Practising inclusion within the regular school setting: students with special needs and their Aprender experience.

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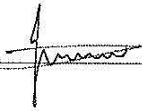June, 2008

Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis for which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

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Candidate's signature: _____

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ABSTRACT

The experiences of students with special needs attending regular schools, their involvement and achievement within their school setting, and the theoretical underpinnings directing and determining what is best practice and delivery of effective education, have been an area of on-going change and development over the last 30 years. Teaching and learning processes involved in the effective pedagogical practice of special education have been consistently evolving, providing schools with developing options to enhance effective education practice for all students regardless of any academic, social and/or physical differences and subsequent needs.

This study researches the experiences of students defined as having an intellectual disability who attend "Aprender", a special program catering to the students' special needs within the framework of a regular school setting. These students are eligible to attend a special school due to their individual circumstances, yet they have chosen to attend a regular Catholic school. The study examines the experiences of the students as they participate in the program, by documenting their voice through their school journeys within the social, locational and academic inclusive participation as members of their school community. The research consisted of a longitudinal case study and methods used included interviews, observations, field notes and surveys.

The study findings identify the value of relationships as a key element determining the success of inclusive practice within the Aprender program, in particular the peer relations that existed between the participants, their teachers and other students. The study also identified the theme of development, with strong emphasis placed on the examination of academic, social and emotional growth within the experiences of the students. The study illustrates the difficulties that the students with special needs encounter in their educational setting, in particular the social and academic challenges that affects their inclusion. These experiences contributed to determining the success of the approaches structured to support the students' inclusion in the

program.

The study found that the program was largely successful in its aims to include SWSN in a regular school setting, though some aspects of a holistic inclusion were less successful, and offers recommendations for further improvement.

Glossary

Differentiation: The delivery of curriculum in different ways to enhance learning opportunities amongst students with different learning abilities.

Disability: Used in special education literature to account for condition(s) presenting developmental limitations to the functioning of the student. A disability could describe a sensory impairment, physical impairment or intellectual impairment that often impedes social and/or learning development (Lerner, 1997). The term is often used to refer to bodily functions or processes that are not working properly in a person (Ashman & Elkins, 2002).

Exclusion: Refers to the experiences of students with special needs when school systems fail to appropriately support and provide effective learning. As result, students fail to be included in the learning processes taking place, and may require placement in alternative education settings (Ashman and Elkins, 2002).

Emotional Development: Refers to the positive acquisition of emotional skills which Students with Special Needs (SWSN) tend to develop when they participate in positive learning environments which promote individual learning and achievement (Meese, 2001).

Inclusion: The process and outcome of attempting to provide for all students, including those with disabilities, in regular schools. Inclusion implies providing for all students within the educational program of the regular school (Moss, 2003). For the purpose of this study, inclusion

refers to the full participation, and progressive academic and social development of the Students with Special Needs (SWSN) within the regular school system that they attend.

Inclusion (Social): An aspect of inclusion explored in this study. According to Beveridge (1999), it refers to situations where all students interact, play, learn and participate in school life. This social participation occurs regardless of levels of ability.

Inclusive Practice: The multi-faceted approach to implementing the inclusion of all students, regardless of ability or other differences, to a common school system where inclusion is the practiced educational approach (Forlin, 2006). Under this approach, schools develop systems that aid the inclusion of all the students.

Integration: The process of integrating students with disabilities into regular/mainstream schools from an external setting. Students may come from a specialist setting and could have previously been excluded from mainstream schools. It implies that students with disabilities can be introduced to a regular school setting when strategic plans are put in place to enhance the integration (Moss, 2003).

Integration Status: The Commonwealth Government of Australia provides funds to schools in support of students with disabilities to enhance their integration. Students entitled to integration support undergo extensive specialist assessment and receive integration status as result. Disabilities include: intellectual, chronic health, hearing, physical and severe language (Elkins, 2002).

Intellectual Disability: A disability that is characterised by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour as expressed in the conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills. (Meese, 2001).

Learning Difficulty: Learning problems that derive from visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage. Students present identified cognitive impairments (ie short term auditory memory, visual-perceptual problems), being not the result of a disability (Prior, 1996).

Learning Disability: A learning disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written. A learning disability may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, speak, think, read, write spell, or do mathematical operations (Lerner, 1997).

Mainstreaming: The practice of educating the disabled student in the regular classroom. Mainstreaming is often associated with sending a student from a special education class to a regular class for specified periods without undertaking full inclusion (Beveridge, 1999).

Mainstream School: (also referred to as regular school) describes the school setting where general education is provided for students. According to Ashman and Elkins (2002), it is a US term that refers to the general education stream in which SWSN may be placed with regular students.

Seclusion: The traditional accommodation of students with special needs who have problems with learning, often outside a regular school setting (Ashman & Elkins, 2002). For this thesis, it refers to the offering of education in a special education setting adjacent to a mainstream school.

Social Development: Refers to the acquisition and development of skills which enhance successful interactions with others. Social development provides students with special needs with skills to maintain positive interpersonal relations within different social situations and environments (Meese, 2001).

Special School: A system separate from the general education system for managing the education of SWSN (French, Kozleski & Sands, 2000).

Students with Special Needs (SWSN): The term adopted for this study to describe students who present varying degrees of learning potential. SWSN is a broad term that includes students with learning difficulties, differences (gifted and talented) and what is regarded commonly in the literature as identified learning disabilities.

CHAPTER ONE

THE JOURNEY BEGINS…

Introduction

All the special education policies of the states and territories in Australia recognise the ability of every student to learn; they recognise the need to focus on students' strengths and needs, not just their weaknesses; and they recognise that instruction must be individualised to the extent necessary for the educational experience to be positive for the student. …. Every child, regardless of the nature of their disability, has the right to be educated in a regular school, and parents may exercise the right to choose the type of schooling for their child. (Foreman, 1996, pp. 37-38).

This study examines the experiences of inclusion of students with special needs (SWSN) attending a regular secondary school. The thesis describes their experiences as they participate in an educational program that aims to facilitate appropriate education to address the students' individual educational needs and experience of inclusion. SWSN have traditionally encountered difficulties with their participation in regular school settings. Ashman (2002) indicates that factors affecting SWSN and their success at school include various difficulties concerning being academically challenged, supported and integrated within the school system. Lerner (1997) also suggests that SWSN are more likely than other students to experience a higher risk of dropping out of school, tend to be less likely to experience academic success, seem more likely to be victims of bullying or bully others, may become too dependent on support structures and possibly display uncooperative behaviour as a result.

The research has adopted a longitudinal case study approach to document the experiences of the participating SWSN and the thesis is written partly as a narrative to

provide a description of the experience. Pseudonyms are used to name the program, the school and all research participants. I have named the program "Aprender" (Spanish: To Learn). By exploring the lived experiences of the SWSN as participants in the Aprender program and members of the greater school community, I document the students' voices in order to reflect on the program and its influence in their participation within the school setting.

Purpose, significance and background of the study

Purpose of the study

The study has two main aims. Firstly, it aims to describe the experiences of SWSN who participate in the Aprender program in order to facilitate understanding of their experiences. Here, it is primarily concerned with narrating the stories of the students as they describe their experiences at school, particularly with reference to their participation not only within Aprender, but also within the larger school setting where the program operates. This part of the study is relevant to an understanding of SWSN in educational settings from the perspective of student experience, reflecting a student voice on participation within the school system. Current studies focusing on narrating SWSN experiences in school settings (Celinska, 2004; Cook, Swain & French, 2001; Davis & Watson, 2001) argue the value of student voice and lived experience as strategies which support the identification of best practice for the students.

Secondly, the study aims to provide insight into what may constitute good

pedagogical practice for SWSN. The study therefore also has relevance to educational settings that are concerned with the implementation of inclusive cultures that encourage the education of each student. Based on these aims, I hope to reach conclusions about what could take place in regular classrooms and/or other school settings that challenge and cater to student diversity and special needs within appropriate educational frameworks. As a result, the documented lived experience of these students through their own voice may offer recommendations for the improvement of the program and education of SWSN in educational settings. As a teacher in and Director of the Aprender program during the research period, the study has particular relevance to my practice as an educator. As a teacher, it will enhance my understanding of how the program impacts on my educational practice. As a researcher, I have an interest in identifying the students' experiences within the program and the greater school setting where Aprender operates, and I expect that this understanding will enable me to draw informed conclusions from inquiry, identification and interpretation of the research findings.

Significance of the study

The significance of the study is that it provides documentation of the lived experience of SWSN who participate in the regular school setting where the study takes place. The description of their experiences is of great benefit to the school in general and to Aprender in particular, since it can inform and support the continuing structuring and development of the program. The study holds significance for the broader concepts of inclusion and the education of SWSN since it may contribute to an understanding of the educational promotion and effective practice of inclusiveness for all students.

Background to the study

Educational literature has examined the experiences and formed perceptions of SWSN attending regular school settings (e.g. Booth, 1987; Forgan & Vaughn, 2000; Forlin 2006; Scott & Gregg, 2000). Since this study is concerned with identifying the impact that inclusive practice has on students' experiences, my research is focused on how the students describe and reflect on their educational journeys within the Aprender program.

Chapman (1988) established how negative factors influence SWSN in relation to how they achieve at school. Given that positive experiences are known to contribute to social-emotional development, motivation and academic achievement, the challenges that SWSN present in the regular classroom need to be considered when structuring learning systems appropriate to support, guide and challenge these students. As well, it is necessary that inclusive systems cater to the needs of the student across all aspects of development.

In considering the needs of individual students, there have been substantial developments in special education in how schools might cater and facilitate effective education for SWSN (Beveridge, 1999; Heiman, 2004; Koay & Sim, 2004; Lerner, 1997). Inclusion refers to the practice of providing for all students, including those SWSN, within regular school settings (Moss, 2003). Inclusion is now considered the

most appropriate approach for the education of SWSN (Karsten, Peetsma, Roeleveld & Vergeer, 2001; Ainscow and Cesar, 2006; Forlin, 2006).

Dempsey, Foreman and Jenkinson (2002) suggest that the movement towards inclusion in the classroom is underpinned by the premise that there are not just two types of students, 'regular' and 'special'. Instead, there is one student body eligible for education, and all students present diverse abilities and needs. The rights of the child means that it is considered unjust to divide students into two distinct separate groups, the "regular" and the "special" (Elkins, 2002). Practising a separate education system can lead to the development of inappropriate attitudes and beliefs that are not reflective of societal practices and may promote inequality as it inevitably will discriminate against certain students (Dempsey, Foreman & Jenkinson, 2002).

In contrast, previous times witnessed the Special School setting as the main approach for the education of SWSN. In this system, students were educated in special school settings that offered specialised education and approaches appropriate to the levels required by the student. Although this approach may have been effective for the individual academic instruction and progression of some students, the approach socially isolates students from the regular school system, thus negating aspects of education that are important for all students.

The Aprender program, the participants and the school setting

The Aprender program

The school where the study took place aims to practice inclusion as its approach to diversity in the student population, however, in an attempt to educate all students appropriately, it created the Aprender program. Aprender is an example of inclusive practice because it aims to engage students in a learning environment where students participate holistically. It provides support structures that are developed to facilitate inclusion for SWSN in a regular school setting. Although the program operates separately from the mainstream school setting for some academic instruction, support structures focus on the inclusion of the students into the life of the college, particularly from a social perspective. More detailed information regarding the program and its aims will be presented in the next section. Aprender promotes the locational, social and functional perspectives of inclusion presented in the Warnock Report (1978). This occurs as Aprender promotes student participation in the academic aspects of schooling in a more resource-rich environment that seeks to enhance the students' development, and this is supported through the students' social interactions within and outside of the classroom.

Special education programs such as Aprender offer students an alternative to mainstream education that accommodates individual differences by providing individual learning programs for each student. The program caters to students' own abilities and is resourced with special education teachers and integration aides. Thus Aprender aims to facilitate a challenging education that caters to the needs of the students in an

environment that is enhanced with supportive teachers, exceptional facilities and relevant curricula. In considering the theoretical perspectives underpinning the practice of special education, Aprender may not be strictly an example of inclusion but rather, of inclusive practice, because it offers a streamed curriculum appropriate to the needs of the individual student. The SWSN are not integrated in regular classrooms for academic instruction, instead they are instructed in a more supportive environment where their individual development is the key goal.

The program's theoretical framework is underpinned by the perspective of constructionism (Mergel, 1998), since it is influenced by Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (1999) and Lev Vygotsky's Social Constructivism (1978). The learning processes are designed to be student centred, authentic and systematically promote cooperative learning within the classroom. The curriculum and its delivery methods are modified and differentiated to meet the individual needs of the students. However, unlike a special school setting, Aprender does not operate in complete isolation, rather it follows the same patterns of academic delivery as any other regular school setting. The key difference is that it functions in accordance with the needs of the students, driven by the individual needs and facilitating alternatives to ensure that the students develop to the best of their ability. Figure 1 illustrates how the Aprender program emerges from the traditional approaches used for the education of SWSN. It shows that the program is influenced by the perspective of inclusion whilst applying a streaming approach traditionally found in mainstreaming.

Figure 1 – The emergence of Aprender and its connections to special education practice
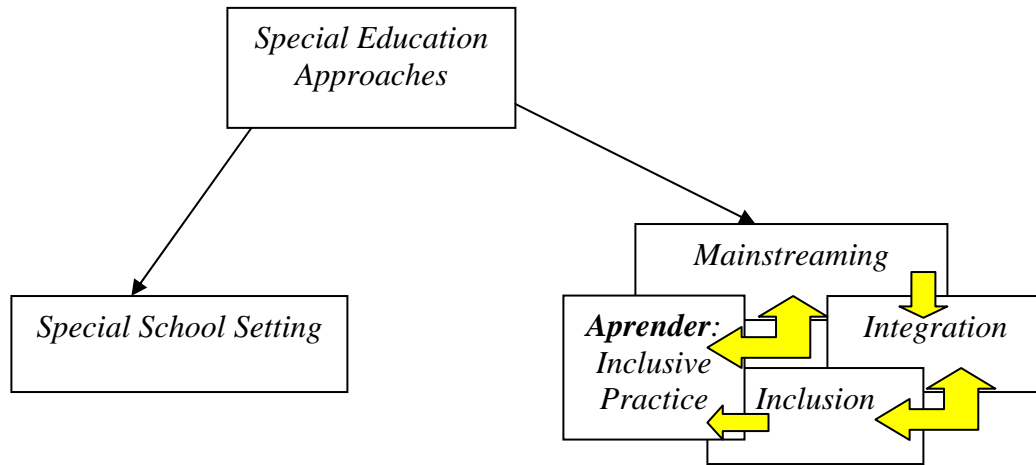
The participants in the study

Since I am interested in how the individual students experience Aprender, and how successful the program is in attempting to include the students, I have selected eight students whose integration into the regular school system is facilitated by the special program. The participants in the study are students identified as having substantial special learning needs. In order to identify the students, and determine the possible reasons for their history of learning difficulties, all students seeking admission to Aprender are assessed using psychological instruments for identifying special needs. The most commonly used assessment instrument is the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Revised Edition Three (WISC-III), (McCarthy, Dyer & Hunter, 2002). This is used to determine the varying levels of ability that a student may have within the areas of verbal communication, arithmetic ability, scholastic aptitude, comprehension, and information

processing. The tests are administered by accredited educational psychologists, and the service is available from educational psychologists working in schools, public educational systems (such as Departments of Education or Catholic Education Offices) or by practicing private educational psychologists. Whilst I have reservations about the use of intelligence-based tests that determine the Intelligent Quotient (IQ) of an individual, and I am concerned with the use of the term "disability" to describe the differences presented by students in this study from the test results, the test and its terminology are in current use in special education practice and literature (Ashman & Elkins, 2002). The prticipants have one or more of hearing and severe language disorders, vision impairments, social and emotional disorders and physical constraints, yet it is their "intellectual disability", determined by their psychological assessments that indicates that they may benefit from participation in Aprender.

The school setting

The setting for this study is a boys' secondary Catholic College situated in Melbourne, Australia. For the purpose of the thesis, the pseudonym "Catholic College" is used to describe the school. It has a student population of approximately 1200 and the school is divided into two separate campuses. The junior campus consists of years 7 to 9, and the senior campus offers years 10 to 12. Although both campuses operate in the same grounds, they follow different timetables with different starting and finishing times, and have mostly different staff. Although the Aprender program operates only in the junior campus of the school there are alternative pathways for SWSN in the senior years, such as options leading to the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian

Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). Both certificates offer different opportunities for students. The VCE offers a traditional pathway to university or the workforce, while VCAL offers students a structured program that often leads to traineeships and trade. The school offers programs that ensure that the individual student is assisted in his journey throughout secondary school, by offering pathways that ensure student accessibility.

My personal connection to special needs education

From my personal perspective, special and alternative education issues are closely connected with my own educational background. I was classified as an "English as a Second Language" (ESL) student upon my arrival in Australia from the country of El Salvador in Central America at the age of 15. Although the needs of an ESL student and the participants in this study are substantially different, my comparison stems from the fact that diverse methods for teaching are needed to teach both groups effectively. As a young student in year 3 in El Salvador, I was considered "unteachable" by teachers who felt that the required concentration, ability to memorise and ability to learn to read and write were simply beyond my reach. They suggested I stay back a year, as my lack of progress was a concern, since I struggled to meet the assessment criteria imposed by the school curriculum. It was the support of my parents, who taught me at home and continually conversed with my teachers on what I needed to do in order to improve, that allowed me to keep up with the demanding expectations. As a result, I did not need to repeat any year of schooling.

By the time that I had reached secondary school, I had always managed to just pass my school related tasks. I often achieved very low results, particularly during my early secondary school years, as most assessment tasks included substantial testing and memorising. Throughout this phase, the stage of secondary school that I consider to be my "educational switch", I had developed good woodworking skills, working alongside my father on the occasional house repair and making timber toys for my younger siblings. It was then that I began to understand what it felt like to succeed, and how rewarding it was to be acknowledged for success. On an informal basis, my parents had provided the first exposure to special education that I experienced. Their ability to incorporate colour systems for alphabet letter identification and sound recognition to help my reading, the purchase of what I considered to have been exciting books at the time, to ensure that I was engaged with books that I could relate to, and most importantly, their belief in my ability, were key examples of what constituted effective pedagogy in my educational experience.

Eventually, I had to address the experience of immigration and the subsequent need to learn a new language, not just for everyday communication, but also as the essential tool that enabled me to continue with education. I began to understand the importance of provision of support systems for the development of emotional skills in the whole process of educational development, which today drives my desire and passion in the area of teaching and learning in inclusive settings, where all students have access to an appropriate level of support.

Reflecting on the developments made by Australian Federal and State Governments in legislation regarding the humanitarian premise supporting inclusion, (Bartak & Fry, 2004), it is clear that schools have moved towards the acceptance of diversity, and teachers are encouraged to deliver good pedagogical practice to ensure the inclusion of all students regardless of their differences. Including students is not just about integrating them in a system but supporting the individual to achieve success and optimise his/her potential as they actively participate in the system (Elkins, 2002). This experience reflects the opportunities I had as a student in two different educational systems, practiced half a world away from one another. Despite this, in both systems, members of the school community attempted to offer me success. As a teacher, I now promote the importance of inclusive practice. I am a firm believer that education is a right for all, and that individual differences must be celebrated and not marginalised; hence my passion and involvement in effective education as a key factor in regular school teaching. Whether it is referred to as special or alternative education, my own experience was of inclusive practice where I was able to learn despite my differences.

The research questions

Educational literature indicates that close relationships exist between social, academic and locational inclusion (Ainscow, 1999; Beveridge, 1999; Moss, 2003). According to Beveridge, locational inclusion occurs when special classes or units are attached to or share a site with ordinary schools (1999). My study has chosen to focus on and explore the experiences of SWSN in the social sphere since an exploration of all

areas of inclusion is beyond its scope. I have defined inclusion within the social perspective, as determined by how much students actively participate and develop socially (Beveridge, 1999). If such development determines the participation and progress of the individual within his school setting, then the study seeks to describe and explore the experiences of SWSN in reference to the following two key research questions:

1. Are SWSN socially included within the Aprender program? If so, how?
2. What are the inclusive learning experiences of SWSN within the Aprender program?

The second question gives rise to the following sub-questions:

- What are experiences of social inclusion for SWSN within the program?
- How is the individual SWSN included outside of the program, in the regular school setting?
- How does social inclusion influence the school participation and development of the individual student within and outside of the program?

Methodology and data collection

The meta-theoretical perspective underpinning this study focuses on enhancing the practical opportunities for the collection of data to reflect the theoretical stance adopted by the research inquiry. This summary is presented in Table 1. Since I set out to

examine and describe the experiences of students in the Aprender program with an emphasis on their social inclusion, I considered a qualitative methodology to be appropriate to explore the lived experience of the participants in depth. According to Connole (1993), the epistemology of constructionism supports the researcher in his or her intention to understand a situation in depth.

The research methodology adopted in this study is a longitudinal case study. Nind, Benjamin, Sheehy and Hall (2004) argue that studies reviewing the implementation of inclusive practice face many challenges for choosing appropriate research methodologies. They suggest that ethnographic studies narrating the experiences of inclusion are useful to identify inclusive practice and how it impacts the education of the students in the setting where the research takes place. In order to examine the participants' lived experience, I have structured a case study methodology that provides the opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be thoroughly studied over a period of time, since, as suggested by Bell (1997), case studies can facilitate data collection specific to the problem observed without being overshadowed by other issues that may exist within the problem. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), it is also a method that offers the opportunity to gather unique examples of real people in real situations. It is suggested that case studies focus on the particularity and complexity of a single case, and are therefore able to focus on a complexity within specific circumstances (Stake, 1995), so it was fitting that I applied this methodology to data collection. In order to gather data that illustrates the lived experience of the participants, the methods used in the study involved interviewing, participant and non-participant observations, journal

entries and surveys. The next section outlines how the research methodology incorporates student voice as the guiding instrument for the collection of the data.

Student voice

According to Rogers (2005), the recognition of student voice provides an active opportunity for students to express their opinions and experiences to make decisions regarding the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their learning experiences. For the purpose of this study, I refer to student voice as the opportunity for the students to express the experiences they face as participants in the school system they attend. Their reflection on, and opinions as to how they participate in the school system offers great insight into the processes that take place in their learning experiences. Francis & Muthukrishna (2004) consider that student voice provides an effective approach for the collection of data in case study research. It is argued that reflective analysis of lived experience of students expressed in their own voice provides the research study with authentic descriptive data that may involve the concerns, anxieties and successes experienced by SWSN with reference to their inclusion in educational school settings (Celinska, 2004; Curtin & Clarke, 2005; Francis & Muthukrisna, 2004). This study has included student voice as a key method for the collection of the students' lived experience, documenting data as expressed by the students throughout the application of the research methodology. Table 1 provides an overview of the research design adopted for this research study.

Data collection

Data were collected by the implementation of the research methods. Firstly, these involved the application of surveys to identify key areas to examine further as the research period evolved. Secondly, as particular areas to analyse further emerged, I was able to construct interview questions that explored these areas. The students' responses were then transcribed and observations of behaviour and experience were later applied to ensure that what was identified in the surveys, were examined in the interviews and then later formed the basis for focused observation as the students participated in their school community. The research period was then divided into five key stages which lasted approximately four weeks each.

Interpretation of the data

The data were examined using theme analysis in phenomenological reflection. Theme analysis is "the process of recovering the theme or the themes that are embodied and dramatised in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work" (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). Following this approach, themes that exist within the data in the formulation of structures distinguishing the experiences presented by the students may emerge from the interpretation of the data. The recognition of themes within the data enhances understanding of the "lived experience" of the SWSN as they participate in Aprender. Since the program functions within the social practice of teaching and learning, I have also endeavoured to add to the research findings by means of my own reflection as part of my participant observation, a procedure described by van Manen (1990) as an approach appropriate for data analysis of phenomenological reflection.

Some of the data are presented in narrative form. This means that I outline the lived experience of two students in Chapter Six as a narrative, expressing their experiences as I interpreted them. The narrative form allowed me to voice the students' experiences in-depth. According to McQueen and Zimmerman (2006), interpretative narrative research methods are useful when expressing interpretations of experience. It is for this reason that the study opted to use a narrative as a method to express the lived experience of two students.

Table one provides an overview of the research design.

Table 1 – Overview of Research Design

Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective	Interpretative/Qualitative
Methodology	Longitudinal Case Study
Methods for data collection of lived experience	Documenting student voice through Interviews, non-participant and participant observation, focus group reflections, surveys, collection and analysis of field notes and journals
Interpretation of data	Thematic Analysis, Narrative Construction

Limitations of the study

In this study, I attempt to document the experiences of SWSN in relation to their lived experience in Aprender. I inquire into events in one particular program operating in one particular school and although certain findings may be applicable to the educational experiences of other students, the study cannot generalise its conclusions, and therefore may not be applicable to other schools approaching the education of SWSN differently.

The experiences of the students are individually based and thus may not be reflective of other students who may be identified as SWSN with somewhat similar backgrounds. The collected data is not intended to measure or assess the program, but instead reflect on the students' lived experiences within the processes of teaching and learning of diverse needs in the regular school classroom.

I aim to form an understanding of how important it is to identify the perspectives developed by the students from their experiences at school while in the program. While it is necessary to recognise that individual needs are different for all students, despite the assumption that the experiences of the participants are likely to be different from other students with similar backgrounds attending different schools, there remain strong connections between some of the common challenges that SWSN experience. Hence, some findings may still be able to point to directions and useful ways forward, considering that inclusion aims to encourage SWSN to be instructed in regular school settings. Although the study has these limitations, it is able to point to alternatives that can support the teaching and learning processes of all students as well as assist other researchers to document their own situations.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter One has discussed the background to the study and introduced an understanding of how the thesis has been structured to describe the social inclusion experiences of eight SWSN. It outlined how the longitudinal case study documents how

Aprender has impacted on the special education of the students as they receive specialised assistance in their school setting.

Chapter Two discusses relevant literature in the field of Special Education. It describes the historical and theoretical perspectives underpinning current approaches for the education of all students, particularly SWSN, and outlines a framework from where the case study and its findings can be systematically reviewed.

Chapter Three provides an outline of the Aprender program in relation to its underpinning structures and processes, making reference to documents that describe the program as a facilitator of inclusive education. Here, the perspective of inclusion presented in Chapter Two is linked to the structures of Aprender. This provides an illustration of how current educational approaches have structured how the program functions in relation to meeting the needs of SWSN.

Chapter Four describes the research design and reviews the methods used to collect the data and the approaches used to answer the research questions in the context of the case study, as well as issues of validity and reliability, and ethics. An explanation of how the data were interpreted is also presented. Chapter Five presents the analysis of the data from the surveys, interviews and observations, and highlights the findings as they emerged through the thematic analysis in relation to identified themes. Chapter Six presents student voice in the form of two case study narratives that draw upon and reflect the documented lived experience of two of the SWSN. It uses this analysis, and the

findings in Chapter Five to answer the two key questions underpinning the study and draws conclusions about the findings. Finally, Chapter Seven outlines the limitations of the study and presents recommendations applicable to the program and which may also apply to other special education programs. The students' experiences will assist understanding of how Aprender has or has not responded to student diversity, and how such approaches could be incorporated in any regular school system for the effective education of all students, particularly those considered as SWSN.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

> *If continued progress toward greater inclusion in Australia is to be made, several issues need to be addressed by education authorities. These include the modification of the curriculum to include the needs of children with disabilities, the development of positive attitudes to disability, the role of school integration policies, and the possibility of having regular classroom teachers assume major responsibility for educating children with special needs"* (Elkins, 2002, p. 95).

This chapter examines the literature underpinning the focus of this study - the practice of teaching and learning for students with special needs in regular school settings. It presents the challenges involved with the provision of appropriate education for SWSN whilst reviewing the difficulties that the students experience when they attend such school settings. The literature review emphasises the importance of the education of SWSN in the regular school system, discussing some of the current approaches available for the education of SWSN in such schools. It then outlines special education practice from a Western historical perspective, providing an overview of the changes in the practice experienced over the last three decades. The notions of equality and social justice and their influence on the development and practice of teaching SWSN in regular schools are discussed next, as current approaches used to facilitate appropriate education for the students are presented. Chapter Two goes on to examine some of the implications for delivery of supportive education through a review of the experience of Australian schools over the last thirty years. Some key theories of learning underpinning the varying approaches for the education of SWSN are reviewed, and a connection between strategies for effective instruction and these theories is made.

Students with special needs in regular school settings: challenges of provision

A number of studies examining the implications for the provision of schooling for SWSN in regular schools point to a range of challenges. Riggs and Mueller (2001) suggest that educators have traditionally found challenges with the provision of special education because of factors that include: political legislation, the increase in the number of students with identified learning differences attending regular schools, changes from segregated to more inclusive practice, and the shift in perspectives of the education provision for SWSN. For Greaves (1999), schools have the responsibility of ensuring that all students have a fair opportunity by which academic, social and emotional achievements are possible. The successful accommodation of special needs students into mainstream school settings is important, as schools are a key in their development. According to Hutchinson (1995) and Lerner (1997), SWSN are likely to experience a higher risk of dropping out of school; are less likely to experience academic success; may experience schools to be negative places because of difficulties with integration; may be victims of bullying or could bully others; may become too dependent on support structures, and may also display uncooperative behaviour towards and within the systems in place. Flynn (1997) indicates that SWSN may experience discrimination in regard to school participation, including refusal of enrolment, failure of the school to sufficiently address harassment and bullying of students, and denial of, or limited access to, school services, facilities and programs.

For Lerner (1997), some SWSN may not be effectively instructed in regular classrooms because their needs may be so substantial that unless individual support and appropriate programs are made available, the student will not make progress. Gibb, Alfred, Ingram, Young and Egan (1999) suggest that further research inquiring into the effectiveness of the pedagogical practices for SWSN in regular school settings is needed. In their study, Gibb et al (1999) illustrated results that inquired into the level of inclusion experienced by SWSN in a school setting. It outlined concerns as described by different participants operating within a regular school. Table 2 summarises these findings, which suggest that despite the participants' similar perspectives on the practice of accommodating the SWSN within the school setting, their responses indicate different opinions on the effectiveness of such programs.

Table 2 – Concerns about the provision of education for SWSN in a regular school setting

Concerns	General Teachers	Support Teachers	School Principals	Students with Special Needs	Other students
1	Withdrawal (from classroom for one to one tuition) strategies are not effective.	Staff not always used as effective resource.	Parents of SWSN lack understanding of the processes and purpose of programs.	Fewer than 5% of SWSN were unsure of the purpose of their program	General education students were positive about including SWSN in their classrooms but knew little about the purpose
2	Further training is required to deal with varying differences and needs in all students.	There is a lack of modification and differentiation of curriculum in regular classrooms.	Continual funding is necessary to maintain demands of program.		

Adapted from Gibb, Allfred, Ingram, Young and Egan (1999).

The study results outlined in Table 2 have great significance for the understanding of the provision of programs for SWSN in the regular classroom setting. Programs for the support of SWSN must account for both individual and collective differences presented by the students (Sigafoos & Arthur, 2002). Accommodating students without accounting for the emotional, social and academic development of the individual tends to result in a poor experience for both the student and the school (Jobling & Gavidia-Payne, 2002). So in order to understand further what schools are doing to facilitate effective education, we must first examine what the literature regards as effective practice from research in the field, which has implications for the practical avenues implemented within any school based system accommodating SWSN. The next section discusses the particular needs of SWSN as a broad group. It outlines some of the commonly identified difficulties that such students tend to experience in schools and describes how specific difficulties experienced by some SWSN may hinder their adaptation to the school setting. It then outlines current procedures used for the identification and support of the students.

Particular needs of students with special needs in regular schools

Researchers have traditionally studied educational practices involved with students with special needs as they participate in the existing school structures, in both the special school and the regular school settings, (Ashman, 2002; Beveridge, 1999; Meese, 2001). Literature has identified that the processes involved in the range of approaches that offer constructive education are of paramount importance to the level of success in the students' development and their individual school achievement (Booth, 1987; Forgan & Vaughn, 2000; Scott & Gregg, 2000). Gibb et al. (1999) suggest that

recent research is focused on special needs as a broad category, and fails to recognise the different specific requirements that may exist within this broad group of students. Furthermore, they argue that research involving SWSN has traditionally been undertaken by psychologists and medical researchers, thus offering little indication of the best approaches available for teachers within the relevant school settings. It is in recognition of this perspective that this study describes the experiences of students from an educational perspective as they attend a particular program, and has focused on the specific needs of the students without generalising the broad SWSN group. Although the previous section outlined some of the general difficulties encountered by SWSN in different schools, this section provides a more detailed account of what research has identified in this area. Mannuzza, Klein, Bessler, Malloy and Hynes (1997) point out that SWSN are likely to experience lower tertiary academic achievements and/or lower ranking employment occupations, and this is possibly an outcome of their inability to develop the necessary skills whilst participating at school. For Gillies (2002), the problems that exist for SWSN in their participation within their school are often an outcome of the schools' inability to address the specific needs of the students. Gillies (2002) also suggests that SWSN tend to encounter problems in some or all of the following areas:

- Speech and language required for school based activities
- Social interactions
- Following instructions
- Understanding and reporting to social cues

- Gross motor skills

- Fine motor skills

- Behaviour

- Maturity (emotional and physical)

- Personal hygiene

Gillies (2002, p. 353)

Taking consideration of the broad number of differences outlined above, it is clear that SWSN require support programs that enhance the experience of active participation within the program in place. Clearly, when considering the special needs of the students as a collective group, negative experiences for SWSN in the regular classroom may occur if no accommodation is made to ensure that all students are supported and their special needs are addressed.

Ainscow and Cesar (2006) suggest that the effectiveness of teaching SWSN depends on the level of collaboration and planning that school settings apply in the planning and design of supportive programs. For Sigafoos and Arthur (2002), support of SWSN is best facilitated when school programs address the needs of the individual student and continually assess not just the goals achieved by the SWSN as the standalone measure, but also evaluate the efficiency of the program as a contributor to progress and achievement.

In order to develop appropriate programs for SWSN in regular schools, there must be a clear understanding of the needs of the students needing support. In order to gain an understanding of the background of the SWSN researched in this study, I now present some of the common difficulties experienced by SWSN who are identified as intellectually disabled.

Describing students with special needs identified as intellectually disabled

The definition provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2000) refers to the educational needs of intellectually disabled students as:

> *"A learning handicap is present if the level of intellectual functioning is significantly lower than average and there are limitations in two or more adaptive skills, in the areas of communication, self-care, home living, social skills, community use, self direction, health and safety, leisure and work"*. (ABS, 2000, 4102.0, Australian Social Trends online)

As discussed in Chapter One, although the terms "intellectual disability" and "learning handicaps" are consistently used to describe students that have learning differences (Foreman, 1996; Lerner, 1997; Prior, 1996), I have chosen to use the term SWSN to describe the students in this research despite the fact that the term 'disability' is in common usage. I have already indicated that such students have what is considered an identified intellectual disability, yet I consider the term "disability" to have negative connotations because it refers to what students may not be able to do. In other words, it refers to a deficit. This is the reason why from this point forward, the student participants are only described as SWSN, and in referring to them, the term disability will be replaced with the term difference, hence removing what I consider to be a negative connotation

from the terminology, unless the term is used in direct quotes from specific references. Although different for each student, it is suggested that people described thus often have difficulties with traditional methods of learning. This could relate to their cognitive development and often delayed progress, and can often can be manifested in difficulties with acquiring higher order thinking, the learning of new concepts, ability to communicate with others, remembering information, making judgements, and problem solving (Lerner, 1997). These restrictions tend to affect SWSN and their progress within the classroom. The following section outlines how SWSN are identified and categorised by the use of psychometric instruments. It describes the Weshler Intelligence Scales for Children Edition Three (Weshler, 1991), and outlines its use for determining support structures for the students.

Weshler intelligence scales for children, third edition (WISC-III)

In order to categorise an individual under the status of an intellectual disability, students are often extensively analysed in relation to their individual circumstances and performance levels. There is normally an application of a relevant standardised assessment test such as the Weschler Intelligence Scales for Children Edition Three (Weshler, 1991), which is often supported with a review of the developmental history of the individual (Foreman, 2005). Despite the classification of students as intellectually disabled, and the very different needs that they would present individually despite their diagnostic circumstances, in Australia all students described as intellectually disabled receive government assistance to ensure their inclusion and support in the general

classroom. This support is valuable as it encourages schools to structure appropriate educational approaches for the students.

For Sigafoos and Arthur (2002), traditional methods for the identification of SWSN involved the assessment of intelligence (eg WISC-III), however, they argue that this approach is no longer applied only to identify SWSN but also provide support to teachers who attempt to include the students within the regular school setting. In order to understand the importance of this shift, it is necessary to understand how the WISC-III works and how it can be used to support the students. According to McCarthy, Dyer and Hunter (2002), the WISC-III is a test that provides insight into the level of ability that a person has across comprehension, vocabulary, arithmetic, verbal, perception and speed of thought processes. Teachers are able to use the diagnosis from the test results to provide the students with more appropriate instruction, and use the information for developing learning programs that address the identified individual needs of the student. This shift is of great importance as it clearly outlines the need to establish clear support structures by which the students are able to make progress as members of the regular classroom. Despite the positive use of the test to identify needs and establish support programs, the use of such tests has been criticised. Ainscow and Cesar (2006) argue that under the "medical model", referring to the use of psychometric tests, educational needs of students are determined in reference to their deficits, solely focusing on what they cannot achieve. This tends to lead to the development of programs which focus on repairing the students' deficits as opposed to building upon the students' abilities.

Since this study is concerned with describing the lived experience of SWSN as they attend a special learning program in a regular school, it is necessary to outline the relevance of student voice in the study. The next section discusses the notion of student voice in research involving the experiences of SWSN in the school setting.

Listening to voices of students with special needs through personal narratives

The focus on student voice represents an important development in educational research that refers to describing students' experiences through their own voice (Celinska, 2004; Cesar & Oliveira 2005; Cook, Swain & French, 2001; Francis & Muthukrishna, 2004). Celinska (2004) argues that using students' personal narratives to gather their perspectives also improves the students' communication skills. She also considers that the use of narratives to describe the students' own perspectives is a significant factor in emotional development. Davies and Watson (2001) suggest that student voice effectively describes what the students consider important, thus illustrating and giving insight into their views. Following Cesar and Oliveira (2005), in an effort to design, develop and implement appropriate educational practices for SWSN in regular schools, in this study, I also consider students' experiences of participation in the inclusive setting. For Cesar and Oliveira (2005), seeking students' experiences as a research strategy resulted in an understanding of the impact that inclusive education had on the lives of SWSN as they attended regular schools. In addition, they suggest that the students' ability to describe their views improved their knowledge, emotions, and attitudes.

Despite the effectiveness of student voice as a method to gather and interpret data however, there seems to be other than the above, limited use of the method in research into the experiences of SWSN in inclusive settings.

The next section outlines the relevance of appropriate support systems for SWSN when providing effective learning opportunities.

Identifying appropriate support systems for SWSN

For Foreman (1996), it is imperative that schools select and identify the approaches that would best suit the individual and collective needs of all students in their care. Unless strategic special programs are in place, it can be problematic to identify what approaches need to function for all students to fully experience school based learning, development and success. In Australia, since Federal legislation allows all states and their schools to determine their own support structures for SWSN, it often means that it is up to the individual student and his/her family to select a school setting appropriate to his/her learning needs. Forlin (2006) notes that the number of identified SWSN attending regular schools has risen over the last 20 years, suggesting that a rise to 47% in 2002 from 7.8% in 1988 in New South Wales schools could be due to better diagnosis, increased number of SWSN attending regular schools and the implementation of inclusion as practice. However, what may work for one student may not work for another under the same circumstances, since specific needs require specific approaches, and schools may not always be able to accommodate specific SWSN differences (Elkins, 2002; Forlin, 2006).

It is from this environment that the school programs accommodating the needs of SWSN are currently developed and, considering the greater demands placed on school settings with the increased number of SWSN, appropriate special programs are required. As Gillies (2002) implies, special programs that operate within inclusive school settings try to accommodate the needs of all the students who are chosen to participate in the regular setting.

Pitt and Curtin (2004) argue that SWSN need to have various options for their education. In their study involving SWSN who made the transition from mainstream schools to special schools, they found that if the mainstream schools were unable to cater to the needs of the students, they had no "real" option but to return to the isolated environment of a special school setting. It is for this reason that strategic approaches need to be developed.

Having illustrated the needs of the students and the challenges for educational provisions, I move to the next section where I outline the historical development of the teaching and learning approaches for SWSN globally, with an analysis of the Australian experience later in the chapter. Although I use the term "global", the research focuses on the practice of special education in some Western countries only, as an examination of a broader number of countries is beyond scope of this study. I begin by describing the changes in the approach to educating SWSN in different school settings, initially focusing on the last 30 years and the evolution of the practices currently in use. I then move to

reviewing the Australian experience in reflection of this. I make connections between the strategic developments of educational programs in response to the varying needs of SWSN in regular classrooms and the evolution of special education practice.

Special education practice: a Western overview

I have used the term "Western" to describe the collective experience of special education in some countries in North America, Europe, Hong Kong and New Zealand because their approaches are extensively described in current literature and in many aspects, mirror the Australian experience of educational approaches to SWSN (Ainscow & Cesar 2006; Ainscow, 1999; Beveridge, 1999; Elkins, 2002; Foreman, 2005). Current special education research describes contemporary key approaches used in schools for the enhancement of the educational opportunities of SWSN in the regular classroom (Ainscow, 1999; Al Zyoudi, 2006; Beveridge, 1999). This literature notes historical reforms that have occurred over the last three decades, identifying advancements in the field.

A key factor in the development of appropriate education for SWSN has been the expansion of theoretical and practical approaches that positively encourage the effectiveness of teaching and learning for the SWSN in the regular classroom. A key result of the development of special education is that the individual differences and respective needs presented by the students are effectively accommodated not just in special education settings, but also in the regular school classroom (Ainscow, 1999;

Elkins, 2002).

Moss (2003) argues that changes in special education are reflective of the paradigm shift from modernism to post-modernism that includes a greater recognition of equal rights and the right of all students to learn to their optimum potential in an equity-based system. In accordance with this shift, Munk and Bursuck (2001) also suggest that the approaches for the education of SWSN have widened from what was considered the traditional approach, the special school system, to current approaches. The special school approach has been widely criticised for excluding students from regular school, hence eliminating their opportunities for socialisation with other students. According to Munk and Bursuck (2001), the purpose of the special school approach was that specialised teaching could be facilitated in a more controlled mode.

For Foreman, (1996), whether through the provision of education in special school settings or attempts to offer inclusive processes for the education of SWSN within regular schools, Western educational legislation, particularly in Australia, clearly outlines the need for schools to adopt and integrate the best possible practice for the teaching and learning of all students. As schools experience the freedom to select different approaches for the teaching of SWSN, and as the ongoing debate of what is best practice for the effective teaching of such students continues, we have repeatedly witnessed the development of new initiatives that derive from the need to address student diversity in all educational settings.

A whole school responsibility

A key understanding in the field of special education is the notion that a system will not be effective unless it has a whole school approach (Foreman, 2005), considered a critical step for addressing student diversity. In a whole school approach, the inclusion of SWSN is the responsibility of all teachers teaching the students, not just special education teachers or integration aides. Here, the processes in place for the support of the students are practiced by all members of the school community. Such an approach takes into account the individual needs presented by all students, SWSN or not, and considers what schools can do to effectively optimise the pedagogical procedures required in the process of establishing appropriate practice to accommodate students' needs.

In an attempt to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of the education of SWSN in school settings, I now consider the approaches that have emerged over the last 30 years through a more detailed account of how the educational approaches for SWSN in school settings have developed and changed.

Changes to special education practice: the last 30 years

As noted by Beveridge (1999), the last 30 years have witnessed a shift in the education of SWSN within the regular classroom across the western world and beyond. For Ashman and Elkins (2002), this educational change has also occurred in Australia, and is reflective of what has happened in other Western societies. The development of different approaches for the delivery of special education for SWSN since the late 1960's

is indicative of the perspective that the education of these students in the regular classroom provides a better alternative for practice and outcomes.

As noted earlier, Moss (2003) considers that the changes in practice over the years reflect shifts in recognition of diversity amongst students, and the global demand for equity in post-modern society. As such, all students have the right to learn in regular settings with assistance to ensure their optimum development. Since this perspective is underpinned in terms of social, academic and physical development of all students (Zarghami and Schnellert, 2004), regardless of their individual needs and differences, a connection between the traditional practice of special education and the subsequent current developments for the instruction of SWSN can be drawn.

According to Lerner (1997), the shift from the special school setting to the mainstreaming of SWSN in regular classrooms began to occur during the 1970's. Since Australian experience in educating SWSN has paralleled other Western nations, inclusive practice has become the leading approach for the education of SWSN in Australia. Lerner (1997) further argues that consequent efforts to develop effective learning processes for SWSN have led to positive changes in pedagogical practice across most schools settings. Despite the positive changes, Moss (2003) considers that different perspectives of the interpretation and understanding of inclusion have contributed to varying degrees of how the inclusion of SWSN is actually practiced in different school settings.

For Ashman (2002), the progressive changes made in the delivery of special

education clearly identify that its practice is now considered to be an element of regular school teaching and learning. This suggests that considering special education as a separate educational perspective has diminished over the last decades. Before considering in detail what contemporary approaches might be, I will first describe previous approaches by linking their progression and subsequent transformation for practice. I begin with the special school approach, examining the traditional approaches incorporating the education of SWSN in the special school setting and the later development of approaches for the education of such students in mainstream schools.

<div align="center">**Approaches to the education of SWSW**</div>

The special school setting

The special school setting (Foreman, 1996; Myers & Hammill, 1990; Lerner, 1997) is a system that offers specialised teaching and learning for SWSN. The special school approach was primarily used in the 1960's, 1970's and into the 1980's (Ferguson, 1996), although today some schools still offer such a system when special needs are severe and students' individual circumstances require a high and specialised level of support. It operates as a parallel alternative to regular schools and it supports the specific needs of students with severe to moderate learning needs who require a low student: teacher ratio and in-depth guidance and support for close monitoring (Foreman, 1996). Thus, in the special school setting, students with special needs are placed in specialist schools or classrooms, typically better resourced and with specialised levels of support on offer. This system may be effective for some students whose circumstances may require

very intensive and supportive teaching.

This level of consistent support may be useful for the development of the students regardless of any identified constraints, but the concern is that special schools promote complete segregation from the regular school system and this aspect may severely affect access to important social interactions that are regarded as necessary elements of good practice (Beveridge, 1999). The practice however, has diminished in Western countries (Beveridge, 1999), and according to Forlin (2006), the provision of education for SWSN in regular schools has limited the number of special schools in operation. The educational options for children with high needs who cannot attend special schools then become limited due to reduced availability of school settings that meet their needs.

As indicated by Ashman and Elkins (2002), historically the special school setting was developed to accommodate the specific developmental needs of SWSN. For instance, hearing impaired, intellectually disabled and vision impaired students would normally attend different classrooms where the delivery of curricula would accommodate the collective needs that the students presented. Further, in support of the need to maintain special schools for some students regardless of the paradigm shift in the education approaches towards inclusivity for SWSN, and the fact that special schools are seen as isolated learning environments, they are still considered to have a place in the education of SWSN in certain circumstances. These include children in hospitals and those who suffer from profound intellectual disabilities or severe emotional disorders (Meese, 2001).

Indeed, Kauffman and Hallahan (1995) suggest that the severity of needs in the case of some students could actually hinder their progress in inclusive regular school settings unless special support systems are in place to support their high level of demand. In such cases, considering that inclusive practice is still evolving in the regular classroom, the special school approach may still be a necessary adjunct to accommodate some SWSN. In fact Pitt and Curtin (2004) note that some SWSN opt to move out of regular schools to join special school settings because of the specialised support offered.

Providing education for SWSN in the regular classroom: from mainstreaming to inclusion

In contrast to the special school system, the teaching and learning of SWSN in regular schools has evolved through a recognition of the benefits of mainstreaming, integration and inclusion. Collectively, such approaches envisage that SWSN participate in regular classrooms that offer strategies for the support of their development, and their active involvement in all aspects of their school life is facilitated by means of appropriate support and strategic teaching (Berres, 1996). But as Foreman (1996) notes, despite the theoretical underpinnings guiding all attempts to integrate SWSN, the strategies tend to be diversely interpreted, and thus applied and practiced differently within different school settings.

The term "mainstreaming" is mainly used to describe the specific changes to special education in the USA, as more and more SWSN moved to the regular school

setting for some of their instruction, yet this approach, although still happens, is no longer

a preferred or common practice in Australian schools (Elkins, 2002). Beveridge (1999)

provides a distinction between systematic inclusion, integration and mainstreaming in

that these approaches differ in the degree of integration possible due to the level of

support available to enhance student development. The next section outlines each of these

three concepts as a method to educate SWSN in the regular school system.

Mainstreaming

As Beveridge (1999) explains, 'mainstreaming' is often associated with sending a

student from a special school or special education class to a regular class for specified

periods without the need for full participation in that class. Forlin (2006) notes that some

Australian schools still practice this approach and the process is determined by the

schools' ability to offer an appropriate educational plan for the student.

Messe (2002) suggests that during initial efforts to mainstream in the USA, the

process was highly criticised as students showed low progress in academic and social

developmental aspects. Messe (2002) further argues that withdrawal from classes may in

fact have hindered the students' ability to learn specific skills, and led to a push to ensure

that teaching and learning processes for SWSN took place more often in the regular

school classroom. In attempting to facilitate the opportunity for SWSN to participate in

more aspects of regular school life, and considering the importance of addressing their

special needs within the regular classroom context with the elimination of some of the

downfalls encountered with mainstreaming, schools moved from this practice to the implementation of what is considered the process of 'integration' (Elkins, 2002).

Integration

Integration describes the process that takes place when the education of SWSN is offered in a school setting that makes minimal changes to the structures already in place, to accommodate the needs of the SWSN (Elkins, 2002). It assumes however, that SWSN are able to be introduced to a regular school (Moss, 2003), and that they will integrate into the life of the school by participating in classes and programs which may not necessarily be specifically designed to enhance their individual special and learning needs, but rather offer general support so that all the SWSN can participate in the regular system. For Messe (2002), the key difference between integration and mainstreaming is that under the integration approach, students participate in the school life more fully, thus requiring the school to develop suitable strategies to ensure not only the social integration of the students, but also their academic development. This means that regardless of the severity of individual needs, all SWSN need to be supported strategically to learn effectively.

For Loreman (1999), however, integration also refers to the education of SWSN in regular schools when no significant changes are made to the nature of the school and the SWSN are supposed to simply integrate into the system. As mentioned earlier, recent developments in educational practice that are influenced by the concept of social justice

and equality for all (Elkins, 2002) have also influenced the practice of special education, promoting the practice of the third perspective, that of 'inclusion'.

Inclusion

According to Elkins (2002), 'inclusion' refers to the full participation and progressive emotional, social and academic development of SWSN within the regular school system they attend. For Moss (2003) it implies providing for all students within the educational program of the regular school. It assumes that all students will fully participate in the life of the school when special provisions are made to cater to individual students without segregating them from the regular classroom (Elkins, 2002). According to Ainscow and Cesar (2006), there is widespread confusion over the interpretation and subsequent practice of inclusion. Forlin (2006) argues that inclusion should provide a single educational setting for all students with a continuum of services made available to facilitate the integration. By making the classroom and the curriculum more accessible, students will experience positive opportunities within the educational setting.

Current research inquiring into the shift in special education practice provides extended perspectives for the understanding of inclusion (Ferguson, 1996; Loreman, 1999). The Salamanca Report (UNESCO, 1994) promoted the perspective that regular schools must be the educational settings for all students with the approach of inclusion as the underpinning strategy facilitating teaching and learning experiences. According to Forlin (2006), the last ten years have witnessed the shift towards inclusive practice as the preferred option for the education of SWSN. Ainscow and Cesar (2006) argue that the

current perspective underpinning the practice of inclusion requires that schools need to be restructured to offer more appropriate pedagogy in the attempt to respond to student diversity, and individual differences cannot be seen as problems to be fixed but rather as opportunities for enriching learning.

The understanding and application of all three perspectives in regular schools (mainstreaming, integration and inclusion) may also determine different levels of student involvement. Forlin (2006) argues that the key difference between integration and mainstreaming as opposed to inclusion, is that schools traditionally operated on the premise of whether or not they could offer appropriate accommodation of SWSN. He suggests that under inclusion, the school actively seeks to determine how they can allow such accommodation to function most effectively.

According to Berres (1996), Ferguson (1996) and Salend (1998), when practicing inclusion, all students must learn within the regular classroom with teachers working in collaboration to ensure that all skills and approaches are consistently used to teach all students. However, there is substantial literature that challenges the notion of inclusion for all SWSN (Kauffman and Hallahan, 1995; Lerner, 1996; Salend, 1998). This focuses on the issue that the severity of the specific needs that some students may individually present could hinder their experiences with the process of their inclusion in regular schools. As previously indicated, some students may still benefit from the special school setting because of the facilities, approaches and specialised teaching it provides. According to Lerner (1997) some of the concerns with inclusion include:

a. SWSN in inclusive settings may experience disengagement with curricula, receive inappropriate delivery of special education due to lack of teacher skill and qualifications, effectiveness in the use of resources and a possible lack of differentiation of curriculum.

b. The possibility of overprotection, which in turn may limit some aspects of student development and foster dependency.

c. Information or support services to enable parents to be informed and to better care for their children may be poor or non-existent.

d. As schools adopt inclusion, the practice of withdrawal from classes for the purpose of remedial instruction segregates children and marginalises their role as members of the regular classroom, yet they may be necessary steps to ensure that the students receive adequate support.

e. Due to the students' differences, an excessive focus on correction and rehabilitation of the child's impairments may negate the opportunity to experience success. It is necessary that there be a recognition and enhancement of the students' strengths and ability to reach full potential.

It can be concluded that in order to overcome these concerns, regular school

programs must engage in specific approaches in support of the individual needs of SWSN. It is necessary for such schools to establish learning programs that address the needs of the individual if inclusion in the regular setting is the strategy in place. Whether through the practice of mainstreaming, integration or inclusion, current practical measures must establish a support system that addresses the needs of the individual students so that they can participate and learn from the same curricula offered to other students. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, it seems that the success of a school program when educating SWSN is underpinned by the appropriateness of its approach as the means by which effective education is offered to the students. Offering an appropriate education is based on the needs of the individual.

Practicing inclusion in the Australian classroom

Since this study is concerned with the development of inclusive approaches for the instruction of SWSN in an Australian classroom context, it is necessary to examine the unique experience of special education development in Australia. In a global review of the practice of inclusion in regular schools since UNESCO's Salamanca Report (Ainscow & Cesar, 2006) it is argued that the needs of SWSN in different countries varies depending on two aspects; the interpretation and application of inclusive practice, and the understanding of what constitutes SWSN. This perspective reinforces the notion that schools must determine how inclusion best supports the needs of its students by determining who the SWSN are, and supporting their inclusion accordingly. The next section examines the historical experience of special education in Australia.

Special education in Australia

The Australian experience with reference to special education can be examined within the historical patterns explained earlier in the chapter. Special education in Australia had its beginnings in the early 1800's as institutions to house and support those individuals considered as having different needs. Ashman and Elkins (2002) suggest that the Australian experience of special education began when State and Federal governments attempted to address the practice and delivery of appropriate education for SWSN. In order to appreciate the developments and what seems to be a positive evolution from humble beginnings, it is important to review some of the key events that Ashman and Elkins (2002) discuss in reference to historical events. These include:

1811 - Residential establishments designed to cater to the needs of people with mental disorders in Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart.

1813 – Development of the Castle Hill, Sydney, Mental Hospital for the mentally handicapped.

1813 – The Benevolent Society of New South Wales (NSW), which in 1820 admitted abandoned children for care.

1837 – Point Puer (Tasmania) operates as the first scholastic system in Australia, focusing on basic reading, writing and mathematics for young English convicts.

1848 – National Education Act created, yet SWSN with intellectual disabilities not formally recognised until later part of 1800's.

1872 to 1898 – evidence of a teacher employed to develop educational programs

for mentally challenged children in the Watt Street Hospital (NSW), Kew Cottages (Victoria) and Minda Home (South Australia).

1880 – Special schools for the hearing and sensory impaired founded in Melbourne and Sydney.

1890 – Victorian Education Act establishes special schools.

1929 – A program to educate special education teachers was established.

1950s – State governments assume responsibility for the education of SWSN through mainstreaming.

1973 – The Handicapped Children Act was established in Victoria.

1975 – Schools Commission in Australia promotes integration for Australian Schools

1980 – The Victoria White Paper on strategies and structures for teaching SWSN.

1980s and 1990s – Implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEP) for the development of the student, and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) so that the student attends the most appropriate educational setting. This period marks the beginnings of inclusion for all students.

Constructed from Ashman and Elkins (2002).

The historical experience of special education in Australia clearly underpins and outlines the gradual recognition of SWSN as full members of society, acknowledging their rightful access to the education system. As outlined earlier, and according to Foreman (1996), SWSN participation in regular Australian classrooms has been an educational trend particularly over the last three decades, with substantial gains being

achieved in the process. Like other Western nations, this pattern has resulted in the shift

from the use of special schools to educate SWSN to the implementation of special

systems and programs aimed at the facilitation of inclusive perspectives within regular

school settings and the emerging practice of inclusion as the accepted practice. As also

noted earlier, the movement towards inclusion in Australian schools has followed the

notion of equity, suggesting that education must be offered to all and must ensure the

ability to deliver within the concept of equal opportunity in schools (Berry, 1989;

Foreman, 1996).

This is supported by legislation at State and Territory level in all educational

systems within Australia (ABS, 2000; Hallinan, Hallinan & Boulter, 1999), which

demands schools offer full inclusion to all students regardless of their differences.

Foreman (1996) notes the common emphasis offered by the policies and legislation at

state level:

> *"All the special education policies of the states and territories in Australia
> recognise the ability of every student to learn; they recognise the need to focus on
> students' strengths and needs, not just their weaknesses; and they recognise that
> instruction must be individualised to the extent necessary for the educational
> experience to be positive for the student.… Every child, regardless of the nature of
> their disability, has the right to be educated in a regular school, and parents may
> exercise the right to choose the type of schooling for their child"* (p. 37-38).

An overview of the Australian experience with reference to special education and,

more specifically, the implementation of inclusive practice is complex, due to differences

in the approaches applied by each state government. This results from the broad

interpretation and application of what constitutes inclusion and an understanding of the

diverse learning requirements of SWSN in different school settings.

Forlin (2006) argues however, that collectively, all Australian states have moved towards the implementation of inclusion as the approach used to accommodate the needs of SWSN. The experience of SWSN in Australian schools can only be examined through an analysis of how each school practices inclusion in its support systems. An outline of the Australian experience describes how inclusion is the preferred approach to educating SWSN, yet an analysis of the experience of schools educating SWSN over the last decade suggests that the practice of inclusion is specific to the individual school setting in reflection of the approaches used for the development of the individual student and his/her needs (Forlin, 2006). My examination of Aprender adds to this knowledge.

The next section outlines the requirements determining the success of support programs in Australian schools. Here I discuss the need to provide SWSN with appropriate educational options. I focus on the premise of inclusion as the preferred option, suggesting that under the framework of inclusion, teaching and learning processes need to incorporate appropriate pedagogy.

Teaching approaches and students with special needs: towards appropriate inclusive practice

Olivier and Williams (2006) claim that teachers of SWSN similar to those in this study, face strong challenges in the provision of appropriate instruction delivery, and this

is attributed to the diverse contextual, social and individual differences that SWSN present. Despite the underpinning philosophies informing inclusion, the delivery of teaching and learning within an effective curriculum is the key element determining success in the processes of learning for SWSN in the regular classroom (Elkins, 2002).

For Olivier and Williams (2005), effective practice is only possible when the educator has a clear understanding of how the curriculum should be delivered, and how different SWSN will respond to it when their differences are considered. Elkins (2002) suggests that offering appropriate curriculum, developing positive attitudes towards SWSN in school settings, ensuring that regular teachers influence the teaching by assuming a key role and ensuring that appropriate programs are designed to deliver teaching practices, are all crucial elements for the appropriate teaching of SWSN. Next, I will discuss some of the theories of learning and practical approaches to teaching SWSN in the regular classroom. These theories are considered appropriate for the teaching of SWSN and lead to the practice of inclusion.

Teaching practices for students with special needs: some underpinning theories of learning

Galbraith, (1999) and Meese, (2001) note that understanding the process of cognitive development amongst SWSN in formative school years has been a major emphasis in educational research since the 1960's, leading to an understanding of how to best educate SWSN within the practices currently operating that are attempting inclusion.

Considering the possible complications that SWSN and their schools may experience when inclusion is practiced, it is necessary to examine some of the theories of learning supporting the educational practice of inclusive classrooms where SWSN are instructed and supported. The theoretical framework behind pedagogical practice for SWSN in current schools has been influenced, and is reflective of, key theories of learning based on the perspectives of cognitivism and of late, the related theory of constructivism. Schuman (1996) explains the epistemological underpinning of each as follows:

Cognitivism: Based on the thought process behind the behaviour. Changes in behaviour are observed and used as indicators as to what is happening inside the learner's mind.

Constructivism: Based on the premise that we all construct our own perspective of the world, through individual experiences and schema.

Constructivism focuses on preparing the learner to problem solve in ambiguous situations.

Adapted from Schuman (1996).

These perspectives have been influential in the way that schools approach the education of all students, not only those considered as SWSN. For Mergel (1998), the theory of constructivism presents the most relevance to current teaching and learning processes in inclusive classrooms. It holds that learning is constructed from experience,

therefore is a personal interpretation of the world, is active and developed from cooperative interactions between individuals, and therefore develops and exists in authentic settings.

This perspective is reflective of Vygotsky's Social Constructivism theory (1978) and to a lesser degree, Gardner's Multiple Intelligence (MI) theory (1999). Gardner's MI is more concerned with individual modes of learning but its practice strongly emphasises the relevance of the environment that encourages all modes of learning to be experienced.

While an extensive analysis of each one of the theories, and how they have influenced education for SWSN is beyond the purpose of this literature review, I now provide a succinct overview of how SWSN may be instructed based on the influence of the practices deriving from these theories. In doing so, I bring together special education as inclusion and theories of education that are appropriate for its success. Inclusive practices in schools tend to be influenced by the constructivist perspectives offered in Piaget's developmental stages (Galbraith 1999; Ginsburg & Opper, 1988); the multiple intelligences theory of Gardner (Gardner, 1984; Gardner, 1999); Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction in the classroom (Vygotsky, 1978), and related educational practices applied in regular schools.

Hood (1995) notes that schools have traditionally accommodated changes to teaching practice, thus incorporating pedagogical approaches to cater to the emerging

understanding of the individual and his or her particular needs. The next section presents the overview of each of the underpinning theories examined in this literature review.

Cognitive developmental stages – Jean Piaget

For Piaget, there are four major phases of cognitive development identifiable in all children (Atherton, 2002). His theory is based on the assumption that all children experience generic stages that constitute cognitive development, and that these stages allow the child to adopt and develop skills applicable to the child's environment.

According to Galbraith (1999), Piaget believed that the developmental stages occur from birth to approximately the end of childhood in a systematic and sequential manner. In order to grasp an understanding of Piaget's theory and how it has influenced the delivery of teaching and learning in education, the theory has been summarised with the stages outlined in Table 3.

Table 3 – Piaget's developmental stages

Sensory Motor Phase (Birth to 2 years)	During this developmental stage, children learn to differentiate their position/stance from other objects. A child recognises his/her ability to act intentionally, using objects to create noise and motion, and also achieves recognition of others' existence (Atherton, 2002).
Pre-Operational Phase (2 to 7 years)	At this stage, children begin to acquire language proficiency for communication, classifies objects by features (groups blocks of similar colour) but maintain an egocentric approach to their environment, by often failing to comprehend others' views or commands (Atherton, 2002; Galbraith, 1999).
Concrete-Operational Phase (7 to 11 years)	Throughout this stage, children acquire logical thinking, understanding and learning about objects and events, have the ability to classify objects according to similarities (Galbraith, 1999).
Formal-Operational Phase (11 Years to Adulthood)	By this stage, children have developed the ability to think logically about abstract prepositions and test hypothesis systematically; become concerned with the hypothetical, the future and ideological problems (Atherton, 2002).

Considering that this theory of cognitive developmental stages has long been instrumental to the understanding, design and application of curriculum initiatives within schools (Ginsburg & Opper, 1988), it is necessary to outline the specific influences that the theory has had on the education of SWSN. Piaget clearly outlines that the process of cognitive development is crucial to learning, and this is manifested within the developmental stages that each student experiences (Ginsburg & Opper, 1988). Given this, the curriculum offered in a school system must address the individual needs of the SWSN within each developmental stage, considering that some SWSN present differences which may affect their capacity to learn within each stage as described by Piaget. Furthermore, since the purpose of inclusive practice is to offer all students an opportune learning environment with strategic plans to address the student diversity encountered in the general classroom, the theory benefits pedagogical practice since the individual student's functioning and ability may be identified within the stages proposed by Piaget.

Although the Developmental Stages theory clearly does not acknowledge the developmental differences often encountered in SWSN, Piaget's theory has contributed to developing an understanding of the role of the environment in the learning processes of SWSN, outlining the processes of maturation and social interactions. Sigafoos and Arthur (2002) argue that SWSN require specialised support for academic instruction in the classroom because their development may be delayed. All the developmental stages outlined by Piaget may never be reached or be delayed in the experience of SWSN. However, understanding of the stages may offer guidance to determine the strengths and

needs of some SWSN. Jobling and Gavidia-Payne (2002) note that Piaget was concerned with how children reach the different stages, not when this happened in their developmental process. This is an important aspect to consider when applying Piaget's stages to the development of school programs because special consideration must be given to the possibility that SWSN may develop differently from their peers (though in the same developmental sequence). Piaget's theories can guide the developmental stages of the SWSN.

For Ginsburg and Opper (1988), Piaget proposed that the process of learning in all children has two broad senses: the narrow sense which involves the acquisition of new information or new responses that are restricted to specific situations, and learning in the broad sense, which involves the acquisition of general thought structures that apply to many different situations. The broad sense of learning is perceived as the more fundamental of the two because it enhances the ability to perform learning in different situations. According to Galbraith (1999), Piaget suggested that knowledge is a constantly changing process that results from the interactions between the individual and the environment; intelligence is gained by building new structures, or schemas, from past structures; and cognitive development is influenced by the individual's maturation, social influences, interactions with the physical environment, and equilibrium.

The term "equilibrium" is defined by Ginsburg and Opper (1988) as the individual's ability to self regulate by developing the process of self-correction. The role

of the environment and social interactions that take place in learning processes are aspects that define and influence the level of learning by the individual learner.

This occurs regardless of the differences presented by students and the stages reached in their development. This notion is fundamental for the teaching and learning processes of SWSN in the inclusive classroom because learning is a social experience and the influence of other students contributes to the students' development.

Vygotsky (1978) and Gardner (1999) have also considered the role of the environment in their theories. They suggest that positive social interactions in the environment are strong influences empowering the learning experience of the student and will be discussed later. When considering Piaget's theory however, it becomes clear that the processes implemented in the Developmental Stages theory have influenced current assumptions of teaching and learning approaches in many school settings, and these approaches may include programs structured for the inclusive teaching of SWSN.

Limitations and critiques of Piaget's theory for SWSN

While Piaget's theory has been effective in providing educators with an understanding of the processes of cognitive development in children, it has also been criticised for its inability to acknowledge other important aspects of development. Howard Gardner's initial development of the Multiple Intelligences theory claimed that Piaget's theory applies only to a select group of children as specific attributes and skills are ignored. Gardner refers to Piaget's theory as monolithic in its emphasis on restrictive

and specific forms of thinking (Gardner, 1983). This view is clearly based on the lack of acknowledgement made in the developmental stages of other types of intelligences. Despite his criticism, Gardner applauds Piaget's information processing approaches and acknowledges the notion of intelligence in such procedures. He claims that such a notion supports the individual's intellectual growth, adding that Piaget's work was fundamental in the movement against the Intelligence Quotient, a measure previously used to assess intelligence potential in children (Gardner, 1999).

Piaget's notion of the environment in the process of learning, and the need for guidance through social interactions, however, has influenced the education of SWSN. Despite the contributions to special education, it is claimed that Piaget's theory does not entirely support current approaches used in some inclusive education settings providing education for SWSN. Lerner (1997) indicates that an implication for teaching is that students need ample opportunities and experiences to stabilise behaviour and thought at each stage of development. The school curriculum however, frequently requires students to develop abstract and logical conceptualisations in a given area without providing sufficient opportunity for them to go through preliminary levels of understanding. When educating SWSN, teachers must provide curriculum approaches that target the individual needs of the students because without the opportunity to offer individualised learning programs, SWSN may not develop the skills required as they make transition from one phase to the next. Lerner (1997) outlines other implications for the teaching and learning of SWSN within Piaget's developmental stages by suggesting the following:

a. A major cause of school difficulty amongst SWSN tends to be their developmental differences and their implications for maturity. In Piaget's theory, maturity is a vital element of developmental; hence students are delayed in their development when maturity is not reached.

b. Given that regular school curriculum may be influenced by the developmental stages theory, the development of SWSN may be hindered in the regular classroom because the students may not have reached the stage required to effectively participate within the year level attended.

c. The concept of readiness to learn is often experienced differently by SWSN. Readiness skills are picked up differently by SWSN if their development is delayed, as they often require special attention to help them gain and strengthen the prerequisite or readiness abilities that they require within the different stages of learning. Individual guidance is therefore almost always necessary as the key element in the development of school programs.

Adapted from Lerner (1997, pp.192-193).

As mentioned earlier, and in support of Lerner's (1997) observations, the stages of development for some SWSN may be different from their peers due to their specific impairments, a possible lack of opportunities and the different patterns of development that the student may experience (Jobling & Gavidia-Payne, 2002). Therefore school programs for the inclusive teaching of SWSN must address the stages of development applicable to the individual student. For Carney (1995), Vygotsky's perspective on the

importance of the individual's experiences and his disagreement with the notion that universal experiences exist for all children regardless of diverse backgrounds could also be perceived as a criticism of Piaget's cognitive developmental theory.

Vygotsky (1978) claims that Piaget's theory assumes that all children have similar life learning experiences, hence fails to acknowledge the diversity of cultural practices that different children may be exposed to. However, despite its limitations in describing development for specific teaching practices of SWSN, Piaget's theory may still be a positive influence in the development of effective learning environments. Piaget's theory of children's development has been central to our assumptions about learning practices. It has contributed to special education, as the role of the teacher in facilitating extensively in the process of learning is highlighted as an essential element in the process of development. The identification of the individual and his or her needs in inclusive education is further supported by Vygotsky's theories of social constructivism. The next section outlines Vygotsky's influence in the education of SWSN within effective school programs.

Developmental learning - Lev Vygotsky

Vygotsky's theory of developmental learning is based on four principles; children actively construct knowledge; the experience of learning can lead to development; development cannot be separated from its social context; and that language plays a central role in mental development (Vygotsky, 1978). The theory assumes that children build knowledge, not just as the result of their individual learning capacities, but also

through the guidance of teachers and other students. He claimed that learning is a social practice and the process is therefore based on experience and guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). This has an impact on the assumptions of inclusion within schools. Lerner (1997) suggests that Vygotsky's perspectives support the notion that guided and supportive education settings are the best learning environments available to SWSN.

Vygotsky's most influential aspect in the education of SWSN is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory (Vygotsky, 1978). The theory is based on the progress of the learners' degree of independent development (ID). ID assumes that learning is acquired through individual's learning styles/processes and capacities, which are the direct result of their own previous learning experiences. Teachers are able to build on that learning by providing a 'Level of Assisted Performance' (LAP). This includes guidance to ensure that the student firstly identifies, then attempts and finally achieves a level of success within a new, unknown task. The 'area' between the ID and LAP is what Vygotsky refers to as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where the learning potential of the student and his/her ability to achieve within new, unfamiliar concepts encourage individual learning. The ZPD is the area that educators target when creating effective and challenging learning environments for all students. This approach can be of benefit to SWSN due to its potential to cater to students' individual needs.

The ZPD theory draws on the assumption that learning is a social function (Vygotsky, 1978) and the delivery of curriculum to SWSN must consider this element in the process. This theory recognises phases of development but emphasises the importance

of the teacher as a provider of guidance and support, thus playing a vital role in the learning process of the students. Carney says of Vygotsky:

"The main objective in the field of special education was the creation of what he called a "positive differential approach", that is, the identification of a SWSN from a point of strength, rather than a disability. He referred to the psychometric approach for the evaluation of the disabled as an arithmetical concept of handicap because of its view of the handicapped child as a sum of negative characteristics" (Carney, 1995, p.73).

Vygotsky's ZPD theory provides encouragement for educators to explore and support students' differences. This emphasis moves the educator from the traditional understanding of limited intelligence domains as measured in psychometric tests, which only allow limited means of student expression and a lack of consideration for the guidance and support needed in special education teaching. It may also empower the teacher to support the individual and achieve effective teaching and learning processes resulting from positive guidance through student-centred teaching. The inclusive classroom approach clearly utilises social degrees of learning as an emphasis for underpinning its structures and principles of equity and social justice through an acknowledgement of the role of social development in learning processes. The role of the environment, and the elements of social experiences contribute towards the progress made by different students. Forlin (2006) argues that Vygotsky's approach to education has been posited to produce more effective teaching and learning experiences for SWSN

in the regular classroom. The next section overviews the contributions of Howard Gardner and the Multiple Intelligences theory.

Howard Gardner and multiple intelligences theory

Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory (MI) suggests that intelligence is multiple, that there are a number of different intelligences, in contrast to the view of one single type (Gardner, 1999). Prior to this, it was assumed that intelligence could be determined by the application of the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test. This limited assessment assumes that one's general intelligence does not change significantly with developments such as age, training, experience or culture. In consideration of these limitations, the IQ test is considered an inappropriate method to describe intelligence (Gardner, 1984). For Gardner and Blythe (1990), MI theory specifically defines intelligence as the capacity to solve problems, or fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings. Multiple Intelligence theory relates to Vygotsky's understanding of intelligence by indicating that children learn in different ways, under different circumstances, thus demonstrating the relevance of social interaction in the process. MI theory supports the notion that humans exhibit several intelligence domains. These are Linguistic, Musical, Logical-Mathematical, Spatial, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Interpersonal and Intrapersonal, (Gardner, 1984), with a recent new addition in the Naturalistic domain (Gardner, 1999). An overview of Gardner's domains is presented in Table 4:

Table 4 – Gardner's MI theory: overview of the domains

Intelligence Domain	Likely abilities
Linguistic	Uses language to communicate, examine, explore, stimulate information
Musical	Uses Musical talents, composes, performs and enjoys music
Logical-Mathematical	Explores patterns, categories and relationships by experimenting, manipulating and relating objects or symbols, in a controlled, orderly manner
Spatial	Perceives and mentally manipulates form or object, to perceive and great tension, balance and composition in a visual and spatial display
Bodily-Kinesthetic	Uses both fine and gross motor skills to perform, play sport,
Interpersonal	Effectively understand and get along with others
Intra-personal	Able to gain access and to understand one's inner feelings, dreams and ideas
Naturalistic	Able to engage with nature, have an aptitude for and respect towards all things natural

Constructed from Gardner (1984, 1999); Gardner and Blythe (1990)

Educators have positively incorporated Gardner's theory into the process of teaching and learning within both special and general education (Gardner, 1983). The theory of MI clearly values the different attributes and abilities of the individual learner and gives teachers the opportunity to creatively develop such strengths. Gardner's assumption about the existence of several intelligences suggests that all students have different learning potentials, and this is a necessary foundation for developing learning programs for SWSN in the inclusive classroom. It is important to note that all students possess all of the intelligences outlined, yet some appear to be more dominant than others, and this has an effect on the way that the individual student learns.

For these reasons, MI theory offers educators a broader perspective of intelligence and its influence on the process of student development. By using MI,

educators may be better positioned to account for any of the differences that SWSN tend to present in their learning, hence allowing strategic programs to be more effective in achieving their goals. In the next section, I present some of the approaches to teaching and learning used in the regular classroom for SWSN. In doing so, I demonstrate the connections that exist between the theories of learning discussed and the practices used in current approaches used to facilitate effective teaching and learning for SWSN.

Strategies used for conceptual and behavioural development of SWSN in the regular classroom

I now discuss four approaches that have been found to be important in supporting the learning of SWSN. The first three refer to direct strategies for learning which are underpinned by the learning theories discussed above. The last discusses an approach to the management of SWSN which is necessary for the creation of a productive learning environment.

A. Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning allows SWSN to experience the socialisation processes that Gardner (1999), Piaget (Atherton, 2002) and Vygotsky (1978) consider essential for learning. It implies that students learn from the opportunity of working together. The concept of cooperative learning in a special education context has been considered a facilitator of inclusive practice (Elkins, 2002; Forlin, 2006; Meese, 2001; Rogers & Johnson, 1994). This approach is thought to provide a positive experience for SWSN in

the general classroom because students are able to interact with one another in their learning (Rogers & Johnson, 1994). For Gillies (2002), cooperative learning involves students working together in small groups to complete a shared common task, and the most important element in the activity is the positive interdependence that involves the individual's application by contributing to the task while ensuring that others in the group also contribute equally. Although it is claimed that cooperative learning has become a common practice in primary schools, secondary schools are yet to use this approach extensively (Gillies, 2002). In the teaching of SWSN, this approach can be of great benefit to the students.

Considering that cooperative learning encourages students to work with one another, it is a step towards inclusive practice. If practiced as intended, the students are not identified by their restrictions and inabilities, but rather have the opportunity to contribute towards the realisation and completion of an activity or task. Gillies and Ashman (2000) (in Gillies 2002), in a study of cooperative learning involving SWSN in the regular classroom, found that in order to practice cooperative learning appropriately, teachers needed to ensure that students accepted responsibility for completing their individual parts in the task, encourage each other, shared resources and information, were able to listen, provided constructive feedback, actively resolved differences in a democratic and fair manner and became accepting of others' points of view.

B. Authentic learning

Authentic learning refers to any learning that uses real world relatable curriculum material in order to encourage students to explore and discuss the content, outcome and resolution of an issue in a way that is relevant to them (Sands, Kozleski & French, 2000). According to Meese (2001), the application of authentic learning concepts in the educational processes of SWSN attending regular classrooms positively supports the students' ability to be included since they are the centre of their learning. Their level of participation should be more substantial when inquiring and learning with areas that are familiar and relevant. This concept is extensively used in the education of SWSN (Meese 2001). Munk and Bursuck (2001) researched the impact that personalised grading plans had on the development of middle school SWSN. Their findings suggest that when authentic goals are set through a relevant authentic curriculum the individual student learns according to his or her level of ability and experience, and achievement tends to be positive.

C. Peer tutoring

According to Gillies (2002), peer tutoring is the process by which two students assume two different roles (tutor and tutee) for supportive learning within the classroom. It usually involves a more capable or older student offering assistance and guidance to a less able or younger peer. When referring to inclusive contexts, Topping (2001) suggests that peer tutoring has some advantages when applied properly and the practice can be used across the curriculum. It may also become a useful vehicle for differentiating curriculum material, empowering social interaction, and working in support of the

cooperative learning approach. This allows SWSN to seek support from other students in the classroom, and in turn, the experience also benefits the tutor. This is a positive step towards learning as it illustrates that the teaching and learning processes are not just controlled by the teacher but may be guided by other members of the classroom. Table 5 provides a succinct overview of the connections that exist between the theories of learning underpinning current special education approaches and the teaching and learning strategies previously presented.

Table 5 – The relationships between approaches to teaching and theories of learning.

Approaches	Piaget: Developmental Stages Theory	Vygotsky: Social Interaction	Gardner: Multiple Intelligence
Cooperactive Learning	As students cooperate in their learning, stages of development can identify aspects of maturation, readiness and social learning by SWSN.	As students cooperate with eachother, social experiences enhance learning opportunities and each member of the group work provides the opportunity for enhancement of ZPD.	As students have the opportunity to participate, their individual skills and interests manifest themselves. SWSN may contribute using their preferred MIs.
Authentic Learning	By applying Authentic Learning in curriculum delivery, SWSN have the opportunity to develop concrete and abstract thought on familiar issues	Learning is based on real life experience and it provides students the opportunity of reflecting on what they know from such experience. The SWSN offer familiar ID.	The individual presents their own experience as their base for learning – Authentic Learning allows SWSN to learn using MIs.
Peer Tutoring	Social experiences in learning, identifying and working within the environment, and the effective development of readiness are enhanced.	Guidance and support manifest the ability of the instructor and the student gaining the support. The ZPD occurs under the guidance and support of peers.	Using MI allows the students to experience guidance by also being exposed to different perspectives and/or interests.

In order that their learning can be properly supported, as well as appropriate learning strategies implemented, SWSN have specific and diverse behaviour management needs. Effective learning can only take place within a classroom where appropriate

behaviour management is operating. Next I discuss a strategy for supporting the management of behaviour of SWSN in the regular classroom.

D. Applied behaviour analysis for appropriate behaviour management

Messe (2001) describes the applied behaviour analysis approach to classroom management as the direct, repeated measurement and recording of observable behaviours targeted for adaptation or change. As the theory's framework is based on behaviourism (Skinner, 1958), it is useful for areas such as behaviour management, rather than conceptual learning. Applied behaviour analysis offers a complimentary approach to the teaching of basic, yet necessary skills for SWSN in the regular classroom. Environmental events proceeding and following these targets are arranged to increase appropriate behaviours and decrease inappropriate behaviours. A practical use of this approach for the teaching of SWSN in the classroom is the need to ensure that the individual student becomes familiar with social cues that may need to be behaviourally learned. Examples are: teaching SWSN that have severe learning differences the need to raise a hand to ask a question and the student acknowledging the system in place to encourage whole class participation by the teacher using random questioning. SWSN need to adapt to and adhere to the rules and regulations established within classroom management approaches. This approach was developed from Skinner's Operant Conditioning Theory (1958), which suggests that learning is a function of change in overt behaviour. For Skinner (1958), changes in the behaviour of students result from their responses to the events that occur in their immediate environment. The theory assumes that students learn and develop according to experience in behaviour processes. Repetition and modelling allows

behavioural learning to take place. I now discuss the role of social and emotional development in the enhancement of inclusion of SWSN within the regular school setting.

Student development: social and emotional

Since this research study is concerned with the influences that emotional and social development have on the inclusion of SWSN within their school setting, an essential element enhancing their inclusion is focus on effective development of both social and emotional skills within the students (Goleman, 2004; Jobling & Gavidia-Payne, 2002; Meese, 2001).

According to Meese (2001), when teachers exhibit self confidence and contribute to build this in students, they enhance the social-emotional development in each individual. Jobling and Gavidia-Payne (2002) suggest that the development of the social and emotional skills enhance the inclusion of the SWSN in the regular classroom because of their ability to relate to others. This is possibly the result of an increased awareness of the individual student as an active member of the school community.

Goleman (2004) suggests that students benefit from the active role of schools as facilitators of social-emotional learning and development. It is suggested that the higher the level of influence by the school in promoting emotional literacy, the higher the adaptations and inclusion of the student within the school community.

Summary and conclusion

This chapter has reviewed a range of approaches that underpin appropriate education of SWSN in the classroom. Firstly it outlined the historical experience of how this has occurred in Western education and its subsequent mirroring in Australia.

Secondly, it provided an overview of SWSN with respect to their experiences in the classroom and some of their learning needs were discussed. The needs of SWSN were examined in general terms, and the conclusion was reached that presenting the students, regardless of their differences, with an appropriate education that enhances their chances to achieve their individual best is a necessary step.

Thirdly, the chapter illustrated the special education reforms that have occurred over the last three decades. It emphasised how inclusive practice has largely become the accepted method for the education of SWSN, and how this operates in contrast with the two traditional education systems offered to SWSN in the recent past: the special school setting and the regular school setting. It is concluded that unless schools offer programs able to support the diverse needs of the students in the classroom individually, the concept of inclusion may not work at its optimal potential.

Fourthly, it examined the epistemological perspectives structuring the theories contributing to learning that underpin some of the current practices for the educating of

SWSN in the general classroom. Here, I discussed the different interconnecting structures that have ordered the ways that school education for SWSN is offered.

Chapter Three moves to examine the specific program which forms the subject of this study. It exemplifies the practice of inclusion through an analysis of the Aprender program. Here, I describe the program and discuss the reasons behind its approaches for the education of SWSN. Reference is made to current school-based documents and curriculum material which outline the program's perspectives and aims. The program is examined as an example of inclusion, and the chapter investigates the multi-faceted approach that the program delivers. The chapter discusses some of the key methods of teaching that occur in the program and identifies the relationship between the theories of learning discussed in Chapter Two and the practices of instruction for SWSN used in the program.

CHAPTER THREE

THE APRENDER PROGRAM

Introduction

This chapter introduces the Aprender program as an example of appropriate educational practice for the teaching and learning experience of SWSN within a regular school setting. Aprender is considered an important element in the community of the school where it operates because it aims to offer opportunities to promote innovative approaches to teaching and learning that are appropriate for the needs of all SWSN.

The Aprender program information booklet (Aprender application form, 2006) outlines that Aprender provides the chance to teach individualised approaches for the instruction of students, meaning that the needs of all students are catered to individually.

The chapter begins by describing the history behind the establishment of Aprender, and examines the structures underpinning the program by reviewing its aims and approaches. It then discusses how the program is informed by a range of approaches examined in the previous chapter, describing how inclusion is practiced within Aprender with reference to the program, its students and the setting.

Reasons for the formation of Aprender

The Aprender program was established to support SWSN in a regular school setting. Rather than implementing traditional inclusion practice as the method for academic instruction, the program was established to work as a separate classroom where the emphasis was to cater to the individual needs of the students appropriately. This strategy can be identified within the school's mission statement:

> *"Our goal, inspired by the gospel and by our faith in Jesus Christ, is to be a positive influence in the development of each person willing and able to make a constructive contribution to our society. This encompasses Emotional, Spiritual, Intellectual and Physical Development"* (School Prospectus, 1998).

The development of the individual is considered of great importance in the school's philosophy and the program is underpinned by the concept of equality and justice, as noted in school documents:

> *"Given that we are all born equal in the eyes of God, it is, however, a fact that all humans do not develop equally. If they did the world would certainly be an uninteresting place... The college acknowledges that all students learn differently. As such, we develop programs that cater for a range of needs to develop the learning of all students. The program is our approach to the diversity of student individual school needs"* (Aprender Information and Application Form, 2003).

In order to cater for the diversity of the needs of all students attending the college, together with responding to the documented increasing demand for appropriate teaching of SWSN in regular schools (Forlin, 2006) as well as the increase in diagnosis of

identified learning differences amongst children attending regular schools (Ainscow and Cesar, 2006), the school where the Aprender program operates established a system to actively cater to the individual needs of the increasing number of SWSN attending the college. This is reflected in the following statement:

> *"To cater to the needs of all students, and in particular address the different abilities and capacities that exist amongst the student body, the college offers Aprender in attempting to provide spiritual, social and academic growth"* (Aprender Information Booklet, 2004, p. 3).

However, as well as attempting to cater for SWSN, Aprender is designed to support all students requiring special assistance individually, including gifted and talented students:

> *"For the highly motivated, independent students, the program offers enrichment and extension of current curriculum studies. This should lead to a deeper understanding of subject material and form a sound foundation for future studies. The student should find the program both challenging and rewarding. A program for the students with special remedial academic needs is also focused at bringing out the students' maximum potential. Concentrating on an achievement within the framework of individual level of curriculum, the student will be given additional academic skill development support and encouragement. The achievement levels will be set specifically to individual ability, resulting in greater levels of confidence and self-esteem. Exposure to this program should lead to development of basic skills for the eventual reintegrating of mainstream academic classes. The program identifies the importance of spiritual and social growth, and has thus far experienced good consistent academic growth amongst its students"* (Aprender Information Booklet, 2004, p. 4).

The statement quoted above clearly expresses the commitment offered to all students requiring special support structures for their education. This study however, is entirely concerned with documenting the experiences of SWSN requiring what the information booklet refers to as *'remedial academic needs'* (2004, p. 4).

Considering recommendations set out by current research into the practice of inclusion (Beveridge, 1999; Elkins 2002), the program was strategically developed to ensure that social, emotional and academic development were all considered as separate focus elements determining the program's structure. This means that the program set out to offer socialisation opportunities by operating as a classroom at each year level, using the same regular school organisational system (curriculum, timeframes, rules, number of subjects offered) and by encouraging the students to be active members of the school community (participating in whole school, year level and homeroom activities).

This aimed to enhance the adaptation of all the students through support strategies whilst encouraging their participation in the development of working relationships with other students and teachers, and ensured that all academic instruction was differentiated or modified to encourage appropriate delivery and student participation. The aim of the program was not to function as a stand alone "mainstreaming" setting with traditional special educational approaches, but rather to be an extension of the regular schooling where the needs of the students determine the educational approaches taken. In order to understand how these aims were determined, I next examine the theoretical underpinnings structuring the program.

Theoretical underpinnings

The theoretical assumptions that underpin Aprender from a structural perspective are now discussed. The program is informed by a constructivist approach to teaching and learning because its practical strategies for curriculum delivery regard the student as the

centre of learning. It is from this constructivist position that the adaptation of the perspective of inclusion is formed.

The constructivist influence

Vygotsky (1978) and Gardner (1999), and to some degree Piaget (Atherton, 2002), discussed in Chapter Two, have influenced Aprender through the underpinning approach of social constructivism. That is, that learning is constructed from the social interactions that occur in the classroom, and the systematic support structures that allow the individual to succeed by reaching his or her own potential in the process are of great importance to the outcome. School documents describe Aprender as concerned with identifying the individual needs of the students and addressing such needs by celebrating the diversity presented by the students in the classroom (Aprender Information Booklet, 2003). Despite the guiding curriculum standards that the program is obliged to follow (Victorian Essential Learning Standards, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, (2005), and Curriculum Standards and Framework Two (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, (2004)), the constructivist approach used in Aprender has required substantial modification and/or differentiation of curriculum content to ensure that the individual student develops according to his readiness level and stage of ability (Aprender Information Booklet, 2006). Aprender is guided by the belief that good guidance and specialised teaching will enhance learning opportunities for the SWSN (Aprender Information Booklet, 2006). In working with this perspective, the curriculum delivery takes the following approach.

Curriculum delivery

In terms of curriculum, the material mirrors the content offered in regular school systems whereby students are exposed to the requirements set out by State and Federal legislation. This is consistent with the adaptation of the Curriculum Standards and Framework Two (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2004) and more recently, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005). However, as discussed earlier, in consideration of the needs of the individual student, the curriculum content and its delivery are strategically offered under the practice of specialised teaching approaches which include differentiation and/or modification of the material. Although the material is often not different from what is offered in the regular classroom, the program operates in what is considered an effective learning environment where nurturing and inviting classrooms are complimented by appropriately planned methods for the instruction of different learning styles and learning differences. Students are offered individualised learning plans with flexible structures and goals, ensuring that the individual student is able to maximise his optimum potential by learning at his own level. The development of such plans involve consultation between the student, parents and teachers, and where applicable, health specialists who work in collaboration with the school. In support of this approach, teaching approaches incorporate strategies outlined in the previous chapter, and include cooperative learning (Gillies, 2002), peer tutoring (Topping, 2001) and authentic learning (Meese, 2001). These approaches encourage the social aspect of learning that underpins the constructivist understanding of teaching and learning in Aprender.

As indicated earlier, although the educational practices applied in the Aprender approach mirror past withdrawal approaches commonly used in the mainstreaming and integration of SWSN in regular classrooms during the early 70's and 80's (Beveridge, 1999; Elkins, 2002), where students were isolated for some or all academic instruction, the aim of the program is to best enhance the opportunities for the SWSN to develop within the school setting. The key difference in Aprender is the emphasis on providing students with inclusion approaches that enable their social, emotional and academic development from an individual needs' base. Aprender aims to provide intensive academic support whilst providing effective social elements of schooling that derive from inclusive practice.

Elkins, (2002) and Forlin, (2006) suggest that due to the particular needs of different students with special needs in different school settings, there needs to be varying approaches undertaken for the practice of inclusion in the regular school classroom. Forlin (2006) argues that Australian schools often interpret inclusion in relation to what constitutes best practice in accordance with the needs of the students attending those schools. The next section examines inclusion as it is interpreted and experienced in Aprender.

Inclusion in Aprender

Since the Aprender program operates with the vision to provide a supportive environment where all students are catered to individually, students are placed in a

program that has a flexible setting where groups can easily be formed within the classroom. This occurs to provide small group instruction where individualised learning is enhanced. The physical setting where the program operates includes four classrooms. Two main classrooms have concertina-style walls to allow an open space or two separate areas. There is a classroom opposite the main setting and the staff area also offers scope for withdrawal of students with a teaching space available. The staff area is next door. The classrooms are equipped with both laptop computers and desktops in an effort to offer information technology as a teaching and learning resource. Each student is assigned a computer which is equipped with appropriate programs and systems that enhance learning opportunities for all students, particularly those considered as SWSN. The tables are shaped so that small groups can be formed. Lockers are located both inside and outside of the program. For SWSN that have both physical and/or organisational challenges, students have the option of having their books and materials inside their classroom. This allows them to be better prepared when undertaking classroom activities. The setting is located in a central area where toilets, library, drop off area and other facilities are close by. Apart from the appropriate academic support outlined earlier, students are also offered social skills development, counselling, development of individual plans with constant monitoring in aspects of growth, modification and/or differentiation of material, peer support and positive approaches to behaviour management (Aprender Information Booklet, 2006). As noted earlier, the term 'inclusion' has many different interpretations and is practiced differently from one school setting to the next (Forlin, 2006; Lerner, 1997). In the school setting where Aprender operates, inclusion refers to the opportunity for any student to take active part in their school life

from an academic and social perspective (School Prospectus, 2002). This notion is strengthened when one considers the development of special programs to cater to the special needs of students from a student-centred perspective, whereby the student will experience supportive guidance and differentiated curriculum to ensure positive developmental progress.

As noted in the program documents, strategic approaches practiced in the program attempt to overcome the likely social concerns that isolation from the mainstream classroom could exacerbate, so that all students may have access to what the regular school has to offer (Aprender Information Booklet, 2005). An application process to join the program ensures that students have the choice of attending the regular classroom if that is the preferred option, hence students and parents are not forced to participate in Aprender even if they qualify. The program has not experienced what Elkins (2002), when discussing streaming programs, refers to as "dumping ground" for SWSN. Within the school community, there has been a positive reception of the aims of the program, as it also involves other students that represent the broad spectrum of students attending the college. This is outlined in the following statement:

> *"The overall philosophy of the program is to provide an educational environment that caters for the broad spectrum of human endeavour existing within this school. It should also ensure that every student has the opportunity to develop skills and confidence that he will carry into his post school life",* (Aprender Information Booklet, 2005, p. 4).

As suggested by Sigafoos and Arthur (2002), some SWSN do not benefit from inclusion practices unless there are support structures that offer individualised support

addressing the needs of all the students holistically.

Inclusion and the program setting

It is in consideration of the difficulties that SWSN tend to experience in the regular classroom (Elkins, 2002; Sigafoos & Arthur, 2002; Kauffman & Hallahan 1995), that the SWSN attending the Aprender program are grouped for their academic instruction. This allows more appropriate individualised teaching support, considering that the needs of SWSN are not always met in their regular classroom (Ainscow & Cesar, 2006; Forlin, 2006; Lerner, 1996). It is believed that collectively, the SWSN attending the school setting where Aprender operates, possess differences that are better addressed in a classroom that offers more appropriate support (Aprender Program Information Booklet, 2006). This practice, I believe, is an outcome of inclusive practice for the full development of SWSN in the regular school system and such approach reflects what Forlin (2006) sees as the multifaceted practice of inclusion: "To provide one educational setting but offer a continuum of services" (p. 267). The program operates as a vertical classroom where students of years seven, eight and nine learn in the same classrooms. This system allows students to become more familiar with each other, to build more profound relationships with their peers and their teachers, and to become more accustomed to the expectations and processes in place within the program. According to Burke (1997), vertical classrooms enhance the learning experiences of SWSN because they benefit from the familiarity developed within their classroom setting. The students are exposed to the strategies previously discussed in the chapter as they participate in the program's classrooms and benefit from having the same teachers and peers over the

period of up to three years. A visual observation of the program's structure within the regular school setting where it operates is presented below:

Figure 2 – Inclusive practice in Aprender

Aprender operates as a separate classroom unit for all the academic instruction of SWSN. Students are secluded from the regular school during most formal learning times. They learn in a curriculum framework that supports their learning needs. They may be in the same classroom for up to three years, with reviewing of placement taking place every school semester.

Experiences of **Social Inclusion** – SWSN have the opportunities to participate in some school activities that include sport and recreation. They have the opportunity to socialise with regular school students.

Mainstream school offers education to all mainstream students. They learn isolated from the Aprender classrooms. They share all the school facilities and recreation times with the Aprender students, resulting in their opportunities for socialisation. In some cases, SWSN attending Aprender may move into mainstream classes after reviewing their individual development and circumstances.

Inclusion and the students

As indicated in the last chapter, the students in this study are SWSN who have been diagnosed as intellectually disabled and have been identified to be within the moderate to severe levels of learning need. Not all students attending Aprender, however, have such levels of academic need. Some students may have other learning differences that relate to poor organisation, lack of school interest and motivation, behavioural or

emotional difficulties. The students attending the program, however, experience a level of difference that determines their participation in it. Their inclusion as members of the school setting is enhanced through their participation in all school activities other than academic.

Conclusion

The Aprender program was established to accommodate the learning needs of SWSN in what is considered as a more appropriate and supportive manner. Despite the inevitable comparisons with mainstreaming and integration approaches, the program strategically accounts for the importance of social inclusion and emotional growth, thus offering operational approaches that engage students in experiences that encourage their participation as members of the school setting where the program operates.

As I move onto Chapter Four, I establish an overview of the methodology implemented for the collection of data for the study. I present the reasons for the choice of methods and discuss the system that facilitated the opportunity to gather the lived experience collected from the SWSN participating in Aprender. I discuss the different data collection methods used to ensure that the research study is rich in description, emphasising the epistemological stance behind it. I then present the data analysis processes and a discussion of Aprender as experienced by the participating students.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology by which data were collected for the purpose of the study that aims to describe the experiences of SWSN in the Aprender program. Here I present the methodological processes that have structured the research study. This includes the theoretical perspectives that informed the practical approach undertaken in the data collection and analysis. The research was structured to describe lived experience, thus it was appropriate that I used methods that enabled me to collect data specifically focusing on the nature of the inquiry in place. I have divided the chapter into four key areas; firstly the research questions are discussed, secondly the meta-theoretical framework supporting the study used is presented, thirdly the issues of validity, reliability and ethics are discussed in reference to the methodology. Lastly I outline the data analysis strategies for the interpretation of all the collected data. This section also includes an acknowledgement of the limitations of the study.

To reiterate the research questions:

1. Are SWSN socially included in the Aprender program? If so, how?

2. What are the inclusive learning experiences of SWSN in the Aprender program?

The second question gives rise to the following sub-questions:

- What are experiences of social inclusion for SWSN within the program?

- How is the individual SWSN included outside of the program, in the regular school setting?

- How does social inclusion influence the school participation and development of the individual student within and outside of the program?

Whilst recognising that the special education literature indicates that the process of inclusion of SWSN in the regular classroom involves social, academic and locational elements (Ainscow, 1999; Moss, 2003; Beveridge, 1999), I have chosen to explore the experiences of SWSN with a primary focus on the social sphere, considering that an investigation of the other areas of inclusion is beyond the scope of this study. I need to stress however, that since there are strong connections between the social, academic and locational inclusive experiences of SWSN in regular schools, and the data collected represent the voices of individuals with an emphasis on the experience of inclusion, the study encounters links between all these aspects within the data.

I argue that if inclusion is investigated from a social perspective, it could be assumed that it relates to how much students actively participate and develop socially within the setting that they participate in. Such development will then contribute to the participation and progress of the individual within his/her school setting, thus also allowing academic and emotional aspects to be explored. I also mention the emotional

aspect of inclusive practice which, since individual students are voicing their own experiences, may be able to describe the extent to which inclusive practice has been achieved.

Meta-theoretical framework

In gathering data that would answer the research questions, I adopted an epistemological perspective of research that highlighted the stance reflected in the research process as a result of its ontological nature, and that provided a direction to the collection of data. Since the study set out to describe the experience of inclusion of students in the Aprender program through their own voices, I have used a qualitative methodology that is appropriate for the exploration of lived experience (Bell, 1997; van Manen, 1990). The methods applied to collect the data allowed for the collection of deep reflections on the process of inclusion in action, as noted in the ethics section that outlines the role of the researcher as teacher in Aprender and the likely effects of this circumstance.

Epistemology

For Crotty (1998), epistemology is the philosophical stance that describes the specific way an individual looks at the world and how such an outlook allows that individual to make a sense of it. Gough (2002) further suggests that epistemology relates to the "thinking" side of doing research and this differentiates it from the practical emphasis of the research methodology. Since the study seeks to create knowledge through the experience of SWSN, the nature of the study is identified within the

epistemology of constructionism. Connole (1993) indicates that a constructionist epistemology supports the task of the researcher when the aim is to document what is taking place through an emerging understanding of the situation. Since the purpose of this study is to gather not only an understanding of the students' experiences of Aprender, but also to identify how the process of socialisation takes place within the concept of inclusion, the study is based on the assumption that the outcomes will illuminate the creation of knowledge from a constructionist philosophical stance. In other words, it is the students' own constructions of their situation that I am seeking to document.

Theoretical perspective - Interpretivism

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), interpretivists believe in pluralistic, open ended and contextualised perspectives of reality. This is further supported by Sarantakos (1998) who states that in an interpretative perspective, reality is not 'out there' but in the minds of people; reality is internally experienced, is socially constructed through interaction and interpreted through the actors, and is based on the definition that people attach to it. Neuman (2000) indicates that for interpretative researchers, the goal of social research is to develop an understanding of social life and discover how people construct meaning in natural settings. Since the aim of this research study is to describe the processes, developments and involvement of the students within the social contexts of Aprender, an interpretative/qualitative approach to data collection is appropriate for this purpose.

Research methodology

The research methodology that I have adopted in this study is a longitudinal case study. The justification for this is based on the intentions of the study mentioned above, particularly as it attempts to describe the lived experience of SWSN in Aprender over time. According to Bell (1997), case study methodology can be described as the opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be thoroughly studied over a period of time without necessarily inquiring into other issues within the problem. This is further explained by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) who state that case studies offer the opportunity to gather unique examples of real people in real situations. More precise however, is the description offered by Stake (1995) who suggests that it is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, and the coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. This is of specific relevance to this study because of the particular inquiry examining the processes of inclusion for SWSN in the program.

Because of the epistemological and ontological nature of the study, it was necessary to apply a methodology that did not require the verification of a hypothesis, since there were no clear predictions or based assumptions relating to any outcomes that needed to be proven or justified. Instead, the methodology allowed the students to describe their experiences in reference to inclusion with an emphasis on socialisation within Aprender. The use of the longitudinal case study seemed appropriate as I researched within the setting over a five-month period. Case studies are effective methods for data collection in social research since, according to Borg, Gall and Gall (1993), the case study method offers the following advantages when gathering data:

- Case studies are well suited to developing detailed accounts of the phenomenological perspectives of the subjects. In the case of the study participants, detailed accounts of their lived experience are necessary to gather relevant data.

- Case studies can be undertaken for explanatory purposes, that is, when the researcher wishes to understand the causes and effects of events or interventions. This supports the research aims of understanding the reasons behind students' voices.

- Case studies focus on specific phenomena by studying a single instance of the phenomenon. In the case of this study, it is necessary to examine events in detail.

- Case studies allow the researcher to investigate events as they take place and over a period of time. This allows the researcher to investigate and gather information as it occurs from the subjects involved. This suits the longitudinal case study structuring the study.

- Case studies allow for the specific inquiry to be studied in its holistic context. Researchers are afforded the ability to study for a desired length according to the nature of the specific phenomena studied.

- Case studies typically involve multiple data sources. A class discussion, an interview with a subject or the observation of a lesson can all support the use of a case study as a methodology. Multiple data sources contribute to the validity of the study.

- Case studies invite the application of detailed conceptual frameworks for data collection and data analysis. Such conceptual frameworks allow for the interpretation of data to take place.

Constructed from Borg et al. (1993).

Participants

As outlined in chapter one, the study documents the lived experience of eight students with special needs who attend an educational program which aims to enhance their inclusion within their regular school setting. The students share some similarities, particularly as they are considered to be in need of special education. They are identified as being "intellectually disabled" and this labelling was given to each student after considerable analysis and testing of their learning potentials. In all cases, the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for children – Revised Edition Three (WISC-III) (Wechsler, 1991) was employed to determine the students' abilities and identify their possible special needs. The students attend years seven and eight of school and have mostly chosen the school because of the Aprender program. In all cases, the students are mostly able to participate independently in all school activities. Pseudonyms are used to name the participants in order to protect their true identity.

Data collection methods

In order to implement the outlined methodology within its theoretical and practical perspectives, I selected research processes that facilitated the collection of data

that allowed me to closely participate in the lived experienced of the students. These are discussed in the following section.

1. Document analysis

In order to understand the Aprender program and how it aims to facilitate inclusive practice for SWSN, I provide an analysis of the school-based Aprender program documentation referred to in the previous chapter.

This analysis is a review of documents that outline the structures establishing Aprender, providing an insight to what drives the program and how it functions within the wider school setting where it operates.

Hoepfl (1997) suggests that analysis of documents is often an invaluable source of data collection in qualitative research because documents that include official records, letters, newspaper accounts, diaries, reports and published literature may provide insightful information.

Although I have discussed the program in the previous chapter, I now make reference to the analysis of school-based documents as a research method used in the study. This analysis clearly provides a ground understanding of the program by establishing an outline of its theoretical and practical underpinnings.

2. Field notes

The case study uses case study or field notes. Field notes are written entries which are recorded from observations of the interactions that took place throughout the collection of data. This approach provides a large amount of data that reflect the prolonged research period. The field notes are later explored in relation to the themes and questions established in research inquiry. They refer to recordings of data that can be organised as an on-going process of development. This ensures that events, confirmations and contradictions are documented as precisely as possible (Burns, 1990). For this research study, field notes were written to record the events and behaviours which I saw as relating to the inclusion processes displayed in the program.

3. Interviews

The research process involved both formal and informal interviews as the central strategy for data collection. Formal interviews were structured, providing a set of questions which directly inquired into specific areas relating to the research questions. Informal interviews occurred in semi-structured mode where students were asked open ended questions referring to their experiences in general, often targeting snap-shots of their daily experiences. The use of interviewing supports the qualitative nature of the inquiry. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) indicate that interviews are consistent with a constructionist perspective. They consider that interviews provide a way for the interviewer and the interviewee to discuss their interpretations of the world, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view.

This view is further supported by Stake (1995), who indicates that interviews are effective for uncovering and understanding the multiple views that different participants offer the research. Considering the intentions of the study, it was appropriate to use both formal and informal interviewing as a key strategy for the collection of data. In order to ensure effective interviewing, I adopted the suggestions offered in Bell (1997), McCulloch and Richardson (2000) and Stake (1995), which recommend the use of open-ended questions to allow the interviewees to express their realities, perceptions and assumptions subjectively. These questions are designed to answer the research questions. Table 6 presents some of the questions used throughout the data collection period and their purpose.

Table 6 – Sample interview questions and their purpose

Questions		Purpose
Interview type: Formal	Interview type: Informal	
	How are you feeling today?	To identify the way the participant feels in reference to his school experience at that point in time. It encourages the student to provide a snap-shot of how he feels with possible further discussions emerging from the initial response.
How do you consider yourself a part of the school?		To encourage discussion with reference to the student's perspective on his role and participation within the school setting. This is a direct question which could lead to further discussions about the individual inclusion of the students as the process of collective inclusion within Aprender is examined.
	What have been your experiences in the school over the last 4 weeks?	To provide an opportunity for students to discuss their school experiences as participating members. This provides examples that support and challenge the notion of how inclusion occurs as the students have the opportunity to discuss different events which allow me to form an image of the experiences of the students.
What have been your experiences as an Aprender student?		To gather data that clearly refers to the experiences of the students within the program. The question refers to what occurs within the walls of the program and focuses on understanding the experiences of the students as members of the program.
	How are you doing with your studies?	To gather an understanding of the academic experiences of the students. Participants can illustrate their progress and challenges in reference to how they achieve within the program.
What have been your good or bad times at the school recently?		A final opportunity to discuss examples of what is good, bad and how it is experienced in the school setting. The question aims to promote more discussion about the challenges and benefits involved with the program.

Overall, these questions were designed to encourage the students to discuss their perspectives from the point of view of their lived experience in Aprender. Because of the needs of the students and some possible limitations with group discussions due to shyness, limited communication skills and/or dominant personalities, some interviews were conducted one-on-one. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Mostly, the interviews were conducted in small groups containing all eight participats, in an open forum where participants were requested to discuss and respond to the open ended questions inquiring their experiences. The participants were encouraged to respond and some prompting to encourage their participation also took place. This was sometimes necessary as the students were asked direct questions if their participation was minimal or whenever other students dominated the discussions. The setting was a small staff study area which measured approximately four by six metres. The seating arrangement included a middle table with all the participants sitting around it. The students were asked to bring journals or notes that could help them remember areas that they wished to have for discussion.

Due to some differences that SWSN present with their communication skills, it was sometimes necessary to adapt the discussions with the use of drawings or a teacher aide support to enhance understanding and interpretation of what was discussed. Drawings were used to describe feelings, for example, an unhappy face could describe a sad experience and a happy face could describe how a student felt about achieving a

positive experience. The teacher aide supported the interviews by explaining to the students the concepts or terminology that may have been difficult to comprehend. This included the paraphrasing of questions to encourage the students' participation. The support systems however, were not overly used as the students seemed comfortable with their ability to participate in the interviews. As a result, the responses were not limited by the differences presented by the SWSN participating. This is largely due to the effort that was made to ensure that the students participated appropriately, providing support and guidance to encourage the participation when needed. I now present the next method, the process of observation.

4. Observation

For Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), observation is described as:

> *"The process by which a researcher is in the best position to gain an understanding of the contexts of programs, is open ended and inductive, sees things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed, discovers things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations, moves beyond perception based data, and has access to personal knowledge",* (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p305).

This view is supported by Stake (1995), who suggests that observation as a method empowers the researcher to identify, enter and understand the situation being described. Cohen et al. (2000) distinguish between three types of observational processes. The first is the highly structured observation where researchers may identify an area to study which illuminates concepts and issues relevant to the study. The observation is "pre-ordinate" (ie, it will have the observation categories already worked out). The second is a semi-structured observation that offers an agenda of issues but gathers data to

illuminate these issues in a far less predetermined or systematic manner. The third is an unstructured observation that is far less clear on terms of what it is looking for, and therefore has to assess the significance of the experience and the events observed before deciding on the relevance and value of such experience (with respect to the aims of the study). In this study, mainly semi-structured observations were used because of the broad area it investigated, but there was also use of both the unstructured and highly structured observation methods. Examples of structured observations are Tables 23, 24 (pp 190) and 25 (pp 191) on Chapter 5. The majority of the observations examined specific events but were unstructured in terms of what they looked for. The observations aimed to document the experience of the students in reference to the research questions within the school setting. At the beginning of the research period, there was extensive use of unstructured observations because the study started by investigating the broad concept of the experiences of inclusion of the SWSN and not any specific areas. These emerged later.

Participant and non-participant observation

The study used both participant and non-participant observations. For Fetterman (1998), participant observation refers to the active involvement of the researcher in the interactions being studied in qualitative research. In my role as researcher in this study, I was actively involved in documenting data that reflected the interactions that the students experienced as participants in the school setting. This occurred through my involvement as teacher in the program, which meant I was in direct contact with the students as the events occurred. This took place primarily in the collection of data within my own classes, with the focus on insights into the pedagogical processes that derived from my

own teaching. It also occurred when I interviewed, communicated both formally and informally, and assisted students in support frameworks both within and outside the classroom.

In contrast to participant observation, Fetterman (1998) suggests that non-participant observation refers to the collection of data where the researcher has limited interaction with the participants s/he observes. In this research study, it describes those times where I participated solely as a researcher when I did not interact or contribute to the events taking place. For example, it occurred as I examined social interactions, the participation of SWSN in formal school activities and their behaviour in the many events that are informally linked to school life. Examples include sitting at the back of the room whilst another teacher taught, observations in the yard, observations in whole school activities such as assemblies, games, lunchtime activities, and excursions. All observations were recorded in a notebook and then entered into the computer. These field notes contributed to the identification of themes and areas for discussion during interviews.

According to Savage (2000), a researcher can never be totally isolated from the research setting, even when undertaking the role of non-participant observer. My presence in the setting, as participant or non-participant observer, itself would have affected the behaviour of the students in the study because of my involvement in the program as a teacher. Although there are likely implications with this, I feel that the collected data were not negatively affected. The study relied on other methods of data

collection to ensure that what was recorded was rich. This was due to the longevity of the study and the extent to which the participants were encouraged to participate. The use of non-participant observation complemented other data collected from the students because I had a record of the behaviours or events that the students referred to during interviews. The ability to observe the experiences of the students provided a greater understanding of the different roles associated with the SWSN as members of the program and school setting.

5. Surveys

Although the use of surveys is most often described as an effective tool for the gathering of data in quantitative research (Cohen et al., 2000; McCulloch et al., 2000; Maxwell, 1992), Wilson and McClean (1994) argue that the application of surveys can be also used successfully in ethnographic and case study inquiry. Surveys are described as useful instruments for the collection of information; providing structured, sometimes numerical data; able to be administered without the presence of the researcher, and often comparatively straightforward to analyse (Wilson & McClean, 1994). The first and last surveys used in this study were based on the Inviting School Attitudinal Survey (ISS), developed by the International Alliance for Invitational Education (1998). The ISS is a tool designed to gather information for the understanding of some of the experiences of students, and their perceptions of their school program. The extensive survey questions the school environment, the social interactions and attitudes to school. I believe that such an extensive survey was useful in examining the participants' views in relation to their school experiences, however, due to the broadly extensive number of questions the

survey was reduced from 50 to 29 questions. The vocabulary was also changed in some cases to enhance the participants' understanding of the questions. According to Shoffner and Vacc (1999), the ISS (IAIE, 1998) is a valid instrument that provides comparison to the Invitational Education Model (Purkey & Novak, 1996) and examines students' perceptions of their school system and environment.

This initial survey provided data on the students' perceptions of the program and their experience of inclusion within the school system. An initial survey was conducted at the beginning of the research period, with the other three different surveys answered at three different stages within the remainder of the period. The purpose behind each survey was different, with survey one attempting to gather topics for further exploration, thus asking questions about the Aprender program and the students' experiences of school participation under the program (see Table 7).

The subsequent two surveys asked more specific questions in the attempt to examine the students' perceptions of the program within the identified themes that emerged at these points in the research. These surveys were constructed by me, iteratively as themes emerged in the data collected throughout the research period. The last survey was the same as the initial survey as I aimed to gather comparison of responses at the different stages. Altogether, the purpose of the these surveys was to gather students' experiences and perspectives with reference to the themes identified in order to explore further in explicit detail as an iterative process. These subsequent surveys are presented in Tables 8-10:

Table 7 - Survey 1: Student attitudes to inclusion in Aprender

Statements	Please indicate your response to each of the following statements by placing an X in the one column that best represents your opinion of Aprender.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	I feel good to be a part of Aprender.					
2.	Teachers are willing to help all students individually and collectively in their learning.					
3.	People in this program have ample time to learn.					
4.	I feel as if I am a part of Aprender.					
5.	I feel to be a part of the school.					
6.	The teachers try hard to include me in all classes as a participant.					
7.	All students are happy to learn cooperatively by supporting one another.					
8.	Teachers express their appreciation for the individual student and his overall learning.					
9.	All students are friendly towards one another.					
10.	Special efforts are made to recognize the contributions of all individuals.					
11.	The teachers are happy to talk to me about my learning.					
12.	Behavioural and/or bullying issues are dealt with appropriately and promptly.					
13.	Few, if any, students fail in this program.					
14.	Teachers are approachable and easy to talk to.					
15.	The use of the school diary for communication by teachers and students is good.					
16.	There are only good perceptions of the program in this school.					
17.	Teachers are approachable outside of the classroom.					
18.	Teachers are generally prepared for class.					
19.	Teachers exhibit a sense of humour in and outside of the classroom.					
20.	I feel that I learn a lot in the program.					
21.	Mainstream teachers often visit the program with interest of student development.					
22.	Students are appropriately extended across all areas of school in this program.					
23.	Work is often changed to suit my learning differences.					
24.	I need Aprender's structure to learn.					
25.	Teachers promote and encourage my self-confidence.					
26.	Teachers expect the best from their students.					
27.	The location of the program's building is appropriate as I feel a part of the rest of the school.					
28.	I am proud to be in Aprender.					
29.	Creative thinking is encouraged in this program.					

Table 8 - Survey 2: Bullying in Aprender

No.	Statement	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
1	The year 9s make Aprender a bad experience			
2	The year 9s were the main reason for discipline problems			
3	The teachers should have dealt with the year 9s separately from us			
4	I got into trouble because of year 9s			
5	Not all year 9s were bad			
6	Some year 9s were very helpful			
7	Some year 9s helped me out in some ways			
8	I miss having the year 9s around			
9	Aprender should be divided into year levels (no composite classes)			
10	Year 8s are similar to the year 9s			
11	Year 7s are similar to the year 9s			
12	Some students use the year 9s as excuse for their own behaviour			
13	Classes when the year 9s are not around are often the better ones to do			
14	The year 9s are too advanced to be in classes with year 7s and 8s			
15	Teachers need to improve the way that they deal with the year 9s to avoid conflict in the classroom			

Table 9 - Survey 3: Teaching and learning in Aprender

Please tick the most appropriate box for each one of the following questions:

No.	Statement	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
1	Teachers in here treat me as an individual			
2	Teachers extend the work to address my ability			
3	I have improved whilst attending the program			
4	I wish I could be a part of mainstream because being in Aprender is portrayed negatively in the school			
5	Other students never tease me about being in the program			
6	I feel sad at being in this program			
7	Aprender is more than just academic support			
8	Aprender is more than just social opportunities			
9	Aprender is a part of the school's community			
10	Aprender works in "too much" isolation from the rest of the school			
11	Most teachers in mainstream visit Aprender			
12	The year level coordinators often visit me here			
13	The other (mainstream) teachers visited my Independent Learning Project presentation night			
14	I am glad to have the current teachers in the program			
15	I wish that teachers had more time for me			

Please answer the following:

- Socially, this is what Aprender has done for me:

- Academically, this is what Aprender has done for me:

- As a person (personal growth), this is what Aprender has done for me:

- This is what Aprender needs to do better to make it a more effective program:

Table 10 - Survey 4: End of research period - student attitudes to inclusion in Aprender

Statement	Please indicate your response to each of the following statements by placing an X in the one column that best represents your opinion of Aprender.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	After the last semester, I feel good to be a part of Aprender.					
2.	Teachers are willing to help all students individually and collectively in their learning.					
3.	Aprender allows you to learn.					
4.	I feel as if I am a part of Aprender because I feel welcomed.					
5.	I feel to be a part of the College.					
6.	The teachers try hard to include me in all classes as a participant.					
7.	All students are happy to learn cooperatively by supporting one another.					
8.	Teachers express their appreciation for the individual student and his overall learning.					
9.	All students are friendly towards me, and one another.					
10.	Special efforts are made to recognise the contributions of all individuals.					
11.	The teachers are happy to talk to me about my life.					
12.	Behavioural and/or bullying issues are dealt with appropriately and promptly.					
13.	Few, if any, students fail in this program.					
14.	Teachers are approachable and easy to talk to.					
15.	I feel that I have a good relationship with the teachers.					
16.	Everyone loves Aprender at this school.					
17.	Teachers are approachable outside of the classroom.					
18.	Teachers are generally prepared for class.					
19.	Teachers exhibit a sense of humour in and outside of the classroom.					
20.	I feel great and special to be here.					
21.	Mainstream teachers often visit the program with interest.					
22.	Students are appropriately extended across all areas of school in this program.					
23.	Work is often changed to suit my learning differences, and it is enjoyable.					
24.	I need Aprender to learn.					
25.	Teachers promote and encourage my self-confidence.					
26.	Teachers expect the best from their students.					
27.	The location of the program's building is appropriate as I feel a part of the rest of the school.					
28.	I am proud to be in Aprender.					
29.	Good learning is encouraged in this program.					

Please finish the following sentences (if you agree with them):

- I have learnt to respect others because:

- I have learnt to respect myself because:

- I have learnt to respect school because:

- I feel more/less confident now because:

- I am more successful with my work because:

- I am not happy to with:

- I feel that Aprender is good because:

Please answer the following:

- The best thing about Aprender is:

- Aprender could improve this way:

Adaptation of surveys to SWSN

In consideration of the reading difficulties, thought processing and writing ability of some of the SWSN in the study, the surveys were offered both verbally and in written form, with the assistance of an integration teacher. This process ensured a greater degree of reliability of the survey responses since it was clear that through explanation of the meaning of the questions/statements and some paraphrasing, the SWSN gained a better understanding of what was being asked. Although this alteration to the delivery of the instrument may lead to a variation in the quality of the responses gathered, offering the survey verbally provided a clearer understanding about what was being asked, and subsequently, enhanced the opportunities for SWSN to provide more reflective responses. This was entirely appropriate, given the nature of the students involved.

As the research process continued, the surveys allowed emerging themes to be examined. They in turn led to further discussions through the development of interview questions where students were encouraged to describe their experiences with reference to their responses to the surveys.

6. Reflective journal entries

A key aspect of this study has been my involvement as researcher, and the subsequent learnings that followed from the experience. Twice weekly, I recorded a reflective insight about what I had observed and heard during the preceding research period.

According to van Manen (1990), journals facilitate research data effectively, particularly lived experience. The reflective journal entries provided an opportunity for me to consider how the students' experiences affected my role as teacher within the program, and this also allowed me to maintain a consistent overview of what was happening both to the students and to me as the research process was taking place.

I also envisaged that the entries would give further insight into the interpretation of the data. The journal entries were guided by a number of questions. Table 11 presents the guiding questions and the purpose behind their use.

Table 11 – Guiding questions for reflective journal entries

Question	Purpose
What did I experience today?	To identify the highlights, low points, and/or themes that the students experienced as participants of the program and school community.
How do I feel about it?	How did the experiences affect me? How did I collect the data, identify what was recorded and what conclusions or links to other events can be drawn?
What can I interpret from the events of today?	Are there new themes emerging? Are the data constituting what has already been identified?
Where there aspects of inclusion that developed from today's experiences?	To examine if the data illustrates the processes of inclusion described in Chapter Two.
How was inclusion practiced today?	If the above question suggests that inclusion took place, then examine how it happened.

The framework of how the data sources are used to answer the research questions is discussed in the next section.

Framework for the investigation

The research focus provides the framework for the investigation based on the experiences of SWSN in reference primarily to their social inclusion, although it also includes voiced experiences based on other elements of inclusion, such as academic progress and the emotional development of the individual student, where deemed relevant. The study also inquired into the practical realities that structure the program as it aims to provide inclusive practice, and questioned the role of Aprender through the experiences of the students. Table 12 provides an overview of the research framework, including how the data were collected during the research period.

Table 12 - Research focus – the framework for the investigation

Research focus	Research question	Sub-questions	Data sources	Data collection			Research Stages
				method	Participants	Frequency	
The Aprender program as an example of appropriate educational practice	Are SWSN socially included in the Aprender program?	How do the students participate within the program's framework	School and program documents, students and teachers in everyday participation.	Review of documents	Documents	Once only	1
				Interviews	SWSN	Every 4 weeks	1-5
				Observations	SWSN	Approximately 3 hours a week	1-5
				Journals entries	SWSN	Fortnightly	1-5
				Surveys	SWSN	Every 4 to 5 weeks	1-4
The educational experiences of SWSN in Aprender	What are the inclusive learning experiences of SWSN in the Aprender program?	How does social inclusion influence participation and development for the individual student?	Students and teachers in everyday participation, student journals	Interviews	SWSN	Every 4 weeks	1-5
				Observations	SWSN and other students	Approximately 3 hours a week	1-5
				Journal entries	SWSN	Fortnightly	1-5
				Surveys	SWSN	Every 4 to 5 weeks	1-4
The experience of SWSN and social inclusion in Aprender	What are the experiences of inclusion in reference to student participation and development	How is social inclusion experienced by SWSN within and outside the program?	Students in everyday participation, student journals	Interviews/drawings	SWSN	Every 4 weeks	1-5
				Observations	SWSN and other students	Approximately 3 hours a week	1-5
				Journal entries	SWSN	Fortnightly	1-5
				Surveys	SWSN	Every 4 to 5 weeks	1-4

Next, an overview of the concepts of reliability and validity as they relate to the study, is presented.

Reliability, trustworthiness and validity

Crotty (1998) notes that researchers bring a number of assumptions to their chosen methodology, and these assumptions contribute to the processes used for the gathering of data, thus requiring that attention be paid to the concepts of reliability, trustworthiness and validity.

Reliability and trustworthiness

Establishing the reliability of the research study can be difficult when using qualitative methods to collect the data (Bell, 1997; Stake, 1995; Wiersma, 1991). In an attempt to justify the reliability of the research, I now outline the aspects of reliability in educational research that are consistent with the nature of the meta-theoretical perspective underpinning the study. One view of reliability relates to the extent to which studies can be replicated in procedure and results (Wiersma, 1991). Le Compte, Millroy and Preissle (1992) suggest that these canons of reliability for quantitative research may be simply unworkable for qualitative research. In quantitative research the assumption is that there is the possibility of replication when the same methods and similar samples are used. This assumption does not address the individuality and intention of a case study, where the purpose is to document the experiences of small numbers of students, hence requiring a different perspective of reliability. Here, the concept of reliability is better described as the trustworthiness that the research study establishes (Moss, 2003)

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) consider that reliability in qualitative methods describes a 'fit' between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched. This is not about striving for uniformity; two researchers who are studying a single setting may arrive at very different interpretations, yet both sets of findings may be reliable. This view illustrates the difficulty that conventional assumptions of the role and use of reliability in research have when quantitative methods are compared with qualitative methods. For Moss, "trustworthiness are acts of integrity that researchers take to ensure they seek truth by contextualizing their studies and disclosing all relevant procedures used in the study" (2004, p.371).

It is for these reasons that I use the term 'trustworthiness' to describe the reliability of the study as I attempted to gather the authentic lived experience that the students described. The trustworthiness of the study is based on the explicit attempt to ensure that the collected data describe the perceived experiences of the individual students at the time, and that such findings may be used to illuminate similarities with other programs or inclusive approaches in any school system that attempts to offer appropriate education for SWSN. The study is therefore considered trustworthy in outlining the experiences of SWSN in the setting where the study took place, and offers understanding and insights into SWSN, their experiences and the role of educational practice in the process.

In order to understand how trustworthiness was addressed in this study, I now outline the relevance of descriptive, interpretative and theoretical validity. The next section outlines the concept of validity as the process of trustworthiness is applied to the data methodology underpinning the study.

Validity

The concept of validity in qualitative research concerns debate about the legitimacy of qualitative research methods (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Maxwell, 1992; Stake, 1995). For Maxwell (1992), qualitative researchers are often under pressure to ensure the validity of their studies, since inconsistency in the attempt to ensure validity may suggest an unreliability of predictions, programs and policies that may be constructed as result of the findings. The concept of validity in qualitative research is described as the level of accuracy under which the researcher is able to account for the participants' realities of the social phenomena studied, and the different procedures adopted by the researcher to ensure the credibility of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Johnson (1997) distinguishes between three different aspects of validity in qualitative research:

1. Descriptive validity – the factual accuracy of the account as reported by the researcher.
2. Interpretative validity – the degree to which participants' viewpoints, thoughts, intentions and experiences are accurately understood and reported by the researcher.
3. Theoretical validity – the degree to which a theoretical explanation developed from the research fits the data and is therefore credible and defensible.

Since I have adopted Johnson's (1997) description of validity that includes descriptive validity, interpretative validity and theoretical validity, I now outline how these aspects are accounted for in the study through the use of different approaches for the collection of data. Firstly, prolonged engagement in the field is relevant to this study because I worked in the school setting where the study is undertaken prior to its commencement. My prior exposure to the dynamics and processes within the school setting as the SWSN

undertake all aspects of their schooling within Aprender provided me with the opportunity to readily begin my research with minimal need to adapt to the system. I believe that elements of trust, friendliness, acceptance and respect already existed in my relationships with the SWSN because of my prolonged engagement in the setting. This is exemplified by my involvement in the process of selection, enrolment and admission of the students into the program, a process that informed of the needs of the students, their identified learning differences and schooling history, and which provided further opportunities to know the students individually prior to the commencement of the research. The data collection processes that ensured prolonged engagement in the field involved interviewing and both participant and non-participant observation where the data were documented. This approach allowed me to describe the findings as the students expressed their experiences in the school setting whilst also having the opportunity to interpret the data to answer the key research questions. The process of answering the research questions created a theoretical explanation that accounts for the experiences of the students under the practice of inclusion. When interpreted, the data provided an insight into the school experiences of SWSN, thus providing a theoretical explanation in response to the key research questions.

According to Creswell and Miller (2001), the use of thick and rich description involves the detailed recording of information to ensure that the data are thoroughly engaged. A strategy supporting this approach is the use of audio recording for the interview sessions, as well as the formal and informal observations of the SWSN as participants in the wider school setting. Thus I have collected data using a number of different methods. It is the intent of the thick and rich description used to analyse data, that the experiences of the SWSN are described and interpreted to establish a theoretical explanation of the program's influences on the students' experiences.

The next section discusses the processes involved with the analysis of the collected data, from the perspective of theme analysis (van Manen, 1990).

Approaches used for data analysis and presentation of findings

The major approach used for the analysis of the documented data involves thematic analysis. There are three main reasons why I have chosen to use this approach to examine and interpret the data. Firstly the theme analysis approach facilitates the opportunity for the data to be segmented and filed according to relevance. This means that as the data are collected, analysis provides the opportunity to identify distinct areas that have common or different elements for effective recording of subsequent material. Secondly, the data illustrate emerging patterns as the recordings are interpreted. These identifiable themes allow for the data to be further separated into different areas according to their relevance. Finally, the use of theme analysis further enhances the validity of the study. Consistent with Johnson's (1997) description of validity, theme analysis promotes the collection of data that describe the students' experiences, allows interpretation of the data consistent with their segmented relevance, and establishes opportunities for the theoretical explanation of the phenomena examined. I now describe how theme analysis was applied to the study.

Theme analysis

Van Manen (1990) suggests phenomenological reflection as an approach for data analysis. For van Manen (1990), this involves the analysis of themes as: "the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatised in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work" (p.78). Since the data are to be collected and analysed for themes

that may define the experiences of the students in relation to their educational experiences within the school setting, they are examined through the identification of emerging themes that exist within the collected data. The process involves, distinguishes and selects experiences that refer to any of the identified emerging themes, to enable an understanding of the lived experience (van Manen, 1990) in reference to the research questions underpinning the study. The next section outlines the specific processes used for the analysis of the data and the identification of themes.

The first source of data analysed was the collation of the survey results. The aim of the first survey was to provide some understanding of how the students perceive the Aprender program, consequently outlining points for discussion, which were later used as focus points in interviews. The second and third surveys inquired specific areas related to bullying and locational inclusion, whilst the fourth surveys followed a similar pattern to the first with its aim to identify comparable data as the research period ended.

The questionnaires allowed me to generate questions to lead to further methods of collecting data. This way, interview questions strategically inquired into the areas that emerged which were relevant to the students as identified in the surveys. The identified themes emerged as I examined the data and further added to through observations (see table 13). The data were read seven times to ensure that emerging themes were clearly identified in the process and the data were then categorised into the themes and their sub-themes. As themes emerged, the data continued to be analysed, therefore are iterative and emergent. The analysis of journals and field notes follow a similar pattern to the interview transcripts; the data were read several times and emergent themes were identified. The data also identified points of reference, which were used during interviews. Table 14 summarises the approach to

the analysis of data, and the development of themes used to work the data in relation to the research questions, i.e. surveys led to interviews and observations.

Table 13 – Overview of the process of data analysis

Data Collection method	Process of analysis	Development of emergent methods
Surveys	Collated and discussion points emerged (for interviews)	Bar charts developed
Structured and informal interviews	Transcribed, read for identification of themes, and identification of further discussion points	Data categorised into subsections according to identified themes
Participant and non-participant Observation	Field notes recorded and read for identification of themes and development of interview discussion points	Data categorised and any assumptions discussed with the students during interviews
Journals	Reading and identification of themes and sub themes in reference to the students' experiences	Data categorised for further discussion during interviews

Presentation of the data

The data were presented systematically, outlining the themes as they emerged and using the data to discuss interpretations and expose the students' lived experiences in narrative form and theme analysis. As indicated earlier, according to McQueen and Zimmerman (2006), the use of narrative form to present data, is common in educational research. The reason for this is the researcher's ability to describe the findings, whilst presenting the interpretation of the data in reflection of the student voice. For this reason, narrative form was used to present findings in Chapter Six, where, two students' experiences are presented. These have been constructed from interviews and observational data.

Ethical issues and concerns

This study inquired into the experiences of SWSN in the regular classroom, and despite the general need for educators to continually research their educational settings for

the improvement of practice, there were certain ethical considerations that needed to be addressed when designing the research methodology. These particularly concerned how the students' experiences in reference to the research questions could be determined; how they could be reflective of the aims of the program and how the program could account for the experiences of the students. The concerns were:

1. Despite my thoroughly explaining the aims of the study as clearly as possible, because of the learning differences of the participants, they may not have fully understood the aims of the study.

2. While collecting the data, I worked as the Director of the Aprender program which I also had developed. As a result, interpreting data was opened to bias because of my preconceived understandings of the educational processes available for SWSN in the program. However, my role as researcher also allowed me to understand different perspectives regarding the program, and to collect data that reflected the appropriateness and/or challenges in the practice of teaching as experienced by the students. As researcher, I attempted to remain open to the findings whether they met my preconceived notions or not.

3. As the developer of the program, all the concepts, values and strategies that underpin it have been largely influenced by my own educational principles and my planning as leader of a group of committed teachers. As such, I have a personal stake and interest in the findings and conclusions of this study, and so I may also present bias from this perspective.

My research methods and application of the case study framework for the collection of data, and particularly my reflective journal entries, ensured that I was able to remain aware of the ethical concerns as I collected data that were reflective of the students' experiences and any prior assumptions that I could have developed in relation to my role within the program. Further to this, the study was accepted by the Australian Catholic University Ethics Committee, with consideration of the above concerns.

Limitations of the study

The study was not intended to assess the program as a special education model that could be applied to other schools. This is primarily due to the individuality of the students, and the need for all schools to firstly identify their students' needs and context before the design and implementation of any specific program can be implemented. The specific results are only really applicable to these students on this site.

Also, the decision to concentrate on the social sphere of inclusion and not specifically consider academic aspects of student development within the program has somewhat limited the opportunity to oversee the holistic impact of Aprender as an inclusive system for pedagogical practice. However, this decision was taken because a study examining all the aspects of inclusion of the students was beyond the scope of this thesis.

Conclusion

Chapter Four has presented the methodology and methods structuring the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data for the study. It discussed the concepts of reliability

and validity and outlined some of the limitations of the study, whilst also indicating its relevance.

The next two chapters bring all the findings together. The data are examined and interpreted in order to identify key themes. These themes are discussed and conclusions about the experiences of the students in the Aprender program are drawn.

The data are presented in two very different ways in order to capture the experience of the SWSN. Chapter Five discusses the themes identified in the research study. It examines the experiences of the SWSN in reference to their participation and inclusion within the school setting and Aprender program. Chapter Six uses the data to construct two case studies. They describe the experience of two particular participants as members of Aprender. I now present Chapter Five and results of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FINDINGS: STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND THEIR

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN THE APRENDER PROGRAM

Introduction

The research investigated the experiences of students with special needs (SWSN) who, at the time of the study, attended the Aprender program for their secondary school education. I documented the experiences of the participants in Aprender with specific reference to their social inclusion within the program and their subsequent experiences as members of the school community. Although the students' experiences are examined primarily from the sphere of social inclusion, the documented data also extend to other significant areas that illuminate the key processes involved in the holistic inclusion of SWSN into the regular school classroom. Here, these processes extend to the students' role as not only active participants in the Aprender program but also as contributors within the structures offered in the school setting.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the research design implements several strategies for the investigation of the research questions underpinning the study. Due to the nature of the investigation, the collected data are necessarily substantial, rich and cluttered. Contributing to this was the length of the research period of five months during a school semester, together with the use of the different methods implemented for the collection of the data. Although the identified themes are therefore inevitably interconnected, and overlapping, I now attempt to outline distinct structures that underpin each one by discussing each theme in reference to the students' experience. Although all the themes are interconnected, I have divided this chapter

into three sections, each one specifically describing one of the identified themes with further sub-themes that emerge from an in-depth analysis of the raw data. I arrived at the themes by examining the different stages of the data collection period. After analysing the survey responses at the initial stage, I was able to identify two key areas discussed by the students with reference to the social aspects underpinning their schooling. These areas involved inquiring into the attitudes towards relationships formed and the role of others in the learning undertaken by the individual students. As the analysis continued, the data clearly collapsed into three distinct, yet related broad themes. These main themes are:

1. The value of relationships in the inclusion of the participants.

2. The experience of academic and social development of the participants.

3. Inclusion and seclusion: the difficulties experienced by the participants.

In responding to the research questions, the students discussed their experiences in reference to how they felt on a particular day, often making reference to past school experiences or other events when attempting to answer the questions. Also, students' responses did not always directly respond to the questions being asked. In the case of direct questioning, where I intended to gather particular information about particular experiences, the students at times responded by discussing or focusing on other areas which were of greater relevance to them at that point in time. This is possibly either due to my role as their teacher or their interpretation of the research questions. The themes are presented in the order that they emerged from the data, beginning with the theme of relationships, then moving onto an analysis on the theme of development and ending with the description of negative experiences illustrating the theme of seclusion from within the school setting. I have used a system to identify data sources by highlighting the different phases where the data emerged,

a pseudonym for the individual student and the line number from the interview transcript for easy identification. The system also includes the type of method applied for the collection of the data. An example is: [Jason, Interview 2, Phase 3, Lines 57-67]. As discussed in the last chapter, the research period phases were separated into 5 distinct stages. I now present theme 1: Relationships.

Theme 1: The value of relationships in the inclusion of the participants.

"Knowing that everyone in the program is friendly, that you can have a joke with the teachers, that when you get up in the morning you know that you will have fun while learning, it makes you feel better" [Jason, Phase 5, Interview 5, Lines 181-183].

Jason's reflection on the role of relationships in facilitating an inclusive learning environment is representative of the collective participants' perspective throughout the research period. The broad theme of the importance of relationships emerged strongly from the data as the SWSN described their experiences of friendships with members of the school community, illustrating the importance of these for their social inclusion. Due to the complex nature of the data, the students' responses with reference to this theme were further sub-divided into three distinct sub-themes. Each one illuminates the significance of relationships that exist between the students and other key members of the school community as they affect inclusion. The sub-themes are:

    A.   The value of relationships between the participants and their teachers

    B.   The value of relationships between the participants and other Aprender students

    C.   The value of relationships between the participants and other mainstream students

The next section examines sub-theme A – The value of relationships that exist between SWSN and the Aprender program teachers with regard to the practice of inclusion

Relationships with teachers

"Yeah, I think learning is about your teachers and having a special relationship. If you have a good teacher, then you want to learn more. So in mainstream the teachers just want to make you learn. In Aprender the teachers want you to learn and have fun at the same time" [Marcus, Interview 5, Phase 5, Lines 72 – 74].

Marcus' quote gives insight into the importance of relationships between students and their teachers in the classroom setting. This theme appeared consistently within all data sources.

Surveys

The statements (S) referring to teachers used in the survey, were:

S2: Teachers are willing to help students individually and collectively in their learning
S6: Teachers try to include me in all classes as a participant
S8: Teachers express their appreciation for the individual student and his overall learning
S11: Teachers are happy to talk to me about my learning
S14: Teachers are approachable and easy to talk to
S15: The use of the school diary for communication between teachers and students is good
S17: teachers are approachable outside of the classroom
S18: Teachers are generally prepared for class
S19: Teachers exhibit a sense of humour in and outside of the classroom
S25: Teachers promote and encourage my self-confidence
S26: Teachers expect the best from their students

The responses to the above are as follows:

Figure 3 – Survey 1 results S2-15
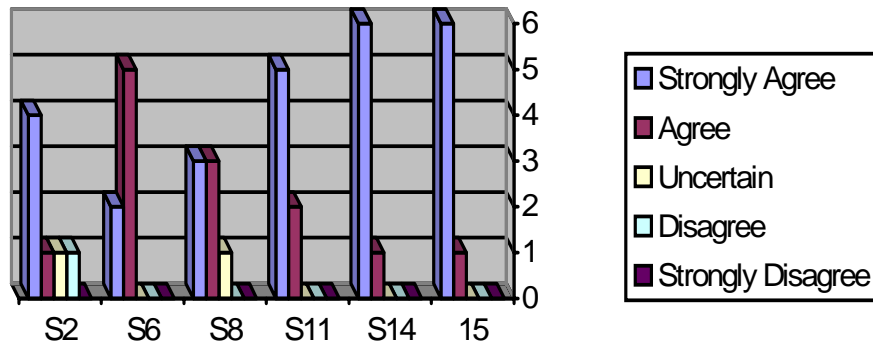
Statements 17, 18, 19, 25 and 26 provide the following results:

Figure 4 – Survey 1 results S17-26.
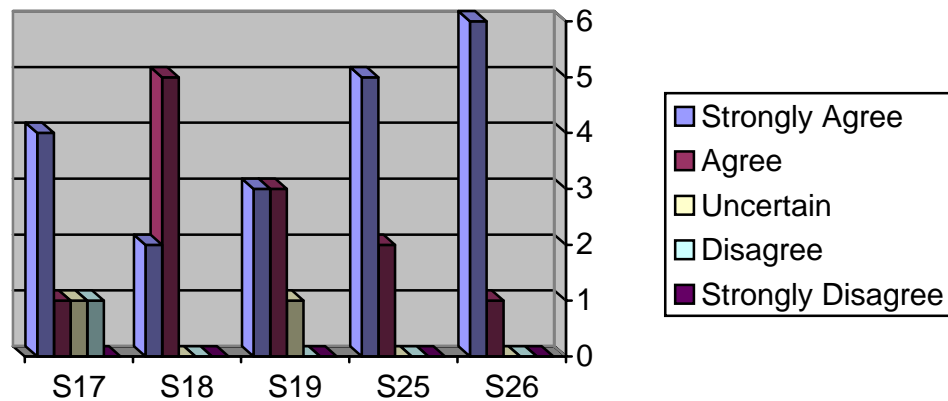
The students' responses clearly indicate the importance of the role of the teacher in the Aprender program classroom, through acknowledgement of the supportive approaches taken by the teachers. The students strongly agree with the statements that teachers are approachable, appreciative of individuals' differences, show their commitment by challenging, yet are able to offer the required help to teach the individual student.

In survey four (page 117), I explicitly asked about the role of the teachers in the Aprender program at the fifth and final phase of the research period. The survey examined the students' perceptions of their teachers and the role that they had in the program. The aim was to examine any possible changes in responses. The responses from the survey are displayed in Figures 5 and 6.

Figure 5 – Survey 4 results S1-7

Figure 6 – Survey 4 results S8-14
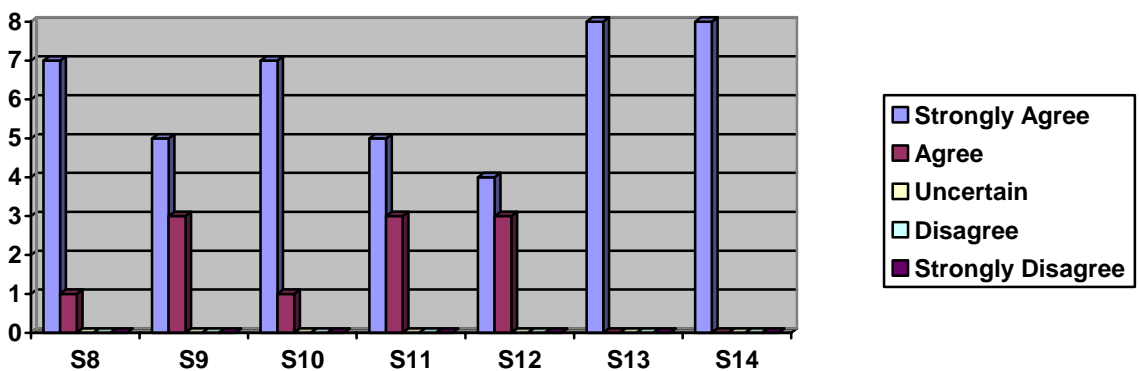
Please note: A participant was absent on the day that surveys were given. He did not complete the survey at any stage.

The results are consistent with those presented at the beginning of the research phase 1. Clearly, the students' perceptions did not change over the five month period. Based upon the initial results in phase 1, the research moved on to examining the experiences of the students to provide further insight into the rol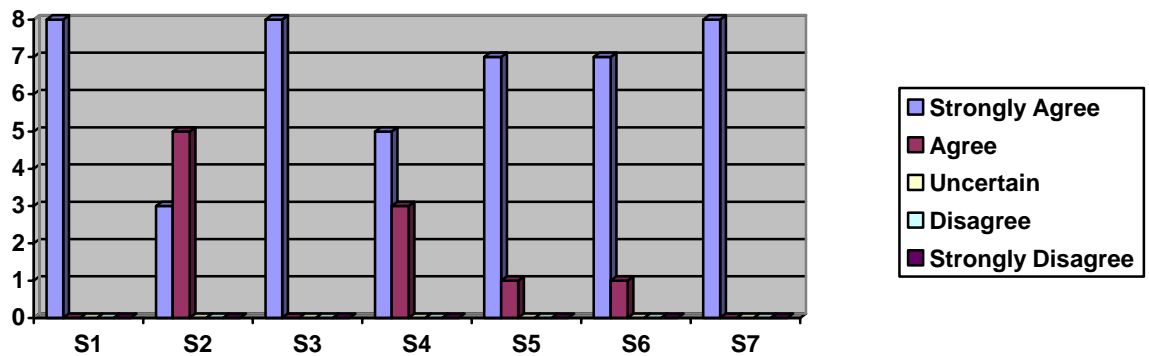e of the teacher in the process of inclusion. This was achieved by interviewing the students in a focus group. The students were also observed as they interacted with their teachers both inside and outside the classroom.

The next section presents the data collected within the area of relationships between students and teachers as they emerged through the interviews. As indicated in chapter Four, I asked students direct questions that explored their views of the role of the teacher in Aprender, based on the results of the first survey. Such questions included:

Why are your teachers so important?

How do your teachers influence the Aprender program?

What is good about Aprender?

How could you reflect on the role of the teacher in Aprender?

Interviews

The data from the interviews confirmed the survey results at both ends of the research period. Students discussed the role of the teacher in depth and it was clearly considered a key element in the positive experiences of the participants. Typical responses were:

> *(Teachers are) "Very important because you get to socialise with your teachers, and back in mainstream is like, do this, do that… I know that in mainstream, teachers say do this and don't have a-muck around (with you)"* [Mal, Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 105 –107].

"Um, oh, I actually woke up in a smiling mood this morning, like, it got better with the day, and it actually got better when I got student of the month. Now going back, I'm just glad that the teachers, (names teachers), one for art and the other for Religious Education, they have been finding funnier ways to give homework. For instance, in Religious Education, she gave us photos for homework, and that is something that the whole class can enjoy doing. (names teacher) has us doing cameras (building cameras), I thought that it would be impossible but now I'm just happy that he is doing this with us. They are good teachers". [Alex, Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 86 – 91].

"Well last semester, when (names teacher) took us for English, and then we were going to start splitting up into groups, some (students were grouped) with (names teacher), and some with (names teacher). When I heard that I was in my group, I started to worry, but this semester, I realise that (names teacher)is a good English teacher, because he can make things good and fun" [Zachary Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 125 – 128].

"You know how a couple of days (ago) I think, you read out the teachers that were coming in for what subjects, I wasn't very keen to have (names teacher) for art and drama, and I thought, well, maybe I give the teacher a chance. The teacher could really help me with art and drama, and then I thought, well this teacher is a nice person to me and that is what is the most important" [Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 114 – 118].

Clearly, for these participants, teachers play an important role in their experience of school. The data indicate that teachers are considered an important element in the make up of the classroom. The students referred to positive experiences with their teachers, explaining that their exposure to different lessons was enhanced by the fact that their teachers made the lessons interesting. This seems to be something of great importance to them.

During the second phase of research, I asked the students how they thought the teachers influenced the Aprender program. These are some typical responses:

"Teachers are very important... Because you don't get the help in mainstream, and here is Aprender you get all the help" [Mal, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 120 and 124].

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"Because if you don't have good relationships with your teachers they won't respect you... And I used to get into trouble but now I am a lot calmer" [Daniel, interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 152 – 153].

"(Here) you have less teachers and (names teachers), like, they are very nice to me and they don't scream all the time" [Zachary, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 173-174].

"Teachers help us a lot, not like in mainstream where there is one teacher in the classroom, here we have more, and it is good" [Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 202 – 203].

"In here (Aprender), I have good relationships with (names several teachers) and they help me because they like me" [Alex, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 229 – 230].

Based on these statements, it is clear that the relationships that the students and their teachers developed seem to be of great importance to the program and the students' experiences. The statements refer to the importance of the teachers in facilitating help, providing support and being friendly. This illustrates the role of the Aprender teacher as one which has a very broad understanding of the individual, and sympathy for, the students.

During phase 4, I asked students to reflect on what, if anything, they felt was good about Aprender. These are responses from some of the students:

"Well, you mingle with the teachers, you get to know them pretty well, in mainstream teachers give you set work, and you just complete it, but here, the teachers talk to you and they give you help, you get the help that you need" [David, Interview 2, Phase 4, Lines 19 – 21].

"Aprender is good... I really like it because it is a good program and in mainstream I would go and struggle a lot, not keep up with the work and it would be too hard for me and in (here) I get to talk to teachers all the time and it is more fun here too" [Daniel, Interview 2, Phase 4, Lines 42 – 44].

"When I study hard I get highs (higher grades) all the time, when I say hi to a teacher they are nice to me and say "how are you?" and are nice to me because they know me, and last year I was getting into trouble and this year I am not getting into any trouble" [Mal, Interview 2, Phase 4, Lines 58 – 60].

Again, clearly, the students are saying that teachers are an important and positive part of the program. They are considered a good 'thing', meaning that their knowledge of the students is a strength. During phase 5, students were asked to reflect on how they felt about their involvement in the Aprender program. In the following responses, the students further illuminated the role of their teachers in how they felt as participants. David put it:

> *"Yes, I am feeling good because of the teachers that I have, they're never mean and they teach me a lot. I feel that I have done well in my English and that I have learnt a lot. I did well in my exam. I like the program because it makes me feel happy and I have a lot of great teachers".* [David, Interview 1, Phase 5, Lines 17 – 20].

And for Marcus:

> *"I woke up this morning and I knew that I had a science test… and my teacher supports me and I like English because the teacher helps me to understand and I am happy to come to school. I have had a good year this year"* [Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 5, Lines 24 – 27].

Daniel said that:

> *"I say that the teachers in Aprender are very helpful which is important because they are there for you. They support you and are very nice"* [Daniel, Interview 1, Phase 5, Lines 35 – 36].

And other students:

> *"Aprender teachers are very important. If you need help then they are there for you. They are never in the background or anything, they are always in the classroom and they are really nice… the mainstream teachers are not as nice… They are helpful because they are happy to give time during lunch or after school to help you. In mainstream they explain it and that is it, you just have to do it"* [Alex, Interview 1, Phase 5, Lines 40 – 46].

> *"Well, I think that it is good because it makes us feel loved in some way and it can take the pressure of school work with exams, assessments, all that is coming ahead in the next week, so I think that it is important. And although the work is still as important, it is good to be able to have a good laugh with teachers"* [Michael, Interview 1, Phase 5, Lines 67 – 70].

"Yes, when I was in mainstream, I used to get in trouble, all databases (referring to monitoring of behaviour through entries on the school database) and detentions because they didn't like me. I came to Aprender and improved because the teachers liked me. I think that I have improved because I am not in trouble as much anymore. I would be at a different school if it was not for Aprender" [Mal, Interview 1, Phase 5, Lines 89 – 93].

By this stage in the study (phase 5), it is clear that the students continued to perceive their teachers as a source of support. They continued to reflect on their participation as members of the program positively, due to the involvement of the teachers. This lends support further to the finding that teacher and students' relationships are vital to the success of teaching SWSN.

In another example, during an interview, I asked David a question focusing on the reasons why he had joined the program. I was seeking his views of the program in comparison to mainstream. This is an extract from his interview:

(I: Interviewer)

> *I: Is Aprender a better option than mainstream?*
> *David: Yes,*
> *I: Why?*
> *D: Because you have less teachers here and Ms. (names teacher), like, they're very nice to me and they don't scream all the time.*
> *I: Are teacher relations important?*
> *D: Yes*

[David, Phase 2, Interview 1, Lines 160 – 167].

After examining the interview responses presented by the students, I moved on to an analysis of the many formal and informal observations that I undertook during the research stage that referred to student – teacher relationships. It was important to observe the social interactions that occurred both within the classroom setting as well as out in the various other

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locations within the school, in particular to observe the different ways that teachers related to their students, to provide further insight into the student-teacher relationships. The key findings from the observations of the relationships that existed between teachers and students are presented in the next section.

Observations

I was able to add to the picture of how the SWSN valued the role of their teachers by observing behaviours and social interactions in reference to this. The examination of the data collected from observations identifies the following key findings from participant observations where I was actively involved in activities where the students participated (eg teaching the students, observing whilst on yard supervision) and non-participant observations where I did not directly participate in students' activities (eg as they played games, ate lunch, were taught by other teachers). Participant observations took place when I was actively involved in a number of aspects of school life. These included staff meetings, discussions with students, yard duty times and teaching periods. These are some of the documented experiences relevant to the theme of student-teacher relationships:

a. Aprender teachers support their students on a one-to-one basis, during lunch and/or recess, and on one occasion, after school. The students appear to enjoy spending time with their teachers, often asking questions about personal interests (eg sports, car preferences, music preferences, asking about family…), and the teachers observed all engaged in the discussions openly. They always responded to the participants' questions, hence building relationships beyond the classroom [Participant Observation 4, Phase 1].

b. The weekly Aprender staff meeting focused today largely on student development and any concerns relating to the development of some of the individual students. The teachers seemed very knowledgeable about the students' school experiences and how they were progressing. This involved discussions about the academic and the social progress made at school. In some cases, it also extended to discussions about the students' home lives (relationships with parents, problems at home, medical problems). Reference was made to student files and the case management of the

student. This meeting reflected what occurs during every staff meeting [Participant Observation 2, Phase 2].

c. Today, students were happy to impress their teachers in the form of academic achievement, sporting achievement and/or community learning achievement. Teachers responded positively with encouragement. This happened at the awards assembly and later in the classroom [Participant Observation 1, Phase 2, Lines 1-6].

d. Some students were in trouble during lunch in the oval. When asked about the reasons for getting in trouble, a student suggested that it always happens when away from their Aprender teachers. It occurred today outside and not on the program premises [Participant Observation 4, Phase 4, Lines 8-20].

The participants' responses to the survey and in the interviews illustrated the importance of their teachers. My observations clearly confirm the level of support and positive approach that each teacher seems to be able to bring to the development of the students in Aprender. This is shown in the extra support offered during break time (lunchtime or recess); the way that students indicated that they never get in trouble with their teachers because they know them well; and most importantly, the optimistic discussion about the needs of the students. At the start of the staff meeting, each teacher involved had views about what he/she considered best practice for the students. This occurred because the teachers knew the students and their individual needs very well. The following are examples of non-participant observations:

a. A teacher is told when things are not going well. A student approaches his teacher to discuss his concerns. It is quite possible for teachers to be told of the many problems that the boys face, problems that other boys may be facing, or problems that relate to a personal matter [Non-Participant Observation 3, Phase 1].

b. A student is overwhelmed with studies because of the amount of tasks given. He appears to be concerned about his workload. When approaching his teachers, they seem happy to spend time with him individually to reduce the level of stress by modifying and simplifying the tasks at hand. In order to be supportive, it seems that the teacher is very alert of the needs of the student [Non-Participant Observation 1, Phase 2, Lines 1-6].

c. Students are happy to talk with their teachers about their personal experiences. It is quite common for teachers to discuss these experiences and particular events that occur in the lives of the students, with the discussions about the concerns constantly taking place in the staffroom [Non-Participant Observation 4, Phase 2, Lines 1-3].

d. Students' parents are constantly contacted to discuss development. This occurs often and enables all teachers to be involved in a group support structure which allows the students to be cared for under a case management approach. This does not only show teacher commitment, but illuminates the role of an Aprender teacher across the emotional and social facets of development in the student. In light of the special needs of the students, parents (particularly those of the students being researched) are contacted at least fortnightly to ascertain development and raise concerns [Non-Participant Observation 4, Phase 2, Lines 1-5].

e. On one occasion, Zachary indicated that he could not wait to see a teacher to show his new contact lenses. Despite the possibility of getting into trouble as he attended a whole school assembly at the time, he attempted to get the attention of his teacher because it seemed that it was important for him to show his new glasses [Non-Participant Observation 1; Phase 1; Lines 4-6].

f. The students tend to differentiate between Aprender teachers and regular school teachers. They suggest that Aprender teachers are very supportive of their needs, and this is different from what they experienced during past school stages [Non-Participant Observation 4, Phase 4].

These observations further add to an understanding of how the participants relate to their teachers. They approach their teachers because they feel comfortable to do so and they also understand that their teachers are there to support them. These observations display the care and empathy that the teachers show for the students, and reveal how the teachers are actively involved in their well-being.

Student-teacher relationships: discussion

There is substantial research investigating the field of student and teacher relationships within the school context (e.g. Greene, Abidin and Kmetz, 1997; Burke, 1997). These findings all stress the importance of good affective relationships between teachers and

their students. The documented data in this study also reveal that Aprender students regard good relationships between their teachers and themselves as a key contributor to their learning, recognising that it has been the role of the teacher, in many instances, that has contributed to the development of the students' active involvement and increasing and improving level of participation within the school setting. There is clear acknowledgement by the students for the work of their teachers in the program. This high level of support is possible because of the commitment of the teachers to the students that is made possible through the structures of the program designed to facilitate the development of relationships. It is the friendly, accepting and supportive approach that the teachers in the program provide that is a key factor in encouraging the students to participate in an effort toward greater achievement, within the structures that Aprender offers. The observations highlight the different approaches that the teachers use when dealing with their students. They often provided far more than academic guidance, listening to how the students felt about participating within the school setting and also discussing amongst the teaching staff how to best support those students in particular need of special guidance. Teachers had a deep personal knowledge of each student.

It is necessary to acknowledge however, that the students' attitudes may also have resulted from a comparison of past and current school experiences. Despite the level of support that the students had presumably received in their previous schooling, they made it clear that being participants in Aprender had cemented a perspective in which students expressed their appreciation of their teachers and the teachers' approaches to them in including and supporting them at school.

The relationships that are developed and experienced in the Aprender program between students and their teachers, support and are examples of the process of inclusion. Here, students are included as social participants, their involvement illuminated by their relationships with their teachers and their positive attitudes to school which result. The participants appear to enjoy their schooling and actively participate in the educational experiences facilitated. As such, this research has clearly established that the role of the teacher in the Aprender program is of great importance to its success, in the view of the students.

I now move on to present the second sub-theme within the theme of relationships. This describes the experiences of the SWSN in this research with other Aprender students attending the program.

Relationships with other Aprender students

"You know when we were having the HPE (Health and Physical Education) lesson, a few weeks ago? Well, I could not see the ball well and no one wanted me in their team, but (names a student) helped me, he is good like that and said, here, come to my team mate". [Zachary, Interview 1, Phase 4, Lines 116-118].

The sub-theme of the significance of relationships between the participants and other students that attend the program is of great relevance to the experience of social inclusion and its positive impact on their holistic inclusion. This is presented next. The data are displayed as in the previous section, where evidence is separated according to the method used and the phase where it occurred during the five months of data collection.

Surveys were used at the initial stage of research for the data collection referring to the social inclusion of SWSN and their peers in the Aprender program. As discussed earlier, these questions were strategically developed to inquire into the attitudes of students as they described their individual experiences, by a response to set statements. The first survey provided an indication of the attitudes that the participants held in reference to their involvement in the program and their peer relations. These statements were:

> *S1 - I feel good to be a part of Aprender.*
> *S2 - I feel as if I am a part of Aprender.*
> *S3 - All students support one another.*
> *S4 - Students are friendly towards one another.*
> *S5 - My friends are important for me to learn.*

Figure 7 – Survey 1: student relationships results – Number of participants and responses to statements
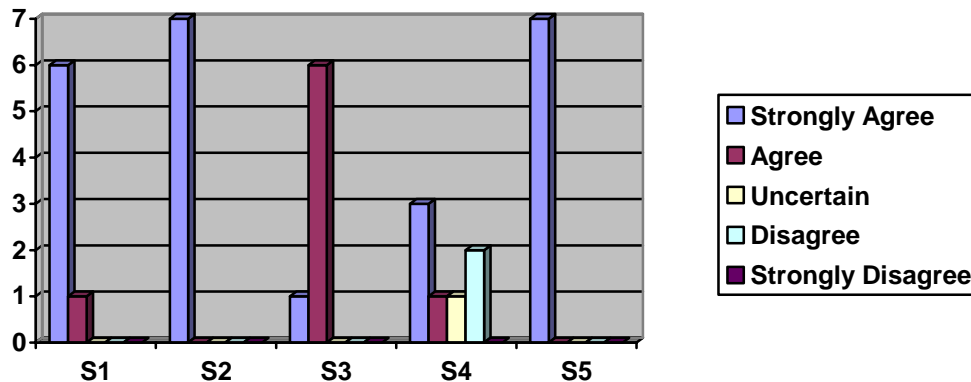
The responses to the statements provide some insight into peer relationships and their role in the experiences of the students. Clearly, the students either strongly agree or agree that they belong within the program, identifying the care that students in the program have

amongst themselves, and indicating that the program students provide support to one another. However, they were less sure that students were friendly to one another.

As before, these responses identified areas relating to students' relationships for further discussion through interviews and observations. In other words, the survey responses established the relationships between the students and their peers as a theme for further examination. Some of the questions used in interviews are presented below:

How do you feel about being in the program?

How important are friends in the program?

How important are the other students in helping you learn?

What are your experiences with friends here in the program?

Next I present data collected from interviews.

Interviews

Through the interviews, the participants provided further insights into their relationships with other students who attended the Aprender program. The students were not asked direct questions examining their experiences of friendships with other Aprender students, rather they were asked questions about their involvement in the program and their experiences within it. The following students' responses outline the role that peer relations play in their experiences as members of the program. During interview 1 of phase 1, I asked some of the students how they felt on that particular day in reference to the program. David's response is typical:

"I feel glad because…(pauses) it's the first week back and I can enjoy it without anyone, anyone causing trouble (for me), and I hope that (maybe) I will have a peaceful second semester", [David Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 6-7].

For David, this was his first week in the program and his response referred to the bullying that he had encountered as a mainstream student in the previous semester. Mal and Zachary responded to the same question with the following:

"It's good, yeah, it's getting better…cause of all the new friends I have made, yeah, it helps you a lot", [Mal, Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 31-33].

"Yes, I am having a good day today. I had a fresh start when I came back this semester. When I first started in (the program) it was ok, but I didn't know that we were going to be mixed up (vertical classroom consisting of students from 7 to 9), and now it has been going well, and I am not teased… I am fine now, [Zachary Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 55-58].

These responses indicate that attending the program seems to be positive for these boys because of the friendships that have been made, not only with students of the same year level, but also with older students who attend the program. In the second interview during phase 2, I asked students to describe the good things about the program. The interview took place approximately four weeks after interview one.

"Friends, people, have (all) been coming up to me and saying, are you alright Daniel? So it is slowly getting away from me now (referring to past experiences of bullying). I have good friends here", [Daniel Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 11-12].

"Kids here are nice and I have made new friends, and the kids here are very nice. I have done well with my assignments", [Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 162-163].

"All the teachers are nice and I have good friends (in Aprender)", [Zachary, Interview 1, Phase 2, Line 189].

These responses emphasise the role of the friendships formed in the program. In all the responses, the participants made positive reference to their friends. In one case, friends

showed interest in the well-being of the student with reference to a past experience of bullying. The other two examples indicate that friends are considered the most important aspect of the program.

Although this was not part of a formal interview session, during a drive to a sporting event, I sat with Zachary and asked him how things were going in the program. This was the beginning of phase three, at the end of the third term of school. He responded with the following statement:

> *"Kids in (Aprender), they never treat you bad because everyone here gets to know you. Everyone likes everyone all the time and that is why I like to be here",* [Zachary interview 1, Phase 3, Lines 30-32].

This illustrates the important that his friends play in Zachary's participation in Aprender, and supports the previous responses.

During Phase 4, I asked Mal and Daniel about their experiences of friendships with students attending mainstream classes. These were their responses:

> *"I still know that I can play with everyone if I want to. I know that I do what my father says, be friend with all the good kids only and I guess that they are all in here (Aprender) anyway"* [Mal, Interview 2, Phase 4, Lines 49-50].

> *"I am friends with everyone but most people here are happy to help me. They are my friends more than the others anyway (referring to non-Aprender students)",* [Daniel, Interview 1, Phase 4, Lines 52-53].

These statements indicate that the other Aprender students are considered their friends more so than those students attending mainstream, because of the support offered and the relationships formed.

When asked about what it felt like being a student in the Aprender program, Mal suggested the following:

> *"I used to be in mainstream. I had lots of friends and when I came to Aprender, I really didn't get bagged (teased) because I knew a lot of them (referring to mainstream students). They were my friends and so they never used to offend me anyway. Just the other day I got bagged (teased) about it, this kid I know, because he used to go my school,(and) he asked me if I was dumb or smart, and I said, I just want to learn, and I like my friends, they are so nice to me…"* [Mal, Interview 1, Phase 5, Lines 124-128].

Overall, the students had positive perceptions of the importance of friendships in the program. They clearly indicated the role of the other program students as relevant to their learning, suggesting a strong link between feeling happy to participate in Aprender and the participants' lived experiences with reference to friendships. The students suggested that in Aprender, they have developed strong friendships with others and that their experiences are of support and care. These examples illustrated the importance of relationships within the program. For the students, their relationships with other Aprender students were important. To provide further insight into how these relationships were experienced within the school, I recorded data from observations. These are presented below:

Observations

As in the previous section, the observations are divided into two categories, participant and non-participant.

a. During participant observation 1 of Phase 1, students organised a down ball game and this was discussed in class. The students requested time to ask the class about everyone's interest in playing because the game was intended for everyone who participated in the program. Most students seemed happy to play together and all but

three students opted to play. This exemplifies the strong bonds that the students have established amongst themselves [Participant Observation 1, Phase 1].

b. Students are tolerant of the needs of one particular student who has difficulties integrating to the school. They raise their concerns with me and other teachers in the staffroom. The matter improved when the student was made "buddy" with some of the students. The students were not encouraged to approach the teaching staff by any adult but rather assumed the role in reflection of their care for the student [Participant Observation 2, Phase 1].

c. A student with severe special needs has a problem with social interaction. The student had difficulties and confrontations with some of the students yet is accepted after a discussion about the best ways to interact. The student continues to display unusual behaviour yet is accepted and not isolated. The other students became accepting of his differences and tolerated his differences by altering the ways in which they interacted with him [Participant Observation 1, Phase 2].

d. A new student is not entirely welcomed into the classroom because of previous experiences of bullying (whilst in mainstream) which included the new student as the aggressor and some of the Aprender students as victims. However, some of the participants make the effort to include the new student in class activities and discuss the matter with their teachers in the effort to ensure that the student will be integrated into the program [Participant Observation 3, Phase 2].

e. A student has physical difficulties and hygiene problems which create concerns amongst the participants. One of the students approached a teacher to express his concerns and requested that the matter be taken care of as he feared that the student could have become a victim of bullying [Participant Observation 5, Phase 2].

f. There are some problems with some year nine students who bully some of the participants. This finding is discussed in greater detail in theme three, however, in this observation, some students approached me to request that I interfered as some of their friends were constantly being bullied by the older year nine students. The students felt that it was their responsibility to ensure that their peer be protected [Participant Observation 1, Phase 4]

g. During phase five, a student is given the opportunity to take part in a public speaking event. This is a very formal event that involved prizes for the best public speakers. On the night, there were many students who had come in to the event in support of the Aprender student who participated. Their support for the student was very uplifting as they clapped and cheered for their friend [Participant Observation 1, Phase 5].

These examples all support the view that other students in the program are integral to the development of the participants, as relationships help enable their inclusion within the school. The Aprender students were very supportive and inclusive of each other. They

displayed genuine care and support by communicating with their teachers often, and they accept each other by tolerating and accommodating their differences. Next, I present the non-participant observations.

The non-participant observations that illustrate the peer relations between the students and their peers are as follows:

a. During phase one, I witnessed Aprender students eating in isolated areas. These were considered "out of bounds" locations and I was concerned because of the lack of social integration that the participants illustrated with the other students that attend the school. Upon approaching the students, I noticed that they were in fact sharing their lunches by placing all the food in the middle, and that there were also other non-Aprender students with them. I asked them to move to the allocated areas and Zachary responded by suggesting, "let's move to the library". [Non-Participant Observation 6, Phase 1].

b. On another occasion, I witnessed some Aprender students being in trouble with a teacher because they were extremely cheerful during an assembly ceremony. A student achieved an award for his academic achievement of the last semester and the Aprender students cheered him loudly despite getting into trouble. This showed the admiration and unity that the students provide for each other. It was great support. [Non-Participant Observation 7, Phase 1].

c. During a regular lunchtime, I walked past a group of Aprender students who played in a game of 'down-ball'. They did this in isolation to the other students and when asked for the reason why they did not play with non-Aprender students, Mal indicated that the other students took it too seriously. In the game, students can be "outed" and can lose their place in the game as result. The game was played by the Aprender students in a way that no one could be outed as they had the right number of players. This meant that everyone gets to keep playing. [Non-Participant Observation 1, Phase 2].

d. Marcus made a request to be a mentor to a new student joining the program despite the fact that this particular student had bullied Marcus when they both attended regular classes in the previous year [Non-Participant Observation 3, Phase 2].

e. A few days later, a student was involved in a fight with a mainstream student. The participants quickly ran to get me and another teacher to ensure that the fight would not go on. The students defended the Aprender student and showed support. [Non-Participant Observation 2, Phase 3]

f. During phase three, there was an incident that involved a physical fight between one of the students and a mainstream student. In this situation, there were many students involved. The matter was a misunderstanding and was solved but the participants again showed their unity and support for one another. I was concerned that they were alienating themselves from others, yet the experience that the students had in fact improved their peer relations with the mainstream students. [Non-Participant Observation 3, Phase 3]

g. The fourth phase in the research period illustrated a high degree of interaction between mainstream students and Aprender as the participants were involved in many social interactions with their peers. However, during two distinct observations, they students participated in events as collective groups where all Aprender participants played sport in the same teams. During one example, the students played soccer as a team [Non-Participant Observation 1, Phase 4], and in another instance, some of the students were in the library sitting together opposite their mainstream peers. The level of interaction was high, and there was no physical isolation between the students and their peers [Non-Participant Observation 2, Phase 4].

h. The level of support that the students offered each other was observed throughout the research period, yet it was at the end of the fifth phase that it was most visible. During the fourth phase, some participants encountered difficulties with older year nine Aprender students. Theme three focuses on such difficulties, therefore an in-depth discussion with reference to isolation will be outlined later. What is relevant to this observation is that the participants seemed to unite against the bullying of their older peers and they described their frustrations constantly. Upon the departure of the year nine students to a year nine campus, the participants appeared to have enjoyed their schooling more substantially [Non-Participant Observation 3, Phase Four and Non-Participant Observation 4, Phase 4].

i. During the end of the research period, the students displayed a high degree of appreciation for one another. During the preparation towards a public presentation of the students' work at the end of the year, the students were continually supported by the peers. This is illustrated in the collective and cooperative learning that took place as well as the support that different students provided for each other [Non-participant observation two, phase five]. This support is best illustrated as a student in the program read out questions in an interview format for a student who struggled to read his own presentation notes. Since one of the students could have missed out on presenting because of his nervousness and inability to read, another participant offered to ask questions of the student so that a description of his work could be appreciated by the parents attending the evening. This was done with no teacher interference. The students engineered the presentation, showing their strong support for each other [Non-Participant Observation 6, Phase 5].

The observation data illustrate a range of interactions that the students experience with their peers in Aprender. These show the value of peer relations in the program, again

supporting the notion of the importance of relationships that emerged in this study. The next section provides an overview and discussion of this theme.

Students' relationships in Aprender: discussion

The descriptions of social interactions reported previously show tolerance, respect, friendship and support, as some of the experiences that were valued. This supportive encouragement for the SWSN was the outcome of acceptance which would be expected to exist if inclusion was practiced effectively. In this case, it was the other students who allowed the participation and the teacher was not even aware that this had happened. This experience contributes towards the emotional development of students, through feeling accepted and involved in the school activities, and/or for their role in the inclusion of others' activities. According to Moss (2003), peer relationships are crucial elements in the practice of inclusion in educational settings. The social interactions between peers are considered as the most important outcomes in the process of inclusion within regular school setting because the students are able to integrate and participate despite any differences. This appears to be the case in Aprender. As discussed in chapter three, one element that enables good relationships to develop between the Aprender students is the vertical structure, which allows students of different year levels to work cooperatively with one another. The advantages of the vertical classroom setting and its progressive structures is discussed by Burke (1997), who offers the concept of "Looping" as a positive approach to educating SWSN. For Burke (1997), students who learn in vertically structured classrooms seem to relate better to other students and teachers and enjoy school whilst achieving better results as the direct outcome of the interactions with older and younger students. It also entails that students have the same classroom, teacher and fellow students for longer than the traditional school year; they move

into the next stage as a group, whilst becoming increasingly familiar with each other and classroom processes and behaviours. This view is reflective of the experiences of SWSN in the Aprender program.

Sharing the same classroom with older and younger students provided the SWSN with the opportunity to model appropriate behaviour, seek assistance from more experienced peers and develop strong bonds that subsequently helped in shaping the experience of inclusion by the individual. Equally important was their role in offering support to the younger students joining the program at a later stage. This is exemplified by Marcus' request to be a mentor to a new student joining the program, despite the fact that this same student had bullied Marcus whilst attending regular classes in previous years.

The promotion of good relationships between the SWSN in this research and the rest of the students in the classroom outlined the importance of acceptance, tolerance and friendship. Despite the differences that existed between the SWSN and their peers, sharing the classroom under the program's structures seemed to have facilitated inclusion. The data indicate that all students, regardless of their differences, have the opportunity to actively participate in the wider school because they tend to encourage each other to participate. However, students' experiences were not always totally positive, as the next section discusses.

Negative experiences

Despite the positive attitudes expressed by most of the participants, the findings also highlighted some discomfort with the vertical structure that underpins Aprender, the physical make up of the classroom in which there are year seven, eight and nine students grouped

together, and who undertake the same curriculum content with the necessary modifications to address the needs of the individual student. Here, different classes take place within the same classroom and are often delivered at the same time.

Although positive experiences were mostly discussed, some of the SWSN also expressed their dislike of some experiences with some of the older year nine students. Quite often, this group is referred to by the others as the "bullies" in the program, as it was often reported that the year nine group bullied the younger year seven and eight students. Although this experience is of concern, it is also acknowledged that good relationships were formed between the students in question and their older class mates, particularly as they got to know each other better as the research stages progressed.

These findings are to be discussed later, within the theme of seclusion and exclusion. It must also be noted the students were inclined to express their discomfort with the "bullying" issue at the initial stages of the research since they identified me not only as the researcher, but also as their teacher. This can be attributed to the practice of inclusion for all students in Aprender. Next, I discuss the third theme, the relationships with students outside Aprender.

Relationships with students outside of Aprender

In order to provide fuller picture of the Aprender experience, the third sub-theme focuses on the experiences of the students as they relate to members of the wider school community, i.e. the students that attend the mainstream part of the school. The importance of the sub-theme of peer relations further extends to the experience of relationships that

developed beyond the Aprender program classrooms. The data indicate the relevance of the social interactions that the participants shared with mainstream students.

As discussed in the literature review chapter, Sparling (2002) suggests that effective inclusive practice assumes the integration and full participation of all students that attend a school setting. For this reason, it is necessary to examine the peer relations which occurred within the greater school setting as these involved social interactions between the participants and the mainstream students.

In this sub-theme, the data are presented in the same format used throughout the theme of relationships. i.e. survey results, interview responses and participant and non-participant observations. The surveys inquiring into peer relations with mainstream students were introduced at the second phase of the research study because it was at this stage that the sub-theme emerged as an area of relevance to the experience of inclusion for the participants. Prior to this stage, the research had focused on peer relations within Aprender, but as the research process developed, it became apparent that the experiences of the students outside of the Aprender environment were significant.

Surveys

Table 14 reports the students' responses to the survey questions. The questions specifically relate to lunchtime activities as these were the times when most social interactions took place and were recorded.

Table 14 – Survey two questions: Relationships with mainstream students

No.	Question	Students' Responses		
		Yes	Unsure	No
1	Do you play with non-Aprender students?	4		3
2	Do you go to the school ovals?	1		6
3	Do you use the school library?	2		5
4	Do you go to the canteen?	7		0
5	Do you enjoy the school lunchtime activities?	4		3
6	Do you play sport at the school?	4		3
7	Do you participate in public speaking?	1		6
8	Did you try out for the school play?	1		6
9	Do you normally leave the Aprender area during lunchtime?	2		5
10	Do you normally use the school's chapel?	2		5

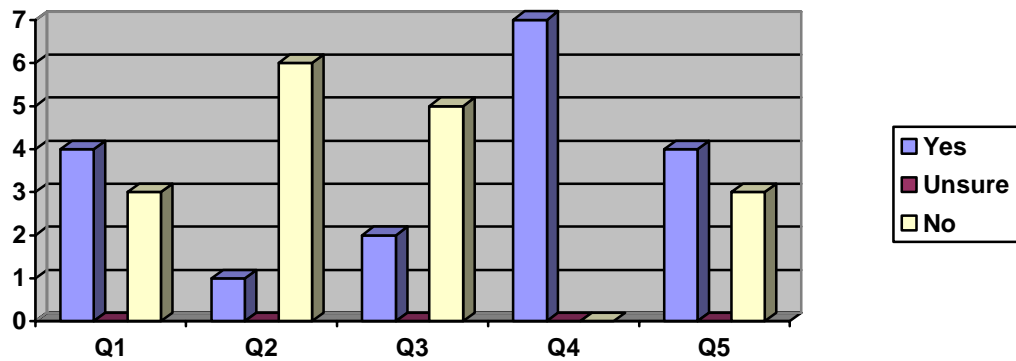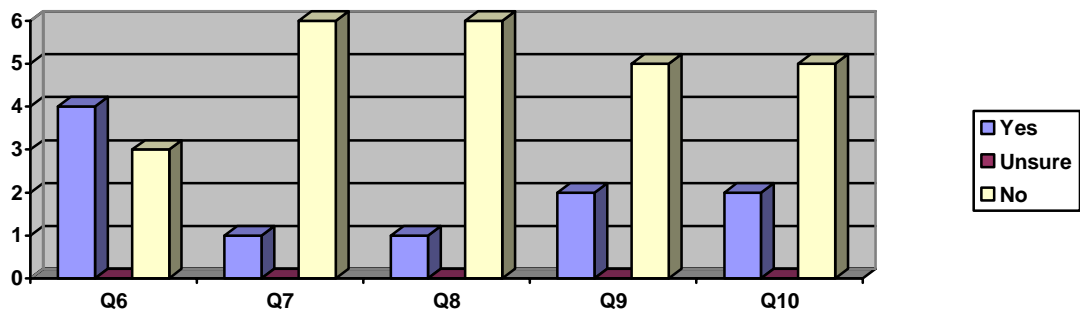The results are presented as follows:

Figure 8 – Student responses

Figure 9 – Student responses continued

The above results' further support the findings that relationships are important. They indicate that the participants have established strong connections amongst themselves and thus make little use of many mainstream school facilities. I arrived at this conclusion as I examined the results and established that despite the students making some use of the facilities mentioned, it seems that they used only few little of the areas that were commonly used by most mainstream students. Less than half claim to play with mainstream students and they tend to interact amongst themselves most of the time. The choices of making limited use of the different school facilities available to the participants affect their peer relations with mainstream students. With an examination of the locational placing of all the facilities mentioned in the survey, the students' responses indicate that they made use of the facilities surrounding the program environment during recreational times instead of mixing with their mainstream peers. This is an example of locational seclusion and is an important descriptor of non inclusive practice. The data show that the choice of interacting amongst themselves results in the participants secluding themselves from the school setting.

In order to reach a better understanding of what these findings may mean, I again developed interview questions to provide further insight into the peer relations that existed between the participants and the mainstream students. The questions were asked in group interviews and they included:

Do you play with mainstream students?

How can you explain your friendships with mainstream students?

Do you ever get teased by mainstream students? Why?

How do you play with mainstream students? Does it happen at school?

I now present some of the responses from interviews:

Interviews

I asked some of the students some questions about their relationships with mainstream students. These were their responses:

I: Do you know and play with mainstream students? Tell me why

"Well, I like some of those kids but some are always teasing me about being in Aprender. They think that I may be a bit dumb or something. I have some friends because they know me from primary school" [Mal, Interview two, phase two, lines 6-8].

"I have many friends from mainstream and they are nice to me because I let them play with my ball. Sometimes they don't want to play with me because they want to play football but I am scared of playing in the ovals" [Zachary, interview two, phase two, lines 12-15].

"I used to play with some of my friends from mainstream because I like them but it is better for me to play with my new friends from Aprender. My friends from mainstream never get to come here so I always have to wait for them and I hate playing in the ovals. I like the library and the basketball courts and only Aprender students go there" [Daniel, interview two, phase two, lines 19-23].

These responses clearly point out to two important issues. Firstly, the students' differences (physical differences) contribute to their choice of leisure activity. In some cases, students opt not to attend the ovals due to the physical constraints that sporting activities could have on the students. This factor alters the way that the students interact with their mainstream peers. Secondly, the students are drawn to the location of the program and opt to play around that area. This may be encouraged by the location of the library which is next door to Aprender. Regardless of the reasons however, the students seem to be secluded and minimally interacting with their mainstream peers.

I then asked the students to explain how their friendships with mainstream students were important to them. This question was asked to examine the influence and relevance of the mainstream students in the school experiences of the participants. Their responses suggested the following:

> *"Some of the students are happy to play with you and they care for you. When they say, go away or you are not good enough so you can't play, I get angry. They never do it, only when (names a student) is there and he tells them to not play with me"* [Zachary, Interview 2, Phase 2, Lines 27-30].

> *"They are very important because they need to know that Aprender is not for dumb people. I want them to come over and see (for themselves)"* [Marcus, Interview 2, Phase 2, Lines 32-34].

These students appear to have negative perceptions of some mainstream students. The data point to the students' feelings of 'exclusion' as they refer to incidents in which they are isolated due to their differences or their involvement in the program. This is of concern to the program since their experiences suggest that the students are excluded from mainstream because of their involvement in Aprender. During phase five, the following was stated by a student in an interview:

> *"I used to be in mainstream year 7 as you know. I had a lot of friends and when I came to Aprender I didn't really get bagged (teased) because I knew a lot of them (mainstream students). They were my friends and that, and they never really got me (offended) anyway. Just the other day I got bagged (teased) about it, this kid I know because he used to go to my school asked me if I was dumb or smart (Aprender or mainstream class), and I said, no one is dumb here, we just learn"*. [Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 5, Lines 123 – 128].

This experience seemed critical to my understanding of how Aprender students were perceived by mainstream students. After Marcus' comment, I revisited my notes on recorded

data and encountered the following extract. It provides some explanation of how the students interrelate with their mainstream peers. The questions and their responses are as follows:

> I: Why do you play down ball?
> Marcus: I like it because it is fun.
> Alex: I love it!
> I: Does it upset you to be outed?
> Both: No!
> Alex: It does but I like playing anyway.
> I: Why
> Alex: No, I don't care, I just like to be there and I go when it is time to go to the library. I like it better there (referring to the library).
> I: Does it upset you when the other boys are not outed?
> Alex: Yes, because they laugh and show off all the time.
> Marcus: No, because I don't care about it. They are all nice to me.
> I: How do they show off?
> Alex: They laugh at me sometimes but I like them because they help me stay in.
> I: How do they help you?
> Alex: They always ask me to play with them and say hello when I see them at the canteen.
>
> [Marcus, Interview 2, Phase 3, Lines 1-16].

The relevance of peer relations between SWSN and mainstream students illustrated the importance of inclusion within the social interactions that take place in all school settings. The significance of relationships between the participants and the mainstream students emerged as observations during the initial stage showed experiences of both positive and negative interactions between the participants and their mainstream peers. The interview responses however, suggest the negative feeling of exclusion were of greater importance to the participants.

In order to draw a better understanding of the relationships between the participants and their mainstream peers, I also observed the students as they interacted with the

mainstream school pupils. The observations are both formal and informal and are presented as they developed in the research stages.

Observations: participant observations

These involve instances when I was actively involved in the different experiences that relate to the participants and their relations with mainstream students.

> In a particular instance, a mainstream student and one of the participants are effectively able to overcome personal differences and confusion in order to find a resolution to a dispute. Here, a SWSN develops a friendship with a mainstream student after an initial disagreement which led to a physical fight. The students were involved in fighting each other whilst waiting in line at the school canteen. The reason why there was a dispute was because the Aprender student did not line up as expected, instead, walking to the front of the line. The other student then grabbed him and pushed him back. I was in yard duty and spoke to the two students about expectations and correct behaviour. Jason, the participant involved was very angry and did not agree with my suggestions. He ran away in great anger. I spoke to him later on that afternoon only to realise that he did not have any money on him and had tried to get the attention of the canteen lady to request a loan. He did not want to line up in fear that he would be embarrassed by waiting and asking for a loan as opposed to purchasing some food. He tried to avoid being noticed because he claimed that the student with whom he had difficulties often bullied him in the school yard [Participant Observation 3, Phase 1].

This observation highlights two aspects of the experiences of the participant. Firstly, Jason's intentions were misunderstood and he opted to not express his problem to the student for fear of embarrassment. Secondly, Jason became frustrated when I intervened but was unable to express his concern. He felt that I had been unfair in my approach. These problems highlight the need for all students to be tolerant. More importantly, Jason needed to develop more effective strategies for dealing with mainstream students and teachers, since he had a premeditated assumption that the other boy would not be tolerant as a result of previous experiences.

In another observation:

> Some students attempted to make friends with mainstream students but were rejected. This occurred as the students walked past the year nine building and called out to the student. They asked him if he had won his basketball game in the gym as the students walked towards the manual arts building. The boy had finished his game and ignored the students completely. I was walking with the students and asked them how they felt about his rudeness. Zachary suggested that the student was always nasty to him but that despite the rudeness, he spoke to him as often as he could because out of school, they were family friends. I asked him if he felt angry about being ignored and he said "well, he is just silly because his friends are here. He is my friend out of school" [Participant Observation 2, Phase 4].

The negative attitudes of some mainstream students regarding the program and its students was manifested as bullying and lack of appreciation. This was expressed by Mal in the following observation:

> Mal considered mainstream students as rude. In a conversation between Mal and I, I described the actions of a mainstream student as polite. Mal responded angrily at my description of the boy and told me that the Aprender students are always teased by that student when teachers are not around. He went on to say that most mainstream students give Aprender students a hard time for no particular reason [Observation 4, Phase 2].

The negative nature of the above observations gave insight into the difficulties that the participants had when interacting with their mainstream peers. In some cases, the participants were ignored, and in others, they lacked communication skills to resolve conflict. Despite some of these negative experiences however, the students seemed able to enjoy their school by developing friendships with other mainstream students, clearly indicating that some students practice inclusion by accepting the Aprender students. The next section presents the non-participant observations collected as I walked around the school yard and observed the behaviours that took place during recreational times. These provide further insight into the experiences of the participants in the school setting.

Non-participant observation

Consistent with the above, during some non-participant observations, it was noted that social participation is not always experienced positively by the participants as they may not be mixing, and in some instances are not accepted by their peers. An example of the experience of exclusion is the participants opting not to leave the Aprender area during playtimes; this provides further perspectives on the students' experiences of peer relations with mainstream students. [Non Participant Observation 2, Phase 3, Lines 1-5]. I now present the non participant observations which provide insight into the very different ways that two students, a SWSN and a mainstream student, perceive an incident in the school yard.:

> During lunchtime, I was involved in separating a small scuffle between two students. They were a participant SWSN and a mainstream student. The boys were playing down-ball (a ball game using a small ball and played in a restrictive area of approximately a three metre ratio) near the year seven mainstream building. Due to a misunderstanding, a small argument and physical pushing developed. After separating the boys, and discussing the matter with them together, I asked them to make up, hoping that a better understanding of their differences had taken place. Initially, I asked Mal to give me a recollection of what had happened. His version of the story could be summarised as follow:
>
> •   The boy, other boys and he were all playing when the ball, which was going in his direction, was suddenly called out of bounds.
>
> •   This caused Mal to argue with the other players as he did not feel that he was "outed".
>
> •   The ball had landed inside the area, yet the boys had a different perspective on the matter.
>
> I then asked the other boy to provide a recollection of his version of the story, and not surprisingly, all of it was similar, with the only differences resulting from the participant's eye sight limitations. The mainstream student believed that Mal had been outed. I explained that in Mal's case, differences presented themselves in the form of vision impairment. He is 100% blind in one eye and has 30% vision in the other. [Non Participant Observation 1, Phase 3].

This gives reason to the very contrasting views presented by the two students. It appears that Mal had missed the ball completely. It was the second time that such event had taken place, yet luckily, none of the other students had reacted so frustratingly the first time. I was happy to see the receptiveness offered by the mainstream student after the situation was explained. After this explanation, he responded with:

> "well, only if I had known!" He assured me that Mal would be allowed to play with them whenever he wished, and on this occasion, he would not be outed. [Non Participant Observation 1, Phase 3].

After reviewing this event, I reflected on the role of inclusion in facilitating schools to prepare students to participate, live and contribute within the structures of our society. In doing so, we hope to prepare students for their relationships with other citizens, making them receptive and accepting of the many differences that each individual has. In Mal's situation, he will one day be a part of a community as an adult; he will work, vote and function as one of millions of other Australians of his generation. His differences need to be acknowledged and respected by all citizens, but more importantly, he needs to be guided through the challenges that will exist along the way. This experience showed me how Mal's differences were perceived by a mainstream student. In the process, the mainstream student also became aware of the challenges that exist for the SWSN. The student gave up his place in the game and reassured me that Mal was going to continue to play. He assured me that Mal's experiences in future would not be as negative.

This is a very important observation. It shows that a key challenge for the participants is to relate to other students who may not be aware of the difficulties that they experience as students in the college. Mal became aware of his difficulties when he failed to communicate with the mainstream student. Initially, the other student was unable to accept Mal's requests

but became very understanding after an explanation of the possible reasons why Mal was unhappy were discussed.

During another observation in the playground, Jason approached me as I walked around and said the following:

"I am being teased because the boys reckon that I "flashed" some boys while at primary school".

He began to cry and continued*:*

"I promise I didn't, I promise you".

This was something that required a discussion and mediation with the perceived bullies. The end result was a promise by the mainstream students that they would not bully Jason again. This was a difficult and concerning experience for both Jason and I. Jason has great difficulty with his physical development. His past school years included being teased about his shyness and low pitched voice, limited growth due to his delayed development and evident academic difficulties. These are reasons for great difficulty and despair for him and his family.

I was told later on in the day that Jason had been unsettled in class. He told a teacher that he was sick and tired of being "made fun of", that he was unhappy at school. He suggested that he felt the need to just walk away from everything. He was verbally abusive and described one of his parents negatively, indicating the frustration that the family experienced when there were problems with him at school. I spoke to him about it and expressed the need for him to be as calmed as possible.

I rang his mother to ensure that they were aware of the day's experience at school. The call was insightful in my understanding of the boy and the need to help him overcome his difficulties. I asked him to go back to class and began to record the day's observation. His mother suggested that he was difficult at home and that there was a need to organise a visit to the specialist because his behaviour had become "unbearable".

As I reflected on the event, I concluded that Jason's very serious anger and poor understanding of the reasons why he is so angry can exemplify some of the collective needs of the SWSN attending the program. Jason has to face so many personal difficulties that it may not even be possible to ascertain how to (and whether it is possible for us to) help him overcome the challenges. In Jason's case, what was to be an observation of his interactions in the playground ended up illustrating the problems that his inclusion process develops when he is not accepted by his mainstream school peers.

During this time, academic instruction became the least concern to the teachers who worked so hard to ensure that Jason felt safe. I found myself reflecting on what needed to be done in order to ensure that all provisions given to the student contained safety and enjoyment.

I concluded that without such consideration, Jason's appropriate inclusion to school may never be facilitated. I felt frustrated because inclusive practice is a slow process, yet I was happy to be in a position where I could guide the student and offer more than just opportunities for academic development. I consider Jason's experience and the program's involvement in supporting him as an illustration of the importance of the role of the student as a member of the school community where all attempts are made to ensure his appropriate inclusion as a member of the school.

It must be noted that Jason's negative experience was triggered by the lack of understanding that the mainstream students had about his differences. Where most students would laugh about the allegations made, Jason could not cope with what had been said about him [Non Participant Observation 4, Phase 2].

The experiences of the Aprender students with mainstream students began to highlight a range of concerns and issues. The students seemed isolated because they exhibited differences. Their social skills, their perceptions and inability to relate to some students seemed to influence the way that they were accepted by their peers. In attempting to establish an understanding of the participation of the participants in the school setting, with particular interest in their peer relations, I observed the following activities; as summarised in table 15. The term 'outed' indicates losing a place in the game, often with a queue of a number of participants awaiting a place in the game. The higher the skill, the longer a player stays in the game.

Total number of Aprender SWSN being observed: 5
Total number of other Aprender students: 3
Total number of non Aprender students: 7
Total time of observation: 15 minutes

Table 15 - Observation in the playground: participation in down ball games

Sessions	Number of Aprender Students "outed"	Percentage	Number of mainstream students "outed"	Percentage
1	13	72.23%	5	27.77%
2	17	80.96%	4	19.04%
3	11	73.34%	4	26.66%

In this game, each session lasted 5 minutes with approximately 15 - 21 students outed during that time. There were two mainstream students who lasted the whole time. Marcus and Alex walked away from the game when they were taken out during the first bounce twice in a row.

In reflecting on this observation, I noted that the SWSN appeared to be happy to play with the other students but equally showed frustration at their inability to play with the same level of skill. Down ball seems to be a game that requires a good level of body control, gross and fine motor skills, and hand-eye coordination. The differences that the students have are contributing factors which determine their level of success, and thus limited their participation as result of their poorer down ball skills. It seems that although the SWSN accept their differences in a down ball game, they seem happy to participate. Through identifying that there is a place for them in the game and that winning or losing does not impede their participation, the SWSN are able to experience social inclusion.

Another key example of the development of relationships between the students and their mainstream peers is the number of students on the ovals at lunchtime, as summarised in the following observation and in table 16.

The purpose of this observation was to continue to examine the social interactions that occur between Aprender boys and mainstream students during lunchtimes. I selected a day when the weather was good because the ovals were frequently used for kick-to-kick of the football, mini soccer or cricket when the weather permitted. On that particular day, there was a small game of soccer and only one Aprender student participated in it. Some other Aprender students walked around the ovals and stopped to observe. They were there for short periods of time and moved on.

Although it is hard to examine the level of involvement that the SWSN have within the greater school, this observation indicates that leaving the

Aprender premises is not common practice for the students. This is shown by the

the small representation of the participants in the area and their absence in the

different activities taking place. It seems that since the SWSN develop good

relationships with other students also attending the program, they tend to use

school facilities that are near the program's premises.

Table 16 – Number of study participants using the school ovals during recreational times

Time Frame	Number of Aprender Students on the ovals during lunch	Number of non-Aprender students on the ovals
1:15	3	16
1:30	1	5
1:45	4	13

[Non Participant Observation 2, Phase 4].

The observations were instrumental in understanding the experiences of the students

in the program. Although in many cases it is clear that the students experience exclusion,

they also develop strong bonds with students in the program and others who are part of

mainstream. This however, shows that full inclusion of the students has not been achieved as

they seem to be perceived as outsiders by some mainstream students. It is for this reason that

these experiences of exclusion are discussed as a theme later in the chapter.

The relationships of the students with their mainstream peers: discussion

The social inclusion of the participants is clearly hindered by the segregation of the

classroom. It is clear in the observations and responses from the students that while a level of

exclusion occurs in most cases, inclusion is also experienced when the students feel invited

to and are interested in participating in the different social interactions offered in the school

setting. These include academic instruction given to the students in the classroom with the

social elements in classroom learning, the activities that occur during free time outside the

classroom, and the relationships that the SWSN are able to form with other students. The data also point to examples of the students' reluctance to participate in games or activities away from Aprender, possibly due to the physical demands of these activities on the students.

This all suggests that while positive relationships are experienced, much still needs to be done in order to ensure that the SWSN are accepted as regular members of the school community. Their exposure to the mainstream setting is a valuable step towards achieving this goal. Elkins (2002) argues that the traditional practice of the special school setting and its segregation affects the development of students within school and their post school endeavours. In the case of Aprender, social experiences with other students takes place in the playground, and the program seems to be perceived positively by some of the mainstream school students. However, further observations indicate that inclusion is not fully experienced by the students all the time. This may often be the result of the students' inability to deal with some of the social practices that other students use or their locational seclusion during academic instructional time.

The concerns arising from the experiences of seclusion highlight the importance of education. Educating the wider community that SWSN are integral members of the school community is something that needs to be considered if inclusion is to go beyond the program's walls. This will be further discussed in the final chapter.

Theme discussion: relationships

The importance of relationships emerged strongly in this study as critical to the social interactions that took place as the Aprender program evolved. Clearly, relationships

contributed towards the level of inclusiveness that existed in this school setting, and more importantly, in the Aprender program. Whether it was the relationships with teachers, students in the program or with mainstream students, good relationships seemed to strengthen the practice and experience of inclusion of the participants. Throughout the data collection stages, it was evident that the students were able to relate positively to their teachers. It was also evident that the teachers were very supportive of the students and their individual needs. This commitment and support is evident in the data as the students extensively referred to their teachers as supportive, helpful and friendly.

These valuable relationships encourage the students to participate positively in their individual school lives, enhancing their opportunities to participate as members of their school community. Sparling (2002) indicates that good relationships between SWSN with special needs and their school community is an important area for research. The relationships developed with other Aprender students are remarkably driven by the students themselves, often as they recognise the importance of social interaction in the learning systems practiced in the program. Through collaborative learning, the students are offered many opportunities to interrelate and effectively develop friendships which evolve out of the classroom. However, the relationships established with some mainstream students create some concern since their experience is not always reflective of inclusive practice. The structures underpinning Aprender seemed to have decreased the opportunities for the experience of the inclusion of SWSN within the school setting because mainstream students were only able to interrelate with the participants during recreational times. For Bartak and Fry, (2004); Campbell, (2003) and Sparling, (2002), "acceptance" by their peers is considered as a key contributor in the practice of inclusion for SWSN. Whether it was in the playground or in classes within the program, the other students helped to determine the level of inclusion that

the SWSN experienced. Since this study is concerned with examining the social inclusion of the students in Aprender, it is clear that the theme of relationships is of extreme importance.

The next section outlines the second key theme. It examines student development within the program by identifying the experiences that each student encountered in the multifaceted perspective of student development within the frameworks of inclusive practice in Aprender. It refers to the social, emotional and, to some extent, academic development that each individual student has experienced as participant of the program as the research stages unfolded.

Theme 2: the participants and their progress during the research period

"I think that you learn more when it is not so serious all the time, you actually learn more because you are not worried, and I think that that is better for me because I feel that I learn a lot more that way". [Daniel, Interview 3, Phase 6, Lines 61-63].

Despite the participants' individual and collective needs and abilities, the data clearly identify their level of participation within their school setting as a positive experience, so this was examined as a theme. Considering the delayed progress with aspects of development that some students with special needs encounter in their schooling (Elkins, 2002; Jobling and Gavidia-Payne, 2002), for the purpose of this study, development is described, not measured, as it is manifested in the experience of the individual student. So the documented data are interpreted in reference to the level of participation that the SWSN experienced.

For Jobling and Gavidia-Payne (2002), the process of development in the individual can be examined within the following areas; the academic, social and emotional growth

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displayed by the individual student. The term "development" was adopted in this study to refer to the students' participation and progression within the structures underpinning the Aprender program. According to Jobling and Gavidia-Payne (2002), development in humans is categorised by "domains", and is reflective of specific achievements and milestones reached as the students make progress and acquire skills within these respective developmental domains. Beveridge (1999) suggests that research undertaken with an emphasis on the development of SWSN during their years of schooling, often presents cognitive, social and emotional development as key indicators of the student progress. Since the theme of development emerges in the study in a cluttered and overlapping manner, I present the theme, and use Beveridge's (1999) interpretation of the three facets of SWSN development within regular schools, by focusing on the following three key areas:

1. Social development
2. Emotional development
3. Academic development

The purpose of presenting the theme in this manner is to identify how the students developed holistically within the frameworks offered in Aprender, considering that their experiences of success clearly involve the three facets being investigated. Although the emphasis of the study was to identify the social aspects of inclusion, the collected data illustrates the strong connections that exist between the academic, social and emotional development in the students.

The following section examines the theme of development as it analyses the data with emphasis on the social achievement experienced by the SWSN, therefore examining the socialisation reached.

Social development

For Sparling (2002), social experiences for SWSN within the regular school setting can often be negative. This is attributed to difficulties with interrelations and/or functioning differences that may limit the understandings of the social cues practiced in the school system. Often, social cues can be beyond the capability and understanding of the students. Beveridge (1999) suggests that social inclusion is a key determiner of the success of the students' effective participation within the school setting they attend. Examples of social inclusion were explored in Theme 1: Relationships, where the participants were considered in reference to their relationships within Aprender and the mainstream school setting. The data suggest that the students experienced the development of friendships with different members of the school community and this contributed their multifaceted inclusion. It is evident in the findings that the friendships created during the research period illustrate the level of social development that they have experienced as members of the Aprender program and the school community.

The sub-theme of social development is examined with relevance to the social interactions that the students experienced as members of the greater school community. The emphasis here is not to re-explore the theme of relationships but rather to illustrate the strong connection that exists between social development and student inclusion within the Aprender framework. Thus exploring the sub-theme reveals how socialisation is an integral aspect of

the overall success and development of the practice of inclusion within the program. It is essential to recognise that since the data are raw and cluttered, there is parallel use of some data to discuss both the theme of relationships and the theme of the social development that enhanced the students' socialisation and eventual development of relationships with their peers both within Aprender and the wider school setting. The data are presented as in previous sub-themes with interview questions examined, interview transcripts presented and observations discussed.

Surveys

This survey took place at the initial stage of the research period. It is clear that that the ways in which students support each other is important to their development. This is illustrated in the following survey responses:

Table 17 – This part of survey 1 explores the participants' perceptions of support in Aprender:

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7	All students are happy to learn cooperatively by supporting one another	1	6	0	0	0
9	Students are friendly towards one another	3	1	1	2	0

These data indicate a positive reference to the influence of other students in the classroom, since the responses referred to the cooperative learning that the program encourages, and the level of friendliness experienced in the social interactions that the students shared.

However, as before, the statements provide only limited evidence of how social development occurs in Aprender. Survey 2 provides further insight into the students' social

development. This survey is designed to establish how students interact with the wider community.

Table 18 – Aprender students' experiences of social interactions

No.	Question	Yes	Unsure	No
1	Do you play with non-Aprender students?	4		3
2	Do you go to the ovals?	1		6
3	Do you use the library?	2		5
4	Do you go to the canteen?	7		0
5	Do you enjoy the school lunchtime activities?	0	4	3
6	Do you play sport for the school?	4		3
7	Do you participate in public speaking?	1		6
8	Did you try out for the play?	1		6
9	Do you leave the Aprender area during lunchtime today?	2		5
10	Do you use the school chapel?	0	2	5

These data indicate that the participants make little use of the communal facilities available at the school. The results provide an indication as to how the students socially participate within the school setting, by showing lack of involvement in the activities offered within the school which involved mainstream students. Although these results are consistent with previous findings in reference to the participants and their relationships with others, they also point to how the students experience and develop within their social inclusion. This is further explored through survey four, where students are asked to respond to the statement; "Socially, this is what Aprender has done for me:"

The responses include:

1. Teachers listen and help me better
2. I get on better with older kids
3. I get to know older kids better
4. I feel good because everyone likes me
5. My organisation has improved because my friends help me
6. Being in this class because of many students from other year levels is good
7. I have made new friends

Such statements provide insight into the role of other students in enhancing the inclusion of the participants. They indicate that in order to gather a better understanding of the role of social interactions in reference to student development within Aprender. As before, I further inquired into the theme through interviews. Some of the responses are presented below.

Interviews

During interview one, I asked David how he felt on that particular day. His response:

> *"Yes, and I am having a good day today. I had a fresh start when I came back this semester. When I first started in Aprender, it was okay, but now it is better. I like my friends here".* [David, Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 55 – 58]

Jason then added:

> *"All my friends here like me and that makes me feel good. Sometimes I get teased outside but I know that my friends here will always help me"* [Jason, Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 449-250]

In the above examples, David and Jason offered insights into their perspectives of the value of the other students that attend Aprender. David is a student with a long history of social exclusion due to difficulties with interrelating with peers. Jason has been a victim of bullying in recent times, and this was reason that he joined the program in the first place. During the second phase of interviews, I asked the participants the following:

> *I: During the last meeting we discussed the issue of bullying and that is something that upsets you to a great degree. Has anything more happened about that?*
>
> *Marcus: No, people have been coming up to me and saying, are you alright? So slowly it is getting away from me right now, it is not bothering me anymore I reckon.*
>
> *I: So would you feel a bit more supported perhaps?*
>
> *Marcus: A lot more supported than normally.*

[Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 9 – 14].

The data indicate that Marcus was now more positive than before in describing his experiences within Aprender. The influences of other students on the socialisation process within the program appear to empower the SWSN who indicate their active involvement with the others. The above examples illustrate this. During an interview, I asked some of the students how they spent their lunches. Daniel responded that they had in fact shared their lunch on particular day. His response is as follows:

"We're sharing food because (names the student, who is a non-participant in the study) didn't have any food to eat today. He forgot his lunch money and so we decided to feed him with our food" [Daniel, Interview 2, Phase 4, Lines 77-81].

Daniel's experience is consistent with other data illustrating the level of support that the students provide for one another and points to the social interactions that take place amongst these students.

There are many examples of how social experiences contribute to the development of the individual within Aprender and these have been extensively discussed under the theme of relationships. I now present my recorded observations as I analyse the social development in the experiences of students in the program with reference to interview responses. Here the observations are discussed in a different format from previous data analysis sections; I present the evidence collected from the observations as a reflection of how social development is experienced by the students (in the form of a narrative). I then discuss the effect that the observations had on my understanding of how the students developed skills that enabled their social participation within the program.

Observations

I begin with Marcus. As indicated previously, during the data collection period, Marcus was invited to act as assistant coach of the year seven school basketball team. He was given the opportunity for two reasons: he was very knowledgeable about the sport as he followed the professional basketball leagues with great interest, and because his physical differences disenabled him from participating in any competitive physical activity. This is an observation:

> Marcus was asked to stop playing sports due to an irregularity with growth, some physical problems and some repair plates that had been inserted in his leg's knee area. Due to this constraint, he had to give up his basketball as a player, but offered a world of knowledge that subsequently supported the students of the year seven team as he became their assistant coach. He was a very successful coach, helping the head coach, and gaining the respect of the team because of his knowledge and enthusiasm. Although he spoke with certain obstruction to the clarity of his voice due to speech related difficulties that he has, all the students who listened to what he said seemed to have understood him, and he stressed that he expected nothing less than full commitment from his players [Non-Participant Observation 5, Phase 2].

Marcus' experience enabled him to socially interact by relating to other students, and this happened outside of the program's classroom. However, the other students responded positively and this illustrated the effectiveness of inclusion.

In this example, it is evident that the participant's confidence and ability were recognised by the students who did not relate to him as a student that could not play basketball anymore, but rather as somebody that could help them achieve their shared goal as a team.

During another observation, I noted that most of the participants had developed a special bond by which they played with each other during lunchtimes, and they appeared to be happy to do so. They would normally play together, eat together and help each other out with homework and/or class activities. This raised the question however, whether or not the students were socialising outside of the Program and if so, to what level [Phase 3, Non-Participant Observation 2].

This is an issue because if students are only socialising with other students from Aprender and not regular school students, then perhaps the program is promoting social exclusion and not inclusive practice. If the students became too dependent on each other and fail to be actively involved with non-Aprender students then perhaps they are being excluded. At this stage in the research period, I considered social interactions and social participation across the whole school as evidence of the level of inclusion that the students experience. As indicated in the relationships theme, the students experienced friendly relationships with students from the regular school. In a further example, during the third phase of the study, a SWSN had a confrontation in the playground that later resulted in the establishment of a new friendship.

The dispute came to an end when the mainstream student realised that the SWSN had a physical condition that affected his level of participation and effectiveness within the game, and what happened from that point was a positive experience in terms of social interactions that describe inclusion in schools. The SWSN was encouraged to play despite his differences and the mainstream student learnt the value of the participant in the game [Phase 3, Non-Participant Observation 1].

The social interactions involving the participants and mainstream students differ from those that are developed amongst the participants themselves as a subgroup. I attributed this to the fact that they spend most of the day together, attending the same classes, having similar educational needs, special education backgrounds and thus develop friendships as result of their connections and participation in the program.

I often reflected on whether the participants needed to become more socially involved outside the program. From all the data presented to this point, it is evident that the participation of the students within the school is generally positive and that despite their involvement in Aprender, the school system is able to embrace their contributions as students because they actively participate as members of the wider school setting.

However, as noted in table 16, I identified that the students with special needs were not using all of the school's facilities, including the available recreational areas. This is an important observation because these areas of the school are visited by many students during lunchtimes and the SWSN appear to prefer to play in seclusion from the facilities, rather opting to play near the program's classrooms instead.

The Aprender students' appreciation for one another and closeness contrasts with previous school experiences where they have encountered seclusion and isolation whilst in primary school and/or secondary mainstream classroom settings. Students claimed that their experiences in these settings had been negative with limited friendships developed as a result, and failure to make close friends.

Through my observations during the stages of the research, I gained a better understanding of the social importance of inclusive practice. It is illustrated in the everyday experiences of the students that their participation as members of their school setting is enabled by their social exposure to the different events that take place.

Social development: discussion

The data indicate clearly that due to the structure of the program, particularly in its operation as a separate classroom, while the participants experience full inclusion in their part of the school setting, they also experience levels of exclusion with respect to the wider school community. This is illustrated by the data that show that the students developed socially within the program in their relationships with their peers; this social development then enables their social experiences outside the program. It is here that the holistic social inclusion of the students develops. The students consistently show that their friendships with students within the program have a considerable impact in determining their social inclusion as members of the wider school setting. In order to examine and determine the possible reasons why students benefit from their friendships within Aprender, and to understand how these enable the students to develop social experiences outside the program. I move onto examine the second sub-theme concerned with development; emotional development. These data are concerned with the development of all students within the framework of their self-perception and identified development.

Emotional development

"Yes, when I was in mainstream, my mother used to beg me to get up, and now I do it by myself because now I know that I won't get in trouble. They are now happy (parents) and that makes me happy too". [Marcus, Phase 1, Interview 1, Lines 187-189].

As noted in the literature review, the term 'emotional development' is used in this thesis to describe the instances that the students believed contributed to their individual positive development of emotional skills. These occurred and were enhanced through as their

development as members of the Aprender program. These instances have been identified in reference to how the SWSN described the impact that their experiences in the program had in determining how their participation in the school setting had enabled their personal growth

As discussed in the literature review, there is substantial literature reviewing the impact of emotions in the classroom (Baumert, Koller, Ludtke, and Trautwein, 2006), and, more precisely, its implications for learning and school based development (Caspi, Donnellan, Moffitt, Poulton, Robins and Trzesniewski, 2006). In examining the data, perhaps the most striking aspect of development that I encountered was the emotional development each student described as integral to their participation in Aprender. I now present the data again, following the same format as the previous sub-themes.

Surveys

The identification of the sub-theme of emotional development primarily emerged in survey one. I asked the students to respond to six statements in order to inquire into the level of emotional skills that existed amongst the students surveyed. This specifically inquired into the role of the program in connection with their perceptions of, and feelings about, themselves. I asked the participant students to respond to the following statements:

S1: I feel good to be in the program

S2: I feel as if I'm a part of the program

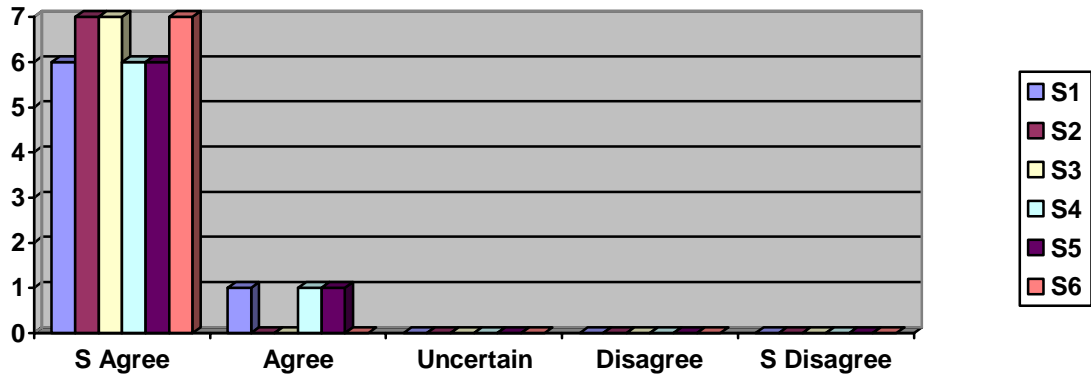*S3: I feel as if I am a part of the school (referring to the mainstream school)*

S4: I feel that I learn a lot in this program

S5: Teachers promote and encourage my self-confidence

S6: I am proud to be in the program

Their results were:

Figure 10 – Students' responses with reference to their personal views

The students' responses indicate that most students strongly agreed with the statements. This exemplifies their perspectives and assumptions about how the program influences their personal development, indicating that being in the program encourages them to feel part of the school setting.

This allows them to participate as included members of their school community. Again, these responses were used to explore how emotional development is experienced by the students in the form of interview data. Some of the questions are outlined below:

What is your view on your own improvements in Aprender?

How do you feel about the many friends you have made?

Are you happier in Aprender than in previous classrooms?

How are you going in your different subjects?

Has Aprender benefited you? How does this makes you feel?

 "Yes, there were a lot of subjects that I was not good at last year (in mainstream), and I have improved them a lot and I have made a lot of new friends" [Daniel, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 82-83].

Although the achievements that Daniel refers to are both academic and social, they have inevitably supported his emotional development. I suggest that here, confidence was developed as result of making new friends and achieving better academic results. This is another example that shows the level of confidence that the students had developed from their experiences in Aprender:

I: Are you happy in Aprender?

Mal: Yes because I get to feel better and the teachers are not as hard markers.

I: Ok, is there anyone else who would like to comment? What about you Jason?

Jason: Well, I think that it is good because it makes us feel loved in some way and it can take the pressure of school work with exams, assessments, all that is coming ahead in the next week, so I think that it is important. And although the work is still as important, it is good to be able to have a good laugh with teachers.

I: If I was to ask, have you learnt more by having that approach here in Aprender?

Jason: Yeah, I think learning is about your teachers and having a special relationship. If you have a good teacher, than obviously you want to learn more. So in mainstream the teachers just want to make you learn. In Aprender the teachers want you to learn and have fun at the same time.

I: How are you going in your subject areas and why do you think that is the case?

Zachary: I am going well because, like an example for integrated studies or photography if you like, we are learning a lot by doing all the work but we are having fun by actually making the cameras and things.

Zachary: It has been better with the teachers, like last year, Math was bad but the last 4 tasks for math have been my best ever, in English I was pretty good but this year I am heaps better because the tasks are explained easier and better so that we can understand it more.

Jason: Aprender has been good, and you learn a lot.

I: In terms of your subjects?

Alex: Last year was appalling, and this year I think that I have done better. I am always improving with my math. All my subjects have improved.

[Interview 5, Phase 5, 65-85]

The above example illustrates the process of a gain in confidence. Not only are the students able to discuss their experiences positively, but they also present the achievements made in reference to their perceived progress. These descriptions show the students' development of confidence. Although the students' emphasis is on academic gain, it is the positive way that they describe their achievements and progress that shows their enthusiasm.

Observations

Throughout the data, it is possible to identify different instances when social development is the result of acquired self-confidence boosting the individual's self-esteem.

Examples are:

1. Zachary's contact lenses. He decided that he needed to improve his appearance and decided to use new contact lenses. This is the result of some extensive surgery [Participant Observation 2, Phase 2].

2. Students express feelings and acknowledge the role of other students in making them feel good about whom they are [Participant Observation 2, Phase 4].

3. The participants are happy to play down-ball for the experience of playing, despite losing constantly, being concerned about participating in the game and not interested in winning shows their positive attitude towards participating [Non Participant Observation 4, Phase 2].

4. As the SWSN eat and share lunch together, they exchange food and maintain very positive discussions with one another [Non Participant Observation 6, Phase 1].

5. All the SWSN participate in the class by actively discussing and contributing to their activities [Non Participant Observation 4, Phase 1].

6. SWSN receive academic awards in acknowledgement of success within their different key learning areas [Non Participant Observation 1, Phase 2].

7. The students do oral presentations in front of a large audience at an independent learning project night [Non Participant Observation 3, Phase 5].

8. Despite having reading difficulties, Marcus reads out loud to the rest of the class [Participant Observation 3, Phase 1].

9. Despite identified learning differences, Marcus participates in the school public speaking competition and wins second prize. He discusses his school experiences and explains his newly adopted attitude towards school because he feels that he can now learn [Participant Observation 1, Phase 5].

10. During a lesson, a student was very confident to read out loud. This was the first person that Jason had read to his peers, and although his reading fluency slowed the reading flow of the class, he seemed comfortable to participate. The rest of the students encouraged him to continue and he looked very proud [Non Participant Observation 7, Phase 1].

11. On our way to class from the awards presentation ceremony, after receiving a merit for his efforts in English and Religion, Daniel said to a group of students, *"I have never received an award before. Do you know how shocked my mum will be when I show her tonight?"* [Non Participant Observation 1, Phase 2].

These examples illustrate that the program's framework offers students the opportunity to develop within their academic and social aspects of school life. Clearly, the students have developed an appreciation for their school and positively participate.

Emotional development: discussion

Although a detailed analysis of what determines how the program empowers emotional development is beyond the scope for the purpose of this study, it is possible to

conclude that the students described their learning as a positive experience. It is clear that much more is needed to overcome the attitudes to differences of SWSN in regular school settings, and that inclusion is far more complex than the provision of appropriate schooling from an academic perspective, in this program, SWSN are actively participating within the school system because they are happy to be there.

Students are able to identify how their individual development is enhanced by their participation in the program. This strongly indicates that development in the inclusive setting is not just about academic achievement and socialisation but also the personal growth and confidence gained by the students in the process.

The students' self perceptions, as successful participants within the program, are enhanced by their successes both inside and outside of the classroom. I now present the academic experiences of the participants as the third sub-theme.

Academic development

> *"Um, oh, I actually woke up in a smiling mood this morning, like, it got better with the day, and it actually got better when I got student of the month. Now going back, I'm just glad that the teachers, Mr. S. and Mrs. M., one for art and the other for RE, they have been finding funnier ways to give homework. For instance, Mrs. M. in RE gave us photos homework, and that is something that the whole class can enjoy doing. Mr. S. has us doing cameras (building), I thought that it would be impossible but now I'm just happy that he is doing this with us"* [Daniel - Phase 1 Interview 1: 86-91].

The participants described their academic achievements throughout the collected data by describing their individual academic progress. The research strategies applied to examine this sub-theme follow the same approach used in the previous themes. That means that I used

survey results to identify and structure interview questions that directly asked students to express their academic experiences as participants in the program. Student responses were then confirmed and further explored and examined through observations. I now present the students' responses to the survey questions:

Surveys

Survey 1 statements inquired into the students' perceptions of the delivery of teaching and learning within the program. I anticipated that these responses would be able to illustrate the relevance that teaching and learning processes have in the practice of including SWSN within the program and the school setting. Such responses would help shape the more directed interview questions which followed. The survey 1 responses are presented below:

Table 19 - Survey 1 Statements and Students' Responses:

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. People in this program have ample time to learn.	3	3	1		
10. Special efforts are made to recognize the contributions of all individuals.	3	4			
11. The teachers are happy to talk to me about my learning.	5	2			
13. Few, if any, students fail in this program.	2	2	2		1
20. I feel that I learn a lot in the program.	7				
22. Students are appropriately extended across all areas of school in this program.	3	4			
23. Work is often changed to suit my learning differences.	4	2	1		
24. I need Aprender's structure to learn.	5	2			
26. Teachers expect the best from their students.	6	1			

The above responses point to the students' perceptions of the program's structures in facilitating participation for learning and subsequent academic progress and/or achievement.

They clearly show the students' perceptions of the importance of learning within Aprender, specifically as the program is considered to offer effective structures for learning. This is an important aspect underpinning the program because it would benefit the students' approaches for participation and learning. This links to phase three where the following question was asked in the third survey:

Table 20 - Survey 3: phase 3

No.	Statement	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
3	I have improved whilst attending the program	7	0	0

Although this is only one statement, the response indicates that all the participants believe they have improved their schooling whilst attending the program. In this survey, students were also given the opportunity to respond to an open ended question. The responses were as follows:

Table 21 – Survey 3: phase 3

Statement	Responses
I learn in Aprender because:	I feel very happy because my mum is happy with my reports. Small numbers in Math helped me to improve (my grades). Doing more (practical) work is better for me because it gives me confidence. I work better on my own now (independent skills). I get to work with my friends (in small group work). I can now ask questions in class.

These statements support the interpretation of the first survey. The students identify the relevance of the approaches used for learning in Aprender and recognise their value in their learning. At the end of the research period, during phase five, I posed the same statements used in the first survey to the students in order to investigate their perceptions of the program. These were their responses:

Table 2 – Survey 4 – phase 5

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. People in this program have ample time to learn.	6	2			
10. Special efforts are made to recognize the contributions of all individuals.	7	1			
11. The teachers are happy to talk to me about my learning.	7	1			
13. Few, if any, students fail in this program.	8				
20. I feel that I learn a lot in the program.	8				
22. Students are appropriately extended across all areas of school in this program.	7			1	
23. Work is often changed to suit my learning differences.	6	2			
24. I need Aprender's structure to learn.	6	2			
26. Teachers expect the best from their students.	8				

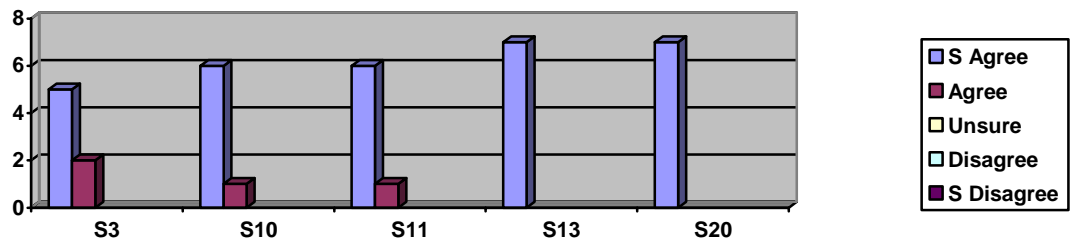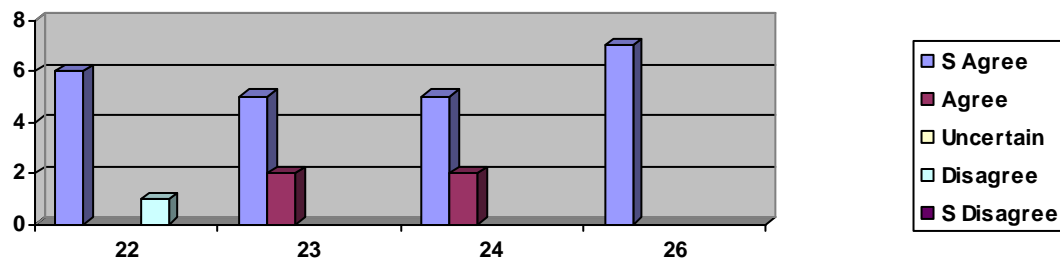*Figure 11 - Responses 3 to 20:*

Figure 12 - Responses 22 to 26:

The above results show consistent positive perceptions of the program in its ability to provide a learning environment as perceived by the SWSN. As before, based on these findings, I moved on to probe further the students' views with the use of interviews, and to structure questions during the interviews in order to provide insight into the students' reflection on their learning progression. Some of the questions include:

How has Aprender helped your learning?

What have you learnt in Aprender so far?

Do you get the necessary support in Aprender?

What have been your learning experiences in Aprender?

Have you improved whilst in Aprender?

Some interview responses are outlined below:

Interviews

During interview 1, I asked students to express how they felt with reference to their schooling at that particular time. The question was:

"How has Aprender helped your learning?"

The question was open-ended to provide students with the opportunity to refer to areas of significance in their development. Some responses were:

"Um, oh, I actually woke up in a smiling mood this morning, like, it got better with the day, and it actually got better when I got student of the month. Now going back, I'm just glad that the teachers, (names teachers), one for art and the

other for Religious Education, they have been finding funnier ways to give homework. For instance, in Religious Education, she gave us photos for homework, and that is something that the whole class can enjoy doing. (names the teacher) has us doing cameras (building cameras), I thought that it would be impossible but now I'm just happy that he is doing this with us. They are good teachers". [Alex, Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 86 – 91].

"I like Aprender because I do well here. My marks are always good and the teachers are always happy with how I am going. It is better than when I was in mainstream and all I did was get into trouble because I asked too many questions all the time" [David, Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 257-260].

"It has been better with the teachers, like last year, Math was bad but the last 4 tasks for math (this year) have been my best ever, in English I was pretty good, but this year I am heaps better because things are explained easier and better so that we can understand it more". [Daniel, Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 79-81].

"My day is always good here because I enjoy the subjects that we do. I like the ILP (Independent Learning Project) because I get to work on cars and I use the computers. My mum is always helping at home because the teachers tell her what I need to learn at home. Even Mr. (names teacher) said to me the other day, well done mate, you are doing well" [Daniel, Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 267-271].

These responses all point to the students' perceptions of the program as facilitator of effective learning. Students indicate that different subjects, teachers and the delivery of the lessons make participating in Aprender enjoyable and productive. During the second phase, I again asked the participants more directed questions about their teaching and learning opportunities in the program, focusing on the progress made by the individual students in the area of academic success. The following are transcripts of their individual responses:

I: what have you achieved in Aprender so far this semester?

Marcus: "Well, I have… there was one awards day where I actually received one for English, and I was very proud of that because English is the one subject that I did not like, and I know that I am getting a distinction towards the end of the year, for integrated studies in the area of cooking, and that is my experience of Aprender so far" [Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 3-8].

I: Right, why are you in Aprender?

Marcus: "Ah, I really like the program with integrated studies, the Independent Learning Project (ILP), computer literacy and all those new subjects that mainstream don't really have and, I like the opportunities that I have here, and that is why I came to Aprender. And more support because I get more attention from the teachers" [Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 15-18].

I: Why is getting more attention so important?

Marcus: "Because in year 7, I really struggled with my work and I feel that Ms. Y, Ms. X, Mr. W, are the teachers showing extra attention towards me, and this is really having an impact on me because I am getting my work done" [Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 19-22].

I: How is Aprender a better option for you?

Marcus: "You get way better subjects because of Integrated Studies, Independent Learning Program and Computer Literacy; you get better opportunities, and it is practically easier homework and work in class time" [Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 33-35].

During the same interview, Daniel also provided this insight:

I: "What are your experiences so far this semester?
Daniel: The ILP… The ILP is very good.
I: The ILP, what do actually mean? Has it been good?
Daniel: Yeah, it is very good because I work on my own with the help of Ms. X.
I: In what sense?
Daniel: I always do well with it and I like it because I get time to do it.
I: How has Aprender been to you this semester?
Daniel: Good,
I: What do you mean?
Daniel: It is good.
I: How?
Daniel: The work is easier and I get more time to do it.
I: Ok, so the work is easier!
Daniel: Yes and much better" [Interview 1, phase 2, lines 39-52]

He then continued…

I: Why are you here then?
Daniel: I want to work but I struggle so Aprender is better for me.
I: Ok, how do you struggle?
Daniel: With work.
I: What are your good subjects now?
Daniel: HPE (Health and Physical Education)
I: Do you like HPE?
Daniel: Yes,
I: Do you feel that you have learnt a lot in Aprender?

> *Daniel: Yes*
> [Interview 1, phase 2, lines 59-68]

I then asked Zachary the same questions:

> *I: Would you like to tell me what your experiences have been in Aprender this semester?*
> *Zachary: Yes, there were a lot of subjects that I was not good at last year, and I have improved them a lot and I have made a lot of new friends.*
> *I: Why do you think that you are in Aprender?*
> *Zachary: I struggled a lot and I need help and in mainstream there are teachers that can't help you.*
> *I: What makes you think that they can't help you?*
> *Zachary: They don't have time to stay in and help you,*
> *I: Ok, so Mainstream teachers have time to stay in and help in the program?*
> *Zachary: Yeah, and they are happy to help you.*
> *I: And how do you feel about that?*
> *Zachary: Good"*
> [Interview 1, phase 2, lines 83-94]

Mal provided his answers to the same questions:

> *I: "Ok Mal, your experiences of Aprender this semester?*
> *Mal: Yes… they have been great. It has been rocky, but it is great"* [Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 96-97].

> *I: Why are you in Aprender?*
> *Mal: Good question. Because I had problems in year 7, my parents put me in here to see how I went, and I have gone very well.*
> *I: To the point that you will be ready to integrate to mainstream, wouldn't you say?*
> *Mal: Yes,*
> *I: And that is a very successful experience isn't it?*
> *Mal: Yes,*
> *I: Do you feel that you have reached a good enough level to undertake mainstream studies?*
> *Mal: Yes, I have people say that, I've heard people have good comments about me.*
> *I: OK, good, what sort of comments are those?*
> *Mal: Yeah, you're cool and all that, smart, you know. People know that you don't get the help in mainstream and here in Aprender you get all the help that you can get.*
> *I: How come you were not in Aprender last year?*
> *Mal: Because my parents had not heard of the program until late, and I didn't until semester 2.* [Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 211-217].

I then asked David his experiences.

> *I: What have your experiences been in Aprender this semester?*
> *David: The ILP and integrated studies have been good.*
> *I: They are the two subjects that you need in Aprender, what about the others?*
> *David: Math has been good,*
> *I: Have you been doing your work?*
> *David: Yeah,*
> *I: Why are you in Aprender?*
> *David: A lot of work problems, I could not focus, was out of focus and did some stupid things, I am a bit calmer because of Aprender, I want to learn.*
> *I: So your behaviour has improved in Aprender?*
> *David: Yes, a lot.*
> [Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 109-141]

Alex provided his responses:

> *I: What have been your experiences of Aprender this semester?*
> *Alex: Very good, kids here are nice, have made new friends and the kids here are very nice. I have done well with assignments.*
> *I: How is that different to last year?*
> *Alex: Well, last year I got way too much work and in Aprender they make it better. I used to get all the assignments together at the same time, and I am not getting bombarded with work all the time now.*
> *I: Ok, in terms of, why are you in Aprender?*
> *Alex: Because I was not very good at math, and my teachers recommended me to come here.*
> *I: Is Aprender a better option than mainstream?*
> *Alex: Yes,*
> *I: Why?*
> *Alex: Because you have less teachers here and Ms. A, like, they're very nice to me and they don't scream all the time.* [Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 161-174].

And finally Jason provided his insights.

> *I: What have been your experiences of Aprender?*
> *Jason: It has been very good, first term I was silly but now teachers all say that I have been good.*
> *I: So things are better from that perspective?*
> *Jason: Yeah,*
> *I: You have had positives?*
> *Jason: All the teachers are nice and I have good friends,*
> *I: Is it easier than mainstream?*
> *Jason: Yeah, because I am not getting as much work now.*
> *I: Would you be surprised if I told you that you do exactly the same amount of work that you do in mainstream?*
> *Jason: Yeah, maybe*

I: Because you do exactly the same amount, it is just that perhaps you are more comfortable doing it, would you say that?
Jason: Yes, maybe.
I: Why are you in Aprender?
Jason: Because in year 2, I failed and wasn't good, and in Aprender, it is a good class and so far it is, and my parents thought I should be in. [Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 184-200].

Based on the above responses, and the clear link that all the students established between their school experiences and the academic support and success that they believe they experience in the program, I began to draw conclusions about the level of support that the program appears to provide the participants in their schooling. Three perspectives about the students' learning experiences in Aprender emerged. Firstly, they suggested that the program does provide appropriate methods to offer an effective learning environment. Secondly, they indicated that the program is successful in meeting their needs because of the commitment given by teachers to each student. This is manifested in the students' recognition of specialised subjects, learning approaches and the teaching styles used. Thirdly, most students made reference to their previous learning experiences. They indicated that their experiences in Aprender differ from those of previous school years because in the program, they achieve personal success. As the research period came to an end, I asked two students to discuss the differences between mainstream and Aprender. These were their responses:

"Because (Aprender) it is better than mainstream, in mainstream they don't always explain things to you. You fall behind the other students and the teachers then don't explain things but in (here) the teachers are there with you most of the time"
[Alex, Interview 5, Phase 5, Lines 13-15].

"Am, ah yeah, I like, well Aprender is like, well if I was not in Aprender, I would be getting more homework than what I get now so, in Aprender they slow down the homework and the teachers help you a lot more, so for instance, they help you and you focus less on math... like now, I know how to do multiplications, I've got them in my head so, I know how to do them"
[Mal, Interview 2, Phase 4, Lines 89-92].

The responses support the previous findings. The students consider Aprender a good program to enhance their learning. Next, I present other data collected from my observations on the theme of academic development amongst the participants in order to provide further insights into and reflections on this process.

Observations

I was asked to provide two speakers to participate in a public speaking competition held at the college. I selected two students from two different Aprender classrooms. As one of the speakers, I invited Marcus, one of the research participants. Marcus seemed "over the moon" and displayed appreciation by what he described to be a nice gesture. I asked him to consider participating in the debate public speaking competition because I considered his progress in across all subjects, particularly English, as positive. Surprisingly, I had opposition from a staff member who felt that giving him the opportunity could backfire and possibly cause conflict which in turn may lead to a breakdown of his self-esteem, possibly leading to long term complications with his overall participation within the school setting. Clearly, there is an assumption that his special needs could hinder his achievement in the competition.

I felt that despite any result, the way that Marcus responded whilst being considered for the event was enough to grant the experience by making it a reality. The goal was not necessarily for him to win but rather participate and learn from the experience. He said that he would write out the speech and that he would show it to me to ensure that he had met all the suggested requirements set out by the competition. At this stage in the research period, I was experiencing the level of success that the students encountered because of the positive affirmation that the program offered. Since I attempted to understand the achievements made by the students within the program under the theme of development, I considered the response given by teacher who felt that exposure to the public speaking activity could hinder any progress made by Marcus and asked myself the following questions:

Are achievements in Aprender unrealistic or of less value if compared to mainstream standards due to the great level of modification and/or differentiation that students require there?

Is the program overprotecting SWSN thus neglecting their full inclusion due to the high degree of academic support offered in what is a secluded environment?

Marcus' experience as a participant in the competition included him into the life of the school setting, not just Aprender. Marcus was a participant because of his great academic progress over the year and his ability to represent the program positively. Despite the concerns that his involvement created, he achieved by making individual progress whilst gaining confidence. Aprender's structures ensured that the student experienced academic progress. [Participant Observation 3, Phase 5].

In many respects, the questions raised during the above observation, were answered when I observed the SWSN as active participants in the school community. Such answers are identified in the following observation:

Observation at the Awards Assembly

The students were eligible to be presented with an award whenever they averaged a very high level of achievement for all assessment tasks in a specific subject, or a teacher determined that the student was one of three who worked hard enough to make remarkable improvement. It was obvious that the students were eager to know whether or not they were to receive awards. Some of the students seemed anxious and waited for names to begin to be called out. As the participants received some of the awards, the following occurred:

Daniel stood up to receive multiple awards. Upon standing up, and walking to the stage, he had a big smile and seemed very proud of his achievements. It was a good moment for him and the program because the awards were received in front of the whole school community. Zac was slightly different in his approach. He, on the other hand, walked awkwardly and appeared shocked to have been given a merit. Initially, he did not even hear his name. He was told to go by the boy sitting next to him. [Non-Participant Observation 1, Phase 2].

During the same event:

Marcus yet again, had a different experience. He had been asking for weeks if he was to get an award. Since he was already aware he was to receive an English merit, he eagerly asked if there were other awards to be given. He told me in the morning that he would feel frustrated at not getting any more awards because he had tried very hard in all his subjects. Upon walking up to the stage, he looked pleased and proud to be receiving his awards. None of the students who did not receive awards appeared concerned at missing out. All students showed exceptionally good behaviour by remaining focused during the length of the very formal activity. Although the experience was good for some, not achieving public awards was detrimental to others who try hard to achieve. Students wanting to achieve could be reflective of their inclusion to school life. Like all students, the participants expect to

get good results and be recognised for their efforts. This is exemplified by Jason in the effort he placed in his subjects in the effort of achieving as best he could during an observation in the classroom [Participant Observation 1, Phase 1].

Another example is a competition that existed between the students when attempting to achieve high results in their homework. Teachers' recorded the completion of the homework with awards given to all those groups who successfully completed the given tasks [Participant Observation 1, Phase 2].

Whether it was through receiving an award for merit [Non-Participant Observation 1, Phase 2], achieving a good grade in a particular subject [Participant Observation 2, Phase 1], or confidently engaging in classroom interaction as participants [Participant Observation 1, Phase 3], the participants experienced some academic progress within the learning environment offered in Aprender. These experiences further encouraged positive attitudes towards the participation of the students, with active inclusion subsequently leading to enhanced academic development.

Non-participant observations

As noted earlier, SWSN attending the program are offered supportive assistance from their teachers. The following observation exemplifies the role of the teachers in the academic experience of the students.

The students were given a class task to complete. They were to write a short story individually, however, they were also instructed to seek teacher assistance during the planning and writing of the story as there were numerous steps to consider with the planning of the task. For the collection of data during the participant observation, I divided the individual working task lesson into 5 intervals, each lasting 5 minutes each. The recordings indicated whether or not assistance was given to the students during the intervals. The assistance was recorded when it was given by the teacher, the teacher aide who works in the classroom or any of the other students in the class.

This example demonstrates the importance of the teacher in the learning processes applied in Aprender. The SWSN are able to seek assistance because of the collaborative culture that the program promotes. The assistance is offered to the students as they seek support from the different resources available. Despite the inconsistency in the number of times that the students seek help, it was clear that the program facilitated the opportunity for all students to request support [Non-Participant Observation 6, Phase 2] .

Table 23 – Seeking assistance during an English lesson

Students	1	2	3	4	5	Comments
Marcus	Y	Y			Y	Worked well after clarification, required help with vocabulary in some cases.
Zachary	Y					Worked exceptionally well, wrote a page in the given 25 minutes.
Daniel	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Needed one to one support consistently. Tends to do minimally without teacher.
Jason	Y					Worked independently the whole time and required little support. He wrote 3/4 page.
Alex				Y	Y	Worked well but required one on one support at the end. He wrote a page.
David	Y	Y	Y			Needed prompting but after clarification achieved a whole page.
Mal				Y		Worked independently but required clarification at the end. Achieved well.

Y represents "Yes".

The following observation is consistent with the above example.

Table 24 - Observation of SWSN in class activities

Student	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	Total
Alex	W	W	W	II	W	W	W	W	W	2
David	I	II	I	W	W	W	I	III	I	9
Jason	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	I	1
Marcus	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	0
Zachary	I	W	W	I	I	W	W	III	W	7
Daniel	III	II	W	W	W	II	W	W	W	7

Each column represents number of 5 minute periods. W constitutes working with no talking during exam revision, Roman numbers constituting the times that the students were disruptive during the 5 minute period. The rows provide the names of the individual students [Non-Participant Observation 4, Phase 5].

In this observation period, the students generally display positive learning behaviour. It is noted that David needed prompting to stay on task on both occasions. Although they did at times become disruptive, they tended to maintain a positive degree of attention that enabled them to maintain an appropriate approach to learning. This could be attributed to the students' attitude towards learning, as they were able to draw on their individual abilities in order to achieve within the learning framework in place. The effort of the students attending the program may be reflective of the commitment that they made to their overall participation

within the school setting, and this in turn was reflective of how the system facilitated the opportunities for appropriate learning to take place. It is evident from the example that the SWSN were active participants in their classroom activity. This is also observed in the next example which describes student participation in an English lesson. This observation identifies the level of class involvement and participation during a reading and comprehension task activity. The text being used is Specky McGee (Arena and Lyon, 2003). The revision task lasted for approximately 12 minutes.

Table 25 – Student participation during a class activity time: 10:10 to 10:22

Observation - Number of students putting their hands up and responding to the oral comprehension questions		
Questions asked by teacher	Students responding (by putting their hand up)	Correct answer on first instance
1. Who was Specky's new coach?	7	Yes
2. Why were the boys so concerned?	7	Yes
3. What is the meaning of sexist?	3	Yes
4. Why is Specky worried?	7	Yes
5. How did coach Papas introduced Ms. Pate?	7	Yes
6. What did the boys say about Specky's behaviour?	6	Yes
7. Why is team work so important in footy?	7	Yes
8. Is football the best sport for the boys?	7	Yes
9. Would you hate having a female coach?	7	Yes
10. Why and how do you justify it?	3	No, later rectified

The observation made in this activity demonstrates the confidence that most of the students displayed when asked to participate publicly. The level of attention given by the SWSN to their class activities, their confident participation and ability to stay on task can all be attributed to their positive engagement in the program. Here, their academic participation and subsequent experience are elements contributing to their inclusion. These examples provide rich evidence of how the students are achieving academically. These levels of success cannot be measured in relation to diagnostic standards expected at different developmental levels, but nevertheless constitute success as the students are engaged and participate within the tasks established in the program.

Academic development: discussion

It is argued that for inclusion practices to appropriately function, school systems must endorse the value of teacher support in the academic achievements of the students (Ashman, 2002; Beveridge, 1999; Forlin, 2006). In the case of the experiences of the Aprender students, their social interactions and development of relationships are very influential in their learning and, although this perspective was extensively discussed in the previous theme, here I have identified the strong connection that exists between the students' familiarity with their teachers and the academic advancements made in the process. The efforts made by the students towards their studies seem to be enhanced as they experience success and achievement. The data in these examples illustrate that despite the difficulties that the students have traditionally experienced with learning, Aprender's framework clearly appears to enhance opportunities for development. Academic development in the program seems to be largely influenced by the students' experience of social interactions and their school based success. I next discuss the theme of development by examining the social, emotional and academic experiences of the students in reference to inclusion in Aprender.

Development: theme discussion

As earlier stated, for the purpose of this study, development refers to the progress experienced by each participant. This encompasses the social experiences, emotional development and academic achievement that the students displayed in their participation both within the program and in the wider school setting. I have previously indicated that this progress cannot be measured against a standard or cohort, since the data reflects the

individuality of the students within their own particular experiences. Student voice has been used to describe the school experiences that have shaped my understanding of the connection between social, emotional and academic development within Aprender. The data show that development was continually occurring, as summarised in Figure 13.

Figure 13 – Illustration of relationship between aspects of development.
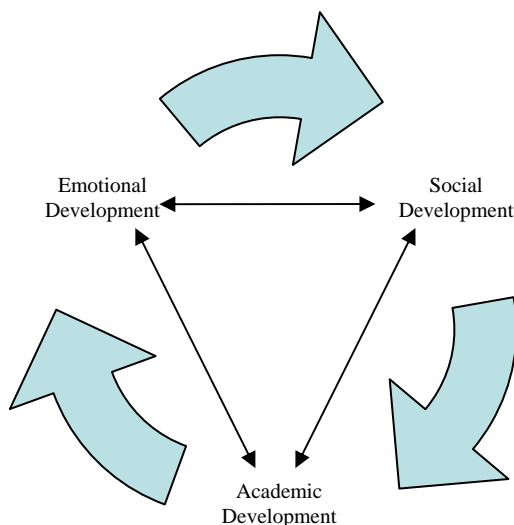

Figure 13 indicates that the emotional development of the individual enables him to integrate not just socially but achieve academically. Equally students are empowered to develop their self-esteem when they experience success in making friends and achieving positive academic progress. This supports the practice of inclusion from a multifaceted perspective because the participants may be isolated from mainstreaming by learning in a separate classroom, yet they achieve academically, interact socially with other members of the school community and emotionally develop their self concept. These aspects are co-dependent, influencing each other.

The inquiry also highlighted the experience of exclusion of the SWSN in this study. It is clear that it has been the experience of the students that an element of exclusion is experienced with the existence of the program within the framework of the mainstream school setting. This concern is evident throughout the data, described in experiences that highlight the negativity involved in the exclusive aspects within and outside of the program. This theme emerged from the previous two themes, i.e. the experience of relationships and development, as their role in inclusion within the setting appears to also have influenced the inevitable experience of exclusion. The next section explores the theme of inclusion and exclusion as voiced by the participants in the study.

Theme 3: the experiences of inclusion, seclusion and exclusion

Whilst the analysis of the data clearly identifies examples of positive school experiences for the participants, there are also many examples that suggest that in their participation within the school setting, the students also experienced exclusion. The term exclusion is used to describe the social isolation that the participants experienced in the school setting. The experience of exclusion is not unique to participants in the study, as Sparling (2002) notes, exclusion occurs in all school settings, regardless of whether students have special learning needs or not. Analysis of the data shows that exclusion occurred within students' social experiences where, while they appeared to have developed strong relationships with some students attending the program, they experienced limited interaction with other members of the Aprender program and members of the extended school community. More specifically, the data indicate that the locational physicality of the program may contribute to the exclusion, possibly because the students participate in an isolated setting. As noted earlier, Aprender is within the school grounds but operates from a distinct

building away from the mainstream classrooms. For the purpose of this study, I describe seclusion as the physical isolation of the program within the school. The individual needs presented by the students require their academic learning to take place in Aprender and this secludes them from the mainstream school. It is clear that locational and academic seclusion contribute towards the full inclusion of the students as members of the school setting, yet the data outlines that such practice also develops the experience of exclusion amongst the participants. Their separation from mainstream for some of the learning experiences illustrates the level of exclusion from the mainstream school that develops.

In order to provide greater insight into the experiences of exclusion, I now examine the data with particular reference to the experiences of the locational seclusion, with emphasis on the social interactions that the students experienced within and outside the program. The emphasis is not to examine the level of exclusion experienced but rather explore how the students expressed their social experiences with their peers. In particular, I examine the experiences of the participants with year 9 students, a group of students whose collective behaviour, the data suggest, may present a barrier to the participants' inclusion within Aprender.

Locational seclusion and the participants

Again the data are presented in a similar format to the previous themes, i.e. surveys, interviews and observations followed by a theme discussion where findings are reviewed. Unlike in previous themes however, survey responses are not presented first because although they were used to examine the theme, they were used at the end of the research period (stage 5). Indeed, the initial surveys used at the beginning of the research period did

not contain evidence of exclusion. When responding to questions inquiring into exclusion and seclusion, the students were very positive in describing their experiences. They indicated that they saw themselves as members of the school community; although there was seclusion, exclusion was not evident. It was only during interviews and observations that evidence of exclusion, however, emerged. Some of the key questions asked are:

Why do you think that Aprender students hang around here (the Aprender locational area) all the time?

Do you play games during recess and lunchtimes?

Is participating (and relating to) with non Aprender students important for your development?

For you, is it important to have friends outside of Aprender?

Can you be a member of the school community if you don't have many mainstream students as friends?

Is Aprender a good setting if it is isolated from mainstream?

Interviews

I begin with an initial interview with Daniel and Marcus, which directly inquired into the SWSN's experiences of exclusion as members of Aprender with respect to their experiences with mainstream students. I then present data that illustrate the relationships between the SWSN and some of their peers in the program. Finally, an observation is presented to provide further insight into how Daniel perceived the Aprender program as supporting his inclusion. Marcus and Daniel were asked their perspectives on the experience of locational seclusion during an interview discussion. I was interested in why the students do not make full use of all the resources available at the school. I asked the following:

I: Why do you think that Aprender students hang around here all the time?

Daniel: Well, you see, it is hard to go to other places because your friends are always around here. I like to go to the library and sometimes to the basketball courts because all the year sevens play down ball there, but when other year eights or nines arrive, they usually take the balls away and make it hard for us to play our game.

At this point in the interview, Daniel had indicated his need to feel safe and explains how other students make it hard for him to participate in other aspects that contribute to his overall participation in the school setting. This then followed with another discussion.

I: Do you play down ball most of the time?

Marcus: No, I like to see my friends play (instead) because I am not too good (at playing the game). That's why the library is better for me (to go to). Mrs (mentions teacher) is always there to help me study. I get most of my work done (then, referring to homework).

I: What can be done to ensure that you enjoy all that the school has to offer?

Marcus: I don't want to do all the other things that other kids do. I am too small to play sport and some of the year eights are rough. Maybe we should have an Aprender soccer competition because when I went to play soccer (on the oval with mainstream students) one day, nobody wanted me to play in their team.

I: Why?

Marcus: Because I am too small.

I: So you basically, do not think that participating with others that are non-Aprender students is not important for your development?

Marcus: What do you mean?

I: Well, is it important for you to have friends outside of the program?

Marcus: Yes, but I prefer my friends in the program because they don't judge me at all. Not even the year 9 boys are that bad.

I: But is it good for you to not have many friends in mainstream when eventually you'll be back there with them after you leave the program?

Marcus: um, um, I don't know. I like to have more friends there but they want to go to the ovals, or want to play fight, and I am too small to do that all the time. I much prefer to play on my own or with my new friends in Aprender because they help me out. Even when we go back (referring to mainstream), they'll (other Aprender students) go back with us anyway.
[Marcus and Daniel, Interview 3, Phase 2, Lines 1-31]

It seems that Marcus had chosen to exclude himself from interrelating with mainstream students on the basis that he now had new friends who also attended the Aprender program. This is further explored in Marcus' case study in Chapter 6. This finding raises questions about the locational seclusion and experience of inclusion of the students attending the program as active participants within the greater school community. At this point in the interview, I began to ask myself whether it was indeed necessary for the SWSN to socialise with mainstream students, if in fact, they were more comfortable relating to students in the program. The dilemma here is that the students made the choice to befriend other Aprender students on the basis of their limited exposure to mainstream, and it seems that the substantial exposure to the other students attending the program also influenced this choice. These experiences shaped the success of the Aprender program in facilitating a learning environment for the students where they also developed relationships with peers. However, is the purpose of social inclusion for SWSN that they become friends with all students, not just those attending the program? Does Aprender still offer the participants opportunities for social interrelations with others in the school community? Should it be a concern that the students opt to play on their own or with other SWSN who also attend the program instead of mainstream peers? I then asked Daniel the same questions that Marcus had responded to.

I: Thanks Marcus, and what about you Daniel, what do you think about the Aprender boys hanging around here all the time?

Daniel: Well, um... well, I think that, that it is hard to go to the other place because it is far.

I: Is it that Aprender is located too far away from the rest of the school?

Daniel: Yes, I think that... um, it is far away. If I have my lunch here, then I don't want to go there (points to back tennis courts, an area away from the main school, approximately 200 metres away with at least 40 steps going down). I feel that because of my leg, if I want to play they won't let me anyway.

I: So what is the solution?

Marcus: Doesn't matter. I am happy here because I couldn't do the work in mainstream and I can here. I don't care if I don't play soccer.

I: Do you feel like you are not a part of the school system because of that?

Daniel: I feel that I am a student here (names school) but I know that I need (to be in) Aprender to do my work.

I: Is that a problem for you?

Daniel: Only for some kids in mainstream who don't know about the program.

I: How could this be improved?

Daniel: Don't worry.

Marcus: (interrupts) sorry sir, maybe make them come here for a day and they'll see that our work is hard also.

I: Is Aprender bad because it is on its own?

Marcus: Only if you get bullied for being in the program, but I still know that I can play with the others if I want to. I know that my dad says, be friends with good kids, and they are all (nice) in Aprender anyway.

Daniel: I am friends with everyone (meaning having friends in mainstream) but most people here are happy to help me. They are my friends more than the others (mainstream) anyway.

[Marcus and Daniel, Interview 3, Phase 2, Lines 32-57].

Based on the above extracts, both Marcus and Daniel clearly identified their involvement in the program as the reason for their experiences of exclusion. The physical differences experienced by the students together with the locational seclusion of the program

are clearly reasons for the students' choice to limit their relationships with mainstream peers and this excludes them from the mainstream school setting where Aprender operates. The experiences of exclusion for the SWSN are also evident in the following example, where, in the school playground, students felt victimised by the behaviour of others.

> On an occasion, a student was bullied by mainstream students due to his inability to express himself [Non Participant Observation 4, Phase 2].

> In a separate event, an argument and physical altercation developed between a participant and mainstream students over a disputing disagreement in a game. Due to an innocent misunderstanding, the students experienced difficulties with playing [Non Participant Observation 1, Phase 3].

The above examples clearly illustrate the difficulties that the participants experienced as they tried to participate in school life. The difficulties occur both within Aprender and within the mainstream school setting.

Clearly, the students identified locational seclusion and the lack of understanding about the program as reasons that may lead to lack of social interactions between some mainstream students and the participants. It is also clear that the students had made the choice to develop relationships with the other students in the program because they found them more relevant in their school life and they could relate better to them.

Although there is clear evidence of the development of friendships within Aprender, Marcus and Daniel also pointed to relational conflict with some students in the program. Such experiences could be regarded as bullying, and promote intolerance for all the participants and their needs. I now discuss the findings that illustrate experiences of how seclusion has led to exclusion within Aprender. This is preseted in data referring to the year 9 students.

Experiences of exclusion: the Year 9 Students and the SWSN in Aprender

The data indicate that the year 9 students who attended the program contributed to classroom difficulties for some SWSN. This was illustrated throughout the data collection period, where students made connections between the year 9 students and bullying, unsettled behaviour and disruption. I now present some of the data that directly and indirectly express those views. These data also include students' drawings and writing. It became clear that the SWSN experienced conflict with the year 9 students that attended the program. This group was largely made up of students whose disengagement with school was causing a degree of difficulty with their academic development because of difficulty with their social, academic and emotional skills, the reason for their participation in Aprender.

> In an observation at the beginning of the research period, despite acknowledging that the program offered valuable instruction and support, Daniel suggested that participating in the music program was the most valuable element of his education at the school because he was able to do that with other students who had similar interests [Non Participant Observation 1, Phase 1]. He further acknowledged that being in Aprender took away the opportunities of participating in music more regularly [Non Participant Observation 3, Phase 1].

Surveys and follow up interviews

The following survey was developed in order to inquire into the students' experiences with other students in Aprender, in particular into relationships that developed with the year 9 students they had often referred to as bullies. The purpose of the survey was to identify the key areas concerning the year 9 students and their relationships with the participants. This is important to determine what is best practice for the inclusion of the students. These were their responses:

Table 26 – Results of survey referring to relationships with year 9 students

No	Statement	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
1	The year 9s made Aprender a bad experience this term	4	2	1
2	The year 9s were the main reason for discipline problems	4	2	1
3	The teachers should have dealt with the year 9s separately from us	6	1	0
4	I got into trouble because of year 9s	5	1	1
5	Not all year 9s were bad	7	0	0
6	Some year 9s were very helpful	7	0	0
7	Some year 9s helped me out in some ways	5	2	0
8	I miss having the year 9s around	4	2	1
9	Aprender should only have students of the same year level	0	4	3
10	Year 8s behave like the year 9s	0	2	5
11	Year 7s behave like the year 9s	0	1	6
12	Some of the year 7 and 8 students use the year 9s as excuse for their own behaviour	3	1	3
13	Classes when the year 9s are not around are often the better ones to do	4	3	
14	The year 9s are too advanced to be in classes with year 7s and 8s	1	4	2
15	Teachers need to improve the way that they deal with the year 9s to avoid conflict in the classroom	3	3	1

Clearly, the year 9 students are considered a problem by the participants. For this reason, in order to gain a better understanding of the SWSN's perceptions and feelings, the survey was followed by extended answers to the following statements:

Table 27 – Extended answers

No	Statement	Responses
1	If I was able to change three things about Aprender, this is what I would change and these are the reasons why:	No year 9s in the program. We should get better laptops. You should have Aprender in year 12. Only bring nice kids (to the program). You should build some sliding doors between classrooms. We should have more classrooms. We should be allowed to eat in class. Should not punish the whole class because of one person.
2	Bullying and the year 9s, this is my view on this:	They tease a lot. Sometimes, they tease me too much. They can be nice to you sometimes. If you stand up (to them) is ok. They like to play too much.
3	The way that Aprender deals with bullies, this is my view on this:	Teachers deal with it well. it is not good to bully. I think that Aprender is a safer place to be in. I like the good communication (with parents). The rules are good.

As well as the year 9 themselves, the results indicate some considerable concern about the ways in which some teachers deal with the challenging behaviours of the year 9 students, which affect the participants' experiences of school. The participants believe that teachers need to improve their dealings with these students. It is also clear however, that not all year 9 students were disruptive or excluded their peers.

Based on these findings, it seems that these relationships are difficult to manage since there appears to be little tolerance of the SWSN by the year 9 students. This affects the formation of relationships and subsequent inclusion of the participants. The SWSN perceived the year 9 students as very challenging, abusing their opportunities in the program and not respecting them in the process. This finding is confirmed in the following interview extract with Alex. The key question asked here was about how Alex felt in that particular day. His response clearly focused on the year 9 students and their relationships with him.

Alex: Sir, I feel glad because... it's first week back and I can enjoy it without anyone, causing trouble, and I hope to maybe have a peaceful, second semester.

I: why do you say that, is anyone causing trouble?

Alex: As in, am... people bullying people, yeah...

I: Is that something that upsets you?

Alex: Yes, cause sometimes I get bullied.

I: Ah!

Alex: And I want it to stop, and want to stop right now (gets upset)!

I: Ok, and how can it stop?

Alex: Yeah, have a … have a … (looked unsure and distressed), have a… penalty write out (school rule as a form of establishing discipline)… I know that, I know that if you get one, it stops, it all stops right away.

I: So, you want the school to be a bit tougher with some of the boys?

Alex: Yes, but I'm not giving you names.
[Alex, Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 6 – 18].

The effect of the year 9 students on Zachary, Alex and Daniel is further exemplified in the following dialogue:

Zachary: Yeah, when somebody gets bullied, it actually rips you apart, not just physically but in the head, and I actually have been bullied once and that was for real, and some little ones (referring to the magnitude of being bullied), but the person who bullies me says it is a joke, and sometimes it goes too far. I don't say anything to them but when it comes to telling them, I wait and then tell them what I think of it (about bullying).

I: And you Alex?

Alex: The year 9's, they could be nicer but sometimes I don't think that… they just tease people too much. Today, (names the bully) was annoying Jacob, and even (names another student) they didn't let me get my work done. I got it done anyway but, people shouldn't be talking during Math, they should be working.

I: So it annoys you? (When they talk) and take away your concentration?

Alex: Yeah,

I: What do you think Marcus?

Marcus: Yeah, I think that too. If you want good grades, you can't do good with people like that in the classroom.

I: So bullying and Aprender, what do you think Daniel?

Daniel: Yes, some year 9s take my things, and I find them damaged and they don't return them, or lost too, and then they come to me and asked more stuff. And they never give it back. Yeah… (mumbles)… some people are alright but some are not.
[Zachary, Alex and Daniel, Interview 2, Phase 1, Lines 161-178].

Here, the students clearly expressed many concerns about the year 9 students. They indicated that their behaviour and the ways that teachers dealt with offending students made

the program a negative experience. This again was exemplified by Daniel at a different stage of the interview:

> I: Daniel, your experience in Aprender, has it been affected by the bullying of some students?
>
> Daniel: Yes it has, it has a little bit, when I have been bullied today (names student), picked on me before recess and the teacher (names teacher) asked me to move. It was unfair because it wasn't my fault, and he told the teacher that it was my fault and it wasn't.

[Interview 2, Phase 1, Lines 199 – 202].

Next, I present observations regarding the year 9 students in reference to their contribution to excluding SWSN in Aprender.

Observations

> During an observation, SWSN, together with other students, showed their frustration towards each other because of the academic learning differences that some students demonstrated in their levels of academic ability. This event led to the experience of bullying as one SWSN was verbally made fun of for his inability to respond to teacher's requests. The lack of tolerance for the individual differences of the students presented great challenges to the teachers in the program. As the researcher, I found myself constantly reflecting on what was happening and how it was severely affecting the learning of the students, not only the study participants but also other students attending the program. [Participant Observation 3, Phase 1]

Students also complained about the personal hygiene of a student who was later bullied as result. This event was initially negative, although it eventuated into acceptance of differences and understanding of the reasons why the student had such problems to begin with. I came to understand that apart from the obvious learning differences, the physical restrictions, health related concerns, emotional well being and others' perceptions play an important part in the development of the students. In the observation, the boy could not hold his passing of urine successfully and since he was beginning to avoid the use of nappies as a precautionary measure (he felt lack of comfort whilst wearing the oversized nappy), this

contributed to urine smells.

> The teasing was coming from the year 9 students. In light of this, I asked the participants to take part in discussing the following key points:
>
> 1. Because of the year 9 students, I sometimes get in trouble…
> 2. The ways in which my teachers deal with discipline affects me because…
> 3. The times when I feel sad to be in Aprender are when…
>
> [Participant Observation 5, Phase 2]

What I asked the students to do was to reflect on the three key statements and respond according to their experiences with reference to what they discussed. Their responses provided the following findings:

1. The year 9 students present some challenges to the rest of the class. They tend to upset the other students with their bad behaviour and lack of cooperation in some classes, and this unfortunately creates tension amongst some the teachers. The result is often the unfair strategy of keeping the whole class in, or addressing the whole class and requesting general improvement instead of dealing with the individuals misbehaving.

2. The way that teachers support the individual within the program is an issue of great concern. Although all the respondents are very comfortable with the approaches given in the pastoral and academic areas, it is quite clear that being kept in when not in the wrong annoys the students dramatically.

3. The students appear to be mostly sad when taking classes with the whole group (year 7, 8 and 9 students attending a class together). This is due to the mentioned behavioural problems but also the lack of support that they receive in smaller classes (when numbers are relatively smaller as the year 9 group may be out). This occurs in some subject areas.

The boys drew a picture to express their feelings, and these pictures illustrated their feelings, when the year 9 boys were there. These are presented below in Figures 3 to 9, followed by their transcripts.

Figure 14 – Marcus
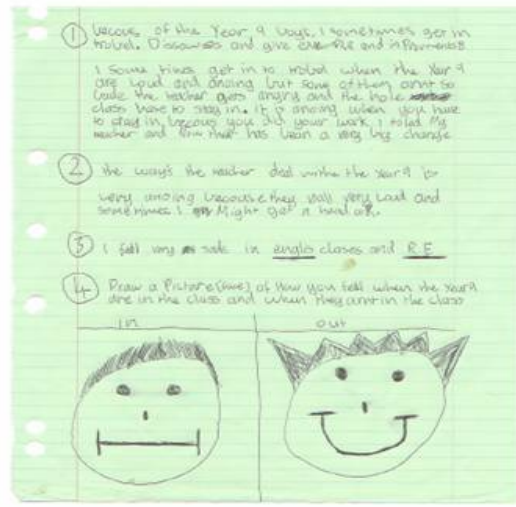
Marcus' response transcript:

Because of the year 9 students, I sometimes get in trouble…

"I get in trouble because the year 9's are loud and annoying but some of them aren't too bad. The teacher gets angry and the whole class has to stay in. It is annoying when you have to stay in because you did your work. I told my mother and now that has been a very big change"

The ways in which my teachers deal with discipline affects me because…

"Very annoying because they talk very loud and sometimes I might have a headache"

The times when I feel sad to be in Aprender are when…

"I feel safe in English classes and RE (Religious Education)".

His drawing suggests that he is happy when the year 9 students are out of the classroom and feels sad when their presence is there.

Figures 15 – Daniel

Daniel's response transcript:

Because of the year 9 students, I sometimes get in trouble…

"…I need to always be focused but now I am having lack of concentration. I am a little bit down but I have made improvements in my ILP (Independent Learning Project). But sometimes I have a good and bad days and sometimes I'm not focused. I got nothing against them".

The ways in which my teachers deal with discipline affects me because…

"This has never happened to me before but I reckon that it is unfair that if one person does something wrong, the whole class has to stay in".

The times when I feel sad to be in Aprender are when…

"I am just a little bit disappointed and mostly sad, very tired also feeling sad. I've never felt very sad, only if my family members die or are sick. This is when you feel happy in the program".

The image drawn by Daniel suggests that he is happy when the year 9 students are out and sad when they are in the Aprender classroom.

Figure16 – Alex
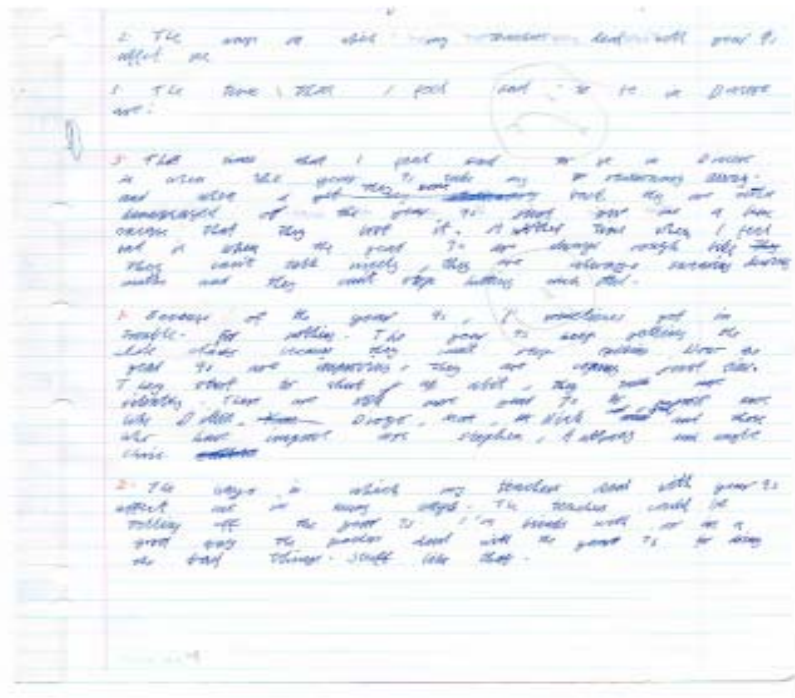
Alex's transcript:

Because of the year 9 students, I sometimes get in trouble…

"…When the year 9's take my stationary away, and when they make trouble. They are better but sometimes the year 9 students give me a hard time that they mean it. A better time is when I feel not bad is when the year 9's are changed not rough like they can't take something from us and they can't take that with others".

The ways in which my teachers deal with discipline affects me because…

"The year 9's keep rolling the class doors because they want to start fighting. Now the year 9's are improving, they are teasing just like this…"

The times when I feel sad to be in Aprender are when…

"The teachers would be telling off the year 9's. I am friends with theme and they are good boys. The teachers deal with the year 9's for teasing the boys with bad things. I feel like that".

Figure 17 - David
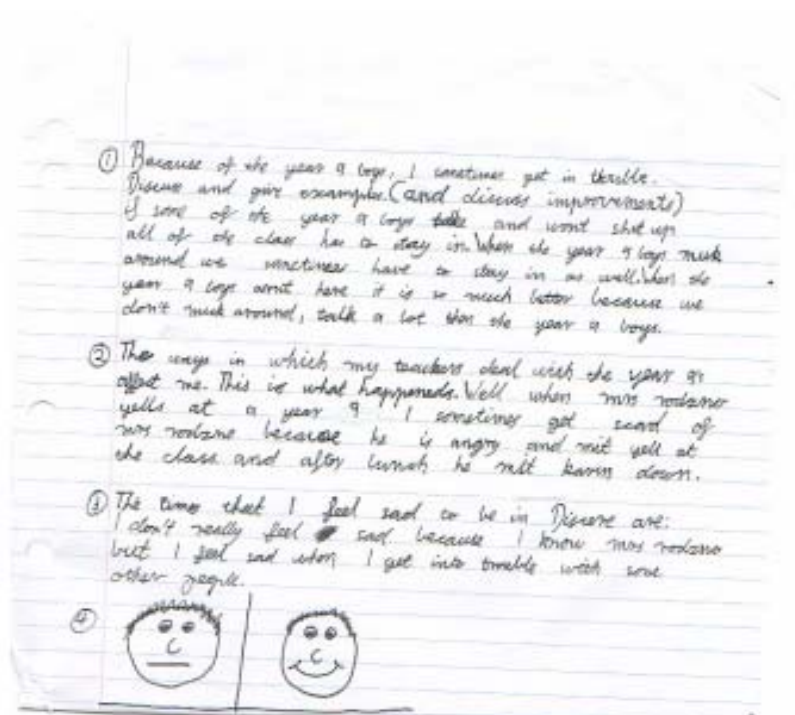
David's transcript:

Because of the year 9 students, I sometimes get in trouble…

"…If some of the year 9 boys don't shut up, the whole class has to stay in. When the year 9 boys want to muck around, we sometimes have to stay in as well. When the year 9 boys are not here, it is much better because we don't muck around, talk a lot when the year 9 boys are not".
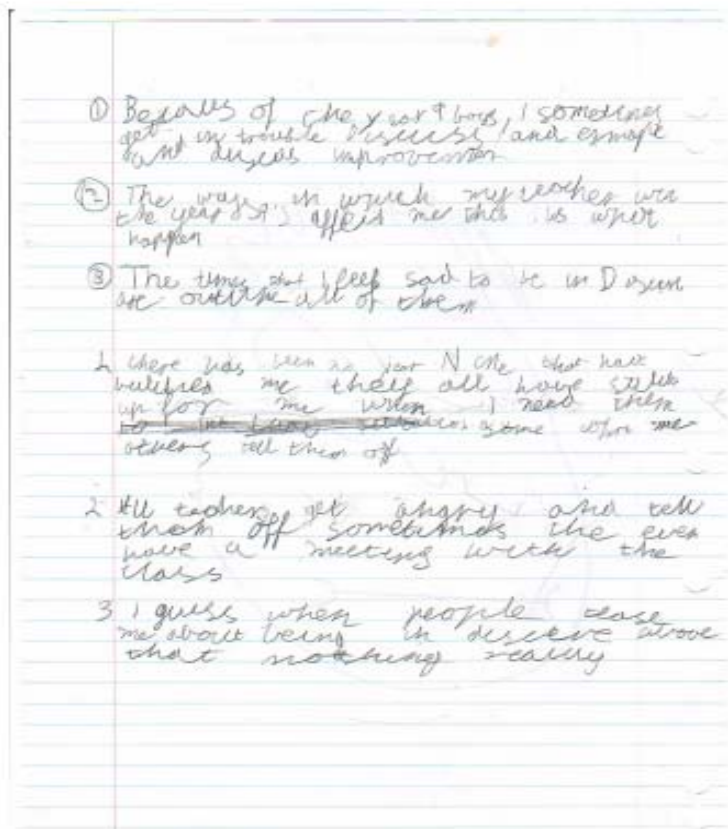
The ways in which my teachers deal with discipline affects me because…

"…Well, when a teacher yells at the year 9's, I sometimes get scared of the teacher because he is angry and after lunch, he has not calmed down".

The times when I feel sad to be in Aprender are when…

"…I don't really feel sad because I know the teachers but I feel sad when I get in trouble with other people"

Figure 18 - Mal

Mal's transcript:

Because of the year 9 students, I sometimes get in trouble…

"There has been no year 9 boys that have bullied me, they all have stuck for me when I needed them. Some teachers tell them off".
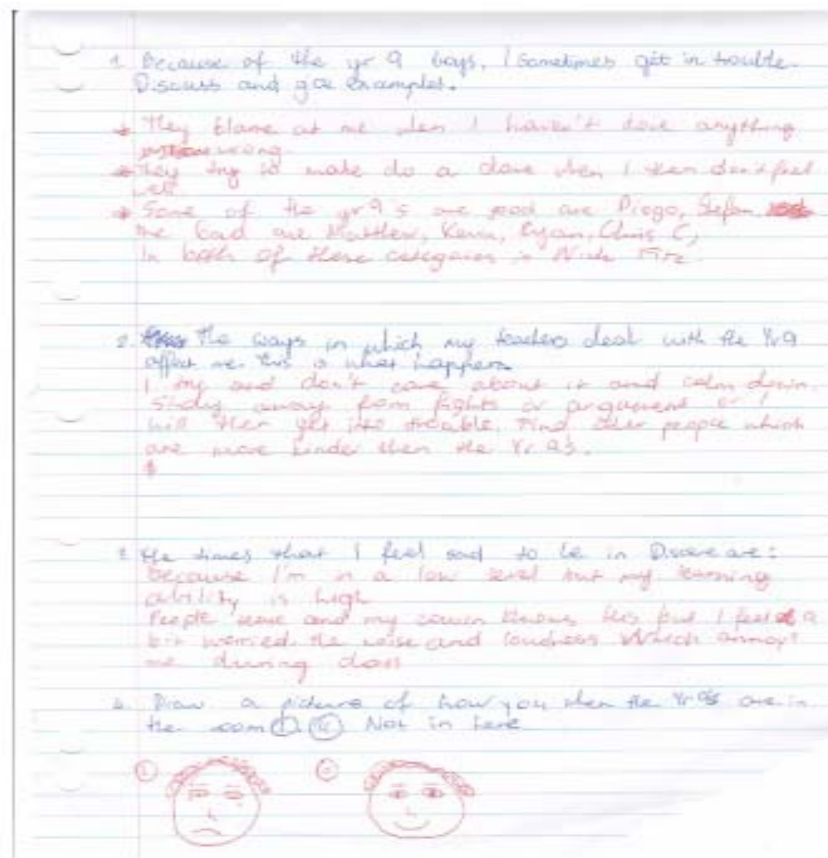
The ways in which my teachers deal with discipline affects me because…

"All teacher always tell them off, some teachers even have meetings with the class"

The times when I feel sad to be in Aprender are when…

"I guess when people tease me about being in Aprender. Apart from that, nothing really"

Figure 19 - Zachary

Zachary's transcript

Because of the year 9 students, I sometimes get in trouble…

"They blame me when I have done nothing wrong, they try to make me do things when I don't feel well. Some of them are good (names some students) and some are bad (names some students)".

The ways in which my teachers deal with discipline affects me because…

"I try and don't care about it, so I calm down. I stay away from fights and arguments or I may get in trouble. I look for other people (to play) but not the year 9's".

The times when I feel sad to be in Aprender are when…

"Because I am in low level and my learning needs to be high, and because of the noise level I sometimes get worried"

Discussion

The data indicate that the needs of both the year 9 students identified as bullies and the participants in the study are relatively different. The tension that exists between the two groups of students is indicative of their differences. So the approaches used to support them need also to be different. What seems to work with one group does not necessarily work with the other, and this may be part of the reason for these ongoing problems.

In the second phase in the research period, approximately five weeks into the research, it seemed that the participants became more interested in discussing their concerns and experiences with me, something that was not occurring as frequently at the beginning. The individual differences that are presented in this study go beyond the learning potential that each individual has, and there are many other aspects of classroom participation that that need to be accounted for when structuring inclusion, such as behaviour. However, the impact of different behaviour practices and the challenges of socialisation that result from such experiences would also be mirrored in mainstream classroom settings. This experience is not specific to the program.

Although the SWSN referred to the year 9 students making trouble for them as a problem, they also suggested that it was the different ways the teachers responded to the behaviour that caused part of the tension. It may also be that what the participants perceived to be bullying is behaviour that other students considered normal. As discussed earlier, some students help themselves to the belongings of other students. This is illustrated in the following observation:

The participants found difficulties with the year 9 students constantly using the SWSN belongings. This includes borrowing and use of rulers, pencils and pens. The perception of this by the SWSN was that this action was bullying, since their belongings were taken with no consent. The other students considered taking someone else's belongings as normal since they saw it as to be returned after use. The expressed notion of the role of the year 9 students and the concept of bullying led to a better understanding of how the students' experiences of perceived bullying as social seclusion are negative aspects affecting the positive experiences that the program sets out to promote [Non-Participant Observation 3, Phase 4].

The approaches used by teachers to deal with the behaviour of students in the classroom were perceived as punishment. However, over time, some more positive relationships began to develop:

It is noted in an observation however that this perception changed as the participants developed better relationships with the year 9 students at the end of the research period [Participant Observation 7, Phase 5].

This was a positive observation since it suggested that appropriate social procedures developed as the participants developed positive relationships.

Despite the identified difficulties of the SWSN in establishing social interactions, the relationship of the students with their peers improved as the researched period came to an end [Non Participant Observation 7, Phase 1].

The students claimed to have learnt about each other and the dynamics and acceptance of their many differences became essential steps in making the program a good learning environment for the students. The students clearly describe their difficulties with some of the older students. They explicitly describe their feelings by suggesting that the year 9 students are directly responsible for making their experiences in Aprender negative at times, and this illustrates levels of exclusion within the secluded environment where Aprender operates.

Exclusion and seclusion: discussion

The issue of exclusion, as an outcome of the seclusion of the Aprender program is of great concern to the practice of inclusiveness in the educational setting. Secluding the students for formal academic instruction clearly leads to their social exclusion and, as indicated by the students in this research, can lead to the development of negative perceptions about the students and their place within the school. Seclusion however, is an impossible aspect to avoid in school settings (Elkins, 2000). Secluding the Aprender students for most of their academic learning is justified by the degree of learning needs presented by the students. However, in applying such seclusion, students experience different levels of social exclusion from the mainstream school. In the case of the school where the program operates, the strict protocol applied to the selection and application procedure for the admission of students into Aprender leads to exclusion of many students, and the procedure indirectly contradicts the inclusive philosophy that the school offers by providing Aprender.

In a sense, Aprender selects its students by discriminating against those considered able to learn in mainstream classes. For those students, seclusion reflects the experience of the SWSN who take part in the program in reverse. The students, however, are very supportive of the notion that Aprender offers them an appropriate learning environment, which may compensate for the concerns about feeling excluded. The development of friendships with other Aprender students is also a positive aspect that supports the overall participation of the students in the school setting. Although the participants are apart from the mainstream school due to the locational seclusion, it is also evident that there are opportunities for interactions with mainstream students to take place. This illustrates

exclusion was actually chosen by the participants, since the option to make friends outside of the program was also available, and in some instances, proved to be a positive experience.

The issue of bullying by some of the year 9 student group from within the program led to two understandings. Primarily, it helped me understand the complexity involved in the practice of inclusion. Whist I assumed that the relationships and development expressed by the students were above all, the most important outcomes of inclusiveness in Aprender, the exclusion within the program that the students voiced in reference to the year 9 students certainly challenged the notion that inclusiveness involves including students without consideration of the behavioural aspects involved in teaching and learning. I identified that the lack of understanding for individual differences and the subsequent tension between the students were aspects of the process of inclusion, and that by the end of the research period, the SWSN were accepted, as they also, identified themselves as members of the Aprender program. Secondly, I gained a deeper insight into the experiences of the SWSN. Their bullying experiences were voiced less and less as the other students became more organised and did not 'borrow' their belongings as regularly.

The restrictions on the participation of SWSN in the extra curricular activities offered by the school community typify the seclusion identified in Aprender, and it is clear the program functions at varying levels of isolation. While the program purports to implement inclusive practice and individualised teaching and learning processes for each student, the experience of the SWSN has revealed a level of exclusion from the practices applied to regular schooling. The program, however, is regarded overall as a positive aspect of school life by the SWSN, and the necessary seclusion experienced by the students does not appear to outweigh the positives previously discussed in the development and relationships themes.

Further, I have identified that in the process of inclusive practice within the program, it is inevitable that both seclusion and exclusion occur. The level of seclusion is reflective of how the program operates. The level of exclusion reflects how the individual student socialises and develops within the school setting. In the experience of the participants, their inclusion and development has been very positive and outweighs the necessary seclusion.

To chapter six

In Chapter Six, I present the next stages of data analysis. In the identification of themes throughout the examination of the data, it became clear that particular participants emerged as key contributors to the study. These students provided the insights into the themes, as they continually shared their experiences and reflections of their school life, and the impact they have on their inclusion as students of both the Aprender program and the wider school community. They have provided key examples that have guided the assumptions made when examining the data. Although many more could have been chosen, it is these students who exemplify the experience of the Aprender participants as members within their school setting.

When working with these students, it becomes obvious that inclusion is not just a theory that must be put into practice, but it is also the realisation that it is the students' experience as their program attempts to facilitate their opportunities to participate and develop accordingly. The next section provides insight into these experiences through the voices of the two students as they journey through the research study.

CHAPTER SIX

STUDENT VOICE: EXPERIENCES OF LIVED INCLUSION

Introduction

After writing the last chapter, and presenting the findings in reference to the themes identified, I decided that in order to answer the research questions more fully, a different interpretation of and perspective on the data were necessary in order to focus more directly on student voice. This chapter therefore focuses on the particular experiences of two SWSN, Marcus and Mal. These students have contributed immensely to our discussions throughout the research and were closely observed during their participation within and outside of the program. Both individually and together, they represent a unique type of student, a SWSN whose needs are significantly different from others. They exemplify the need for an approach to education that aims to support these students by overcoming the difficulties that are experienced in the regular school setting.

I developed a particular interest in these students' social participation in and outside of the classroom setting because their experiences gave insight into the inclusive practices that the students lived. The students give voice to their lived experience that exemplifies the processes involved in the inclusion of SWSN into the regular school setting, particularly as their development appears to have been effective. I use a narrative form to describe their experiences because such an approach allows for the students' voices to tell their story. According to McQueen and Zimmerman (2006), narratives allow researchers to interpret themes and examine experiences by describing the participants' responses as stories. I now present the two students, beginning with Marcus.

Marcus

There was one awards day where I actually received one (an award) for English, and I was very proud of that because English is one subject where I don't do well, and I know that I am getting a distinction towards the end of the year for integrated studies in the area of cooking, and that is my experience of Aprender.
[Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 3 – 8].

Marcus was born prematurely and has developmental problems with his physical growth, as well as speech related and moderate intellectual disabilities. He often reflected upon his educational difficulties with schooling during his earlier years, particularly during the later part of the primary school stages. He indicated that back then, he felt school was unsafe, he was unable to do most of the work given and would also be bullied by other students [Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 213-214; Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 222-231]. It was at this stage that he was referred to an educational psychologist who assessed his learning ability and diagnosed his condition based on results from an educational assessment.

Marcus was awarded funding by the Commonwealth of Australia since it was concluded that he required specialised support systems that address his learning differences as he attends school. Due to his decision to attend his current school, he was initially offered a modified school program that was delivered with an integration aide supporting him to enhance his participation. The supportive integration program was firstly delivered in mainstream classes, and subsequently in the Aprender program during the time of research, because the student and his parents decided that Aprender would support his needs best. This is illustrated in the following:

I: Right, why are you in Aprender?

Marcus: Ah, I really like the program with integrated studies, the ILP, computer literacy and all those new subjects that mainstream don't really have and, I like the opportunities that you have here and that is why I came to Aprender. And more support because I get more attention from the teachers.

I: Why is getting more attention so important?

Marcus: Because in year 7 I really struggled with my work and I feel that (names teachers) are the teachers (giving me) extra attention and this is really helping me because I am getting my work done.

Me: So you would say that teacher relations are really important?

Marcus: Here in the program, yes.

I: When was Aprender introduced here at the school? Do you remember?

Marcus: Not really.

I: Any particular reason why you did not attend Aprender last year?

Marcus: I wanted to see the difference between them, the reason why I didn't attend in year 7 was because my parents wanted mainstream, to see if it was easier, and now I can say that Aprender is better than mainstream.

[Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 15-31].

Marcus entered the program after a referral from mainstream teachers who concluded that unless he was offered intensive support for both numeracy and literacy, he faced the possibility of not grasping the basic functional skills needed for his promotion through different school year levels. Marcus joined the Aprender program because after semester one, he was on the verge of not being promoted from year seven. So he arrived in the program after encountering the mainstream work as difficult, despite the moderation in the differentiation and modification of the curriculum provided. Marcus also had difficulties with school attendance, completion of work and generally perceived school as a negative environment. This is evident from the following:

Marcus: Aprender has been good to me, and you learn a lot more here.

I: In terms of your subjects?

Marcus: Last year was appalling, and this year, I think that I have done much better. I am always improving with my Math. All my subjects have improved and I come to school a lot more too.
[Marcus, Interview 5, Phase 5, Lines 82-85].

Although he was cooperative and attempted the work by following instructions and requesting help from his teachers, Marcus claimed to have had difficulties with school both inside and outside. It was of great concern to Marcus that the transition to secondary school was becoming such a negative experience where, despite the efforts of all involved, the gap between his skills and what was expected at his year level was widening with the danger that it could continue unless special education intervention took place:

Marcus: I needed to be in Aprender because of personal reasons, I fell behind in work.

I: Why?

Marcus: Something that I need to work on.

I: You said that you're here for personal reasons. How is Aprender helping you?

Marcus: Mum and teachers say that I don't get into trouble now

I: How?

Marcus: Here people help you, in mainstream they say do this, but in mainstream they say, go at your own rate.
[Marcus, Interview 1, Phase 2, Lines 217-225].

The experience of receiving modified curriculum whilst others were doing different work, the limited support that Marcus was offered due to limited resources, and the many

different teachers and teaching styles that the regular classroom students experienced (up to 11 different teachers across all subject areas), were factors that significantly interfered with his inclusion in the college, hindering his ability to perform at his best. As a result, Marcus' individual program support group members decided that it would be to his benefit if he were given the opportunity to participate in Aprender on a full time basis. Marcus joined the program and immediately began to show signs of positive development. In an observation, Marcus indicated that in mainstream, he never participated because the other students would often make fun of him. During the class that I observed however, he participated and contributed to the discussion by sharing his experiences as a football player in recent years, completing the given tasks and appearing to be engaged with the requirements of the task [Non Participant Observation Two, Phase 1]. Throughout the research period, he attained many achievements whilst participating in activities in and outside of the classroom.

Marcus' extra-curricular achievements include being awarded merits and distinctions attainment of consistently good grades [Non Participant Observation 1, Phase 2]. A real highlight for him was participation in the school's Public Speaking Competition that resulted in him winning the competition's encouragement award. The following extracts illustrate Marcus' experiences as he participated in the public speaking competition.

The public speaking experience

> As an English teacher in Aprender, I was asked to nominate two speakers to participate in the school's public speaking competition. I selected two boys, one of whom was Marcus. I gave him the invitation.

> Marcus accepted the invitation, however, I had opposition from other staff who felt that giving him the opportunity could backfire and cause conflict, with a possible breakdown of his self-esteem if he did not do well, particularly in front of a large audience. I felt that whatever happened, the way Marcus reacted when told of the opportunity was enough to justify the decision. He said that he would

write out the speech and that he would show it to me to ensure that he had met the competition's requirements.
[Non-Participant Observation 4, Phase 4].

The observation led to two questions about Marcus' experiences in Aprender; firstly I questioned the issue that arose from the other teachers' opposition to Marcus' participation. I wondered whether the program was offering SWSN a false level of success, and secondly, if the purpose of Aprender was in fact to offer opportunities for success by recognising individual achievements in seclusion from the mainstream curriculum. If these were the realities, I wondered if Marcus' experiences would hinder his progress and sense of real achievement?

The questions that emerged from this experience clearly highlight the underpinning perspectives of inclusion. How effectively does inclusion operate for SWSN in any school setting when their needs have to be addressed with substantial modification to ensure their participation? The questions led to further reflection on the role of the school in providing better alternatives for SWSN. It had become clear in my mind at this stage that Aprender was a good alternative for the provision of specialised education, and that although in some ways contradicting the traditional philosophy of the inclusion of all students, the program had developed inclusive practice as its main approach because the students were participating in an environment concerned with offering support structures to enhance learning experience.

The fact that Marcus was a participant in the public speaking event was essentially the result of that inclusive practice, and it was not whether he won or lost that really mattered, it was his participation, regardless of his differences, that justified the program as an educational option for Marcus. Marcus' progress was a lesson for all his teachers that the

approaches used in Aprender were supportive of his needs, and that he was able to participate in an activity once deemed beyond him.

I reached this conclusion as I considered the opposition from the colleague who felt that Marcus' emotional skills seemed fragile and could have been adversely affected by his participation. My conclusion helped my understanding of how Aprender stands apart from both the special school and the regular school setting. It certainly offers aspects of both, yet operates within a system that more realistically represents the broader school system.

Although the SWSN attempt modified work, they still follow the standards set out for all students, and they participate in a school setting that promotes the same outcomes for all students, regardless of their individual differences. Marcus' achievement and success in his personal development was evident because he could represent his grade, he also had the opportunity to win the competition, and was able to celebrate his lived experience proudly with an audience who equally gained from the experience. When he won the award, he showed that his efforts were truly recognised and celebrated. This was exemplified in the following:

The experience of support from the Aprender program

> Marcus was keen to let his class know that the next week, he would be representing them in the public speaking competition. He was excited and wished to practice the speech in front of the class. Although and probably in need of a different choice of vocabulary to enhance his expression, Marcus' speech is one of the most sincere I have ever heard from a boy of his age. He spoke about being short in stature, having being born prematurely, having problems with remembering and failing most subjects in year 7. To start with I felt hollow, hopeless and helpless as I sat next to him. I then looked around the room to see many smiles of support. One student said "at least you are not almost blind", and the rest of the class laughed. Marcus was the king of his class that day as he had the support that he needed. The boys applauded him and

showed the appreciation that they had for him. It was the best experience for anyone in any way involved in the program. From this point on the rest of the class was good. The boys asked that they be given the opportunity to write out a speech instead of working on the text recount that I had requested two lessons ago. Following Marcus' example, they too wanted to express themselves publicly, and when given the opportunity, they did it well.

[Participant Observation 1, Phase 5].

My reflection on the event is easily described. It was the best day I had had in a long time. I felt that this was what the program stood for, to provide opportunities for SWSN to participate and achieve within the school setting. The boys work hard and appreciated their opportunities. Marcus won the encouragement award and was regarded highly by teachers, parents and students who had not had contact with him prior to the night. In some ways, it was this event that gave others a different perspective of Aprender. By his participation, Marcus had it made that his role as student was greater than being just an Aprender student, he was a member of the wider school community.

Just as importantly, Marcus steadily improved his basic literacy and numeracy skills in the classroom. During an observation in his English class, I recorded the following:

The students were asked to read out their completed homework. A designed competition between year 7 and 8 students means that the boys are eager to do as best as they possibly can. Marcus read out very well. His essay was positively structured and fluent. He appeared happy to read. All the boys were happy to listen to his reading. This is a magical experience for Marcus whose self-esteem has grown since the beginning of the current year. The rest of the boys were equally happy with the decision of having a competition between year levels. In some cases, there were smiles, whilst others looked confused. All the students seemed extremely keen for their group to win the days' homework check up. When asked about the effects of the homework competition on the boys and their learning, the students suggested that at least this way they were encouraged to participate in the classroom. A student said that it was hard to do homework unless you have something to go for and get out of the experience.

[Non-Participant Observation 7, Phase 3].

The significance of this example is in the influence of Aprender in Marcus'

educational life. Clearly, this is evidence that Marcus was showing a new level of confidence with his academic abilities as well as feeling comfortable to express himself publicly. Undoubtedly he achieved much of this because of his effort and approach to school. But just as importantly was the influence of the Aprender program as the provider of different alternatives to enable Marcus to learn.

Although he has achieved remarkably well in the Aprender program, there were several occasions where Marcus found his differences reason for disengagement. As noted in the previous chapter, he had a problem with personal hygiene due to an inability to control the passing of urine, which led to difficulties with other students who complained and embarrassed him.

> Due to the complaints of some students, and the concern of some teachers, I was asked to speak to the boys in reference to personal hygiene. This was initially a general discussion but soon focused on the concerns upheld by the teachers, as two of the students in Aprender were experiencing difficulties with personal hygiene. One of those boys was Marcus who resentfully was unable to deal with the negativity involved in the general discussion. My observation of the event was clear, the boys knew who was to blame and some pointed the finger with no hesitation. At this very negative experience, I responded by finishing the discussion with the class and indicating that I would speak to individuals separately.

[Participant Observation 5, Phase 2].

This event was significant for the inclusion of Marcus because of the difficulties he faced with his own differences. More importantly, it indicated that despite the safe haven that Aprender had created for Marcus and the other SWSN, some of the differences that the individual students presented were difficult for others to accept and understand. Despite this however, Marcus claimed to have been happy in the program and willing to continue his education there.

> *Me: Is Aprender helping your education?*
>
> *216AR: Yes because Aprender is preparing us, growing up here has helped me a lot. It has helped me to become more confident and I want to be here.*

[Interview 1, Phase 5, Line 215-217].

Marcus' story is representative of the experience of inclusive practice because he was able to participate, develop, and be a part of a school system that embraced his differences and provide him with the opportunity to undertake his formal education effectively. While there were many instances when Marcus experienced difficulties related to his differences, overall he was successful in achieving considerable development under the support and guidance that Aprender offered. I now present Mal, the other case study.

Mal

I selected Mal's story for similar reasons to Marcus' experiences. He too has been able to engage in the frameworks offered within the Aprender program, participating and developing within the school. Mal is a student with multiple and diverse differences that have made his regular schooling difficult.

> *Me: Has your experience in Aprender been affected by bullying?*
>
> *Mal: Yes it has, it has a little bit, when I have been bullied, today (names student) picked on me before recess and the teacher (names teacher) asked me to move. It was unfair because it wasn't my fault, and um, he told the teacher that it was my fault and it wasn't.*

[Interview 1, Phase 1, Lines 199-204].

Mal has a developmental condition that impedes a balanced growth of both his legs. This means that one leg has grown differently from the other and this has severely affected his knees and their role in his stance and physical movement. This makes both sides of Mal's body stand unevenly, and requires constant surgery to ease the growth pains and

complications from lack of exercise, sporting participation and just difficulties with everyday physical functions. He is also partly blind which affects his ability to focus and follow text when he reads. Mal has difficulties with his short-term memory as he is not able to recount and process all oral information. This means that unless the information is provided in short segments, Mal fails to process and understand information with continuity. In addition, Mal was diagnosed with an intellectual disability, with the attendant complications discussed in Chapter Two.

Despite the degree of difficulties that Mal experiences at school as a result of his differences, he consistently shows that he is committed to doing all he can in order to achieve. In reviewing his participation in Aprender, it becomes clear that the effort made in class emphasises his ability to respond to the challenges encountered in his participation, as he continually attempts all given work with interest. If students were to be rated according to effort, Mal would be top of any list. He joined the program upon confirming his enrolment in the college. At that time I was advised that his needs were substantial and that his placement in the program was necessary from his first day of school. In fact, Mal was one of the original Aprender students, boys that have attended the program for all of their middle school years in the school. He was the first year seven enrolled in the program and a student who helped shape the framework underpinning the program. Mal's primary school support group (primary school teachers, parents and educational psychologist) effectively provided all the Aprender teachers with relevant information about how Mal responded to different special education approaches, suggesting that he was receptive to any help and did not have concerns about doing modified work [Program Support Group Meeting Minutes, Term 1, 2003]. This information ensured that Mal actively enjoyed the benefits of learning under the supportive structures offered in Aprender. He participated in the program by making remarkable

progress with his basic literacy skills, ability to socialise with others and developing confidence to actively participate in groups and class discussions.

> *Me: Do you think that you have improved your learning?*
>
> *Mal: I do heaps of good work now. My parents are always happy with me. I think that I can read better and I can even help my little brother with his homework.*

[Interview 1, Phase 5, Lines 220-222]

Outside the classroom, Mal experienced the opportunity of assisting in the coaching of the year 7 basketball team. As mentioned earlier, this happened because despite the difficulties with his physical condition, Mal had a remarkable level of knowledge about the game of basketball, and also had the ability to relate to the players who welcomed his participation. This is exemplified in the following extract:

Mal and coaching

Mal was given the opportunity to assist the coaching of the year 7 basketball team. As the coach, I asked him to talk to the players during time outs and then had a conversation with him on the way back to school (in the bus). This is how he reflected on his experience:

> *I: How did you feel while coaching?*
>
> *Mal: Good, maybe I can be the new coach for all the teams (smiles). I liked it, and thanks for letting me do it.*
>
> *I: Did the boys listen to you?*
>
> *Mal: Yeah, only... (names one boy) didn't listen. All the others did.*
>
> *I: What would you change if you had the chance to do so?*
>
> *Mal: Nothing, I think that I coached well.*

I: Has Aprender helped your confidence to talk to other students that are not in the program?

Mal: Yes, yeah.

I: Why and how?

Mal: Because I don't care if they like me or not because they're not in the program. If they're not in Aprender than I don't have to worry but if they like me then at least I have new friends.

I: Are other school students different to Aprender students?

Mal: Yes.

I: How?

Mal: They don't have laptops, and they are always doing heaps of homework. I don't think that it is easier in Aprender, but I think that it helps when you get little homework. They don't have good teachers like us
.
I: What do you mean?

Mal: The Aprender teachers care for you. All the other (mainstream) students always say bad things about the teachers. We don't do that in Aprender.

[Non-Participant Observation 5, Phase 2].

The role that Mal played in the research was significant. As can be seen from the above extract, he had the ability to make the most of his opportunities, exemplified in his participation as assistant coach of the team despite his differences. He was happy to be involved in the sport in some way, even if not as a player. As a participant, he contributed to all interviews and discussions, and displayed a degree of comfort in describing his educational experiences. Mal clearly enjoyed his role as member of the Aprender program, and was able to participate and achieve within the school setting. As noted throughout the data, he showed remarkable progress during the research period, particularly as he increased his learning skills by planning his future adult life and inquiring about possible career options.

What are you planning to do when you finish school?

Probably work with my dad (building developer). I may be a mechanic because I like cars. I want to do up a Lexus or get a brand new Alfa Romeo Spider.

Do you think that school is helping you to get there?

Yes because being in Aprender means getting more help than in mainstream. I also learn by doing the Independent Learning Project. Next year, I am going to do a car manual to teach kids to fix them (cars).
[Interview 1, Phase 3, Lines 5-10].

This was a solid advancement in his thinking, since being only in year 8 to have thoughts about future career aspirations can be seen as positive. What was surprising was that Mal had a realistic approach to his planning, recognised his differences (and dislikes), and expressed the wish to embark on an apprenticeship as motor mechanic or builder. He noted that he disliked reading and much preferred to work on cars, concluding that it would be only logical to follow his interests.

Mal faced multiple issues that could have hindered his role as member of the school and overall participation as a student. His sight problem meant having to wear "thick glasses" which unfortunately led to some bullying from some of the other students. This is exemplified in the following:

Mal come to see me today and told me that he had a headache. I was concerned because of his experiences of last semester; a time when his headache meant that he was in some way feeling uncomfortable at school. He came to see me at the end of last semester to tell me that he was not enjoying school anymore. He had been victimised severely by two other boys in the program and this had caused him to hate school. He felt that although the teachers had interfered and suggested that the bullies stopped, others had began to tease him as well. The bullying was due to his glasses, speech and inability to play sport (he has a metal brace inserted in his knee to avoid fracture of soft joints). This semester, or at least during the last 3 days, he has been very happy. He told me that he was glad to be in Aprender and that his new contact lenses were making him feel a lot

better. He stated that his headache was because of the new lenses, and I suggested that he did not read during class. He looked at me and smiled. He then said, "so you won't let me go home this time?" and I responded, "how can I when you compliment this program so well!" He smiled again and said, "thank you".

[Participant Observation 2, Phase 1, Lines 1-12].

A greater concern was that Mal requested the use of contact lenses and during the transition between his normal lenses to the new contacts, he suffered from headaches, was unable to participate in games and found classroom involvement even more challenging.

Although he had never attended mainstream classes at the school, Mal was aware of the challenging differences between the program and mainstream because a member of his family was also a student of the school. So he witnessed the level of work and intensity of the tasks when they were not delivered in modified or differentiated form. Mal suggested that contrary to his experiences in the program, mainstream work seemed harder and far more demanding

Me: Why are you happy to be in Aprender?

Mal: Because I get to be friends with everyone here. The teachers are good to me and I do less work than mainstream. My brother does 2 hours of homework every night, and I only do 30 minutes or so.

[Mal, Interview 1, Phase 3, Lines 1-4].

I chose to describe Mal and his lived experience because he exemplifies the SWSN that the program aims to support. Inevitably, Mal still faced the difficulties that SWSN are bound to experience in any school system. However, it was his ability to overcome these difficulties whilst participating in the Aprender program that enabled his remarkable progress across academic, social and emotional development. For Mal, despite his differences, the

program's structure allowed him to participate, develop and enjoy his place as a member of the program and the regular school system.

The experiences presented in this chapter outline the importance of accommodating all students within appropriately structured learning settings. For both Marcus and Mal, Aprender has contributed towards their development as students at their respective stage of schooling. They have suffered exclusion and need to be secluded for their academic learning, yet have developed positive attitudes towards school and take part as active participants in what the school has to offer. They describe their successes as a direct outcome of their involvement and participation in Aprender, suggesting that it is such experience that accounts for their overall development.

I now move to discussing my own journey in the attempt to understand inclusive practice within the lived experience recorded in this research study. In Chapter Seven, the concluding chapter of this thesis, I review the research findings and answer the research questions. Through this, I reach conclusions about the Aprender program and what it represents. I then make recommendations for the program, and conclude with a personal reflection on the research.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUDING THE JOURNEY

Introduction

This chapter concludes the journey, where the recorded lived experience of the participants provides answers to the research questions. The research study has documented the experiences of the participants in their school setting. It has inquired into the participation of the students as they participate in the Aprender program. The previous chapter provided an insight into two of the students' lived experiences, where data were used to illustrate what they encountered as members of their school setting. I now move to answer the research questions.

The research questions

The research study was designed and structured to document the experiences of particular SWSN as they undertake the processes of inclusion as it occurs within the frameworks structuring the Aprender program. I attempted to gain an understanding of how the processes developed and how they impacted upon the experiences of the participants. The research questions for this study are:

1. Are SWSN socially included in the Aprender program? If so, how?
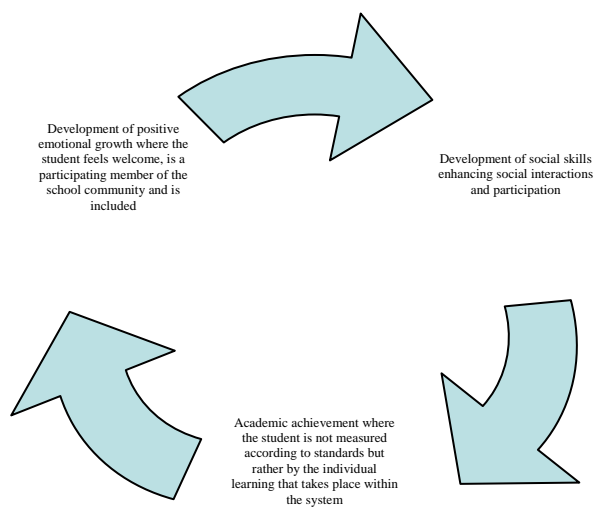

This initial question examines the possibility of social inclusion occurring under the structures of the program, suggesting that if inclusion is experienced, the processes should be able to be researched. I firstly examined school-based literature about the program, and then used observation and questioning through surveys and interviews to gather an understanding of how inclusion was practiced by the school, and more importantly, how it was in turn experienced by the students. The findings suggest that aspects of inclusion in Aprender are indeed experienced by the students because they are able to participate in the life of the school as active members of the community. The student participation and experiences were examined by focusing on social aspects of inclusion. The data showed that as the participants participate and have the opportunities to experience social inclusion, they develop relationships that clearly enhance their emotional and academic progress. The findings support the notion that the program provides opportunities for the students to experience inclusion and participate accordingly because it is the individual who is the integral element in the design and development of the educational program.

Although the experience of the students is generally positive, I also found that the participation of students within Aprender is hindered by varying degrees of seclusion both within the program and the school setting. The data indicate that SWSN experienced a positive level of inclusion in Aprender because of their involvement in the program. It is inclusive practice that determined the overall experience of the students in reference to their learning processes, and they have opportunities not only to participate but to achieve. However, the students were not always able to participate fully in certain aspects of the school life, particularly when there was lack of modifications to activities for the

participation of the students. In such cases, the students were unable to participate in physical activities or could not relate to the social practices taking place amongst mainstream students.

The participants made clear the importance and relevance of the teachers in the processes of inclusive practice, clearly indicating that relationships built between teachers and students, together with the relationships developed with other students, both those attending the program and those who make up the regular school system, are key aspects supporting the development of the individual within the structures underpinning Aprender. Relationships are of great importance in the development of students in the school setting. The data identify this in the different facets of development that the SWSN experienced during the research period. It can be concluded that for these students, development in the program follows a pattern where positive emotional growth leads to their ability to socialise and integrate within the school system. This facilitates their ability to develop academically, and as the cycle continues, students experience development within the structures of inclusive practice offered in the program. Figure 10 illustrates this pattern:

Figure 20 – The cycle of progress as experienced by the participants

Development of positive emotional growth where the student feels welcome, is a participating member of the school community and is included

Development of social skills enhancing social interactions and participation

Academic achievement where the student is not measured according to standards but rather by the individual learning that takes place within the system

I reached these conclusions as I became aware of the success that each student had experienced within the three facets of development that I identified in the data. Based on this, it is clear that multifaceted levels of inclusion are expressed in Aprender. They are experienced whenever an individual student is able to appropriately participate, individually develop and actively hold a place in a community that embraces his significance and differences. As mentioned earlier, it is clear that the academic development that the individual student makes cannot be measured against a cohort standard, and an exploration of that dimension was never the aim of this study. The participants experienced their education positively in Aprender because they were given an opportunity for success consistent with their own potential. This occurred in an environment where the key determiner outlining success was what the student had achieved rather than what the student was not able to do. Key aspects of development experienced were the socialisation processes and the emotional growth that each SWSN expressed.

So in answer to the first research question: the students are socially included in the school setting within Aprender, and that this inclusion underpins the emotional and academic development that were experienced during the research period amongst the participants. Social and emotional skills are considered vital in the development of the SWSN in school settings (Jobling and Gavidia-Payne, 2002; Goleman, 2004; Meese, 2001), and such a perspective is identified in the results presented in this study. As the students identified themselves as members of their school, they experienced success that went beyond their social inclusion. Here, they developed good emotional skills and achieved academically. The second question focused on the multifaceted levels of inclusion identified in the study.

2. What are the inclusive experiences of SWSN as members of the Aprender program?

The second question gave rise to the following sub-questions:

- What are the experiences of inclusion for SWSN within the program?

- How is the individual SWSN included outside of the program, in the regular school setting?

- How does inclusion influence the school participation and development of the individual student within and outside of the program?

The SWSN have indicated that their experiences in reference to inclusion are generally optimistic and positive. Although there were instances presented in Chapter Five (exclusion and bullying) which could challenge this perspective, these students would have traditionally had difficulties with socialisation (Elkins, 2002). Yet the Aprender program has successfully established a system whereby SWSN are exposed to social experiences within a classroom setting that supports their social and academic development. The SWSN are encouraged to participate within the life of a greater school community where they are identified as students of the regular school. Social development has occurred amongst all the students inside the classroom because the individual has been able to embrace the opportunities to develop relationships with the teachers and other students. This has encouraged a new perspective of the value of school amongst the SWSN participating in the study, and further justifies the operation of the program as an alternative to mainstream schooling within the regular school setting.

Clearly, the data point to positive social development that the students experienced within Aprender. Even when instances of bullying occurred because of the students' perceived differences, they consistently claimed that they enjoyed being a part of the college. Aprender operates in locational seclusion from the rest of the school yet the students report that they have developed good friendships with students outside Aprender. This happened because the SWSN enjoyed the opportunity to be participant members of their school, creating relationships with other students whose interests and perspectives were in common, that existed beyond the obvious differences that traditionally had labelled the participants. It was apparent that there was a high degree of tolerance and acceptance of the SWSN by the others. This is very positive as it is the essential factor enhancing the social inclusion of SWSN.

The opportunities for inclusion that the SWSN experienced from a social perspective in Aprender describe the practice of school inclusiveness for all students and, as presented in Chapter Four, this is a goal of the school where the program functions. Although there is concern with the inevitable experience of seclusion created by the program's physical isolation, and this creates some difficulties with the socialisation processes between the SWSN and some students attending mainstream classes, the documented experience of inclusion suggests that the value of relationships is highly relevant to the life of the student and the individual's school development. Based on these findings, I consider that Aprender does in fact offer the SWSN the opportunity to develop socially. Although the study has overwhelmingly endorsed the effectiveness of the program, there is always room for improvement in any system. Based on these findings, it is clear that Aprender fulfils most aspects considered vital for the inclusion of SWSN. As pointed out in chapter 2, SWSN need to be offered an appropriate level of instruction, must experience social interactions and need

to develop social, academic and emotional skills (Beveridge, 1999; Elkins, 2002: Goleman, 2004; Meese, 2001). Despite the success of the students, and their development as participants in the school setting, there are clear areas where Aprender fails to include holistically. I now move into discussing my recommendations as a result of such findings.

Recommendations

The recommendations are discussed in terms of firstly the Aprender program, secondly the school setting where the program operates and lastly the educational approaches for all students, particularly SWSN, learning in regular inclusive settings. Based on the findings from the study and my own involvement as program director, I offer the following:

1. In order to continue to develop a positive culture of inclusion, the school must promote what Forlin (2006) identified as the positive appropriate application of inclusive practice, a multi-faceted approach to include SWSN in regular school settings. Based on the findings, I conclude that inclusive practice is the result of the attempt to encourage the participation and achievement of the individual student regardless of their potential and differences. Since inclusion implies that the individual student must learn within the regular system, assuming that the same curriculum goals can be delivered to all students, then schools should incorporate the implementation of strategies and systems that will deliver these goals. Whether it is by implementing full time special programs, part time programs offering mainstreaming or integration perspectives, regular schooling with learning support or itinerant assistance (Ashman & Elkins, 2002; Beveridge, 1999), schools should implement a system that best meets the requirements of the individual student. From

this perspective, the offering of a full time special program like Aprender should not be regarded as a step back towards mainstreaming, but rather a positive option to promote inclusive practice more appropriately. The strategies used in Aprender to develop emotional skills, social opportunities and academic progress ensure that the SWSN are not "mainstreamed" within the school setting, but rather that they are given the best possible learning environment to meet their individual's needs.

2. If teaching SWSN involves an understanding that development occurs holistically across the social, emotional and academic dimensions, then student plans must include strategic integration and inclusion pathways that address and identify individual goals for the achievement of individual success. Students, particularly SWSN, need to be offered realistic programs that will allow their differences to be addressed. As Elkins (2002) noted, schools must ensure that they effectively differentiate among students so that they are given appropriate access to common goals. In the case of Aprender, this does occur since the individual student is offered a system that caters to his own needs.

3. The success of SWSN cannot be entirely measured against specific standards that focus on academic development. It has been the experience of the SWSN in this study that their inclusion involved social and emotional development, and that academic success was not necessarily achieved through graded results from the learning environment, but rather from their opportunity to learn; the chance to actively participate in a classroom that facilitated and invited the students' involvement and the opportunity to do this in a regular school setting with other students whose needs are different. As the SWSN endeavoured to achieve to their optimum ability, they

experienced academic development regardless of whether this achievement was reflective of the standards applicable to their year level or not. This is not to suggest that SWSN should not be challenged academically; it is clear that this is an essential element in the teaching of SWSN in regular schools. My recommendation is that the SWSN be given the opportunity to develop according to their own needs and abilities, and that their success be measured in accordance to their emotional, social and academic progress. These three aspects must drive the students' individualised approaches to learning. This perspective is strongly supported by Ashman and Elkins (2002) who suggest that SWSN require individualised learning approaches.

4. Since the teaching of SWSN is not just based on academic development and the study has highlighted the importance of relationships, teaching SWSN is clearly not the responsibility of the special education teacher alone. Rather, it must be a collaborative approach of the school community to ensure that SWSN are taught in inclusive and inviting settings. It must be noted however, that for the SWSN to develop across all areas, the learning environment must be familiar to the students. This may be difficult to achieve in the secondary school setting due to the large number of teachers who teach specialised subjects. The Aprender program provides a small number of teachers to teach SWSN. Based on the students' responses, I recommend that any teaching of SWSN in a regular classroom or special program in a regular school setting involve the support for teaching by a number of teachers who are familiar to the students and who have positive relationships with them. With a nucleus of a small number of teachers, any program could facilitate such a setting. However, since the teaching of SWSN should not be the sole responsibility of special education teachers (French, Sands & Kozleski, 2000) the development of curriculum and strategies to

improve the program must be done in collaboration, involving all members of the school community. It is clear that having familiar teachers exposes the students to familiar teaching styles and improves the capacity to develop strong bonds between teachers and students. This does not, in any way, take away the role of other teachers and students in the school setting, as they facilitate the opportunities for the social sphere of inclusion. However, it ensures that inclusion is the responsibility of all members of the school community, yet also ensures that classroom teaching is delivered in a manner familiar to the students.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the documented data showed that there is an element of exclusion that Aprender students can experience due to the program's isolation. It is for this reason that I recommend that SWSN be included within the whole school community and that all members of the school community are in many ways involved with the program. This can be enabled by educating the school community on the importance of the program in providing positive learning options for students, educating the school community of the differences that some students present by celebrating their individual achievements and by implementing some of the useful strategies used in Aprender from which all students could benefit, such as, independent learning projects, as discussed in the literature (Ashman & Elkins, 2002; Meese, 2001). Evidently in the data, student achievement and experience of recognition based on positive experiences aids the learning of the SWSN, and in reverse, mainstream students learn to appreciate the efforts of their SWSN school peers.

5. All students have identifiable strengths and these must always be celebrated if the students are to engage in the school setting positively. It is necessary to identify those strengths and to cherish the contribution that each student offers to the make up of the school setting. This perspective is supported by the practice of Multiple Intelligence theory (Gardner, 1999), as each SWSN has a preferred learning style based on an interest that brings relevance to his learning. Such an approach is also realised through the implementation of Vygotski's zone of proximal development (Vygotski, 1978). It is necessary that SWSN learn from a point of strength, and that assessment of their progress does not solely involve the aim of "repairing" their deficits, but rather incorporating their strengths to support their needs.

6. Bullying was experienced by some SWSN during the research period. It is necessary that schools offer inclusive practices that focus on strategies that help students to experience effective positive relationships, regardless of their individual differences. A key strategy is ensuring that all students are exposed to the strengths of the individual, and that ignorance about certain conditions be eliminated through whole school teaching. Although bullying was experienced by the participants, the study found that the SWSN were able to work through this effectively, as with the progression of time, bullying was reportedly ended. This is partly the outcome of the strong stance that the school takes on eliminating bullying, and the ability of students to overcome differences. A school system needs to ensure that these issues are dealt with each individual, and that the goal is not only to protect the SWSN from the bully but rather to empower SWSN to identify strategies to overcome the problem. According to Koller, Baumert, Ludtke, and Trautwein (2006), emotional skills have implications for academic development, suggesting that the learning environment

determines the development of the individual's academic skills and subsequent learning. Considering the role of all students in promoting inclusive practice, I recommend that students are educated on the value of the individual from a point of strength, ensuring that a culture of acceptance is reached through an understanding of the different learning conditions that exist in any school setting. This will help ensure that the learning environment is positive and supportive of the needs of all students.

7. The lived experience and student voice as documented in this study must be taken into account as the program is shaped and reshaped to ensure its success in educating SWSN. On-going research needs to be undertaken in order to identify the best ways that academic, social and emotional development are enhanced amongst SWSN in the school setting allows the student voice to be heard.

8. In order to practice inclusion, Aprender has applied elements of seclusion for the students. Since the aim of the program is to inclusively educate all students, regardless of their differences, the rest of the school now needs to practice the emotional and social aspects of education that so successfully have included SWSN in the program. If this becomes common practice, any student, regardless of any identified special need, will have the opportunity to be educated in any classroom as it will be enhanced in practice to support all individuals to meet the common goals set out by the curriculum. The recommendation is therefore to adopt and practice the Aprender approach in all classrooms, as VELS dimensions encourage.

In summary, I believe that all schools need to practice what takes place in Aprender at all levels. If this is not possible, there is a need to have special programs such as Aprender

functioning within the regular school. In this study, all the participants engaged with their schooling because of the opportunities offered in the program. Ultimately, this is the aim of all education, to make a difference in the life of all students, regardless of their differences. If inclusion ensures that participation occurs for students, it is highly likely that inclusive practice will ensure the best possible experience for the students.

Students with special needs, inclusion and my personal journey in Aprender

The most powerful experience for me as an educator has been the exposure to the lived experience that the students shared during the collection of this data. It was a powerful experience for me as teacher and researcher to document and analyse the students both as members of the Aprender program and the school setting where the program operates. The research experience exposed me to the many realities that exist in the practices and processes underpinning the program. I often felt empowered by the students' honest perspectives on their realities because these allowed me to develop a better understanding of their differences and their participation in this school system. This has had an invaluable impact on my continuous development as an educator keen to work with students from their point of individual differences and strengths. The SWSN in this research study invited me into their lives and allowed me to actively witness their development, whilst continually reminding me of the reasons why teaching is so important to me personally. As I examined individuals 'under the microscope', not only did I find their likely difficulties, but the beauty that each one offered as individual. More importantly, my experience as a researcher in this study has reasserted the belief that teaching SWSN in any school setting involves catering to the individual needs of the students, identifying their strengths and valuing their progress regardless of how limited the advancement may be when addressing any standardised guiding frameworks.

My journey as researcher began with great curiosity. It was important for me to understand how education is practiced in Aprender, and how the students experienced their participation within the program. It was challenging to learn that a traditional implementation of the practice of inclusion, as described in current literature (Beveridge, 1999; Elkins, 2002), is perhaps not the best way to describe how the Aprender students experience their participation in the program. In some ways, I was initially looking for reassurance that the program was doing what it claimed to do for SWSN from the perspective of inclusion. Prior to my participation and contribution within the program, I was always surprised to witness the expressions of SWSN whose needs and differences had became accepted reasons for school failure and personal disappointment. As they became more and more comfortable with their participation in the Aprender program, they exemplified positive degrees of involvement and this had a great impact on the collection of data for the study. I was initially interested in knowing how appropriately the program represented a vehicle for the inclusion of the participants in their school. I became satisfied with the realisation that at least during the research period, the program seemed to have emphasised inclusive practice as the underpinning perspective determining its approaches and practice.

Despite the negative aspects of bullying, the varying levels of seclusion that the participants are exposed to and the extensive need to modify and differentiate curriculum to ensure that the students participate in the academic aspects of school, the students were always happy to attend their classes and experienced inclusion in an environment that provided them with support in an inviting manner. I have reached a realisation that in the attempt to offer inclusion to the students, the Aprender program became the means by which the school offered the multi-faceted level of inclusive practice that Forlin (2006) argues to be

the only way to offer inclusion to all SWSN effectively. I was able to distinguish between what is inclusion and what is inclusive practice based on what I experienced as teacher and researcher in this study. I learnt a lot about myself in this study. I learnt to understand the importance that the program has for me personally as I reflected upon my past experiences as student but also reached the understanding that individual differences are vital to the make up of any school setting.

During the research period, I reflected on the experiences by reviewing the field notes on a daily basis to document the data. The findings recorded in my journal entries after conducting interviews, experiencing participant and non-participant observations, conducting surveys and whilst holding casual discussions with the participants, are very powerful tools that have increased my understanding of how inclusion drives appropriate education for all students. Quite simply, such tools taught me about what are the important aspects in the processes of inclusive education: the teaching of the student as an individual, the importance of developing good relationships that will ensure that the path towards achievement is undertaken, and equally importantly, the provision of a challenging curricula that will not just engage the individual in learning, but will empower the student as an effective learner. By researching the participants and their experiences, I learnt to listen.

Effective listening is something that I have recognised as a personal difficulty in past years so the research experience for me has improved my interpersonal skills as an educator. I have reached a new understanding of inclusion and of my role as a teacher since I began my doctoral studies. I clearly understand that the socialisation sphere of inclusion is important in the process yet can also conclude that it may not be of benefit to the development of the student unless it is a part of a bigger process. It is important to value inclusive practice from a

point of academic, emotional and social development, and this cannot be achieved unless the inclusive process is able to provide good relationships which welcome the student as an individual and celebrates his or her differences individually and collectively as a member of their school setting.

I have learnt to identify aspects of school that were once unnoticeable to me. In reflection, I can identify that it was the academic development of the students that drove my passion for education and this narrow perspective has since changed. I have learnt to identify the importance of the social and emotional aspects that enhance the individual student's participation in the school setting. I also identified that the experience of seclusion is an aspect closely linked to inclusion. I described this as a theme because as the students enjoyed participating in the program, they also experienced aspects of isolation from the mainstream school setting. This is exemplified as the SWSN seem more likely to be teased and bullied by their mainstream school peers.

Individual human differences interfere with what happens in and outside of the inclusive school system, and since the SWSN in this research were 'put under the microscope' in this regard, it became more evident to me that inclusive experience occurs differently for different students. The participants still have substantial differences, and they still need to attempt a modified curriculum, but they do it with the understanding that school is a relevant place for them. They still have levels of difficulty when attempting to learn and dislike having to undertake reading recovery style lessons which highlight their needs. They claim that they dislike many aspects of mainstream school, yet they attend school happily because they feel that Aprender supports their individual differences.

The journey ends

The journey ends with the conclusions I have reached about the impact that Aprender has had on the SWSN and how their experiences have impacted my teaching and appreciation for the education of SWSN. It has been a long journey, one that opened my eyes to the many realities about the educational pathways available for SWSN. The students in the study provided clear insights into their world, and as time progressed, it became clearer that their objectives were not necessarily the same as those imposed by the system providing them with their education. Overall, the students expressed admiration for their teachers and fellow students, indicating that Aprender had provided a much better option than had been offered to them in previous years. The students also expressed their interest in achieving academically, suggesting that they had improved across the academic aspects of school.

From my perspective, the methodology and data analysis used in the study has equipped me with a new skill, the ability to inquire into the processes that occur in my own classroom. Despite the strong connection and subjective closeness that I experienced with the program, and the effects that such conditions had on the research study, I have learnt to question a system that does not always consider what I have determined to be the three most important aspects of education:

- Equity and justice for all students, regardless of their differences;
- The need for appropriate support to ensure that common and individual goals are achieved by all students, regardless of their differences;

- The provision of opportunities to develop holistically, because all students can learn – emotional, social and academic development aspects are all part of the learning processes.

The research study has clearly illustrated the differences that exist between the theoretical frameworks and practical applications underpinning inclusion. In this particular study, it became clear that in order to achieve inclusion, a level of seclusion had to be experienced by the SWSN from others in the school community This seeming paradox enables Aprender to operate as a system that encourages SWSN to enjoy the social customs that the greater school offers. It encourages the individual to develop through independent learning plans targeting individual goals, and offers many opportunities by which any SWSN can find success.

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Appendix 1

⊕ACU National

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Copy for Participant to keep

TITLE OF PROJECT: Practising inclusionwithin the regular school setting: students with special needs and their Aprender experience

SUPERVISORY RESEARCHER: Dr Caroline Smith

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Napoleon Rodezno

Participant Consent

I have read and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that any interview with me can be video and audio taped and that my classroom participation may be video recorded also. I agree to participate in this research activity, realizing that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way, although the disclosure of the program's name could allow the data to be identified. I am aware of the counselling support option available to me as participant.

Name:_____
(block letters)

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Principal Researcher: Dr Caroline Smith

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Student Researcher: Napoleon Rodezno

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2

⊕ACU National

PERMISSION FORM
Copy for Principal's Records

TITLE OF PROJECT: Practising inclusionwithin the regular school setting: students with special needs and their Aprender experience
SUPERVISORY RESEARCHER: Dr Caroline Smith
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Napoleon Rodezno

Principal's Permission

I .... have read and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to the School Principal. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I give permission for Staff and selected students of *Discere, St. Bernard's College* to participate in this research activity where parental and participant permission has been granted. I understand that in the case of the program's name to be revealed, an identification of data could occur. I am not a direct participant in the study. I understand that Video and Audio recording may take place in the process of interview and class analysis research.

Name: _____
(block letters)

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Supervisory Researcher: Dr Caroline Smith

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Student Researcher: Napoleon Rodezno

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Appendix 3

⊕ACU National

INFORMATION LETTER TO CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE

TITLE OF PROJECT: Practising inclusion within the regular school setting: students with special needs and their Aprender experience

STAFF SUPERVISOR: Dr. Caroline Smith

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Napoleon Rodezno

DEGREE: Doctor of Education

This is a formal request to the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, to seek permission for the student researcher, Napoleon Rodezno, to access students and teachers for a research project at St. Bernard's College in Essendon. The purpose of the study is to research and describe the experiences of students with an intellectual disability who attend "Discere", a special program catering to the special needs of students within the college. It proposes to use a longitudinal case study methodology over the period of a school semester, with the students and their teachers observed, interviewed and surveyed in the process. It is expected that the students and teachers will meet formally and informally with the researcher as the research process takes place. As result, students will be required to write, reflect and keep journals regarding their school experiences. They will be expected to respond to surveys and their interviews will be audio-recorded. Parental consent and permission granted by the school Principal, Mr. Frank FitzGerald, will be obtained prior to the commencement of any research or contact regarding the research study with any student.

Since the aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of the role of Discere in facilitating effective positive learning for all students, particularly those with special needs, the study is of substantial benefit to the students and the school. The description of their experiences is of great relevance to Discere since it will inform the continuing structuring and development of the program when attempting to offer the best teaching and learning practices to all students. Consequently, it will also benefit education generally, since schools attempt to address the effectiveness of special education teaching within the general classroom. The study is a requirement for the award of Doctor of Education, a study currently undertaken by the student researcher. The study will be published as a thesis for assessment.

The participants are free to refuse their involvement in the study at any point, without reason or justification for their decision. Any withdrawal from the study will not be reason for prejudice in any form, and the participants' role within the Discere program will not be affected. The confidentiality of the participants is ensured, and any publication arising from the study will not identify the concerning participants. Any questions regarding the study should be directed to:

Research supervisor: Dr. Caroline Smith
School of Education
ACU National, St. Patrick's Campus
(03) 9953 3289
C.Smith@patrick.acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern relating to the study, the way that participants have been treated while participating in the study, or a query not satisfactorily responded to by the supervisor or researcher, could be addressed in writing to:

Appendix 4

INFORMATION LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

TITLE OF PROJECT: Practising inclusionwithin the regular school setting: students with special needs and their Aprender experience

STAFF SUPERVISOR: Dr. Caroline Smith

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Napoleon Rodezno

DEGREE: Doctor of Education

Dear Frank,

I hereby request formal permission to access students and teachers for a research project within the school. The purpose of the study is to research and describe the experiences of students with an intellectual disability who attend "Discere", the special program catering to their special needs within the regular school setting. It proposes to use a longitudinal case study methodology over the period of a school semester, with the students and their teachers observed, interviewed and surveyed in the process. Due to the demands of the study, it is expected that the students and teachers will meet formally and informally with the researcher as the research process takes place. As result, students will be required to write, reflect and keep journals regarding their school experiences. They will be expected to respond to surveys and their interviews will be audio-recorded. Parental consent will be obtained prior to the commencement of any research or contact regarding the research study with the students.

Since the aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of the role of Discere in facilitating effective positive learning for all students, particularly those with special needs, the study is of substantial benefit to the students and the school. The description of their experiences is of great relevance to the school, particularly to Discere since it will inform the continuing structuring and development of the program when attempting to offer the best teaching and learning practices to all students. Consequently, it will also benefit education generally, since schools attempt to address the effectiveness of special education teaching within the general classroom. The study is a requirement for the award of Doctor of Education, a study currently undertaken by the student researcher. The study will be published as a thesis for assessment.

The participants are free to refuse their involvement in the study at any point, without reason or justification for their decision. Any withdrawal from the study will not be reason for prejudice in any form, and the participants' role within the Discere program will not be affected. The confidentiality of the participants is ensured, and any publication arising from the study will not identify the concerning participants. Any questions regarding the study should be directed to:

Research supervisor: Dr. Caroline Smith
                         School of Education
                         ACU National, St. Patrick's Campus
                         (03) 9953 3289
                         C.Smith@patrick.acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern relating to the study, the way that participants have been treated while participating in the study, or a query not satisfactorily responded to by the supervisor or researcher, could be addressed in writing to:

Appendix 5

⊕ACU National

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARENTS OF STUDENTS AT THE COLLEGE PARTICIPATING IN APRENDER RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE OF PROJECT: Practising inclusionwithin the regular school setting: students with special needs and their Aprender experience

STAFF SUPERVISOR: Dr. Caroline Smith

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Napoleon Rodezno

DEGREE: Doctor of Education

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Your son is invited to participate in a research study. The project needs your permission for the student researcher, Napoleon Rodezno, to interview, observe, discuss and record your son's experiences as a student in Discere. The purpose of the study is to research and describe his experiences at St. Bernard's as a student. It proposes to use a longitudinal case study methodology over the period of a school semester. This means that he will be observed, interviewed and surveyed in the process. It is expected that he will meet formally and informally with Napoleon for this to happen. He will write, reflect and keep journals regarding his school experiences. As result, he will be expected to respond to surveys and interviews will be video and audio recorded.

Since the aim of the study is to establish a better understanding of the role of Discere in facilitating your son with his current schooling, the study is of substantial benefit to the students and the school. The description of his experiences is beneficial to St. Bernard's college, other schools aiming to implement effective learning programs and the reassessment of Discere and its current structure. It will help our reassessment of what we can do to improve the program. The study is a requirement for Napoleon to be awarded the Doctor of Education degree and will be published as a thesis for assessment.

You are free to refuse your and your son's involvement in the study without reason or justification for your decision. Any withdrawal from the study will not be reason for prejudice in any form, and his role within the Discere program will not be affected. All confidentiality will be maintained, and any publication arising from the study will not identify your son individually as a participant. The program however, will be referred to by its name "Discere". This means that a possibility of identification of data on this basis is possible. Any questions regarding the study could be directed to:

Research supervisor: Dr. Caroline Smith
                        School of Education
                        ACU National, St. Patrick' Campus
                        (03) 9953 3289
                        C.Smith@patrick.acu.edu.au

The school counsellor at St. Bernard's is available to deal with any difficulties that students may find arising from the research. Any complaint or concern relating to the study, the way that you have been treated while participating in the study, or a query not satisfactorily responded to by the supervisor or researcher, could be addressed in writing to:

Chair, HREC
C/O Research Services,
Australian Catholic University,
Melbourne Campus, Locked Bag 4115
Fitzroy VIC 3065
Tel. (03) 9953 3157 - Fax. (03) 9953 3315