

**Thinking, Feeling, Including**  
**An Exploratory Study of Emotional Intelligence and Attitudes**  
**and Intentions Towards Inclusion Among a Sample of Irish**  
**Primary School Teachers**

Volume 1 of 2

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## Declaration

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Michèle Kehoe



## Summary

The title of this thesis is *Thinking, Feeling, Including, An Exploratory Study of Emotional Intelligence and Attitudes and Intentions Towards Inclusion Among a Sample of Irish Primary School Teachers*. This study presents an exploration of emotional intelligence (EI) and attitudes to inclusion and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. For this study the following definitions of EI and inclusion are used. EI is defined as “the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10), and inclusion is defined in its broad sense as proposed by Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2017) as it “concerns the inclusion of all children” (p. 803).

The methodological approach was informed by Creswell and Creswell’s (2018) three phase exploratory sequential mixed methods design. Phase 1 of the approach involved the collection and analysis of qualitative data. A sample of six Irish primary school teachers participated in individual semi-structured interviews about the meaning and practice of EI and inclusion in the classroom. A thematic analysis of the data was undertaken guided by the approach of Braun and Clarke (2022) which led to the identification of six themes. The six themes identified were EI Means Others, Inclusion Means Everyone, Feeling the Weight of Responsibility, Change Happens to and Around Teachers, The Missing Self, and EI and Inclusion are Interconnected. Phase 2 was the point of integration as the six identified qualitative themes led to the development of quantitative measures by the researcher about the nature of responsibility and the experience of change and training. In addition, the identified themes informed the researcher’s decision to use the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS, Wong & Law, 2002) and the Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale

(AIS) and the Intention to Teach in an Inclusive Classroom Scale (ITICS) developed by Sharma and Jacobs (2016). Phase 3 involved the collection of quantitative data using the questionnaire, which was made available to respondents online, and the analysis of the data gathered. Whilst 120 respondents accessed the link to the questionnaire presented on the Qualtrics platform, the questionnaire was completed fully by 73 participants (60.8%).

The findings of the research demonstrated that respondents recorded an overall high level of EI, had positive attitudes towards inclusion, and very favourable intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom. The findings showed that the participants had a very good level of knowledge about the concept of EI which supported the models of EI presented by Salovey and Mayer (1990, 1997), Goleman (1995), Bar-On (1997, 2005), Petrides and Furnham (2000, 2001), and Drigas and Papaoutsis (2018). The findings regarding the respondents' attitudes towards inclusion and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom indicated overall positive beliefs towards inclusive education and very positive feelings towards inclusive education. Also, the results demonstrated that the respondents had very favourable intentions to teach in a way that the classroom becomes an inclusive classroom using curriculum changes and consultation.

The strength and limitations of the study were examined, and recommendations made about the need to recognise and celebrate primary school teachers, the need for EI training, the enhancement of self-efficacy and the reduction of burnout, the introduction of social emotional learning, the need for resources and training for inclusion, and the inclusion of teachers at the centre of the inclusion discussion. Based on the results of this research, it was concluded that Irish primary school teachers are fantastic and that they are emotionally intelligent, have positive attitudes towards inclusion, and have very favourable intentions to create an inclusive classroom.

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“May all that is un-lived in you, Blossom into a future, Graced with love”  
(O’ Donohue, 2007, p. 114).

## **List of Acronyms & Abbreviations**

AIS	<i>Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale (Sharma &amp; Jacobs, 2016)</i>
CASEL	<i>Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning</i>
DEIS	<i>Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools</i>
DES	<i>Department of Education and Skills</i>
EI	<i>Emotional Intelligence</i>
EPSEN	<i>Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (Act 2004)</i>
IE	<i>Inclusive Education</i>
ITICS	<i>Intention to Teach in an Inclusive Classroom Scale (Sharma &amp; Jacobs, 2016)</i>
OEA	<i>Others' Emotional Appraisal</i>
OECD	<i>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development</i>
ROE	<i>Regulation of Emotion</i>
RULER	<i>Recognizing, Understanding, Labelling, Expressing and Regulating emotions</i>
SEL	<i>Social &amp; Emotional Learning</i>
SEN	<i>Special Education Needs</i>
SNA	<i>Special Needs Assistant</i>
SEA	<i>Self-Emotion Appraisal</i>
UEA	<i>Use of Emotion</i>
UN	<i>United Nations</i>
UNESCO	<i>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</i>
WHO	<i>World Health Organization</i>
WLEIS	<i>Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (Wong &amp; Law, 2002)</i>



## List of Figures

- Figure 2.1** *Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions (1980)*
- Figure 2.2** *Four Branches of EI (Salovey & Mayer, 1997)*
- Figure 2.3** *The Emotional Intelligence Pyramid (Drigas and Papaoutsis, 2018)*
- Figure 3.1** *CASEL's SEL Framework or "CASEL Wheel" (CASEL, 2020)*
- Figure 3.2** *The Mood Meter (Brackett, 2019)*
- Figure 4.1** *Bioecological Model of Development - Person-Process-Context-Time Model (PPCT) (Santrock, 2007)*
- Figure 4.2** *Ecological System of the Irish Primary School Teacher*
- Figure 4.3** *Government of Ireland, Education Indicators for Ireland, February 2023*
- Figure 4.4** *Contextual Framework for Exploring the Relationship between EI and Attitudes to inclusion Among a Sample of Irish Primary School Teachers*
- Figure 5.1** *Methodological Layer Cake (Loxley, 2019)*
- Figure 5.2** *Critical Realist Stratified Ontology (Saunders et al., 2016)*
- Figure 5.3** *A Framework for Research – The Interconnection of Worldviews, Design, and Research Methods. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)*
- Figure 5.4** *Exploratory Sequential Design (Three-Phase Design) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)*
- Figure 5.5** *Three Phases of the Exploratory Mixed Method Sequential Design Used in the Study*
- Figure 6.1** *Semi-Structured Interview Participant Information*
- Figure 6.2** *Dataset Familiarisation Notes*
- Figure 6.3** *Extract from Table Created to Present Interview Question Numbers and Participant Responses*
- Figure 6.4** *Overall Dataset Familiarisation Notes*
- Figure 6.5** *Example 1 of Development of Possible Code Labels*
- Figure 6.6** *Example 2 of Development of Possible Code Labels*

- Figure 6.7** *Clustering of Concepts to Develop the Themes*
- Figure 6.8** *Reviewed Thematic Map Presenting Six Candidate Themes*
- Figure 6.9** *Theme Names and Definitions*
- Figure 6.10** *Room for Creativity!*
- Figure 6.11** *Six Themes Developed from the Reflexive Thematic Analysis*
- Figure 6.12** *Theme 1 – Clustering of Concepts: EI Means Others*
- Figure 6.13** *Theme 2 – Clustering of Concepts: Inclusion Means Everyone*
- Figure 6.14** *Theme 3 – Clustering of Concepts: Feeling the Weight of Responsibility*
- Figure 6.15** *Theme 4 – Clustering of Concepts: Change Happens To and Around Primary School Teachers*
- Figure 6.16** *Theme 5 – Clustering of Concepts: The Missing Self*
- Figure 6.17** *Theme 6 – Clustering of Concepts: The Practices of EI and Inclusion are Interconnected*
- Figure 6.18** *Interconnection of the Language of EI and Inclusion*
- Figure 7.1** *Moving from Qualitative Analysis to Scale Development. Based on Creswell and Creswell (2018)*
- Figure 7.2** *Three Phase Exploratory Mixed-Methods Approach with the Focus on the Point of Integration*
- Figure 8.1** *Percentage of Respondents by Setting of School*
- Figure 8.2** *Location of Respondents' School by Irish County*
- Figure 8.3** *Respondents' Class or Role in School*
- Figure 8.4** *Frequency of Total EI Scores*
- Figure 8.5** *Respondents' Ranking of Responsibilities*
- Figure 8.6** *Respondents' Responses to Change and Training Questions 8, 9, and 10*

## List of Tables

- Table 8.1** *Progress Made by Participants Through Questionnaire*
- Table 8.2** *Respondents' Mean Score and SD for Each of the Four EI Dimensions*
- Table 8.3** *AIS 'Beliefs' and 'Feelings' Subscales Results*
- Table 8.4** *ITICS 'Curriculum Changes' and 'Consultation' Subscales Results*
- Table 8.5** *Correlations Between Respondents' EI Total, EI Four Dimensions and Years of Teaching Experience (YTE)*
- Table 8.6** *Correlation between AIS (Beliefs & Feelings) and ITICS (Curriculum Changes & Consultation) and Years of Teaching Experience (YTE)*
- Table 8.7** *Correlation between ITICS 'Curriculum Change', ITICS 'Consultation', EI, AIS Beliefs, AIS Feelings and YTE*
- Table 8.8** *Multiple Regression Model Predicting Attitudes Towards Inclusion (Beliefs and Feelings)*
- Table 8.9** *Multiple Regression Model Predicting Respondents' Intentions to Teach in an Inclusive Classroom (Curriculum Changes and Consultation)*

## **List of Appendices**

- Appendix A** *Epigeum Certificate of Completion*
- Appendix B** *Completed TCD Ethical Approval Application Form for Study, Cover Page*
- Appendix C** *Confirmation from TCD of Ethical Approval for Study*
- Appendix D** *Sample of Questions for the Pilot Study*
- Appendix E** *Emerging Item Pool – EI & Inclusion*
- Appendix F** *Participant Information Sheet (Pilot Interview)*
- Appendix G** *Participant Consent Form (Pilot Interview)*
- Appendix H** *Pilot Semi-Structured Interview Protocol*
- Appendix I** *Pilot Interview Transcript*
- Appendix J** *Revised Interview Schedule*
- Appendix K** *Text Message Sent to Prospective Participants*
- Appendix L** *Participant Information Sheet for Interview*
- Appendix M** *Participant Consent Form for Interview*
- Appendix N** *Interview Schedule*
- Appendix O** *TA Familiarisation - Table of Interview Questions and Participant Responses*
- Appendix P** *Set of Researcher's Handwritten Record of the Development of Code Labels  
(Pages 1-14)*
- Appendix Q** *Set of Researcher's Concept Clusters and Theme Development  
Figures*
- Appendix R** *EI and Inclusion Questionnaire Presented on the Qualtrics Platform*
- Appendix S** *Information About Study with the Qualtrics Link posted on WhatsApp,  
Twitter, and LinkedIn.*
- Appendix T** *Email Sent About Study with Qualtrics link to Prospective  
Respondents*
- Appendix U** *Respondents Responses to the Open-Ended Question on  
Questionnaire*
- Appendix V** *Thematic Analysis of Data from Open-Ended Question on Questionnaire*

## Contents

Declaration	iii
Summary	v
Acknowledgements	vii
List of Acronyms & Abbreviations	viii
List of Figures	ix
List of Tables	xi
List of Appendices	xii
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Purpose of the Research and Research Questions	1
1.3 Structure of the Thesis	2
1.4 Researcher's Identity, Positionality, and Reflexivity	8
<b>Chapter 2 The Story of Emotional Intelligence</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Introduction	13
2.2 A Brief History of Emotional Intelligence	14
2.3 The Meaning of the Concept of Emotional Intelligence	18
2.3.1 Intelligence	19

2.3.2 Emotion	23
2.3.3 Intelligence & Emotion	26
2.4 Models of Emotional Intelligence	28
2.4.1 Salovey & Mayer’s Four-Branch Model of EI or Ability Model	30
2.4.2 Goleman’s Model of Emotional Intelligence or Competency Model	38
2.4.3 Bar-On’s Model of EI or Emotional-Social Intelligence Model	42
2.4.4 Petrides & Furnham’s Trait EI or Trait Emotional Self – Efficacy Model	46
2.4.5 Drigas and Papaoutsi’s Nine Layer Pyramid of Emotional Intelligence	48
2.4.6 Comparing the Five Models of EI	50
2.5 An Elusive Construct – Current and Future Research Challenges	52
2.6 Conclusion	57
<b>Chapter 3 Teaching is an Emotional Practice</b>	<b>59</b>
3.1 Introduction	59
3.2 Teaching is an Emotional Practice	60
3.3 EI & Teachers’ Emotional Management, Outcomes & Support	63
3.3.1 Emotion Regulation	64
3.3.2 Self-Efficacy & Burnout	66
3.3.3 Training & Development	67

3.4 Social and Emotional Learning	70
3.4.1 Building EI Through RULER	72
3.5 Conclusion	74
<b>Chapter 4 Inclusion in Education Means Everyone</b>	<b>76</b>
4.1 Introduction	76
4.2 Inclusion in Means Everyone	77
4.3 A Brief History of Inclusion – Making the Grade in be Included in the Classroom	81
4.3.1 United States of America	83
4.3.2 United Kingdom	86
4.3.3 Republic of Ireland	90
4.4 Every Learner Matters	97
4.5 Inclusive Education	100
4.5.1 Implementation of IE	102
4.5.2 Teachers Attitudes Towards Inclusion	105
4.5.3 Challenges to Inclusive Education	108
4.6 Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development	110
4.7 Teachers in an Organisational Context	115
4.8 Conclusion	120

<b>Chapter 5 Research Questions &amp; Methodological Approach</b>	<b>124</b>
5.1 Introduction	124
5.2 Research Questions	125
5.3 The Methodological ‘Layer Cake’ and Research Design	127
5.4 Philosophies – the ‘ologies’	129
5.4.1 Positivist/Post Positivist/Empirical Science	130
5.4.2 Critical Realism	131
5.4.3 Interpretivism	132
5.4.4 Postmodernism	133
5.4.5 Pragmatism	134
5.5 Research Approach	135
5.6 Research Method – Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods	139
5.7 Validity, Reliability, and Triangulation	142
5.8 Ethical Issues and Approval	144
5.9 Conclusion	145
<b>Chapter 6 Phase 1 Exploratory Mixed Methods – Qualitative Data Collection &amp; Analysis</b>	<b>147</b>
6.1 Introduction	147





<b>Chapter 7 Phase 2 Exploratory Mixed Methods - Point of Integration of the Qualitative Data Leading to the Development of the Quantitative Measure</b>	<b>215</b>
7.1 Introduction	215
7.2 The Point of Integration	216
7.3 Conclusion	221
<b>Chapter 8 Phase 3 Exploratory Mixed Methods - Quantitative Data Collection, Analysis, &amp; Results</b>	<b>222</b>
8.1 Introduction	222
8.2 Rationale for Use of Questionnaire	222
8.3 Ethical Issues in Using Questionnaires	224
8.4 Development of Questionnaire	225
8.5 Pilot Test of Questionnaire	232
8.6 Sampling Strategy & Respondents	233
8.7 Procedure	235
8.8 Quantitative Data Analysis Strategy	235
8.9 Quantitative Results	237
8.9.1 Introduction	237
8.9.2 Descriptive Statistics – Demographic Information, EI Profile, Attitudes & Intentions Towards Inclusion	237
8.9.3 Inferential Statistics – EI, Attitudes & Intentions Towards Inclusion	244

8.9.4 Respondent Ranking of Responsibilities	249
8.9.5 Change and Training	251
8.9.6 Themes from Open-Ended Question	253
8.10 Conclusion	255
<b>Chapter 9 Discussion &amp; Conclusion</b>	<b>258</b>
9.1 Introduction	258
9.2 Discussion of the Findings of the Research Questions	260
9.2.1 Research Question 1 – Meaning & Practice of EI & Inclusion	261
9.2.1.1 EI Means Others	261
9.2.1.2 Inclusions Means Everyone	266
9.2.2 Research Question 2 – EI Profile	272
9.2.3 Research Question 3 – Attitudes & Intentions Towards Inclusion	275
9.2.4 Research Question 4 – EI, Attitudes, & Intentions Towards Inclusion	279
9.3 Further Important Findings	286
9.3.1 Responsibility	286
9.3.2 Change & Training	290
9.3.3 Comments & Suggestions	294
9.4 Strengths & Limitations of the Study	297
9.5 Recommendations	301
9.6 Time for Reflection	304
9.7 Conclusion	306
<b>References</b>	<b>310</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>See Volume 2</b>



# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis presents an exploration of EI and attitudes towards inclusion and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. This first chapter introduces the reader to the study by the outlining the purpose of the research and the research questions. A description of each chapter of the thesis is presented. The final section of the chapter provides an insight into the researcher's identity, positionality, and reflexivity.

### **1.2 Purpose of the Research and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

The research questions are:

1. What do the concepts of emotional intelligence and inclusion mean to a sample of Irish primary school teachers and what influence do they believe that these concepts have on their practice in the classroom?
2. What is the emotional intelligence profile of a sample of Irish primary school teachers?
3. What are the sample of Irish primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and what is their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom?

4. What is the relationship between the emotional intelligence profile and attitudes and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom among a sample of Irish primary school teachers?

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis, in nine chapters, presents an exploration of EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

#### ***Chapter 2 The Story of Emotional Intelligence***

This chapter presents an examination of the meaning of EI and the theoretical models of EI which have enabled the researcher to develop the research questions. In addition, this chapter informs the reader about how the concept of EI is to be defined for the purpose of this study, evaluates the contributions made by five primary theorists, and examines the relevance of each approach for the purpose of this research. Therefore, this chapter informs the development of the research questions for this study in terms of the meaning and practice of EI and will provide the theoretical context for the exploration of the relationship between EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

#### ***Chapter 3 Teaching is an Emotional Practice***

The focus of this chapter is on the relationship between EI and the emotional practice of teaching. EI and the experience of teachers' emotional management, the outcomes including self-efficacy and burnout, and the initiatives proposed to support teachers are given consideration. The importance and application of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) will be

presented with reference to the RULER (Recognising, Understanding, Labelling, Expressing, and Regulating) method developed by the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence (Brackett, 2019). Therefore, the research framework presented in this chapter facilitates the exploration of the practice of EI by a sample of Irish primary school teachers in meeting the emotional demands encountered in the classroom and the wider school environment.

#### ***Chapter 4 Inclusion in Education Means Everyone***

This chapter provides an exploration of the meaning of the concept of inclusion and an insight into inclusion in practice in education. It presents a perspective on the emergence of the central issues and debates that are embedded in inclusion by using a historical framework which identifies key events that have influenced developments in inclusive education from the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), and the Republic of Ireland. The publication of policy papers has highlighted the importance of inclusion, such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2007) and has led to many changes in policy and practice and to widespread support for the belief that every learner matters and matters equally. The nature of inclusive education, and teacher's attitudes to inclusion, along with the challenges being experienced and developments in the area are considered. Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1989) framework is presented to demonstrate the importance of inclusive education in context and the organisational context of the experience of being a primary school teacher in Ireland today. Inclusion is understood in a broad sense rather than specifically relating to children with SEN, therefore, the focus of

this chapter and study is on all children which is in line with the principle of inclusive education.

### ***Chapter 5 Research Questions & Methodological Approach***

This chapter presents the research questions which provide the focus and framework for this study. The concept of the methodological layer cake (Loxley, 2019) will be examined as it provides a context for the research design. Following from this a brief examination of the relevant philosophical approaches to research will be presented that address competing assumptions about what knowledge is and how it is represented. This informs the presentation of the description of the research approach and research methods deemed most appropriate for this study. The stages of the exploratory sequential mixed methods approach, and triangulation will be examined. Ethical issues and the process of ethical approval for the study will be presented. Traditionally in this chapter the qualitative and quantitative methods used would be presented and the details of the participants/respondents, materials, and procedure presented. However, the researcher has decided to present the research questions, methodological approach, qualitative and quantitative methodology, and analysis of findings in this and the three chapters that follow. The sequential presentation of these chapters best represents the three phases of the exploratory mixed methods sequential design used in this study which most appropriately addresses the purpose of the research to explore EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.



## ***Chapter 6 Exploratory Mixed Method Phase 1 – Qualitative Data Collection, Analysis, & Results***

This chapter presents Phase 1 of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design in which the collection and analysis of the qualitative data was undertaken using semi-structured interviews. The researcher's purpose in conducting this phase of data collection and analysis was to address the first research question that sought to understand the meaning of the concepts of emotional intelligence and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers and the influence they believe that these concepts have on their practice in the classroom, and to inform the development of the quantitative measure to be tested in the final phase of the research. Following an examination of the nature of the semi-structured interviews and ethical considerations, details are provided about the stages of planning and conducting the pilot study, identification of the conclusions drawn, and the impact on the development of the interview schedule. The researcher describes the experience of, and insights acquired while undertaking the pilot study to develop the semi-structured interview schedule. The interview process undertaken with a sample of six Irish primary school teachers is described by presenting information about the participants, the materials used, and the procedure implemented. The qualitative dataset was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) practical guide to reflexive thematic analysis and the researcher shares their reflections on the experience of engaging with this approach to data analysis. Finally, following thematic analysis the themes that were identified as (i) EI Means Others, (ii) Inclusion Means Everyone, (iii) Feeling the Weight of Responsibility, (iv) Change Happens To and around Teachers, (v) The Missing Self, and (vi) EI and

Inclusion are Interconnected, are used as a framework to present key pieces of information and quotations from the participants.

### ***Chapter 7 Exploratory Mixed Method Phase 2 - Point of Integration of the Qualitative Data Leading to the Development of the Quantitative Measure***

This brief but important chapter describes the point of integration of the qualitative themes, identified in Phase 1, leading to the development of the quantitative instrument. This chapter describes Phase 2 of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design and therefore represents the point of integration as the qualitative findings now result in the identification, confirmation, and development of the quantitative measure to be tested in Phase 3. The sequential collection of qualitative and quantitative data provided the most appropriate, complete, and relevant approach to addressing the research questions to explore EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

### ***Chapter 8 Exploratory Mixed Method Phase 3 - Quantitative Data Collection, Analysis, & Results***

This chapter sets out the rationale for the use of the quantitative measure in this phase of this exploratory sequential mixed methods study into EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. The ethical and practical issues surrounding the use of this method are considered. The structure of the seven-part online questionnaire is presented and the pilot study that was undertaken to test the instrument is described, and the outcomes are reported. Information regarding the sampling strategy, respondents, and the procedure used to

administer the online questionnaire is provided. The data analysis strategy is described and the findings of the quantitative measures regarding the respondents' background information, the emotional intelligence profiles of the respondents, their attitudes towards inclusion, and their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom, and other relevant and important results are presented.

### ***Chapter 9 Discussion & Conclusion***

This chapter represents the purpose of the research and the research questions to inform the discussion of the research findings. A review is provided of the descriptive information about the participants for the qualitative phase and about the respondents for the quantitative phase of this study to provide a context for the discussion of the results. This is followed by a separate examination of each of the four research questions through the discussion of the findings related to each question, the evaluation of the results in terms of the theoretical perspectives and previous research presented in the literature, and the interpretation by the researcher of the implication of the findings of each research question in terms of the sample of Irish primary school teachers being studied. Additional important findings about responsibility, change and training, and those made based on the respondents' comments and suggestions are presented. An evaluation of the strengths and limitations of the study and recommendations are proposed by the researcher. A final reflection on the experience of undertaking the study and conclusions are provided.

#### **1.4 Researcher's Identity, Positionality, and Reflexivity**

The researcher acknowledges that it is of central importance to the research process that they situate themselves within the research to gain an insight into who they are and how their beliefs, values, and practices shape their interpretation of all the stages of the current research. The researcher recognises that their identity, positionality, and reflexivity have and will influence all aspects of this study including the identification of the research questions, design, approach, and data analysis. This is widely acknowledged in the literature by sources including Huberman and Miles (2002) and Savin-Baden and Major (2013) and as commented by Denscombe (2014) that the researcher does not come to the research “with a clean sheet” (p. 88) but uses conceptual tools including their culture and values. The researcher believes that it is of central importance to the study that they have an explicit awareness of self and how this understanding shapes their interpretation of all the stages of this study and supports the assertion by Freud (1897) that being entirely honest with yourself is indeed a good exercise. The researcher appreciates that from the moment the research process starts that which is being researched and the researcher become intertwined. To develop self-awareness and perspective the researcher asked themselves questions such as “who am I?”, “who do I think I am?”, and “how will this understanding of myself influence this study?”. According to Greenbank (2003) and May and Perry (2017) the researcher needs to undertake explicit self-consciousness and self-assessment of their views and positions and how this might, may, or have, directly or indirectly influenced the design, execution, and interpretation of the research data findings.

The identity of the researcher can be described as female, white, middle aged, Catholic, psychology graduate, professional, middle class, suburban, wife, mother of three children, daughter, eldest child of four, sister, aunt, cousin, friend, employee, lecturer, author, and student. These classifications and categorisation can be used to describe the researcher's identity, and from which ascribed attributes will follow. The researcher believes that they are a product of nature and nurture and as such their genetic inheritance and environmental experiences have shaped and continue to shape them. These factors have influenced the researcher's perception of the world, attitudes, learning experiences, motivation, and personality. One of the key factors that has influenced the selection of the area of research and approach are the researcher's core values and beliefs in family, friendship, education, dignity, and respect. The goal of the researcher's life's work that has many facets is to ultimately be happy being who they are and to provide the space for all the other people in their life to be happy being themselves too.

Positionality according to Savin-Baden and Major (2013) is the position a researcher has chosen to adopt within their research study which required the researcher to examine their identity to gain an insight into how their personal characteristics, perspective, and assumptions have influenced the decision to undertake the current study and the research approach being adopted. Malterud (2001) and Grix (2019) assert that positionality can be determined by placing the researcher around three areas: (1) the subject under investigation, (2) the research participants, and (3) the research context and process. This brings into question the position of being an insider or outsider. However, for the purpose of this study the researcher supports the viewpoint proposed by Mercer (2007) that the insider/outsider dichotomy is in fact a

“continuum with multiple dimensions and that all researchers constantly move back and forth along several axes, depending upon time, location, participants, and topic” (p. 1). It is apparent to the researcher that at various stages of the research process, in particular contexts, and with particular participants, they will be both an insider as the researcher is an educator and outsider as they are not a primary school teacher and at times somewhere in-between. This is a position that has been called the “in-between” researcher, and is conceptualised by the fact that the researcher identifies themselves as neither entirely inside or outside (Milligan, 2014).

The philosophy or worldview that informs the mixed methods approach being used is pragmatism, interpretivism and postmodernism. The researcher acknowledges that their training and personal experiences have strongly influenced their choice of approach. With a background in psychology and organisational behaviour and over 30 years lecturing experience, this has led the researcher to develop a particular philosophical approach which is pragmatic by nature and constantly seeks out applications for theoretical concepts. The researcher supports the management mantra that states, “if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it”. The researcher’s traditional background in psychology trained them to undertake research in a structured manner with a bias towards quantitative research. However, the philosophical aspect of psychology has always been of interest to the researcher who finds alternative worldviews fascinating. As a result, the researcher is drawn to interpretivism as a means of understanding individual differences. As an educator the researcher has a passion for providing people with a life chance through education. The postmodern perspective reflects for them the importance of voice, empowerment, and social justice, and the

need to address that which is absent. However, the study has challenged the researcher to stretch and flex their approach and to be open to the rich world of qualitative research. The benefit of the mixed methods approach being undertaken is that it will offer insights beyond those that can be gained through quantitative methods alone.

The researcher's positionality towards the prospective participants is as perceived from the researcher's own worldview which is based the researcher's educational experience, orientation through a psychological lens, past research experience, and has been influenced by those who have acted mentors and advisors over the years. The researcher's reason for arriving at this study currently is a combination of professional and personal experience. As a mother of three children, one female and two males, who naturally have different personalities, the researcher's perception is that their journey of learning had been greatly influenced by the EI of their teachers which has led to their experience of inclusiveness in the classroom and the wider school environment. Some teachers have very effectively met the social and emotional needs of the researcher's children and their friends and classmates. Therefore, the researcher sees the prospective participants through their own experience in school, the orientation of their discipline, their profession as an educator, and through the observed experience of their children.

In addition, the researcher recognises the need to consider the wider audience which consists of their supervisor, lecturers, and examiners, journal editors and readers, colleagues, teachers, schools, and the Department of Education (DES). The researcher acknowledges that their values, biases, and

personal background will affect the research process and outcomes and is aware that those same factors will influence the participants and the audience. In planning and managing the research process with due regard to the ethical requirements of each stage the researcher believes that this study will be undertaken in a respectful manner that will yield benefits for all involved. The researcher recognises the importance of continually reflecting on the position that they are adopting throughout the research process and the impact on data collection and analysis.

As Probst (2015) advises the issues of researcher identity and positionality call for reflexivity for the duration of the study to ensure that the account provided is trustworthy and honest. Reflexivity demands that the researcher thinks critically to address issues of identity and positionality by making their assumptions explicit and to develop strategies to address these (Lazard & McAvoy, 2017). Pillow (2003) reflected that living with a reflexivity of discomfort can be used as a methodological tool. The researcher has found that reflexivity is challenging but worthwhile and reflected on the first psychology book that they ever read which was by Powell (1969) *Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?* The answer stated was because, if I tell you who I am, you may not like who I am, and it's all that I have. As the researcher is in the world and of the world that they are researching, positionality, and reflexivity are viewed as an iterative process and will not be undertaken at one point in the research but is seen as a continual process until the completion of this study and beyond.



## Chapter 2

### The Story of Emotional Intelligence

*“Emotional intelligence is the “something” in each of us that is a bit intangible. It affects how we manage behavior, navigate social complexities, and make personal decisions that achieve positive results” (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009, p. 17)*

#### 2.1 Introduction

As described by Salovey and Mayer (1990) the concept of emotional intelligence, or what is commonly called EI, generally describes a person’s ability to identify and manage their own emotions and to understand and influence other people’s emotions. The skills associated with EI provide individuals with the ability to build better relationships, manage difficult emotions, increase creativity and innovation, and lead others effectively (Goleman, 1998a). EI shapes our interactions with others and our understanding of ourselves. To navigate the social world, people need to process emotional information and manage the emotional dynamic in an intelligent manner (Lopes et al., 2004). The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. Thus, the focus of this chapter is on the exploration of the meaning of EI and theoretical models of EI which will enable the researcher to investigate the area leading to the development of the research questions. In addition, this chapter will present the definition of EI that is being used for the purpose of this study,

The chapter firstly provides a brief history of the developments in the thinking and the approaches to EI. An examination is then presented of the meaning of the concept of EI and its constituent elements of intelligence and emotion which inform an understanding of the concept. The primary models of EI and assessment methods developed by Salovey and Mayer (1990), Goleman (1995), Bar-On (1997, 2005), Petrides and Furnham (2001), and Drigas and Papoutsi's (2018) are presented in chronological order to demonstrate the developments in thinking and approach over time. While individually these models provide five different psychological perspectives on EI, collectively they provide an insight into the abilities and traits associated with EI which will be used to guide and inform the research approach. In conclusion, the current and future challenges encountered in researching EI are examined as they present important considerations about the meaning and validity of EI that are relevant to the current study. Therefore, this chapter will lead to the development of the research questions for this study about the meaning and assessment of EI and will provide the context for the exploration of the relationship between EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

## **2.2 A Brief History of Emotional Intelligence**

The history and development of the theories of EI spans several decades and presents a wide range of perspectives. A chronological overview of the key developments in EI is presented to demonstrate the evolution in the conceptualisation of the meaning of EI. This provides a framework for

this study to explore the meaning of EI, the principal models of EI, and the challenges presented.

The term “Social Intelligence” was first mentioned in 1909 by the educational philosopher John Dewey in his book *Moral Principles in Education* and was defined as “the power of observing and comprehending social situations” (p. 43). In the 1930’s Edward Thorndike described the concept of “Social Intelligence” as the ability to get along with other people (Thorndike & Stein, 1937). Following this in the 1940s David Wechsler suggested that affective components of intelligence may be essential to success in life and acknowledged the effect of multiple factors on intelligent behaviour. Wechsler (1944) defined intelligence as “the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, to think rationally, and to deal effectively with his environment” (p. 3) and spoke about non-intellective elements, affective, personal, and social, being essential for predicting one’s ability to succeed in life. In the 1950s Humanistic psychologists such as Abraham Maslow (1954) described how people can build emotional strength and develop their ability to effectively handle and control emotion. Up to this point in time a general description of this type of intelligence was presented, however models and methods of measurement of EI had yet to emerge.

In 1964 Michael Beldoch, a Clinical Professor of Psychology in Psychiatry at Cornell University, first coined the term “Emotional Intelligence” for the research paper titled Sensitivity to expression of emotional meaning in three modes of communication. Following this publication, the term appeared in 1966 in a paper by a German psychiatrist Hanscarl Leuner titled Emotional intelligence and emancipation published in

the *Psychotherapeutic Journal of Practice of Child Psychology and Child Psychiatry*.

Over the previous decades the impact that emotions and personality have had on physical wellness and illness have been explained in psychosomatic models provided by theorists such as Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) (Weiner, 1982). This research informed the thinking about the difficulty that some individual’s experience in feeling and verbally expressing emotions which contrasts to the descriptions of EI. The term for this psychological concept of alexithymia was coined by Sifneos (1972) and is formed from several Greek words which literally mean lack of words for emotion. Empirical studies on alexithymia by Taylor et al. (1991) provided results leading to a clear explanatory model based on the elementary premises that it involves difficulty in identifying and describing feelings; difficulty in distinguishing between feelings and bodily sensations related to emotional activation; restrained and limited imaginative processes, adopting the guise of an impoverished fantasy; and a cognitive style oriented toward the outside (López-Muñoz & Pérez-Fernández, 2020). This research can be seen to highlight the value of EI to individuals and the impact on their psychological and physical wellbeing. The research that was to follow attempted to define and describe the meaning of EI.

In 1975 Howard Gardner published *The Shattered Mind* and introduced the concept of multiple intelligences that discussed the two personal intelligences of “intrapersonal intelligence”, which is the ability to access and make use of one’s own feelings, and “interpersonal intelligence”, which is the ability to notice and make distinctions about the moods, temperaments, motivations, and intentions of other people. In 1983 Gardner

presented his theory of multiple intelligences in his book *Frames of Mind*. Following from this, in 1985 Wayne Payne introduced the term emotional intelligence in his unpublished doctoral dissertation entitled *A study of emotion: developing emotional intelligence; self-integration; relating to fear, pain and desire (theory, structure of reality, problem-solving, contraction/expansion, tuning in/coming out/letting go)*. In 1987 a significant event took place when Keith Beasley, in an article in *Mensa Magazine* first used the term “Emotional Quotient” (EQ) or Sensitivity and defined it as one's ability to feel. According to Beasley (1987) “The person with a high EQ is one who is easily 'moved' and who needs to openly express his or her feelings” (p. 25). It has been suggested that this was the first published use of the term. However, Reuven Bar-On (1988) contends to have used the term in an unpublished version of his graduate thesis. At this time the research into EI was gathering momentum leading to the development of models of EI.

In 1990 Peter Salovey and John Mayer published their landmark article Emotional Intelligence in the *Journal of Imagination, Cognition and Personality*. It presented the first serious academic inquiry of the term which focused on a set of abilities rather than traits and discussed the four-branches of emotional intelligence which are perceiving emotion, reasoning with emotion, understanding emotion, and managing emotion. In 1995 the concept of EI entered popular culture following the publication of Daniel Goleman's bestselling book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More Than IQ*. This book played a significant part in popularising his conceptualisation and framework of EI which consists of the four components of (i) Self-Awareness, (ii) Self-Management, (iii) Social-

Awareness, and (iv) Relationship Management. In 2006 Goleman published *Social Intelligence – The New Science of Human Relationships* and presented the idea that while EI is about Self-Awareness and Self-Management, the concept of Social Intelligence is about social awareness and relationship management, which he termed Social Facility. This advancement in thinking has led to the development of the concept of Emotional and Social Intelligence.

An understanding of the different conceptualisations of EI are central to the current study into EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. This knowledge provides a foundation for both the researcher and reader to further investigate the meaning of EI, the different psychological perspectives presented in the models of EI, and the challenges presented. Subsequently, the meaning ascertained about EI will be used to inform the research approach undertaken to explore the meaning and practice of EI among a sample of Irish primary school teachers and to discuss the research findings.

### **2.3 The Meaning of the Concept of Emotional Intelligence**

EI refers to the ability to understand your own emotions and the emotions of the people around you. EI has a long history but since its re-emergence in the 1990s almost thirty years of research has uncovered that it results from the interaction of intelligence and emotion (Mayer, et al., 2004), and refers to an individual's capacity to understand and manage emotions (Cherry, 2018). To gain an insight into the concept of EI it is essential to provide an examination of its constituent parts, namely intelligence and

emotion, and to describe how these concepts are integrated to create the construct of EI (Côté, 2010; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). An understanding of the different aspects of EI is important for this study as this research seeks to uncover the meaning of EI among a sample of Irish primary school teachers the relationship to their practice in the classroom.

### ***2.3.1 Intelligence***

Intelligence has generally been defined as an ability or a capacity and as stated by Wechsler (1958) it is “the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, to think rationally and to deal effectively with his [or her] environment” (p. 3). Over the past century models of intelligence have been presented by theorists including Binet and Simon (1916), Spearman (1923), Thurstone (1938), and Wechsler (1958) which have posited the dominance of general intelligence, or what is termed the “g” of intelligence and proposed that it represents the primary mental ability that underlies intelligence and can be measured using intelligence tests. It reflects “overall brain efficiency or the close interconnection of a set of mental skills or working memory” (Waterhouse, 2006, p. 210). Historically, intelligence has been viewed as a major determinant of success and those who have a high Intelligence Quotient (IQ) have been seen as more likely to experience accomplishments and achievements in life. However, theories such as Gardner’s (1983) Theory of Multiple Intelligence challenged this and contended that people have different types of intelligence.

Gardner’s (1983) book *Frames of Mind* presented a radically different approach to understanding and measuring intelligence. His Theory of Multiple Intelligences provided a new perspective presenting non-

hierarchically arranged primary mental abilities. His approach, and assertion that it is not how smart you are, but “in what ways” you are smart, challenged the notion of generalised intelligence. He believed that there are many ways to be intelligent and presented seven types of intelligence: (i) verbal, (ii) mathematical-logical, (iii) spatial, (iv) bodily-kinaesthetic, (v) musical, and two discrete yet frequently linked personal intelligences, namely (vi) interpersonal, which is proposed to be the ability to understand the perception and desires of other people, and (vii) intrapersonal intelligence, which is proposed to be the ability to understand one’s own feelings and motivations.

In 1999 Gardner contended that each intelligence operates from a different area of the brain and revised his model to add naturalistic intelligence “which is evolutionarily derived from the hominid capacity to recognise, group, and label distinctions among natural phenomena” (Gardner & Moran, 2006, p. 229). In addition, Gardner (1999) proposed the concept of existential intelligence which is the ability to see oneself “with respect to the further reaches of the cosmos...or total immersion in a work of art” (p. 60). In 2004, Gardner presented two further intelligences named “mental searchlight” intelligence which allows individuals to “scan wide spaces in an efficient way thus permitting them to run society smoothly” (p. 217), and “laser intelligence” which permits the generation of “the advances (as well as the catastrophes) of society” (p. 217). Gardner (2004) contended that the intelligences he has presented are “consistent with how most biologists think about the mind and brain” (p. 214) and that neuroscientists “are in the process of homing in on the nature of core operations for each of the intelligences” (p. 217).



The lack of empirical studies that provide evidence about the validity of the theory of multiple intelligence has been reported by researchers such as Sternberg (1994), Allix (2000), and Sternberg and Grigorenko (2004). Sternberg (1985) proposed a triarchic theory of creative, analytical, and practical intelligence which could be viewed as multiple intelligences. In response Gardner (2004) stated that he would be “delighted were such evidence to accrue” (p. 214). However, Chen (2004) provided a defence of the theory of multiple intelligence and its lack of empirical support and claims that new measures are required due to the novelty of the intelligences and that its validity has been demonstrated by its successful classroom application. However, Waterhouse (2006) contended that improvements in student learning while using the multiple intelligence framework are influenced by factors such as novelty and serendipity. However, key concepts of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence led to further theoretical developments by theorists such as Salovey and Mayer (1990, 1997) and Goleman (1995, 1998a) about EI as a form of intelligence. These models of EI provide an important theoretical framework for the current study.

Following the publication in 1995 of Daniel Goleman’s *Emotional Intelligence; Why it can matter more than IQ*, people around the world became interested in the area and how it could make a difference to their lives. Goleman (1995) contended that the measure of EI called Emotional Quotient (EQ) is as important as IQ for success in an individual’s academic, professional, social, and interpersonal life. Goleman (1998b) defined EI as the ability to recognise our own feelings and those of others, to motivate ourselves, and to handle our emotions well to achieve the best outcome for

ourselves and for our relationships. In 1997 Sternberg proposed that “intelligence comprises the mental abilities necessary for adaptation to, as well as shaping and selection of, any environmental context” (p. 1030). This definition points to the fact that intelligent behaviour involves an individual’s successful adaptation or reaction to the environment and the act of shaping and changing their current environment to meet their needs. Pfeiffer (2001) reflects that Sternberg asserted that intelligence has a common core of mental processes that are independent of culture or environmental context.

From the review and analyses presented in this section, it is evident that the nature of intelligence and its importance as an aspect of EI has been investigated by many theorists. Since intelligence is so integral to the human condition it is beneficial to have a range of theories to compare their perspectives on the nature of intelligence, yet these theories can coexist to provide a broader and deeper understanding of the concept. Collectively the theories enrich this study by providing a depth of understanding about the nature of EI. These models will be used to evaluate the perspectives of EI presented by a sample of Irish primary school teachers. Central ideas such as intelligence being an ability that helps individuals to deal with the environment (Wechsler, 1958), the generalised model of intelligence and the use of IQ tests, the concept of Multiple Intelligence (Gardner, 1983) and the many ways that there are to be smart, and the measure of EQ as presented by Goleman (1995) will influence the development of the research questions, methodology, and analysis of the findings. In addition, the perspective that is taken of EI and the role of intelligence and its measurement makes an important contribution to the aspect of this study that seeks to explore attitudes and intentions towards inclusion in the classroom.

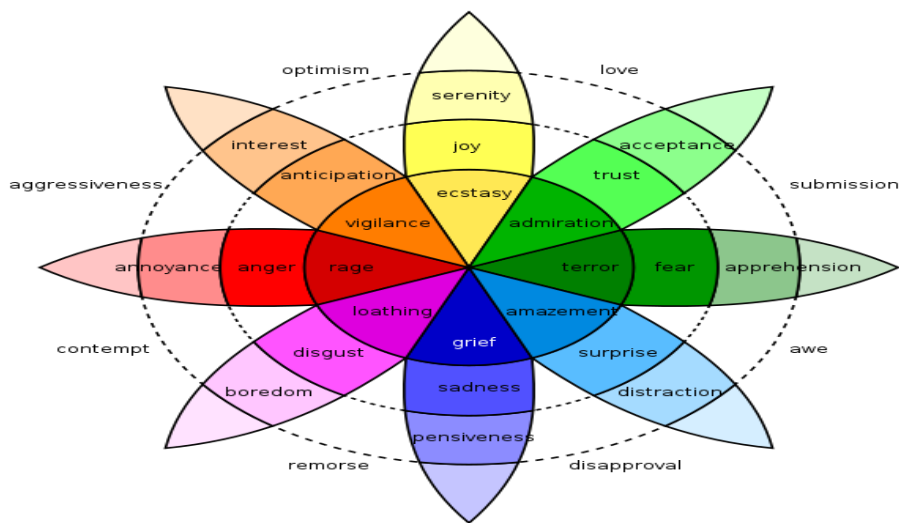
This section of the chapter has provided an analysis of the concept of intelligence and the following section will present a similar analysis of the nature of emotion. It is of central importance to this study that both the researcher and reader understand the nature of intelligence and emotion. The integration of these constructs has informed the development of EI which along with inclusion in education is the main focus of this research.

### **2.3.2 Emotion**

The focus of this section of the chapter now turns to the concept of emotion and while there has been much debate and theorising about the nature of intelligence, an agreed definition or theory of emotion has eluded philosophers, poets, and scientists over the centuries due to the wide range and experience of human emotions. Emotions are central to the expression of self and provide us with an ability to communicate with each other. Around the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Aristotle proposed a list of emotions that included the 14 distinct emotional expressions of fear, confidence, anger, friendship, calm, enmity, shame, shamelessness, pity, kindness, envy, indignation, emulation, and contempt. Darwin (1872) theorised in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* that emotions were innate, evolved, and had a functional purpose. A range of theories have been proposed about how and why people feel emotion, and these include the evolutionary theories (Hammond, 2006; Nesse, 1990), The James-Lange Theory (Cannon, 1927; Lang, 1994), The Cannon-Bard Theory (Dalglish, 2004), Schacter and Singer's Two-Factor Theory (Schacter & Singer, 1962; Reisenzein, 1983) and Cognitive Appraisal (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985).

A 20<sup>th</sup> century approach to understanding emotion was presented in Plutchik’s (1980) psychoevolutionary classification theory in which he contended that even though “most people believe that they know a great deal about emotions, psychologists have had a difficulty in achieving consensus about what emotions are and how they work” (Plutchik, 1982, p. 529). He proposed the following eight primary emotions—joy, sadness, trust, disgust, fear, anger, surprise, and anticipation and created a wheel of emotions to describe the relationship between emotions and asserted that emotions can be experienced at different intensities, can overlap, and bleed together into the next like hues on a colour wheel, see Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1**  
*Plutchik’s Wheel of Emotions (1980)*



Mason and Capitanio (2012) questioned Plutchik’s (1980) theory and argued that the emotions presented can vary by culture and society and that an understanding of emotion should be presented which is universally experienced by all cultures. This issue had been investigated earlier by Ekman (1972) who undertook a study of emotions and their relation to facial expressions. Ekman (1972) conducted research on the biological correlations of specific emotions to demonstrate the universality and discreteness of

emotions in a Darwinian approach. This led to the development by Ekman and Friesen (1978) of the Facial Action Coding System (FACS) which is an anatomically based system for describing all observable facial movement for every emotion. Ekman (1972) proposed that there are seven emotional expressions universal to people all over the world: happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, anger, disgust, and contempt. Ekman's (1972) research further investigated the effect of nature or nurture on emotional response; however, he faced much criticism in 2004 when he proposed that the FACS method could be used as a method of lie detection.

Following from Ekman's (1972) studies, Jack et al. (2016) presented a study that aimed to determine emotions based on facial expressions regardless of social cultural influences. Four irreducible emotions were identified as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. They contended that more complex variations of emotion have evolved over the millennia because of many social and cultural influences. An interesting contribution to our understanding of the expression of emotion was that common facial expressions have a primarily biological origin, whereas subtle and complex emotional expressions are sociological and are dependent on culture and shared learning experiences.

The range of emotions experience by individuals are central to their experience of being human. Emotions such as joy and fear have been described by early thinkers including Aristotle and since the time of Darwin (1872) the evolutionary function of emotions has been considered. The complexity of this research was further supported and developed by Plutchik (1980) and Ekman (1972). This research has informed this study as the language used to describe emotions will be a focus of the research. In addition, the research findings point

to the importance of the consideration of the influence of the social and physical school environment on the expression of emotion by the sample of Irish primary school teachers and their perception of the expression of emotion by pupils and others in the school environment.

### ***2.3.3 Intelligence & Emotion***

The integration of definitions of intelligence and emotion provides an understanding that EI is a set of abilities that relate to the organised set of responses to events that constitute emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1990, 1997). Caruso in Freedman (2017, para. 2) reminds us that “it is very important to understand that emotional intelligence is not the opposite of intelligence, it is not the triumph of heart over head – it is the unique intersection of both”. EI is different to other intelligence factors such as verbal and numerical intelligence which focus on cognitive processes, as EI provides an insight into how effectively a person can solve a set of problems that involve emotions (Côté & Miners, 2006; Mayer et al., 2008). The definition of EI which combines both intelligence and emotion offers the possibility to determine “at least some ‘right’ answers as to feelings” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 9). It is contended by Matthews et al. (2004) that these right answers may be used to distinguish individuals who have higher and lower levels of EI. The cultural context in which correct answers are determined must be given due consideration (Matthews et al, 2004; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Cattell (1963) described two distinct types of intelligence, crystallised and fluid. He defined fluid intelligence as relating to abstract, adaptive, biologically influenced cognitive abilities and crystallised intelligence as the applied, experience-based, and learning-enhanced ability. As reported by

Matthews et al. (2004) individuals who have a high level of EI know information regarding emotions that other people ignore which represents the crystallised intelligence aspect of EI. The fluid aspect of intelligence can also be seen in those with high levels of EI who, as Matthews et al. (2004) commented, can provide appropriate solutions to problems about emotions and do so quickly. Rosenberg (2015) observed that people are dangerous when they are not conscious of their responsibility for how they behave, think, and feel.

Based on the consideration of the nature of both intelligence and emotion, it is proposed that emotional intelligence represents a unique and significant intersection of abilities that enable individuals to create meaning in their lives, meet the challenges they face, and to function effectively in the social environment. Emotional intelligence is central to the experience of being human. EI was defined by Mayer and Salovey (1990) as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action” (p. 185). This definition was revised by Mayer and Salovey (1997) to state that EI is “the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (p. 10). Based on a consideration of the meaning of EI presented by the many theorists, Mayer and Salovey’s (1997) definition will be used for the purpose of this study into EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

## **2.4 Models of Emotional Intelligence**

Having reviewed and analysed the intelligence and emotional aspects of EI which is central to this research as it seeks to uncover the meaning of EI among a sample of Irish primary school teachers the relationship to their practice in the classroom. Attention now turns to the models of EI. This section of the chapter analyses five primary models of EI that provide a range of perspectives and instruments for the measurement of EI. These are the models of EI and assessment methods developed by Salovey and Mayer (1990), Goleman (1995), Bar-On (1997, 2005), Petrides and Furnham (2001), and Drigas and Papoutsis's (2018) which are presented in chronological order to demonstrate the developments in thinking and approach over time. An understanding of these models will inform the development of the research questions, the research approach, the measures of EI to be used, and the discussion of findings.

