MASTER OF EDUCATION (INCLUSIVE EDUCATION)

Investigating principals' attitudes towards inclusion and potential barriers to inclusion in Western Australia

EDUC9742: Dissertation in Education

STUDENT: Brody Fulton

STUDENT NUMBER: 2256054

SUPERVISOR: Peter Walker

inspiring achievement

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION

I declare that:

This dissertation entitled: **Investigating principals' attitudes towards inclusion and potential barriers to inclusion in Western Australia** presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, is clearly acknowledged.

Brody Fulton
June 2024

ABSTRACT

High quality education is essential to provide young Australians with the potential for positive life outcomes. Students with special educational needs (SEN) are no different. The most effective provision of high-quality education is inclusive education. Inclusive education has been shown to increase student performance in students with SEN, while not detracting from the outcome of students without identified disability. Despite Australia's commitment to inclusion, the number of special schools in Western Australia has increased and the Australian education system remains one of the most segregated among the OECD countries. Given the importance of school principals to inclusion, the current study sought to investigate Western Australian principals' attitudes towards inclusion, determine if experience with students with SEN affects attitude, and determine what, if any, Western Australian connections principals see between NAPLAN and inclusion. The study utilised a cross-sectional, mixed method. An adapted version of the School Principals' Attitude Toward Inclusion Scale was used to collect quantitative data, while two semi-structured interviews sought to add real-world experience. Multiple regressions of experience with inclusion and attitudes towards inclusion showed a small, statistically significant positive correlation (r (54) = .323, p = .008). Tests of ANOVA showed that the percentage of students with SEN was dependent of geographical location, F (3, 51) = 3.45, p = 0.023. The qualitative portion identified a number of themes that principals view as barriers to inclusion, such as teacher training and workload, disruptions, and difficulties accessing services and outside professionals. Two principals were interviewed, utilizing a semi-structured interview. Neither principal identified NAPLAN or My School as barriers. These findings are important as they reinforce the need of a focus on training and implementation of inclusive education practices. Given the trend that Australian schools are becoming more diverse, high quality inclusive practices will be essential.

Investigating principals' attitudes towards inclusion and NAPLAN and My School as potential barriers to inclusion

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Access to high-quality education is a must to ensure young Australians are provided with the best possible opportunities to good life outcomes. Despite making up only a portion of young people's lives, schools are almost exclusively tasked with the education of future generations (Govorova et al., 2020). As such, it is essential that young Australians have access to high-quality schools no matter their background or where they were born. However, this is not always the case. A number of factors influence the provision of education within Australia (Considine & Zappalà, 2002). These include geographic locations—rural versus metropolitan—socioeconomic status, and disability (Boyle & Anderson, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2018). While these factors can be difficult to overcome, it is imperative that viable solutions are found. Students who disengage from schooling are more likely to leave school early, a practice that is associated with a number of negative life outcomes, such as higher rates of unemployment, risk of imprisonment, and poorer health outcomes (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). As such, it is important to provide inclusive, engaging and challenging content to all students, including high-risk groups—such as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and children experiencing family difficulties.

One such high-risk group is students with disability. Students with disability are often excluded from the general education classroom, either being taught in a segregated classroom or special schools (Schools, 2021). However, research consistently shows that students with disability who are taught in the general education classroom perform better than their segregated counterparts (De Bruin, 2020). Despite the proven benefits of inclusion, the Australian education system remains one of the most segregated in the developed world, particularly for students with disability (Chambers & Forlain, 2021; Education at a Glance, 2018). This trend is acutely evident in Western Australia where the percentage of students taught in special schools has been increasing for over a decade (Schools, 2021). A practice that drew much criticism from some members of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability (RCVANEPD; Commonwealth, 2023), who called for the phasing out of segregated special schools in Australia, including Western Australia; other recommendations, however, called for greater integration of students at special schools into the mainstream system while maintaining the need for special schools.

Further, a number of barriers in recent years—such as a standardised curriculum and the use of high-stakes testing—have incentivised schools to engage in further exclusionary practices (Boyle & Anderson, 2020). Students with disability, particularly those with substantial or extensive educational needs, are

disproportionately being excluded from testing that would help guide policy around funding and resources (Mayes & Howell, 2017). Further, the school system has become more segregated in the previous decade, with schools in largely disadvantaged areas bearing the responsibility of educating the largest portion of students with disability (Smith et al., 2018).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The field of inclusive education continues to grow. Despite the benefits of inclusion—such as improved academic outcomes (De Bruin, 2020), reduction of stigmas (Boyle & Anderson, 2020), and providing meaningful interactions between students with and without disabilities (Krischler et al., 2019)—the Australian education system remains largely segregated (Education at a Glance, 2018). It is understood that principals are key to enacting inclusion within a school (Carter & Abawi, 2018). However, principals do not work in isolation and are subjected to outside influences that can affect their ability to implement inclusive practices (Duncan et al., 2021). While not the only factors to influence exclusionary practices, the introduction of NAPLAN and the My School website have been highlighted as barriers to inclusion (Armstrong, 2017; Boyle & Anderson, 2020). As such, it is important to establish whether principals perceive a relationship with the development of NAPLAN and My School and inclusive education.

STUDY AIM

While teacher attitudes towards standardised curriculum and testing have been documented (see Hogan et al., 2018), there is a dearth of knowledge surrounding the effects these changes have had on principals' views on inclusive education (Duncan et al., 2021). Given that principals are the driving force for inclusion within a school, this is a concern. The current study seeks to identify factors that contribute to, or hinder, the provision of inclusive education in Western Australian schools. Further, it seeks to clarify principals' attitudes towards inclusion and the perceived barriers faced within the education system.

RESEARCH QUESTION

As such, the current study seeks to add to the breadth of knowledge surrounding inclusive education by answering the following questions: a) *How do Western Australian principals define inclusion* b) *What barrier exist to implementing effective inclusive education?* and c) *What, if any, additional barriers have NAPLAN and My School added to inclusion as perceived by Western Australian principals?*

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The proposed study is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, despite principals being key to inclusive education (Duncan & Punch, 2021; Stokes et al, 2017), little research has explored Australian principals' attitudes towards inclusion. Further, exploring the perceived barriers to inclusion, particularly in relation to NAPLAN and My School, can guide practice in field. Education is a key indicator of future life outcomes (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). All students need to know that their needs are met and they will be given the best opportunity to succeed academically and, therefore, better prospects in adulthood. As such, the proposed research will add to the body of knowledge surrounding educators' views on inclusion in order to determine specific barriers that hinder the implementation of inclusive education. It is hoped that the findings of this study can help principals address issues faced by principals who are often tasked with implementing aspirational goals while not receiving roadmaps or guidelines of the process of implementation.

POSITIONAL STATEMENT

I, the researcher, am very passionate about inclusive education. Although I took a rather unconventional path to academia, it is now something important to me. I had never planned to work in education, although was I teaching English as a second language for a number of years. Like so many of my colleagues, I was pursuing a career in psychology. While doing so, I began working in special education as a teaching assistant. Once I was working in this area, I developed a love for the profession and decided to engage in further research into the field. While still studying, I was promoted from TA to Special Education teacher, and then took on the role as the Special Education Coordinator. Throughout my study, I noticed that my life trajectory mirrored that of the literature and that I shared a number of the risk factors related to the topics of continued education and its effects on life outcomes. Having seen the differences in my own life before and after attending higher education, as well as the risk factors that I had experienced in my own life which had ultimately affected my school life, I wanted to understand the factors that affect the provision of inclusive education. As such, I based this study on my identity as a special educator and someone who has seen firsthand the difference an education can make for someone who has challenges at school.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

TOWARDS INCLUSION OR SEGREGATION?

INCLUSION IN AUSTRALIA

In 1994, Australia became one of the first signatories of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). It was an ambitious document that declared that "every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning" and that "those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs" (UNESCO, 1994, p. iii). It provided an objective for governments around the world to implement this vision of inclusive education (Anderson & Boyle, 2019). Australia reaffirmed its commitment to inclusion by signing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which states that all parties will "ensure an inclusive education system at all levels" (United Nations, Article 24, para. 3) without being "excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability" (United Nations, Article 24, para. 2). However, while inclusive practices within the education system have improved, increasing access to education for many more students with disability, many obstacles remain to realise full inclusion.

The UNCRPD is Australia's biggest commitment to inclusive education given its international nature, with General Comment 4 (United Nations, 2016) outlining exactly what is meant by the term 'inclusion'. Paragraph 11 of GC4 on the UNCRPD defines inclusion as:

> a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences.

Further, the UNCRPD calls for a commitment to ending segregation, with GC4 calling for an end to "the education of students with disability [being] provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular or various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities" (para. 11, UNCRPD, 2016).

The most recent national commitment of inclusion is the 2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Education Council, 2019). It promises that all Australian students will be provided "with equality of opportunity to reach their potential and achieve their highest educational outcomes" (Education Council, 2019, p. 17). Yet, the Australian education system remains the fourth most segregated of any OECD country (Education at a Glance, 2018). Further, one in four young Australian students are not meeting their developmental milestones; while the number is higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, students with disability, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, from regional areas, and those who study in schools which have a high concentration of disadvantaged students (Smith Family, 2016). Further, despite almost three decades of championing inclusion, at least in writing, evidence suggests that segregation is becoming more commonplace (Schools, 2018). This is a concerning trend given the poorer life outcomes faced by those with the lowest academic performances (Smith Family, 2016). Obviously, much still needs to be done in order to bring the Australian education system up to the level to which Australia has committed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSION

Inclusive education provides social and academic benefits for students with disability (SWD). Students with disability have advocated for inclusive education as beneficial as it provides "exposure to the diversity they are expected to live with as adults (Allan, 2009, as cited in Anderson & Boyle, 2015, p. 6). Further, prejudices towards SWD are broken down and the risk of ostracism reduced when they are taught in the general education classroom (Boyle & Anderson, 2020). Inclusion has benefits that reach far beyond the classroom, reducing segregation not only within the education system but also in society as a whole by providing meaningful contact for students with and without disabilities (Krischler et al., 2019). Conversely, the continuation of exclusionary practices perpetuates the idea of otherness among SWD and can reinforce the idea of segregation being necessary (Slee, 2019). From a social-justice standpoint, the evidence suggests that students with disability being taught in the general education classroom is a catalyst for changed beliefs and expectations surrounding students with special educational needs. While, alone, having SWD in the general education classroom is not sufficient for inclusion, it is a prerequisite for inclusive practices to occur.

Further, the educational benefits of inclusion support the necessity for inclusive education. Despite popular opinion, studies show that SWD who are taught within the general education classroom outperform their counterparts taught in special education classrooms (De Bruin, 2020). Further—and again, contrary to commonly held beliefs—SWD do not detract from the education of students without disabilities (Boyle

& Anderson, 2020). Some studies even suggest that the inclusion of SWD within the general education classroom provides a benefit for students without disabilities (Boyle & Anderson, 2020; Szumski et al., 2017). Despite the benefits of inclusive education for SWD and the evidence showing no detriment to students without disabilities, Australia continues to fall short on its promises for equitable education to all. These concerns were expressed in a United Nations review of Australia's response to their commitments to the rights of persons with disability (CRPD, 2019) when the report noted a lack of focus on the rights of children with disability, as well as the "significant increase in segregated inclusion" (Art. 23, 45(b)).

BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

Even today, more than a quarter of a century on from the Salamanca Statement, inclusive education encounters many obstacles. For instance, despite being considered one of the cornerstones of equitable education, no conclusive definition exists for exactly what constitutes IE (Graham, 2019). However, many have commented that it should be difficult to define, as inclusion is not a simple set of practices but rather a value system (Boyle & Anderson, 2020; Clough & Corbett, 2000; Slee, 2011). As such, definitions of inclusion are largely left up to the states, school districts, and can even change from school to school (Graham, 2019). The RCVANEPD (2023) noted that this way a key issue in the provision of inclusive education, given that a student's ability to access education can change from one jurisdiction to another.

Another difficulty stems from the standardisation of the Australian curriculum. A number of criticisms have been levelled against the standardised curriculum, such as underrepresentation of minority or disadvantaged groups (Foley & Mundoon, 2014; Jagose et al., 2019). Further, Boyle & Anderson (2017) posit that "those with the power" (p. 207) are who choose what is represented in the national curriculum. Given that people with disabilities are underrepresented in positions of influence (Hayes & Bulat, 2017), students with disability, too, will likely be underrepresented in the curriculum. Further, the standardisation of the curriculum means that students from all backgrounds and educational levels are held to the same expectations and standards no matter their special educational needs or current life circumstances (Graham, 2020). Despite intentions of inclusion being espoused (ACARA, 2021), the very teachers tasked with teaching this curriculum continue to question the accessibility for all students (Anderson & Boyle, 2015). Given that SWD have special educational needs, a standardised curriculum that allows little in the way of accommodations without lowering expectations remains a substantial barrier to inclusion.

