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Inclusive Education and Distributed Leadership:
A Qualitative Research Study of Primary Schools
in New South Wales (Australia) and Slovakia

Jozef Miškolci

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2013
Author’s Declaration

This is to certify that:

I. this thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy Degree
II. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used
III. this thesis has approximately 86,000 words.
IV. no part of this work has been used for the award of another degree.
V. this thesis meets the University of Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requirements for the conduct of research.

Signature(s): 

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Date: 01/07/2014
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Abstract

This thesis explores how research participants perceive and understand the concepts of inclusive education, distributed leadership and their relationship in practice in two public primary schools: one in New South Wales (Australia) and one in Slovakia. These two schools were identified by external informants as good practice examples of inclusive education. To explore participants’ understanding of these concepts, their relationship and how they manifest in practice in the two schools, the study used qualitative research methods based on interviews and group discussions collected through ethnographic procedures.

The thesis scrutinises the research problem of whether practising distributed leadership in any way hinders, assists or is irrelevant to practices of inclusive education in the two schools through two theoretical paradigms: organisational and socio-political. When looking through the prism of the organisational paradigm, the thesis exposes two main understandings of inclusive education, distributed leadership and their relationship, which offer two different answers to the research problem of this thesis. In the first understanding, practising distributed leadership principally neither assists nor hinders achieving goals of inclusive education. The concept of inclusive education is narrowly seen as a set of goals that target students exclusively, and not adult school stakeholders, while distributed leadership is only seen as a set of processes with no specific goal. In the second understanding, distributed leadership is constructed as an indispensable component of inclusive education. This understanding broadens the target group of inclusive education from exclusively students to all school stakeholders, and extends distributed leadership beyond its narrow frame of only including processes to also encompass democratic goals and inclusive values as well. The thesis exposes that both perspectives are held in the
researched schools, which may influence how inclusive education and distributed leadership are practised across the sites.

In contrast, when looking through the prism of the socio-political paradigm, the thesis reveals that research participants presented a limited understanding of inclusion, while positioning the main problem either in individual children or schools as organisations. This thesis discusses particular wider social and political conditions or contexts of the two researched primary schools which may significantly constrain and shape their practices of inclusion and distributed leadership and also how these practices relate to each other.
Abbreviations

ABS     Australian Bureau of Statistics
ADHD    Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
EBD     Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
EFA     Education for All
ESBD    Emotional, Social and Behavioural Difficulties
EU      European Union
IEA     International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements
IEP     Individual Educational Plan
LAP     Learning Assistance Program (in NSW)
LST     Learning and Support Team (in NSW)
MCEETYA Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (in Australia)
MŠ SR   Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic (in Slovak: Ministerstvo školstva Slovenskej republiky)
NAPLAN  National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (in Australia)
NR SR   National Council of the Slovak Republic (in Slovak: Národná rada Slovenskej republiky; Slovak parliament after 1993)
NSW     New South Wales
NSW DEC New South Wales Department of Education and Communities
NSW DET New South Wales Department of Education and Training
OECD    Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA    Programme for International Student Assessment
SEN  Special Educational Needs
SERAP  State Education Research Application Process (*in NSW*)
SNR  Slovak National Council (*in Slovak: Slovenská národná rada; Slovak state parliament during the Czechoslovak federation before 1993*)
SSP  School for Special Purposes (*in NSW*)
ŠŠI  State School Inspection (*in Slovak: Štátne školské inšpekcia*)
ŠÚ SR  Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (*in Slovak: Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky*)
TASR  News Agency of the Slovak Republic (*in Slovak: Tlačová agentúra Slovenskej republiky*)
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ÚIPŠ  Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education (*in Slovak: Ústav informácií a prognóz školstva*)
ZVPP  Institution for Educational Guidance and Prevention (*in Slovak: Zariadenie výchovného poradenstva a prevencie*)
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Chapter One: Introduction

Context of the Study

The question of how to define and practise inclusive education has challenged academics and teaching practitioners all over the world for more than two decades. Addressing this question has become even more important recognising the continued growth in the identification of special educational needs (SEN) in many countries such as Australia (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011) and Slovakia (Žovinec & Seidler, 2010). The concepts of inclusion and inclusive education emerged in Anglo-American countries in the mid-1980s and early 1990s as a critical response to the existing arrangements of special education and the integration model. Proponents of inclusive education have criticised the concept of integration as referring to a mere placement of children categorised as students with SEN into mainstream schooling without any substantial attempt to combat hidden exclusionary forces within the mainstream education and society. They were making a case that integration may become exclusionary and discriminatory and have unfavourable consequences for these students (Armstrong, Belmont, & Verillon, 2000, pp. 70, 72; Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2002, p. 144), and critiqued integration for being “inherently assimilationist” (Corbett & Slee, 2000, p. 141). In contrast, the concept of inclusive education attempts to address the exclusionary pressures within mainstream schools, which requires a profound reconstruction of schooling in all its aspects, that is, in “the nature of the curriculum and teaching methods, school ethos and overall expectations” (p. 141).

The term inclusive education emerged as a new concept that distances itself from some basic premises of integration. Inclusive education advocates argue that integration still assumes a deficit in students, categorising them according to various diagnoses so they could be individually treated, though in a mainstream school setting (Slee, 2011, p. 110). “Integration requires the objects of policy to forget their former status as outsiders and fit
comfortably into what remain deeply hostile institutional arrangements” (p. 107). In this sense, integration represents an attempt to rectify and eliminate differences between students. It invites students to adjust and assimilate to the majority. In contrast, inclusive education does not differentiate students into any categories – for instance into those who have or not have SEN or disabilities – but respects and celebrates difference (Horňáková, 2006, p. 3; Zborteková, 2010, p. 123).

**Origins of the concept of inclusive education.** Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou (2011) distinguish four origins that brought the concept of inclusion into life. First, they claim that parents, teachers and other advocates of students with disabilities challenged the existing system of integration which was posing limits on the level of students’ impairments for them to be integrated in mainstream schools. In addition, integration required an elaborate system of assessment of SEN which determined the amount of resources for various forms of individual interventions (e.g., students being withdrawn from the regular classroom). Second, the emergence of the Social Model of Disability, introduced by Michael Oliver (1996), significantly challenged general thinking about disability. The model states that it is not the person’s impairment that disables them to actively participate in social life, but it is the way society responds to them which disadvantages and excludes them. To simply explain how the model might apply to an educational context, it might mean, for instance, that a person using a wheelchair is not disabled by her/his own physical impairment, rather the physical construction of school building disables her/him by preventing free movement in its space. Third, the introduction of free-market logic, including competition, accountability, control and choice into educational systems, provoked a broader critique of these educational reforms and how they affected the ways schools managed difference. Fourth, the work of international organisations, especially the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
Organization (UNESCO), played a pivotal role in establishing inclusive education as a relevant policy agenda for all its member states and gave a political relevance for researching it (Armstrong et al., 2011, pp. 30-31).

**Inclusive education as a global policy agenda.** Inclusive education can be traced as a global policy agenda to 1990, when the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien (Thailand) appealed to policy makers around the world to adopt mass schooling as their primary agenda for education. Subsequently, in 1994 the UNESCO *Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1994) established education as a fundamental right for every child and proclaimed that those with SEN must have access to regular schools with an “inclusive orientation” (p. ix). These initiatives culminated in conducting the biggest review of education in history, in which 183 countries participated, and resulted in adopting a *World Declaration on Education for All* (EFA) at the World Education Forum in Dakar (Senegal) in 2000 (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2010, p. 45). Finally, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 December 2006, which obligates signatory countries to “ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning” (Article 24). The Convention was ratified by Slovakia in 2010 (Lechta & Balážová, 2011) and Australia in 2008 (Callaghan & Ryan, 2012), including New South Wales (NSW) as one of the Australian states and territories. In this way, both Australia and Slovakia committed themselves to practise *inclusive education*.

**Inclusive education as a policy agenda in NSW and Slovakia.** Even before adopting the Convention, Australia introduced policies and legislation which are considered to comply with the commitments defined by these international policy documents. In Australia, school-based education is the responsibility of individual state and territory governments. Notwithstanding, the federal Australian government has a unique fiscal
position in being the primary source of funding for all states and territories and may adopt policies which have a dominant legal power (Tearle, 2012). The *Disability Discrimination Act* (Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department, 1992), *Disability Standards for Education* (Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department, 2005) and most recently the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) are a few examples of federal policy documents which relate to the concept of inclusive education (see Appendix Z). For instance, the last mentioned document obligates all Australian government school sectors to “provide all students with access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability, socioeconomic background or geographic location” (p. 7).

NSW, as Australia’s largest state in terms of population (ABS, 2013d) and gross domestic product (ABS, 2012a), also has to comply with these international and federal policy documents. It supposedly does so by educating most students in regular classes of regular schools (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011; Graham & Sweller, 2011). Nevertheless, while all students with *special learning needs* or *learning difficulties* have to be educated in regular classes (NSW DEC, 2013a; NSW DET, 2007), students with *confirmed disabilities* can also be educated in segregated environments of support classes in regular schools or special schools (NSW DEC, 2013a; NSW DET, 2004b).

In comparison, the Slovak Republic also committed itself to comply with the requirements of the international policy documents promoting inclusive education (see Appendix AA). In addition to these, the *Constitution of the Slovak Republic* in Article 42 guarantees all children the right for free education (at the primary and secondary level). This right is strengthened in the *Anti-discrimination Act No. 365/2007* (NR SR, 2004) promising equal treatment in the field of education. In 2008, the Slovak Parliament also approved a
crucial document which aimed at reforming the whole educational system – the *School Act No. 245/20008* (NR SR, 2008). Although this School Act is supposed to meet the international commitments to ensure practising inclusive education in Slovakia, it also establishes an option of educating students in segregated environments. Students with SEN can be “integrated” not only in regular classes of regular schools, if rights of other students are not reduced by this (NR SR, 2008, Article 29), but they can also be educated in special classes within regular schools or in special schools. The School Act also defines a category of students coming from *socially disadvantaged backgrounds*, who can be educated in preparatory year classes and subsequently in “specialised classrooms”, established solely for this category of students (ŠŠI, 2011, pp. 15-16).

A limited number of academic studies critiqued these policies of NSW (Australia) (e.g., Graham, 2012; Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011; Graham & Sweller, 2011; Graham, Sweller, & Van Bergen, 2010; Tearle, 2012) and Slovakia (e.g., Žovinec & Seidler, 2010), demonstrating their potential to perpetuate exclusion in schools of the respective countries. While “tracking” inclusion and exclusion in NSW government schools, Graham and Sweller (2011) aptly point out that the judgment of whether an educational system has realised *inclusion* depends on where one sits on the “inclusive/special education spectrum” (p. 942). For some people, the enrolment of students in special schools or special classes within regular schools can be a manifestation of inclusion, while for others inclusion means educating *all* students solely in regular classes of neighbourhood schools. The latter understanding of inclusive education is thus grounded in a different belief system compared to special education (Erten & Savage, 2012, p. 222). If defining exclusion as a reduction of participation in the cultures, curricula and communities of local mainstream schools (Booth, Ainscow, & Dyson, 1997, p. 337), the former understanding of inclusion becomes problematic. As a result and in line with the critical studies mentioned above, it becomes
problematic to consider whether the current state policies of NSW and Slovakia really ensure inclusive education.

As Tearle (2012) in her analysis of learning support policy in NSW demonstrates, the efforts of changing state policies to ensure inclusion should be seen merely as a series of “add-ons” to mainstream education (p. 1). These efforts have not radically restructured the mainstream schooling system, curriculum and pedagogy, but only attempted to provide a greater support which is still aimed at remediating, normalising or assimilating students who do not perform in their school at a level considered as normal. In other words, policy makers might have attempted to redistribute access to education but have not taken away anything from the mainstream (Slee, 2011). The current state policies of NSW (Dempsey, Foreman, & Jenkinson, 2002; Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011; Tearle, 2012) and Slovakia (Žovinec & Seidler, 2010) are based on the individual psycho-medical perception that a problem resides in a student. The student is perceived as intrinsically flawed or having a deficit which should be managed (Allan, 1996; Fulcher, 1989). In this sense, the category of special educational needs or learning difficulties can be viewed as an umbrella term not for the purpose of support but to manage “troublesome” student populations (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 96).

Inclusive education as an academic field. The scholars who subsume themselves under the academic field of inclusive education do not scrutinise the exclusionary potential of state policies only. From the emergence of inclusive education as an academic field, academic research has grown exponentially in various aspects of inclusion in all levels and forms of education (Erten & Savage, 2012). If distancing from the special education belief system which locates the problem in a student as her/his intrinsic deficit, the field of inclusive education most commonly locates the problem in three main areas: (1) in teaching styles or strategies within a classroom; (2) in schools as organisations with their particular culture, policies and practices; or (3) in the wider social and political context.
Inclusive education as a teaching problem. With regards to the quest of defining the best inclusive teaching practices within a classroom, there has been a proliferation of published texts specifically aimed at classroom teachers, offering them practical advice to support an increasingly diverse range of learners in their classrooms (Black-Hawkins, 2012). These texts, however, vary greatly in the actual usefulness for teachers and in the extent they manage to free themselves from the special education belief system. In this respect, Smith (2006) introduces a useful distinction between “deficit-oriented” texts and “competence-oriented” texts. While the former texts are premised on the psycho-medical model of remediating “the (often) irreparable individual”, the latter understand all learners in their wholeness and complexity and focus on their strengths (p. 93).

Inclusive education as an organisational problem. Academic literature which focuses on making schools more inclusive organisational environments explores various aspects of school policies, cultures and practices (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). This literature acknowledges and strengthens the importance of researching inclusive curriculum and teaching practices within a classroom. Nevertheless, it also claims that inclusive culture and values have to permeate all aspects of school life, not just curriculum and teaching (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Carrington, 1999; Corbett, 1999). In order to become more inclusive and be able to address the unique characteristics of diverse learners, schools have to reorganise themselves, which will require teachers to extensively collaborate and create problem-solving teams (Clark, Dyson, Millward, & Robson, 1999b, pp. 158, 168). The whole organisational and professional culture has to be redefined from a bureaucratic task-mastering one to active problem solving and collaboration (Skrtic, 1991, p. 148).

These academic texts also argue that leadership plays a crucial role in the process of reorganising schools. When referring to school leadership, a large portion of these texts recommend that schools adopt “an inclusive approach to leadership”, which means to avoid
autocratic leadership manoeuvres, rigid hierarchy and to involve teachers and school community in decision-making processes (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 99). In other words, they recommend minimising the autocratic aspects of school leadership and enhancing the processes of distributed leadership (Ainscow et al., 2006, pp. 183-186; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Under this particular point lies the primary inspiration for conducting this study. This research focuses on exploring the convergence of two distinct academic areas of research: inclusive education and distributed leadership. It aims to investigate the various understandings of these two concepts and what it means for school stakeholders to put them into practice. Most importantly, it aims to explore what is the relationship between these understandings and practices of inclusive education and distributed leadership.

However, it should be pointed out that it is only the academics within the field of inclusive education who go beyond their field and enter a distinct one of school leadership or distributed leadership specifically. In other words, none of the studies on distributed leadership explicitly addresses the goals and issues of inclusive education. Distributed leadership is explored either as a purely descriptive concept which can be applied in the analysis of any kind of organisation (Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009; Spillane, 2010), or as a strategy for school improvement understood primarily in terms of enhancing students’ educational outcomes (Harris, 2009, p. 3; Hartley, 2010, p. 278). Although improving students’ educational achievements might be considered as a goal relevant for academics in the field of inclusive education as well (Black-Hawkins, Florian, & Rouse, 2007), it most certainly is not the only one. Consequently, there is great potential for further academic exploration into how the practices of distributed leadership may relate to the goals and practices of inclusive education.

Inclusive education as a social and political problem. There is a group of academics in the field of inclusive education who admit the importance of exploring inclusive teaching
and classroom strategies or attempts to reorganise schools to become more inclusive organisations, but who also believe that the main problem might be located in the wider social and political context instead. These academics are convinced that language which school stakeholders and policy makers use, matters and can be used as an instrument of power (Allan, 2008; Fulcher, 1989; Slee, 2011). Several of these scholars critique various state policies – as it was already mentioned in case of NSW and Slovak educational policies – in order to expose their inconsistent and contradictory potential, which may perpetuate existence of exclusion in schools instead of ensuring inclusive education as they are often presented in public (Armstrong et al., 2010; Armstrong, 2005; Fulcher, 1989; Tearle, 2012). These academics uncover the incongruous impact of various pervasive themes used not only in policies, but also in everyday interactions in schools, such as marketisation, efficiency and effectiveness, educational excellence and league tables, on inclusive practices in schools (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011; Slee, 2011). In short, they claim that any compensatory measures at a classroom or school level – as important and valuable as these may be – will not bring any large scale sustainable change in schools towards greater inclusion unless the social and political level is addressed (Armstrong et al., 2010).

**Aims of the Study**

This research study aims to contribute to the academic debates on how to make schools more inclusive environments for *all* students and other members of a school community. Because I consider the academic efforts to address the issue of inclusion at a localised school level at least as important as the efforts addressing barriers to inclusion at the wider social and political level, this study is informed by academic contributions from both theoretical positions. On the one hand, because the state policies which proclaim to ensure inclusive education in schools have not proved to be so in practice, I can understand the arguments of the theorists promoting localised school schemes to combat discriminatory
practices (Ainscow et al., 2006; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). On the other hand, I also agree with the arguments that it is contestable to put all the responsibility on school stakeholders to practise inclusion considering their limited potential to reform any systemic matters such as curriculum, models of learning support, funding mechanisms, or assessment and reporting (Tearle, 2012). This might be considered as disputable because the systemic level might pressure school stakeholders to put into practice mechanisms which sustain and perpetuate instances of exclusion in schools (Fulcher, 1989; Slee, 2011). Therefore, this study is fundamentally positioned within the academic field of inclusive education, which also questions the assumptions of special education.

Besides this broader objective, this research project aims to explore the relationship between understandings and perceptions of practices of inclusive education and distributed leadership. This topic is inspired by the academic texts viewing inclusive education as an organisational endeavour that recommend distributed leadership as a way to enhance and support inclusion (e.g., Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). Because these texts fail to provide any comprehensive theorisation of how these two concepts relate to each other in various contexts, this study aims to contribute to filling this gap in the academic knowledge and instigate further research in this area.

To gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership, qualitative research methods based on interviews and group discussions collected through ethnographic procedures were employed. These were used in two public primary schools identified by external informants as good practice examples of inclusive education: one in New South Wales (Australia) and the other in Slovakia. This study first examines how research participants (school staff members, parents, and students) perceive the practice of inclusive education and distributed leadership in their schools. It then scrutinises the various understandings of these concepts and of their
relationship, which introduces different implications for the practice. In this sense, although this study is essentially based in and contributes to the academic field of inclusive education, it also surpasses its boundaries and aims to address academic literature on distributed leadership as well. In this thesis, I argue that academic texts in the field of inclusive education, which have already attempted in a very limited way to research the relationship between inclusion and school leadership, have not substantially engaged with the academic literature that focuses specifically on distributed leadership. This study aims to do so in a greater and more substantial way as well.

By using qualitative research methods based on interviews and group discussions collected through ethnographic procedures, and thus focusing on the micro-level of particular schools in two different contexts, this study attempts to meet the call of prominent theorists within the academic field of comparative education (e.g., Crossley, 2008; Crossley, 2010; Crossley & Vulliamy, 1984; Crossley & Watson, 2009; Hoffman, 1999; Masemann, 1990, 1999; Welch, 1993, 2001, 2003). These academics claim that large-scale quantitative research can provide only a very limited understanding of complex social reality and can be insensitive to cultural and social specificities of particular regions. In other words, this research aims to be conducted and presented in a context-sensitive manner.

**Significance of the Study**

This study can be considered as significant and original in a number of ways. Most importantly it brings together two separate areas of research: inclusive education and distributed leadership. While some academic studies within the field of inclusive education have already attempted to theorise aspects of school leadership, they either overemphasised the role of the principal in making schools more inclusive environments (e.g., Angelides, Antoniou, & Charalambous, 2010; Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell, & Capper, 1999; Riehl, 2000), or they promoted non-hierarchical organisational structures, collaboration and involvement
of all school stakeholders in decision-making processes – all of which being aspects of distributed leadership (e.g., Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). First, none of these authors have actually acknowledged that these two positions might be perceived as contradictory. Second, they do not substantially engage with the academic literature on distributed leadership. Third, even academics who promote distributed leadership recommend principals to be “autocratic” in instances when some school members do not comply with inclusive values (e.g., Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004, p. 140). This study can be considered a valuable contribution to academic knowledge for attempting to address this theoretical contradiction and lack of engagement with existing scholarly materials on distributed leadership within the specific academic field of school leadership and management.

This research project can also be viewed as significant for employing the particularly time-demanding ethnographic data collection procedures which, as a result, may bring detailed and valuable data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Riemer, 2012; Wolcott, 2008). For instance, my immersion in the researched environment for an extended period of time might have enabled me to gain the insider’s perspective (Riemer, 2012, p. 165) and might have minimised my influence on participants’ usual behaviour in their environment (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 102). Because of this immersion, I had a unique opportunity to establish trusting relationships with the research participants who, as a result, might have expressed more genuine and critical opinions than they would have done if not knowing me at all (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; O'Reilly, 2008).

This research might also be considered as significant and unique for its attempt to explore the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership in two different cultural and political contexts, which may add particular value to its findings. Bakhtin (1986) claims that “a meaning only reveals its depth once it has encountered and...
come into contact with another, foreign meaning” (p. 7). By conducting this research as a comparative study, particular aspects of practices and meanings presented in one research site might have stayed unnoticed if not exposed to significantly different practices and meanings. In addition, because one might expect more commonalities in practices and understandings between two schools within the same social and political context of one country, exploring the concepts of inclusion and distributed leadership in two different countries might have introduced much greater variety of how research participants understand them and put them in practice.

