their everyday “lived experience” (Sands, 2004, p. 64). Therefore, the interview process provides a platform for teachers to talk at length to someone outside their family, friends or close colleagues about their experiences (Seidman, 1998). Through talking about their experiences, they are given an opportunity to reflect on their work and to inform others of successful strategies they have used in their classrooms (Knight, 2001). As well, the interview provides an opportunity to stand back and talk about their interpretations and reactions to past incidents.

Part of the study will involve the teachers being interviewed, individually at a negotiated time and setting. My main request is that the venue has as little extraneous noise as possible

because the noise will affect the recording quality. Due to the majority of the interviews taking place during the North Queensland summer; this issue is particularly relevant when it involves air conditioners in classrooms or coffee shops. In this study, the interview will be used as a turn taking system during which I will propose topics (Dingwall, 1997) in the form of predetermined questions. Each interview will last between forty-five minutes and one hour. The schedule aims to cover the research questions but, at the same time, the teachers will be given the opportunity to guide the agenda by the extent of their enthusiasm for the topic. The onus will continue to be on the researcher to ensure that the teachers are comfortable with the interview process.

Teachers will be encouraged to explore issues from their own perspective and on their own terms. In particular, they will be asked “to talk through specific experiences in their lives rather than what they ‘would do’, or what they have ‘generally done’” (Mason, 2002, p. 64). In order to gain an authentic insight into these primary experiences of the teachers (Miller & Glassner, 2004), I will act as an informed learner who is there to learn more about what happens when students with disabilities are included in the secondary school environment and the sense that teachers make of these experiences (deMarrais, 2004; Seidman, 1998). The purpose of the interviews is not to change the respondent’s attitudes and behaviour but rather to reveal them.

Semi-structured interviews will be chosen as the major data collection method. In order to gather information on the teachers’ experiences, open-ended questions will be used. The structuring of these questions will be guided by previous research on the inclusion of students with disabilities and the impact that this process has on teachers (see Appendix B for a list of the questions). At each interview, I will ask the same major questions but keep the freedom to alter the sequence (Vidovich, 2003), to request elaboration on an answer or to probe for more information as dependent on the teachers’ response. As an insider researcher, I will be able to use the “internal jargon and draw on their own experiences in asking questions” (Coghlan, 2001, p. 51) and in following up on replies. Additionally, this technique together with the use of semi-structured interviews will provide the opportunity to continually check that my interpretation of their answer is correct.

The focus of the interviews is to encourage teachers to describe their positive and negative experiences when including students with disabilities in the secondary school environment.

This use of semi-structured interviews makes it possible “for comparisons and reliability across interviewers and across time and kept the teachers focused on the topic” (Scott et al., 2007, p. 40). As I move through the interviews, I will be able to analyse the answers to the key questions to compare and contrast each teacher’s attitude to inclusion, the challenges in the different secondary schools and if the interviewed teacher believed the perceived challenges are adding to existing stress levels. It is anticipated that there will be many similarities in each teacher’s answer to the same question.

The process of interviewing is never devoid of some form of emotional commitment from both the interviewer and the interviewee. McCracken (1988, p. 27) refers to participation in this type of interviewing being “time consuming, privacy endangering, and intellectually and emotionally demanding”. As well as being in possession of information, the participants are people with emotions and feelings (Sikes, 2004) and may find the process stressful (Creswell, 2009). As an insider researcher, I will have a common bond with many of the teachers which will help establish trust and respect and may lead to a more in depth interview. Yet, I have to also be aware that the conflict between the roles of colleague, researcher and parent could be intellectually and emotionally challenging.

### **3.7.3 *Reflective Journal***

In the context of insider research, reflection is a central concept and of vital concern. Holliday (2002) explains the use of reflection as a way in which the researcher capitalizes in a methodical way on the complexities of researching within the research setting. Reflection means “thinking about the conditions for what one is doing, investigating the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement affects interaction” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 245) with the area of research. The researcher, working in the naturalistic paradigm of inquiry, is not only an observer but disturbs the research setting and is also disturbed by it (Mehra, 2001). Thus, throughout a study, it is necessary to systematically reflect on identities, roles and relationships so as to work towards validity and authentic inquiry (Ravitch & Wirth, 2007). “The subjectivities of the researcher *and* of those being studied” (Flick, 2002, p. 6) become part of the research process.

Within the reflective journal, it is possible for the researcher to write about his/her actions and record observations of the study. Human beings are self-reflective and able to use their minds to reflect on actions rather than just act (Monk, 2001). Thus, keeping this type of journal is

seen as an essential part of interpretative research (Koch, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe one aspect of a reflective journal as a kind of diary in which the researcher records what is going on whilst doing the research. Humphrey (2007, pp. 18-19) found during her research that

a journal absorbs our disturbing thoughts and feelings without pronouncing judgement upon them; it allows us to draw pictures in accordance with the language of our soul; [and] it also stores these archives for our own subsequent processing.

During this study, I will record notes in the reflective journal as a researcher, a special education teacher and a parent. To develop critical thinking skills, the journal will use a framework where the situation is described, interpreted and evaluated in relation to the research questions. Included in the journal will be personal anecdotes, stories, descriptions of work-related problems and field notes written at the completion of each interview. Keeping the reflective journal will help to define and redefine the purpose of this research, locate and reconstruct personal attitudes and beliefs and orientate myself to teachers within the secondary schools. It will also provide a link to the perspectives and stories shared in each interview. The journal may even serve as a cathartic outlet for the tensions and stress that are present with inclusion in the secondary school classroom.

My continued reflection will also include my observations on my ongoing participation as an insider in the inclusion process. These observations will document the transactions (Dingwall, 1997) between the secondary school teachers and special education teachers within my workplace. In this manner, the journal assists in locating self in the research process (Koch, 1998). At the same time, I will be doing justice to the variability of teachers as I perceive them over time (Peshkin, 2001a). Although these field notes are dependent on my recollection and interpretation of observed events, the notes from my personal observations of the inclusion process during my work as a special education teacher in a secondary school will help to compensate for this potential weakness. In spite of working in a different secondary school, many of my experiences will be similar to the participating teachers (Creswell, 2009). As Elbaz-Luwisch (1997, p. 75) points out, reflection when using qualitative research requires the researcher to “examine the context within which the research is carried out and its broader implications”. Thus, the journal will become my way of



examining my personal experiences, my biases, assumptions and beliefs about the inclusion process. When I reflect on my biases, I can then recognise those biases which may distort my understanding and replace them with those that help in being more objective.

In this examination of the inclusion process, my reflective journal will also be available to record notes from conversations with my critical friend. Carrington and Robinson (2004, p. 143) describe a critical friend as “someone outside the school who has been trusted to provide guidance and honest feedback”. The role of critical friend includes encouraging processes which will uncover deeper aspects of thinking (Carrington & Robinson, 2006). In the context of this thesis, a critical friend is a trusted ‘other’ who will ask thoughtful, sometimes provocative questions as well as offering critiques and suggestions after listening to a summary of the data collected. As a psychologist, my critical friend will be able to make relevant suggestions based on her experiences and expertise and to assist me in learning from my own experiences (Ainscow, 2000). Her comments will help in systematically reflecting on identities, roles and relationships so as to work towards validity and authentic inquiry (Ravitch & Wirth, 2007).

Maintaining this reflective journal will help me to locate the teachers and myself in the busy, even at times, chaotic world of the secondary school. The comments and information in it have the potential to become data in their own right thus forming part of the interpretation (Flick, 2002). At the same time, the information collected serves the important role of providing support not only to the credibility but also the dependability of the study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). Jasper (2005, p. 256) proposes that “trustworthiness is enhanced when researchers describe and interpret their experiences, and identify the events, influences and actions influencing their research.” In using this reflective journal, I will follow the suggestions of Koch (1998) who argues that the whole research process is a reflective one and all stages in the research process need to be seriously monitored.

### **3.8 *Data Analysis Methods***

In the subsequent analysis phase of the study, data obtained from the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and reflective journal will be combined. The three different data collection techniques will result in three discrete but interrelated sets of data. Using three interrelated sets of data assists in increasing the validity of the study and provides added depth

to the investigation of inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools. This form of triangulation means combining several qualitative methods (Gray, 2009) and allows the weaknesses in one data collection technique to be compensated by another technique. Every technique used for collecting data has certain weaknesses and these weaknesses, inherent to the techniques, may result in a potential limitation to the validity of an investigation. To help strengthen the study, therefore, data will be collected and analysed from these three techniques. The aim is for each weakness exposed by one technique, for compensation to be provided by the remaining two. Bloor (1997) argues that data from this replication of findings by different methods can help to minimize the possibility of findings being the result of a particular analysis bias.

The semi-structured interview, while being a relatively robust data collection technique, has two weaknesses in the context of this study. Firstly, because the interview will be guided by researcher-determined questions, there will be limited opportunities for the teachers to present their experiences in their own way. Secondly, data collection will also be limited by the time available to conduct the interviews. However, these weaknesses will be compensated by the ongoing reflective journal which will be used to capture contextual information relating to the individual interviews as well as my own personal observation of inclusion in a secondary school.

There will be a number of sources of information available in this exploration of the teachers' perspective of inclusion of students with disabilities in North Queensland secondary schools. There is the dialogue between the teachers and researcher who is also a teacher in a secondary school, the internal dialogue between researcher as researcher and researcher as special education teacher. As well, there will be the dialogue between the researcher and her critical friend. Each dialogue will be located in wider contexts of time, place and relationships of power. As I will conduct the study in the tradition of qualitative research to 'uncover the meanings of events in individual lives' (Janesick, 1994, p. 217), it is imperative that my role as most privileged player in the representation and reconstruction of the teachers' experiences does not result in my voice speaking over, as well as for the teachers.

### **3.8.1 Data Analysis**

Analysis of data collected in this study will be conducted in an inductive manner. For this study, the experiences of the teachers when including students with disabilities will be looked

at as a whole. As naturalistic inquiry uses inductive data analysis in order to make inferences from the data (Green, 2002), the data analysis will begin during the collection of data. At the same time, it is important that the analysis of data is always reconcilable with what is known about everyday life in a secondary school (Dingwall, 1997). To assist in keeping data reconcilable with the secondary school environment, I will include critical reflections on my multiple roles as researcher, mother of a son with disabilities and special education teacher. Thus, the focus will concentrate on understanding experiences from the teachers' frame of reference within the contexts of the secondary school.

This research will use thematic analysis as a means of organising the raw data into text. The purpose of the coding will be not only to describe but, more importantly, to categorise the data into themes. Themes may convey the spirit of the experience in an abstraction but they do "fix the experiences in a temporal and exemplary form" (Kramp, 2004, p. 116). Thus, the data will be taken holistically and rearranged under themes which emerge as data are analysed. It will not be the words themselves but acquiring new understanding of the phenomenon of interest which will be the primary focus. These themes will represent a dialogue between data and researcher (Holliday, 2002). In order to capture the experiences of the teachers in their own words (Kramp, 2004) excerpts and quotes from the interviews rather than entire transcripts will be used to illustrate the common themes. In this manner, the reader can be continually directed by the researcher's interpretative voice.

A central element of data reduction when using thematic analysis is the coding process of identifying the themes which emerge from the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) described research analysis as three concurrent flows of activity which include data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. Using disciplined science, creative artistry and personal reflexivity, it is possible to convert the interviews, completed questionnaires and reflective journal into raw data (Patton, 2002). Data will be coded and analysed according to the classic analytic strategies of 'three levels' advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994). As well, to facilitate the analysis, sets of themes or categories may be drawn from the initial literature review as well as everyday experiences as an insider researcher. Following the suggestions of Bourdon (2002), the themes will not be totally inclusive of all data nor mutually exclusive as there are occasions when certain comments can be associated with more than one theme. It may be possible to identify similarities across the data but at the same

time include a “meaningful range of perspectives, experiences and standpoints including my own” (Mason, 2002, p. 177).

Using descriptive accounts, it will be possible to glean an insight into the views, emotions and attitudes of the teachers involved in the study. However, it must be remembered that these descriptions of the personal experiences “do not present objective, comprehensive accounts of events but rather perspectives on events” (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 45). In the telling of the incidents, the participants may include a personal dimension resulting in recounting experiences which are based on the speaker’s point of view (Gibbs, 2002). It is important, therefore, that throughout the analysis of the interview data the interpretation is reconcilable with what I know about life (Dingwall, 1997) in the secondary school as a special education teacher.

### **3.8.2 Procedures**

Taking into account the research constraint of available time for this study, I will use a combination of manual techniques and electronic methods. These methods provide the means to sort out the mass of complex data from the completed questionnaires, the teachers’ interviews and my reflective journal. The initial step involves fully transcribing each recorded interview. Punctuation will be added which is faithful to the delivery of the dialogue and to make the text more readily intelligible to the reader. To gain a higher level of interpretation, I will continue to listen to the tapes of the interviews. Listening to the voices of the teachers; hearing any intonation, laughter or concern, will assist in the interpretation of meaning. Data can also be collated from the completed written questionnaires and my reflective journal. Using these methods will be supportive of the interpretations that are part of this study.

Once all data is collated, it will be possible to identify common themes within the data. Although the general topics were determined at the beginning of this study by the research questions, the precise categories will come from the data (Ezzy, 2002). This coding into themes will be the first step to more inductive analysis (Richards, 2005). As well, the analysis of the data may highlight issues and problems which have not been anticipated. To initially identify common themes, traditional methods including colour coding specific sections of the printed copies of the interviews as well as highlighting sections on the electronic version will be used.

### 3.8.3 *QSR NVivo*

One of the challenges of qualitative research involves the massive amounts of data which require intensive analysis. There is a feeling of being almost overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the data. Bryman (2004) points out that during the last twenty years, a major development has been the introduction of different computer software packages which can assist in analysing qualitative data. These programs are designed to efficiently carry out the administrative tasks related to organising data. They can be used to systematically explore (Welsh, 2002) and store data. The programs can also provide an electronic audit trail when saving and storing the successive iteration of the data analysis (Drisko, 2004). Maintaining this audit throughout the research process provides a means for tracing decisions and assumptions.

A number of computer programs have been designed to organise text by codes and themes. One particular software package which assists in the analysis of qualitative data is QSR NVivo. NVivo is an example of the software programs that “support a variety of analytic styles in qualitative work” (Gibbs, 2002, p. xxii). Drisko (2004, p. 195) proposes that a “key advantage of electronic text searches is that *all* instances of the text are located”. The software program can be used as a tool to interrogate data by using the available coding tools to create categories as well as developing layered dimensions for coding themes (Siccama & Penna, 2008). By using NVivo, the researcher has the capability to recognize and sort text that is entered into the program under different headings.

NVivo can also add rigor to the analysis process by allowing the researcher to carry out quick and accurate searches. It can add to the validity of the results by ensuring that all instances of particular thematic codes are found (Welsh, 2002). This technique will also assist in understanding how the different themes knit together to form the whole account on inclusion. Drisko (2004) argues though that the actual judgments about the meaning, relevance and importance of any given data must always be determined by the researcher and not the software alone. Computer programs are still a long way from being able to understand the meaning of texts which is a requirement of qualitative research (Gibbs, 2002; Patton, 2002). Finding the text segment does not imply it is meaningful to the research purposes but indicates merely the presence of specified words or phrases.

The text from the interviews as well as information from the questionnaires and reflective journal will then be saved in NVivo. Using this computer program, I will be able to store all information, code the collective data. Over time, as the analysis progresses and patterns and ideas take shape, these will be organised and reorganised into hierarchical, branching structures or 'tree' nodes which allows the researcher to organise the coding according to conceptual relationships – as one way of identifying patterns in the data. With the use of NVivo, it will be possible to see the link between the code and the original text by retrieving and displaying similarly coded original texts attached to the code (Gibbs, 2002). At the same time, I must be aware that NVivo will not reflect on the text or will be able to look for specific themes unless provided with the key words (Richards, 2005). It will be necessary to continuously interpret and reflect on the meanings in the context of the interviews.

Data analysis will begin while I am still collecting data. This ongoing and recursive process will enable any readjustment of the focus as I become aware of any new emergent findings (Anzul et al., 2001). As qualitative research is about discovery and exploration, the categories for investigating data have the potential to change (Richards, 2005). Each idea will stimulate new ideas. This is an important element of qualitative research as this method of research is not concerned with the objective truth but rather with the truth as the informant perceives it. For example, as I speak to the different teachers from the same setting, I may find that they have varying attitudes, professional beliefs and perceptions of inclusion in the same secondary school.

### **3.9 *Ethical and Political Considerations***

In the process of the interview, a measure of intimacy can develop between interviewers and participants that leads the participants to share aspects of their lives that, if misused, could leave them extremely vulnerable. (Seidman, 1998, p. 49)

A primary consideration in any study is to be aware of the ethical and political aspects of the participants and setting. It is imperative that research is conducted in “a responsible and morally defensible way” (Gray, 2009, p.69). Because participants in this research are human as well as being vulnerable to negative reactions to comments about their workplace, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them (Creswell, 2009; Fontana & Frey, 2008).

According to Fehring (2002), the ethical implications of involving human beings in the research study imposes certain considerations which may affect the selection of participants, the time of research and data gathering techniques. Qualitative research involves transforming the knowledge gained about others into a public forum. In doing so, it is imperative the researcher consider the involvement of moral-political commitments.

When reflecting on ethical and political considerations within this research, the principles of trust, integrity and informed consent are paramount. Christians (2003, p. 218) maintains that “professional etiquette uniformly concurs that no one deserves harm or embarrassment as a result of insensitive research practices”. Qualitative writing tends to be rich with quotation and descriptions in an attempt to capture conversations, experiences, perspectives, voices and meanings (Hull, 1997). Unlike quantitative research, the results are not entirely reducible to numbers and charts. They are often based on holistic analyses and presentations of what may be personal, identifiable and idiosyncratic material. For this reason, the question of confidentiality and anonymity are extremely important (Davies, 2008; Mason, 2002).

As an insider researcher, I am a recognised member of the participating group of teachers. It is envisaged that certain barriers will be down and the experiences and understandings will be shared freely in a context of past experiences and understanding which are common between the teachers and the teacher as a researcher. Basically, the protective barriers and strategies that are usually present in such situations may be largely absent. There is the obligation, then, to “protect those who have shared with us” (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). Working as a special education teacher, I will have knowledge of the successes, failures and foibles (Edwards, 2002) of certain participating teachers. Therefore, it is of ultimate importance that I give consideration to the exclusion of all collateral information that would enable institutions and/or individuals to be identified. This consideration reinforces Seidman’s (1998) comment concerning the vulnerability of participants to the misuse of information that they have provided.

The ethical and political considerations within the study signify the need to complete a series of forms. The beginning of the process will involve gaining ethics approval from James Cook University and from Education Queensland (see Appendices C and D for record of ethics approval). After gaining permission to conduct the study at the university level and from Education Queensland, the principals of the selected schools will be approached and provided

with a comprehensive explanation of the project. A request will be made to use their school as a research site. As the Advisory Visiting Teachers work with students with disabilities in a number of secondary schools, the relevant principal who is manager of each teacher will be approached for permission for the teachers to participate.

At the beginning of the interviews, I will endeavour to ascertain that each teacher has a clear understanding of all aspects of this study. It is important they know what they will be asked to do, how their comments will be treated and as research is a process of discovery, the results can never be known at the onset (Davies, 1998; Gillham, 2005). They will be given a written explanation of the research plus a consent form. As soon as the teachers have assured me that they understand the focus of the research, I will ask them to sign the consent form, which gives permission to record the interview and to use the data for the doctoral thesis and future publications. These steps will follow the comments of Howe (2003) who indicated that the underlying rationale behind informed consent is the protection of autonomy and privacy.

The research will be conducted in an area where there is frequent professional contact between the staff of the selected schools. This is particularly so with the special education teachers and the advisory visiting teachers. To facilitate the maintaining of anonymity and confidentiality and lessen the threat of consequences, I will use pseudonyms for the participating teachers and any students they mention across all levels of data analysis and reporting. Tapes from the interviews will only display a code and once full transcripts are completed from the recordings, these tapes will be placed in a locked cabinet until data analysis is completed. The tapes will then be destroyed. All transcripts and data files will be computer password protected. Of equal ethical importance is the maintaining of the participant's voice whilst not disclosing their identity because the use of thick description in reporting can further complicate the protection of privacy.

### **3.10 Assumptions and Bias**

The lives of both researcher and research subjects are defined within systems of gender, race, and class and lived out in particular temporal, social, and cultural moments. (Larson, 1997, p. 459)

Any view is a view from some perspective and therefore incorporates the stance of the observer. Previously, what was brought from background and identity of the researcher has



been treated as bias and something whose influence needs to be eliminated from the design, rather than a valuable component of it (Maxwell, 1996). Yet Glesne and Peshkin (1992, p. 104) would argue that the subjectivity of the researcher is a strength and “is something to capitalize on rather than to exorcise.” Casey (1995, p. 232) added that “the researcher’s own subjectivity is becoming an expected part of the analysis”. In Flick’s (2002, p.6) words ‘the subjectivities of the researcher and of those being studied are part of the research process’.

It was important that I recognise the biases I bring to the research. Yet, I do not want to overlook the value of my own perspectives which can lead to insights derived from my particular way of seeing. To discover any bias, I need to examine the main roles I play in my professional and private life – teacher educator, special education teacher, researcher and mother of a son with disabilities – and the ways in which these roles can be supportive and conflicting (Herzog, 1998). Thus, when interviewing the teachers, I must be aware of my personal reactions and determine whether they fit the research situation or are extraneous. In a number of cases, the participants will be in similar situations compared to my teaching environment which places an emphasis on viewing their comments in a non judgemental manner.

From the perspective of an insider researcher, there are advantages and disadvantages in being a teacher studying the experiences of other teachers. Since my background is similar to many of the teachers I will interview, I can bring a certain level of sensitivity and understanding to the interviews and analysis. At the same time, data validity will be strengthened as I am more likely to know or suspect when pretence takes place (Edwards, 2002). This will assist in a situation where the validity of anecdotal evidence is based on the personal subjective experience of the interviewee.

My personal familiarity with the subject matter, however, may make it more difficult to pursue beyond the obvious information. I already have an insider’s knowledge of many situations and tend to take this familiarity for granted. During the interviews, there may be times when I must mentally remind myself not to assume too much. As Coghlan (2003) recommends, it is vital I probe beyond the obvious answers and think as if I was an outsider and ignorant of the situation. Creswell (2009) also warns that the status of the interviewer has the potential to influence the responses provided to the questions within the interviews. My role as a senior teacher employed by the same government department may bring a bias to

responses particularly when interviewing beginning teachers or teachers whom I taught at University.

Basically, we cannot do qualitative research without looking at ourselves, our knowledge, skills and dispositions as educators which will shape the biases we bring to research. No research method “can completely filter out widespread social biases that are deeply inscribed in a culture (Lather, 1991, p. 25). However, in order for my findings and interpretations to be regarded as credible, dependable and confirmable, I will use the techniques of prolonged engagement and persistent observation as an insider researcher as well as data cross-checking to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. In this way, insider research can be used as a way to increase the validity of the study. Therefore, during the study, it will necessary to acknowledge the advice given by Coghlan and Holian (2007, p.5) when they state that the insider researcher should be aware of:

how their roles influence how they view their world as well as how they are perceived by others, and to be able to make choices as to when to step into and out of each of the multiple roles they hold.

### **3.11 Limitations**

There are a number of limitations to conducting a study using qualitative research. Gray (2009, p. 61) insists that it is important for researches to “identify the weakness and limitations of their own research”. Therefore, before beginning this study, I will investigate the weakness and limitations within the project. I am aware that at every stage, texts will be interpreted and created with symbols standing for the experiences of the teachers. I will not be present when an incident to which a teacher refers takes place. “Meaning is ambiguous because it arises out of a process of interaction between people: self, teller, listener and recorder, analyst and reader” (Reissman, 2002, p. 228). Interpreting experience involves creating and re-creating voices over and over again so that while the goal may be to tell, truthfully, of an experience, the narrative becomes the researcher’s creation.

In the process of organizing their experiences, people tend to select the elements to construct a meaningful pattern of their experiences. Unfortunately, “in retrospective recall and without any conscious desire to deceive, people tidy what they have experienced so that it makes

sense” (Gillham, 2005, p. 48). The past is a selective reconstruction (Reissman, 2002) so the stories told by the participant are already interpretations or modifications of reality, not merely a factual account of events. Additionally, as I am researching as an insider, the results of my research are only one possible expression of a range of possible readings (Macartney, 2005). Thus, interpretation is carried on with the interviewer researching the comments of the participant and is continued by the reader of the final text.

Adding to the limitations is my position as an insider researcher using qualitative research. Due to work commitments and time limits, the sample size will be small. Data will be gathered about the lived experiences of 20 teachers in only four secondary schools in one region of North Queensland. Participants in the study will be recruited via personal contact with special education colleagues making the sample convenient in nature but the data gathered may not be representative of all teachers in secondary schools in North Queensland. Essentially, the findings from qualitative research are not generalizable from one setting to another (Hull, 1997) so as Reissman (2002) points out, reaching any theoretical levels of thought makes comparative work essential. To develop any theories about the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools and the impact on teachers would require a more extensive research project.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

The qualitative methodology in this study provides the structure and coherence to collect, analyse and report on a range of data. Qualitative research is defined by the use of nonnumeric data (Drisko, 2004) which means I will be interpreting what I see, hear and understand (Creswell, 2009). The study is based on the personal, individual daily experiences of teachers working in secondary schools. Teachers are the key to successful inclusion which made it imperative to investigate their attitude to the changes brought about by the inclusion process. The rich data obtained when interviewing the teachers will help to illuminate my questions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities into the secondary school environment and to make the actions of the teachers even more believable.

In an attempt to make my analysis as transparent as possible, I will incorporate examples from the transcripts. Nevertheless, the possibility that my own subjectivity as an insider researcher will influence the decisions I make about what I include and exclude is very real (Sands, 2004). During the analysis of the data, it will be necessary to make editorial and creative

decisions about what to include in the research (Sikes, Lawson & Parker, 2007). These inclusions and omissions will result in a specific description of experiences with inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools from the perspective of teachers participating in this study.

Evidence from the research literature illustrates an acceptance of inclusion of students with disabilities in the education system. While most teachers would agree with the philosophy of inclusion, they do have concerns regarding the changes needed to implement this process (Vinson Inquiry, 2002) particularly in the secondary school. In the next chapter, it is these perceptions and attitudes which will be explored and the willingness of teachers to accommodate students with disabilities in inclusive settings. The chapter will be structured around the main themes which will be identified from transcripts of the teachers' interviews. To analyse qualitative data there is a need for ongoing reflective decision making by the researcher. The use of quotes will be used to show exactly how the ideas discussed are expressed by the interviewed teachers. These quotes will also constitute evidence that the analysis is valid and accurate (Gibbs, 2002).

## *Chapter Four*

*“Miss, you don’t understand. I’ll get teased if people see me with these retards.”*

*(Karen, urban secondary school teacher)*

### **4.0 Introduction**

The student population enrolled in the secondary schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has become increasingly more diverse. Although there is a drive to establish in these secondary schools an environment which is “free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability” (Department of education, Science and Training [DEST], 2005, p. 3) this does not always happen. Instead, students with disabilities and staff who work with them can encounter a culture where negative attitudes to disability are still widespread. Working as a special education teacher in a secondary school, I am, like Karen, very aware of this culture and the derogatory language as manifested by use of the word ‘retard’ by students with and without disabilities. With teachers playing an important role in setting the tone of classrooms, the success of inclusion may depend upon their prevailing attitudes in interactions with students with disabilities (Carroll, Forlin & Jobling, 2003) as well as their attitudes, use of language and behaviour with colleagues and students without disabilities.