Outlining all barriers to inclusion is beyond the scope of this paper. However, one barrier to inclusion that needs to be clarified is the popular ideology of neoliberalism. This economic philosophy that promotes deregulation and favours a free market to provide best choices for consumers has seeped into every facet

of Western culture (Denniss, 2018). Education has been no exception. The rebranding of the education system as a consumer good was attributed to providing parents the option to compare schools and make informed choices that best suit their child's needs (Rowe & Lubienski, 2017). However, researchers have noted that this system is flawed. For instance, it presupposes that all parents have the means to choose the best option for their child (Boyle & Anderson, 2020). Rowe and Lubienski (2017) argue, however, that such a system creates geographical segregation among public schools in which schools in affluent areas were rated more highly than those in poorer regions. Given that a disproportionate number of students with disability come from disadvantage backgrounds (Shifrer et al., 2011), this creates a situation in which the most advantaged students can attend privileged schools, while more disadvantaged government schools are required to provide services to a disparate number of students with special educational needs (Bonnor, 2019).

A further contributor to the neoliberalist view of education came with the implementation of the standardised test NAPLAN in 2008 and the school comparison website My School in 2011 (discussed below; Boyle & Anderson, 2020). Since the inception of NAPLAN, there has been a marked increase in the gap between the best performing schools and the lowest performing schools, with the lowest performing schools being found more and more in disadvantaged areas (Smith et al., 2018). Rebranding education as a consumer product has been correlated with not only stagnating inclusive practices but, as is in the case of Western Australia, to a more segregated education system (Schools, 2021). Having a solely market-driven educational system has created a structure which incentivises exclusionary practices while failing to deliver the expected benefits (Rowe & Lubienski, 2017).

NAPLAN

AN INTRODUCTION TO NAPLAN

The National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is a national, standardised test taken by all year 3, 5, 7, and 9s. The high-stakes test (Howell, 2017) gathers information from students at two-yearly intervals in order to measure progress of literacy and numeracy against national averages (Boyle & Anderson, 2020). NAPLAN tests the five areas of Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation, and Numeracy (ACARA, 2021). The test is designed to gather information that will measure student growth, determine national benchmarks, inform policy, and inform funding, and guide curriculum development (Howell, 2017).

Further, the information gathered is also seen to guide parents' decisions on schools by making schools' performances available on the My School website. Similar to other standardised tests, NAPLAN is based on neoliberal ideas that seek to make education a consumer product; one in which parents are able to make decisions on the best school for their children (Armstrong, 2017; Boyle & Anderson, 2020). However, there is evidence to suggest that both contribute to further segregation of the Australian school system, with more popular schools servicing high socioeconomic regions (Rowe & Lubienski, 2017). Those who have the means to choose the strongest performing schools do so, while those from disadvantaged background are not afforded the same privilege, instead being "segregated into struggling schools" (Bonnor, 2019, p. 2).

CRITICISMS OF NAPLAN

Despite being promoted as a low-stakes test, NAPLAN is anything but. Test outcomes have significant impact and importance for schools, such as guiding funding, policy development, and curriculum (Boyle & Anderson, 2020). Given the intense focus of school comparisons on the My School website, as well as the possibility of increased or decreased funding to a given school, NAPLAN has produced unintended consequences, similar to those seen in other countries which utilise such standardised tests (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). This has led to teacher frustration as they feel required to teach to the test (Hogan et al., 2017). Teachers have reported that NAPLAN takes time away from inquiry-based learning, and integrated learning in favour of specific test-based teaching (Howell, 2017). Further, the rigid timeframe of the NAPLAN limits the available instructional for students with special educational needs, meaning they are not provided with an equitable opportunity to demonstrate knowledge (Mayes & Howell, 2017). Overall, NAPLAN has contributed to a narrowing of the curriculum that continues to be inaccessible to many students with special educational needs (Dempsey & Davies, 2013; Roberts et al., 2019).

While the idea of NAPLAN may have stemmed from honourable intentions, it has been met with much ire from the outset. Since its inception, NAPLAN has been criticised for being inaccessible to students with disability, with very few accommodations being allowed (Dempsey & Davies, 2013). While much has been done to rectify this situation, due to continued restriction on modifications and accommodations, the test remains out of reach for many students (Davies et al., 2016). Given the strict protocols surrounding confidentiality, applications for modifications are required up to three months in advance (Anderson & Boyle, 2019). Further, modifications to test taking (but not content) are limited and not necessarily in line with those offered in the student's general education classroom (Davies et al., 2016). They include a small amount of extra time, extended breaks, and the use of some (but not all) of the assistive technology (NAP,

2016). This leads to a situation in which students with disability are unable to demonstrate their knowledge under testing conditions (Boyle & Anderson, 2020). As such, NAPLAN remains out of reach for a number of students with special educational needs.

With NAPLAN continuing to be inaccessible to many students, one course of action has been to remove particular students from testing. Exemption from testing is only granted for severe intellectual disabilities or for students from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) who have been in Australia for less than a year (Mayes & Howell, 2017). However, no explanation is necessary for students who are absent or withdrawn by their parent/carer on philosophical or religious grounds (Anderson & Boyle, 2019; Davies, 2012). As such, although the percentage of exemptions has remained steady—or, in some cases, decreased—the total number of students who are removed from the NAPLAN testing is increasing (ACARA, 2021). The majority of these students are from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or have some form of special educational needs (Davies et al., 2016). Further, there is evidence to suggest that in some schools, students who are deemed to have the potential to decrease school rankings are encouraged to withdraw from the test by principals (Iacono et al., 2019). While students who are exempt are considered to have scored below the national average, students who are absent or who are withdrawn are simply not counted (NAPLAN, 2021). Given that a large portion of the students who do not sit the NAPLAN test have disabilities (Davies et al. 2016), this means that the students who need representation the most are being left out of the data. Further, the trend seems to be worsening in that participation rates across Australia are in decline. Therefore, the unintended consequences of NAPLAN are retained but with fewer of the benefits.

Western Australia has not seen as precipitous decline in participation as some other states; however, a noticeable decrease still exists. According to the NAPLAN National Report (ACARA, 2021), in 2021, the participation rate for year 3 Reading was 95.7%, the same as in 2008, while the Numeracy portion was 94.0%, both above the Australian rates of 93.9% and 92.5% respectively. However, rates of participation decline as students get older, with year 9 participation for Reading and Numeracy at 93.5% and 92.0% respectively (down from 94.1% and 93.9% in 2015; ACARA, 2021). Further, the number of students studying in Western Australian schools has grown by more than 90,000 students since 2008, an increase of almost 25%, most of whom entered into the public education system (Department of Education, 2021). What this means is that the total number of students being excluded from NAPLAN has been increasing more than a simple percentage point would suggest. Given the aforementioned stakes of NAPLAN (Howellda, 2017), this means more of the most disadvantaged students are being excluded from the test that would give them a voice. Of particular concern is the suggestion that NAPLAN has produced an environment which is inherently against the inclusion of students with disability, particularly cognitive difficulties (Teather & Hillman, 2017). This could, therefore, create a scenario in which principals are

incentivised to withdraw students from NAPLAN in an effort to maintain higher results. As principals are the main drivers of inclusion within schools, this produces a clash of what schools purport to do under the Salamanca Statement and the Education Declaration and what is seen as in the best interest of the school.

<center>*PRINCIPALS AND INCLUSION*</center>

The principal of a school is consistently cited as being a key figure in regards to inclusion (Duncan & Punch, 2021; Stokes et al., 2017). This is of vital importance in Australia today as classrooms are more diverse than ever before, including students with specific learning disabilities or disabilities , students from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE), and from culturally diverse backgrounds (Anderson & Boyle, 2019). For schools to develop and foster an inclusive environment, they need strong leadership and an inherent belief in inclusion to ensure full implementation (Carter & Abawi, 2018). Research shows that principals view themselves as instructional leaders in regards to inclusion as they promote the culture of inclusion through modelling, encourage inclusive behaviour, monitor teachers' professional capabilities, and provide support where needed (Billingsley et al., 2018). Three main ways in which principals influence inclusion have been identified: Vision and implementation, developing people, and managing teaching and learning (Hoppey & McLesky, 2013; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Shogren et al., 2014).

Vision and Implementation: The vision of a school starts with strong leadership. In order for inclusion to work, it requires unwavering belief in the importance of implementation starting at the top. Principals need to adopt inclusive education as a core value and model inclusion in order to "facilitate buy in" (Billingsley et al, 2018, p. 68). This is never more pronounced than when the vision of inclusion is met with pushback from parents and teachers who do not believe in the value of inclusion or who are worried it will have a detrimental effect on the general education classroom (Shogren et al., 2015). In such instances, strong leadership is required to create an environment that meets the needs of all students (Hoppey & McLesky, 2013; Waldron et al., 2011). Further, principals are required to make unpopular decisions in order to advocate for and strive towards inclusion (Carter & Abawi, 2018; Duncan & Punch, 2021). In order for vision to become reality, schools need strong leadership that is willing to make difficult decisions in service of inclusion.

Developing People: While a strong vision of inclusion is vital to develop a culture, it is not sufficient on its own. Structural support, as well as an administrative focus, are necessary factors for inclusion (Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019). While this is not a one-person job—true inclusion requires a committee of stakeholders to create a programme, teach inclusion, guide the process, and monitor the progress (Billingsley et al., 2018)—the principal is necessary to make difficult decisions that are in the best interest

of inclusion (Carter & Abawi, 2018). For instance, creating a culture of inclusion that works together with parents in advocating for a curriculum that is accessible to all (Graham & Spandagou, 2011). Providing teachers with continued opportunities to develop inclusive practices, to develop a deeper understanding of inclusive education, to develop co-teaching techniques, and effective behavioural supports is required to make inclusion beneficial (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Shogren et al., 2015). Teachers require support in the form of continued professional development which, in turn, requires strong leadership from principals.

Managing Teaching and Learning: The final way in which principals promote inclusion is through the management of teaching and learning. Multiple studies have noted the importance of strong leadership in the form of creating access to training and resources that promote inclusion (see Duncan & Punch, 2021; Stokes et al. 2017). Principals, too, have noted the importance of providing teachers with knowledge and training around students with disability for them to be effective in their roles (Dally et al., 2019). Further, to make the curriculum accessible to all students, often some modifications to the core curriculum are required (Billingsley, 2012). To do so, principals are vital in promoting and facilitating collaboration between special and general education teachers which allows for joint planning, differentiation, and modification in order to create more accessible curricula (McLeskey et al., 2014; Shogren et al. 2015). By facilitating open dialogue between all relevant stakeholders and the continued provision of professional development, principals are at the forefront of inclusion.

While principals have the power to promote inclusion through modelling a strong vision, and promoting strong teaching practices and training, they can also influence the school culture through exclusionary practices. A full summary of these practices is beyond the scope of the current study; however, one relevant practice driven by principals that can lead to segregation is *gatekeeping*.

Gatekeeping: Gatekeeping refers to the practice of schools putting systemic obstacles in place to enrolment with the specific intent of excluding certain groups of students (Poed et al., 2020), in this case, student with disability. This exclusion can take a number of forms, such as reinforcing a lack of services for the student (Cologon, 2014), espoused low expectations for students with disability (Iacono et al., 2019)—a view that some researchers have linked to the withdrawal of a disproportionate number of students with disability from NAPLAN (Forlin et al., 2013)—and a lack of provided accommodations (Iacon et al. 2019). Principals hold the power to enact such barriers that make students with disability and their families feel unwelcomed, unwanted, or unable to access an education within that institution based on the perceived barriers (Oleinik, 2015). The RCVANEPD's Final Report (Commonwealth, 2023) found that gatekeeping practices were widespread throughout Australia, including Western Australia, with schools denying

"students with disability access to the school of their choice or informally discourage their attendance" (pg. 95). Further evidence of these practices was highlighted by Poed et al., (2020), who found that 70% of Western Australian families of a student with disability experienced at least one form of gatekeeping.

Such practices are not only harmful, but in many instances infringe on the rights of students with disability. For instance, gatekeeping in the manner mentioned above was found to violate Australia's obligation described in section 4.2 of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (DSE), which states:

(1)   The education provider must take reasonable steps to ensure that the prospective student is able to seek admission to, or apply for enrolment in, the institution on the same basis as a prospective student without a disability, and without experiencing discrimination.

(2)   The provider must ensure that, in making the decision whether or not to offer the prospective student a place in the institution, or in a particular course or program applied for by the prospective student, the prospective student is treated on the same basis as a prospective student without a disability, and without experiencing discrimination.

Further, the provider must "make a reasonable adjustment for the student [to ensure the student is able to seek admission]" (Section 4.2 (3)). However, as noted in the RCVANEPD (Commonwealth, 2023), that principals are not equipped with clear guidelines as to what constitutes reasonable adjustments, and therefore no consistent application of "reasonable adjustment" was found. This was highlighted by the Disability *Standards for Education 2005* 2020 Review (Department of Education, Skills and Employment) which proposed amendments to the standards such as improving teacher and leader training around providing support for SWD, and also providing examples of good practice for providing support for SWD. Despite violating both the rights of students with disability and the law, gatekeeping continues to be used as means to prevent students

As can be seen, while inclusion is an aspirational goal, it is not always achieved. Principals have noted that financial issues—that can lead to a lack of proper training, teacher knowledge, and resources—as a key barrier to inclusive education (Duncan et al., 2021). Considering the importance of full principal buy-in (Dickson, 2014) and the need for continued training and support for both teachers and principals (Iacono et al., 2019), a lack of financial support can be a devastating blow to the goal of inclusion. As such, it is important to get the perspective of principals on how they feel education has changed in recent years.