Finally, this study can also be regarded as having practical value for teaching practitioners and other school stakeholders. In the processes of analysing the findings, this study discusses implications for putting into practice inclusive education and distributed leadership at the organisational level. In addition, it explicitly argues that school stakeholders should not be deemed fully responsible for not being capable of eliminating all instances of exclusion occurring in their schools. It identifies particular wider social and political pressures which may significantly constrain their endeavours to practise inclusion and distributed leadership.

**Summary of the Chapter**

This introductory chapter primarily attempted to provide an overall political and academic research context for this study. First it explored the social, political and theoretical origins of the concept of inclusive education. It then attempted to position this research study within the global policy initiatives promoting inclusive education and policy documents specific for NSW (Australia) and Slovakia, which are often presented as ensuring inclusive education in schools in the respective countries. Subsequently, the chapter briefly positioned this study within the academic field of inclusive education. Building on this work, it delineated the main aim of this study to be an exploration of the relationship
between understandings and perceptions of practices of inclusive education and distributed leadership in two public primary schools – one in NSW and one in Slovakia – in a context-sensitive manner.

**Organisation of the Thesis**

The thesis is organised into eight chapters. This first chapter states the aims and rationale for this study, and provides the background context in which to place and interpret this research. Chapter Two reviews academic literature on inclusive education and distributed leadership in detail. It defines the theoretical framework and informs and supports the aims of this study. Chapter Three explores the methodological approach underpinning this study, and particular decisions about the methods used to investigate the research problem. Chapters Four, Five and Six present the findings of this study. Chapter Seven discusses the results of the research and positions them in the context of the existing literature. The final chapter summarises and draws conclusions about this study. Besides delineating limitations of this study and possible areas for future research, it primarily highlights the contributions to academic knowledge that this research provides.
Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter aims to review academic literature relevant to this research study, and presents the theoretical framework that has been used as a lens to inform my thinking about the data. In particular, the chapter explores academic literature which deals with the concepts of inclusive education and distributed leadership. It attempts to examine these two distinct bodies of academic literature and search for interrelationships between them. Because the two fields consist of studies that may adopt very different and diverse theoretical perspectives, the chapter formulates the theoretical framework that has determined the whole research process (choosing a research methodology, data collection techniques, data analysis methods and data interpretation). I also elucidate reasons why this study is designed as a qualitative research project. To achieve this, the chapter is divided into three sections: (1) inclusive education; (2) distributed leadership; and (3) the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership.

Each of the three sections attempts to review the literature and situate this research project in its context. Past research in the relevant areas is summarised and evaluated, and an overview of controversies and inconsistencies within these fields is provided. To be more precise, the first section on inclusive education primarily discusses the controversy between two theoretical approaches. The first theoretical approach revolves around researching schools and their practices (organisational paradigm). The second approach critiques the broader socio-political context that impacts on schools’ practices and policies (socio-political paradigm). The second section explores two dominant conceptualisations of the term distributed leadership: the normative and descriptive one. Finally, the third section reviews studies which bring the concepts of inclusive education and distributed leadership together. These studies are thematically closest to the research problem of this thesis. The research problem is ultimately specified in this section.
Although this chapter attempts to look at literature in two academic areas of research – inclusive education and distributed leadership – in this thesis they do not represent equal importance. Besides the fact that the two fields significantly differ in the accumulated amount of research, in this thesis they are not explored to the same extent either in depth and breadth. The field of inclusive education represents the primary reference and starting point for the entire research project. The aim of exploring practices and policies related to inclusive education lies at the very heart of this study. This study should be perceived primarily as a contribution to the academic field of inclusive education. Nevertheless, I hope that it can be considered as a valuable contribution to the field of school leadership as well.

**Inclusive Education**

This part of the chapter looks at existing literature in the field of inclusive education. It focuses on the theoretical disputes among various groups of academic works that are considered to constitute the field. To be more particular, first, it unpacks in detail two contradictory theoretical positions, which are adopted by various academics in the field of inclusive education. Second, since one of the most significant differences between these two positions is how they understand and use the concepts of *policy* and *practice*, these concepts are scrutinised in detail as well. Third, this part of the chapter also presents a theoretical framework relevant for this thesis. This leads into a discussion on defining *inclusive education* and an introduction of research questions for this thesis.

**Theoretical controversies within inclusive education.** As already delineated in Chapter One, the academic field of inclusive education is a relatively recent one. Existing literature which is considered to constitute the academic field of inclusive education can be classified into several groups according to various criteria such as:
• unit of analysis: (1) classrooms; (2) schools; (3) state policies and educational systems; (4) concepts and theories;

• research methods: (1) quantitative; (2) qualitative; (3) mixed (Erten & Savage, 2012); and

• theoretical paradigms: e.g., (1) psycho-medical; (2) organisational; (3) socio-political (Clark et al., 1999b).

It is difficult to determine where the emphasis in the academic field of inclusive education is situated within these three axes of classification. With regards to the unit of analysis, the primary interest of the field is to discuss and possibly reform and change practices of schools and classrooms towards greater inclusion. At the same time, studies about policies, educational systems, concepts and theories constitute a significant segment of the research within the field (Slee, 2011, pp. 63-64). On the matter of research methods, there is a great diversity of methodologies used to study inclusion, ranging from a multifaceted selection of experimental studies, case studies and ethnography, through to action research (Allan & Slee, 2008; Erten & Savage, 2012). That is to say that a substantial proportion of inclusive education literature has adopted qualitative research methods. This might be anticipated taking into consideration that one of the original reasons for emergence of the field was a qualitative critique of special education and integration practices. The research of inclusive education pointed out that although the quantity of integrated students in mainstream schooling may be rising in some respects, the quality of their experiences and educational practices can be still discriminatory and segregational in a range of more subtle ways (Slee, 2011). Having said that, several studies that are concerned with the complexities and qualitative aspects of education do make use of quantitative data. To provide some examples these may scrutinise quantitative data from surveys about teachers’ attitudes on inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011); data on
admissions to special schools and special classrooms (e.g., Graham, 2012; Graham & Sweller, 2011; Graham et al., 2010); quantitative data from experimental designs studying effectiveness of inclusive education (Lindsay, 2007); or statistical data of supranational organisations such as Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and in particular its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (e.g., Alacaci & Erbas, 2010; Field, Kuczer, & Pont, 2007). Notwithstanding, as Erten and Savage (2012) argue, the greater concern than the diversity of methodologies employed in studies on inclusive education might be the lack of methodological information reported in each study.

In his attempt to review existing literature on inclusive education, Slee (2011, pp. 63-64) distinguishes three groups of academic works. He calls the first group *neo-special education*. These texts still use the premises of special education (or integration), but at the same time refer to the concept of inclusive education. The second group constitutes texts that conceptually critique special education while being framed in various theoretical perspectives (e.g., disability studies, feminism, postmodern theories). The third group comprises of texts freed from special education premises that discuss particular and practical areas of interests such as curriculum, teaching and learning, teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion, educational leadership, and assessment. Since this thesis aims to investigate the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership, it can be primarily considered as a contribution to the third group of academic works.

In a certain way, this classification of Slee may be paralleled with an older one formulated by Clark, Dyson, Millward, and Skidmore (1995). The latter differentiate three theoretical paradigms in the field of inclusive education: *psycho-medical, organisational* and *socio-political* (p. 78). Although their classification was formulated already in the mid-nineties, I am convinced that it has not lost its relevance. In some aspects I consider this
classification more useful for the purposes of this thesis than that of Slee. The reasons for that will be explored later in the chapter.

To unpack the first theoretical paradigm of Clark et al. (1995), their conception of the psycho-medical paradigm can be equated with Slee’s neo-special education literature or essentialist theoretical perspective (Slee, 2011, pp. 63, 67). Goode (1994), in his text on deviance, defines essentialism this way:

Essentialism is the view that all phenomena in the world have an indwelling “essence” that automatically and unambiguously places them in specific, more or less unchanging categories. . . . Essentialists are comfortable with using the term “true” and “real” when referring to categories or their representatives. Certain inherent, unchanging characteristics define, for example, “true” alcoholism or “true” homosexuality. (Goode, 1994, p. 32)

In this sense, the essentialist perspective is often associated with the functionalist worldview (Skrtic, 1991, p. 152; Welch, 1985) and positivism (Welch, 2003, p. 36), which are based on scientific and objectivist claims about reality. This worldview arose from the Enlightenment era in 18th century Europe and the American colonies. It attempted to uncover objective truths about various natural phenomena by using rational, scientific and supposedly value-neutral methods. In this respect, the psycho-medical paradigm attempts to discover “pathological impairments” or “deficiencies” in individuals as their particular essences. It attempts to remedy and treat the individual’s “defects” by formulating various diagnoses and applying appropriate interventions. It aims to eliminate difference. The “pathologies” of individuals are seen as “naturally” occurring and are perceived as reasonable justifications for excluding the individuals from the regular educational settings (Slee, 2011, p. 67). This approach has been referred to as a deficit model (Thomas & Loxley, 2007, p. 3).
The second theoretical paradigm formulated by Clark et al. (1995) – the organisational paradigm – distances itself from the psycho-medical paradigm. Clark, Dyson, Millward, and Robson (1999a) hold that the organisational paradigm can be best represented by the work of Thomas Skrtic in the US (1991, 1995; Skrtic, Horn, & Clark, 2008) and Mel Ainscow in the UK (1991; 1997; 1999; 2007; Ainscow et al., 2006; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Nevertheless, many other authors can be associated with this paradigm as well (also e.g., Carrington & Robinson, 2006; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Reynolds, Hopkins, Potter, & Chapman, 2001; Rouse & Florian, 2006; Stainback, Stainback, Moravec, & Jackson, 1993; Villa, Thousand, Nevin, & Liston, 2005). All these authors critique the psycho-medical or essentialist paradigm, and claim that students’ difficulties in learning do not arise out of their own deficit but because the school as an organisation inadequately responds to those students. This was why the name organisational paradigm was adopted. In order to accommodate all learners the school needs to reorganise to enable teachers to collaborate in problem-solving teams (Clark et al., 1999b, pp. 158, 168) within an alternative school organisational structure and professional culture which Skrtic (1991) terms “adhocracy” (p. 148).

The researchers within the organisational paradigm are interested in the processes of how schools can be changed and improved towards becoming more inclusive environments. In this respect, compiling the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011), published in its first edition in 2000, can be considered as a valuable contribution to the literature framed in the organisational paradigm. The Index can be perceived as a form of manual for schools to create inclusive cultures, produce inclusive policies and evolve inclusive practices. Nevertheless, the authors are cautious to present it as a manual since they are convinced that inclusion is an unending process – an ideal which cannot ever be fully reached (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, pp. 20, 40). Notwithstanding, they do not substantially theorise why
inclusion is a never-ending process or that instances of exclusion are an inevitable part of this process in any school (Hansen, 2012)

Finally, Clark et al. (1995) specify the third group of academic texts within the inclusive education field, which they name as the socio-political paradigm. The studies that can be subsumed under this paradigm have in common a message that “structural inequalities at the macro-social level are reproduced in institutional form” (Clark et al., 1995, p. 78). In this sense, the term socio-political should not imply that society or state policies are the exclusive focus of analysis of these studies. This name should rather suggest that these authors put an emphasis on social and political factors as having the major impact on practices at school and classroom level. They imply these factors should not be ignored or sidelined as organisational paradigm theorists may appear to do. Thus, the unit of analysis of the studies within the socio-political paradigm can just as easily be state policies or conceptual questions of education as particular teaching practices in a classroom environment. To simplify the matter, the main differences or controversy between the organisational and socio-political paradigm theorists lies in which area has a bigger impact on practices in schools and which area should receive more focus to bring inclusion to schools. While the organisational paradigm appears to focus on the agency of particular school stakeholders and does not excessively dwell in the bigger social and political picture, the socio-political paradigm scrutinises the latter as an unavoidable area which has to be changed if we wish to bring a sustainable and large-scale change towards inclusion in schools (Armstrong et al., 2010).

The academic works that could be associated with the socio-political paradigm may significantly differ from each other but have one point in common. They differ, for instance, in the ways and extent they engage with various theories (e.g., materialist, social constructionist, postmodernist theories, disability studies) (Slee, 2011, pp. 66-67) and use
their methodological tools; in how they see the world and field of education; and in what they see as needed in order to bring about a change towards inclusion in education. Despite this diversity, the theorists of the socio-political paradigm seem to converge in the argument that schools and teachers in particular are embedded in the present social, political, and language-related contexts, which may fundamentally undermine endeavours to practise inclusive education at school level (e.g., Allan, 2008; Armstrong et al., 2010; Fulcher, 1989; Grimaldi, 2012; Slee, 2011; Thomas & Loxley, 2007).

To be more exact, the authors of the socio-political paradigm illuminate the negative impact of pervasive themes – or discourses, if borrowing the concept from Foucault – of marketisation, accountability, efficiency, educational achievements, league tables and school choice (Allan, 2008, p. 110; Armstrong et al., 2010, pp. 20-21; Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011, p. 280; Slee, 2011, p. 94; Tearle, 2012, p. 63). These, on the one hand, are intended and presented to motivate schools and teachers to increase educational achievements of all students, including students categorised as having SEN or disabilities. On the other hand, in this context schools face fierce competition amongst each other where parents are becoming clients to be fought for and attracted. Low academic achievements associated with any school will create a bad image and discourage parents to enrol their children there. Therefore, the question is: what should the schools do with students who underperform in narrowly defined standardised tests? Justifying their decisions by the discourse of professionalism (Slee, 2011, p. 97; Tearle, 2012, p. 25) and expert knowledge of special education (Thomas & Loxley, 2007, p. 19) which ascribes a deficit to a particular underperforming student, segregation in special schools or classrooms invites itself as a possible solution to the dilemma. According to the socio-political paradigm, the social, political and language-related pressures all significantly constrain schools’ and teachers’ potential to practise inclusive education.
While acknowledging this adverse situation, studies within the socio-political paradigm seem to resist a nihilistic position. One group of academics see a way out of this situation by “re-radicalizing the inclusion project as an education imperative” (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 113) which requires redefinition of the whole purpose of education for individuals (p. 138). Slee (2011) puts it that “[i]nclusive education is not a technical problem to be solved through an ensemble of compensatory measures. . . Inclusive education ought to declare itself as a far more radical and creative enterprise” (p. 108). This group of authors does not agree with compromising the dilemmas that the current legal and political conditions bring as Norwich (2008) suggests in his “dilemmatic approach” (p. 217). They critique Norwich’s account by claiming that attempts to resolve dilemmas by finding optimal balances and trade-offs insufficiently interrogates the conservatism and foundations of special educational needs and the culture and structure of learning (Armstrong et al., 2010, pp. 110, 113; Slee, 2011, p. 109). Although disagreeing on how to resolve the current situation, these two approaches – radical and pragmatic – both agree on the point that social and political conditions significantly shape school and classroom practices.

These authors receive a lot of criticism from special education theorists for being full inclusionists (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2012; Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995). The argument of special education theorists is that mainstream education environments might not benefit all students. Unfortunately these critics seem to ignore that inclusive education theorists think the same that the mainstream education in its current form can be very hostile to some students and might not benefit them at all. The critics seem to ignore that socio-political paradigm theorists call for the foundational change of the education system in order it to be welcoming and celebrative of student diversity where the current hostilities would be dismantled. The inclusive education theorists defend their position that “inclusion as a radical project has not been implemented and therefore the claim that it has failed
unsubstantiated” (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 113). It is only in this sense that they do not see room for segregated forms of schooling that special education promotes.

In contrast, the organisational paradigm theorists are not concerned with socially radical change. They direct their entire attention to the challenge of how to practise inclusive education at a school and classroom level regardless of the outside social, political and language related pressures or influences. In some aspects they express consent with the tenets of the socio-political paradigm. For instance, both paradigms critique the deficit thinking that a problem lies within a student. They also acknowledge that the “standards agenda” (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 114) and “performance indicators” (Ainscow, 2005, p. 119) may reinforce exclusive tendencies in schools and reduce the chances for developing more inclusive responses to student diversity. Nevertheless, their position evidently decouples from the socio-political paradigm in their claim that:

amidst the apparently non-inclusive aspects of ’standards agenda’ there is also a strand that may be used in the service of the development of inclusion, and which may be linked to the broader strands of the government’s inclusion agenda. . . . We suggest, therefore that the effects of those concerned to put inclusive values into action must not only be directed at the radical critique of educational policies, important as such critiques will continue to be. Rather, we must concentrate on trying to expand the inclusive aspects of current policy and support teachers in taking greater control over their own development. (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 192)

The organisational paradigm theorists see themselves as holding an “optimistic” view that inclusive practices can emerge under appropriate organisational conditions regardless of any social or political circumstances. In other words, they distance themselves from the “pessimistic” view that perceives school developments as too vulnerable to outside policy pressures (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 190).
The organisational paradigm theorists argue that distributed leadership is one of the appropriate organisational conditions that supports inclusive practices (Ainscow et al., 2006, pp. 183-186; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). The recommendation that schools should adopt an “inclusive approach to leadership” – collaborative instead of autocratic, avoiding rigid hierarchy, involving teachers and community in decision making – constitutes a great portion of the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 99) and re-emerges as a theme in various other writings associated with the organisational paradigm (e.g., Ainscow et al., 2006, pp. 183-186; Ferguson, Kozleski, & Smith, 2005). This particular recommendation informed the formulation of the research problem of this thesis. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged at this point that these authors do not explicitly claim that there is a direct causal relationship between distributed leadership and inclusive education. They do not simplistically assert that in order to have inclusive practices at school, the school leadership must be distributed. Nor do they argue that this is the only and most important condition for inclusive practices to emerge in schools.

In this theoretical controversy between the organisational and socio-political paradigms, the authors associated with the latter explicitly raise their critique of the former. This critique is mostly based on the argument that matters of education are interlinked in very complex and intricate ways with conflicting policy agendas and frameworks, and with local historical, social and cultural traditions. As a result, in many ways these foster exclusion and discrimination in practice and ways of thinking by the general public, including teachers. All these pressures cannot be simply construed as problems that can be solved at a school level by appropriate school measures that the *Index for Inclusion* proposes (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 118). Putting all the responsibility of practising inclusion on teachers, while forcing them to face the “tyranny of transparency” and “accountability regimes”, might induce in them frustration, guilt and exhaustion (Allan, 2008, pp. 14-18).
Even if some schools manage to practise some form of inclusive education, these “success stories” solely depend on a particular constellation of fortunate conditions which are not sustainable (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 110). The good practice of one school most probably does not have any major impact on other schools and the educational system as a whole (p. 34). In other words, if the context – political, cultural, historical – does not foster inclusion in a systemic way, these good practices of “inclusive schools” will continue to disappear just as quickly as they emerge.

After this elaboration of the classification of inclusive education literature into three theoretical paradigms – psycho-medical, organisational, and socio-political – originally formulated by Clark et al. (1995), I address the question why this classification is more relevant for this thesis than the one formulated by Slee (2011, pp. 63-64). Although both classifications differentiate three groups of academic contributions, they significantly differ in one aspect. Slee distinguishes three groups of academic work within inclusive education: (1) neo-special education; (2) critiques of special education; and (3) particular areas of interest in education freed from special education axioms. This classification implies one main controversy happening in the field. It states that there is one camp (first group) of academic works that operate with the term inclusive education, but they have not freed themselves from the deficit thinking of special education. Then that there is an opposing camp (second and third group) which has freed from this thinking and/or explicitly focuses on critiquing it. If we take into consideration the origins of the field of inclusive education being the critique of special education and integration, it is debatable whether we should consider the first group to be an authentic part of the academic field at all. In contrast, the classification proposed by Clark et al. (1995), which differentiates three theoretical paradigms – (1) psycho-medical; (2) organisational; and (3) socio-political – implies that besides the controversy over the deficit essentialist model (first against second and third
group) there is also a controversy between organisational (second group) and socio-political (third group) paradigm. In this thesis I refute the neo-special education or psycho-medical model as a theoretical paradigm which goes against the very basis upon which the field of inclusive education was founded. The more relevant question for this thesis is on which factors we should focus our academic attention if we wish to research school practices and/or if we wish to bring about a change towards more inclusive practices in schools. Should we change society, language, policies on the one side, or introduce particular practices and values in schools as organisations on the other, in order to make schools more inclusive? In this question lies the main difference between the organisational and socio-political paradigm, if somewhat simplifying the matter.

In a complex way, unpacking the research problem of this thesis oscillates between the stances of organisational and socio-political paradigms. The underlying idea of the research problem – whether distribution of school leadership in any way relates to inclusive practices – was inspired by the recommendation of some representatives of the organisational paradigm (e.g., Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Nevertheless, the practices of distributed leadership and inclusive education and their relationship may be significantly shaped by various social and language constructions or policies, which may become a focus of academic research. In this research study, I focus on the school as an organisation, its stakeholders and what meanings they construct about their practice, values and various concepts such as inclusion and leadership. I consider these constructed meanings of school stakeholders to be unavoidably informed and shaped by the dominant social norms and tradition, language forms, and state policies. In this aspect, my theoretical framework is informed by the socio-political paradigm. While agreeing with their argument that to bring a sustainable large-scale change of schools towards inclusion we need a radical social and political shift in education, my interest in this thesis is not to explore this
goal. I focus more on what particular meanings get constructed about inclusion and leadership in a contained unit of a school and how these might shape school’s practices. While doing so, the social and political contexts within which these meanings get constructed are fully acknowledged. In other words, the thesis explores how schools negotiate their meanings to make their practices more inclusive within its particular socio-political context, and not on how or whether these contexts need to first be shifted so the school could find it easier to become more inclusive. As a result, this thesis does not have an ambition to merge the organisational and socio-political paradigms, which I consider as impossible, but merely to balance and dynamically shift from one perspective to another when interpreting the collected data in the two researched primary schools.