As I am interested in the important role played by teachers, the first focus of my thesis was to explore the attitudes of the 20 teachers towards inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools. During the period of collecting data, the availability of teachers meant that I interviewed nine teachers who regarded themselves as secondary subject specialists and 11 teachers who worked as secondary special education teachers. The use of the qualitative method made it inevitable that the information gathered in these interviews was subjective and interpretative in nature. However, until I had the opportunity to hear and feel what the teachers had to say about inclusion, I would not know what they thought and felt (Sikes et al., 2007). According to Elbaz-Luwisch (2005), it is important that we listen to the teachers’ voices and the stories they can tell about their work in the schools and how this work impacts on their lives. Therefore, with the collection and analysis of data, I hoped to gain an insight into the lived experiences of the teachers involved in the implementation of inclusion programs.

In the four different research settings, each teacher and situation were unique and each relied on his or her own personal philosophy and insights. Carrington (2007a, p. 42) suggests that “teachers in a school community hold implicit beliefs about students, the subjects they teach and their teaching responsibilities”. As an insider researcher, I was in the position to provide insight and understanding about the teachers too. I could, in the words of Maria [rural mainstream teacher] “share my [Maria’s] experiences”. Even though the personal views and stories of the teachers were about inclusion in a particular secondary school, in many incidences it became apparent, very quickly, that their words echoed the research literature on teachers in similar situations as well as my own teaching experiences.

This chapter begins with an observation of the changes in secondary school inclusion for students with disabilities in Australia and particularly in North Queensland. Rich descriptions are then presented of the settings and teachers involved in this research. The chapter then focuses on the first research question which is to investigate the attitudes of the 20 teachers to inclusion. As the participating teachers began to speak about their experiences, they provided the data that helped in detecting attitudes which were influenced by the daily experiences in a secondary school environment.

The use of the computer software program QSR NVivo assisted in systematically exploring (Welsh, 2002) and sorting from the interview transcripts. The hierarchical, branching structures or ‘tree’ nodes allowed a coding according to conceptual relationship. Thus, linked to the attitudes of the teachers were the themes of social benefits for students with disabilities, academic benefits for students with disabilities and teaching competence. Each of these themes had numerous references to substantiate the reason for being selected as well as containing descriptions of actual incidents as perceived by the teachers.

#### **4.1     *“There’s been a dramatic increase of students with disabilities”***

***(Bill, an urban secondary school teacher)***

Due to the alteration of education policy and practice in Queensland, teachers are now frequently encountering students with disabilities in the primary and secondary schools. There is an increased acceptance that the mainstream classroom provides “age-appropriate role-models and interaction with peers, together with an environment conducive to learning” (O’Rourke & Houghton, 2008, p. 228). Behind these changes has been the gradual

implementation of new policies and procedures for enrolment in state primary, secondary and special schools. In all Australian states, the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Disability Standards for Education 2005 require that all students seeking enrolment in a State school be given access on the same basis as students who do not have a disability. Principals can make decisions about access to special education programs and services provided by the school but there are few grounds to refuse enrolment (Education Queensland, 2007). The result as Weiss and Lloyd (2002) maintain is that teachers are now facing the challenge of a diversity of learning needs which can be exhibited by students with disabilities.

These changes in enrolment procedures mean that students with disabilities who had been originally given the opportunity to access the school system through early intervention programs are now moving into Queensland secondary schools. Working as a mainstream teacher at the same urban secondary school for more than ten years, Bill had recently noticed the dramatic increase in students with disabilities enrolled in his school. When he described inclusion at his school, he referred to the number of students with disabilities in the playground and an increasing number of students from the Special Education Unit who had been included in his classes across all year levels. The words of Jenkins (2002, p. 61) who argued that “education is about preparing our students – all students with and without disabilities – for life in the culture and society to which they belong” points to changes in educational focus which continue to be instigated for students with disabilities and for the teachers who are responsible for providing the teaching and learning in the mainstream classrooms.

Overall, secondary school classrooms in North Queensland have followed the model of secondary schools throughout Queensland in that there has been a gradual increase in the enrolment of students with disabilities. Verification of this can be found in the existence of special education units or special education classes situated in the majority of secondary schools within the region. Within these units and classes, there has been a consistent and substantial increase of students with disabilities who now have the opportunity of enrolling in their neighbourhood secondary school and attending mainstream classes with their peers. As many of these students would formally have spent their teenage years in a special school, the impact on North Queensland secondary school administration, secondary teachers and students without disabilities has been noticeable.

As an insider researcher, I have had personal experience of this change in direction and practice at one North Queensland secondary school. In the early 90's, the special education teachers, learning support teachers and students with disabilities all competed for space in a demountable building on the boundary of the secondary school. The four students with physical disabilities accessed selected mainstream subjects but the very small groups of students with intellectual disabilities had only limited contact with the secondary school teachers and were usually taught in self-contained classrooms. There appeared to be a predominant belief within the school staffrooms that the education of students with disabilities was the sole responsibility of the special education teachers. Evidence of this belief was in the frequent telephone calls from secondary school teachers on playground duty to 'come and look after your student'. At this time, there was limited social interaction between students with and without disabilities and even at school parades, the students with disabilities were seated on the outer fringe of the student groups.

By the end of 2009, there had been a number of changes in the education opportunities available to students with disabilities in this secondary school. The Special Education Unit was now located in a separate, purpose built building near the front of the school. Enrolled in the unit were 54 students. Amongst these 54 students were students with intellectual disability, autistic spectrum disorder, physical impairment, visual impairment or speech language impairment. The most dramatic change had been in the access of students with disabilities to the mainstream classes. The self-contained classrooms were still in use for small group work in English, Mathematics, Science and SOSE based on modified unit plans from the mainstream subjects. These classrooms were also used for tutoring in specific subjects for students with disabilities attending mainstream subjects. All students with disabilities however now spent varying amounts of time with their mainstream peers in different subject classrooms, were included in the school parades and encouraged to socialise with the students without disabilities.

#### **4.2     *“There is a lot of diversity at secondary schools”***

***(Ken, a rural special education teacher)***

Using qualitative methods of research meant studying real-world behaviours as they occur naturally in a classroom or an entire school. In describing the settings for this study, it is important to be aware of the diversity that can be found in the population and teaching



methods in a modern secondary school. As well as classrooms with students from a range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, no longer is the emphasis on the memorisation of facts but on learning the skills to handle direct access through technology to a range of information. Additionally, Lane et al. (2004) indicate that the secondary school years are associated with substantial changes in social and behavioural expectations of all students including the students with disabilities. Secondary schools could thus be described as reflecting the complexity of society and, at the same time, operating as increasingly complex education environments.

Although the four state secondary schools which I visited differed in several respects, including size and location, they did operate as complex education environments and were typical of a number of other secondary schools in North Queensland. Each school was co-educational and catered for students from Year 8 (12-13 years of age) to Year 12 (17-18 years of age) with a wide range of academic and vocational-oriented subjects included in the school curriculum. A year co-coordinator organized classes of the same year and, whenever possible, teachers with specialized training usually taught specific subjects in a separate classroom. Each subject area was supervised by a Head of Department. Depending on the student enrolment, the Principal was assisted by two to three deputy principals. At three of the research sites, a Head of Special Education Programs (HoSEP) was responsible for the Special Education Programs whereas at the fourth site, a special education teacher was in charge of the special education class.

The first two research sites were located in Australia's largest tropical city in North Queensland. With a rapidly growing population of approximately 160,000, the housing and industrial estates have spread along the coast and inland. It is a vibrant city which has continued to expand due in part to its importance as a commercial and public service administrative centre and port as well as the relaxed lifestyle of a city in the tropics. In turn, this growth requires a wide range of support services and recreational activities. This continued increase in the population of the city has led to the construction of a number of state and private secondary schools.

Situated in an outlying suburb of the city, the secondary school used as the first research site had been built in the late nineties. All classrooms were at ground level and designed for the tropical north. This resulted in the school buildings being spread over a wide area. On my first

visit I was soon lost trying to find a specific classroom and was very happy to find a guide to show the way to the Special Education area. When I reached my destination, I found a small number of classrooms which were situated on the edge of the school complex at a very noticeable distance from the administration office.

With an enrolment of less than 1,000 students, the population consisted of students from a diversity of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The special education class was taught by a special education teacher and a primary trained teacher who worked part time. The special education teacher was also responsible for all administrative tasks specific to the education of students with disabilities. In spite of the population growth in the surrounding suburbs and subsequent rise in enrolment, the school still enjoyed the supportive school environment offered by a relatively small secondary school. In spite of the location of the special education class, Jane, a secondary school teacher described a school environment where “students tended to talk to people that they wouldn’t necessarily do in a bigger school”.

The secondary school selected as a second research site, opened in the early nineties due to the demands of an increasing number of families moving into the surrounding suburbs. The catchment area for students attending the school includes established suburbs, new housing estates and acreage blocks of land on the edge of the city. As this school is in my neighbourhood, I have watched the construction of a number of new buildings and sporting facilities to cater for a steadily increasing enrolment. When I visited the site, there was an enrolment of over 1,000 students with 36 of the students receiving some level of support from Special Education Programs.

From its first years of operation, this state secondary school has included students with disabilities. The initial special education class was composed of students with disabilities who transferred from a special school when it closed. As school enrolment numbers have increased due to the population growth in the new subdivisions, so too has the enrolment of students with disabilities. This increase in numbers has meant a reclassification of the special education class to having a teacher in charge of the teacher education programs. However, there has not been a corresponding increase in the availability of suitable classrooms for students with disabilities many of whom often find it difficult to concentrate in a noisy environment. As a special education teacher, I have often found myself in a similar situation when forced to share classrooms with other groups of students with disabilities. The

frustration felt by special education teachers in this study and by special education teachers at my school, at the lack of specific teaching space for students with disabilities was illustrated by the comments made by Karen, an urban special education teacher.

We also need lots more space. We're sharing rooms and with small classes but special ed classes sometimes can get a bit unruly so sharing space with another class and trying to get your class to just focus on you rather than what's happening at the back of the room, that's a big one.

The facilities at this state secondary school were a repeat of the first research site in that students at both schools had access to the full range of specialist teaching classrooms. Again, all school buildings were at ground level with a series of interconnecting covered walkways. Although the original plans designated the second research site as accessible for students with physical disabilities, there continued to be access problems for students who used wheelchairs. Bill, a secondary school teacher, referred to this deficiency in planning when he described a school environment where it was necessary for the administration and teachers to overcome a number of design problems.

They have had to fix toilets and ramps. Only a couple of years ago they were still putting in ramps and things to cater for kids in wheelchairs.

As a parent of a child with physical disabilities, I had previous experience of these difficulties when my son who uses a wheelchair was a student at the school. In a review of the notes in my reflective journal which were written after my interview with Bill, I found evidence of the lack of knowledge and understanding of how a physical impairment will impact on a student's ability to move around the school. As can be seen in the following extract from my reflective journal, the physical environment of the school was of concern to my son, the family and the special education staff.

My son was the first student in a wheelchair to attend the secondary school [second research site]. On his arrival, it was discovered that the door on the wheelchair assessable toilet

had been incorrectly fitted. He was not able to open the door and, at the same time, maneuver his wheelchair to get into the toilet.

The secondary school designated as the third research site was located 135 kilometers inland from the initial research sites. Opened in the early 1900's, the school is a mixture of heritage and modern buildings. A number of the classrooms are on the second floor with wheelchair access available to selected classrooms. The small student population of less than 500 could be attributed to the option for students to attend one of the private secondary boarding schools that cater for remote rural families. During the interviews, a number of the teachers referred to classes in which many of the more academically motivated students from the town attended the boarding schools as day students. This situation impacted on the secondary school as Peter, a rural special education teacher explained:

The problem with this place is that education is one of its industries. There are three boarding schools as well as the state high school and so we've got our good kids but you do lose a lot.

To the young teachers, many from the city and with little teaching experience, this state secondary school was considered a school in a remote area. With the loss of academically motivated students to the boarding schools, some classes in the secondary school contained a higher percentage of students who had little interest or motivation to be academically successful. Added to the difficulties for these beginning teachers in coping with socially unacceptable behaviour was the distance from family and limited access to urban entertainment. Often, they did not stay long which resulted in a high teacher turnover. Peter, a mature age rural special education teacher, had witnessed this movement of teachers in a school where he felt he was an 'old' teacher in comparison to many staff.

This is my sixth year and there are not too many people in front of me. Probably one, probably two senior teachers that I can think of that have ten or twelve years. So there's 3 in 30. All the rest are maybe in their second or third year or first.

The location of the fourth research site was in a town situated 88km south of the initial research sites. Agriculture is the mainstay of the town and the effect of any downturns in this industry can be quickly felt. This was the case when recent lower prices for produce led to corresponding lowering of house prices in the town. As a consequence, a number of families who were less economically advantaged and looking for inexpensive accommodation moved into the town. The behaviour of the children from these families was often adversely affected by the move from the cities to a small country town. Nicole, a rural special education teacher who had lived and worked in the town for many years, expressed frustration at the way in which population demographic changes had influenced the diversion of resources at the state secondary school. She firmly believed that the behaviour of a minority of students had impacted indirectly on the students with disabilities.

You think you've got the money to do the special ed room or the learning support room but the library had a break in and we had to replace all the carpets and things like that. [There has been a] fair bit of vandalism in this town in the last few years because the nature of the population is changing here.

Opened in the 1930's, this state secondary school has a number of new buildings at ground level but many of the students are taught in older style buildings which have classrooms on two levels. Gaining access to classrooms on the second level can be a complex operation for students with physical impairment. In this secondary school, attempts had been made to provide wheelchair access to some classrooms. Nicole, who was in charge of the Special Education Programs, was still finding the situation extremely difficult "because of the need for a lift". She explained:

We do have a fly over to join a couple of the buildings together because we needed that. When we knew we were getting our first child in a wheelchair he [the principal] just set the groundsman to do ramps. What stopped him a lot of the time, of course, were the finances.

Each of these research sites was similar in some ways yet unique in other aspects. Working as a qualitative researcher, I was the principal research instrument (Anzul et al., 2001) which

meant that it was important to make my personal position as an insider researcher explicit to the participants. As a special education teacher, I had previously visited three of the secondary schools and was aware of their methods of operation. I had witnessed the building and opening of the first two research sites and knew personally or professionally a number of the staff and students at all the secondary schools. My insider knowledge included an awareness of each school's culture including the "beliefs, values, habits and assumed ways of doing things among the school community" (Carrington, 2007a, p. 31). Additionally, during my childhood and later, as a beginning teacher, I had lived, attended school and taught in rural areas. As I conducted the interviews, I found that many of the teachers were aware of my family background and past teaching experiences which assisted greatly in gaining trust and respect from the participating teachers.

#### **4.3     *"I'm no more or less typical of other teachers"***

***(Jim, an urban secondary school teacher)***

All participants in the study were teachers working for the state education system in Queensland, Australian. As Jim explained, he believed the teachers in his school were typical of teachers within many Queensland secondary schools. To be qualified to work in Queensland secondary schools, the teachers in the study, like their colleagues, required a four year teaching degree with a strong focus on the subjects they would be teaching or a degree in another discipline as well as a post graduate qualifications in teaching. Also, a number of teachers who worked specifically with students with disabilities had additional qualifications in special education.

Before beginning the actual collecting of data from these typical teachers, a series of tasks needed to be completed. The first priority had been to gain permission from James Cook University and Education Queensland to conduct research in secondary schools. Once this permission was granted, the principals of the four secondary schools were approached and approval was readily granted for contact to be made with their staff. A similar situation arose when I approached the principals who acted as managers of the itinerant special education teachers. However, it was emphasized by the principals that the teachers who agreed to participate must do so voluntarily and that their agreement was based on a complete understanding of the commitment involved. I was specifically asked not to hassle or coerce (Creswell, 2009) any of the teachers. During the conversations with the principals, a number

of them expressed a personal interest in the topic in relation to their secondary school and requested an update on my findings.

On gaining permission from the principals, I communicated directly with the special education teachers in the nominated schools and the itinerant special education teachers. In all cases, the special education teachers were willing to participate in the study and were also able to suggest mainstream teachers whom I could contact. As an insider researcher, this gave me the opportunity of interviewing teachers who I knew professionally as well as secondary school teachers with common professional contacts. At the same time, with my knowledge of the behaviour and attitudes of individual teachers (Edwards, 2002), I attempted to avoid teachers I knew to be 'difficult' both as people and as research participants. However, this was not always possible because amongst the group of what Jim, an urban secondary school teacher, described as typical teachers were two teachers who, when interviewed, exhibited little interest in the topic. Overall, my insider status helped to create an atmosphere of mutual trust as I attempted to create meaning and understanding of the topic under investigation (Etherington, 2004).

The teachers were not selected as 'victims' of the challenges associated with inclusion but rather as volunteers who were willing to tell their own stories of the everyday teaching of students with disabilities in a secondary school. On hearing the topic of my study, many of them were eager to make time in their busy schedules for our meeting. They wanted to give their own personal account of teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. As Dianne, an urban special education teacher commented, "[she] wanted me to know about inclusion and whether or not it's a stressful place ... [and] how it is to be a special education teacher". This resulted in conducting individual interviews at a variety of locations including deserted classrooms, school libraries, empty conference rooms, borrowed offices and coffee shops. Although these locations were not natural field settings (Creswell, 2009) each of the locations did provide the privacy to speak about sensitive topics with the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity (Mason, 2002).

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 20 teachers. Information from the short written questionnaire which was completed before each interview provided an informative description of the participating teachers. The group of teachers participating in the study consisted of 13 females and 7 males. The years of teaching experience ranged from

one year to 35 years with an average of 16 years. Although all teachers worked with students with disabilities, the majority of the group had only limited specific qualifications in teaching students with disabilities. Seven of the special education teachers had postgraduate qualifications in special education. Another special education teacher had a Psychology Degree (Hons) and had majored in special education in his postgraduate teaching course. The special education qualifications of the secondary school teachers were limited to completing a special needs subject as part of their undergraduate teaching degree. Additionally, there were three teachers working with special education programs who although qualified secondary school teachers were working as special education teachers.

As the focus of my study was the lived experiences of the teachers, I approached them as someone who had personal involvement in this area. Hodkinson (2005) proposes that holding insider status can offer important additional benefits and possibilities, most notably with respect to generating a relaxed atmosphere conducive to open conversation and willingness to disclose. Working as a special education teacher in a secondary school, I found that during the interviews, there were shared or similar experiences to which reference was quite often made. At the same time, as an insider researcher, I had to remind myself that my knowledge of the environment and students could let me presume to know what was supposed to be happening. Consequently I was often in danger of not asking the kinds of questions I would ordinarily ask in interviews in any other research setting (Wolcott, 1994).

At the end of each interview, the teachers indicated they appreciated being listened to in a non-judgmental manner and would be interested in reading about the information gathered during my research. There was mutual agreement that this was an area of education that required continual investigation. For my part, I repeated information provided at the beginning of the interview during which their role in the study was explained as well as assuring them of complete anonymity in keeping with the James Cook University ethical guidelines. I then expressed my sincere thanks for their participation in the study and presented each teacher with a token of my appreciation.



#### **4.4 “In some ways, I have sort of mixed feelings about inclusion”**

*(Jane, an urban secondary school teacher)*

The attitude of teachers towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary school environment has become an important variable in the inclusion process. As a qualitative researcher, I could assume that reality would be multiple and shifting (Hull, 1997). Therefore in the study, I encountered secondary school teachers who like Jane, had mixed feelings towards including students with disabilities in secondary school classrooms. Research indicates that attitudes are strongly influenced by the nature of the disabilities and the educational problems they will encounter (Avramidis et al., 2000; Ellins & Porter, 2005; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). Salend and Duhaney, (1999, p.124) expanded on this by explaining that a teacher’s attitude is:

related to their success implementing inclusion, to student characteristics and to the availability of financial resources, instructional and ancillary supportive services, training, administrative support and time to collaborate and communicate with others.

A number of the teachers used stories to explain their attitude to the inclusions of students with disabilities. For example, Nicole, a rural special education teacher, referred to past incidents with students to illustrate her beliefs regarding inclusion. She was now teaching in the secondary school but had taught for many years in a range of settings within the town. Although she acknowledged it had not been easy, she believed that her knowledge of the town and the support she received from the townspeople had helped make the inclusion process worthwhile.

We’ve had students who graduated from grade 12 with significant disabilities. They have gone on to find employment. It’s not always been easy [and] not always successful at first but we have had them. I think for me as a teacher it’s the support I get from the teachers here [and] the support I get from the parents and the community. That’s the

big thing for me. If I see students who graduated from school walking or I see them downtown, I talk to them. They're always very willing even though some times I've given them a hard time. I've only given them a hard time to get them on the right track.

In contrast to the secondary school teachers, all the special education teachers in the study were strong advocates for inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream classroom. However qualitative research can yield multifaceted findings (Anzul et al., 2001) as displayed by Janice, an itinerant special education teacher who although promoting the inclusion of students with disabilities also revealed support for segregated education. In her present position, she worked with students with disabilities who required specialised behavioural support to be successfully included in a mainstream classroom. Janice had been involved in cases where this support was not immediately available. In one case, it was decided to move the student with disabilities from the mainstream classroom to a nearby special school. This enabled the students without disabilities and staff to develop the necessary skills to cope on the student's return as well as assist the student with disabilities to learn specific strategies to be used in the mainstream classroom. Thus, as can be seen in the following comment, her belief in inclusion was balanced with the continuation of accessibility to segregated education especially when used as a preparation for future inclusion (Connor & Ferri, 2007).

I believe that students [with disabilities] ... have every right to access mainstream classes, mainstream social [life] and mainstream curriculum opportunities... I strongly believe there's a place for inclusion and I believe there's a place for segregated education as well.

John, an itinerant special education teacher supported Janice's conviction especially when "the disability is so great that the child can't relate to the mainstream peers". He suggested that as these students "need to gain the social skills necessary to function in society ...they may be better off ...in an environment where they have good social acceptance".

For the secondary school teachers, in the interviews, there were times when it was an ongoing struggle to hold on to their positive professional beliefs about inclusion when faced with the

demands of the classroom. Their support in teaching students with disabilities appeared to relate to the severity of the disability and the amount of support available within the classroom. This was particularly evident when teaching students with and without disabilities who exhibited socially unacceptable behaviour. Jim, an urban mainstream teacher, echoed the comments of Conway (2008) and Idol (2006) in that his positive attitude to inclusion was overshadowed by concerns about disruptive students.

The only reason I would for instance not want a kid in the room tends to be a discipline type issue. Basically discipline issues are the sort of things that can be a major problem.

These concerns regarding socially acceptable behaviour within the classroom were particularly felt by the teachers involved in teaching academic subjects. Four of the secondary school teachers questioned the suitable placement of students with disabilities. Julie, a secondary school science teacher in a rural secondary school made it very evident in her interview that she did not really agree with inclusion of students with disabilities into her classrooms. According to the research conducted by Ellins and Porter (2005) and that of Siperstein, Parker and Widaman (2007) there can be a belief among secondary school teachers and students without disabilities that the inclusion of students with disabilities will have a negative effect on results in academic subjects or create problems with discipline. Julie's belief in the inclusion of students with disabilities in her academic subjects echoed the data from this research. She had been teaching for 15 years and believed that "the brighter students or even the average students feel neglected because you're spending so much time with the [students with disabilities]". As a teacher educator and a special education teacher, I have heard similar comments from pre-service secondary school teachers as well as secondary school teachers. They continue to express concern about their own ability to include students with disabilities in academic subjects as well as cater for students without disabilities.

This anxiety regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classes was aggravated when there was a lack of consultation. As Bill, an urban secondary school teacher reported, scheduled meetings between the staff involved did not always occur because he had "situations happen a few times where they've put [students with disabilities] into your class and you don't know what particular disability that they have". For secondary school teachers in the study who are already finding the inclusion process difficult, lack of control over the

number of students with disabilities in their classes had the potential to negatively influence their attitudes. They readily agreed with Heiman (2004) who suggested that teachers might be more favourable toward the inclusion process if they participated in any decision making on the inclusion of students with disabilities in their own classes.

The opportunity to participate in the inclusion process was also a high priority for parents of students with disabilities. Already committed to the education of their child, the majority of parents of children with disabilities have continued to be strong advocates for inclusion and to working in partnership with the school. Internationally, they have been encouraged to become more involved in the education of their children (Forlin & Hopewell, 2006). There is an expectation that inclusion will lead to increased contact with the neighbourhood and skills in handling social situations. The comments of Jane, an urban secondary school teacher, reflected her attitude and the dilemma she faced both as a parent and a teacher: As a parent she supported the idea that a student with disabilities should be in the mainstream classroom but as a teacher, she was very aware of the challenges she faced in her classroom.

Because I'm a parent of a child who has behaviour problems in the classroom [student with a disability] and I'm a teacher and I can understand it from a teacher's perspective when you're dealing with lots of other children. I've seen it from that perspective, from a teacher's perspective. But [I] also understand as a parent, I don't want my child excluded.

Being a secondary special education teacher and the parent of a student with disabilities, I faced a similar dilemma to Jane. I believe that all students should have the right of access to the best education. Believing in this, to then send my very verbal son to a special school where the students were non-verbal did not appear to be the optimal educational choice. However, enrolling him in a secondary school where his behaviour mirrored many of the socially unacceptable behaviours I faced every day in my secondary special education classroom was the cause of equal professional concern. Even though my son has now left school, I continue to have mixed feelings about inclusion of certain students with disabilities in the secondary school.

Among the many stories told by the teachers, the experiences of Bill, an urban secondary school teacher, were of particular interest when investigating teacher attitudes to inclusion. At 3.30pm, he met me at the administration office with the comment that he did not have much to say. An hour and a half later, I left the school and an empty car park. Bill used the interview as a place to discuss experiences which he was not prepared to make public (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). At times, he asked that I turn the tape off as he did not want any record of his comments. Over all, I was given the impression of someone who was not coping with the current situation. His emotional exhaustion meant a strong reduction in his emotional resources (Kokkinos, 2007) leading to the necessity of taking a week's leave when he found himself yelling at his own son. Even though he enjoyed having the students with disabilities in his class, he often found that without trained teacher aide support, it was difficult to include them in the practical aspects of the industrial skills. Although Bill was adamant that he enjoyed teaching students with disabilities, his comments after speaking with his colleagues reflected their present attitude to the inclusion of students with disabilities.

In a nutshell I don't think the system at the moment, integration as such, is working in the mainstream. There has to be some changes made for the students as well as the teachers' sake and the other twenty or so students in the class, for their sake as well. I really don't think it's working and as I said I've passed it around the staff room and that's the general opinion that I got from some of the other staff there who responded to it as well.

Teachers have a responsibility to cater for the needs of all students in their classes. However, their belief in and attitude to inclusion may affect the degree to which they carry out that duty. Negative attitudes of teachers can undermine the efforts of inclusion. Carrington (1999) maintains that personal beliefs, attitudes and values shape how teachers interact with students. The teacher's interaction with the students and related educational opportunities can directly impact on the quality and quantity of that student's learning (Ashman, 2008b; Cook, Tankersley, Cook & Landrum, 2000). The teachers in this study echo the comments of Avramidis et al. (2000) who believe teacher attitudes to inclusion are recognised both to vary and to be essential in successful implementation of inclusive policies and practices.