The current study seeks to add to the breadth of knowledge on the perceived barriers to inclusion. While teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, and the ways it can be implemented given a number of outside influences, is well documented, little research has been done on principals' attitudes ((Duncan & Punch, 2021). Given that principals are the most influential factor in regards to inclusion, this is an important area of study. As such, this study seeks to use qualitative and quantitative data to get a deeper understanding into the views of principals. Three hypotheses were developed for the quantitative survey section (for the qualitative research questions, see the Study Aims section). The first hypothesis references the study by Smith, Parr,and Muhidin (2018), that plotted NAPLAN score onto their geographic location, showing that schools in regional and remote schools scored lower on the test. The second hypothesis reference a study by Galaterou, and Antoniou (2017), that found that teachers with higher levels of inclusive education experience showed more favourable views of inclusive education. Hypothesis three, relates to data that show more students with disability are being exclude from NAPLAN (Department of Education, 2021). Hypothesis four postulates that the link between experience in inclusive education will then translate to viewing NAPLAN as a barrier to inclusion. The hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Schools in regional and rural areas will have a higher proportion of students with special educational needs than those in metropolitan and outer suburbs

H2: Principals with higher levels of experience in special and inclusive education (as measured by training and experience teaching in an inclusive classroom) will score higher on the School Principals' Attitude Toward Inclusion Scale

H3: Principals who rate the importance of inclusion higher will be more likely to identify NAPLAN and the My School website as barriers to inclusion

H4: Principals with greater levels of experience will be more likely to identify NAPLAN and the My School website as barriers to inclusion

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

DESIGN

The current study utilised a mixed-method, sequential design. A mixed-method design was chosen to enable an in-depth exploration of the relationship between principals' understanding of inclusion and inclusive education, their attitudes towards inclusion, and the barriers to inclusion as perceived by principals. Using this method allowed the researcher to add context and voice to the quantitative findings to provide a richer, more wholistic view of the research findings. The survey section of the study focused on the connection between the independent variables (see below) and the principals' attitudes towards inclusive education; while the semi-structured interview sought to explore principals' real-world experiences with regard to inclusion in their school and the barriers or facilitators to inclusion. The study was exploratory in nature, seeking to identify principals' beliefs and feelings on the topic of inclusive practices and barriers towards those practices. A synthesis of the two forms of data was undertaken to identify the key factors of both areas.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited using convenience sampling. The survey was first sent via the Western Australian Primary Principals Association (WAPPA), the Western Australian Secondary School Executive Association (WASSEA), and the Principals' Federation of Western Australia. However, this method did not prove effective and the researcher chose to email schools directly after receiving ethics approval to do so.

INSTRUMENTS

The School Principals' Attitude Toward Inclusion Education (PATIE) is a 30-question survey. Bailey (2004) attempted to create an Australian-based survey to measure the level to which principals (the cohort was Queensland principals ranging from kindergarten to high school) believed in the practice of inclusive education. It measures attitudes towards inclusion based on five identified factors: teacher workload, student behaviour, learning challenges, excluded students, and professional training (Bailey, 2004). The PATIE is comprised of four sections: demographics of school, experience in education, attitudes towards inclusion, potential barriers to inclusion. The attitudes towards inclusion section is a 24 question scale which utilises a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". A number of studies

have demonstrated the validity of the scale (Aldosari, 2024; Pedaste et al., 2021), and demonstrated its importance given the key role principals play in developing inclusive educational systems.

Measuring the reliability of a scale is an important step in research as it assesses the consistency with which the scale produces. The term reliability refers to how well a questionnaire measures the effect it intends to measure (Field, 2013). Measure of reliability found strong internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.923). Further inspection identified the four factors measured by the scale, summarised in *Table 1*. While the internal consistency of the scale was found to be high, it is also important to test the inter-item correlation. This is an important step in order to scrutinise how well each item relates to the measure (Bailey, 2004). Two items were identified as having low inter-item correlation, and were also found to not measure any of the identified factors (*teachers are adequately trained to teach students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom* & *students with disability take up too many resources*), and were, therefore, deleted.

Table 1

Factor Title	Number of Items in Factor	Items Included	Cronbach's α
Benefits of Inclusion	9	1, 4, 5, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 22	0.875
Teacher workload	6	2, 6, 10, 12, 20, 24	0.599
Exclusionary Practices	7	3, 7, 8, 13, 17, 18, 19	0.810

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Phase 2 explored the lived experiences and perceptions of Western Australian principals. This portion of the research was qualitative in nature. Creswell (2013) argued that a qualitative approach should be used when variables are not easily quantified, and when the researcher is seeking a deeper and richer understanding of an issue, or to give voice to a particular population. Given the lack of research into principals' attitudes towards inclusion (Duncan et al., 2021), principals lived experiences with inclusion is valuable information to add details to a complex situation. Given the different backgrounds and experience of each participant, their perspective will likely vary, leading to the construction of multiple realities (Creswell, 2013). Participants come from different regions in Western Australia, have different backgrounds in education and, of most importance, differing levels of experience in special education. As such, a qualitative approach was appropriate to add a holistic view to the quantitative data.

Interviews are a key component to qualitative research as they are able to provide the researcher with multiple perspectives from people with different backgrounds and lived experience to which the researcher

may, otherwise, be unfamiliar (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher conducted two online interviews using Zoom lasting between 25 and 30 minutes. The participants were contacted via email based on their openness to participate in the interviews. The questions were open-ended to encourage candour from the participants and consisted of main questions and sub-questions, which were to be developed as the interviews progressed and primary themes emerged (Creswell, 2015). Further, the responses from the first interview were analysed prior to the second interview to facilitate the development of further lines of inquiry that arose from the first interview. Prompts and follow-up questions were also utilised as a means to ensure that the researcher fully understood what the participant was saying (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data was downloaded from Qualtrics using Numbers. It was then uploaded to JASP in order to undertake in-depth analysis. The researcher firstly conducted a visual inspection of the data to determine validity. Any incomplete responses or responses missing more than 25% of responses were deleted. Text-based questions were then given numerical values to facilitate analysis. A lower score was given for negative responses, e.g., a score of 1 was allocated to "strongly disagree" while a score of 5 was given to "strongly agree". Reverse scored questions were given the inverse of this (5 indicated "strongly disagree"). A total score for attitudes for inclusion was then taken by summing the responses (a higher score indicated more positive attitudes towards inclusion). The same process was followed for experience with special education.

Next, a linear regression was run on the variables. Linear regression is used to model a relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables to understand the relationship between the variables (Field, 2013). For this test, the dependent variable was the attitudes towards inclusion while the independent variable was special education experience. Further, inspection of the residuals was conducted using a residual plot to ensure that the residuals are randomly dispersed. This is an important step as randomness indicates that the model is a good fit for the measured variables (Field, 2013). Finally, a Q-Q plot was used to determine how well the distribution applied to the particular model. The closer to the predicted normal distribution the datapoints fall, the better fit the model is (Field, 2013).

To test the relationship between geographical location and the number of students with disability, a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. ANOVA is a statistical technique that measure the means of two or more groups against a single dependent variable (Field, 2013). As the current study sought to assess the impact of geolocation, which included multiple fixed factors, against the total number of

students with disability within the school, ANOVA was an appropriate technique for this portion of the analysis. In this model, the dependent variable was percentage of students with special educational needs, while the fixed factor was the geolocation (metro, outer suburbs, rural, remote).

Finally, to investigate the relationship between attitudes towards inclusion and experience in special education, and NAPLAN as a barrier to inclusion, two independent sample t-tests were used. Independent sample t-tests are used to determine whether the means of two groups differ in relation to a single dependent variable (Field, 2013). As the grouping variable (NAPLAN) was a "yes" or "no" response, a t-test was an appropriate statistical technique for this portion of the analysis.

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

To facilitate analysis of the qualitative data, the interviews were firstly transcribed, with recordings of the interview typed out by the author. By transcribing the interviews in this way, the author was able to separate the speakers using colour coding. The author then read the interviews multiple times to gain a wholistic understanding of the topics. Following this, the author deleted superfluous or redundant information to better facilitate coding (Creswell, 2018). Following transcription, the data was segmented. The segments were based on a reading of the text that identifies particular topics being spoken about. The segments were then separated and coded (Creswell, 2018). Identified codes were based on deduction (identifying predetermined codes, such as effects of NAPLAN on inclusion) and induction (emergent themes identified from the data). Upon further re-readings of the interviews, the author then organised the codes into themes to identify the connections and deeper relationships between the codes. Themes are broader, more abstract concepts that better encapsulate the essence of the data (Creswell, 2018).. Finally, the data were compared to the quantitative results to compare validity and corroborate the principals lived experience.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 63 participants responded to the survey. Six respondents did not complete the survey, and their responses were deleted. Two multivariate outliers were also deleted, leaving a total of 55 responses. Almost 71% of respondents were women (N = 39), all of whom have been working in education for more than 15 years. The number of years participants have been a principal varied, with the majority (N = 30) having between one and 10 years of experience as principal. Respondents were relatively evenly split between metro and outer suburbs, and rural and remote, with the largest section of respondents being from rural schools (N = 23). Respondents worked mostly as primary years principals (N = 36). All respondents reported having students with special educational needs; 11 with 1-5% of students with SEN, 11 with 6-10%, three with 11-15%, nine with 16-20%, and 13 with more than 20% of students requiring special education. Six respondents had a degree in special education, although 45 of the respondents have experience with special education, the majority of which being "moderate" to "a great deal" (N = 35). Of the respondents, two were interviewed. A full summary of the interview participants is found in the results section.

EXPERIENCE WITH INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

To establish the principals' level of experience regarding inclusive education, a Total Inclusive Score was calculated. This was calculated summing the principals' responses to questions pertaining to inclusion and special education (i.e., "do you have a special education qualification; how much experience do you have teaching in an inclusive classroom), with a higher total indicating more experience with inclusion (See *Table 2*). The minimum and maximum possible scores were 4 and 25 respectively; however, actual scores ranged from 7 to 22 (M = 13.8, SD = 4.17). A majority (56.4%) scored above the midpoint score, indicating that most respondents had at least a moderate amount of experience with inclusion. A large majority (88.2%) also indicated that they had had "a moderate" to "a great deal" of experience teaching within an inclusive classroom; only one respondent responded as not having any experience.

An analysis of the frequency tables for each category showed that a slight majority of respondents (54.5%) work with students with severe special educational needs (categorised as needing one-to-one support). Almost all (97.8%) have students with at least moderate needs—requiring pull-out services. Further, slightly over half (54.5%) reported having school populations with greater than 10% of students having special education needs, while more than a quarter (25.5%) have special education populations

above 20 percent. In contrast, 35 respondents (63.6%) indicated that their school did not have a special education program.

Table 2

	Percentage of SEN students	Level of Support	Special Education Pro	Experience in Inclusive Classroom	SpEd Exp
Valid	55	55	55	55	55
Mean	3.000	5.745	1.709	3.345	13.800
Std. Deviation	1.575	2.817	0.956	1.075	4.170
Minimum	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	7.000
Maximum	5.000	9.000	3.000	5.000	22.000

PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSION

To determine the principals' attitudes towards inclusion, the sum of the 22 questions included in analysis were summed. Two multivariate outliers were found using Mahalanobis' distance and were deleted from the analysis, leaving a total of 55 valid cases (Field, 2013). The results are summarised in Table 3. The minimum and maximum possible scores were 22 and 110 respectively; however, the minimum and maximum scores were 39 and 101 respectively (M = 73.9, SD = 13.4). The use of histograms and skewedness tests indicated the responses were normally distributed. These results indicate that the majority of principals hold a positive view of inclusion, with 90 percent achieving above the midpoint score of 55.