In Slovak academic literature, the process of adopting and scrutinising the concept of inclusive education is much more recent than in English-speaking developed countries. It started to emerge in Slovak academic texts around 2005 (Horňáková, 2006). In this respect, it should be taken into consideration that in what was then Czechoslovakia, integration of students diagnosed with having SEN was legislatively allowed only after the fall of Communism in 1990 (see Appendix AA). Until then, all these students were educated either in special schools or special classrooms within regular schools but only very exceptionally in regular classrooms (Horňák, Kollárová, & Matuška, 2002). Because of the geographic location of Slovakia (and the Czech Republic), developments in academia in the field of education have been primarily informed by its Western neighbours of Austria and Germany. In German-speaking countries, the field of curative education is often associated with inclusive education. Curative education also has a long academic tradition in Slovakia (from the 1960s), and represents one stream of how inclusive education permeated Slovak academia (Horňáková, 2010b). Only in the last decade did English language academic
literature surpass the German language contributions and, thus, also started to inform the field of education.

As a result of these influences from English and German-speaking academic texts and global political agenda set by UNESCO, currently the concept of inclusive education is relatively well-established in the education faculties of all major Slovak universities (Žovinec & Seidler, 2010, p. 179). One could already identify Slovak academics adopting either the organisational (e.g., Janoško, 2009; Sádovská, 2011) or socio-political (e.g., Horňáková, 2010a; Kudláčová, 2011; Lechta, 2010a; Sabolíková, 2011; Žovinec & Seidler, 2010) paradigm in their writings. Nevertheless, because the concept was accepted only recently, it is still foreign to Slovak legislation, public understanding and the vast majority of practising teachers (Lechta, 2011). This thesis engages with some of these Slovak academic texts on inclusive education in various sections as well.

This part of the chapter attempted to map out the existing literature in the field of inclusive education and to expose the main theoretical controversies within it. In detail it explored the controversy between the literature that is still anchored in the essentialist assumptions of special education and the literature that is freed from them. Within the latter group, two paradigms – organisational and socio-political – were differentiated that lead to another internal dispute within the academic field. It was presented that this study does not aim to merge these paradigms but to balance and dynamically shift from one to another when interpreting the data.

**Policy and practice of inclusive education.** When exploring the differences between the organisational and socio-political paradigms, it is essential to scrutinise how these paradigms understand and use the concepts of policy and practice. In this part of the chapter, these two concepts are defined, noting that the dividing line between policy and practice may be rather blurry, if not overlapping. After that, the policies and practices of
inclusive education at state and school level are explored through the prism of socio-political
and organisational paradigms. When discussing policies at the state level, concrete examples
of current policies in NSW and Slovakia are delineated.

*Conceptualising policy and practice.* Various academics in social and political
sciences grappled with the issue of why particular policies do not get “implemented” in
practice (e.g., Ball, 1994, 2008; Bowe & Ball, 1992; Fulcher, 1989; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).
Because the academics in the inclusive education field who adopted the organisational
paradigm generally avoid scrutinising policies at the state level, it is primarily the theorists
within the socio-political paradigm who offer some theorisation of the concepts of *policy*
and *practice* (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2010; Slee, 2011; Thomas & Loxley, 2007). To a great
extent the conceptualisation of policy and practice of these inclusive education theorists is
informed by the scholarly work of Gillian Fulcher (1989). For the purposes of this thesis, I
consider it valuable to briefly review her theoretical account on policy and practice in
relation to inclusive education.

Gillian Fulcher (1989) critiques the linear understanding of policy processes. To
demonstrate this, she uses the term *implementation* in inverted commas (p. 3). She argues
that the top-down linear model puts the blame on bureaucracies and people that inadequately
“implement” governments’ intentions. She claims that this model merely implies that the
government is in charge and has the real power (p. 6).

Fulcher (1989) conceives *policy* as taking various forms – not just written (e.g., laws,
reviews, reports, regulations), but also stated (e.g., at parliament meetings, school meetings,
teacher union meetings, teacher-parent encounters) and enacted (e.g., teaching practice).
Accordingly, she holds that policy is made at all levels – not just at state or national levels.
She perceives policy as an exercise of power – as a capacity to make decisions and act
accordingly. In other words, Fulcher significantly broadens the concept of policy. This way
she dissolves the distinction between policy and implementation, or policy and practice, since in her understanding all educational practices are policies and all policies are a form of social practices that constitute social life (pp. 5-15).

Fulcher (1989) claims that “[p]olicy is made at all levels; no one level determines another, though it may establish conditions for other levels” (p. 16). In this sense, school staff meetings or other meetings and practices at school level can be considered as particular “arenas of struggle” (pp. 4-6) relatively autonomous from the higher levels. Fulcher holds that “[i]ndividual schools can be democratic in a context which is generally undemocratic” (p. 254). In comparison, Ball (Ball, 1994; Bowe & Ball, 1992), who also theorises the concept of policy, seems to develop even further Fulcher’s message about why policies at the state level often do not get translated at lower levels. He claims that policies as texts are never fully clear, closed and complete. They are a result of various compromises, and their meaning is in a state of “becoming”, constantly shifting and changing. Policies as texts do not usually specify what we need to do in each specific situation; rather they define circumstances (the rules of the game), goals, processes that still allow space for differing options and interpretations – often even very conflicting ones. They contain “gaps” which allow for confusion and “play” in interpretation to happen. This way policies may bring very different “first order and second order effects” (Ball, 1994, pp. 15-25).

While Ball’s theoretical account can be considered as closely related to the socio-political paradigm, in one particular point Fulcher’s work oscillates between the theoretical positions of the organisational and socio-political paradigms. On the one hand, she claims that it is “social actors”, not structures or totalising concepts such as class, that make decisions and policies (Fulcher, 1989, p. 14). In this sense, she does not take away the individual responsibility (or agency) of particular people – for example, teachers whom she calls “highly powerful policy makers” (p. 265) – who have vested interests and tactically
deploy them through discourses. On the other hand, she makes visible how various
government policy strategies (and/or wider institutional conditions) with their hidden or
conflicting discourses construct conditions at other levels (school or classroom) (p. 248). In
other words, she holds that government policies do not “determine” practices at other levels;
while at the same time, they have “a significant effect” (p. 269). I understand this tension in
Fulcher’s account that by allowing people (social actors) to have agency, she also allows for
reconstructing practices/policies to be more democratic. In her opinion for this change to
happen, it presumes that people understand political processes and learn to “decode” the
discourses that they incorporate (p. 278).

**Policies and practices related to inclusive education at the state level.** In this part of
the chapter, literature about inclusive education policies and practices at the state level are
explored. This exploration goes in line with the conceptualisation of policies and practices as
presented in the previous part of the chapter. In this sense, policies at the state level define
the “rules of the game” (Ball, 1994, p. 21) and “institutional procedures” (Fulcher, 1989, p.
274) affecting the policies and practices of schools. Academic literature exploring current\(^1\)
educational policies of NSW and Slovakia will be briefly reviewed to demonstrate some of
the points that the general literature on policies of inclusive education is making.

Various authors within the socio-political paradigm identify particular discourses or
goals within policies that may inhibit practising inclusive education in schools (e.g.,
Armstrong et al., 2010; Fulcher, 1989; Slee, 2011; Tearle, 2012; Thomas & Loxley, 2007).
Fulcher (1989) calls these the “divisive discourses” (p. 9). Admitting the existence of

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\(^1\) By *current* legislation or policies at state level of either NSW or Slovakia, I refer to policies that
were valid in the period of data collection in the two researched schools – in NSW (July to November
2011) and in Slovakia (November 2011 to April 2012).
divisive discourses explains why some policies that are proclaimed to be pro-inclusive do not develop in their “second order effects” (Ball, 1994, pp. 24-25) as inclusive, but rather segregational and discriminatory. This set of literature identified the following discourses that could be called “divisive” or that may create systemic obstacle for schools to practise inclusion:

(1) Individual deficit discourse (psycho-medical, essentialist, (ab)normalcy);

(2) Professionalism discourse (special education as a professional expertise);

(3) Educational excellence discourse (high performance, high educational achievements, high standards); and

(4) Market discourse (accountability, efficiency, students as human capital, education as mass production).

The main point of the authors writing about the individual deficit discourse is that perceiving a student as having individual deficit in her/his *essence or nature* constitutes a major stumbling block to practise inclusive education. This particular perception of students puts all the blame on them and creates a picture of a personal trouble which can be remedied only to some extent by professional interventions (Fulcher, 1989, p. 27). This discourse creates a *truth* vision that divides some students to be *normal* (without deficit) and others as *abnormal* (with deficit). As long as we make this division, segregation and discrimination of the *abnormal* ones might offer itself as a justifiable option (Tearle, 2012). Ascribing particular special education (psycho-medical) categories to students is criticised by inclusive education theorists as institutionalising discrimination against students called disabled or having SEN (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 23; Slee, 2011, pp. 69-70). Several of these theorists propose a counter discourse to the individual deficit discourse, which celebrates the differences and diversity of students without a need to categorise or label them (Slee, 2011, p. 69; Tearle, 2012, p. 19).
The NSW policies\(^2\) presented in the official web pages of NSW Department for Education and Communities distinguish seven categories of *confirmed disability* eligible for funding support: intellectual disability, physical disability, vision impairment, hearing impairment, language disorder, mental health conditions or autism. These are identified in students and assessed by the school counselling service (NSW DEC, 2013a) (see *Appendix AD*). Besides confirmed disabilities, NSW policies also define *students with learning difficulties* (NSW DET, 2007) without specifying particular categories under this umbrella term. In the period of data collection, the *Learning Assistance Program* (Martin, Jackson, & Burke, 2006) was in action, which enabled students to be eligible for learning support without requiring a formal diagnosis of SEN or disability while tying funding for learning support to the results of national standardised testing. In her work, Tearle (2012) demonstrates that despite this non-categorical approach, the policy (program) has not been freed from the notion of *normal* or *average* student and an *abnormal* student that requires the support. Graham and Jahnukainen (2011) consider this non-categorical approach of NSW to be a positive step. Nevertheless, because a strong parallel system of special schools

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\(^2\) All NSW policies are subordinate to policies adopted at the national Australian level. There is a range of policy documents in Australia which define how students called disabled or having SEN are educated in public primary schools. The overarching one – *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department, 1992) – imposes duties on schools not to discriminate against a student on the grounds of her/his disability in enrolment or providing access to school benefits and curricula. Under this Act *Disability Standards for Education* (Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department, 2005) were formulated to further specify rights, obligations and measures to make education accessible in various areas for students with disabilities (see *Appendix Z*). These national policies are translated into more concrete policies attached to particular funding mechanisms at the level of individual Australian states and territories.
and special classes for students with confirmed disabilities (see Appendix AF) still exists in NSW, the individual deficit discourse remains to dominate the policies and practices and hinders inclusive discourses (p. 269).

The Slovak School Act No. 245/2008\(^3\) uses the terms special educational needs\(^4\) (SEN) and students from socially disadvantaged background\(^5\) (NR SR, 2008). SEN are further unpacked in nationally-determined curriculum documents called State Educational Programs that are specifically defined for twelve disabilities\(^6\). In this way, the law defines a different curriculum for students diagnosed with SEN, which makes it deeply rooted in the psycho-medical way of thinking. The law also conditions the funding of schools upon the

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\(^3\) Since the fall of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1989 and after the separation of the republic into Slovakia and Czech Republic in 1993, the School Act No. 245/2008 represents the very first complex educational reform in Slovakia. It was approved in 2008. (See Appendix AA)

\(^4\) In the Slovak language, the law uses the term “špeciálne výchovné a vzdelávacie potreby” which speaks not only of special educational needs but also of “výchovné” needs. The term “výchovné” is often translated as educational, but it stands also for upbringing, nurture, care, training and discipline. Nevertheless, since the term doesn’t have one exact equivalent in English, for the purposes of this thesis I will be using the simplest possible translation special educational needs or its abbreviated form SEN.

\(^5\) In practice, it is the children of the Roma ethnic group that usually fall under the category of students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (Hapalová & Daniel, 2008; Salner, 2004). In Slovakia, people who are labelled as having a Roma ethnic background constitute around 7% of the Slovak population (Vaňo, 2001), which is the second largest ethnic minority in the Slovak Republic after citizens self-identified as Hungarians (around 8.5%) (see Appendix Y).

\(^6\) (1) Autism; (2) deaf-blind; (3) sick and health weakened; (4) mental disability; (5) communication skills disorder; (6) activity and attention disorder; (7) behavioural disorder; (8) hearing disability; (9) physical disability; (10) multiple disability; (11) developmental learning disorder; and (12) visual disability.
number of students diagnosed with particular categories of SEN attending the schools (Vláda SR, 2008; Žovinec & Seidler, 2010).

Accordingly, when referring to the literature which analyses educational policies in NSW and Slovakia, it demonstrates that to a great extent they are both based on individual deficit discourse. Both NSW and Slovak state educational apparatuses seem to be designed so that if some students are not capable of managing the content of education with the pace and tools determined for an average or normal student, they should leave the mainstream educational path (Graham & Sweller, 2011; Žovinec & Seidler, 2010). It appears that in both countries there still dominates the model of deciding between “is it/ isn’t it possible to integrate the student” over “how to include the student” (Žovinec & Seidler, 2010, p. 175).

Besides the individual deficit discourse, scholars in the area also identify a related discourse which they call the professionalism discourse. This discourse institutionalises and sets out particular practices which pass the responsibility of dealing with the students, who are not perceived as average or normal students, onto the professional experts in the field of special education (Fulcher, 1989, p. 261; Slee, 2011, p. 97). Nevertheless, as Fulcher (1989, p. 264) points out, not only bureaucracy but also teacher training institutions support this discourse of professionalism which requires a separate pedagogy and a separate profession to teach particular students. She holds that the discourse of professionalism makes a claim (through language) to expert knowledge, which is tactically deployed to control all educational practices (p. 261).

In Slovakia, it is an external expert institution which diagnoses students with various SEN categories and which defines their educational future. The assessment for SEN is always conducted by an Institution for Education Guidance and Prevention (see Appendix AE) and never by internally employed school counsellor, special education teacher or other school staff members. This might leave an impression that schools are not or should not be
capable and competent to deal with the diversity of their students but they always need or should need an external professional institution to help them. Besides diagnosing a child, these institutions also recommend a particular educational path to her/his parents, be it “individual integration” in a regular classroom, or education in a special classroom within a regular school or in a special school (see Appendices AE and AF). An important aspect in this procedure is the fact that a high percentage of these institutions are established as a component of a particular special school (Žovinec & Seidler, 2010, p. 178). To secure their future existence, these diagnosing institutions might be biased to recommend their special school as the best educational path for the student under assessment. This systemic arrangement might function as a self-preserving mechanism for professional special education facilities in the country.

With regards to the discourses of educational excellence and market, these two highly correlate. They both are based on the “personal choice” theories (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 20) and/or “school choice” theories (Slee, 2011, pp. 150-151). These celebrate individuals’ (parents’) right to choose for their child a particular educational facility in the marketplace of schools as a “commodity” or a “consumption good” (Ball, 1994, p. 51). The schools need to compete between each other to attract “clients” (parents, children). To do that, policies at the state level imply criteria that the schools should compete over. These are coupled with the market discourse in which the most important criterion appears to be “production” of highly employable persons (human capital theory) (Tearle, 2012, p. 25). This should be expressed in increasing students’ educational achievements (performance and standards) and educational excellence. For this purpose, the educational outcomes have to be measured somehow, so the schools could be transparent, efficient and accountable to their clients (and the state bureaucracy apparatus) (Ball, 2008, p. 189). The market discourse is often criticised as a powerful “control” mechanism of practice in schools and classrooms.
in which overt coercion was replaced by “self-steering” and an appearance of “autonomy” and “self-determination” (Ball, 1994, pp. 54, 60). The market discourse is also considered to be a manifestation of “neoliberalism” (Grimaldi, 2012; Welch, 2010b, pp. 243-246) and its focus on “competitive individualism” which accepts the inevitability of substantial inequalities and injustices in society (Slee, 2011, p. 173).

The conflict of market discourse with inclusive education comes at the point when particular academic achievements – often narrowly defined in terms of test results and/or public national league tables of school performance (Slee, 2011, p. 6) – establish “a narrow understanding of normality” (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 95). This becomes an incentive for professional intervention and/or segregation. The transfer of students to special schools would secure for the school a better standing in the league tables. In this policy context, “[s]chools have become particularly choosy about which students are likely to improve their inspection and examination performances. In this context disabled students become a threat and parents are counselled to look for more suitable educational settings or choices” (Slee, 2011, p. 71).

Although theorists from both camps – organisational and socio-political – reflect on these policies on educational excellence and standards, there is one significant difference in how they see them work in relation to inclusion. The organisational paradigm claims that although these “external imperatives” might threaten inclusion, they might also catalyse change in schools towards inclusion (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 117). In contrast, the socio-political paradigm theorists hold the radical position that the market (competition) discourse has to be abandoned altogether and/or challenged to its core (Slee, 2011; Thomas & Loxley, 2007), otherwise the emergence of inclusive practices will remain an exceptional phenomenon rather than a sustainable and systemic one. Justifying the market and educational excellence discourse as sometimes nudging the schools to rethink their practices
does not systemically invite schools to practise inclusion, rather the opposite. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that it does not make it impossible either.

In relation to the NSW policies, Graham and Jahnukainen (2011) critique the introduction of the new Commonwealth government’s National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). NAPLAN assesses the performance of Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students in reading, writing, grammar, language conventions and numeracy in all Australian public schools (see Appendix AB). The students’ achievements or performance of particular schools are made public on the *My School* website (http://www.myschool.edu.au/). This practice of measurement of school/students’ performance and competition between schools puts an immense pressure on them not to be publicly perceived as underperforming so they could attract enough students to sustain their existence.

In Slovakia, the standardised national testing exists as well, but does not receive such a media attention as NAPLAN in Australia. The National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements, which is a state organisation founded by the Slovak Ministry of Education, organises the so-called Testing 9. It externally assesses educational results of every student who is in Year 9 of primary school – the final year of primary schooling (see Appendix AC) – in mathematics and the Slovak language. Results from Testing 9 for each school are made public on a specific website (http://dataportal.nucem.sk/vysledky/testovanie.php), which allows comparing the results with other schools in Slovakia. Despite this, Testing 9 has not gained as much public and academic attention (V. Lechta, personal communication, August 16, 2013) as the NAPLAN in NSW has. It does not seem to have much significance and relevance for the public. Nevertheless, after the introduction of “school choice” for parents in Czechoslovakia in 1990, parents can choose for their child a public primary school
outside of their catchment area. Together with a slow emergence of private schools, a specific form of competition between all primary schools has developed. It is mostly based on word-of-mouth and on the success of students in being accepted to particular elite secondary schools. Occasionally some newspapers attempt to identify the “best” primary schools based on all these criteria (e.g., Nejedlý, 2011), which confirms that Testing as a form of standardised testing does not dominate public debate. Nevertheless, since the fall of Communism, competition between schools has been institutionalised, and it might gradually bring about a greater gap in educational achievements between schools (Koršňáková & Kováčová, 2007).

Besides discussing discourses that may make practising inclusion in schools more difficult, academics also scrutinise discourses that might be conducive to inclusion. The most recurring discourse in the inclusive education literature in this respect is the human rights discourse (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Barton, 2000, p. 1). It is based on an assumption that it is a human right for every child to attend a neighbourhood school and be adequately included in the curricula and social community of the school. In this respect, both NSW (Australia) and Slovakia have adopted (and/or ratified) several policies as texts that anchored this right (see Appendices Z and AA). Although these policy documents often delineate various limitations and definitions which may constrain this right – Slee (2011) calls them “clauses of conditionality” (p. 76) – both countries do have legislation

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7 In the 2011/2012 school year, 94% of all students attended public primary schools, 5% church primary schools and only 1% private non-religious primary schools (ÚIPŠ, 2013c) (see Appendix AF).

8 Graduates of primary schools (at the age of 15) are being accepted to a particular secondary school either on the basis of their grades in final reports or entrance exams organised by the secondary school. The latter process is common particularly for academically oriented grammar schools which prepare their students for tertiary education (see Appendix AC).
establishing the right for *all* students to be included in regular schools in their catchment areas.

Despite that, various academics raise some doubts about the effectiveness of human rights discourse in relation to practising inclusive education in schools. Although human rights can be a powerful tool to justify inclusion (Armstrong et al., 2010, pp. 45, 112; Fulcher, 1989, pp. 30-31), some academics point out that the rights discourse predisposes people to use it to address their “individualistic concerns”, but it does not secure a sense of belonging, meaningful participation, social connection and respectful relationships with others which might more probably bring them contentment and happiness than “individualism” (Thomas & Loxley, 2007, p. 151). Vlachou (2004) claims that rights discourse is so abstract and vague that putting it in practice is often sidelined by other more dominant and pragmatic discourses. Tearle (2012, p. 59) adds that unless the rights discourse remains rooted in the discourse of individual deficit, it cannot bring about a systemic change of celebrating diversity.

Another recurring discourse supporting inclusion is the discourse of individual needs. This discourse is founded on the idea that to support all students we need to respond to their individual needs. It counters the one-size-fits-all principle. Both NSW and Slovak jurisdictions related to inclusive education are based on the needs discourse (Sabolíková, 2011, p. 192; Tearle, 2012, p. 60). In the NSW policy document *Assisting Students with Learning Difficulties* (NSW DET, 2007), paragraph 1.3 states: “Students experiencing difficulties in learning will have differing levels of educational need”. The *School Act No. 245/2008* (NR SR, 2008) labels particular students as having special educational needs.

Some academics raised doubts about the needs discourse as well. The trouble with the needs discourse is that it does not shift the focus from an individual and her/his difference or otherness to the norm (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 20). It may perpetuate a
perception that some students *need* to be segregated or remedied because of their individual deficit (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 16). The concept of needs might imply dependence and reliance on professionals (Fulcher, 1989, p. 276). In other words, although the needs discourse may be intended to support inclusion of all students with their diverse needs, at the same time it may have the potential to be used for an entirely opposite purpose – segregation of students.

The celebration of students’ diversity is another frequently referred to discourse that is considered to be conducive to inclusive practices in schools (e.g., Slee, 2011, p. 69; Tearle, 2012, p. 19). As already mentioned, it is often presented as an alternative to the deficit discourse. Nevertheless, it is not explicitly present in any of the educational policies at the state level in Slovakia or NSW.