Firstly, Salovey and Mayer (1990) presented the Four-Branch Model which uses the self-assessment tool called the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). Secondly, Goleman's (1995) model of emotional intelligence or competency model was developed which uses the 360-degree assessment instrument of the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI). Thirdly, the Bar-On (1997, 2000) model uses the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQi). The fourth model is the Trait Emotional Intelligence or "trait emotional self-efficacy" model presented by Petrides and Furnham (2001) and is assessed using the TEIQue. Therefore, each of these first four conceptualisations of EI has been operationalised for use. The central difference between these models is whether the focus is on a set of mental abilities or a set of personality traits. EI was originally referred



to as an ability by Mayer and Salovey (1997), whereas more recent definitions and models have incorporated many personal attributes by theorists including Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (1997). The theories that combine both ability and personality characteristics are referred to as mixed models of EI. A further development has been seen in the fifth theory of EI to be reviewed. This is Drigas and Papoutsis's (2018) New Layered Model of EI which proposes an emotional–cognitive based approach to the process of gaining EI. While many have questioned the validity of the study of EI, the number of theoretical perspectives that exist is an indicator of the robustness and theoretical maturity of the research (Fernandez-Berocal & Extremera, 2006).

For this study, a clear understanding of the theoretical approaches to EI is required in order that different perspectives provide a range of insights into the meaning of EI and can be evaluated for their relevance as part of the methodology and to contribute to the discussion of findings. Comparisons can be made between the five models of EI that follow and at times conflict can be found between approaches, however they are not mutually exclusive and can co-exist to provide a collective multi-dimensional insight into the meaning and practice of EI as reported by the sample of Irish primary school teachers. An examination of the models of EI will be presented in the order as follows, Salovey and Mayer (1990), Goleman (1995), BarOn (1997, 2005), Petrides and Furnham (2001), and Drigas and Papoutsis's (2018).

#### ***2.4.1 Salovey & Mayer's Four-Branch Model of EI or Ability Model***

The original concept of EI is attributed to US psychologists Peter Salovey of Yale University and John D. Mayer of the University of New Hampshire. They presented the first theory of EI in 1990. In their definition of EI, they focused on and gave equal weight to the words “emotional” and “intelligence”. EI is defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (p. 189). Accordingly, emotion is made up of feelings that encompass physiological responses, such as sadness, happiness and fear, and cognitions such as, assessments of the meaning of emotion and learning about ourselves from our emotions. Intelligence is understood to refer to capacities to think and reason about information. Salovey and Mayer (1990) divided the concept of EI into four capacities:

1. Accurately perceiving emotions.
2. Using emotions to facilitate thinking.
3. Understanding emotional meanings.
4. Managing emotions.

In 1997 Mayer and Salovey revised and extended their definition of EI and proposed that it was made up of the “ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions as to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (p. 10). They presented an ordered hierarchical four-branch model which starts with the fundamental

psychological processes that appear at earlier stages of development and progresses to more complex processes that emerge later in development. The branches of the model are as follows:

### **1. Perceiving Branch - Perception, Appraisal, and Expression of Emotion**

A high level of this type of EI enables a person to recognise emotions in other people. The initial step in understanding emotions is to achieve an accurate perception of them. This is achieved through their use of language, sound (tone) and behaviour, as well as nonverbal signals communicated through facial expressions and body language. In addition, a person should be able to identify accurately their own emotions in relation to their thoughts and feelings. This leads to the correct expression of emotions in relation to their thoughts and feelings. The following four specific abilities in this branch have been identified by Côté (2014) as follows:

*The Ability to Identify the Emotions that Others Feel.* The ability to accurately identify the emotions that others are feeling, such as sadness, anger, or joy. This is achieved normally by processing nonverbal information including facial expressions and vocal tones (Buck et al., 1980; Elfenbein & Eisenkraft, 2010; Jenness, 1932). In addition, this ability has been named empathic accuracy (Côté et al., 2011b), emotion recognition ability (Rubin et al., 2005), and nonverbal receiving ability (Buck et al., 1980). Van Kleef (2009) asserted that this ability assists people to gather information about other people's attitudes, goals, and intentions which are communicated through emotional expressions.

*The Ability to Detect the Authenticity of Others' Emotional Expressions.* This is the ability to accurately distinguish emotional

expressions that are authentic from those that are fake (Groth et al., 2009; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Individuals consider if they can rely on the expression of another person to infer their attitudes, goals, and intentions or if they should proceed with caution.

*The Ability to Appraise One's Own Emotions.* This concerns an individual's ability to identify and understand their own emotions to events that are taking place around them. An aspect of this ability is interoceptive awareness which is the ability to identify physiological changes that are related to the experience of stressful events and strategies to regulate the emotional response (Barrett et al., 2004).

*The Ability to Express One's Own Emotions Clearly.* This is the ability of individuals to clearly demonstrate their own emotions (Buck et al., 1980; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Zuckerman et al., 1976). It has been termed nonverbal sending accuracy by Buck et al. (1980) and results in observers identifying the emotion(s) that a person wishes to display to them.

## **2. Facilitation Branch - Emotional Facilitation and Thinking**

A high level of this type of EI enables a person to use their emotions as a memory aid and to make judgements about feelings to prioritise their thinking. This permits the consideration of multiple viewpoints and the effective use of emotions in problem solving. The following two specific abilities in this branch have been identified by Côté (2014) as follows:

*Knowledge of the systematic Effects of Emotions on Cognitive Processes.* This is an ability that individuals have regarding the knowledge about how emotions systematically guide cognitive activities such as the

experience of feeling anxiety and avoiding risk taking behaviour (Fine et al., 2003; Morgan et al., 2010; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

*The Ability to Harness Emotions to Guide Cognitive Activities and Solve Problems.* This is the ability of individuals to “generate emotions ‘on demand’” and to adapt their cognitive activities to the current situation” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 12).

## **2. Understanding Branch - Understanding and Analysing Emotions; Employing Emotional Knowledge**

A high level of EI results in the ability to label emotions accurately and recognise the relationships between emotions. In addition, the meaning behind emotions is understood and the connections between emotions as part of a process, for example failure in a spelling test would make you feel unhappy. Transitions among emotions are recognised by those with a high level of understanding. An example would be a time that you had shouted at your friend because you were annoyed, but later you regretted the way you spoke and think that it was the wrong thing to have done and now feel remorse. Three specific abilities in this branch have been identified by Côté (2014) as follows:

*The Ability to Comprehend Emotion Language.* This is an individual’s ability to accurately recognise the relationship between words and emotions and to attach verbal labels to their own and other peoples’ emotions (Fine et al., 2003; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). A person who has this type of ability has a rich vocabulary about emotions which permits them to associate the correct words to emotional reactions.

***The Ability to Analyse the Cause-and-Effect Relations Between Events & Emotions.*** This ability concerns how effectively an individual can identify past events that have drawn forth current emotions and the accuracy with which they can predict future emotions based on present events (Fine et al., 2003; McCann & Roberts, 2008; Morgan et al., 2010; Yip & Côté, 2013).

***The Ability to Understand How Basic Emotions Combine to Form Complex Emotions.***

This is described by Salovey and Mayer (1997) as how individuals learn “to recognize the existence of complex, contradictory emotions” (p. 13) and acknowledge these combinations of emotions.

#### **5. Managing Branch - Reflective Regulation of Emotion to Promote Emotional and Intellectual Growth**

A high level of this type of EI provides a person with the ability to stay open to feelings that are both pleasant and unpleasant. This permits the person to reflect on or detach from a particular emotion to evaluate whether it is informative or not. The person can monitor emotions in themselves and others to assess if the emotion expressed is typical, is influencing them, or is unreasonable. Finally, this type of person manages their own emotions and others by monitoring emotions. At times emotions can be instrumental for personal, intellectual, or emotional growth. Three specific abilities in this branch have been identified by Côté (2014) as follows:

***The Ability to Set Emotion Regulation Goals.*** This is an individual’s ability to identify if their present emotions are the most suitable in the current circumstance and if necessary to set goals for changing their emotions, if required (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

*The Ability to Select Emotion Regulation Strategies.* This ability has also been termed emotion regulation knowledge (Côté et al., 2011a) and regards an individual's ability to choose regulation strategies that are likely to result in desired emotions.

*The Ability to Implement Emotion regulation Strategies.* This concerns how effectively an individual uses regulation strategies to create the desired effect on emotions (Côté et al., 2010; Sheppes et al., 2013). According to Côté et al. (2006) appropriate regulation strategies may have been chosen by an individual, but they may not be implemented effectively.

Salovey and Mayer (1997) further placed these four branches into experiential and strategic categories which have lower and higher levels of sophistication of ability, see Figure 2.2.

**Figure 2.2**

*Four Branches of EI (Salovey & Mayer, 1997)*

<b>Experiential</b>  (Relating to, or derived from, experience)	<b>Strategic</b>  (Relating to intended objective, or plan of action)
Perceiving branch	Understanding branch
Facilitation branch	Managing branch
<b>Lower Sophistication</b>	<b>Higher Sophistication</b>

This model of EI is labelled as an ability model of emotional intelligence as it involves ability in having and dealing with emotion, using emotion to enhance thought, and to reflect and engage in a range of emotions and these abilities are placed in order of sophistication. The mental abilities

model of EI presents an intelligence system focused on the processing of emotional information which is an integrated part of other traditional and well stabilised intelligences (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999). This model of EI has been supported by the scientific community firstly due to its solid and justified theoretical base, and secondly due to its novel approach to measurement as compared to other approaches; and finally due to its systematic evaluation and the support received from both basic and applied fields (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006).

**Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MCEIT).** In 2002 Mayer and Salovey were joined by Caruso and together they further developed their model and a performance-based measurement of EI. The method of assessment provides a means of determining how well participants perform tasks and solve problems about emotions. The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test V2.0 (MSCEIT V2: Mayer et al., 2003) is made up of a 141-item scale and measures the four emotional intelligence abilities. Upon completion of the test a person receives an overall emotional intelligence score on the MSCEIT

V2.0, in addition to subscale scores for the four abilities of the Perceiving Branch, Facilitating Branch, Understanding Branch, and Managing Branch. Mayer et al. (2004) concluded that people who are rated as higher in EI tend to be more agreeable, open, and conscientious. Sternberg (1997) provided support for the ability model presented by Mayer and Salovey (1997) as he wrote “A priori, there is no reason not to posit the abilities to understand and regulate emotions as a kind of intelligence” (p. 1034), but also observed at this time that these abilities needed to be tested to qualify as a form of intelligence. A strength of the MSCEIT is that it includes the four-branches



of Mayer and Salovey's (1997) model of EI and that evidence for its validity and reliability has been presented in previous studies such as Côté and Miners (2006) and Farh et al. (2012). The limitations of the MSEIT have been considered and include criticism about expert selection, consensus approach, and accessibility of the performance-based measure. Concern has been reported by Conte (2005) that the selection criteria for experts consisted only of members of a professional society on research on emotions, the International Society for Research on Emotion, and questions have been asked about the theoretical basis for correct answers to the problems presented being determined by general consensus. Also, access to the MSCEIT is restricted as it is copyrighted, and it can be used only through arrangement with a psychological assessment company (Côté, 2014).

In 2008 the set of abilities connected to emotions and emotional information was further highlighted by the definition of EI as "the ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought (Mayer et al., 2008, p. 507). Mayer et al. (2016) revised the four-branch model of EI and included more instances of problem-solving and asserted that the mental abilities involved in EI still need identification.

The model presented by Salovey and Mayer (1990) is important to this study and its focus on the meaning and measurement of EI as it provided the first clear theory of EI which combined both emotions and intelligence into the concept of EI. It expanded on the meaning of EI through the development of the four branches of EI and made a further contribution through the development, in conjunction with Caruso, of a method of assessing EI in the form of the MSCEIT (Mayer et al, 2002, 2003). The work

of Salovey and Mayer (1990) was significant, yet the model that came after that was developed by Goleman (1995) is the most widely known model of EI and popularised the idea that emotions are a valid aspect of intelligence.

#### ***2.4.2 Goleman's Model of Emotional Intelligence or Competency Model***

Goleman (1995) defines EI as “being able to rein in emotional impulse; to read another’s innermost feelings; to handle relationships smoothly” (p. xiii). While Goleman (1995) constructed his theory based on Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) model, with reference to physiological and cognitive terms, he also introduced the world to several new concepts. Goleman (1995) claimed that EI has its origin in the part of the brain called the amygdala which is in the medial temporal lobe and part of the limbic system. This group of brain structures play a role in a range of emotions such as pleasure, fear, and aggression and in the process of memory. The amygdala is involved in aggression and fear which are responses to threat. This is based on the description provided by US physiologist Walter Cannon in 1929 of the experience of “fight-or-flight” or stress response. Goleman (2015) reported that research findings that uncovered that “the limbic system learns best through motivation, extended practice, and feedback” (p. 8). Goleman’s (1995, 1998b) main proposition is that the effective balance and management of emotions will determine how intelligently individuals will behave and experience success in their life.

The first three components of EI described by Goleman (1995) are the self-management skills of self-awareness, self-regulation, and

motivation, and the two final components of empathy and social skill, which focus on the ability to manage relationships with others.

### **Self-Awareness**

This involves an individual being able to define their emotions, identify their origins, and understand the influence of these emotions on themselves and others. Also, it involves the ability to correctly evaluate how other people perceive their behaviour. Self-awareness provides individuals with an insight into their strengths, limitations, needs, drives, values, and goals, and a capacity to be honest with themselves and others. Characteristics of those with a high level of self-awareness include self-confidence, realistic self-assessment, and a self-depreciating sense of humour.

### **Self-Regulation**

This concerns the management of an individual of their emotions and behavioural state appropriately so that they do not cause themselves or others distress. It involves the control, channelling, or redirection of impulses and moods that are disruptive. This involves taking responsibility for actions and having an openness to change and innovation. The indicators of self-regulation are trustworthiness and integrity, comfort with ambiguity, and openness to change.

### **Motivation**

This is about individual's use of their emotions to provide them with the energy to achieve their goals even in the face of challenges. Motivated people can be identified by a strong drive to achieve, optimism even when faced with failure, and organisational commitment.

## **Empathy**

This concerns an individual understanding about what others need or want and being able to share the emotions of other people. It involves the ability to evaluate the needs of other people and being a caring person. Empathy in the workplace results in building and retaining talent, cross-cultural sensitivity which is key in a globalised environment, and enhanced service to clients and customers.

## **Social Skills**

This involves the skills of individuals to lead, change, build trust, communicate, collaborate, and cooperate and provides people with the ability to get on smoothly with others in lots of different types of environments. It represents a culmination of other components of EI. The hallmarks of high levels of socially skilled individuals include their ability to lead change, persuasive nature, and effectiveness at building and leading teams.

Goleman's (1995) model was refined to present four essential dimensions that are subdivided into 20 competencies (Boyatzis et al., 2000; Goleman, 2001) as follows:

- 1) Self-Awareness – emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence.
- 2) Social-Awareness – empathy, service, orientation, organisational awareness.
- 3) Self-Management – self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, achievement drive, initiative.
- 4) Relationship Management – developing others, influence, communication, conflict management, leadership, change catalyst, building bonds, teamwork, and collaboration.

Goleman (2001) contends that each of the four dimensions provide the basis to develop other learned abilities or competencies required in organisations. An emotional competence is a learned capability based on EI that produces outstanding performance at work (Goleman, 1998b). The instrument developed to measure Goleman's model is the Emotional Competence Inventory 2.0 (ECI 2.0) and its purpose is to assess social and emotional competencies in the organisation. The measure uses a 360-degree methodology which is based on external evaluations by colleagues and superiors. It consists of 110 items and three items are the minimum number used to assess each competence. This approach is easier and quicker as compared to the individual interview and is wider as it provides a general indicator of 20 emotional competencies about a person's work performance using a single instrument. In addition, higher levels of validity and reliability can be achieved with this measure as it facilitates the comparison between the employee's perception of their competencies and other employee's and the boss' perception of these competencies (Boyatzis et al., 2000).

Goleman's (1995) model is different to Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of emotional intelligence as he added several personality characteristics such as leadership, collaboration, and conscientiousness (Gayathri & Meenakshi, 2013). Goleman (2015) asserted that each person is born with a certain level of EI skills and that these abilities can be learnt and strengthened through persistence, practice, and feedback which involves sincere desire and concerted effort, and that EI increases with age. Goleman's (1995) approach has been criticised for not being very scientific and too commercial in its orientation (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006). This

observation has been supported by the development of more scientific models of EI by theorists including Mayer and Salovey (1997), Bar-On (1997), and Boyatzis et al. (2000).

While Goleman (1995) further built on the findings of Salovey and Mayer (1990) by including an emphasis on physiological and cognitive terms, he introduced several new ideas. These include the addition of personality characteristics and the development of the measure of EI by the Emotional Competence Inventory (Boyatzis et al., 2000). The model presented by Goleman (1995) provides this study with a further theoretical framework that will be used to gain an understanding of the self-management skills of self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation, and empathy and social skills, that may be described by the sample of Irish primary school teachers. A third model of EI was presented by US psychologist Bar-On (1997, 2005) that uses the term emotional-social intelligence.

#### ***2.4.3 Bar-On's Model of EI or Emotional-Social Intelligence Model***

The original and most comprehensive definition of “Emotional and Social Intelligence” (ESI) was presented by Reuven Bar-On in 2005 which draws on the Darwin’s evolutionary theory of effective adaptation. Emotional social intelligence is “a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands” (Bar-On, 2005, p. 3). According to Bar-On (2005) the focus of the model is on the potential for success rather than success itself and is more process-oriented than outcome oriented.

The model describes five high level factors of emotional and social intelligence which are divided into fifteen sub factors as follows (Bar-On, 2006):

### **Intrapersonal Skills**

This is ability of being aware and being able to understand emotions, feelings, and ideas in the self. It is subdivided into the five subfactors of self-regards, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, and self-actualisation.

### **Interpersonal Skills**

This is the ability of being aware and understanding emotions, feelings, and ideas in other people. It is subdivided into the three subfactors of empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationship.

### **Adaptability**

This refers to the ability of being open to change our feelings depending on the situation.

It is subdivided into the three subfactors of reality-testing, flexibility, and problem-solving.

### **Stress Management**

This concerns the ability to cope with stress and control emotions. It is subdivided into the two subfactors of stress tolerance and impulse control.

## **General Mood**

This is the ability to feel and express positive emotions. It is subdivided into the subfactors of optimism and happiness.

Bar-On (1997) developed a self-report method of quantifying and measuring ESI called the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i). The results from the EQi provide an insight into the motivation behind human behaviour and the relationships that are formed over a lifetime. When the test is correctly conducted predictions can be made based on the results about a person's academic performance, career path, organisational effectiveness, occupational performance and leadership, and psychological and physical health and wellbeing. His work has been updated and developed over the years. Bar-On (2006) developed the EQ-i to investigate why some people who have a high IQ struggle in life, whereas others who have a moderate IQ are successful. The test measures the emotional, personal, and social aspects of intelligence which is non-cognitive intelligence. This leads to a prediction of the likelihood of success in various areas of life and an insight into the degree of an individual's common sense and street smarts. The EQ-i presents the five dimensions of the model with the related subscales and consists of 133 items. The EQ-i is a scientific measure of EI and is one of the best normed instruments of EI. According to Bar-On (2006) the self-report measure has been administered to over 42,000 participants in 36 countries and therefore has multicultural applicability. It is multifaceted and examines aspects of both emotional and social intelligence.

Bar-On (2000) stated that the method of measurement provided by the EQ-i includes many emotional and social competencies which presents both an estimation of the level of EI and an affective and social profile. As a result,



it has been suggested that Bar-On's (2000) approach can be viewed as a mixed model of EI as it combines both social, emotional, cognitive, and personality dimensions (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). The distinction can be made between Goleman's (1995) and Bar-On's (1997) model as the ESI model includes stress management and general mood elements like optimism and happiness. In addition, Bar-On (2006) includes reality testing which asserts how far an individual is aware of the gap between the actual meaning and their construed meaning of a given situation, and impulse control which is an ability to control oneself from reacting to a situation in a reckless manner (Gayathri and Meenakshi, 2013).

In common with the models of EI developed by Mayer and Salovey (1990) and Goleman (1995), Bar-On's (1997, 2005) model has a biological basis, but in contrast has a focus on emotionally and socially intelligent behaviour from the perspective of Darwin's (1872) theory of effective adaptation. Bar-On's (2005) mixed model of EI provides this study with the lens the five domains of intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability skills, stress management skills, and the aspects of general mood of happiness and optimism, through which to examine the meaning and practice of EI among the sample of Irish primary school teachers.

In the fourth model of EI a different approach to EI is presented by Petrides and Furnham (2000, 2001) in that EI is not regarded as an intelligence or cognitive ability, but more than a personality variable.

#### ***2.4.4 Petrides & Furnham's Trait EI or Trait Emotional Self – Efficacy Model***

The Trait Emotional Intelligence (Trait EI) or “Trait Emotional Self – Efficacy” model, was developed by Petrides and Furnham (2000, 2001). Trait EI “describes our perceptions of our emotional world: what our emotional dispositions are and how good we believe we are in terms of perceiving, understanding, managing, and utilizing our own and other people's emotions” (Petrides et al., 2018, p. 50). This model of EI is different to earlier approaches as it is not viewed as an intelligence or cognitive ability but conceptualises it as being made up of “emotional self-perceptions” (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). It is also referred to as emotional self-efficacy which is an individual's subjective belief in their ability to be successful in emotional situations, therefore Trait EI focuses on self-perceived emotional abilities (Petrides, 2011). Petrides and Furnham's (2001) model presents a conceptual contrast to the earlier ability trait models of emotional intelligence.

Trait EI is comprised of emotionally related self-perceived abilities and moods that are located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies and are evaluated through questionnaires and rating scales. The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) (Petrides, 2009) is made up of the sampling domain of 15 facets, four factors and global trait EI which aims to provide complete coverage of emotional aspects of personality. The 15 facets of the Trait EI theory are Adaptability, Assertiveness, Emotion expression, Emotion perception, Emotion regulation, Low impulsiveness, Relationships, Self-esteem, Self motivation, Social-awareness, Stress management, Trait empathy, Trait happiness, and Trait optimism. The 15 facets are grouped into the four factors of “Emotionality”, “Self-Control”, “Sociability”, and “Well-

Being” (Petrides, 2011). Individuals with high EI rankings believe that they are in touch with their feelings and can regulate them in a manner that promotes prosperity and may enjoy higher levels of happiness. In the Trait EI model there is no standard profile of an emotionally intelligent person as certain sets of emotional and social traits are adaptive, functional, and useful in some situations whereas the same traits may cause difficulties for individuals in other contexts. The traits provide the individual with the ability to understand their own and others' emotions and provide them with the ability to be successful on a personal, social, and professional level.

Again, this theoretical perspective provides a useful insight in to EI which will be used to examine the meaning and practice of EI as described by the sample of Irish primary school teachers in this study. The final model of EI presented by Drigas and Papaoutsi (2018) focuses on both the ability level and trait level of EI and the development and improvement of EI.

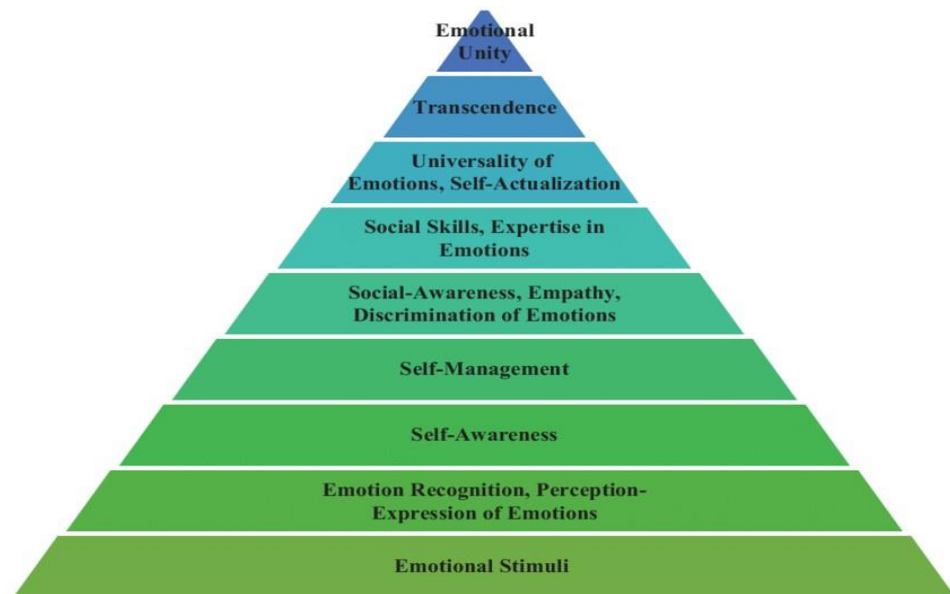
#### ***2.4.5 Drigas and Papaoutsi (2018) Nine Layer Pyramid of Emotional Intelligence***

Drigas and Papaoutsi's (2018) model presents an emotional–cognitive based approach to the process of gaining emotional intelligence. The model is based on ability and trait approaches to EI which are presented in a hierarchical order. According to the model the ability level refers to awareness, self and social, and to management and the trait level refers to the mood associated with emotions and the tendency to behave in a certain way in emotional states.

In addition, the hierarchical structure is based on the concepts of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences presented by Gardner (1975). Drigas and Papaoutsi (2018) proposed the pyramid of EI in an attempt to create a new layer model based on emotional, cognitive, and metacognitive skills. The focus of the model is on the development and improvement of EI to move towards one's personal growth and a higher state of self-regulation, self-organization, awareness, consciousness, attention, and motivation which will over time lead to higher levels of self-actualisation and transcendence. It is concluded by Drigas and Papaoutsi (2021) that individuals need to adopt additional abilities/skills and training strategies that are included in each of the nine levels of the pyramid model, see Figure 2.3. This will facilitate individuals mastering the skills of the pyramid, developing emotional intelligence for the creation of a better self, and succeeding in self-actualisation and transcendence.

**Figure 2.3**

*The Emotional Intelligence Pyramid (Drigas and Papaoutsi, 2018)*



Examples of the skills that are needed for the development of metacognitive and metaemotional skills and contribute to the promotion of emotional intelligence have been identified by Drigas and Papaoutsi (2021) as follows:

- An ability to identify and describe what people are feeling.
- An awareness of personal strengths and limitations.
- Self-confidence and self-acceptance.
- The ability to let go of mistakes.
- An ability to accept and embrace change.
- A strong sense of curiosity, particularly about other people.
- Feelings of empathy and concern for others.
- Showing sensitivity to the feelings of other people.
- Accepting responsibility for mistakes.

- The ability to manage emotions in difficult situations. It is proposed by Drigas and Papaoutsis (2021) that the cultivation and training of the metacognitive and metaemotional abilities and skills identified on each level of the pyramid of EI is essential for the increase of EI and will have a significant impact on an individual's personality and relationships. The skills and strategies that are needed to develop emotional intelligence are interconnected in a dynamic set which will increase the projection of the true self of knowledge into an emotionally unified universe (Drigas and Papaoutsis, 2019). This model offers an insight into the skills and training needed to develop and improve EI require and provides a useful framework of the exploration of the meaning and practice of EI among the sample of Irish primary school teachers in this study.

#### ***2.4.6 Comparing the Five Models of EI***

The five different psychological perspectives and measures of EI demonstrate the development of the theories of EI over several decades. These models of EI may appear to be fragmented as they present different perspectives, however they can be seen to collectively contribute to the developing story of EI. The integration of the theories can be examined by comparing the ability, mixed ability, and trait models of EI and the method of measurement used to operationalise them. Mayer et al. (2000) proposed the ability models of EI that attempt to identify and define a single theoretical framework leading to an accurate understanding of the nature of EI. Mayer and Salovey's (1997) four-branch model of EI defines a set of abilities that are proposed to be unique to EI and do not consist of personality or behavioural characteristics. Whereas the mixed-models presented by

Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (1997, 2005) focus on understanding EI to present a definition of the successful “emotionally intelligent” person by examining the abilities that are possessed by successful emotionally intelligent individuals and have social, emotional, cognitive, and personality dimensions. The trait approach differs to the ability and mixed ability models as EI is not considered an intelligence or cognitive ability but focuses on self-perceived emotional abilities to be successful in emotional situations (Petrides, 2011). The model presented by Drigas and Papaoutsi (2018) is based on ability and trait approaches to EI and presents a layer model based on emotional, cognitive, and metacognitive skills.

The five models of EI have informed this study by providing an understanding of the different perspectives and methods of measurement of EI. The theoretical framework provided by the ability, mixed-ability and trait approaches will be used to provide a context for the interpretation of the meaning of EI as perceived by the sample of Irish primary school teachers and the impact on their teaching practice. Therefore, these models of EI will inform the development of the research questions, the research approach, and the analysis of the findings.

The researcher’s insight into these theories will determine the selection of the most appropriate research instruments in terms of the qualitative questions asked and the quantitative measure of EI selected. The qualitative and quantitative findings will be discussed in terms of the alignment, conflict, and coexistence with the theoretical framework. Even though several theories of EI have been advanced, many questions and controversies still surround the nature of EI and require consideration. This study aims to contribute to the continuing story of EI and its relationship to

inclusion in the classroom from the perspective of a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

## **2.5 An Elusive Construct – Current and Future Research Challenges**

The construct of EI remains for many as one that is important yet elusive. There are many valuable applications of the concept such as in understanding individual differences and personal development in general, and more particularly in fields such as workplace psychology, management and leadership, education, sports and coaching, advertising, and marketing, therefore it is a useful concept to many professionals. Upon consideration of the fact that after nearly 100 years of research consensus does not exist about what IQ is or the best way to measure it, it may be too much to expect that such a consensus would exist about EI at this stage of the theory's development.

Côté (2014) presented number of key controversies about the nature of EI. These are important considerations for this study about the meaning of EI and the impact on the teaching practice among the sample of Irish primary school teachers. Côté (2014) provides a useful framework for the debates that challenge to the concept of EI as follows:

### ***The Meaning of EI***

An insight into the constituent parts of EI, intelligence and emotion, provides an understanding of the benefit of the integration of the constructs. EI represents a set of abilities that enable an individual to effectively perform tasks and solve problems about emotions. The meaning of EI can be further



examined using the theoretical frameworks presented by Salovey and Mayer (1995), Goldman (1995), Bar-On (2005), Petrides and Furnham (2001), and Drigas and Papoutsi's (2018). These approaches need to be constantly revived and revised as further research findings become available and as external operating environments evolve. Cherniss et al. (2006) highlights the fact that "there is considerable overlap among the models, and it is in this overlap that one can find at least a provisional definition of the concept that can guide discourse. Specifically, all the models recognise that EI involves two broad components: awareness and management of one's own emotions and awareness and management of others' emotions" (p. 240).

### *Is EI Really a New Construct?*

Questions have been asked about whether EI is different to other individual differences in intelligence and personality. Researchers such as Schulte et al. (2004) have asserted that EI was not much more than general intelligence and personality. Research undertaken to investigate meta-analytic correlations between EI, and other individual differences found equal to or lower than .25 (Joseph & Newman, 2010), which indicates that EI does not lack unique content.

### *EI as a Fuzzy Concept*

There exists some confusion and ambiguity about the definition and nature of EI and the problematic fuzziness of the concept has been examined (Pfeiffer, 2001). Locke (2005) contested that the ultimate motive behind the theory of multiple intelligence and by extension EI is egalitarianism and that the meaning of what it means to be intelligent has been redefined in order that everyone will be equal in intelligence, in some way, to everyone else. However, Cherniss et al. (2006) contends that the emergence of several

versions of EI theory is an indicator of vitality in the field should not be seen as a weakness.

### ***Validity of Measures of EI***

The lack of precision in defining the concept of EI has resulted in measures not meeting acceptable levels of scientific quality. Researchers such as Pfeiffer (2001) have questioned if EI can be measured scientifically and objectively as many measures used are self-report instruments, lack norms and standardisation, and have low levels of internal consistency or stability. The development of self-report and performance-based instruments to measure EI may be viewed as problematic as it makes the comparison between studies difficult, and it makes meta-analyses challenging (Landy, 2005). According to Locke (2005) EI has been defined too broadly to be tested adequately. However, the weight of the evidence now supports the claim that EI is distinct from IQ, personality, or related constructs (Mayer et al., 2003). The variety of theoretical approaches and methods of measurement may not be seen as a weakness but as strength and as a sign of robustness and theoretical maturity (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006).

### ***Unresolved Issues***

Matthews et al. (2004) undertook a review of the evidence regarding EI theory and identified several critical unresolved problems. Firstly, they stated that there were too many conflicting EI constructs, secondly that there was not successful differentiation between EI and personality constructs and general intelligence, and finally that the claim that EI was critical for

real-world success had not been validated. A response presented by Cherniss (2006) stated that “although there is still much to be learned about the relation between EI and work-related outcomes, the evidence in favour of such a relation continues to accumulate” (p. 241-242).

### ***Can EI Be Taught?***

The theory of EI presented by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and Mayer and Salovey (1997) provides a framework to examine social and emotional adaptation and the focus is on emotional skills that can be developed due to learning and experience using the four abilities of perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions. These skills can be viewed as an intelligence as they develop with age (Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003). According to Hodzic et al. (2018) and Mattingly and Kraiger (2019) EI can be learned, cultivated, and mastered through training, interventions, and life experiences and EI training is effective.

### ***EI and Age***

The literature shows that there are mixed findings about the relationship between EI and age. Research findings presented by Chan (2004) and Kafetsios & Zampetakis (2008) found that there was no significant relationship between EI and age. Whereas Day and Carroll (2004) found a statistically significant negative relationship between age and EI. However, findings by Bar-On et al. (2000) and Van Rooy et al. (2005) reported that the measure of EI increases with age.

### ***Cross-Cultural Variations in EI***

Questions need to be asked about the significant impact of culture on the development, expression, and measurement of EI. Further investigation is required to investigate the influence of cultural dimensions on an individual's ability to attend to, understand, and regulate their emotion and the impact on people's social and emotional adjustment (Fernández Berrocal, Salovey, Vera, Extremera, & Ramos, 2005).

### ***EI as a 'Hot' Intelligence***

According to Mayer et al. (2012), Mayer et al. (2016) hot intelligences can be described as those in which people engage with subject matter about people. A 'hot' intelligence includes practical, social, and emotional intelligence. They position EI among personal and social intelligences.

### ***Benefits of EI***

There are many benefits of having a higher level of EI as it enhances our effectiveness in our personal and professional lives. Research has demonstrated the positive relationship of EI to with psychological and physical health, personal well-being, stress (Bao et al., 2015) (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016), academic performance, work performance (Miao et al., 2017), social relationships, education, (Peurtas Molero et al., 2020) and leadership (Goleman, 2021).

### ***Further Research***

Lopes et al. (2004) identified the need for further research in areas such as the cohesiveness of EI as a theoretical construct, the evaluation of the predictive validity of emotional competencies, and the effect of emotional training skills on social relationships. In addition to the further understanding of how EI is expressed in people's everyday lives (Brackett et al., 2004). Other important questions remain unanswered such as are women more emotionally intelligent than men, the impact of age on emotional intelligence, and the effect of life experience and culture.

### **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented an understanding and analysis of the history, meaning, models, and controversies in EI. Therefore, a theoretical framework has been provided for this study to explore the meaning of EI among a sample of Irish primary school teachers and its relationship to their practice in the classroom, to identify the EI profile of the sample of Irish primary school teachers, and to establish a knowledge base to examine the relationship between EI and attitudes and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom. Collectively this knowledge will be used to guide and inform the research approach, and the analysis and discussion of findings.

While five important models of EI have provided the theoretical framework for this study, to provide clarity and consistency of communication the researcher has decided to use one definition of EI for this research. The meaning of EI as defined as by Mayer & Salovey (1997) as "the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to

understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (p. 10) will be used for the purpose of this study.

An understanding of EI is key to our experience of being human and represents the skills that are required to function effectively in our social world. EI represents the intersection between intelligence and emotion. The intelligent use of emotions is significant and relevant for people today in all areas of life. The multiplicity of definitions and the variety of ability and trait perspectives to EI does raise criticism, but collectively they have provided a framework for understanding a concept that can appear elusive. It is acknowledged that many challenges remain and there are many unanswered questions, but this only provides motivation to continue the search for meaning. Emotional intelligence can make a difference to all areas of our lives, and as Mayer et al. (2008) stated that emotional intelligence is still a promising area of study but there remain significant gaps in knowledge. Let this study contribute in some way to filling the gap in the unfolding story of EI and its relationship to attitudes and intentions towards inclusion in the classroom among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Teaching is an Emotional Practice**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

“Emotions are at the heart of teaching” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835). A central focus of this study is the exploration of the meaning and practice of EI among a sample of Irish Primary School Teachers. Thus, it is important to gain an insight into the emotional demands placed on teachers and the impact at a personal and professional level. The models of EI presented in the previous chapter provided a theoretical framework for understanding the emotional practice of teaching. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the relationship between EI and its relationship to teaching practice. This will facilitate the evaluation of the research presented in this chapter in relation to the insights provided by the sample of Irish primary school teachers in this study.

In addition, EI and the experience of teachers’ emotional management, the outcomes including self-efficacy and burnout, and the initiatives proposed to support teachers will be considered. The importance and application of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) will be presented with reference to the RULER (recognising, understanding, labelling, expressing, and regulating) method developed by the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence (Brackett, 2019). Therefore, the research framework presented in this chapter facilitates the exploration of the practice of EI by a sample of Irish primary school teachers in meeting the emotional demands encountered in the classroom and the wider school environment.

### **3.2 Teaching is an Emotional Practice**

Many demands are placed on teachers as they are expected to be aware of their emotional states and associated moral issues, and to be able to reflect and learn from these emotional experiences (Hyry-Beihammer et al. 2019). Therefore, an important part of a teacher's skill set is the ability to work with their own emotions and the emotions of pupils (Corcoran & Tormey, 2013). Teaching is a very challenging, emotional, and stressful occupation due to the extensive and multidimensional roles that are undertaken by teachers and the demanding nature of the profession (Miyagamwala, 2015). Hargreaves (1998) comments that good teachers "are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy" (p. 835). It is recognised by Fried (2001) that teachers are passionate about ideas, learning, and their relationship with students. Nias (1996) presented three fundamental reasons why emotions are key for teaching and teachers, firstly, teaching involves interaction among people; secondly, teachers' personal and professional identities often cannot be separated therefore classrooms and schools become locations for their self-esteem, fulfilment, and vulnerability; and finally, teachers experience profound feelings about their work because they invest so much of themselves in it including their values. However, even though it is recognised that teaching is not just "a matter of competency, knowledge, and efficiency, or techniques only" (Shahzad et al., 2020, p. 1334), the consideration of emotions has been left aside as the focus of teaching and learning has been on the mind, cognition, and rationality (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009). Yet, emotional demands are reported to be one



of the greatest job-related threats to the occupational health and well-being of teachers (Hakanen et al., 2006).

It has been observed that the teaching profession is an emotional struggle, but there is an alignment between good teaching and constructive emotions (Shahzad et al, 2020). It was asserted by Corcoran and Tormey (2013) that an important part of a teacher's skill set is the ability to work with emotion, while Hargreaves (2001) stated that teaching is an emotional practice which "activates, colours and expresses the feelings and actions of teachers and those they influence" (p. 1057) and while teaching and learning concern knowledge, cognition, and skill they are also emotional practices (Hargreaves, 1998).

Hargreaves (1998) presented four interrelated theoretical precepts to analyse how emotions are located and represented in teachers' relationships with students, as follows:

***Teaching is an emotional practice.*** Teaching as an emotional practice influences the feelings and actions of teachers and those with who they work and form relationships. The outcomes of this emotional practice are key for the achievement of educational standards, success, and student achievement and equity.

***Teaching and learning involve emotional understanding.*** This enable teachers to recognise emotions, to understand if they are justified or misplaced in a particular context, and to respond accordingly. As teachers and students may differ in ethnocultural, or social class backgrounds, gaps of emotional misunderstanding may occur.

*Teaching is a form of emotional labour.* Hargreaves (1998) commented that “for many teachers, it is a labor of love” (p. 840) and that classroom would be a boring and barren place in its absence. Emotional labour does not just involve ‘acting out’ feelings at a superficial level, but actually experiencing the emotions that are needed to perform well in the job. He contends that the concept of emotional labour when care is put into context is “an act of work that can be supported, made difficult or turned against the person exercising it” depending on the context (p. 840).

*Teachers’ emotions are inseparable from their moral purposes and their ability to achieve those purposes.* The moral actions and judgements that teachers make are based on both emotional and cognitive understanding. When teachers experience their purposes being fulfilled then happiness is experienced (Oatley, 1991) and when the opposite is the case teachers may lose their sense of purpose and become demoralised (Nias, 1991).

Hargreaves (1998) contends that the four precepts demand us to think of emotions as central rather than a short-term aspect of teaching and schooling and worthy of much greater focus in educational policy and reform. He draws attention to feminist writers who highlight how essential caring is to good quality teaching and learning, however it is not often taken into consideration in the official politics of educational reform and administration. Hargreaves (2000) asserted that little or no attention is given to emotions by educational policy and administration and the educational research community in general. The priority is rationalised, cognitively driven and behavioural priorities which include knowledge, skills, standards, targets, performance, management, planning, problem-solving, decision-making, and measurable results (Hargreaves, 1997). Therefore, this further strengthens the argument

in favour of the importance of considering the impact of EI on teachers and their teaching practice at many levels.

### **3.3 EI & Teachers' Emotional Management, Outcomes, and Support**

Hargreaves (2000) asserted that emotions are an integral part of education. This perspective is supported by research findings on teacher's EI have demonstrated its significance across a wide range of areas including its importance in the promotion of a good classroom climate (Maamari & Majdalani, 2019), the achievement of student's higher academic performance (Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2020), teacher engagement (Abiodullah et al., 2020), satisfaction with work (Li et al., 2018), and the reduction of burn-out (Kant & Shanker, 2021). EI has been shown to have an impact on teachers' self-efficacy (Kostić-Bobanović, 2020) and on their teaching practices (Go et al., 2020; Kaur et al., 2019). Further Tsoli (2023) demonstrated a significant positive correlation between Greek primary school student teachers' EI and effective classroom management. According to Mevarech and Maskit (2015) teachers are presented with a range of situations that lead to the experience of intense emotions, including: interactions with other people including students, colleagues, principals, and parents (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003); reactions to teachers' goals (Hargreaves, 2001, Nias, 1996); and, the evaluation of teaching events and the educational system (Zembylas, 2004). Ramana (2013) contends that teachers who have a high level of emotional intelligence are more caring to their students, have a greater familiarity with the needs of students and respond more effectively and consequently reduce unacceptable student behaviours and enhance the

achievement of higher educational goals and academic performance. The emotional practice of teaching is affected by a number of variables including emotion regulation, self-efficacy and the experience of burnout and EI should be part of the human resources provided for teachers as part of their training and development. An examination of these outcomes and the support required for teachers is considered in the following sections.

### ***3.3.1 Emotion Regulation***

Emotion regulation is used by teachers to control their emotions (Sutton, 2004; Taxer & Frenzel, 2015) which has been defined by Gross (1999) as “the process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” (p. 275). Taxer and Gross (2018) contend that “why” and “how” teachers regulate their emotions when they are in the classroom impacts on their effectiveness, health and well-being, and student emotions and motivation. Prior research about how teachers modify their emotions mainly focused on the use by teachers of the emotional labour strategies of deep acting which involves the act of internalising the desired emotion in order that the expressed emotion matches the felt emotion (Grandey, 2000). The findings from Taxer and Goss (2018) revealed that the most frequently reported strategy for regulating emotions used by teachers was suppression and that they regulate their own emotions and their students’ emotions as a means of increasing their teaching effectiveness and regarded their own or students’ negative emotions as impeding and positive emotions as fostering the quality of their teaching and students’ learning. These findings support the assertion made by Hargreaves (2000) that teachers may get enjoyment from hiding or faking their emotions as these strategies help teachers in achieve higher order

goals to increase teaching effectiveness, professionalism, or managing student misbehaviour.

Corcoran and Tormey (2013) contended that the EI model has a value in that “it provides a clear and accessible framework for understanding and measuring the ability to work with emotion” (p. 34). The acceptance of teachers of their limits and weaknesses is enabled by socio-emotional abilities (Fer, 2004). A review by Uitto et al. (2015) of 70 articles that appeared in the *Journal of Teaching and Teacher Education* demonstrated that teaching is infused with emotion and requires a level of emotion management. Tal (2010) found that teachers’ awareness about their emotions and how to manage them made a significant contribution to their relationship with students and affected the continuity and nature of the teacher-pupil relationship. This finding is supported by Kedar (2011) who asserted that teachers with a high level of EI tend to be more compassionate towards their students and are more familiar with their needs and respond appropriately. In addition, a study undertaken by Agbaria (2021) demonstrated that kindergarten teachers who have higher levels of EI more effectively use emotion to focus on student behaviour and during lessons to think rationally, logically, and creatively which contributes to enhanced classroom management effectiveness. A systematic review undertaken by Merida-Lopez and Extremera (2017) uncovered evidence of the moderating role of EI in an educational setting. Teachers with high levels of emotional intelligence were found to experience more positive affect, employ more constructive thought patterns, will easily identify faulty appraisals, will have higher perceptions of social support, and look at stressful situations as challenges rather than threat, and will therefore have lower reactivity to

stressful situations at both psychological and physiological levels. Those with low levels of emotional skills will be less protected to psychosocial risks such as burnout. The relationship between the emotional aspects of teaching to burnout has been established in both western and eastern contexts (Naring et al., 2006; Cheung et al., 2011). The psychological well-being of teachers has a significant impact on a classroom climate (Geraci et al., 2023).

### ***3.3.2 Self-Efficacy & Burnout***

Self-efficacy and burnout in teachers are highly interconnected (Geraci et al., 2023) and EI can play an important moderating role. Self-efficacy in teachers can be understood using Bandura's (1977) social-cognitive theory as an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as "the beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Models of self-efficacy contend that it is context specific, and that teacher self-efficacy can be affected by several contextual variables in school settings (Bandura, 1986). Teachers' level of self-efficacy has been shown to correspond to their belief in personal and instructional ability to be successful in coping with instructional tasks, obligations, and challenges (Caprara et al., 2006). Teaching has been acknowledged globally as one of the high-risk professional groups for burnout (Nizielski, 2014). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) burnout is a result of sustained unmanaged high work stress that is seen in the form of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy. Burnout in teachers can have an impact on their health and well-being which increase the chances of experiencing physical and psychological pathologies (Martínez-Montegudo et al., 2019). A systematic review was undertaken by Mérida-

López and Extremera (2017) to investigate the association between EI and teacher burnout. They found significant evidence about the role of EI in reducing burnout in an educational setting. This was further investigated by Chakravorty and Singh (2020) who proposed that it is reasonable to suggest that a relationship exists between the emotional demands of teaching and emotionally related outcomes such as burnout. The study undertaken by Chakravorty and Singh (2020), which had a sample of 800 Indian primary school teachers, demonstrated the significant moderating role of EI between work/family interference and burnout. It was proposed that the results may be due to fact that EI provides a means for teachers to construct a supportive environment around them through the effective use and regulation of emotion. There needs to be a recognised regard for the context in which teachers work as ever-increasing demands may be making the emotional commitment to students more difficult to sustain. A study conducted by Geraci et al., (2023) confirmed the protective role of EI against burnout in teachers and for maintaining high levels of self-efficacy and work engagement.

### ***3.3.3 Training & Development***

Chakravorty & Singh (2020) proposed that EI should be recognised as a personal resource for teachers to be developed through training. The emotional intelligence of teachers should be part of human resource process such as selection and development criteria to reduce burnout and to enhance personal and professional well-being (Chakravorty & Singh, 2020). Also, EI should be part of the appraisal process as the risk highlighted by Shahzad et al. (2020) is that the emotional aspect of teaching will be ignored while the

focus will remain on content and pedagogy. If the education system does not facilitate the development and expression of teachers EI in order that they understand and feel understood and that their needs are met, then teachers may not be able to be compassionate, understanding, and empathetic to the needs of students. Beginning and continuing teachers should be provided with the appropriate knowledge, cognition, and skills. However, an area of significant concern includes the importance of social emotional learning becoming part of the teacher training (Waajid et al., 2013); the fact that emotional development should be the focus of initial and continuous teacher training programmes (Turculet, 2015); and the need to recognise schools that create an emotionally intelligent learning culture. Shahzad et al. (2020) contend that emotional intelligence skills should be incorporated into teacher education. In addition, they assert that teachers should be evaluated on the emotional aspect of teaching and not just on content and pedagogy.