Specifically, the success of an inclusion program depends, to a certain degree, on the attitude and professional beliefs of the teachers towards the policy and its implementation.

#### **4.4.1 “Socially kids are able to meet their peers”**

*(Dianne, an urban special education teacher)*

Students with disabilities may find the acquisition of sophisticated social skills extremely difficult. Within secondary schools there is a demanding environment (Hay & Winn, 2005) with complex webs of friendship (Senge et al., 2000). However, Dianne, an urban special education teacher, believed inclusion provides an opportunity for students with disabilities to connect with their peers. As Belinda, an urban special education teacher explained “with inclusion they've got other students around from which to role model or see how to relate to other students and teachers”. Secondary school students are expected to be competent in using a range of interpersonal skills to negotiate social demands and respond to peer pressure (Lane et al., 2004). Students with disabilities can be influenced by the social climate of the school and, in particular, by the behaviours they see modelled (Roland & Galloway, 2004). Participating in the complex social environment of the secondary school therefore may assist students with disabilities in acquiring more sophisticated social skills.

In spite of differences in attitudes towards inclusion, the majority of the interviewed teachers were alert to this link between inclusion and social skills. The theme of social benefits for students with disabilities was evident as the teachers continued to refer to the non-educational, social and self-concept outcomes which can be achieved in an inclusive school environment. There was also reference to the role played by the teacher in fostering or hindering the social inclusion of students with disabilities (Sparling, 2002). It was believed that students without disabilities can be influenced by the way in which teachers treat students with disabilities. Frederickson et al. (2007) explain this concept by pointing to acceptance of students with disabilities being associated with positive social behaviours and roles.

Sarah, an itinerant special education teacher had worked with many students with disabilities and was aware of the need for social skills. She saw the social benefits of inclusion as:

I think one of the positives would be friendship, peer  
friendship and peer support. Self-esteem for the children that

they feel like they're part of the wider community, part of the whole school...The friendship thing, I think is a big thing and also role models. I think that's really very important in high school, more so than primary school.

In the semi-structured interviews, the teachers were usually eager to tell stories about the positive aspects of social inclusion. Anne, an urban secondary school teacher, had watched the social transformation brought about by good teaching strategies and peer support. She had successfully included a student with disabilities into her class and it was easy to see during the interview that she was very proud of the result.

I have one little girl Jessica who is in my year nine drama class. At the beginning of the year she wouldn't have enough confidence to even stand up and say something in front of everybody. And we have just done our final term four performance piece which is an individual task. So she stood up on stage all by herself and did a dance with a mask on. Fair enough I let somebody sort of stand over to the side of the stage so she wasn't standing up there all by herself. Just for her to be able to do that. Such a great thing for her, the confidence just went through the roof.

When students with disabilities are included in the secondary school environment, it allows them to have the same experiences, challenges and risks that other students are entitled to have. They have the opportunity to participate in 'near to normal as possible' schooling experiences. Salend and Duhaney (1999) found that the benefits of inclusion included increased acceptance, understanding and tolerance of individual differences together with the development of meaningful friendships. Maria, a rural secondary school teacher had had little contact with students with disabilities before beginning work at her present school. However, she was finding in her present classroom "all the students spoke to him [a student with a visual impairment] like he doesn't have any disabilities at all and I find it very good".

Inclusion has given students with and without disabilities the opportunity to learn ways to work together. It is believed that inclusion will assist students without disabilities to be more

understanding of students with disabilities (Anderson et al., 2007). Secondary school students, themselves, hold the expectation that inclusion will have a positive effect on them (Siperstein et al., 2007) as they learn to value diversity and be proud of difference by seeing it and experiencing it (Parsons, 2007). The comments of Belinda, an urban special education teacher, support Katz and Mirenda (2002) who propose that social, communication and behavioural skills of students with disabilities are likely to increase with contact with typical peers. As Belinda revealed, an indication of the benefits of inclusion could be found in the opportunities for improvement in social, communication and behavioural skills available to students with and without disabilities in her secondary school. Evidence of the changes in the students as they took advantage of this environment could be seen in the following comment.

I think there are a lot of benefits. I know that it can be very difficult to manage but we have just experienced a student come to us as a mainstream student who has been in a special school for quite some time. You realize what skills our students [with disabilities] have picked up from being in the mainstream regularly.

The social opportunities provided by inclusion in the secondary school when contrasted with the segregation of the special school dominated a number of interviews. According to Dianne, an urban special education teacher, students with disabilities in segregated settings are not exposed to the adolescent social expectations that are an element of the secondary school environment. To substantiate her belief, she described Gavin who had previously attended a special school before transferring to the secondary school. With assistance, he was included in specific mainstream subjects. She firmly believed the improvement in his social skills could be attributed to contact with his peers in the mainstream classes. As she explained:

If you look at Gavin who just knocked on the door [he's] my student who's intellectually impaired. His speech and language has come on hugely since he had to speak to kids in friendship. I think his social skills will be quite good now as a result of having to mix with his peers.



Gavin is an example of the danger in special schools when too little in the way of social skills is expected of students with disabilities. As Foreman (2008) argues, there is the opportunity for an improvement in social skills and communication when interacting daily with peers in an inclusive classroom. Kym, an itinerant special education teacher explained this when she referred to the difficulty in gaining social skills in the segregated special school. She believed that placing students with disabilities in separate facilities can leave them without positive role models and knowledge of the world outside the school environment.

If you put kids with special needs only where they only ever see other kids with special needs, they don't see the normal peer group, and the normal role models, and they don't see the normal consequences for things. It's not the normal real life deal.

Many of the teachers in the interviews indicated that students with disabilities should have the contacts, relationships and friendships in school just like other students. Robert, a rural secondary school teacher, considered this was happening “especially in a school like this where the kids are fairly tolerant of disability or things like that”. Rejection of students with disabilities by their peers, though, can take away a sense of belonging to the school and hinder access to social experiences. Emma, a rural special education teacher taught at the same secondary school as Robert. In contrast, her experiences had revealed mainstream students who are not always tolerant of students with disabilities. At the beginning of the year, she wanted to put up posters relevant to the academic ability of the special education students in a mainstream classroom which had been allocated to the special education students. Conversely, she was told “the mainstream students would poke fun at the special education students” when they saw the posters.

A note of caution was also heard in the comments of Bill, an urban secondary school teacher. As Sparling (2002) pointed out, the attitude of teachers can have a profound impact on the social inclusion of students with disabilities. Bill found the inclusion of students was “very difficult in a big class especially if you're got students in there with discipline problems” because “you still need to help them quite a lot”. He was very aware that some students with disabilities could be easily led by students engaging in socially unacceptable behaviour but could still see the social benefits of inclusion. As he explained, “actually staying with the

other students is not what you might like to encourage sometimes but it would be good for their self-esteem to be in with other students and so think more highly of themselves”.

For students with disabilities, inclusion in a secondary school classroom does not necessarily mean they are included in the social activities of the school. Students without disabilities are not always willing to interact with students with disabilities outside school because the social norms and pressures of the peer group can drive behaviour (Siperstein et al., 2007). Even when interaction occurs, students with disabilities are not always willing to take advantage of the situation (Katz & Mirenda, 2002). Yet, socialization during free time or at extra-curricular activities is very important in the formation of friendships (Sparling, 2002). To acquire sophisticated skills of social activities, it is paramount that the students with disabilities be provided with the opportunity to observe the social modeling of their peers (Anderson et al., 2007). Access to these opportunities can be increased when students without disabilities become more familiar with students with disabilities because of their continued presence within the neighbourhood. However, it is only recently that the majority of students with disabilities have been able to access their neighbourhood secondary school.

Until recent changes in the guidelines on enrolment of students with disabilities, many Special Education Programs in secondary schools were designated by Education Queensland to cater for students with particular disabilities. As an insider researcher, I knew of many students who were forced to travel to schools outside their suburb. In doing so, they lost contact with the majority of their neighbourhood peers. To compound the problem, living out of the school catchment area meant that these students had little or no opportunity to interact or socialise with each other or with their mainstream peers outside school hours. Ainscow (1999, p. 218) describes the education of students with disabilities as involving “many processes that occur outside of school”. However, because many of the students with disabilities do not have the same skills as their peers to access recreational opportunities outside the school environment, there is always a danger of these students becoming socially isolated. Secondary school is a time of self exploration, social activities and meaningful relationships. Thousand et al. (1997) would argue that non-academic components of secondary school continue to be critical for students with disabilities. Belinda, an urban special education teacher, summarised her attitude to the benefits of inclusion particularly in improving social skills when students with disabilities are included in secondary schools with the following words:

They have to learn how to communicate and get along. If they can do that, they'll survive anywhere in a life, cause really that's what life's all about, relationships. And that to me is above even what they can do on paper. Because if they've got the skills to be able to relate to people, to tell people if they're hurt or concerned, and respond appropriately to people, they'll survive.

Overall, there was agreement amongst the interviewed teachers that one of the most important benefits to inclusion was the opportunity for the student with disabilities to have exposure to their mainstream peers. The teachers stressed that the school years are crucial in developing the necessary social skills if students with disabilities are to enjoy “active and productive lives and productive lives at home and in the workforce” (Smoot, 2004, p. 16). Without these skills, there is the danger of students with disabilities leading isolated lives dependant on their family for financial and social opportunities.

#### **4.4.2 “They’ve got access to teachers with a wide variety of skills”**

*(Kym, an itinerant special education teacher)*

During the interviews, the teachers referred often to the social benefits of inclusion but a number of them also mentioned the academic benefits to be achieved by students with disabilities. Using this theme, it was possible to gain an impression of these benefits in the secondary school. Kym, an itinerant special education teacher, described secondary schools as a place where students with disabilities are taught by teachers who are specialist in specific subject areas. Karen, an urban special education teacher, continued this explanation when she spoke about the students with disabilities having access to “different, a whole range of different teachers, different range of subjects” giving them a more varied and interesting curriculum.

Inclusion of students with disabilities has changed the academic environment of many secondary schools. According to Foreman (2008), the provision of an optimal learning environment for all students regardless of their ability or disability means many teachers can expect to include a student with disabilities in one or more of their classes. Belinda, an urban

special education teacher, was a strong advocate for catering to this diverse range of students by making academic adjustments to match the ability of the students.

It's more about suiting the individual so that if a student can cope with the academic curricula of mainstream that's great. If they can't cope with the academic curricula I am a great believer in having programs to suit their level but still have access to things that are going on that they can join in with.

Many students with disabilities are provided with the necessary support to spend the majority of their day in mainstream classes. However, in each of the secondary schools I visited, small groups of students with disabilities were still taught the core subjects in the special education classrooms. Depending upon their interests and abilities, these students with disabilities joined their peers in mainstream classrooms usually for elective subjects.

The academic expectations for students with disabilities continued to be a source of anxiety for mainstream teachers. Amongst secondary school teachers, there may be a view that inclusive school practices are a primary school problem and expect that students with disabilities will be 'fixed' prior to their arrival at secondary school. Other teachers are frequently concerned about the academic and behavioural adjustment of students with disabilities in inclusive classes (Heiman, 2004). Ben, an urban secondary school teacher, suggested academic inclusion "depends on what the disabilities are of course". His classes had included students with physical disabilities leaving him with the reaction "if it's just physical, then a lot of the students with physical disabilities, they can do just as much academically as any of the other kids".

When there are questions about the academic benefits of inclusion, the lack of student progress could be attributed to inappropriate academic opportunities within a classroom. The secondary school teachers in the study were very aware of the emphasis on academic standards and competence. Within each of their schools there was a strongly competitive academic emphasis demanded by parents and reproduced in government policy. At the same time, Carrington (2007a) proposes that teachers have the opportunity to shape the learning experiences of all students. Teachers need to take the responsibility of providing tasks that will suit the ability of the student with disabilities but are still challenging to that student.

However, secondary school teachers do not always provide this opportunity. In this instance, as an insider researcher, I was able to use notes from my reflective journal as evidence of my own experiences.

In the secondary school, when including students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms there can be problems in finding the 'right' class. The dilemma is between selecting a class where the behaviour is good but the work is too difficult with little adjustments made for students with special needs or selecting a class where the work is at the correct ability level but the behaviour of the class is unacceptable. Looking for a solution has dominated many conversations in our staff room.

Even when the mainstream teacher includes students with disabilities in the classroom planning, there can be difficulties. According to Scott et al. (2007), there is a tendency to hold low expectations for students with disabilities. Nevertheless, it is obvious in the following story told by Belinda, an urban special education teacher that it is worthwhile to have high expectations and spend the time on adjustments and modifications which may be necessary to achieve a successful inclusion program.

We have a student that came to us from a primary school and having spoken to the guidance officer later in the student's life; apparently the student was written off as not going anywhere when he was quite young. Actually, he graduated as a senior student and he topped one of the classes for that subject. With support and with having confidence in his own abilities, he really achieved.

Many of the teachers in the study were conscious of the low academic results associated with special schools. They were very aware that in a mainstream secondary school classroom, there is administration, teacher, parent and peer expectation of academic success. This expectation of academic success is often absent in a special school environment where there is more emphasis on social skills curriculum (Jackson, 2005). There is the risk too, that teachers

in special schools will expect too little academically of students with disabilities because they have lost perspective of the level of achievement in the mainstream classrooms (McLeskey & Waldon, 1996). Fran, an itinerant special education teacher, was especially conscious of this comparison between the two types of schooling and of students reaching their potential.

Where if you're in a special school you may have a math's teacher that may not be the greatest in their area, or a manual arts teacher that strikes no interest because all kids have interest areas and we may never open them up. They may never find their potential if they're not exposed to it.

The teachers did comment on the potential for academic and social complications when students with disabilities were not fully included and spent time in the mainstream classrooms as well as in the Special Education Unit classroom. Peter, a rural special education teacher noticed that "some SEU kids don't want to identify with it [special education unit] ... they don't want anything to do with it even like having an aide in the class". In the urban secondary school where Karen, a special education teacher was employed, there was a similar theme.

I had one student who is very low as far as his reading and his maths go ... He's in my maths class and he doesn't want to be associated with the special ed unit at all. In fact, I've got rooms that don't have any windows or if they do have windows, they have dark curtains on them so that if other students walk past he doesn't get seen by them. If you're in a room that has access to windows, he'll hide under the desk ... so he doesn't get seen by the rest of the kids.

Students without disabilities do not always readily accept students with disabilities into the academic subjects. Siperstein et al. (2007) conclude that students without disabilities base their acceptance on their perceptions of the competence of the student with disabilities. Particularly in secondary school, their attitude could be influenced by how the presence of a student with disabilities will affect their own access to teacher assistance. Bill, an urban secondary school teacher, found in his subject there was very little contact between the two

groups of students because “I often find that in my area the kids are so busy working on their work there’s not a lot of integration”.

There may be another danger faced by the inclusive classroom which caters for the diversity of student abilities. The process runs counter to the strongly competitive academic emphasis that parents demand from schools and which is often seen reflected in government policy. The secondary school teachers spoke of pressure which is exerted on the teachers and students to raise marks related to examination results. The demands of this situation may be adversely affecting the attitudes of secondary school teachers to inclusion of students with disabilities (Ellins & Porter, 2005). Teachers and particularly students without disabilities in academic subjects are very dependent on results which will allow them to achieve the tertiary course of their choice. This can result in the attitude that the enrolment of a student with disabilities in the subject will impact on the overall mark of the class. Jim (an urban secondary school teacher) claimed “they’re not necessarily gaining much themselves but they are in fact disadvantaging other students”.

This attitude of the teacher to inclusion of students with disabilities can extend to the need to make adjustments. Belinda, in her interview, reflected on her experiences as an urban special education teacher supporting students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. For her there was a mixture of attitudes particularly among teachers of academic subjects towards implementing the academic adjustments necessary to successfully include students with disabilities.

Some teachers are very good at being supportive and putting strategies and processes in place to work with you. Other teachers just flatly refuse. And you'll get that wherever you go. That's life and you've got to learn to work around it.

Anne as a beginning urban secondary school teacher was very conscious of this academic support and the strategies required by the students with disabilities. This awareness was highlighted when, at the end of her first six months of teaching, she was asked by a school deputy to explain her strategies for including students with disabilities. In the research interview, she used the following story to assist in explaining how she worked in the classroom to include the students with disabilities in the academic curriculum.

The aide was helping them a lot and they're really developed over time. They've lost their aide but they're really growing and they're doing really well in their subjects. They've got A's for their assignments and I marked them no differently than I would have for anybody else. I started off modifying all tasks and then I modified a select few. They're really starting to grow, really shine.

It is evident that Anne was responsive to the challenges associated with inclusion and had taken a proactive stance. She was slowly limiting the number of adjustments required through explicit teaching of the necessary skills and by encouraging the assistance of peers.

#### **4.4.3 “How about my own learning?”**

*(Anne, an urban secondary school teacher)*

Providing teachers with the skills to maximise the learning of students with and without disabilities is an important obligation of the school and an integral part of inclusion. Teachers in secondary schools are already expected to provide education in academic and vocational areas as well as meet the individual needs of all students (Della Rocca & Kostanski, 2001). Although a specialist in her own teaching area and with previous industry experience, Anne, an urban secondary school teacher, still found the inclusion of students with disabilities extended her teaching skills. In her interview, she spoke of being very conscious of the need for specific skills when students with disabilities were included in her classes. Previously, Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden,(2002) highlighted this concern when their research showed the necessity for secondary teachers to possess not only sufficient core subject knowledge but also generic teaching skills. Thus, the theme of teaching competence became an important issue when researching the attitude of teachers to inclusion of students with disabilities.

This quality teaching requires teachers to provide positive and supportive environments and programs that draw on the individual capacities and interest of each student. According to Spedding (2008, p. 394) inclusion involves practices that are “proactive and reflective”. The use of these practices assisted Jane, an urban mainstream teacher “to clarify what you do



expect from the students ...how you are going to modify the curriculum”. Anne, an urban secondary school teacher, summarized the benefits of teaching students with disabilities as:

I think it keeps them (the teachers) on their toes. It keeps them thinking. It keeps them reflecting on their own work and what they’re doing in the classroom and I think that’s really important.

Including students with disabilities in the classroom requires more than the usual planning. As a result of the move towards inclusive education, more responsibility has now been placed on the secondary school teachers to provide the learning environment. For Avramidis et al. (2002, p. 155) the inclusion of students with disabilities “requires instructional adaptations on the part of the teacher to ensure all students participate in the curriculum and benefit from the lessons”. Even though specialist in their own teaching area, secondary school teachers may find this task difficult particularly without background knowledge of the way in which a disability can impact on learning. As urban secondary school teacher Jane, revealed, “sometimes, you might be unsure of the best way to modify it for the student”.

Years of a segregated education system has left a legacy of difference when mainstream teachers and special education teacher view the adaptations and modifications necessary for the same unit of work. Brownell et al. (2006) point out that when teachers work together, there is the potential to change instructional practices making planning and working together an effective professional development tool in the inclusion process. In this study, however, there was evidence of detectable differences in planning priorities. For example, in his interview, Jim, a technology teacher with many years of experience teaching in an urban secondary school, referred mainly to changes in the evaluation when planning a unit of work. When asked about his academic expectations of the students with disabilities in his class, his main focus appeared to be on the assessment of the topic.

Changing what you expect is a big one. You don’t necessarily have two separate assignments but quite often if you are doing, for instance, a PowerPoint you can concentrate on getting all the basic stuff first then some of the kids in the

class get to do all the fancy bells and whistles and other kids don't.

Qualitative research is not concerned with the objective truth but rather with the truth as the informant perceives it. This made it possible to document the individual perspectives (Hull, 1997) towards a successful inclusion program from the views of two teachers working in the same classroom. As a special education teacher, Karen supported two students in the same technology subject taught by Jim. In her interview, her focus was on the teaching strategies used by Jim. She had found no evidence that he had changed his teaching strategies to accommodate the students she was supporting or adjustments which would accommodate the different learning styles of a range of student abilities within the classroom.

I was working with two boys with SLI [speech language impairment]. The IT teacher wrote on the board all the things about a PowerPoint and expected all of the students to understand. My two boys had no idea how to take the notes from the board and then relate that back to a PowerPoint presentation.

As an insider researcher, I have been involved in similar situations regarding the academic inclusion of students with disabilities. The emphasis appeared to be on the planning of the assessment with less time spent on investigating teaching strategies that will cater for all students in the class. Often, there is a lack of consideration about the way in which a disability can impact on learning. As Karen indicated, the impact on learning of speech language impairment meant that the students were unable to understand and copy notes written on the board. Like many other students with and without disabilities, they needed a visual representation of the making of a PowerPoint. Karen suggested that although class size is important, it is also important secondary school teachers and special education teachers examine their practice as a starting point for establishing more inclusive practices in the secondary classrooms (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007; O'Rourke & Houghton, 2008).

The opportunity to learn to accommodate differences within the diverse classroom and to modify programs within their own subject areas for students with disabilities may have a ripple effect on teaching skills. McLeskey and Waldron (2002) explain this ripple effect as

any changes in a classroom or school having the potential to affect all students with and without disabilities. This is seen when a teacher adapts the curriculum and has different expectations for individual students. Each of these changes will be influenced by issues such as the perspectives of the teachers in the next grade, the principal's perspective on adaptations, the student's expectations and other students in the classroom. In turn, the changes in expectations and teaching methods will impact on the ability of the student with disabilities to be successful. This made "programming to a student level extremely important" (Belinda, an urban special education teacher). When instruction is too difficult or too easy, the student is likely to be disruptive, hostile, inattentive or bored (Kauffman, Landrum, Mock, Sayeski & Sayeski, 2005).

A number of teachers in the study had experienced the benefits of modifying programs to accommodate differences in abilities. John, an itinerant special education teacher, echoed the evidence of Idol (2006) when he noted in one section of the interview that many of the strategies which work with students with disabilities also succeed with students who are at risk of school failure.

If we cater well for all people with disability, we cater well for half the students with literacy and numeracy problems. I might add that most of those students are the ones that present with behavioural difficulties at school.

As head of special education services, Ken, a rural special education teacher, found that teachers without students with disabilities included in their classrooms "could get very focused on their subject content". When students with disabilities were included, he experienced situations where teachers continued to be unaware of how the problems in the classroom could relate to their own teaching strategies. They just continued to be frustrated by the lack of success with teaching and learning. It was in these circumstances that he was in the position, as a special education teacher, to offer assistance.

That's something that I noticed with people that they often don't realize when there's a problem with their own teaching so they don't identify. They just get frustrated and so that frustration to me is usually a sign that they obviously want to

achieve a goal in the classroom and I need to help them from my perspective

Amongst the benefits to inclusion, therefore, is the opportunity for all teachers to develop professional skills. According to O'Rourke and Houghton (2008), what matters most is the quality of instruction for each student in the classroom. To achieve this goal, secondary teachers "require information, technical expertise and social support far beyond the resources they can muster as individual is working alone" (Carrington, 2007a, p. 44).

The majority of the teachers in the study agreed that there were professional benefits available in an inclusive school particularly in broadening teaching skills. For example, as an insider researcher, I believe that there can also be an opportunity for making changes in my teaching role. Inclusion will assist in shifting my role of special education teacher from an isolated and autonomous expert to the role of partner and a provider of resources for the secondary school teachers (Rodriguez & Romaneck, 2002). Thus, inclusion can offer the prospect of experiencing professional growth (Foreman, 2008; Salend & Duhaney, 1999) as well as develop an increased confidence in personal teaching ability.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Inclusion of students with disabilities into the mainstream secondary school is not easily accomplished. It will impact on educational outcomes including academic, social and personal development of students with and without disabilities. Foreman (2008) has suggested that a major factor in the inclusion process is the attitude of the teacher. The teacher who exhibits a positive attitude by investigating methods to facilitate the process will, in turn, be prepared for the diverse classrooms of the modern secondary school.

Qualitative methodology allowed a widening of the lens as it became clear that there was more to inclusion of students with disabilities that needed telling. A major feature of this study was investigating "naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10) so the interviews provided an opportunity for teachers to describe their experience with inclusion of students with disabilities in their secondary schools. The majority of the teachers were supportive of the philosophical ideals of an inclusive approach and recognised the social, academic and professional benefits inherent in the process. However, the logistical aspects of organizing the inclusion of students with disabilities into

mainstream classrooms were causing a rethink of absolute acceptance of the inclusion process. This, in turn, was impacting on their attitude to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary school. With the increased number of students with disabilities in the secondary school came recognition of the challenges which must be faced and strategies that were needed to be implemented on a daily basis.

In the following chapter, I will use the experiences of the teachers to identify, describe and reflect on particular challenges encountered in the classrooms. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) describe research as a fundamentally interpretive activity. At the forefront of the research experience is the question of why things happen (Miles & Huberman, 1994) which makes it important to discover how the perceived challenges when working with students with disabilities may add to existing stress levels of the 20 teachers involved in the study. Throughout Chapter five, thick description will be used in order to assist the reader in understanding the teachers' worldviews (Cho & Trent, 2006) when students with disabilities are included in the secondary school classrooms.

## *Chapter Five*

*“There’s been a few times when we’ve been a bit alarmed”*

*(Bill, urban secondary school teacher)*

### **1.0 Introduction**

Within the secondary school classrooms there are many challenges which must be faced daily by the teachers. These teachers realise that the stress, which results from the demands in the performance of their professional roles and responsibilities, is an inherent part of their profession (Larwood & Paje, 2004; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). At the same time, as professionals, they have a high level of personal commitment to the provision of equal educational opportunities to all students within the secondary school. Like Bill, many of these teachers give little thought to the personal cost as they work hard at establishing a classroom where students with and without disabilities benefit from their educational experiences.

The second research focus for this study is the specific challenges those teachers encounter within an inclusive classroom. Underlying this focus is the examination of the teachers’ experiences in order to identify possible links between what they perceive as challenging when working with students with disabilities and teacher stress. As demonstrated in chapter four, teachers tend to agree with the educational philosophy and practice of inclusion. Their support for inclusion was very noticeable in the different stories they told about their experiences with the inclusion of students with disabilities. These stories “frequently focused on the human and personal aspects of day to day involvement with individual pupils” (Sikes et al., 2007, p. 359). As the analysis of data progressed, however, the number and frequency of stressful incidents encountered in daily teaching became more obvious.

My use of the qualitative research method as an insider researcher provided the teachers in this study with a unique opportunity to speak freely about these stressful incidents. An important element of the interviews was the chance to examine how their “experiences are connected to other experiences and are evaluated in relation to the larger whole” (Richardson, 1995, p. 210). Within the stories of their experiences, it was possible to observe the implication in the classroom, make connections to the wider school environment and consider the personal effect on a number of the teachers. In order to report these stories within the

larger framework of the chapter, brief excerpts and quotes from the interviews are included rather than providing entire transcripts. This approach provides “more in-depth information on individual understandings, perceptions and description of practice” (Carrington & Elkins, 2002b, p. 8) and allows the focus to be continually redirected to the researcher’s interpretative voice.

Through a process of induction, key themes which originated in the analysis of the teachers’ stories of their experiences. These themes are used to organise the chapter into 10 separate but interconnecting parts. Direct quotations are used to highlight these themes. The same method is used to highlight the focus of this chapter which is to investigation of the second research question – the perceived challenges associated with the inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary school. Thus, the chapter heading is a direct quote from Bill an urban mainstream teacher. Section one sets the scene by introducing information on teacher stress and the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools. In section two the theme is the workload of secondary and special education teachers while in section three an account of the multiple roles expected of teachers within the modern secondary school is provided. The theme of responsibility for students with disabilities is discussed in section four. Communication is the theme for section five and this is followed by a section on the classroom environment. Sections seven, eight and nine explore the support available in the inclusive school environment and section ten focuses on professional development.