This attempt to briefly reflect on the current educational legislation of NSW and Slovakia through the perspective of divisive and inclusive discourses may put the proclamations of some politicians that their policies are pro-inclusive into a different light. In both countries, for instance, legislation allows enrolling a child with a confirmed *disability* (NSW) or *SEN* (Slovakia) not only in regular classes,⁹ but also in special schools and support classes in regular schools (see *Appendix AF*). To be enrolled in a mainstream school in a catchment area of the student’s residence is considered as her/his right in both countries. Thus, it is implied that it has a priority over other options. That is one of the reasons this policy is interpreted as a pro-inclusion policy. If we admit that there are some

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⁹ The Slovak legislation uses the term *integration* to name this option of enrolling a child with SEN in a regular school (NR SR, 2008). There is no reference to the terms *inclusion* or *inclusive education* in any policy document at the state level in Slovakia. The NSW policy documents do not use the term *integration*, but avoid using *inclusive education* as well.
divisive discourses (e.g., individual deficit, professionalism, educational excellence and market) presenting themselves in the current legislation or policies and practices at the state level which may dominate and overpower the inclusive discourses, it might be problematic to claim that these policies really ensure inclusive education at all levels of education in these two countries.

Policies and practices related to inclusive education at school and classroom level. After exploring policies and practices at the state level, in this part of the chapter policies and practices related to inclusive education at school and classroom level are scrutinised. Practices (and policies) of inclusive education at the school and classroom level are the primary focus of the organisational paradigm. The *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) is an embodiment of the endeavours to define which practices (policies) at the school and classroom level can be considered as inclusive. The authors claim that their focus in not on practices and forms of provision, but values such as equity, participation, community, compassion, respect for diversity, sustainability and entitlement (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 23). Their approach practically involves a process of making explicit the values that should underlie actions, practices and policies, and learning how to better match these values with our actions. They hold that inclusion in education is a process of putting values into action. This statement, however, brings them back to practices when they state that a particular set of practices are so integral to their conception of inclusion that they actually have to define them (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 26).

They perceive inclusion to be about enhancing presence, participation and achievements of all students (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 25). The first term, *presence*, refers to the open access and admission of all students without exception. To enhance the presence of students in the school also means for them not to exclude or expel any student on any grounds, not to group students according to their abilities, and that physical space of the
school is accessible. The second term, participation, relates to the active involvement of all students in the curricula and learning process, in cultures and local communities. This way they all can experience “success in learning” (Ainscow, 1995, p. 66) and be treated and praised as same-valued individuals – not only by the teaching staff, but by other students as well. A favourable culture and attitudes of staff toward inclusion are a precondition to achieving this goal. Staff members should collaborate among each other, school leadership should be distributed and students should be encouraged to learn collaboratively in order to experience supportive friendships (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Finally, the term achievement encompasses a broader range of educational achievements besides the academic ones, such as social, emotional, creative and physical forms of achievements. Although this elaboration suggests that some particular practices can be considered as inclusive, the authors of the Index for Inclusion claim that true ideal of an inclusive school is not reachable.

The list of practices or indicators, which are elaborated in detail in the Index, can be critiqued in that although some of them may appear as integral to the conception of inclusive education, they do not necessarily need to be experienced by all their participants as inclusive. To give two examples: (1) the practice of staff meetings which are intended to enhance collaboration and involvement in decision making can be perceived by some members as a formality act which is rather used by the principal to push through her/his agenda and ideas; and (2) the collaborative learning can be experienced by some introverted children as not inclusive of their specific individuality that prefers to work and learn individually. That is to say that any practices proposed as inclusive do not need to be experienced or perceived as such – either they are performed only as a formality or they do not take into account the diversity of individuals, their characteristics and inner experiences. However, it should not be implied that trying to define potentially inclusive practices is not a worthy endeavour. This thesis simply aims to unpack their complexity and point out the
territories where they can be perceived and experienced not only as inclusive but also exclusionary.

In contrast, the socio-political paradigm theorists do not propose any particular practices at school level that may be considered as inclusive. They primarily focus on how language and the state level policies may affect school and classroom level practices and policies. For example, they might make visible that the procedure (rule of the game) – that was defined (institutionalised) by state policy in NSW and Slovakia – of assessing a child and labelling her/him with a particular disability or SEN, invites school stakeholders to follow this rule or procedure. Schools can resist and not let a child be assessed, but, by doing so, they would deplete themselves of potential resources. If the socio-political theorists do talk about school and classroom practices, they rather focus on the exclusionary ones which mostly arise from the wider socio-political contexts. They are usually very eager to refute any practices associated with special education, such as individual interventions by a professional (withdrawals), ability groupings, teacher’s aides assisting one child, or special classrooms or units (e.g., Slee, 2011; Thomas & Loxley, 2007). This thesis attempts to scrutinise even these practices and discuss whether they cannot be experienced by some of their participants as inclusive as well.

So far in this chapter various theoretical controversies in the academic field of inclusive education were discussed. This thesis refuted the psycho-medical model and was specifically situated in-between the organisational and socio-political paradigms. Although the main focus of this thesis is not a critique of special education as an academic field, the conceptual and paradigmatic position of this thesis is fundamentally based on a rejection of basic assumptions of special education about students having individual deficits. Subsequently, the concepts of policy and practice at state and school/classroom level were theorised in relation to inclusive education. When referring to policies at the state level,
current policies related to inclusive education in NSW and Slovakia were briefly reviewed as well. It was indicated that it is problematic to consider them as ensuring inclusive practices at the school/classroom level.

**Theoretical framework for researching inclusive education.** In this part of the chapter the theoretical framework for this thesis is defined. In doing so, the concepts of disability and SEN are scrutinised. These concepts usually represent a crucial component of the definition of inclusive education (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 15). They are explored through a classification of theoretical paradigms that is relevant for researching a wider range of social sciences topics.

The concepts of disability and SEN have in many ways been crucial for the academic field of inclusive education until now. As elaborated above, the field of inclusive education emerged from the critique of integration and special education. It distanced itself from the essentialist assumptions about the concepts of SEN and disability that special education seems to be based on (Slee, 2011, p. 120). Despite this starting point, many scholars and activists from both the organisational and socio-political paradigms argue that the field is not solely concerned with education of students with disabilities or SEN (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Slee, 2011). They recognize and try to understand the nature of discrimination and exclusion happening in education in its entire complex, contradictory, pervasive and elusive forms. In this way, inclusive education as a field can be perceived as addressing not only instances of exclusion on the basis of students’ disability or SEN, but any other form of difference and/or identity such as gender, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, faith and family background (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 18). In other words, it is concerned with inclusion of all students.

Although many scholars adopt this broad definition of inclusion, the field of inclusive education is still dominated by discussing the concepts of disability and SEN
(Youdell, 2006, p. 3). There may be several reasons for this situation. The first one may be the fact that the field emerged from the critique of special education which is fundamentally based on the concepts of disability and SEN. The second might be that while scrutinising disability and SEN, various authors might still fully acknowledge the existence of discrimination and exclusion on the basis of other categories of difference and identity without claiming that one has a greater importance that the other (e.g., Graham, 2012; Tomlinson, 2008). These authors simply point out how the categories of disability and SEN can be systematically used to cover up racial, gender or other forms of discrimination. The third reason might be that the concepts of disability and SEN are often explicitly present in written educational policies at the state level (for instance in Slovakia and NSW) and in various ways determine the level of funding schools receive. Together with several other factors, this may result in a situation where the categories of SEN and disability contribute to forming a common repertoire of vocabulary by practising teachers in their everyday lives in schools.

This thesis also scrutinises the concepts of disability and SEN to a greater depth than other categories of difference and/or identity. The main reason for this is that participants of this research project overwhelmingly gravitated towards the concepts of disability and SEN when unpacking their understanding of inclusive education. It was decided to maintain this focus on disability and SEN, since exploring other categories of difference or identity, which research participants rarely mentioned explicitly, might unduly divert our attention from the most central topic of this thesis, which is the participants’ understanding of the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership. By no means, however, this should imply that any other categories of difference or identity can be considered as less important in the educational context than disability or SEN.
While the classification into the psycho-medical, organisational and socio-political paradigms sheds some light on how the concepts of disability and SEN can be perceived, at this point other classifications of research worldviews (theoretical paradigms or perspectives) may be more useful to research and better understand various concepts such as disability, SEN, inclusion or distributed leadership. These other classifications are not directly related to the field of inclusive education. They may be applied to any discipline related to social sciences, humanities and education. They expose theoretical debates and controversies relevant for all these fields. To give some examples of these classifications, Burrell and Morgan (1979) distinguish four paradigms to analyse social theory: (1) functionalism; (2) interpretivism; (3) radical structuralism; and (4) radical humanism. Creswell (2009) differentiates four worldviews: (1) postpositivist; (2) social constructivist; (3) advocacy and participatory; and (4) pragmatic. Schensul (2012, p. 76) speaks of four theoretical paradigms dominant in social sciences: (1) positivist; (2) interpretivist; (3) critical; and (4) participatory. In many ways one can find links and overlaps between these three examples of classifications.

These classifications may inform not only how particular scholars perceive various concepts such as disability, SEN and inclusive education, but also how they research them. Of the three mentioned above, the most recent classification by Schensul (2012) can be used here to demonstrate how these different theoretical paradigms may help to understand the research subject of disability, SEN or inclusive education as such. To a great extent, the first paradigm – positivist – can be paralleled with the essentialist and psycho-medical claims about reality (ontology) and what and how we know about reality (epistemology). The positivists hold that reality is external to the self and can be observed. Through research we can produce objective information that is reproducible (Schensul, 2012, p. 76). The second
paradigm – interpretivist – is an approach that theoretically frames this thesis; it is going to be explored in more detail later in the chapter.

The third paradigm – critical – is very prominent especially among the socio-political theorists in inclusive education. Critical theorists believe that social and political structures shape lives of individuals in a way to create various power imbalances and persistent inequalities. The larger systems of dominance and control are systematically transferred to the behaviours and meaning systems of vulnerable populations (Schensul, 2012, p. 77). Critical theorists expose socially and historically constituted power relations while focusing on language as central to the formation of subjectivity belonging to a certain social group, be it privileged or marginalised (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, p. 140). The study *A Sociology of Special Education* (1982) by Sally Tomlinson is often referred to as the groundbreaking critical analysis of special education in exposing vested interests of the professional groups involved in special education who control and hold power over particular groups of students labelled as having SEN (Thomas & Loxley, 2007, pp. 4-5).

Critical researchers endeavour to examine not only the way these relationships of power and oppression came about, but how these relationships could be “changed” and “transformed” (Tomlinson, 1988, p. 46). In this sense, critical researchers perceive the interpretivist approach as inadequately addressing the issues of social justice. The critical theorists claim that researchers should be more engaged in politics and a political agenda to bring about the desired social change (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Nevertheless, various critical theorists may significantly differ in their focus of analysis and what the kernel of this social change should look like. A critical paradigm could be still considered only as an umbrella term that can incorporate many more theoretical systems such as neo-Marxism, feminism, gender and queer theory, postcolonial theory, critical race theory or critical disability studies (Goodley, 2011; Malpas & Wake, 2006; Parker, 2012).
The fourth paradigm – participatory or collaborative approach – brings together researchers and stakeholders of a particular research area to conduct research toward some form of social action. The researchers have the expertise in research methodology, and engage stakeholders in making decisions about research design, data collection, interpretation and use of findings. With this particular paradigm, Schensul (2012, p. 78) claims that all the existing research paradigms can be combined to guide a study to move toward desired social change. He holds that to some extent the other three paradigms can be combined even outside of the participatory paradigm.

Coming back to the second paradigm in Schensul’s (2012) classification, this thesis adopts the interpretivist paradigm as its theoretical framework. It can be traced to the philosophy of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey’s and other German philosophers’ studies of interpretive understanding called hermeneutics (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, p. 196). The position I hold in this research project is that social or cultural phenomena emerge from the ways individuals construct meanings as they interact with each other and engage with the world they are interpreting. Together with other interpretivist researchers, I hold that reality and our perception of it is socially constructed (Creswell, 2009, p. 8; Mertens, 2005, p. 30).

The interpretivist paradigm has both an ontological (what exists) and epistemological (how do we know what we know) aspect. As for the former, the social reality exists but it is a product of social processes and human interactions (Hacking, 1999, p. 25; Miovský, 2006, p. 20) in which meanings are negotiated and consensus is formed (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 74). Thus, there is no determined nature or fixed essence inside things or people that make them what they are. They are being constantly constructed, and these constructions change in various social, historical or geographical contexts (Burr, 2003, p. 5). Nevertheless, these constructions are often perceived and taken for granted as something natural and universal.
As for the epistemological aspect, the research studies framed in the interpretivist paradigm are in line with the premise that we cannot know the reality per se. We may only interpret it, and by doing it we construct the meaning of it and how it appears to us (Miovský, 2006, p. 20). It is through the daily interactions between individuals that our unique construction of knowledge becomes fabricated (Burr, 2003, p. 4). This knowledge is relative to particular social, political and historical contexts (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Therefore, the concepts of truth and objectivity become problematic. This research project does not attempt to portray objective facts or a truth about social reality. Unique meanings that each research participant creates are not averaged to proclaim it as an objective explanation of phenomena. Creation of unique meanings applies to researchers as well (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012, p. 8). That is why I acknowledge the effect of myself as a researcher on the interpretation of collected data. In order to access and better understand meanings that study participants create about phenomena and their behaviour, I immersed myself into their setting and interactions (Schensul, 2012, pp. 76-77). For this purpose, qualitative research methods were used in this study. The intent of this thesis is to make some sense of the meanings research participants have about the world or particular phenomena such as calling a student disabled or having SEN, or what it means to them to practise inclusive education and distributed leadership.

When speaking about social constructions such as disability and SEN, Hacking (1999, p. 11) posits a crucial question: What exactly is said to be constructed? It can be a specific kind of person that is socially constructed or it can be the idea of that person, for instance the idea of a student with disability or SEN that is constructed. He claims that by constructing an idea or category of a person, the individual her/himself is socially constructed as a certain kind of person. The reason is that ideas or categories do not exist in a vacuum. Ideas constitute a social setting and may have sheer material impacts. This way
an idea of a student with disability may determine her/his material reality, for instance that she/he happens to be segregated in a special school.

Ways of classifying human beings interact with the human beings who are classified. There are all sorts of reasons for this. People think of themselves as of a kind, perhaps, or reject the classification. All our acts are under descriptions, and the acts that are open to us depend, in a purely formal way, on the descriptions available to us. Moreover, classifications do not exist only in the empty space of language but in institutions, practices, material interactions with things and other people (Hacking, 1999, p. 31).

The meanings individuals construct through interactions with other people, institutions and habitual practices determine also their material reality and their behaviour. This is a strong enough reason for interpretivist researchers to conduct research about these concepts, be it the concept of disability, SEN or practice of inclusive education and distributed leadership.

In line with the interpretivist paradigm in this thesis, the concept of disability is considered to be a political and social construct (Fulcher, 1989, p. 21). The construction of disability may be independent of the presence of any impairment (e.g., emotional and behavioural disability), but the presumption is made that it is present. The label or identity of being disabled or having SEN in the educational setting is a product of routine, institutional practices or interactional processes in school and educational policies at the state level rather than attributes of students. In the educational context, the concepts of disability and SEN are in many ways intertwined if not overlapping completely. This is the case for the Slovak School Act No. 245/2008 as well. The trouble with this social construction is not only that it may prescribe constraining descriptions of behaviour, it may adversely affect students’ access to various educational opportunities. Eventually the construction of disability may function as an oppressive mechanism that may lead particular individuals into a life of
poverty, unemployment and dependence on low-level government benefits (Fulcher, 1989, pp. 23-42).

In line with Fulcher’s reflection, in this thesis language and policies are viewed to be particularly relevant for the process of construction of disability and SEN (Slee, 2011, pp. 99-104). They inform people’s interactions and how they think about disability. Speaking about language, Fulcher (1989) borrows from Foucault’s notion of discourse. She claims that any verbal proclamation deploys discourse as a “theoretical basis” or a “tactic” for attaining its inherent objectives (pp. 7-8). The way we see the world, how it works and what we want to achieve in it constitutes the discourse. Thus, discourses are present in the language of our everyday practices and interactions with people, but also in all forms of policies. With regards to the concepts of policy and practice, these will be scrutinised in detail in the following section of this chapter.

Accepting the position that any categories of disability and SEN have a socially constructed character, all the categories such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), intellectual disability, emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), or reading difficulties become problematic. The main trouble with these categories is that they imply that there is some kind of an innate disposition or deficit in students which has to be professionally treated. For instance, Thomas and Loxley (2007, pp. 47-65) discuss the disability categories: emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and emotional, social and behavioural difficulties (ESBD). They claim that the current arrangement of schools might present a very challenging environment for many children. By using the category EBD/ESBD, we imply that this difficulty is a form of deficit in a child, and we take away the responsibility of schools to become more inclusive. The term EBD/ESBD offers an appearance of straightforward quasi-clinical assessment while ignoring the great complexity
of motives for particular human behaviour. It legitimises judgments about the causes of “emotional difficulties” and the ensuing actions to tackle them.

In fact, any other special education or medical category of disability or SEN can be questioned as socially constructed, be it ADHD (Graham, 2008a, 2008b; Prosser, 2008), autism (Kim, 2012; Lester & Paulus, 2012) or reading difficulties (Graham & Grieshaber, 2008; Tomlinson, 1988). Another relevant aspect to this construction of a disability label or identity of disabled, is who is more likely to acquire such a label. Tomlinson (1982), for instance, makes a link between being labelled as disabled and coming from working-class background in the UK. She argues that this might also be caused by the fact that parents coming from working-class backgrounds find it difficult to negotiate with professionals of special education (Fulcher, 1989, p. 37). Tomlinson (1982) in the UK, together with Graham et al. (2010) in NSW, points out that it is much more likely that boys acquire a disability label especially through various non-normative categories such as autism or behaviour disorder. More than four decades ago, Dunn (1968) demonstrated the higher incidence of students coming from ethnically and/or economically disadvantaged backgrounds to be labelled as mildly retarded in the USA. The message has not changed much until recently with Graham (2012) making visible the disproportionate over-representation of Indigenous students in special schools in NSW, or Salner (2004) pointing out the predominance of Roma students in Slovak special schools.

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10 Tomlinson (1982) distinguishes between normative and non-normative categories in special education. The former refers to blindness, deafness, or physical disability, while the latter to categories such as “feeble-minded, educationally subnormal, maladjusted and disruptive”. She claims that about the former there can be reached some normative agreement, which is not the case for the latter (p. 65).
When speaking about social constructedness of disability and SEN categories, it should be acknowledged that the interpretivist paradigm allows for materially manifested diversity of students. This paradigm recognises that students do have different bodies, skills and abilities, learned ways of behaviour, forms of identities, histories and life experiences – sometimes as radically different as experiencing sexual abuse or living in extremely poor material conditions. Students bring all these life stories to a classroom, which may present major challenges to any teacher or student. As I understand the interpretivist paradigm, it claims that the ways these manifestations of diversity are understood and reacted towards are socially and culturally constructed, which in the end may shape these material manifestations themselves. In other words, interpretivist paradigm does acknowledge the existence of reality. It is the way it is understood that is socially determined, and this understanding also conditions how we react to it. In the end, this may shape the material existence or reality itself as well.

The academic field of disability studies has for more than two decades attempted to grapple with the questions of how to define the concept of disability, why discrimination against people called disabled (ableism) occurs, and what actions should be undertaken to change the social situation of ableism happening on a large social scale (Goodley, 2011, pp. 1-21). The understanding of disability as a social construct is often associated with the social model of disability formulated by Oliver (1996). This model has dominated disability studies in the United Kingdom. It undermines the assumption that the individual is disabled by her/his impairment, and asserts that it is socially constructed barriers that disable her/him on the basis of a perceived impairment (Goodley, 2011, p. 11). Since its emergence, various authors have critiqued the social model (e.g., Corker & Shakespeare, 2002; Terzi, 2004), besides other reasons, for the lack of acknowledgement of the effects and individual experiences of impairment on everyday life. For instance, the condition of constantly
experiencing physical pain is not addressed by the social model as this particular example obviously does not represent a socially constructed barrier (Thomas & Corker, 2002).

Postmodern theorists contribute to the critique of the medical and social model as well. Although they cannot be described univocally, some common features of the postmodern model of disability can be identified. Most significantly, they challenge the very existence of “impairment” as the supposedly real or fixed point, on the basis of which the social construction of “disability” is created (Carlson, 2010). They claim that impairment and its materiality cannot exist prediscursively or be “dissociated from the historically contingent practices that bring it into being” (Tremain, 2002, p. 34). If attempting to position postmodern theorists of disability within the Schensul’s (2012) classification of theoretical paradigms, to a varying extent they could be associated more with the interpretivist or the critical paradigm. Since this thesis uses the interpretivist paradigm as its theoretical framework, the postmodern view on disability can be considered as partly relevant for this thesis as well.

This part of the chapter attempted to position the concepts of disability and SEN in the academic field of inclusive education. The classification of theoretical paradigms was introduced – relevant to all areas of social sciences research – which distinguished four paradigms: positivist; interpretivist; critical; and participatory. The second one – the interpretivist paradigm – was explored in greater detail as it was adopted as the theoretical framework for this research project.

Attempts to define inclusive education. The issue of defining the term inclusive education is a rather complex one, and the field receives a lot of criticism for its vagueness and elasticity (Slee, 2011, p. 64). For many, inclusive education may merely signify a different name for special education (Armstrong, 2005; Brantlinger, 2006; Tearle, 2012). As Armstrong et al. (2010) put it: “inclusion may end up meaning everything and nothing at the
same time” (p. 29). In this part of the chapter, the concept of inclusive education is theorised, while various issues related to attempts to define it are presented.