Table 3

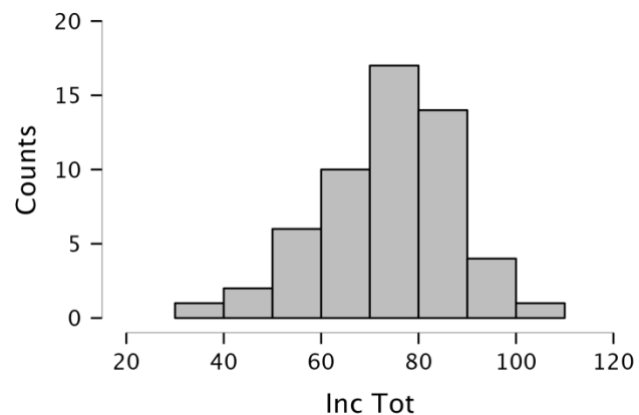|	Inclusion Total
Valid	55
Median	76.000
Mean	73.891
Std. Deviation	13.362
Minimum	39.000
Maximum	101.000

Figure 1

Analysis of the individual means and standard deviation showed which questions had the most agreement amongst the respondents. Specifically, all respondents agreed that students with mild special educational needs should be taught in the regular classroom (M = 4.6, SD = .596). Overall, questions relating to the benefits of inclusive education showed the greatest agreement. For instance, 83.9% agreed that students without special educational needs benefit from inclusion. Further, 74.5% of principals agreed that including students with disability in the general education classroom is beneficial to students, and 83.6% agreed that students with disability benefit from inclusion. In addition, 98.2% were in accordance that differentiation is the mechanism that allows for inclusion to take place. Principals also showed agreeance that teachers are not adequately trained to teach students with disability in the general education classroom, and that schools do not have adequate funding to implement effective inclusion (80% and 98.1% respectively).

Principals were more divided on the matter of excluding students with disability from the special education classroom. For instance, only 23.6% of principals believed that mainstream schools could compete with special schools in the provision of education. This jumped to 45.5% when the same question was negatively worded and spoke in exclusionary terms: "students with disability belong in special schools". Further, while all principals agreed that students with mild needs should be taught in the regular classroom, this number dropped to 81.8% for students with moderate needs. This was also reflected in the responses of two principals who stated their answers for the scale would be different depending on the severity of the disability.

Principals' responses were more varied in regard to teacher workload. For instance, some principals felt it was unfair for teachers to be expected to teach students with disability in the general education classroom. Further, 50.1% of respondents believe that students with disability cause excessive disruption to the general education classroom. This was reinforced with 52.7% of respondents stating that students with disability are often disruptive to other students. However, only 20% stated they believe that students without an identified disability will be disadvantaged by students with disability being taught in the general education classroom.

ANOVA

The Univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the relationship between the four geolocations and the percentage of students with special educational needs. The ANOVA tests whether the percentage of students with special educational needs is statistically significant in the different

geographically located schools. The dependent variable was the percentage of students with special education needs, while the fixed factor was the four geolocations (metro, outer suburbs, regional, rural). The ANOVA was statistically significant, $F(3, 51) = 3.45$, p = 0.023. The results show a significant effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.169$) of geographic location and percentage of students with disability. The results are summarised in *Table 4*. The results showed that outer suburbs and remote schools had the highest number of students with disability (M = 4 (15-20%), SD outer suburbs = 1.43, SD remote = 1.56).

Table 4

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η²
Geo Location	22.583	3	7.528	3.446	0.023	0.169
Residuals	111.417	51	2.185			

CORRELATION AND LINEAR REGRESSION

To determine if a positive correlation exists between experience with inclusive education and principals' attitudes towards inclusion, a correlational regression was run. Inspection of the residual plots—see Figure 2—showed random distribution of the residuals, indicating that the model is a good fit, demonstrating linearity (Field, 2013). It also suggests that the errors are independent of one another, suggesting no correlation amongst the residuals is present (Field, 2013). Inspection of the Q-Q plot—see Figure 3—showed that the observed distribution was similar to that of the theoretical distribution.
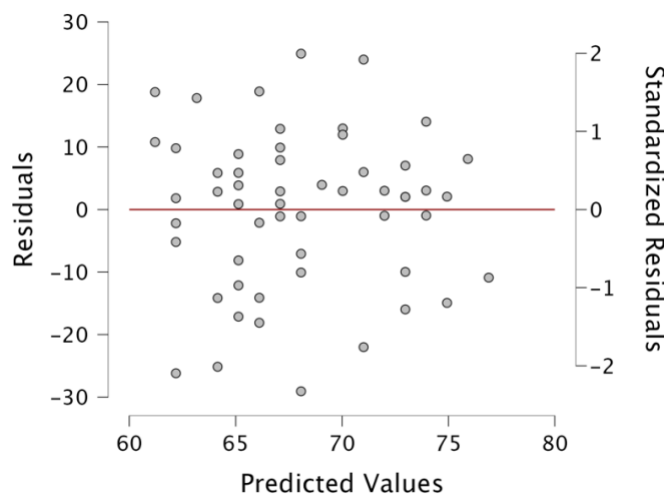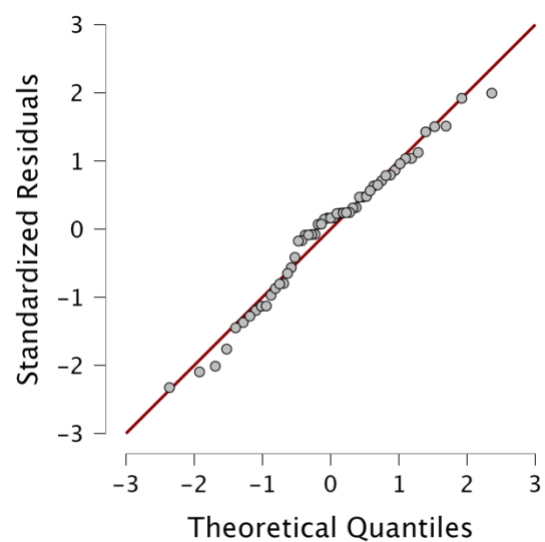
Figure 2

Figure 3

26

There was a small, significant positive correlation between experience in inclusive education and attitudes towards inclusion (r (54) = .323, p = .008). A multiple regression of special education experience (M = 14.964, SD = 4.303) and attitudes toward inclusion (M = 17.055, SD = 8.704) showed a significant positive correlation (p = 0.017). The data predict that for every additional point of inclusive education experience that a principal has, they will rate inclusion 0.980 points higher. The results are summarised in *Table 5*.

Table 5

Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
1	(Intercept)	60.231	3.603		16.715	< .001
	Special Ed Experience Z-Score	0.980	0.399	0.320	2.457	0.017

INDEPENDENT SAMPLE T-TEST

Finally, an independent sample t-test was run to test principals' perception of NAPLAN on inclusion. A t-test was run measuring the difference in attitudes towards inclusion, and in special education experience; in both models, the grouping variable was whether the principal had seen NAPLAN as a barrier to inclusion. A non-significant (p > .05) effect was found between the two groups was found with attitudes towards inclusion. There was also a non-significant (p = 0.074) in regards to special education experience (M = -1.925, SD = 1.310) between the two groups of NAPLAN. The results are summarised in *Table 6*.

Table 6

	t	df	p	Mean Difference	SE Difference	95% CI for Mean Difference		Cohen's d	SE Cohen's d
						Lower	Upper		
Inc Tot	0.178	52	0.570	0.750	4.209	-∞	7.799	0.055	0.311
Special Ed Experience	-1.470	52	0.074	-1.925	1.310	-∞	0.269	-0.456	0.315

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

INTERVIEWS

The purpose of the qualitative portion of the research was to gain a greater understanding of principals' firsthand experience with inclusive education, the perceived barriers towards inclusion, and which—if any—additional barriers NAPLAN and the My School website produced. The following research questions guided the interview process:

1. *How do Western Australian principals define inclusion?*

2. *What barrier exist to implementing effective inclusive education?*

3. *What, if any, additional barriers have NAPLAN and My School added to inclusion as perceived by Western Australian principals?*

In order to answer these questions, two principals were interviewed for an in-depth conversation of their perception of inclusive education. This section begins with an overview of the participants—their experience, background in education, school location. It then moves to the analysis of the themes that were identified through analysis of the collected data.

Both principals work in rural primary schools with small populations between 100 and 500 students. Further, both have been working in education for more than 30 years, and been a principal for more than 10 years. A summary of the participants relevant information is found in *Table 5*.

Table 5

Principal	Geolocation	Year Level	School Size	Years in Education	Years as Principal
A	**Rural**	Primary	260	32	15
B	**Rural**	Primary	180	33	11

Principal A has been in education for 32 years and has been a principal for 11 and a half year at the same school. He started in secondary education before moving to primary some 20 years ago. He has a Master's degree in Educational Leadership and is planning to do a second Master's degree in Inclusive Education. He has an interest in the practices of inclusion, particularly what are the effects of inclusive education on teachers and students without diagnosed disabilities. The school is a small rural school that caters for students with a variety of learning needs, both documented and undocumented.

Principal B has worked in education for 33 years. He has been a principal for 15 years, spanning four schools. While he has no specific training in special education, he has vast experience in running

schools with large numbers of special educational needs. For instance, the school he is principal of has roughly one quarter of its population with some form of special educational need. He also worked in an education centre within a larger school whose student population was students with disability. His current school is located in a rural area, with a large number of students who have experienced multiple school changes.

THEMES RELATING TO QUESTION ONE

The first research question examined what principals understand by the term inclusive education. Two themes emerged from this:

- Students with disability being included in as many school activities with their peers as possible
- The principal's responsibility in inclusive education

Included in activities: Both participants gave the view that what was meant by inclusion was providing students with disability the chance to be included in as many activities as possible. Principal A shared the viewpoint that "wherever possible [students with disability] are working and integrated into the normal learning that occurs in a classroom and the normal activities that occur in a classroom with whatever support we can put in place to support them." Principal B shared similar views, stating, "wherever possible, all the kids get involved in everything that they can. That's probably the most important thing." Both principals share the view that inclusion refers to not excluding students from the general education classroom while including them in as many regular activities as possible.

Principal's Role: Both principals indicated they have key roles in providing a space that is conducive to inclusion. Principal A spoke about the provision of teacher and education assistant training as vital to the process of inclusion, for example, when he said, "we're doing some work here… to try and get a collegial, cross-school approach to supporting our education assistants professional learning." Further, he felt that it was also his duty to keep abreast of best practices to provide teachers with the necessary resources to implement inclusion. Principal A also noted that principals are key to fostering an environment in which students are able to participate to the greatest extent possible. Principal B felt his biggest role as principal was to provide an environment that promotes inclusion. He proposed the way he is able to do this is "to enable the conditions so that everyone here can work as well as possible… [To ensure] the environment we

provide here is one where teachers and EAs and support staff want to be here, are allowed to use their skills and knowledge, and are not being micromanaged, are getting support and encouragement…"

THEMES RELATING TO QUESTION TWO

The second research question examined the perception of Western Australian principals as to which barriers exist in regards to implementing inclusive education. Three major themes emerged relating to question two:

- There is a lack of clarity around defining inclusion and the what is meant in regards to accommodations
- The level of work teachers are expected to undertake in order to provide reasonable accommodations for students
- Many students and families are unable or unwilling to receive diagnoses that qualify for funding

Lack of Clarity: A key theme that was borne out by the interviews was a lack of clarity around certain terms relating to inclusion, particularly "reasonable adjustment." The principals spoke about the effect a lack of clarity has on the provision of inclusion, as well as the way in which it shapes discussions between stakeholders. For instance, what parents of a particular child may view as reasonable adjustment for their child may not be viewed as reasonable by the school or principal. Principal A commented on the difficulties this can produce when he said, "But there's no proper definition of it. And often it comes down to even other legislation, reasonable accommodations, but reasonable to who? And is it reasonable to ask a classroom teacher to do it?" This lack of clarity also refers to which disabilities merit funding. As Principal B stated, "The first one is in our system, there's a certain number of categories that kids can be diagnosed in and they get an official diagnosis where we receive funding. And we've got 11. But if you count up the number of kids who are in the national consistent collection of data for disability, it's about 71."

Teacher Workload: Both principals stated that a key barrier to inclusion is the teacher workload, in particular around the number of students with disability each school was required to service. Both principals noted that the number of students requiring differentiation in each school is higher than the official number reported. Principal A noted that that teachers are often expected to provide differentiation for students with disability as well identified gifted students in addition to the regular education students. He gave an explicit example when he noted:

So a couple of years ago, in a grade five class, I had five children who had quite high diagnosed special needs, three ASD, two highly dysregulated ASD kids. Another one was quirky. And so, I only had another child who had quite serious intellectual disability. And so all that in a classroom, as well as two kids who go to PEAC, so academic extension, plus a handful of kids who are normal academically, plus the general run of the mill kids.

Principal shared similar concerns about the number of students with special needs within a given classroom. He noted that it becomes difficult for a teacher if they are expected to provide spaces to calm students, give them breaks, and teach the class without extra support within the classroom. He stated, "They need another person who can help with behaviour management, with giving kids a break, taking them to the sensory room, providing one-on-one, small group tutoring."

Difficulties in Diagnoses: Both principals spoke of the concerns related to receiving sufficient funding for the students they serve. Two main reasons were put forward. Firstly, Principal A spoke of the issues relating to students receiving a diagnosis. An inability to schedule a consultation with the necessary professionals when he said:

there is either basically trying to access a paediatrician is not possible. They either close their books or there's a greater than 12-month wait list. And so, in our system, unless there is basically a paediatric diagnosis, there is no problem. And so, it's up to the teacher in the school to meet that child's needs because that's our responsibility is whether they've met their needs, if they don't have a formal diagnosis.