### **5.1      *“There's lots of issues that we've got to deal with”***

***(Belinda, urban special education teacher)***

Secondary schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are enormously complicated institutions designed to cater for the educational needs of all students from ages 12 through to 18. In these schools, changes brought about by the movement of Australia into the global economy as well as the rapid expansion of technology into everyday life have contributed to making education more complex (Carrington & Robinson, 2004). This complexity has lead to a situation where teachers, like Belinda, are often compelled to take care of many student issues which are not always related to their specialist teaching area.

Secondary school teachers are faced with the responsibility of providing students with the skills required by a changing workplace as well as dealing with the explosion of knowledge

available through access to technology. This changing workplace has impacted on the availability and educational requirements for even unskilled jobs (Senge et al., 2000; Wallace, 2007). While the teachers in the study acknowledged these changes and the resulting difficulty faced by secondary schools, they also referred to the controversy inherent in their teaching roles.

The interviewed teachers suggested that parents and the community did not always consider the primary role of teachers in secondary schools as providing instruction in a specific subject area. Among the solutions to the challenges caused by economic and social change has been an expectation that schools will solve the problems faced by the students. This led to a situation where these teachers believed that schools were often “seen as a panacea for all problems of society” (Kelly & Colquhoun, 2003, p. 193). The 8 classroom teachers felt under pressure from the school administration to promote a supportive learning environment while outside the school, they saw growing social instability (Hargreaves, 2003). Additionally, there was the anxiety that if not successful in solving the problems, “a lot of teachers are starting to feel that they are going to be made the scapegoats” (Jim, urban secondary school teacher).

Of particular concern to the secondary school teachers in the study was the clash of expectations between the demands of the community and the particular curriculum requirements of their subject areas. They were trapped in a situation where there was a belief that they would deal with the many social problems (Kelly & Colquhoun, 2003) but at the same time achieve student academic success demanded by parents and the school administration. As they were working with an increasing number of students with complex academic, emotional and social needs (Brownell et al., 2002) these expectations were often difficult to fulfil. Janice, an itinerant special education teacher believed that “a lot of stress comes from frustration”. When she visited the secondary schools, she saw teachers who were “dealing with different types of behaviours” and were unable to “get to the curriculum”. As Janice explained “there’s such a broad spectrum of children in the classroom and so little support”.

Difficulties with the relationship between the secondary school teachers and the special education teachers did not help when providing support for students with disabilities. Secondary school teachers, as professionals, have a high level of personal commitment to the provision of equal opportunities to all students. However, in the study, secondary school



teachers and special education teachers referred to different expectations centered on teaching and learning within the classroom. For secondary school teachers, there was a professional belief that students should attain success in the subject content while the focus of special education teachers was on students with disabilities achieving at their highest potential.

This clash of expectations extended to a number of the secondary school students without disabilities. Particularly in the subjects where there was an academic focus, the primary objective of the students was to gain a good result (Siperstein et al., 2007). Yet, when students with disabilities were included in the class, there was the danger of a clash between the needs of each student group. As Julie, a rural secondary school teacher complained “brighter children get sick and tired of the need to work independently or the teacher having to slow things down and explain basic things over and over again”. The teachers were aware that, particularly in the last two years of school, many of these students without disabilities considered it imperative that they acquire the best possible academic education. At times, they encountered teacher and student resentment which was fuelled by the teacher time involved in inclusion.

## **5.2     *“Teachers are spending time filling in forms”***

***(Karen, urban secondary school teacher)***

The ongoing push towards accountability means that many secondary school teachers are required to spend a considerable part of their time completing administrative tasks. Johnson et al. (2005) refer to teachers continuing to be concerned about large quantities of paperwork that must be completed often at the detriment of planning and teaching time. As Karen explained, her colleagues often complained of spending far too much time filling in forms instead of planning their lessons. At the same time, teachers are currently under considerable pressure to create a highly effective instructional environment which would cater for all students (Lane et al., 2004). This clash of expectations is not helped by the multitude of tasks associated with the diverse and demanding student populations of the modern secondary school.

In particular, the addition of students with disabilities has added to the administrative workloads of teachers. Teachers’ own time is already overcrowded with much planning and

correcting (Horne & Timmons, 2009). As I compared data from the twenty interviews, it was possible to identify a pattern of responses (Charmaz, 2006) to my question on the quantity of work linked to inclusion of students with disabilities. Karen, an urban special education teacher expressed her distress as she contrasted the amount of paperwork expected in the name of accountability when she first started working in special education to the present levels of bureaucracy.

This is my third year here [in the S.E.U.] and the first year I did my IEP's (Individual Education Plans) and we went on excursions and we filled out this one form to go out on an excursion. Now, if I want to go on an excursion, I have to make sure everyone has a risk assessment done. Now each student has a behaviour management plan and you fill out mountains of paperwork just to go out to the shops. It's time consuming and there's no time to do it.

There appeared to be substantial changes in the types and number of forms which Karen was required to complete. Research indicates that change has the potential to be stressful (Adams, 1999; Cartwright & Cooper, 1997) making these changes an additional stress in her workday. Comparing the changes in my own paperwork as a special education teacher, I am very conscious of the stress associated with the learning of each new procedure in addition to the time it takes to complete the form or multiple forms. Often, there is the situation where one procedure is learnt only to find that there are more changes in the method for completing administrative paperwork.

Besides the administrative workload, an additional challenge for many secondary school teachers when including students with disabilities in their subject area was finding time to plan. With the numbers of students seen each day by a secondary school teacher, planning individualised programs is simply not feasible (Ainscow, 1997). Tom, an urban secondary school teacher, was searching for time because he had "a subject area and having [it] from grade eight to grade twelve and having to do all that planning and also plan for maybe one or two special needs children". He argued that the organizational structure and work expectations of the secondary school often reduced opportunities to confer with the special education teachers (Avamidis et al., 2000; O'Shea, 1999). It was only possible for Tom to

make adjustments and modification to the work for the whole class as the additional time requirement of students with disabilities severely impacted on his already limited planning time within a rigid school timetable.

This challenge of limited planning time and inclusion of students with disabilities was a common concern with the teachers in the study. In terms of job stressors, Kokkinos (2007) found that lack of time could significantly predict emotional exhaustion. Results from the present study and from my own experiences as a special education teacher support the worry regarding lack of time. Emma, a rural special education teacher spoke of “tiredness” and of doing “a lot more planning and marking in Special Ed because these kids require it”. When she contrasted her present workload with past employment as a secondary school technology teacher, she explained the time consuming aspects of developing lessons for individual students and constant marking had not been present when she was using a very structured curriculum to teach different aspects of technology.

Within the classrooms, the requirements of students with disabilities continued to impact on the secondary school teachers. Bill, an urban secondary school teacher was mainly concerned with the daily situation in his classroom where all students were competing for his time (Vallence, 2001). He explained, he was continually faced with the dilemma of “whether you get the time to help them [students with disabilities] and if you can give them that extra time that they need in a class of 25 students or 30”. Without additional support in the classroom, this predicament of limited time for individual teaching was faced, daily, by all the secondary school teachers in the study.

The increasing workload and limited time had also impacted on the flexibility of teaching programs catering for students with disabilities. In the secondary school, time was increasingly governed by an inflexible subject timetable. As an itinerant special education teacher, Kym had witnessed the restrictions placed on secondary school teachers because of this inflexibility. She believed the situation led to a clash between creativity and availability of support making teachers unable to follow the natural flow of teaching a topic within their subject area. Visiting the various secondary schools in her area, she found that with inclusion, teachers were losing the ability to be flexible in their planning. Secondary school teachers had told her that usually “they might do theory lessons here and practical lessons there and they

want to change it one week and they can't because there's only support on certain days for their theory lessons".

Additionally, the impact of limited time and strict school organisation was felt by teachers supporting inclusion in a number of schools. Itinerant special education teacher Sarah was continually trying to match the availability of the secondary school teachers to her timetable. As she attempted to negotiate time to see teachers at a number of schools, her present job was becoming extremely stressful. Listening to her comment, it was apparent that she was aware of the pressure placed on teachers in the classroom but she still believed it was important to advocate for 'her' students.

Time, getting to the teachers and having time to in-service and to work out programs for special needs children and getting time for meetings, because as we know teachers are really stretched to the limit as it is in a regular classroom let alone having a regular classroom and a child with special needs.

As an insider researcher, I have often seen evidence of the frustration experienced by itinerant special education teachers as they attempted to make contact with secondary school teachers or provide professional development. Their despondency when they had planned an afternoon meeting to provide information on a particular disability and only two teachers from a group of twelve secondary school teachers attended is always very obvious.

In essence, many teachers feel the present workload associated with students with disabilities, together with the restricted available time, has the potential to impact negatively on all staff and students. Evidence from the study echoed previous research suggesting that, with the current workload in secondary schools, trying to find the time to complete tasks can lead to increased levels of stress (Thomas, Clarke & Lavery, 2003; Williams & Gersch, 2004). The concern of Dianne, a rural special education teacher that "the kids miss out because you're so exhausted trying to keep up" appeared indicative of the majority of 20 teachers interviewed. While other teachers spoke extensively of overwork, tedious administration tasks and lack of support, Karen, an urban special education teacher, expressed her alarm at the administrative workload that is now part of day-to-day teaching and the resulting impact on staff:

You get to the stage when you want to give everything up. I can see staff that are up to here with paperwork and their teaching and their morale is suffering because there's always that something hanging over your head.

Often the teachers, when referring to their daily workload appeared almost overwhelmed. Cooper et al. (2001) point out that excessive work requirements can generate significant psychological and physical strain while Forester and Still (2002) report on a connection between the escalating cost and frequency of stress related illness and increases in employee workloads. According to Kyriacou (2001) there is also a danger that teacher stress can sometimes undermine teachers' feelings of goodwill towards students and lead teachers to over react with hostility. As teacher attitude plays an important role in the inclusion of students with disabilities, there is the prospect that the loss of goodwill will work against a successful inclusion program.

Inclusion programs which increase the workload can be detrimental to teachers as well as students with and without disabilities. Ultimately, the demands of the excessive workloads have the potential to drive the best teachers out of the classroom (Howe, 2004; Robertson, 2002). It is when this workload becomes unmanageable that the acknowledgment of Bill, an urban secondary school teacher, who "hit the wall a couple of times recently. It's got to me" may reflect the behaviour of other teachers coping with inclusion in the secondary school.

### **5.3     *"It's just too many roles to do"***

***(Dianne, urban special education teacher)***

Teachers working in the secondary schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are expected to successfully operate in a multiplicity of roles. They face a combination of expectations and demands placed on them by school administration, colleagues, students, parents and the community. Scheib (2003) suggests that when the pressure from the number and variety of roles within the school environment become overwhelming, teachers are unable to perform any one of the roles to a satisfactory standard. Like Dianne, they believe that with so many roles, they have outreached their capacity to meet the many expectations and demands.

The teachers in the study were already aware of the multiplicity of work roles and the way in which these roles impacted on their professional and personal life. These excessive expectations had resulted in situations where teachers like Dianne when asked about her job as special education teacher, expressed her frustration with the words “there’s not enough time to do them [roles] in and you don’t feel like you do anything well”. A similar emotion was noticeable in the words of Anne, a secondary school teacher. She was including students with disabilities in her subject but was finding the pressure of “trying to scaffold assignment tasks” continually adding to her stress. Throughout the interviews, it was obvious that the teachers in the study were affected by attempting to cope with the many roles demanded of them by parents, the administration, colleagues, students and the community. It has been identified by Travers and Cooper (1996) that when teachers find themselves in similar situations, there is a potential for their lives to be impinged on by the stress of attempting to cope with the multiple expectations.

Amongst the secondary school teachers involved in the study there was agreement that work roles were influenced by the teacher’s experiences, beliefs, desires, theories and values. This was often evident in the varying attitudes of teachers from different subject departments (Ellins & Porter, 2005). A number of secondary school teachers in the study highlighted this by stating their primary role as teaching students whose main objective was high academic achievement. In my role as a special education teacher in a secondary school, I have unfortunately encountered similar attitudes from secondary teachers. In her interview, Sarah, an itinerant special education teacher, described a number of the secondary school teachers she tried to work with as narrow minded. She believed:

They’ve got one idea. ‘I’m teaching maths and I have this curriculum to get through and at the end of the year all my students will be at this level.’

In spite of differences in attitude to their role when teaching students with diverse abilities, secondary school teachers usually still follow set curriculum guidelines in their subject area. This has made student placement a major concern (Vlachou, 1997) for teachers who are specialists in specific academic subjects. As an urban secondary school teacher, Jim, teaching a senior academic subject, focused on assisting his students to achieve high academic results. Although his comments during the interview demonstrated an acceptance of inclusion, it was

apparent there was a clash between this belief and the belief in his role as a teacher of a very academic subject. He questioned the value of students with disabilities who had been enrolled in the academically focused subject. Jim argued they would find it “very frustrating and difficult and not very rewarding.” Julie (a mainstream science teacher) echoed Jim’s comments with “I don’t see many positives for having these students here [in my subject]”. In their interviews, teachers of academic subjects continued to question the placement of students because they believed the students had no chance of academic success.

Additionally, the placement of students with disabilities into secondary schools continues to impact on the role of special education teachers. Washburn-Moses (2005) explained that special education teachers often find themselves overburdened with multiple and sometimes competing roles and responsibilities. Stress for the special education teachers in the study reflected the comments of Gersten et al. (2001) who referred to the conflict between role expectations. In the interviews, the special education teachers spoke of the range of roles including educator, advocate and mediator as well as providing ongoing encouragement to all stakeholders. In their new roles, they attempted to work collaboratively with secondary school teachers in and out of the mainstream classroom delivering services to students in need (Dukes & Lumar-Dukes, 2007). However, there were times when they found themselves in conflict with the expectations held by school administrators, colleagues, parents and the public.

As an insider researcher and a special education teacher, I have personal experience of this conflict in role expectations within the secondary school. It was anticipated that I would have the knowledge to provide the secondary school teachers with teaching strategies for students with a diverse range of disabilities. In another role, there was the expectation that even with limited knowledge of specific subject content (Keefe & Moore, 2004), I would provide effective in class support and adapt any assessment items for the students with disabilities. At the same time, my work entailed designing and implementing literacy and numeracy work units as well as life skills programs suitable for students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities. Like many of my colleagues in special education, I was often challenged and, at times, stressed by the discrepancy between the role criteria of my job and the reality of the school environment.

#### 5.4 *“Secondary school teachers need to take some responsibility”*

*(Janice, itinerant special education teacher)*

One concern raised by secondary special education teachers was that many secondary subject teachers have issues around taking responsibility for students with disabilities. Some secondary teachers are reluctant to accept the role (Hay & Winn, 2005) and expect special education teachers to be responsible for teaching all academic and social skills to students with disabilities. Carrington (2007b, p. 109) explains this scenario by suggesting secondary school teachers who work in a traditional model most likely do not believe “that it is their responsibility to plan and differentiate learning” for the needs of all students in the classroom. As a secondary special education teacher attempting to include a number of students with disabilities across a range of subjects, I have found, like Janice, that when secondary school teachers will not take responsibly for the students with disabilities, the task can appear almost insurmountable.

An avoidance of responsibility for students with disabilities was present at a number of secondary schools in this study. John, an itinerant advisory special education teacher depicted a tradition of two separate areas of responsibilities which often originated within the school administration. Speaking about the secondary schools which he visited, he commented:

They really want someone else to be responsible so they try and isolate them [students with disabilities] and if possible fence them in and keep them as a separate unit. They can be in the school but they are really viewed as a separate unit so most admin really don't want to know.

The negative attitude held by school administration towards taking responsibility for students often filtered through to the classroom teachers. Special education teachers in the study had encountered the attitude of Jim (urban secondary school teacher) who implied that “if they come [to the subject] with an aide then it's not too big a problem”. The secondary school teachers then presumed that the teacher aide was responsible for the student academically and behaviourally. In these circumstances, the special education teachers in this study considered that the secondary school teacher had abdicated responsibility by separating the students in the classroom into neat compartments of mainstream students and special education students.



The special education teachers in the study were very vocal when providing examples of abdication of responsibility by secondary school teachers. In his interview, John, an itinerant special education teacher referred to this attitude when he found himself working with “secondary school teachers who have little knowledge and little interest in gaining the knowledge of different teaching methods”. Working as a special education teacher supporting students with disabilities in a mainstream classroom, I have encountered similar reactions to taking responsibility. In a number of classrooms, the secondary school teacher would focus primarily on the students without disabilities with “the student with disabilities physically in the classroom but not accepted academically” (Reflective Journal). It was expected that I would be responsible for the teaching, learning and behaviour of the students with disabilities. As I was often working with a group of students with disabilities in classrooms where I had limited prior knowledge of the subject content and did not want to be seen as professionally incompetent (Benjamin, 2002a), I found this situation could be extremely stressful professionally and physically.

The connection between attitude and taking responsibility for the instruction of students with disabilities was clearly identifiable to the special education teachers in the study. They suggested that for inclusion of students with disabilities to be successful, teachers must reconsider their own thinking and practice. At the same time, they could name teachers with “a mindset where if a student has an A that means you’re a good teacher” (Ken, rural special education teacher) who found it extremely challenging including students with disabilities. These teachers believed that a successful teacher must “be continuously improving and that continuous improvement must be demonstrable in the improving examination results” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 43). The special education teachers believed that these secondary school teachers were addicted to achieving high learning outcomes and saw students with disabilities as a threat to their identity as a good teacher. As Sarah, an itinerant special education teacher explained, “success with inclusion really goes back to the attitude that the teachers have”.

Overall, secondary school teachers face many challenges if they are to change their attitude to taking responsibility for students with disabilities. The teachers in the study referred to secondary school teachers accustomed to working in isolation as the primary instructor and holding a territorial attitude to the classrooms. These same teachers are now forced to deal with the loss of complete control (Guthrie, 2006) over their teaching methods. As well, there

is the exposure to personal and professional vulnerabilities (Federico et al., 1999) which can take place when there is another teacher in the classroom. As Emma observed, “as a secondary teacher in a mainstream classroom, I used to hate anyone coming into my class or sitting in the back”. She acknowledged that she expected to be responsible for the teaching and learning of all students in the classroom. Nonetheless, she found it extremely difficult to extend her expectations to the student with disabilities and collaborate with the special education teacher.

The special education teachers in the study were also finding challenges in sharing responsibility for the students with disabilities. They found it could be difficult trying to “fit someone’s philosophy to accommodate someone [a student with disabilities] who’s definitely from outside the bookends” (Janice, an itinerant special education teacher). With little or no time for planning with the secondary school teacher, they were often relegated to the role of teacher aide in the classroom (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007). My personal insight into these changes (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) involved moving the students with disabilities from my self contained classroom to the mainstream classroom. Often it was necessary to leave my teaching role in the special education classroom and embrace a new role which is multifaceted. Although I have many years of training and experience as a teacher, this new role as a teacher providing support in a mainstream classroom continues to be one of professional uncertainty.

### **5.5 *“It’s just trying to get teachers to talk to each other”***

***(Sarah, itinerant special education teacher)***

To meet the challenge of obtaining the best educational options for students with disabilities in the secondary school environment, it is crucial to encourage professional contact between teachers in the daily routine. Collaboration involving communication between secondary school teachers who know the curriculum and special education teachers with the skills to adjust activities is essential (Kirk et al., 2006; Rainforth & England, 1997). Effective collaboration is built on parity and trust. Keefe (2007b, p. 187) states that when teachers use collaboration each “will have a unique perspective about an issue and their own ideas about how a problematic situation may be resolved”. As Sarah commented, it is vitally important

that teachers make the effort to talk to each other about the students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Unfortunately, the attitudes of secondary school teachers to inclusion can often make it difficult for them to collaborate with special education teachers. Secondary schools present many obstacles for secondary school teachers and special education teachers working together (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001) particularly in regard to academic expectations in the classroom. Feelings of mistrust can be experienced by the secondary school teachers. Instead of collaborating, they fear they are being observed and expected to show excellent teaching skills. Itinerant special education teacher, Sarah, experienced this difficulty with collaboration when attempting to assist secondary school teachers with strategies for teaching students with disabilities. Her suggestions were not always accepted by secondary school teachers. Instead she encountered a reaction from the teachers of “What are you doing here? Why are you trying to tell me what to do?”

The experiences of a number of teachers including Sarah were indicative that collaboration between special education teachers and mainstream teachers continues to be a problem in their secondary schools. As the special education teachers struggled to implement inclusion of students with disabilities, they referred to encountering secondary school teachers who were strongly opposed to the proposal of having students with disabilities in their classrooms. This was evident in the conversations, emails and lack of consultation on unit planning. John, an itinerant special education teacher, supported students with disabilities in a number of primary and secondary schools. Working for many years with students with disabilities, his experiences had led him to believe in inclusion. However, he was often frustrated by the present situation as illustrated by the following comment.

The level of ignorance in high school is quite dramatic. They're given a child with a disability but they don't even attempt to try and find out what the educational needs of that child [are].

Problems with collaboration can extend to the overall communication system within schools. De Noble and McCormich (2007) point out that stress can rise from a lack of or inefficient communication. As Sarah, an itinerant special education teacher explained “that's another

thing in high schools. Everybody is isolated and nobody gets together”. When I compared these comments to the data from Belinda’s interview, I found that she had echoed this concern when she expressed her annoyance at the organizational and structural barriers in her urban secondary school which made her work as a special education teacher extremely difficult.

It's hard work, and that's probably where a lot of your time goes [communicating information] and the stress happens because all the pieces don't fit together ...Yet, if you don't work together and you don't have team meetings and you don't put out memos about students and people don't know, the staff are the first ones to jump up and down and scream and say, 'Why didn't you tell me?'

Evidence of difficulties with communication was also presented by the secondary school teachers. Without participation in decision making, secondary school teachers can become alienated from the inclusion process (Cronis & Ellis, 2000). Bill, an urban secondary school teacher, explained that the students with disabilities had profiles but “none of them are very thick and to me they seem wishy washy”. According to Bill, the special education teachers should “see you personally because we’re not trained in that area and we don’t know the student’s history and their capabilities”. He complained he was finding it difficult to fulfil his professional responsibilities because of insufficient information (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). However, Julie, a rural secondary school teacher, was more aware of the staffing difficulties in her secondary school. Although she received written information about the students with disabilities in her subjects she “might not necessarily see the people [from the SEU] because they’re just run flat off their feet.”

The need for efficient communication which supports collaboration within the school organisation continues to be essential in the secondary school environment. In their research, Cartwright and Cooper (1997) identified inadequate communication within the organisation as a major cause of stress. For example, Kym, an itinerant special education teacher, like many of her colleagues relied on an effective communication system to support a teaching timetable which included visiting a number of schools. However, secondary schools, particularly those with large enrolments, often added to her level of stress by not providing up-to-date information on proposed changes in the daily routine. Her explanations from

schools had included “Sorry we had parade this morning, all our times have changed” or “Oh they’ve gone on an excursion, didn’t anyone tell you?” Although she enjoyed working with the students with disabilities, lack of consistent communication from the secondary schools was impacting on her ability to efficiently perform her role within the school environment.

Overall, the interviewed teachers continued to draw attention to the importance of collaboration. Cooper et al. (2001, p. 107) pointed to “organisational cultures that foster collaboration and cohesion, that enable employees participation in decision making, and that acknowledge individuals’ efforts are less prone to burnout and other stress-related symptoms”. The majority of the teachers in this study could readily list specific examples of difficulties with communication in their secondary school. As the inclusion process in secondary schools involved many challenges, they believed it was fundamental that teachers be made aware of the problems which can arise with inefficient collaboration between staff and schools.

#### **5.6 “You have to have eyes in the back of your head”**

***(Bill, urban secondary teacher)***

Students with disabilities who exhibit challenging behaviours must be continually monitored to ensure safety. A number of these students can be involved in behaviours that are dangerous to themselves, to property, to other students and to staff. According to Park (2008), workers are already concerned about physical hazards and injuries in a range of workplaces. As Bill, the urban secondary school teacher stated in his interview, teachers who work with adolescent students with socially unacceptable behaviour, are very mindful of the importance of being constantly vigilant and the increasing risk of physical and psychological injuries.

The teachers in the study acknowledged that an ability to effectively manage students with socially unacceptable behaviour is critical to student success and to personal professional accomplishments. In the words of Bill, an urban secondary school teacher, “... if you can’t keep control of the class, you’re in trouble.” Thus, a teacher’s attitude to inclusion can become less favourable when faced with students with discipline problems that disrupt classroom activities (Subban & Sharma, 2006). The teachers agreed unreservedly with research that argues that dealing with disrespectful, disruptive and aggressive students can

disrupt the teacher's capacity to meet the needs of all students as well as have the potential to negatively impact on the teacher's health and reduce the effectiveness of the school (Kelly & Colquhoun, 2003; Naylor, 2001; Naylor, 2002).

In the study, the teachers concentrated on the human aspects of day-to-day challenges with behaviour when involved with students with disabilities. There was an echo of Adams (2006, p. 50) who argued that "although most teachers and experts support the goal of inclusion, many are increasingly pushing for modifications, or 'responsible inclusion' – especially when faced with aggressive or violent kids". The following example of behaviour in the classroom of Bill, an urban mainstream teacher, highlights their concern with behaviour.

There have been a couple of blow ups and we have had kids [with disabilities] come in and all of a sudden they're throwing things [tools] and cutting themselves and hitting kids.

Exposure to student violence in the classroom is not without a corresponding physical and mental reaction from the teacher. Sutherland and Cooper (2000) explain that the body reacts to a stressful incident with changes to the body including the release of hormones. These changes prepare the body for physical activity centered on the fight or flight response to stressful incidents. As well as experiencing these reactions, the body then has a memory of the incident which will, in turn, influence all future interactions with students. A particular situation in a classroom or even the name of a student can prompt a teacher to mentally revisit the prior incident and wonder "if the student is going to go 'off' again" (Reflective Journal). Individuals become stressed by the constant fear of violence (Fleming & Harvey, 2002) with the presence of a certain student usually leading to episodes of challenging behaviour.

Frequent episodes of socially unacceptable behaviour from a student in the classroom have the potential to instigate in the teacher a constant fear of violence from that student. Jane, an urban mainstream teacher, found herself teaching a boy with disabilities who was continually challenging her authority. In her interview, she explained that she had already experienced his violence in the classroom so that each teaching session became even more stressful.

There was one boy [with disabilities] ... I found ... particularly stressful. While initially he started in a very positive mindset, he picked up with the bad peer group. His behaviour came very hard to turn the tide after that and he became violent in the classroom.

In the interview, Jane's anxiety when speaking of this student was evident. Her strain had grown out of the negative experiences that accumulated over a term. In that time, the lack of improvement in his behaviour had given her no opportunity to re-formulate her belief that he could behave in class (Margolis & Nagel, 2006).

Stress caused by exposure to violent incidents had also become familiar to Dianne, an urban special education teacher. She was employed in a school where as "a jack of all trades" there was an expectation that she work with a very diverse range of students and their parents. When I spoke to Dianne, she explained that a previous incident between an aggressive parent and a student resulted in her "walking out of there. I was just exhausted, just mentally had it". Additionally, she was feeling the stress of high numbers of students in her SEU class because "I've got kids in here who should be in the mainstream but because of their behaviour, they just destroy [mainstream] classes".