As explored in the previous parts of the chapter, the concept of inclusive education can be applied to practices and policies in various levels – in classrooms, schools, states or society. Bearing this in mind, I do not necessarily see the vagueness and elasticity of definitions of inclusive education as a failure of the discipline because what is required for inclusion may differ significantly across all these arenas of struggle and debate (Fulcher, 1989, p. 4). Despite that, a number of scholars in the field of inclusive education have felt a need to develop a universal definition of inclusive education (Tearle, 2012). To better grasp the complexity of the concept of inclusive education, Cigman (2007) offers three guiding questions in her attempt to theorise it: included in what? excluded from what? and excluded by whom? (p. xvii). If combining these three questions with the ones proposed by Armstrong et al. (2010) – inclusion for whom? into what? and for what purpose? (p. 31) – we may end up with the following four key questions when attempting to theorise and define the concept of inclusive education:

- inclusion for whom?
- inclusion (or exclusion) by whom?
- inclusion into (or exclusion from) what?
- inclusion for what purpose?

**Inclusion for whom?** In an attempt to address the first question, Ainscow et al. (2006, pp. 14-27) differentiate narrow and broad definitions of inclusion. The former understanding of the term promotes inclusion of narrowly defined groups of students, primarily those with disability and/or SEN, in mainstream or regular education. The latter definition, however, does not delineate any particular group of students, but focuses on promoting and celebrating diversity and inclusion of all students. In this respect, Armstrong
et al. (2011, pp. 31-32) add a new dimension to the broad versus narrow distinction, namely fragmented definitions. An example of a fragmented definition in their understanding signifies that either a broad or narrow definition can be broken down into fragments or categories of social groups of students that can potentially be excluded. They point out, however, that by naming particular social groups of students, such as students with SEN, gifted and talented, sick children, young carers, pregnant girls and teenage mothers, etc., we are running a risk that inclusion becomes a process of “managing” individuals and groups treated as “problems” for society (p. 32).

While some academics point out that in supporting the participation and learning of students, the participation and involvement of families and staff in schools are crucial, too (e.g., Ainscow et al., 2006; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Ferguson et al., 2005), none of them actually consider families and staff as equally important target group of inclusive education as students. In other words, presented definitions of inclusive education do not generally speak about inclusion for all school stakeholders such as teachers, principals, parents, and non-teaching school staff members, in addition to the students. This thesis aims to demonstrate that focusing exclusively on students when defining inclusive education may create an implication that it does not matter how other school stakeholders are treated as long as all students are included. It might be implied that the end of including all students justifies any means to get there. Placing the same importance on both the inclusion of students and the inclusion of other school stakeholders would mean that the latter is not perceived merely as a precondition for the former but a worthwhile end of inclusive education by itself.

**Inclusion by whom?** The second question – inclusion by whom? – addresses the issue of who should be held responsible for putting inclusion in practice and/or who actually has the agency to do that. As discussed in the previous parts of the chapter, policies and
practices of inclusion/exclusion get formulated and struggled over in various levels or 
arenas, be it classrooms with teachers and students as social agents, schools with all their 
stakeholders, or states with all their policy makers (Fulcher, 1989). In this respect, the 
organisational paradigm places all the agency and responsibility on school staff members, 
while the socio-political paradigm highlights the impact of policies, social values and social 
constructs deployed through language as tactics in everyday interactions and practices in 
schools and classrooms. Although the latter acknowledges some agency to school staff 
members as well, they highlight aspects and mechanisms through which this agency can be 
significantly constrained, most often without the social actors being fully aware of it. 

*Inclusion into what?* If addressing the third question – *inclusion into what?* – when 
referring to a school level, scholars usually promote inclusion *into* “the curricula, cultures 
and communities of local schools” (Ainscow et al., 2006). In this respect, Len Barton (1998) 
defined inclusive education as being 

not merely about providing access into mainstream school for pupils who have 
previously been excluded. It is not about closing down an unacceptable system of 
segregated provision and dumping of those pupils in an unchanged mainstream 
system. Existing school systems – in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, 
teaching expectations and styles, leadership roles – will have to change. This is 
because inclusive education is about the participation of all children and young 
persons and the removal of all forms of exclusionary practice (p. 85). 

In other words, inclusive education is not merely about students’ presence or *inclusion into* a 
neighbourhood mainstream school, but about securing *inclusion into* its physical space, 
curriculum, social relations and culture, or about enabling and supporting students’ 
participation in learning and all aspects of school community life.
In this respect, the organisational paradigm academics around the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) call to school stakeholders to commit themselves to certain broadly defined values such as equity, participation, community, compassion, respect for diversity, sustainability and entitlement (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 23). They understand inclusive education as a process of putting these values into action. Nevertheless, they do not consider an inclusive school as needing to reach some perfect state. Rather, they see it as constantly moving while consciously engaging with change (p. 25). This approach can be also perceived as a *pragmatic* framework of constantly trying to balance what is achievable and what is desirable (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 33). Other scholars – associated more with the socio-political paradigm – often present inclusive education as “a continuous struggle” and “uncertainty as positive” (Allan, 2008, pp. 101, 111), or as a process of constantly problematising “notions of inclusion and exclusion and of different ways of being” (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 31). These all go beyond the school walls and are strongly intermingled with or determined by wider social, cultural and political realities. They argue that only this constant process of problematisation may enable school stakeholders to welcome and celebrate difference and engage them with the challenges posed by diversity of students and other school stakeholders in a positive, supportive and respectful way (Tearle, 2012, p. 19).

As already indicated in the previous parts of the chapter, it is highly debatable whether education happening in special schools or special classrooms or through the use of various special education intervention practices can be considered as a manifestation of inclusive education. Some academics are more concerned about exclusion *from* mainstream schools, while others worry more about being excluded *within* mainstream schools and *by* other children (Baroness Warnock, 2007; Moore, 2007). Although the latter concerns might be countered by the argument that exclusion and stigmatisation within schools can be
eliminated if employing appropriate strategies, the debate between the two positions does not seem to cease. In this respect, Cigman (2007) claims that most theorists within the academic field of inclusive education – implying especially the ones within the organisational paradigm – are not concerned with the question of all versus some students being included in mainstream schools, but with inclusion as opposed to integration. Hence, no assumptions should be made about their position in this question if they simply do not address it (p. xix).

In my understanding of the socio-political paradigm, it also goes beyond the question of inclusion of all versus some children into mainstream schools. Authors within this paradigm understand inclusion primarily as a critique of educational systems and current practice and its potential role in contributing to create inclusive and democratic societies. Curtailing this wide social and political critique to the question of all versus some might be considered as yet another reduction of their arguments. Over time, their call to seriously engage with and rethink the purposes and values of educational practice has been sidelined by embracing only the “feel-good” aspects of the inclusive discourse (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 29). That is why the authors within the socio-political paradigm request re-radicalisation of inclusive education as a political struggle or grand project (Armstrong et al., 2010; Slee, 2011). Radical redefinition of how we currently imagine the purposes and functioning of mainstream schools can be shifted so much that one day a long-term segregated educational environment for students with disability or SEN, which is currently provided in special classrooms or special schools, might be widely perceived as not benefiting anybody and redundant. Nevertheless, I do not consider this to be their ultimate aim. I see as their ultimate aim a democratic and inclusive society or, simply, “fair and just relationships between people” (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 138).
By asking this question of inclusion into what? Graham and Slee (2008) expose an underlying contradiction within the concept of inclusion or inclusive education. They claim that by the mere use of the terms inclusion or inclusive, we are constructing and perpetuating “a normative, fictional centre” (p. 285) and, as a consequence, we are othering the groups that do not fit into it. “This results in an illusionary interiority; an apprehended inclusion, where the maintenance of notions relating to normality, mainstream, natural and majority ensures that certain children lead a marginal existence as representatives of ‘the included’” (p. 285). This critique of the inclusive project from within the field also introduces an implication that inclusion is inseparable from exclusion, and one necessitates the other and vice versa. Similarly, Hansen (2012) claims that inclusion and exclusion processes are an internal part of all communities. The situation of including everyone, also those with intolerant and discriminatory attitudes, will necessarily introduce a limit to inclusion (p. 93). Hansen also claims that exclusion is unavoidable for communities because there is always a limit to handling diversity in their endeavours to preserve their sense of cohesion (p. 94). In addition, because people experience and perceive various practices differently and employ different understandings of inclusion, some practices may be presented as inclusive but are experienced by some as inclusive and others as exclusionary (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 35).

Inclusion for what purpose? Finally, addressing the fourth question – inclusion for what purpose? – may uncover various layers of the issue of defining inclusive education as well. Inclusion may achieve a number of immediate or short-term purposes, goals or outcomes, but also higher value-related purposes. With regards to the former and if speaking about inclusion for students only, Ainscow et al. (2006, p. 25) define the main goals of inclusion as ensuring the “presence, participation and achievement” of all children and young people in schools. Various academics focus their research on one or more of these goals or outcomes of inclusion, or several other ones, while often tackling a very challenging
question of how to measure them. For instance, a number of scholars concentrate on the goal of enhancing educational achievements of all students (Black-Hawkins et al., 2007; Lloyd, 2008; Rouse & Florian, 2006); explore the nuances of students’ participation and inclusion (Allan, 2003; Gibson & Haynes, 2009); look at social and friendship relationships among all students in an inclusive setting (Morrison & Burgman, 2009; Webster & Carter, 2007); or examine students’ behaviour (Cooper, 2011; Grossman, 2004; Wood, Spandagou, & Evans, 2012). When addressing teachers but still focusing on inclusion for students, scholars might measure, for instance, their attitudes towards inclusion, workload or sense of preparedness; and if speaking about school-level measures, these may include, for instance, enrolment practices, use of teacher’s aides, staff retention, grouping of students and methods of instruction (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 35).

With regards to the higher value-related purposes of inclusion (for students), primarily socio-political paradigm theorists identify purposes which might hinder practising inclusion in schools. The higher purpose of inclusion of all children in education might be, for instance, that they have access to equal educational and career opportunities through which they might learn all the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully apply these in work during adulthood, in their personal friendship and family relationships, in the creative (cultural), the physical (sports) or the spiritual (religion) realms, or in a civil and democratic society. In this respect, the socio-political paradigm theorists primarily critique when the purpose of education and inclusion becomes watered down or reduced to students’ academic or educational results which are often presented as securing their success in the job market and material well-being (Allan, 2008; Armstrong et al., 2010; Slee, 2011; Tearle, 2012). As much as this purpose might be important for people, its socially and politically accepted overemphasis might contribute to exclusion and discrimination of some individuals based on their academic achievements and abilities. That is why they also call to re-think and
reformulate this higher purpose of education and training. Nevertheless, I identify as a limitation of their account that they do not substantially articulate, scrutinise and support these alternative purposes of education.

To summarise, the task of formulating one universalist definition of inclusive education is a very problematic one, if possible and desirable at all. I have argued here that inclusion and inclusive education is multilayered and complex and can be realised in practice and policy at various levels, for instance in classrooms, schools, districts or states. It may target different school stakeholders, thus, not only students but also teachers, principals, non-teaching school staff or parents. It might be understood as being realised not only in neighbourhood mainstream schools but also in special classrooms or special schools. Inclusion might fulfil differently prioritised goals and purposes. In other words, the concept of inclusive education runs a risk of being too reduced and diminished if formulated in one all-encompassing definition while bypassing and ignoring its multilayered complexity. This research project aims to explore how various school stakeholders in the selected primary schools navigate their definitions or understandings of inclusive education through some of these multidimensional realms, while implying their own answers to the four questions of inclusion *for whom, by whom, into what and for what purpose*.

**Researching inclusive education in this study.** After reviewing existing literature in the field of inclusive education, exposing the theoretical controversies within the field, delineating the theoretical framework for this research study and, most importantly, identifying issues if trying to define the concept of inclusive education, I can present the research questions of this thesis that relate to the aspect of inclusive education. The thesis aims to address these questions:
• How do school stakeholders understand the concept of inclusive education?
• How do they perceive that inclusive education is practised in their school?
• In what ways do they link this understanding and practices of inclusive education with the specific socio-political context of NSW and Slovakia?

These questions aim to answer how various school stakeholders understand the concept of inclusion and inclusive education, and what beliefs, values and assumptions they present in this understanding. These questions also explore the practices of inclusion and how they are understood and perceived by different stakeholders. Last but not least, they attempt to explore the relationship between state policies and the understandings the research participants present – how they negotiate the meanings of these policies and translate them into their understandings.

At this point I can move on to the next important area of this research project. Because this thesis aims to study the relationship between understandings and practices of inclusive education and distributed leadership at school level, in the following part of the chapter the concept of distributed leadership is explored along with the academic discussions happening around this concept.

**Distributed Leadership**

This part of the chapter aims to review existing academic literature on the concept of distributed leadership. It will present various theoretical controversies around this concept while focusing on the same theoretical paradigm – interpretivist paradigm – which was adopted in relation to inclusive education. To conclude this section, three research questions on distributed leadership are presented that informed the data collection and their interpretation.
Theoretical controversies within school leadership. School leadership and management as an academic field faces a similar issue to that faced by inclusive education; namely, to clearly define its core concept (Crawford, 2012, p. 613; Watson & Scribner, 2005, p. 2). The term school leadership may mean everything and nothing at the same time. Besides traditionally connecting leadership with personality, style or roles of one leader in the top position of an organisational hierarchy, various scholars depart from this understanding and associate leadership with taking initiative (Ritchie & Woods, 2007), performing various functions, tasks or responsibilities (Firestone, 1996) within a particular division of labour (Gronn, 2002a), including in decision making (Weiss & Cambone, 1994), or exercising power over others (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998; Hatcher, 2005). This broadening of understanding of leadership brings all members of an organisation (school) into the picture as potential leaders – either formal or informal (Harris, 2009, p. 2).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) suggest that at the core of most definitions of leadership is the idea of exercising “influence” and providing “direction” (p. 2).

One of the reasons various academics differ in defining the concept of school leadership is that they employ different theoretical paradigms. The classification of theoretical paradigms by Schensul (2012), which was explored in the previous section of the chapter about inclusive education, is relevant for all social sciences, humanities and education disciplines. Consequently, it can be applied to the field of school leadership. Over the long history of various scholars trying to define the concept of school leadership, the positivist paradigm has been the dominant perspective until the present (Gronn, 2009a, p. 202). These scholars focus on researching the behaviour of one person in a leading position or her/his roles, styles, and personality. They believe school leadership can be described in objective terms. In the last two decades, however, this approach has been challenged by scholarly works that have adopted either interpretivist or critical theoretical paradigms.
which perceive school leadership as a socially-constructed phenomenon (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 175).

In this thesis, school leadership is conceptualised through the interpretivist paradigm. The concept of school leadership is perceived here as a social construction, a product of socio-historical and collective meaning-making in which language and communication play a fundamental role (Barge, 2001). In this sense, school leadership is both the process and product of interactions between and among social actors (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 175; Watson & Scribner, 2005, p. 8). Leadership defined as an “interactional phenomenon” (process) (Watson & Scribner, 2005, p. 10) and “social construction” (product) (Meindl, 1995) decouples from the leader-centric approach to define the concept.

When speaking about leadership as a social construction, Fairhurst and Grant (2010, p. 177) distinguish the *construction of social reality* from the *social construction of reality*. The former signifies the cognitive product or perception, while the latter refers to the process of social interaction by which these products or perceptions are brought into being. To unpack the social processes of constructions, scholars are often inspired by the Foucauldian archaeological and genealogical analysis and his understanding of *discourse*. In this sense, discourses construct an appearance of truth about what leadership and management is and how it is to be performed (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 179). As group interactions within an organisation are embedded in society, history, culture and language with particular dominant discourses, these also inform how we construct our identity as followers or leaders (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). This makes the identities of leaders and followers fluid, interchangeable and contextual. This thesis aims to explore particular meanings school stakeholders construct about the concept of school leadership and themselves as leaders and/or followers. Therefore, this study does not focus on the actual processes by which these meanings and identities get produced.
Both the interpretivist and critical theorists point out how, at present, neoliberal discourses shape the meaning of school leadership. The studies that adopted these theoretical lenses often make visible how current school leaders are constructed and constrained by the dominant discourses of “efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness” (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998, p. 334), “government-driven headteacher managerialism” (Hatcher, 2005, p. 225), “market-driven individualism” (Hartley, 2010, p. 280), or “the state-sponsored new managerialism. . . which has commodified schooling through marketisation and competition” (Gronn, 2002a, p. 673). As a result, educational policies often construct school leaders as managers who have to put various educational goals into practice in an efficient, effective and competitive way. These discourses may put significant constrains on the school leaders in practising not only distributed leadership (Hartley, 2010, p. 280) but also inclusive education (Leo & Barton, 2006, p. 174).

**Theoretical controversies within distributed leadership.** In the turn of the millennium, the concept of distributed leadership was widely accepted and used by academics and practitioners (Bolden, 2011, p. 252). The majority of studies that deal with the concept of distributed leadership are framed in the interpretivist theoretical paradigm (Hartley, 2010). The interpretivist lens destabilises the perception that leadership should be associated only with one individual appointed to a given role. This implies that leadership may shift and be distributed among other members of an organisation (Fairhurst, 2007, p. 6). Although the majority of studies on distributed leadership do adopt an interpretivist paradigm, some academic works take a positivist or critical turn as well. Part of the difficulty in asserting this is that research on distributed leadership often does not make its theoretical basis explicit and/or transgresses through more paradigms (Hartley, 2010, p. 281).
The interpretivist studies on distributed leadership point to the process of constantly shifting influence from one individual to the other, and expose various interdependencies among individuals in performing organisational tasks (Harris, 2009, p. 3; Spillane, 2010, p. 3). This makes the distinction between the concept of leadership and management problematic. This distinction constructs leaders as change-masters and managers as taskmasters who implement the change (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 179) or leaders as visionaries and managers as planners and budgeteers, while both are involved in attempting to influence other people (Kotterman, 2006, p. 15). In this thesis, adopting the interpretivist paradigm does not allow delineating a clear and stable conceptual boundary between the concepts of leadership and management. These concepts are perceived as happening in tandem with each other, as intertwined phenomena (Gronn, 2009a, p. 211). Although the academic discussion on differences between these two concepts might have some added value in the workplace (Kotterman, 2006), participants of this research project were not asked about the concept of management, unless they brought it into the discussion themselves. This was due to the focus of the thesis being the topic of relating distributed leadership and inclusive education – not management and inclusive education.

In academic literature the definition and understanding of distributed leadership varies from the descriptive to the normative (Bolden, 2011, p. 251; Leithwood et al., 2009, p. 1). The descriptive approach employs the concept merely as a means to understand school leadership in general. That is to say, the descriptive understanding of distributed leadership is not synonymous with democratic or collaborative leadership. It allows for both democratic leadership and autocratic leadership or anything in between. It is merely used as a specific prism to unpack how leadership is distributed in each school (Spillane, 2010, pp. 4-5). In contrast, the normative approach aims to maximise the distribution of leadership as a potential strategy for school improvement (Harris, 2009, pp. 3-4). This distinction is useful
for this research study in one respect. Both these approaches attempt to define *types* of distribution (Gronn, 2009a; Harris, 2009; Spillane, 2010), *extent* of distribution (Spillane, Camburn, & Pareja, 2009), or *degrees* of distribution (Ritchie & Woods, 2007).

Nevertheless, in contrast to the descriptive understanding, the normative approach sees distributed leadership as an antonym of *solo leadership* (Crawford, 2012, p. 610), and it is associated with particular benefits that it may bring (Woods, 2005; Woods & Gronn, 2009). This thesis aims to explore this normative aspect of distributed leadership in relation to the goal of practising inclusive education. It asks whether distributed leadership (in a normative sense) can be conducive for practising inclusive education in schools.

With regards to the descriptive perspective on distributed leadership, two models appear to dominate the academic literature. The first one was developed by Gronn (2002a, 2002b, 2009a) and the second by Spillane (2006, 2010). Gronn’s model distinguishes two meanings of distributed leadership: a *numerical action* and *concertive action* (Gronn, 2002b, p. 429). The traditional approach considers only one individual in the top position to be the leader, while the numerical view of distributed leadership means that the aggregated leadership is dispersed among more members, if not all. It does not privilege one individual over others, and allows for all organisation’s members to be leaders in some situations. This approach implies that we can draw a “line on a frequency continuum” (Gronn, 2002b, p. 429). This is the most common definition of distributed leadership (Watson & Scribner, 2005, p. 29). In contrast, Gronn (2002b, p. 430) perceives distributed leadership as a concertive action in a holistic way rather than as aggregated, individual acts. This concertive action can take the form of *spontaneous collaboration* (more individuals pool their expertise to perform some task); *intuitive working relations* (analogous to intimate interpersonal relations based on trust such as friendship); and *institutionalised practices* (formalised structures which are contrary to traditional hierarchical systems).
In the second model, developed by Spillane (2006, 2010), there are two aspects of a distributed perspective: the leader plus aspect and the practice aspect. The leader plus aspect means that there are multiple leaders in any organisation who are not always in a formal leadership and management position. Distribution of responsibility among members of an organisation (school) is achieved through the division of labour, co-performance, and parallel performance of various functions (Spillane, 2010, p. 2). This aspect focuses on who takes responsibility for particular leadership functions and routines (Spillane, 2006, p. 50). Spillane, however, adds the practice aspect to his conceptualisation. He sees practice as “a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and aspects of their situation” (Spillane, 2010, p. 3). This puts interactions at the core of understanding leadership practices which are always situated in particular organisational routines, artefacts (such as policies and regulations) and language. However, he admits that shifting the focus from the actions of leaders to interactions in leadership practice poses major methodological challenges (Spillane, 2006, p. 85). He distinguishes three types of distribution: collaborated (more people performing one function); collective (people work separately but interdependently); and coordinated (people perform functions in a particular sequence) (Spillane, 2010, p. 4).

