"I believe in inclusion but…" :
A critical exploration into teacher beliefs and values around inclusion.

by

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Abstract

This critical exploration into teacher beliefs and attitudes around inclusion serves to examine the various ways in which The Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador's implementation of its Inclusive Education Initiative (2009) is being understood by educators. In particular it explores how teachers' past experiences with inclusion impact their core beliefs and values. Due to the importance of relationship within the development of inclusive school cultures (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), this research is positioned within a framework of relational theory and restorative justice. This narrative inquiry focuses on three educators working in primary/elementary schools in St. John's, NL. There was a marked difference in discussions around inclusive education before and after unpacking the participants own core beliefs and values around inclusion. Suggestions are offered for professional development components that explore inclusive core beliefs and values.

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DOENL	Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador
IRT	Instructional Resource Teacher
NLESD	Newfoundland and Labrador English School District

Prologue

This critical exploration into teacher beliefs and attitudes around inclusion serves to examine the various ways in which The Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador's implementation of its Inclusive Education Initiative (2009) is being understood by educators. In particular it explores how teachers' past experiences with inclusion impact their core beliefs and values.

Chapter 1: Introduction

You, who are on the road
must have a code that you can live by.
And so become yourself
because the past is just a good bye.

- **Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young**

Gaining insight at the mall

I can say without hesitation that my Mother has taught me many things in the course of my life. She has shared her stories, her life and her love with me unconditionally and, for that, I am forever grateful. My Mother was a high school teacher and taught for thirty years in the denominational school system in Newfoundland and Labrador. She began her career in the community of Curling on the west coast of Newfoundland, spent three years in Ferryland on the southeast coast, taught the next two years in Goose Bay, Labrador, and spent the last twenty years of her career in the capital city of St. John's where she taught mainly in one Catholic high school.

I spent many happy evenings in my Mother's classroom, occupying myself while she corrected papers, exploring the classroom as she organized her work and, oftentimes, playing teacher as she prepared her lessons for the week. I delighted in helping her decorate her classroom in early fall and happily anticipated the end of the school year when we took everything down again and carefully placed items in boxes for the next year. I loved the smell of freshly waxed floors and dusty chalkboards. I loved listening to the conversations my Mother had and the laughter

she shared with the maintenance staff at the school and with the other teachers who lingered long after the school day was over.

I knew my Mother as a teacher yet I never witnessed her in action in the classroom. I would often hear stories from her and from my Aunt, her sister, who was also a teacher. They would share stories about singing songs, doing dramatic re-enactments and playing games as part of their teaching strategies. They would try a multitude of techniques to help their students connect with learning whether it was Shakespeare, poetry, essay writing or even parts of speech.

In 1984, my Mother was asked to participate in a new program that her school was incorporating, a program that was designed to help students who were identified as potential dropouts. My Mother took on this teaching assignment readily and fearlessly even though it required intensive preparation in addition to her regular workload. As a young child, I was not aware of many challenging things related to my Mother's teaching career. I gathered only pieces patched together from snippets of conversations. I do know that her teaching experience was both rewarding and challenging at the same time. Now, many years later, I understand these emotions very clearly as I am, today, a teacher myself.

I experienced my first real understanding of the kind of teacher my Mother was when I was fifteen years old. She and I were Christmas shopping at the Village Mall when we heard a distinctive voice call from behind, "Mrs. Power! Mrs. Power!" When we turned, we saw a young man coming toward us. He had light brown hair and a short mustache. He wore faded blue jeans, a red plaid shirt and beige work boots. His smile was broad and his eyes brimmed with excitement, the kind of

excitement you encounter when you see a long lost friend for the first time in years. "Oh my, Jimmy! How good to see you! How are you doing?" my Mother responded. As he came close, she gave him her signature arm squeeze that was warm and welcoming. Jimmy responded in kind and then blurted out, "Will you wait here a moment? I want to run and get my wife and my little girl. I want them to meet you!" He dashed away leaving us in the middle of the busy concourse only to return beaming with delight at the prospect of introducing them to his "favourite teacher." He continued with, "This is Mrs. Power. This is the teacher I told you about." "It's true, his wife responded, "He talks about you all the time. He always says that you were the reason he finished school." "It's true", said Jimmy, "You never gave up on me. You know, you're the reason that I stayed in school. I didn't want to disappoint you." I stood next them in silence overwhelmed by the experience. "I knew you could do it, Jimmy", my Mother said. At that moment, I was struck by his sincerity and his honest emotion. I could not believe how thrilled he was to finally have his wife meet my Mom, his former teacher. This is just a sampling of our public life together. It was not uncommon for us to run into her past students wherever we went and their reaction was always the same and her reaction to them was always the same.

Over the years, I have seen a multitude of former students greet Mom and regale her with stories of their lives. Some send letters and pictures, some track her down to say thank you. Some, whose lives were difficult growing up, always remember her as a light in the darkness. They knew that she cared very deeply for them and that she did everything she could to help them succeed. "Sometimes just

knowing that someone really cares about you is all you need to move ahead," I heard her say on many occasions. She accepted her students for who they were, supported them where they were and helped them move forward as best they could.

My Mother has taught me many things in my life to date and hopefully she will continue to do so. I have learned a great deal from my relationship with her but also from the total experience of my personal and professional relationships. They have fostered in me, as an educator, a deep belief in the power of relationships and their essential nature in helping students move forward from where they are at that moment in time.

This deep belief has shaped and guided my understanding of my role as an educator and has directly impacted the relationships I have built with my students and my colleagues over the years. It has shaped my role in the culture of the schools of which I have been a part. At the forefront of my pedagogy, is the need for establishing healthy, co-operative, and safe learning environments supported by strong relationships.

From the Village Mall to the classroom walls

This focus on relationships was tested in 2009 when I was working with a Grade 6 class. When the school year started, my first and foremost intent was to establish a good rapport with my students by making the classroom a safe and encouraging enclave for learning to take place. Unfortunately, the combative nature of the relationships among the students soon became evident. There was constant bickering and fighting going on among the students and disparaging comments

were openly made or quietly voiced. The students had been together for their entire school career. They had been in the same class since kindergarten and many even lived in the same neighbourhood. Initially, I assumed that this would work to my advantage and a sense of togetherness would be easily established. After all, they had six years to build relationships. This was true to some degree, but the relationships, for the most part, were divisive and exclusive.

To help encourage a better rapport among students, I began to do research into relationship building within the classroom. The previous year, I had taught Grade One and had some success using daily morning circles with the students. It was part of our classroom routine and those students had enjoyed it very much. As I continued my research, I stumbled upon an area of work that suggested the use of circles with older students and it offered examples of what this would look like. I immediately began the process with my Grade 6 class. I incorporated a regular morning circle where students shared information about themselves, their experiences, their likes and their dislikes, their emotions and their frustrations. Together we played team-building games in circle and practiced listening to each other. Over time, the changes that occurred in the class were remarkable. My students started treating each other differently. They handled situations in the classroom differently and the relationships of the students with me and with each other changed for the better. Even my own teaching style changed. I learned to listen more and talk less. I was able to do more group work, more project-based work with the students' improved cooperation. This experience for me reinforced

the belief in the importance of building healthy relationships. I was able to see that relationship building was at the core of developing a robust classroom community.

Initiating the Inclusive Initiative

It was within this framework of relational pedagogy that I was first introduced to the inclusive education initiative established by the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador (DOENL) in 2009. This inclusive education initiative was to be implemented so that schools from all parts of the province would enter into the process in phases. There were six phases in all. During the implementation phase, representatives from each school would receive training in four areas: the use of the Index for Inclusion, the implementation of differentiated instruction, the use of collaborative teaching models and the development of annual action plans. Schools would also be supported by district level inclusive education itinerants. Within each school, teachers would also receive professional development opportunities to further their experience with inclusive education.

The Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador (2011) defined inclusive education as:

- the right of all students to attend school with their peers, and to receive appropriate and quality programming
- a welcoming school culture where all members of the school community feel they belong, realize their potential, and contribute to the life of the school;
- a school community which celebrates diversity
- a safe and caring school environment

- a continuum of supports and services in the most appropriate setting respecting the dignity of the child

  (DOENL, 2011, p.5)

These principles were to apply to every member of the school community without considering economic status, gender, racial or religious background, academic ability or other areas of diversity. (DOENL, 2011). Immediately, I began to think about ideas around community and began to reflect on, not just my own classroom community, but also our school community as a whole. How did my classroom community impact the broader school community and, likewise, how did the broader school community impact my classroom? This gave me a more capacious perspective of my own role both within my classroom and within school community as a whole.

Departmental literature highlighted that inclusive education involved everything that happened within a school community. It was the embodiment of a philosophy which permeates a school's culture, policies and practices (DOENL, 2014). An inclusive philosophy was heralded as the creation of learning environments that allowed an opportunity for every individual to experience success. The philosophical slant of this initiative intrigued me. I felt that this opened up an exciting opportunity to reflect on the relationships that were built within schools and how we create environments that can both support and alienate students. I felt that understanding inclusive education as a philosophy was more than just accepting a new policy. I felt that it was something that could challenge the way we think about difference and diversity. I was new to the profession and I was enthusiastic and interested in the possibilities of this inclusive initiative.

Considering school culture

There were a few key areas of focus in the inclusive initiative, one being the creation of an inclusive school culture. The requirements in building an inclusive school culture would go further than surface changes such as diversity training, bullying workshops or creating value statements about inclusion (DOENL, 2014, para. 2). An inclusive school culture requires a transformation in the attitudes of all those within the school community as well as the development of policies and practices that reinforce inclusive behavior (DOENL, 2014, para. 2). The idea of a transformation of the attitudes of those engaged with the initiative seemed a large-scale task. What type of work would need to be done to engage people in the conversations required to transform their attitudes around difference and diversity. What were the kinds of changes the department was looking for? According to the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador (2014), "An inclusive culture is based on the philosophy that the whole school shares in the responsibility for inclusion. A real culture of inclusion cannot be brought about unless everyone embraces it. (para. 3)" In the Department's recognition of this, was it assumed that people would embrace it readily? If not, what was the plan to allow people a place to explore these ideas?

Three stages were recognized in developing inclusive educational programming in schools. The first was to address teacher beliefs and values concerning inclusive schooling. According to McLesky and Warren (1996), from whose article these stages were sited, the beliefs of teachers about students and the organization of schools are critical factors in inclusive education and they must be examined, reflected on and changed before inclusive programming can be implemented. I had had the opportunity in

the past to have time to reflect on some of my own core beliefs and values and so this stage really made sense to me.

For me, creating communities of belonging where everyone felt valued and safe was key to my own teaching philosophy and an integral part of my pedagogy. So as an early-career teacher, I embraced the inclusive initiative. I felt that the philosophy of inclusion existed in my own core vales and beliefs. Yet there were many teachers who had serious doubts about the new initiative. They did not view the initiative from the same standpoint as I did. For them, this was more an issue of a change in policy and practice, something that meant substantial changes to the school structure and to roles of the professionals working within this structure.

Perplexed by policies and practices

At the same time, conversations were beginning around the inclusive education initiative, its focus on a shifting philosophy and the creation of an inclusive school culture; a major change in policy with a direct impact on practice was also released. In my conversations with colleagues, it seemed that this is where their attention was focused. The Service Delivery Model for Students with Exceptionalities restructured the way that services were provided for students with exceptionalities. An exceptionality, according to the Department of Education, "is a term used to identify patterns of strengths and needs common to groups of students. These strengths and needs may be cognitive, emotional, behavioural, medical, social, and/or physical" (DOENL, 2011, p. 5). The Service Delivery Model focused on developing an inclusive framework for program delivery. While there were many changes in the delivery of services, what

seemed to draw the most conversation among my colleagues were the changes to professional roles and responsibilities of both classroom teachers and special services teachers, who were now titled Instructional Resource Teachers (IRT). The table below shows an overview of the overarching changes for the delivery of services of students with exceptionalities.

Traditional Model	**Inclusive Model**
Focus on student	Focus on classroom
Assessment by the expert	Collaboration and consultation with expert
Diagnostic profile	Classroom and instructional needs
Program for student	Strategies for teacher
Potential placement in program	Responsive and flexible classrooms

Table 1.1: Department of Education – Newfoundland and Labrador (2011)

This shift was toward a structure where students were not being taken out of the classroom to receive support services. Instead, supports would be available within the classroom, where possible. This new type of servicing demanded a different relationship between classroom teachers and IRTs. More collaboration would be required to determine programming and support and co-teaching was encouraged between IRTs and classroom teachers.

This change in service delivery was one part of the implementation and reworking of policies and procedures that would be a part of the plan for moving toward an inclusive philosophy in education in the province. Yet, it seemed to me that it was this change that was receiving all the focus. It had an immediate impact on the lives of those within the school community and, from what I could tell, it had become completely

intertwined with their understanding of the Inclusive Education Initiative.

It seemed to me that further discussions pointed to two key challenges: (a) Teachers felt that this move toward inclusion was mainly a change in policy around the delivery of services to students with exceptionalities, a move that dramatically shifted the roles of classroom teachers and IRTs. (b) There was very little conversation happening on developing inclusive school cultures and discussing teacher beliefs and values surrounding inclusive education.

What I heard from teachers was that while they could say that they believed in inclusion, they had deep concerns and reservations around the new Inclusive Education Initiative. This moved me to want to know more about how teachers understood the Inclusive Education Initiative. As a result of my own experience, I was interested in exploring how teachers had experienced inclusion in their own lives and how these experiences shaped their own core beliefs and values. I wanted to look more closely at how these core beliefs and values around inclusion shaped how teachers understood their role within the development of an inclusive school community.

The Department recognizes the importance of teacher beliefs and values and their part in determining the success of an inclusive school. In an analysis of print and on-line resources, as well as personal involvement with professional development sessions, this essential component was not addressed in a comprehensive way. Space for real reflection and real dialogue was not established.

Concerns and questions are a natural part of change. According to Blood and Thorsborne (2006), teacher's reaction to change is often determined by "the way that that change is implemented, what is happening for the person at the time, past experiences,

how they learn and the nature of the environment they are working within at the time" (p.7). Having time to reflect on and explore our own experiences of inclusion and the core beliefs and values that we have developed through these experiences is an essential first step to beginning to create a healthy relational inclusive school culture (Carrington, 1999). This type of critical reflection is essential to building relationships within an inclusive school culture and is key to both positive change and effective school development (Cornwall, 2012).

Research purpose

In this study I explore and describe how teachers understand the Inclusive Education Initiative implemented by the Department of Education in Newfoundland and Labrador. I inquire into the lived experiences that teachers have had with inclusion in their own lives and examine core beliefs and values that are highlighted in these experiences. Further, I investigate how these core beliefs and values shape teacher's understanding and involvement in creating an inclusive school culture. I explore this through both the framework of relational theory (Llewlyn, 2012; Downie and Llewelyn, 2012) and of restorative justice (Llewlyn, 2012; Vaandering, 2012; Pranis, 2007). Through the lens of relational theory and restorative justice I examine how core beliefs and values shape the relationships that are built within a school and how these relationships impact the development of an inclusive school culture (Cornwall, 2012).

Research questions

There are four key questions that are central to this research. The questions mirror my own journey in exploring inclusive education and are designed to focus on each participant's own experience and understanding of inclusion.

- How do teachers understand the most recent inclusive education initiative?
- What have been teachers' lived experiences of inclusion throughout their own lives?
- How have these experiences shaped their core beliefs and values regarding inclusion?
- To what extent do these beliefs and values shape teachers perceived role in the development of an inclusive school culture?