Principal B echoed these concerns when he stated:

The first one is in our system, there's a certain number of categories that kids can be diagnosed in and they get an official diagnosis where we receive funding. And we've got 11. But if you count up the number of kids who are in the national consistent collection of data for disability, it's about 71. Probably 73 actually

For both principals, the outcome was the same. The schools, and individual teachers, were placed in the situation they needed to meet the needs of students without the requisite diagnosis, and the funds and resources to provide necessary accommodations.

THEMES RELATING TO QUESTION THREE

The final research question examined the link between NAPLAN and the My School Website and inclusion. The three major themes relating to question four was:

- Schools serving small, rural populations have little competition, and therefore do not feel the pressure of school rankings
- Schools in rural areas did not feel the need to exclude students based on disability or expected poorer performance
- My School can be used as a valuable tool for schools to show improvement and comparison to like schools

Lack of competition: Both principals noted the effects of being a rural school on their ability to include all students in NAPLAN. Principal A's school is located in a region with three public schools serving primary school students, while Principal B's school is the only school in his region. Ninety percent of Principal A's population is in the bottom half of income, "Ninety percent of my students fall in the lower half, the bottom two quartiles of income; while the population Principal B's falls below the median income, "And also, we're a country school where our socioeconomic index is lower than the median. So, we're at 975, and the median is 1,000." Further, parents did not have an understanding or access to resources outside those provided by the school, and therefore their choices for schooling were limited. Given the socioeconomic status of the student body, both principals felt they were able to provide inclusive education without fear of negative outcomes.

No pressure to exclude students: In the most recent NAPLAN, only one student from either school was excluded, and this was based on the request of the parents as the student has Down Syndrome. Both principals indicated that their geographical location, as well as the student body they represent, meant that there was little external pressure to exclude students based on expected low performance. For instance, Principal B stated:

> No, from my perspective, no, and most parents, in fact almost every parent says, oh yeah, that's part of it, and regardless of whether their kid has a language disorder or not, have a go, yeah.

Principal A also viewed the inclusion of all students in testing as important, stating, "[we] are very diligent in making sure that all of our children who can participate do." Both principals indicated that this is in large part due to the demographics of their students. Principal A indicated that the lack of alternative schools in the area meant that the school did not need to spend "weeks and weeks preparing" for NAPLAN and had no

reason to exclude students from the test. Principal B outlined a number of outside issues, such as familial concerns, including multiple school changes, as reasons exclusion was not necessary.

My School as a valuable tool: Again, both principals responded favourably to the use of the My School website. Principal A stated that he had used the website to defend his school's performance by using the comparison to like schools. He also stated that he had previously used the site to compare against like schools in other states; however, this feature has been removed. Principal B stated that it serves a good purpose as long as it is kept in perspective, "I like My School. I think it serves a really good purpose. No, I think as long as you keep it in balance it doesn't become the be-all and end-all, so we obviously want good NAPLAN results, but we don't spend weeks and weeks practicing and rehearsing and preparing, and it's one thing that we do in the year."

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In the past three decades, education has expanded to include students, and give those who were previously excluded the chance to attain their academic dreams. Throughout the world, almost every country has agreed through actions such as the signing of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2007) that they are committed to providing an education to all students. Australia was one such country. It continues to espouse the values of inclusion, including introducing its own internal commitment in the form of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Education Council, 2019). However, despite these commitments, Australia remains one of the most segregated education systems in the developed world (Education at a Glance, 2018), with the number of special schools increasing in the previous 10 years (Schools, 2021).

While the reasons for successful inclusion are many, one particular group is of key importance. Principals play a vital role in ensuring inclusive practices within a school (Duncan & Punch, 2021; Stokes et al., 2017). Principals are tasked with creating and modelling an inclusive environment, developing teachers through access to training, and overseeing the teaching and learning process (Billingsley et al, 2018; Duncan & Punch, 2021; Stokes et al. 2017; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019). However, principals do not work in a vacuum; they are subject to a number of outside pressures that can influence their desire or ability to engage in inclusive education (Duncan et al., 2021). As such, the purpose of the current study was to use qualitative and quantitative data to identify Western Australian principals' attitudes towards inclusive education. It did this in a number of ways. Firstly, it sought to examine the perceptions of principals in regards to the inclusion of students with disability within the general education classroom. It also wanted to determine whether a positive correlation exists between the level of experience principals have with inclusive education and their attitude towards inclusion. Further, it attempted to clarify if Western Australian principals identified NAPLAN as a barrier to inclusion. Finally, the study wanted to add breadth and depth to the study by providing qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews with Western Australian principals.

The study looked at the distribution of students with special educational needs in Western Australian schools. The Univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showed a positive correlation with the geographical location of the school and the percentage of students with special educational needs. As such, in regards to H1, the null hypothesis was rejected. The results of the current study align with previous research that shows schools in regional, often poor, areas are often required to service a disproportionate number of students with disability (Boyle & Anderson, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2018). In the current study, it was found that remote schools were most likely to have a special education population over 20 percent.

These data need to be interpretated with caution, however, given the small number of respondents from remote schools. Further, outer suburb schools had higher numbers of students with disability. This confirms research the findings of Rowe and Lubienski (2017), and Bonnor (2019) who both argued that schools in affluent areas can be more selective on admissions, while schools—generally government schools—in poorer suburbs are required to attend the needs of disproportionately high numbers of students with disability. The results of the current study are similar to previous studies which show that schools in lower socioeconomic regions have higher numbers of students with disability (Bonnor, 2019).

The findings of the current study also confirm previous research that shows schools in remote and regional areas have higher rates of students with disability (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020). These findings are of particular importance for a number of reasons. Firstly, finding qualified staff in regional areas is difficult (Patil, 2023). This was an issue expressed by Principal A when he stated, "it's hard to be picky" in reference to hiring teachers. As such, newly qualified teachers or teachers with little experience are often recruited to regional and remote schools (Kline & Lock, 2013). This creates an environment in which a large student body with identified learning needs is being taught by teachers with little experience, particularly in the area of special education. Further compounding the situation is the fact that schools in these areas are often servicing students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, whose circumstances have been identified as barriers to high-quality teaching—e.g., through lack of access to technology, low educational literacy, and poverty (Gore et al., 2021)—which were supported by the findings of the current study. Both principals interviewed were at schools in which the majority of students come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. As such, these students often have difficulty accessing available resources, or even knowing what resources are available (Smith Family, 2017). The findings of the current study again supported this, with Principal A expressing that many students with special educational needs are unable to access the relevant professionals to secure a diagnosis. As such, they remain unable to get funding to provide the school with the necessary resources. Therefore, a situation exists in which students from some of the poorest socioeconomic backgrounds are being taught by underqualified professionals in schools that lack the funding to cope with the demand.

Next, the current study predicted that experience with inclusive education would correlate positively with principals' attitudes towards inclusion. The data show that this prediction was confirmed. Few principals held a degree or diploma in special education, and less than half of the schools had a designated special education program. However, those holding a special education degree were significantly more likely to have experience teaching in an inclusive environment, increasing their overall special education experience. This supports previous research that showed that inclusive practices reduce stigma around SWD and ostracism (Krischler et al., 2019), while exclusionary practice promote the continued the sense of

otherness (Slee, 2019). The current findings also confirm previous studies that show, generally speaking, school administrators hold positive views of inclusion (Vlachou & Tsirantonaki, 2023). The findings add a different dimension to research that found teachers with a special education degree were more likely to rate the importance of inclusive education higher, reinforcing previous research that shows contact with SWD is vital to reducing stigma (Alnahdi & Schwab, 2021; Krischler et al., 2019). Interestingly, the data suggest that if principals are not confident in implementing inclusion in their school, it negatively impacts their overall perception of the value of inclusion.

Further analysis of the results, in particular exploration of the individual clusters, adds credence to this assumption. For instance, the benefits of inclusive education were seen favourably by most principals. Overall, regardless of background in special education, principals stated that inclusive education has many benefits, even for students without identified disabilities. Indeed, an understanding of the importance of inclusion by administrators has been demonstrated previously (Nguluma et al., 2017). These findings suggest that even when a principal perceives inclusive education in a negative light, it is not because they do no view it as beneficial, but rather because they believe it to be unfair on other students and staff. More credibility is given to this argument when looking at teacher workload, as responses to this cluster were much more divided. One explanation for this is that having experience in teaching in an inclusive education environment improves understanding of what is required, leaving principals more confident in teachers' abilities to teach in an inclusive environment. Indeed, the findings that principals with higher levels of special education background, including experience teaching in inclusive classrooms, were more likely to rate teacher workload more favourably support this idea. These findings support previous research by Pregot (2021) who found that the prior knowledge of special education leaves school principals feeling more confident and qualified in implementing and modelling an inclusive environment. The current findings also suggest that principals' biggest concerns align with those of teachers, who have also been found to hold high concerns surrounding the way in which inclusion can increase teacher workload (Jury et al., 2023; Warnes et al., 2021).

Principals with less experience in special education were also more likely to back exclusionary practices and believe students with disability are better suited to special schools. This is of particular interest as studies suggest that a majority of families of a student with disability have experienced gatekeeping practices to exclude their child from a school (Commonwealth, 2023; Poed et al., 2020). It is important to place these findings in the context of the literature. As mentioned previously, the RCVANEPD (Commonwealth, 2023) found that students and families had been denied or discouraged for attending the school of their choice based on a disability. Understanding this practice in the context of the principal of a school in, therefore, extremely important. If a principal believes that a student with disability will be better

served in a special school, it not only becomes morally acceptable, but also in the best interest of the student. However, this presupposes that students with disability are able to access a special school that meets the needs of their child (Boyle & Anderson, 2020). However, researchers argue that this creates a form of segregation based on location, in which schools in lower socio-economic outer suburbs receive disproportionate numbers of students with special educational needs (Rowe & Lubienski, 2017). These findings were supported in the current study which showed schools in outer suburbs were more likely to have rates of students with disability above 10 percent. This is of concern as students attending schools with high levels of disadvantaged students often have poorer academic performances (Smith Family, 2018).

The findings of the Principals' Attitudes Towards Inclusion section of the study provide valuable insight into the perceptions of inclusive education held by Western Australian principals. Given the unique position of principals in regards to inclusion, it is important to explore the reasons behind inclusion would be seen positively. Principals are vital to inclusion through vision and implementation of inclusive practices and modelling inclusive behaviours (Billingsley et al, 2018; Carter & Abawi, 2018; Duncan & Punch, 2021; Shogren et al., 2015), assisting teachers through training and professional development (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Shogren et al., 2015), and through managing teaching and learning (McLeskey et al., 2014; Shogren et al. 2015). Further, principals can be responsible for potential exclusionary practices such as gatekeeping (Poed et al., 2020). As such, understanding the mechanisms that will likely affect a principal's attitude towards including students with disability is of vital importance. As the findings suggest that a key factor in principals' likelihood of viewing inclusion in a positive way is experience in special education, this can lead training recommendations into special and inclusive education. Such a recommendation fits with the RCVANEPD (Commonwealth, 2023) findings that stated that although the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* puts forward obligations that principals are expected to meet around inclusion and accommodation, principals are not guided through the implementation process. As such, understanding around inclusion and its potential benefits are fractured and largely left to the interpretation of a single individual. These findings also suggest that providing principals with such tools can improve confidence around implementation and, therefore, increase positive perception of inclusive education. However, further research is required to confirm these findings.

Finally, the researcher predicated that the principals' level of experience in inclusion, and their attitudes towards inclusion would predict if they had perceived NAPLAN and My School as a barrier to inclusion. The data does not support this hypothesis. As each aspect of this hypothesis showed different levels of significance, they will be addressed separately. Firstly, no connection was found between attitude towards inclusion and NAPLAN and My School as barriers to inclusion. One explanation for this comes from the semi-structured interviews which suggested that schools in areas that serviced higher numbers of

students with disability experienced less competition based around My School and were, therefore, less pressured into removing students from the testing. Both principals were from rural schools serving lower socioeconomic populations with little competition for schools. As such, neither principal saw NAPLAN or My School as exclusionary tools. As the majority of respondents were from rural schools, this may explain why principals did not view NAPLAN as a barrier to inclusion. Evidence to support this claim can be found in the literature. My School is based on the assumption that all parents have the choice of which school will best serve their child (Armstrong, 2017; Boyle & Anderson, 2020). However, as was found here, school populations are segregated by geolocation, while students and families are left with no option but to frequent the school in their region (Rowe & Lubienski, 2017). Given that rural schools are more likely to serve lower socioeconomic populations, and students with disability are disproportionately from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Rowe and Lubienski, 2017), it is possible that schools in rural and regional areas, as well as the outer suburbs, place less importance than metropolitan schools on NAPLAN due to a lack of competition and it, therefore, is less of a barrier to inclusion.