Comparing Gronn’s and Spillane’s models, they seem similar in the more descriptive understanding of the term distributed leadership, but they significantly differ. They both distinguish two ways of understanding the term and three particular forms of distributed leadership in practice. Nevertheless, in contrast to Spillane’s account, Gronn deems the numerical understanding of the term as less appropriate, and prefers the holistic understanding that he calls the concertive action. On the contrary, Spillane’s model perceives both understandings of distributed leadership equally relevant and adequate. This way he recognises that distributed leadership is both about the practice of influence and particular individuals (leader plus) who influence others.
With regards to the normative understanding of distributed leadership, the concept is perceived as a strategy for school improvement to achieve particular goals or benefits (Crawford, 2012). The goal most often presented by scholars researching distributed leadership in a normative way is securing improved performance or achievements of students (Harris, 2009, p. 3; Hartley, 2010, p. 278). Although this goal is considered by several academics in the field of inclusive education as a desirable one, they emphasise that it matters how we define student performance or achievements (Black-Hawkins et al., 2007). The scholars who research distributed leadership and connect it with a purpose of increasing students’ achievements do not seem to problematise this issue. In addition, it does not seem that sound evidence has been gathered to demonstrate a causal relationship between distributed leadership and higher student performance (Harris, 2009).

Besides the far-reaching goal of increasing students’ achievements, the academic works on distributed leadership in a normative sense also discuss more immediate benefits distributed leadership may bring to the school community. Woods and Gronn (2009, p. 438) list four main benefits of distributed leadership: increased effectiveness; increased engagement and self-esteem; enhanced organisational capacity (tapping ideas, creativity and skills); and greater organisational capacity to deal with complexity and work intensification (sharing leadership burden). In comparison, Hatcher (2005) mentions two main reasons distributed leadership may be beneficial for teaching personnel. First is the belief that “alienation and powerlessness are detrimental to the performance of workers and therefore to economic efficiency” (p. 254); and second is the idea that “the knowledge required to solve complex problems is dispersed throughout organisations, [hence] all can contribute to the exercise of influence” (p. 254). In other words, distributed leadership may bring more ownership of the teachers’ work and sharing of knowledge how to do their job better. Another potential benefit mentioned in the academic literature is an increased level of “trust
and reciprocal support” among school members (Harris, 2009, p. 4). All these benefits – sharing expertise and knowledge among staff members; professional and personal support; and feelings of belonging and being heard – can be considered as relevant in practising inclusive education as it was explored in the previous section of the chapter.

The theoretical controversy between the normative and descriptive perspective on distributed leadership becomes most obvious when scrutinising the use of the term in practice in schools. Bolden (2011), in his review of academic literature on distributed leadership, concludes that “a purely descriptive approach is of limited use in enhancing leadership practice, while a normative approach may inadvertently end up promoting inappropriate, ineffective and potentially unethical practices” (p. 263). In line with a number of other academics theorising distributed leadership (e.g., Bush & Glover, 2012; Crawford, 2012; Robinson, 2009), Bolden is convinced that various forms of leadership networks and collaboration always co-exist with solo leadership. In other words, heterarchical relations, which are not arranged vertically and linearly but are random, unstructured and fluid, always co-exist with a hierarchical division of rights and authority (Woods & Gronn, 2009, p. 440). Because of this, in his later academic works Gronn (2009a, 2009b) introduces the concept of hybrid leadership as a more suitable term to describe the simultaneous co-existence of various forms of leadership.

This theoretical controversy constantly shapes both normative and descriptive perspectives on distributed leadership. It should be acknowledged here that the understanding of distributed leadership through the normative perspective – as the more relevant one for this thesis – does recognise the inevitability of this co-existence of heterarchical and hierarchical forms of leadership (Bush & Glover, 2012; Crawford, 2012). In other words, distributed leadership in a normative sense does not call for a perfectly egalitarian or exclusively fluid and random division of labour and leadership processes in an
organisation. Instead they call for finding a “balance between individual, collective and situational aspects of leadership practice and, importantly, when and why particular configurations are more effective and/or desirable than others” (Bolden, 2011, p. 264). That is to say that distributed leadership in a normative sense acknowledges the existence of various spontaneous and fluid forms of leadership, while at the same time attempting to theorise when particular forms of leadership are more desirable or effective in achieving particular goals.

Distributed leadership (in a normative sense) is often conflated with other similar notions such as shared, collective, collaborative, emergent and co-leadership (Bolden, 2011, p. 263). Perhaps the most academic attention is given to theorising the distinction between distributed leadership and democratic leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Woods, 2004; Woods & Gronn, 2009). In this respect, Woods and Gronn (2009) point out three central ideas to the idea of democracy: self-governance, protection from arbitrary power, and legitimacy grounded in consent. Particularly the second of these elements entails a commitment to human rights and “equality of respect for all moral agents” (Harrison, 1993, p. 232). Unlike the concept of distributed leadership, democratic leadership is thought of exclusively as a normative concept and is more concerned with philosophic and ethical values than distributed leadership (Crawford, 2012). Nevertheless, Woods and Gronn (2009) do admit that there is some relationship between the two concepts: distributed leadership “has the potential to open doors to democratising features.” (p. 442).

In the academic literature on leadership, one can notice another theoretical controversy. One group of authors seems to privilege individual agency, while others see structures as dominating individuals (Gronn, 2000, p. 317; Watson & Scribner, 2005, p. 27). The former see leaders as change-makers and an epitome of individualism, while the latter as managerial leaders, representatives of systemic properties and role structures without any
sense of agency (Gronn, 2000, p. 317). In this controversy, Gronn offers a theoretical solution. He links the structure and agency through the process of structuring, in which agency influences structure. He allows for structuring actions that may either reproduce or transform existing structural arrangements and relations. Nevertheless, the concept of distributed leadership does not place agency on one individual but perceives it as a form of conjoint agency. Gronn (2002a) defines conjoint agency as “the concertive labour performed by pluralities of interdependent organisation members” (p. 678). When speaking about agency and structures, the latter should not be interpreted as referring to organisational structures only. In line with the interpretivist paradigm, these structures can refer to wider social, cultural and political structures, social institutions, routine practices or dominant language forms (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 181). In this sense, conjoint agency can be performed only within these wider structural contexts, while at the same time these are constantly being constructed by the individuals.

Besides the interpretivist paradigm, various theorists of distributed leadership also adopt a critical theoretical position and point at limitations that the concept of distributed leadership may present. Distributed leadership is challenged by critical theorists (e.g., Anderson & Grinberg, 1998; Hartley, 2010; Hatcher, 2005; Maxcy & Nguyen, 2006) who argue that it should not be equated with sharing or democratising access to power as it is often implied not only in the normative understanding of the term. Critical theorists consider some practices of distributed leadership as a form of self-disciplining or self-regulation, which only increases the burden and responsibility of school members and ties them to follow goals determined by individuals at higher levels of the school hierarchy. The process of distributed leadership can make the exercise of the latter’s power concealed. In this sense, Hatcher (2005, pp. 256-257) argues that “the power of the head teacher cannot be understood if the unit of analysis is limited to the school itself. Its source lies outside the
school: it is delegated by the State”. These state structures make the principals occupy the dominant position in the power structure of the school and therefore the privileged site of influence. This implies that the opportunities for distributed leadership and for participating in collaboration or decision-making process are in fact sanctioned, delegated, and licensed by the authority of the principals, who usually define the limits and vision for school culture. Furthermore, Hatcher claims that this managerial prerogative of principals will always and everywhere trump influence of other school stakeholders (Gronn, 2009a, p. 210).

The response to this critique is the argument that although distributed leadership is not synonymous with democratic leadership, it at least lays the grounds for it. By de-monopolising leadership, it allows other members (besides the principal) to have voice and significantly influence school practices and policies (Gronn, 2009a, p. 212). With regards to the issue of power of the principal in delegating the distribution of leadership, the interpretivist paradigm does not deny the fact that state policies may construct principals as holding the power in school structures. Such policies then may significantly inhibit school stakeholders to construct different meanings about the principal’s role if she/he does not purposefully counter these policies and delegates her/his power and responsibilities to others in the school community. This whole issue implies that the construction of meaning school members create about school leadership is not arbitrary, but contextual and situated in particular social and political arrangements, which are also discussed in this thesis.

With respect to Slovak academic literature, the concept of distributed leadership (or “distribuované vedenie” in the Slovak language) does not exist. To better understand this fact, it has to be pointed out that in Slovakia it is not possible to study at a university level for an academic degree – Bachelor, Master, or Doctorate – in school leadership, educational management and leadership, or in any similar discipline (Obdržálek, 2011). Principals of primary and secondary schools are obliged to undergo a further education course most often
organised by particular governmental institutions (Methodical and Pedagogical Centres), but they or anybody else cannot study a university degree in educational management and leadership (Laššák & Hašková, 2009) as such a degree does not exist in Slovakia. However, there is a network of university academics who deal with the issues of school or educational leadership and who have attempted to establish a university degree in this field (e.g., Hašková, 2008; Horváthová, 2008; Obdržálek et al., 2008; Pisoňová, 2010; Zelina, 2010). Because the current legislation – Act No. 317/2009 (NR SR, 2009) – does not recognise the education of school principals within a university degree, they were unsuccessful in these efforts. This fact determines the limited number of academics who actually theorise the concepts such as school leadership, and the limited quality, breadth and depth of academic literature in the area of school leadership and management available in Slovak language (Obdržálek, 2011). I consider this fact to be the main reason the concept of distributed leadership has still not infiltrated the language of the academic field of educational leadership and management or the common vocabulary of teaching practitioners in Slovakia.

Attempts to define distributed leadership. As has already been indicated, the concept of distributed leadership and/or school leadership has a similar problem to inclusive education when it comes to formulating its definition. It might end up meaning everything and nothing at the same time. In this chapter, it has been demonstrated that the concept of distributed leadership may have various complex layers and aspects. Using the framework of four questions which were explored in the case of inclusive education – for whom? by whom? into what? and for what purpose? – might be useful for the concept of distributed leadership, as well, in order to identify its layers and complexity.

The target group of distributed leadership – for whom the leadership is distributed – may span from teachers to other school staff members, parents, students, district officials, state policy makers and others. All these stakeholders may in various ways be involved in
school leadership processes. When it comes to the question of leadership being distributed
by whom? – who has the agency to distribute leadership or merely to be or act as a leader –
things get even more complex. Various academics may conceptualise school stakeholders,
including the principals, as having only a very limited agency, if any at all, and being only
pawns of state policies and social discourses (Gronn, 2000; Watson & Scribner, 2005). In a
different understanding of school leadership, merely the school principals or people in
official accountability positions can be viewed as the only leaders having great agency over
an array of spheres of school life. Because state policies usually dictate leadership and
management accountabilities only for school principals – in NSW it is the policy document
of Leading and Managing the School (NSW DET, 2000), while in Slovakia it is the Act No.
296/2003 (NR SR, 2003) – usually only principals are perceived and/or constructed as
having the agency to distribute leadership to other school stakeholders. Scholars adopting
the interpretivist theoretical paradigm and engaging with the concept of distributed
leadership may argue that every school stakeholder has some agency in the complex
constellation of leadership roles, functions, responsibilities and collaboration within a school
(Bolden, 2011; Harris & Spillane, 2008).

The answers academics in distributed leadership offer for the question of into what?
may significantly vary as well. As discussed above, school leadership can be constructed in
terms of taking initiative (Ritchie & Woods, 2007), performing various functions, tasks or
responsibilities (Firestone, 1996) within a particular division of labour (Gronn, 2002a), self-
identifying as a leader (Meindl, 1995), as being involved in collaboration activities
(Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007; Slater, 2005; Watson & Scribner, 2005), as
playing an influential role in the decision-making processes (Weiss & Cambone, 1994), or
exercising power over others (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998; Hatcher, 2005). When asking the
question of into what? with regards to distributed leadership, school stakeholders can be
involved into all these aspects or processes of school leadership. It should be pointed out that even scholars in distributed leadership acknowledge constant co-existence of various forms of distributed leadership and solo leadership (e.g., Bush & Glover, 2012; Crawford, 2012; Robinson, 2009). In other words, they admit that involvement in all these leadership processes will never be completely equitable, but will always co-exist with some manifestations of solo leadership as well.

For what purpose should the leadership be distributed? As in the case of inclusive education, distributed leadership – if theorised in a normative sense – is presented as introducing various short-term goals and benefits, as well as some higher value-related purposes. With respect to the former, distributed leadership may, for instance, increase engagement and self-esteem of involved stakeholders, bring more ownership and satisfaction to their work, enhance their knowledge by sharing it with others or simply enhance school organisational capacity (Hatcher, 2005; Woods & Gronn, 2009). As for more long-term goals, several academics present distributed leadership as a strategy for school improvement and students’ educational results in particular (Harris, 2009, p. 3; Hartley, 2010, p. 278). Last of all, some academics argue that distributed leadership may open doors for a higher purpose of bringing democracy and democratic values of equality, respect and self-governance in schools (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Woods, 2004; Woods & Gronn, 2009).

To summarise, as in the case of inclusive education, the task of formulating a universal definition of distributed leadership is problematic, if possible and desirable at all. It was argued here that distributed leadership is very complex and multilayered social phenomenon and theoretical construction. This research project aims to explore how various school stakeholders in the selected primary schools navigate their definitions or understandings of distributed leadership through all these multidimensional realms, while
implying their own answers to the four questions of distributed leadership for whom? by whom? into what? and for what purpose?

**Researching distributed leadership in this study.** After reviewing the existing literature on distributed leadership and exposing the theoretical controversies about the concept of distributed leadership, I can present the research questions of this thesis that relate to the aspect of distributed leadership. The thesis aims to address these questions:

- How do school staff members understand the concept of distributed leadership?
- How do they perceive that distributed leadership is practised in their school?
- In what ways do they link this understanding and practices of distributed leadership with the specific socio-political context of NSW and Slovakia?

These research questions aim to unpack how school stakeholders perceive and understand not only the concept of distributed leadership in abstract terms, but also concrete practices they associate with it. Furthermore, these questions ask how school stakeholders refer to state policies or any aspects of the wider social context that may impact on their practices of distributed leadership.

**Relationship between Inclusive Education and Distributed Leadership**

In this section of the chapter, literature of both fields – inclusive education and distributed leadership – is explored while focusing on how this literature scrutinises their relationship. Each field is discussed individually, then studies that are situated in-between the two fields and that focus on their relationship are introduced in greater detail. That leads to a formulation of the last research question and research problem for this thesis.

**Theorising the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership.** To explore how the academic literature scrutinises the relationship between
inclusive education and distributed leadership, one needs to look in three directions. First, one can find references to this topic in various studies on inclusive education that do not particularly focus on this relationship but partially mention it. Second, the academic literature on distributed leadership may contain various aspects that are also relevant for inclusive education. Finally, there are studies that focus on and investigate this relationship. The last group is thematically most relevant for this research project. These studies significantly differ in defining school leadership and the research methods they use. Thus, there is practically no study that would approach the issue of relating distributed leadership and inclusive leadership in a similar way and using similar research methods as defined in this thesis.

As already explored in the previous sections of this chapter, it is primarily studies of inclusive education framed in the organisational paradigm that mention the aspect of school leadership as playing some role in practising inclusive education in schools. With regards to the crucial academic work of the organisational paradigm – the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) – it lists an “inclusive approach to leadership” as one of the indicators schools should adopt to develop inclusive policies and practices. The Index unpacks this indicator as a form of collaborative leadership rather than an autocratic one, as knowledge sharing amongst staff, and as a practice of staff members being enabled to contribute to a decision-making process while their input is respected. Among other relevant indicators for distributed leadership, the Index also mentions “staff co-operate”, “staff expertise is known and used”, or “staff plan, teach and review together” (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 99).

The theme of staff collaborating or co-operating and sharing knowledge is perhaps the most recurring one offered by the organisational paradigm theorists as one of the most important strategies to practise inclusion in schools (e.g., Ashman & Elkins, 2012; Ferguson et al., 2005; Flem, Moen, & Gudmundsdottir, 2004; Foreman, 2011; Hyde, Carpenter,
Conway, 2010; Yeung, 2012). In this respect, Skrtic (1991, p. 171), another organisational theorist within the inclusive education field, introduces the specific term *adhocracy*, which refers to an alternative organisation of school to the professional bureaucracy. In adhocracy, school staff members are organised in innovative problem-solving teams where they work collaboratively on various tasks and assume joint responsibility to complete them. This definition of adhocracy relates to the question of distributed leadership into what? as presented in the previous section of the chapter. Besides collaboration, another possible manifestation of distributed leadership may be that all staff members take responsibility or perform various leadership functions and are involved in the decision-making process. Although less frequently, these practices can be implied as conducive to inclusion as well (e.g., Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Ferguson et al., 2005).

With regards to the academic literature on distributed leadership, there is practically no study that mentions inclusion or inclusive education as one of its potential benefits. As was already stated, this field focuses on school improvement and increasing students’ achievements (Harris, 2009, p. 12). This literature, however, elaborates on the immediate benefits distributed leadership might introduce to the school community which are of particular relevance for practising inclusive education. Hatcher (2005, p. 254) mentions that practising distributed leadership may minimise alienation and powerlessness of workers – school staff members – and may give them a feeling of engagement and enthusiasm for their work. Distributed leadership is also crucial as a mechanism to share knowledge and expertise. To practise inclusion in schools, both of these benefits of distributed leadership are very pertinent. Practising inclusive education in schools is undisputedly a challenging task, which is one of the main reasons teachers favour inclusion as a principle but express rather negative attitudes towards inclusion of students with more severe disabilities or students with *behaviour difficulties* (de Boer et al., 2011). Teachers usually feel they do not
have sufficient time, skills and training for inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). In this situation, being able to feel engaged and enthusiastic about their work and to share expertise and knowledge seem particularly useful, if not necessary conditions, for teachers to practise inclusion.

Finally, there are some studies – usually written by authors associated with the field of inclusive education – that focus particularly on the relationship between school leadership and inclusive education. These studies can be divided into two sets: (1) scrutinising the role (behaviour and attitudes) of school principals in practising inclusion; and (2) investigating school leadership understood more broadly – hence, at times as a distributed leadership – and how it relates to inclusive practices in schools. As for the first group, for instance, Bailey and du Plessis (1997) and Graham and Spandagou (2011) investigate primary school principals’ attitudes towards inclusive education in Queensland and New South Wales respectively. In both studies, principals acknowledge the importance of inclusion, but what they describe as inclusion is reminiscent of the older models of *integration*. In addition, principals usually condition the inclusion of students by the level of funding available and type of disability. The longitudinal case study by Leo and Barton (2006) partially investigates principals’ attitudes while exposing a “moral dilemma” principals have to face when trying to reconcile opposing agendas of inclusion and excellence (p. 176).

Besides principals’ attitudes, scholars also investigate principals’ behaviour that is conducive for inclusion. Guzmán (1997), for instance, emphasises the role of principals to support collaboration between teachers and their professional development. Ingram (1997, p. 423) stresses the principals’ task to foster “the development of shared values and beliefs, meanings, and commitment to common goals”. Keyes et al. (1999) investigated behaviour of one principal of an inclusive school where they demonstrated the principal’s crucial role in creating a supportive environment for critique, collaboration, and teachers’ adopting a
problem-solving responsibility. Riehl (2000) also offers various theoretical leads in his extensive literature review of educational administration practice in which he scrutinises the principal’s role in creating inclusive schools for diverse students. In this review, he highlights three administrative tasks of principals: (1) fostering new meanings about diversity; (2) promoting inclusive practices within schools; and (3) building connections between schools and communities. Riehl (2000) concludes:

> When wedded to a relentless commitment to equity, voice, and social justice, administrators’ effort in the tasks of sensemaking, promoting inclusive cultures and practices in schools, and building positive relationships outside of the school may indeed foster a new form of practice (p. 71).

Looking at studies about inclusive education and school leadership that are defined more broadly than just principalship, the aspect of distributing the leadership becomes more visible. For instance, Mayrowetz and Weinstein (1999) argue that all school stakeholders should perform leadership functions such as promoting a common vision of inclusive education, providing encouragement, obtaining resources, and monitoring progress in order to successfully practise inclusive education in schools. Despite that, although the authors do not admit it explicitly, their study implies that support of a principal for inclusion is a precondition. A similar implication is present in the study by Angelides et al. (2010). The principals are portrayed as the ones obliged to distribute and empower others. Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) go even further in this respect. While calling explicitly the *positional* leaders or the principals to support “distributed leadership and participative decision-making”, they invite principals to be “autocratic” when supporting the values and beliefs central to inclusive education (pp. 139-140). In the more recent and theoretical study by Ainscow and Sandill (2010), the authors call for distributed leadership without mentioning a possibility to resort to autocraticism. By the same token, they still portray principals as the
only ones responsible for challenging the hierarchical structures in schools, promoting inclusive values, and encouraging other school stakeholders to participate in leadership functions. They do not seem to consider an option that other school stakeholders may challenge the hierarchical structures and promote inclusion in schools, too.

Except for the studies on principals’ attitudes, all the other mentioned studies are framed in the organisational paradigm. To a varying extent, many of these studies cling more to the positivist theoretical position – away from the interpretivist paradigms – which situates them further away from the theoretical framework of this research project. First of all, although several of these studies acknowledge an existence of different meanings of leadership, no study framed in the organisational paradigm admits their socially constructed character. They are based on particular taken-for-granted assumptions without making these explicit. For instance, although talking about distributed leadership, many of these studies still portray principals as the ones with power, who can delegate it to others or who can interrupt it by employing autocratic manoeuvres. By not questioning this assumption, the studies only recreate this construction of principals’ solo leadership (Crawford, 2012). That is, however, not to deny the fact that policies may place (construct) principals in a different power position than other school stakeholders: for instance, by giving them the legal power to hire and fire the personnel or by considering them as legal representatives of the school. Regardless, without acknowledging the constructed character of this arrangement, we may be contributing to its reconstruction as something natural and essential. These studies rarely scrutinise the socio-political contexts that all researched school stakeholders are immersed in and need to constantly negotiate around. The neoliberal discourses of managerialism, efficiency, and individualism may place an insurmountable hurdle to practise distributed leadership (Hatcher, 2005) and/or inclusive education (Slee, 2011). This is rarely spoken of
when these authors recommend collaboration, distribution of responsibilities, involvement in decision-making processes or inclusion of all students in schools.