As the previous sections have demonstrated teaching is an emotional practice that is managed using emotion regulation and affected by teacher's self-efficacy and experience of burnout. However, these outcomes can be mitigated by providing the appropriate EI supports in terms of training and development. Consequently, researchers have put forward initiatives that should be undertaken to develop the relationship between EI and effective teaching practice. Cherniss et al. (2006) stated that there is already an increasing amount of literature that shows the positive impact on children's healthy development and school success of EI programming that promotes social and emotional learning. They propose that solid data has now demonstrated the importance of EI theory and practice for educational psychology. Jones and Bouffard (2012) have highlighted that the social



emotional learning of pupils is directly influenced by their teacher's social emotional competence as well as their pedagogical skills. Corcoran & Tormey (2013) presented the surprising findings that teacher performance did not correlate significantly with teacher EI. They contended that cognitively orientated teacher education and teaching practice do not present opportunities for student teachers to develop their emotional intelligence. The preparation of teachers for their role should be prioritised over the methods of selection. In addition, Corcoran and Tormey (2013) stated that EI should be used as part of teacher selection and development criteria to reduce burnout and enhance personal and professional well-being. Turculet (2015) contends that teacher training should include emotional competency and that "initial and continuous teacher training programmes should include emotional development" (p. 995). This is further supported by Agbaria (2021) who proposed the introduction of workshops for teachers to raise awareness about the importance of EI, and by Corcoran and O'Flaherty (2022) who stated that there should be an explicit focus on the development of evidence-based approaches to SEL and well-being during initial teacher education. Akhtar et al. (2020) put forward the view that an effective instructional curriculum should be developed that incorporates EI skills with the objective of enhancing the personal and career success of teachers.

### **3.4 Social and Emotional Learning**

According to Nathanson et al. (2016) ‘Social and Emotional Learning’ (SEL) “refers to the processes of developing social and emotional competencies, which depend on individuals’ capacity to recognize, understand, and manage emotions (i.e., emotional intelligence or EI)” p. 1.) The Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) proposes that SEL is an integral part of education and human development and define it as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions”.

CASEL (2020) uses an integrated framework (see Figure 3) that is made up of multiple settings and five broad and interrelated areas of competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The framework is beneficial as it can be taught and applied across the developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and in a range of diverse cultural contexts.

**Figure 3.1**

*CASEL's SEL Framework or "CASEL Wheel" (CASEL, 2020)*



SEL and well-being have been referenced at policy level in many countries including Ireland (DES, 2018). The documents provide guidance for schools, government departments, and non-government organisations in the promotion of well-being in education (DES, 2018). However, research has found that many teachers do not feel that their training has prepared them to model and implement SEL and well-being components in the classroom (Challen et al., 2014; Corcoran et al., 2018; Dulak & DuPre, 2008; Lendrum et al., 2013). It has been suggested that the inclusion of SEL training in initial teacher preparation had benefits and gave the pre-service teachers confidence to effectively implement SEL interventions (Corcoran & Tormey, 2012). A leading example of organisation that is researching and providing training in SEL is the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence (YCEI) using the RULER method. The consideration of the RULER method provides this study with

an approach that could be used in Irish primary schools to promote and develop EI.

### ***3.4.1 Building EI Through RULER***

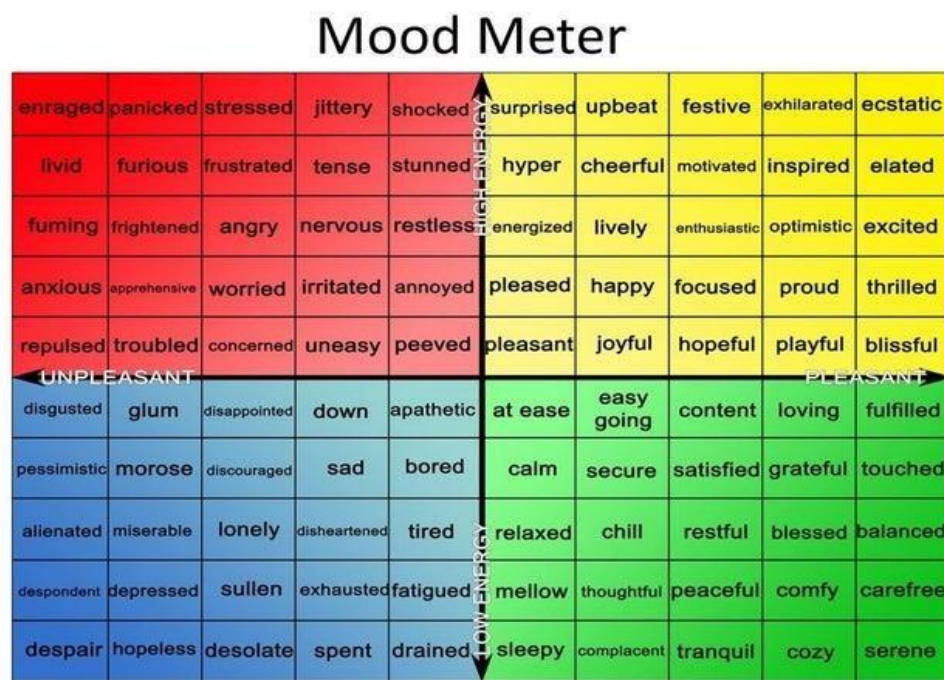
The core belief of the YCEI (2023) is that emotions matter. The purpose of the centre is to conduct research and offer training to support people of all ages to develop emotional intelligence skills. Marc Brackett was the Founding Director for the YCEI and is author of the bestselling book *Permission to Feel* (Brackett, 2019). The centre applies scientific research to develop new and effective approaches to teaching emotional intelligence. The centre has developed a research-based, field-tested approach called RULER, which stands for Recognizing, Understanding, Labelling, Expressing and Regulating emotions. This approach has been associated with enhancements in students' academic performance and social skills. In addition, it has been demonstrated to assist in the development of classrooms that are more supportive and student-centred. RULER is a systemic approach to SEL, and its aim is to impart the principles of emotional intelligence into the US education system from students from five to eighteen years. The programme provides information about how leaders lead, teachers teach, students learn, and families support students. RULER is an acronym for the five skills of emotional intelligence – recognising, understanding, labelling, expressing, and regulating. The development of these core skills is facilitated using the four core tools developed by the centre.

The first tool is The Charter which is a collaborative document that details how members of the community aspire to treat each other. The second tool is the Mood Meter (see Figure 3.2) which enables students and educators

to identify and communicate the full range of their emotions and assess how these emotions may affect their actions. The third tool is the Meta-Moment and this assist participants in handling strong emotions with their “best selves” in mind. The final tool is the Blueprint, and this helps students and teachers to tackle conflict effectively. According to Brackett (2019) the collective implementation of the tools assists everyone within the school community to understand the value of emotions, build the emotional intelligence of individuals within the community, and to create positive emotional climates both in and out of school environment.

**Figure 3.2**

*The Mood Meter (Brackett, 2019)*



The success of RULER has led Yale to deliver programmes to businesses, governments, and families. Partners of the YCEI include the

Born This Way Foundation and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

The real value of EI in education cannot be underestimated as it has the potential to further enhance the learning experience and development of students and teachers which will have a positive impact on the school community and beyond to the wider society. The RULER method provides as means of appreciating, accepting, and valuing diversity among all those in the school community and therefore contributes to the creation of positive and inclusive environments. These valuable outcomes demonstrate that this approach is relevant to this study into EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter provides an understanding of the relationship between EI and its impact on the emotional practice of teaching. Teaching is an emotional practice, and research has demonstrated that teachers play a key role in constructing emotional relationships. The importance of understanding of the concept of EI and the recognition of the emotional demands of teaching should be of primary consideration as the creation of inclusive educational systems gains global momentum. The relational, organisational, and societal factors that influence the emotional practice of teaching need to be examined. The context experienced by the sample of Irish primary school teachers in this study is an important consideration as it has an impact on their understanding and practice of both EI and inclusion. An understanding of this wider framework will provide a broad theoretical insight into the complexity of the emotional practice of teaching in an

inclusive classroom and will have implications for teacher education, policy, and reform. Teachers should be provided with the training and support to develop emotional competencies that will make inclusive education both possible and successful. The development of EI provides a pathway to creating mindsets and practices that mean education is for every learner.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Inclusion in Education Means Everyone**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Inclusion concerns all children and can broadly be defined as the provision of teaching and learning opportunities that make it possible of all students to benefit and fully participate in education (Subban et al., 2022). For decades there has been a global increase in the interest and implementation of inclusive education. As a result, growing numbers of students that are identified as having a disability or a diagnosis of Special Educational Need (SEN) are attending mainstream schools rather than being educated in special schools or classes. This chapter provides an exploration of the meaning of the concept of inclusion and an insight into inclusion in practice in education. It presents a perspective on the emergence of the central issues and debates that are embedded in inclusion by using a historical framework which identifies key events that have influenced developments in inclusive education from the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), and the Republic of Ireland. The publication of policy papers has highlighted the importance of inclusion, such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994) and the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2007) and has led to many changes in policy and practice and to widespread support for the belief that every learner matters and matters equally. The nature of inclusive education, and teacher's attitudes to inclusion, along with the challenges being experienced and developments in the area are considered.



Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1989) bioecological framework is presented to appreciate the importance of inclusive education "in context" and the organisational context of the experience of being a primary school teacher in Ireland today. Inclusion is understood in a broad sense rather than specifically relating to children with a SEN, therefore, the focus of this chapter and study is on all children which is in line with the principle of inclusive education (IE). Therefore, Qvortrup and Qvortrup's (2017) definition of IE which states that it "concerns the inclusion of all children" (p. 803) will be used for the purpose of this research.

## **4.2 Inclusion Means Everyone**

While many definitions of inclusion have been presented, the concept has been seen as elusive and challenging to define. Difficulties in definition are created by the fact that different perspectives are held by many scholars who argue for either philosophical or empirical investigation of inclusive education (Farrell, 2000). It was asserted by Culham and Nind (2003) that inclusion is best conceptualised as a "journey" or a "process" and as contended by Naylor, (2005) that it should not be viewed as a "destination" as the aim of achieving equity is always ongoing rather than realised. The process of inclusion involves moving towards equity for all and at the same time recognising and supporting the richness of social diversity, and challenging narrow cultural parameters of normality (Armstrong, 2005). Armstrong et al. (2011) contended that "it is not simply that inclusion means different things to different people but rather that inclusion may end up as meaning everything and nothing at the same time" (p. 31). Lauchlan and Greig (2015) identify the challenge that there is no exact definition of

inclusion but assert that it is “generally taken to mean that children and young people are included both socially and educationally in an environment where they feel welcome and where they can thrive and progress” (p. 70). Inclusion can be seen as more than a set of practices, it is a philosophy, a way of thinking about people, diversity, learning and teaching (Graham, 2020). Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2017) acknowledged that it is a difficult concept to define as it involves not just those with special needs but “concerns the inclusion of all children” (p. 803) and this concise definition of inclusion will be used for the purpose of this research.

Ainscow et al. (2006) made an important distinction between two types of definitions, “a descriptive definition of inclusion reports on the variety of ways “inclusion” is used in practice, whereas a prescriptive definition indicates the way we intend to use the concept and would like it to be used by others” (p. 14). Further to this Ainscow et al. (2006) make the distinction between “narrow” and “broad” definitions of inclusion. Narrow definitions of inclusion refer to the promotion of the inclusion of specific groups of students, mainly, but not exclusively, disabled students and/or students with special education needs in ‘mainstream’ or ‘regular’ education. However, broad definitions of inclusion do not focus on specific groups of students, but rather on diversity and how schools respond to the diversity of all students and other members of the school community. Armstrong et al. (2011) added yet another dimension to this distinction, namely fragmented definitions. They refer to the observation that both narrow and broad definitions can be fragmented when they break down the group that they refer to and assert that this way of distinguishing definitions of inclusion can be helpful when looking at what exactly policy documents propose.

In 2016 the difficulties surrounding the definition of inclusive education were recognised by the committee with responsibility for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). To provide clarification on the legal obligations and the steps required to achieve realisation, General Comment No. 4 (GC4) was adopted by the CRPD Committee to explain the human right to inclusive education. Inclusion is defined by the GC4 as follows:

“a process of systematic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organisation, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion.”  
(United Nations 2016: paragraph 11)

Other definitions presented by the United Nations in the GC4 of integration, segregation, and exclusion facilitate a clearer understanding of inclusion are as follows:

***Integration.*** Is defined as “a process of placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions, as long as the former can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions”. (United Nations 2016: paragraph 11).

***Segregation.*** Is defined as “when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular or various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities (United Nations 2016: paragraph 11).

***Exclusion.*** Is defined as “when students are directly or indirectly prevented from or denied access to education in any form” (United Nations 2016: paragraph 11).

As stated by UNESCO (2017: 7) inclusion is “a process that helps to overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners” (UNESCO, 2017: 7). This perspective is supported by Graham (2020) who defines inclusive education as a “fundamental human right and process of systematic reform in education that aims to eliminate barriers, enabling all students to participate in learning experiences and the learning environment with their same-aged peers. Inclusive education differs from exclusion, segregation and integration” (p. xxi). The terms inclusion and mainstream are frequently used in an interchangeable manner, yet they are not compatible. As Graham (2020) contends it may be believed that a school is inclusive if there is no agreed definition of inclusive education and therefore impossible to make that school inclusive if a flawed definition is used in its implementation and results in the erroneous conclusion that inclusion has been achieved. In addition, as presented by Walton (2015), there has been a gradual take over by special education of the concept and language of inclusion. This has led to the application by educators of exclusionary practices that were believed to be inclusive (Graham, 2020). This has been summed up by the term “fauxclusion” as described by Colgon

(2021) which refers to exclusion masquerading as inclusion, and it is stated that this has caused both confusion about inclusion but also has prevented it taking place. However, there is overwhelming support in the literature for the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms and the benefits have been found to extend to both students with and without disabilities (Rujis & Peetsma, 2009). An inclusive learning environment according to Shevlin et al. (2009) is one “that regards and respects all pupils, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, ability, socio-economic background or special educational need” (p. 4). These distinctions have arisen from the history of inclusion which should more aptly be called the history of exclusion in education.

The history of the meaning and practice of inclusion provides a context to the current study about the attitudes to inclusion among Irish primary school teachers and identifies many challenges past and present.

#### **4.3 A Brief History of Inclusion – Making the Grade to Be Included in the Classroom**

The history of inclusion demands reflection as our current understanding is a product of the past experience of inclusion or more aptly it may be seen as a time of the exclusion of many. Armstrong et al. (2000) contend that a historical perspective is very important to understand the nature of exclusionary policies and practices and put forward three reasons why this is the case. Firstly, it serves as a reminder that current practices are not natural, inevitable, or unchangeable. Secondly, the definition and application of key concepts will counteract individualised and deficit models of disability. Finally, an historical awareness will show how the voices of disabled people have been historically excluded and how this has been

developed, legitimated, challenged, and changed over time. In many countries around the world today the provision of inclusive education is written into the legislation and the wide range of benefits associated with inclusion are recognised at the level of the individual and society, for those students with and without diverse learning needs (Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009; Salend, 2015). In addition, there is increased access to education for children with additional learning needs worldwide (UNESCO, 2020a), however this has not always been the case.

It is important that the story of inclusion is placed in context, as without context there is no meaning. The narrative of inclusion is written at an international, national, community, local, and individual level and in a wide variety of settings. Developments in the conceptualisation about the importance of inclusive education have been contingent on many factors. It is critical that the time in history is taken into consideration, along with other cultural, societal, and religious factors. As observed by Kozleski et al. (2014) progress around inclusion is complex, context-specific, and related to deeply established systems of marginalisation. Therefore, the story of inclusion is a thread running through a tapestry which is woven into a space and time. The story told by the history of inclusion in education varies across the world and countries are at different stages as outlined by the definition provided by the UNCRPD GC4 (2016). To gain a historical and contextual perspective on developments in inclusive education in an Irish context a review of the evolution of legislation and practice in the USA will be presented, then key events in the United Kingdom are considered, and finally the focus will turn to the Republic of Ireland. The USA has been selected for review as Ireland and the USA has had a long-established relationship based on common

ancestral ties and shared values and the two governments have had official exchanges in areas including education (DFA, 2023). According to Woodin and Wright (2023) the educational history in Britain and Ireland can be regarded a dynamic field of study. Over a century ago the UK had a direct role in determining the nature of education in Ireland and while the political landscape has changed the geographic, economic, and cultural ties between the countries remain and continue to influence developments in education. The decisions made about exclusion, segregation, integration, and inclusion in education are central to the continuing story line as can be seen from key events in the USA, the UK, and Ireland which have informed the meaning, practice and challenge of inclusive education today.

#### ***4.3.1 United States of America***

Research undertaken by Boroson (2017) presents an investigation into how education in the United States of America (USA) has evolved from exclusion to inclusion, judgement to acceptance, and from disability to difference which is relevant to this study on attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. Historically in the USA the grounds for exclusion from education were based on race and gender. As reported by Marable and Mullings (2003) until the 1850s almost all slave codes in the US prohibited the education of black Americans. The prevailing belief was that the education of those who were inferior was a waste of time and a threat to the dominant majority.

**Jim Crow Laws.** These laws enforced racial segregation in the Southern United States were enacted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries

and were in place until 1965. The “separate but equal” laws and provisions mandated the segregation of public schools, public places, and public transportation. In addition to the segregation of restrooms, restaurants, and drinking fountains between white and black people. In 1964 the Civil Rights Act eradicated the Jim Crow Laws and discrimination was forbidden based on race, however entrenched biases persisted. Boroson (2017) compares the situation at that time with concerns that are raised by an inclusive approach to education today as she states that “just as many educators and families today fear the intrusion of students who are differently abled into general education classrooms, many white Americans believed that black students would be a drag on teachers' time and energy, and would dilute the dignity and integrity of a homogenous learning environment” (p. 20).

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century education was the domain exclusively of white males. For girls and young women, who were fortunate to access to education, it was limited to homemaking skills, such as needlework, cooking, and etiquette (Forman-Brunell, 2001). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century women were permitted to enrol in male-only colleges. As Boroson (2017) reports this was disapproved of by many professors who asserted that “women were constitutionally incapable of higher-level academic work” (p. 20). The prejudice and discrimination experienced by women as they participated in education was replicated when black students first entered historically white-only schools. In 1972 (2018), Title IX of the Education Amendments Act was enacted into law, which prohibits federally funded educational institutions from discriminating against students or employees based on gender. In the USA in 1975, the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was introduced which required public



schools to guarantee a free, appropriate public education to students with disabilities. However, as Boroson (2017) identified the nature of what constituted appropriate education was left to the courts (Esteves & Rao, 2008). Despite the legislation, Boroson (2017) further identified problems as the inclusion of individuals with special needs was thought by many educators to be of questionable worth, seen as a drag on teachers' time, and an intrusion and a threat to the status quo (West, 2000).

*1980s – 2015.* During the 1980s US activists began to lobby for a broader civil rights statute. Consequently, in 1990 the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed which provided equal access and equal treatment for people with disabilities. Duncan (2015) reports that in the late 20th century, 1.8 million students with disabilities in the US were excluded entirely from the public education system. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was first passed as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHA), is named the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, coupled with the ADA, and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015), and other legislation, aims collectively to ensure that the concepts of access and appropriateness are interpreted and applied consistently.

According to Boroson (2017) all students in the US are now “guaranteed an education that is not only accessible, but also free, appropriate, timely, non-discriminatory, meaningful, measurable, and provided in the least-restrictive setting” (p. 19). According to Snyder, de Brey, and Dillon (2016) over 90 percent of all US students with disabilities receive education in mainstream schools, and more than half are included in the general classroom for at least 80 percent of the day. Boroson (2017)

recognises the significance of the introduction of the legislation, but recognises that “long-standing assumptions, stereotypes, and pedagogical practices have persisted” (p. 19). She contends that on a practical level, “educators still struggle to balance the acute needs of a few with the ongoing needs of the whole” (p. 19). While there may be a move semantically and paradigmatically from disabled to different, Boroson (2017) asserts that the “education community continues to worry that students with special needs will detract from the integrity of the competitive classroom environment” (p. 19).

The presentation of a brief history of exclusionary practices in the US provides a perspective to understand the developments in mindset and practices of today. Great advances have been made, but many challenges remain. The fight for inclusive education was not just experienced in the USA as the struggle to achieve a more equitable system was evident also in the United Kingdom.

#### ***4.3.2 United Kingdom***

The education system in the United Kingdom (UK) and the approach to inclusive education has been shaped by over a century of legislation and policies can be dated back to 1880. Once again, the historical record demonstrates experiences of exclusion, segregation, integration, and a desire for inclusion in education from 1880 to the present.

**1880.** The Education Act was introduced and stated that education should be compulsory for all children between the ages of five and 10 years old, before this only a small number of children in the UK went to school and

school fees were abolished in 1891. Following this in 1893 special schools were established for blind and deaf children. 1899 witnessed the extension of school leaving to 12 years and the establishment of special schools for physically impaired children.

*1902 – 1944.* The Education Act provided Local Authorities with the freedom to develop their own educational plans to meet the needs of their area, which included strategies to identify children's cognitive abilities using IQ tests. Whether children were deemed suitable to attend mainstream education was determined by medical professionals based on low IQ and/or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The first educational psychologist, Cyril Burt, was appointed in the UK during the 1920s and his focus was on the identification of children's potential and capabilities. The result was that by the end of that decade assessments of children were being undertaken by teams consisting of psychiatrists, psychologists, physicians, and social workers. The Education Act or Butler Act of 1944 again called for the increase in school leaving age from 12 to 15 years of age. Secondary education was to be delivered in grammar schools for high achievers, secondary technical schools for average students, and secondary modern schools for others. This Act led to even further segregated education as it stated that children who have any disability of the mind or body should be provided with an alternative educational provision.

*1978 - 1993.* In 1978 the Warnock Report challenged the earlier Butler Act and stated that all students should be taught in mainstream education instead of in segregated provisions. The contention presented at that time was that an increasing number of children were being placed in special schools, but the needs of most can be met in mainstream education.

The Butler Act was believed to have led to the stigmatisation of students who were labelled as “maladjusted” or “subnormal”. This legislation was followed in 1981 by the Education Act which introduced the Statements of Special Educational Needs for children with severe barriers to their learning. The Act required teachers to identify children who needed extra assistance and for local authorities to formally assess children and to provide their schools with additional resources to meet needs of these children. Consequently, conflict arose between teachers and the local authorities about meeting the needs of the child and the finances required. Also, this Act provided parents of children who needed additional assistance with the right to appeal the decision of the local authority. In 1988 the Education Reform Act was introduced and was based on the principles of making schools more competitive and giving parents choice. The marketisation of schools was facilitated by league tables and open enrolment. Also, the National Curriculum was introduced which was to be followed by every child, regardless of their educational needs, however, special schools were given permission to deliver the curriculum at a much slower pace and a lower level. This Act introduced school inspections and standardised testing such as the key stage Standard Attainment Tests (SATs). Teachers were placed under pressure to ensure that students achieved high results as parents could choose the school for their child. A significant result of this approach was that it prevented the inclusion of those with SEN. The 1993 Education Act and the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice required schools should meet the needs of children with SEN and this was to normally be done in mainstream schools or settings.

*2001 – 2015.* At the start of the new millennium in 2001 the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act put in place three different levels of support that schools can provide to students with SEN. Firstly, School Action requires teachers to adjust teaching practices to accommodate the needs of the child/children with SEN and to get the assistance of the schools' Special Education Needs Co-ordinator. Secondly, School Action Plus made schools provide help for the child/children but allowed them to get assistance from outside professionals including physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, and psychologists. Finally, the introduction of the Statement of SEN which involves multi professional assessments initiated by the school and the local authority. In 2011 Green Paper was presented about "all the children and young people in this country who are disabled or identified as having a special educational need" (p. 2). The plan set out to address inefficiencies of the current system and to identify children's needs earlier through early checks and a reduced time-limit for SEN Statements; offer personal budgets to parents with an SEN child; provide families with trained workers to help them through the process; give parents a wider choice of schools; give schools more autonomy to transform SEN provision; introduce a single SEN category to replace School Action and School Action Plan; offer more training to teaching staff in order to better address specific issues such as poor behaviour; and to help pupils with SEN to prepare for adulthood. The Green Paper was followed by the 2014 Children and Families Act that determined a young person only has 'special educational needs' when special provision is required to meet them: learning difficulties do not in themselves constitute such a need. In 2013 the Education and Skills Act 2008 came into force, requiring all young people in England to stay on in education or

training at least part-time until they are 17 years old, with this extended to 18 years in 2015.

Again, the historical context provides an insight into how the meaning and practice of exclusion, segregation, integration, and inclusion has developed in the UK and the continued challenge presented by the important goal of inclusive education. Similar challenges were experienced in the Republic of Ireland in the provision of an inclusive educational system.

#### *4.3.3 Republic of Ireland*

A brief insight into the history of education in the Republic Ireland from 1831 provides an insight into the meaning, practice, and challenges of inclusion that exist in the Irish educational system today and is therefore relevant to the current study. A description is provided by Swan (2000) of the developments in special needs education in Ireland during three phases which are identified as firstly the era of neglect and denial, secondly the era of the special school, and finally the era of integration or inclusion.

*1831 – 1990s.* As described by Swan (2000) in 1831 the National Education System was established under English rule which made school attendance compulsory for all children between the ages of six and 14. The 1892 Education Act required to attend at least 150 days of school each year. However, the education of children with special needs was not seen as necessary by the Government as their needs were determined as purely medical. At this time many children with special needs lived in hospitals, asylums, and county homes. Around this time the establishment of several religious-run special schools took place and from 1919 to the early 1990s education and care was almost entirely undertaken by the religious orders,

this included children with special needs. During these decades the Government policy and legislation introduced was very limited regarding special needs provision. The dominant belief at this time was that children with special needs should not be educated with their peers, as it was considered to be detrimental to the education of ‘normal’ children and their teachers (Commission of Inquiry into the Reformatory and Industrial School System 1934–1936). This arrangement remained in place until the dramatic decline in the numbers of religious in Ireland which resulted in many institutions and schools formally in their care were taken over by the State.

*1960s – 1993.* The years from the 1960s to the mid-1980s witnessed the establishment of a considerable number of new special schools to meet the needs of children with physical, mental, and sensory impairments (Swan, 2000). During these years there was an acknowledgement that children with special needs should be educated but not in the mainstream setting. During the 1980s a worldwide lobby came into force for the integration of children with special needs into mainstream schools. Irish educational policy responded by putting in place several classes for children with mild learning disabilities or physical disabilities in mainstream schools. In addition, special education was introduced to teacher training provided by the State’s teacher training colleges. The Education Act introduced in 1988 aimed to give practical effect to the constitutional rights of children, including children who have a disability or other special educational needs. In 1991 the Irish Government commissioned a review of all special needs provision from preschool to secondary school. By 1993 there were more than 2,000 children placed in special classes within mainstream schools.

**1992.** The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) was ratified by Ireland, and it was observed by Kenny et al. (2020) that this “led to shifts in both policy vision and legislative precedent that introduced a right-based perspective regarding provision for young people within the Irish education system” (p. 2). 1993 saw the landmark publication of The Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) which was published by the Department of Education and Science following the 1991 review. The report was important as it proposed several recommendations for the improvement of the lives, education, and care of children with special needs. Flood (2013) asserted that the report was important as the recommendations included a definition of special needs, desire of parents of children with special needs to be educated in mainstream schools, that a psychologist manage issues of assessment and planning, and that the segregation of children with special needs was harmful to their development. In addition, it pointed out the inadequacy of teacher training in special needs provision and the lack of contact between special education and mainstream schools. A continuum of educational provision was recommended to meet various levels of special educational need and dependent on individual need, children could have full-time placement in a mainstream school with additional support, part-time or full-time placement in a special class or school, full-time placement in a residential special school, or part-time placement in a child education and development centre or special school. During this time, children with special needs were viewed through the medical model lens. That is, they were seen as the sum of their disability (Flood, 2013). According to Swaine (2011) this model is often detrimental



to children with special needs as it focuses too heavily on disability and impairment rather than on individual's abilities and strengths.

**1995 - 1999.** The White Paper on Education, *Charting our Educational Future*, Department of Education and Science, stated that all students, regardless of their personal circumstances, have a right of access to and participation in the education system, according to their potential and ability. In 1996 a report entitled, *A Strategy for Equality*, was published by the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities which highlighted the lack of cooperation between special and mainstream schools, the lack of support services, transport, resources and equipment and the lack of flexibility within the mainstream curriculum for people with special needs. The Education Act 1998 established the right to education for every person in the state. The act emphasised inclusivity and equality of access which included provision for persons with disabilities or other special educational needs and gave the right to parents to send their children to a school of their choice. In 1999, a White Paper on early childhood education, *Ready to Learn*, published by the Department of Education and Science. This report highlighted the importance of early intervention for children with special needs and called upon the government to improve this sector's provision by giving parents access to early childhood education experts; improving the training and skill of early childhood educators; increasing the level of provision for preschool children with special needs; increasing support for preschools already enrolling children with special needs; and increasing resources with visiting teacher supports. 1999 also saw the establishment of The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) with responsibility for all educational psychological services for children, with clinical

psychological services provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE). Swan (2000) described the progression of special needs education in Ireland in three phases: the era of neglect and denial, the era of the special school and the era of integration or inclusion.

*2000 – 2018.* These years saw the introduction of The Equal Status Acts which prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation, and education. They promote equality and prohibit types of discrimination, harassment, and related behaviour based on the nine grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community. In 2000 the Education (Welfare) Act, the legislation governing school attendance, stated that parents must ensure that their children from the age of six to the age of 16 attend a recognised school or receive a certain minimum education. In 2003 The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was established which has overall responsibility for special needs provision in Irish schools, assessing applications for and co-ordinating services throughout the country. From October 2005 it was formally established under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act).

The purpose of the EPSEN Act was to “put the provision of education for persons with special educational needs on a new footing” (NSCE, 2006, p. 5). The act stated that children with SEN should be educated whenever possible in an inclusive environment with children that do not have an SEN. Therefore, the provision of inclusive education became mandatory at this time, with some exceptions regarding the impact on the child and their peers in particular settings. However, to date only some parts of the act have been

put into effect. The sections of the act that came into force deal mainly with the right to be educated in an inclusive manner, the duties of schools, and the establishment of the NCSE. The sections of the act that have not yet been implemented relate to an individual's right to assessment, individual education plans, the designation of schools, appeals process and co-operation between the education and health services.

The 2005 Disability Act “further consolidated the rights of children with disabilities and complements and supports the objectives of the EPSEN Act, 2004” (NSCE, 2006, p. 39). A point of concern was that the Disability Act (2005) includes the remark that provisions for children with additional needs will only be put in place if resources are available as determined by the minister. In 2007 the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was signed but was not ratified in Ireland until 2018. The purpose of this convention was to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all people with a disability. A concern has been presented by Kenny et al. (2020) about whether the principles of the Convention are being adequately met today by the systems for resourcing and supporting inclusion in Irish schools.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 enacted that schools cannot discriminate based on a child having a disability or a SEN. Theoretically this means that a parent should be able to apply to any school and that the school should be able to accommodate the child. However, the reality is that some schools do not have the facilities to accept students with particular special needs. This act was amended and extended with the introduction in 2022 of the Education (Provision in respect of Children with

special Educational Needs) Act which stipulates that a school can be directed to make additional provision for children with SEN.

**Recent Years.** In recent times other key developments have been enacted including Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures—the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014–2020, which is committed to providing services to enable the growth and development of all children. For instance, it committed to “develop a plan for the inclusion of children with a disability in mainstream pre-school and early years settings” (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014, p. 70). The NCSE (2019) published the Progress Report of Policy Advice on Special Schools and Classes which presents a vision for “Total Inclusion” of students with SEN in mainstream school classes. The rationale for this approach of including all children in mainstream class settings was connected to the Irish government’s obligations after the ratification of the UNCRPD in 2018. However, the United Nations committee that has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Convention has advised that having a mainstream and a separate special education system is not in line with its perspective on inclusion and that parallel systems are not thought to be inclusive (NCSE, 2019, p.3). At the present time the Irish Department of Education is undertaking a review of the EPSEN Act (2004) to provide assurance that the provision of education for children with SEN is adequate. The historical review demonstrates the move away from a medical model to a rights-based approach to provide the resources for students with SEN and the fact that Ireland has attempted to alter the provision for students with SEN from segregated to mainstream provisions.

An understanding of history can provide significant insights into exclusion, segregation, integration, and inclusion and is relevant to the current study which aims to explore attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. The experiences in the USA, UK, and the Republic of Ireland demonstrate changes in legislation and practices over many decades. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) in 2018 reported the challenges faced by countries, including Ireland, about their special and inclusive education provisions. The challenges identified included the question of how to generate funding incentives that prevent exclusionary practices; the promotion of school-developed approaches to inclusive education; the creation of flexible and innovative learning environments; and the development of systems for inclusive education that are transparent and accountable. However, the key lesson that can be learnt from history is the complex reality of putting in place policy changes in educational system, but it is worth it as every learner matters and matters equally (UNESCO, 2020b).

#### **4.4 Every Learner Matters**

As Colgon (2021) stated everyone has a right to inclusion to flourish together and it should not be seen as an act of kindness or charity. UNESCO's Salamanca Agreement (UNESCO, 2015) provided an international framework for inclusion and its objective was to improve human rights, social justice, and equity for all students (Sharma & Michael, 2017). In 1994 the World Conference on Special Needs in Education took place in Salamanca, Spain. A Framework for Action was adopted that called on schools to welcome all children regardless of their physical, intellectual,

social, emotional, linguistic, or other characteristics. It was the first international document to introduce a human-rights-based approach to the education of persons with disabilities (Florian, 2019) and the principles identified provided a foundation for an awareness of the importance of inclusion in education.

Since that time there is a broader understanding of the concept of inclusion which focuses on all learners and, according to the UNESCO in its 2020 review of the Salamanca Statement 25 years on, it is based on “the assumption that every learner matters equally and has the right to receive effective educational opportunities” (p. 12). The importance of inclusive schools which means that mainstream schools are enabled to educate all children was prosed (UNESCO,1994) and justified on an educational, social, and economic basis. It was recognised that new thinking was needed that focused on the barriers experienced by some children that result in them being marginalised due to contextual factors, in contrast to the categories a learner may or may not be placed in. If the barriers can be identified and overcome, then inclusive education systems become possible. Once again, the inclusion discussion has moved on and there is an increasing focus on equity and the importance of fairness in relation to educational opportunities for all students globally (UNESCO, 2020b). In 2019, the Cali Commitment to equity and inclusion in education (UNESCO, 2019) highlighted the significance of inclusion in education as a transformative process which ensures full participation and access to quality learning opportunities for all which respects and values diversity and eliminates discrimination. This approach to inclusion puts forward the concept of intersectionality which acknowledges that disadvantage experienced by learners is compounded

when it intersects with other characteristics related to discrimination and oppression, including physical, social, psychological, and systemic barriers. In addition, it presents the size and complexity of the transformations needed at educational, social, and cultural levels. The policy developed by New Brunswick in Canada was given special mention as its policy on inclusive education demonstrated significant progress. Other countries that have made significant advances in policy development cited were Italy, Portugal, and Finland.

The definitions presented in the *UNESCO Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education* (UNESCO, 2017) are clear and provide access to the concepts to a diverse range of stakeholders. Inclusion is defined as “a process that helps overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners” and equity is defined as “about ensuring fairness, where the education of all learners is seen as having equal importance” (p.25). The core message that is presented is that every learner matters and matters equally which is deceptively simple as it will demand changes in thinking and practice at all levels of the educational system.

Shevlin and Banks (2021) contend that Ireland is at a crossroads as it manages the challenge of establishing inclusive school environments. The UNCRPD has led to the radical reconsideration by Irish policy makers. Ireland needs to consider how inclusive learning environments can be made a reality and be informed by the consultation process undertaken for EPSEN 2023. According to the findings of research conducted by Rose and Shevlin (2021) inclusion in Irish schools is dependent on the interrelated factors changing attitudes, the enhancement of the skills of professional, the

provision of resources, and the evaluation of the impact of the measures as they are introduced. In a similar manner to other countries, educational policy in Ireland is attempting to change the provision for students with SEN from segregated to mainstream settings (Kenny et al., 2020). In mainstream schools the students who have an SEN are placed in either a special class which is designated for a specific type of disability or a range of disabilities or are taught in the mainstream class and usually get supplementary teaching (Mc Coy et al., 2014). Over the past twenty years the number of children and young people who have been identified as having an SEN has increased significantly and now represents over a quarter of the Irish school population (McCoy et al., 2019). Therefore, the exploration of attitudes and intentions towards inclusion in this study among a sample of Irish primary school teachers is both important and timely.

#### **4.5 Inclusive Education**

The United Nation' s Education 2030 agenda has stimulated increased efforts in many countries to promote inclusion and equity in their education systems (UNESCO, 2017). As described by Operti et al. (2014) IE has been thought of as an approach to meeting the needs of children with disabilities in general education settings, however, in more recent times it has been regarded in broader terms as a reform that responds to diversity among all learners (UNESCO, 2017). Inclusive schools promote communication, consultation, and collaboration between teachers, students, parents, and other professionals to achieve the goal of changing and adapting educational practices (Kinsella & Senior, 2008). As asserted by Subban et al. (2022) inclusive schools value equity and diversity and make sure that every



student in the school is supported in accordance with their need to enable them to succeed (Ainscow & César, 2006). Mc Guckin and O'Síoráin (2021) contend that “it is no longer possible to argue that the education of pupils with special educational need, or who are recognised as being particularly able or talented, or both is the remit of someone else” (p. 19). No evidence was found by Thomas and Loxley (2022) that special schools are more effective than mainstream schools with regards to academic attainment. Research has suggested that teachers' attitudes (Boyle et al., 2020; Sharma & Sokal, 2016) and their intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms (Opoku et al, 2021; Sharma & Jacobs, 2016) are critical to the implementation of successful inclusive practices. These findings provide clear support for the current study into the attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers and highlights the importance in terms of creating inclusive classrooms.

Grove et al. (2019) examined five principles of putting the fundamental right of IE into practice. Each principle contributes to a definition of IE as follows - diversity in the classroom enriches and strengthens education; a strength-based and personalised curriculum; student engagement, agency, and voice; engaging with all your critical stakeholders; and inclusive teachers need commitment, knowledge, and practical skills. Inclusive education is greater than a set of practices, it is a philosophy “a way of thinking about people, diversity, learning and teaching” (Graham, 2020, p. 11). The process of systematic reform described by the GC4 of the United Nations in 2016 that all teachers need to be taught to be teachers of all and the learning experiences and environments in which children learn need to be accessible to all. As Sobel and Alston (2021) highlight “teaching children

with a range of strengths and needs can be a real challenge” (p. 1). Adderley et al. (2015) identified four interconnecting areas of concern that impacted the experience of mostly happy school children as unfairness; shouting; loneliness and seating plans. These were observed to be associate with children’s interpersonal relationships which are essential to understanding and developing inclusive education. Ways of thinking and behaving adopted by both teachers and children need to be challenged to create more inclusive learning environments. Lewis et al. (2019) raises the concern that change in teaching practice is limited because too much emphasis is placed on “quick-and-dirty” trainings that achieve donor pleasing statistics and case studies that attract publicity, but this does not result in extensive and sustainable change to education systems and cultures. Higher levels of equity in learning outcomes are demonstrated in countries where teachers believe their profession is valued (Schleicher, 2015). Further support was presented by Riordan et al. (2019) who stated that educational systems should not be about compliance but be engines for equity.

#### ***4.5.1 Implementation of IE***

There is a wide range of variation in the implementation of inclusive education in school systems within and among individual countries (Schwab, 2021). There is no single ideal model of the inclusive school as there are so many interconnected variables to consider which are contextually sensitive. Booth and Ainscow (2002) developed an Index for Inclusion for schools who wish to understand and improve inclusive goals. This outlines the three dimensions of inclusion that schools should be aiming to provide, which involve creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and

evolving inclusive practice. Messiou (2008) explored the idea of listening to the voices of pupils as an approach for fostering inclusive practices in schools. This was further developed in the interesting approach to the effective engagement of all pupils by teachers was presented by Messiou and Ainscow (2020).

Their approach called Inclusive Inquiry “requires teachers to enter into dialogues with primary school children and with their colleagues about how to develop lessons that respond positively to learner differences” (p. 670). A key aspect of this strategy is the role pupils play in collecting information from other pupils in the class to help the process of planning lessons. The results Messiou and Ainscow’s (2020) study revealed that following the introduction of this approach the pupils were more engaged in their classes and felt more positively about themselves as learners. This demonstrated that giving the pupils both choice and a voice had benefits in the development of inclusive practices in schools and the opportunity to transform organisational cultures to create more inclusive settings.

***New Brunswick Model of Inclusion.*** Despite the dissenting voices of Gordan-Gould and Hornby (2023) who espouse the myth about the feasibility of full inclusion, through legislation and best practice, the Canadian province of New Brunswick has pioneered the concept of IE for nearly four decades. A model of full inclusion was introduced which put in place provision for all students including those who are socially disadvantaged, First Nations, newcomers, those with a disability or additional leaning needs, and those with exceptional ability to attend their neighbourhood school and be placed in the common learning environment.

As recorded by AuCoin et al. (2020) it is based on a commitment to provide each child with an equitable and meaningful education and the evidence from New Brunswick's fully inclusive system indicates that it is possible for all learners to achieve at high levels in this type of school system. AuCoin et al. (2020) conducted an analysis of New Brunswick's journey to inclusive education and further supported the perspective that an entire community of stakeholders and partners needs to be involved to ensure the success of IE (Ainscow, 2005; Carrington and Robinson, 2006), that it was built on the general goals of the Salamanca Framework, and has made a contribution to the achievement of the desired result of the UNSDG for 2030 of the participation of every child in an inclusive public education system.

Dyson et al. (2004) reported that the features that highly inclusive schools have in common is that they are welcoming and supportive environments for all their students. Indeed, there has been criticism of inclusive education as it has been seen as a white colonialist idea forced upon development countries by wealthy countries from the Global North (Walton, 2018). Ainscow (2021), in a podcast interview, described inclusion as a process and stated that "there probably never will be an inclusive school, it's an impossible dream" (Gordon-Gould & Hornby, 2023, p. 30). Ainscow (2021) contended that his belief is the pragmatic way forward of creating networks of schools that create a sense of schools supporting each other and, in this manner, segregated provision could be integrated into the system. As concluded by AuCoin et al. (2020) that "making an inclusive school a reality is work that is always evolving and is never fully accomplished" (p. 325), but the benefits for all are worth the effort. Teachers are an essential part of

the inclusive school and the attitudes that teachers have towards inclusion require investigation.

#### ***4.5.2 Teachers Attitudes Towards Inclusion***

A systematic review of primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education over the last fifteen years was conducted by Linder et al. (2023). The results indicated that teachers have neutral or ambivalent attitudes towards IE and that inclusion appears to be related to students' type of disability and that the inclusion of all students is not favoured. An observation from the findings was that teachers' attitudes are not stable and immutable and that their attitudes develop in a positive manner due to the accumulation of theoretical and practical knowledge and are linked to their sense of teaching efficacy. A key finding by Linder et al. (2023) was that guidance is lacking for improving teachers' attitudes in the studies that have been conducted in the past few years. Therefore, this study provides the opportunity to explore attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers with the potential outcome of providing guidance for teachers.

Attitudes towards inclusive education in research are based on definitions to attitudes proposed by Allport (1935) and Eagly and Chaiken (1993, 1998) who regard attitudes as inner tendencies and evaluative responses. Thus, attitudes are three-dimensional constructs that consist of cognitive (beliefs), affective (feelings) and behaviour (intentions to act) components (Kehoe, 2013). Earlier studies have investigated teachers' attitudes towards IE and revealed concerns regarding implementation, total

inclusion, type of disability, and scarcity of human and material resources. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) undertook a meta-analysis of studies published from 1958 to 1995 and uncovered the fact that about two-thirds of teachers who were surveyed had relatively positive attitudes towards inclusive education, but a smaller number of teachers had the intention to implement inclusion in their classrooms. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) presented a review of studies undertaken from 1984 to 2000 and demonstrated that in general teachers' attitudes were positive but evidence to support total inclusion was absent. A significant finding from this study was the teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of a student was influenced by the type of disability experienced by the student and the barrier to IE created by the lack of human and material resources. Later de Boer et al. (2011) undertook a systematic review of studies published between 1998 and 2008 and their findings revealed generally that primary school teachers had neutral attitudes towards inclusion but supported earlier studies in the finding that the type of disability had a significant influence. Linder et al. (2023) concluded that "inclusive education has a long way to go before it is embraced and fully applied by teachers" (p. 19) and recommended the evaluation of different types of teacher training programmes to develop positive attitudes, and the assessment of innovative inclusive programmes and the impact on the teachers involved in the implementation.

Inadequate teacher training has been found to be a significant barrier in the transition to fully inclusive classrooms and that the training needed should include the mainstreaming of special needs education across training courses and the development of targeted training (Mittler, 2000; Norwich,

2002). The successful outcome of inclusive educational reforms is greatly dependent how well prepared the teachers are in terms of their beliefs and skills to teach students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers in the same classroom (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

Additionally, as contended by Sharma et al. (2023) there are difficulties in the measurement of the use of inclusive practices in classrooms, however a predication can be made based on a teacher's intention to include all learners in a school. This supports Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour which proposes that intentions to perform a behaviour are the best predictors of actual behaviour. These intentions are affected by several variables including attitudes, behavioural control, and subjective norms which have a strong correlation with actual rates of behaviour. As summed up by Sharma et al. (2023) within the context of inclusive education "a teacher will have stronger intentions to use inclusive practices if they hold positive attitudes towards inclusion, experience support from school leaders, colleagues, and the school culture more broadly and have a high degree of perceived control over their behaviour" (p. 3).

The attitudes that the sample of Irish primary school teachers have towards teaching in an inclusive classroom are central to this study as positive attitudes will facilitate the implementation of inclusion and neutral or negative attitudes may act as a barrier to inclusion.

### ***4.5.3 Challenges to Inclusion***

Inclusion is an ongoing process and at the current time inclusive education in Ireland is viewed as being at a crossroads (Shevlin & Banks, 2021). The challenge is to fundamentally rethink the existing educational systems if inclusive education is to become a reality. The inclusion of pupils with SEN requires an adapted teaching and learning environment, the rethinking of teacher education programmes, and teaching all teachers to be teachers of students with disability, not just some. This is of fundamental importance as education must be at the heart of the understanding that exists about social inclusion (Banks, 2023). It has been observed by Linder et al. (2023) that inclusion appears to be a matter of students' type of disability and that directions for improving teachers' attitudes are missing. Support for teachers is required to support children (Sobel & Alston, 2021). The challenges faced by many countries in making provision for special and inclusive education have been identified by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2018) and include the need to prevent costly and inequitable exclusionary practices; to create incentives for a school-development approach that supports inclusive education; ensure flexible and innovative learning environments; and develop transparent and accountable systems for inclusive education.

Additional challenges to IE were highlighted by the findings of Banks et al. (2016) who tracked the experiences of students and staff over two years in Ireland to evaluate if special classes were meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. They found that the teachers working in these classes were frequently younger, recently recruited staff, covering maternity leave, or on temporary contracts. Importantly the results demonstrated that



when the teachers in the study did not have specific qualifications in special education, support from their colleagues and school leaders there was a risk of stress and burnout. Later Shevlin and Banks (2021) asserted that “current thinking appears to be to provide the physical space, a unit or special class within mainstream schools, a support teacher and special needs assistants and see what happens instead of providing funding or resources to schools, not only for student supports but for building teacher capacity which encourages inclusive practice” (p. 10). There is a need to build teacher capacity to encourage inclusive practice (Shevlin & Banks, 2021).

Lewis et al. (2019) asserted that the challenges that exist in teacher education are daunting resulting from the millions of diverse learners that are excluded both from and within education and the relative lack of resources that have been made available to assist teachers to become confident and competent inclusive practitioners. They recommend that implementing and funding organisations need to undertake a cultural change “so that learning about and improving quality of teacher education for inclusion takes priority” (p. 735) and that a large part this involves changes in attitudes. While Woods (2020) reflected that “the underdevelopment of emotional intelligence is a consistent barrier to taking action to advance inclusion and justice” (p.2). He contends that when the collective development of EI has taken place we will be better prepared to deal with the emotional exposure of accountability and growth and face the discomfort about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A further challenge to inclusive education is that it does not take place in isolation but is embedded in the context of the school environment, community, and society. Bronfenbrenner (1977) presented a framework that effectively demonstrates all the aspects of influence the experience of

education for all. This model provides an important perspective to this study as the meaning and practice of EI and inclusion among the sample of Irish primary school teachers can be placed in context and the interrelationship between the parts of the system can be examined.

#### **4.6 Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Development**

Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1989) provided an understanding and insight into how children's learning and development is located in a dynamic, integrated, and ever-changing context or ecology. Learning is influenced by social and cultural factors in addition to the experiences and material resources that the pupils have at home, in their neighbourhoods, and at school. He believed that to raise children successfully the involvement of the entire society is required and acknowledged and valued the role of state-supported early childhood education and care (Hayes et al., 2017). In addition, Hargreaves (1996) contends that teacher development theorists who have adopted Goleman's (1995) model of EI approach the development of EI "among teachers as matter of individual competence or personal choice, and not as a product of the circumstances in which teachers work" (p. 836). Hargreaves (1996) argued for a more sociologically and politically informed perspective on teaching and teacher development.