Further, no significant difference was found between experience in special education and the perception of NAPLAN as a barrier to inclusion. One explanation for this is a small sample size. Given the p value of .074, a lack of power in the results could explain the lack of significant results. As such, further study into the subject with a larger sample size is required to confirm this possibility. Conversely, another explanation is that principals may not view excluding students from NAPLAN as a barrier to inclusion. Multiple principals expressed that they felt it was just to remove students from NAPLAN based on disability, while others commented that they had witnessed other principals engaging in this behaviour. These findings partially support previous research that shows students with disability are excluded on the basis of disability (Mayes & Howell, 2017), as well as findings showing that students with disability continue to face gatekeeping measures and exclusionary practices (Iacono et al., 2019; Forlin et al., 2013; Poed et al., 2020). Further evidence for these claims was provided in the semi-structured interviews. The principals expressed that there remains a lack of clarity around what is meant by inclusion. As was observed by the RCVANEPD (Commonwealth, 2023), principals are not provided with clear guidelines as to what constitutes inclusion and reasonable accommodation for students with disability and, therefore, interpretation of these terms are left to principals. However, given the borderline nature of the significance of these findings, these findings should be taking with caution. Further research is needed to support these claims.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS IN CONTEXT OF RESEARCH

Speaking with principals about their experience in inclusive educational settings provided further evidence of the commitment and dedication of education professionals to providing high-quality education to all students, even when faced with many challenges. The two principals were both very passionate when speaking about their work. It is important to note that the high number of SWD reported by Principal B could be interpreted as his school providing high-quality inclusive education, possibly providing a better option than the other schools in that region for families of SWD. Principals are in a difficult position in which they are required to balance the needs of individual students with those of the school as well as the broader stakeholders, such as parents. Although both principals were committed to inclusive education and believe in its benefits, they were also open about the difficulties they face on a daily basis in regards to the provision of high-quality education. These include training, resources, teacher workload, and buy in from families. While neither principal spoke of exclusionary practices—neither engage in gatekeeping or exclusion based on disability—both were open about their perception of the limitations of inclusive education.

Resources and training were the biggest issue faced by both principals in regards to inclusion. Both spoke of the issues and disconnect between the disability standards and the way in which funding is provided for schools. For instance, while schools are not allowed to refuse entry to a student based on disability, with gatekeeping practices being both illegal and in opposition to best practice, it is incredibly difficult and, indeed, at times impossible, to get funding for those students. As such, both principals are in a situation in which the official number of students—that is, the number of students for whom they receive funding—is substantially lower than the actual number of students with disability within their school. However, research suggests that not all students with disability necessarily require additional funding. For instance, Linda Graham (2017) highlights the fact that quality differentiation for students is an Australian standard and an expectation of teachers. In Western Australia, Standard 1.5 of the Professional Standards of Teachers in Western Australia states teachers must "differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs ofstudents across the full range of abilities" (Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia, 2011). Providing an inclusive environment that meets the needs of all students is a requirement and prerequisite for inclusion, yet both principals and those who responded to the survey identified that they felt too much was being expected of teachers to differentiate for students with disability.

Further issues reported by the principals were as to which disabilities are funded and which aren't. Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) receive funding from the Nation Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), as is Intellectual Disability (ID). However, more common disorders such as dyslexia and

ADHD are not funded despite requiring resources, time, and trained professionals. Dyslexia interventions, such as Multi-Lit, require additional funds, as well as training for the individuals tasked with providing the support. Both principals expressed further issues regarding funding due to an inability for students to access professionals or an unwillingness to access those professionals. Effectively, the two principals reported that they were expected to provide an education to a disproportionate number of students with disability without the necessary funding to do so. Further, the National Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) states that funding is distributed based on the level of support needed to accommodate students' needs for extensive, substantial or supplementary (2022). It is a possibility that many of the students the principals spoke of have needs that do not fall into areas that require funding but, rather, that can be serviced using differentiation, a practice that supports all students and is an obligation as outlined in the standards (Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia, 2011). A need to change the view that differentiation is a special, rather than general, education practice was also highlighted in the Royal Commission (2023) which stated that a barrier to inclusion were such viewpoints, arguing that "a transformation in culture, policy and practice in educational environments to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students" (p. 95) is necessary for an inclusive environment.

Another key finding was regarding teacher workload in the provision of inclusive education. Interestingly, the two principals were split on their views in regards to the extra work required by teachers in the provision of inclusive education. However, a key caveat to this finding is in the number of students with official diagnoses differed between the two schools. While, as mentioned, both were servicing more students with special educational needs than official numbers suggest, Principal B has more documented students. As such, he reported having fewer students per educational assistant. Research suggests, however that overreliance on educational assistants can be detrimental to student progress and lead to a number of concerns, such as learned dependency, stigmatisation around labelling or educational assistants only working with a subset of students, or even students with special educational needs being taught content by the least experienced adult in the room (Graham, 2015). Principal A was clear in his views that teacher workload was a clear barrier to inclusive education. Teachers in rural areas of often tasked with teaching a class of up to 30 children, many of whom have documented or undocumented learning needs. As such, the level of work expected of a teacher increases. Such concerns reflected those of classroom teachers who also reported workload as a hindrance to inclusion (Galaterou et al., 2017). It was a concern as the school wants to and believes in providing differentiation for its students, however, felt unconfident about to what extent and what can realistically be expected of the teacher in providing reasonable accommodations as outlined in the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (DSE). As mentioned above, however, the Teaching Standards of Western Australia (Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia, 2011) require

differentiation to meet the needs of all students as requirement. Again, this spoke to the bigger issue of resources. Both principals expressed they would be able to provide better levels of inclusion with more personnel and resources. The Royal Commission (2023) argued in favour of more robust teaching standards that apply a human-rights approach to teaching and learning, as well as improved professional development for teachers in regards to inclusion and teaching students with disability to resolve some of the perceived difficulties surrounding inclusion. The difference between the two was the level of success that could be produced from inclusion, with Principal A expressing that at some point, students with disability reach the limit of what they are capable of achieving and more resources would be unnecessary at this point. However, it is reasonable to argue that this is the case for all students.

In regards to NAPLAN and the My School website, neither principal saw a link between the test and exclusionary practices. Both schools are located in rural areas with little competition, and serve lower socio-economic populations. As such, neither principal felt there was an issue with having their scores posted on the My School website. Both, contrary to what was predicted, actually saw the website as beneficial. It was seen as a way to demonstrate to those who may question their results that the schools were, in fact, improving or achieving above like schools. The fact that both schools serve lower socioeconomic regions was significant to the principals as it meant the students at their school are dealing with a number of comorbidities in relation to education. Research by the Smith Family (2016) shows that these factors negatively impact school performance, which was also noted by the principals. Truancy, school changes, trauma, abuse, and disabilities were all represented higher in the schools than in the general population. A lack of understanding of the education system also meant that the schools' NAPLAN scores are not as important to outside parties. Of course, both schools want to demonstrate improvement in their literacy and numeracy rates, but did not feel the need to prepare extensively for the tests in order to inflate their scores to attract greater numbers of students for the next school year.

In sum, both principals are dedicated, passionate professionals who believe in their role of providing an education to all students but feel outside influences exist that can often make the provision of such education more difficult. A lack of teaching options in regional areas, as well as receiving adequate funding for the number of students with special educational needs, were identified as key barriers to the provision of inclusive education. Neither principal saw NAPLAN or My School as impediments to inclusion; however, given both schools geolocation and the families they serve, competition between schools was not an issue.

The current study focused on the general views of Western Australian principals on inclusive education. It provided a mixed-method view of the issue of principals' attitudes towards inclusion by providing firsthand accounts to add breadth and depth to the quantitative data collected. However, limits to the study exist that could affect the results. It is important to identify these limits to facilitate future study into the area of inclusive education in Australia. These limitations are around a) the scale used in the study, b) the sample size of the study, c) the recruitment of participants, and d) the respondents willing to participate in a semi-structured interview.

A number of principals responded that they felt the survey was inadequate and that they would change their answers depending on the severity of the disability. While the scale demonstrated internal-consistency and validity, it did not differentiate between levels of disability except for Question 5 (Students with mild special education needs should be included in the regular classroom) and Question 16 (Students with moderate special education needs should be included in the regular classroom). Given the different responses the two questions, it is possible that principals' attitudes towards inclusion will differ depending on the level of support needed.

The sample of the current study was smaller than expected (N = 55). This lowers the power of the study and increases the risk of a Type II error (false-negative). This was evident when in the findings of the link to special education experience and viewing NAPLAN as a barrier to inclusion. Given the nature of the recruiting, in which the researcher personally emailed schools for participants, and limiting the scope to only Western Australia, it was difficult to recruit a larger number of participants. This was also evident in regards to the principals willing to participate in the semi-structured interview. Principals from the metropolitan region were unwilling to participate in the study, meaning both participants were from rural areas. It had been the hope of the researcher to compare responses from regional and metropolitan principals.

IMPLICATIONS ON PRACTICE

This study explored principals' attitudes towards inclusion and if that is affected by experience in the field. Based on research into educators' views on inclusive education, the current study used a survey and interviews to develop themes around principals' attitudes towards inclusion. The themes that emerged were: a) principals' understanding of inclusive education, b) principals had generally positive attitudes towards inclusion, c) the level of experience in special education positively correlated with attitudes towards inclusion, d) funding and resource remain a key barrier to inclusion. From both the survey data as well as

the semi-structured interviews, it emerged that principals agree on the benefits of inclusion but differ in their knowledge, understanding, and expectations of implementing inclusive practices. Principals act in the best interest of their school to secure funding and resources for their students. Principals with less experience in special and inclusive education were found to be more likely to think of students with disability as a hindrance to acting in the best interest of the school, despite research not supporting this notion (Szumski et al., 2017). Therefore, the findings of this study support the view that improved training and exposure to inclusive education can improve principals' confidence in creating an environment in which teachers are trained, supported, and confident in creating inclusive classrooms.

The findings support the fact that greater focus needs to be placed on the training and implementation of inclusive education. Given that Australian schools continue to become more diverse (Anderson & Boyle, 2019), the likelihood that a given school will be expected to provide for students with disability increases. Australia has continued to make commitments to inclusion within the education system, yet the governmental support has lagged behind. As such, some principals continue to engage in gatekeeping practice in the perceived best interest of the school at large (Poed et al., 2017). However, the current findings suggest that improved training and access to resources regarding special education leads to a greater confidence in the provision of special and inclusive education. An understanding of what a differentiation for students with disability looks like can demystify some of the concerns surrounding the provision and implementation of inclusive education. Further, continued interactions with students with disability and those who have graduated from inclusive schools will help to add a human element to an otherwise abstract idea.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The researcher believes the current study was a valuable piece of knowledge that adds to the breadth and depth of the research into inclusive education and the way in which it is perceived by educators. However, as mentioned above, it was limited in its scope and, as such, has created new areas of research to be developed. With that in mind, the following are recommended areas of future research:

1) In order to determine whether the current findings generalise to principals throughout Australia, further study into principals' attitudes towards inclusive education utilising an Australian cohort of principals. In this way, it is possible to determine if state difference exist, as well as between regions and experience levels. It can also guide whether the way in which inclusion is defined influences perceptions of inclusion.

2) Given that multiple principals expressed that they would give differing answers depending on the severity of the disability, expanding the questionnaire to include different levels of severity and to understand more deeply the way in which different disabilities are viewed by principals is another area of research to expand on the current findings.

3) A further area of research is a comparative study of schools that utilise different forms of differentiation to determine which practices are most effective given a school dynamic and population of students with disability. This could act as a guide for principals who rate the benefits of inclusion highly but are concerned about the practicalities of implementation.

REFERENCES

Aldosari, M. S. (2024). Psychometric properties of principals' attitudes toward inclusive

education (PATIE) scale: Arabic version. *BMC Psychology*, *12*(1).

https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-01524-z

Alnahdi, G. H., & Schwab, S. (2021). Special Education Major or Attitudes to Predict Teachers'

Self-Efficacy for Teaching in Inclusive Education. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*.

https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.680909

Anderson, J., & Boyle, C. (2015). Inclusive education in Australia: rhetoric, reality and the road

ahead. *Support for Learning*, *30*(1), 4–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12074

Anderson, J., & Boyle, C. (2019). Looking in the mirror: reflecting on 25 years of inclusive

education in Australia. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *23*(7–8), 796–810.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1622802

Anderson, K. P. (2020). The Relationship Between Inclusion, Absenteeism, and Disciplinary

Outcomes for Students with disability. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*,

43(1), 32–59. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373720968558

Armstrong, D. (2017). Wicked problems in special and inclusive education. *Journal of Research*

in Special Educational Needs, *17*(4), 229–236. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12402

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2021). National assessment

program literacy and numeracy achievement in reading, writing, language conventions

and numeracy national report for 2021. In *2021 NAPLAN National Report*.

https://nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2021-naplan-national-

report.pdf

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Education in remote and complex environment.*

    https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/ahrc_submission_inquiry_education_remot

    e_2020_0.pdf

Bailey, J. (2004). The validation of a scale to measure school principals' attitudes toward the

    inclusion of students with disability in regular schools. *Australian Psychologist*, *39*(1),

    76–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/00050060410001660371

Barbara Boroson. (2017). Inclusive Education: Lessons from History. *Educational Leadership*,

    74(7), 18–23. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1138108

Belfield, C. R., & Levin, H. M. (2007). *The Price We Pay: Economic and Social Consequences*

    of Inadequate Education (Illustrated). Brookings Institution Press.

Billingsley, B., DeMatthews, D., Connally, K., & McLeskey, J. (2018). Leadership for Effective

    Inclusive Schools: Considerations for Preparation and Reform. *Australasian Journal of*

    Special and Inclusive Education, *42*(01), 65–81. https://doi.org/10.1017/jsi.2018.6

Bonnor, C. (2018). *Separating scholars: How Australia abandons its struggling schools*.

    Sydney: Centre for Policy Development.

Boyle, C., & Anderson, J. (2020). The justification for inclusive education in Australia.

    PROSPECTS, *49*(3–4), 203–217. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09494-x

Carter, S., & Abawi, L. A. (2018). Leadership, Inclusion, and Quality Education for All.

    Australasian Journal of Special and Inclusive Education, *42*(01), 49–64.

    https://doi.org/10.1017/jsi.2018.5

Chambers, D., & Forlin, C. (2021). An Historical Review from Exclusion to Inclusion in

    Western Australia across the Past Five Decades: What Have We Learnt? *Education*

    Sciences, *11*(3), 119. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11030119

Clough, P., & Corbett, J. (2000). *Theories of Inclusive Education: A Student's Guide*. SAGE Publications.

Considine, G., & Zappalà, G. (2002). The influence of social and economic disadvantage in the academic performance of school students in Australia. *Journal of Sociology*, *38*(2), 129–148. https://doi.org/10.1177/144078302128756543

Cologon, K. (2014). Better together: inclusive education in the early years. *Inclusive Education in the Early Years: Right From the Start*, 3–26. http://minerva.mq.edu.au:8080/vital/access/manager/Repository/mq:37115

Commonwealth Australia (2023). *Royal Commission Into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability: Final Report: Volume 4, Realising the Human Rights of People with Disability*. https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2023-09/Final%20Report%20-%20Volume%207%2C%20Inclusive%20education%2C%20employment%20and%20housing%20-%20Summary%20and%20recommendations.pdf

Cook, R. D. & Sanford, W. (1984). Residuals and Influence in Regression. *Technometrics*, *26*(4), 413. https://doi.org/10.2307/1269506

Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research (6th Edition)* (6th ed.). Pearson.

Davies, M. (2012). Accessibility to NAPLAN Assessments for Students with disability: A 'Fair Go'. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, *36*(1), 62–78. https://doi.org/10.1017/jse.2012.7

Davies, M., Elliott, S. N., & Cumming, J. (2016). Documenting support needs and adjustment gaps for students with disability: teacher practices in Australian classrooms and on

national tests. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *20*(12), 1252–1269. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2016.1159256

De Bruin, K. (2020). Does inclusion work? In L. J. Graham (Ed.), *Inclusive Education for the 21st Century* (1st ed., pp. 55–76). Allen & Unwin.

DeMatthews, D., & Mawhinney, H. (2014). Social Justice Leadership and Inclusion. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *50*(5), 844–881. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x13514440

Dempsey, I., & Davies, M. (2013). National test performance of young Australian children with additional education needs. *Australian Journal of Education*, *57*(1), 5–18.

Denniss, R. (2018). Dead right: How neoliberalism ate itself and what comes next. *Quarterly Essay*, *1*(70), 1–79. https://search-informit-com-au.ezproxy.une.edu.au

Dickson, E. (2014). Disability standards for education 2005 (cth): Sword or shield for australian students with disability? *International Journal of Law and Education*. https://eprints.qut.edu.au/78372/

Disability Standards for Education 2005. (2005).

Duncan, J. & Punch, R. (2021). Building inclusive education workforce capability: School principals' perceptions of roles and responsibilities. (2021). *Australasian Journal of Special and Inclusive Education*, *45*(1), 62–75. https://doi.org/10.1017/jsi.2021.2

Duncan, J., Punch, R., & Croce, N. (2021). Supporting Primary and Secondary Teachers to Deliver Inclusive Education Educatio. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *46*(4), 92–107. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2021v46n4.6

Education at a Glance 2018. (n.d.). Retrieved 28 October 2022, from https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2018_eag-2018-en

Education Council (Ed.). (2019). *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) education declaration* (Vol. 1).

Education Council. https://uploadstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public-assets/education-

au/melbdec/ED19-

0230%20-%20SCH%20-%20Alice%20Springs%20(Mparntwe)%20Education%20Declar

ation_ACC_proof18.pdf

Employment, A. D. O. E. S. A. (2020). *Disability Standards for Education 2005: 2020 Review :*

Final Report.

Field, A. (2013). *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics, 4th Edition* (4th ed.). SAGE

Publications Ltd.

Foley, G., & Muldoon, E. (2014, August 14). *Pyning for Indigenous rights in the Australian*

Curriculum. The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/pyning-for-indigenous-

rights-in-the-australian-curriculum-30422

Forlin, C., Chambers, D., Loreman, T., Deppeler, J. M., & Sharma, U. (2013). Inclusive

education for students with disability: A review of the best evidence in relation to theory

and practice. *The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)*.

https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-

resources/command/download_file/id/246/filename/Inclusive_education_for_students_wi

th_disability_-_A_review_of_the_best_evidence_in_relation_to_theory_and_practice.pdf

Freeman, J., & Simonsen, B. (2015). Examining the Impact of Policy and Practice Interventions

on High School Dropout and School Completion Rates. *Review of Educational Research*,

85(2), 205–248. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654314554431

Galaterou, J., & Antoniou, A. (2017). Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education: The Role of Job Stressors and Demographic Parameters. *International Journal of Special Education*, *32*(4), 643–658. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1184123.pdf

Gore, J., Jaremus, F., & Miller, A. (2021). Do disadvantaged schools have poorer teachers? Rethinking assumptions about the relationship between teaching quality and school-level advantage. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *49*(4), 635–656. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00460-w

Govorova, E., Benítez, I., & Muñiz, J. (2020). How Schools Affect Student Well-Being: A Cross-Cultural Approach in 35 OECD Countries. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00431

Graham, L. (2019). *Inclusive Education for the 21st Century: Theory, policy and practice* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Graham, L. J. (2015). *The way schools cope with learning difficulties is doing more harm than good*. The Conversation. Retrieved October 30, 2023, from https://theconversation.com/the-way-schools-cope-with-learning-difficulties-is-doing-more-harm-than-good-36544

Graham, L. J. (2017). *Not all students with a disability need funding*. The Conversation. Retrieved October 30, 2023, from https://theconversation.com/not-all-students-with-a-disability-need-funding-78520

Graham, L. J., & Spandagou, I. (2011). From vision to reality: views of primary school principals on inclusive education in New South Wales, Australia. *Disability &Amp; Society*, *26*(2), 223–237. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2011.544062

Group, E. C. S. P. (2021). *Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability: 2022 Guidelines*.

Hogan, A., Thompson, G., Sellar, S., & Lingard, B. (2017). Teachers' and school leaders' perceptions of commercialisation in Australian public schools. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *45*(2), 141–160. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-017-0246-7

Hoppey, D., & McLeskey, J. (2010). A Case Study of Principal Leadership in an Effective Inclusive School. *The Journal of Special Education*, *46*(4), 245–256. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466910390507

Iacono, T., Keeffe, M., Kenny, A., & McKinstry, C. (2019). A Document Review of Exclusionary Practices in the Context of Australian School Education Policy. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, *16*(4), 264–272. https://doi.org/10.1111/jppi.12290

Jagose, A., Wallace, L., & Rawlings, V. (2019, February 15). *Pages and prejudice: how queer texts could fight homophobia in Australian schools*. The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/pages-and-prejudice-how-queer-texts-could-fight-homophobia-in-australian-schools-111437

Jury, M., Laurence, A., Cèbe, S., & Desombre, C. (2023). Teachers' concerns about inclusive education and the links with teachers' attitudes. *Frontiers in Education*, *7*. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.1065919

Kim, J. M. (2019). Multicollinearity and misleading statistical results. *Korean Journal of Anesthesiology*, *72*(6), 558–569. https://doi.org/10.4097/kja.19087

Kline, J., White, S., & Lock, G. (2013). The Rural Practicum: Preparing a quality teacher

workforce for rural and regional Australia. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*,

28(3), 1–13. https://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30050747/kline-ruralpracticum-2013.pdf

Krischler, M., Powell, J. J. W., & Pit-Ten Cate, I. M. (2019). What is meant by inclusion? On the

effects of different definitions on attitudes toward inclusive education. *European Journal*

of Special Needs Education, *34*(5), 632–648.

https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2019.1580837

Little, R. J. A. (1988). A Test of Missing Completely at Random for Multivariate Data with

Missing Values. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, *83*(404), 1198–1202.

https://doi.org/10.1080/01621459.1988.10478722

Mayes, E., & Howell, A. (2017). The (hidden) injuries of NAPLAN: two standardised test events

and the making of 'at risk' student subjects. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*,

22(10), 1108–1123. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1415383

McLeskey, J., Waldron, N. L., & Redd, L. (2012). A Case Study of a Highly Effective, Inclusive

Elementary School. *The Journal of Special Education*, *48*(1), 59–70.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466912440455

Nguluma, H. F., Bayrakcı, M., & Titrek, O. (2017). School administrators' attitudes toward

inclusion of children with disabilities in the general education classrooms. *International*

Journal of Lifelong Learning and Leadership, *3*(2).

https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/551088

Oleinik, A. N. (2015). *The invisible hand of power: An Economic Theory of Gate Keeping*.

Routledge.

Patil, R. (2023). Rethinking Teacher Retention Policy: Empowering Australian teachers through autonomy, collaboration and career progression. *The International Journal of Community and Social Development*, *5*(3), 306–323. https://doi.org/10.1177/25166026231198300

Pedaste, M., Leijen, Ä., Kivirand, T., Nelis, P., & Malva, L. (2021). School leaders' vision is the strongest predictor of their attitudes towards inclusive education practice. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1994661

Poed, S., Cologon, K., & Jackson, R. (2020). Gatekeeping and restrictive practices by Australian mainstream schools: results of a national survey. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *26*(8), 766–779. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1726512

Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2009). *Globalizing Education Policy* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Roberts, P., Barblett, L., & Robinson, K. (2019). Early years teachers' perspectives on the effects of NAPLAN on stakeholder wellbeing and the impact on early years pedagogy and curriculum. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *44*(3), 309–320. https://doi.org/10.1177/1836939119855562

Rowe, E. E., & Lubienski, C. (2016). Shopping for schools or shopping for peers: public schools and catchment area segregation. *Journal of Education Policy*, *32*(3), 340–356. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2016.1263363

Schools, 2018. (2019, March 8). Australian Bureau of Statistics. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/2018

Schools, 2021. (2022, February 23). Australian Bureau of Statistics. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release

Shifrer, D., Muller, C., & Callahan, R. (2011). Disproportionality and Learning Disabilities: Parsing Apart Race, Socioeconomic Status, and Language. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *44*(3), 246–257. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219410374236

Shogren, K. A., Gross, J. M. S., Forber-Pratt, A. J., Francis, G. L., Satter, A. L., Blue-Banning, M., & Hill, C. (2015). The Perspectives of Students With and Without Disabilities on Inclusive Schools. *Research and Practice for Persons With Severe Disabilities*, *40*(4), 243–260. https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796915583493

Slee, R. (2019). Belonging in an age of exclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *23*(9), 909–922. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1602366

Smith, C., Parr, N., & Muhidin, S. (2018). Mapping schools' NAPLAN results: a spatial inequality of school outcomes in Australia. *Geographical Research*, *57*(2), 133–150. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12317

Smith Family (2016). *Improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged young Australians: Learning for Life Program*. https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/-/media/files/research/reports/research-disadvantaged-young-australians-learning-for-life.pdf

Smith Family. (2017). Review into regional, remote and rural education. *The Smith Family*. https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/-/media/files/research/policy-submissions/review-of-regional-rural-and-remote-education-submission-aug-2017.pdf

Szumski, G., Smogorzewska, J., & Karwowski, M. (2017). Academic achievement of students without special educational needs in inclusive classrooms: A meta-analysis. *Educational Research Review*, *21*, 33–54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2017.02.004

Stokes, M. A., Thomson, M., Macmillan, C. M., Pecora, L., Dymond, S. R., & Donaldson, E.

    (2016). Principals' and Teachers' Reports of Successful Teaching Strategies With

    Children With High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Canadian Journal of School*

    Psychology, *32*(3–4), 192–208. https://doi.org/10.1177/0829573516672969

Sullivan, K., McConney, A., & Perry, L. B. (2018). A Comparison of Rural Educational

    Disadvantage in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand Using OECD's PISA. *SAGE Open*,

    8(4), 215824401880579. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018805791

Teacher Registration Act 2012 (WA).

    https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/prod/filestore.nsf/FileURL/mrdoc_46328.p

    df/$FILE/Teacher%20Registration%20Act%202012%20-%20%5B00-i0-

    00%5D.pdf?OpenElement

Teather, S., & Hillman, W. (2017). The invisible students with disability in the Australian

    education system. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, *36*(6),

    551–565. https://doi.org/10.1108/edi-02-2017-0029

The Smith Family. (2016). *Improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged young*

    Australians: The Learning for Life program. https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/-

    /media/files/research/reports/research-disadvantaged-young-australians-learning-for-

    life.pdf

UNESCO (Ed.). (1994). *The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs*

    education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427

United Nations. (2004). *Convention on the rights of people with disabilities*.

UN Report on Australia's Review of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

    (2019). In *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disability*. Retrieved

August 4, 2023, from https://www.afdo.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/UN-Outcomes-Report-on-Australia.pdf

Vlachou, A., & Tsirantonaki, S. S. (2023). The Importance of School Principals' Values towards the Inclusive Education of Disabled Students: Associations between Their Values and Knowledge, Beliefs, Attitudes and Practices. *Education Sciences*, *13*(4), 360. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13040360

Warnes, E., Done, E. J., & Knowler, H. (2021). Mainstream teachers' concerns about inclusive education for children with special educational needs and disability in England under pre-pandemic conditions. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, *22*(1), 31–43. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12525

Willig, C., & Rogers, W. S. (2017). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology*. Sage Publishing.

Woodcock, S., & Woolfson, L. M. (2019). Are leaders leading the way with inclusion? Teachers' perceptions of systemic support and barriers towards inclusion. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *93*, 232–242. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2018.11.004

APPENDIX A: INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

To whom it may concern,

My name is Brody Fulton. I am a graduate student at Flinders University. I am currently completing a Masters' Degree in Inclusive Education. As part of my studies, I am completing a dissertation in the same field. My research seeks to identify the perceived barriers that principals experience in regards to inclusive education.

To help in this research, I would like to invite principals to participate in one or both of the following: completion of the Principals' Attitudes Towards Inclusion survey or a 30-minute interview. The timing of the interview would be decided based on mutually appropriate times. Any information collected, either through the questionnaire or interview, will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Further, all responses to the questionnaire are confidential and do not ask for any personal information or information that may be identifiable. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality and anonymity for interview participants and any identifiable details will not be reproduced in any form as part of the resulting dissertation, any reports or other publications. *Participation is voluntary and any interview participant is entirely free to request their response not be used if they decide they do not want to continue following the interview.*

If you wish to participate in a semi-structured interview, please respond to Brody Fulton at fult0033@flinders.edu.au and I will provide you with an information sheet and consent form in order to continue.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,
Brody Fulton

APPENDIX B: FORMS

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Investigating the Relationship Between NAPLAN and Inclusion

Chief Investigator
Mr. Brody Fulton
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work
Flinders University
Tel: 0414 636 754 `

Supervisor
Dr Peter Walker
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work
Flinders University
Tel: +61 8 82015562

My name is Brody Fulton and I am a Flinders University Masters student. I am undertaking this research as part of my degree. For further information, you are more than welcome to contact my supervisor. His details are listed above.

Researcher's Introduction
Brody Fulton has worked in Inclusive Education for the past four years. In this time, he has been part of a team that was tasked with creating an inclusive special education program within his school. Inclusive education is a passion of Brody's and he seeks to understand it more fully by undertaking the current research.

Description of Study
The current study seeks to add to the breadth of knowledge surrounding inclusive education by answering the following questions: a) What are Wester Australian principals' perceptions on student demographic changes since 2011? and b) What, if any, additional barriers have NAPLAN and My School added to inclusion as perceived by Western Australian principals?

Rationale

The current study aims to identify perceived barriers to inclusive education faced by Western Australian principals and to determine if a relationship exists between the inception of NAPLAN and added barriers to inclusion.

Study Outline

The study will be completed in two phases: the first will be an anonymous questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of four (4) sections that seek to identify principals' attitudes towards inclusion, as well as any barriers faced by principals in reference to inclusion. Further, any principal willing to participate in a semi-structured interview will be asked to answer questions relating to inclusion. Each interview will be roughly 30-minutes long. Following the interviews, the interview will be transcribed. A copy of the transcription will be provided to the participant prior to analysis to ensure it is an accurate representation of the principal's views and to allow an opportunity to make any adjustments. Participation is completely voluntary and participants can choose to terminate the process at any stage if they decide they do not want their information used.

Study Benefits

Despite Australia committing to inclusive education, there remain many barriers to practice. By identifying the perceived barriers faced by principals in regards to inclusion, it will elucidate the path forward to Western Australia becoming a truly inclusive educational system and to achieve the commitment set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

Privacy

No identifiable markers (name, sector, etc.) are requested in the questionnaire. Further, any identifiable markers gathered during the interview will be removed prior to publication. Only the lead researcher and his supervisor will have access to the raw data. All necessary precautions will be taken in order to maintain confidentiality and ensure privacy.

Potential Harm

As no personal information is being requested, the investigator believes the potential risk of harm is negligible. However, when dealing with human participants, there always remains a slight risk. As such, the researcher will take all precautions to minimise these risks. The participants are also free to terminate the interview at any point if they experience any discomfort and/or harm. Following the interview, participants may contact the researcher to discuss any issues that arose after the completion of the interview.

How Will I Contact You?

The final section of the questionnaire is titled *Semi-Structured Interview*. If you wish to participate in the interview, please answer 'yes' in the section: Do you wish to participate in a semi-structured interview on the topic of Inclusive Education? If you respond 'yes', you will be asked to leave your name and a contact email address. The lead researcher will then enter into contact with you to schedule the interview.

The interview will take about 30 minutes and participation is entirely voluntary.

The researchers do not expect the questions to cause any harm or discomfort to you. However, if you experience feelings of distress as a result of participation in this study, please let the research team know immediately. You can also contact the following services for support:

- Lifeline – 13 11 14, www.lifeline.org.au
- Beyond Blue – 1300 22 4636, www.beyondblue.org.au

Withdrawal Rights

You may decline to take part in this research study. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you may, withdraw at any time without providing an explanation. To withdraw, please contact the Chief Investigator or you may just refuse to answer any questions / close the internet browser and leave the online survey / leave Focus Group discussions / not participate in exercises at any time. Any data collected up to the point of your withdrawal will be securely destroyed.

Data recorded during focus group discussions may not be able to be destroyed. However, the data will not be used in this research study without your explicit consent.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Only researchers listed on this form have access to the individual information provided by you. Privacy and confidentiality will be assured at all times. The research outcomes may be presented at conferences, written up for publication or used for other research purposes as described in this information form. However, the privacy and confidentiality of individuals will be protected at all times. You will not be named, and your individual information will not be identifiable in any research products without your explicit consent.

No data, including identifiable, non-identifiable and de-identified datasets, will be shared or used in future research projects without your explicit consent.

Data Storage
Data Storage

The information collected may be stored securely on a password protected computer and/or Flinders University server throughout the study. Any identifiable data will be de-identified for data storage purposes unless indicated otherwise. All data will be securely transferred to and stored at Flinders University for at least 12 months after the completion of the project. Following the required data storage period, all data will be securely destroyed according to university protocols.

How will I receive feedback?

On project completion, a short summary of the outcomes will be provided to all participants via email or published on Flinders University's website.

Ethics Committee Approval

The project has been approved by Flinders University's Human Research Ethics Committee 5534.

Queries and Concerns

Queries or concerns regarding the research can be directed to the research team. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Flinders University's Research Ethics & Compliance Office team via telephone 08 8201 2543 or email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet which is yours to keep. If you accept our invitation to be involved, please sign the enclosed Consent Form.

Kind regards,
Brody Fulton

CONSENT FORM

Consent Statement

☐   I have read and understood the information about the research, and I understand I am being asked to provide informed consent to participate in this research study. I understand that I can contact the research team if I have further questions about this research study.

☐   I am not aware of any condition that would prevent my participation, and I agree to participate in this project.

☐   I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study.

☐   I understand that I can contact Flinders University's Research Ethics & Compliance Office if I have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this study.

☐   I understand that my involvement is confidential, and that the information collected may be published. I understand that I will not be identified in any research products.

☐   I understand that the data collected in this research will be held for at least 12 months after the completion of the project

I further consent to (choose as many options as required; completing the questionnaire does not necessitate participating in a semi-structured interview):

☐   completing a questionnaire
☐   participating in an interview
☐   having my information audio recorded

Signed:

Name:

Date:

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION

I, ………………………………………………………., being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate in the requested interview for the research listed above.

1. I have read the information sheet provided.
2. Details of the procedures and any risks have been outlined and explained satisfactorily
3. I agree to have the interview recorded for transcription
4. I understand that I should keep a copy of the Information Sheet and the Consent Form for future reference
5. I understand:
    - Participation in the proposed research is entirely voluntary; I am free to withdraw at any time, including after the interview is conducted
    - My participation will remain confidential, with any identifying markers being removed before publication
    - I may ask the recording to be stopped at any time, and ask for the interview to be terminated at any point
    - No one will have access to the raw data gathered in this research other than the researchers, unless I grant consent
    - I may not benefit directly from this research

Participant's signature………………………………………Date…………………...

I, Brody Fulton, declare that I have explained the aforementioned information to the participant and he/she has agreed to participate.

Researcher's name: Brody Fulton

Researcher's signature………………………………………...Date…………………….

6. I, …………………………………….., have been provided with a copy of the transcript of my interview and agree to its use by the researcher.

Participant's signature…………………………………….…………Date…………………...

APPENDIX D: PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSION QUESTIONNAIRE

Attitudes Towards Inclusion

School Demographics

1. Which option best describes your school's geolocation?

   Mark only one oval.

   ( ) Metro

   ( ) Outer suburbs

   ( ) Rural

   ( ) Remote

2. Which option best describes the students your school serves?

   Mark only one oval.

   ( ) Early childhood

   ( ) Primary years

   ( ) High school

   ( ) Primary and High school

   ( ) K-12

3. Which option best describes the size of your school

   Mark only one oval.

   ( ) 0-100 students

   ( ) 100-500 student

   ( ) 500-750 students

   ( ) More than 1000 students

55

4. Roughly what percentage of your school requires special education support?

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ No students require special education support

    ◯ 1-5% of students require special education support

    ◯ 5-10% of students require special education support

    ◯ 10-15% of students require special education support

    ◯ 15-20% of students require special education support

    ◯ More than 20% of students require special education support

5. What level of support do these students require?

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Mild (minimal support, in class support only)

    ◯ Moderate (in class, differentiation, pull-out services, etc)

    ◯ Severe (modifications, one-to-one shadow, etc.)

    Educational Background

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been working in education

    _____

7. Please indicate the number of years you have been principal

    _____

8. Gender

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female
- ◯ Prefer not to say

9. During your tenure as principal, have you had a situation where you have had one or more students with disability?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Unsure

10. Do you have a Special Education program at your school?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

11. If yes, how many Special Education teachers does your school employ?

_____

12. Do you have a Special Education qualification (degree, grad dip, grad certificate, etc.)?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

13. Have you had experience teaching an inclusive classroom with students with special educational needs?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure

14. In your opinion, what are the benefits of inclusive education?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

15. In your opinion, what are the negatives of inclusive education?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Attitude Towards Inclusion

16. Students with special educational needs should be taught in the general education classroom

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

68

17. Including students in the general education classroom causes few disruptions

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

18. Special education schools are better resourced and should therefore teach students with special education needs

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

19. Regular students benefit from inclusive education

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

20. Students with mild special education needs should be included in the regular classroom

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

69

21. Students with special education needs take up too much of the teacher's time

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

22. Inclusive education should be promoted no matter parents' opinions

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

23. Students with special educational needs belong in special schools where their needs can be met

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

24. Inclusive education is beneficial for all students

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

70

25.   Students with special needs are often disruptive to the other students' learning

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

26.   Students with special needs taught in mainstream classrooms do better than those taught in special schools

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

27.   Regular students will be disadvantaged by having students with special needs in their class

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

28.   Students with behavioural issues should not be taught in the mainstream classroom

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

29. Including students with special needs in the mainstream classroom is beneficial to students

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

30. Students with disabilities benefit from being included

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

31. Students with moderate disabilities should be included in the mainstream classroom

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

32. It is unfair for teachers to have to teach students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

72

33. Differentiated classrooms are essential for schools to support all students' needs

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

34. Students with disabilities belong in the mainstream classroom

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

35. Having students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom is detrimental to regular students

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

36. Students with disabilities take up too many resources

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

73

37. Teachers are adequately trained to teach students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

38. Schools have enough funding to adequately accommodate all students needs

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

39. I feel supported in providing an inclusive environment

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

Barriers to Inclusion

40. What, if any, do you believe are barriers to providing an inclusive educational environment?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

74

41.   Have you seen a connection between the introduction of NAPLAN and the My
       School website and inclusion? If so, what?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

42.   Any other comments

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

75

APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been in education?

2. How many years have been a principal?

3. Do you have a background in special/inclusive education? If so, what?

4. What do you understand by the term *Inclusive Education?*

5. What, if any, barriers do you believe there are to inclusion?

6. Have you seen a connection between the introduction of NAPLAN and the My School website and inclusion? If so, what?