There is, however, one book that is thematically and paradigmatically closest to this research project – *Inclusive Leadership* by James Ryan (2006a). This book introduces a unique theoretical concept of *inclusive leadership* which brings together the academic fields of inclusive education and school leadership. Ryan sees inclusive leadership as a process that does not rely on one central individual but rather “on many different individuals who contribute in their own often humble ways to a clearly established process. In this view, an individual may be a key mover in one situation and an observer in another.” (p. 17).

Notwithstanding, Ryan also defines inclusive leadership as being organised to achieve particular ends or products. It promotes the values of inclusion, democracy and social justice. Because various students may find themselves routinely excluded from the learning, experiences and interactions in schools, the definitive end of inclusion requires teachers “to discover or invent routines to affirm the different knowledge, experiences, cultures, and histories of the students who attend their schools” (p. 16). In other words, inclusive leadership has as its goal practising inclusive education.

The book *Inclusive Leadership* (Ryan, 2006a) is a form of literature review on inclusion, various types of exclusion (based on poverty, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability) and relevant types of school leadership (emancipatory leadership, teacher leadership, student leadership and community involvement). It also provides practical suggestions for promoting inclusive leadership in practice. The book is not based on original primary data but, rather, puts existing research together in a theoretically unique way. The author discusses – on a theoretical level – issues which may arise in practice and that come out of combining the concepts of inclusive education and distributed leadership. In this way, *Inclusive Leadership* can be considered as closest to this research project. Because the book
is not based on any original research that would actually focus on the relationship between inclusive education and school leadership but rather puts existing research of the two distinct fields together on a theoretical level, this thesis can still be considered as an original endeavour. In addition, Ryan’s book does not explicitly refer to the concept of distributed leadership, and does not substantially engage with existing academic literature on distributed leadership in particular, which this study attempts to do as well.

To summarise, academic writers link the topics of inclusive education (IE) and distributed leadership (DL) in various ways:

1. Authors in the IE field (within the organisational paradigm) invite to perform particular practices of DL as conducive or indispensable for IE (e.g. teachers’ collaboration, knowledge sharing, involvement in decision-making);

2. Authors in the DL field speak about particular benefits and effects of DL practices which are relevant for practising IE as well (e.g. enhancing teachers’ expertise and motivation; improving students’ achievements);

3. Authors in both the DL and IE fields (within the socio-political paradigm) point out various social discourses and state policies which may constrain practising DL and IE in schools.

**Defining the research problem of this study.** As explored in this chapter, various theoretical disputes take place within the academic field of inclusive education. This literature review focused on one particular debate: distinguishing an organisational paradigm and a socio-political paradigm (Clark et al., 1995). The former emphasises the role of schools and teachers as having the agency to practise inclusive education. The latter highlights the role of wider social, cultural, historical and political factors that may significantly shape school stakeholders’ possibilities to practise inclusion in schools. This research study was specifically situated in between them. It focuses on the school level and
what meanings school stakeholders create and put in practice (organisational paradigm). In that process of meaning creation, the wider socio-political factors are acknowledged and explored here (socio-political paradigm) as well. In this chapter, a general classification of theoretical paradigms, which is relevant for all fields of social sciences, was introduced (Schensul, 2012). The interpretivist paradigm was adopted for this thesis as an overarching methodological and theoretical framework. Looking through this lens, social reality is perceived as a result of the process of social construction.

As was further explored in this chapter, academics predominantly within the organisational paradigm see a connection between the concepts of inclusive education and distributed leadership (e.g., Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Ferguson et al., 2005). They either see distributed leadership as a particular feature of inclusive education or as its precondition. The latter understanding is primarily expressed in their call for collaboration between teachers to share knowledge and support each other in practising inclusion (e.g., Ashman & Elkins, 2012; Flem et al., 2004; Foreman, 2011; Yeung, 2012), while collaboration is defined here as one manifestation of distributed leadership.

If we see distributed leadership as a precondition or inherent feature of inclusive education, we may stumble against a major theoretical paradox. The extensive research on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education shows that teachers usually feel that they do not have sufficient time, skills and training for inclusion. That is why they favour inclusion mostly as a principle, but express rather negative attitudes towards inclusion of students with more severe disabilities or students with behaviour difficulties (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Taking this fact into consideration, distributing school leadership and taking on board all stakeholders’ attitudes in the decision-making processes might hinder practising inclusive education. In other words, in the situation where school stakeholders have reserved attitudes towards inclusion,
distributed leadership appears rather as an obstacle than a prerequisite. That is why the very same authors that see distributed leadership as a precondition of inclusion admit that principals might need to act autocratically if teachers do not fully adhere to the inclusive values (e.g., Keyes et al., 1999; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). As Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) argue:

> the importance of collaborative processes points to the importance of distributed leadership and participative decision-making. The ‘strong’ leaders we met were supporters and enablers of staff as they engaged in a collaborative process of school development. They would not, however, hesitate to be autocratic when faced with decisions impacting on the foundation of their schools’ inclusive cultures (p. 140).

This theoretical paradox represents the main research problem which motivated me to conduct this research study.

This theoretical paradox introduces a dilemma whether the *end* should justify the *means* or whether the process of distributed leadership should be compromised for the aim (product, end, or goal) of inclusive education. There are, however, two underlying assumptions in the proposal that sometimes the principals should act autocratically to enforce inclusion. The first assumption is that the principal is in a position of power and that is why she/he can act autocratically. Although state policies in NSW and Slovakia may construct principals as having a greater power than other school stakeholders, by assuming it we may be re-constructing the status quo. The second assumption is that the principal her/himself has pro-inclusive attitudes, which is often not the case (Graham & Spandagou, 2011; Praisner, 2003). In other words, the proposal for the principals to be autocratic does not take into consideration a situation in which all or most of teaching staff members in a particular school have pro-inclusive attitudes except for the principal.
The above-mentioned theoretical paradox casts some doubt on the possibilities of practising inclusive education itself. If distributed leadership as a process is understood to be inherent in the definition of inclusive education, then not being able to practise distributed leadership in all situations may bring into question the possibility to practise inclusive education itself. If that is the case, the question remains who should decide in which situations to act inclusively and in which exclusionarily, and in what ways.

To unpack this paradox, we also need to examine the issue of teachers’ or school stakeholders’ attitudes on inclusive education. If all people wanted inclusion, distributed leadership would be unproblematic. This research project examines what meanings school stakeholders create about diverse students and practices and policies of inclusive education, and how they negotiate their understanding of inclusive education with the current state policies.

To relate to the practices of distributed leadership, we need to look at what attitudes school stakeholders hold towards the concept of distributed leadership. We need to investigate what meanings they construct about school leadership and how they negotiate it with the current state policies or wider social discourses. Although the current state policies in both NSW and Slovakia may construct the principal’s role as a representative and executive of the school, which may put her/him in a different power position than other school stakeholders, the school may still problematise these constructions of leadership and attempt to enable everybody to actively participate in leadership. These attempts are worthwhile to investigate as well.

By adopting the interpretivist paradigm, the social reality of any school is considered multidimensional, “messy” and complex. In this respect, an intention of this research project to identify and examine a “good practice” example of an inclusive school is by definition problematic as in this theoretical position there is no such school as an inclusive school.
admitting that there is no single reality but multiple perspectives and interpretations, full inclusion will never be possible for everybody in each situation. Especially in the wider socio-political context in which individual deficit discourse or market discourse play a significant role in our meaning constructions, we can only attempt to be inclusive by constantly problematising what the notions of inclusion and exclusion mean in different school contexts. These attempts are, however, worthwhile to investigate in more detail. This research project aims to do exactly that. In addition, it aims to shed some light on the complex relationship between attempting to act inclusively and practices of distributed leadership in these two schools that were identified by external informants as “inclusive schools”. This brings us to introducing the very last research question of this study:

- How does school stakeholders’ understandings of the concept and practices of inclusive education relate to their understanding of the concept and practices of distributed leadership in the two socio-political contexts?

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has attempted to map existing literature across two distinct academic areas of research: inclusive education and distributed leadership. This process exposed the main theoretical controversies in these respective fields, and explored the key concepts for this research study. It was explained that with respect to inclusive education, this thesis will work both with the organisation as well as socio-political paradigm. With regard to distributed leadership, it will focus on its normative understanding. Furthermore, the chapter presented the interpretivist paradigm as a theoretical framework of this study as this framework spans both of these academic fields. Most importantly, it specified the research problem of whether practising distributed leadership in any way hinders, assists or is
irrelevant to practices of inclusive education in the two researched schools. The chapter also introduced particular research questions for this study. In the following chapter, the methodological approach and the particular methods employed in this research will be explored in detail.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Methods

This chapter will explore the research methodology and methods used in this study. First, these are interlinked with the epistemological and theoretical framework discussed in the previous chapter. Afterwards, the data collection process is briefly delineated, and the main decisions that shaped it are outlined. The chapter sheds some light on the process of data analysis, validity of this research, my role as a researcher, and how this study addressed various ethical issues.

The Components of the Research Process

As discussed in the previous chapter, the academic field of inclusive education emerged as a critique of the integration model and special education (Armstrong et al., 2011). The scholars who share this critical attitude towards the field of special education, also critiqued research methodologies traditionally used in special education (Kearney, 2009, p. 53). Although an increasing number of academics in the special education field call for using qualitative or mixed methods (e.g., Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; Brantlinger, Klingner, Richardson, & Taylor, 2005; Klingner & Boardman, 2011; McDuffie & Scruggs, 2008; Sandall, Smith, McLean, & Ramsey, 2002) or suggest that evidence-based practices in special education do not need to be based on quantitative methods (e.g., Cook & Cook, 2013; Odom et al., 2005), by doing so they imply that the generally preferred research methods in special education are quantitative methods and (post)positivist theoretical perspective inspired by the medical sciences. Most importantly, researchers of special education do not seem to free themselves from the taken-for-granted assumptions about the existence of individual medical or psychological problems within students. Oliver (2009) claims that special education research which focuses on this identification and remediation of alleged deficits, may reinforce negative stereotypes of people with disabilities and their discrimination and exclusion.
To better understand the relationship between the theoretical perspective, research methodologies and research methods, Crotty (1998) introduces a hierarchical diagram portraying these as main elements of any research process (see Figure 1). Through this diagram, Crotty (1998) demonstrates that the higher element of any research process always determines the possibilities of the lower one. There were a number of rationales that influenced the decision as to which particular epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods to employ to investigate the research questions problem and research questions of this study.

Figure 1. The basic elements of the research process (Crotty, 1998, p. 4).
**Epistemology**

As touched upon already in Chapter Two, epistemology is “the study of the nature of knowledge and justification” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 71). It concerns itself with the questions: what is knowledge and what does it mean to know something? In any research, it provides a philosophical grounding of what kinds of knowledge are possible and adequate. In this respect, Crotty (1998) points out that there is a range of epistemological stances. One example is the objectivist epistemological position, which mainly claims that meaning exists apart from any consciousness or context. At the opposite end of the epistemological spectrum lies subjectivism, which holds that meaning is created exclusively by individual subjects who impose their specific meanings on objects (Crotty, 1998, p. 9).

In contrast, a constructionist epistemological stance is founded on the idea that all knowledge and all “reality” are dependent on human beings who construct it in the process of their interactions. Knowledge and reality are created and transmitted within particular social contexts. In other words, researchers holding the constructionist position do not start with nothing – as the subjectivist position might present it – but with the people and objects already existing in the world, although constantly changing and co-constructing themselves and their meanings (Burr, 2003; Crotty, 1998; Kearney, 2009). This research project adopts the constructionist epistemological stance as well. I have decided to take this stance not only because it is represented in a substantial proportion of existing literature on inclusive education (see Chapter Two), but also because I primarily see the world in a constructionist way as a person and researcher. In certain sense, it can be considered as my belief system. In addition, because the objectivist epistemology – dominant in special education – may result in reinforcing various forms of discrimination and exclusion in education and society (Oliver, 2009; Slee, 2011), a constructionist epistemology may better serve the higher aim of this research project – to promote inclusion and social equity.
Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective provides a philosophical context for the chosen methodology and grounds its logic and criteria. By elaborating on my theoretical perspective (paradigm or worldview), I would also like to state and be explicit about the assumptions that I bring to this research task (Crotty, 1998, p. 7). As already discussed in Chapter Two, this study adopts the interpretivist theoretical perspective (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 7; Schensul, 2012, p. 76; Yanow & Ybema, 2009). By adopting the interpretivist perspective, I hold a theoretical assumption that human actions and social phenomena emerge from the ways in which people in their specific contexts create meanings. The way people interact is informed by these constructions of meaning, and these interactions also contribute to and constitute these constructions. How people see, interpret and talk about their actions and various concepts such as inclusive education and distributed leadership in their usual environment is thus crucial for me as a researcher to uncover some of the meanings that may guide their behaviour and practices. In this sense, I perceive the interpretivist theoretical perspective as very suitable for addressing the research questions of this study which focus on scrutinising participants’ perspectives and interpretations of various concepts and practices in a particular social context.

By adopting the constructionist epistemology and interpretivist theoretical perspective, as a researcher I do not deny the existence of social reality (Burr, 2003). Nonetheless, I argue that we have little chance to understand it; that the process of understanding reality is always impacted by context, interactions, social discourses or my own biases. It is more an act of interpretation than exploration. The aim for researchers is not to create an image that would correspond most accurately with the reality, because there is no possible way to verify this correspondence (Miovský, 2006, p. 22). Therefore, I
attempt only to interpret reality in this study, while acknowledging my own biases and theoretical assumptions.

**Research Methodology**

This particular theoretical perspective determines various research methodological options. I have chosen a qualitative research methodology as it is more associated with the interpretivist theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Lapan et al., 2012) and more suitable to address my research questions, which are not quantifiable, but focus on contextual, unique and constantly changing human perceptions of particular concepts and practices (Miovský, 2006). This qualitative study is based on interview and group discussion data which was collected through an ethnographic approach. In contrast to quantitative research, by employing the qualitative research methodology and interpretivist theoretical perspective, I acknowledge that I have participated in the construction of social meanings which most probably affected and influenced context in the research site (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miovský, 2006). In addition, I acknowledge that my interpretations are shaped by my socio-historical location, values, interests and various identity markers (Biklen, 2010). I regard my account as a construction that inevitably reflects my socio-historical position and assumptions. Nevertheless, by saying that my findings and data presented here are *constructed* should not imply that they do not or cannot represent social phenomena (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 16).

When referring to *ethnography*, one may understand very different things under this term. Despite this variation in meanings, ethnography usually involves the following features: research takes place in the field when researcher is immersed in everyday context for a long-term period; data is gathered by multiple methods (observations, formal and informal interviews, documents, artefacts, etc.); data collection is usually unstructured; data analysis is mostly spiral involving hypothesis building and theory testing; and the focus is
usually on a small number of cases, a single setting or group of people in depth but provoking the basis for theoretical generalisation (Hammersley, 2010, p. 387; Walford, 2009, p. 272). There have been continuing disputes as to whether any of these features are essential for calling a study an *ethnography* or about their relationship to a broader banner of *qualitative methods*. Since some of these features have not been completely fulfilled in this study, I prefer to state that this project adopted the interview-based qualitative research methodology with some ethnographic data collection aspects.

There are a number of reasons for choosing this research methodology. As discussed in the previous chapter, inclusive education and distributed leadership are complex theoretical concepts. Qualitative research methodology and/or ethnography are often used and considered as particularly useful to uncover and scrutinise this complexity of both of these concepts – inclusive education (e.g., Benjamin, 2002; Deering, 1996; Slobodzian, 2009; Vlachou, 1997) and distributed leadership (e.g., Arrowsmith, 2007; Brooks, Jean-Marie, Normore, & Hodgins, 2007; Gronn & Ribbins, 1996; Maxcy & Nguyen, 2006). In this study, I decided to employ an ethnographic data collection approach by spending a “good deal of time in the field” (Riemer, 2012, p. 170) so as to minimise some of the biases that one-shot formal interviews or observations often involve. Spending four months in each school as a teacher’s aide and/or observer allowed me to build trusting relationships with teachers and students. Having this *trust* and *closeness* with a number of research participants, they revealed to me very sensitive information about feeling hurt or critical of some practices, which would probably not have happened without having a relationship with them (Biklen, 2010; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In addition, my constant presence in the schools most likely reduced the *social desirability bias* when respondents might have answered in ways to please me as a researcher or “look good”, which might have caused misrepresentation of their genuine perceptions (Norwood & Lusk, 2011, p. 528). Because
they knew that anytime I could verify any of their statements by observing them or informally asking others about some content of these statements (while respecting their confidentiality), they might be more inclined to answer authentically and candidly (Neuman, 2000, p. 171). In other words, “[s]ituated behaviors themselves serve as a ‘validity check’ against the reports of subjects” (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014, p. 195). Employing the ethnographic approach in the data collection process might have brought a unique quality to the data presented in interviews and group discussions which are reported in this thesis.

This data collection approach might have revealed an emic or insider’s perspective on participants’ reality and their everydayness – various mechanisms and automated ways of functioning – that the participants live in and of which they might not be fully aware (Pole & Morrison, 2003; Riemer, 2012). My immersion into the researched environment for a substantial period of time gave me a plethora of opportunities to observe and converse with research participants on a number of informal occasions. This could have provided me with a much more authentic understanding of the culture, everyday processes and dynamics of relationships in the school community than most of other methodologies (Wolcott, 2008). Just as in the study Unequal Childhoods, by using ethnographic methodology Lareau (2011) could grasp issues appearing in her interviewers’ everyday lives, which they were not able to routinely articulate since they took them for granted. This ethnographic data collection aspect of immersing myself in the researched environment was particularly attractive to me as a researcher for one more reason. In conducting any kind of research in Australia – as a foreign country to me – I felt particularly concerned about my foreignness to the Australian primary education system, and felt too removed and lacking the required competence to write about it in a sufficient depth without getting a more profound and everyday experience of it. The qualitative research methodology based on ethnographic data collection procedures enabled me to get acquainted with everyday routine practices in the researched...
NSW school and the general terminology teachers and students use when referring to their practices and policies. It enabled me to gain that *emic* experience and competence to speak about it. In contrast, spending an extended period of time in a Slovak primary school after experiencing the NSW one provided me with a new lens where I could see the known from a new perspective (Crossley & Watson, 2003).

**Comparative Aspect of the Research Methodology**

The last mentioned point brings me to the comparative aspect of this study. There have been a number of reasons this research project was designed and conducted as a comparative study in two countries. I would like to start with clarifying my position towards one reason that is often assumed as the main and obvious reason of any comparative study in education, which is *policy borrowing* (Halpin & Troyna, 1995) or *policy transfer* (Crossley, 2010). It is usually research reports that are framed in objectivist or positivist theoretical perspective based on large scale quantitative research methods, and are often conducted by various international organisations such as OECD or IEA, which imply that it is possible to simply transfer one policy functioning well in one country and expect similar outcomes in another one (Crossley & Watson, 2009). There have been reported many examples of internationally inspired policies which did not bring about the expected and desired outcomes observed in other systems (King, 2007). Scholars who adopted “socio-cultural and interpretivist paradigmatic perspective” in comparative education (Crossley & Watson, 2009, p. 634), point out that

> [w]e cannot wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower from one bush and some leaves from another, and then expect that if we stick what we have gathered into the soil at home, we shall have a living plant (Sadler, 1900, as cited in Bereday, 1964, p. 310).
In other words, they identify real dangers in these simplistic attempts of policy borrowings which uncritically ignore the specificities of particular living cultures and contexts (e.g., Crossley, 2010; Phillips & Ochs, 2003). This study does not aspire to propose any recommendations for policy transfer.

The studies in comparative education framed in the interpretivist perspective most often rely on qualitative research methods (Crossley & Watson, 2009, p. 636). They call for bridging the findings of educational research and the lived experiences of educational practitioners through (re)focusing on the micro-level and research methodologies such as ethnography (Crossley, 1990; Crossley & Watson, 2003, p. 126). Masemann (1990) raises a similar point and urges that “studies in comparative education need to be based on classroom reality” (p. 472) for which ethnographic research methodology can be particularly useful (Masemann, 1982, p. 13; 1999, p. 127). This research project aligns with this call as it employs various ethnographic data collection procedures and researches perceptions of lived experiences and practices of members of two schools (at a micro-level).

Instead of trying to propose any policy transfer, I see the practical value of studying a foreign system of education – the NSW system in case of this particular research project – “in our being better fitted to study and to understand our own” (Sadler, 1900, as cited in Bereday, 1964, p. 310). In this respect, the constructions of difference and similarity need to be explored. An intention to discover similarities and differences between two or more studied entities usually lies at the basis of the analytical process of comparison (Postlethwaite, 1988, p. xvii). Comparing is considered as a fundamental thought process which enables us to make sense of the world and the way we experience it (Phillips, 1999, p. 15). Bakhtin (1986) claims that “a meaning only reveals its depth once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning” (p. 7). This view represents a very important rationale for conducting this research project in a comparative way. It is the
reason this research project studies two schools in two different countries, while Slovakia signifies for me as a researcher my own and NSW a foreign meaning. When comparing particular understandings and perceptions of practices which emerge in the Slovak school with the NSW school and vice versa, these are assumed to have greater differences when comparing across countries, as opposed to fewer differences when comparing to public schools in the same country’s context. This may make more visible the aspects of these understandings and practices which might have passed as unnoticed if not being exposed to this specific difference. Conducting this research as a comparative study might not only enable me to go deeper in understanding particular practices of the primary school that is part of my own educational system, but may provide a unique perspective on the data gathered in the NSW school, which can be valuable for the NSW audience as well.

In addition, some practices and understandings related to particular concepts such as inclusive education or distributed leadership might be absent or relatively insignificant in one cultural and political context, while in others they may represent a crucial component of these concepts. Conducting this kind of research in more schools within one cultural and political context would not be able to identify these absent spaces because of not encountering the difference. This study might present a broader and more extensive understanding of these theoretical concepts (see this point being addressed in Chapters Four to Six).