Besides the presence of challenging behaviour in the school environment, Dianne was teaching students whose disabilities impacted on their ability to make a connection between their actions and the resulting positive or negative reactions. Already feeling the stress due to a need to be, like Bill, constantly vigilant, Dianne's voice in the interview reflected her disbelief as she told the story of a past incident involving a student with disabilities in her special education class. My impression was that even after a month, she still had vivid memories of the hit of adrenalin she felt as she watched the event occurring in front of her.

It's very dynamic stuff [the behaviours in the SEU]. We had a kid here who was given a computer by one of our computer guys to tinker with. He brought it in here and powered it up using the kettle cord. And I looked and I thought 'that light is on and he's got a fork and knife in there and he's tinkering' and I'm thinking 'Oh my God it's ON! What do I do? If I

knock his hand away and he gets a shock at that time'. Oh it was just... You know, it's really hard.

Although, at first, the story told by Peter did not match the drama within Dianne's working day, the unpredictability of one student's behaviour in his class was an ongoing concern. In his interview, Peter explained he began his teaching career in the mainstream classrooms of a rural secondary school. In spite of his limited knowledge of special education, he was now working in a special education unit that catered for students with a range of disabilities. Inclusion meant that the classes in the special education unit were small but the high support needs of a student with severe and profound disabilities still impacted, often negatively, on the staff and other students with disabilities. According to Peter, he could "never trust her" and when questioned provided the following details:

I try and include her with the rest of the SEU class but when she's in one of her moods and dominating; I'll take the kids out and leave the aides with her for the safety of the other kids because she just demands full on. She keeps getting out of her seat and coming up trying to hug me and won't let go. She'll go to hug someone and nearly snap them in half. You can't teach, just can't get away.

Even though a minority of the students with disabilities will have major challenging behaviours, other students will engage in verbal abuse, intimidation and threats as well as exhibit persistent low-level disruptive and off task behaviours. At times, these behaviours can be seen as bullying (Teachers' Union of Ireland, 2006) and can be extremely damaging and distressing (Leather & Brooks, 2001). The episodes can also be highly stressful for the teacher especially when there is a need to continually refocus the group. An urban special education teacher, Karen used one particular incident as it unfolded in the classroom (Bowman, 2006) to illustrate how behaviour could impact on her teaching.

It was only a small [Maths] group today ...and three were working well. One [student] arrived really upset from something that happened this morning which I found out later so I wasn't pre-warned that he was already agitated and when



I asked him to sit down and do some work then he told me where to stick my work. Then he started just niggling and picking on the other students and in their personal space and really making it hard for them to learn ... he couldn't recognise that he arrived in a mood that was not conducive to do any work ... his reaction was to intimidate and not let anyone else do any work.

Besides dealing with a range of behaviours, the teachers in the study were aware of a clash between individual students with disabilities and mainstream students. At times, there were problems cultivating good social relationships amongst all students (Friedman, 2000) as not all mainstream students accepted students with disabilities in the classroom. Instead, "a few kids at school don't accept them, tease them and don't want a bar of them" (Dianne, urban special education teacher). Usually, once these same mainstream students discovered the weak points of the student with disabilities, they focused on trying to get a reaction. In his interview, Peter, a rural mainstream teacher, spoke of inclusion and behaviour patterns that often ended in stress for the student with disabilities, a number of students without disabilities and the teacher.

When I was teaching a mainstream subject, I had him [a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder] in my class and the kids would purposively push his buttons to get him fighting and he was going to belt them and you had to send him off to the SEU anyway to settle down. After the first couple of times you knew what someone was going to do, so you could intervene but if you weren't quick enough or it happened on the way into class, then you would have major problems.

Analysis of the data pointed to an agreement among the 20 teachers that students with disabilities continue to confront teachers with major episodes of socially unacceptable behaviour as well as persistent low-level disruptive behaviours. As Dianne, an urban special education teacher commented:

there are really bad days when lots of things go wrong. Those days take it out of you. I think that probably the hardest thing with inclusion is a lot of the behaviours

Students with disabilities within the secondary school environment can exhibit a range of behaviours from major challenging behaviour involving physical attacks to low-level disruptive behaviours usually in the form of repetitive negative verbal comments. According to Griffith et al. (1999), in these situations, a teacher's perception of stress can be affected by social support and coping skills. However, as an insider researcher, I have found that in spite of collegial support, teachers still believe they are ultimately responsible for dealing with student behaviour (Dukes & Lamar-Dukes, 2007) within the classroom and any failure to cope will reflect on their professional ability. Karen, an urban special education teacher was very aware of the challenging behaviour of a number of students with disabilities and the effect on members of the staff. She was discovering, though, changes in attitude as teachers recognised the importance of collegial support without blaming the professional ability of individuals.

I wasn't involved but there was an issue in our school last week where a student [with disabilities] physically attacked a teacher. When I arrived Monday, everyone was still really upset by the situation. Really it makes the whole staff bond very closely together because you have to rely on each other.

**5.7** *"I don't think most administrators have a specific interest"*

**(John, itinerant special education teacher)**

Leadership in secondary schools comes from an administration team composed of a principal, deputy principals and teachers-in-charge of subject departments. John believed that few of these teachers had a specific interest in the inclusion of students with disabilities. Yet, effective leadership from the school administration is crucial in helping to set the tone of the school's culture (Gersten et al., 2001; Spedding, 2008). One factor that will contribute to a positive school climate towards inclusion is support from the school administration (Brownell et al., 2002). In contrast, a perceived lack of support can impact negatively on teachers (Margolis & Nagel, 2006).

Teachers within the schools are under constant surveillance by administration to meet the demands of the curriculum. There was a common complaint from the interviewed teachers that the administration in their schools usually “focus on the things that education is structured around like OP’s or Block Ed stuff” (Ken, rural special education teacher). Inclusion and special education were frequently ignored as John, an itinerant special education teacher explained when describing the administration within the schools he visited.

The area of disability, it’s like a flea on the hide of the elephant. They don’t really want it to bite and annoy them; they just want it to go away. It can be there but they don’t really want it to impact on them.

Peter, a rural special education teacher, echoed this sentiment when he explained that “the mainstream, that’s where the energy is going to be. We’re on the margin, that’s about it”. As Adams (2006) points out, the challenge can be in finding a delicate balance between ensuring that students with disabilities are included in the school and, at the same time, maintaining a school wide learning environment.

Meeting the demands of the curriculum through maintaining a school wide learning environment involves working with a range of staff and students. However, stories told by the interviewed teachers substantiate a belief that the school administration often failed to recognise the unique characteristics and needs of students with disabilities included in the school (Burchielli & Batram, 2006). Karen, an urban special education teacher, considered that the school administration needed to have ready access to knowledge on the individual students with disability including the impact of their disability on learning and behaviour. At the same time, she believed there should be a penalty for the breaking of school rules. With this perception of inclusion, she advocated that “they should not pass the buck either. They need to be in there and show that there are consequences for our students that are the same as for others”.

Also involved in maintaining a school wide learning environment were the staff from the special education units. The teachers in the study agreed that effective leadership must come not only from school administration but from the teacher-in-charge of the Special Education

Programs. Each of the HoSEP (Head of Special Education Programs) within the study found that the school administration listened to any suggestions but often had to balance requests against the needs of the secondary school. Unless there was a specific interest in students with disabilities, the administrators would leave the daily running to the teacher-in-charge of the Unit because they were “under a number of pressures” (Ken, rural HoSEP). As Emma, a rural special education teacher explained “the amount of work the HoSEP does, I’m just astounded. I don’t know how she’s done it for so many years”.

In secondary schools where the benchmark for recognition is academic excellence or vocational training success, the slow student improvements gained by these teachers who work with students with disabilities are rarely acknowledged. Instead, the teachers in the study found a continuing focus on academic and vocational outcomes when some students, particularly those with disabilities, are simply unable to reach the high levels demanded by governments and modern society. As a result, the teachers who work with the included students rarely receive professional recognition for their endeavours (Burchielli & Bartram, 2006) or social support while students with disabilities are often an invisible population of the school. Margolis and Nagel (2006, p. 154) highlighted the problem when they proposed that “perceived day-to-day validation and support from administration was the greatest determinant” when teachers decide if they will stay in teaching.

More often than not, there was concern amongst the teachers that when the school administration accepts inclusion it is for the wrong reasons. Instead of focusing on the social and academic benefits for the students with disabilities, the acceptance of inclusion comes from the belief special education teachers will be responsible for the behaviour of the students with disabilities. Belinda, an urban special education teacher revealed that although the administration at her school accepted the presence of the special education unit it was because they were “getting rid of kids they find hard to manage or that they have to manage a lot”.

## 5.8 *“Schools need to recognize these kids need extra help”*

*(Kym, itinerant special education teacher)*

A vital component of a successful inclusion process is the recognition from school administration that students with disabilities require additional human and physical resources. As Kym explained, there needs to be acknowledgment that the presence of students with disabilities in a classroom places additional demands for individual student assistance on the teacher. Many students with disabilities were originally identified due to their inability to complete, without support, similar tasks as their mainstream peers (Kirk et al., 2006) and placed in supportive special schools. The increasing number of students with disabilities now included in the mainstream classroom has resulted in continuous claims from schools to fund the escalating need for human and material support.

Funding and resource allocation for human and material support has become an issue when running inclusion programs. Inclusion can be a drain on resources particularly when providing individualised attention for students with disabilities. The programs require “significant resources in order to be implemented” (Jenkins, 2002, p. 57) and schools do not always receive the necessary funding from the central administration. For example, Karen, an urban special education teacher described a situation where:

there’s teacher aide time and we use that resource as best we can ... we’ve got some classes where a teacher aide spends half the lesson with one student and then goes off to another half a lesson with another student and that is a lesson that is 35 minutes long.

The special education teachers in the study were often caught between the expectations of support from the secondary teachers and the economic constraints of the school system. In her interview, Karen an urban special education teacher was upset because “mainstream teachers are crying out for help as we are [in the SEP] but we need to be seen to be assisting them and it’s never enough”. Frost (2003) pointed out that dealing with these situations can exact a high personal toll on the person in the middle which, in many circumstances, was the special

education teacher. However, special education teachers rarely take time to consider the personal wear and tear caused by handling the emotions of others.

Compounding the difficulties with human resources is the physical working environment. When teachers are forced to make the classroom resources, the resulting tasks can impact on their workload and affect their perception of the stress involved in teaching. Wright and Sigafos (1997) in their study established that teachers find trying to obtain appropriate resources stressful. These resources can range from desks to accommodate students with wheelchairs to the daily resources used in the classroom. According to Elkins (2005), there is no justification for inclusion that is inadequately resourced. Teachers, like Kate a rural secondary school teacher, wanted to provide an educational environment which supported the learning needs of the students with disabilities but often became frustrated by the lack of specific teaching resources.

Last year was my first year teaching and I was teaching a subject [maths] that I had no training in and had a student who was blind so it was a lot to take in and on my own. A lot more time had to be spent preparing resources and stuff which is fair enough but we have a full teaching load and it made a difference. I sometimes felt guilty, I guess, because he would get more attention and so much time would be spent on him trying to get him on task and engaged that the other kids would be overlooked.

With the presence of support in the classroom, however, comes the danger mainstream teachers will continue to exclude students with disabilities from the curriculum. Carrington and Elkins (2002b, p. 5) consider there are times when “in-class support may actually exclude students from accessing the curriculum”. Mainstream urban teacher, Anne, used a story about one particular student to explain her beliefs and actions (Dorries & Haller, 2003) in using support in an inclusive classroom. In the interview, she did admit that there was ongoing stress involved in her method of including the students with disabilities.

They tend to do less [with the aide]. Like the aide sort of naturally took over and started chopping up the bits and bobs

and once I said ‘Hey listen, I think we’ll be fine. Maybe we could get the aide for like the exams’. Well there’s a bit of stress attached to the situation but they’re doing really well, top kids.

The teachers in the study were aware of the extensive range of resources available to assist each inclusion program. In rural areas, though, lack of access to support personnel with knowledge of these resources was a common concern. Teachers in these schools struggled with the unique issues of teaching students with a diverse range of disabilities. Kate’s comment “I probably could have done more but I didn’t know what” reflected her frustration as a beginning teacher in a rural secondary school. The dissatisfaction of the teachers in the rural areas with the present system was unmistakable as, knowing of my extensive experience in special education, they would often ask for help with individual students. Consequently, I often found myself, at the conclusion of the interviews, stepping out of the researcher’ role and into the teacher/ teacher educator role to answer questions regarding resources and teaching strategies that might assist specific students.

### **5.9 “So we’ll sue the school, sue the teacher”**

*(Janice, itinerant special education teacher)*

When parents and carers believe their child is not receiving the best educational services, there is the possibility they will resort to negative action against the school and teachers. They want the best for their child and, as Janice explained, will react against the teacher if they believe this is not happening. However, the journey towards inclusion continues to be long and problematic (Naylor, 2005). This has resulted in times when, instead of supporting teachers in their role as educators, parents may pin the blame on teachers for any problems that occur both in and outside the classroom (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005; Friedman, 2000).

Evidence from the interviews indicated that teachers, as professionals, held a high level of personal commitment but at the same time, they were vulnerable if unable to meet the demands imposed by the parents and society. The special education teachers, in particular, felt they were under constant surveillance by parents who would often contact them about even minor complaints made by their son/ daughter. Forbes (2007, p. 67) argues “the current policy of parental choice has created an expectation that *all* teachers will be equipped to cope with

*all* disabilities in *all* settings”. Janice, an itinerant visiting teacher had seen cases where the teachers tried very hard to do the right thing but in the process made a mistake. This resulted in a situation where the parents “come down on them like a ton of bricks and then the teacher who’s been working so hard just loses it”.

The range of expectations placed on teachers by some parents continues to be grounds for stress. Hargreaves (2003) suggests that while teachers have improved their ability to collaborate with colleagues, they have been less effective at doing so with parents. It was clear in the interview with Sarah, an itinerant special education teacher that she believed strongly in students with disabilities being included in the mainstream classroom. She even questioned the use of special education units believing the school should provide full inclusion. However, in the following comments, her frustration came not from been unable to advocate for the inclusion of a student with disabilities but from the inability to reach a consensual understanding with the parent on the potential danger of the student’s behaviour.

I’ve got a parent at the moment that would cry discrimination at the drop of a hat. And yet you know the things that are happening, it’s not because this child’s got a disability, it’s because this child is in danger and if this child didn’t have a disability she’d still be in danger. And when you try to explain this to the parent, she just won’t have it. She keeps saying that I am only making these suggestions because her child has a particular disability. She will not believe that I am worried because I believe that any child in a similar situation would be in danger.

Many parents of students with disabilities, however, can find themselves in a vulnerable position. According to Janice, an itinerant special education teacher, parents may be “struggling with parenting because these kids are very different”. Other parents associated the school with their own “past history of uncomfortable learning” (Senge et al., 2000, p. 13). Teachers working with students with disabilities can face a home situation that can be quite complicated and like Sarah, an itinerant special education teacher, become quite emotionally involved with the parents, “because sometimes they’re struggling with the whole idea of a disability.”



The teachers in the study had met parents who held the belief that inclusion into a secondary school environment holds the key to successful inclusion into society. As Janice, an itinerant special education teacher explained:

There are some people who probably blindly think, if I put the state school uniform on and he goes off to school every day in the state school uniform, then he's not different and there are no extra needs.

Being a special education teacher and the parent of a son with disabilities, I was very conscious of the attitudes of teachers to parents and, at times, the tendency to blame the parents for the behaviour of the student. When talking with colleagues, I have heard comments which link the behaviour of the student with disabilities to bad parenting skills. At other times, teachers appeared almost caught between their own expectations of parents and the expectations of individual parents. For example, Karen, an urban special education teacher complained about the lack of writing materials with which the students with disabilities came to school. Each year she found herself coping with the following alternatives.

There are some families that don't provide them ... and we always go and buy a big stack of books and pencils. But we also want the students to be responsible for their own things so we are sort of stuck between a rock and a hard place. Do we give them all the stuff that they need or do we make their parents and them responsible?

It is a question that as a secondary school special education teacher, I have asked many times. Like Karen, special education teachers in the secondary school can be placed in a position of providing the personal equipment so that the activities are completed or seeing students fall behind in their work due to lack of equipment. Unfortunately, it is a problem which does not appear to have a solution making many of the special education teachers feel they are 'between a rock and a hard place'.

### 5.10 *“I probably could have used more but I didn’t know what”*

*(Kate, rural secondary school teacher)*

Teachers working with students with disabilities require opportunities for ongoing professional development. Naylor (2005, p. 11) argues that even when teachers have “some awareness of diversity, and perhaps knowledge of adaptation and other approaches, teachers also require in-service to teach to diverse needs.” Foreman (2008) disagrees, however, by stating that there is no need for special skills other than those which are used by all competent teachers. In this study, the views of Kate, a rural secondary school teacher, were similar to Naylor as, often during the interview, she referred to her own lack of knowledge when faced with teaching students with disabilities.

The teachers in the study were unanimous in highlighting the importance of ongoing professional development. Traditionally, teachers have been expected to make necessary adjustments to ensure students in the classroom are making academic and social gains (Dukes & Lamar-Dukes, 2007). However, many of the teachers found the situation challenging as they attempted to design and present consistent educational programs that were appropriate to the ability of the students with disabilities as well as maintain effective teaching for all students in the classroom (Forlin, 2001; Forlin et al., 2008; Horne & Timmons, 2009). A common theme in the interviews was the need for “more professional skills when teaching students with disability” (Lisa, advisory special education teacher). Without these skills, they commented, there was the danger of feeling incompetent and personally inadequate when attempting to work with students with disabilities.

This need for professional development is substantiated by information gathered during the study from the questionnaires. The questionnaires concentrated on gaining personal demographic details (Best & Kahn, 1998) and revealed a substantial number of the teachers had limited training in teaching students with disabilities. Of the 20 teachers interviewed, only eight teachers held post graduate qualifications in special education. From the remaining 12 secondary school teachers, three teachers had moved from the mainstream classroom to the special education unit but had only completed one undergraduate subject in special needs and admitted they had little practical knowledge of working with students with disabilities before beginning their new appointment.

Special education teachers working in administration areas found it particularly difficult when working with untrained staff. The four HoSEP (Head of Special Education Programs) revealed, for some teachers, there was a misconception that working in special education was “a soft option” (Ken, rural HoSEP). In particular, Ken described teachers who, unable to cope with the mainstream classroom, had asked to be transferred to the special education unit because of the smaller classes. The four HoSEP also referred to secondary school teachers working in the special education unit due to family commitments and the opportunity to work part time. However, Belinda, who was in charge of the Special Education Programs at her urban secondary school, explained how the performance of teachers who lacked the skills and experience required in adaptation of programs as well as information on teaching strategies for students with disabilities (Avramidis et al., 2000; McLeskey & Waldron, 2000) impacted on her and the other teachers teaching the special education programs.

A lot of staff that are involved with the SEP at the present moment aren't trained, and if you have a trained [special education] teacher and non-trained teacher the difference is phenomenal. You can just tell the trained teacher to go away and do something and they've got all that background knowledge and skills to implement it in such a way that it flows smoothly. An untrained teacher, there is nothing wrong with them, but they don't have all that background knowledge and skills.

Belinda often found herself teaching the teachers without special education training. Additionally, she needed to complete the majority of the special education administration as the secondary school teachers working in the mainstream or special education unit lacked the knowledge and skills. This situation continued to add to her workload and resulting exhaustion.

The lack of expertise in special education is being exacerbated by a number of factors. Forbes (2007) points out that attrition rates amongst special education teachers are especially high, primarily due to the impact of an ageing population. The majority of trained special education teachers within the study had been teaching for an average of 20 years. As they leave the teaching profession or retire, the accumulated knowledge of special education is being lost. In

response, Belinda, an urban special education teacher, advocated for the special education teachers to take on the responsibility in educating the rest of the school. She referred to special education teachers being more “pro-active” as they had a “professional role to play”. In this role, they could not only teach the secondary school teachers about the special needs of students with disabilities but also provide strategies on how to accommodate the learning and emotional needs of students with and without disabilities (Robinson, 2002).

However, it was apparent from the questionnaire, as well as my own knowledge as an insider researcher, that teachers with special education training are limited in number and have even more limited ‘spare’ time. John, an advisory special education teacher, extended this concern when he explained that it is assumed special education teachers are experts in all areas of disability even though the focus of their training may not have been on a particular disability. In the interview, he made it clear that special education teachers can find the additional role extremely stressful because “besides the other jobs, they’re faced with attempting to work out in their own time how to gain information about the particular disability”.

A number of secondary teachers in the study were also concerned about their pre-service training which impacted on their confidence in teaching students with disabilities. Perceived professional competence which is linked to knowledge and skills (Forlin, Keen & Barrett, 2008) and the ability to collaborate with special education teachers (Hay & Winn, 2005) can contribute to stress when including students with disabilities). Ma and MacMillan (1999) extended this link by pointing out that professional competence is a key contributor to job satisfaction. This concern with perceived professional competence has been echoed by teachers in a national survey of 1207 beginning teachers by the Australian Education Union (2006). The survey found that 65% of beginning teachers did not feel that their pre-service education prepared them for dealing with the needs of students with disabilities. In her interview, Anne, a first year urban secondary school teacher echoed the concerns of many first year teachers when she reflected on her difficulties in the following comments:

I tend to stress in the theory lessons ... you’ve got those kids in there that have special needs. You really have to try really hard to think about them. I think you tend to be more critical of what you’ve actually done in the classroom as well. You walk out of there and think did I do the right thing by Kay

[student with disabilities], did I do the right thing by Jean  
[student with disabilities], how about everybody else?

Furthermore, limited opportunities for ongoing professional development extended to the people employed as teacher aides. Amongst the interviewed teachers there was a similar viewpoint to Idol (2006) who advocated for teacher aides to be better trained in the impact that different disabilities may have on learning. As Bill, an urban secondary teacher explained:

You'll do a demonstration and the kids go back to their desks... The teacher aides, they're struggling because they might have two or three kids there and they're trying to help the kids do different stages.

Karen, an urban special education teacher had a similar corresponding criticism related to when teacher aides "just walk in not knowing what their role is and the teachers don't know how to use them either". This may result in a situation where the actions of the teacher aide can significantly reduce the challenge for the student with disabilities by providing too much support or act as a social barrier between the students with disabilities and their peers (Ainscow, 2000). Karen's idea was for teachers to be given instruction on strategies in the effective and efficient use of teacher aides. This would assist in achieving a more inclusive classroom.

Additionally, there was a concern amongst teachers in the study that training should be available for teachers and teacher aides on the effective use of specific equipment which is used with students with disabilities. Individualized adaptation of the available equipment or the purchased/ borrowed equipment is often necessary if inclusion is to be meaningful for students with disabilities. The teachers felt that without training for all staff involved in the inclusion process, the result was feelings of stress and incompetence. These concerns for training echo Cooper et al. (2001, p. 36) who stated that "unless adequate training and preparation is provided, potentially stressful situations may develop when new technology is introduced into the workplace and the individual feels unable to cope with the innovations".

In spite of a growing emphasis on support and access to professional development, there continues to be a clash between secondary school teachers who would readily include students with disabilities in their classes and teachers who were experts at finding excuses. The attitudes of these two types of teachers become common knowledge particularly among staff in the special education units of a school. The special education teachers mentioned that they were very alert to this situation and over the years had made a list of teachers who were 'good' with the students from the unit. Sarah, an advisory special education teacher suggested that:

What happens in a lot of schools and where people get stressed out is if there's a teacher in the school who does very well with any of the special needs kids they have in their class. Then they're going to have special needs the next year and the next year and the next year. I have had teachers that don't want special needs kids. Why give them to them because they're not going to do anything with them anyway?

If teachers are unable to meet the needs of the students with disabilities due to lack of knowledge or limited human support within the classroom, students with disabilities can be placed in the classroom but there is no guarantee of participation or achievement. Burchielli and Batram (2006) imply that stress can come from teachers being expected to fulfil roles requiring knowledge and skills that they have not learned. However, Ellins and Porter (2005) argue that if students with disabilities are to succeed in the mainstream classroom, then their needs must be met and teachers must be willing to provide for them. The presence of these messages continues to contribute to the feelings of frustration evident in the words of Jim, an urban mainstream teacher.

I know some teachers who have a group of very diverse abilities from special ed kids who aren't coping to the academic kids who are doing everything you want straight away and wanting more. That can be very upsetting because they feel no one's happy.

### **5.11 Conclusion**

There was agreement amongst the teachers in the study about the nature and intensity of the stress involved in the inclusion of students with disabilities. This was evident in the use of the words frustrated, discouraged, overwhelmed, anxious, tired and exhausted which were repeated often in the interviews. Spedding (2005, p. 414) refers to a belief amongst teachers that they are “unappreciated, overworked, not respected as professionals, undervalued and unsupported, and frustrated by the ‘non-teaching’ demands placed upon them.” Listening to the comments from each of the interviews, it was evident these words described the feelings of many of the teachers. Although the performance of a teacher is difficult to measure, one can assume that stressed teachers show more inappropriate actions and cognitive malfunctions than teachers who are not stressed. As a result, the level of stress affecting teaching can have direct influence on the lives of the students that are taught (Adams, 1999; Dorman, 2003; Overland, 2001).

What differentiates the insider research process from research conducted by outsiders is the ongoing enmeshment of the insider in the work environment that is the subject of the study. As a special education teacher listening to the stories told by the teachers, I could connect with many of their experiences as I had had similar experiences in my secondary school. When I was experiencing high levels of stress, I was unable to function effectively (Overland, 2001). Like the teachers in the study, I believed in the philosophy of inclusion but like Dianne, an urban special education teacher, found myself with so many different roles that I was in danger of overreaching my capacity to meet the many expectations and demands.

A common element of teaching and qualitative research is the process of reflection. During the study, it was important that I systematically reflect on the identities, roles and relationships (Ravitch & Wirth, 2007) of the teachers I interviewed. Throughout this process it was possible to identify similar roles, relationships and incidents at the secondary school where I was employed as a special education teacher. It was evident that there were different interpretations of the inclusion process allowing multiple views of a problem to emerge (Creswell, 2009). The following chapter will look at those different interpretations as well as the different status given to each person in the inclusion program.

## *Chapter Six*

### *Insiders, Outsiders and Boundary Riders*

#### **6.0 Introduction**

Reflection is an important aspect during the gathering and analysis of data in qualitative research. Self-reflexivity becomes increasingly central when trying to make meaning from “interaction with the data and the politics of meaning” Lather (1991, p. 23). Later research from Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000, p. 245) describes reflection as trying to “ponder upon the premises for our thoughts, our observations and our use of language”. Although this type of reflection can be difficult, it is necessary because within a research situation, readers, participants and researchers can all make different interpretations allowing multiple views of a problem to emerge (Creswell, 2009). Reflection, in this study, encouraged the unpacking of issues and in the process gained an insight into the location of staff, students with and without disabilities within the culture of the secondary school.

Amongst the 20 teachers there was recognition of a school culture which was not always inclusive in secondary schools. The culture of an inclusive and socially just school requires everyone to be treated with respect for their knowledge and experiences (Carrington, 1999; Carrington & Robinson, 2004; Moss, 2003). However, within the culture of their schools, the presence of insiders, outsiders and boundary riders was very observable. That is, staff and students could have full insider membership of the powerful group or be seen as an outsider when they were prevented from entering the group. This study also provided evidence of a third group or boundary riders whose role was to assist students with disabilities in becoming recognised members of the group of insiders.

The purpose of the following chapter will be to reflect on the data gathered from the participants in this study and their roles as insiders, outsiders and boundary riders. As a special education teacher, I am very aware of the need to reflect on the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools. Many of the changes in my role as a teacher have left little time for rest, recovery or reflection (Margolis & Nagel, 2006). This research topic, therefore, has allowed me to indulge my passions as a parent and a teacher and to be in a position to view issues around inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools from multiple perspectives. Ainscow (1999) describes inclusion as a never ending process rather than a simple change of state. It is dependent on a continuous pedagogical and



organisational development with the mainstream. For these reasons, it is significant at this stage of the thesis to reflect on the gathering and analysis of the data as well as revisiting the questions behind this study.

### **6.1 “We can give you a different, not better, perspective”**

*(Sarah, itinerant special education teacher)*

The interviews provided the teachers with an opportunity to present their perspective of inclusion of students with disabilities in their secondary school environment. As a naturalistic researcher, I wanted to listen to what they thought and felt about inclusion (Sikes et al., 2007) and to interpret the “given context(s), and the ways in which life takes place from the view of the participants” (Green, 2002, p. 9). It was evident that each of the 20 teachers had different experiences when working with students with disabilities so the interviews provided the opportunity to listen to each of their perspectives on the total cost and value of inclusive education policies (Anderson et al., 2007). In the role of special education teacher working in a secondary school, I was able to delve into the multiple aspects of inclusion while, at the same time, reflecting on my role as a boundary rider or overseer as well as some of my own biases and beliefs about inclusion.

In principle, the teachers in the study believed in the social justice paradigm of equal educational opportunities for all students. However, I found this belief was often influenced by their teaching area. Although positive teacher attitudes are essential in successful implementation of inclusive policies and practices, these attitudes can vary (Avramidis et al., 2000) depending upon the subject area and available support. Essentially, in this study, the teachers could understand the reasons behind an inclusive school but when they related their experiences of what actually happens in the classrooms, it was possible to understand their concerns.

The teachers described secondary schools where students with disabilities were still excluded from the culture of the mainstream classroom. Carrington and Elkins (2002b, p. 13) support this concern when they observe, “students may be accepted into a class but may not have their learning needs met effectively if the teacher does not believe that she or he is responsible for teaching all students in the classroom”. When asked to reflect on the present situation as well as what adjustments and modifications were required for successful inclusion of students with

disabilities, Karen, an urban special education teacher was able to suggest a number of prerequisites for change.

I guess I really want those students to feel comfortable in those classes because if they're not comfortable they're not going to learn and that's the main thing. So the teachers need to make them feel welcome and need to allow those students to achieve success. You need to get that feeling of confidence for the student that they can actually do some of this stuff.

As an insider researcher, I recognized the wisdom in what the teachers were saying. When students find the instruction too difficult requiring understandings or performance that they do not have, they will exhibit a number of behaviours including embarrassment, anxiety, inattention or hostility (Kauffman et al., 2005). Comments from the 11 special education teachers reveal that this behaviour can result in a situation where the secondary school teachers only see the students with disabilities as behaviour problems in the classroom reacting with the attitude of "just put them in the unit and I don't have to do this" (Julie, rural secondary school teacher).

Analysis of the data from the interviews had also revealed different viewpoints on inclusive education exhibited by special education teachers working in administrative positions. They brought different understandings and interpretations (Pring, 2004) to the interview which impacted on the data. As boundary riders, they were often more aware of the 'big picture'. Belinda, who was in charge of a special education unit, explained the dissimilarity in opinion with "probably because I am an administrator of special education. I've been in the job a few years and have a different perspective to a teacher in the classroom". Therefore, during the interviews the teachers working in administration positions would frequently bring to light a new range of issues as well as suggest changes which would assist the inclusion process. This data highlighted my own position as a classroom teacher not working in an administrative position because I was not simply reflecting upon a situation which I produced.

As I finished each interview, I added comments about the atmosphere of the meeting with the teacher in my reflective journal. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) propose that what people say in interviews can differ from their beliefs. Therefore, it was interesting to note the diverse

ways in which each teacher reacted to my presence in the interview. According to Salend and Duhaney (1999), the responses of the teachers may be affected by their desire to reply with socially accepted answers which were not always an accurate reflection of their attitude and experiences with the inclusion of students with disabilities. For example, the first year teachers were very much on their guard, the teachers in administrative positions tended to speak the departmental language while the teachers who had been teaching for a period of time and saw themselves as classroom teachers were eager to express their frustrations. Interestingly, even though I undertook to respect personal and work related confidentiality, in the interviews with these classroom teachers, many of the most interesting comments came after I had been asked to turn off the tape recorder.

The comments I heard in each interview had the potential to influence my decisions as a researcher, as a special education teacher and as a parent. Although at times I personally did not agree with the teachers, I still found it important that I show my respect by taking seriously “what they say, what they think they are doing, what they make of things” (Peshkin, 2001a, p. 244). Listening to their stories, I found I was also questioning the different roles played by the teachers and students. As if in answer to my concerns about the process, Kate, a rural mainstream teacher was able to provide positive interpretation of inclusion when she used the actions of actual students to illustrate how the process worked in her school.

It's that the kids get to interact with each other. Other students work with this particular person and I find that other students are really good at keeping him on track and giving him help when he needed it. I guess it probably made him see though that he couldn't have attention whenever he wanted because he wasn't the only one there. He couldn't disrupt the others when he wanted to.

As well as providing information on what happens when students with disabilities are included in the secondary school, the interviews provided an opportunity for the teachers to reflect on what sense they were making of these experiences (deMarrais, 2004; Seidman, 1998). One of the problems faced by many teachers is that the pace and demands of the classroom allow little space for reflection. Yet Carrington (1999, pp. 264-265) argues that when teachers reflect on their views and actions, they will “gain an awareness of their

assumptions, beliefs and how they relate to practice”. In this study, the teachers had been provided with the chance to tell thick rich descriptive stories about different experiences in the classrooms. At the same time, colleagues when given an opportunity to read extracts from the collected stories responded with “That’s *my* story. I am not alone” (Richardson, 1995, p. 213). Thus, reflecting on inclusion in their secondary school enabled the teachers to carefully consider their current practice and to envision new and innovative approaches. Amongst the changes they believed would be beneficial was to encourage teachers to talk to a variety of other teachers and not stay isolated in their subject areas.

## 6.2 *“It’s good to talk to other teachers, too”*

*(Jane, urban secondary teacher)*

Research has found that effective inclusive education programs are built on a foundation of collaboration. Collaboration through effective communication amongst all members of the inclusion team is therefore becoming a key ingredient in creating a successful inclusion process (Carpenter and Dyal, 2007; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Turnbull et al., 1999). As Jane suggests, it is good to talk to other teachers teaching the students with disabilities. However, she believed it is important that the communication involves not just the students with disabilities and specific teachers but other teachers, the school administration, the mainstream teachers, the parents and the mainstream students (Cronis & Ellis, 2000; Heiman, 2004; Pearce & Forlin, 2005; Rainforth & England, 1997). This rejects the notion that the delivery of special education services is dependent upon a place (Dukes & Lamar-Dukes, 2007). As Sarah, an itinerant special education teacher commented, “communication is a key issue” when students with disabilities are included in the mainstream classroom ‘because everyone really needs to talk to each other’.

Teachers have the opportunity to teach themselves as they talk to teachers and other members of the inclusion team about practice. Ainscow (2002) insists it is vital teachers working with students with disabilities reconsider their own thinking and practice as the emphasis on inclusion becomes more obvious. When teachers use their own experiences as springboards for examining why they do what they do, the connection between who they are as teachers can become stronger. Ken, a rural special education teacher, in his position as head of special education services, provided assistance with adaptations and modifications of the curriculum

for secondary school teachers including students with disabilities in their subjects. In this role, he was very aware of benefits associated with reflection on thinking and practice.

I think one does reflect on practice [with inclusion]. Once they're [teachers] reflective, they're better able to identify information. You know we talk about the problems. When they are able to identify the problems and then develop skills and strategies, then that's great.

However, secondary schools can be so compartmentalized that teachers lose sight of what goes on elsewhere in the school. According to Brown and Kennedy (2001), secondary school teachers may find this sharing of information a challenge as previously the emphasis was on working in separate subject departments. The teachers often see themselves as too busy to seek assistance and may be too wary to reveal their fears (Holmes, 2005). Yet collaboration with other teachers to address student problems continues to be an important element of inclusive classrooms. Evidence of the success of this strategy can be found in the words of Jane, an urban mainstream teacher. Jane believed she was the only one having problems with student behaviour until given the opportunity to talk to other teachers about a particular student. In the conversations with her colleagues, she learnt:

they [the teachers] have had a similar struggle with him [student with disabilities] over a particular issue with compliance or whatever ... I was able to get strategies that weren't just all negative.

Simply sharing the problem with colleagues, Jane found was an effective way in which to help dissipate the feelings of stress associated with including a particular student with disabilities in her classroom. Learning about the capabilities of the student (Scott et al., 2007) as well as gaining proven successful strategies to use became critical factors in helping her cope in a classroom which previously had not been conducive to teaching and learning.

Collaboration through effective communication between teachers is not confined to the environment of the secondary school. Awareness and extensive support of colleagues (Heiman, 2004) can extend to communication with teachers working in other schools. With

Anne, the understanding and support she received from her mother, a senior teacher, had worked in providing welcome encouragement to a beginning teacher who was still learning her craft.

I am a first year teacher and I've done so much extra stuff this year it's unbelievable and because I'm keen and I've still got that energy and enthusiasm, it makes it okay. You know I can deal with anything. You just have to show me how to deal with it. My mum's a teacher as well, she's been teaching for 30 something years and we talk about our students. And I mean she still has trouble dealing with her special needs kids which is interesting and we talk about strategies.

In spite of a willingness to collaborate, language differences can create or intensify barriers between secondary school teachers and special education teachers. As a special education teacher working in a secondary school, I have often felt isolated from the secondary school teachers particularly when visiting staffrooms where the focus is on teaching specific subjects. Although I continued to investigate ways in which to interact with colleagues in a substantive fashion (Gersten et al., 2001), talking to fellow special education teachers is always a welcome respite because as Sarah, an itinerant special education teacher explained "we speak the same language".

Along with opportunities for collaboration can come a sharing of responsibility for the education of students with disabilities. Reflecting on the situation in the secondary school in which I teach, I find that secondary school teachers, who are not committed to inclusion, find it difficult to take responsibility for students with disabilities. Evidence of this attitude was apparent when a special education teacher in our staff room needed to make six telephone calls to different secondary school teachers before one of the teachers would take responsibility for the behavioural support of a student with disabilities who attended all mainstream subjects. In secondary schools, there is still a tendency for teachers to work in the model where they look to the special education teachers to assume all responsibility (Bunch & Valeo, 2004) for students with disabilities.

Even though the secondary school teachers and special education teachers in the study could see the value in ‘talking to other teachers’, they were often frustrated with the lack of scheduled time (Turnbull et al., 1999) to meet or even to think. Research has shown that limited team skills and lack of scheduled opportunities during the school day have become major barriers to collaboration (McLeskey & Waldron, 2000; Naylor, 2001; Turnbull et al., 1999). Ben, an urban mainstream teacher described a situation where he had difficulty “just finding the time to talk to others, finding the time to reflect on your practices and how you are coping with the kids”. Rodriguez and Romaneck (2002) argue that if secondary school teachers do not have time or the opportunity to share information about students with disabilities, their accepting attitudes change as they quickly become disenchanted with inclusion and refer to it as ‘mainstream dumping’. Unfortunately, in secondary schools where there is a relentless drive towards increased, measurable achievement (Hargreaves, 2003, Thousand et al., 1997) the needs of teachers working with students with disabilities is often not seen as a high priority.

### **6.3     *“There’s still a slight stigma attached to the unit”***

***(Peter, a rural special education teacher)***

There are a number of school factors which may influence the implementation of an inclusion program. Factors including school policy, the principal’s attitude to inclusion, the relationship between mainstream and special education teachers and the teachers’ level of confidence when working with students with disabilities all play an important role (Carrington, 1999). When special education is viewed as an ‘add on’ to the school culture, there are often students who do not want to be identified as belonging to the special education unit. Peter, a rural special education teacher had noticed that some secondary students believed there was a stigma in being seen as a student from the special education unit so they “don’t want to identify with it, even some of the SEU kids don’t want to identify with it”. Sarah an itinerant special education teacher explained that by the time students with disabilities reach secondary school, they would probably have experienced rejection and discrimination on many occasions and were frightened that once the other students knew they belonged to the special education unit, the teasing would start again.

On entering the secondary school, many students with disabilities discover that even the position of the Special Education Units can cultivate rejection and discrimination. As in this study, the classrooms are usually in buildings situated on the perimeter of the school buildings while the special education department lacks prestige amongst the other secondary school departments. The students are aware of the ethos of a supportive environment which is based on individual educational needs in the Special Education Unit. But, at the same time, as Peter and Sarah indicated, they fear the ridicule of the special education label. Often, students with disabilities will react from fear of the negative label. Student behaviour can then mirror the behaviour of students in classroom used by Karen, an urban special education teacher. She would find herself in a situation where ‘if you’re in a room that has access to windows, he’ll hide under the desk ... so he doesn’t get seen by the rest of the kids”.

A number of the teachers had similar stories to tell regarding the stigma of special education and the student’s fear of being an outsider. Before commencing her present position, Janice, an itinerant special education teacher, was employed as a special education teacher in a secondary school. In this position, she taught a group of students with disabilities in a Special Education Unit classroom. Her experiences echo previous research which found that students with disabilities are often caught between academic success within a curriculum matched to their skill repertoire and the need to be accepted and respected by their peers in the mainstream environment (O’Rourke & Houghton, 2008).

The minute they were seen by people outside of the SEU such as other peers or even other school staff, they were very sensitive about being in that [SEU] class. Worried about those sorts of things, they were caught in that conundrum of knowing that the best education, the best opportunities and where they felt best about themselves happened within those four walls. But they also knew that when they went outside there was the stigma to them. They don’t want their friends to know they’re in the SEU class because their friends will tease them.



Providing assistance to students with disabilities without the accompanying label of special education continues to be a challenge. Ben, a rural mainstream teacher, referred to this labeling among students when he described one student's behaviour as "in the mainstream he doesn't want to be seen getting any special help ...he wants to be just like the other kids ... he says he is not special ed." Sparling (2002, p. 98) reveals that "the developmental stage of adolescents make inclusion more difficult as students are unwilling to risk stigma by association." Many students with disabilities, especially in secondary school, want to be accepted by their peer group. Receiving assistance from special education teachers or teacher aides may mean they will "get teased if people see me [as belonging] with these retards" (Karen, urban secondary school teacher).

A number of the other special education teachers in the study had involved in similar situations in the mainstream classroom where the students did not want to be identified as belonging to the special education unit. Essentially, they do not want to be shamed in front of their peers by having an adult specifically assisting them (Pearce & Forlin, 2005). The students know they need academic assistance which is available from the supporting teacher or teacher aide but believe any positive academic gains can be cancelled by the potential social stigma (O'Rourke & Houghton, 2008). As a result, when operating as a support teacher, they will often focus their attention on students without disabilities enabling the classroom teacher to provide assistance for the students with disabilities.

In the secondary school, there are also times when students with disabilities encounter a negative attitude to disabilities from staff. Teachers may be concerned about the academic skills and socially acceptable behaviour of students with disabilities in inclusive classes (Heiman, 2004). As Anne, an urban secondary school teacher explained, "everyone [secondary teachers] takes them [students with disabilities] but I think the level of commitment by the teacher varies." She believed that some teachers put the students with disabilities in "the too hard basket". The secondary school teachers in the study did admit they had to confront many of their own and "others valued assumptions which appeared to shape people's perspectives on social and educational arrangements" (Zaretsky, 2004, p. 274) when they started working with students with disabilities. However, with a successful inclusion experience, their attitudes changed and the majority were able to echo the words of Bill, an urban secondary school teacher.

As I said, I would be happy to get a class of these kids [students with disabilities] and I'd be happy teaching them because as I said I love to see the effort they put in, the pleasure that they get out of the end product.

In spite of a range of reactions from secondary school teachers, Nicole, a rural special education teacher, had a positive attitude to inclusion. She often dealt with “students with disabilities getting bullied” and “students with disabilities with low self-esteem” because of their inability to cope with the mainstream environment. She could understand the potential for conflict when students with disabilities spent part of their time in the mainstream classrooms and part of their time in classrooms in the Special Education Unit. However, Nicole still felt “with a lot of intense work and help we can win” but “everyone on staff has got to make a big step and the sooner we attack it the better we are”. To work towards a school climate which supports every student (Bauer & Brown, 2001) as well as staff, Harry (2005) recommends that teachers pay attention to differences rather than ignore them. Although labels may initially influence the attitudes of the teachers and students, there is strong evidence that direct contact for an extended period of time is an effective way to change these attitudes (Scott et al., 2007). Teachers are already stressed (DeNobile & McCormick, 2007; Guthrie, 2006). Failure to change the school climate has the potential to add to that stress.

#### **6.4 “You toss and turn in bed thinking about behaviour”**

*(Karen, urban special education teacher)*

The reference by Karen to nights of restless sleep appeared to be indicative of the high levels of stress attributed by the teachers to dealing with the challenges associated with socially unacceptable behaviour. Adolescence is a period of transition characterised by an accelerated change in cognition, social and psychological functioning as well as the marked physical restructuring of puberty (Klein, 1997) making working with adolescents in secondary schools quite often a challenge (Bauer & Brown 2001). As the teachers reflected on their role in a secondary school, they agreed that teaching adolescent students with disabilities who are considered to have emotional and behavioural difficulties can rate as extremely challenging.

In fact, the teachers in the study were very outspoken whenever the challenges of inappropriate behaviour was introduced into the interview. Their concerns echoed international and Australian research which pointed to a less favourable attitude to inclusion of students with disabilities when those students exhibit behavioural and emotional disorders (Benjamin, 2002a; McLeskey & Waldron, 1996; Subban & Sharma, 2006). At the same time, there was and continues to be a major concern when the teacher's perceived competency is related to the behaviour of the student (Forlin et al., 2008). Comments in the interviews also revealed a clear difference between problems with academic learning and behaviour problems (Idol, 2006). Difficulty with academic work was seen by the majority of the teachers as being more acceptable and manageable whereas challenging behaviours meant there was always the possibility of coming in contact with work related violence. Exposure to this challenging behaviour resulted in the daily risk in the classroom of physical assaults as well as psychological forms of violence such as verbal abuse, intimidation and threats (Leather & Brooks, 2001).

Employers have a duty of care to employees to ensure they work in an environment without exposure to physical and psychological forms of violence. This makes the provision of a safe learning environment an important issue for every school (Adams, 2006; Munro, 2009). However, this is not always the situation as Karen, an urban special education teacher found. She spoke readily of the challenging behaviour which can be exhibited by students with disabilities. At the same time, she listed strategies that would quickly defuse a situation and return the classroom to a safe learning environment. Her view was that secondary school teachers received inadequate preparation for teaching students with diverse behavioural needs. Without training in managing emotional and behaviour problems, these secondary school teachers can run the risk of escalating the situation with resulting negative consequences for staff and students (Engelbrecht et al., 2003). For example, Karen recently found herself working in classrooms far from the support of her special education colleagues with only limited support from the secondary school teachers in the surrounding classrooms.

Our staff room is very close to the rooms that we normally use so if there is an incident or an issue you can quickly run and grab somebody but since we've grown in size [number of students with disabilities] they've sent us to other parts of the school and in smaller rooms because special ed classes are

smaller and the small rooms tend to be tucked inside of buildings which ... [are] ... not safe. If something happened and a student decided to go off, then it is not a safe environment. You can't quickly call for help and if you call for help it may be another teacher who doesn't really understand what's going on and might try to restrain someone who doesn't need to be restrained. So we've had a lot of trouble from being away from the unit and the people who we know that we can rely on as team members.

As a special education teacher, I have witnessed or listened to reports where secondary school teachers have escalated the socially unacceptable behaviour of the student with disabilities. It is very frightening particularly when working with older students who, in anger, do not consider their own strength and ability to physically hurt a person. However, many of these students if diverted quickly from the situation will usually 'cool down' and eventually agree to listen to the teacher. In her interview, Karen expended on her suggestions regarding training by stressing that secondary school teachers need to be explicit in stating what was expected of the students. She had found students with disabilities often found it difficult to accomplish the formidable task of identifying teachers' expectations and adjusting their behaviour to meet these expectations (Lane et al., 2004) especially when their timetable meant being taught by a number of teachers.

A significant aspect of inclusive practices involves teachers coping with students with disabilities who exhibit socially unacceptable behaviours. For each teacher, the source of stress can be different depending upon a complex interaction between personality, values, skills and circumstances (Adams, 1999; Kyriacou, 2001). However, research has shown that the accumulative effects of ongoing insidious day-to-day classroom incidents do have the potential to impact on teacher stress levels and general well being. For special education teachers, there is also a constant apprehension that the included student with disabilities will exhibit challenging behaviour by failing to follow the rules and expectations of the secondary school classroom. As Dianne, an urban special education teacher, explained "sometimes I find it really hard when I get home to just turn off. I just can't turn off my thinking".

## 6.5 *“I just get disillusioned by the whole thing”*

*(Ben, urban mainstream teacher)*

Teaching is a profession in which there is almost constant interaction with students. At the same time, the teacher is “trapped in an infernal triangle of competing pressures and expectations in the knowledge society” (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 59). Teachers work in an environment where there are often high levels of demands made on teachers to complete tasks within short periods of time. To the competing pressures and expectations have now been added the changes associated with inclusion of students with disabilities. With the focus of inclusion being presence, participation and achievement (Ainscow, 2005), teachers working with students with disabilities may find the situation extremely challenging as they attempt to design and provide a consistent educational program that is appropriate to the ability of the students. As a special education teacher, I have found that the disparity between philosophical positions and actual implementation of this educational program in the classroom (Anderson et al., 2007) continues to be highlighted by the disillusionment and frustration felt by many teachers in the secondary school.

The majority of the secondary school teachers in the study explained that they were rapidly becoming disillusioned and frustrated when trying to adapt the ideal of an inclusive school to their secondary school. Salend and Duhaney (1999) imply that the inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary school has the potential for a positive impact on students with and without disabilities as well as their teachers. Teachers, however, become disillusioned if they lose the rewards of job satisfaction and student achievement (Joseph, 2000) particularly when the day-to-day experiences within the classroom do not match the description of their ideal world. Instead, there is the danger of stress due to poor job design found in the discrepancy between what teachers believe about their jobs and the realities of their jobs (Gersten et al., 2001). Ben, an urban secondary teacher believed “we’re fooling ourselves that one person is going to go in there [the classroom] and cater for all students all the time”. According to Menlove, Hudson and Suter (2001) teachers sometimes feel they are working in a field of dreams where legislation and regulations mandate practices in settings that are controlled by limited time and resources.

Disillusionment and frustration was also felt by the special education teachers. In spite of limited time and resources, their focus was on catering for different learning needs by

adjusting and modifying the mainstream curriculum. As a result, these teachers were in danger of accumulating physical and mental fatigue by either staying at work longer or taking work home in the evening and at the weekends (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997; Wainwright & Calnan, 2002). Working as a special education teacher, I often feel the physical and mental fatigue when I spend many extra hours working on adjustments and modifications for students with disabilities. Like many of my special education teacher colleagues, there are also times when I become disillusioned with the lack of recognition for my efforts and the emphasis on my role as an outsider in the subject planning. This feeling is evident in the following extract from my reflective journal.

I spent the weekend adjusting the worksheets for John so that he can use them. He says he can see the words when I use the large font and I really want him to do the work himself. I was not exactly happy when I went to the mainstream classroom this morning (Monday). The teacher had decided to do another topic so I spent the time reading and transcribing for John. It looks like it was another wasted weekend of work and John has lost his chance to work independently. Why can't she just remember his needs? Why can't she remember there's another teacher in the classroom?

Policy makers of legislation and regulations would argue though that inclusion provides many benefits for students with disabilities. It does not stigmatise them and encourages interactions with students without disabilities. Yet, Janice, an itinerant special education teacher spoke of often being faced with the frustration of secondary school teachers who had commented to her "that's not fair, why do we turn ourselves inside out for that kid [student with disabilities] while this kid over here has equal needs?" According to Easthope and Easthope (2007), in the present economic climate, teachers who are not provided with adequate support can be forgiven for perceiving inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms as just another way of saving money.

Essentially, the emotional and physical labour of achieving a consistent and sustainable level of performance in day-to-day interactions with students is something teachers do expect within their working day. Depending on the support available, they can be motivated or

discouraged by the quality of their work environment (Brownell et al., 2002; Naylor, 2002). However, with the increasing numbers of students with disabilities in the secondary school classrooms and “a resourcing level that is gradually being reduced” (Nicole, rural special education teacher), teachers can become quite disillusioned. The degree of their stress may thus be determined by the classroom environment and by their perception of the daily events (Joseph, 2000). As Lisa, an itinerant special education teacher explained, teachers begin to question the whole process.

You’ve got to look at the rest of the class; you’ve got to look at the child that’s got the disability. Each one of the students has to be included in that class. Now the child with a disability comes in and it’s all of a sudden because they’ve got intellectual impairment, should they expect that they’re going to get a lot more time than the rest of the kids? I think they should give the same amount of time as the rest of children but it never happens.

Lisa continued her comments by suggesting one solution was ‘teachers should have more skills too’. According to Carrington and Elkins (2002a, p. 52), teaching students with disabilities in the secondary school will require “significant innovation and change in daily instructional approaches”. When speaking about supporting students with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms, the special education teachers in the study continued to refer to the importance of knowledge and skills. As well as providing understanding of the learning needs of students with disabilities, recognition of the need for this knowledge and skills may also encourage secondary school teachers and special education teachers to collaborate (Robinson, 2002). Working as a team, may help to change attitudes. Secondary school teachers who are concerned about their lack of expertise in working with students with disabilities will be able to provide special education teachers with a feeling of being needed for their expertise.

#### **6.6 “Teachers need ready access to information”**

*(Janice, itinerant special education teacher)*

When including students with disabilities into the secondary schools, it is crucial that teachers are provided with essential information regarding the impact of disabilities on learning. Secondary school teachers may have a positive attitude towards inclusive schooling but have limited knowledge and skills in adapting the curriculum for all students (Carrington, 1999) with the danger of unsuccessful inclusion eventually influencing their attitudes. To Janice, the availability of information for mainstream teachers and special education teachers had become vital. She was aware of the connection between a positive attitude to inclusion and teachers receiving the professional development to successfully develop and run an inclusion program, (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Sparling, 2002). However, she, like the teachers in the study, believed the opportunity to access information on teaching students with disabilities continues to be an issue.

To include students with disabilities, secondary school teachers can find it necessary to adapt their teaching and learning practices. They may need to apply academic accommodations and adaptations to enable all students to profit from the curriculum (Martinez & Humphreys, 2006). Lack of the skills and experience required in developing these programs as well as information on teaching strategies and methods of improving the learning environment can increase the challenge of including students with disabilities (Avramidis et al. 2000; McLeskey & Waldron, 2000). Reflecting on the classes I have taught in 20 years as a special education teacher, I believe part of the difficulty is the variety and complexity of disabilities, which can range from mild to severe learning and physical disabilities or a combination of disabilities and a combination of learning styles. Kate, a rural secondary school teacher was adamant that “the teachers need more training. I think they need to know what to do and what needs to be done differently”.

In the study, the secondary school teachers working as special education teachers were particularly aware of their lack of background knowledge and skills. Emma had originally taken the part time teaching job due to family reasons. Her comments on her professional struggle in the new setting included “until you are teaching these types of kids you don’t realize how slow they can be”. She admitted that working in special education had been “a bit of an eye opener for me” but after the initial difficulties was finding she enjoyed this opportunity to work with individual students. However, professional competence is a key aspect of job satisfaction (Ma & MacMillan, 1999) and it was evident during the interview that she continued to question her professional competence in this area of teaching.



A primary focus of teachers working specifically with students with disabilities is to ensure the needs of these students are included in planning the curriculum to be taught in the classroom. But, when Sarah, an itinerant special education teacher tried to help the secondary school teachers, she discovered “there’s a lot of stuff they don’t know”. According to Carrington and Elkins (2002b, p. 5), the inclusion process needs to concentrate not only on the support of students in the classroom but should include “an examination and redevelopment of teaching and learning styles across the curriculum”. Karen, an urban special education teacher argued that the secondary school teachers “need to start thinking about how people learn” while Ken, a rural special education teacher emphasized the need for teachers to reflect on practice because once they were reflective, they were more able to identify the successes and problems with their teaching.

The research on inclusive education continues to highlight the necessity of information for all teachers about special education issues. This was emphasized by Margolis and Nagel (2006) who identified the need for all teachers to receive systematic professional development which builds from their experiences. The perceived competency of teachers when working with students with disabilities is a major concern (Forlin et al., 2008) as was evident when speaking to the special education teachers in the study. After describing the present situation in the secondary schools which she visited, Kym, an itinerant special education teacher observed, “from a teacher’s point of view, I would like secondary teachers to have knowledge of the disability including the effects on learning”. She believed secondary school teachers in an inclusive classroom require core subject knowledge and effective teaching skills as well as access to knowledge of the impacts on learning for the various disabilities.

Knowledge of the impacts on learning needs for students with disabilities is covered to some extent as part of pre-service teacher training. However, in the past, it was assumed students with disabilities would be educated in separate special schools (Engelbrecht et al., 2003) with universities providing a range of courses which focused on specific disabilities. Attempting to cover all the complexities of teaching students with disabilities which were formally taught in a number of courses cannot be accomplished in a single pre-service course. Instead, Titone (2005, p. 27) recommends a program which “stresses the importance of collaboration, differentiating curriculum and pedagogy and continuing professional development”.

Essentially, there is a need for this because as Nicole, a rural special education teacher explained:

Most classes will encounter the special education students at some time and I know that there are some great staff and they're ready to learn. At the moment, they find it too challenging and they don't want it to happen. The reality is our children have a need to learn so I think that all teachers should be trained a lot more in special education areas.

Overall, there was a general acknowledgment from all teachers of a desperate need for continuing access to knowledge and skills when including students with disabilities. They agreed continuing professional development is essential for the maintenance of the quality of education (Carroll et al., 2003). This made professional learning in teaching an individual obligation as well as an institutional right (Hargreaves, 2003). When reflecting on the situation in his secondary school, Peter, a rural special education teacher suggested there was a need for:

Some core professional development for the general staff not just some elective or some conference for the SEU teachers but for all the staff where someone funded to come around to the schools and give an in service at a staff meeting.

Like Peter, the other teachers in the study who worked in rural secondary schools spoke earnestly about the need for and their desire to participate in professional development. Sparling (2002) argues there should be opportunities for professional development on issues relating to students with disabilities available to all teachers. However, the teachers in the rural secondary schools found opportunities for participation in professional development were often curtailed by distance and family responsibilities. As Emma, a rural special education teacher commented, "the last thing you want to do is drive an hour to another town when you're exhausted from a full day of teaching and I've got my own kids to look after too". Due to the increasing demands on teacher time and lack of funding, there continues to be difficulties in supporting opportunities for additional professional development (Forlin, 2005) during school hours.

An additional reason for providing access to professional development lies in the limited number of trained special education staff in the four secondary schools. In each school, the only teachers with academic special education qualification as well as knowledge of the multiple administration duties associated with students with disabilities were the teachers-in-charge of the special education units or special education class. Winzelberg and Luskin, (1999, p. 75) propose that special education teachers who are faced with an overloaded workload without support can react to their environment “with physiological, emotional and behavioural manifestations of stress”. During her interview, Nicole, a rural special education teacher indicated she was about to resign from her job due to the overwhelming pressure. However, she did suggest the following solution which may help other special education teachers.

I think it [professional development] would benefit greatly rather than the staff relying on a few [teachers] with the knowledge. I know the teachers often rely heavily on me as the only trained special education teacher to fix the problem. It’s not my problem. I’m just a cog in the wheel. I think the whole school needs to really address it.

Access to professional development continued to be a common concern within the interviews. At the same time, the teachers agreed with the opinion of Forlin et al. (2008, p. 262) who argued that professional development should “focus directly on the explicit concerns of teachers in relation to specific children within a particular context, rather than being too generalised”. The opinion of Ben, an urban mainstream teacher, was for teachers to reflect on their own learning experiences which they brought to the classroom. He then wanted teachers to gain perspective on the class and decide which personal professional skills needed to be developed so that the teaching program would include every student. Belinda, an urban special education teacher expanded on Ben’s comments when she advised that “the big thing is you've got to really address what the students’ needs are and you've got to put the resources where the students need it to be”.

## 6.7 “Resources are the big issue”

*(John, itinerant special education teacher)*

Teachers are in the position to make a valuable contribution to inclusion but are not always provided with optimal working conditions. Of particular importance is their access to available human and material resources. Research has shown that significant resources are required to implement an inclusive program (Jenkins, 2002; Sindelar et al., 2006). As Jenkins (2002, p. 59) argues, it is time the “debate on inclusive education ...focus[es] on resolving the questions of how to fund, deliver and sustain the effective support mechanisms that will enable students with disabilities to receive good quality education in regular schools”. John, an itinerant special education teacher explained, “schools have got to recognise that if you have a child with a disability in your class you’re going to need to cater for this kid’s needs. Teachers must have the resources”.

The teachers in the study were eager to draw attention to the practical difficulties inclusion imposes when they are not provided with resources necessary for a successful inclusion program. From their perspective, with the inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms came the challenge of finding support for students with additional educational needs. This challenge was in addition to meeting the needs of all students in classes which can be extremely difficult (O’Rourke & Houghton, 2009). Acknowledging this, a number of the secondary teachers in the study were focusing on strategies to minimise this need for support but continued to encounter difficulties. As an urban special education teacher, Belinda’s comments echo many of their fears.

We've had a few students that have grown from year 8 to year 12 by having support. Support is the issue. That I believe. In inclusion, if you don't have enough resources well that's one thing that can go wrong.

Support for inclusion of students with disabilities must begin with the school administration. Depending upon their commitment to inclusion, they can sustain or introduce new reforms (Sindelar et al., 2006). Ultimately, they must be willing to include students with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms despite any personal reservations towards the process. The special education teachers in the study believed this support was not only important in promoting

teachers' satisfaction with their work (Brownell et al., 2002) but also in reducing any harm caused by teachers with different levels of experience at including students with disabilities in a secondary classroom (Ma & MacMillan, 1999). The school administration's support, interest and knowledge of students with disabilities did vary from school to school (Patterson et al., 2000) with each of the interviewed teachers having a different perspective on the role played by the administration in their secondary school. Nicole, a rural special education teacher, spoke of a school administration that had been:

supportive and always listens to what I've got to say. They may not agree with me but they know I'm there to advocate for special ed and I'm also very mindful that it's a big school out there.

In contrast, Bill, an urban mainstream teacher referred to a school administration who knew of staff needing extra help but responded with 'these are the kids, this is what you've got to work with and so be it'. For both teachers, though, there was a growing frustration with financial cuts and criticism (Robertson, 2007) and the way in which school administrators often placed the special education staff as outsiders when considering support for the inclusion process.

Funding issues abound at the mention of resources for schools. While there is a concerted push towards inclusion from governments, society and education authorities, there is not the same eagerness to provide the funds. The special education teachers referred to the costs in providing human and material resources to assist in the inclusion of students with disabilities. They believed the challenge was in finding a delicate balance between justifying spending a large amount of money on teacher aide time or equipment for one student at the expense of other equipment which will maintain a school wide learning environment for a larger number of students (Adams, 2006). Unfortunately, inclusion is often attempted by stretching the available resources which can impact on the educational conditions of the mainstream students. Ben, an urban secondary school teacher, described a situation where "if it's a major disability, they'll need support so that's resources that are taking money from the system". For him, the resulting lack of funding for mainstream students has the potential to cause antipathy which, in turn, can lead to resentment and the exclusion of students with disabilities.

The four special education teachers working in administration positions as well as teaching saw the allocation of resources as a continuing challenge. When they reflected on their daily problems with timetables and support for students with disabilities, they spoke of secondary school teachers and special education teachers crying out for support which they were often unable to provide. This fight for resources can result in an ongoing battle with school administration and colleagues. However, from personal experience, I have found it facilitates the process of resourcing classrooms, if teachers “recognise the range of resources they have, the additional resources they need to enhance their inclusive practice and how they can gain access to them” (Munro, 2009, p. 97). The results can be surprising when the initiative is taken to investigate the knowledge and expertise of the staff.

Inclusion remains a challenging prospect in secondary school with resources continuing to be an extremely important issue. The response to inclusion from the teachers is often associated with “their perceptions of the availability of training, resources and administrative support” (Berry, 2006, p. 490). Any positive attitudes may ‘shrink’ in keeping with diminishing resources (Avramidis et al., 2000; Vlachou, 1997). The special education teachers agreed that full inclusion was not for every student with disabilities but promoted programs which included students who would benefit from the experience. However, if resources continued to be an issue, these teachers believed the progress which had already been made in changing professional beliefs and attitudes of secondary school teachers may be lost. There is a danger secondary school teachers will start to question the amount of time students with disabilities spent in their classrooms and advocate for them to return to the special education programs or special schools.

### **6.8     *“Inclusion really depends on the individual student”***

***(Belinda, urban special education teacher)***

A perception exists where inclusion of students with disabilities means full inclusion in the mainstream classrooms. Nevertheless, as Belinda, an urban special education teacher suggests, the model of inclusion used “depends on the student because each student is so different”. Furthermore, Carrington and Elkins (2002a) state there is not one particular model for inclusion of students with disabilities. Some students with disabilities can be included very well in every mainstream classroom but not every student (Kauffman et al., 2005). Jackson

(2005) argues that the current school culture does not suit some students. Therefore, it is important to recognise that while many studies note the positive effects of inclusive education; the secondary school environment is not a positive experience for all students with disabilities.

As stated in chapter five, the special education teachers in this study were strong advocates for inclusion. They supported a view where “inclusive education starts from the assumption that all children have a right to attend their neighbourhood school (Ainscow, 1997, p. 5). Yet Janice, an itinerant special education teacher who was working with students with disabilities with high behavioural support needs offered a different view in her interview. Although she was aware that a limited number of students return to the mainstream school after moving to a special school, she continued to support the availability of enrolment in special schools. However, she believed there needed to be an option for students with behavioural disabilities to return to the mainstream classroom when the student was ready, and there was appropriate support.

However, secondary school teachers in the study who taught academic subjects felt the students with disabilities impacted on the academic success of students without disabilities. They agreed with a belief amongst certain secondary school teachers that the inclusion of students with disabilities will have a negative effect on results in academic subjects and create discipline problems (Ellins & Porter, 2005; Rouse & Florian, 2006; Siperstein et al., 2007). Belinda, an urban special education teacher was particularly aware of the different attitudes to inclusion held by a number of the mainstream teachers in her secondary school. She identified a damaging aspect of the inclusion process as “the belief that if an individual student is failing in the schooling system, it is because of a dysfunction of the individual learner” (Spedding, 2005, p. 406). As a result of her experiences in the secondary school, she supported a balance between the teachers who would advocate for a more fully inclusive school and those who believe that students with disabilities belong in the special schools.

My version of inclusion is more about suiting the individual so that if a student can cope with the academic curricula of mainstream that's great. If they can't cope with the academic curricula, I am a great believer in having programs to suit their level. So you need to set your school up so students can

do a program at their level but still has access to things that are going on. They can join in with and have enough people around to support them and talk them through any of the issues.

Another group of people who often ask questions regarding the suitable educational placement of students with disabilities are the parents. They are usually well informed on the range of programs offered at individual secondary schools as well as being aware of the low academic expectations associated with special schools (Conner & Ferri, 2007). At the same time, they do not want their child to be disadvantaged by lack of support in a secondary school. As a parent with a son with disabilities, I could empathize with these parents and understand why they were keen for their child to be included in educational environment of the secondary school. During my son's education, I had been the instigator in a similar situation with my son by moving him from a special school to a secondary special education unit. Like Jane, a mainstream teacher in the study and the mother of a son with disabilities, I did not want my son excluded. However, as a teacher, I could identify with Jim an urban mainstream teacher who believed the secondary school classrooms were:

not necessarily the best placement for that student at that time and you know there's a tendency to focus on a note from the parents of the students, to focus on their rights but not to see a broader picture that other students have rights too.

As I reflected on the interviews, it was apparent teachers in the study had come to realise that full inclusion was not the best option for every student with disabilities at all points in the student's school life. The ideal of full inclusion can mean all students educated together without regard to the type of instruction being reasonably performed under such conditions. This ignores what is known about how students learn best and about the multiple tasks teachers can manage. For example, Ken, a rural special education teacher, claimed the lack of teaching experience and the demographics of the school population due to the transfer of many students to private schools had a noticeable impact on the inclusion process in his secondary school. He elaborated on the topic as follows:



We have new teachers. We have a number of behavioural issues. Put the lot together you get teachers trying to learn their craft in a difficult environment with behavioural issues, lots of noise. That's sometimes one of the worst places I could put a student [with disabilities] because they're going to get picked on. The environment is not congruent to their learning, especially if they have an intellectual impairment. The teachers are so overworked anyway with trying to deal with all this other stuff while they're learning their craft.

Research has shown that there are many benefits for students with disabilities when they are included in secondary schools. However, there is also evidence from the studies which points to programs where inclusion has been a negative experience resulting in physical and psychological damage for students with and without disabilities and for staff. What is known though, is that in classrooms where inclusion has been successful, the teacher began with effective teaching skills to which was added particular strategies for teaching students with disabilities (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). This means, teachers in charge of placing students with disabilities in secondary school classrooms must look for teachers like Emma. A rural special education teacher, she understood that "not all children of any given age have learnt the same things; they cannot all be taught in the same place, much less the same thing, at the same time" (Kauffman et al., 2005, p. 3) and was prepared to change her teaching strategies to include all students in her classrooms.

#### **6.9 "You've got to pick the teachers"**

*(Fran, itinerant special education teacher)*

With the role of the teacher in the inclusion process regarded as vitally important, the careful selection of a secondary teacher to teach the student with disabilities becomes paramount. In an inclusive school, the culture highlights teaching for diversity instead of teaching to the group as the norm (Turnbull et al., 1999). There is an emphasis on teaching to the range of student abilities repeated in each classroom. Kauffman et al. (2005) suggest a good teacher delivers instruction that caters for all students and at the same time continues to monitor student progress. It is also important teachers are able to recognise if a student is not making progress, to call in special help and, if necessary, move the student to another educational

setting. When including students with disabilities, Fran looked for teachers who delivered instruction that catered for diversity. She also wanted teachers who were willing to request help if the student was not making progress. These types of teachers she had discovered were amongst the successful teachers when including students with disability in their classroom.

The choices made by teachers regarding teaching strategies and approaches are determined by teachers' professional beliefs about learning and their own attitudes to students. This choice Carrington (1999, p. 264) explains may be influenced by the "beliefs that teachers have about teaching students with different learning needs and beliefs about their roles and responsibilities in meeting these needs". These personal choices were evident in the roles taken by the different teachers in the study. For example, the secondary school teachers who taught practical subjects, acknowledged a range of strategies and approaches to include students with disabilities but the four teachers who taught academic subjects saw their primary job as developing, defining, interpreting and delivering the curriculum at a set class level. For the special education teachers in the study, these differences in professional beliefs about inclusion and attitudes towards including specific students with disabilities continue to be an additional challenge in the inclusion process.

From these examples, it is evident secondary school teachers can still question their role in the education of students with disabilities. As Bunch and Valeo (2004) indicate, they believe it is the role of the special education teachers to assume all educational and social responsibility. Secondary school teachers can also have attitudes which focus on a negative mindset for students with disabilities. Their attitudes are rooted in a deficit model that fails to appreciate the inherent potential of every student (Abbott, 2006). Belinda, an urban special education teacher insisted it was a "culture thing". For her, the role of special education teachers was not to take responsibility for all the students with disabilities but to "teach some mainstream teachers, not all, how to deal with the students effectively so they could take responsibility". At the same time, special education teachers were learning quickly which secondary school teachers were adapting better to students with disabilities and who had better tolerance levels and greater empathy (Abbott, 2006).

Additionally, the special education teachers in the study referred to the tolerance levels and empathy towards students with disabilities of particular school principals within the education system. Although they rated the contribution of the school principal to implementation of

inclusion (Heiman, 2004) as very important, they sometimes questioned the commitment of certain administrators. They accepted there were many other areas of concern in a secondary school but still could feel like outsiders in the allocation of time and resources. Janice, an itinerant special teacher made the following comments regarding principals who she had met during her visits to schools.

I have seen some positive changes with change of principal. One very interesting example was a school that just put their head under the blanket and said 'disabilities don't happen' and the next principal happened to be a parent of a disabled girl and within 6 months we had students from the special school going down doing regular inclusion. So that's a very positive thing and that's a personality thing. I don't think people run away from it because of the bad attitude. I just think they're scared. They don't know. It's from lack of knowledge and lack of understanding and it's just another thing to worry about; another piece of paper to come across the desk.

As Janice indicated, principals can lack knowledge of students with disabilities. These students have only recently been included in the secondary schools and unless principals have had contact through family or previous schools, it is unlikely they have met many students with disabilities. Reflecting back on my early teaching career when many of these principals were teaching in the classroom, there were very few students with disabilities included in primary or secondary mainstream classrooms.

Fortunately, there are secondary school teachers who are trained, skilled and effective in working with students with disabilities. However, they tend to be asked to take on more and more roles. A note of caution, therefore, comes from Adams (2006) and from Lisa, an itinerant special education teacher. According to Adams, if this situation continues with often the most difficult kids put with the best and most accepting teachers then there is a danger the situation will make those teachers more susceptible to burnout. Lisa when visiting a number of secondary schools saw it as a catch 22 situation. The special education teachers wanted to place the students with disabilities with teachers who were willing to assume responsibility

for their social and academic achievement (Van Reusen et al., 2000). However, what usually happened was:

the people that work well with them [students with disabilities] keep getting them and then they get stressed. You're not going to give them to the ones that don't want them because they just won't do anything with them and they whinge. And the kids know that.

This study has highlighted some of the challenges associated with the inclusion of students with disabilities. Often, secondary school teachers are faced with a curriculum that is invariably mismatched with the repertoire of skills of students with disabilities (O'Rourke & Houghton, 2008). It is imperative they are provided with the knowledge and skills to make appropriate curricular and instructional modifications. Additionally, as Jane, an urban secondary school teacher discovered, they are now faced with working with other adults in the classroom. She had "found it quite daunting when I first started at the beginning of the year". However, with support from the Special Education Programs and experience, she was finding it "not too bad but still a lot to follow up". Reflecting on the experiences of Jane and the other secondary school teachers, it was possible to understand their unease with aspects of the inclusion process. In a place where "procedures and structures can dominate the school" (Brown & Kennedy, 2001, p. 29), they often found it a challenge to adjust to the changes inherent in the inclusion process.

#### **6.10 "You need to be flexible"**

*(Dianne urban special education teacher)*

With the gradual increase in students with disabilities enrolling in secondary schools, acceptance of responsibility through changes in teaching style becomes even more important. Teachers need to be alert to the idea that students without disabilities are often influenced by the way in which the teachers treat students with disabilities. Carrington (2007b, p.119) maintains secondary school teachers need to be "flexible and learner-focused in contrast to content-focused". Dianne, an urban special education teacher explained what she meant by this concept with the following comment.

I think the most important thing is that you don't have the concept of 'never' or 'not' or 'it won't work' or 'it can't work' or 'it's not supposed to work'. Like I think you have to be really open-minded and be positive about the fact that it has to work and I'm going to make it work.

Teachers want to teach. They want to improve teaching and learning. Lupart (2000) describes teachers whose aim is to make available to all students the knowledge to lead successful and productive lives as adults. Although there was acknowledgment of the challenges associated with inclusion, there was still personal enthusiasm evident in some of the interviews including that of Emma, a rural special education teacher who was happy to describe her present teaching position.

I can definitely say that I love my job. I absolutely love it ... what I've found is because I put so much effort and time and work into my classes that I teach, I feel that the kids can see that and they give me that same respect and appreciation back... You take an interest in them which they might not get in other subjects. I found that made a real difference to my class.

As a trained secondary teacher who had transferred to teaching students with disabilities, Emma had refused to be stopped by her limited professional knowledge of disabilities and was changing her teaching style to suit the students within her class. She believed all students have unique learning needs (Keeffe, 2007a) and was working towards providing for these students.

Inclusion of students with disabilities has brought changes to the classrooms of the secondary school teachers. These changes in teaching practice are not something that emerge from and within the secondary schools but something that must be consciously planned and managed. At the same time, there was an expectation secondary school programs will prepare students for the complex demands of the workforce (Van Reusen et al., 2000). Teachers want to be flexible with their teaching programs, but Kyriacou (2001) cautions there is a danger that the many changes and demands now placed on the teachers will have a negative impact upon

teacher stress and consequential resiliency. For the teachers in the study who were already feeling stressed, the expectation to be flexible in their teaching methods was adding an additional burden to an already overloaded workload.

Additionally, in spite of surface changes to accommodate inclusion of students with disabilities, the teachers in the study saw the underlying structure of their secondary schools as hierarchically and departmentally organised. Any opportunity to be flexible happened in spite of a structure which was based on a model of the individual teacher being accountable to the head of the department and ultimately, the administration. Slee (2001, p. 168) argues that “inclusion is an aspiration for a democratic education and, as such, the project of inclusion addresses the experiences of all students at school”. Thus, there is a need to investigate the inflexibility of the school structure. It is paramount that teachers are given the opportunity to engage in innovative educational activities which may not always fit within the rigid structure of the school but will be positive experiences for students with and without disabilities.

### **6.11 *Insiders, outsiders and boundary riders***

Throughout this research, I was an insider researcher talking to other insiders within the organisation. What differentiates the insider research process from research conducted by outsiders is the ongoing enmeshment of the insider in the social world of the work environment that is the subject of the study. The insider possesses an insight of the system (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) and has knowledge of the cultural norms of the organisation (Edwards, 2002). The researcher working inside the organisation is in a position to achieve understanding through participation instead of second hand understanding (Coghlan, 2003). Doing insider research involves a history of relationships, networks, perceptions and shared knowledge that extends from before the research began, influences the research itself and continues past the formal writing of the thesis which is usually the symbolic end of the research process for outsiders.

As an insider researcher, my research centred on specific teachers in the organisation and their perceptions regarding a particular group of students. Power in the school and individual classrooms is “implicated in the social status of individuals as well as in academic activities (Berry, 2006, p. 515). Teachers or insiders with social status and academic knowledge are described as the powerful members of the ‘in group’ in schools (Keeffe, 2007a). Their power in the classroom is seen as the stable attribute. It is the teachers who define and enforce the

conditions of learning (Berry, 2006). Because there are unequal power relations which operate between teacher and pupil (Snelgrove, 2005), this gives teachers a privileged position as authoritative classroom leaders.

Even though as a teacher I am an apparent insider, because I am a special education teacher in a secondary school not a special school, I can also be treated as an outsider (DeLyser, 2001). This feeling of being an outsider is particularly evident when I visit the staff rooms of other departments or look at my teaching timetable. For example, I have a full teaching load but the print out from the school computer shows only the mainstream classes which I support. There is no mention of classes taught in the special education programs. Not providing supply teachers to cover our SEP classes when special education teachers are absent can be also seen as evidence of the outsider status of teachers working in the SEP.

This feeling of being termed an outsider in the school organisation extends to the group of students in whom I am interested. Students with disabilities have historically been marginalized and oppressed. As Kirk et al. (2000) observe, education through the ages, has reflected the values of the dominant members of society. This dominant group usually defines the features of a culture including differentiating between people who can and those who cannot receive a mainstream education (Keefe, 2007a). It is only with changes in attitude towards the education of students with disabilities within this dominant culture that there has been a movement towards inclusion of these students in the mainstream classrooms. However, many of the students with disabilities still remain outsiders in the mainstream classroom culture. Students with disabilities often find the acquisition of sophisticated social skills and negotiating the complex webs of friendships (Senge et al., 2000; Sparling, 2002) extremely difficult. As a result, they can be considered as outsiders of a student group being 'in' but not 'of' the class in terms of social and learning membership.

Amongst the insiders who participated in the study were a number of special education teachers who assisted the students with disabilities. In their role as boundary riders, the special education teachers were working towards collaboration with mainstream teachers in and out of the mainstream classroom by delivering services to students in need (Dukes & Lumar-Dukes, 2007). The boundary riders were often faced with multiple challenges. For secondary school teachers and special education teachers to work together, they needed to overcome a long history of working so separately that even the language, routines and

timeframes for their work may have little similarity (Ferguson, 2008). Boundary riders could also be found within the group of students without disabilities who, by their actions, ensure students in their environment are respected, irrespective of gender, ethnic origin, ability or language.

Parents of students with disabilities can also be termed as outsiders. This was very evident in a number of educational decisions which were made for my son, without taking into consideration my knowledge as a parent, special education teacher and researcher. Carrington and Robinson (2006, p. 328) remind us that schools frequently describe “parents as partners in the educative process” but the amount of involvement of many families particularly in secondary schools is minimal. Yet parents have an inside knowledge of their children which makes listening to them when confronted with a collective problem a positive factor for educational success.

As an insider researcher, moving between my various roles and identities was often one of the biggest challenges. I frequently found myself trying to negotiate these different roles at the research sites. This resulted in circumstances where every decision had “an added layer of relational and professional complexity that influences design, implementation, and analysis” (Ravitch & Wirth, 2007, p. 77). Even when considered an insider, my precise level of proximity was liable to fluctuate somewhat from one interviewee to another (Hodkinson, 2005). Therefore, in carrying out research, I had to be sensitive to my place within the school community. I also had to understand how I helped to create – and become part of – the methodology I was studying (DeLyser, 2001). I was studying not only the teachers’ attitudes, professional beliefs and perceptions of inclusion but also attempting to gain some insight (DeLyser, 2001) into my own attitudes, professional beliefs and perceptions of the inclusion process.

Personally, working as an insider researcher, and involved in analysing the experiences of teachers participating in the inclusion of students with disabilities, has encouraged reflection on my own actions in this process. The study provided opportunities for learning and self-transformation (Macartney, 2005). I found that my attitude and perceptions of what was happening with the inclusion process did not always mirror the teachers in the study. Sometimes, an internal tension would exist between my roles as a researcher, special education teacher and parent particularly in terms of feeling uncomfortable in interviews



where I did not share the view of the participating teacher. I knew that any comments I heard in an interview had the potential to influence my decisions as a researcher, as a teacher and as a parent. It was at this time that my critical friend often took the time to understand the complexity of the work in progress and would continue to advocate for my completion of the study. In spite of these difficulties, this was a topic which I felt strongly about so I endeavoured to use my different roles as insider, outsider and boundary rider to help, not hinder, the collection of data.

### **6.12 Conclusion**

Working as an insider researcher during this study has entailed caution, awareness and ongoing reflection. It was important to investigate “the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement affects interactions with whatever is being researched (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 269). Cogan (2003) describes insider researchers as using their pre-understanding of the organisation while working on practical issues of concern to their organisation. Thus, reflection assisted in utilising this pre-understanding selectively without being confined to it, thereby resulting in maximum usefulness of interpretations during the study.

Reflecting on the positives in the dual role of researcher and special education teacher, I realised that I knew and respected the skills and perspectives that the teachers brought to the interviews. My experiences as a teacher and the skills I had learnt as a parent helped the teachers involved in the study to feel comfortable and safe about sharing their perspectives. Working as an insider in an organisation was not simple. As a special education teacher in a secondary school, I had knowledge and understanding of the culture and organisation of secondary schools in North Queensland. I could identify and understand many of the attitudes and professional beliefs of the teachers who participated in the study. At the same time, I felt that much was communicated with a background of assumed knowledge. Gaining a perspective on something which one is part of could pose a challenge. Therefore, as a researcher, I endeavoured to use the ‘insider’ status to help, not hinder, the collection of data. Identifying who I am and being explicit about my own perspectives became an essential part of being reflective.

The following and final chapter will be used to provide a summary of the qualitative research on the attitudes and professional beliefs together with the challenges for 20 teachers working

with students with disabilities in four secondary schools in North Queensland. Education Queensland (2005, p. 1) states “inclusive education ensures that schools are supportive and engaging places for all students, teachers and caregivers”. Analysis of the data from the interviews demonstrates that the teachers perceived the mainstream classrooms in their schools were not always supportive places particularly for students with disabilities and the teachers. Instead, the teachers spoke of their personal struggle as they attempted to implement the practices of an inclusive classroom. At times, the pressure on teachers to implement comprehensive and successful change left little time for rest, recovery or reflection. Taking their concerns into consideration, chapter seven will also list a number of recommendations which may provide assistance for these teachers and the students within their classrooms.

## *Chapter Seven*

### *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*

#### **7.0 Introduction**

This qualitative study set out to investigate the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools in North Queensland from the experiences and perspective of the teachers who work with these students. The study sought to amplify the various voices of the teachers encountered during this research, place them in the context of the secondary school and clearly present their views. The responsibility to translate the ideal of inclusion into practice involves substantial changes and challenges for teachers particularly in the secondary school, making a study of the impact upon teachers increasingly critical.

Current educational philosophy argues that, wherever possible, all students, including those with disabilities are best educated in regular classes. There is a belief within the government and held by parents, that all students should have the opportunity to attend their neighbourhood school as well as be placed in heterogeneous classrooms at their grade level alongside their peers. Inclusion, though, is not simply a question of placement of students with disabilities in their neighbourhood school. Research, including this study has revealed that providing inclusive education programs can be exacerbated by a number of structural, curricular, instructional and expectancy factors and conditions in secondary schools.

Teachers care about their students with and without disabilities. However, change can be an unpredictable and messy experience. At the same time, there is an expectation that staff can cope in the educational environment while maintaining high personal standards of efficiency and commitment. This has resulted in teachers questioning their professional skills and the availability of physical resources to operate a successful inclusion process particularly in a secondary school. They believe that there is often a discrepancy in that what they want to do as teachers and what they were required to do in the structure of their schools. Due to circumstances over which they believe they have no control, they find themselves unable to transform their classrooms into a place where a broad range of needs are met pragmatically and thoroughly. They feel caught in the middle between the demands of administration and the practicalities of the classroom with no solution to their predicament. There is the sensation of being caught between a rock and a hard place.

Within their interviews, all the teachers expressed concern about what is happening in schools as teachers move toward more inclusive educational practices. The objective of chapter seven is to summarize these concerns as well as highlight the strengths and limitations of the study. As an insider researcher, acknowledgement is made of the personal, subjective and emotional nature of this research. Practical implications of the study are listed and recommendations made for inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary school. These recommendations include suggestions for future research in the area of inclusion of students with disabilities and the challenges faced by teachers working with these students.

### *7.1 Summary of the study*

Professional concern regarding the need for further research into the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, combined with my identity as the parent of a son with disabilities, was the catalyst to concentrate my research in this area. My specific interest was the inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary schools. Working as an insider researcher, I wanted to focus on the experiences and perceptions of the teachers entrusted with including students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom. In doing so, I hoped to create an awareness of the daily challenges that these teachers face as they cope with the changes in educational opportunities for students with disabilities.

Internationally and in Australia, changes in economic, political and social circumstances have been accompanied by corresponding adjustments in beliefs and attitude to the education of students with disabilities. This has resulted in a shift from the traditional methods of labelling and separate specialized educational system to an emphasis on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms. Research has revealed, however, that effective inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms relies upon a number of variables. Amongst these variables is the teacher who, it is alleged, holds the most important key to a successful inclusion process.

Within the inclusion process, the attitude of teachers towards including students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms continues to be a critical factor. To achieve a deeper understanding of these attitudes, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 teachers working in four North Queensland secondary schools. Within the interviews, the teachers were encouraged to provide a personal insight into their experiences and perceptions

of inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary schools. The interviews were then transcribed and analysed for similar themes using QSR NVivo and manual techniques.

From the transcripts of the interviews, it was possible to identify a number of common topics of concern expressed by the participating teachers. Evidence of acceptance of the philosophical ideals on which inclusion is based was soon apparent. However, as reported in chapter four, the logistical aspects of organizing the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms was impacting on their attitude to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary school. The perceived challenges associated with the inclusion of students with disabilities were evident through the voices of the teachers in chapter five. Comments from the teachers in chapters five and six illustrated that the majority of teachers believed that the process of including these students in the mainstream classroom also added to their existing stress levels. Within secondary schools there are different patterns of achievement and social contribution which fit the various cultural, ethnic and gender differences that students bring to school. Inclusion in this environment continues to be complex and challenging; highlighting what appeared to be a large gap between rhetoric and reality.

In spite of differences in professional beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion, the majority of the interviewed teachers commented on the prospect of improvements in social, communication and behavioural skills. They emphasised the available opportunities for students with and without disabilities to learn increased acceptance, understanding and tolerance for individual differences. The teachers argued that students with disabilities in a segregated setting were not exposed to the adolescent social expectations which are key elements of the secondary school experience. Students without disabilities and school staff in the inclusive classroom also benefited from learning to value diversity through seeing and experiencing difference.

Additionally, within the inclusive classroom, all students are encouraged to respect difference in academic ability as well as social competency. The special education teachers described a successful inclusion program as one which is epitomized by accommodations and adaptations leading to all students being active participants in learning. Nonetheless, analysis of the data indicated that catering for any differences in academic ability could be a challenge for the secondary school teachers. These difficulties, the special education teachers pointed out, were

outweighed by the opportunity for students with disabilities to gain access to teachers who are specialists in specific subject areas, as well as meeting the higher academic expectations of the secondary school.

An effective secondary school is one that provides all students with a comprehensive curriculum which has been developed by teachers who have access to professional development. Even though there was acceptance that including students with disabilities extended their teaching skills, a number of the teachers questioned their professional ability to meet the needs of all students. Additionally, they referred to a belief that a teacher's perception of personal competence could be eroded by the failure of some students to learn and by continual challenging behaviour in the classroom. Amongst a number of the teachers in the study there was a feeling of skepticism about the practical implication of inclusion because they had experienced teaching episodes that were difficult (large classes), problematic (lack of support) as well as extremely time-demanding.

Of particular interest in this study was the substantial stress felt by secondary school teachers and special education teachers when dealing with students with disabilities who exhibit challenging behaviours. The teachers in the study revealed that the presence of these students had caused a considerable impact on them personally and on their teaching practices. They readily expressed their disquiet particularly about their own efficiency in teaching students with disabilities with increasingly divergent needs. Causes of distress were also evident in the number of changes experienced, including increased workloads and multiplicity of roles. Lack of support from administration and fellow teachers moreover, continued to be a challenge for many of the teachers involved in the inclusion process.

Each of the 20 teachers in this study brought many different past experiences, beliefs, attitudes and values with them to the interviews. When I began the study, the main focus of the research was on teacher stress caused by the inclusion of students with disabilities. However, as the analysis of the data progressed, I found it necessary to reframe the questions in order to focus on the attitudes of the teachers towards inclusion in the mainstream secondary school classroom. Although, as an insider researcher I was aware of the stress inherent in the inclusion process, the majority of the teachers would not admit to stress but instead referred to frustration, dissatisfaction, tiredness or exhaustion. They were more interested in speaking about their experiences and reactions to the inclusion of students with

disabilities. Had this reframing not occurred, I believe, the work would have overlooked important aspects of the research.

## **7.2 *Strengths of the study***

The great strength of using qualitative research is its ‘naturalism’ which comes from an intimacy with real people in real situations. A focus of qualitative research is seeking to understand human beings as they act in the course of their daily life. Through rigorous research, the researcher attempts to uncover voices which often bring awareness to perspectives of an issue which has been overlooked. By focusing on the stories of lived experiences told by teachers and setting the research within the complex environment of the secondary school, it was possible to gain the individual teacher’s perspective of inclusion in the secondary school.

For the teachers involved in the study, the use of semi-structured interviews was a welcome experience as there are not many people who want to listen to teachers talk about their work. At the same time, set questions provided the means to maintain control within the interview by ensuring the questions would enable a comparison across participants as well as keeping the teachers focused on the issues being investigated. By concentrating on the lived experiences of the teachers within the complex setting of the secondary school some understanding of the multiplicity of their views could be gained.

Using the methods of qualitative research as a special education teacher/ researcher engaged in teaching students with disabilities in a secondary school provided an ideal position for this study. I had an insider’s perspective. As teacher educator, I had witnessed a culture amongst secondary school pre-service teachers which questioned the inclusion of students with disabilities in academic subjects. Additionally, as someone inside the secondary school organisation, I knew the culture and had encountered different reactions amongst staff to the push for an inclusive school. The willingness of the teachers to share stories of their experiences was largely based on their perception of me as one of them. I was a researcher who understood the challenges of working as a teacher coping with the inclusion of students with disabilities in ways in which others who had not been part of the process could not. Additionally, my role as a parent of a son with disabilities meant I could relate to the challenges of inclusion from a parental perspective.

### 7.3 *Limitations of the study*

Limitations exist within the methods of qualitative research. Issues of equipment quality, teachers' time commitments, time consuming procedures, inappropriate interviewing locations as well as inexperience in research methods and interview technique have all affected the data to some extent. The research was also reliant upon my skills as a sensitive observer together with expertise in using detailed descriptive writing to present the experiences of the teachers in the study accurately and with clarity. Thus, as a beginning researcher, the problems associated with limited expertise needed to be overcome at each stage of the study.

The small sample of 20 teachers working in four secondary schools in one geographic location limited the range of the data. Additionally, inherent in the procedure used to select participants was a certain element of what could be termed 'sampling bias'. This was clearly recognised when the sampling procedure was devised. That is, a selected school was not necessarily a random sample of all schools possible, nor was it the case that participants were randomly selected from the population of teachers in general. These possible limitations, however, while regarded as restrictions to generalisation of the study were outweighed by the heuristic value of the data which could be obtained from a purposeful selection of teachers having particular characteristics.

A further limitation to this study relates to the researcher's lack of extended relationships with the participants. To do justice to the variability of teachers, it is best to perceive them over time. However, I interviewed each teacher only once, using a structured interview protocol even though there was allowance for further elaboration or explanation within the interview, when necessary. Multiple interviews conducted to the point of data saturation would have been ideal but a limited time frame for completion as well as the availability of teachers due to work commitments made this impracticable. I knew that teachers lead very busy professional lives and, although interested in the research, they often found it difficult to participate without creative use of time and interview locations.

Limitations and assumptions were also present in my position of researcher-as-insider. As I am a special education teacher working in a similar location, I was often in the situation where I felt that much was communicated with a background of assumed knowledge. This



limited my ability to gain a perspective on something in which I was also involved. There was also the possibility of teachers to whom I talked reshaping their own identities to meet what they perceived to be my expectations. That is, they created themselves as they believed I wished them to be. I found this was particularly evident when I was interviewing beginning teachers and teachers-in-charge of special education programs. Recruitment through school colleagues was also limiting. I was aware that these colleagues were not comfortable in identifying teachers with whom they or others in the school had negative relationships.

Generalization was not the aim of this study. The plan was to determine a new and better understanding of the experiences and perceptions of 20 teachers in North Queensland when including students with disabilities in the four secondary schools. Data from the interviews did reveal a small snapshot of the professional beliefs and attitudes of teachers involved in the inclusion process. However, these results may not reflect the attitudes of teachers at various other education settings nor the inclusion process in all secondary schools.

#### **7.4 *Personal, subjective and emotional***

As a qualitative researcher, I attempted to capture the experiences of the teachers by carefully listening to their stories. Although my intention was to listen and interpret them without judgment, I was aware of personal, social and local factors which can influence the research process and its results. My roles as a researcher, a special education teacher and parent did not exist in isolation of each other and did not always have discernable boundaries. Quite often the research and workplace roles were present together. It is acknowledged, therefore, that my subjective perspectives as a qualitative researcher, an insider researcher, a special education teacher and a parent of a child with disabilities as well as two children without disabilities were present throughout the process of this study. It was just not possible for interpretation of the teachers' experience with the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools to be separated from my own background, history, the context and prior understandings.

Basically, it is impossible to engage in qualitative research without constant awareness of self as a research instrument. Findings, methods and self are all interrelated. Therefore, it was important to continually scrutinise the methods by which any data were obtained. In this study, this led to some difficulties and challenges, the most constant and prominent being the difficulty of simultaneously being an insider with a range of ongoing roles which demanded time and attention and a researcher trying to reflect, observe and collect data on the research

process itself. There were the challenges of subjectivity, sensitive information and friendships. Making it even more complex was the role that I played as the mother of a son with disabilities as a number of the teachers had taught my son. This tension was never adequately resolved and did limit both the quantity and quality of the data and depth of analysis in some cases.

Despite my efforts to allow the teachers to speak in and through the text, I am conscious of being personal, subjective and emotional. I was trying to make sense of people's subjective experiences and their constructions of those experiences. They were telling me their feelings and opinions about certain things or certain aspects of their lives and I was attempting to understand how they made sense of their experiences. In other words, I was making sense of their sense of what happens in the secondary schools. In this way, I was actually constructing reality, based on the constructions of reality of my participants. My subjective and constructed realities and those of my research participants and the interactions among these various realities were thus the foundation for this study.

### **7.5 *Practical implications***

A considerable number of studies have investigated primary teachers' views regarding the inclusion process and the strategies that teachers use to cope with students with disabilities in their classes. Fewer studies have examined the different perceptions and expectations of teachers working in secondary schools. Nevertheless, examining inclusion at the secondary level is especially important because it is when students enter secondary school that the academic, social and behavioural expectations become more rigorous for students with and without disabilities. Research has shown that it is during this period of schooling when the most difficulties with inclusion are being experienced.

The majority of teachers involved in this study appreciated the inherent appeal of including all students with disabilities but had several concerns. They pointed to decisions which were made on commendable philosophical premises by Education Queensland but left them responsible for translating this philosophy into teaching in ever-more-challenging classrooms. Many of these secondary school teachers had little academic and practical knowledge of teaching students with disabilities whereas the special education teachers were faced with subject content of which they had limited familiarity. Nonetheless, the teachers were now

expected to have the knowledge and skills to teach students who frequently have very divergent educational needs. An additional challenge was that the secondary school teachers and special education teachers often worked in secondary schools where the school culture did not encourage inclusion. They could often perceive a significant gap between expectations of a successful inclusion process and the actual, less satisfying reality.

Underlying the comments of the majority of secondary school teachers was a personal belief of not always being able or willing to cope with students with disabilities in their classrooms. These professional beliefs and attitudes to inclusion were strongly influenced by their past experiences, the nature of the disabilities, the educational problems and the teaching area. They argued that they were working with increasingly diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and ability groups and were already accountable for providing these students with a range of skills and knowledge. When students with disabilities were included in their classroom, they were required to meet the needs of all students in an equitable, efficient and appropriate manner. They were faced with the challenges associated with developing specific activities as well as coping with the additional support required by the student with disabilities in the classroom.

Responsibility for the classroom teaching and learning for students with disabilities continues to be a complicated professional issue with mainstream and special education teachers. Data from this study supports international and Australian studies that the professional beliefs and attitudes of teachers profoundly affect the degree to which inclusive education can be implemented. Difficulties with taking responsibility for secondary school teachers could be associated with their perception that special education teachers and teacher aides are primarily responsible for educating students with disabilities. The teachers referred to years of a segregated education system as having left a legacy of difference where mainstream teachers and special education teachers may operate from very different paradigms and belief systems. Special education teachers, however, pointed to changes in the way all teachers consider their own thinking and practice. Taking responsibility for instruction of students with disabilities could also be assisted by collaboration between secondary school teachers and special education teachers.

Although the teachers spoke of the value of collegial support particularly the benefits of collaboration between all major stakeholders in the inclusion process, there was still anxiety. Successful collaboration is based on mutual respect, trust, commitment to planning and a

common philosophy. Yet, creating effective collaboration among all staff members at a school is especially challenging at secondary level because most secondary teachers are accustomed to working alone or within their specific departments. The teachers proposed that the secondary schools need to be more flexible in the way are organised so that teachers can work in partnership in problem-solving teams to develop responses to even the most problematic of students. They saw a better organisation and communication within the secondary school and an improved climate of social support as assisting teachers to cope with inclusion. For example, evidence of administrative support could come in the form of scheduling of release time for secondary school teachers and special education teachers to work together.

The difficulties with collaboration and support were evident when students with disabilities were included in the classroom. These students often required additional support to complete assignments, review concepts and complete exams. Many of the comments from the interviews suggested that teachers are feeling stressed and confused at what are perceived as ever-increasing demand in relation to students with disabilities. They did not feel appropriately prepared for a context in which they would be teaching students with disabilities when they knew that for inclusion to be successful, it must be explicitly planned and scheduled. Others pointed to real and pressing inadequacies in relation to resources and training for the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. These inadequacies included the availability of teacher aides and the level of training available for these teacher aides who often worked with students with socially unacceptable behaviours.

In spite of the best efforts of the secondary school teachers, the lack of training can unintentionally contribute to use of inappropriate strategies leading to tension, conflict and a lack of learning outcomes for the student concerned. The willingness of the teachers to promote inclusion depends on their perceived level of knowledge as well as the time and support available. The secondary school teachers and three of the special education teachers in the study were concerned about their lack of academic expertise in working with students with disabilities. Previous studies have shown that the level of training was significantly matched with the level of confidence in teaching students with disabilities. Particularly in times when financial resources to support inclusion are scarce, there is a need for a more deliberately focused attempt to address the professional development of teachers. Ultimately,

the success of a secondary school's inclusion program may depend on the degree to which the teachers are provided with training in the use of best practices as well as ongoing support.

During the telling of their different experiences in the classrooms, the teachers were given an opportunity to mentally and verbally organize the different incidents involving inclusion and to construct any connection between the events. It can be argued that access to the retelling of these experiences is more open and available to the researcher who is situated within and inhabits the landscape under investigation. Analysis of these experiences indicates that all partners – teachers, parents, students with and without disabilities, departments of education and universities – need to work together to understand and improve inclusive education for all students. Essentially, there is no doubt that the implementation of inclusion will inevitably create new and increased challenges for teachers. By listening to the concerns of teachers expressed in this study, it may be possible to identify the training, support and research which will be relevant in a secondary school setting.

#### **7.6 Recommendations**

The study focused on teachers and their perceptions of the challenges involved in including students with disabilities in the secondary school classroom. It was evident when analysing the transcripts from the interviews that the teachers were concerned about these challenges. To ignore the difficulties they face in inclusive classrooms is to put at risk the continuation of successful inclusion in secondary schools. For this reason, the following recommendations have been created from the suggestions of the participating teachers.

- Training for teachers in the use of collaborative skills and encouragement to make these skills an essential element in the inclusion process.
- Pre-service training which ensures secondary school teachers have the skills to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms.
- Encouraging secondary school teachers to take responsibility for students with disabilities by changing the paradigm that only 'specialists' can work with these students.

- Acknowledgement and support from the secondary school administration which is critical in the development of an inclusive model.
- Disability specific professional development which closely targets the concerns of teachers working with students with disabilities within the classroom.
- Training and support for teacher aides who often work with students who exhibit socially unacceptable behaviours and in subject areas of which they have limited academic knowledge.
- Research into the culture of the secondary school in order to find strategies which will assist in erasing the negative special education labels placed on students with disabilities and the teachers working with these students.
- The continuation of research on examining the strategies and practices used to include students with disabilities in the secondary school classroom without reliance on traditional approaches such as one-to-one teacher/ teacher aide assistance or ‘pull out’ methods.

### **7.7 *Future research***

The results of the present study add weight to existing evidence demonstrating further research is needed to explore significant issues within the inclusion process. Research is particularly imperative when students with disabilities are included in secondary schools where the student population has increasingly been described as melting pots of diversity. The complexity that teachers face in these classrooms can be highly demanding both physically and mentally. As a result, inclusion continues to be a challenging prospect for teachers, students with and without disabilities and administrators.

Previous research has shown some secondary schools are more inclusive than others which must be taken into consideration for further study. At the same time, there is evidence showing no one method is more successful for the process of inclusion. However, there are lessons to be learned from the voices of secondary school teachers and special education teachers. By investigating the culture of the secondary school and the political factors that

affect teachers' decisions and behaviours, information may be gained to help individual secondary schools meet the needs of all students. Additionally, this research would provide insight into the strategies which are successful in including students with disabilities.

Inclusion has brought many changes to the roles of secondary school teachers and special education teachers. Amongst these changes are the expectation that secondary school teachers will provide an inclusive curriculum and special education teachers must leave their self contained classrooms to support secondary school teachers. Extensive literature has stressed that, in order to break down barriers and achieve successful inclusion, it is important to provide people who do not have disabilities with opportunities for interaction, as well as information, instruction and formal education about and familiarisation with different aspects of disabilities. Secondary school teachers and special education teachers, therefore, must be encouraged to learn to work together after many years of working under a separate educational system. Future research into how they can learn how to work effectively as collaborators in support of students' participation will assist all involved in the inclusion process.

The personal growth through research was an additional benefit of this study. Completing this thesis has been a long, sometimes arduous, and always fascinating journey. Meeting the demands of the formal research process provided the opportunity to contribute to my own professional learning as a researcher, special education teacher, teacher educator and a parent. I frequently discussed my topic with anyone who was interested, which helped to clarify my knowledge and understanding of the positive and negative effects of disabilities on individuals and families. As a result, I believe my approach to inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary school environment is more self-reflective. The birth of my son 26 years ago began a research journey which will continue even with the completion of this thesis.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

One objective of qualitative research in education is to go at least part of the way toward solving or shedding light upon a significant problem. In this study, the data from interviewing the teachers did achieve this outcome by highlighting a number of substantial challenges related to inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary school. As a qualitative researcher, it was necessary to strive to understand the complexities and contradictions when

including students with disabilities. Using data from the 20 interviews, it was possible to supply the teachers' personal insight of the inclusion process. This research, however, was aimed at facilitating the inclusion of students with disabilities from the teacher's perspective and is not intended to be judgmental.

The main objective of this study was to raise awareness of the challenges which teachers face when including students with disabilities in the secondary school. To achieve this awareness, 20 teachers working in four North Queensland secondary schools described their professional beliefs and attitude to the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools. Reference was made to the ability of the secondary school along with the teachers to provide age appropriate role models, peer interaction and an environment conducive to learning. A particular focus was on how they described the nature of perceived challenges which they faced on a daily basis when including students with disabilities in the secondary schools.

A further objective of this study was to consider in what ways the perceived challenges when working with students with disabilities added to existing stress levels of these 20 teachers. Within the rapidly changing political and economic environment of the Australian secondary school, achieving teaching and learning outcomes are becoming extremely taxing. Additionally, a number of students with disabilities can exhibit socially unacceptable behaviour as well as requiring teachers to more carefully organise and adjust their lessons. It is clear that teachers contend with events beyond their control. What is within the realm of personal choice is their response to these events. By identifying the strategies that work, teachers may have the prospect of successfully working with these students in the classrooms.

Despite its limitations, this small study can be seen as important in several ways. It has significance for special education teachers, secondary teachers and administrators in secondary schools because first and most important, it tends to provide a snapshot of the challenges inherent in the inclusion of students with disabilities in four secondary schools. Research has shown that the professional beliefs and attitudes of teachers may vary but at the same time are essential in the successful implementation of inclusive policies and practices. It is interesting to note that the majority of teachers involved in this study appreciated the inherent appeal of including students with disabilities but still had substantial concerns regarding the availability of professional and physical resources.



Students with disabilities will continue to constitute a challenge both to the bureaucratic configuration of the school and the convergent thinking inherent within the cultures of education professionals. In 1997, Ainscow argued that “a scrutiny of the practice of what we sometimes call ‘ordinary teachers’ provides the best starting point of understanding how classrooms can be made more inclusive” (p. 4). In 2010, I believe that his argument is still relevant. By listening to the teachers who work with the students with disabilities, it may be possible to gain an insight into the challenges they face in their classrooms and develop ways of effectively supporting teachers who are currently implementing inclusive practices in their own classrooms. As well, methods of preparing those who will be experiencing this innovation in their own future professional lives may be implemented. The strategies that evolve from these actions may “light our own small fires in the darkness” (Handy, 1994, p. 271) and encourage increased acceptance of inclusion of students with disabilities in the secondary school classrooms.

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*Appendix A*

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

Gender: male            female     

In what age category are you?

24 or younger            25-34            35-44            45-54        
55 and over     

How many years have you been teaching?      \_\_\_\_\_

Subject /Work Area (s)

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Please list your special education qualifications.

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Are there any other comments that you would like to add?

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## *Appendix B*

### Questions

1. Why do you think I am interviewing you?
2. What do you think are the positive aspects of including students with disabilities in secondary school(s)?
3. What do you think are the challenging issues relating to including a student with disabilities?
4. Do you have any stories to share about your experiences of including a student with disabilities?
5. What control do you have over the inclusion of students with disabilities in your subjects?
6. Did you find this experience stressful? Why?
7. In what ways has this impacted on your work, learning and personal well being?
8. When including students with disabilities, what human support did you receive?
9. How effective was that support?
10. In particular, how effective was communication between the staff from the SEU and mainstream teachers?
11. Do you think the teachers acted as a team or did the students with disabilities become the responsibility of one person?
12. When including students with disabilities, what support in the terms of information, teacher aides and material resources did you receive?
13. How effective was that support?
14. What importance do you think Administration place on inclusion of students with disabilities?
15. What do you think is the most important aspect, from a teacher's perspective, of including students with disabilities in the secondary school?
16. Would you like to see any changes in the process of including students with disabilities in the secondary school?



*Appendix C*

ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTATION HAS BEEN REMOVED

*Appendix D*

ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTATION HAS BEEN REMOVED