A key concern of Bronfenbrenner (1975) was in "how environments change, and the implications of this change for the human beings who live and grow in these environments" (p. 439). The framework provided by the ecological approach is a means of examining the interrelations between the developing person and the ever-changing micro and macro context in which development takes place. The term "ecological" is used to demonstrate the embedded micro and macro level of context and holistic nature of human

development. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological framework locates the developing child at the centre of a series of four nested systems from those that are closest or proximal to those that are indirect or distal, as follows:

***Microsystem.*** These are the aspects of the environment that affect the daily life of the child, including parents, siblings, wider family, teachers, and other children in school or day care.

***Mesosystem.*** This level of represents the interconnections between two or more microsystems, including school, family, and peer groups, and acknowledges the influence on the child.

***Exosystem.*** This demonstrates the distant and less visible influences on a child's life, even though they do not participate in them. It includes the nature of a parents' workplace, social media, informal social networks, and the educational policymaking community.

***Macrosystem.*** This is the cultural level of influence that a child is not in direct contact with, however the cultural context influences the societal values, attitudes and ideologies that impact the experience of the child. The macrosystem is subject to ongoing change and impacts on the child in terms of the broader social and cultural context leading to change and development.

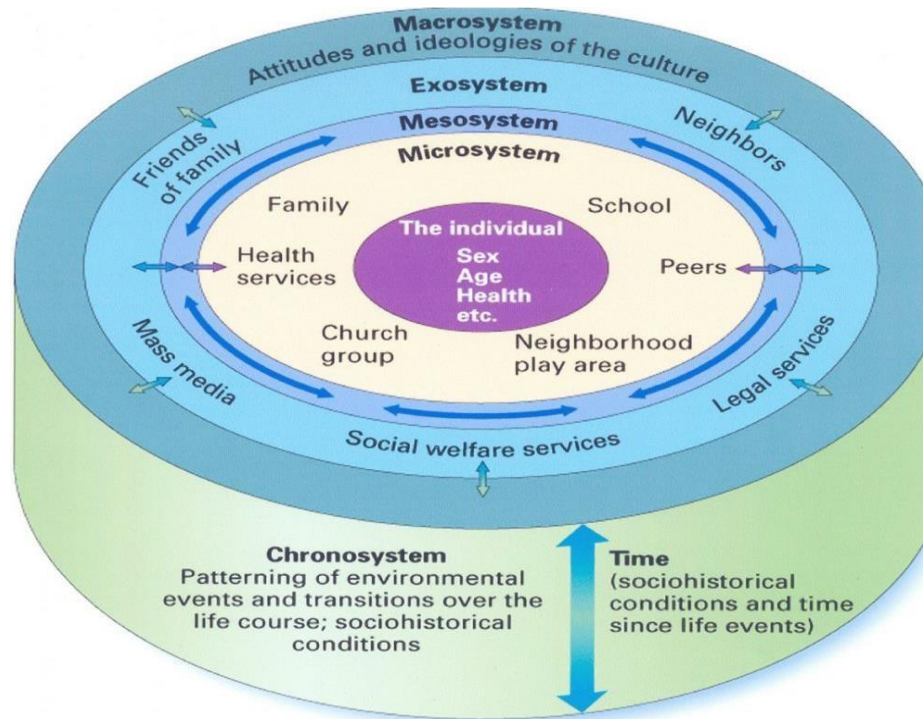
These levels of the system are arranged from the center outwards with those closest to the middle being those most proximal to the child and those furthest away being distal, see Figure 4.1. In 1986, Bronfenbrenner added the ***chronosystem*** as a fifth level which acknowledged the significance of time and history as a factor in the development of the child and the environment. Rosa and Tudge (2013) noted that the model was originally presented in 1979 as the Ecological Model of Human Development and then

in 1998 and 2006 as the Biological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006), and that the title was reconsidered to highlight the developing individual at the center of the interacting systems.

In 1993, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, presented the first draft of the bioecological model and characterised it as the PPCT model. The person (P) with their individual characteristics is at the centre, and the process (P) represents the reciprocal interaction of the person and the environment. This addressed a criticism of his earlier theory by Anastasi (1958) about the nature-nurture debate and the transformative process involved in the genotype becoming a phenotype. These proximal processes occur within the microsystem and have a primary influence on the development of the individual. The impact of these processes is impacted by the characteristics of the person (P), of the contexts (C) and the time periods (T) in which they occur. Therefore, the proximal processes transform the genetic potential and particular individual characteristics, and behaviors are demonstrated. This underlines the importance of high-quality, regular interactions over time in primary education and the significant role of the teacher in their emotional, social, and cognitive development. Also, the child should be regarded an active participant who is an agent of their own learning as they engage in reciprocal interactions with their environment.

**Figure 4.1**

*Bioecological Model of Development - Person-Process-Context-Time Model (PPCT) (Santrock, 2007)*



Throughout his lifetime, Bronfenbrenner asked for his bioecological model to be challenged by real-world data to test its key principles and predications (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). To this end Navarro and Tudge (2022) have responded and proposed key changes to Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1989) theory to reflect the technological and virtual world of today. In their Neo-ecological theory, they suggest that microsystems should be understood to be physical and virtual. The physical is the experienced in face-to-face setting whereas the virtual is one experienced on a digital platform. In addition, they place importance on the macro-systemic influences of culture and within-society subcultural variation to achieve an understanding of development in the digital age. Navarro and Tudge (2022) contend that in this digital age the virtual microsystems are a

central context in which young people engage in proximal processes and need to be understood by parents, practitioners, policy makers and technologists. Also, in response to the real-world application of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) theory allowed researchers to consider how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted children's development. During this time children experienced dramatic changes in their day-to-day lives and educational experience. Frankel and Sampige (2022) presented the challenge of the need to reconsider the ecological systems theory as it was developed before the Covid-19 pandemic and may not fully represent children's context beyond the pandemic as it has impacted numerous aspects of family life.

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) real-world approach to research informed both policy and practice and it was his belief that academic scholars had the responsibility to engage with policy makers and professional and to use their work to improve society (Hayes et al., 2017). This research accepts this challenge through the exploration of experiences in the real world. The bioecological model provides a framework that can be used to consider the development of the individual in a complexity of dynamic interacting systems and how this can impact practice, research, and policy. Therefore, the model offers the opportunity to contextualise and understand how the interrelationship between EI and attitudes to inclusion in the practice of primary school teachers in the classroom which provides valuable "real world" insights. In the current chronosystem it is now the time for EI and attitudes to inclusion in classrooms to be acted on in research and practice. It is very important to gain an insight into the organisational context that

teachers are part of to understand how this system influences their attitudes to and experience and practice of inclusive education.

#### **4. 7 Teachers in an Organisational Context**

Primary schools are organisations that are made up of people who communicate with each other to undertake tasks. They work together to achieve the shared objectives and the collective goals of the organisation. The performance of members of the school, in common with other organisations, is controlled which leads to its efficient and effective functioning. The concept of control distinguishes an organisation from other social groups. Enrolments, number of schools, numbers of teachers, pupil to teacher ratios, and class sizes are a headline measures in the education system. Control involves setting standards, measuring actual performance by monitoring the behaviour of employees; comparing standard performance with actual performance; and taking corrective action as required. Primary school teachers need a wide range of knowledge and skills to do their job effectively. This may involve job redesign, the provision of training and development programmes, reviewing reward systems and the development and implementation of new policies and procedures (Kehoe, 2013). A primary school has all these requirements to ensure that it fits effectively into the current external operating environment and meets the many demands placed on it by those within and without the system.

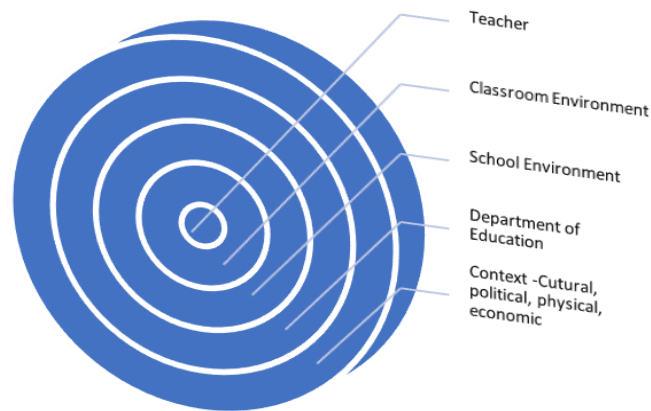
The importance of the impact of the external operating environment which surrounds organisations including primary schools needs to be recognised as the context will present both opportunities and constraints.

External pressures include social, cultural, physical, political, and economic factors. The effectiveness of the primary school will be contingent on its level of fit with the current and future demands made on it by the operating environment. Internal forces are equally important including leadership, management, employees, technology, resources, and the consideration of the needs of pupils and their families (see Figure 4.2). The teacher is part of the national culture, educational system, and school organisation. It is contended by the OECD (2018) that schools should be reconceptualised as ‘learning organisations’ that they respond effectively to changing external environments, meet the challenges of innovation in internal organisation, and ultimately enhance student outcomes. Therefore, there are many factors external and internal to primary schools that contribute to the creation of an organisation that is emotionally intelligent and inclusive. An insight into the contextual factors is important as it provides a framework to use to inform the understanding, and practice of EI and inclusion among the sample of Irish primary school teachers in this study.



**Figure 4.2**

*Ecological System of the Irish Primary School Teacher*



The ecological systems in educational practice can be strengthened by good communication between teachers and parents; an appreciation by teachers of the situations that student’s families are experiencing such as social and economic factors; and the relationship between the parents and teachers will positively shape the child’s development (Guy-Evans, 2023). The child should be active in their learning, engaged both academically and socially, work as a team with their peers, and be involved in meaningful learning experiences to enable positive development (Guy-Evans, 2023). In addition, the creation of a positive school environment through a school ethos that values diversity has been uncovered by Wilson et al. (2002) to have a positive effect on student’s relationships within school and that the incorporation of this ethos has an influence on those within the developing child’s ecological systems.

In February 2023 the Department of Education and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science released

a publication of the latest Education Indicators for Ireland (2022). The statistical information provides an insight into the ecological system being experienced by Irish primary school teachers, see Figure 4.3.

**Figure 4.3**

*Government of Ireland, Education Indicators for Ireland, February 2023*

(<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/055810-education-statistics/>)

<b>INDICATOR</b>	<b>YEAR 2021</b>
Number of pupils in primary school	554,788  It is noted that there is a downward trajectory of enrolments at primary level from a peak of 567,772 in 2018.
Number of pupils in DEIS schools 2021	107,139
Number of pupils in non-DEIS schools 2021	447,649
Number of primary schools 2021	3,240
Number of DEIS primary schools 2021	687
Number of non-DEIS primary schools 2021	2,553
Number of primary teachers 2021	40,351
of which mainstream teaching teachers	23,460
2021	
of which other teachers	16,779
PTR: Average students per teacher in primary schools	13.7 (Since 2017 the pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools has fallen from 15.3 to 13.7)

Average class sizes in primary schools	22.8
Number of special schools (NCSE supported only)	116
Pupils in special schools	8,682
Teachers in special schools	1,503
Pupils in special classes in mainstream primary schools	8,740
Number of SNAs in special schools	2,775
Number of SNAs in primary schools	11,506
% Primary pupils in Catholic ethos schools	89.2%
% Primary pupils in Irish-medium schools	8.1%
Number of Catholic primary schools	2,749
Number of multi/inter-denominational primary schools	165
Number of Irish-medium primary schools	252

The aim of the report was to present a comprehensive set of educational indicators for the education system in Ireland. Several of the figures presented are headline measures of the size of the education system including enrolments, numbers of schools, numbers of teachers, the pupil to teacher ratio, and class size. It should be noted that enrolments in primary level are on a downward trajectory, having peaked in 2018. However, the number of pupils with SEN in mainstream primary and post primary schools have risen substantially in recent years, as has the number of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). It is stated in the report that it is a key strategic goal of

the Department of Education to advance the progress of learners with SEN and to support them to achieve their full potential. While it is noted that the percentage of pupils enrolled in Catholic schools is falling this ethos continues to dominate the school system in Ireland. The Programme for Government (2016) made a commitment to increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools and to reach 400 schools by 2030. The report on the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (2012) contains several recommendations for increasing diversity of school types. This information provides an insight into to the contextual factors that present both opportunities and constraints to the continued development of an inclusive education system.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

While the definition of the concept of inclusion may be seen by some as elusive, inclusive education is universally applauded and it is agreed to mean everyone. Upon consideration of the challenge of where to go to next on the journey of inclusion one thing that is certain is that every learner is worth it. The many benefits of inclusive education for pupils, schools, families, and the community are worth all the effort required. The past can be witnessed as a time when students for many and varied reasons were denied an education. The historical developments and the narrative of inclusion tells its own tale of exclusion, segregation, integration, and finally inclusion. When politics and legislation is put aside the need to create an educational system that values all and provides a meaningful sense of belonging is ever present. The inclusive education of all students is a human

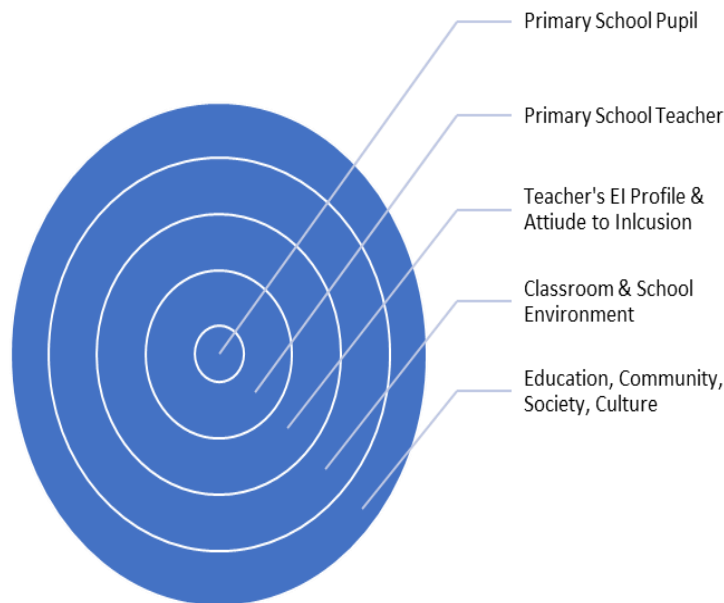
right, and it is time to go beyond the debate about its meaning to its implementation. In practice this requires all teachers being taught to be teachers of all students and the learning experiences and environments in which children learn need to be accessible to everyone. Therefore, the rethinking of the educational system to ensure that inclusive education goes beyond rhetoric and becomes reality is needed.

In the real world the context of learning and development is dynamic, integrated, and ever-changing, and there exists the complex reality of enacting policy change within the education system. An understanding is needed of the organisational context of the pupils, teachers, school, educational system, and beyond to appreciate the interrelationship and the need for collaboration between all parts of the system. The factors that influence the operation of the educational system inform the practice and understanding of inclusion. Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1989) provides an approach for understanding the many factors that influence the educational experience of pupils and teachers. This valuable framework provides a perspective on the many factors that influence how teachers think, feel, and behave. Therefore, the educational context experienced by the sample of Irish primary school teachers in this study is likely to influence their understanding and practice of both EI and inclusion, see Figure 4.4.

#### Figure 4.4

*Contextual Framework for Exploring the Relationship between EI and Attitudes to inclusion*

*Among a Sample of Irish Primary School Teachers*



Effective teaching and learning are of critical importance to all students, especially for those with SEN, and within the classroom environment there are personal, social, and emotional challenges and opportunities for all. Teaching approaches and methods should be inclusive of the needs of all in the classroom and create an environment of value and respect. At the core of the meaning of inclusion is belonging and relationships, therefore the link to EI is critical as it is central to the experience of being human and enables us all to understand and manage our own emotions and those of the people around us. The skills that constitute EI

facilitate the creation by teachers of successful inclusive learning environments in classrooms where everyone belongs. Awareness, understanding, and the effective management of emotions creates and strengthens relationships and provides the foundation for truly responsive inclusive educational practices. Primary school teachers need a wide range of knowledge and skills to do their job effectively. The development of EI skills will enable teachers to create inclusive learning environments. If the education system does not facilitate the development and expression of teachers EI in order that they understand and feel understood and that their needs are met, then teachers may not be able to be compassionate, understanding, and empathetic to the needs of students. Inclusion is vital for the good of society and the creation of inclusion in education is central to the achievement of this goal. Therefore, this study will explore the meaning and practice of EI and attitudes to inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers to appreciate the important contribution made by teachers to everyone, every day in the experience of thinking, feeling, and including.

## Chapter 5

### Research Questions & Methodological Approach

*“The time will come when diligent research over long periods will bring to*

*light things which now lie hidden” Seneca*

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the research questions which provide the focus and framework for this study. The concept of the methodological layer cake (Loxley, 2019) will be examined as it provides a context for the research design. Following from this a brief examination of the relevant philosophical approaches to research will be presented that address competing assumptions about what knowledge is and how it is represented. This informs the presentation of the description of the research approach and research method deemed the most appropriate for this study. The stages of the exploratory sequential mixed methods approach, and triangulation will be examined. Ethical issues and the process of ethical approval for the study will be presented. Traditionally in this chapter the qualitative and quantitative methods used would be presented and the details of the participants/respondents, materials, and procedure presented. However, the researcher has decided to present the research questions, methodological approach, qualitative and quantitative methodology, and analysis of findings in four separate chapters. Thus, the information presented in the set of four chapter is as follows: Chapter 5 presents the research questions and methodological approach. Chapter 6 presents Phase 1 of the sequential



exploratory mixed methods design which includes the qualitative data collection, analysis, and results. Chapter 7 presents Phase 2 of the exploratory mixed methods design which includes the point of integration of the qualitative data leading to the development of the quantitative measure. Chapter 8 presents Phase 3 of the exploratory mixed methods design which includes the quantitative data collection, analysis, and results. The sequential presentation of these chapters best represents the three phases of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design used in this study to most appropriately address the purpose of the research to explore EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

## **5.2 Research Questions**

The research questions have been informed by the theoretical frameworks presented in the studies of emotional intelligence and inclusion and previous research and have dictated the methodological approach being used to conduct this research. The purpose of the study is to explore EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

The research questions are:

1. What do the concepts of emotional intelligence and inclusion mean to a sample of Irish primary school teachers and what influence do they believe that these concepts have on their practice in the classroom?

2. What is the emotional intelligence profile of a sample of Irish primary school teachers?
3. What are the sample of Irish primary school teachers' attitudes to inclusion and what is their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom?
4. What is the relationship between the emotional intelligence profile and attitudes and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom among a sample of Irish primary school teachers?

The structured inclusion and intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms. It is important at this stage of the research process that a clear understanding of the terms used in the study are presented as this will help to avoid issues that may be created at a later stage with the interpretation and measurement of concepts. For the purposes of this study EI will be defined as described by as “the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10). The researcher acknowledges that inclusion is a challenging concept to define but for the purpose of this study the perspective as presented by Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018) that it involves not just those with special needs but “concerns the inclusion of all children” (p.803) will be adopted. The outcome of this investigation has the potential to enrich approach used in this study aims to explore the EI profile of a sample of Irish primary school teachers and their attitudes to teaching practice through an understanding of EI and attitudes and intentions to teach

in inclusive classrooms and lead to the creation of more inclusive learning environments in Irish primary schools.

The researcher recognises that there are limits to the conceptualisation of their research question. Sequeira (2014) highlights the physical, cultural, and technological limitations to conceptualisation and the process of measurement and brings the researcher's attention to the reality that facts do not speak for themselves as they are limited by the creation of conceptual and perceptual frameworks and methods of measurement. At this stage of the study the researcher accepts these limitations and questions the objective reality of the concepts of EI and inclusion and whether the researcher is creating a reality based on their own worldview of these concepts. The researcher hopes that the findings of this study may contribute to programmes for the further development of teachers which may assist in addressing disparities in the learning experiences of pupils and may lead the way in developing mindsets and practices that mean education is for every learner.

### **5.3 The Methodological 'Layer Cake' and Research Design**

It is of central importance in undertaking this study to have a strategy of inquiry and the methodological layer cake, see Figure 5.1, represents the starting point for the current research design.

**Figure 5.1**

*Methodological Layer Cake (Loxley, 2019)*



The concept of the methodological layer cake provides a scaffolding or framework to the research design which allows consideration of a broad theoretical perspective. Crotty

(1998) contends that to align the research questions and the data collection methods the researcher must consider the epistemology, theoretical perspectives, and methodology that will provide a frame of reference for the study. Crotty (1998) advises that the use of data collection without this careful consideration may result in a poor fit between the research questions and the methods of data collection.

The layer cake provided the researcher with a controlled framework to conduct the investigation. The foundation of the design is constructed from the research philosophies or worldviews that she has selected as being relevant to her research. These philosophies have enabled the researcher to

understand the ontological and epistemological assumptions and corresponding methodologies upon which the research is founded. The researcher's dominant research tradition comes from the social sciences in general and psychology in particular. The research approaches considered include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.

#### **5.4 Philosophies – the ‘ologies’**

At the foundation of research traditions are coherently articulated ontologies, epistemologies, and corresponding methodologies. Each tradition provides a means of understanding the construction of knowledge and its validity. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994) the character of each research tradition or paradigm can be analysed by asking the following questions and it is expected that a research tradition will have a coherent response to each of these questions as a paradigmatic trait (Gallifa, 2018):

1. *Ontological*: What is the form and nature of reality and what is there that can be known about it?
2. *Epistemological*: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would be knower and what can be known?
3. *Methodological*: How can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?

As described by Slife and Williams (1995) philosophical ideas influence the practice of research and need to be identified even though they remain to a great extent largely hidden in research. A worldview can be seen as a general philosophical orientation about the world. Guba (1990) uses the term

to mean “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p. 17). Other terms have been used including paradigms (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Mertens, 2010), epistemologies and ontologies (Crotty, 1998) or broadly conceived research methodologies (Neuman, 2009). Five major philosophies, or worldviews, that are widely discussed in the literature are examined by the researcher to gain an insight to the epistemology, theoretical perspective, and methodology of each worldview and to inform the current research approach.

#### ***5.4.1 Positivist/Post-Positivist/Empirical Science***

This is the worldview adopted by the natural scientist and involves working with an objective social reality which can be externally observed and from which law-like generalisations can be made. It consists of philosophers and scientists such as Bacon, Comte, Durkheim, Newton, and Locke. The focus is on unambiguous, accurate knowledge which is pure and not influenced by human interpretation or bias. Using this approach universal laws and rules are used to explain and predict behaviour. The researcher remains neutral and detached to avoid influencing findings (Crotty, 1998). This scientific method is value-free, objective research which according to Gill et al. (2010) employs highly structured methodology to facilitate the replication of studies. The post-positivists look for the causes that determined the effects or outcomes. They are reductionists as they attempt to reduce ideas or variables to construct research questions and hypotheses. A matter of key concern is the validity and reliability of quantitative research to characterise reality through measurements. The aim of this research tradition is the establishment of scientific laws that establish relationships between

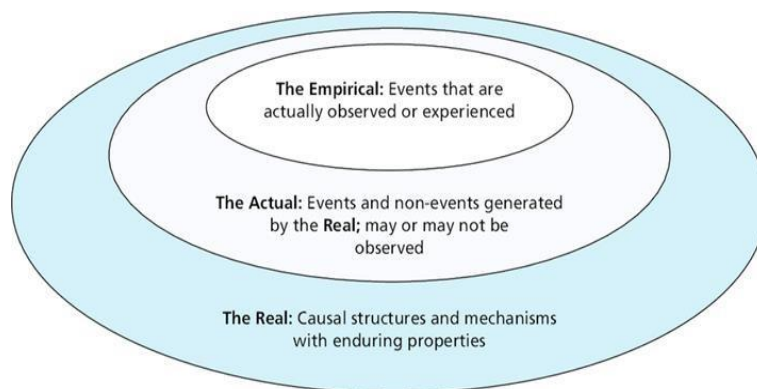
variables or formulas. In Psychology, this ontology, epistemology, and methodology can be seen, for example, in Behaviourism and in Psychometric and Experimental Psychology. From the perspective of this study, measures of emotional intelligence such as such as the EQi (BarOn, 2004) and the MSCEIT (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003) have been influenced by this tradition.

#### **5.4.2 Critical Realism**

This perspective purports that reality is external and independent and not directly accessible, see Figure 5.2.

**Figure 5.2**

*Critical Realist Stratified Ontology (Saunders et al., 2016)*



The sensations that are experienced are a manifestation of the real world and not objective reality. Firstly, there is the experience of sensation and then the mental processing of this information. Reproduction is used which means that we reason backwards from the perspective of interpretation to understand the cause (Reed, 2005). Critical realism asserts that knowledge

is a product of its time and is therefore historically situated. According to Bhaskar (1989) social facts are understood as social constructions that are agreed on by people as opposed to existing independently. This viewpoint supports a range of methodological approaches and provides an insight into how the socio-cultural background and experiences of the researcher may produce inherent biases. Therefore, from a critical realist perspective it is important to minimise biases and errors to achieve objectivity. The relevance of this perspective for this study is the acknowledgement by the researcher of the importance of reflexivity as both the researcher and participants bring their own values and biases. To gain an insight into the context and avoid subjectivity mixed methods research will be used in this study of EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

#### ***5.4.3 Interpretivism***

The main assertion of this approach is that social science research needs to be different from natural science research as human beings and their social worlds cannot be examined in the same way as physical phenomena. The central difference is that humans create meanings. This approach consists of several strands including hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (Crotty, 1998). Knowledge is not direct; it can only be inferred. Different people at different times create different meanings about things, therefore different social realities are created and experienced. This contrasts to the beliefs of the positivists who attempt to generate universal laws and as result this approach is idiographic rather than being nomothetic in nature. The research methods used by interpretivists focuses on collecting rich, meaningful, complex data from participants. The



techniques include qualitative interviews, observation, case studies, life stories, narratives, and repertory grids. The researcher must be both empathetic as they enter the world of the participant and be aware of the role of their values and beliefs in the research process. The ontology of this worldview is that reality is a construction of the subject which is relative and only contextually valid. The scaffolding provided by this tradition will provide this study into emotional intelligence and inclusion with a qualitative approach which will access meaning through the use of semi-structured interviews.

#### ***5.4.4 Postmodernism***

In this worldview nothing is tangible or fixed and fragmentation is part of the human condition. There are no external truths or values, and the focus is on the role of language and of power relations. Postmodernists such as Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, and Baudrillard questioned established ways of thinking and gave voice to marginalised views. According to Chia (2003) any sense of order is provisional and has no foundation as this can only be brought about through language with its classifications and categorisations. However, language both marginalises, suppresses, and excludes while simultaneously providing privilege and emphasis. The collective determines what is the right and true way to describe the world at a given point in time and this becomes the dominant way of thinking. Perspectives that are suppressed may have equal value and lead to alternative realities. Postmodernists attempt to deconstruct realities and expose instabilities to reveal that which is absent and in so doing create aporia. Thus, empowering, giving voice and legitimacy to previously

excluded ways of describing the world and altering power relations. The researcher believes that the concepts of emotional intelligence and inclusion are worthy of deconstruction. Within each of these theoretical approaches it is of value to consider the concepts have been included and those that are absent and to question in terms of the concept of inclusion who holds the power and who should be empowered.

#### ***5.4.5 Pragmatism***

Reality matters to the pragmatist and, according to Kelemen and Rumens (2008) concepts only have relevance when they support action. The practical consequences of ideas, theories, hypotheses, and research findings are all important. The research problem determines the research design and strategy, and the pragmatist focus is on practical outcomes. The reflexive process of inquiry is driven by the values of the researcher. Multiple methods of research such as mixed, qualitative, quantitative, and action research, are recognised as ways of interpreting the world. Pragmatists use the method or methods that enable credible, well founded, reliable, and relevant data to be collected that advance the research (Kelemen and Rumens, 2008). The worldview of the pragmatist offers this study the opportunity of considering consequences which can influence the practice of EI and inclusion, guide policy, and supports a mixed methods approach as a way of understanding the world.

These research traditions have provided the researcher with many lenses through which to see and understand the chosen research approach in terms of assumptions and methods of measurement. They have achieved the purpose of providing an ontological, epistemological, and methodological

framework for this study. The researcher will explicitly seek to bring these philosophical assumptions to this study to guide the research approach to EI and inclusion.

### **5.5 Research Approach**

Wener and Woodgate (2013) provided the researcher with a valuable insight into how the use of a systematic process to consider and understand the position of the research questions in the broader context of epistemology and theory would provide directions for how to align the research objectives with the most appropriate data collection methods. The researcher considered key factors to determine the approach to use to study the area under investigation.

Firstly, the researcher acknowledged the philosophical assumptions that are being brought to the study, the resulting procedures of inquiry (research designs), and the specific research methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Secondly, the researcher recognised that the research approach would provide a framework which would ensure the quality and coherence of the study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe that coherence, explicitly or implicitly, involves the appropriate articulation of the correspondence between ontology, epistemology, and methodology. This helps to achieve the repeatability and comparability of findings and the establishment of the relevance of the current study into EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

The research approach used in this study adopts a pragmatic world view based on the premise that truth is what works at the time. Also, the researcher

is drawn to interpretivism as a means of understanding individual differences. It is the belief of the researcher that a mixed methods approach will provide the best understanding of the research problem and the decisions made about what and how the research is undertaken are based on the intended consequences. The researcher acknowledges that research takes place in a social, historical, political, organisational, religious, and other contexts, and therefore will also adopt a postmodern worldview that reflects social justice and political aims. The great strength of using a mixed methods approach in this study is that several philosophical approaches can be used to understand the research question, multiple research methods, forms of data collection, and analysis. Consideration was given by the researcher to the different research approaches, namely qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. As contended by Creswell (2015) and Newman and Benz (1998) qualitative and quantitative approaches to research should not be perceived as rigid, distinct categories, polar opposites or dichotomies. Each approach is at a different end on a single continuum. The mixed method approach occupies the middle position and combines aspects of the qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Quantitative approaches to research dominated in the social sciences from the late 19th century and persisted until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and originated mainly in psychology. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century interest increasingly grew in qualitative research approaches. Alongside this mixed methods research emerged. Quantitative research approaches attempt to test objective theories and in so doing investigate the relationship between variables. Its origins can be found in anthropology, sociology, and the humanities. The measurement of these variables using various instruments

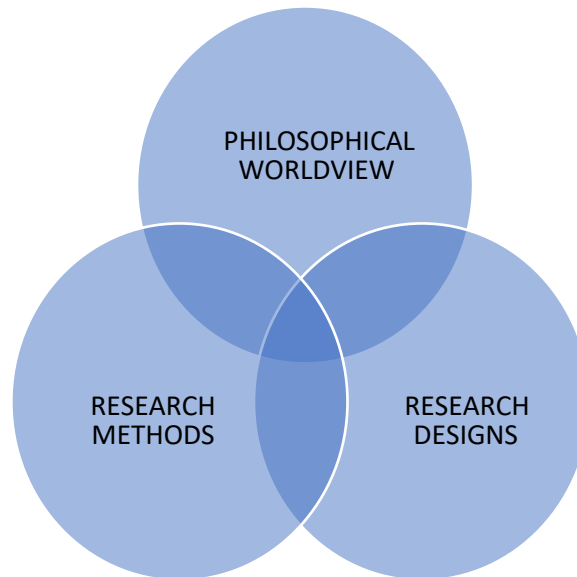
is of central importance. The resulting numbered data is then analysed using statistical methods. A structured report is presented which based on an underlying deductive approach and the findings can typically be generalised and replicated.

Qualitative research provides a means of gaining an insight into the meaning individuals and/or groups ascribe to a human or social problem. It is inductive in nature and focuses on reporting the complexity of the matter being investigated. The stages of the research process involve the emergence of questions and procedures, data which is normally collected in the participants setting, data analysis which is inductively constructed from the particular to the general, and the researcher interpreting the meaning of the research findings. The mixed methods approach draws on the philosophical assumptions and theoretical framework of both quantitative and qualitative research. The combination of these established approaches results in greater insights into the area under investigation. This may be seen to be akin to the Gestalt perspective of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) have described a framework for research design, see Figure 5.3, which involves the philosophical assumptions and methods and procedures. This constitutes the plan or proposal to conduct research which represents the intersection between philosophical worldviews, research design, and research methods.

### Figure 5.3

*A Framework for Research – The Interconnection of Worldviews, Design, and Research Methods. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)*



The researcher gave serious consideration to the different philosophies, traditions, and approaches that could have been used for the purpose of this study. However, when due regard was given to the research question and the participants, the researcher determined that the most appropriate research method to use was the exploratory sequential mixed-method design as presented by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The philosophy or worldview that informs the mixed method approach being used by the researcher is pragmatism, interpretivism and postmodernism as this is deemed to be the most valuable in the exploration of the EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

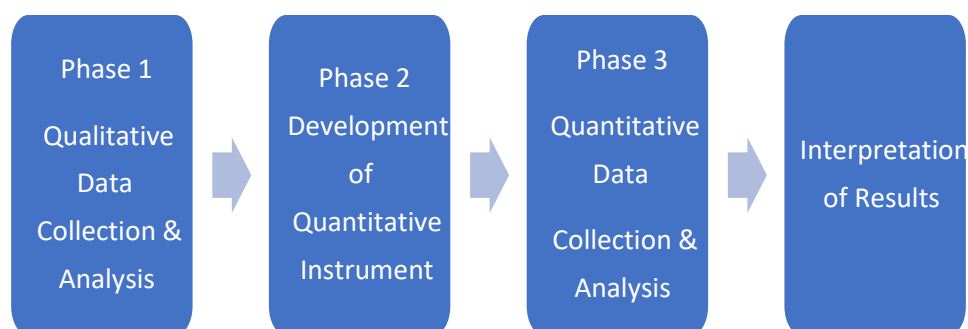
## **5.6 Research Method – Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods**

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) a mixed method study should have a quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method research question as mixed method research involves the integration of quantitative and qualitative data to answer proposed research questions. According to Brannan (2005) “there are pressures to view research in terms of this divide but perhaps more pressures to ignore such a divide” (p.173). When using mixed methods both qualitative and quantitative approaches are rigorously applied during the research process. The data are integrated to provide explanations and to create a framework of knowledge. Both approaches have strengths and limitations, therefore the combination of the two enhances data collection and provides a better insight into the research question.

An exploratory sequential three phase mixed methods design will be used as the strategy for investigation in this study, see Figure 5.4. The first phase will involve the exploration of qualitative data to gain an in-depth insight into the area under investigation from the perspective of the participants and then the analysis of the data will be undertaken. In phase two the findings will be used to develop a meaningful and relevant quantitative research instrument. The third phase will involve testing the measure through the collection and analysis of the quantitative data.

**Figure 5.4**

*Exploratory Sequential Design (Three-Phase Design) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)*



The purpose of this design is to explore the meaning of the concepts being investigated and to develop a quantitative instrument that can be shaped to represent the experiences of the participants. The connection between the qualitative and quantitative research processes are all important in this design. This research method will be used to explore the relationship between the EI and attitudes and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. The research questions will be addressed using the exploratory sequential research design as follows:

***Phase 1 - Qualitative Data Collection and analysis***

*Research Question 1* – What do the concepts of emotional intelligence and inclusion mean to the sample of Irish primary school teachers and what influence do they believe that these concepts have on their practice in the classroom?

***Phase 2 - Point of Integration – Analysis of Qualitative Data Leading to the Development of the Quantitative Measure***

***Phase 3 - Quantitative Data Collection and analysis***

*Research Question 2* – What is the emotional intelligence profile of the sample of Irish primary school teachers?



*Research Question 3 - Quantitative:* What are Irish primary school teachers' attitudes to inclusion and what is their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom?

*Research Question 4 – Quantitative:* What is the relationship between the emotional intelligence profile and attitudes and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom among a sample of Irish primary school teachers?

A challenge of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design is the use of the qualitative data to develop the quantitative feature.

In Phase 1 the meaning of the concepts of “emotional intelligence” and “inclusion” among a sample Irish primary school teachers and the influence that these concepts have on their practice in the classroom will be explored. The data will be collected using semi-structured interviews and will be analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) which will yield quotes, codes, and themes.

Phase 2 is the point of integration in the design in which the qualitative data and validated scales to measure EI and attitudes towards inclusion and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom will be used to develop a questionnaire to ensure that is tailored to best represent the sample of primary school teachers being studied.

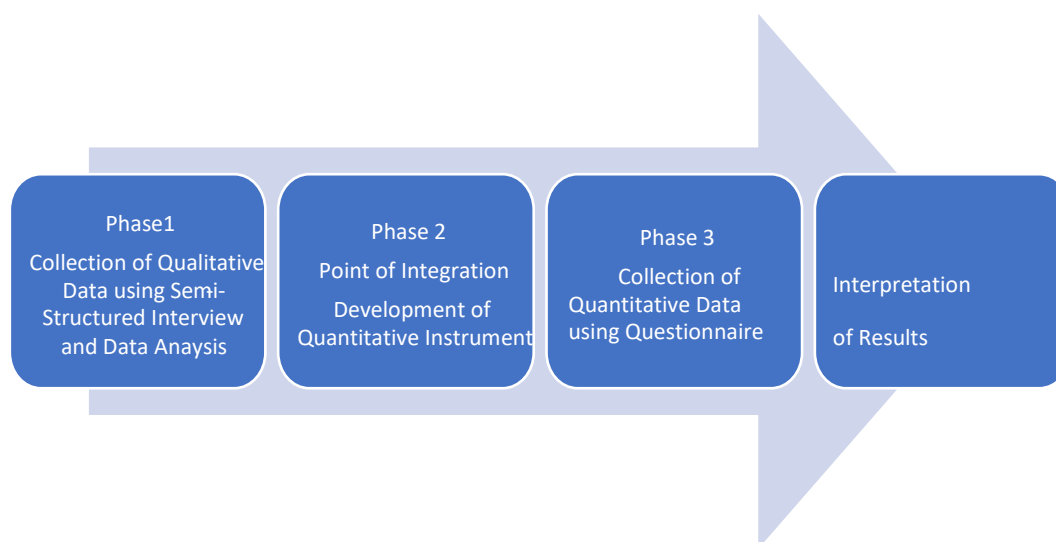
Phase 3 will involve the administration of the quantitative measure which is the questionnaire and the collection and analysis of the data.

A benefit of the mixed methods approach is that an exploration can be undertaken to determine if the qualitative data can be generalised to a larger sample of Irish primary school teachers. This allows a movement from

the particular to the general and facilitates an understanding of the personal situation of teacher in the classroom and the challenges experienced. This approach requires extensive qualitative and quantitative data collection and considerable time is needed for data analysis (see Figure 5.5).

### **Figure 5.5**

*Three Phases of the Exploratory Mixed Method Sequential Design Used in the Study*



### **5.7 Validity, Reliability and Triangulation**

The researcher will establish the validity of both the qualitative and quantitative approach being used. The measures used will be appropriate for their intended purpose and careful consideration will be given to the accuracy of the analysis of the results and the relationships being presented. It is acknowledged that the qualitative approach requires careful consideration and the adoption of a rigorous approach, and that the development of the quantitative instrument requires adequate planning. The researcher recognises the importance of replication and consistency and the need to

achieve both internal and external reliability. Threats to the reliability of the study include participant error, participant bias, researcher error, and researcher bias. To ensure methodological rigour each stage will be carefully considered, planned, and evaluated. Transparency will be a core objective throughout the study to permit replication. Pilot testing will be undertaken in advance of both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study and any issues encountered will be recorded and changes made as appropriate.

The term triangulation is often used to describe research which involves the act of combining two or more research methods, known as mixed methods. The exploratory three phase research approach used in this study has triangulation at its methodological core. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods provides balance and a richer and truer account of the concepts presented. In addition, it ensures the validity of the research data, analysis, and interpretation. The mixed methods approach helps to reduce measurement, sampling, and procedural biases. However, it is important to be aware of assumptions and biases and the impact that they may have on the study. A failure to acknowledge the presence of biases is called a design bias and it is best practice to engage in reflexivity. Heale and Forbes (2013) caution about the assumptions made about triangulation which include the belief that the distinct research methods are comparable and may or may not be of equal weight in the study. In addition, even if there are convergent findings between the two data sets that it may indicate that each of the data sets is flawed. Tashakkori and Teddle (2003) question the meaning of the term triangulation as it is so broadly defined and prefer the term mixed methods. Notwithstanding these challenges the researcher believes that triangulation provides a comprehensive insight into the area

under investigation and enhances the rigour of the research study in EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

## **5.8 Ethical Issues & Approval**

When research involves collecting data from people, about people (Punch, 2014) ethical issues need to be anticipated and as stated by Israel and Hay (2006) there is a need for researchers to protect their participants, develop trust, and promote the integrity of the research. They must also guard against any misconduct and impropriety that may reflect badly on their institutions or organisations while managing new and challenging issues. Israel and Hay (2006) inform researchers about the ethical considerations around matters such as personal disclosure, authenticity, the credibility of the research report, and issues of personal privacy. In addition, the legal framework provided by the General Data Protection Regulation which sets guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information from individuals who live in the European Union needs to be acknowledged. As the researcher collects, analyses, reports, shares, and stores data, it is recognised that ethical issues are an integral part of all the stages of the research process. As Blaikie (2010) advises “there is always a risk that even asking someone quite innocent questions could be disturbing to that person” (p. 31).

To ensure that the study was conducted to the required standard the researcher completed an online Epigeum Research integrity course provided by Trinity College Dublin.

This course was completed successfully in December 2020, see Appendix A for Certificate of Completion. Following this on the 14th of February 2022 a Level 1 application for ethical approval for this research project was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin (see Appendix B for Cover Sheet). The application provided the details of about the research questions, the proposed research methodology and measures. In addition, details about the selection, recruitment, and consent of participants, and relevant ethical issues were provided. Ethical approval for this study was given on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2022 by the Trinity College Dublin, School of Education, Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix C).

## **5.9 Conclusion**

It has become apparent to the researcher that there is no one best way of conducting research and this study will have strengths and weaknesses, however in common with all research, the strategy of inquiry endeavours to have a coherence and consistency between ontology, epistemology, and methodology. An insight into the research traditions presented provides an important scaffolding which will guide and inform the approach taken. Gallifa (2018) stated that when the awareness of these traditions is appropriately and explicitly stated it will lead to quality, impactful research. At the centre of the research are the research questions and the worldview of the researcher as they endeavour to explore the emotional intelligence profile of Irish primary school teachers and their attitudes and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom through a new lens. In planning and conducting the research the researcher acknowledges the central role of ethics and that their

identity and positionality has influenced and potentially introduced biases to the research process but hopes by reflexively engaging with these factors that the research study will achieve a rigorous standard.

The information presented in this chapter presented the research questions and methodological approach. The following Chapter 6 presents Phase 1 of the exploratory mixed method which includes the qualitative data collection, analysis, and results. Then Chapter 7 presents Phase 2 of the exploratory mixed methods design which is the point of integration of the qualitative data leading to the development of the quantitative measure. The set of four chapters is completed by Chapter 8 which presents Phase 3 of the exploratory mixed method which includes the quantitative data collection, analysis, and results. The researcher decided that the sequential presentation of these chapters best represented the three phases of the exploratory mixed method sequential design used in this study to most appropriately address the research question to explore EI and attitudes to inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

## Chapter 6

### Phase 1 Exploratory Mixed Methods – Qualitative Data Collection & Analysis

*"Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand."* Menninger (1942) (pp. 275-276)

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the researcher presents phase one of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design in which the collection and analysis of the qualitative data was undertaken using semi-structured interviews. The researcher's purpose in conducting this phase of data collection and analysis was to address the first research question that aims explore the meaning of the concepts of EI and inclusion to the sample of Irish primary school teachers and the influence they believe that these concepts have on their practice in the classroom, and to inform the development of the survey instrument which will be tested in the final phase of the research. Following an examination of the nature of a semi-structured interview and ethical considerations, the researcher provides details about the stages of planning and conducting the pilot study, identifies the conclusions drawn, and the impact on the development of the interview schedule. The researcher describes the experience of and insights acquired while undertaking the pilot study to develop the semi-structured interview schedule. The interview process undertaken with a sample of six Irish primary school teachers is

described by presenting information about the participants, the materials used, and the procedure implemented. The qualitative dataset was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) practical guide to reflexive thematic analysis and the researcher shares their reflections on the experience of engaging with this approach to data analysis. Finally, the qualitative findings provide the themes that are used as a framework to present key pieces of information and quotations from the participants. The qualitative findings presented in this chapter inform the second phase of the exploratory research which is the point of integration between the qualitative themes and quantitative measure which will be described in chapter 7. This will result in the development of an EI and inclusion questionnaire that will be presented along with the analysis of the results in Chapter 8.

## **6.2 Qualitative Methodology – Data Collection Using the Semi-Structured Interview**

Cohen et al. (2018) provide important guidance to the researcher that the interview is a social, interpersonal encounter, and not just a data collection exercise. The researcher recognised that they had the choice of approaching this encounter with the participants from the perspective of a miner or a traveller based on Kvale's (1996) metaphor. The miner focuses on extracting information, however the traveller journeys with the interviewee into an unknown country to co-construct knowledge (Kvale, 1996). The researcher decided that the journey taken as a traveller with the participants would have more meaning. The researcher endeavoured to journey alongside each of the participants and to listen to their voices to gain



an insight into their understanding of the concepts of EI and inclusion being explored and their experiences in the classroom. It was the belief of the researcher that the viewpoint of the traveller would add greater value to the study as the shared passage of exploration was undertaken leading to the construction of the knowledge framework. In addition, it was recognised by the researcher that the interview is a social encounter, but it is not an ordinary, everyday conversation (Dyer, 1995). It was acknowledged that it has a specific purpose, it is normally question-based, the responses must be explicit and detailed, and it is planned, and the interviewer must have due regard for the rules of the game (Cohen et al., 2018). Five unavoidable features of the interview situation identified by Cicourel (1964) cited in Cohen et al., (2018) guided the researcher in the development of the interview schedule:

1. There are many factors which inevitably differ from one interview to another, such as mutual trust, social distance, and the interviewer's control.
2. The participant may well feel uneasy and adopt avoidance tactics if the questioning is too deep.
3. Both interviewer and participant are bound to hold back part of what is in their power to state.
4. Many of the meanings which are clear to one will be relatively opaque to the other, even when the intention is genuine communication.
5. It is impossible, just as in everyday life, to bring every aspect of the encounter within rational control.

There are number of limitations to the interview as a method of data collection as highlighted by Creswell and Creswell (2018) including the fact that the information provided is indirect as it is filtered through the views of the participants, the information is collected away from the natural field setting, the presence of the researcher may bias responses, and participants are not equally articulate and perceptive. According to Greenbank (2003) and May and Perry (2017) the researcher needs to undertake explicit self-consciousness and self-assessment of their views and positions and how this might, may, or have, directly or indirectly influenced the design, execution, and interpretation of the research data findings.

At this stage it was important to the researcher that they gave consideration to the type of interview that was most appropriate for purpose of this study into EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. As proposed by Kvale (1996) interviews can be viewed along continua and differ in the openness of their purpose, the degree of structure, exploratory or hypothesis testing, descriptive or interpretive, and cognitive or emotion focused. On one end of the continuum there are structured interviews which are closed by nature and involve the determination in advance of the content and procedures, the semi-structured interview occupies the next position along the continuum and while the topics and questions are provided an open-ended approach is adopted to the wording and at times sequencing of questions. At the other end of the continuum lies the unstructured interview which needs to be carefully planned but allows greater flexibility and freedom. The semi-structured interview was deemed by the researcher to be the most appropriate approach to achieve the research objectives of exploring the meaning of the concepts of emotional intelligence

and inclusion to a sample of Irish primary school teachers and the influence that they believe these concepts have on their practice in the classroom. This type of interview allowed for the open-ended sharing of information, the possibility of exploring thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and the examination of issues further as appropriate during the encounter between the researcher and participants.

### **6.3 Ethical Issues in Interviewing**

The ethical dimension of interviews is of great importance, since as commented on by Cohen et al. (2018, p. 540) “they concern interpersonal interaction and produce information about the human condition”. Therefore, key ethical issues were considered by the researcher and informed the process undertaken which can be identified as informed consent, beneficence, do no harm, confidentiality, and a recognition of the consequences of interviews. An application was made to the Research Ethics Committee, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, for ethical approval to undertake the research project and permission was granted as described in Chapter 5.

In advance of the interview a matter that was considered by the researcher as highlighted by Kvale (2006) was regarding the power asymmetries in interview relationships. While the interview provides the opportunity for participants to have voice, interview dialogue is misleading as “it gives an illusion of mutual interests in a conversation, which in actuality takes place for the purpose of just the one part—the interviewer” Kvale (2006, p. 483), Therefore, it was recognised by the researcher that

ethics becomes as important as methodology in interview research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). The intersection of ethics and inclusion as termed by Quirke et al. (2022) as “Ethics as a Process” and “Inclusion as a Process” is an important consideration. The value of thinking, designing, and practicing inclusion in a reflexive manner at each point of the qualitative phase of this study was a key concern of the researcher.

#### **6.4 Stages of Planning and Conducting Pilot Study**

Kvale (1996) identified seven stages of conducting in-depth interviews which were used by the researcher as framework for planning and conducting the pilot interview for this study. The stages are thematising, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying, and reporting. Cohen et al. (2018) extended these to a ten-stage sequence. These stages were seen by the researcher as beneficial as they provided guidance and a structured and standardised approach in undertaking the pilot study.

##### ***Stage 1 Thematizing***

This stage involved clarification by the researcher of the purpose of the research, the general objectives, and the research questions about the meaning and practice of emotional intelligence and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers, as described in section 5.2 of Chapter 5. The researcher’s focus was on the design, development, and piloting of the semi-structured interview which constituted phase one of the exploratory research approach.

## *Stage 2 Designing*

This stage challenged the researcher to translate the overall research objectives and research questions into interview questions with due regard to ensure that the questions would enable the collection of the information sought to address the research question and to ensure that these could be presented to the correct informants. Upon consideration of the interview question format, the researcher was informed by the following factors identified by Cohen et al. (2018):

- The objectives of the interview
- The nature of the subject matter
- If the interviewer was dealing in facts, opinions, or attitudes
- If specificity and/or depth being sought
- The participant's likely level of understanding
- The kind of information that the participant can be expected to have
- Whether the participant's thought needs to be structured
- Assessment of the participant's motivational level
- The extent of the researcher's own insight into the participant's situation
- The type of relationship the researcher can expect to develop with the participant

The researcher used this information as a guide in making an informed decision about the selection of the appropriate type of interview and the inclusion and exclusion of question types to ask the participants.

### ***Stage 3 Construction of Schedules***

Following from the considerations of the first two stages, the researcher decided to develop a semi-structured interview with open questions as opposed to a closed structured or unstructured interview. The rationale for this choice of schedule was that it allowed for flexibility; to probe for depth and clear up misunderstandings; to test the limits of the participant's knowledge, encourage co-operation, and establish rapport; and to ensure a more accurate perception of the beliefs of the respondent. This open-ended approach provided the possibility for unexpected or unanticipated responses (Cohen et al., 2018). In addition, in preparing the interview questions the researcher followed the advice provided by Arksey and Knight (1999) that attention needs to be given to vocabulary, prejudicial language, ambiguity, and imprecision; leading, double-barrel, assumptive; hypothetical or speculative, and sensitive or personal questions; assumptions that the participant has the required knowledge/information; and ease of recall of the participant. The researcher considered at this point that even though the term emotional intelligence is used in everyday conversation the participant may not have a detailed knowledge. Also, this may be the case for the concept of inclusion, despite its apparent universal acceptance, the participant may not have given considered to their attitude to inclusion in the classroom.

### ***Stage 4 Question Format***

Consideration was given by the researcher to the type of questions and response modes and about how questions should be phrased or

organised. The framework provided by Tuckman (1972) provided guidance and informed the researcher's decisions about whether the questions should be direct or indirect, general, or specific in nature, and/or seeking fact or opinion. The researcher decided that the question format would be open, structured, direct in asking about the participant about their personal experiences, and opinion seeking in terms of recommendations for changes that the participant believed could be made to make education more inclusive.

### *Stage 5 Response Mode*

The researcher acknowledged that the nature of the information that was being looked for, the type of interview and the kind of questions asked determined the response mode. In addition, the researcher was aware of how important the response mode is in providing the type of information required and to allow for the analysis of the data collected. Based on the research objectives and questions, a sample of questions for phase one of the research using the semi-structured interview was initially drawn up by the researcher (see Appendix D). On further consideration of the research objectives and the concepts presented in the research question a matrix system was used by the researcher to develop an emerging item pool (see Appendix E). The researcher found that the construction of the emerging item pool proved to be a very beneficial exercise and provided a robust framework to determine the questions to be included in the interview schedule.

## ***Stage 6 Conducting the Pilot Interview***

The researcher conducted the pilot semi-structured interview with an Irish primary school teacher in May 2021, to explore the meaning and practice of emotional intelligence and inclusion in the classroom. The purpose of undertaking a pilot of the semi-structured interview was to increase reliability, validity, and the practicality of the tool.

### ***Participant***

The participant was selected using convenience sampling and had due regard for the need to meet the inclusion criteria that the participant was an Irish primary school teacher. The participant was female and had 34 years teaching experience. She was teaching in a DEIS Band 2 school which is a programme that is part of the Irish Government's policy initiative to respond to educational disadvantage. DEIS is the acronym for Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. The schools in the DEIS programme are assigned to DEIS Urban Band 1, DEIS Urban Band 2, or DEIS Rural based on their location or level of disadvantage. The participant's role in the school was a Special Education Needs (SEN) teacher. She was teaching fourth class pupils, who are between nine and ten years of age, at the time of the interview

### ***Materials***

The materials that were used were the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix F), the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix G), and the Pilot Semi-Structured Interview Protocol (see Appendix H).



## *Procedure*

The researcher contacted the participant to ask her if she would be interested in taking part in the pilot test of an interview which would contribute to the researcher's study into emotional intelligence and inclusion among Irish primary school teachers. Upon receipt of a favourable response from the participant, the researcher sent an email to her containing the Participant Information Sheet and the Informed Consent Form. The participant was asked to read both documents and was instructed that the Informed Consent Form would be provided in hard copy before the commencement of the interview and that if all was to her satisfaction that she could sign the document at that time. In addition, the participant was informed again about the voluntary nature of their participation, her right to withdraw at any time, and the fact that all information would be anonymised. Information was provided about the approximate length of the interview which was estimated at 30 minutes and the date, time, and location were agreed.

At the start of the interview, the researcher introduced herself to the participant and informed her about the nature and purpose of the interview. The researcher reviewed the Participant Information Sheet with the participant and invited her to sign the hard copy of the Informed Consent Form which the researcher signed also. The researcher retained a copy of the consent form signed by both the participant and researcher which was scanned and stored securely on OneDrive in encrypted format on a locally encrypted machine which is accessible to the principal investigator only. In addition, the participant was given a copy of the consent form.

The researcher confirmed that the participant was happy to consent to taking part in the interview. The researcher used the Pilot Semi-Structured Interview Protocol to ask the planned questions and handwritten notes were taken by the researcher during the interview. The interview consisted of a blend of open and follow-up prompts and probes which allowed for clarification and elaboration and the use of why and/or how questions. Continued questioning about an item or over probing was avoided, as advised by Wellington (2015), as this may have provoked resentment or bias. The researcher adopted an agile and flexible approach, and the interview guide was considered a work in progress. Galletta's (2013) assertion about the importance of understanding that data collection remains subject to change as feedback begins to accumulate and adjustments are made was acknowledged by the researcher. Following the pilot interview all aspects of the interview were reviewed and modifications made during the data collection process were recorded by the researcher.

### ***Stage 7 Transcribing***

The researcher chose to hand write the responses made by the participant and acknowledged the potential for data loss, distortion, and the reduction of complexity (Cohen et al., 2018) as it is a translation from an oral and interpersonal source to a written system. The researcher was mindful of the comment by Kvale (1996) that the transcript becomes an opaque screen between the researcher and the original interview and that the statements made by participant are not just collected by the researcher they are in fact co-authored. This is a reason why the researcher's positionality and reflexive analysis are so important. Therefore, the value of this approach was

recognised by the researcher as it facilitated the social encounter which lies at the heart of the interview. Following the interview, the researcher typed out the transcript (see Appendix I).

### *Stage 8 Analysing*

The process of the analysis of the transcript of the interview involved interpretation and represented a reflexive, and reactive interaction between the researcher and that decontextualised information that was the interpretation of the previously held social interaction with the participant. Upon analysis of the pilot interview and a conversation with the participant, the following key issues became apparent to the researcher:

1. The interview time of 46 minutes was deemed to be lengthy.
2. The number of questions asked should be reduced.
3. The opportunity to add probing questions if needed was recognised.
4. The participant appeared to find it difficult to talk about the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of other teachers.
5. It was considered that a more direct style of questioning may be more effective, using questions such as “what practices do teachers engage in that demonstrate their emotional intelligence or is inclusive in nature?”

The researcher used this information and reflections on the experience to develop the Interview Schedule. Examples of how this information was used

to inform the revised interview schedule was the reduction in the number of questions and the use of a more direct style of questioning.

### ***Stage 9 Verifying***

The effective completion by the researcher of each of the previous stages in the process of developing, planning, and piloting the semi-structured interview contributed towards the validity of the qualitative research instrument. In addition, during each stage the ethical aspects were taken into consideration by the researcher.

### ***Stage 10 Reporting***

The data collected from the pilot semi-structured interview were presented using a word-based account. The data was used by the researcher to inform the development of the interview schedule only and therefore the data was not included as part of the main dataset.

#### ***6.4.1 Conclusions and Outcome of the Pilot Study***

Having undertaken the process of developing, designing, and piloting the semi-structured interview many issues were taken into consideration by the researcher. This aspect of the research design provided space to undertake what Woods (2019) terms ethical reflexivity. The pilot study provided the space and foundation for reflexive analysis and the consideration of ethical issues beyond approval; therefore, it is important that it has visibility in the study. The key conclusions were firstly that the researcher realised the importance of developing rapport as Rosenblatt (2003, p. 229) commented that “good interviewing will draw out from interviewees what they would be reluctant to tell most people”. Secondly, the researcher recognised the value of adopting a flexible and agile approach during the qualitative phase of data collection as it remains subject to change as feedback begins to accumulate and adjustments are made (Galletta, 2013). Finally, on a practical level, the researcher recognised the limitations of handwriting the interview notes and considered that a video recording to capture contextual factors including visual and non-visual aspects of the interview would be very beneficial.

In conclusion, the researcher considered the semi-structured interview using the insights provided by Berner-Rodoreda et al. (2018) as they built on Brinkmann’s (2007) distinction between doxastic versus epistemic interview types along the continuum “from a focus on understanding the interviewees’ experiences, behaviours and context to coconstructing knowledge, and from the role of the interviewee as a respondent to an equal partner.” (p. 2). The researcher considered a means that could be used during the first qualitative phase of the research to shift “the focus from gleaning personal information in a neutral encounter toward

engaging in dialogue and deliberation” (Berner-Rodoreda et al., 2018, p. 10). In addition, this raised a matter highlighted by Kvale (2006) regarding the power asymmetries in interview relationships. While the interview provides the opportunity for participants to have voice, as contended by Kvale (2006), interview dialogue is misleading as it presents an illusion of mutual interests in a conversation, which in reality takes place for the purpose of just the interviewer. Therefore, it was recognised by the researcher that ethics becomes as important as methodology in interview research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005).

The outcome of the experience, insights, and understandings gained by the researcher from the pilot study of the semi-structured interview resulted in significant changes being made to the interview schedule. The researcher and supervisor made significant revisions which involved the grouping of questions and the phrasing of questions to use a less formal style of questioning for the revised interview schedule (see Appendix J).

Upon the completion of the pilot study the researcher reflected on the significance of the statement made by Roulston (2003) that one thing that has been learnt is that interviewing is much more difficult than it could have been ever imagined it would be. The experience of undertaking the pilot study reinforced the researchers position that they did not wish to be a miner and have chosen to be a traveller on the research journey.

The qualitative pilot study provided a valuable opportunity for ethical reflexivity and foundation for the study on EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

The outcomes have informed and led to the development of an enhanced interview schedule. This will guide the researcher as they venture forward with a commitment to care for the research project and the participants.

## **6.5 Semi-Structured Interview**

This section presents details about the participants, materials, and procedure undertaken to collect the qualitative data using the semi-structured interview to explore the meaning of the concepts of emotional intelligence and inclusion to a sample of Irish primary school teachers and the influence that they believe that these concepts have on their practice in the classroom.

### ***6.5.1 Participants***

Having evaluated different methods of sampling, the researcher selected six participants using convenience sampling (see Figure 6.1). The strengths and limitations of this method of sampling were recognised by the researcher. The researcher informed family, friends, and colleagues about the study by word of mouth and asked for their help in identifying potential participants with due regard for the need to meet the inclusion criteria that they were an Irish primary school teacher. This type of non-random sampling was used to ensure that the teachers that participated were available at the time required for this phase of the research and that they were willing to participate in the study by sharing their understanding of EI and inclusion as the results would inform the quantitative phase of the study. For this study the use of convenience sampling supported the exploratory research design, however it was noted by the researcher that convenience sampling can introduce research biases including selection, sampling, and positivity bias. The mixed methods approach used in this study will address concerns

regarding the representative nature of this sample and the ability to generalise findings as the quantitative phase will use a convenience snowballing sampling design.

**Figure 6.1**

*Semi-Structured Interviews Participant Information*

Participant	Gender	Years of Teaching Experience	Urban/Rural School	Irish County Location of School	Previous Professional Qualification and Experience
1	Female	25	Urban	Wicklow	None
2	Female	30	Rural	Wexford	None
3	Female	4	Rural	Wexford	None
4	Male	10	Urban	Dublin	None
5	Female	5	Urban	Dublin	None
6	Female	20	Urban	Dublin	Civil Engineer 15 years

**6.5.2 Materials**

The materials used for this phase of the study were as follows:

1. A text message to prospective participants to thank them for their interest in the study and to ask them if they would like to participate in a 45-minute interview on MS Teams at a time and date suitable to them (see Appendix K).
2. The Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix L).
3. The Participant Consent Form (see Appendix M).
4. The Semi-Structured Interview Schedule (see Appendix N).



The semi-structured interview consisted of three sections with a total of twenty questions and had a blend of open and follow-up prompts and probes which allowed for clarification and elaboration and the use of why and/or how questions. The purpose of the first section of the interview was to collect background information about the participant, the second was to collect information about the meaning and practice of emotional intelligence in the classroom, and the third was to get an understanding of the meaning and practice of inclusion in the classroom, school, education, and society.

**Section A Background Information.** In this first section of the interview the researcher asked the participant about their employment history, involvement in voluntary, community, or sports groups; years of primary school teaching experience; if they like teaching and what would they wish for to make the job better; their roles in school; if they are happy at school and if the experience meets their needs for growth and development; who is the patron of the school; the type and location of the school; and the numbers enrolled in school and teaching and other staff.

**Section B Emotional Intelligence.** In this part of the interview the participants were asked to measure their understanding of EI on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents very poor knowledge and 5 represents excellent knowledge; to describe what the concept of EI means to them and how they are emotionally intelligent in their practice; to consider what their colleagues would say about them and their approach to teaching; to describe how they use EI when working with pupils, colleagues, and parents; to consider who they are responsible for while doing their job; and to determine if their

teacher training provided them with the knowledge and skills needed to manage the emotional aspects of teaching.

**Section C Inclusion.** The researcher asked the participants to describe what the term ‘inclusion’ means to them and in what ways are they inclusive in their practice; they were asked if they have the training and support that they need to create a more inclusive classroom; and to consider a change that they would like to implement to make their classroom, school, education, or society more inclusive.

The interview closed with an expression of thanks to the participant for taking their time and sharing their insights and experience.

### ***6.5.3 Procedure***

The researcher informed family, friends, and colleagues about the study by word of mouth and informed them that prospective participants were required for the study who met the inclusion criteria of being an Irish primary school teacher. The researcher asked people that were known to them to share the researcher’s contact details with primary school teachers who may be interested in taking part in the study. When a prospective participant, who met the inclusion criteria, contacted the researcher, and expressed interest in the study, the researcher sent an SMS text to them to provide more details. If they confirmed by return SMS text that they would be happy to be part of the study, the researcher asked for their email address and then sent the Participant Information Leaflet and the Interview Consent Form to them. Upon completion and email return by the participant of the

Interview Consent Form, the researcher arranged the time and date to conduct the interview on MS Teams and each participant was sent a meeting invitation on MS Teams. The interviews took place between Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2022 and Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2022 inclusive.

On the day and time of each of the participant's interview the researcher logged onto MS Teams and waited for the participant to join the meeting. The researcher opened the interview by welcoming the participant, provided a description of the structure of the interview, and asked if the participant had any questions and then followed the script for the interview in a semi-structured manner. The researcher adopted a flexible and agile approach to questioning while adhering to the interview schedule. At times the researcher assisted the participant by repeating the question, providing clarification, and further elaboration. The researcher closed the interview with an expression of thanks to the participant for taking their time and for sharing their insights and experience. The approximate duration of each interview was 45 minutes. The interview was recorded using MS Teams and a transcript of the interview was made by MS Teams simultaneously. In addition, the researcher made handwritten notes about the participants responses during the interview.

Following the interview with each participant a transcript of the interview was downloaded from MS Teams and a copy was printed. The date of each interview and the participant number was recorded on the transcript. Subsequently, the researcher watched and listened the MS Teams video recordings of each interview while reading the transcript and referred to the written notes that were taken during each interview. Amendments were made

by the researcher to correct errors found in the transcript which were mainly due to the incorrect recording of words or abbreviations as misinterpreted by MS Teams. Following this, as the required information had been transcribed, the researcher deleted the MS videos of each of the participants interviews. The transcripts of the interviews were stored in OneDrive in encrypted format on a locally encrypted machine which was accessible to the principal investigator only.

## **6.6 Qualitative Data Analysis**

The method of qualitative analysis selected by the researcher to address the research question was reflexive thematic analysis. Even though this is a widely used method in the social sciences, there is not a single but a wide range of descriptions of this method. The researcher decided to use the practical guide to thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2022) to navigate the way through the phases of thematic analysis. This provided the researcher with a method of analysis that would enable them to explore the deep, complex, nuanced meaning and understanding of the concepts of emotional intelligence and inclusion to achieve the objectives of the study. Other approaches to thematic analysis that were considered by the researcher included coding reliability (Boyatzis, 1998) and Codebook (King, 2012).

The rationale used by the researcher in selecting this approach was that reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) is described by Braun and Clarke (2012) as an easily accessible and theoretically flexible interpretative approach to qualitative data analysis that facilitates the identification and analysis of patterns or themes in a particular dataset. The researcher's active

role in knowledge production is highlighted in RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and the codes represent the researcher's interpretations of patterns of meaning across the dataset. It is considered a reflection of the researcher's interpretive analysis of the data conducted at the intersection of the dataset; the theoretical assumptions of the analysis; and the analytical skills/resources of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As such it is not expected that the codes and themes generated by one researcher will be same as another researcher, even though this could possibly happen. Themes are produced by organising codes around a relative core commonality, or "central organising concept", that is interpreted from the data by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The approach presented by Braun and Clarke (2022) was selected by the researcher as it encouraged them to embrace reflexivity, subjectivity, and creativity as assets in knowledge production while providing clear instruction on how to follow the iterative process of conducting RTA. In addition, the framework supports the approach of "Inclusion as a Process" as termed by Quirke et al. (2022) which informs the inclusive engagement with the data. The following section of the chapter details the systematic approach used by the researcher to code the data and to develop themes which were used by the researcher subsequently to inform the development of the quantitative survey measure to explore EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

### ***6.6.1 The Analytic Journey - Phases of Reflexive Thematic Data Analysis***

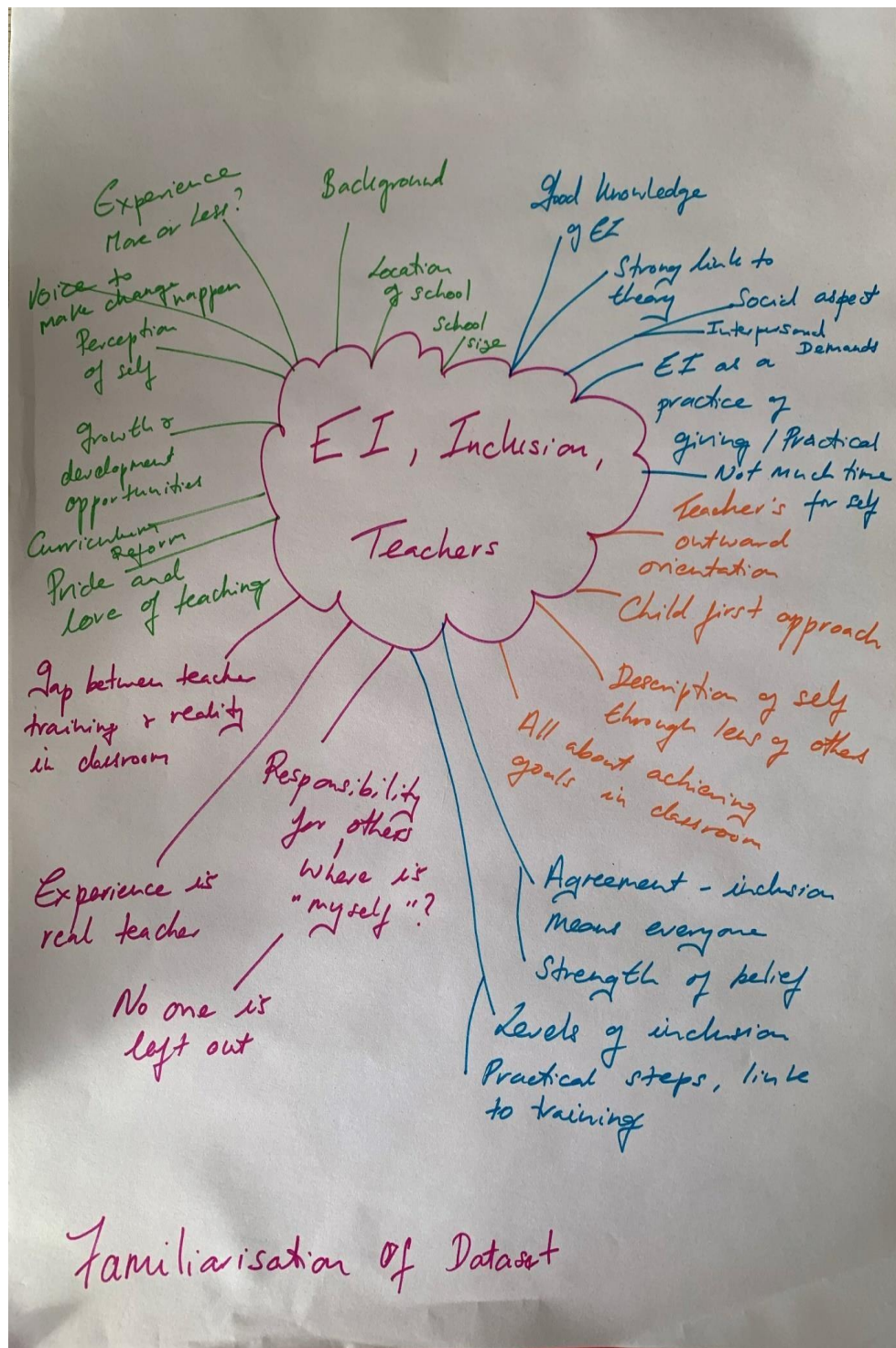
The following sections outline the systematic approach used by the researcher to code the data and develop themes during the months of July and August 2022.

***6.6.1.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation with the Data set - Unlocking Meaning.*** The familiarisation phase of reflexive thematic analysis began when the researcher conducted the online interviews and subsequently watched and listened to the recordings of each of the participant's interviews on MS Teams while reading the transcript of each interview while making some initial notes about their observations and thoughts.

The researcher then decided to write out by hand each question and the key points made by each participant in response to consider each question in turn and the meaning of the response made by each participant in terms of the research question, the theoretical framework, and their positionality. This afforded the researcher the opportunity to think and make familiarisation notes about meanings and patterns, what was being said commonly by participants, what was said by only one or two participants, or what was not said at all about each data item and within the dataset. Key thoughts recorded by the researcher at this stage led to the development of Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2

Dataset Familiarisation Notes



At this point the researcher felt actively involved and as if they were beginning to make sense, contesting and challenging, critiquing, and using

their imagination to consider possibilities. This approach allowed the researcher to get both a sense of being close to the data by being immersed in it while looking at it from a distance and critically engaging with it. The researcher considered the meaning of the experiences presented by the sample of Irish primary school teachers with regards to the theoretical framework and the relevant research in the area and their account of their practice of emotional intelligence and inclusion in school. In addition, at this time the researcher recognised the impact of their positionality on their reaction to and interpretation of the dataset.

The researcher decided to further immerse themselves in the dataset by creating a table using MS Word to record each question and the key aspects of the responses from each participant and noted the line number of each response on the table. An example of an item is presented in Figure 6.3 below and the complete table is presented in Appendix O.



**Figure 6.3**

*Extract from Table Created to Present Semi-Structured Interview Question Numbers and*

*Participant Responses*

Question Numbers	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6
EI Meaning 9,10	9. 4 on scale. 269 10. It would never be touched on in any teacher training. 273 Dealing with emotions. 288 Understanding their emotions. 291 Get along with others. 294 Share tasks. 297	9. 4 on scale. 286 10. An awareness of myself and then if I have an awareness of myself, I should be able to control myself. 301-302.	9. 2 on scale. 443. 10. It's how you kind of deal with your emotion and how you recognize them or the ability to recognize them. 463-464.	9. 4 on scale. 272. 10. I think that emotional intelligence is about having the awareness of being able to deal and work with people. 278-279.	9. 4 on scale. 350. So I suppose emotional intelligence for me would be	9. 4 on scale. 449. 10. I suppose kind of being able to read people and read situations and kind of understand, kind of have an empathy and being able to
	Empathy for others. 298	I should also have empathy with other people. 305. Social skills. 309. To be able to reflect as well. 311 Self awareness, self-control, empathy, social skills and the ability to reflect. 311-315.	How you deal with those feelings and feelings that you've recognized. 465-466.	Empathy and being able to empathize with other and I suppose having all those social, that social capital or that social knowledge where you can interact successfully and navigate that whole social world and where you are	about and awareness of my own emotions and how they affect my life, how I manage them, but also the emotion of the people around me and how they, their emotions would impact me as well. 359-361.	understand people and to just like, you know, you see, I see I would see it with kids, like some kids can kind of read the room. 464-472. I suppose being able to understand other people or understand how they're feeling, maybe and empathize with the. 476-477.

				able to show empathy with others, collaborate with other people, cooperate. 279-284.		
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The researcher then wrote a set of overall familiarisation notes for the dataset representing emotions, thoughts on the process so far, and expectations for the journey ahead as presented in Figure 6.4.

This phase demonstrated to the researcher the assertion made by Braun and Clarke (2022) that analysis is a complex process of meaning-making at the point of intersection between the researcher, the dataset, and the analytic and data context.

**Figure 6.4***Overall Dataset Familiarisation Notes*Overall Dataset Familiarisation Notes

Even though the researcher has been involved in education for over 30 years, she has no experience of being a primary school teacher. She engaged with the process of thematic analysis with a sense of excitement, fear, and anticipation. The researcher considered that she brought with her knowledge, the research question and many expectations and biases.

Thoughts that occurred to the researcher during the process of familiarisation included:

- The amount that teachers give on many levels.
- The difference between inexperienced and experienced teachers in terms of their decision making.
- The lack of opportunities for growth provided to teachers.
- Frustration experienced by teachers about class sizes, the curriculum, and career progression.

- Burden placed on teachers by paperwork and the need and desire for more time to plan.
- Awareness of the link between growth and development and the relationship between the child, parent, teachers, and the principal and school.
- Joy, pride, and love in teaching.
- High level of commitment to teaching and a desire to do what is best for all the children in their class.
- The many roles that teachers have both officially and unofficially.
- Importance of the community of support in a primary school.
- Need for a more pluralistic approach to education.
- Inclusion is about everyone.
- There are many layers to inclusion.
- Feeling of responsibility and guilt experienced by teachers about including everyone, talking to everyone, and developing the potential of all.

The researcher finished the familiarisation phase with a sense of excitement about the journey ahead while also feeling the weight of responsibility to do justice to the meaning and experiences expressed by the primary school teachers.

#### ***6.6.1.2 Phase 2: Coding – Reducing the Mess by Building the***

***Blocks!*** The researcher considered the meaning of the dataset in terms of the research question, the theoretical framework, and their positionality. The questions and set of answers presented by the participants in response was

handwritten on A3 paper and systematically considered by the researcher. As the participants' responses were written down the words that were used that were deemed to be important were underlined, and then key words were collated. Using both semantic codes which represent surface explicit meanings in the data, and latent codes, which represent hidden ideas and assumptions, a diversity of possible code labels were identified and recorded. Following this the data items were considered in the reverse order and all the information recorded was reread and words and their meanings were considered and reconsidered leading to the addition or removal of code labels. This phase was facilitated by the previous phase of familiarisation. Using this approach the researcher coded the entire dataset, then code labels were collated, and segments of data were presented for each code. An example of a segment of the data is the quote from Participant 1 about the practice of emotional intelligence who stated that "always thinking about children and where they are coming from" and from Participant 3 when considering who they are responsible for they stated that there is an "onus to be there for the children". Examples of how the information was recorded by the researcher to facilitate this process are presented in Figures 6.5 and 6.6. See Appendix P for the complete set of the researcher's handwritten pages recording the development of code labels.

Figure 6.5

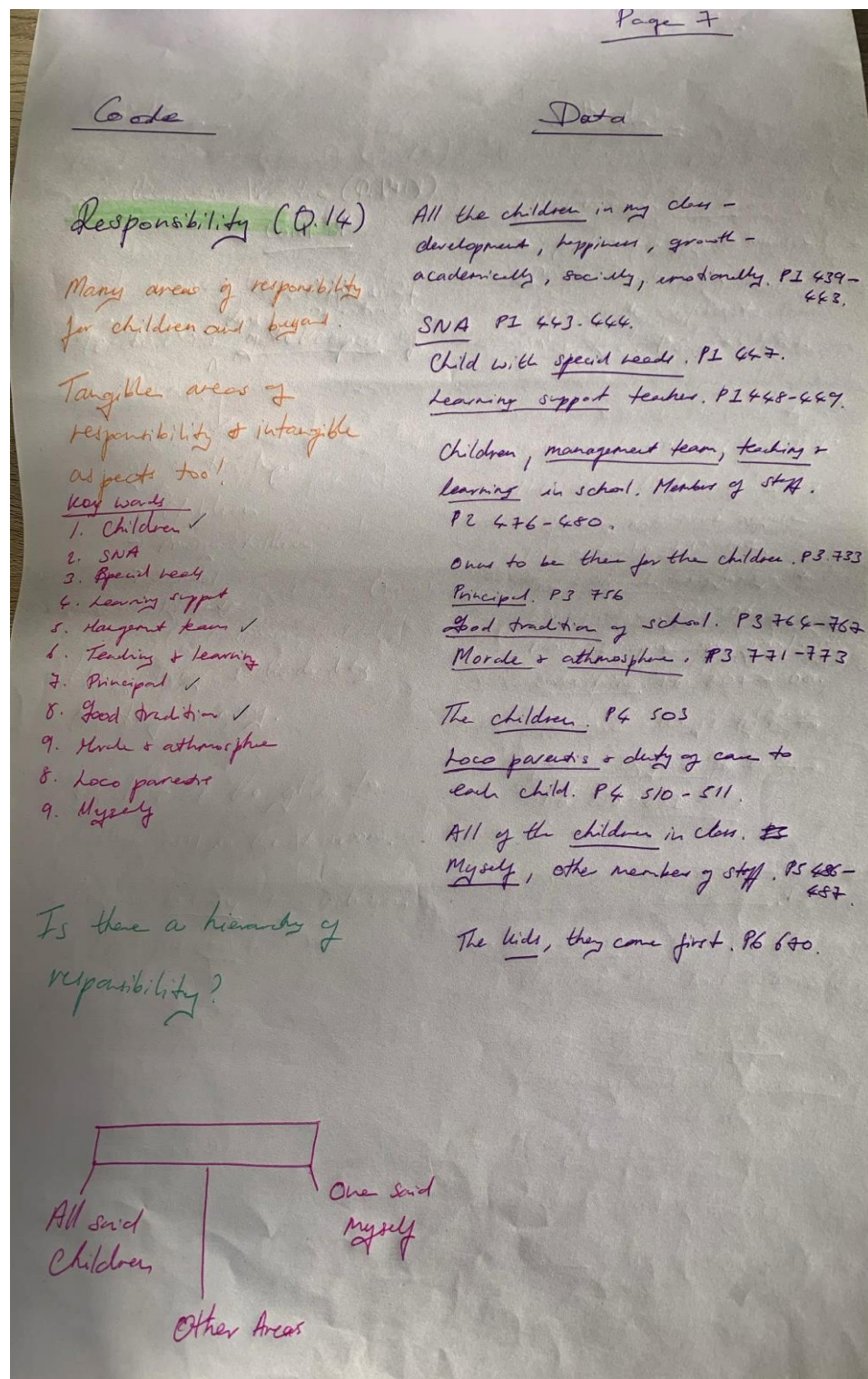
Example 1 of Development of Possible Code Labels

page 2

<u>Codes</u>	<u>Data</u>
<p><u>EI + Practice (Q.11)</u></p> <p><u>A practice of giving</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EI used to meet needs of others: selfless.</li> <li>• Children First Approach.</li> <li>• Many ways to practice EI</li> </ul> <p><u>Key words</u></p> <p>Think Aware Empathy Social skills Acknowledge Everyone feels Make sure Transfer Give Show up Understand Listen Respect Preserve Dignity Maintain Relationship Image.</p> <p>* Action / Practice / Doing in best interest of others.</p> <p><u>Outward / other orientation</u></p>	<p><u>Think</u> where the children are coming from. P2 305.</p> <p><u>Aware</u> of each child &amp; differences. P2 313-314.</p> <p>Always thinking about the children and what they're coming from. P2 334-335.</p> <p><u>Empathy</u>. P2 365.</p> <p><u>Social skills</u>. P2 368.</p> <p><u>Greet</u> children &amp; colleagues. P2 373-375.</p> <p><u>Acknowledge</u> everybody. P2 375-376.</p> <p><u>Everyone</u> feels they have been seen &amp; noticed and appreciated. P2 376-377.</p> <p><u>Acknowledge</u> how I'm feeling. P3 476-477.</p> <p><u>Make</u> sure that what I'm feeling doesn't necessarily transfer into how kids would see me. P3 485-486.</p> <p><u>Give</u> coping mechanisms. P3 492-503</p> <p><u>Show up</u> myself. P3</p> <p><u>Think</u> about how I deal with my own emotions. P3 528-530.</p> <p><u>Understanding &amp; listening</u> to what they have to say. P4 298-299.</p> <p><u>Aware</u> of the different needs of children. P4 302.</p> <p><u>Respect</u> for everyone in the classroom. P4 311-314.</p> <p><u>Preserve</u> dignity</p> <p><u>Maintain</u> that very important relationship. } P4 362-368</p> <p><u>Image</u> qualities to meet needs. P4 358</p>

**Figure 6.6**

Example 2 of Development of Possible Code Labels



As the researcher continued the exploratory process of meaning making the code labels that were developed started to reveal some repeated meanings and patterns across the dataset that were both data driven or

inductive and researcher-driven or deductive. While acknowledging the comment by Braun and Clarke (2022) that the process of coding is never complete, because meaning is never final, the researcher decided to adventure forth to the next stage of the process.

**6.6.1.3 Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes – Capturing the Patterns of Meaning.** Using the guidance provided by Braun et al. (2014) the researcher endeavoured to define themes by meaning-unity and conceptual coherence and focused on the need for each theme to have its own distinct central organising concept. The dataset was explored for patterns of shared meaning which was informed by the research questions. The creative aspect of this phase was experienced by the researcher as being both exciting and challenging. The constraints were recognised including their skills, experience, positionality, dataset, and research questions, but the opportunities to see concepts in a new way and gain insights into the experiences of the participants provided the researcher with the energy for the exploration.

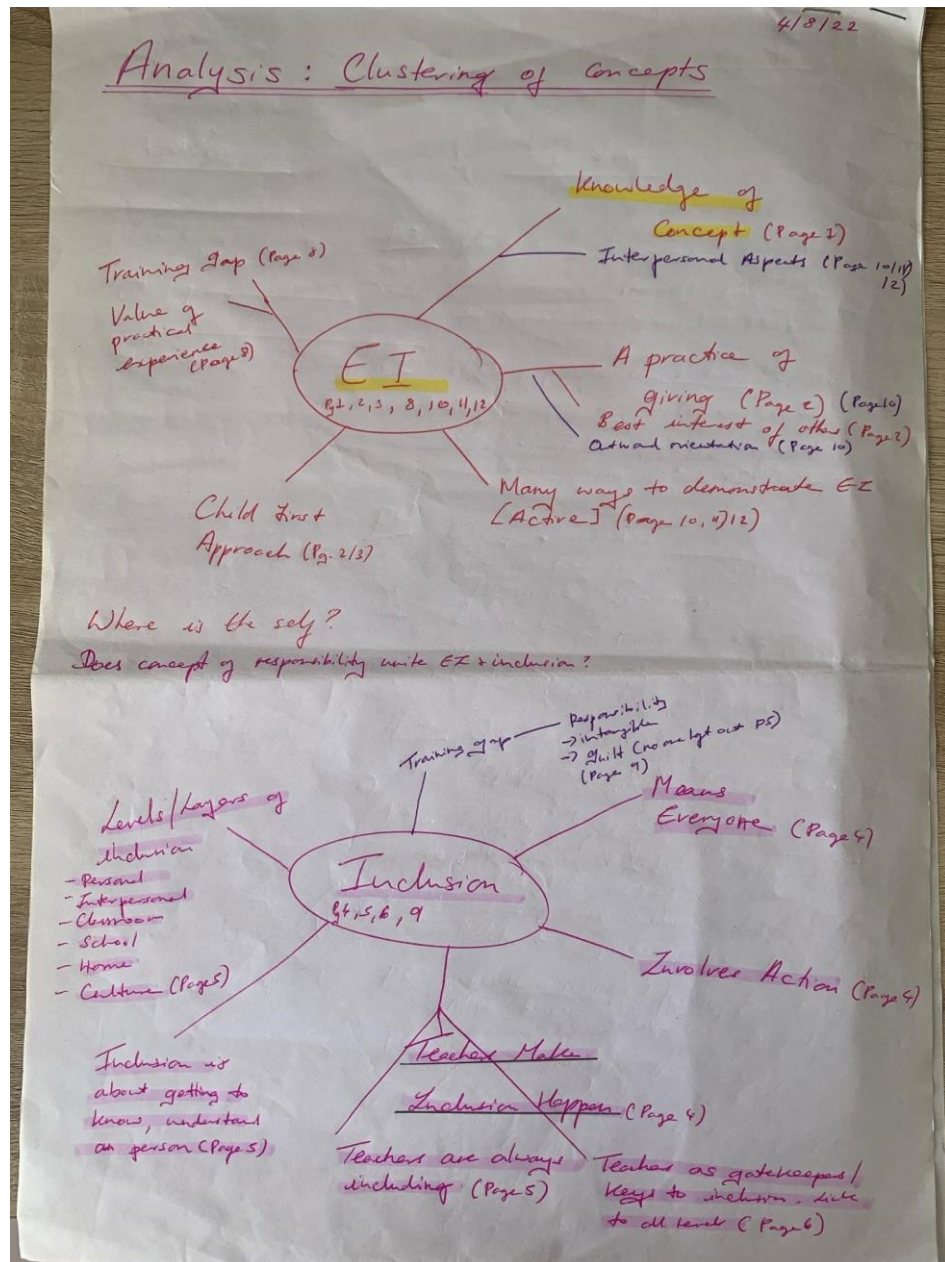
The researcher examined all the data codes that were recorded in the earlier phase and sought out similarity in meaning. Then potentially connected codes were clustered into potential themes and subthemes. Also, the page number of the handwritten data set was noted which related to each interview question.

An example of the diagram developed by the researcher as they engaged in the process of the clustering of codes and theme development is presented in Figure 6.7. See Appendix Q for the complete set of four concept clusters and theme development diagrams.



**Figure 6.7**

*Clustering of Concepts to Develop the Themes*



Each clustered pattern that emerged from across the dataset was considered for the meaning that it presented on its own, how it related to the research questions, and what it contributed to the wider analysis. The four clusters of concepts led to the development of the exploration by the researcher of the following four candidate themes:

1. ***Candidate Theme 1: The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI).***  
The codes that cluster around this concept related to knowledge about EI, how EI is an outward practice of giving, that there are many ways to demonstrate EI, the teacher's child-first approach, and a training gap.
  
2. ***Candidate Theme 2: The concept of Inclusion.*** The codes that gave meaning to this candidate theme clustered around this concept of inclusion and that it means everyone, involves action, teachers make it happen every day, how it is about getting to know and understand a person, and the levels or layers of inclusion.
  
3. ***Candidate Theme 3: Responsibility.*** The analysis of the patterns among the codes revealed responsibility as a central organising concept with codes clustering around levels of responsibility, tangible and intangible aspects of responsibility, and a child first approach. The absence of a concern for a responsibility to self among the teachers was noted.
  
4. ***Candidate Theme 4: Experience of Change.*** The meaning and experience of change among teachers was a pattern that was seen by the researcher in the dataset. The codes clustered around the various levels of change, the teachers' outward orientation to change, how change can make the educational experience better, a practical approach to change supported by suggestions, and a selfless

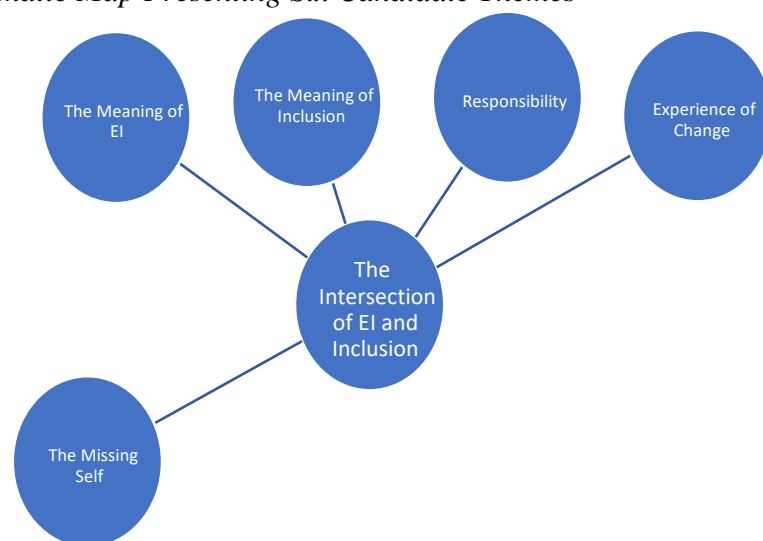
orientation. Again, the fact that the self of the teacher appears to be absent was noted by the researcher.

Following the advice of Braun and Clarke (2022) the researcher evaluated these provisional themes for meaning, coherence with the main idea that combines the data and codes, and the provision of clear boundaries. Finally, the researcher thought about how the analysis represented the rich, contextualised story of exploration on the journey of analysis to this point.

**6.6.1.4 Phase 4: Developing and Reviewing Themes.** This phase involved the researcher reviewing the themes that were developed in phase three. The coded data was considered in the context of the entire dataset which provided a process to check the validity of the quality and scope and richness of the potential themes. A recursive and flexible approach was adopted by the researcher and the potential four themes were found upon review of the dataset to effectively tell the story of the adventure so far. However, the researcher identified two further themes that came forward from their research which led to the development of themes five and six, as presented in Figure 6.8.

**Figure 6.8**

*Reviewed Thematic Map Presenting Six Candidate Themes*



**Candidate Theme 5: The Missing Self.** Following from the meaning and patterns seen in the code cluster and the candidate themes the importance of the concept of the “missing self” became clear. It emerged due to that which was absent in the codes as the researcher asked themselves the following questions, “where is the self in emotional intelligence?”, “how is it that inclusion means everyone, but not for self among primary school teachers?”, “what about the responsibility that primary school teachers feel to self?” , and “where is the teacher who is the change agent in the classroom?”.

**Candidate Theme 6: Integration of the Meaning and Practice of Emotional Intelligence and Inclusion.** The code labels were seen by the researcher as overlapping between the concepts of EI and inclusion. Key areas of intersection were identified about the concepts of shared knowledge, practice, and responsibility. In addition, code labels suggested to the researcher that the sample of Irish primary school teachers believed that EI

and attitudes to inclusion were integrated as means to create change in the classroom and beyond.

**6.6.1.5 Phase 5: Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes.** In this phase the researcher wrote a definition of each theme to demonstrate the central organising concept of the theme and the specific contribution of each theme to the overall exploratory research journey, see Figure 6.9.

**Figure 6.9**

*Theme Names and Definitions*

Theme 1	<p><b>EI Means Others</b></p> <p>EI is used by primary school teachers to meet the needs of others. It is a child-focused practice of giving that is demonstrated by a wide range of activities.</p>
Theme 2	<p><b>Inclusion Means Everyone</b></p> <p>Primary school teachers make inclusion happen every day and there are many layers to inclusion both inside and outside school.</p>
Theme 3	<p><b>Feeling the Weight of Responsibility</b></p> <p>The responsibility of the primary school teacher is mainly focused on the children. Aspects of responsibility are described in both a tangible and intangible manner.</p>
Theme 4	<p><b>Change Happens to and Around Teachers</b></p> <p>The orientation of primary school teachers to change is outward towards others and this causes them to see change in a very practical manner at many levels.</p>

Theme 5	<p><b>The Missing Self</b></p> <p>The primary school teacher is important, they understand and practice emotional intelligence, they act in an inclusive way every day, have a great sense of responsibility to others, and are an important agent of change. But they do not see their own importance and the self appears to be missing.</p>
Theme 6	<p><b>EI and Inclusion are Interconnected</b></p> <p>In primary school teachers the knowledge and practice of EI provides a foundation for understanding the importance of the practice of inclusion in the classroom.</p>

**Theme 1 EI Means Others.** This represents the orientation demonstrated by the participants when asked about the meaning of EI and the impact on their teaching practice. In response to interview questions the participants reported that they understood and used their EI to reach out and meet the needs of the pupils in their classroom. They used words such as “empathy”, “awareness”, “understand”, “respect”, “listen”, and “social skills” to describe their practice of acting in the best interest of others.

**Theme 2 Inclusion Means Everyone.** This focuses on the participants’ meaning and practice of inclusion. The responses demonstrated a consensus that inclusion means everyone and that it is an active ongoing process that involves “including”, “belonging”, “facilitating” and the recognition of individuality and unity in the classroom.

**Theme 3 Feeling the Weight of Responsibility.** This was based on the responses made by the participants that revealed that they feel the weight of responsibility primarily for the pupils in their classroom but also to many others in the school. Tangible, identifiable areas of responsibility were

identified such as to the “learning support teachers” and other intangible aspects such as maintaining the “morale and atmosphere” of the school.

***Theme 4 Change Happens To and Around Teachers.*** This theme encapsulated beliefs presented by the participants that change is constantly taking place within the environment of the school and beyond. However, the descriptions of the changes needed to make the classroom and society more inclusive focused on practical aspects such as class sizes, equipment, professional supports, and funding. The purpose of change was seen to be to make education better and the orientation to change was outwards, but the absence of the participants as being a central agent of change was significant.

***Theme 5 The Missing Self.*** This theme presents a common thread that emerged from the development of the previous themes as the researcher asked themselves the question “where is the teacher?”. Questions and observations arose regarding EI and where is the self, inclusion means everyone to teachers but themselves, what about the responsibility to self, and the missing change agent in the classroom and beyond.

***Theme 6 EI and Inclusion are Interconnected.*** This represents the connection between EI and inclusion among the participants as demonstrated by their knowledge and practice of EI and inclusion, their sense of responsibility to be both emotionally intelligent and inclusive every day, and their use of EI to create both an inclusive classroom and school.

***6.6.1.6 Phase 6: Writing It All Up!*** The final phase of reflexive thematic analysis involved writing up the detailed accounts of each phase. It describes the journey from the beginning with the identification of the

research question, the methodological approach, the phases of reflexive thematic analysis, the analysis of the data, the discussion, recommendations, and conclusions. Therefore, it is contemplated by the researcher that this phase is not finished until the research project is complete or perhaps as the research is read and then examined the interpretation of meaning by the researcher, examiners, and readers will continue on into the future!

### **6.6.2 Reflexive Thematic Analysis and Me**

In the spirit of reflexive thematic analysis the researcher believed that it was appropriate at this point to consider their emotional experience of thematic analysis and their positionality going forward in the exploratory research journey. The researcher embarked on the process of engaging with the phases of thematic analysis on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 2022 with sense of excitement, fear, and anticipation. They felt as if they had arrived in a new land and hoped that they would find the familiar and that which is confirming but would also appreciate the new and uncover insights. To equip them on this journey the researcher brought their knowledge of the subject area, the research question, and their many expectations, biases, and assumptions. Their quest throughout was meaning making, but the initial encounter was characterised by the messy experience of starting thematic analysis as a novice qualitative researcher. With a sense of impatience, the researcher started the journey not knowing where they would get to or what they might find or worse not find!

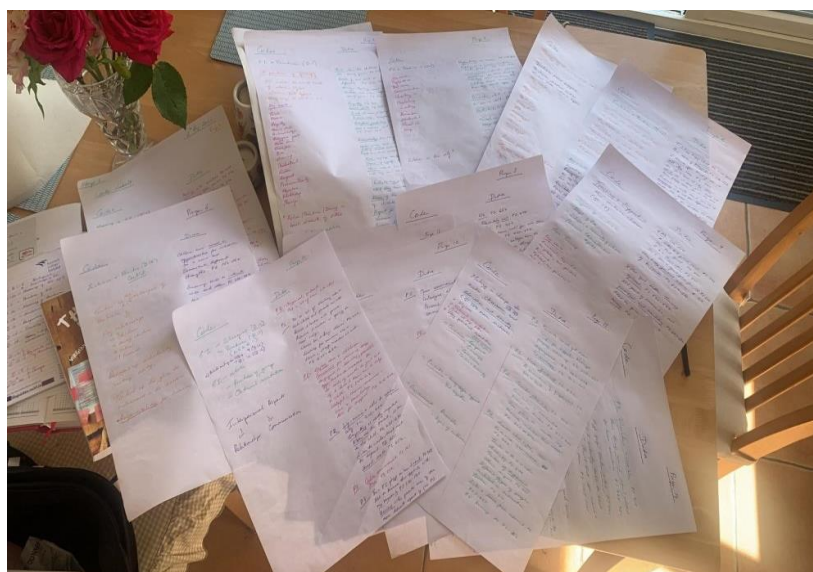
The researcher decided that manual coding worked best for them due to their age, training, experience, and their desire to engage deeply with the



data and the process to achieve a high level of familiarisation. Guided by Braun and Clarke (2022) the researcher worked their way through the phases of thematic analysis with equal measure of doubt about the process working and a need to trust the process. They kept asking themselves questions such as “what is the story here?”, “if they didn’t have a background in psychology or decades lecturing would the research be conducted this way?”, and “if they were someone else what would they see?”. The researcher was very fortunate to undertake the thematic analysis during the summer and in a location away from the demands of their everyday life. The analysis was undertaken in Wexford in a house beside the sea that afforded the researcher the opportunity to spread out all their notes, see Figure 6.10. It was a place that allowed lots of time and space, both mental and physical, for creativity and sea swims!

**Figure 6.10**

*Room for Creativity!*



As August came around, the researcher could see a path that they had created through the phases of thematic analysis and had found a land in the

form of themes that they now felt was familiar. There was a sense that they were a leader and had conquered the context that as Bennis (1989) stated can be “the volatile, turbulent, ambiguous surroundings that sometimes seem to conspire against us and will surely suffocate us if we let them” (p. 7). However, the researcher hadn’t let that happen, they had conquered the context and felt on emerging from the phases of the thematic analysis journey that once again, they could breathe. The researcher recalled a quote from Marcel Proust (1927) that had renewed meaning about the real voyage of discovery consists, not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes. It is now clear to the researcher that their new qualitative eyes provided them with very valuable understandings and insights which would be integrated into the quantitative phase of the study. It was not the last time that the researcher would review the process and they realised that thematic analysis never ends until it is all over and even then, the interpretation of meaning has the potential to continue.

## **6.7 Qualitative Findings - Let the data speak!**

### **6.7.1 Introduction**

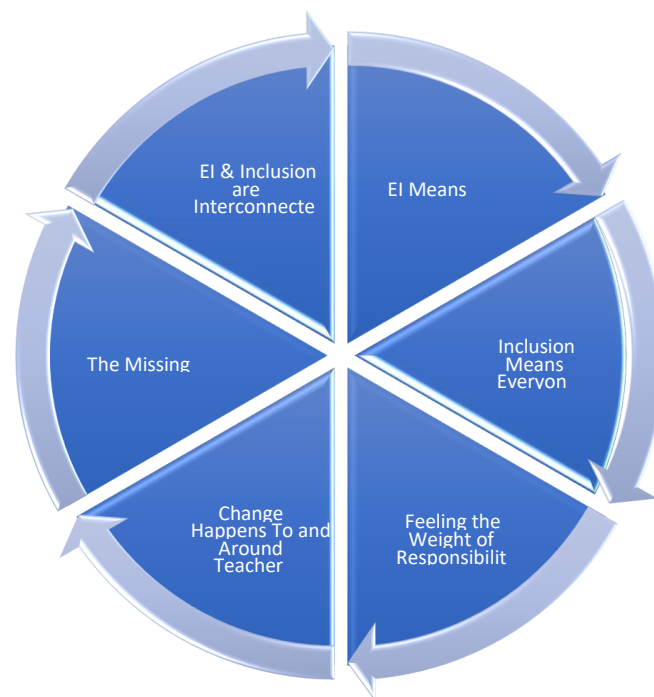
The aim of the presentation of the qualitative research is to tell the story of emotional intelligence and inclusion as experienced by the sample of six Irish primary school teachers who participated in the first phase of this study. The researcher hopes that the meaning expressed through their voices is captured in a manner that respects the time, knowledge, and insight that they have shared so generously. The interpretation of the quantitative data

was informed by the research questions, the dataset, the theoretical framework, the researcher's positionality, and the process to develop the interpretation. The story of the findings will unfold using the framework of the six themes. The very act of presenting the results contributed to the further development of the meaning of the concepts explored and the insights into the lived experiences as described by the participants.

The approach adopted has been guided by Braun and Clarke's (2022) so-called making an argument model which offers the opportunity for a rich contextualised exploration of the topic within existing knowledge, theory, and context. The researcher believes that this presentation of the qualitative findings will demonstrate the insights presented by the participants both individually and collectively about the meaning and practice of emotional intelligence and inclusion and their experiences in the classroom. The themes presented in Figure 6.11 represent the data and the meaning that has been attached to them by the researcher within the conceptual and theoretical framework.

**Figure 6.11**

*Six Themes Developed from the Reflexive Thematic Analysis*



### **6.7.2 Theme 1 – EI Means Others**

During the process of interviewing, reviewing the transcripts, and making many notes the researcher developed the belief that EI for primary school teachers is about others. An example of a quotation is from a participant who stated that it is an

“Awareness of being able to deal and work with people” (Q.10, p.4, 278-279).

Their statements revealed that they use EI to meet the needs of others, and this was interpreted by the researcher as a child-focused practice of giving that is demonstrated by a range of activities.

**Figure 6.12**

*Theme 1 – Clustering of Concepts: EI for Primary School Teachers Means Others*



***1. Knowledge of Concept.*** An initial interview question asked the teachers to rank their understanding of the concept of EI on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing extremely poor knowledge of EI and 5 representing an excellent knowledge of EI. Five of the teachers rated themselves as a 4 on the scale and one teacher rated themselves as a 2 on the scale. The teacher who believed that they had the lowest level of knowledge had four years of experience which was the lowest among the participants.

When asked about what the concept of EI meant to them interesting key words that were used by teachers included dealing, understanding, empathy, awareness, control, social skills, reflect, recognise, collaborate,

read, and manage. The need to understand self which forms the basis of EI was demonstrated by the statement that EI is

“An awareness of myself and then if I have an awareness of myself, I should be able to control myself” (Q.10, participant 2, 301-302).

This meaning is shared among the teachers and was expressed by a participant who said, “I think that emotional intelligence is about having the awareness of being able to deal and work with people” (Q.10, participant 4, 278-279).

**2.A Practice of Giving.** The participants described how they demonstrate being emotionally intelligent in their practice in the classroom by considering the impact that they have on the children and where each child is coming from. They consider how they present themselves to the class to

“just to make sure that kind of what I am feeling doesn’t necessarily transfer into how the kids would see me” (Q.11, p.3, 485) and do this while being “very aware of each

child and each child is so, so different” (Q.11, p.1,

313-314).

Also, there was a sense that their practice would guide children “I suppose checking in with the children, kind of modelling for them kind of identifying their emotions, labelling their emotions, how they would cope with them, stuff like that” (Q.11, p.5, 396-399) and influence their emotions “I kind of try to keep them happy” (Q.11, p.6, 548).

From the responses the researcher believes that EI is seen by teachers as an effective way to meet the needs of children in the classroom and is a practice of giving.

**3.Many Ways to Demonstrate EI.** The interpretation of the interviews revealed that there are many ways that the six teachers used EI when working with pupils, colleagues, and parents and the key terms used were thinking, assessing, empathy, listen, relationships, understanding, reflection, compromise, and communication. The language used provides an insight into the many ways teachers demonstrate their emotional intelligence. From the thinking aspect demonstrated by a teacher who stated,

“I would probably do a lot of thinking about, you know, each individual and even parents as well” (Q.13, p.1, 395-398),

to the teacher who said that they

“Listen to understand not to respond” (Q.13, p.2, 435).

The skills needed to manage the relationships in school was expressed as

“you need lots of emotional intelligence definitely to walk that tightrope when you’re dealing with lots of different groups and different people” (Q.13, p.5, 495-496) and supported

“I think one of the big things that you need is to have...good relationships with your colleagues” (Q.13, p.4, 442-443).

**4.Child-First Approach.** The teachers were unified in their response when asked to identify those to whom they are responsible for

while doing their job. The immediate answer that all teachers gave was that they are responsible for the children and put them first. This response clearly communicated the shared sentiment that

“the kids like, yeah, they come first” (Q.14, p.6, 670).

Another teacher expanded this to include

“All the children in my class and their development and their happiness and their growth, you know, academically and socially and emotionally as well” (Q14, p.1, 439-443).

A sense of responsibility was also asserted to an SNA in the classroom, the principal, the management team, teaching and learning in the school, other members of staff, and the good school tradition. Only one teacher stated in their answer that they were responsible for themselves.

***5.The Training Gap and the Value of Practical Experience.*** The final concept that clustered around the meaning of EI was based on the responses that the teachers gave when asked if the teacher training that they had received provided them with the knowledge and skills needed to manage the emotional aspects of the job.

Five out of the six participants stated in a very affirmative manner that their training did not provide the knowledge and skills required and can be summarised by the response

“in a word no” (Q.15, p. 4, 521).

The one remaining participant expressed that they did not know if this was the case or not.



There was a belief stated by two of the participants that you learn more in the classroom than you do in college where the focus, one participant replied, is

“on the educational aspect rather than the emotional side of things” (Q. 15, p.3, 816).

A suggestion was made by two of the participants that emotional aspects should be dealt with during initial teacher education and one proposed that a module in communication and relationships would be beneficial and this would help to deal with the job as it is

“emotionally draining” (Q.15, p.4, 550) and the fact that

“you give a lot of yourself during the day” (Q.15, p.4, 554).

### 6.7.3 Theme 2 – Inclusion Means Everyone

**Figure 6.13**

*Theme 2 – Clustering of Concepts: Inclusion Means Everyone*



**1.Means Everyone.** The participants presented a unified belief that “inclusion” means everyone, and they make it happen every day. When asked what the term inclusion means to them the key words and phrases that were used included everybody, equal, integrated, every child, all, meaningful, valued, voice, and same right. The unity in the expression of the understanding of the meaning of inclusion was demonstrated by the following statements,

“I always think of just including everybody” (Q.16, p.1, 494) and

“Inclusion is that you’re trying to bring everyone along” (P.6, 769-770).

The importance of all students having a fair and equal opportunity in the classroom was clearly communicated by participants and is shown by this response

“Everybody is facilitated to take part and to enjoy and attain and achieve and

participate in the classroom” (P.2, 535-550)

and also, the importance of the learning experience

“All children regardless of ability or background or race would be able to engage ...in school life in a meaningful way” (P.4, 598-605)

and that

“Everybody takes part ...is a valued member of the group or that they have a voice, that their opinions are heard” (P. 5, 552-555).

**2.Involves Action.** It became apparent to the researcher during the interviews that teachers are always practicing inclusion; that it involves action as it is about knowing and understanding the person and that there are many layers to inclusion as it is personal, interpersonal, and an important part of the classroom, school, home, and national culture. The teachers shared their insights into how they are inclusive in their practice by using the words and terms of including, belonging, find a way in, not can't but can, facilitate, equal chance, voice, knowing, valued, access and opportunities, interaction, and praise and strengths. The inclusive nature of their approach is well described as

“Everybody needs to be included because we all have needs”

(Q.17, P.2, 648-649) and means that teachers

“Make sure that the children have access and have opportunities for inclusion on a social level” (Q.17, P. 5, 546-567)

and that it is centrally about the need for a teacher to

“give them a sense of belonging” (Q.17, P. 1, 536-537).

**3.Primary School Teachers Make Inclusion Happen.** The statements made by the primary school teachers revealed that they are central to the creation of an inclusive environment in the classroom. They are the gatekeepers to inclusion and make inclusion happen through their practice by developing relationships with each child, between children, the school, and parents, and as a teacher reflected

“I think you kind of do it all day long” (P.1, 540).

**4.Inclusion is About Getting to Know and Understand a Person.** It was clear that as the teachers recognised the individuality of each pupil, they created unity in the classroom as

“I suppose you’re always trying to find a way in for kids” (Q.17, P.6, 830-831). This is facilitated by getting to know and understand a person as

“each child learns differently” (P.1, 530)

and you can

“include everybody by knowing the children” (p.2, 663).

**5.Layers of Inclusion.** The layers of inclusion that were perceived by teachers in terms of not just the relationship between each pupil and the teacher but in a wider sense as

“you create a kind of culture in the classroom where each child’s voice is respected, or

children feel like they can participate” (Q.17, P.4, 683-684).

Further, one teacher stated,

“there’s so much you can do in the classroom, but I mean if the school isn’t inclusive,

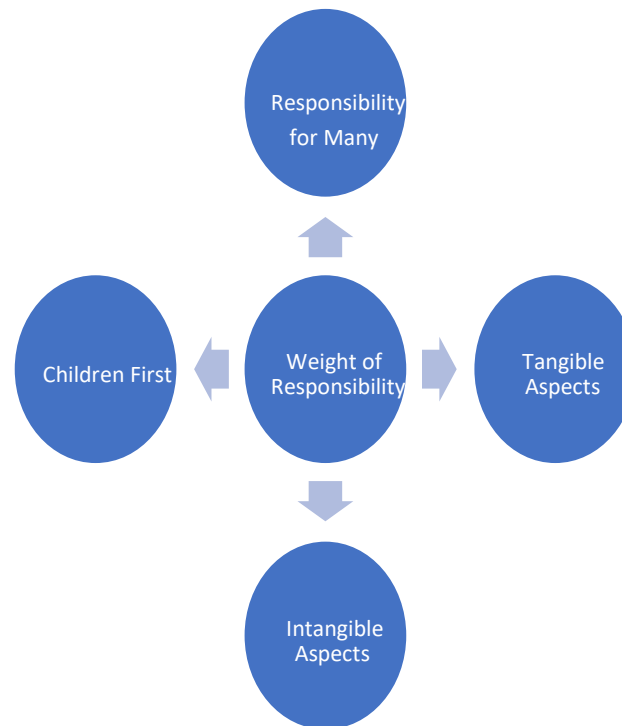
you’re kind of fighting a losing battle” (Q.17, P. 3, 890-891).

It is worthy of note that not one participant made a statement that was negative in any way about the meaning or practice of inclusion.

#### 6.7.4 Theme 3 – Feeling the Weight of Responsibility

**Figure 6.14**

*Theme 3 – Clustering of Concepts: Feeling the Weight of Responsibility*



For the researcher an unexpected outcome of the interviews was the strength of feeling expressed by the teachers about the weight of responsibility that they all expressed as a first priority for the children in their care. They also expressed a sense of responsibility for others in the classroom and the school environment. While this responsibility was expressed by the identification of both tangible and intangible aspects of responsibility, the focus was always that the children came first.

The main tangible aspect of responsibility identified as the first response by all six participants was to the children and was summed up by the participant who stated that

“the kids like, yeah, they come first” (p. 6, 670).

Other tangible aspects of responsibility identified concerned meeting the children’s academic, social and emotional needs, the relationships with the Special Needs Assistant and leaning support teachers, the principal, the management team, and acting in loco parentis. The intangible aspects of responsibility were identified by teachers as the children’s development, happiness, growth; teaching and learning in the school; maintaining in the school the

“good tradition... good standard of teaching” (P.3. 764-767)

and of having a general

“duty of care not only to the children but also to the members of staff in the school” (p.2. 476-480).

It is worthy of note that only one of the six participants used the word “myself” in relation to responsibility. This participant stated that

“I think I am responsible for all of the children in class. I’m responsible for myself and responsible for other members of staff that I come into contact with” (p. 5. 486-487).

### 6.7.5 Theme 4 – Change Happens to and Around Teachers

**Figure 6.15**

*Theme 4 – Clustering of Concepts: Change Happens to and Around Primary School*

*Teachers*



The interpretation of the interviews led the researcher to believe that change is experienced by primary school teachers as happening to and around them and their orientation towards others causes them to see change in a very practical manner at many levels. When the teachers were asked to consider the changes that they would like to implement to make their classroom, school, education, and society more inclusive their responses demonstrated that there are many areas of change perceived by teachers; that their orientation/focus to change is outward; changes can make the educational experience better; their approach to change is practical; and teachers demonstrate a selfless approach.



The participants identified the key areas that require the implementation of change as the classroom, parents, environment, and the educational system.

With regards to the classroom

“the first change is smaller class size” (p.2, 744),

the need for more equipment, and

“the technology to help children” (p.1, 702-703);

the identification that the

“curriculum is overloaded” (p.2, 753-755),

and need for early intervention and team teaching. Also, a suggestion was made that there should be teachers who have a disability and an observation that there are

“very few teachers of different ethnic origins” (p.2, 803).

With regards to parents a change that was proposed was that

“parents could get more language support” (p.1, 658),

and an opportunity to get parents together as

“some of the parents would be very isolated” (p.6, 1047).

Factors about the environment that were suggested as needing change were that the school could be made

“wheelchair accessible” (p.3, 958)

and that for children

“signs of their own culture or their own language” (p.5, 662)

should be present in school. Wider changes that were proposed to the educational system were more funding,

“appropriate professional supports” (p.4, 874)

for children with additional educational needs, a recommendation to

“take religion out of schools” (p.6, 1086)

and the need to reduce

“a mountain of paperwork as it doesn’t help a huge amount with your actual teaching” (p.1, 766-769).

The teacher’s outward orientation to change was demonstrated by the fact that when asked about the changes they would like to implement they all spoke about factors beyond themselves. It was noted by the researcher that no teacher said that they would like a change which would be of personal benefit. The changes that were desired by the teachers demonstrated their desire to make the educational experience better for all in the school community. They wanted to achieve a better classroom experience for pupils in terms of what and how they were taught and the physical resources. They wanted to enhance the language skills of parents and to build social networks. They asked for an accessible environment and one that represented different cultures. Changes were proposed at the level of education system to increase funding, supports, and curriculum changes. Again, the absence of the teachers speaking about making the educational experience better for themselves was clear.

The approach that the teachers adopted in proposing the implementation of change was very practical and solution focused. They made clear suggestions about what could be done at the level of the classroom, with parents, in the school environment, and to the educational system. Their responses were focused, tangible, and realistic, but once again it was noted by the researcher that they were not about themselves or their needs.

The teachers have demonstrated that they take a very selfless approach to the implementation of change in the classroom and beyond. The communicated desires for change were for other people, the environment and factors relating to the educational system. At no time did any participant say that they wanted change for themselves.

### 6.7.6 Theme 5 – The Missing Self

**Figure 6.16**

*Theme 5 – Clustering of Concepts: The Missing Self*



This theme emerged from a noticeable and significant absence in the responses made by participants about themselves. The question of where the ‘self’ of each teacher is in the practice of EI is first arose as teachers described what the concept of EI meant to them and then how they could be seen to be emotionally intelligent in their practice. When the teachers were asked about the meaning of the concept of EI only two teachers stated that it was about

“an awareness of myself” (p. 2, 301) and an “awareness of my own emotions and how they affect my life” (p.5, 359-360),

however, they also said that it was about other people around them.

Notably, other teachers did not refer to themselves and spoke about

“empathy for others” (p.1, 298), and

“being able to deal and work with

people” (p.4, 278),

and “being able to understand other people or understand how they’re feeling” (p.6, 476477).

In terms of the practice of EI in the classroom the responses to the interviews demonstrated that EI is used to meet the needs of others and not those personal needs of the teacher. One teacher said that “I’m always thinking about the children and where they’re coming from” (p.1, 334-335), another wanted to make sure that

“everyone feels that they’ve been seen and noticed and appreciated for turning up” (p.2,

376-377),

for another it is

“showing respect for everyone in the class” (p4. 311-314),

and another reflects that

“I try to treat kids like they’re people because I remember what it was like to be a child” (p.6, 511-512).

When listening to the response of the teachers to the interview question about what the meaning of the term inclusion meant to them it became apparent that for them “Inclusion Means Everyone, but not me”.

Upon an analysis of the key words the words “me” or “myself” is absent, however the words “everybody”, “everyone” and “every child” are used frequently by participants. While the teachers never mention themselves in relation to inclusion one did state that

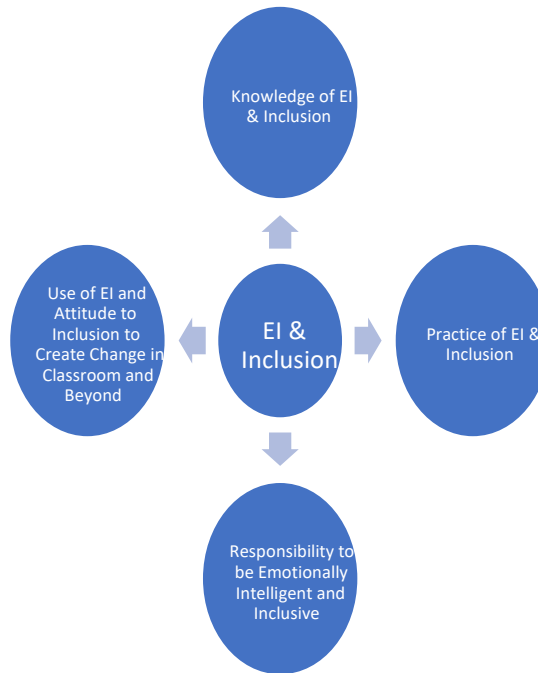
“it’s up to us as teachers to make that happen” (p.2, 535-550).

Another piece of evidence that was found that demonstrates the absence of the self, or the presence of the missing self, was found when the teachers were asked about who they believe they are responsible for while doing their job. Every participant reported that they were responsible for the children primarily and then reported other people and areas of responsibility as reported earlier. Only one teacher said that they were responsible for themselves, the remaining five participants did not include themselves in any way.

Finally, when the teachers were asked about a change that they would like to implement to make their classroom, education, and society more inclusive, once again the findings from the interviews revealed that they were the missing “agent of change”. The teachers collectively reported the need for changes in the classroom, for parents, in the environment, and the educational system. No teacher said that they were a central part of change or that they would like any changes to enhance their personal or professional development. This missing self as part of the change process was very noticeable by its absence.

**6.7.7 Theme 6 – The Practices of EI and Inclusion are Interconnected**  
**Figure 6.17**

*Theme 6 – Clustering of concepts: The Practices of EI and Inclusion are Interconnected*



The practices of EI and inclusion are interconnected. In primary school teachers the practice of EI provides a foundation for the practice of inclusion in the classroom, as expressed by the teacher who stated,

“I always think of just including everybody” (p.1, 498)

and another who said that they are

“trying to bring everyone along” (p.6, 769-770).

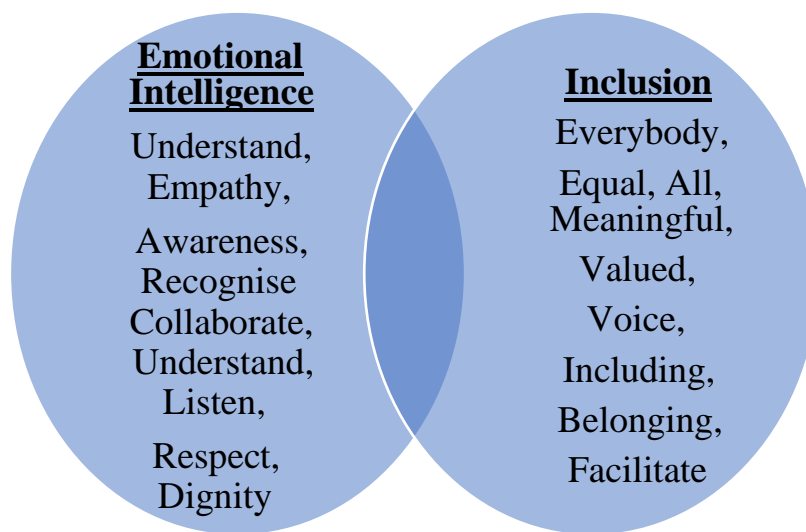
The responses that the teachers gave when they were asked about what the concept of EI means to them demonstrated the relationship between the EI abilities used by the teachers and their understanding and practice of inclusion. EI skills identified were represented by the key words used

including understanding, awareness, and empathy. The meaning of inclusion as expressed by the teachers extended this understanding and key words used included everybody, valued, meaningful, and voice.

The practices of EI and inclusion were reported by teachers to involve many important activities which were focused on the needs of others. The activities involved in the practice of EI included thinking, acknowledging, giving, respecting, listening, and understanding. These skills and abilities relate to the practice of inclusion as described using the words including, belonging, facilitating, and valuing, see Figure 6.18.

**Figure 6.18**

*Interconnection of the Language of EI and Inclusion*



In addition, the unanimous sense of responsibility that the teachers expressed to the children in their class and many others in the school demonstrates both their level of EI and sense of the importance of inclusion.

As demonstrated by the teacher who said that it is important that



“everyone feels they have been seen and noticed and appreciated” (p.2, 376-377)

and another that spoke about creating a culture in the classroom where

“each child’s voice is respected” (p.4, 683-684).

The knowledge that teachers have demonstrated about EI and inclusion and the impact on it on their practice is related to the desired changes that they have expressed that should be implemented in the classroom, and the wider school environment and educational system. Using their EI abilities and understanding of inclusion they have proposed many practical changes that could be implemented to make the school experience more inclusive.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

Phase 1 of the research focused on the collection and analysis of qualitative data to get an insight in the meaning and practice of emotional intelligence and inclusion among Irish primary school teachers. The experience of the pilot interview proved to be very beneficial and informed the construction of the interview schedule. The experience of the thematic analysis of the interview data was challenging but provided the researcher with a window into the world of the primary school teacher. Six important themes were identified which collectively present the researcher’s interpretation of the real-life lived experience of EI and inclusion among the six primary school teachers that participated in the study. The themes that were developed informed Phase 2 of the research which builds on the initial database to contextualise the development of the quantitative research

instrument to explore EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Phase 2 Exploratory Mixed Methods –**

#### **Point of Integration of the Qualitative Data Leading to the**

#### **Development of the Quantitative Measure**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This brief but important chapter describes the point of integration of the qualitative themes leading to the development of the quantitative instrument. The three-phase exploratory sequential mixed methods design used in this study started in Phase 1 with the exploration of the meaning of the concepts of emotional intelligence and inclusion to a sample of Irish primary school teachers and the influence that they believe these concepts have on their practice in the classroom. This qualitative phase was undertaken by conducting semi-structured interviews with a sample of six participants. Using thematic analysis six themes were identified by the researcher as (i) EI Means Others, (ii) Inclusion Means Everyone, (iii) Feeling the Weight of Responsibility, (iv) Change Happens To and Around Teachers, (v) The Missing Self, and (vi) EI and Inclusion are Interconnected.

This chapter describes Phase 2 of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design and therefore represents the point of integration as the qualitative findings now result in the identification, confirmation, and development of the quantitative measure to be tested in Phase 3. The sequential collection of qualitative and quantitative data provided the most appropriate, complete, and relevant approach to addressing the research

questions to explore EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

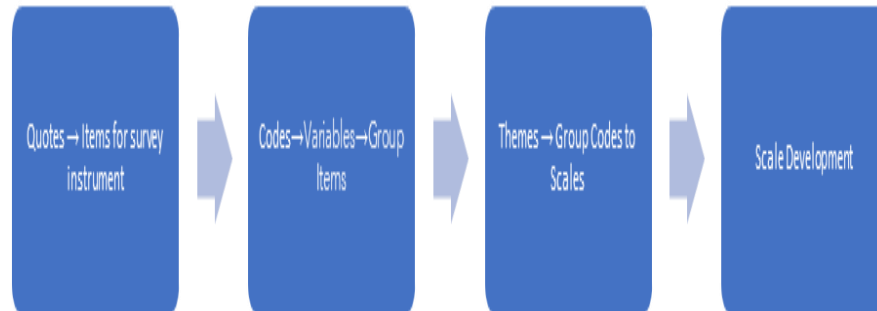
## **7.2 The Point of Integration**

Phase 1 of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design required the collection and thematic analysis of the qualitative data, as described in Chapter 7. This chapter focuses on the second phase and demonstrates how the information that was collected from the Phase 1 of the study is integrated into the development of the quantitative instrument. Phase 3 of the design requires the administration, testing and analysis of the questionnaire, as described in Chapter 8. This research design challenged the researcher to think of the study into EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers as a before, during and after approach.

The point of integration builds on the qualitative research findings to ensure that the quantitative research instrument is tailored to reflect the meaning of the concepts as understood by the participants and the context of the study. The purpose of this design was to explore indepth the concepts of EI and Inclusion by gaining insights into the perspectives, attitudes, and experience of the six Irish primary school teachers. The thematic analysis of interview data provided a means of aligning the experiences of the sample of Irish primary school teachers being studied by yielding quotes, codes, and themes which informed the development of the questionnaire in the quantitative phase. The guidance provided by Creswell and Creswell (2018) was followed as the quotes were used to identify items, the codes to develop variables to group items, and then themes were used to group the codes into scales, see Figure 7.1.

**Figure 7.1**

*Moving from Qualitative Analysis to Scale Development. Based on Creswell and Creswell (2018)*



The quantitative measure which was informed by the thematic analysis of the interview findings was constructed to address the following research questions:

What is the emotional intelligence profile of a sample of Irish primary school teachers?

What are Irish primary school teachers' attitudes to inclusion and what is their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom?

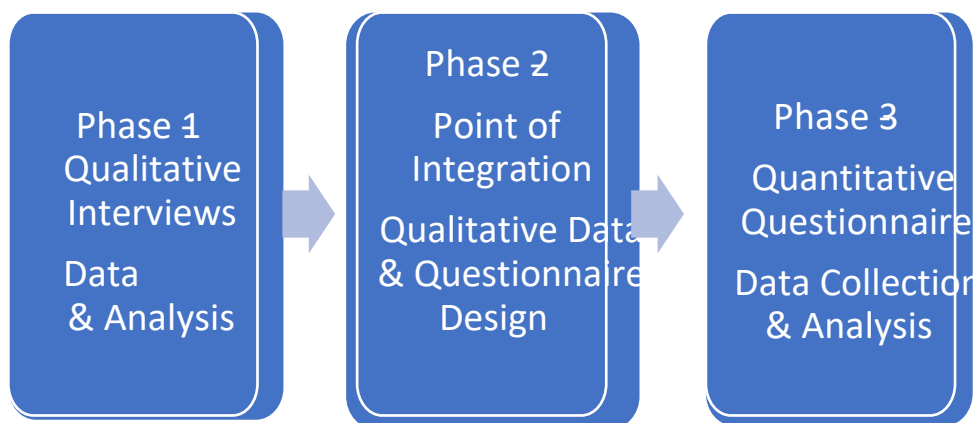
What is the relationship between the emotional intelligence profile and attitudes and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom among a sample of Irish primary school teachers?

The guidance about instrument design proposed by DeVellis (2012) in relation to item discrimination, construct validity, and reliability was considered in the development of the scales to be used in the questionnaire. It was of central importance to the researcher that the instrument was a good

fit for the sample and population of Irish primary school teachers being explored. The purpose of this approach is to determine if the themes identified in Phase 1 of exploratory sequential design can be generalised to a larger population of Irish primary school teachers. The identified themes were EI Means Others, Inclusion Means Everyone, Feeling the Weight of Responsibility, Change Happens to and Around Primary School Teachers, The Missing Self, and EI and Inclusion are Interconnected. The purpose of each of the three phases of the exploratory mixed-methods approach is shown in Figure 7.2.

**Figure 7.2**

*Three Phase Exploratory Mixed Methods Approach with the Focus on the Point of Integration*



The six themes identified in Phase 1 of the exploratory sequential mixed methods informed the identification and confirmation of the scales to be used in the quantitative measure to be tested in Phase 3 to address the research question.

In addition, the six themes led to the development of further measures to explore the identified themes among a sample of Irish primary school teachers as follows:

### ***Emotional Intelligence***

Based on the analysis of the literature review and the qualitative findings, this confirmed to the researcher the rationale for using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (Wong & Law, 2002). Following the analysis of previous research in the literature review this 16-item practical, short EI measure was determined to be the most appropriate to meet the research aims of the study and was considered a valid and reliable method to identify the emotional intelligence profile of a sample Irish primary school teachers.

### ***Inclusion***

Based on the analysis of the literature review and the qualitative findings the researcher confirmed the rationale for including Sharma and Jacobs' (2016) scales to measure Irish primary school teacher's attitudes and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom. The first scale is the Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale (AIS) which assesses teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and consists of the subscales of "Beliefs" and "Feelings". The second scale is the Intention to Teach in an Inclusive Classroom Scale (ITICS) which consists of two subscales. The first subscale assesses the teachers' "intentions to implement curriculum changes", and the second subscale reflects the teachers' "intention to consult with others and further one's professional development". This measure was determined by the

researcher as valid instrument to use to examine the research question concerning Irish primary school teacher's attitudes to inclusion and their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom.

### ***Responsibility***

Upon analysis of the qualitative findings the researcher identified the theme of Weight of Responsibility as experienced by the Irish primary school teachers who participated in the study. This was determined by the researcher as worthy of further investigation. To explore the theme of Weight of Responsibility, the people, groups, and departments that were identified by the teachers were listed and a rank order question was developed. This enabled the researcher to explore further the concept of the Weight of Responsibility by examining to whom the sample of Irish primary school teachers felt the most responsible for. In addition, it provided the opportunity to identify where the sample of Irish primary school teachers placed themselves in the order of ranking and how this may relate to the theme of The Missing Self.

### ***Change and Training***

The findings of the interviews as interpreted by the researcher revealed that the experience of Change Happens to and Around Teachers. The statements made by the participants led the researcher to conclude that the sample of six Irish primary school teachers that were interviewed did not feel that they had a lot



of control over what happens to them in terms of their teaching practice. In addition, there was an almost unanimous response from the teachers that they did not have the training required to cope with the emotional aspects of the teaching. Based on the responses of participants the researcher developed 10 statements to explore further the experience of change and training needs of the sample of Irish primary school teachers.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

The exploratory sequential mixed methods design provided the framework for the researcher to gain an understanding and insight into the meaning and practice of a sample of Irish primary school teachers of emotional intelligence and inclusion in the classroom which led to the development a contextually sensitive quantitative instrument. In addition, it confirmed the researcher's decision to use the identified EI scale of the WLEIS (Wong and Law, 2002) and the Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale (AIS) and Intention to Teach in an Inclusive Classroom Scale (ITICS) developed by Sharma and Jacobs (2016). In addition, measures were developed to explore the concepts relating to the themes of The Missing Self, Weight of Responsibility, and Change and Training. The purpose of Phase 3, which is the quantitative phase of this design, is to test if the qualitative themes can be generalised to a larger sample of Irish primary school teachers. Chapter 8 provides a description the quantitative measure to be used in Phase 3 of this exploratory sequential mixed methods study. The structure of the seven-part online questionnaire is presented and information regarding the respondents and procedure used to administer the online questionnaire is provided. In addition, the data analysis strategy and findings are described.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Phase 3 Exploratory Mixed Methods - Quantitative Data Collection, Analysis, & Results**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to set out the rationale for the use of the quantitative measure in Phase 3 of this exploratory sequential mixed methods study into EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. The ethical and practical issues surrounding the use of this method are considered. The structure of the seven-part online questionnaire is presented and the pilot study that was undertaken to test the instrument is described, and the outcomes are reported. Information regarding the sampling strategy, respondents, and the procedure used to administer the online questionnaire is provided. The data analysis strategy is described and the findings of the quantitative measures regarding the respondents' background information, the emotional intelligence profiles of the respondents, their attitudes towards inclusion and their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom, and other relevant and important results are presented.

#### **8.2 Rationale for Use of Questionnaire**

In Phase 3 of this exploratory study, a questionnaire was developed by the researcher to address the following descriptive research questions:

What is the emotional intelligence profile of a sample of Irish primary school teachers?

What are Irish primary school teachers' attitudes to inclusion and what is their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom?

What is the relationship between the emotional intelligence profile and attitudes and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom among a sample of Irish primary school teachers?

In addition, the questionnaire was developed to further explore the six themes identified in Phase 1 of the study in addressing the research question about the meaning and practice of EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. These findings led to the development of measures used in the questionnaire to explore the themes among a sample of Irish primary school teachers of "EI Means Others", "Inclusion Means Everyone", "Feeling the Weight of Responsibility", "Change Happens to and Around Teachers", "The Missing Self", and "EI and Inclusion are Interconnected".

The researcher followed the guidance of the OECD (2012) and Dillman et al. (2014) and determined that the advantages of using the survey design for the current study were as follows:

- Information can be collected in an economical and efficient manner.
- A wide target population of Irish primary school teachers may be reached which may enable generalisations to be made.
- Numerical data would be generated which can be statistically analysed.
- Descriptive, inferential, and explanatory information can be provided.
- Standardised information can be collected.

- Correlations between variables may be ascertained.
- Opportunity to use open, closed, and rank order questions.
- The accuracy of the survey instrument will be enhanced due to the earlier qualitative phase, the piloting testing of the questionnaire, and the revisions undertaken which are part of the iterative process of the survey design.

The most appropriate mode of data collection was determined by the researcher as an online self-report questionnaire which was recognised as presenting both opportunities and constraints (Corcoran & Mc Guckin, 2014). The opportunities included the fact that the questionnaire may be more accessible to a larger number of potential respondents and that it could be completed in a time and place that is convenient for them. However, it is acknowledged by the researcher that self-report measures can introduce bias, as respondents may under-report to avoid socially undesirable responses or over-report to present socially desirable answers (Cohen et al., 2018). In addition, self-reporting required that all the respondents would understand the questions, in the same way, and the manner intended, as advised by Kenett (2006). In conclusion, the use of this method recognised that respondents could be biased in what they remember and be prone to the error of selective recall.

### **8.3 Ethical Issues in Use of Questionnaire**

The most important initial ethical concern of the researcher in relation to the use of a questionnaire approach was to gain the informed consent of respondents. Each respondent was made fully aware of the nature and

purpose of the study, what their consent was being given for, and that they had the right not to participate in the study or to withdraw at any time without consequence. Ethical issues also related to need to take all reasonable steps to ensure anonymity, and non-traceability (Cohen et al., 2018). There is a serious duty of care to do no harm as the respondent puts their trust in the researcher that this will be the case. As described in Chapter 5, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, for the current study which addressed issues relating to access to, collection, storage, use, dissemination, and reporting of data by the researcher. In a similar manner to the previous qualitative phase the researcher engaged in a reflexive manner with the development, design, administration, and analysis of the survey and data. The approach taken was informed by the guidance provided by Quirke et al. (2022) regarding “Ethics as a Process” and “Inclusion as a Process”.

#### **8.4 Development of Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was developed using the theoretical framework, the literature review, the research questions, and the identification of the six themes following that thematic analysis of the data in Phase 1. The six themes identified were “EI Means Others”, “Inclusion Means Everyone”, “Feeling the Weight of Responsibility”, “Change Happens to and Around Teachers”, “The Missing Self”, and “EI and Inclusion are Interconnected”. The themes confirmed the use of the Wong and Law’s (2002) Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) (Part 4), and Sharma and Jacobs’ (2016) Attitudes towards Inclusion Scale (AIS) and Intention to Teach in Inclusive Classroom Scale

(ITICS) (Part 5). In addition, the themes informed the development of the Responsibility questions (Part 6) and Change and Training questions (Part 7). The online questionnaire platform consisted of seven parts and is presented in Appendix R.

The structure of the online EI and Inclusion questionnaire, sample questions, and response formats was as follows:

### ***Part 1 – Respondent Information***

This section provided the respondents with the title of the study, an invitation to participate which identified the nature of the study, the researcher's contact details, the benefits of the study, the approximate time needed to complete questionnaire, information about the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw without consequence, and data collection and protection information.

### ***Part 2 – Respondent Consent***

This section asked the respondent to answer “yes” or “no” to 12 statements about their understanding and agreement to take part in the study. These statements were adopted from the approved Ethics Form, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin Trinity, e.g. “I understand that participant in this study is entirely voluntary, and if I decide that I do not want to take part, I can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason”. It should be noted that no respondent recorded their refusal to participate in the study.

### ***Part 3 - Background Information***

Information was collected about the background of the respondents who were asked open-ended questions to identify their gender, age, the class group they were teaching, years of teaching experience, county location of their school, number of pupils in their class, and number of pupils in their school. The respondents were asked to identify whether their school was in an urban or rural location. In addition, they were asked about the type of school setting that they teach in and for this question they were provided with eight categories (denominational school, multi-denominational school, non-denominational school, Irish speaking school, special school, non-state aided private primary school, DEIS school, other) and asked to select all that were relevant to them.

### ***Part 4 - Emotional Intelligence Questions***

To address the research question to describe the emotional intelligence (EI) profile of a sample of Irish primary school teachers the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) (Wong & Law, 2002) was used.

The measure consisted of 16 questions with four questions relating to each of the four dimensions of EI. These are Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA), e.g. “I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time”; Others’ Emotion Appraisal (OEA), e.g. “I always know my friends’ emotions from their behavior”; Use of Emotion (UOE), e.g. “I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them”; and Regulation of Emotion (ROE), e.g. “I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally”. The response format was a 7-

point Likert-type scale anchored from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”, therefore for each of the four dimensions a score of four is the highest and most positive score and a score of 28 is the lowest and most negative score. Each dimension can also be summed to create a total, therefore for each respondent emotional intelligence is represented by the mean score across the four EI dimensions. As such possible scores ranged from 16 to 112, with lower scores reflecting higher level of emotional intelligence. The internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) among the present sample was satisfactory for each emotional intelligence dimension (Self-Emotion Appraisal = .83; Others’ Emotional Appraisal = .80; Use of Emotion = .78; Regulation of Emotion = .88), as was the overall emotional intelligence total score ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

### ***Part 5 – Inclusion Questions***

To investigate the research question regarding the sample of Irish primary school teachers’ attitudes to inclusion and their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom, two measures developed by Sharma and Jacobs’ (2016) were used. These were the Attitudes towards Inclusion Scale (AIS) and Intention to Teach in Inclusive Classroom Scale (ITICS).

The Attitude towards Inclusion Scale (AIS) is composed of two independent subscales that measure two separate but related constructs of “Beliefs” and “Feelings”. For the first factor about “Beliefs” towards inclusion the response format is a set of structured statements which are presented as items one to four. An example of a statement is “I believe that all students regardless of their ability should be taught in regular



classrooms”. The items were rated on a Likert type 7-point scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (7) with higher scores reflecting more favourable attitudes towards inclusion. For each participant a score of 4 would indicate the highest level of disagreement and the most negative beliefs towards inclusive education and a score of 28 would indicate the highest level of agreement and most positive beliefs towards inclusive education.

The second factor of the AIS subscale is about “Feelings” toward inclusion and is measured using items seven to ten. An example of an item is “I am pleased that that I have the opportunity to teach students with lower academic ability alongside other students in my class”. The items are rated on a Likert type 7-point scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (7). For each participant a score of four indicated the highest level of disagreement and most negative feelings towards inclusive education and a score of 28 indicated the highest level of agreement and most positive feelings towards inclusive education.

The original scale developed by Sharma and Jacobs (2016) consisted of 10 items, however the authors recommended removing two negatively worded items as they did not load on any of the factors and did not fit the model, therefore, the results from questions five and six of the original scale were disregarded. For this study the internal consistency of the attitudes towards inclusion scale was satisfactory for both the ‘Beliefs’ ( $\alpha = .78$ ) and ‘Feelings’ ( $\alpha = .89$ ) subscales.

The Intention to Teach in Inclusive Classroom Scale (ITICS) (Sharma & Jacobs, 2016) focuses on actions rather than beliefs and is

composed of two independent subscales. The first of the ITICS subscales is the “intention to implement curriculum changes” subscale which consists of three Items (Questions 1, 6, 7). An example of this type of item is the statement “Change the curriculum to meet the learning needs of a student with learning difficulty enrolled in your class”. The seven items on the scale were measured using a 7-point Likert type scale anchored from “Extremely Unlikely” (1) to “Extremely Likely” (7), with higher scores reflecting greater intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom. Therefore, for each respondent a score of three indicates the highest level of disagreement and least favourable intentions and a score of 21 indicates the highest level of agreement and most favourable intentions.

The second ITICS subscale is the “intention to consult with others and to further personal professional development” subscale and consists of four Items (Questions 2, 3, 4, 5). An example of this type of item is the statement “Consult with your colleagues to identify possible ways you can assist a struggling student in your class”. The items are rated on a 7point Likert-type scale from “Extremely Unlikely” (1) to “Extremely Likely” (7), with higher scores reflecting greater intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom. Therefore, for each participant a score of four indicates the highest level of disagreement and least favourable intentions and a score of 28 indicates the highest level of agreement and most favourable intentions. For this study the internal consistency of the ITICS was satisfactory for the “Consultation” subscale ( $\alpha = .70$ ); however, the “Curriculum Changes” subscale was below satisfactory ( $\alpha = .59$ ). Given that “Curriculum Changes” subscale consists of only three items, it is possible that the internal

consistency is underestimated due to the Cronbach's alpha statistic favouring measures with a larger number of items (Graham et al., 2006; Raykov, 1997).

### ***Part 6 – Responsibility***

This section of the questionnaire asks the respondents to consider those to whom they have responsibility in their role as a primary school teacher. The question was developed following the thematic analysis of the interview data. The researcher used the data to list those people and groups to whom the respondents identified that they have a sense of responsibility (e.g., my school, children in my class, the parents of children in my class, myself, and the Department of Education). The respondents were asked to rank order the items from one to 10, with one indicating the highest level of responsibility and 10 the lowest level of responsibility.

### ***Part 7 – Change & Training***

This final section of the questionnaire was developed from the analysis of the interview data. Ten statements were included, and respondents were asked to rate them on a 5-point Likert type scale anchored from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. The first four questions were based on statements made by the teachers during the interviews about their experience of introducing change to their teaching practice. The fifth question asked the teachers to rate the extent that they feel in control of how they teach. The next two questions reflected concerns expressed by the teachers, the sixth question asked them about their level of agreement about whether their workload is reasonable, and the seventh question asked whether the pupil teacher ratio in their class was appropriate. The final three

questions addressed an issue raised by respondents during the interviews about the training needed for the emotional aspects of the job, the creation of an inclusive classroom, and preparedness for the role as a teacher. The final item in this section was open-ended and asked respondents to make any comment or provide any suggestion that they would like to make.

### ***Qualtrics Platform***

The researcher used the Qualtrics platform to create, publish, and distribute the survey via a link.

### **8.5 Pilot Test of Questionnaire**

In September 2022, the link to the pilot questionnaire on the Qualtrics platform was emailed to two female primary school teachers who were selected through convenience sampling. They were asked to consider the following questions:

1. Could you access the survey using the link?
2. Were the instructions clear?
3. Did the flow of the survey make sense?
4. Did the language used make sense?
5. How long did it take you to complete the survey?
6. Do you think any changes should be made to the survey?

The respondents confirmed that they were able to access the questionnaire and that it took them approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete it. Some suggestions were made regarding the wording of

questions, an example is question number 12 which states “Consult with the parents of a student who is struggling in your class”. A respondent stated that “I would not use the word ‘struggling’ – experiencing challenge/ finding it challenging (as it is my fault as the teacher if they are struggling i.e. I have not differentiated the Curriculum)”. However, a decision was made by the researcher not to make changes to the wording to retain the integrity of the previously validated scales. Upon consideration of the section about responsibility a respondent expressed that she “Loved the question where you could move the answers, really made me think!”. The responses to the questionnaire from the two respondents were not used in the final analysis.

## **8.6 Sampling Strategy & Respondents**

Having evaluated different methods of sampling, the researcher decided to recruit the respondents using non-probability convenience snowball sampling. The strengths of this method were that it was appropriate for use with the sensitive nature of the topic of EI and inclusion, it would help to reach the relatively small population of Irish primary school teachers who are geographically dispersed, it was low cost, and flexible. However, the limitations of this method of sampling were recognised by the researcher as the sample may not be representative of the population of Irish primary school teachers, and there is a high chance of research and sampling bias.

One hundred and twenty respondents accessed the link to the survey presented on Qualtrics. One hundred percent of the questionnaire was completed by 73 participants (60.8%).

Table 8.1 presents the progress that the participants made through the questionnaire.

**Table 8.1**

*Progress Made by Participants Through Questionnaire*

Valid	Number of Respondents	Percent of Progress	Cumulative Percent of Progress
6.00	22	18.3	18.3
12.00	3	2.5	20.8
65.00	5	4.2	25.0
71.00	12	10.0	35.0
82.00	2	1.7	36.7
88.00	3	2.5	39.2
100.0	73	60.8	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

A total of 93 respondents answered the question asking them to state their gender. Eighty-two (88.2%) of the respondents recorded that they were female, 10 (10.8%) participants recorded that they were male, and 1 (1.1%) respondent recorded that they would prefer not to say. The respondents had a mean age of 40.02 years (Mdn = 40.00 years, SD = 12.14, range 22 - 70 years). In terms of teaching experience, the participants had an average of 15.55 years (Mdn = 12.00, SD = 11.38, range 0 – 40).

## **8.7 Procedure**

Ethical approval to conduct this study was granted by the School of Education, Ethics Committee, Trinity College Dublin as outlined in Chapter 5 and a pilot test was undertaken to ensure the social validity and acceptability of the measures.

Prospective respondents were informed about the study through a message that was sent via text message, email, and social media channels. Information about the study and the Qualtrics link to the questionnaire was posted by the researcher on WhatsApp, Twitter, and LinkedIn (see Appendix S). The researcher outlined the nature and purpose of the study and invited recipients to complete the questionnaire using the link to the Qualtrics platform, and to forward the link to other primary school teachers. In addition, an email (see Appendix T) was sent to relevant work and personal contacts of the researcher and to five primary schools located in proximity to the researcher's home and place of work. Data was collected from mid-September 2022 to the end of October 2022.

## **8.8 Quantitative Data Analysis Strategy**

To undertake the analysis of the quantitative data the researcher first used descriptive statistics to determine the average EI score and each respective dimension score for the four EI dimensions. Second, zero-order correlations were used to determine the bivariate associations between years of experience teaching and the four EI dimensions and three questions measuring the perceived training needs of teachers. Pearson's  $r$  was used to

determine the association between years of experience teaching and the emotional intelligence dimensions, whereas Spearman's rho ( $\rho$ ) coefficient was used to examine the associations between years of experience teaching and the perceived training needs of respondents, given the ordinal nature of the items measuring the perceived training needs.

Third, multiple regression analyses were performed to examine the association between the four EI dimensions and attitudes towards inclusion in the classroom (Beliefs and Feelings subscales). Fourthly, multiple regression analyses were performed to examine the association between attitudes towards inclusion (Beliefs and Feelings) and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom (Curriculum Changes and Consultation), while controlling for emotional intelligence (total score of four subscales) and years of experience teaching. A total score was used for EI, rather than the individual dimensions, to reduce the number of predictor variables included, given the limited sample size.

Missing data were handled using pairwise deletion. Data were analysed using SPSS version 28.0.1.1.



## **8.9 Quantitative Results**

### ***8.9.1 Introduction***

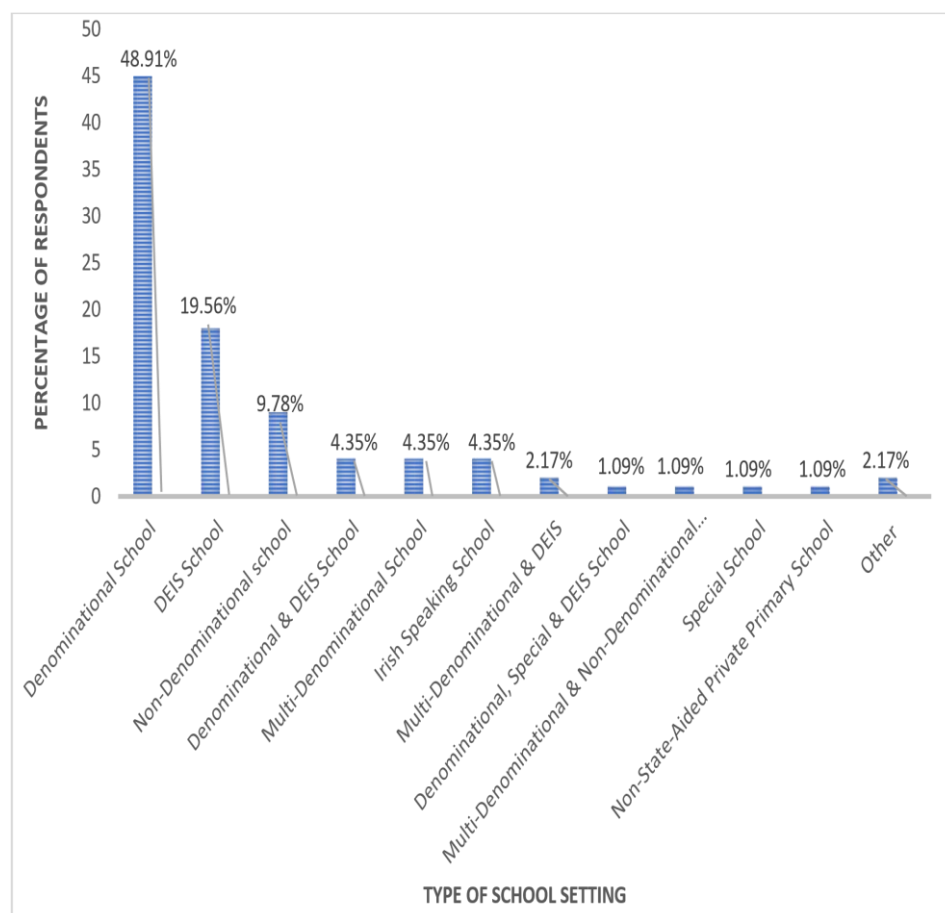
The quantitative findings are reported to answer the second research question regarding the description of the EI profile of a sample of primary school teachers and address the third research question to examine the relationship between attitudes and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom among these primary school teachers. The descriptive statistics are firstly reported and then the inferential statistics are presented. Findings regarding the responsibility, change and training are then detailed, and the themes that were identified from the analysis of the final open-ended question are presented.

### ***8.9.2 Descriptive Statistics – Demographic Information, EI profile, Attitudes & Intentions towards Inclusion***

*Setting of School.* The respondents who took part in the survey reported that they were working in a wide range of school settings. The majority (n = 45, 48.9%) of the respondents were working in denominational schools, with nearly one-fifth (n = 18, 19.6%) working in DEIS schools and 9 (9.8%) in non-denominational schools. The other 20 respondents were teaching in a variety of different types of school settings as presented in Figure 8.1 below.

**Figure 8.1**

*Percentage of Respondents by Setting of School*

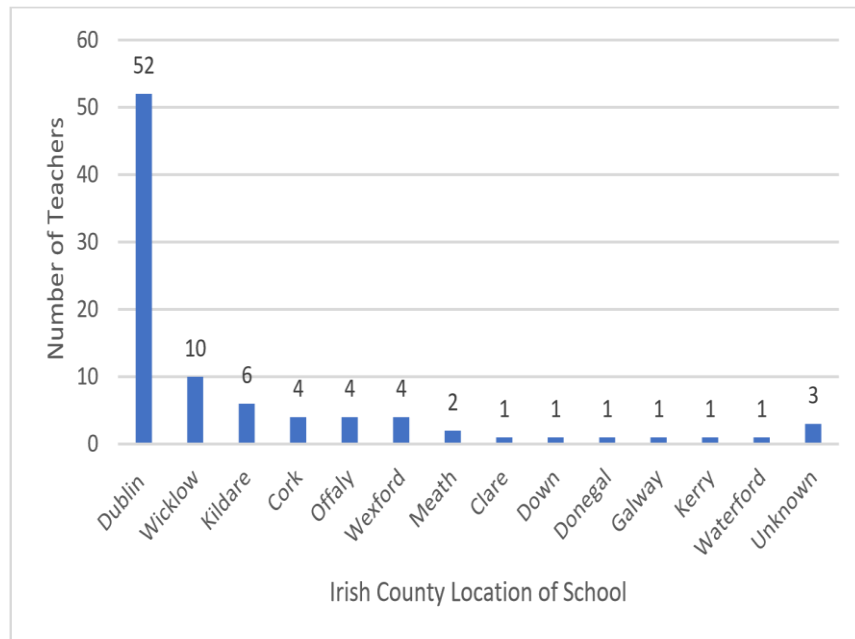


***Location of Respondents' School.*** Ninety-two respondents answered the question about the location of their school, 77 (83.7%) identified that their school was in an urban location and 15 (16.3%) responded that their school was in a rural location.

Ninety-one respondents answered the question about the Irish county location of their school, 52 (57.1%) reported that their school was in county Dublin, 10 (11.0%) that their school was in county Wicklow, and 6 (6.6%) that their school was in county Kildare. The remaining 23 stated their school was located in various counties throughout Ireland, as presented in Figure 8.2.

**Figure 8.2**

*Location of Respondents' School by Irish County*

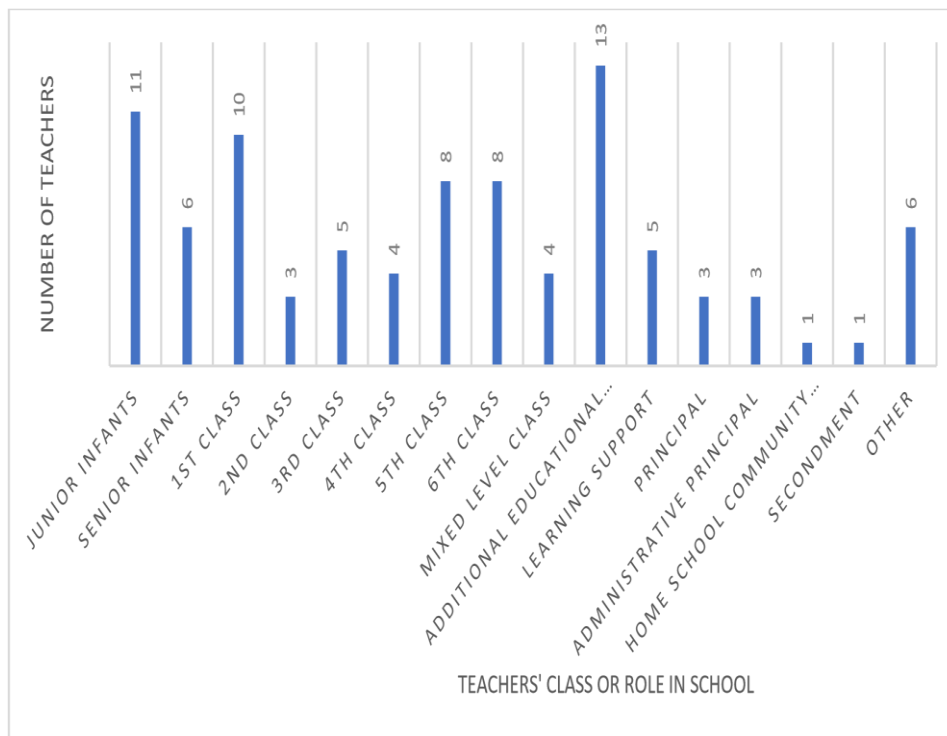


**Total Number of Pupils in School.** The respondents reported that the approximate total number of pupils in each of their schools was 414.12 (Mdn = 400.00, SD = 237.14, range 11 to 900 pupils).

**School Class Size.** 82 responded to the question asking them about the number of pupils in their class. The mean number of pupils per class was 22.8 (Mdn = 24.50, SD = 8.06, range = 1-35). The respondents reported that they are teaching and working in a wide range of classes and roles in the schools. 59 reported that they teach classes from junior infants to 6<sup>th</sup> class, while 18 work in additional educational needs and learning support. In addition, 14 respondents have responsibilities including the principal, home school liaison and other roles. The roles of the respondents are presented in Figure 8.3.

Figure 8.3

*Respondents' Class or Role in School*

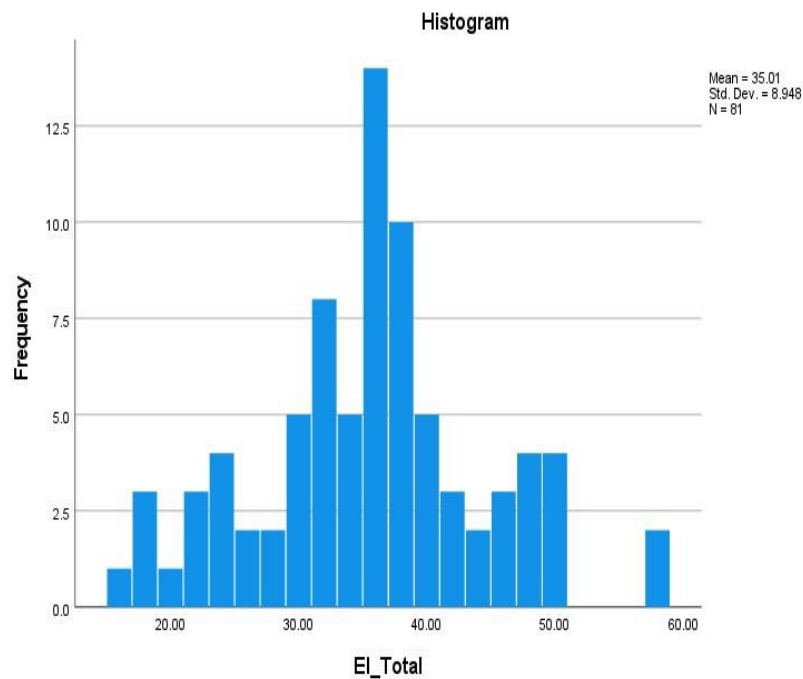


***Emotional Intelligence Profile.*** To answer the research question regarding the description of the EI profile among of a sample of Irish primary school teachers, the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS, Wong & Law, 2002) was used.

The findings revealed that for the 81 respondents who completed the EI measure they had a mean score of 35.01 on the EI scale (possible range 16 – 112), with lower scores reflecting higher level of EI (see figure 8.4).

**Figure 8.4**

*Frequency of Total EI Scores*



The respondents scores for each of the four dimensions of EI the scales are presented in Table 8.2. For each of the four dimensions a score of four represents the highest level of ability and most positive score and a score of 28 represents the lowest level of ability and most negative score.

**Table 8.2**

*Respondents Mean Score and SD for Each of the Four EI Dimensions*

<u>EI Dimensions</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Range</u>
<b>Self-Emotional Appraisal (SEA)</b>	7.87	.28	8.00	2.5	12
<b>Others' Emotional Appraisal (OEA)</b>	8.48	.28	8.00	2.5	12
<b>Use of Emotion (UOE)</b>	9.53	.38	9.00	3.5	16
<b>Regulation of Emotion (ROE)</b>	9.44	.41	9.00	3.8	16

Overall high levels were recorded for each of the four dimensions of EI among respondents. The dimension that achieved the lowest score (indicating highest emotional intelligence dimension) was Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA) which means that an individual has a high level of ability to understand their deep emotions and to express them naturally. This was followed by Others' Emotional Appraisal (OEA) which indicates that an individual has the ability to perceive and understand the emotions of people around them. The Use of Emotion (UOE) indicates a high level of individual ability to make use of emotions which is achieved by directing emotions towards constructive activities and personal performance. Finally, the Regulation of Emotion (ROE) indicates a high level of ability to regulate emotions which enables individuals to recover more rapidly from psychological distress.

***Irish Primary School Teachers' Attitudes to Inclusion and Their Intention to Teach in an Inclusive Classroom.*** To investigate the research question regarding Irish primary school teachers' attitudes to inclusion and their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom, two scales developed by Sharma and Jacobs' (2016) were used. The results of the Attitude towards Inclusion Scale (AIS) and the Intention to Teach in Inclusive Classrooms Scale (ITICS) are presented.

The descriptive statistics for the AIS "Beliefs" subscale are presented in Table 8.3. A mean score of 17.91 was found. Given the possible range of 4 – 28, this suggests a high level of agreement with the statements presented and overall positive beliefs towards inclusive education.

The teachers' results for the AIS "Feelings" subscale are presented in Table 8.3. The results show that on the scale from 4-28, the teachers mean score was 24.59 which indicates a very high level of agreement with the statements presented and very positive feelings towards inclusive education.

**Table 8.3**

*AIS Beliefs and Feelings Subscales Results*

<b>AIS Subscale</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Range</b>
<b>Beliefs</b>	17.91	.63	18.00	5.52	24
<b>Feelings</b>	24.59	.49	26.00	4.20	23

For the first ITICS "Curriculum Changes" subscale respondents reported a mean score of 18.42, on the scale from 4-28, which indicates a high level of agreement with the statements presented and very favourable intentions to change the curriculum. For the ITICS "Consultation" subscale participants reported a mean score of 26.16, on the scale from 4-28, which indicates a very high level of agreement with the statements presented and an extremely favourable intention to consult. The results of the ITICS subscales demonstrated that the respondents have very favourable intentions to teach in a way that the classroom becomes an inclusive classroom (see Table 8.4).

**Table 8.4**

*ITICS "Curriculum Changes" and "Consultation" Subscale Results*

<b>ITICS Subscale</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Range</b>
<b>Curriculum Changes</b>	18.42	.28	19.00	2.48	10
<b>Consultation</b>	26.16	.21	26.00	1.83	8

### 8.9.3 Inferential Statistics

The correlation between the overall mean EI scores for the respondents and their years of teaching experience was examined. The results revealed that there was no statistically significant correlation between the respondents' mean EI scores, the four dimensions of EI, and their years of teaching experience (see Table 8.5 for full details).

**Table 8.5**

*Correlations Between Respondents' EI Total, EI Four Dimensions, and Years of Teaching Experience (YTE)*

	<b>EI Total</b>	<b>SEA Total</b>	<b>OEA Total</b>	<b>UOE Total</b>	<b>ROE Total</b>	<b>YTE</b>
<b>EI Total</b>	1					
<b>SEA Total</b>	.68***	1				
<b>OEA Total</b>	.67***	.38***	1			
<b>UOE Total</b>	.70***	.33**	.26*	1		
<b>ROE Total</b>	.84***	.393***	.50***	.46***	1	
<b>YTE</b>	-.02	-.05	.04	-.03	.07	1

Note: EI = emotional intelligence; SEA = self-emotion appraisal; OEA = others' emotion appraisal; UOE = use of emotion; ROE = regulation of emotion.

Statistical significance: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001

A correlation was undertaken to examine the relationship between the respondents' results on the AIS subscales for "Belief" and "Feelings", the ITICS subscales for "Curriculum Changes" and "Consultation", and years of



teaching experience. The correlation matrix results are presented in Table 8.6 and reveal that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between the AIS subscale of “Beliefs” and the ITICS subscale of intention to introduce “Curriculum Changes”. There was a statistically significant positive relationship between the AIS subscale of “Feelings” and both the ITICS subscales of “Curriculum Changes” and “Consultation”. There was a statistically significant positive relationship between the two ITICS subscales of “Curriculum Changes” and “Consultation”. A statistically significant negative relationship was found between AIS “Beliefs” subscale and years of teaching experience. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between either AIS “Feelings” or ITICS subscales and years of teaching experience.

**Table 8.6**

*Correlation between AIS (Beliefs & Feelings) and ITICS (Curriculum Changes & Consultation) and Years of Teaching Experience (YTE)*

	<b>AIS Beliefs</b>	<b>AIS Feelings</b>	<b>ITICS Curriculum Changes</b>	<b>ITICS Consultation</b>	<b>YTE</b>
<b>AIS Beliefs</b>	1				
<b>AIS Feelings</b>	.13	1			
<b>ITICS Curriculum Changes</b>	.24*	.32**	1		
<b>ITICS Consultation</b>	.02	.31**	.54***	1	
<b>YTE</b>	-.30**	.11	-.13	.03	1

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## EI Profile and Attitudes and Intentions to Teach in an Inclusive Classroom

Correlation analyses were undertaken to examine the relationship between the EI total score, the scores for the AIS subscales of Beliefs and Feelings, and the scores for the ITICS subscales of Curriculum Change and Consultation, and years of teaching experience among the sample of Irish primary school teachers, the correlation matrix results are presented in Table 8.7. The results revealed no statistically significant association between EI and attitudes or intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom, and no association between EI and years of teaching experience.

**Table 8.7**

*Correlation between ITICS “Curriculum Change”, ITICS “Consultation”, EI, AIS “Beliefs”, AIS “Feelings”, and YTE*

	<b>ITICS Curriculum Change</b>	<b>ITICS Consult</b>	<b>EI Total</b>	<b>AIS Beliefs</b>	<b>AIS Feelings</b>	<b>YT E</b>
<b>ITICS Curriculum Change</b>	1					
<b>ITICS Consult</b>	.54***	1				
<b>EI Total</b>	-.19	-.11	1			
<b>AIS Beliefs</b>	.24*	.02	-.15	1		
<b>AIS Feelings</b>	.32**	.31**	-.13	.13	1	
<b>YTE</b>	-.13	.03	-.02	-.30**	.11	1

Note: ITISC = Intention to Teach in Inclusive Classroom Scale; AIS Beliefs = Attitude towards Inclusion Scale – beliefs subscale; AIS Feelings = Attitude towards Inclusion Scale – feelings subscale; YTE = years of teaching experience. Statistical significance: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the associations between EI subscales (Self-Emotion Appraisal [SEA], Others' Emotion Appraisal [OEA], Use of Emotion [UOE], Regulation of Emotion [ROE]) and attitudes towards inclusion (Beliefs and Feelings). Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity.

The EI subscales explained 6.0% of the variance in "Beliefs" about inclusion ( $F(4, 68) = 1.10, p = .366$ ) and 14.6% of the variance in "Feelings" regarding inclusion in the classroom ( $F(4, 68) = 2.90, p = .028$ ). There was no association between any of the EI subscales and AIS "Beliefs" about inclusion. A moderate negative association was found between Self-Emotion Appraisal scores and AIS "Feelings" regarding inclusion in the classroom ( $\beta = -.40, p = .003$ ). Full details are available in Table 8.8.

**Table 8.8**

*Multiple Regression Model Predicting Attitudes Towards Inclusion (Beliefs and Feelings)*

	AIS Beliefs		AIS Feelings	
	$\beta$	95% CIs	$\beta$	95% CIs
Self-emotion appraisal	-.15	(-.42 / .11)	-.40**	(-.65 / -.14)
Others' emotion appraisal	.02	(-.26 / .30)	.16	(-.10 / .43)
Use of emotion	.09	(-.18 / .36)	-.09	(-.34 / .17)
Regulation of emotion	-.19	(-.49 / .11)	.10	(-.18 / .39)

Note: AIS = attitudes towards inclusion;  $\beta$  = standardised beta value; 95% CIs = 95% confidence intervals.

Statistical significance: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

## **Attitudes Towards Inclusion and Intentions to Teach in an Inclusive Classroom**

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the associations between attitudes towards inclusion (Beliefs and Feelings) and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom (Curriculum Changes and Consultation), while controlling for EI (total score of four subscales) and years of experience teaching. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity.

The model explained 16.7% of the variance in the “Curriculum Changes” subscale ( $F(4, 68) = 3.40, p = .013$ ) and 10.0% of the variance in the “Consultation” subscale ( $F(4, 66) = 1.83, p = .134$ ). A moderate association was found between AIS “Feelings” towards inclusion in the classroom and both the ITICS “Curriculum Changes” ( $\beta = .29, p = .012$ ) and “Consultation” ( $\beta = .30, p = .014$ ) subscales. Full details are available in Table 8.9.

**Table 8.9**

*Multiple Regression Model Predicting Respondents' Intentions to Teach in an Inclusive Classroom (Curriculum Changes and Consultation)*

	ITISC – curriculum changes		ITISC consultation	
	$\beta$	95% CIs	$\beta$	95% CIs
Emotional intelligence (total)	-.13	(-.36 / .09)	-.08	(-.32 / .16)
AIS - beliefs	.14	(-.10 / .38)	-.04	(-.29 / .21)
AIS – feelings	.29*	(.07 / .52)	.30*	(.06 / .54)
Years of teaching experience	-.12	(-.36 / .12)	-.01	(-.26 / .23)

Note: ITISC = Intention to Teach in Inclusive Classroom Scale; AIS – beliefs = Attitude towards Inclusion Scale – beliefs subscale; AIS – feelings = Attitude towards Inclusion Scale – feelings subscale;  $\beta$  = standardised beta value; 95% CIs = 95% confidence intervals.

Statistical significance: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

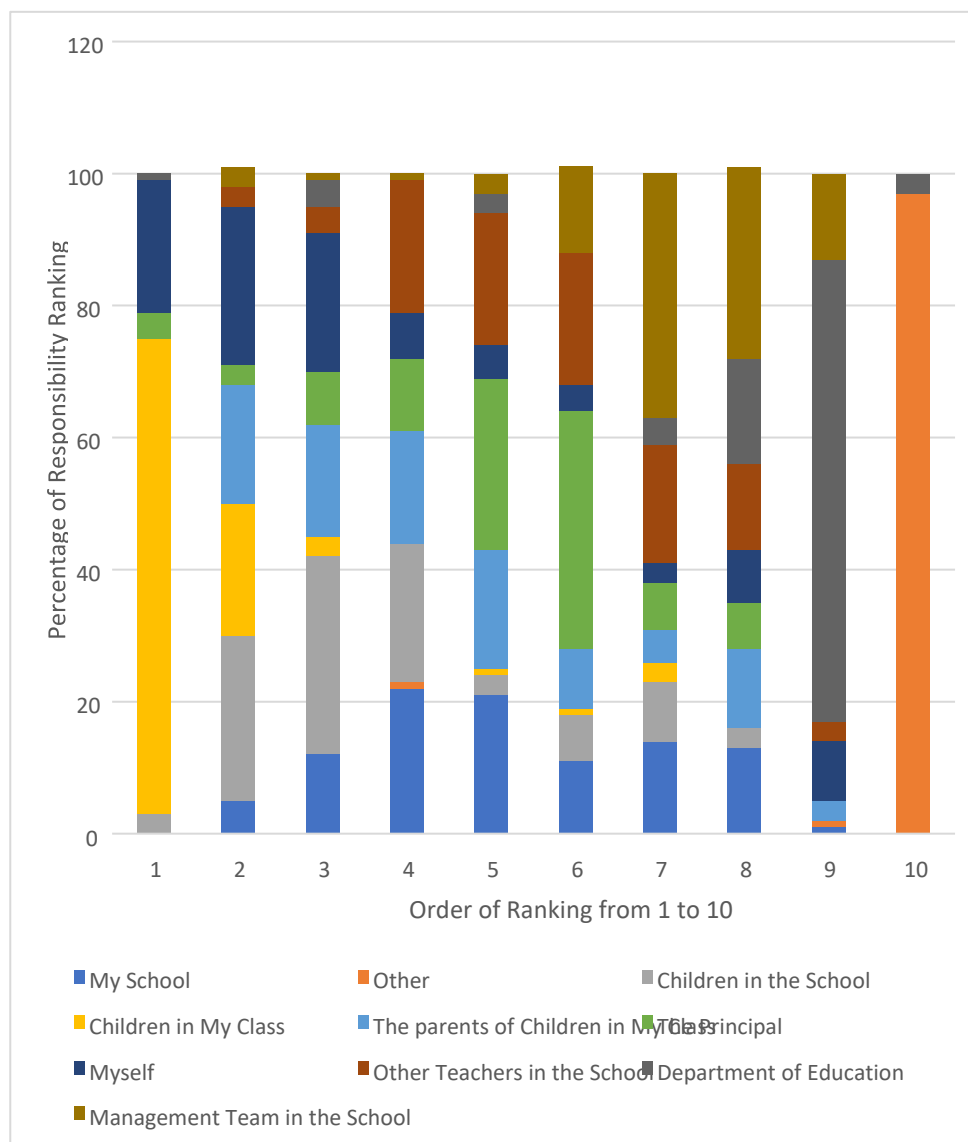
#### **8.9.4 Respondents' Ranking of Responsibilities**

The respondents were asked to consider those to whom they have responsibility and to rank them from one to 10, with one indicating the highest level of responsibility and 10 the lowest level of responsibility. As presented in Figure 8.5, the results show that 72% (n = 55) of the first-place rankings were given to children in my class and the next highest first place ranking was to myself at 20% (n = 15). The second-place ranking was allocated mainly to children in the school (25%, n = 19), myself (24%, n =

18), children in my class (20%, n = 15), and the parents of children in my class (18%, n = 14). The third-place ranking demonstrates a similar trend in the results. Mid-range rankings are given to other teachers in the school and the principal. Lower rankings of responsibility are assigned to the management team in the school and the Department of Education.

**Figure 8.5**

*Respondents' Ranking of Responsibilities*



### 8.9.5 Change and Training

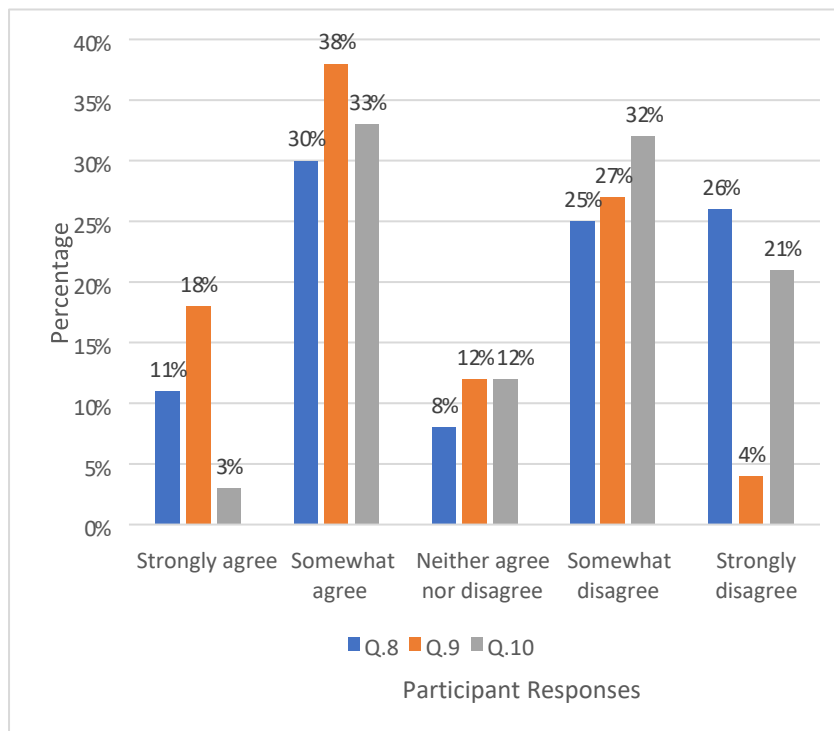
In a response to the first question in this section which asked the respondents to rate if they can easily introduce changes to their teaching practices. Using a Likert 5-point scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”, of the 72 who responded to the question, 39% (n=28) “Strongly Agreed” and 49% (n=35) “Somewhat Agreed” that they can easily introduce changes to their teaching practices in the classroom. However, the respondents then reported that 55% (n=40) of them “Somewhat Agreed” that the changes that they can make to their teaching practice are limited by rules and regulations. When the respondents were asked if they felt in control of how they teach, out of the 73 responses 41% (n=30) strongly agreed and 47% (n=34) “Somewhat Agreed”. However, when asked if their workload is reasonable of the 73 responses 41% (n=30) “Somewhat Disagreed” and 16% (n=12) “Strongly Disagreed”.

The final three questions in this section addressed the issue of teacher training that was dominant in the review of the literature and was reported by the teachers during the qualitative phase of this study. The teachers were asked to express their degree of agreement with statements about whether “I have the training needed to cope with the emotional aspects of teaching” (Q.8), “I have the training needed to create an inclusive classroom” (Q.9), and “I was well prepared for my role as a teacher” (Q.10). 73 respondents answered each of these questions, see figure 8.6. The respondents reported a high level of disagreement about having the training to cope with the emotional aspects of teaching as 25% (n=18) “Somewhat

Disagreed” and 26% (19) “Strongly Disagreed” with the statement. For question nine, 56% of respondents “Strongly Agreed” (n=18) or “Somewhat Agreed” (n=38) that they have the training needed to create an inclusive classroom. However, for question 10 only 3% (n=2) responded that they “Strongly Agreed” with the statement that they were well prepared in college for their role as a primary school teacher and 21% (n=15) “Strongly Disagreed”.

**Figure 8.6**

*Respondents’ Responses to Change and Training Questions 8, 9, and 10*



A Spearman’s Rho correlation was performed to examine the association between the perceived training needs of the respondents and their



years of experience teaching. Results revealed no association between years of experience teaching and the need for training to cope with the emotional aspects of teaching ( $\rho = -.17, p = .146$ ), the training needed to create an inclusive classroom ( $\rho = .01, p = .954$ ), or the perception that they were well prepared for their role as a teacher ( $\rho = -.06, p = .599$ ).

### **8.9.6 Themes from Open-Ended Question**

The final survey question invited the respondents to make any comment or provide any suggestion that they would like to make. 19 respondents provided comments or suggestions (see Appendix U). These statements were thematically analysed using the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022). The researcher became familiar with the data, generated initial codes, searched for themes, and reviewed them (see Appendix V). Using thematic analysis, the researcher identified the following three themes:

*Theme 1. The focus of college is academic, the classroom is where the real learning takes place.* Eight primary school teachers expressed their belief that while their college experience was focused on the academic aspects of teaching, it did not address the practicalities and challenges of the classroom experience. One participant stated that

“Colleges teach you the curriculum and some aspects of the methodologies you can use to teach them. There is not a huge emphasis on social emotional learning, inclusive based methods or how to deal with issues that can arise within your class as a result of this” (R. 8).

**Theme 2. Inclusion has many challenges.** The participants commented on the challenges of inclusion in the classroom. Issues relating to SEN and mainstream education were identified. In addition, resource issues related to teacher training, pupil teacher ratios, and the physical environment were reported. An example of a statement made by a participant was:

“As well as training, resources (or lack of them) are a huge factor for inclusion- the physical size of classrooms in older school buildings greatly inhibits the use of strategies and methodologies which aid inclusion. Teacher student ratios are not conducive to effective teaching of multiple children with additional needs in the one class” (R. 7).

**Theme 3. Teachers Need Support.** The statements made by several teachers demonstrated that the primary school teachers need to support from others. They would like information about minding themselves on the job, a school wide approach to teaching practices in order that teachers can support each other, support from external agencies for speech and language therapy and occupational therapy. A statement made by a participant was that

“The landscape of teaching has change dramatically over the course of my teaching career so far and I do not feel that we are adequately trained or equipped for all of the aspects of the job that we are now expected to cover” (R. 17).

## 8.10 Conclusion

This chapter represents Phase 3 of the exploratory sequential mixed methods approach being used in this study to explore EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. The rationale and ethical considerations for using a questionnaire were presented. The measure was developed, pilot tested, and was subsequently made available to potential participants using the Qualtrics platform. Upon analysis of the data several interesting findings were reported. The respondents worked in a wide range of school settings which were predominately located in urban areas. They reported high levels of EI and demonstrated high levels of self-emotion appraisal. With regards to attitudes toward inclusion, positive beliefs and feelings were reported towards inclusive education. In addition, very favourable intentions to implement curriculum changes and to consult with colleagues to teach in an inclusive classroom were reported.

No statistically significant relationship was found between the respondents' total EI score or scores on the four dimensions of EI and years of teaching experience. Relationships were found between AIS and ITICS subscales, and a statistically significant negative relationship was reported between the AIS "Beliefs" subscale and years of teaching experience. No statistically significant correlation was found between the ITICS intention to "Consult", the participants mean EI score, AIS "Beliefs" subscale, and years of teaching experience (YTE). Also, no statistically significant association was reported between any of the emotional intelligence subscales and "Beliefs" about inclusion. A moderate negative association was found between Self-Emotion Appraisal scores and "Feelings" regarding inclusion

in the classroom, while controlling for the other emotional intelligence dimensions, suggesting that greater levels of self-emotion appraisal are associated with greater feelings towards inclusion. Moderate positive associations were found between “Feelings” towards inclusion in the classroom and both ITICS subscales of intention to “Curriculum Changes” and “Consultation” with others regarding inclusive teaching, while controlling for emotional intelligence, beliefs towards inclusive teaching, and years of experience teaching.

The ranking of responsibility by the participants showed that the highest level of responsibility at 72% was to “children in my class”, and the second highest ranking was to “myself” at 20%. In response to the questions about having the training to cope with the emotional aspects of teaching a higher level of disagreement was reported, whereas 56% of participants strongly or somewhat agreed that they have the training needed to create an inclusive classroom. However, only 3% of the participants responded that they strongly agreed with the statement that they were well prepared in college for their role as a teacher and 21% strongly disagreed.

A thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke (2022), was conducted on the responses to the final open-ended question on the questionnaire, regarding any comments or suggestions that the respondent would like to make. Three themes were identified based on the analysis, firstly, that the focus of college is academic, the classroom is where the real learning takes place; secondly, that inclusion has many challenges; and thirdly, that teachers need support.

The three phases of the exploratory mixed methods sequential design used in this study of EI and inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers have been undertaken. Phase 1 involved the collection of qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews from six participants and the subsequent thematic analysis which led to the identification of six themes. Phase 2 of the study focused on the use of the qualitative data to inform and develop the questionnaire to be used in the following phase. Phase 3 presented the questionnaire, and the collection and analysis of data. The time has now arrived to consider the qualitative and quantitative data in terms of the research questions, the theoretical framework, and previous studies to explore where the journey should go to from here in terms of conclusions and recommendations.

## Chapter 9

### Discussion & Conclusion

#### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the purpose of the research and the research questions to frame the discussion of the research findings. A review will be provided of descriptive information about the participants for the qualitative phase and about the respondents for the quantitative phase of this study to provide a context for the discussion of the results. This will be followed by a separate examination of each of the four research questions through the discussion of the findings for each question asked, the evaluation of the results in terms of the theoretical perspectives and previous research presented in the literature, and the interpretation by the researcher of the implications of the findings of each research question in terms of the sample of Irish primary school teachers being studied. Additional important findings about Responsibility, Change and Training, and those made based on the respondents' comments and suggestions will be presented. An evaluation of the strengths and limitations of the study and recommendations will be made by the researcher. A final reflection on the experience of undertaking this study and conclusions will be provided.

The title of this study is “Thinking, Feeling, Including, An Exploratory Study of Emotional Intelligence and Attitudes and Intentions Towards Inclusion Among a Sample of Irish Primary School Teachers”. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

The research questions were:

1. What do the concepts of emotional intelligence and inclusion mean to a sample of Irish primary school teachers and what influence do they believe that these concepts have on their practice in the classroom?
2. What is the emotional intelligence profile of a sample of Irish primary school teachers?
3. What are the sample of Irish primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and what is their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom?
4. What is the relationship between the emotional intelligence profile and attitudes towards inclusion and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom among a sample of Irish primary school teachers?

In Phase 1 of the three-phase sequential mixed methods approach, which was the qualitative phase, six participants took part in semi-structured interviews about the meaning and practice of EI and inclusion in the classroom. Five of the participants were female and one was male, they had a range of teaching experience from 4 to 30 years, four of the schools that they were teaching in were in urban locations and two were in rural locations. The findings from this phase of the research addressed Research Question 1 and are presented in Chapter 6. The thematic analysis of the qualitative data informed the development of the quantitative measure as describe in Phase 2 of the study in Chapter 7.

In Phase 3 of the sequential mixed methods approach the quantitative measure was tested which was an online questionnaire. This phase of the study addressed Research Questions 2, 3, and 4 and is described in Chapter 8. While 120 respondents accessed the link to the survey presented on Qualtrics, the questionnaire was fully completed by 73 participants. Of the total of 93 respondents that answered the question asking them to state their gender 82 (88.2%) recorded that they were female, 10 (10.8%) recorded that they were male, and 1 (1.1%) recorded that they would prefer not to say. The average age of the respondents was 40.02 years, and they had an average of 15.55 years teaching experience. The majority of 45 (48.9%) of the respondents were working in denominational schools, 77 (83.7%) identified that their school was in an urban location, and 52 (57.1%) reported that their school was in Dublin. The respondents reported that the approximate total number of pupils in each of their schools was 414.12, and that the average number of pupils per class was 22.8. The respondents reported that they were teaching and working in a wide range of classes and roles in the schools.

## **9.2 Discussion of Findings of the Research Questions**

This section presents a separate examination of each of the four research questions through the discussion of the findings for each question asked, the evaluation of the results in terms of the theoretical perspectives and previous research presented in the literature, and the interpretation by the researcher of the implications of the findings of each research question in terms of the sample of Irish primary school teachers being studied.



## 9.2.1 Research Question 1 – Meaning and Practice of EI & Inclusion

*What do the concepts of emotional intelligence and inclusion mean to a sample of Irish primary school teachers and what influence do they believe that these concepts have on their practice in the classroom?*

The first research question explored the meaning of the concepts of EI and inclusion among the sample of Irish primary school teachers and the influence that they believed that these concepts have on their practice in the classroom. This research question was addressed in Phase 1 of the three-phase exploratory sequential mixed methods approach used in this study. Phase 1 was qualitative and consisted of the collection of data using semi-structured interviews from a sample of six primary school teachers as described in Chapter 6. The data was analysed by following the practical guide to thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2022) and the themes identified were “EI Means Others”, “Inclusion Means Everyone”, “Feeling the Weight of Responsibility”, “Change Happens To and Around Teachers”, “The Missing Self”, and “EI and Inclusion are Interconnected”. The themes of “EI Means Others”, “Inclusion Means Everyone”, and “EI and Inclusion are Interconnected” will be discussed as they directly address Research Question 1. The findings relating to the themes of “Feeling the Weight of Responsibility”, “Change Happens To and Around Teachers”, and “The Missing Self”, will be further discussed in the following sections presented in this chapter.

**9.2.1.1 EI Means Others.** This theme was identified by the researcher as representing the orientation demonstrated by the participants when asked

about the meaning of EI and the impact on their teaching practice. In response to the interview questions the participants reported that they understood and used their EI to reach out and meet the needs of the pupils in their classroom. They used words such as “empathy”, “awareness”, “understand”, “respect”, “listen”, and “social skills” to describe their practice of acting in the best interest of others. Their statements revealed that they use EI to meet the needs of others, and this was interpreted by the researcher as a child-focused practice of giving that is demonstrated by a range of activities. Five concepts were identified as clustering around the meaning of EI to the sample of primary school teachers and these were knowledge of the concept, a practice of giving, many ways to demonstrate EI, child-first approach, and the training gap and value of practical experience.

***Knowledge of Concept.*** In response to the interview question which asked the participants to evaluate their understanding of the concept of EI, five of the six participants asserted that they had a very good knowledge of EI. Following this, during the process of interviewing, reviewing the transcripts, and making many notes the researcher developed the belief that EI for primary school teachers is about others. When asked about what the concept of EI meant to them interesting key words that were used by teachers included “dealing”, “understanding”, “empathy”, “awareness”, “control”, “social skills”, “reflect”, “recognise”, “collaborate”, “read”, and “manage”. An example of a quotation is from a participant who stated that it is an “Awareness of being able to deal and work with people” (Q.10, p.4, 278279). Their statements revealed that they use EI to meet the needs of others, and this was interpreted by the researcher as a child-focused practice of giving that is demonstrated by a range of activities. The need to understand self

which forms the basis of EI was demonstrated by the statement that EI is “An awareness of myself and then if I have an awareness of myself, I should be able to control myself” (Q.10, participant 2, 301-302).

The findings demonstrated a very good level of knowledge about the concept of EI among the participants. Their statements about the meaning of EI support the definition of EI proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997) that it is “the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (p. 10). In addition, the statements support the assertion by Cherry (2018) that EI is an individual’s capacity to understand and manage emotions. The findings are in line with the components of EI described by Goleman (1995) are the self-management skills of self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation, empathy, and social skill.

***A Practice of Giving.*** Based on the responses of the participants the researcher identified that EI is seen by teachers as an effective way to meet the needs of children in the classroom and is a practice of giving. The participants described how they demonstrate being emotionally intelligent in their practice in the classroom by considering the impact that they have on the children and where each child is coming from. They consider how they present themselves to the class to “just to make sure that kind of what I am feeling doesn’t necessarily transfer into how the kids would see me” (Q.11,

p.3, 485) and do this while being “very aware of each child and each child is so, so different” (Q.11, p.1, 313-314), and there was a sense that their practice would guide children.

These findings support the aspects of Salovey and Mayer’s (1997) perceiving branch of the model described as the ability to appraise one’s own emotions and the ability to identify the emotions that others feel. Firstly, this concerns an individual’s ability to identify and understand their own emotions to events that are taking place around them. An aspect of this ability is interoceptive awareness which is the ability to identify physiological changes that are related to the experience of stressful events and strategies to regulate the emotional response (Barrett et al., 2004). Secondly, it is the ability to accurately identify the emotions that others are feeling, such as sadness, anger, or joy. This is achieved normally by processing nonverbal information including facial expressions and vocal tones (Buck et al., 1980; Elfenbein & Eisenkraft, 2010; Jenness, 1932). In addition, this ability has been named empathic accuracy (Côté et al., 2011b), emotion recognition ability (Rubin et al., 2005), and nonverbal receiving ability (Buck et al., 1980). Van Kleef (2009) asserted that this ability assists people to gather information about other people’s attitudes, goals, and intentions which are communicated through emotional expressions. Also, the meaning of EI as a Practice of Giving as identified by the researcher can be seen to support the definition of EI as “a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands” (Bar-On, 2005, p. 3). As summed up by Hargreaves (1998) that “for many teachers, it is a labor of love” (p. 840).

***Many Ways to Demonstrate EI.*** The interpretation of the interviews by the researcher led to the finding that there are many ways that the participants used EI when working with pupils, colleagues, and parents and the key terms used were “thinking”, “assessing”, “empathy”, “listen”, “relationships”, “understanding”, “reflection”, “compromise”, and “communication”. The language used provides an insight into the many ways teachers demonstrate their emotional intelligence. From the thinking aspect demonstrated by a teacher who stated “I would probably do a lot of thinking about, you know, each individual and even parents as well” (Q.13, p.1, 395-398), to the teacher who said that they “Listen to understand not to respond” (Q.13, p.2, 435). This finding provides support for Drigas and Papaoutsis’s (2018) model of EI that states that EI is both an ability and a trait. On the ability level EI refers to awareness, self and social, and to management and the trait level refers to the mood associated with emotions and the tendency to behave in a certain way in emotional states.

***Child-First Approach.*** The teachers were unified in their response when asked to identify those to whom they are responsible for while doing their job. The immediate answer that all teachers gave was that they are responsible for the children and put them first. This response clearly communicated the shared sentiment that “the kids like, yeah, they come first” (Q.14, p.6, 670). These findings support the assertion made by Fried (2001) that teachers are passionate about ideas, learning, and their relationship with students. In addition, they support the finding made by Kedar (2011) that teachers with a high level of EI tend to be more compassionate towards their students and are more familiar with their needs and respond appropriately.

***The Training Gap and the Value of Practical Experience.*** The final concept that clustered around the meaning of EI was based on the responses that the teachers gave when asked if the teacher training that they had received provided them with the knowledge and skills needed to manage the emotional aspects of the job. Five out of the six participants stated in a very affirmative manner that their training did not provide the knowledge and skills required and can be summarised by the response “in a word no” (Q.15, p. 4, 521). A suggestion was made by two of the participants that emotional aspects should be dealt with during initial teacher education and one proposed that a module in communication and relationships would be beneficial as this would help to deal with the job as it is “emotionally draining” (Q.15, p.4, 550). The statements made by the participants are in line with Chakravorty and Singh’s (2020) proposal that EI should be recognised as a personal resource for teachers to be developed through training and development. Support for this proposal is found in the assertion made by Shahzad et al. (2020) that EI skills should be incorporated into teacher education and that teachers should be evaluated on the emotional aspect of teaching and not just on content and pedagogy.

**9.2.1.2 *Inclusion Means Everyone.*** The theme is defined by the researcher as Irish primary school teachers make inclusion happen every day and there are many layers to inclusion both inside and outside school. The responses of participants demonstrated a consensus that inclusion means everyone and that it is an active ongoing process that involves “including”,

“belonging”, “facilitating” and the recognition of individuality and unity in the classroom. Five concepts were found to cluster around the meaning of EI for the sample of Irish primary school teachers and these were Inclusion Means Everyone, Involves Action, Primary School Teachers Make Inclusion Happen, Inclusion is About Getting to Know and Understand a Person, and Layers of Inclusion.

The participants presented a unified belief that “inclusion” means everyone, and they make it happen every day. When asked what the term “inclusion” means to them the key words and phrases that were used included “everybody”, “equal”, “integrated”, “every child”, “all”, “meaningful”, “valued”, “voice”, and “same right”. The unity in the expression of the understanding of the meaning of “inclusion” was demonstrated by the following statements, “I always think of just including everybody” (Q.16, p.1, 494) and “Inclusion is that you’re trying to bring everyone along” (P.6, 769-770). The importance of all students having a fair and equal opportunity in the classroom was clearly communicated by participants and is shown by this response “Everybody is facilitated to take part and to enjoy and attain and achieve and participate in the classroom” (P.2, 535-550) and also, the importance of the learning experience “All children regardless of ability or background or race would be able to engage ...in school life in a meaningful way” (P.4, 598-605) and that “Everybody takes part ...is a valued member of the group or that they have a voice, that their opinions are heard” (P. 5, 552-555).

These findings are in line with the definition of inclusion used for the purpose of this research proposed by Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2017) that it “concerns the inclusion of all children” (p. 803). In addition, the statements

from participants support the assertion by Shevlin et al. (2009) that an inclusive learning environment is one “that regards and respects all pupils, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, ability, socio-economic background or special educational need” (p. 4) and “the assumption that every learner matters equally and has the right to receive effective educational opportunities” (UNESCO, 2020, p. 12).

***Involves Action.*** It became apparent to the researcher during the interviews that teachers are always practicing inclusion; that it involves action as it is about knowing and understanding the person and that there are many layers to inclusion as it is personal, interpersonal, and an important part of the classroom, school, home, and national culture. The teachers shared their insights into how they are inclusive in their practice by using the words and terms of “including”, “belonging”, “find a way in”, “not can’t but can”, “facilitate”, “equal chance”, “voice”, “knowing”, “valued”, “access and opportunities”, “interaction”, and “praise and strengths”. The inclusive nature of their approach is well described as “Everybody needs to be included because we all have needs” (Q.17, P.2, 648-649) and means that teachers “Make sure that the children have access and have opportunities for inclusion on a social level...” (Q.17, P. 5, 546-567) and that it is centrally about the need for a teacher to “give them a sense of belonging” (Q.17, P. 1, 536-537).

The finding that inclusion involves action was described by Kinsella and Senior (2008) in their comment that inclusive schools promote communication, consultation, and collaboration between teachers, students, parents, and other professionals to achieve the goal of changing and adapting



educational practices. Further support is found in the need to make sure that every student in the school is supported in accordance with their need to enable them to succeed (Ainscow & César, 2006).

***Primary School Teachers Make Inclusion Happen.*** The statements made by the primary school teachers revealed that they are central to the creation of an inclusive environment in the classroom. They are the gatekeepers to inclusion and make inclusion happen through their practice by developing relationships with each child, between children, the school, and parents, and as a teacher reflected “I think you kind of do it all day long” (P.1, 540). This had been described as the need to make sure that every student in the school is supported in accordance with their need to enable them to succeed (Ainscow & César, 2006).

***Inclusion is About Getting to Know and Understand a Person.*** It was clear that as the teachers recognised the individuality of each pupil, they created unity in the classroom as “I suppose you’re always trying to find a way in for kids” (Q.17, P.6, 830-831). This is facilitated by getting to know and understand a person as “each child learns differently” (P.1, 530) and you can “include everybody by knowing the children” (p.2, 663). This finding supports the statement made that inclusion is a process that helps to overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners’ (UNESCO, 2017: 7) and enables all students to participate in learning experiences and the learning environment with their same-aged peers (Graham, 2020).

***Layers of Inclusion.*** The layers of inclusion that were perceived by teachers in terms of not only the relationship between each pupil and the teacher but in a wider sense as “you create a kind of culture in the classroom where each child’s voice is respected, or children feel like they can participate” (Q.17, P.4, 683-684). Further, one teacher stated, “there’s so much you can do in the classroom, but I mean if the school isn’t inclusive, you’re kind of fighting a losing battle” (Q.17, P. 3, 890-891). The significance of the layers of inclusion identified by the participants was commented on by Sharma et al. (2023) who stated that within the context of inclusive education “a teacher will have stronger intentions to use inclusive practices if they hold positive attitudes towards inclusion, experience support from school leaders, colleagues, and the school culture more broadly and have a high degree of perceived control over their behaviour” (p. 3). This finding points to the challenge that inclusive education does not take place in isolation but is embedded in the context of the school environment, community, and society. Bronfenbrenner (1977) presented a framework that can be used to identify and understand the layers of inclusion and their influence on the experience of education for all.

The purpose of Research Question 1 was to explore the meaning of the concepts of EI and inclusion among the sample of Irish primary school teachers and the influence that they believed that these concepts have on their practice in the classroom. This was addressed through an examination of the findings relating to the themes that were identified by the research as “EI

Means Others” and “Inclusion Means Everyone”. However, the theme identified as “EI and Inclusion are Interconnected” is also important. Key areas of intersection were identified by the researcher regarding the concepts of shared knowledge, practice, and responsibility.

The researcher identified that in primary school teachers the knowledge and practice of EI provides a foundation for understanding the importance of the practice of inclusion in the classroom. This is an important finding as the successful outcome of inclusive educational reforms is greatly dependent how well prepared the teachers are in terms of their beliefs and skills to teach students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers in the same classroom (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). The findings relating to these and the other themes of “Feeling the Weight of Responsibility”, “Change Happens To and Around Teachers”, and “The Missing Self”, will be further discussed in the following sections presented in this chapter.

### **9.2.2 Research Question 2 – EI Profile**

*What is the emotional intelligence profile of a sample of Irish primary school teachers?*

The objective of the second research question was to describe the EI profile of a sample of Irish primary school teachers. This question was addressed in quantitative phase of the study using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS, Wong & Law, 2002) which was included in the online survey. The findings revealed that for the 81 respondents who completed the EI measure they had a mean score of 35.01 on the EI scale. The possible range was 16 – 112 with lower scores reflecting higher level of EI. Therefore, the results demonstrate that the sample of Irish primary school teachers in the study had a high level of EI.

Overall high levels were recorded for each of the four dimensions of EI among respondents with a possible range of 4-28, with lower score representing a higher level of ability. The four dimensions were Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA), Others' Emotional Appraisal (OEA), Use of Emotion (UOE), and Regulation of Emotion (ROE). The EI dimension that achieved the lowest score which indicates the highest level of ability was Self Emotion Appraisal (SEA) with a Mean of 7.78, which means that an individual has a high level of ability to understand their deep emotions and to express them naturally. This was followed by Others' Emotional Appraisal (OEA) which achieved a Mean of 8.48 and indicates that an individual can perceive and understand the emotions of people around them. However, high levels were also recorded for the Use of Emotion (UOE), with Mean of 9.53, which indicates a high level of individual ability to make use of emotions

which is achieved by directing emotions towards constructive activities and personal performance, and the Regulation of Emotion (ROE), with a Mean of 9.44, which indicates a high level of ability to regulate emotions which enables individuals to recover more rapidly from psychological distress.

The EI profile demonstrated by the sample of Irish primary school teachers provides support for the concept of EI as described by Salovey and Mayer (1997) as the “ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions as to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (p. 10). In addition, the results support by Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) Four-Branch Model or Ability Model of EI which identifies the four capacities of accurately perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thinking, understanding emotional meanings, and managing emotions. In addition, the finding support the identification by Goleman (1995), which were further developed by Boyatzis et al. (2000) and Goleman (2001), of the four essential dimensions of EI as Self-Awareness, Social-Awareness, Self Management, and Relationship Management.

These abilities provide the sample of Irish primary school teachers with the potential for success as described by Bar-On (2005) in his mixed model which consists of intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability skills, stress-management skills, and the aspects of general mood of happiness and optimism. The high level of SEA demonstrated by the respondents supports the Trait EI or Trait Emotional Self-Efficacy Model (Petrides and Furnham, 2000, 2001) that focuses on an individual’s subjective belief in their ability to be successful in emotional situations. The order of the EI

abilities demonstrated by the respondents from the highest being SEA, then OEA, ROE, and UOE is interesting in terms of The Emotional Intelligence Pyramid (Drigas and Papaoutsi, 2018). The model enables the identification of the skills and strategies that are needed to develop EI which are interconnected in a dynamic set which that will increase the projection of the true self of knowledge into an emotionally unified universe (Drigas and Papaoutsi, 2019). Therefore, even though the respondents had an overall high level of EI and demonstrated high levels of ability across the four dimensions of EI, the model presented by Drigas and Papaoutsi (2018) provides guidance about additional training to further develop the EI skills of Irish primary school teachers.

The quantitative findings demonstrate the EI Profile of the sample of Irish primary school teachers and show that they have a high level of EI. This provides further support for the finding from the qualitative phase of the research of the identification of the theme “EI Means Others”. In Phase 1 of the research the statement made by the participants revealed that they use EI to meet the needs of others, and this was interpreted by the researcher as a child- focused practice of giving that is demonstrated by a range of activities. In particular this was supported by the score for the Others’ Emotional Appraisal (OEA) dimension of EI which achieved a Mean of 8.48 and achieved the second highest score for the dimensions, OEA indicates that an individual can perceive and understand the emotions of people around them.

Interestingly the results highlight a variation in the findings between the qualitative and quantitative research data. While the participants’ highest level of ability was Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA) with a Mean of 7.78, which means that an individual has a high level of ability to understand their

deep emotions and to express them naturally, theme of “The Missing Self” was identified in Phase 1 of the research. This theme was defined and understood by the researcher as the primary school teacher is important, they understand and practice emotional intelligence, they act in an inclusive way every day, have a great sense of responsibility to others, and are an important agent of change. But they do not see their own importance and the self appears to be missing. The idea of “The Missing Self” will further be examined in the findings that are presented later in this Chapter when the results of the Responsibility and Change and Training questions are discussed. This may indicate a gap in the sample of Irish primary school teachers’ understanding of self as demonstrated by the EI profile and how this relates to their meaning and practice of EI in the classroom.

### **9.2.3 Research Question 3 - Attitudes & Intentions Towards Inclusion**

*What are the sample of Irish primary school teachers’ attitudes to inclusion and what is their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom?*

The third research question examined attitudes to inclusion and the intention to teach in inclusive classrooms among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. This question was addressed in the quantitative phase of the study using Sharma and Jacobs’ (2016) Attitude towards Inclusion Scale and Intention to Teach in Inclusive Classrooms Scale (ITICS). These scales were presented to the respondents as part of the online questionnaire and overall, the findings for the AIS subscale were positive and ITICS subscales were very favourable.

The findings for the AIS subscales of “Beliefs” and “Feelings” were positive. The findings for the AIS “Beliefs” subscale, on a possible range from 4 – 28, found a Mean score of 17.91. This suggests a high level of agreement with the statements presented and overall positive beliefs towards inclusive education. The findings for the AIS “Feelings” subscale, on a possible range from 4 – 28, found a Mean score of 24.59 which indicates a very high level of agreement with the statements presented and therefore very positive feelings towards inclusive education.

Secondly, the findings for the ITICS subscales of “Curriculum Changes” (intention to implement curriculum changes) and “Consultation” (intention to consult with others and to further personal professional development) were very favourable. The findings for the first ITICS “Curriculum Changes” subscale, on a possible scale from 4-28, found a Mean score of 18.42, which indicates a high level of agreement with the statements presented and very favourable intentions to change the curriculum. For the second ITICS “Consultation” a Mean score of 26.16 was reported on the scale from 4-28, which indicates a very high level of agreement with the statements presented and an extremely favourable intention to consult with others and to further personal professional development. The results of the ITICS subscales demonstrated that the respondents have very favourable intentions to teach in a way that the classroom becomes an inclusive classroom using curriculum changes and consultation.

The findings need to be viewed from the perspective of the history of inclusion which has been defined by political and legal actions that have resulted in decisions being made about exclusion, segregation, integration,



and inclusion. These events have influenced education in the past and have informed the meaning, practice, and challenge of inclusive education today.

Of particular importance was UNESCO's Salamanca Agreement (UNESCO, 2015) which put in place an international framework which led to a broader understanding of the concept of inclusion which focuses on all learners. Within this context, the respondents have reported positive attitudes to inclusion and very favourable intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms.

The results of the AIS and ITICS scales for the sample of Irish primary school teachers contrasts with the findings of Linder et al. (2023) who indicated that teachers have neutral or ambivalent attitudes towards IE and that inclusion appears to be related to students' type of disability and that the inclusion of all students is not favoured. Also, the results from the current study challenge the findings of Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) who uncovered the fact that about two-thirds of teachers in their study had relatively positive attitudes towards inclusive education, but a smaller number of teachers had the intention to implement inclusion in their classrooms. The current study found that the sample of Irish primary school teachers has both very positive attitudes towards inclusion and very favourable intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms.

In addition, the quantitative findings for the third research question supported the identification by the researcher of the theme "Inclusion Means Everyone" in the qualitative phase of this study. The theme focused on the participants' meaning and practice of inclusion and was defined as primary school teachers make inclusion happen every day and there are many layers to inclusion both inside and outside school.

Shevlin and Banks (2021) contend that Ireland is at a crossroads as it manages the challenge of establishing inclusive school environments. However, when this challenge is combined with Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour which proposes that intentions to perform a behaviour are the best predictors of actual behaviour, the positive attitude and favourable intentions towards inclusion demonstrated by the respondents places the Irish education system in enviable position. However, the reality is that the Bioecological factors described by Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1989) that affect inclusion in Irish schools need to be taken into consideration. These have been identified by Rose and Shevlin (2021) as the interrelated factors of changing attitudes, the enhancement of the skills of professional, the provision of resources, and the evaluation of the impact of the measures as they are introduced. Within the context of inclusive education these factors were summed up by the statement made by Sharma et al. (2023) that "a teacher will have stronger intentions to use inclusive practices if they hold positive attitudes towards inclusion, experience support from school leaders, colleagues, and the school culture more broadly and have a high degree of perceived control over their behaviour" (p. 3).

The findings from this research question regarding the attitudes towards inclusion and intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms of a sample of Irish primary school teacher are to be welcomed as research has suggested that teachers' attitudes (Boyle et al., 2020; Sharma & Sokal, 2016) and their intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms (Opoku et al, 2021; Sharma & Jacobs, 2016) are critical to the implementation of successful inclusive practices. While the results of the AIS "Belief" subscale were positive, they were lower than the AIS "Feeling" subscale, therefore consideration should

be given by the Irish Department of Education to further training for Irish primary school teachers about the meaning and importance of inclusion the education. In addition, the researcher believes that question needs to be asked that if the respondents have such favourable intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms are there any factors that will act as a barrier to this? Further consideration will be given to this question in conjunction with the identified theme of “The Missing Self” and the results from the Responsibility and Change and Training questions later in this Chapter.

#### **9.2.4 Research Question 4 – EI, Attitudes, & Intentions Towards Inclusion**

*What is the relationship between the emotional intelligence profile and attitudes to inclusion and intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms among a sample of Irish primary school teachers?*

The fourth research question explored the relationship between the EI profile and attitudes to inclusion and intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. This question was addressed in Phase 3 of the study which was quantitative and used the online questionnaire as described in Chapter 8. The results from the measure of EI using the WLEIS (Wong & Law, 2002) and measures of the Attitude to Inclusion (AIS) and Intention to Teach in Inclusive Classrooms (ITICS) (Sharma & Jacobs, 2016) Scales were considered collectively using inferential statistics.

Firstly, a correlation was conducted between the overall mean EI scores for the respondents and their years of teaching experience. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between the EI profile, the four dimensions of EI, and the number of years of teaching experience of the respondents. Upon consideration of this result the researcher wondered if emotion regulation is mastered at an early stage of teaching and used by teachers to control their emotions (Sutton, 2004; Taxer & Frenzel, 2015). Also, perhaps as asserted by Taxer and Gross (2018) the respondents regulate their emotions using suppression when they are in the classroom as they have learnt that this impacts on their effectiveness, health and well-being, and student emotions and motivation. In light of these findings, the research presented by Corcoran and Tormey (2013) that teacher performance did not correlate significantly with teacher EI is worthy of note. They contended that cognitively orientated teacher education and teaching practice do not present opportunities for student teachers to develop their emotional intelligence. This is advanced by Akhtar et al. (2020) who put forward the view that an effective instructional curriculum should be developed that incorporates EI skills with the objective of enhancing the personal and career success of teachers. The introduction of these courses may result in a positive relationship between the EI profile of primary school teachers and their years of teaching experience, as according to Hodzic et al. (2018) and Mattingly and Kraiger (2019) EI can be learned, cultivated, and mastered through training, interventions, and life experiences and EI training is effective.

Secondly, a correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between the respondents' results on the AIS subscales of "Belief" and "Feelings", the ITICS subscales of "Curriculum Changes" and

“Consultation”, and years of teaching experience. The results revealed that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between the AIS subscale of “Beliefs” and the ITICS subscale of intention to introduce “Curriculum Changes”. There was a statistically significant positive relationship between the AIS subscale of “Feelings” and both the ITICS subscales of “Curriculum Changes” and “Consultation”. There was a statistically significant positive relationship between the two ITICS subscales of “Curriculum Changes” and “Consultation”. These results demonstrate the relationship between the positive “Beliefs” about inclusion and the intention of the respondents to introduce “Curriculum Changes” to create more inclusive classrooms. In addition, there was further positive “Feeling” about “Changing the Curriculum” and a willingness to “Consult” with others and to further personal professional development to create inclusive classrooms. Further the positive relationship between making “Curriculum Changes” and “Consultation” with each other was demonstrated. These results support Ajzen’s (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour which proposes that intentions to perform a behaviour are the best predictors of actual behaviour. These intentions are affected by several variables including attitudes, behavioural control, and subjective norms which have a strong correlation with actual rates of behaviour. Also, these findings support the assertion of Sharma et al. (2023) that within the context of inclusive education “a teacher will have stronger intentions to use inclusive practices if they hold positive attitudes towards inclusion, experience support from school leaders, colleagues, and the school culture more broadly and have a high degree of perceived control over their behaviour” (p. 3).

An interesting finding was that there was a statistically significant negative relationship was found between AIS “Beliefs” subscale and years of teaching experience. This indicates that as the respondents’ years of teaching experience increases their score for the “Belief” subscale of the AIS decreases. In addition, the findings from this correlation found no statistically significant relationship between either the AIS “Feelings” or the ITICS subscales and years of teaching experience. Therefore, the respondents’ “Feelings” in terms of their attitudes to inclusion and their “Feelings” about “Curriculum Changes” and “Consultation” are not affected by the years spent in the classroom. These findings provide some support for Linder et al.’s (2023) research that indicated that teachers have neutral or ambivalent attitudes towards IE and that inclusion appears to be related to students’ type of disability and that the inclusion of all students is not favoured. However, the findings of this study do not support Linder et al.’s (2023) observation that teachers’ attitudes develop in a positive manner due to the accumulation of theoretical and practical knowledge and are linked to their sense of teaching efficacy. However, a key finding from Linder et al. (2023) was that guidance is lacking for improving teachers’ attitudes in the studies that have been conducted in the past few years. Further consideration will be given to the findings of a statistically significant negative relationship between the AIS “Beliefs” subscale and years of teaching experience and the findings of no statistically significant relationship between either the AIS “Feelings” or the ITICS subscales and years of teaching experience and a possible relationship to the later results presented about Change and Training.

Thirdly, correlation analyses were undertaken to examine the relationship between the total EI score, the scores for the AIS subscales of

“Beliefs” and “Feelings”, and the scores for the ITICS subscales of “Curriculum Changes” and “Consultation”, and years of teaching experience among the sample of Irish primary school teachers. The results revealed no statistically significant association between EI and the AIS subscales or the ITICS subscales, and no association between EI and years of teaching experience. Therefore, no relationship was found between the respondents’ EI profile and their attitudes to inclusion and intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms and years of teaching experience. This finding supports the research undertaken by the NCSE (2017) that indicated that there is a lack of confidence among Irish pre-service teachers with regards to their knowledge and ability to implement inclusive practices in schools and that they would like more support in this area. Therefore, these results support the suggestion that the successful outcome of inclusive educational reforms is greatly dependent how well prepared the teachers are in terms of their beliefs and skills to teach students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers in the same classroom (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

Fourthly, using multiple regression analyses an examination was undertaken of the associations between EI subscales of Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA), Others’ Emotion Appraisal (OEA), Use of Emotion (UOE), Regulation of Emotion (ROE)) and attitudes towards inclusion (“Beliefs” and “Feelings”). However, no association was found between any of the four EI subscales and AIS “Beliefs” about inclusion, but interestingly a moderate negative association was found between Self-Emotion Appraisal scores and AIS “Feelings” regarding inclusion in the classroom ( $\beta = -.40, p = .003$ ). Therefore, when a high SEA score was recorded for respondents and at the same time a less positive score for the AIS “Feelings” subscale was

demonstrated. Guidance in understanding this result may be found in the previously mentioned finding by Linder et al. (2023) that guidance is lacking for improving teachers' attitudes in the studies that have been conducted in the past few years and that there is a need to build teacher capacity to encourage inclusive practice (Shevlin & Banks, 2021). Guidance could be sought in this regard from the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence (YCEI) which uses the RULER method to contribute to the creation of positive and inclusive environments.

Finally, multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the associations between attitudes towards inclusion ("Beliefs" and "Feelings") and intentions to teach in an inclusive classroom ("Curriculum Changes" and "Consultation"), while controlling for EI (total score of four subscales) and years of experience teaching. A moderate association was found between AIS "Feelings" towards inclusion in the classroom and both the ITICS "Curriculum Changes" ( $\beta = .29, p = .012$ ) and "Consultation" ( $\beta = .30, p = .014$ ) subscales. This confirms earlier findings that there is statistically significant relationship between the AIS subscale of "Feelings" and both the ITICS subscales of "Curriculum Changes" and "Consultation". This highlights the central role of the affective aspect of attitudes among the sample of Irish primary school teachers and the fact that an important part of a teacher's skill set is the ability to work with their own emotion and the emotions of pupils (Corcoran & Tormey, 2013) which has a positive impact on their intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms.

In conclusion to this section of the chapter, a summary of the key inferential statistical findings made in response to Research Question 4 are presented as follows:



***Years of Teaching Experience (YTE).*** The respondents' years of teaching experience was not shown to be related to their EI score, or to the AIS subscale of "Feelings", or the ITICS "Curriculum Changes" and "Consultation" subscales. However, there was a statistically negative relationship between AIS "Beliefs" and years of teaching experience.

***Beliefs & Intentions.*** There was a positive relationship between the AIS "Beliefs" subscale and the intention to introduce "Curriculum change".

***Feelings & Intentions.*** There is a statistically positive relationship between the AIS "Feelings" subscale and the intention to introduce "Curriculum Changes" and "Consultation".

***EI Dimensions & Beliefs & Feelings:*** No association was found between any of the four EI dimensions and AIS "Beliefs" about inclusion. A moderate negative association was found between the EI dimension of SEA and the AIS "Feelings" subscale.

***AIS & ITICS (Controlling for total EI score & YTE).*** A moderate association was found between AIS "Feelings" subscale and the ITICS subscales of "Curriculum Changes" and "Consultation". Therefore, these results indicate that there is a need to provide training for Irish primary school teachers to further recognise and strengthen the important connection between EI and attitudes and intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms. In addition, this training should be provided both during initial teacher education and throughout the teacher's career.

### **9.3 Further Important Findings**

Following the analysis of data from the quantitative measure several important findings were made in the areas of Responsibility, Change and Training, and the themes that were identified from the thematic analysis of the final open-ended question on the questionnaire that asked the respondents to make any comments or suggestions.

#### ***9.3.1 Responsibility***

In Part 6 of the questionnaire the respondents were asked to consider those to whom they have responsibility and to rank them from one to 10, with one indicating the highest level of responsibility and 10 the lowest level of responsibility. This question was developed by the researcher to further examine Theme 3 identified in Phase 1 of the study. This theme was named “Feeling the Weight of Responsibility” and was interpreted by the researcher as the belief that the responsibility of the primary school teachers in the study was mainly focused on the children and that aspects of responsibility were described in both a tangible and intangible manner.

The results from the questionnaire demonstrated that 72% of the first-place rankings were given to “children in my class” and the next highest first place ranking was to “myself” at 20%. The second-place ranking was allocated mainly to “children in the school” (25%), “myself” (24%), “children in my class” (20%), and the “parents of children in my class” (18%). The third-place ranking demonstrates a similar trend in the results. Mid-range rankings were given to “other teachers in the school” and “the principal”. Lower rankings of responsibility were assigned to “the management team in the school” and “the Department of Education”.

Therefore, the results of the questionnaire supported the identification and interpretation of the meaning of the theme “Feeling the Weight of Responsibility” as being mainly focused on the children. The weight of this responsibility was supported and clearly described by Hargreaves (1998) in the comments that good teachers “are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy” (p. 835). Also, the focus of the responsibility of the role is further supported by Fried (2001) who asserted that teachers are passionate about ideas, learning, and their relationship with students. It is considered that when teachers experience their moral purposes being fulfilled then happiness is experienced (Oatley, 1991) and when the opposite is the case teachers may lose their sense of purpose and become demoralised (Nias, 1991). Indeed, this weight of responsibility may be seen as an emotional demand and therefore as Chakravorty and Singh (2020) proposed it is reasonable to suggest that a relationship exists between the emotional demands of teaching and emotionally related outcomes such as burnout. Arising from this finding it is proposed that EI training is provided to Irish primary school teachers. This initiative is supported by the findings of a study conducted by Geraci et al. (2023) who confirmed the protective role of EI against burnout in teachers and for maintaining high levels of self-efficacy and work engagement.

In addition, the results from Part 6 of the questionnaire about responsibility provide further support for the previously identified themes of “EI Means Others”, “Inclusion Means Everyone” and “The Missing Self”. Firstly, for the theme “EI Means Others” a code that clustered around this concept was the teacher’s child-first approach. This was supported by the

results shown for the ranking of responsibility by the respondents in which “children in my class” were given the highest ranking. Secondly, the theme identified as “Inclusion Means Everyone” and described by the researcher as primary school teachers make inclusion happen every day and there are many layers to inclusion both inside and outside school. The quantitative results further showed that the respondents reported a level of responsibility to many people but mainly to the children in their class, and then themselves, but also to children in the school. Mid-range rankings of responsibility were given to other teachers in the school and the principal. Lower rankings of responsibility are assigned to the management team in the school and the Department of Education. There is a level of responsibility felt for everyone in the school environment and beyond.

However, finally the theme of “The Missing Self” remains a concern to the researcher, while the primary school teachers in the study reported that they had a responsibility to themselves, in the rankings “myself” only represented at 20% of the first place rankings. This raises a concern as teachers’ level of self-efficacy has been shown to correspond to their belief in personal and instructional ability to be successful in coping with instructional tasks, obligations, and challenges (Caprara et al., 2006). This may place primary school teachers at risk as according to the WHO (2019) burnout is a result of sustained unmanaged high work stress that is seen in the form of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy.

The results from Part 6 of the questionnaire demonstrates that the respondents believe that they are responsible for many different people and groups. The results show that they feel the greatest level of responsibility to the people that they work physically closest to and spend the most time in

their role as a primary school teacher. The people they feel greatest responsibility to are the “children in my class” and “myself”,

This representation of responsibility corresponds to and supports Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1989) Bioecological Model which provided an understanding and insight into how children’s learning and development is located in a dynamic, integrated, and ever-changing context or ecology. From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological framework the developing child and the teacher can be located at the centre of a series of four nested systems from those that are closest or proximal to those that are indirect or distal. Firstly, the Microsystem consists of the responsibility the teacher believes they have for the children in their class, themselves, and other children in the school. Secondly, the Mesosystem represents the interconnections between the microsystems of the school, family, and peer groups which has an influence on the child and teachers. At this level the respondents reported having a responsibility to the principal, other teachers in the school, the parents of children in the class, my school. Thirdly, the Exosystem has a more distant and less visible influence on a child’s and teacher’s life and includes the management team in the school and the Department of Education. Finally, the Macrosystem is the cultural level of influence that children or teachers are not in direct contact with, however the cultural context influences the societal values, attitudes and ideologies that impact their experiences in the classroom.

These levels of the system are arranged from the center outwards with those closest to the middle being those most proximal to the child and the teacher and those furthest away being distal. The respondents presented a ranking of responsibility that was similar in nature to the

Bioecological Model. Therefore, it is proposed by the researcher that Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1989) theory can provide an understanding of the factors that shape the emotional lives and work experience of Irish primary school teachers.

### ***9.3.2 Change & Training***

The thematic analysis of the interviews with the six participants in Phase 1 of the study identified the theme that "Change Happens To and Around Teachers". This theme was interpreted by the researcher as meaning that the orientation of primary school teachers to change is outward towards others and this causes them to see change in a very practical manner at many levels. The statements made by the participants led the researcher to conclude that the sample of six Irish primary school teachers that were interviewed did not feel that they had a lot of control over what happens to them in terms of their teaching practice. In addition, there was an almost unanimous response from the teachers that they did not have the training required to cope with the emotional aspects of teaching. To further explore the sample of Irish primary school teachers' experience of change and training and based on the responses of participants, statements were presented to the respondents as part of the online questionnaire.

The results for Part 7 of the questionnaire provided an insight into the respondents experience of the introduction change and their workload. In a response to the question which asked the respondents if they can easily introduce changes to their teaching practices, of the 72 who responded to the question, 39% (n=28) "Strongly Agreed" and 49% (n=35) "Somewhat

Agreed” that they can easily introduce changes to their teaching practices in the classroom.

However, subsequently 55% (n=40) of respondents “Somewhat Agreed” that the changes that they can make to their teaching practice are limited by rules and regulations. When the respondents were asked if they felt in control of how they teach, out of the 73 responses 41% (n=30) strongly agreed and 47% (n=34) “Somewhat Agreed”. A significant finding was that when respondents were asked if their workload is reasonable of the 73 responses 41% (n=30) “Somewhat Disagreed” and 16% (n=12) “Strongly Disagreed”.

While the results are positive in terms of the respondents’ level of agreement about the fact that they can easily introduce changes to their teaching practice, the fact that they believe that these changes are limited by rules and regulations may have an impact on their self-efficacy. The results of this study support the findings that as teachers’ level of self-efficacy corresponds to their belief in personal and instructional ability to be successful in coping with instructional tasks, obligations, and challenges (Caprara et al., 2006). The importance of self-efficacy is also related in the literature to burnout (Geraci et al., 2023), which give support to the finding of this research that the majority of respondents believe that their workload is not reasonable. Worthy of note are the findings of a study conducted by Geraci et al., (2023) that confirmed the protective role of EI against burnout in teachers and for maintaining high levels of self-efficacy and work engagement.

In addition, questions in Part 7 of the questionnaire explored the issue of teacher training that was dominant in the review of the literature and was

reported by the teachers during the qualitative phase of this study. The respondents were asked to express their degree of agreement with statements about whether they have the training needed to cope with the emotional aspects of teaching, they have the training needed to create an inclusive classroom, and if they were well prepared for my role as a teacher. 73 respondents answered these questions. The results showed a high level of disagreement expressed by respondents with the statement about having the training to cope with the emotional aspects of teaching as 25% (n=18) “Somewhat Disagreed” and 26% (19) “Strongly Disagreed”. However, 56% of respondents “Strongly Agreed” (n=18) or “Somewhat Agreed” (n=38) that they have the training needed to create an inclusive classroom. Importantly only 3% (n=2) of respondents reported that they “Strongly Agreed” with the statement that they were well prepared in college for their role as a primary school teacher and 21% (n=15) “Strongly Disagreed”. Also, the relationship was examined between the perceived training needs of the respondents and their years of experience teaching; however, no association was found between years of experience teaching and the need for training to cope with the emotional aspects of teaching, the training needed to create an inclusive classroom, or the perception that they were well prepared for their role as a teacher. Once again years of teaching experience have been found to have no effect on the experience of the respondent.

The results for these questions demonstrated that most of the respondents reported that they did not have the training to cope with the emotional aspects of teaching and were not well prepared in college for their role as a primary school teacher. However, the majority reported that they have the training needed to create an inclusive classroom. Interestingly years



of teaching experience were not found to influence any of these results. These findings about the need for training to cope with the emotional aspects of teaching support Chakravorty and Singh's (2020) proposal that EI should be recognised as a personal resource for teachers to be developed through training and development. To provide further support for teachers EI should be part of the appraisal process as the risk highlighted by Shahzad et al. (2020) is that the emotional aspect of teaching will be ignored while the focus will remain on content and pedagogy. Also arising from these findings is support for the suggestion that emotional development should be the focus of initial and continuous teacher training programmes (Turculet, 2015). This may address some concerns arising from the findings of this research that teachers did not believe they were prepared for their role as a primary school teacher and did not have the training to cope with the emotional aspects of teaching which may mean that years of teaching experience will make a difference to the experience of primary school teachers in the future.

The finding that most of the respondents reported that they believe that they have the training needed to create an inclusive classroom is to be welcomed. This finding provides acknowledgement of understanding of UNESCO's (2017) core message that every learner matters and matters equally. It rejects the results from Linder et al. (2023) which indicated that teachers have neutral or ambivalent attitudes towards IE and that inclusion appears to be related to students' type of disability and that the inclusion of all students is not favoured. The finding from this study is favourable at a time when Ireland is at a crossroads as it manages the challenge of establishing inclusive school environments (Shevlin and Banks, 2021). There is further work to be done as the NCSE (2017) indicated that there is

a lack of confidence among Irish pre-service teachers with regards to their knowledge and ability to implement inclusive practices in schools and that they would like more support in this area. However, the importance of the finding can be found in the fact that research has suggested that teachers' attitudes (Boyle et al., 2020; Sharma & Sokal, 2016) and their intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms (Opoku et al, 2021; Sharma & Jacobs, 2016) are critical to the implementation of successful inclusive practices.

### ***9.3.3 Comments & Suggestions***

Following the thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke (2022), of the comments and suggestions made by the respondents to the final open-ended question on the online questionnaire, three themes were identified by the researcher.

***Theme 1. The focus of college is academic, the classroom is where the real learning takes place.*** In the identification of this theme an example of a quote from a respondent is that “Training does not prepare for life challenges (e.g., close family death of a child) but focusses on academics” (R.1). Thus, the identification of this theme supports the assertion made by Hargreaves (2000) that little or no attention is given to emotions by educational policy and administration and the educational research community in general. The priority is rationalised, cognitively driven and behavioural priorities which include knowledge, skills, standards, targets, performance, management, planning, problem-solving, decision-making, and measurable results (Hargreaves, 1997). In addition, the identification of this theme supports Corcoran & Tormey's (2013) contention that cognitively orientated teacher

education and teaching practice do not present opportunities for student teachers to develop their EI and that EI should be used as part of teacher selection and development criteria to reduce burnout and enhance personal and professional well-being.

**Theme 2. Inclusion has many challenges.** According to UNESCO (2017: 7) inclusion is “a process that helps to overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners”. The challenges around inclusion act as barriers which include as stated by a respondent that “training, resources (or lack of them) are a huge factor for inclusion” (R.5). The understanding presented by Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1989) into how children’s learning and development and the experience of the teacher is located in a dynamic, integrated, and everchanging context or ecology could be used to identify the many challenges of creating an inclusive learning environment.

**Theme 3. Teachers Need Support.** In the identification of this theme statements that were made by respondents were that “Class teachers need more support from external agencies such as SLT and OT” (R.15) and “proper supports including appropriate SNA and SEN support” (R.9). Primary school teachers need physical and human resources and support to create an inclusive learning environment. As part of this support Corcoran & Tormey (2013) proposed that EI should be used as part of teacher selection and development criteria to reduce burnout and enhance personal and professional well-being. While SEL and well-being have been referenced at policy level in many countries including Ireland (DES, 2018) research has found that many teachers do not feel that their training has prepared them to

model and implement SEL and well-being components in the classroom (Challen et al., 2014; Corcoran et al., 2018; Dulak & DuPre, 2008; Lendrum et al., 2013). The promotion of SEL could be facilitated through teacher training using the RULER method which provides as means of appreciating, accepting, and valuing diversity among all those in the school community and therefore contributes to the creation of positive and inclusive environments.

The qualitative and subsequent quantitative findings from this study explore the meaning and practice of EI and attitudes and intentions towards the creation of inclusive classrooms. Overall, the results of study have allowed for the determination to be made that the qualitative themes identified in the first phase could be generalised to the larger sample of respondents in the third quantitative phase. The results of this study have presented many interesting findings that have supported the results of research presented in previous literature. In addition, the findings of this study have added to the knowledge of the area of study, and have provided an insight into the EI profile, attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. Therefore, this study has a number of strengths, but is not without its limitations.

#### **9.4 Strengths & Limitations of the Study**

This section will examine the strengths and limitations of this exploratory study into the EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers.

The main strength of this study is that it makes a theoretical and practical contribution to the fields of study of EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion within the context of Ireland and among the specific sample of primary school teachers. This study is unique in its approach of exploring the relationship between EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. This study has the important characteristics of replicability and transparency. In this thesis comprehensive details have been presented on how the qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed, and how conclusions were reached which will permit other researchers to test the findings of this study. Of central importance is the fact that this research was undertaken with the approval and in accordance with the standards of research ethics committee in Trinity College Dublin.

A strength of this study is that the literature review acknowledged the previous research that has been undertaken in the area. The exploratory three-phase sequential mixed-methods approach was the best method to answer the research questions and allowed for the collection of qualitative data which confirmed and informed the development of the measure used in the quantitative phase. This provided the study with a depth and breadth of data and allowed for the determination to be made that the qualitative themes

identified in the first phase could be generalised to the larger sample of respondents in the third quantitative phase.

The measure of EI that was used was Wong and Law's Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS, Wong & Law, 2002) is one of the most widely used measures of EI. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) among the sample for this study was found to be satisfactory for each emotional intelligence dimension (Self-Emotion Appraisal = .83; Others' Emotional Appraisal = .80; Use of Emotion = .78; Regulation of Emotion = .88), as was the overall emotional intelligence total score ( $\alpha = .87$ ). To explore the sample of Irish primary school teachers' attitudes to inclusion and their intention to teach in an inclusive classroom, two measures developed by Sharma and Jacobs' (2016) which have been widely tested were used. These were the Attitudes towards Inclusion Scale (AIS) and Intention to Teach in Inclusive Classroom Scale (ITICS). The internal consistency of the AIS for this study was satisfactory for both the "Beliefs" ( $\alpha = .78$ ) and "Feelings" ( $\alpha = .89$ ) subscales. The internal consistency of the ITICS for this study was satisfactory for the "Consultation" subscale ( $\alpha = .70$ ); however, the "Curriculum Changes" subscale was below satisfactory ( $\alpha = .59$ ). Given that "Curriculum Changes" subscale consists of only three items, it is possible that the internal consistency is underestimated due to the Cronbach's alpha statistic favouring measures with a larger number of items (Graham et al., 2006; Raykov, 1997).

A strength of the study was that the interviews were conducted online, and the questionnaires were completed online. This resulted in several advantages including the fact that it facilitated the recruitment of

participants and respondents as it allowed for greater accessibility to a larger pool of potential participants and respondents, it provided scheduling flexibility for the participants for the interviews and the online questionnaire could be completed at a time and in a place that suited the respondent, and it was cost effective.

However, this study is not without its limitations. Firstly, the validity of the exploratory three-phase sequential mixed-methods approach needs to be addressed. The limitation of this design is that it is subject to the validity of the qualitative data and the validity of the quantitative scores. To address this potential limitation a rigorous approach was used by the researcher to analyse the qualitative data using the approach developed to thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2022). The findings used to confirm and develop the quantitative measure. This ensure that the researcher took advantage of the richness of the qualitative findings in combination with validated measure of EI and attitudes and intentions to inclusion.

It was recognised by the researcher that whatever sampling method that is used it is important that the individuals selected are representative of the whole population and for the purpose of this study this population was Irish primary school teachers. Convenience sampling was used which meant that participants for the interviews and respondents for the questionnaire were selected based availability and willingness to take part in the study. This non-probability sampling method is useful for this exploratory research study and convenient cost effective. The results from this study are valuable but it is recognised by the researcher that they are subject to significant volunteer bias as those who took part in the interviews and responded to take part in questionnaire may have a different EI profile and attitudes and intentions

towards inclusion as compared to those who were not part of the study. Also, the sample may not be representative of other characteristics.

A further limitation of this study is the representativeness of the sample of Irish primary school teachers who participated in the interviews and who responded to the questionnaire. Firstly, the sample was a convenience sample from one defined country, Ireland, and as such there is a need for more research based on random sampling from a wider geographic area. The relatively small sample size of Irish primary school teachers who participated in the interviews and responded to the questionnaire may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research using larger samples could be used to examine if the results can be replicated.

The qualitative results from this study were affected by the limitations present in the choice to use the online interview as a method of data collection. Creswell and Creswell (2018) highlighted the difficulties encountered in interviewing as the information provided is indirect as it is filtered through the views of the participants, the information is collected away from the natural field setting, the presence of the researcher may bias responses, and participants are not equally articulate and perceptive. To address some of these concerns the researcher used a semi-structured interview.

The quantitative aspect of the study used of a self-report questionnaire for data collection. This was subject to the limitation of social desirability bias which means that the sample of Irish primary school teachers may have felt a desire to respond in a manner consistent with perceived social conventions. While the use of an online survey had the



benefit that it was easily accessible to participants, however in the case of lack of clarity the opportunity to respond to question immediately was not available.

## **9.5 Recommendations**

Based on the previous literature and the findings of this study the researcher is making the following recommendations:

**Recognition and Celebration.** From the results of this study which was based on a sample of Irish primary school teachers, the DES should recognise and celebrate all primary teachers in the country as they demonstrate high levels of EI, positive attitudes to inclusion, and very favorable intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms. This will have many benefits in including the fact that higher levels of equity in learning outcomes are demonstrated in countries where teachers believe their profession is valued (Schleicher, 2015).

**Need for EI Training.** It was acknowledged by Hargreaves (2001) that teaching is an emotional practice and proposed by Chakravorty and Singh (2020) that EI should be recognised as a personal resource for teachers to be developed through training and development. Irish primary school teachers should be given training in EI while in college and at later stages throughout their careers to develop the relationship between EI and effective teaching practice and to enhance their personal and career success.

**Enhance Self-Efficacy and Reduce Burnout.** EI should be part of the selection, preparation, development, and appraisal criteria of Irish primary

school teachers to reduce burnout and to enhance personal and professional well-being.

**Social emotional learning (SEL).** It is recommended that evidence-based approaches to SEL such as RULER this become part of teacher training and continued professional development.

**Inclusion – Resources and Training.** Funding needs be made available by the DES to research the barriers to an inclusive education system and the resources to overcome these barriers to ensure inclusion and equity. Also, inadequate teacher training has been found to be a significant barrier in the transition to fully inclusive classrooms, it is recommended that teacher training should include the mainstreaming of special needs education across training courses and the development of targeted training. This is in accordance with the GC4 of the United Nations in 2016 it is recommended that all teachers need to be taught to be teachers of all and the learning experiences and environments in which children learn need to be accessible to all.

**Inclusion of Teachers.** The Irish primary school teacher needs to put at the centre of the discussion about inclusion in the classroom, as stated by (Shevlin & Banks, 2021) there is a need to build teacher capacity to encourage inclusive practice. It is recommended that different types of teacher training programmes are evaluated to develop positive attitudes, and the assessment of innovative inclusive programmes and the impact on the teachers involved in the implementation. Teachers must be recognised as central to the implementation of change and should be considered and

consulted by those who make decisions within the school and external policy makers.

**Support for Teachers.** Research findings reported by Sharma et al. (2023) have demonstrated that teachers have stronger intentions to use inclusive practices if they hold positive attitudes towards inclusion, and if they experience support from school leaders, colleagues, and the school culture more broadly and have a high degree of perceived control over their behaviour. This was supported by the findings from this research; therefore, the recommendation is made that teachers are given more support in terms of training, but also human and physical resources.

In making these recommendations the researcher is aware of the importance of the identification of the factors present in the external operating environment which surrounds Irish primary schools. The context needs to be recognised as it will present cultural, physical, political, and economic opportunities and constraints that will affect the implementation of the recommendations.

Arising from these recommendations is the need for further research into EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among Irish primary school teachers. Important areas for further research include the following:

- Exploration of the development of EI over the career of a primary school teacher,
- The impact on attitudes and intentions towards inclusion depending on the experience of the teacher

with students who have different types of disabilities in a range of settings,

- The development of a measure of the practice of inclusion at the level of the classroom and school in the Irish educational context.
- The benefit of the training of teachers to be teachers of all students,
- The impact on the well-being of teachers of adequate and appropriate EI and inclusion training,
- Continued investigation of the experience of exclusion, segregation, integration, and inclusion in Irish primary school education,
- Impact of the 2023 review of the EPSEN Act, 2004,
- Replicate this research with a sample of second and/or third-level education teachers Ireland.
- Replicate this research with a sample of primary school teachers in another country.

## **9.6 Time for Reflection**

As the researcher comes to the end of their four-year D.Ed. research journey, they believe that it has been challenging and worthwhile. As they reflect on the start date of September 2019 the thoughts that come to mind are concerns about taking such a big leap, getting used to studying in TCD, what the other students in the class would be like, and how life for their family would inevitably change during the years ahead. The modules that

were undertaken as part of the programme provided a great opportunity to become immersed in the thinking and approach of the School of Education which had a particular emphasis on inclusion in education. Also, they presented the time and space for the researcher to consider their position in relation their proposed area of study. However, the events of March 2020 that heralded the arrival of Covid-19 were to change the plans of people worldwide. The world of work and academia pivoted online and was to be experienced by people from their homes. Therefore, in their capacity as a lecturer it changed how work was undertaken and in their capacity as a student how they were to engage with the research process for some time ahead.

The new reality for the researcher was the need to recruit participants for online interviews in place of the planned face-to-face meetings. This challenged the researcher to consider the development of rapport with the participants online as so many of the nuances of an in-person meeting would be missing. However, by this time due to the experience and disruption of Covid-19 to everyday life, meetings online had become the new normal. What was missing for the researcher and people everywhere during the restrictions and lock downs were the valuable in-person interactions with family, friends, colleagues, and students, but despite this education at all levels continued.

As the world and researcher continued to adapt to the influence of the pandemic, their study progressed. They experienced a significant challenge in the thematic analysis of the six interviews from the sample of Irish primary school teachers, this is documented in Chapter 6. This was a very valuable learning experience and led to the development of knowledge and skills

about qualitative analysis. The use of the Qualtrics platform to present the questionnaire to respondents and to capture the data also provided valuable professional development.

The journey has been one of personal self-discovery and professional development. The researcher now appreciates the focus, dedication, commitment, and support from others that is required to reach the D.Ed. destination. The area of study selected by the researcher of EI and inclusion remains centrally important to them. Key things that have been learnt by the researcher are that teaching is indeed an emotional practice, more support and training should be given to primary school teachers, and that perceptions of inclusion are changing in education and society, but the researcher more than ever believes that inclusion means everyone everywhere, all the time. The change that the D.Ed. journey has made to the researcher is that it has refreshed and reenergised them to go forward with the confidence to make some changes that will hopefully make the world of education a little bit more emotionally intelligent and inclusive.

## **9.7 Conclusion**

The main conclusion that can be arrived by the researcher following the four-year exploration of emotional intelligence and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers is that Irish primary school teachers are fantastic. The results of the research have demonstrated that they are emotionally intelligent, have positive attitudes towards inclusion, and very favourable intentions towards inclusion. The three-phase sequential mixed methods approach used in this study provided a unique perspective into the relationship between EI and

attitudes and intentions towards inclusion among a sample of Irish primary school teachers. The thematic analysis of the rich qualitative data was used to confirm and inform the development of the quantitative measure of the questionnaire which resulted in the voices of many Irish primary school teachers being heard. The findings of this study provide support for the theories and previous studies of EI and inclusion, but also contribute to knowledge in the fields of EI and inclusion.

The main findings from the sample of Irish primary school teachers in this study demonstrated that EI Means Others and in particular the children in their class and school come first. The results of the WLEIS (Wong & Law, 2002) demonstrated that the sample of Irish primary school teachers in the study had a high level of EI. Overall high levels of EI were recorded for each of the four dimensions of EI of Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA), Others' Emotional Appraisal (OEA), Use of Emotion (UOE), and Regulation of Emotion (ROE) among respondents. However, they must ensure that they acknowledge themselves as a central part of the emotional practice of their teaching and further develop their self-efficacy to avoid burnout. This will enable them to carry the weight of responsibility that they bear in their role, but additional support is needed in the form of EI training over their career.

Inclusion was understood by the sample of Irish primary school teachers in the study as it "Means Everyone". Their attitudes to inclusion and intention to teach in inclusive classrooms was measured using Sharma and Jacobs' (2016) Attitude towards Inclusion Scale (AIS) and Intention to Teach in Inclusive Classrooms Scale (ITICS). The findings for the AIS subscales of "Beliefs" and "Feelings" suggested overall positive beliefs towards inclusive education. The findings for the ITICS subscales of "Curriculum

Change” (intention to implement curriculum changes) and “Consultation” (intention to consult with others and to further personal professional development) were very favourable. This demonstrated that the respondents have very favourable intentions to teach in a way that the classroom becomes an inclusive classroom using curriculum changes and consultation.

An interesting finding was that there was a statistically significant negative relationship was found between AIS Beliefs subscale and years of teaching experience. This indicates that as the respondents’ years of teaching experience increases that their score for the “Belief” subscale of the AIS decreases. In addition, the findings from this correlation found no statistically significant relationship between either the AIS “Feelings” or the ITICS subscales and years of teaching experience. Therefore, the respondents’ “Feelings” in terms of their attitudes to inclusion and their “Feelings” about “Curriculum Change” and “Consultation” are not affected by the years spent in the classroom.

Their positive attitude and favourable intentions towards inclusion provides a strong foundation for the continued implementation of inclusive education in Ireland. However, as is the case with the need for the continued development of the emotional skills required by teachers, training is needed for all teachers to be teachers of all. These results indicate that there is a need to provide training for Irish primary school teachers to further recognise and strengthen the important connection between EI and attitudes and intentions to teach in inclusive classrooms which should be provided during initial teacher education and throughout the teacher’s career. As can be concluded by AuCoin et al. (2020) that “making an inclusive school a reality is work



that is always evolving and is never fully accomplished” (p. 325), but the benefits for all are worth the effort.

As the researcher comes to the end of this study on EI and attitudes and intentions towards inclusion, they consider the two concepts of EI and inclusion to be as Euripides described as like “two friends, one soul”, as for the researcher they collectively embody the invaluable use by Irish primary school teachers of emotions intelligently, every day, to ensure that inclusion means everyone.

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