Despite that, looking for differences between cultures and studied entities may bring not only benefits but also some dangers to the research process. Seeing difference through an interpretivist paradigm as socially constructed, Hoffman (1999, pp. 470-472) warns that the notion of difference may place boundaries between cultures, essentialise their characteristics and create distance. This may support the process of othering – rendering the different other as inferior or subordinate to self. Hoffman proposes seeing difference as
situational and contextual without borders or boundaries. Crossley (2008, p. 331) and Welch (2001, p. 481) follow up on this point and appeal to celebrate and value difference and diversity. This study endeavours to do just that without trying to identify “good” and/or “bad” practices of inclusion or distributed leadership in the researched schools.

A few studies have attempted to research inclusive education in a comparative way and employing an ethnographic research methodology. While focusing on various aspects of inclusive education and using ethnography, Arnesen, Mietola, and Lahelma (2007) studied schools in Finland and Norway, Spandagou (2002) examined schools in England and Greece, and Kugelmass (2006) looked at schools in the United States, United Kingdom and Portugal. Whereas none of these also addressed the topic of school leadership or distributed leadership, the study by Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) did that to some extent. Notwithstanding, as already elaborated in Chapter Two, it did not substantially theorise the concept of distributed leadership and the paradox presented in the research problem of this thesis.

Research Methods and Data Collection Process

After exploring the decisions made and the rationale for these decisions about epistemology underpinning this research study, its theoretical perspective/paradigm, research methodology and its comparative aspect, the chapter will now explore in detail the research methods employed in this study. First it will describe the selection process of research sites, then it will continue with the account of how and when in the data collection process particular research methods were used and with which particular participants.

Selection of research sites. It was only possible to research a maximum of two public primary schools within the time frame of my doctoral studies due to the data collection process involving a prolonged immersion in the research site. In addition, because it was decided that this study would have a comparative aspect, another decision was made
that one researched school would be located in New South Wales (Australia) as the country of my university, and the other one in Slovakia as my home country. In order to research a relationship between practices of inclusive education and distributed leadership in a school, some kind of external referral was needed to guarantee that the selected schools would demonstrate at least some practices of inclusive education as the concept was theorised in Chapter Two. I was conscious that inclusive practices are closely related to exclusionary ones (Armstrong et al., 2010; Graham & Slee, 2008) and that no school can be considered as inclusive in its ideal sense (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). The aim was to select the schools that various stakeholders in the field of inclusive education in the two countries would identify as some “good practice examples” of inclusion – in whichever way they understood the term – which would provide at least some form of guarantee that the schools could be associated more with inclusive practices than the exclusionary ones. Another reason to research good practice examples of inclusive schools was to potentially introduce some implications for practice for making a school a more inclusive environment.

The practice of distributed leadership was not a criterion for selection. It was expected and assumed that the forms of practising distributed leadership would differ considerably in the two research sites due to being situated in two different socio-political and historical contexts – Australia having a long history of democratic government (see Appendix Z), while Slovakia having experienced an autocratic Communist regime in its relatively recent history (see Appendix AA). It was assumed that this historical and political development of the two countries might have manifested in the leadership practices of public schools in some way as well (Laššák & Hašková, 2009). In this sense, a difference between how each school practises distributed leadership was desired. Having more substantial difference in the aspect of distributed leadership might have shed some light on the relationship between understandings and practices of inclusive education and distributed
leadership. Whether this expectation has been in any sense confirmed is discussed in Chapter Five.

To select the research sites for this study, a “purposeful sampling” (Schensul, 2012, p. 84) was used. In order to identify good practice examples of inclusive public primary schools, it was planned to contact a number of academics in the two countries working in the field of inclusive education, representatives of non-governmental organisations that deal with inclusive education and relevant departments of the ministries of education. They received a letter (see Appendices E and F) with General Information Statement (see Appendices I and J) asking to identify one or two schools that they considered as good practice examples of inclusive public primary schools in their capital – Sydney (NSW) and Bratislava (Slovakia) – and to provide reasons for this selection. Once the addressed individuals and institutions informed me about their suggestions, the principal of the school which was identified by the most sources in each country was approached. With some particular differences which are explored below, the actual process of identifying and approaching the research sites was realised according to this plan in each country.

In this selection process, I was also concerned about the issue of comparability of the two schools in terms of their location, size and student composition. All these aspects needed to be weighed and considered once the schools were identified. The issue with the location and student composition of the schools was that Sydney and Bratislava differ significantly in terms of ethnic and national diversity of population (see Appendices X and Y). In terms of student composition, both selected schools approximately represented the average population of the country. In terms of size, the two schools differed slightly. Both schools were of middle to small sizes compared to an average public school. At the same
time, the selected NSW public primary school\textsuperscript{11} in Sydney was considerably smaller in the number of students, teachers and classrooms than the selected Slovak public primary school\textsuperscript{12} in Bratislava (see Table 1). In this sense, the selected school in Sydney was rather atypical for a metropolitan, urban NSW school (NSW DEC, 2012a).

\textsuperscript{11} In this thesis, the name of the researched public primary school in NSW is not revealed. When referring to it in the following parts of the thesis, a generic term “NSW public primary school” or simply “NSW school” is used to represent the research site in NSW.

\textsuperscript{12} In this thesis, the name of the researched public primary school in Slovakia is not revealed. When referring to it in the following parts of the thesis, a generic term “Slovak public primary school” or simply “Slovak school” is used to represent the research site in Slovakia.
Table 1

Basic features of the two researched primary schools\textsuperscript{13}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>NSW school</th>
<th>Slovak school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location:</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Bratislava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students:</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Range:</td>
<td>K – 6</td>
<td>1 – 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Regular Classrooms:</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Special Classrooms:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Students per Classroom:</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Full-Time Teachers:</td>
<td>5 plus 1 teaching principal (no deputy principal)</td>
<td>30 plus 1 teaching principal &amp; 1 teaching deputy principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selecting and accessing NSW public primary school. For the purpose of identifying a good practice example of an inclusive public primary school in NSW, first I approached a manager of a project run by the University of Sydney which supports primary school students to participate in higher education. They advised me to approach particular lecturers at the university who coordinated a practicum component for teacher students and had

\textsuperscript{13} For the purpose of protecting anonymity of the researched schools, various features in this table have been modified. These modifications, however, have not fundamentally disrupted representation of some of the schools’ key features. For example, if the location of the schools was changed, the real location would be one of the three biggest cities in the respective countries, so the feature of the school of being an urban school would still be represented in the thesis. These modifications have been made consistent throughout the whole thesis.
contacts with particular primary schools in Sydney. These lecturers gave me suggestions of schools which I could select as my research site. In addition, I was informed about the Director-General’s School Achievement Award bestowed by the NSW Department of Education and Training¹⁴ (NSW DET) or NSW Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC), which is in some instances granted also to public primary schools for practising inclusive education. This provided me with another list of potential research sites.

At that point, I was recommended by a colleague researching inclusive education to contact one employee of the NSW DEC who consulted to primary schools in Sydney in the area of inclusive teaching practices. This employee not only identified one particular primary school suitable for my research study, but also organised a meeting with the principal of the school. Being aware that obtaining adequate access to observe and fully participate in the life of a research site can be a very challenging and can significantly impact on the quality of collected data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 41-49), I welcomed this opportunity. At this meeting with the principal, the employee of the NSW DEC acted as my informal sponsor to access the school (p. 47). Until that point in my search for a suitable research site, none of the identified schools were mentioned by more informants. It was a matter of trusting both the judgement of this employee of the NSW DEC and my judgement from the meeting with the principal as to the suitability of the school as my research site. The main concern was the small size of the school (only around 100 students) as I expected difficulty in finding a school of comparable size in Bratislava.

¹⁴ In 2012, just before starting the data collection in NSW, the name of the state department responsible for the area of education and primary schools was changed from the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) to the NSW Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC). Hence, in this thesis I will primarily use the latter name. However, several research participants were still using the former one.
The combination of obtaining easy access to the school and the very welcoming and supportive approach of its principal, together with the referral from the NSW DEC employee supplemented by information retrieved from the My School web pages (http://www.myschool.edu.au/) confirming above average students’ achievements in NAPLAN tests, persuaded me that this school was a suitable choice for my research study. After making this choice, I was invited to present the research proposal to staff members of the school so they could decide if they wanted to participate in the study and in which ways. Two weeks after the presentation, they expressed their consent. After receiving the invitation letter to participate in this research project (see Appendix G), the principal negotiated with me the conditions in which I could conduct my data collection, which were acceptable to me. This process also positioned the principal of NSW school as the gatekeeper (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 49; Riemer, 2012, p. 168) and key informant (Riemer, 2012, p. 175) for my data collection in this research site.

**Selecting and accessing Slovak public primary school.** The selection process of the Slovak public primary school reflected more the predefined plan. Through emails and official letters (see Appendix F) sent from Australia, I contacted four of the best known academics in inclusive education in Slovakia, two non-governmental organisations that organised a conference on inclusive education the year before the data collection, a private speech therapy organisation that worked with children with speech and learning difficulties in primary schools for the whole Bratislava region, and finally the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic. Except for one academic, all the other institutions and individuals provided me with their suggestions of an inclusive primary school in Bratislava. None of them provided me with a detailed justification of their choices. Most probably because the number of schools in Bratislava is much lower than in Sydney, two public primary schools were identified by most sources. In the case of Slovakia, the sponsor (Hammersley &
Atkinson, 2007, p. 47) to access the research site happened to be an employee of the Ministry of Education, as occurred in NSW.

The official of the Ministry of Education sent an email to the principal of one of the two primary schools in Bratislava that were identified by most sources asking her if she was willing to participate in this research project. The official also forwarded to her the General Information Statement about this research (see Appendix J). Through this email communication, the principal agreed to participate in the study (see Appendix H). At my first meeting with the principal and the deputy principal at the start of my data collection, I introduced to them in detail my research proposal and plan for collecting data. The principal agreed to it and expressed a very welcoming attitude towards the research. At that time, none of the staff members of the school knew about the plan to conduct this research study at their school as they were not consulted on this issue. During the very same first meeting with the principal and deputy principal, all staff members were just called to the principal’s office so myself and my research project could be introduced to them.

The concerning issue of comparable size between the NSW school and Slovak school became relevant in various aspects of the data collection (see Table 1). However, a systemic and structural feature of primary education in the two countries needs to be taken into consideration here. Public primary schools in NSW usually contain K-6 classes (see Appendix AB), while public primary schools in Slovakia usually consist of Y1-9 classes (see Appendix AC). Consequently, Slovak primary schools have two more year levels of students to educate. Despite this, the two researched schools differed significantly in the number of staff members, with five teachers and one teaching principal in the NSW school, and thirty teachers plus one teaching deputy principal and one principal in the Slovak school (see Table 1).
Research methods. To collect data, I immersed myself in the environment of each of the two selected schools in NSW and Slovakia for a period of approximately four months. I was present in both schools on average two or three days a week within the fieldwork period. In the NSW school, my data collection lasted from mid-July until mid-November 2011. In the Slovak school, I collected data from mid-November 2011 until the end of March 2012 (see Table 2).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>NSW school</th>
<th>Slovak school</th>
<th>Activities of data collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st stage</td>
<td>mid-July to mid-August 2011</td>
<td>mid-November to mid-December 2011</td>
<td>Through observations and informal conversations, I was becoming familiar with the environment of the school, its usual practices and routines, and names and backgrounds of staff members and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd stage 1st and half of 3rd month</td>
<td>mid-August to end of September 2011</td>
<td>January to mid-February 2012</td>
<td>Through observations and informal conversations, I was focusing on collecting data relevant for the research questions and information that informed minor adjustments of the interview schedules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd stage half of 3rd and 4th month</td>
<td>October to mid-November 2011</td>
<td>mid-February to end of March 2012</td>
<td>While continuing in my observations and informal conversations, in this stage I conducted all interviews, group discussions and drawing activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During this period I used the following research methods to collect data:

- observations
  - participant and non-participant observations of classroom practice (see Appendix U); and
  - participant and non-participant observations of staff meetings, parent meetings, school assemblies and other relevant school activities (see Appendix U).

- interviews
  - formal in-depth semi-structured interviews with the principal, deputy principal, teachers, non-teaching staff and parents (see Appendix S); and
  - informal situational interviews and conversations with various school stakeholders at different meetings or breaks.

- group discussions with students (each with three students) (see Appendix T)
- drawing activity with students (see Appendices V and W)
- documents (newsletters and web pages of the school).

The exact numbers of participants in the formal interviews (see Table 3) at each school were very similar, except for a few minor differences. In the NSW school, there was no position of a deputy principal. In contrast, in the Slovak school, the deputy principal represented the key informant role for my research; hence, she was interviewed as well as the principal. In the NSW school, the person in the position of school administration manager (non-teaching staff member) was (in my perception) an integral part of the school life. This person was constantly in the company of teachers (in staff room or her/his office), dealing with and knowing all parents, teachers and students. She/he also took part in most staff meetings. For these reasons, she/he was also interviewed. In the Slovak school there
was no such position, just an administrative assistant or a secretary who did not appear to play such a crucial role in life of the school; hence, she/he was not interviewed. Regarding the group discussions with students, the initial plan was to conduct six of them in each school. However, the number of students in the two selected classrooms of the Slovak school was only around fourteen students. Due to the absences of some students on the day when group discussions were to be conducted and because parents of several students did not agree in their Consent Forms (see Appendices Q and R) for their children to be interviewed, I had to reduce the number of group discussions in the Year 5 classroom to two only.

Table 3

*One teacher was also a parent. She/he was added to both cells as she/he was asked all questions relevant for teachers and parents.

I initially intended to observe students of Year 5 or 6 in both schools as I wished them to become familiar with me first and so I could more easily interact with them during the group discussions. However, the NSW school only allowed me to observe the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research methods</th>
<th>NSW school</th>
<th>Slovak school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>1 principal</td>
<td>1 principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 teachers</td>
<td>6 teachers*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 parents</td>
<td>6 parents*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 non-teaching staff member (school administration manager)</td>
<td>1 deputy principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group discussions (each with 3 students)</th>
<th>NSW school</th>
<th>Slovak school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 groups of Y3-4 students</td>
<td>2 groups of Y5 students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 groups of Y5-6 students (total of 18 students)</td>
<td>3 groups of Y6 students (total of 15 students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kindergarten classroom and Y1-2 classroom. Despite this diversion from the initial plan about observations, staff members agreed that I could conduct group discussions with older students (Y3-6). In the later phases of data collection, after classroom teachers of Y3-6 got to know me better, they also allowed me to observe their classes before my group discussions with their students (see Table 4). To a great extent the initial plan was fulfilled.

To make the data comparable, in the Slovak school I enquired about the possibility to observe one classroom from Y1-2 and one from Y4-6. As a result, I was allowed to observe Year 1 and Year 5 classrooms (see Table 4).

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research methods</th>
<th>NSW school</th>
<th>Slovak school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom observations</td>
<td>K-2: 47 hrs 30 min</td>
<td>Y1: 30 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y3-6: 4 hrs 45 min</td>
<td>Y5: 35 hrs 35 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations of staff meetings</td>
<td>14 hrs 40 min</td>
<td>3 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations of other meetings (e.g., with parents)</td>
<td>56 hrs 40 min</td>
<td>21 hrs 55 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and activities (e.g., breaks, carnivals, excursions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews &amp; group discussions</td>
<td>22 hrs 40 min</td>
<td>16 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y3-4: 1 hr</td>
<td>Y5: 1 hr 30 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y5-6: 1 hr</td>
<td>Y6: 1 hr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of data collection, there was one more significant difference in my observations of classrooms in the NSW school and Slovak school. In the former, I was
mostly involved as a teacher’s aide. The classroom teacher prepared activities for me to do with an assigned group of students, or I assisted with the whole classroom as directed by the teacher. The students simply perceived me as another teacher in the classroom. In the Slovak school, in the Year 1 classroom I was acting as a teacher’s aide in cases where students were working on some individual or group tasks. Since the teacher-directed instruction constituted a significant part of education there, this was not happening as often as in the NSW school. In Year 5 of the Slovak school, different subjects were taught by different teachers (similar to high schools in NSW). Despite my suggestions to these teachers in the first weeks of data collection that they could treat me as their aide and that I could assist them with anything they needed, none of them used this opportunity. Most of the time I just sat quietly as a non-participant observer in the back of the classroom.

In Table 4 one can notice a significant difference in time spent observing staff meetings in the NSW school and the Slovak school. In both schools I was allowed to access all staff meetings. In practice, the shorter period devoted to observation of staff meetings in the Slovak school was a result of combination of factors: primarily the low frequency of such meetings (see Appendix AH) and the way I was informed and enabled to participate in them (for instance, on one occasion I was asked to be on duty supervising students during the recess break instead of participating in the staff meeting).

One can also notice a difference in time spent on observations of other meetings (e.g., with parents) and activities (e.g., breaks, carnivals, excursions) in the two schools. Again the reasons for this were structural as well as individual. Simply put, the frequency of other activities like carnivals or excursions was either not as high in the Slovak school as in the NSW school, or some activities (e.g., assemblies or transition programs for future students) were not practised in the former at all. In both schools I was open to participate in any event or activity the staff members invited me to or allowed me to participate in.
Nevertheless, in the NSW school I felt that the principal was very keen to introduce to me every significant activity of the school, which eased my immersion in the environment. In contrast, in the Slovak school I felt I needed to be more proactive to obtain relevant information and gain access to relevant activities, meetings and events.

**Selection of participants.** The process of selection of classrooms for observation was outlined above. To a great extent, this selection predetermined which students could participate in group discussions and drawing activities. In the NSW school there were only four classrooms (KM, Y1-2, Y3-4, Y5-6). My group discussion schedule was prepared for older students, and the principal and teachers agreed to distribute Consent Forms (see *Appendix Q*) and Information Statements (see *Appendix O*) to all Y3-6 students. Since the return rate of consent forms that approved participation in group discussions was not high (around 50%), it only allowed me to conduct three group discussions in each class. In the Slovak school, because I observed the Year 5 classroom, this predetermined that they became participants of group discussions and drawing activities. In addition, I suggested to the principal and deputy principal to involve also the Year 6 regular classroom in group discussions and drawing activities. The classroom teacher agreed, distributed Consent Forms (see *Appendix R*) and Information Statements (see *Appendix P*), and I conducted the data collection with students during the Arts Education class.

Because I consider any kind of psycho-medical diagnosis of students as problematic (see Chapter Two), I did not inquire about these in relation to any students during the data collection. Even if some teachers occasionally referred to them, I consciously ignored these references and successfully forgot them. Whenever a student is quoted in the findings of this study, I do not reveal whether she/he was diagnosed with any SEN or disability category because I simply was not aware of it. Notwithstanding, because diagnosed students might comprise in the vicinity of half of the classroom in the Slovak school, and because the NSW
school was using the non-categorical approach (Martin et al., 2006; Tearle, 2012), one can assume that a number of students that participated in group discussions were identified as having *SEN, disability* or were experiencing *learning difficulties*.

In the NSW school, all teachers participated in the interviews. After three months of having me in their school, the principal informed me that they were all willing to participate in the interviews. In the Slovak school, it was not feasible to interview all thirty teachers. Therefore I interviewed primarily teachers who taught classes that I had observed (Year 1, and two subjects of Year 5). I also interviewed the special education teacher as I considered her/his contribution relevant for the topic of inclusive education, and two more classroom teachers who were recommended by the deputy principal for “doing their job particularly well”.

As anticipated, selecting parents and conducting interviews with them was the most challenging issue. It was organised in the last phase of my data collection. In the NSW school it was the principal who selected the parents. She told me she wanted to choose a “sample of diversity” of parents who are part of the school community. She also had to consider the pragmatic aspect of who would agree to it and be prepared to come to school for this purpose. In the Slovak school, the selection of parents happened through the deputy principal. As she presented the process to me, she asked various teachers to propose parents who they thought might be willing to participate in the research and who regularly come to school. She contacted them, and, after they expressed their consent, she gave me their contact details to arrange an interview. In other words, the main criterion for selecting the parents in the Slovak school appeared to be the teachers’ perception of the most co-operative parents with the school. This selection criterion in both schools needs to be taken into consideration in interpreting parents’ contributions.
Data Analysis

Qualitative data collected in this study included very detailed self-reflective field notes from all my observations, transcriptions of all interviews and group discussions, and drawings. In the process of analysing the data, I made some crucial decisions about data reduction to manage the huge amount of collected data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 12). Because my research questions focus on school stakeholders’ perceptions and understandings of particular concepts and practices/policies, I made the decision to focus my analysis on the data from interviews and group discussions. This did not mean however, that I completely sidelined all the data from my observations, drawings and other materials. All this data was used to triangulate the various information and statements presented in interviews and group discussions by testing them against each other (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 184). In this report, I used observation data to illuminate various context related aspects to data from interviews and group discussions, which I spelled out whenever relevant or possible with respect to the constraints of word length of this thesis. Various data from my observations and other methods were used to support some of the claims I made in my interpretations of findings. Lastly, some observation data informed a number of appendices (see Appendices AD-AH, particularly Appendices AG and AH). A brief quantitative analysis of drawings is presented in Chapter Four.

In other words, I decided to concentrate on the data from interviews and group discussions in this report primarily because of the huge amount of all the collected data and that the research questions were designed to focus on perceptions and understandings of the concepts of inclusion and distributed leadership. Another reason was that in this report I preferred to use school stakeholders’ own words as the primary evidence in this qualitative study instead of my own perceptions (Biklen, 2010). That is not to say that this study is less subjective than any other research, as by accepting the interpretivist theoretical perspective I
acknowledge my part in constructing and influencing the researched context and all forms of collected data and my interpretations of them in particular (Miles et al., 2014; Miovský, 2006). By focusing on school stakeholders’ perceptions, I did not aim to ignore the topic of their practices. Their practices are very present in this report but more through a scrutiny of their own words, in which I identified several inconsistencies and contradictions (see Chapters Four to Six), which often provide an implication of their actual practices. Despite that, because this thesis as a written report is based on data from interviews and group discussions and does not engage with other forms of data – observations in particular – to a similar extent, it is problematic to consider it an ethnographic study in a conventional sense (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Pole & Morrison, 2003; