ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

An exploratory inquiry into inclusive practices built on experiences of practitioners in the Further Education and Training Sector: with a specific focus on disability

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the MEd in Adult Community and Further Education (MED)

Department of Adult and Community Education

Maynooth University

2019

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DECLARATION

This thesis is submitted in part-fulfilment of the requirements of the MEd in Adult and Community Education of the National University of Ireland Maynooth and has not been submitted for any academic assessment to any other university. I confirm that this thesis is my own work. Assistance received has been acknowledged. Permission is given to the National University of Ireland to lend this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This study is an exploratory inquiry into Inclusive Practices built on the experiences of practitioners in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector. It is primarily focused on issues that arise when students present with a disability. The rational for the study is to observe the implementation of inclusive education and practices from the perspective of adult educators in Further Education and Training (FET) sector with the aim of making recommendation to the Adult Education Service (AES) where I am employed as a Literacy Tutor.

In this study, literature on inclusive education and issues for students with disabilities are reviewed. The study focuses on the challenges to inclusive education for students with disabilities from the perspective of adult educators working in a further education and training colleges, under the remit of Dublin City Education and Training Boards (CDETB). The research is conducted through qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews. The responses to the questions lay the foundation for data analysis. Themes have been extracted based on the experiences and opinions of the participants.

The research presents key findings which need to be addressed if further education is to be made more accessible to students with disabilities in the future. Issues that were identified include funding, continuous professional development, as well as the challenges that are faced by students with disabilities. For example, being able to complete a programme of study over a two-year period as opposed to having to complete it in one year. The shift in adult education to a neo-liberal approach and the professionalism of FET sector were also raised.

The neoliberal agenda has altered the course of the sector towards supporting the requirements of the economy rather than the needs of the learner (Grummell in Murray 2014, p. 127). Adult education no longer has a person-centred approach. FET colleges use an outcome-based approach with a focus on employability. This study demonstrates how an outcome-based focus is affecting programme delivery from the perspective of practitioners in a Post Leaving Certificate college. Deconstructing the socially constructed interpretations of students with disabilities and their ability to participate in courses provided by FET is highlighted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and deep appreciation to my supervisor Dr Bríd Connolly for all her support and guidance, and for keeping me motivated throughout the process of producing this Master's dissertation.

I wish to thank Dr Michael Murray and Dr Fergal Finnegan for inspiring me to open my mind to new learning experiences. Their passion and enthusiasm for their subjects were profound and made my learning experience as an adult student really enjoyable.

I would sincerely like to thank the practitioners for taking part in this study, they enthusiastically gave of their time and voiced with authenticity and integrity their knowledge and experience of the Further Education and Training sector. Their interest in the project is much appreciated. I am indebted to one of the interviewee's for providing the title to this dissertation, '*One Size Does Not Fit All'*. This statement encapsulates how students with a disability ought to be regarded when accessing education.

A special word of thanks to my dear friend Priscilla for always being so supportive and for encouraging me to be the best that I can be. Your faith in my ability empowered me to retain my commitment to completing this thesis.

Very special thanks to my husband Colin, and my daughters Tori, Amber and Ella without you and your continued support, this thesis would never have been written. Your love, support and encouragement were invaluable to me. You had confidence in me when I was losing confidence in myself.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

AES — Adult Education Service

AHEAD — Association for Higher Education Access and Disability

ALS — Adult Literacy Service

CSO — Central Statistics Office

DAI — Dyslexia Association of Ireland

DES — Department of Education and Skills

ETB — Education Training Board

ETBI — Education Training Board Ireland

FET — Further Education & Education

FSD — Fund for Students with Disabilities

HEA — Higher Education Authority

PLC — Post Leaving Certificate

QQI — Quality and Qualifications Ireland

SLD — Specific Learning Difficulty

SOLAS   Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanunaigh Agus Scileanna

TLC   Teaching & Learning Centre

UDL   Universal Design for learning

VEC   Vocational Education Committee

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

This study is an exploratory inquiry into inclusive practices built on the experiences of practitioners in the Further Education and Training sector, with a specific focus on disability.

The research is approached from a social constructivist perspective. Using a social constructivist methodological approach sees 'knowledge which creates as well as describes the world' (Banister, Barman and Taylor 1994, p.9). When I began this project my own experience and knowledge of disability was quite limited. I was interested in exploring the issues surrounding disability and inclusive education. By examining the operating of inclusive practices in a particular location, I hope to be able to gain knowledge in how best to implement inclusive practices to provide support for students with disabilities that present to the Adult Education Service where I am employed as a Literacy Tutor.

1.2   Context of the Research

I am employed as a tutor in the Adult Education Service (AES) formerly known as the Adult Literacy Service (ALS), which is under the remit of City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB). The AES provides a variety of educational programmes for adults at levels one to four on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The service shares a campus with a Post Leaving Cert (PLC) college. The college provides rooms to the AES on a permanent bases and the AES offers additional support services to PLC students who need extra literacy support.

I became interested in the area of disability whilst working with a specific ITABE (Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education) group. The ITABE project is available to all the sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs) throughout Ireland. The CDETB describes ITABE as; a model of tuition in adult literacy and basic education for adults who are educationally disadvantaged (City of Dublin Education and Training Board 2019). The aim of the programme is to provide participants, in groups of six to eight students, with an opportunity to have six hours tuition per week over a fourteen-week period of time.

The group I teach have basic reading and writing skills but they have progressed from Level Two to Level Three on the NFQ. One of the mandatory modules at Level Three is a Communications module. This module requires the student to produce ten pieces of writing and the students find this difficult. Some of them may have had an undiagnosed learning disability; I questioned why it is necessary for them to write? Could they not use another method of assessment? These students were intelligent people; they had other abilities such as technology skills and verbal ability. Why did they have to communicate through pen and paper when it was quite obvious that this made them feel uncomfortable?

1.3   Background leading to the Research

These questions prompted me to query equality for students with a disability in adult education. As my own experience and knowledge of disability was quite limited. I undertook a course in Assistive Technology in Enable Ireland which taught me how to use technology as an alternative educational tool. The course made me realise that there is a variety of ways to learn other than the traditional way of reading and writing.

I also realised that in the AES other than the provisional core annual budget, there was no funding structure that could be used to buy additional technology. This core budget is used primarily to pay tutors and to cover running costs. Another anomaly that became apparent was that the AES only offered courses on a part-time basis which meant that students with a disability could not avail of funding for additional resources. These additional resources are available to students in the PLC College because they were enrolled on full time courses.

It was at that point that I really began to question the principle of equality in education. If students have an equal entitlement to education how is it possible that students with a disability on one type of programme were entitled to additional support and funding while students with a similar disability on another programme were not so entitled. Student progression is being hampered by their inability to comply with obligatory accreditation requirements due to their disability. As a practitioner, I found this procedure disheartening and I believe the system needs to change in order to facilitate all learners.

1.4   The development of the Research Question

As I became very aware of the process of inclusive education and practices, I began to ask the practitioners in the PLC college questions about inclusive education and how they implemented inclusive practices. There is no Disability Officer in this college, in the interim an Assistant Principal (A Post) manages the admissions process and monitors the implementation of inclusive resources for students with a disability that present to the college.

The duties of an A Post holder varies from situation to situation the DES state:

> 'Assistant Principals occupy positions of strategic importance in the leadership, management and administration of the school. In line with the principles of distributed leadership, Assistant Principals work in teams in collaboration with the Principal and/or Deputy Principal and have shared responsibility, commensurate with the level of the post'
>
> (Circular Letter 0003/2018 p.7)

After a discussion with the A Post holder in the college and with the permission from the principal of the college, I decided it would be beneficial to conduct the research in the Post Leaving Certificate college. The college appeared to have a very effective system in place. I wanted to explore the operating of inclusive practices in the college and relate my research findings to the AES as a vision for change.

1.5   Teaching and Learning Centre

Although the college offers support to all students, there are specific rooms in the college that are known as the "Teaching and Learning Centre". These rooms are known in the college as "TLC". The TLC was developed by a team of devoted practitioners, who are committed to promoting inclusive education in this college. The TLC offers study support from the practitioners and provides a safe space for students. Students who attend FET come from a variety of backgrounds with different life experiences. They may be early school leavers, single parents, unemployed, carers or they may have a disability (Brine and Walker 2006).

The A Post holder manages the TLC, preparing the timetables for the practitioners and organising resources and materials for students. There are practitioners in the room at designated times on specific days. The students can avail of one-one tuition as well as support in relation to any issues they may have. The practitioners did not see this service as a remedial education rather it was a way

to promotes holistic education. The name of the support room has changed over the years and the importance of having the correct name was acknowledged as a very important factor for introducing inclusive education. *Respondent 8* in the research explained the importance of the name TLC *"the political names keep changing it had almost a resource name at one stage. I didn't like the name. Students have had resource or Special Needs Assistants in secondary school they see this as a chance not to have it…it is a chance to spread their wings and fly".*

Initially, I wanted to conduct my research exclusively with the practitioners in the TLC. However, one of the practitioners in the TLC recommended that I involve practitioners that were not part of TLC, as their opinion and contribution were important too. She highlighted that the support offered to learners did not start and end in the TLC but rather inclusivity was an approach embraced by all in the college and she felt it was necessary that their voices be heard too. I took her advice and invited other practitioners to participate in the research. The research participants all teach a variety of modules on the different courses that are offered in the college. Each practitioner teaches different modules on the various courses. From interacting with the practitioners in the research my research inquiry emerged early in the research process.

1.6   Adult education: *Learning for Life* - The White Paper 2000

Learning for Life, The White Paper on Adult Education, was published in July 2000. This White Paper underpinned three core principles:

> (a) Equality of access, participation and outcome for participants in adult education, with pro-active strategies to counteract barriers arising from differences of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and disability,

> (b) Lifelong Learning as a systematic approach which recognises that the interfaces between the different levels of educational provision, and

> (c) Inter-culturalism the need to frame educational policy and practice in the context of serving a diverse population as opposed to a uniform one (*The White Paper,* 2000, p.3)

The White Paper outlines 'a commitment to a lifelong learning agenda as a relatively seamless progression through an educational continuum from the cradle to the grave' (*Department of Education and Science*, 2000, p.30). Connolly (cities in Murray 2014, p.61) 'the *Learning for Life*

was the first White Paper on Adult Education making the adaptation to of lifelong learning as a governing principle of educational policy'.

The White Paper advocated a national programme of adult education as part of its overall framework of lifelong learning with six key priority areas: Citizenship, Cohesion, Competitiveness, Conscious raising, Cultural Development and Community building.

It is clearly stated in the White Paper that disability is one of the challenges with regard to attainment in education.

> 'The Government recognises that barriers arising from differences of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, disability and gender continue to hinder the emergence of a fully inclusive and cohesive society. Considering the significance of educational attainment in a society where qualifications are becoming ever more important, inequalities in educational opportunities and attainment arising from such barriers are a major concern' (p.33)

A key priority in the White Paper was to promote an inclusive society and to target investment towards those most at risk (The White Paper 2000, p.13). However, I believe that over time there has been a shift in focus in the philosophy for adult education.

1.7   Further Education & Training

In July 2013 the Irish education and training landscape changed utterly. Under the Education and Training Act 2013 FÁS was dissolved, thirty-three Vocational Education Committees (VECs) were amalgamated and replaced by sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and *An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna* (SOLAS) was established. Further Education and Training (FET) is defined as 'education and training which occurs after initial education has been completed. Students as young as 16 years of age can enrol on a FET programme. However, is not part of the third level system' (Murray, Grummell and Ryan 2014, p. 5). FET provides a wide range of education options including apprenticeships, traineeships, Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, Youth Reach, Vocational Training Opportunity Schemes (VTOS), community and adult education as well as literacy and numeracy services and Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). Murray et al, (2014, p.4) posits that 'Further Education and Training is being used instead of adult education to describe this sector'. The Further Education and Training Strategy (2014, p.51–52) states the FET sector is a key provider of Quality and Qualification Ireland

(QQI) accredited programmes at level One to Six on the National Framework of Qualifications. QQI is responsible for the external quality assurance for further and higher education (Murray et al, 2014, p.3).

1.8   Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019

In 2014, for the first time in the history of the state a five-year Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019 was published. The strategy aimed to reform the further education and training sector and give direction to the FET sector over the next five years. Although there was progress in acknowledging persons with disabilities the focus was on employability 'people with disabilities get the education and training that enable them to reach their potential relevant to enable progression to employment opportunities ensuring provision of vocational education for people with disabilities by the ETB's' (Further Education and Training Strategy 2014, p.97). I would argue that, this strategy places emphasis on employment that responds to the needs of the economy and market rather than responding to the needs of the students. Grummell, (cited in Murray 2014, p. 128) 'market orientated discourses refine further education and the vocational ethos to targeted training for employment'.

1.9   Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters which outline the challenges and the difficulties faced by students with a disability in the FET sector through the views expressed by the practitioners.

1.9.1   Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one gives an overview of the research topic and it traces the background to the research.

1.9.2   Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Two investigates contemporary and traditional literature pertaining to inclusive education and disability in the FET sector. It is divided into two sections: (a) Irish Context, which introduces government policies and presents challenges that affect inclusive practices (b) Theoretical Context, which introduces the theorists that I choose to encapsulate and represent the developing themes and patterns that emerged from the data.

1.9.3   Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter Three describes and justifies the methods used in this research and my own ontological and epistemological approach.

1.9.4   Chapter Four: Findings

Chapter Four presents the voices of the participants as well as a brief analysis of the findings.

1.9.5   Chapter Five: Discussion and Analysis

Chapter Five discusses how I delve deeper in to the emerging themes referring back to my own ontology and literature reviewed in this research.

1.9.6   Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendation

Chapter Six draws conclusions and makes recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection of my educational journey.

2.0   Summary

In this chapter the reasons for choosing the research topic are explained and the research question is outlined. The education landscape is outlined and relevant terms are explained. The researcher is placed in the context of her experience an AES tutor.

A review of relevant literature will be conducted in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This study is an exploratory inquiry into inclusive practices built on the experiences of practitioners in Further Education and Training (FET) sector, with a specific focus on disability. This chapter will outline the relationship between inclusive education and disability. The chapter will begin by investigating contemporary and traditional literature underpinning inclusive education and disability in the FET sector. I will identify a variation of content to lay the foundation of the research question**.** This will also afford me the opportunity to examine solutions to problems that may present themselves and will also highlight the possible need for the modification of specific factors that impact on the implementation of inclusive education and practices. Given the broad scope of the topic it is not possible in this thesis to cover all aspects of disability. Therefore, I have decided to explore the following four areas as the context of this research: (a) Definition of Disability, (b) Social Inclusion and (c) Irish Policy (d) Challenges to inclusive practices in the FET sector.

The theoretical context of the research will introduce the theory that I choose to encapsulate and represent the developing themes and patterns that emerged from the data. I have approached this research as a social constructivist. The theorists that I have selected share the same philosophy: society is socially constructed through social interactions and through the absence of social, economic and cultural rights. Challenges can occur for individuals with disabilities, which may lead to marginalisation and disadvantage with in the social systems. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of disadvantaged – social, economic and cultural capitals will be applied as a way to describe the lived experiences of the learners through the observations of the practitioners.

The relationship between feminism and disability will be highlighted as will critical social theory through the concept of 'intersectionality'. Hancock (2011, p. 183) claims, intersectional approaches are 'inclusive and incisive' and foster 'deep political solidarity'. I will attempt to make sense of the practitioners' social world by using the term intersectionality to relate theory to practice to critically analyse the data relating to disability: Intersectionality adds an additional lens to inclusion for

investigating disability. This is a vital point for decoding the implementation of inclusion practices for learners with a disability. It creates a framework that highlights barriers that practitioners are experiencing whilst trying to promotion inclusive practices in the FET sector.

The humanistic approach will be explained though the exploration of affective equality to highlight the caring relationship between the practitioner and learners. This approach according to the psychologist Carl Rogers looks at empathy as an element of understanding and caring for a person. The process of being empathic involves 'the ability to sense a person's world "as if" it were your own without losing the "as if" quality' (O'Rourke. 2001).

The professionalization of FET will be investigated by examining neo-liberalism. According to Harvey (2005) neo-liberalism is a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be better advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. If these markets do not exist in areas such as education then they must be created, by state action if necessary.

The Social Model of disability will be outlined as an approach to investigating disability. The social model of disability says that disability is constructed by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. The social model according to Lee (2017, p.28) 'views the inability of a person to participate in society not as limitations within the person themselves, but rather as barriers that can be removed by society: remove the barriers, and people with disabilities can live on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers'.

Section A- Context of the Research

2.2   Defining Disability

Disability has many forms; physical – mobility, visual or hearing impairment – and intellectual disability. The Disability Act 2005 states:

'Disability', in relation to a person, means a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry out a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment. Substantial restriction means a restriction that is permanent (or likely to be permanent) which results in significant difficulty in communication, learning or mobility and means that the person has a need for services to be provided on a continuous basis.

(Disability Act 2005   p.6)

Various descriptions have been employed to identify the multiple terminologies for learners that present to education institutions with disabilities. At all levels of education in Ireland there are individuals who have learning difficulties.

2.2.1   Multiple Terminologies of Disability in relation to education

The term Special Learning Disability (SpLD) is an umbrella term used to cover a range of disabilities such as; Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Asperger's Syndrome, and Autism to name but a few. These conditions according to Bishop (2007) are relatively common neuro-logical developmental disorders and many individuals affected by these conditions will have life-long difficulties. A student diagnosed with a SpLD will have a large discrepancy between educational achievement and intellectual ability. (British Dyslexia Association). This can have a significant impact on education and learning. According to the Dyslexia Association of Ireland ten per cent of people in Ireland have some form of dyslexia. (Dyslexia Association of Ireland, 2019.) The Task Force on Dyslexia (2001) defined the condition as follows:

'Dyslexia is manifested in a continuum of specific learning difficulties related to the acquisition of basic skills in reading, spelling and/or writing, such difficulties being unexplained in relation to an individual's other abilities and educational experiences. Dyslexia can be described at the neurological, cognitive and behavioural levels. It is typically characterised by inefficient information processing, including difficulties in phonological processing, working memory, rapid naming and automaticity of basic skills. Difficulties in organisation, sequencing and motor skills may also be present'.

(Report of the Task Force on Dyslexia 2001, p.31)

Students who have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) will have difficulties with social communication and interaction. They will also display restrictive repetitive patterns of behaviour. As well as these difficulties, those with Asperger's syndrome may be physical clumsy and have limited empathy (Autism Speaks, 2019). Other disabilities include sensory processing disorders which are conditions that affect receiving and responding to information from the senses including vision and hearing. If learners have a sensory processing disorder, the brain has difficulty organising and defining the external sensory information (*Nepean Area Disabilities Organisation, 2019*).

These conditions continue to be a huge impediment to equality for students trying to access all levels of education in Ireland. They can also present considerable challenges for teachers and education providers. Interestingly, Lee (2017) declares that statistics reported from census data 2016 shows that Irish people with disabilities have significantly poorer educational outcomes and for that reason learners with a disability can quite often be labelled as "at risk" learners. Difference is 'socially constructed' (O'Brien, 1989, p. 5) and it is when society compares one person to another that people then become labelled as different.

2.3   Social Inclusion

Social inclusion means being in a position to participate fully in the life of the society one lives in and conversely social exclusion is being prevented from doing so (Gannon & Nolan 2005). People with disabilities face many barriers to fully participation in society. A person with a disability is more likely to have problems such as poverty and economic inequality and 'the relationship between disability and educational attainment is a complex one' (Gannon & Nolan 2005, p. 24).   It is society's responsibility to provide appropriate and adequate services to ensure the needs of disabled people are fully taken into account in its social organisation. Inclusion Ireland – *National Plan for People with Disability* highlights (2018) explains that when people with a disability leave school further education and training, higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships or employment options are generally not considered. The key implication drawn from this statement from Inclusion Ireland is that we all need to be reminded that it is society that creates exclusion.

The consequences of the failure of society to create inclusivity does not subjectively fall on the individuals but systematically discriminates against disabled people as a group throughout society. Disability can be a consequence of social, attitudinal and environmental barriers that inhibit people from participating in society and from gaining a sufficient quality of life; 'a multi-dimensional concept involving personal well-being is experienced when a person's basic needs are met and when he or she has the opportunity to pursue and achieve goals in major life settings' (Felce, 1997, p. 143).

The focus on social barriers to inclusion has been introduced into various documents produce by the United Nations. A primary example is the Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for People with Disabilities (United Nations 1993). A further influence has been identified as social policy in Europe. Additionally, a broad social model perspective underpinned Rethinking Care from Disabled People's Perspectives sponsored by the World Health Organization's (WHO 2001) Disability and Rehabilitation Team. (Barnes & Mercer, 2004, p.7). Although there is a vast amount of legislation to protect persons with disability, the focus is essentially on primary, second level or higher education.

2.4   Irish Policy

Essentially, the need for services to promote inclusion in the life of people with disabilities is important and needs to be addressed by all Irish governmental organisations. Carlson, Hemmings, Wurf & Reupert (2012, p.18) emphasises 'teachers are motivated to establish inclusive teaching practices when certain support systems are in place'. According to Morris & Sharma (2011) the following structures need to be brought into effect (i) support and resources (ii) planning (iii) time (iv) adequate education and professional development of practitioners (vi) sufficient personnel and (v) adequate materials, to create an inclusive education.

The right to an education is protected by Article 42 of Bunreacht na hEireann – Constitution of Ireland and by various laws. There are various pieces of legislation and government policies on equality and disability in education, I will focus on: The Equal Status Act 2000 to 2004, The Disability Act 2005 as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The Disability Act 2005 allows for provision to be made for the assessment

of educational and health needs of persons with disabilities. Under this law disability refers to a substantial limitation to a person's ability to function in a profession or occupation.

Additionally, it acknowledges that the disability places a restriction on the person to play a part in cultural and social life by reason of sensory, intellectual, physical or mental health impairment. The Disability Act 2005 is designed to underpin the protection of people with disabilities in society by placing an obligation on public bodies to provide access to education, employment, social systems and health care services (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005). A key interpretation of the Disability Act 2005 is that an individual is restricted by reason of their disability yet, the requirements for accreditation targets in adult education are the same for a person with a disability as for an able-bodied person.

The Equal Status Act 2000 was amended by the Equality Act 2004; together they are known as the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004. This Act prohibits discrimination on the following grounds: Gender, Marital Status, Family Status, Sexual Orientation, Religion, Age, Disability, Race and Membership of the Traveller Community. Discrimination is described as unfavourable treatment of a person any of the nine grounds listed above. Equal Status Act 2000 aims to promote equality and under this legislation a person with a disability is entitled to equal consideration. The act places responsibility for equality on anyone who attends or manages a school, college or educational establishment. Disability and reasonable accommodation suggest that specific treatment or facilities should be provided to enable a person with a disability to avail of the service provided. However, it is not mandatory for people or organisations to provide special facilities or treatment if it is more than a nominal cost.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was adopted in Ireland in 2006. This provides for a complaints system that enables individuals and groups to bring complaints to the UN committee in situations where a state has violated one or more of its obligations under the UNCRPD. The UNCRPD outlines the following, (i) Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability (ii) Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided (iii) Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education (iv) Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic

and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion. This was only ratified by Ireland in 2018 and is not yet fully implemented.

2.4.1 Funding Process in FET

The government in 1994 introduced funding for Students with Disabilities. The Association for Higher Access and Disability (AHEAD) is one of the leading organizations for training and educational information on disability in Ireland. AHEAD is an independent non-profit organisation working to promote full access to and participation in further and higher education for students with disabilities and to enhance their employment prospects on graduation. AHEAD also design and deliver tailored training on inclusive education and employment practices, which incorporates anything from basic disability awareness training, to longer more complex sessions around policymaking, or inclusive employment practices.

Initially AHEAD supported fifty students and sixteen higher education institutions at a total cost of eight thousand euro. Eventually it became too large a task for AHEAD as the funding demand increased. In 2003 The Higher Education Authority (HEA) took over the management of the fund on behalf of the Department of Education (AHEAD, 2016). The funding in FET is linked to the European Social Fund (ESF), which is Europe's attempt to increase inclusion. The fund is underpinned by education policy and legislation designed to ensure equal participation in higher education for students. This funding is also accessible to learners who attend the FET sector. The funding subsidizes reasonable accommodations that is required in FET. It also focuses on supplying key resources and supports for learners with visual and hearing impairments (HEA, 2017).

The fund currently supports over six thousand students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties in higher education across Ireland. The funding amount varies annually depending on the overall grant available and number of students who apply in that academic year. In 2016/2017 the FET sector was allocated two point four million euro in funding. The colleges receive a block amount for the eligible students who applied for supports. One of the limitations of this funding process is that it is only applicable to learners with disabilities who are in full-time PLC courses. Learners with a disability that attend courses on a part-time basis or students that have no medical evidence of their disability are not eligible for support under this initiative.

At third level the disability or access officer support students by initially providing an educational assessment and screening tests to determine the type of learning difficulty and thereafter provides strategies to implement in order to accommodate the student's needs (Ascent, 2007). Unfortunately, in FET, there is no funding allocated for students to access an educational assessment by a trained educational psychologist. A report *Barriers to Further Education and Training with Particular Reference to Long Term Unemployed Persons and Other Vulnerable Individuals* conducted in 2017 by Mooney & O'Rourke on behalf of SOLAS on FET: highlights that the FET sector has a major image problem. The reports crucially states that for many years FET has been the "neglected middle child of the Irish education system" which lacks the resources and status of schools and universities. (Munell in *Education Matters* 2017).

2.4.2 Continuous Professional Development

Continuous Professional Development and Training is identified in *Further Education and Training Professional Development Strategy 2017-2019* as crucial for the application of inclusive practices. Currently, SOLAS, ETBI and the ETBs will collaborate to develop the systems, infrastructure and funding for focused and targeted professional development in the FET sector.

The strategy aims to:

> 'ensure that professional development is planned, delivered and reviewed as an integrated process throughout the FET sector. In doing so, and reflecting the fact that the new FET landscape is still establishing itself, the strategy aims to support the growth of a unified sector identity: an identify that has the quality and professionalism of the FET practitioner at its heart'

> (*Further Education and Training Professional Development Strategy 2017-2019, p.7).*

The strategy also states 'the effectiveness and quality of the FET sector depends, ultimately, on the excellence of this workforce' (ibid, p.7). In 2017 the FET sector conducted a research project on Active Inclusion (one of SOLAS's five strategic goals), which involved Cork Education and Training Board (CETB) and AHEAD. The purpose of this collaboration was to identify a structure and approach for Further Education and Training services that will further support staff in their efforts to meet the needs of learners with additional needs and disabilities.

According to the report:

'the Further Education and Training sector (FET) has seen significant changes in the recent past not least of which is the huge diversity of learners enrolling on these courses, including mature learners, learners with disabilities, learners of different cultures and backgrounds, ages and sexual orientation'.

(The Active Inclusion Network, 2017, p.8)

The report was built around two key values (a) Universal Design for Learning as a way of thinking about how to include a diversity of learners in education (b) Action learning as a mechanism to build capacity for inclusive practice (*The Active Inclusion Network, 2017, p.11*).

The Universal Design Model (UDL) incorporates both inclusive education and practice. It offers a wide range of techniques and activities to meet various needs and abilities of learners. The UDL model promotes a multisensory practical approach to learning which includes visual clips, diagrams, demonstrations and participation in tactile activities. It also uses bullet points and clear headings to categorise information and making complicated subjects easier by reducing unnecessary jargon. Mind mapping and assistive technology are also identified as being useful in supporting learners with learning disabilities (AHEAD, 2017). FET practitioners ought to facilitate in integrating of these methods into inclusive education.

2.5   Challenges preventing inclusive practices in FET

One of the challenges identified in this study is the emphasis placed on accreditation in FET. The assessment process ultimately seems to regard education in terms of credentials acquired by individuals that are primarily a means to an end (Allais, 2014). The QQI outcome based model for learning is proving challenging for students with a disability. The National Skills Strategy target for 2020 for FET is that forty-five percent of people should obtain a National Framework qualification at Level Four or Five. It notes that a further seven percent will have a qualification at Levels One to Three on the national framework of qualifications (Aontas, 2011 as cited in Murray, 2014, p.126). Uncertainty around provisions to remove challenges to inclusion in educational institutions can be problematic**,** 'the agenda set for learning is mainly set by others' (Biesta,

2006). The focus of adult education is 'becoming a tool for the economy' (O'Reilly, as citied in Murray 2014). The new FET policy would appear to confirm this situation.

The Further Education and Training sector currently faces many challenges as it was evident throughout the course of this literature review. Although the policy legislation to protect persons with disability is vast, it is obvious that the FET sector is neglected. I would argue that the government is discriminating against learners in FET as they are providing only part of a full service that is available to higher education students. Power is evident in FET through the implementation of rigid curricula that is validated through QQI. Fitzsimons, cited in (Murray 2014, p.160) that 'programme plans as a compulsory check-list for delivery with tutors held to task if they stray from this format'. This format restricts practitioners' creativity in the teaching process.

Section B – Theoretical Context

2.6   Bourdieu's Perspective on Education and Inequality

The practitioners who took part in this research highlighted that learners are from various disadvantaged backgrounds. The educational system quite often reinforces and continues to aid social inequalities that arise from differences in class, gender, race, and ethnicity. According to Sullivan (2002) Bourdieu's work is influential in the context both of the debate on social inequalities in educational attainment and of broader questions of class reproduction in advanced capitalist societies. Bourdieu cited by Sullivan (2002, p.144) maintains that 'educational credentials help to reproduce and legitimate social inequalities, as higher-class individuals are seen to deserve their place in the social structure'. I would argue that the rigid QQI system is promoting such social inequality. Sullivan (2002) points out that education can produce inequalities by measuring outcomes rather than focussing on person-centred education. The measuring outcome approach can affect the learner's retention and attainment rates in the college. In some cases, it can lead to learners "dropping out".

Bourdieu was also concerned with social power particularly, with the way in which power supports the *status quo* in society and the means that are used to transfer power from one generation to the next.

"A senior executives son is eighty times more likely to enter university than a farmer's son and forty times more than a workers son: and he is twice as likely to enter a university even as a low rank executive's son"

(Bourdieu and Passerson 1979, p.2)

However, Dennis (1986, p.109) highlights that a shortcoming of Bourdieu's work it the virtual absent of the state she claims 'that only a distorted sociology of education can avoid the role of the state funding, regulating and defining national education systems'. I would argue that Bourdieu's concepts of capitals provide a vehicle for investigating multiple representations for the reproduction of inequalities in education in this research study.

Bourdieu introduced the concept of capitals, (economic capital, cultural capital and social capital) field and habitus as ways of viewing education and he explained how these concepts play a part in creating inequality or by reinforcing inequalities that already exist. The *field* or setting is a particular focus concerned with the movement and disruption of social actors between "fields" such as family, employment or educational settings (Robinson & Robertson, 2014). The *habitus* according to Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002, p.36.) is understood as 'the values and dispositions gained from our cultural history that generally stay with us across contexts'. Habitus is the way an individual internalizes the social structures of their world and their actions within that world. Habitus shapes the parameters of people's sense of agency and possibility; it entails perceptual schemes what are commonly shared by those in similar circumstances and therefore appear reasonable given that individual's particular position in a stratified society (Bourdieu, 1996).

Education can reinforce the status quo for these learners.

'The structure of social space as observed in advanced societies is the product of two fundamental principles of differentiation – economic capital and cultural capital – the educational institution, which plays a critical role in the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital and thus in the reproduction of the structure of social space, has become a central stake in the struggle for the monopoly on dominant positions'.

(Bourdieu, 1996, p.5)

The practitioners taking part in this study point out that, inequalities which existed in the educational system seemed to further oppress the learners, which ultimately had an impact on the learner's retention and attainment rates in the college. The Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire maintains oppression as 'the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness' and how, '(a)s long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically 'accept' their exploitation' Freire, (1976, p.11). The practitioners claimed that there was a high percentage of the mature students enrolled in the social care course who had experienced extreme disadvantage. What this tells us is that these learners are only engaging in education that represents their life experiences.

Bourdieu reiterates that the education system is the main institution that amplifies class difference. Learners who lack these capitals are disadvantaged and are considered to be in an inferior social position. Connolly (1996, p. 36) identities certain groups as being unequally served by the educational system 'the two major marginal groups as women and working-class people, are not served adequately by the formal educational system'.

2.7   Feminism Perspective

A feminism perspective was chosen as a method into inclusive practice built on experiences of FET practitioners; the research has a specific focus on learners with disabilities. The research highlighted a gap in policy. It was not easy linking the field of research to a suitable theoretical framework or an inclusive policy that represented intersecting oppressions. However, through researching an array of theorist I came to the conclusion that a feminist methodology would capture the participant's stories.

Feminism as a theoretical framework holds a broad vision for conducting research and it can be applied to research of any marginalised or oppressed group in society. It can be a catalyst to challenge and highlight socially constructed views of people with disabilities. Barnes and Mercer (2010, p. 64) highlight the connection between 'feminist struggles to overturn patriarchy…and disabled people campaigns against their social exclusion'. People with disabilities are marginalised because they are different.

Feminist research actively seeks to uncover inequality and oppression, it investigates the imbalance between the research and the subject; it tries to change social inequality and it acknowledges that there is a gap between reality and the ideal world. I am of the opinion that feminist research can be used as a method for consciousness rising when structures of institutional policy and practice need to be adjusted and viewed through alternative lens. Policy implications in relation to disability and inclusion do not fully consider the primary factors for investigating the general inequalities and exploitation that illustrate other categories present in one's social life.

According to Baker, Lynch, Cantillion & Walsh (2004, p.13), 'the disabled person was traditionally defined as the *'Other'* person whom the researcher was not, but about whom the researcher could speak'. This can be said of the approach to research of the '*founding fathers'* of sociological thought such as (*Marx, Durkheim and Weber*) who posed a male culture arbitrary on alternative voices, be these females, disabled, or people from some other maginalised group. (Baker, Lynch, Cantillion & Walsh 2009).

Oakley (1989) highlights there is a weakness in interpreting disability through a patriarchal lens. She claims that specific questions were not asked, and if asked were not conceived as serious. According to Connell (1987) pro-feminist started to challenge the sociological thought of the *'founding fathers'* which eventually led to an interest in feminist thought. However, with the emergences of Post-Modernist theorist such as Michael Foucault patterns of thought began to change in sociology.

Foucault places emphasises on issues of power in society and on its function and transmission in cultural spaces. This focus of power resulted in the questioning how social institutions were employed to monitor, regulate and observe human consciousness which provoked interest in the sociology of 'emotions' (Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009). The research data linked with Foucault's theories in the context of the power of policy discourse and social systems lacking in recognition of care and emotion in FET.

Consistent with the concept of care Lynch et al (2009) state, care is deeply interwoven into various states of dependency and interdependency and each care reality is '*intersectionally*' connected to the other. The world of care is not isolated; it is interlinked with economic, political and cultural relations. Intersectionality is based on the understanding of the complexities of people's lives and situations, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to intersectional research. Building on Foucault's ideology of power in spaces, intersectionality seeks to address powers through the intersection of multiple axes of multiples positionalities.

2.7.1   Intersectionality Perspective

The term intersectionality is a widely used term in contemporary social science. US legal scholar and feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term to reflect the complexity of the experience of violence and discrimination of black women. She has used intersectionality as a concept to understand how multiple axes of power intersect.

Crenshaw (1995, p.3) reveals:

> 'An intersectional approach goes beyond conventional analysis in order to focus our attention on injuries that we otherwise might not recognize . . . to 1) analyze social problems more fully; 2) shape more effective interventions; and 3) promote more inclusive coalitional advocacy'.

Intersectionality addresses a central feminist concern about capturing multiple positionalities, placing emphasis on differences among social groups (Davis, 2008). Quite often ill-informed attitudes and low expectations form a barrier that limits opportunities for learners who experience disability. These institutional barriers essentially further add to a higher risk of exclusion to those already oppressed by the system. Intersectionality approach to research according to Meekosha & Shuttleworth (2009) unearths subjugated knowledge and aims to rewrite prevailing oppressive formats about disability and considers challenges to inclusion and participation of people with disability in educational institutions. However, Foley (2018) states there is limitations to intersectionality it does not offer an adequate explanatory framework for focusing on the foundations of social inequality in the capitalist socioeconomic system. Bowleg (2012) would strongly disagree with Foley (2018) he posits:

'Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for understanding how multiple social identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, SES [socioeconomic status], and disability intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect interlocking systems of privilege and oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism) at the macro social-structural level'.

(Bowleg, 2012, p. 1267)

This statement by Bowleg (2012) is relevant for the investigation of disability from a practitioner perspective in FET insofar as it poses some critical analysis that establishes a link between those experiencing low socioeconomic status in society as well as their disability. This field study exposed that the learners experience various social, economic and cultural occurrence that impact on their participation in education and retention in college.

According to Weber & Parra-Medina (2003) intersectional perspectives show how social categories are dynamic, historically grounded and social constructed. The practitioners highlighted how by not acknowledging other categories of oppression that the learners presented with, was essentially neglecting the learners' needs. It is crucial to place emphasis on the intersection of one or more social or cultural categories when focusing on learners with a disability to try to make sense of their reality. On the other hand, the practitioners in this research have taken into consideration that the learners come with various experiences of disadvantage. They have taken hold of something negative in the educational system and reacted in a positive way to ensure the learners are cared for in an environment which values equality.

2.8 The Caring Approach

Human life is lived in a wide range of care networks and there are sets of relational realities connected to each other in complex and often unobservable ways (Gilligan, 1982). The approach taken by the practitioners in this research displayed a duty of care to the learners that harmonises with *'affective equality'*. Lynch et al (2009, p.13) defines affective equality as a 'private highly feminised and emotionally - driven sphere' she goes on to say it generates two forms of inequality (i) inequality in the degree to which people's needs for love and care are satisfied (ii) inequality in the work that goes into satisfying them'. According to Baker et al (2009), the affective domain takes

into consideration other social systems, it is regarded as a by-product of social, economic and cultural action and it can be understood as a highly defined feminised and emotionally-driven sphere

Although affective equality implies the implementation of '*love, care and solidarity'*. For this research the focus will be only on the caring approach portrayed from the practitioners as they aspire to create a learning space where equality lays the foundation for professional practice. The unique reaction from the participants in regards to their inclusive practices towards learners with disabilities disclosed a humanistic approach that involved a lot of care and emotion. Sayer (2005) posits that failure to investigate the emotional impact of inequality can neglect affective relations as a subject of research on public policy in the field of education. (Baker et al, 2009, p.41) claims 'structural injustices can intensify affective deprivations'.

Delphy and Leonard (1992), explain, care is like other forms of work it attends to human needs, has observable intended outcomes, employs complex skills, requires time and effort and challenges some stress. The practitioners involved in this research declared how much they cared for the learners especially when it came to the other social, economic and cultural factors that arose in the life of the learners and how that impacted on well-being, participation and retention of the learners in the college. Baker et al (2009, p.113) adds that 'factors of gender, class and family status intersect to produce complicated patterns of affective equality'. Complex patterns of affective inequality did emerge for practitioners in their professional practice. There was uniqueness to how the practitioners built a trusting relationship with the learners.

However, fear of learners dropping out due to personal issues caused concern for the practitioners. Standing (2001) remarks, caring can involve stress due to the fear of failing the recipient. It was evident in this college that the practitioners feared that learners were at a socio-economic disadvantage and were liable to leave due to the challenges demanded of a college student as well as having to complete a QQI full award within one academic year. This was putting too much pressure on some learners and was adding to their struggles.

2.9   Neo-Liberalism and Professionalisation of Education

There is no denying the influence this market driven discourse has had on the curricula offered in further education. Gummell (as citied in Murray 2014, p.130) points out 'learning outcomes are often separate to the learning process the main objective of the learning tends to 'privilege the employer and acts as a method for social power' (Wheelahan, 2009, p.203). Somewhere along the way, the person-centred approach to lifelong learning in adult education seems to have been lost. Finnegan (2016) highlights that students are perceived as customers in educational institutions especially in Further Education and Training to justify what they can do in markertised terms. He argues that this shift is linked to modes of assessment in adult education. Whilst Gurtler (2005) states that, education is seen as primarily a preparation for economic productivity. The ultimate target is employability skills rather than a strategy that would promote a 'society that can allow for the expansion of capabilities of persons to lead lives they can value and have reason to value' (Sen, 1999, p.18).

Grummell (2014) explains:

> 'The incremental creep of the based system for the 'knowledge economy' has created another unquestioned reality of further education as the provider of training for jobs in this new economic landscape. The neo-liberal shift to a global transient marketplace remains largely unquestioned in this transformation'

(Grummell, in Murray 2014, p.133)

The focus of policy seems to have shifted. Ryan (cited in Murray 2014, p.171) stresses 'the abandonment of the all-embracing approach to education as envisioned in the White Paper has created and utterly altered philosophical and practical environment as the context of professionalization of FET is now happening'. The field of adult education can be perceived as a sector that is outside the dominant traditions of education. Ryan (2014) raises the point that FET is lacking a shared conceptual framework. This disparity continues to ignore the importance of an all-embracing approach to lifelong learning and places emphasises on the neo-liberal approach to education. Those who '*fall behind*' are '*at risk*' of being left behind and regarded within the neo-liberal view, as a failure. As highlighted by Murray, Grummell Ryan (2014, p.3) the emphasis on education policy is a 'distinct political project underpinned by the spirit of capitalism'. The neo

liberalism approach to education combined with the professionalism of the FET sector makes it extremely difficult for learners who are disadvantaged to fully access education as it is directly linked to the neo-liberal discourse.

Given that SOLAS is now responsible for ETBs, which are linked with the neo-liberal discourse. I am concerned for the future of learners as it appears that they are not fully understood and recognised in educational policy. As Ryan declares 'since the White Paper was published the move to professionalisation FET is finally underway and the use of the term lifelong learning to encompass all forms of learning is well and truly abandoned' (Ryan, cited in Murray 2014, p.171). The approach taken by FET fails to take into account the learners who are already faced with disadvantage and oppression in society.

2.10 Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability and social inclusion explored in the context of this research are congruent with equality. The social model views disability as an issue that stems from someone with a disability trying to function in an inaccessible society. According to Oliver (1996, p. 30) society can perceive disability as having 'something wrong with you'. However, when barriers are removed, disabled people can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives. The starting point for the social model was the publication of The Fundamental Principles of Disability by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in 1976.

It stated that:

> 'In our view it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society'
>
> *(UPIAS 1976:14)*

Barnes and Mercer (2010, p. 20) acknowledge that the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH) (WHO, 1990) has had the most

influential involvement in moving away from the traditional medical model of disability to the more social model. This influential move was achieved by identifying 'impairment' as the underlying cause of 'disability' and or 'handicap', as well as recognising and highlighting the 'social handicap'. This fundamental principal changed the perception of disability; it argued that it was not impairment that was the central focus of the social exclusion of disabled people but the reaction of society in their response to people with impairments.

However, Crow (1996, p. 9) led the way in criticising the social model she states 'the failure of the social model to encompass the personal experience of pain and limitation which is often a part of impairment, that the 'strong' social model had itself become a problem, and that it cannot be reformed'. On the contrary Oliver (1990 p.7)) argues 'it is not individual limitations, of whatever kind, which are the cause of the problem but society's failure to provide appropriate services and adequately ensure the needs of disabled people are fully taken into account in its social organisation'

Barnes and Mercer (2010, p.24) cite Beatrice Wright's emphasis on the 'ways of behaving prescribed by society' 'that 'impairment' is not a sufficient condition for social 'handicap'. Therefore, the impact that the social environment has on individuals with disabilities cannot be ignored (1960, p. 3). I agree with Wright's position on the impact the social environment has on individuals with a disability. There are sixteen FET colleges throughout the city of Dublin, eight of these colleges have disability access. There are three disability officers employed to oversee these fifteen colleges. I feel that it is obvious from an inclusive policy perspective that disability officers are not deemed to be highly relevant within the sector. Consequently, each college has their own approach to inclusive practices for learners with disabilities in adult education. The social model of disability raises many questions in relation to learners with disabilities in their effort to access adult education in FET colleges.

2.11 Summary

This literature review started by examining the Irish Context. The definition of Disability and Multiple Terminologies of Disability in relation to educational were outlined. An exploration of Social Inclusion was conducted followed by an examination of Irish Policy by discussing The Equal Status Act 2000 to 2004 and The Disability Act 2005 together with the United Nations Convention

on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Challenges to Inclusive Practices in Further Education and Training sector were also highlighted by exploring QQI and the impact it has on adult education. The Theoretical Context of the research began with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of disadvantaged – social, economic and cultural capitals. Feminism perspectives, intersectionality and affective equality were explained before introducing the professionalization of the FET through the concept of neo-liberalism. The chapter concluded by investigating the social model of disability.

The next chapter, the Methodology will provide an outline of my ontological and epistemological perspective as well as identifying the methods and methodology framework undertaken within this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

This study is an exploratory inquiry in to inclusive practices built on experiences of practitioners in the Further Education and Training Sector. I began this research with the general aim of exploring the experience of practitioners in a PLC college within the FET. This chapter describes my ontological and epistemological stance and the overall methodological approach taken. The decision to use a qualitative research through semi-structured interviews and the specific strategy of constructivist grounded theory are explained. Peck and Furman (1992, p.231), notes that researchers have used qualitative methods to identify the fundamental roles of ideology, organizational dynamics, and the social-political process are outlined. The ethical considerations are explained and the chapter concludes with a section on Reflexivity.

3.2   Research Philosophy

Gray (2009 p.2), stated 'research is a systematic and organised effort to investigate a specific problem that needs a solution'. Therefore, as a researcher it is crucial to identify which paradigm the research belongs to. Patton (1990) notes that a paradigm is a common perspective, a method of breaking down the complexity of the real world. Paradigms tend to reflect the interest and focus of the various research groupings within Social Science for example, Feminism or Post-Modernism and they support the research as a theoretical framework. The research methodology can be determined by the paradigm that guides the research project.

Depending on the paradigm the theory can be operated in a different way. Guba and Lincoln (1985), states that a research paradigm is intrinsically associated with the concepts of ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology and Epistemology are interdependent and lead into specific methodologies and together make methods appropriate for research. Guba and Lincoln

(1985) suggest that research investigation is be based on (i) the concepts of ontology - the way the investigator defines the truth and reality (ii) epistemology - the process in which the investigator comes to know the truth and reality (iii) and methodology - the method used in conducting the investigation. Gray (2009), explains that ontology represents understanding *what is,* while epistemology aims to understand *what it means to know*.

3.3 Ontological Perspective

Essentially, our ontology refers to what we know about the world (Creswell, 2003). According to Mertens' (2009) concepts of disability, femininities, masculinities, race, class and ethnicity, are social constructed phenomena that mean different things to different people. Feminism, the labour movements and disability movements have responded to the inequalities that have come out of these structures. These socially constructed ontological perspective has greatly influenced my decision to set about this research within a social constructionist and feminist paradigm.

I have chosen to research Inclusive Practices built on the experiences of practitioner's in further education, with specific focus on disability. I sought to understand how the practitioners in the PLC sector of FET managed inclusive practices with learners that present with a disability. My ontological approach to research is echoed by Antwi's (2003) statement which posits that reality is a product of social practices

As stated in chapter one my own experience and knowledge of disability is quite limited. I became interested in learners with disability whilst working with a specific ITABE (Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education) group. The learners had basic reading and writing skill and they had progressed to level three on the National Framework of Qualifications**.** One of the mandatory modules at this level is Communications. This module requires a lot of writing which the learners found difficult.

When these learners misunderstood something or when they wrote something incorrectly their natural reaction was to say "sorry about that". I found this response really sad, it made me feel very

uncomfortable, I reassured them that they should never be sorry. This is adult education not school and this should be an enjoyable experience for them.

3.4   Epistemological Stance

Epistemology according to Antwi (2015) refers to the nature of the relationship between the researcher, the nature of human knowledge and understanding what can be acquired through various types of investigation. Reality is perceived to be subjective. Tubey, Rotich &Bengat (2015, p.224) states that epistemology presents the following questions (i) *what is the relationship between the knower and the known?* (ii) *How do we know what we know?* (iii) *What counts as knowledge?* There are two extensive epistemological positions positivism and constructivism. According to Tubey, Rotich &Bengat (2015) positivism trusts that there is an independent reality and constructivism assumes reality is a product of social practices.

I believe that reality is a product of social practices and social researchers cannot separate their subjective experiences from the research. As a social researcher, I acknowledge that my ontological and epistemological perspectives are inextricably interwoven. My epistemological approach will be analysised through a constructivists lens, specifically focusing on social practices experienced in the field of adult education. As Creswell (2003) outlines, the researcher is heavily influenced by their own background, cultures and norms.

Encompassing an understanding of the individual's circumstances and their reality can be a foundation for the building a trusting relationship for research. Through the conduction of this research I hoped to highlight through the voices of the practitioners the realities for those who are still experiencing educational inequality rather than inclusion in the education system. My research aims to underpin the understanding of disability and inclusion in the Irish education system. This research cannot be separated from reality and the lived experiences of the participants were involved in this research. This research is their story; I respected that throughout the research.

I do not feel the inclusive approach used by the participants in this research is embraced by the entire FET sector. There seems to be a deep lack of consideration of other categories of

disadvantage, for instance, a learner with a disability can also present with other socio-economic difficulties which can impact on their educational experience. By looking at disability in isolation, retention and attainment rates can be affected. I believe that the challenges and complexities that learners with disabilities experience need to be further investigated to highlight changes that could make their educational experiences more inclusive.

3.5   Research Paradigm

The traditional aim of research is to discover something new in relation to a phenomenon or problem. Good quality research is something that unwraps the nature of problems and initiates questions to find new understanding of one's reality and to highlight a positive change. This approach resonates with feminist research in relation to disability studies. According to Willsher & Geol (2017) feminist research draws upon the struggles and insights of oppressed and disempowered groups which results is a richer understanding of these groups thus leading to ways of empowerment, alleviation of inequalities and improved social policies. By using problems posing research paradigms such as feminism it addresses complex questions about factors that 'moves beyond traditional frameworks that separate social life into discrete or pure strands' (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p.76).

In researching my topic I struggled to find a suitable paradigm that would serve fairly in telling the participants realities, I had an array of options to choose from, in the end, I embraced "Intersectionality" - an emerging paradigm for disability studies. This paradigm laid the foundations that enabled me to understand how different axes of powers intersect and 'move beyond traditional frameworks that separate social life into discrete pure strand' (Brah & Pheonix 2004, p.76). By no longer seeing disability in isolation from other categories (gender, class, cultural background and many others), it allowed me to find something new in relation to a problem that presented through my research.

3.6   Methodology Approach

I have explained in my ontological and epistemological approach, how and why my research lead me to conduct my research in a PLC college. My ontological and epistemological experiences

have led the research to be conducted through a social constructivist's lens. In keeping with a grounded theory approach. Charmaz (2006, p.2)) refers to constructivist grounded theory methods as 'systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories "grounded" in the data themselves'.

The grounded theory approach is inductive rather than deductive. The participants' real life experiences within their social contexts are given the upmost consideration.   The defining characteristics of grounded theory is that the 'theoretical propositions are not stated at the outset, rather, generalisations (theory) emerge out of the data themselves and not prior to data collection' (Mertens, 2015, p. 242). As mentioned in my ontological and epistemological approach I have limited knowledge in relation to learners with disability, I value experiential knowledge, the participants were chosen based on their knowledge and experience of power in the field of further education. All the participants had over ten years of experience in the further education sector. Their knowledge and expressions of their experiences within their worlds gave me a new perspective on disability.

I originally thought I could have a gender balance for the research, but that was not possible as the membership of the TLC group is predominately female. However, I interviewed two males, one was part of the TLC the other was one of the teaching staff. Overall six practitioners from the TLC were interviewed and four teachers who were not members of this group. Two tutors did not respond to the invitation to take part in interviews therefore, the ratio is uneven in the representation of the teaching staff. The interviews were conducted in the college and that was down to the choice of the participants. I was aware, that time was an issue and that they were meeting me between classes and during their breaks. I assured them that the interviews would be half an hour and with the exception of one interview going over that they all ran smoothly and naturally and to time. My aim for the interview process was to 'create a dialogue between two equals through ongoing negotiation of dialogue' (Friere 1972, p.53).

I feel it is crucial to be aware of the way the questions are structured**.** The sequencing of the questions can determine the dynamic of the interview. The questions posed should be clear and relevant and relate to the topic been investigated. Mertens, (2005, pp. 17-18)   states 'knowledge

should be a resource of and for the people who create, hold and share it. Knowledge and values are culturally, socially, and temporally contingent. Knowledge is filtered through the knower. The researcher must recognise and explore the unique conditions and characteristics of the issue under study. The characteristics of the knower will influence the creation of knowledge; critical Self-reflection if necessary'

3.7   Qualitative Research

Qualitative research according to Creswell (1994, p.145), emphasises that 'qualitative researchers are interested in meaning – how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world'. I was aware that qualitative research and the data extracted would depend on my performance as an interviewer, as well as on my skills as an analytical interpreter of the data assembled. The qualitative approach provides the opportunity to gain accurate insight and understanding of how an individual exists in their world 'the very virtue of qualitative interviews is their openness' (Kvale, 1996, p.84).

Qualitative research lends itself to case study method for research. The research will be based on a case study method with a qualitative approach. Yin (2009) explains that a case study allows the researcher to be holistic and explore meaningful characteristics of real life events. A case study method is widely used in social science for the study of human society and interaction. A case study is an in-depth study of a certain situation rather than a generalised statistical survey. It is a method used to narrow down a comprehensive field of research into a straightforward researchable topic.

However, Seale (1999) reminds us of the need to reflect on one's pre-conceived notions and beliefs so that the researcher can be reflective on how their personal disposition and perspective could sway the study. As I selected the interviewees I may have influenced the outcomes of the research. To counteract any possible bias on my part I chose semi-structured interviews as they allowed for the participant to explore and express their opinions without be me controlling the interview process. According to Bloom & Crabtree, (2006, p314) 'semi-structured interviews are quite often the sole data source for qualitative research projects'.

3.8   The Interview Process

I choose to use semi-structured interviews with the participants. Semi-structured interviews according to Mason (2003, p.63), is 'the construction or reconstruction of knowledge more than the excavation of it'. Neuman (2003) maintains that thick description of data of social experiences can be correlated by engaging and encouraging dialogue of the respondent's life experiences. Exploration of points raised from dialogue allows the interview to advance in to new territory. I was extremely mindful not to invade or influence the interview process. Charmaz (2006) remind us, that, as part of the research process, researchers should be mindful of not imposing their own 'concepts, concerns and discourses upon the research participant's reality' (2006, p. 32).

Semi-structures interviews encourage an open friendly environment that allowed the respondents to speak freely about their experiences. Bloom et al, (2006, p.315), regards semi-structured interviews as allowing 'the interviewer to delve deep into social and personal matter'. Closed ended questions were voided with the exception of questions regarding specific details regarding specific information. It is crucial the questions are fluid and consistent. Boeije (2010) highlights the importance of the interviewer having a 'rapport' with the interviewees. I held a pilot interview, to ensure my questions were clear, and to get over my own nervousness due to inexperience.

In the first two interviews, the practitioners were inclined to follow the sequence of the questions, and the interviews did not last the allocated thirty-minutes. I was concerned that I was not eliciting enough information and I was nervous of asking for answers to be expanded. However, by the third interview, I was more confident and I allowed the interview to take its own route. The interviews were beginning to be less formal which resulted in richer data and with new knowledge emerging. The openness of semi-structured interviews proved to be very effective method for the research. As the participants explored and discussed their stories, it was obvious that a trusting relationship had been built through the communication we had throughout the process.

I wanted the participants to feel comfortable in expressing their knowledge. I made it clear from the start that I appreciated their contribution to the research. Mertens, (2005, pp. 17-18) reminds us 'the

characteristics of the knower will influence the creation of knowledge; critical self-reflection is necessary'. I was consciously aware that I was learning about an area that I was not entirely knowledgeable about and that it was vital that I listen and not interrupt the process in order to gain new knowledge from the information that that was forthcoming. Farzanfar (2005), states the nature of constructivists inquiry is interpretive and the purpose of the inquiry is to understand a particular phenomenon and not to generalize.

3.9   Data Collection

The interviews sessions were audio recorded I used this approach because it is an accountable method for obtaining concrete knowledge plus it allowed me to replay the findings to reinforce the information the respondents were revealing. Seidman (2006, p. 114).) agrees, audio recording are a good source of data collection, 'the participants thoughts become embedded into words'. The audio recording captured very honest data in relation to the experiences and feelings of the participants, I could hear the passion in their voices and I wanted this to come through in the findings and analyses. However, I was aware that audio recording can be difficult and distracting, It was important that I ensure the interview was conducted in an environmentally sound area, which preferably was familiar to the respondent. Additionally, I spent some time at the start of each interview to explain the process. It is important to ensure that the respondent understands the procedure.   If the respondent feels comfortable in their surroundings a trusting relationship can be formed, which essentially will set the platform for a noteworthy interview. Confidently and anonymity was guaranteed before and after the interview. Awareness of your own bias is crucial while conducting research, I needed to be adaptable, resilient and have the ability to adjust my thinking to the respondents lived experiences. Gray (2009) states that, the novice interviewer needs to be resilient and aware that semi-structure interviews can go in a direction that can cause negative rather than positive outcomes. It's vital to appreciate that the respondent controls the interview process not the researcher. The interview is their story.

3.9.1   Data Analysis Process

Bell (2005, p.201).), notes that data means 'very little until they are analysed and evaluated'. The researcher intends on analysing and interpreting the data from the interviews by using a thematic approach method. Thematic analysis in qualitative research can be administered to revise and reduce

data. Thematic analysis is a process of encoding. I began the process by (i) replaying the audio recording and taking notes (ii) reading the transcripts multiple times and identifying reoccurring themes (iii) outlining themes on the transcripts with coloured highlighter and adding notes (iv) sub-themes that emerge will be identified by a different colour highlighter. The thematic approach assisted in identifying, analysing, and organising the data, this made it familiar and retrievable when producing the thesis. I wrote notes on the side of the transcripts and used a notebook to record the findings as they formed throughout the analyses process. This approach proved to more accessible and flexible than using technology to store the data. As ideas emerged, it was more convenient to enter it into the notebook. I used an excel spreadsheet to record information that relates to the themes and sub-themes. This excel sheet will be paramount when linking the literature review to the findings.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

It is crucial that the participants are protected at all times Orb, Eisenhauer &Wynaden (2001) explains ethical issues present themselves in any kind of research, ethics involves doing good and avoiding harm. Therefore, it is crucial that the interviewer is aware of what might be uncovered from social interactions. My aim was to build a trusting relationship with the participants. I made informal contact through email and then engaged in informal conversation by doing this I had been given informed consent before sending the research information. Kvale (1996) emphasises that in qualitative research autonomy should lie with the participant and this can be honoured through informed consent. The interview process was outlined clearly in the Informed Consent Form which the participants had to sign before being interviewed. Participants were provided with informed consent form so they understand the interview process, it was important to me that participants should be fully informed and that their privacy would not be invaded. I explained to participants that they would have the opportunity to read the transcripts and to withdraw from the research at any given time.

According to Bell and Byram (2007) the researcher needs to consider and protect the participant's anonymity. Confidentiality was respected throughout the interview process - the anonymity of the participants was assured and the secure storing of data was explained and guaranteed. Security was implemented by using identification numbers instead of names, data was kept on a password protected laptop and all relevant paperwork was filed in a safe environment.

3.10.1 Insider Research

For the past eleven years I have been employed in the organization where I conducted my field study. I have reflected a lot on inside research and ethical issues that could arise. Firstly, it was crucial that I get permission from the Principal of the college before I contacted college staff to invite them to participate in the study. Secondly, I have a professional relationship with some of the respondents that I intend on inviting to partake in my field study. Therefore, I needed to be cautious not to expose too much of my opinion before or during the interview as the participants contribution to the research may be just 'fuzzy generalisations' (Bassey, 1999, p.62).

Additionally, because of my familiarity with the respondents they may feel they should reveal what they think I want to hear. Ultimately, it is important that I try to remain impartial. Silverman (2000) warns, informing respondents of the specific research information can contaminate the data. I need to be mindful of how human relationships can influence the study. I wanted the respondents to feel appreciated and valued however, at the same time I wanted the research to be valid and authentic. Being reflective in my approach to research and by reading the Research Ethics Guidelines from Maynooth University has helped me understand ethical considerations and their importance when conducting a field study.

3.11   Reflexivity

I am aware of my position of power regardless of how egalitarian I try to make the process. 'Our subjectivity and wider cultural understanding shape our response and interpretation' (Merrill and West, 2009, p.115). I have chosen the area of research, the possible interviewees, the method, the methodology and the interview questions. I decided the theoretical framework that would conceptualize my data and the theorists that relate to the findings. I am very conscious of my position as researcher, I remained aware of having my bias in this research. I gave the participants the questions before the interview so they could reflect on their responses. One of the first interviewees was of the opinion that the questions were not posed in a clear way. So, we cancelled

the interview and rescheduled it for another date. I took her advice and changed the sequence of the interview questions, as I was now aware that they did not have a natural flow.

This taught me the importance of being adaptive and reflexive in my approach to research. It was an exploratory research project based on practitioners experiences so it was necessary that I adjust my thinking and learning. I offered transcripts to all participants, some took me up on the offer whilst others were happy with the interview. This research is of particular interest to the practitioners, who perhaps do not have a voice at management level. I sincerely want to ensure the data received on the concerns that they have is articulated in a transparent and ethical way.

I am aware that participants are dedicated to supporting the learners. However, I had not expected to hear factors such as homelessness, age and poverty to name but a few, had such an impact on the learner's participation and retention in the college. Themes that emerged, as discussed throughout the thesis, are themes of care, equality, disadvantage and neo-liberalism. I was not expecting such themes to emerge so strongly.

The uniqueness of the practitioner's inclusive practices resulted in me searching for a method that would encompass their distinctive and caring approach to the learners. These themes compelled me to delve into readings about Feminism and Kimberle Crenshaw's term Intersectionality as well as the work of Kathleen Lynch's concepts of Affective Equality. The practitioners demonstrated the characteristics of affective equality (care, love & solidarity) towards the learners in response to negativities that neoliberal policies instigated in the educational system in relation to participation and retention.

Disadvantage as a barrier for learners has strongly emerged in the research. Although this research is not about the learners I could not ignore the effect it was having on the practitioners. This urged me to study theorists like Pierre Bourdieu as a method of encapsulating the learner's realities of disadvantage through the eyes of the practitioners. Without doubt, the participants motivated and influenced the reading I undertook beyond my initial exploration of existing policy about Inclusive Practices and Disability. The responses of the participants added a third lens to my research –

Intersectionality. This research has taught me how important it is to be adaptive and reflexive in my thinking, and by being conscious I have remained true to the commitment I made to the practitioners involved in this research which is to tell their story in an honest, respectful, transparent and eloquent fashion.

3.12 Summary

This chapter described my ontological and epistemological stance and the overall methodological approach taken in this study. It explained why I choose qualitative research through semi-structured interviews and a constructivist grounded theory approach.

The next chapter will introduce the findings and analysis from the interview process.

CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The research was carried out in a Post Leaving Cert college in the Further Education and Training sector under the remit of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board.   The primary focus of this research was to uncover inclusive practices built on experiences of practitioners in FET, with specific focus been placed on students with disabilities. I will position the research within the context of inclusive practices in further education by building on the experiences of the practitioners. The findings and analysis are constructed through a qualitative approach based on the data presented by the participants. My ontological and epistemological approach to research which is outlined in Chapter Three has influenced how I organised the data obtained from the findings. I will identify variation of content and provide an understanding of the research problem. This will also allow me to examine solutions to problems that present and highlight the need for new policy legislation.

Analysis of the initial findings showed the positive consequences of implementing inclusive practices. It also highlighted the challenges to inclusive practices for students with disabilities from the perspective of practitioners teaching in FET. The research confirmed some of the obstacles which I had expected to surface in relation to challenges of implementing inclusive practices, such as the funding process for the college. However, a number of my preconceived ideas of inclusive practices were challenged. The emergence of factors that are an integral part of the FET sector exposed interesting actualities. Concepts, such as low socio-economic disadvantage in education, neoliberalism and professionalization of the FET sector are challenges that have affected the attainment rates and retention of students presenting with disability in FET.

Initially, I did not consider these factors as challenges for practitioners who were proposing to implement a professional and inclusive practice for students. However, I now acknowledge that these powerful factors are undercurrents that are affecting inclusive practices. Ironically, these negative factors prompted a unique and positive response from the practitioners in this college. They understood that these factors had an adverse effect on the attainment rates and retention of students and they strive to make a difference to the learner's educational experience. They found a way of supporting the students by applying an affective equality mind-set through a method of care. Their approach resembled the "intersectionality" approach as described by Crenshaw (1995) in the Literature Review to cater for overlapping of social, economic and cultural influences that may also impact on a learner with a disability.

4.1.1   Contextualizing the Research

The participants in the study were six practitioners from the Teaching and Learning Centre and four teachers who members are teaching staff. Two of the participants are males, one is part of the TLC and the other is a member of the teaching staff. For this study, I have generated interconnected themes using thematic coding. The framework I use for data analysis consists of coding processes and is a useful way of analysing qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The findings will be presented under similar themes that are listed in the literature review however; specific sub-themes will accompany some of the themes which will be listed below. As a researcher it was necessary for me to read and re-read the transcripts over and over again and refer back and forth to the literature review. This was essential in order to generate discursive themes. The voices of the participants are represented by using quotes from the transcribed interviews.

4.2   Defining Disability

The present study confirmed the students attending this college presented with varied disabilities. The practitioners were concerned about large classes and lack of experience dealing with students who have a wide range of disabilities *Respondent 2* reveals *"it can be challenging if you have a large class and have eight different classes".* Some of the practitioners disclosed the diversity of students attending the college with various disabilities was a fairly new experience for them.

> ***Respondent 1****"...mental health issues...they can be varied. There's dyslexia, dyspraxia, ASD, some years you have people with visual impairments or hearing impairments. A lot of them would be early school leavers and some are in recovery"*

Respondent 2 *"Also, I notice this year too, and in the last few years, an awful lot of students are presenting with anxiety, so it's...you know, you have your normal student with dyslexia...or...you might have somebody with dyspraxia and you have....we have a lot of students with Asperger's Syndrome as well, you know".*

Respondent 7 *"One thing I have noticed in the last few years is that ....the level of disability is deepening. And...the type of disability is becoming very diverse altogether, you know. So we are seeing people now with general learning disability coming in ...like a very low IQ....who really wouldn't have come to this level before. And they are appearing here. And...and they are very often people with a GLD".*

Respondent 10 *"I think training is really important, right across the board. We need it. I think the biggest problem I see now is students coming through on the spectrum".*

The Disability Act 2005 as mentioned in the literature review notes that sensory, intellectual, physical or mental health impairment can restrict one's cultural and social life. It outlines that the person with a disability has a need for services to be provided on continued bases. However, some practitioners although, aware of the range of disability they disclosed they lacked experience in this area. *Respondent 8* clarifies *"there should be in every ETB or even in further education ...there should be a dedicated psychologist so that you don't have to....be running around you need an expert in the area"*

Respondent 3 *"Some of the things that appear in my lifetime as a teacher .... I don't remember them, obviously they did exist but I don't remember knowing about them when I was a twenty-two year old teacher. And I would barely know about dyslexia and a lot of the things I've never heard of until the last ten years"*

Respondent 10 *"...this is all new to me in a sense learning needs, homelessness and mental health ...I have never had to experience that at this level...but it's coming through you know"*

Respondent 10 *"I see...there's going to be a need for...massive supports. And....it's one-to-one. And we don't have those supports. Like a guidance counsellor...they can do a certain level of testing....but it's.....the psychological report that's needed.*

Respondent 5 highlights her fears for students *"there are some people you are wondering would they be able, would they work in the industry".* Whilst *Respondent 1* raises concerns for the students *"should we have given them a place are we setting them up for failure, do we genuinely have the supports that can see them succeed?"* These findings show evidence that there is genuine concern for the cohort of students. However, *Respondent 6* noted that her colleagues concerns are important

but is robust in her approach *"Jesus, it was never this bad but get real and just accept that we have an opportunity to help people".* There is a fear that the learner will fall through the cracks, *Respondent 6* notes**:** *"I would steer them to the various people in the college that could help".* The Practitioners although fearful for the students show an overall solidarity in their approach students with disabilities. *Respondent 7* sums things up by suggesting *"we are conscientious teachers who really want to do the best for our student to get them through to go on in further education".* Foucault describes in the literature that power transmits in cultural spaces. He describes education institutions as blocks of 'capacity-communication-power' that supports each other to create relationships of power and knowledge. Foucault (1982) argues when these regulated and concerted systems fuse together it effects educational institutions and practices thus adjusting abilities and teaching behavior and, in this process, structuring how teaching and learning takes place. The influence of these *"blocks*" have resulted in the practitioners in this research developing their own adaptations to how the college functions in relation to the multiple terminologies of disability.

4.3 Social Inclusion

This chapter looks at Social inclusion Gannon & Nolan (2005) addressed in the literature review that social inclusion is a position that allows one to participate fully in the life. The practitioners felt it was important to speak about equality in the college and what it means to them in their professional practice. Respect and integrity were shown to the students through the promotion of equality. The practitioners that were part of the Teaching & Learning Centre spoke proudly of their work with the students affective care was the heart of the centre.

4.3.1   Equality

The practitioners highlighted the importance of equality and inclusive practices in the college in their response to the diversity of students. They take into account social inequalities and they demonstrate strong ethical values and respect in their professional practice. The participants highlighted that the FET sector often get students that are less able for third level education. *Respondent 6* reveals it is notable that *"the better able students are getting higher education so we are getting the students that are less able".* However, the practitioners embraced the diversity of the students.

Respondent 5 *"But we just make them feel…completely equal. And I think students in the classrooms are very good like that as well. There's just an air….there's…there's a fostering of….fairness and equality. I believe that largely in this college".*

Respondent 10 *"But when they come in to the classroom, you have to kind of break down barriers and get them to see…hey, you are all on the same page now, and that means a lot of teambuilding…and working with students….to try and break down the barriers of age".*

Respondent 3 *"You don't want the students to feel different from their fellow students I think it is important that we treat everybody the same as much as possible"*

4.3.2   Teaching and Learning Centre

The practitioners discussed the relevance of the TLC. The practitioners disclosed that the name was crucial. *Respondent 8* states "*the students don't want to be coming back into something that has the connotations of second level they want to spread their wings and fly to a certain extent".* The practitioners cared about the students and the Findings demonstrated how they implemented a caring approach.

Respondent 8 *"So the teaching and Learning Centre was a neutral name to call the room"*

Respondent 2 *"It's happening in the corridors and in the conversations…are you OK…kind of….you know…Checking in with the students….all that kind of stuff. We provide...Care…support, time….you know. Yeah….it's all happening".*

Respondent 1 *"The team is a great team…really….yeah, it really is, yeah. A brilliant team, yeah. And they are all different. They all bring something different into it, you know and the principal...is really good too. And as a college we are exemplary in caring for students… Yeah. And it is…it is exemplary you know. And it's not easy to give that kind of support but its all here in this college"*

The findings draw attention to the holistic approach to students from the participants *Respondent 8* notes *"you should be able to go to college no matter what socioeconomic group you come out of".* The practitioners in this study took pride in the environment they created *Respondent 5* "*no matter who they are no matter where they live it about equality and inclusiveness in this college once they come into a classroom they are equal*". As explained in the literature review feminist approach can be a catalyst to challenge and highlight socially constructed views of people with disabilities. These findings acknowledge that the practitioners are striving to make the college experience a positive one for the students in the TLC as well as the whole college setting. As pointed out by Felce (1997)

when a person's basic needs are met he or she has the opportunity to pursue and achieve goals in major life settings.

4.4   Irish Policy

There is a wide range of Irish policy for inclusive education. However, the practitioners highlighted that most the policies address the symptoms rather than tackling the cause. The learner's issues become the practitioner's issues. Policy can impact on the learning provision quiet often affecting the quality of inclusive education and practices. *National Plan for People with Disability* (2018) documented in the literature when people with a disability leave school further education and training, higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships or employment are not an option for them.

4.4.1   Funding Process for the students

The practitioners identified that the application process for enrolling in the college is not a straightforward procedure for students with a disability. Essentially all documentation pertaining to applying for additional support, reasonable accommodation and any other resources, need to be current and issued by an educational psychologist. There is a strict protocol to follow which is organized by a practitioner who is assigned to the A Post holder. Some of the TLC team are trained in conducting a Needs Assessment with students.

> **Respondent 8** *"There's a criteria…it comes in end of August. And it comes in from them. And it sort of outlines the conditions that are eligible for the fund at this particular level you know.   And it's very specific. And it says what you would need to support that particular condition.*

> **Respondent 4** *"Maybe if a person suffered with dyslexia, they would have certain aids to their assessment, like…a grammar waiver, a spelling waiver, a reader, extra time…somebody on a laptop….so if we know that they have had those things, then we will make it our business to make sure that they…if ….depending on the system…that's tested…if it's a child system it runs out at the age of 18. If it was an adult system, it continues. So that kind of way, then we make sure we have supports for them".*

> **Respondent 1**"*So there's a question when they apply. Is there anything that we need to know? Some of them tick it, some of them don't. So we sort of…ask that question again at interview…just in case they wouldn't have ticked it. If they have a psychological report, we tell them to get it in as soon as possible.   This will be photocopied…and that they would*

meet a member of the learning support team….probably early September, who will interview them and do needs assessment on them".

The findings also identified some limitations in the funding process. Students who are enrolled on part-time courses and students without educational psychological reports are ineligible for additional funding. As discussed in the literature review the UNCRPD (2005) identified the necessity of individual support measures to maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion, the practitioners were experiencing reverse of these recommendations in practice. The practitioners note that resources and funding are essential commodities in order for education to be accessible for students with disabilities.

> **Respondent 4** *"We have to go through their needs assessment, their psychological report, but…the problem that we have is sometimes they may not produce the copy of the paperwork. So you are looking at…you have to have the conversation…you need the paperwork.*
>
> **Respondent 6** *"So we would try and collect ….you know, maybe information on the types of assessments in the past they have had, types of health they have had in the past, so we are looking at them as an overall holistic learner now. And we want to make sure that they have what they need in place."*
>
> **Respondent 10** *"The tests the college can't pay for everyone…I mean in every class you probably get two or three do you know what I mean"*

The literature review disclosed that the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2005) under The Disability Act 2005 identified that the people with disabilities in society should be protected by placing an obligation on public bodies to provide access to education. *Respondent 8 argues "I think more people feel they have a right to go to college and they should be able to go regardless what socio-economic group they come out of…the eligibility should be bigger and broader"* The cost of an educational psychological assessment is approximately four hundred euro. Unfortunately, not all students are in a position to obtain a report from an educational psychologist due to the expensive charges involved. *Respondent 10* notes the college tries their best to put support in place *"the test is big bucks... but we do try facilitate everyone particularly anyone who would be struggling".* Oliver (1982) reported in the literature, to address the issue of society's attitudes in relation to disability, the social model is a way of getting us all to think about the things we had in common, and the barriers that we all faced. However, the social model of disability unfolds in this college through the consequences of education policy. *Respondent 3* explains, *"I think the college does try to be inclusive and offers learning support but I think the college is limited in what it can*

provide but we do our best. There is not enough money invested in education and I think the department has a lead in these things". It is evident the practitioners are trying to implement inclusive practices but they do not have autonomy over funding therefore, they just have to do manage as best they can.

4.4.2 Continuous Professional Development

It was documented in the literature review in the *Further Education and Training Professional Development Strategy 2017-2019* that professional development should be planned, delivered and reviewed as an integrated process throughout the FET sector as it is crucial for the application of inclusive practices. I believe that AES would benefit greatly from the professional development to implement inclusive practices in the sector especially in Universal Design for Learning. The findings disclosed that some of the practitioners had a keen interest in CPD Respondent 6 explains *"There's a good cohort of us I think who are very interested in this area. It's not everybody's cup of tea… you know, it is good I mean the other tutors…they would be positive. You know they wouldn't be trying to say, oh I don't want to know about that or…it's nothing to do with me. They are not like that…They do care too….you know"*. The practitioners that partake in CDP highlight the benefits of upskilling.

I have assured anonymity to the participants in the research, as a consequence I choose not to use identity codes for this section as it could identify the practitioners who are part of the TLC.

> *"There is a good few of us that done universal design for learning with Ahead if you bring those element into the classroom you are benefiting all"*

> *"A student would have a learning agreement so you can put things in place for them in order to do that 4 of us went to training in Ahead"*

> *"I would have done the Ahead course which I found very…very doable it thought you how to recognise….disabilities…And how to cope with them and how to assess them. And…we were introduced to a number of scenarios and a number of people who had disabilities and went to college, and how they were supported and whatever*

> *"I done Ahead training online…it's great to be able to understand it more….and appreciate how to deal with those students now more…and not to isolate them from the class….we try and be more inclusive, you know…."*

"I have done the Ahead course which is looking at the assessments, looking at the needs, and….this month I'm going to do…a course on people with ASD….and further education"

The practitioners that trained with AHEAD and were experienced in the Universal Design for Learning model as outlined in literature review, promotes a multisensory practical approach to learning which categorises information and makes complicated subjects easier by reducing unnecessary jargon. While all the practitioners share common values and objectives, their role as practitioners involves doing a wide variety of different jobs. This has impacted on their commitment to inclusivity, *Respondent 2* exposes*" there is no disability officer there is an A Post it not only includes support for disability it includes study support the canteen and other student services"*. The complex and changing nature of the FET practitioner role suggests that CPD is vital and something practitioners should anticipate having to take part in. Respondent 8 highlights *"the teachers and staff have to be scribes and readers in exams"*.

4.5 Challenges preventing Inclusive Practices in FET

The research discovered that practitioners were at ease with the diversity of students and recognised that different students required different supports, such as language and academic supports. However, they explained that the students were experiencing low socio-economic disadvantage as well as coping with their disability. They were concerned for the attainment levels and the retention rate of students in the college.

4.5.1 Disadvantaged Students

The practitioners revealed that the students were presenting with social, economic and cultural disadvantage and sometimes the college life was proving difficult for the students. The practitioners were concerned that some students were experiencing multiple and intersecting disadvantages. The literature pertaining by Crenshaw (1989) strongly suggests that intersectionality helps to explain how multiple social identities, socioeconomic status, and disability intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect interlocking systems of privilege and oppression.

Respondent 6 "*I teach mature social care. And I would say, every year I have 20 odd students…and I'm not exaggerating when I say 18 of them have difficult personal circumstances, ranging from homelessness to transitioning from foster care…to addiction problems, to mental health issues, to difficulties with kids…single parents.*

Respondent 4 "*We would have students that ….are in temporary accommodation for example even bring it into…where they reside.*

Bourdieu (1996) identified that the educational system quite often reinforces and continues to aid social inequalities that arise from differences in class cultures. The practitioners highlighted that some students were experiencing severe economic disadvantage. Bourdieu reiterates that the education system is the main institution that amplifies class difference**.**

Respondent 3 "*But the problem then is…not every student has computers at home or internet access at home and stuff like that. So…that gap in education between the haves and have-nots is still there*"

Respondent 1 "*And then the students, I notice the more mature students have come to me for ….letters…explaining that they are in college and they are going to the St Vincent de Paul and that, looking for laptops, so that they have access to a laptop.*

Respondent 3 "*Their attendance is poorly…And I think there's a combination of reasons. I think…mental health is a big one. I think part-time jobs…I think there's lots of part-time work out there, and once….especially the younger students…, once they get used to earning their own money…it's very difficult for them to….and I think there's a lot of pressure put on them….in their jobs to do extra work and overtime and stuff like that. But they need the money they can't say no*".

Some of the students were participating in a course that almost represented their life experiences. These groups are exhibiting what Bourdieu identifies as class habitus which can play a role in their educational choices. *Respondent 5* highlighted *"a lot of them would have had…personal issues or circumstances….that were….very upsetting. And they are coming back now to try and get a job in the sector themselves"*. Bourdieu gives a comprehensive description in the literature review on how educational institutions as playing a critical role in the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital. The practitioners revealed that the some students were without homes, had no network of friends or family therefore they had no support to help negotiate the system. Some students were finding it all too much. All these socio-economic disadvantages as well as having a disability was affecting some students.

Respondent 8 *"Some students are having meltdowns, stress….anxiety, panic attack….you know…is the profile female…it's not…it's both…It's both. And it doesn't seem to be specific to age...So I'm seeing a lot of older guys…who you would think…well they are like bodybuilders coming….who are almost sort of sitting in a corner weeping…kind of thing, you know"*

Respondent 4 *"Homelessness…in my social care class…that was the issue…around those that left. Yeah, it was homelessness. It was just…they couldn't cope with like other life circumstances…it just gets too much"*

4.5.2 Professionalization of FET

The findings identified that the practitioners were extremely frustrated with the QQI accreditation system. They realized that FET is undergoing changes that are out of their control and as a result of this they disclosed that the standard of the outcome-based curriculum was a millstone for some students. The same changes are occurring in the AES, the outcome-based curricula are a millstone for students in this sector too. They argued that the rigid learning structure was causing stress and affecting retention and attainment rates for students. Grummell (2014) already pinpointed in the literature review that learning outcomes are often separated from the process of learning. The majority of practitioners raised concerns about the professionalization of FET.

Respondent 4 *"They find it all daunting….mature students, students with difficulties…people who often are returning to education, they haven't been in education for a long time, they haven't a clue what the word module, assignment the whole thing…it is scary".*

Respondent 5 *"But they're finding it…overwhelmingly difficult to get their…their eight subjects together and all of the ….the discreet components that are involved in those. Yeah…well January….January is the time where people get a reality check and they …they genuinely think they can't see it through and some don't".*

Respondent 6 *"Bamboozling them and confusing them…and looking for students to…have a distinction level of understanding…to even understand the brief there are eight to ten modules lots of briefs…Yeah. And they…genuinely…the mature students in social care go….oh I'm overwhelmed…I'm so anxious, I can't even…I can't even look at that brief"*

The findings suggested that the QQI process was causing a lot of distress for students and practitioners alike. Thus, impacting on inclusive practices. The amount of modules, assignment

briefs and assessments were established as a core problem. Two practitioners highlighted the difficulty experienced at level five in comparison to higher levels of QQI levels seven and eight on the NFQ.

> ***Respondent 6****" The QQI Level 5 is actually a difficult course. When I meet the students at graduation who have gone to Level 7 they say it's an easy semester so far…I have less modules…less time in college…Yeah, but the other thing is like…isn't there something wrong with a system where someone finds the first year of a Level 7 easier than their QQI Level 5? Yeah, I think it does…genuinely. I don't think the problem lies with the Level 7. I think the problem lies with the Level 5".*

> ***Respondent 8*** *"I taught on the degree programme. And it was easier than the Level 6 and 5 here in some cases….It was more of a cakewalk for them…like it was really straightforward, you know. And I would have taught it up to the…you know the last year of the thesis…in the degree. And it was nothing as bad as this".*

The findings established that the practitioners are very disheartened and angry with the current QQI process and they have a real sense of concern for the students.

> ***Respondent 8*** *"Yeah I think it's a bit like a beast out of control, to be honest, you know…Oh I think it's…crazy…I have no respect for it at all".*

> ***Respondent 6*** *"Every time someone leaves I'm upset….there's no two ways about it...You know, it doesn't matter what it is….what was the reason…..Like I would be making phone calls….I would be seeing if there's ways of getting extensions. It would be literally like…it would be…it would be the last resort for them to leave.*

The Statement from QQI in relation to participation and "*their work with students*" reveals:

> "QQI engages with students in governance structures through consultation with representative groups; and the involvement of students in our review and accreditation processes".

> (Quality and Qualifications Ireland 2018)

I disagree with this statement from QQI, these findings have demonstrated that there is no connection or communication with the students and government bodies' in fact *Respondent 8*

expresses confusion with the structure of the educational system *"I suspect that QQI as an organisation understaffed….probably you know…not totally 100% clear of its role anymore either. Because it's up against…. you have solas, you have….you know, it's become like who is who and what's what…you know...is there a national standard…so for me….it's a horrendous system".*

Freire (1971) states 'the language of the people cannot exist without the thought and neither language not thought can exist without a structure to which they refer'. If the practitioners are confused about the structures in place how would it be even possible for the students to comprehend, "who is who and what is what"?

The findings also highlighted that if a student drops-out of a course without receiving accreditation it can affect the college's overall annual funding received from SOLAS. This can result in a cutback to staff numbers. Ultimately, less funding for the college can mean that a practitioner maybe assigned to another college. This could affect the TLC team in providing inclusive practice for students with a disability. *Respondent 8* posits "*August to September the hours are allocated so there is a danger of it being reduced".* Again, SOLAS's link to the neo-liberal discourse is clear.

The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 (p.118) states:

> "The aim is to replace current funding arrangements for all FET provision, on a phased basis, with an outcomes based funding model. The funding approach will operate on the continuous improvement model, whereby SOLAS will evaluate the FET provision of each ETB and agree corrective/preventative actions if required"

4.6 Summary

This chapter outlined the understandings and experiences of the practitioners implementing inclusive practices for students with a disability who were experiencing socio-economic disadvantages in FET. Valuable insight into the challenges that can impact on inclusive practices were outlined. These include the lack of funding to access educational assessments for students with disabilities as well as highlighting the need for funding for staff training. The findings also demonstrated the caring relationship between the practitioners and the students in their efforts in implementing best practice to support the student's retention and attainment rates. The neo-liberal approach through the professionalization of FET was made apparent in these in the findings.

The following chapter will analyse and discuss these themes in greater detail.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

5.1   Introduction

This research is an exploratory inquiry in to inclusive practices built on the experiences of practitioners in further education and training sector with a focus on students with a disability. I will position the literature review and the findings within the context of further education and training sector and its professional practice. Once again, my ontology and epistemology has influenced how the analysis has been presented in this chapter.

5.2   Defining Disability

The multiple terminologies of disability raised concern about the different attitudes in relation to disability and the impact it had on inclusive practices in the college. The range of disability caused questions to be asked by some of the practitioners in relation to admissions of learners with disability in the college. There were questions concerning the availability of resources in place for the learners to succeed. However, during the research I sensed that there was a genuine interest among the practitioners in the area of disability. Although, not all were part of the TLC and were not fully trained in certain areas they all played their part in providing a professional practice for learners. I got a feeling some practitioners were disheartened. It really was close to their heart but with so many barriers impacting on inclusion it was very challenging for the practitioners.

It is evident in this research that there is a genuine concern for the learners. However, fear of learners dropping out due to personal issues caused concern for the practitioners. As Standing (2001) remarks in the literature review, that worrying for learners can involve stress for practitioners. However, the practitioners that are a part of the TLC were more confident in dealing with issues that came to light due to they were knowledge and adaptability in their approach to disability. Whilst there were uncertainties among some of their colleagues who were not part of the TLC. The training with AHEAD is not mandatory for FET practitioners, but some practitioners who participated in this research felt it was essential.

I raised the question with practitioners as to why they were not part of the TLC. The main reason given was *time*. They revealed that time was challenging, trying to teach eight modules and then trying to plan time to attend CPD was not an option for them. It was evident that they all provided support to the learners they encountered in the classroom. As has been previously reported in the literature by Morris & Sharma (2011) structures need to be brought into effect for effective inclusive practices such as planning and time.

The White Paper on Adult Education – Learning for Life (2000) proposed that:

> 'people with disabilities should be targeted by every Adult Education programme so that they may avail of integrated mainstream options on an equal basis; disability awareness training should be developed and provided for Adult Education and training staff generally in order to promote awareness of the barriers facing students with disabilities'.

Nineteen years on and training for practitioners in FET does not appear to be a priority. Practitioners are attempting to attend training in their own time as well as during working hours and it was proving impossible for some practitioners. *Respondent 2 discloses, "there is a study support network, it's once a month, the problem is you can't go to them all because you are missing the same classes all the time… time is an issue".* The challenge of time is an important finding in the understanding of the inclusive practices from the practitioner's perspective. One respondent points out "*CPD it does exist but I haven't taken it up myself as I'm juggling too many balls at one time*". The practitioners highlighted that there is a need for a permanent disability officer and an educationalist psychologist who are specially trained around the area of disability. The extra support needed to create inclusive education is impacting on the professional practice of the practitioners as pointed out by a practitioner the college needs more than a guidance counsellor there is a lot of emotional stuff happening.

5.3   Social Inclusion

Gannon & Nolan (2005) warns that social inclusion poses a challenge to further evolve and develop equality strategies and to more effective include an equality dimension in general development

strategies. The TLC provided for students an environment that they could feel psychologically safe *Respondent 6* states in relation to the TLC "*so it kind of evolved… it all began organically…it has been a part of the college years".* The findings disclosed that the practitioners were empathetic to the students and adapted their roles to fulfil their need. Being empathetic attempts to understand the student's world as Rogers (1951) posits it perceives and interprets events in their world. For the practitioners in this research it was fundamental that adult education advocates equality regardless of the background of a person presenting to an educational institution they were aware of how internal and external factors had implications on the student's college experience. Lynch (2009), reminds us that care in social organisation is important as students can experiences various by-products of social, economic and cultural action. The practitioners were fully aware of the students personal backgrounds. The findings disclosed that they reacted to the students' needs with a unique caring approach. Bourdieu (1996) acknowledged that education institutes play a part in creating inequality or by reinforcing inequalities that already exist, therefore it is vital that social inclusion is promoted in education. Murray (2014) pinpointed that raising the subject of systematic inequalities' and injustices in society are increasingly observed as merely recreational education and unnecessary diversion from the pursuit of economic progress.

I agree with Murray, it is my understanding that education is focused on the economy rather than social inclusion.

SOLAS *Active Inclusion Strategic Goal 2 - 2014-2019* states:

> ' "active inclusion" as enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society…including those with barriers to participation such as persons with a disability to stay engaged, complete qualifications, transition successfully into employment or where appropriate, move into higher level qualifications in further and higher education'

SOLAS national plan through active inclusion focuses on education for economic progress. Ryan (2014) argues the use of the term lifelong learning is to encompass all forms of learning is well and truly abandoned in FET. *The White Paper on Adult Education - Learning for Life* (2000) as claimed by Ryan is no longer the philosophical ideology for adult education. The recommendations for adult education as pointed out in chapters one should be underpinned by three core principles, promoting: (a) equality of access, participation and outcome for participants in adult education and (b) a systemic approach to life long learning

The White Paper (2000) also places emphasizes on promoting an inclusive society with a target investment towards those most at risk. The same can be recognized in the UN Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (2011) state, under Article 24:

> 'State parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong-learning directed to: the full development of human development potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity'.

Although various policies allude to inclusive systems, the practitioners in this research demonstrated a sound understanding of the importance of social inclusion in this college. The work of the practitioners in this college can be encapsulated by the phrase, "improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity" *The World Bank Organisation (2018).*

5.4   Irish Policy

There is a wide range of Irish policy legislation for inclusive education. The practitioners highlighted the policies address the symptoms rather than tackling the cause. The learner's issues become the practitioner's issues. Policy can impact on the learning provision quiet often affecting the quality of inclusive education and practices.

5.4.1   Funding for Learners

An important factor emerging from these findings is that learners must have medical evidence of their disability and produce a report from an educationalist psychological in order to access additional supports in FET. The practitioners demonstrated their concerns that students were not receiving the intervention or supports they needed due to not having the necessary documentation. As mentioned in the literature review the colleges have a final closing date to request funding for services and supports under the fund from the Higher Education Authority. The institution has the discretion to use the funding already allocated to support the learner provided a needs assessment

has been undertaken. The fund does not cover assessment or diagnosis of a disability (Higher Education Authority, 2014, p.6).

The HEA's (2017) position is that letters from Medical General Practitioners are not acceptable in any circumstances as documentary evidence of disability. These points to the need of a procedure to be put in place for learners who have personal issues and who do not have the relevant documentation necessary for additional support. This is particularly relevant for learners who present with invisible disabilities such as mental health issues. There are no grants available to learners with disabilities who are enrolled in part-time courses. For learners with disabilities, the challenge of completing eight modules in one academic year is almost impossible.

The opportunity to complete a lesser number of modules per academic year is not an alternative as funding is only available to learners on full-time courses. The need to be flexible and to offer the experience of accessing FET on a modular basis was highlighted as way of supporting learners with a disability achieve their goals. *Respondent 6* clarifies "*a two year level 5 would be brilliant…their level of need is so high, we can't possibly give them what they need but we could if we had it over two years*" whilst *Respondent 10* points out "*one size does not fit all*".

In my opinion, the idea that current policy is being fully inclusive to learners with a disability needs to be reviewed and evaluated. It was reported in the literature by Oliver (1996) that when barriers are removed, disabled people can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives. The current grant process for education is not providing a person with a disability fair access to an education that is responsive to their needs. The practitioners are concerned for the learner's retention and their level of attainment rates in the college as the one-year full time course is proving too much for some learners.

The National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan 2013-2016 acknowledges that structural issues can indirectly exclude people with disabilities if the architecture, policies, information or service delivery, are not geared to include people with a range of disabilities. An acknowledgement in policy is not enough to create change. According to Oliver (1996), the attitude that disability is

to have 'something wrong with you' needs to transform. Priority should be given to investigating and identifying ways of ensuring learners with disabilities have equal opportunities that are fully taken into account in social organisation and educational policy.

5.4.2 Continuous Professional Development

The findings highlighted some practitioners in this college have an effective culture of ongoing CPD. However, it is evident with the changing nature of FET that all practitioners need CPD to support the shifts and adaptations of their changing roles. In the absence of a disability officer, the TLC team conduct many roles such as: the needs assessments for learners, learner agreements, order and provide additional resources such as assistive technology and coloured paper, they ensure the font and print on all examination papers are of a universal size. The TLC decided to source the same coloured paper and to use a large font size for everyone taking examinations. This was to ensure that inclusive practices were in place so no individual student felt different to another: equality and inclusiveness are in high regard in the college.

Baker, Lynch and Lyons (2009) revealed in the literature that structural injustices can intensify affective deprivations. These extra duties are all additional to their roles as practitioners and they highlighted that all the extra work is time consuming. The Further Education and Training Professional Development Strategy 2017- 2019 notes there are challenges encountered by those working in the sector, such as an increase in administrative tasks and responsibilities. *Respondent 1* mentions *"some of us are trained in doing needs assessments you would be nearly apologizing they are ten pages long and very detailed"*. I would argue that there is a great deal of pressure on the TLC team to provide a professional inclusive practice as *Respondent 8* explains *"in recent years it has been in around fifty to sixty students who would have a learning agreement it would take up to half an hour to do one"*.

The Further Education and Training Act 2013 states:

> 'That one of the functions of SOLAS is to provide or assist in the provision of training to persons charged with the delivery of further education and training programmes'.

In this context, SOLAS is responsible for coordinating and funding implementation of CPD. The Further Education and Training Professional Development Strategy 2017- 2019 (2017 p.18) highlights 'the sector will be primarily supported, facilitated and structured by the local ETB organisation as the employer, and with support at a national level from the Education and Training Board of Ireland and support services'. These findings highlighted that at local level the principal in this college was committed to implementing inclusive practices. *Respondent 8* points out *"the principal has a commitment to the area and makes rooms available and provides hours to tutors the principal is trying to maintain it"*. This research did not find the implementation of professional practices in relation to disability training for practitioners as declared in the professional development strategy mentioned above.

The training mentioned in this study was either done through AHEAD and other similar organisations and this was arranged by the A-Post holder. Respondent 8 highlights "And we put a lot of training in. Bridge came in and talked about having a deaf student. Somebody came in from Dyslexia Ireland…and we had somebody from mental health". Additional training was undertaken through the initiative of practitioners and conducted in their personal time *Respondent 6* states *"I have done numerous courses in sensory processing disorder, dyspraxia, autism spectrum. So I would have had to do those for myself, just to learn them"*. Another practitioner reveals that many years ago there was a great system in place for training. *Respondent 1* laments, *"we done eight weeks over a year… I learned so much…psychologists came to the school twice a year to see how we were getting on and would meet with the groups we were dealing with"*. I wonder, what has changed so drastically in the education system that has put CPD at the bottom of the priority list.

Mike Oliver claims:

> 'Models are ways of translating ideas into practice and the idea underpinning the individual model was that of personal tragedy, while the idea underpinning the social model was that of externally imposed restriction'.
>
> (Oliver, 2004, 1996)

I argue that the externally exposed restrictions from policy providers such as funding for all learners and CPD for practitioners are hampering inclusive practices in FET for learners with a disability. As previously raised, time and the changing nature of practitioners' roles and responsibilities are

crucial issues. Disability awareness training should be introduced and provided to all staff to promote awareness of the challenges facing learners with disabilities. There should be a dialogue between the college, learners and disability groups on how curricula can be adapted to meet the needs of the learner. Given the limitations, the findings have shown that this college is endeavouring to meet the needs of learners with a disability. The ethos of the college is dedicated to promoting equality and inclusiveness for learners as *Respondent 10* stated *"… it comes from the top down"*.

5.5   Challenges preventing Inclusive Practices in FET

The findings identified that the practitioners were extremely frustrated with the QQI accreditation system. The research discovered that practitioners were at ease with the diversity of students. They explained that the students were experiencing low socio-economic disadvantage as well as coping with their disability. They were concerned for retention and attainment rates of students in the college.

5.5.1 Disadvantaged Learners

These particular findings cause me to rethink my approach in encapsulating the themes that were emerging and it was through the practitioner's eyes that I framed the learner's life experiences through the concept of intersectionality. Crenshaw (1989) identified intersectionality as a concept to understand how multiple axes of power intersect and it was through this lens that I observed how the power of social, cultural and economic capitals impacted on a learner with a disability. The findings demonstrated that inclusion, disability and intersecting privilege and oppressions are all vital components that educational policy does not seem to take into consideration as intersecting forces of disadvantage.

The analysis of these findings also cause me to reflect on the changing nature of adult education and how it has deconstructed the practitioner's philosophy of adult education. The practitioners have had to adapt to increasing developments in the FET sector. Apart from trying to provide inclusive practices for learners they also have an element of care that attends to human needs. As Delphy and Leonard (1992) points out, attending to human needs requires time and effort and challenges some stress. *Respondent 10* claims *"they have fallen out of so many education levels ….they need support now. Somebody…get them…do you know what I mean, care for them. Get*

them assessed and even a dedicated support psychologist. On the ground we care for the student...we are doing our best".

Crenshaw (1995) states that an intersectionality approach goes beyond an analysis of social problems. The FET sector is oppressing learners further by placing them at a disadvantage in education rather than in society. Freire, (1976) claims as long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically 'accept' their exploitation'. The reality faced by these learners is absent or invisible in current policy. The practitioners demonstrated their concerns that students were not receiving the intervention or supports they needed because they did not have the relevant medical documentation. The Higher Education Authority fund does not cover assessment or diagnosis of a person with mental health, anxiety or depression. This situation is impacting on retention and attainment rates of learners in the college. The practitioners have identified that learners quite often leave because they are just not able to continue.

5.5.2 Professionalization of FET

From the findings it is clear that there is considerable frustration with the QQI accreditation system. The practitioners and learners are both affected by the structures that are in place. The emphasised on a neo-liberal discourse is evident in this college. As highlighted by Harvey (2005) when markets do not exist they must be created in areas such as education. The implementation of QQI is putting pressure on the students to receive accreditation. Having to complete eight to ten modules numerous assignments per module in the space of one year for full time learners and two years for part-time learners has proved too difficult for some students. This has resulted in poor retention and attainment rates in the college. *Respondent 3 "they drop out…what happens is, they can't keep up to date with their….with their assignments. Then the assignments bottle neck. Then what happens is….they are afraid to come in".* Ironically, if the learner's drops out of college without receiving a full level five award in a one year or if the college does not reach their target quota of learners the funding allocation is reduced for the following academic year.

The practitioners revealed they get approximately twenty hours a week which is allocated from the principal and is distributed through the A Post holder to the practitioners in the TLC to provide support. A problem arises if practitioners are transferred and there is a decrease in teaching hours in the college Respondent 1 states "so if you are principal and you have an allocation you are trying to run a number of programmes you have to pull teachers in all of those teaching areas". It is inevitable the first place that will be affected is the TLC. However, it was acknowledged by most of the practitioners that the principal is in full support of the TLC and to date there has not been a deduction in hours provided to the TLC team. *Respondent 10* highlights *"there is 100% collaboration in the college and I mean the Principal … it comes from the top down"*.

These findings are vital as they highlight the significant shift that is happening in adult education. Fitzsimons (2014) identified that programme plans are compulsory checklists tutors are held to task if they stray from this format. Unfortunately, market orientated and employment targets are defining further education with a broad vocational ethos of training for employability rather than meeting the needs and abilities of the learners. Grummell, (as cited in Murray 2014, p. 128) that 'market orientated discourses refine further education and the vocational ethos to targeted training for employment'. What is becoming increasing apparent through reports produced by FET in relation to barriers to inclusion is 'that institutions that offer adult education have been entrusted with the daunting task of including individuals in society and combatting social exclusion' (Walker, 2009, p.348).

The most challenging issues that I would have observed which are preventing inclusivity in FET colleges are the employment of Disability Officers. The research found that one of the most challenging issues facing the sector was the absence of Disability Officers and this situation is hindering the implementation of inclusivity practices in FET colleges. Practitioners are modifying and adjusting their professional practices. The findings disclosed that they are doing their best to promote inclusive practices but sometimes they are feeling upset and confused with the system and structures.

I would be concerned for their well-being. Who cares from them? There is a need for SOLAS to review current policies such as, funding, CPD processes and the accreditation system in further

education for learners who have a disability. Grummell (as citied in Murray 2014 p.133) highlighted 'the neo-liberal shift to a global transient marketplace remains largely unquestioned in this transformation'. I think it is time to question this transformation as it is apparent the professionalization of FET is not benefiting learners who have a disability as well as other limiting socio-economic factors.

5.6   Summary

This chapter drew on the literature from Chapter Two with the findings in Chapter Four in order to provide an analysis of inclusive practices built on the experiences of these practitioners in FET. Multiple Terminologies of Disability were identified. The different attitudes of the practitioners in relation to disability were highlighted. I presented the importance of social inclusion in educational institutions through a discussion around social economic and culture implications. I put forward the challenges that are impacting on inclusive practices by examining policy legislation such as funding and continuous professional development, while also reviewing relevant literature with that of national organisations and the practitioners in adult education in order to establish a clear understanding of the pragmatic issues which need to be addressed in FET. I concluded by placing emphasis on the shifting focus of FET to the professionalization of the sector through rigid accreditation measures.

Chapter Six, the conclusion will depict the thesis study and recommendations and areas of further study will be outlined which identify ways to improve future inclusive practices in adult education.

CHAPTER SIX
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1   Introduction

This study gave me the opportunity to draw attention to inclusive practices built on the experiences of practitioner's in Further Education and Training (FET) as well as exploring how the area of disability and social disadvantages has impacted on the students in adult education.   The practitioners in this research identified concern for students with disabilities who also experienced low socio-economic disadvantages.   They highlighted that these internal and external factors together with the professionalization of the FET sector were impacting on student retention and attainment in the college. They emphasised that additional training was required to ensure positive inclusion practices for students with a disability.

The practitioners in the Teaching and Learning Centre claimed that training in teaching methodologies and individual learner assessments should be undertaken to keep up-to-date with inclusive methods of facilitation. They identified the Universal Design for learning model as the way forward for inclusive education in this college. The purpose and focus of the FET sector needs to be revaluated to establish and standardise inclusion education policies and practices.

Current policies on funding and on continuous professional development should be reviewed by SOLAS. More supports for students in this sector, who present with disability and social disadvantage need to be made available. The practitioners were of the opinion that an increase in the number of educational psychologists and disability officers was necessary to provide a comprehensive approach to inclusive education. Implementing change is complex, legislation is set at macro level through national and international government and state agencies initiatives. However, implementation of policies is done at micro level and at the moment local responses are varied.

By conducting this research, I discovered that it is important at a micro level to use adult education institutions for radical education and action. There are dedicated and caring staff in educational institutions who every day make a difference to students' experience of further education. I remain optimistic that in the future students with disability who also experience social disadvantage will have equal opportunities to access inclusive adult education in the Further Education and Training sector. We must remember that "One size does not fit all". I will make recommendations for further research and discuss the area of further study. Finally, I will discuss in my reflection my own values in relation to adult education and relate it to what was identified by this project. The chapter will end with a brief Conclusion.

6.2   Recommendations

As previously mentioned, I am employed in the Adult Education Service (AES), my rational for this research was to identify how this Post Leaving Certificate College managed inclusive practices for students presenting with a disability to the college and relate my findings back to the AES. The two sectors are separate sections within the same organisation; they both share the same campus. The findings within the parameters of this research have led me to make the following recommendations in order to promote inclusive education for students with disability that present to the AES.

1   The Department of Education and Science could accept a wider range of documentary evidence to support applications by students who wish to apply to the fund for students with disabilities. A universal test could be developed that would be administered by specially trained practitioners rather than each student paying approximately €400 to get assessed by an educational psychologist.

2   Currently there are three disability officers employed in the FET sector but their contractual obligations are not extended to the AES. Additional funding could be be secured to provide for the employment of a disability officer to cover the five regional Adult Education Services across Dublin. .

3   In the interim, a post for an Inclusion Development Worker could be introduced in each AES to provide training and support to practitioners in order to provide a professional inclusive service within each AES.

4   Workshops for practitioners in learning and teaching methodologies that would assist them in responding to the multiple needs of students in their classrooms.

5   The European Social fund and SOLAS manage the funding for the AES. Currently the target for funding is based on accreditation statistics. Many students in the AES are stuck in a vacuum because they cannot comply with the standard of writing that is required by QQI, therefore they cannot be put forward for accreditation. Ultimately, there needs to be a modification of the QQI Component Specifications to incorporate inclusive learning with the provision of reasonable accommodation for students with a disability.

6   Develop documentation to ensure students who present with learning difficulties are identified early so appropriate measures can be put in to place immediately.

7   Build strong working and learning relationships with local disability support services.

8   Incorporate funding in annual budgets to purchase assistive technology to support students.

6.3   Areas of Further Study

This was a small piece of research within one Post Leaving Certificate college under the remit of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board. The aim of the research was to explore inclusive practices built on the experiences of practitioner's in FET: with a focus on students with a disability. This research could be extended across the CDETB. Most importantly, any further research in the area needs to include the voice of the learner.

The practitioners in this research spoke very strongly of social, economic and cultural factors that were impacting on the retention and participation of learners in their college. One practitioner mentioned the influence the Department of Social Protection (DSP) had on students who were in receipt of state payments. She stated "there were women in a community group that wanted to do a

social care course, they are carers and on a payment from DSP but their payments will be stopped if they go over the hours they are permitted to attend education courses. And it's crazy because it's keeping people in the poverty trap". The concerns of the practitioners cannot be ignored; this researcher recommends further research in areas mentioned above.

6.4   Reflection

My interpretation of readings has been influenced by a variation of theorists and frameworks such as Pierre Bourdieu, Feminism Theory, Social Model of Disability and Affective Equality. They accompanied me on my educational journey and laid the foundation for my understanding of inequality in education and my understanding of inclusive education and disability. They exposed the influence that social, economic and cultural positions have on students with a disability in adult education. As time went by I discovered, that my philosophies were not ground-breaking, theorists have been researching and writing on disability and inclusion for decades.

However, I found that policy documents and legislation did not seem to investigate the impact of socio – economic disadvantage as well as disability when examining challenges that is faced by some students with a disability in adult education. Finding all these theories and frameworks that linked to my subjective beliefs was enlightening and motivating for conducting this research. I felt I was discovering a lens that was authentic for the voices of the practitioners that work in the area to speak of their experiences of inclusive education and practices.

The influence of neo-liberalism in education is more than evident in this college. The powerful influence of outcome based learning and QQI curricula are causing great stress for the students and practitioners alike. The retention and attainment rates of the students is becoming really difficult to manage. The lack of having the support of a dedicated educational psychologist and disability officer is resulting in the practitioners having to adapt their roles to facilitate students. As noted in the findings, the college is providing resources for students who have a diverse range of disabilities. Some students do not have the documentation required to register for reasonable accommodation and students on part-time courses are not eligible for supplementary funding.

I must admit I was shocked at the inequality students were experiencing in FET through educational legislation. It must be noted that practitioners did their best to alleviate this inequality. I am bewildered as to why college funding is based on the attainment and accreditation of students. It is blatantly obvious that due to funding restrictions materials and resources are not in place to support

students. This obviously impacts the ability of the college in providing what is necessary for professional and inclusive education. I cannot help but reflect on what Walker, (2009, p.348) claims 'that institutions that offer adult education have been entrusted with the daunting task of including individuals in society and combatting social exclusion'. I believe practitioners are doing their best within the social and educational mess. It has to be accepted that it is worrying for students with disabilities who are trying to succeed in the educational system. It poses the question: Is the educational system setting them up for failure? For me, this research has been a journey that has opened my mind to array of new knowledge and insights. I believe with the support of my colleagues in the AES we can pave the way to make positive changes for learners with a disability in adult education.

6.5   Summary

My learning from this research can be summed in a quote from Oliver (1990 p.7)) 'it is not individual limitations, of whatever kind, which are the cause of the problem but society's failure to provide appropriate services and adequately ensure the needs of disabled people are fully taken into account in its social organisation'. This statement fits in with my philosophy as a social constructivist. I believe social organisation need to make radical changes in the field of adult education to improve the educational experiences for those who present with a disability as well as low socio-economic disadvantage. This journey has transformed my perceptions of adult education and I am happy that I have developed a new mind-set. The promotion of inclusive education and a holistic approach to the issues involved needs to be built into the quality assurance processes in addition to policies and practice as appropriate.

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6.7 Appendices

Appendix A

Research topic

Practitioner Research: An exploratory inquiry to Inclusive Practices built on the experiences of Practitioners working with students with disabilities that need learning support in a Post Leaving Cert (PLC) college of Further Education & Training.

Lisa O'Meara: lisa.omeara.2018@mumail.ie
Brid Connolly: brid.connolly@ mu.ie
Department of Adult & Community Education, Maynooth University

Your involvement in this research is voluntary. You may withdraw from this research study at any stage. There will be no penalty for withdrawing from this research study. This research will be available to the public, however, confidentiality and anonymity of participants in this research is assured.

Participant – Please complete the following: (Please enter Yes or No after each statement).

1. I have read Plain Language Statement/Email
2. I have the opportunity the ask questions and discuss this study
3. I understand the information provided
4. I received satisfactory answers to all my questions
5. I agree to be interviewed in the course of this research
6. I am aware that the interview will be audio taped
7. I am aware that my response may be anonymously quoted in research-based papers
8. I am aware that I can withdraw from this research study at any time

Signature: I have read and understood the information on this form. The researcher has answered my questions. Any concerns I have in relation to this research have been addressed and answered by the researcher. I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Date: _____

Questions: <u>Teaching & Learning Centre</u>

1. What are the profiles of the learners in your classroom, are there students with a disability?

2. What are the profiles of the students that present to the Teaching & Learning Centre?

3. Do you conduct initial assessments with the students? Can you explain the process?

4. Can you give examples of the students' needs that emerge from the assessments?

5. Do the students always volunteer their personal information?

6. How do you foster inclusion in the classroom?

7. What training do you have for your work in the area of supporting students with a disability?

8. What do you believe are the best methods in creating an inclusive learning environment to help participants with disabilities feel equal and valued?

9. Have you any other comment?

Questions: <u>Teaching Staff</u>

1. What are the profiles of the learners in your classroom, are there students with a disability?

2. How do you foster inclusion in the classroom?

3. How do you work with students that present with learning difficulties in the classroom?

4. Have you observed good practice in the college? Can you explain?

5. Do you have any training in the area of supporting students with a disability?

6. What do you believe are the best methods in creating an inclusive learning environment to help participants with disabilities feel equal and valued?

7. Have you any other comment?

Coordinator of Teaching and Learning Centre

1. What is your role and responsibilities as the co-ordinator of the Teaching and Learning Centre?

2. What training do you have for your work in the area of supporting students with a disability?

3. Can you explain the funding structure for students presenting with a disability to the college?

4. What do you feel could improve the centre?

5. Is there challenges that affect Inclusive practices in the college?

6. What do you believe are the best methods in creating an inclusive learning environment to help participants with disabilities feel equal and valued?

7. Have you any other comment?