Core beliefs and values in research

My belief in the importance of relationship, as highlighted at the start of this chapter, has led to my desire to explore this subject through a lens of relational theory and a framework of restorative justice. In the same way that core beliefs and values shape my understanding of the philosophy of inclusive education, my core belief in the essential nature of healthy relationships in building community has also guided me to this research.

I have chosen narrative inquiry as the methodology for this research. Each participant's core beliefs and values will be shared and explored through the collection of their stories and lived experiences. According to Kay Pranis (2005), a leader in restorative justice, to feel connected and respected, we all need to tell our stories and have others listen. It is at the root of the development of healthy, social relationships.

As a researcher, I believe that it is important to share my own personal experiences that have helped shape my own core beliefs and values throughout this thesis. To begin, I want to share my own story that I believe has drawn me toward narrative inquiry. Although it happened many years ago, it still remains fresh in my mind. It is a story that shaped some of my own core beliefs and values that have guided me on my own life path.

Sharing the light

I remember very vividly walking with my Father down Water Street one summer's day when I was around eleven years old. My Father was a real people watcher and loved to go strolling downtown. On that day we were taking in the sights, walking, talking and checking out the general hustle and bustle on a busy Saturday afternoon. As we walked up Water Street, I remember seeing a man sitting on a green bench. He was an older gentleman and wore an old worn brown suit and a brown fedora hat. His face had deep lines and was worn with age. As we came upon him he looked up at my Father and asked him if he had a light. My dad stopped and searched his pockets for his lighter and handed it to the man. The man took a partially smoked cigarette from his pants pocket. There was hardly anything left to it and as he put it to his lips, I noticed that his hands were very shaky. He took the lighter in his hand and tried to light his cigarette but his hands were shaking so badly that he couldn't get it to light. After numerous attempts my father leaned over gently and said, "Let me help you with that" and he leaned forward and took the lighter from the man's hand. He sat down on the bench next to him, turned to the old man and lit his cigarette. I thought that would be it and we would be off down

the street again but that wasn't the case. They started talking about the weather, then on to the changes to the downtown over the years and the conversation went on and on. As a young girl, I was not part of their conversation but I walked in circles looking in the store windows while the two of them talked. I am not sure how long they spoke. To me what seemed like hours was probably more like 15 minutes. The next thing I knew, Dad was up and we were on our way. As we walked away, Dad said something that I have never forgotten and is ingrained in my very being "Everybody's got a story, Erin," he said "and if you take a minute to listen, you never know what you will learn." I have taken those words to heart and have always been interested in hearing people's stories. Family, friends, strangers, students, colleagues, I have listened to many stories and have learned a great deal about these people and about myself from each story that has been shared. I have also learned how to listen. To really listen to someone's story is not an easy feat but something that needs care and attention.

At the root of this research is the belief that teachers' stories will reveal how their core beliefs and values are shaped and defined. In a field where teacher voice is limited and restricted, narrative inquiry allows for a space to give voice to those whose stories have previously been unheard (Creswell, 2009).

What is to follow?

In the second chapter, I elaborate further on the meaning of an inclusive school culture. I examine the foundational role played by the school culture in supporting inclusive policies and practices. I also examine the integral relationship that core beliefs

and values play in the development of an inclusive school culture. I further define what is meant by core beliefs and values and offer insight into current research in this area.

The third chapter offers insight into theoretical framework of the research. I expound on the specific context of relational theory as it relates to this research and clarify the relationship between relational theory and restorative justice. I then draw connections between relational theory and inclusive education as it relates to this research.

The methodology makes up the fourth chapter of this thesis. In this chapter, I explain in detail why narrative inquiry was the most fitting methodology for this research. I explain in detail the structure of the research layout and discuss how the challenges of reflexivity and trustworthiness were addressed.

The narratives of each participant and an analysis of each narrative will follow in the fifth chapter. This will offer insight into the data collected from each participant and major themes that appear in each narrative.

The final chapter will investigate overarching themes that were observed and explain how each connects with the experience of the individual narratives of the participants. I address the limitations of the research as well as explore ideas for future research and for future practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny.
— Mahatma Gandhi

Narrowing the focus

As I focused on this research, I began to recognize that further explanation was needed when addressing ideas around what was meant by terms like inclusive school cultures, core beliefs and core values. Questions arose as to what exactly a school culture is and what is encompassed in its scope? I had frequently engaged in conversations of beliefs and values, but did I really understand what these terms meant? Often there is an assumed understanding of these terms. These presumptions can create false perceptions of shared beliefs and values and I found that this is often the case in work around inclusive beliefs and values. The literature around these terms is broad and for this reason I believe that it is imperative to define these terms to clarify their meaning for this research.

Creating an inclusive school culture

A school's culture characterizes much more than just the social organization of the school. It is shaped by traditions, beliefs and values, rules and regulations, policies and procedures (Kruse & Louis, 2009). In this understanding of school

culture, policies and practices are embedded within the culture. The policies and practices are not separate entities but instead are intertwined within the school culture itself. In its literature, the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador (2014) acknowledged that inclusive education is the embodiment of a philosophy that permeates a school's culture, policies and practices. Within an intervolved understanding of school culture, the policies and practices become part of what makes up the school culture.

The Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) is a resource that was utilized by the Department of Education in order to help schools assess their own level of inclusion. Within the Index, inclusion is explored through three dimensions of school development: creating school cultures, producing school policies and evolving school practice. These three dimensions are outlined in the diagram presented in figure 2.1.

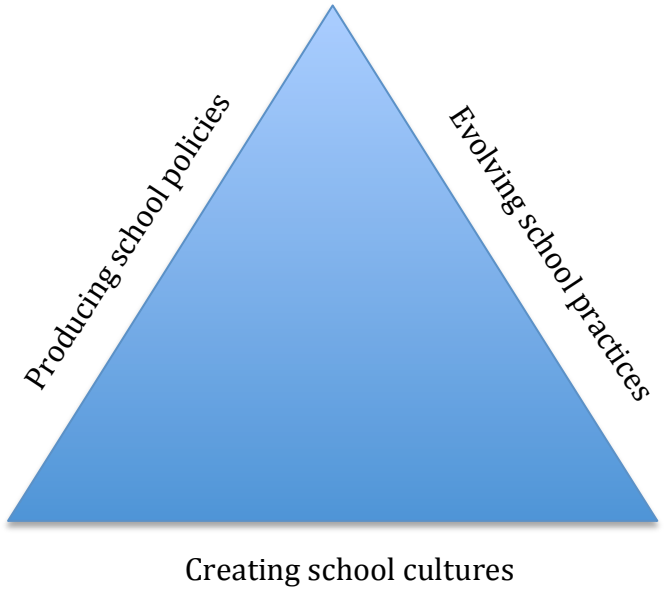

Figure 2.1: The three dimensions of the index (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.7)

Although all dimensions are important, Booth and Ainscow (2002) place 'creating school cultures' along the base of the triangle intentionally. They state:

> At times, too little attention has been given to the potential for school cultures to support or undermine developments in teaching and learning. Yet they are at the heart of school improvement. The development of shared inclusive values and collaborative relationships may lead to changes in the other dimensions. It is through inclusive school cultures that changes in policies and practices can be sustained… (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.7).

When we look at the role of school culture in supporting inclusive education, again we see how culture, policies and practices are intertwined. For many teachers, much of the focus remained in change in policy and practice and the more philosophical concepts of inclusive education remained in the realm of school culture. This for me was problematic as it seemed to highlight the many layers and partially mask the intention of the Inclusive Education Initiative.

Also entrenched within school culture are beliefs and values. According to Ekins (2012), shared inclusive values are key to developing an inclusive school culture and, in order to develop these shared values, each member of the community must evaluate his/her own beliefs and values (p.64). In Sergiovanni and Starrat's (1993) onion skin model of school culture, one that remains prominent in work around school culture (Frick & Frick, 2010; Vlachou, 2004; Carrington, 1999), beliefs and values are in fact central to exploring school culture. Yet a clear understanding of what is meant by beliefs and values is often elusive.

Focusing on beliefs and values

In my own experience, as professionals, we often engage in discussions around beliefs and values under the illusion of a shared understanding, yet it is imperative to this research that a specific understanding of these terms is understood.

Beliefs become thoughts (Mahatma Ghandi)

Bandura (1986), Dewey (1933) and Rokeach (1968) have all done foundational work around beliefs. They are echoed in the work of Pajares (1992) who supports the idea that "beliefs are the best indicators of the decisions individuals make throughout their lives" (p.309). In terms of this research, it is important to recognize the vital role that beliefs play in consciously or unconsciously shaping the decisions that teachers make in their professional lives – decisions that directly impact their role in the development of an inclusive school culture. As stated by Borg (2001), " a belief is a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held" (p.186). Being that beliefs may be unconsciously held yet accepted as truths, beliefs need to be brought to the surface (Farrell & Ives, 2014). It should be made clear that beliefs, according to Hammond (2006), are not the sole predictors of teacher behavior but they set out the 'terms of reference' by which they are guided. With the implementation of the Inclusive Education Initiative, each of the participants of research has had to set out his/her 'terms of reference' for evaluation of this initiative and from this place they have made decisions about their actions within this inclusive school culture.

According to Hammond (2006), "beliefs are stable sets of references but they are not innate" (p.296). This is an important consideration as it indicates that beliefs, though engrained in our understanding of our experience, also stem from previous experiences. Pajares (1992) explains, "they can be formed by chance, an intense experience, or a succession of events, and they include beliefs about what oneself and others are like" (p.309).

Hammond (2006) and Nias (1984) argue that core beliefs carry a strong sense of emotional attachment and moral purpose and are important for self-identity. Specifically, in a school environment, these beliefs would also shape the teacher's own professional identity.

Values become destiny (Mahatma Gahandi)

Discussions around values contain many similar themes to discussions around beliefs. Values, too, are not innate. Values are embodied culturally; they are formed through engagement with cultural institutions and with personal interactions (Gudmundsdottir, 1990). This highlights the relational side of the acquisition of values. They, like beliefs, are garnered from both public and personal relationships. Experiences with these relationships then form the basis of these beliefs and values.

Unlike beliefs, values seem to stem more from cultural interaction. Gudmundsdottir (1990) continues, "values build on aspects of culture, such as ideologies, ideals, and conflicting interests. They are unlike ideals and ideologies because values always imply choice" (p.41). Values remain more in the public

sphere and values reflect specific interests that may have faded from public memory but remain as part of the individual (Gudmundsdottir, 1990). Due to the element of choice in values, when these specific interests are chosen and remain with a person, they do so because these personal values have reached the core of his/her self identity. (McKinny, 1980).

One of the key similarities between beliefs and values is that, like beliefs, values do not determine our behavior but instead guide our judgment of a situation. According to Peters (1970), "they rule out certain courses of action and sensitize us to features of a situation which are morally relevant" (p.232). The two then guide our behavior and our decisions to act in particular situations yet we may not always be aware of their influence on our state of mind.

This brings to the forefront the idea of the awareness of core beliefs and values. Both in discussions around beliefs and values, there is a distinction between espoused beliefs and values and core beliefs and values or beliefs and values in action (Carrington, 1999; Borg, 2001; Hammond, 2006). More broadly, what we say are our values and beliefs may at times be different from the values and beliefs which influence our actions. In education, in particular, what teachers say and what teachers actually believe are not necessarily the same (MacBeath, Galton & Stewart, 2006). Hodges (1998) makes the important distinction between participation and identification when considering beliefs and values. For example, a teacher could participate in a school's inclusive culture yet not identify with it. Therefore, there is an inconsistency between what a teacher says he/she believes, and how he/she acts. Carrington (1999) identifies this as a difference between an espoused theory and

theory in use" (p.262).

Due to the fact that beliefs and values are often deep rooted and are often intertwined with our self-identity (Hammond, 2006; Gudmundsdottir, 1990, Pajares, 1992), then exploration into these beliefs and values requires more than just surface conversation. It requires a type of reflection and exploration that allows the participant to "go deeper" (Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005, p.48). In this research, it is through deep reflection on teachers' beliefs and values that have been shaped by past experience, that allows for a place where participants bring to the surface these core beliefs and values.

Core research around teachers' values, beliefs and school culture

Current research into the exploration of teachers' core beliefs and attitudes around inclusion offers great insight into the challenges that schools are facing in their development of a whole-school inclusive culture (Ekins, 2012; MacBeath, Galton & Stewart, 2006; Cole, 2005). For the most part this work has been done using descriptive case studies that have gathered in-depth interviews around teachers' understanding of and feelings around inclusion. Some have explored teachers' attitudes around the philosophy of inclusion (Abbot, 2006; Ainscow, 2007) which are shown to be quite positive. Others are an exploration into how this understanding influences both their teaching practices (MacBeath, Galton & Stewart, 2006) and their participation in the inclusive culture of the school (Ekins, 2012; Cole, 2005). It seems that this is where the discrepancy lies; teachers say that they

believe in inclusion but are frustrated by its policy and practice (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006).

What is presenting as problematic here is the difference between teachers' espoused beliefs and values impacting their understanding of inclusion and their beliefs and values in action. This certainly proves problematic when we consider the central role that beliefs and values play in the development of school culture (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993). If there is a discrepancy between what teachers are saying about inclusion and what they really believe, questions must be asked about how these teachers engage in the inclusive culture of the school and the authenticity of the relationships that they form with others in this environment (Vaandering, 2011).

Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) argue that values underpin the actions and plans of action and all practices within the schools. They also determine the policies for the shaping of practice. Therefore, values cannot be assumed. Instead, they argue that "the development of inclusion requires us to make explicit the values that underlie actions, practices and policies" (p.25). In fact, the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador acknowledge that inclusive education "is more than just developing a value statement that talks about inclusion" (2014, para. 2) yet they have not been explicit about the values that have guided their own development of policies and practices. Therefore, as an educator reading this policy document, it is assumed that in discussion around inclusion, I, along with my colleagues, inherently know what these values are. This is problematic as my values and those of my colleagues may in fact differ from the assumed values.

If at the core of an inclusive school culture are the existing beliefs and attitudes, then it becomes apparent that an in-depth exploration into beliefs and attitudes would help unpack the value system in order to address the ingrained assumptions that we have around difference and belonging.

Current research literature pertaining to inclusive education, reveals that there continues to be a lack of critical exploration of inclusion among those working in schools (Ekins, 2012) and that revised policy often does not result in effective implementation of inclusive practices (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011). This research is positioned to offer insight into the role that beliefs and values play in the understanding and development of an inclusive school culture and to examine the implications of bringing these core beliefs and values to the surface. It will add to the research into the exploration of inclusion among those working in schools (Ekins, 2012).

" I believe in inclusion but…"

"I believe in inclusion but…" is a statement I have often heard as an educator in Newfoundland and Labrador in conversations. This statement is a powerful one as it speaks to the contradictions encountered in teachers' experience with inclusion in the province. Research has shown that teachers can be part of an inclusive school culture and participate in it, yet they might not hold it as part of their own beliefs and values (Carrigan, 1999; MacBeath, Galton & Stewart, 2006). Their relationship with inclusion is not genuine and therefore the relationships that they build within an inclusive culture become problematic. Relationships are a key component to the

development of inclusive schools. It is "through the quality and character of relationships that values, beliefs and norms are felt" (Sergiovanni, 1994, p.18). Therefore, without critical reflection around teachers' core beliefs and values, the fundamental relational structure of inclusion is compromised (Ekins, 2012).

Teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador have had little opportunity to critically reflect and to unpack their own beliefs and values around the newest inclusive initiative even though the Department of Education acknowledges this important stage. They have had limited opportunity to dialogue with other educational stakeholders around these key thoughts and ideas.

To my knowledge, there has been limited research conducted on teachers' beliefs and attitudes, particularly as examined through a relational theoretical lens (Llewelyn, 2012; Downie & Llewelyn, 2006). This type of research is important as it directly addresses both the importance of relationships within inclusive education and the foundation of these relationships, namely teacher belief and values around inclusion.

Over the past six years, Newfoundland and Labrador has begun a new journey into the second wave of inclusion policy in education. At this new time in inclusive education in Newfoundland and Labrador, I feel that research focusing on teachers' beliefs and values around inclusion and its impact on the development of the inclusive culture of the school would certainly add to the literature that has been written about inclusion specifically in Newfoundland and Labrador. I feel that this research, using narrative inquiry as its methodology, will help develop a deeper and richer understanding of inclusive education in the Newfoundland and Labrador

context.

Chapter 3: Relational Theory/ Restorative Justice

Then the child moved ten times round the seasons
Skated over ten clear frozen streams
Words like when you're older must appease him
And promises of someday make his dreams

- ***Joni Mitchell***

Putting the circle in the square

To further the story I began in Chapter 1 concerning my understanding of the powerful impact of relationships in establishing classroom culture, it was with these Grade 6 students that I began to develop a clearer conception of the self as deeply connected to others. As I stated in Chapter 1, this group of students had been together for their entire elementary school experience. Many of them lived in close proximity to one another and, as a result, socialized outside of school. One of the students in this identified group acted differently from the others. Despite the fact that he grew up with his classmates and spent time with them both inside and outside of school, he struggled with social interaction and was, at the time, very isolated within the class. When he did interact with the other students, these interactions, as I witnessed, were confrontational. His challenges, both academic and social, had manifested behaviorally within the classroom and generally within the school. Fortunately, my relationship with the student had been overall a positive one and so it was from this framework that I viewed his interactions with his fellow students and with his teachers.

When we first started doing circles in the classroom, Reggie was not interested in participating. As the facilitator of the circle, I recognized that the students needed to be in the circle willingly and so I accepted his decision to remain in his seat. Each morning I would call the students to circle and I would ask Reggie if he was interested in joining us but each day, he would say, "No". This went on for a period of weeks. The other students, by this point, looked forward to our morning circle. The atmosphere created was a very positive and engaging one. Then one day, to my delight, I realized that Reggie was sitting next to me. Without acknowledging his sudden appearance, I continued with our circle and when the talking piece was handed to Reggie, he quietly passed it to me. Things continued this way for another week or so until one day, when discussing the events of our weekend, Reggie held the talking piece and shared that he had gone out 'around the bay' to his grandparents'. This was a huge and exciting moment for him and for me. As time went on, Reggie continued to share with the rest of the class. He shared the victories and defeats he experienced with his favourite video games; he shared stories of visiting his dad and some days he simply shared what he had for breakfast. Whatever the topic was for the day, Reggie engaged in the conversation. Gradually the relationships Reggie had with his classmates started to change. There still remained significant behavioral challenges but the way the children addressed him and the way he addressed them improved greatly. Reggie, who was in the past totally excluded from interaction with his peers, now became more included in the social life of the classroom. It was remarkable to watch the subtle differences in the way he spoke, the way he physically carried himself and the increase in the

frequency of his smiles. I began to consider how intertwined Reggie's understanding of his own self was in the relationships he had with his peers and with me as his teacher.

This experience was transformative for me. It made me realize the impact that feelings of exclusion and inclusion can have on the understanding of self. This consideration of how our concept of self is often shaped by our own social context has, many years later, led me to use relational theory as a framework for this research.

This was a significant moment in my own professional research and growth as it was the experience of working on building relationships and developing a healthy classroom culture through circle work that led me to begin to explore the foundations of restorative justice in education (Pranis, 2005). What I saw in restorative justice that resonated with me was the emphasis on relationship. The centrality of relationship also rang true for me when I reflected on the principles of inclusive education. It was from this perspective that I began my own exploratory journey into the development of inclusive education.

Putting the "I" in "We"

When we think about a healthy inclusive school culture, great focus must be paid to the many relationships that are built within the school (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006). In the school environment, we are continuously engaged in relationships. Relationships with our own selves, relationships with other people, relationships with the curriculum, relationships with the institution including its policies and procedures and

relationships with the broader community all play a substantial role in creating a school culture and in determining how a person engages with said culture (Vaandering, 2014). In fact, we would be remiss to not focus on relationships in the study of inclusive education.

At the very root of inclusive education is the development of a school culture where all participants feel they belong, where they can realize their own potential and where they can contribute positively to the life of the school; it is the creation of a learning environment where all people can experience success (DOENL, 2011).

Yet, an individual cannot experience these things alone. These goals can only be achieved through relationship. That is why, I argue, a focus on relationships through relational theory and restorative justice is essential to understanding how individuals navigate through issues of and experiences with inclusion. In the case of this research, these theories help to explore the experiences of each participant by understanding that our own identity and our own understanding of self are inextricably connected with the ways in which we are in relationships at individual, collective and even institutional levels (Downie & Llewelyn, 2012).

According to Llewelyn and Downie (2012), the understanding of self as relational is a fundamental claim rather then an empirical claim about the way in which we live. The core of relational theory recognizes that we live both in relationships with others and also that relationship and connection with others are necessary to the existence of self. When we consider this specifically in the context of education professionals, a teacher's professional self-identity, then, impacts the relationships built within the school and is also interwoven in the relationships that this professional experiences in the school. This theoretical framework allows for an exploration of the participant's individual

perspective and current understanding of inclusion, his/her own experiences with inclusion and his/her perceived role within the school culture through a relational understanding of self, recognizing that these experiences need to be explored through a relational lens. It is important to note:

> A relational conception of the self seeks to recognize the intrinsically relational nature of the self without denying the significance of the individual and the agency of the self. This balancing is reflected in the image of the relational self as constituted in and through relationship. The choice of *in and through* rather then *by* is intended to reflect the presence of an individual self with agency who is able to reflect and choose but who cannot do so alone.
>
> (Llewelyn & Downie, 2012, p.5)

This is important to recognize in a career where professional autonomy and agency have at times been challenged. According to Ekins (2012), there have been so many new initiatives introduced within the school system in recent years, that teachers have had little to no time to spend reflecting on key issues and the implications of these changes. Instead, she argues, teachers are expected to simply implement these initiatives without question. This, according to Ekins (2012), supports the de-professionalization of teachers. For this reason, I feel that it is important to retain an understanding of the value of the individual working within her/his own school context. It is this individual then who makes professional decisions when confronted with a new initiative and who can support a healthy, relational culture within the school.

What relational theory does is challenge us to take as our starting assumption the fact that we are all connected and that this connection directly impacts our well being and the well being of others (Vaandering, 2014; Pranis, 2007). When we consider restorative justice within this context, we shift from a retributive understanding of justice to a more relational understanding (Zehr, 2005; Vaandering, 2011). "Justice understood relationally is concerned with the nature of the connections between and among people, groups, communities and even nations. Justice aims at realizing the conditions of relationship required for wellbeing and flourishing" (Llewelyn, 2012, p.91). It is for this reason, I feel, that a theoretical framework of restorative justice embedded within relational theory is important to this research. At the core of inclusive education is the desire for each member of the school community to flourish and to be celebrated for her/his own diverse contributions to the school community. The crux is the well being of each member of the school community. It follows then, that in a school culture that is working toward inclusive education, relationships should be examined to identify whether they support the wellbeing of all.

Restorative justice offers a place to explore issues of equality within a school culture and within relationship, but not in the individualistic sense of equality; instead relational equality centers on "a more fundamental commitment to the nature of connection between and among parties" (Llewelyn, 2012, p.92). The concept of relational equality is dependent on establishing basic elements required for well-being and for flourishing, namely: respect, concern and dignity (Llewelyn, 2012). In this research, restorative justice allows a place to examine the foundation of relationships that create

the school culture in order to determine their contribution to the overall wellbeing of both the relational self and of others.

Restorative justice in the educational context, acknowledges the many layers of relationship that are developed within a school culture. At the core of restorative justice is a belief that we are all worthy and interconnected (Vaandering, 2014; Zehr, 2005). This core belief then ripples out and impacts the relationship with self, with colleagues, students, curriculum, pedagogy and with the institution itself, including its policies and practices (Vaandering, 2014).

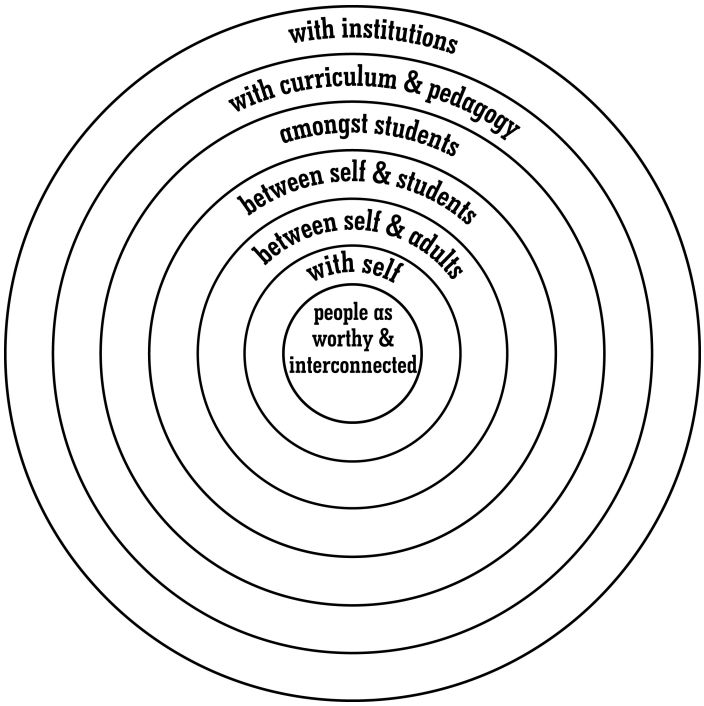

Figure 3.1. Themes of Relationship Rippling Out From Core Values (Vaandering, 2014)

What is highlighted here is the importance of core beliefs and values and how they in fact actually impact all relationships within a school. In this research, much of the focus is on allowing participants a chance to explore their own core beliefs and values. Allowing an opportunity for this to happen provides the participants an opportunity to consider the role that these beliefs play in their relational involvement with inclusive education.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems… They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect. And of course, they remind us of our persistent fallibility… (Noddings & Witherell, 1991, p. 280)

'Stories are powerful research tools': A case for narrative inquiry

As I explained in the first chapter, listening and learning from the stories of others has been a long standing belief of mine. This research is focused on:

- how the participants understand the newest inclusive initiative
- their past experiences with inclusion and the resulting core beliefs and values
- how these beliefs and values impact their role within an inclusive school culture.

I believe that narrative inquiry through the collection of oral histories supports an exploration into all of these areas.

Gubrium and Holstein (2009) note how the "big stories" of various settings are reflexively related to the "little stories" of individuals within those settings (p.163). Each participant in this research works daily with the current inclusive education initiative. In asking each participant about their current understanding of this initiative, I am asking them to share this understanding through experiences they have had with this initiative in their own professional practices. The daily lives of the participants are shaped by stories

of who they understand themselves to be and similarly how they see others (Clandinin &Connelly, 2006). Sharing insight into their own daily lives with inclusive education through stories of experience allows for a richer examination of how these participants have come to understand the initiative.

Inquiring about past experiences with inclusion in the lives of each participant in order to begin to understand the construction of core beliefs and values, requires a narrative structure for inquiry. In the collection of oral histories around past experiences with inclusion, we gain insight into the effect that these experiences have had on the participant (Plummer, 1983; Creswell, 2013). As Pajares (1992) notes, core beliefs are often formed by past experiences and are deeply personal. In asking participants to reflect on these experiences, participants are challenged to consider their role in shaping their core beliefs around inclusion, beliefs that they may not have been aware of before. Farrell and Ives (2014) lays emphasis on the importance of making us aware our own beliefs and stresses how important they are in the development of self-identity.

A picture of 'real people in real situations'…

Narrative inquiry requires a contextual understanding of time and social place. Artiles and Kozleski (2007) point to the fact that although the philosophical underpinnings of inclusive education are broad, the actual implementation of inclusive education is in fact "a very localized process (p.353)." In Canada, provinces govern their own education systems and therefore the process by which inclusive education has been implemented is unique to each province. Education in Newfoundland and Labrador has its own history and development that reflects the culture of the province, therefore it is

important that the methodology selected supports the contextual significance of this research.

Setting

This research takes place in St. John's, a mid-sized urban center in Newfoundland of approximately 150,000 people. The school system in the province has experienced great change over the course of the past 50 years. A denominational public school system determined the organization structure of school until 1998 when, at that time, the province became the sole authority over education in the province (Higgins, 2011). The participants in this study and I are all from Newfoundland and received our grade school education during the time of the denominational school system.

Recently, another large structural change has taken place. Until 2013, the Newfoundland and Labrador schools were organized into four separate districts: Eastern, Central, Western and Labrador. This has now changed and the four are consolidated into one large district known as the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD). The NLESD supports 259 schools with approximately 67,000 students and 8,000 staff (NLESD, 2015).When this research began, this change had not occurred and both the participants and I were teaching in the Eastern School District of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As stated earlier, the newest inclusive education initiative in Newfoundland and Labrador was implemented in six phases, with specific schools from across the province targeted each year. For this research, the particular phase of the school or the number of years actively engaged with the initiative was not a factor in participant selection. As the

research is concerned less with site-specific policy and programs, the number of years that a school had been engaged with the philosophy was not a priority.

Due to the personal nature of the research, the participants were able to choose their interview space. All three participants invited me to their homes for all of the interviews. This created a comfortable and safe setting for each participant.

Whose stories?

The selection process for this research incorporated both typical-case and volunteer sampling (Creswell, 2012). I was interested in teachers who had been part of their school community since the inception of the Inclusive Education Initiative. I felt that this was important as it added to the recollective, lived experience of each participant. Teachers who were part of the implementation process would have been part of any professional development opportunities.

Typical-case sampling is a form of purposeful sampling which focuses on gathering participants who are "typical" to a given situation (Creswell, 2012). I was interested in working with teachers who were experiencing inclusive education in the Newfoundland and Labrador context. I felt that professionals who were engaged in the daily life of schools and experiencing the Inclusive Education Initiative first hand would offer insight into the Newfoundland and Labrador experience. An email was sent out to colleagues of mine explaining the research and requesting that they forward names of fellow professionals who they felt would be interested in this research. These suggested teachers were then sent an email explaining that they had been recommended for the research and asked if they would be interested in participating. They, too, were asked to

recommend colleagues that they felt might be interested in the research. None of the teachers contacted were informed of who had made the recommendation.

From here, potential participants were contacted and selected. A sample size of three was chosen for the research. Limiting the number of participants to three allowed for an opportunity to build a relationship with each participant and, in turn, collect more in-depth narratives through the interview process. The three participants were chosen based on their personal interest in the research, their role within the school community and their openness to sharing their personal narratives and exploring their core beliefs and values.

Of the three participants who were selected, one is a classroom teacher, one an instructional resource teacher and one a guidance counselor. I felt that the varied roles within their schools would offer insight into their experience within the school community. All three of the participants worked at the primary/elementary level and all three were working in schools within the Metro area. Margaret, the classroom teacher, had more than ten years teaching experience in schools. Paula, the instructional resource teacher had over twenty-five years experience and Richard, the guidance counselor had been involved in the school system for almost fifteen years. The varied years of experience was not a concern for this research, particularly as I was using a narrative inquiry methodology and each participant's narratives were collected and analyzed as a unit instead of as a collective whole.

The volunteer component of this sampling was also important. Although the normative experience of the implementation of inclusive education could be shared by all teachers, the exploration of teachers' own core beliefs and values required participants

who were willing to dig deeply to explore their own experiences through this lens (Farrell & Ives, 2014). Due to the strong emotional attachment carried in core beliefs (Hammond, 2006), this type of exploration may have been unsettling for some or disconcerting for others and, for this reason, voluntary participation was essential.

'Our persistent fallibility': The role of the researcher

In the first chapter, I outlined how I was brought to this research. For me, the Department of Education's inclusive education initiative challenged me to think about my own pedagogy and the role that I played in creating an inclusive school culture. At my own core was the belief in the essential nature of developing positive relationship with self and with others in the creation of healthy school cultures. This belief shaped how I interacted with the initiative. Understanding this core belief helped me negotiate my own place within the inclusive school community. This experience allowed me to reflect on the importance of focused attention on uncovering core beliefs and values I had experienced. This ultimately led me to research.

Subjectivity

I recognize the subjectivity of this research and that I came to this research with my own experiences and my own core beliefs and values that have influenced my own perspective. So I can say that I come to this research aware of my pre-understandings and through recognizing them and reflecting on them throughout the course of the research, I hope to address any issues of bias that might influence how I understand my participants lived experiences (Scott & Usher, 1996).

Being a classroom teacher in Newfoundland and Labrador offers both benefits and challenges to this research. It allows me, as researcher, to develop a more intimate knowledge of the inclusive education initiative in schools in the province, how it is organized and of the people who work within it. This is beneficial when considering issues of researcher authenticity (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This shared experience is also beneficial to the development of the researcher and participant relationship. In sharing my own experiences and listening to their experiences, I gain insight from both a researcher perspective and a collegial perspective.

Reflexivity

According to Wells (2011), "Stories are told by someone to someone else, at one or more points in time, and in a specific historical and cultural context. The individual to whom the story is told, whether the individual is a research interviewer or another, may shape the story that emerges" (p.29). In this case, my own relationship with the education system in the province has potential to shape what I hear and how I understand the stories of the participants. It is essential then that I both acknowledge my own experience and be mindful that it shapes how I understand what is being said.

In narrative inquiry, the researcher is not hidden but always part of the discussion (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2006; Riessman, 2008). In narrative inquiry, according to Wells (2011), "even in situations in which an investigator/interviewer attempts to minimize his or her role, the interviewer helps to shape the interviewee's talk through not only the way in which questions are asked but also the way in which responses are acknowledged both verbally and nonverbally in relation to, for example,

pitch or volume of voice, pacing of speech, body movements, or use of interpersonal space" (p.27). With this in mind, reflexivity was carefully considered throughout this research. Sandelowski and Barroso (2002) emphasize, "Reflexivity is a hallmark of excellent qualitative research and it entails the ability and willingness of researchers to acknowledge and take account of the many ways they themselves influence research findings" (p.222). I have tried to be very present in this research, addressing the ways in which I may have, without intent, influenced the analysis of each participant's data.

Ethical considerations

This research received ethics approval from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University. Due to both the professional and personal narratives of the participants, ethical issues were discussed before the interviews began and informed consent was collected from each participant. The purpose, the layout, the voluntary nature of the research and issues of confidentiality were discussed in detail with each participant (Groenwald, 2003). Pseudonyms were used in place of all actual names in this thesis.

Ethical considerations remain central in narrative inquiry (Clandinin, Pushor and Orr, 2007). "Ethical considerations permeate narrative inquiries from start to finish: at the outset as ends-inview are imagined; as inquirer-participant relationships unfold, and as participants are represented in research texts." (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 483). All decisions that were made in this research were always done with the "participant's imagined presence" (Clandinin, Pushor and Orr, 2007, p.30) in mind.

Time and resources

Time and resources were key considerations when planning the research itself. Mapping out the time required to move through each stage of research was an essential guiding point. Three interviews were conducted with each participant over the course of three weeks. In spreading out the interviews, I hoped to address any tension that might arise, allowing myself distance from the participants. Each interview was between 60-90 minutes long and was recorded using digital recording software. A backup recorder was used in case of technical difficulties. Aside from these interviews, participants were asked to keep an electronic journal, allowing them to delve more deeply into their own core beliefs and attitudes and to reflect on or add to the stories that they shared. In order to address issues of ambiguity and vagueness, the interviews were sent back to the participants for member checking. Any clarifications by the participants were made to the stories shared.

Trustworthiness and generalizability

Issues of trustworthiness were addressed in this research by an attempt to limit my own biases and preconceptions through constant reflection and self-exploration. While I have made every effort to address these concerns, I am aware of the limitations of my own ability to separate my own biases entirely. I have tried to be explicit about areas of bias and of subjectivity.

I have used both triangulation and precise description in order to address issues of trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Creswell, 2013). Triangulation was

achieved by collecting multiple interviews with each participant, collecting written journals and gathering secondary source materials.

This research was very site-specific and was focused on the lived experience of a limited number of teachers in a specific place and time and therefore there can be no promises made about generalizability. The focus of this research was on exploring teacher core beliefs and values, their lived experiences with inclusion and their understanding of the most recent inclusive initiative. The limited number of participants may be a limitation of the study and more participants might create a different picture of these core beliefs and attitudes around inclusion.

Data Collection

Through the use of semi-structured, in-depth interviews, rich descriptions of teachers' lived experience were explored in detail (Merriam, 2009). To accomplish this I used two types of questioning. First, Schatzman and Strauss' (1973) framework for interview questioning that works to locate critical moments in life experience which allowed for a descriptive account of experience, as well as a more interpretive exploration into the participants core beliefs. Thus, specific questions that guided the interview included:

- *What does inclusion mean to you? What does inclusive education mean to you?*
- *Can you tell me about your own personal experiences with inclusive education in your school?*

- *I would like you to think back on the impact of inclusion in your own life. Can you think of one memory that you have of experiencing inclusion in your own life? This experience does not need to be strictly an educational experience it can be any life experience that you may have encountered that stands out for you.*
- *How would you say this has influenced you?*
- *What role did others play in this event?*
- *How would you describe the influence that this experience had on you?*
- *How has this experience shaped your own core beliefs and attitudes around inclusion?*
- *Can you describe for me what a healthy, inclusive school culture looks like?*
- *Can you explain to me what you see as your role in developing an inclusive school culture?*

Second, in order to get at the root of the core values and beliefs, I used a slightly altered version of an established framework of questioning used in restorative justice to more deeply explore specific critical moments. These questions included:

- *Can you tell me what happened?*
- *What were you thinking at the time of the incident?*
- *What were you feeling at the time of the incident?*
- *How have you been impacted by this incident?*

- *How might this incident impact your current view?*
- *What might you need to consider as you move forward?*

  (Zehr, 2005; Vaandering, 2012).

The use of these questions allowed the participant to unpack the specific life experiences they identified. These questions allowed the participants to delve more deeply into the incident of inclusion or exclusion itself and really examine these critical incidents to understand their impact on their core beliefs and values.

Secondary source data was also collected which helped me familiarize myself with the school settings, understand the overall inclusion context and address issues of authenticity. Collecting departmental inclusive school development plans, inclusive education action plans, policies and memos relating to inclusive education allowed a space to look at inclusion from a department wide perspective.

Journaling was also a source of data collection. Based on the interviews that took place, participants were asked to reflect on the interview process to delve more deeply into unpacking their own core beliefs and values. I think this time for reflection allowed the participants to personally reflect on inclusion without the researcher being directly present. I also kept a journal to record what I experienced, what I saw, heard, and thought throughout the collection process. This process allowed a space for both reflection on the "descriptive nature of the research and the interpretative nature of the research" (Groenwald, 2003, p.13).

All data collected was filed and stored safely away or held on a password-protected computer to limit issues of confidentially.

Narrative analysis

Data analysis in narrative inquiry is different from many other types of qualitative research. Broadly, "the data collected… needs to be analyzed for the story they have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies" (Creswell, 2013, p.189). More specifically, this research used thematic analysis in order to analyze the narratives of each participant (Riessman, 2008). Though determining themes is not unique to narrative inquiry, unlike other methodologies, themes are not established from the data collected from all participants but instead the narratives of each participant are analyzed as units that make up a narrative whole (Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2007).

In order to analyze each narrative, I have chosen to use an organizational structure that encapsulates both the restorative justice questioning framework (Vaandering, 2011) and Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry space. In the interview process, this questioning framework was established in order to delve more deeply into specific lived experiences with inclusion whether that be in the present or past. In the analysis, these questions can help categorize the various elements of the story allowing for themes to emerge between the narratives of each participant.

In Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional inquiry space, all stories are told within three main dimensions: the personal and social (the interaction), the past, present and future (temporality), and the place (situation). These encompass all the narratives. In an analysis within this inquiry space, the researcher is challenged to analyze each of these

dimensions for each narrative (Creswell, 2013). I see the questioning framework of restorative justice as a way to clearly explore each dimensions of the story. For example, the question "What happened?" allows me, as researcher, to explore the personal experience of the storyteller as well as the situational impact on others (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002). "What was the context?" demands that I examine the context of place in each experience (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002). Finally, questions like; What were you thinking and feeling at the time?, How might this impact you moving forward?, How might this incident impact your current view?, help to organize a temporal examination of the situation and its impact on the past, present and future (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002).

Organizing the data using this type of analysis, allows for organizational continuity among all stories. From here, themes and patterns can be detected (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) across each participant's narratives.

Another consideration in this type of narrative analysis is that of the place of the researcher within the data. According to Clandinin (2006), working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space highlights the relational dimension of narrative inquiry. " Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather need to find ways to inquire into participants' experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process (Clandinin, 2006, p.47). Therefore, as a researcher I bracket myself in to the analysis, considering my own place within the analysis of the data.

Chapter 5 – Narratives and Analysis

Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives, the power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change, truly are powerless, because they cannot think new thoughts.

—Salman Rushdie

The story of our lives

As I have already addressed, when I began the journey that brought me to this research, I was challenged to think about my own understanding of the inclusive education initiative. The roll out of this initiative unleashed a huge amount of information on the professional community and, reflecting on this, it seems to make sense that people would pick up on different aspects of the initiative that matched their own experiences or which impacted them in the greatest way. I connected with the philosophical notions of inclusion, challenging how we built school/class cultures and how we understood difference so that was what I took from the literature and professional development sessions around inclusion. Yet this was not the case for others and I found it interesting to hear from my colleagues what they had taken from these sessions. Why was it that my understanding was so different from what others had heard and experienced? What was it about my past experiences that had brought me to a focus on the more core philosophical understandings of inclusion rather than on the shift in the service delivery model?

Upon reflection, I believe it was my own past experiences with inclusion and my core beliefs and values that shaped my own understanding. Before I started the education program, I completed a Bachelor's degree in Social/Cultural Anthropology. Drawn to this program from a desire to explore those on the margins, to hear the stories of others, those often excluded from the norms of the society that I had grown up well within, I was challenged to critically reflect on experiences of both inclusion and exclusion in my own life and in the lives of others. Without having specifically defined this process as an exploration of core beliefs and values, I suspect that this experience directed me toward my support of the inclusive education initiative. It was only later when I began my Master's program that I again was challenged to explore my own core beliefs and values. It was then that I began to make connections between an understanding of core beliefs and values and their role in understanding inclusive education.

I felt connected to the fact that my experience of exploring core beliefs and values and how they impacted our own understanding of inclusion was mirrored in the Department of Education's (2014) attention toward "addressing teacher's beliefs and values concerning inclusive schooling. (*Three stages in developing inclusive programs,* para. 1) " What I heard echoed in that statement was a shared understanding of the importance of core beliefs and values in developing inclusive education. When I chose to pursue this research, my intent was to lead each participant through a similar experience of exploration to my own. This guided the interview process. I designed the interviews to reflect this experience. I wanted a place for my participants to at first freely share their own immediate understanding of inclusive education, how they were experiencing inclusion in their own school lives and the impact that it was having on their school

community. From there I wanted to move into discussions around core beliefs and values around inclusion and to use this as another entry point into exploring their experience with inclusive education. I chose this deign, conscious of the need for reflexivity because I wanted to know if my experience might actually inform how core values and beliefs could be addressed with educators.

In order to share the narratives of my participants, I have chosen to structure the retelling of the narratives around the interview process itself. In doing this I hope to honour not only the narratives of the participants but also to honour the experience of the interview process. This method of narrative retelling offers a shared interview experience to each participant and, in its framework for retelling it, offers a shared point of reference to the reader from which to understand each narrative.

I was privileged to have had the opportunity to build relationships with each participant and it is important for me, as the presenter of these narratives, to attempt to allow the reader to understand each participant with some depth. Again, considering how the research was designed, I wanted to create relationships that were open and balanced. With over one hundred pages of transcriptions, it was a challenge for me as a researcher to figure out how to honour the narratives of my participants. This meant that it would be challenging to select which narratives to share here, to determine which would be brought to the paper. I addressed this issue by analyzing all of the stories and pulling out those that highlighted particular themes that were common in each narrative. With this in mind, I have chosen to start each narrative with the story of how each participant came to the education profession in order to offer insight into the background, the character and the lives of each participant.

Margaret's story…

Skimming the Surface

Margaret is an elementary classroom teacher who was born and raised in St. John's, Newfoundland. An only child, Margaret grew up with a strong desire to engage with other children. She was always curious about how children interacted. *When mom and dad used to bring me to the park or if I went with my friends, I'd leave them and go with the young kids just to see the way they interacted. I loved it. I suppose it was because I never saw it when I was younger. I never had anyone to interact with unless it was mom or dad or all the adults.* When it was time to choose a career, Margaret knew only that she wanted to work with children. *I knew I wanted to work with children and that's what I wanted to do,* she explained. *I wanted to see them grow.* She considered opening a day care but after speaking with an academic counselor at the university, she decided that teaching was the avenue that she wanted to take.

It is evident in conversations with Margaret that she is a passionate teacher who spends a considerable amount of time and energy preparing for her daily teaching practice. She cares very deeply about her students, which is noticeable in her stories of staying with students after school and helping students through family turmoil and parental divorce. Margaret has over a dozen years of elementary classroom experience and has spent the majority of her career teaching in St. John's. She is actively involved in her school community and is regularly engaged in professional development. She stays after school to tutor students who need extra support, she is part of a collegial circle that meets once a month outside school hours for grade level planning and she is an active member of an online forum, sharing her lessons and resources.

In initial conversations, Margaret shares that although she understands that the newest inclusive initiative is school wide, she considers it more focused on the classroom. *It is a school wide initiative but to me it's so based in every different classroom because the needs are so different,* she explains. *You are going to your support teachers and you're saying "I need help" then they're there to help you,* she continues. These initial conversations around inclusion are steeped in an understanding of inclusion as a service delivery model for students with exceptionalities (see page 11).

She indicates that she often feels challenged in meeting all of the academic needs of her students. *I had 24 students and out of those students, I had four really weak students who were going out for alternate programs in language arts and math. They were too far behind. Their science, their social studies, their health, their religion, everything was modified so each time I went to teach a concept in any other course I had to look at these four students and go "This one doesn't need that and this one doesn't need that." It can be so overwhelming.* When asked if she feels she is supported in the classroom she responds, *No and I guess that's the problem. God bless them for wanting to include but I really think that they need the backbone there in order to adequately provide… I know we're not the only school that is fighting for support teachers so how can you… how can you provide a program, a model of inclusion when you don't have the proper foundation?*

When it comes to the core…

As Margaret reflects back on her memories of growing up in St. John's, she notes how much has changed over the course of her life. She comments that children are much

more restricted these days. *Kids are way older these days than 20 years ago; our society has changed so much. The children hear too much and see too much.* Margaret remembers when she was the age of her students, taking the bus by herself and going downtown to meet her mother after work where they would walk together along Water Street and stop for supper. This was a cherished memory for Margaret. She relayed that she feels that this kind of freedom is not part of the lives of her students. *I don't think children have that these days. There is such a pressure. There's such a pressure for children, for parents, they want to make sure their children are well-rounded etcetera that they don't have time to stop and be kids. There are a lot of children that don't have parent time. We put so many expectations on them that I don't think we're letting them be kids.*

As Margaret shares her experiences of inclusion in her own life, each story is based in particular relational experiences. Many of the stories are concerned with experiences where Margaret was directly impacted by the actions of others. Without prompting, Margaret often makes connections with these experiences and discusses how they influence her current teaching practice.

One incident in particular stands out as very significant in Margaret's mind, one that she indicated had a lasting impact on her as a person. It was an episode that took place on Halloween night when she was about 12 years old. Having spent time

in the week leading up to Halloween making and decorating the bags they would use to collect their treats, Margaret and her neighbourhood friends made plans to meet at a particular spot at a specific time and go together from house to house to collect their

treats. Margaret, ready to go, waited at the corner for over an hour and no one showed up. She returned home, upset and spoke with her mother.

Mom: What's wrong?

Margaret: I'm not impressed. I'm not a happy camper.

Mom: But you hang around with them every day.

Margaret: I know. Why pick Halloween night to do this to me?

So I went out to a few homes and got some goodies and came home. While Margaret was out, her mother called one of the other parents and explained the situation. "It was supposed to be a joke" was the answer that was given but that did not take away the sting of the event.

> *We'd all gotten together and did the loot bags up and did our pillow cases and marked them up with markers. We all made our own Halloween bag and you know it hurt. And you know, I still remember that. I told them after that I hoped that I hadn't done anything that made them feel like, you know, I wasn't worthy of their friendship for that night. [They said] "We're sorry. It was only supposed to be a joke." Well, not on Halloween night.*

The feelings of exclusion that Margaret felt that night are referenced again when she speaks of her time in high school. *I was one of those students, I felt I was always nice but you had those uppity up people who were like "Yeah, well you're only Margaret." Well, that didn't make me feel good. I mean, you don't have to like me but you do have to*

respect me, I'm still human. I hated that there were cliques and for me no one should have to feel like they were not as good as another person or no one should be degraded by anyone else. Respect is a core belief for Margaret and one she believes is essential in the development of an inclusive school community. She acknowledges that it is very important to teach her students to respect others. Margaret understands the term respect, which stems from these experiences with exclusion in a very specific way. Her understanding of respect is based on how we, as human beings, act toward each other while recognizing that although there are differences, groups of people must learn to act respectfully toward one another no matter the level of relationship in which they are is involved . For example, Margaret has a rule in her class that everyone should respect each other. She tells her students, *Guys, it's like this, I don't care if you like everyone, no one says you have to because that's the way life's going to be but you have to respect everyone and that's it.* As Margaret continues to explain her discussions with her students around inclusion, it is evident that these discussions of respect are based on a belief that showing respect focuses on the actions of others in relation to the self.

> *It's like children have to realize, you only come this way once, man. And you know they're going to be going to different groups of children, meeting new friends because even as you get older, I mean people with disabilities or inabilities I mean, it's not like they're only going to meet them at school. They're going to be in their swimming classes, they're going to be in their summer camps and they can't go up to that person and be like "Oh, I don't like you." No! Just walk away from that person if you don't want to talk to that person but if someone*

says "Hi" to you, have the common decency to say "Hi" back. That way no one is any different.

For Margaret, this is one of the most important things that she can teach her students and one that is addressed regularly in her daily classroom life.

A shift toward relationship…

As the interview unfolds, conversations around inclusion begin to shift from discussions about the relational culture of the school from an academic and behavioral focus on inclusion toward a more relational focus. Positive collegial relationships are regularly mentioned throughout the third interview. Margaret is actively engaged in collegial circles both inside and outside the school. These relationships are very energizing and powerful for Margaret. The sharing of ideas among her colleagues gives her the affirmation that what she is doing in her classroom is quality teaching. These professional relationships are very powerful and Margaret recognizes the need for relationships with colleagues from other schools, as she is not able to find them within her grade level at her own school. Yet, Margaret indicates that she feels connected with her colleagues at her school and will often go out of her way to boost the confidence of another teacher or to show kindness to a fellow staff member whether that be engaging in private conversations with a colleague in need or dropping in to offer praise to a teacher while passing by his/her classroom. This focus on relationships then continues to drive conversations about issues of school culture.

It's nice when you actually build relationships with your colleagues, when you actually learn about them. I mean, learning about what someone is thinking or feeling, you're learning from them but you are also listening to them. For me, that changes the relationship with that person. The more I know about you… you know personal or professional; that's how you build trust and respect. It goes back to my respect thing.

Here, conversations about respect are more focused on building strong relationships that are built on listening and learning. This is a shift away from focusing on the actions of showing respect, to a more relational understanding of the term respect.

Bringing it back to the self…

As Margaret reflects on the ideal values in an inclusive school culture, she speaks of the importance of self-assessment and its power to make people take ownership of what they believe in. It is toward the end of the third interview that this comes up again when considering the self in an inclusive school culture. *Well you know you can't love others unless you love yourself and you can't respect others if you can't respect yourself. So you have to do it all first, and that's how you grow and learn.* This sentiment shows a shift toward reflection on the self and on how the self impacts relationships with others.

We finish our interview by discussing to what extent beliefs and values shape the role a teacher plays in the development of an inclusive school culture. Margaret acknowledges that she believes that core beliefs have a large impact on teachers and how they understand the most recent inclusive initiative. *To me it's like you have concrete*

blocks and that's what you build upon and you need that heavy foundation before you can build a house, baby. You need a strong foundation with anything, with any relationship, could be with your mother, father, sister, brother, boyfriend, you need a strong relationship or a strong foundation, she concludes. This understanding of the power of the development of strong relationships is a focus toward the end of our interviews.

An analysis of Margaret's narrative…

Current Understanding

During the first interview, Margaret and I spend the majority of the time talking about her current experience and understanding of inclusive education and what that means to her. Margaret shares her experiences openly as it relates to her in the moment. It is evident through our interview that the majority of her understanding is a vision of inclusive education initiative as a restructuring of the service delivery model for students with exceptionalities. The stories of inclusion that she shares about life in her classroom are focused on students with academic and behavioral challenges. Her frustration is evident in these conversations not, I would argue, because she doesn't believe that all students should spend the majority of time in the classroom, but instead because of her feelings of confusion and distress at not being able to offer her students the support that they require in order to achieve what she would consider success in the classroom. MacBeath and Steward (2006) argue that many teachers view inclusion in a positive way yet there is still an underlying sense that inclusion as a principle has made the job of teaching more difficult. This confusion and distress brings on feelings of failure. When

considering these feelings in terms of relationship, Margaret acknowledges that she is not able to contribute to the overall wellbeing of all of her students. According to Ekins (2012), inclusion needs to be understood as a subject rich in emotion and consideration must be taken around its impact on teacher self-identity. Margaret's feelings of failure and frustration directly impact her own professional identity and what she believes she is contributing to the overall school culture.

Margaret focuses on inclusive education as a classroom initiative because of what she understands to be the unique needs of every classroom. Up until the implementation of the inclusive education initiative, Margaret worked within a service delivery model for students with exceptionalities, where support for many students was offered outside the classroom. Discussions around difference and need were based on meeting the needs of students with academic and behavioural challenges. In Margaret's direct teaching experience, changes to this model of service delivery have been what has had the most direct impact on her classroom and in turn on Margaret herself. The cultural makeup of her classroom has remained mostly consistent. Perhaps it is because of this that the service delivery model is at the hub of conversations around inclusion. Issues of diversity, which include conversations around economic status, gender, racial or religious background, and language, are not immediately included in what she considers the inclusive education initiative. They remain in the sphere of school culture and climate. This division speaks to a disconnect in the understanding of the Inclusive Education Initiative. The separation of the service delivery model from a holistic understanding of inclusive education that requires a focus on all the relationships within a school culture,

including but not limited to the service delivery model, creates an understanding of inclusion for Margaret, that is limited in scope.

Understanding the current

When we begin to talk about Margaret's past experience with inclusion, we move outside the confines of the school. As we begin to explore experiences of inclusion that have shaped Margaret's core beliefs and values, there is a marked shift in the feel of the interviews. Perhaps, for me as the researcher, it is recognition of a relationship of trust that has developed between us. Chamberlain and Thompson (1998) stress that when narratives are shared, the time, the place, the occasion, the narrator, the audience, and the narrative are immediately intertwined. Reflecting on this, I believe that it was at this point that I began to appreciate the magnitude of the responsibility I carried in being offered these stories.

As for Margaret, she very much valued the freedom that she experienced as a child. It was a time in which she was free to navigate both physically and socially through the complex world of childhood. She remembers taking the bus by herself and meeting her mother for an evening walk along Water Street before her father would pick them up. She laments the lack of freedom that children experience today. Children are *no longer allowed to be children.* Instead, they are pushed from activity to activity essentially missing out on what she considers an essential part of child development. She blames the parents for pushing this overworked lifestyle on their children. Margaret values her independence but this independence has been created from relationship. Margaret highlights the strength of her relationship with her mother, one that was built on

trust and respect. This strong relationship allowed Margaret to feel a sense of independence. Perhaps it is the lack of time that overburdened parents and their children have to develop these same relationships that Margaret laments. Without these types of relationships, her students do not develop the same sense of independence that she experienced as a child.

Talking about inclusion through stories of exclusion is a theme that becomes apparent in discussions with Margaret. Margaret's insight into the impact that the pain caused by exclusion in her own life has had on her is clear. Her exclusion by her friends when going trick-or-treating on Halloween night and the stories of her not being accepted for who she was in high school, have developed what Margaret considers a guiding core belief in her life, one that she values above all else, namely respect.

You don't have to like me but you do have to respect me, I'm still human. This phrase is echoed throughout the interviews with Margaret. The heart of this statement, *I'm still human,* emphasizes the inherent worth and well being of all humans and as discussed earlier, creates the foundation of restorative justice (Vaandering, 2014, 2011; Zehr, 2005). Because she is human, Margaret indicates that she feels that she should be valued and respected. While I agree with this point, what stands out for me is the importance of the first part of that statement in thinking about the kinds of relationships needed to be built within a healthy, inclusive school culture. To explore this further, I return to the creation of relationships focusing on the wellbeing of all through the lens of restorative justice (Vaandering, 2014, Pranis 2007). Often we consider ideals of relationship by looking at intimate, personal relationships and while personal relationships are an important focus in a school culture, in the larger picture of an

inclusive school culture, the understanding of relationship goes beyond personal and intimate relationships to a more social understanding of relationship, "with the basic elements and conditions of relationship required for peaceful and meaningful coexistence and flourishing" (Llewelyn, 2012, p.103). With this understanding, we can look at Margaret's statement from two perspectives. From the perspective of intimate, personal relationship, this statement may prove problematic as there is a sense of falseness in the relationship if one party or both do not in fact like each other but are required to act in respectful ways. Yet, if we look at the relationships that Margaret is speaking about from a broader social level, we can see that relationship, in this case, is more focused on acquiring what is necessary for relational equality; respect, concern and dignity (Llewelyn, 2012, p.103), a necessary requirement for a healthy inclusive school community.

Sharing stories of inclusion in her own life and reflecting on core beliefs and values that stem from these experiences, opens a space for Margaret to consider how these core beliefs shape her pedagogy and her role within the school culture. From these conversations, Margaret begins to understand she does in fact have many beliefs that support inclusive education and that much of her pedagogy supports these beliefs. This shift for Margaret is empowering and she repeats, in a couple of instances, her belief that many teachers have very inclusive beliefs but they are not being recognized for it. Thinking about this in terms of the relationship with the institution, by not recognizing inclusive beliefs and values, many professionals do not feel honored thereby creating an imbalance in that relationship.

When Margaret recognizes her inclusive beliefs and values, she begins to speak in a more in-depth manner about her relational experiences within the school. The conversation shifts to a more relational discussion of inclusive education. She shares stories that encompass her relationships with her students and their relationships with each other and about her relationships with her colleagues and with parents. It is through these conversations that Margaret begins to understand the importance of her role in the development of a healthy, inclusive school culture. She reflects on the types of relationships that she builds within the school support staff and students. I would argue, the sense of relational responsibility that becomes a focal point for Margaret allows her to shift from a focus on the policy and practice of inclusive education to a more relational focus on the development of an inclusive school culture.

Paula's story…

Skimming the Surface

Paula's journey into teaching began over 25 years ago. This substantial career has taken Paula across the province as well as to mainland Canada. Paula has worked in a variety of positions within the primary/elementary school system. Currently, Paula is an Instructional Resource teacher at a primary/elementary school in St. John's, NL. She is a passionate teacher who cares very deeply for her students. However, teaching was not Paula's first career choice. *I fell into teaching,* she shares, *it was something that, if I had my time back again, I would never have done.* She continues:

> *If I had seven lives, I probably would have done it for one of them. I went to university and wanted to be anything but a teacher but career choices in the late 60s were not all that great: social worker, secretary, nursing and for a scattered student, law... It's been a good career but what I really wanted to be was an engineer and of course was told that girls couldn't be engineers.*

At that time in her life, according to Paula, her interest was in civil engineering and architecture. These programs were not offered in Newfoundland and were not open to women applicants and so Paula, in her words, *became a teacher by default*. *I settled for building minds. After a while you find that niche that makes you happy and gives you that pulse and energy and juice and it's okay."*

Paula's early career work involved multi-grade teaching in rural Newfoundland. After a move to St. John's and years of teaching in a variety of classroom positions, which included teaching Kindergarten for a number of years, and the completion of a

Master's degree, Paula moved into the area of what was formerly known as Special Education. According to Paula, moving to Special Education was a natural progression from Kindergarten. *I think Kindergarten is a lot like Special Ed. Watching the kids coming in as individuals and sorting them out. I enjoyed seeing their strengths and weaknesses and the like and trying to bring out the best in kids. For me it was a natural step.* The puzzle of trying to understand each student and determining how to meet their needs always intrigued Paula and the importance of not taking things at surface values and always digging deeper in order to bring out the best in students, made Special Education a natural fit. This is a subject that comes up at numerous points throughout the interview process. *I think my draw has always been the puzzle pieces, figuring something out that the answer is not obvious,* shares Paula.

In her current school, Paula works with a small number of students with exceptionalities and supports them in various ways. She works tirelessly to develop educational plans and create learning environments that support the success of each student. In doing so, she spends many hours creating lessons and developing programs for each student. Paula believes in project-based learning and finds that the students that she works with can best show their strengths using this type of learning. She is also very interested in collaborative work with other teachers, although at times, she is frustrated by the lack of participation she receives from classroom teachers. *They have their own agenda, their own work and they may say they care about the underdog but really they're very much into power and control in every phase of their lives. Letting go of that power and control, letting a classroom become busy and child centered doesn't fit the model that they want. They're not comfortable.*

In our initial conversations around inclusive education, Paula's differentiates between social and academic inclusion and its possibilities in schools. *It isn't the same. Socially, I think, we could almost… if we had that attitude of openness it, could be done but including academically with this whole damn thing of accountability, it's much more complex.* Paula understands the challenges to the implementation of the inclusive education initiative to be more systemic then contextual. *Inclusion, to me, is so complicated because while we have an outcome based curriculum, and overly burdened outcomes, to me, that undermines people buying into true inclusion because people are only human.* Paula continues that although we can place blame on the classroom teachers or others involved in the school, the actual concern is lack of time and flexibility. For Paula, optimum learning occurs when students are given flexibility to make choices about their own learning and to showcase their strengths and ideas through child-centered project based learning. *Until there is flexibility and we just look at process outcomes, people are not going to have the flexibility to create projects.*

Although Paula sees great potential for the implementation of the inclusive education initiative in schools she has concerns as well. *It hasn't been properly in-serviced and so people put out their own interpretation and usually that interpretation has been put on from their own point of view. I think there are a lot of principals out there who are very ambitious and want to look good,* Paula explains. Paula says this with caution, her concern is that often people can make things look like they are working but, in fact, below the surface there has been no change. She references the teachings of a woman who had a large impact in the Paula's life. *Her mantra was to look beyond the obvious, look beyond the surface because some people have this wonderful ability to*

make it look like it's percolating and it's wonderful and it's not. Because how you measure anything is by how you treat your weakest members.

While acknowledging Paula's role as an instructional resource teacher, much of Paula's initial discussions revolve around the inclusive education initiative as a service delivery model. She often sees herself as an advocate, a voice for her students and their families. This role can be both inclusionary and exclusionary when considering the relationships she builds with her colleagues and the school community. She very much wants what is best for her students. She prides herself on building strong relationships with both the students and their families but the role of the advocate can also be isolating when considering her relationships with her colleagues. As previously mentioned, at times Paula finds herself in heated discussions and debates with colleagues regarding programming and planning. This makes her feel isolated at times but her strong belief in her professional role justifies this position.

When it comes to the core…

Her perfervid desire to be a voice for her students is genuine. This passion stems from what Paula identifies as two of her key core beliefs. Firstly, that everyone deserves to be the best that they can be and secondly, that there is more than one right way to do things. When asked to talk about this in the context of her past experiences with inclusion, Paula is clear about their beginnings. *I was screwed by the school system,* she states. After completing an IQ test when she was in grade 8, Paula's father was told that she had one the highest IQs the tester had been seen. What was a source of pride for her father meant something different to Paula. She explains:

I thought, "Yeah, I think I'm smart" but my smartness was my creativity; putting things together in a different place and a different way. When I went to school there was one right answer and the teachers said, "Sit down, shut up and do as you're told." Especially the girls… we were supposed to be seen and not heard so yeah, I got that baggage big time. I think that creativity wasn't valued. What was valued was the ability to remember and do paper and pencil [work] and you know something? I'm probably still reacting to it. It's true. I'm probably still reacting to it because I truly feel that I was cheated out of what I wanted to be. Cheated out of my engineering, my architecture.

Paula also holds dear the belief that we must always look below the surface to understand what is really going on. This belief permeates many of the narratives shared during the course of our interviews. This belief was also cultivated from her feelings of exclusion from the school system and not fitting what she saw was the norm as a child. Throughout her education, she never thought that what she had to offer was valued. She was an exceptionally creative student but was pressured into following certain societal norms, veering her from the path that she wanted to forge for herself. Paula feels that these experiences are the reason that she believes in 'digging below the surface'. She explains that society imposes certain values and norms which regulate behaviours. They make people act in certain ways but they do not give a real picture of what is below the surface of that person. It is just an act.

Exploring relationships…

It is evident that experiences of Paula's past have directly impacted the relationships that she builds with the students, but also the relationships she maintains with her colleagues, her relationship with the curriculum and with the education system as a whole. She has very strong feelings about her role in the school. She explains:

> *I think it's morally wrong to screw a kid over, whatever the difference is in that child. I guess I have just picked the kids who have defined learning difficulties because they are going to be left at the back of the bus unless they have parents to fight for them. I think that for me it's that idea that because you are not an important person, you are muzzled that maybe I am reacting to… I don't like to be muzzled. I don't like to be told what to do. I don't like to be told what to think and just because I am an ordinary teacher doesn't mean that I am any less important in the structure of things. I am nothing. I am a drone. So maybe I'm reacting to that too.*

Through the course of our interviews, Paula continues to make connections with her past experiences with the education system, both as a student and as a teacher, and how these experiences have impacted her current pedagogy. She also speaks to how the core beliefs and values created by such past experiences shape the role that she plays within the school culture. These discussions and the sharing of stories allow Paula time to reflect on these connections.

Connection with the core… a second look

Making connections between her past and her present have a meaningful impact on Paula. For Paula, sharing her narratives and exploring core beliefs have a deep effect on her. Paula realizes that she does in fact, hold core beliefs that are very inclusive and that for her whole career she has based her own practice around these beliefs. When reflecting on her role within an inclusive school culture, Paula feels that she understands the role she takes within the school culture more after discussing her past experiences with inclusion. *I think for me it's affirming. It's like when I went back and did my Masters, I realized that I wasn't the one that didn't fit in. I think that it's really affirming to recognize how good it is to take risks, to change, to make change and to be open to change and to listen to the voices of kids. It's something that I've done more or less all my life…but it's affirming.*

Toward the end of our interview process, Paula emphasizes again her realization of how past lived experience impacts the present. She shares:

> *It's kind of scary and you know they say the more things change, the more they stay the same. I'm still that same person. You know, I remember someone saying to me "Underneath it all you are still this little kid that wants to be recognized." Even though I don't fit the mold and I'm not going to come first in the class, there's still value in that, so maybe it's not just the kids that want to be valued. I want to be valued too. It's not that I really need it because I know I'm valued. I no longer need accolades or for people to say you're great. I don't need any of that. I know I'm good but it's taken a long time. I'm not perfect you know but I think that school is the thing that I have had the most success at…*"

Toward the end of our interviews, Paula talks about how much she enjoyed the process of going back and remembering incidents that she had forgotten.

An analysis of Paula's story…

Current Understanding

Paula and I begin our interview discussing changes in the education system throughout Paula's life. She remembers from her time in school, large classes of children who were told to sit and be quiet while being taught and then expected to regurgitate the right answer. In her reflection, she notes that she has seen great change over the years but also notes that the structure of the school system has remained the same for over 200 years; *one person teaching, students still grouped solely by age, herded through their schooling years*. This is particularly meaningful in discussions around the inclusive education initiative. Paula believes that a main barrier to inclusive education is a systemic educational rigidity and that attempts at inclusion are ultimately undermined by an overly burdened, outcome-driven curriculum that is fundamentally unchanging. The stress that this causes on those working in this system, according to Paula, does not allow for a true exploration of inclusion. This sentiment echoes the work of Ekins (2012), who argues:

> Schools have become overrun with new initiatives. Schools and teachers are overloaded trying to respond. So much time has been spent slavishly following the latest piece of guidance from the government that time has been taken away or lost from the fundamental business of reflection within schools. A system has emerged where teachers have become accustomed not to think and reflect

themselves but instead to follow an over prescriptive curriculum. Schools and teachers are overloaded trying to respond (p.60).

It is evident in our discussions, that Paula's relationship with the education system itself is damaged. Paula's frustration with what she has experienced in her career as countless policies and programs have come and gone during her time within the school system has certainly impacted her relationship with the inclusive initiative. There is no question that Paula believes that there is little relational equality within this relationship. As a professional, it comes up numerous times that Paula does not feel valued within the system where she works.

When Paula speaks of the inclusive education initiative, she focuses on how she works to engage her students in the regular classroom setting. She sees her role as making sure that these students are receiving the services and accommodations required for them to achieve success. Paula focuses on building relationships with her students that are foundationally based on a belief that they deserve to be the best that they can be and deserve a learning environment that supports that. From that relationship, Paula feels that her efforts are appreciated and she gains confidence in her professional role from this. Paula admits to having a strong voice for her students, and after listening to the stories that Paula has shared, it is clear that, in part, she acts as the voice for the student, a voice that she could not be for herself during her own education. When looking at how Paula understands her role within the school culture, it is clear that she puts her relationship with the students ahead of all other relationships. All other relationships within the school are directly impacted by this relationship with her students.

Paula experiences frustration because of what she perceives as lack of effort on the part of some classroom teachers to change the dynamic of the classroom to a more project-based, child-centered environment which Paula feels would be best suited to meet the needs of the students. Paula feels isolated at times from some of her colleagues when attempting to collaborate on best practice for the classroom. This does bring up questions of relational importance and brings to light questions around relational hierarchy.

Understanding the current…

It is clear from discussions around past experiences with inclusion, that Paula's own experiences within the educational system in Newfoundland and Labrador had a lasting impact on her own professional career. What comes out through Paula's narrative is that she felt that her strengths were not valued and her creativity and unique interests were not acknowledged. Her experience in school taught her that children, particularly girls, should be seen and not heard and should only participate in limited job opportunities. Ultimately, these limitations denied her the chance of following her dream of becoming an architect or engineer. It is while sharing this story that Paula makes the connection between this experience and its impact on her current professional practice. *I've got that baggage, big time… I'm probably still reacting to it.* This is a powerful moment for Paula as it highlighted how her current relationship with the school system is directly connected with her past. From this moment on in our conversations, Paula continues to make connections between her past and present. It is apparent, in this case, that Paula's relational self was very impacted by her negative relationships within the school culture that she experienced as she was growing up. Paula remains impacted by

this and it determines how she engages in relationships within her current school culture.

Another of the core beliefs that is highlighted for Paula is the importance of looking below the surface of a situation to really understand what is happening. This belief is particularly poignant when considering that reflection of core beliefs and values requires us to delve deeply into our own lived experiences in order to bring these beliefs and values to the surface. Due to the fact that beliefs and values are often deep rooted and intertwined with our self-identity (Hammond, 2006; Gudmundsdottir, 1990, Pajares, 1992), then exploration into these beliefs and values requires more than just surface conversation and requires a type of reflection and exploration that allows the participant to "go deeper" (Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005, p.48). This type of self-reflection, not only gets to the heart of one's own guiding beliefs and values, but also helps us understand firstly, how relationship helps form these beliefs and values and secondly, how significant core beliefs are to the creation of relationships with others.

In Mittler's (2000) work on the development of inclusive school cultures, he stresses how core beliefs and values shape teachers' engagement with inclusive education claims. According to Mittler (2000), "Teachers need opportunities to reflect on proposals for change that touch on their values and beliefs as well as affecting their day-to-day professional practice…providing opportunity for reflection and discussion is essential to the implementation of innovation of any kind" (p.134). This experience for Paula, was both affirming and awakening. In talking about her own experiences, Paula was able to overtly state the core beliefs and values that have guided her though her own life, recognizing that these beliefs supported a broad understanding of inclusive education.

Throughout the course of all three interviews, Paula's concerns and frustrations with the inclusive education initiative more or less remained constant. What did seem to change was Paula's understanding of why she engaged in a particular role within the school culture. Having gained more insight into her own relational self, she was able to explore these other relational contexts more thoroughly. This deeper understanding allows Paula a point to begin to critically reflect on her place within the creation of a relational inclusive school culture.

Robert's story…

Skimming the Surface

Robert is a guidance counselor who works in a primary/elementary school in St. John's, NL. He has worked in the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador for close to 15 years. Robert's journey into education is different from many. He had no desire to become a classroom teacher. After earning a degree in Psychology, Robert was originally interested in pursuing a career in Law. With a letter of acceptance to a Canadian Law school in hand, he quickly decided that a life of reading and research was not what he desired and so he chose to follow the path of other family members and move outside the province to work in a factory on the mainland. Soon realizing that a future in this industry was not for him, he searched the paper and applied for a job as a teaching assistant. This position offered him the opportunity to work with people, a proposition that interested him, and so when he returned to Newfoundland and Labrador some time later, he continued to work with youth. Eventually, he decided to be a guidance counselor. In addressing why he wanted to become a guidance counselor, he replies, *It was the psychology background of it, the human behavior aspect of it that attracted me*. In order to become a guidance counselor, though, he needed a degree in education although he had no intention of teaching in a classroom. *It's a very admirable profession but it wasn't what drew me to education. In order to work with kids at that capacity in school you had to be a teacher first and so that's what brought me into education.*

Robert has a very rich understanding of the newest inclusive initiative. *Inclusion in itself is not a service delivery model. It's philosophical. It's cultural. It's not only how you see your classroom, but how you see the world.* Yet philosophies of inclusion are not new to Robert, he explains that inclusion has been a societal focus really since the 1970's. Having worked with an organization that was centered on helping people with physical and cognitive challenges access the community and employment opportunities as a way to feel part of the community, Robert sees inclusion as an idea that, most people would agree, is important. *I don't think there are many people who would say, "Yeah, people shouldn't have equal access, you know, and be part of the community." And that's what it's about, being part of a community.*

A lot of the confusion around the implementation of the inclusive education initiative, according to Robert, is that people are receiving mixed messages. On one hand, he argues, the Department has clearly stated that inclusion is not a service delivery model yet these statements are presented as part of a five minute preamble in presentations around the initiative and the rest of the presentation is focused on changes in delivery of services to students with exceptionalities. He states:

> *If you support the notion of inclusion and what it means, it's not just about where kids have their service delivered. There is more to it than that. It's about how welcome people feel when they walk into the school and it's about how parents are involved in school culture and school life. I think the big picture of inclusion has become focused on delivery of service and I don't know if they started out saying that they didn't want this to happen or if they started out saying this is part of how we are going to get here. You know I don't know if this has happened*

accidentally or if it's been a purposeful decision. The jury's out on that for me, I'm not sure if it is intentional or not.

Robert doesn't necessarily feel that the two are separate entities but that instead one aspect of inclusion, mainly the service delivery model, is receiving the attention and therefore people have a misrepresentation of what inclusion actually is.

As the guidance counselor at his school, Robert has been one of the team leaders in the implementation of the inclusive education initiative within his school. He has engaged in many conversations with teachers. One of the key implementation concerns for Robert has been a lack of open dialogue between the Department and all involved parties, namely members of the school community. He explains:

I mean that dialogue hasn't happened, at least not in my school, and if it has happened, it has happened very informally. I'd be surprised if you had to ask 100 teachers if they've had the opportunity to discuss what this means or what inclusive education looks like or what it's about or what it means for our school, I'd be very surprised if that's happened.

A main focus of Robert's professional life has been developing a healthy school culture and climate. The mainstay of his role in the school, as he sees it, is to help to develop a healthy, inclusive school culture.

From a school counseling perspective, I think that my role is ensuring that we have a school culture that's understanding, that's supportive that is caring, where there is a sense of community and belonging and that we understand each other's

differences so any type of programming or initiative that would support that. I think that's where guidance plays its most significant role. I think ensuring that students and parents, when they come to the school, that they feel welcome and they feel cared for, is my most significant role. Unfortunately though, I get wrapped up quite a bit with the service delivery aspect and so I spend a fair bit of time in that but if I was to look solely at inclusion, I would think that ensuring that there is a safe and caring school is of utmost significance.

Robert has spent a significant amount of his career focused on building healthy school cultures but often feels as the school year continues, the amount of time that he has to focus on school culture becomes more limited.

Coming to the core…

Robert has a clear understanding of what he feels are the core beliefs and values that guide him. In our interview he begins this discussion by stating these beliefs.

Well, for me it comes down to a couple of really strong beliefs that I have… the notion of equality is one. The notion that no matter what we believe in, we are all, as human beings, equal and that's important. The other thing that really guides me in that one is that I firmly believe that our emotional reaction as human beings, our emotional reaction would bring us more toward conflict, but I would say more is accomplished through dialogue. It's not hard to see, when we look around the world, where conflict is bringing things as opposed to where they could go if they had dialogue and if they believed that they were equal and if they

respected each other's beliefs and their differences, right? So for me those things filter through whatever I do.

When asked about past experiences that may have led to these beliefs, Robert is less certain. Having grown up in a large family with parents that extolled what he considered very "traditional" roles; he attended an all-boys school until his later years of high school when his high school turned co-ed. Reflecting back on his own schooling he shares:

I can always remember having the feeling of wanting to buck authority a little bit in school and at home but in school in particular. I got myself in some trouble when I was in junior and senior high. Yeah, I was the real class clown, got kicked out of class and skipped off school and all that stuff. I always had a little thought in my head that the scale shouldn't be tipped so heavy and I think that that transferred over into a bigger picture; that we need to be equal and we can't be governed by an entity whether that's a government or a husband by his wife. I believed that no one should be governed by anyone and we should be free and we should be able to make choices that are best for who you are unless it impedes on somebody else's ability to do the same. So I suppose I was a true Trudeau Liberal in a sense, right?

Robert also believes in the essential nature of relationships. He found that in his experiences in various fields, particularly his time spent working with youth at-risk, his role was most effective when he was able to build a more balanced relationship with the

individual with whom he was working, one that was less weighted in power dynamics, but yet, remained true to expectations of the environment they were in. This was one of the challenges that Robert faced when he began working in schools. He found the educational system to be top-heavy and steeped in traditional processes.

> *I think that it's important to try to show kids that you're human and that you carry on and can fool around and you can joke around and you can act stupid. I think that if kids can see that in you, then you're better able, when things aren't going the way you want them to go, to deal with that situation then because they sort of know you instead of this entity that they call the teacher.*

The stories that Robert shares around his past experiences with inclusion are entirely based in his past working life. Robert has experienced what he considers a very inclusive working environment, a model of the possibilities of inclusion within the workplace. Before he began his career in schools in Newfoundland and Labrador, he worked with an organization that centered on helping youth-at-risk and marginalized adults receive the supports they needed to thrive within their community. The organizational structure was based on a collaborative model of leadership. No decisions were made within the organization without the agreement of all parties involved. These discussions were often difficult but people respected each other's opinion and their right to disagree. Robert feels that these types of difficult discussions were possible because of the focus on developing strong, healthy relationships between those who worked there. *The staff needed to see each other as human beings. They needed to see their*

administrators as human beings with faults even in situations where it might not have been easy. I think if you can get to that level, you can see some real change.

When Robert left this organization, he went to teach in a First Nations community. Here, he found himself isolated from the broader community. He found in this situation that it was difficult to build relationships and to have open conversations. This was very eye opening for Robert. He felt that, although he was eventually able to build some positive relationships with some of the students he worked with, there was limited trust because the turnover rate of the teachers at the school was so high. *The kids would say to you "Oh you're coming in here to start your career." And they were right.* Robert was very aware of this truth and found his role in the school to be very challenging. There had not been a guidance counselor at the school for over five years and many of the assessment tools were outdated. He found that his main role was counseling which he found to be challenging because of the lack of trust between him and the students. He also was concerned by the relationships between the staff members. Staff members from the community and those from outside the community rarely mingled. They did not socialize during school hours or after school hours. This added to Robert's feelings of isolation.

Robert's role within the community went beyond the school walls. He was also part of a community crisis intervention team. In this role, Robert worked closely with the RCMP and was responsible for both notifying and counseling families dealing with tragic events such as suicides and murders of individuals in the community. This was an

extremely difficult position for Robert at this stage in his career and had a deep emotional impact on him. The impact of these incidents remains with him, even today.

One of the biggest frustrations from this experience was his inability to engage in open conversations with other community members about serious issues, like the underlying causes of the murders and suicides that he faced directly. Robert began to understand how essential open communication was in the creation of healthy relationships and healthy communities. He stayed for a full year and while he considered staying for another year, the emotional strain was too much and he returned to the province to find work in St. John's.

He feels that working in these two extreme conditions has given him a unique perspective in his current position.

> *You know, I think that I've had many experiences in the past seeing inclusion work or working in an inclusive environment and seeing how it works in the natural environment. I think when you see this then you sort of want to promote those same types of beliefs in the work environment that you are currently in.*

Robert feels that these beliefs and experiences impact his daily life both inside and outside the school community.

The central role of relationship…

In our final interview, conversations around what an inclusive school community looks like remain fixed in relationship. *So you look at something like inclusion…it's important that the relational aspect of the people in that environment is in a healthy*

place before you start throwing around big ideas, or else you are just having a superficial conversation. Robert feels that his school is advancing more than many others in its move toward inclusion, mainly because of the relational culture of the school. He believes that this is due, in large part, to the leadership of the principal of his school who he considers be extremely relational.

> *She is all about relationships and that has made things difficult for her in the past but it is just who she is. I respect that and I have always had a good relationship with her. It really does comes down to the relationship piece because if I didn't have such a good relationship with her, then I wouldn't have been so open to going and having those difficult conversations with her and she wouldn't have been so open to accepting my ideas.* At the same time, he still feels that work needs to be done in order to move toward a more inclusive school.

For Robert, the most effective way to make the Inclusive Education Initiative successful is to focus on the school culture. Yet again, he highlights the complications caused by the implementation process of the inclusive education initiative.

> *I think that, rightly or wrongly, many people view inclusion as a service delivery model and it isn't a service delivery model. I know that the department has very clearly said that it's not a service delivery model even though it's been tightly wrapped up in that. It is something that people feel like they've got to do when in fact there are lots of aspects of a school that would show or demonstrate that they are doing it but they don't recognize it because they don't really see inclusion for what inclusion really is.*

An analysis of Robert's narrative…

Current understanding…

At no point in Robert's career did he want to be a teacher. After his first foray into working with students who were deaf or hard of hearing, as a teacher's aid, he knew that he wanted his career to continue in that direction. Before Robert moved into the education system, he worked with numerous organizations that supported youth at-risk or marginalized adults, working tirelessly to help them gain access to their community. The focus of much of Robert's career has been on offering help to those who were marginalized or remained on the outskirts of their community. A man well connected with his core beliefs, in particular a belief that we are all human beings and therefore as human beings we are all equal, Robert understood that feelings of belonging within a community depend very much on relationships (Vaandering, 2014). This sense of relational wellbeing carries over into Robert's daily professional practice. It shapes his understanding of inclusion and of what is required to create inclusive school cultures.

Robert understands the multi-dimensional nature of inclusive education. He believes that creating an inclusive school community involves many different components but the core is about creating communities of belonging. This echoes the work of Artiles, A. & Kozleski, E.B (2007) who state that "the basic premise of inclusive school communities is that schools are about belonging, nurturing and educating all children and youth, regardless of their differences" (p.351). Yet though he recognizes the numerous requirements needed to support the newest inclusive initiative, Robert sees school culture as the root of any plan for implementation. Booth and Ainscow (2002) argue that it is school culture that has the potential to support or undermine developments

and change within a school. In fact, as discussed earlier, the Index for Inclusion used by the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador, Booth and Ainscow (2002) uses school culture as the foundation of the three dimensions that support an inclusive school community: creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies and evolving inclusive practices (p.10). School culture embodies the policies and practices within an inclusive school. Mittler's (2000) work also supports the foundational importance of school culture, stating that inclusion involves reform of both policy and procedure, which must be based on a value system that welcomes and celebrates diversity.

In the case of the Newfoundland and Labrador experience, part of the reform in policy and practice has meant a restructuring of the service delivery model. Robert's concern that this focus of much of the professional development and professional conversations happening around inclusion seems to match my own experience with the implementation process. He feels that mixed messages are being sent and the result is that teachers are viewing inclusion as a change in policy and procedure and not as a philosophy or a paradigm shift that challenges us to reconsider how we build inclusive school communities. This is connected to his concern with the lack of dialogue around these key issues. For him, open communication and dialogue is key to building healthy relationships that support an inclusive school culture.

In his position as guidance counselor, he understands that his role in supporting inclusion in his school is focusing on the development of the school culture and working to develop a school community that welcomes all students and parents. He finds that often his focus is more on attending to issues of service delivery which is at times a source of frustration. As someone who has a strong grasp on what inclusion could look

like, he attempts to live his professional life inclusively, building strong relationships with students, colleagues and parents, attempting to create spaces for dialogue to occur.

Understanding the current…

One thing is clear throughout our interviews. Robert's core beliefs and values play a significant role in how he has come to understand inclusion and the newest inclusive initiative. Yet, when we speak about these core beliefs and values, Robert does not go back to his youth to explain where these beliefs have come from. In contrast, he claims that although he is very aware of his guiding beliefs, he does not know their origin.

Our beliefs and values are shaped throughout the course of our own lives. Robert, as a youth felt a draw toward bucking the system, toward rebelling against an imbalance of power and control that he felt were unjust. Perhaps it was the experiences of school rebellion, fighting, skipping off school that was the beginning of experiencing the inequality of top-heavy relationships.

When Robert shares stories of his past, lived experience around inclusion, he spends much time discussing the development of his career. In particular, he shares his experience of working with an organization that he felt highlighted what it meant to work in an inclusive work environment. It seems from the types of experiences Robert shares, that many of the beliefs he holds were developed throughout his working life. The experience of speaking to Robert about his core beliefs and values differs significantly from the other participants. His beliefs and values seem to be drawn less from what Pajares (1992) would call an intense experience but more over a period of time, through a

succession of events. When I read through the transcriptions of Robert's interviews, I was left wondering if Robert was drawn toward work with marginalized groups because of his beliefs in equality or was it his work with these groups that strengthened these core beliefs and values?

When we return to our discussion around inclusion in our third interview, the conversation is very much entrenched in the importance of relationship. Robert speaks to the fact that before any big ideas are brought to the forefront in any school, the relational culture of the school needs to be examined and that the acting parties in that environment need to be engaging in healthy relationships. He feels that he knows, first hand, how necessary it is to have a solid relational foundation where honest conversations around difficult subjects can happen as well as the difficulties that arise when those relationships are not in place. It is important to again consider the types of relationships required to grow these healthy school cultures. The types of relationships that Robert references are very similar to Llewellyn's (2012) emphasis on relational equality. These relationships focus less on an individualistic sense of equality and more on a communal understanding where attention is given to the "nature of connection between and among parties" (Llewelyn, 2012, p.92). Attention is then given to the three commonplaces of relational equality: respect, dignity and concern. According to Robert, establishing relationships where people feel respected and valued allows a place for people to voice their different opinions and concerns without fear of reprisal.

As Robert moves ahead in his experience with inclusive education in his own school, he believes that though they are on the right track, there is still much work to be done before he would say that they had established a healthy, inclusive school culture. He

believes that big changes take time and the place to start is through honest conversations among his colleagues. Working toward creating a space where those difficult conversations can happen is one of his main goals. He believes that though they are on that path, they still have a long way to go. *In the words of my principal, it's a journey,* he shares as we finish our interview.

Chapter 6 – The Discussion

ALICE
She drank from a bottle called DRINK ME
And she grew so tall,
She ate from a plate called TASTE ME
And down she shrank so small.
And so she changed, while other folks
Never tried nothin' at all.

- ***Shel Silverstein***

Who wants to live in a comfort zone?

Six years ago, I decided that I would take part in the RPM challenge. In this challenge, participants write and record a full album of original music, 10 songs or 35 minutes of music within the month of February. Up to that point, I had never written a song in my life. I played piano a little and my guitar skills were limited to 5 chords yet I was mesmerized by this immense challenge. I remember the song writing process very clearly; I remember scratching down ideas, piecing together lyrics and forever searching for rhyming words. The process was all consuming but yet very enjoyable. I would be forever writing down snippets of ideas in the classroom, in the car, and drifting off to sleep. What stands out for me as a pivotal moment was while sitting at an old Rhodes keyboard plucking out a melody for a tune about love gone wrong, I froze with the realization that this music that I was writing and that I would eventually record, was going to be put out into the public sphere. This song and nine others were going to be recorded, packaged and shared

with family, friends and people I did not know. People I did not know! I panicked and re-evaluated the entire project. Who was I to make an album, to write songs, to act like a musician? What gave me the right to do these things? I was torn. I was in a state of constant self-talk. *Keep going, Erin. It's not a big deal. Who's really going to listen anyway? Why shouldn't you do it? It's a challenge, not a competition. Your voice is as important as anyone else's.* Well, I did keep going and made an album of 10 songs in 28 days and I shared it with family, friends and fellow participants. I even posted it online. It was a grueling journey, one of self-awareness and self-doubt. It was both a recognition of possibilities and of limitations but in the end it was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life and, six years later, it has become an annual challenge that has lead to unimaginable opportunities.

Throughout the course of this research, I encountered many of these same experiences and emotions. I felt the same anticipatory excitement of beginning a new and unfamiliar journey. I reveled in moments of clarity and slid into depths of obscurity. I experienced profound professional and personal growth and was humbled by the sincerity and candor of my participants. It has been an experience like no other and I am left forever changed by the experience.

Looking back, when I began this journey, I believe I wanted my participants to have the same experience as I had in exploring my own core beliefs. I wanted them to have "aha" moments that would bring them to an inclusionary awakening. This is not necessarily what happened. This expectation was not realistic and more importantly it was an arrogant assumption. What did happen though, I would argue, was that this research offered a place to openly discuss how each participant was

experiencing and engaging with the newest inclusive initiative. They were able to do this in a safe place that was free from judgment or any obligation to say what was appropriate. It offered participants an opportunity to reflect on past, lived experiences of inclusion and often with lived experiences of exclusion. It made room to consider how core beliefs and values garnered from these experiences shaped their own professional practice. In doing that, I would argue, participants had an opportunity to think about inclusion from a different vantage point.

We all experience feelings of inclusion and exclusion in our lives. It is part of the human experience. We feel these experiences very deeply. They are relatable emotions that often have an impact on us for our whole lives. As Ekins (2012) stresses, when considering how to move forward with inclusive education, there needs to be an understanding that inclusion is an emotive subject that deeply impacts teacher identity.

Connecting the currents…

In the first set of interviews, Margaret, Paula and Robert were given the opportunity to speak with abandon about their current understanding and experiences with the newest inclusive initiative. Though each of these three experiences was very different from one another, there was a common and confirming thread that ran through all three narratives. There is confusion and a lack of clarity of what the newest inclusive initiative actually is. The focus of the conversation in all three interviews was on inclusion as a service delivery model. In these interviews, both Margaret and Paula speak about their experiences through

the changing context of how services are delivered to students with exceptionalities. They talk about what this means for their teaching practice and for the students. They talk about the frustrations that they both feel as they search to unpack their new role within an inclusive school community. Robert, on the other hand, has an understanding of the newest inclusive initiative that is focused on school culture and climate. He feels that changes in the service delivery model are a necessary part of new policies and procedures needed to support inclusive education. Robert acknowledges that in his own school's experience, many of his colleagues are receiving mixed messages about what is at the core of this inclusive initiative. Professional development opportunities, in his experience, have offered a five-minute preamble about the philosophy of inclusion while the remaining part of the session has a detailed focus on the reshaping of the service delivery model. This has led many teachers on his staff to understand inclusion as a shift in policy and practice.

A key difference between Robert and the other two participants is that in Robert's narratives, he shares that many of the career opportunities that he experienced before coming to his current position involved working in broad concepts of inclusion. Working with organizations that supported marginalized adults and youth gave him an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of inclusion and his own beliefs around inclusion. According to Robert, during this period he also had an opportunity to work in what he considered a very inclusive environment where relationships and dialogue were of utmost importance. These experiences have contributed to a change in perspective of this newest inclusive initiative.

One consideration to take into account when looking at the difference in inclusive focus among the three participants is their role within the school community. A main focus of Robert's work as a guidance counselor in the Newfoundland and Labrador school system over the course of almost 15 years has been on developing safe and caring schools, with a focus on school culture and climate. From the onset, he has always believed that this is the key to creating a thriving school community. It is of little surprise then, that when the inclusive education initiative was implemented, his focus went to understanding it in terms of school culture and climate. Paula has worked as an instructional resource teacher for the past 15 years and sees herself as an advocate for her students with exceptionalities. She works to be the voice for these students and is very focused on what this new service delivery model means for her students. She feels frustrated with the system and with some of her colleagues, that her students are not receiving the supports needed in the classroom to be at their best. She is frustrated by the newest inclusive initiative as she doesn't believe that inclusion can work, namely the service delivery model, in the current education system. Margaret feels the changes to the service delivery model very deeply in her own classroom. It has added extra pressure to an already full workload. Margaret has found that the implementation of the inclusive initiative has shaken her confidence in her own ability to meet the needs of all students in her class. This has been a source of frustration for Margaret as she feels a great responsibility to create a classroom where all students can succeed. What is evident here is that all three participants have been impacted by the focus on policy and practice in the implementation of the inclusive initiative.

Reaching to the core…

I remember when I first had the opportunity to explore my own core beliefs and values; it unearthed old memories for me, ones that I had not thought about in years. I had never considered their meaning and impact at the time. For me, some of these memories were very affirming but others forced me to critically reflect on my own beliefs and values and propelled me to challenge some of my unconscious beliefs. It was not an easy process. When I began the interviews, I was uncertain of how my participants would respond to being asked about their core beliefs and values. I didn't know if they had had any experience with this type of exploration. I was also unsure how each participant would feel about sharing narratives about their past experiences. I felt the magnitude of what I was asking them to do. I was asking them to share with me, a researcher, intimate details of their lives and to unearth both conscious and unconscious beliefs and values they held. Margaret, Paula and Robert were open, honest and sincere. They took time to reflect on these issues and, in some cases, they brought to light memories that they had not thought about for many years.

Margaret, Paula and Robert shared numerous stories of inclusion in their lives but what stood out for me, in reflecting on these narratives, was each participant's acknowledgment of inclusive core beliefs and values that stemmed from their own experiences with exclusion. Margaret reimagines a Halloween night when she was left alone to go out collecting candies. The group of friends, a group she felt were very close to her, told her a different meeting time and went trick or treating without her. This experience had a profound impact on Margaret. Paula also

experienced a deep sense of exclusion in her youth. With a passion for engineering and architecture, Paula felt she was excluded from following her career dreams. She also felt that her creativity was undervalued. Robert experienced feelings of exclusion when teaching in a First Nations community. He had great difficulty establishing positive relationships with his students and with some community members as well. For a man who very much values the power of relationships, this was very difficult for him. All three of these experiences had profound effects on the lives of each participant. For each of them, the hurt felt from these experiences challenged them to think about issues of inclusion and exclusion and played a role in solidifying particular beliefs. For Margaret, it was the belief that all people should be respected for who they are. For Paula, it was that there are many ways to learn and that all should be celebrated and for Robert, it was that without healthy relationships, healthy, inclusive communities cannot exist.

In the second interview, this journey through narratives supporting core beliefs and values uncovers something else for the three participants. In each case, conversations about changes in service delivery, about co-teaching and about policy changes are shifted after sharing past lived experiences with inclusion in their own personal lives. What seems to happen for Margaret and Paula is that it shifts discussions around inclusion from something that is policy based or practice driven. It moves from inclusion being something outside of themselves that is acted upon them, to something that belongs to them, something that they have felt and experienced in their own lives. In doing this, there seems to be a personal connection with inclusion and a realization that they do, in fact, hold very inclusive

beliefs and values that play into their professional lives. Robert's experience is somewhat different though, grounded in the personal. Robert has already spent time reflecting on his inclusive core beliefs and values. Robert shares two pivotal narratives that point to two polarized experiences with inclusion in his life that have allowed him to reflect on issues of inclusion. The first is his experience in working in an organization which he felt highlighted the meaning of inclusion. It was an organization built on healthy relationship and dialogue. He believes that healthy relationship and dialogue are essential to the success of an inclusive school community. He also had experience working in an environment where he was an outsider and not able to connect fully to a cultural community. Having worked at this position directly after the aforementioned position, Robert was able to see, even more clearly, his own beliefs about humanity as a whole.

When we return to conversations around inclusion in the third interview, participant perspectives vary. Yet, in reading through the transcriptions, there does seem to be a similar theme that runs through all of them. In each of the three cases, the conversations around inclusion involve references to core beliefs and values that were addressed earlier. For example, conversations about inclusive education remain similar to beginning conversations for Paula. She remains frustrated by the new service delivery model and by the unchanging education system. Yet in final conversations with Paula about her experience with the newest inclusive initiative and her role within an inclusive school culture, Paula says something that shifts how she understands her role. While speaking about wanting to be the a voice for those who do not have a voice, namely students with exceptionalities, Paula pauses and

says, *I think that for me it's that idea that because you are not an important person, you are muzzled, that maybe I am reacting to… I don't like to be muzzled. I don't like to be told what to do. I don't like to be told what to think and, just because I am an ordinary teacher, doesn't mean that I am any less important in the structure of things. I am nothing. I am a drone. So maybe I'm reacting to that too.* At this moment, Paula understands herself more clearly, she understands how the relationships of her past with teachers, parents and the school system as a whole have influenced the role that she plays within the school community now. This shift indicates Paula's understanding of herself within the context of the school community and her capacity to engage differently.

When Robert and I return to discussions around inclusion, relationship and dialogue are the focus of our conversations. Robert claims that building healthy relationships is essential before any dialogue around large-scale change can happen. He talks about ways that he has been working to build relationship with students and with parents. The interview that follows our conversations around core beliefs becomes more personal for Robert. He talks at great length about his strong relationship with his principal and he feels that having such a relationship allows him to bring new ideas to the table. He feels that he can have difficult conversations with his principal and highlights that he feels that she works from a relational leadership role, which he feels is very inclusionary. These are the types of relationships that Robert feels need to be fostered in his school in order to encourage honest conversation when it comes to inclusion.

In our third interview, Margaret's conversation around inclusion changes dramatically. She moves from early feelings of fear and frustration, from what she feels is a clear understanding of the inclusive initiative as a shift in the service delivery mode,l to a much more relational conversation around inclusion. It seems that from the shared narratives around core beliefs and values, Margaret becomes more confident and self-assured that she, in fact, holds very inclusive beliefs and for a long time these beliefs have guided her teaching. This is very liberating for Margaret. She says on repeated occasions that many teachers do have inclusive beliefs and are acting in very inclusive ways but are not being recognized for it. Margaret begins to talk about her collegial support system both inside and outside the schools, and what those relationships mean to her. She takes more time to talk about the relationships with her and her students and between her and her colleagues. This shift seems to happen from a new understanding of her relational self. Through her narratives, she addresses how specific beliefs and values were shaped and developed from past relationships with others. Issues of inclusion for her, then, became more real; they became more personal and she was more aware of how she had been impacted by experiences with inclusion and exclusion.

So what?

So what does this mean? Why is it important for those working with the newest inclusive initiative to have a strong understanding of the philosophy of inclusion? Why is it important to explore inclusive education as a matter of school culture and not just a shift in policy and practice? To answer this, I return to Booth

and Ainscow's (2002) Index for Inclusion. A key resource used by the Department of Education in order to determine levels of inclusivity in schools, the index uses three basic scales on which to analyze the school's data: culture, policy and practices (p.9). According to Booth and Ainscow (2002), each of these three dimensions is necessary to support the ever-evolving development of inclusion within a school. They organize these three dimensions into a triangular formation:

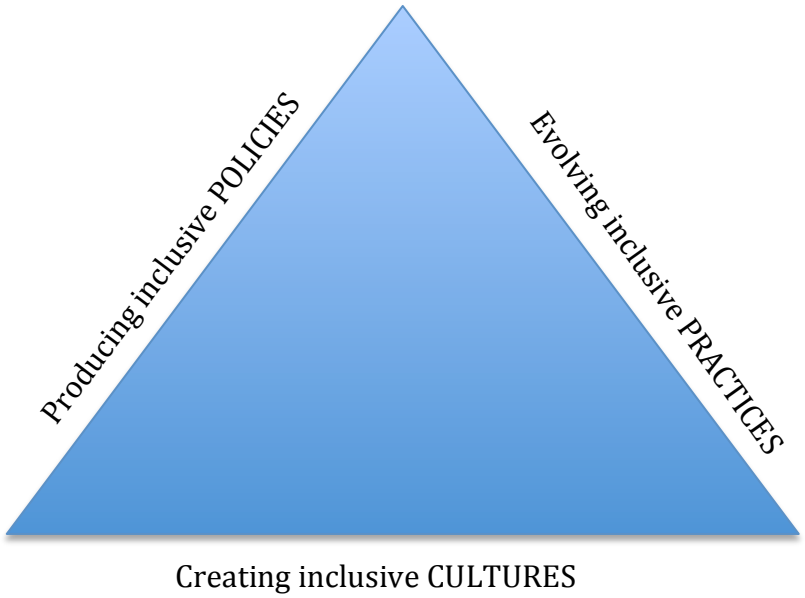

Figure 2.1: The three dimensions of the index (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.7)

According to Booth and Ainscow (2002), "creating inclusive school cultures is placed as the foundation for the triangle because it is school culture that is at the core of school improvement. School cultures have the potential to support school development. The development of shared inclusive values and collaborative relationships may lead to changes in the other dimensions" (p.8).

In the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, the most significant, visible change in policy has been the restructuring of the service delivery model for students with exceptionalities. I propose that when the focus is placed on changes in policy and practice from the start, then there is no foundation to support these changes. Without this foundation, there is uncertainty, frustration and no space for those involved to engage in real dialogue about these concerns. I believe that this is seen very clearly in conversations around inclusion throughout the interviews. School culture, on the other hand, is based on a series of relationships. When this relational foundation is strong and supportive, then there is greater potential for positive change to occur. Within an inclusive school culture, there are supportive relationships throughout the many levels of the school community. This school culture becomes strengthened when teachers understand their role in developing said culture.

Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) argue "values underlie all actions and plans of action, all practices within the schools and all policies for the shaping of practice" (p.24). It is these values that shape the relationships built within the school. What needs to be stressed is that the Department of Education has made it clear that they feel the first stage in addressing inclusive programming is addressing teacher beliefs and values around inclusive schooling. Yet, creating a space for explicit exploration to occur is challenging. My research has borne out that conversations around core beliefs and values create an understanding of inclusion as part of our lived experience. This shifts our relationship with inclusion from a policy or practice that is thrust upon teachers to an understanding of inclusion as a

shared experience where educators willingly engage. I argue that this is a fundamental step in the development of healthy, inclusive school communities in this province. In this way, conversations around diversity and difference can happen and policies and practices become just a part of a broader understanding of inclusion.

So what can the Department of Education do in order to engage teachers in conversations around core belief and values? What types of professional development opportunities can be created in order to achieve the first stage of the Department of Education's plan for developing inclusive programming?

There seem to be two key questions that need consideration. Firstly, how is it possible to create professional development opportunities that will guide professionals, who have never gone through the experience of exploring core beliefs and values, in a manner that is both deep and meaningful? Secondly, if these professional development sessions were to involve multiple parties, how would a relationship of trust required to explore these ideas be built between those leading the sessions and those participating?

I would like to offer two possible suggestions. To start, perhaps the answer lies in simply supplying the time and the structure required for a professional in the education system to reflect on his/her own experiences and beliefs without necessarily having to answer to another. To further this idea, professional development sessions could begin with a round table conversation around the connection between core beliefs and values, school culture and inclusion. In this type of environment, clarity of meaning could be discussed in a sharing circle where

participants would be free to contribute equally to the conversation. Time could then be offered to all of those involved to engage in personal reflection, to think of their own experiences with inclusion and the core beliefs and values that connect with those experiences. This could be followed by another circle conversation where professionals share what they have experienced by going through the process. Following this, discussion could continue around the types of core beliefs that were brought to the surface for the participants during their reflection and how these beliefs and values shape the relationship and role that the professional maintains within his/her school culture.

Relationships are built over time. Relationships of equality in inclusive schools are built on a commitment to the connection of all members in that community (Llewelyn, 2012). These relationships are based on equal respect, concern and dignity (Llewelyn, 2012). Beginning with an understanding of self in relation to others is a starting point for any exploration into the relationships that form an inclusive school culture. It seems imperative that a first step is understanding the core beliefs and values that inform decisions and choices that we make as individuals and then examine how this impacts communal choices. Professional development opportunities that would allow for this experience would be essential in the construction of a strong foundation required to support the newest inclusive initiative. Further research would be required to allow me to confirm whether these recommendations for professional development would in fact be an effective way for educators to explore core beliefs and values in a professional development context.

Limitations

Clandinin and Connelly (2006) stress that any type of narrative research must be conducted within a three-dimensional inquiry space; the interaction, temporality and place (see p.52). In my research, this space allowed my participants to "look backward and forward, look inward and outward, and it situated their experience within place" (Creswell, 2013). Although this allows for a richer analysis of the data, this type of inquiry space also has its limitations. The narratives that each participant shared, the selected experiences of inclusion were connected to a specific place, space and time. This creates issues of transferability. Artiles and Kozleski (2007) believe that the context of inclusion in Newfoundland and Labrador is unique to this province and its educational history, geographic location, political climate and population. "Inclusive education research and practice must be examined in the larger context of cultural histories and practices related to how our society treats difference" (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007, p. 353).

The Inclusive Education Initiative was implemented for the first time in 2009. Teachers in this province have only been working with this initiative just over five years. Inclusive education is more than just an adoption of new policy, it is a paradigm shift (Carrington, 1999). As such, time is needed for individual schools to examine their own school communities and to understand where they need to begin to develop an inclusive school culture. The experience of each school will without a doubt vary. It would be interesting to sit with each participant in five years' time to

engage in the same discussion. How might their experience with inclusive education be similar? How might it have changed?

Looking Ahead

I can say now, looking back on this research that I have changed. In the five years since I began to think about the Inclusive Education Initiative, I have continued to challenge my own understanding of what inclusive education means to both me and to my school community. I feel I have a much stronger understanding now of the philosophy of inclusion than I did at the start of this research. This is in part because of the amount of personal reflection and self-examination that I have done through the course of this work. This research has allowed a space to really examine my own core beliefs and values and not just those of my participants, and this has had a big impact on me.

At the start of this chapter I reference the poem, ALICE by Shel Silverstein. I believe in this research, I am Alice. There were moments of clarity throughout this research that made me feel so big. I felt I understood my topic, my participants and my own self. I felt confident and self-assured. Then there were moments of realization, of confusion and of self-doubt that made me realize how very little I understood. It was during these moments that I can say that I felt very small. Yet, it was precisely these moments that challenged me to dig deeper, to look further and to confront uncertainty. After going through all of these experiences, like Alice, I changed.

Inclusive education is an emotive topic (Ekins, 2012). In Newfoundland and Labrador, it has meant substantial changes in policy and practice that have directly impacted educators. The Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador have already acknowledged the importance of allowing educators to explore their beliefs and values around inclusive education but have yet to move forward in enabling this to happen in a meaningful way. The experience of being able to explore core beliefs and values throughout this research has allowed both my participants and me to gain a more in-depth understanding of the Inclusive Education Initiative and to better understand our role in creating a supportive, inclusive school culture foundational to the success of inclusive education.

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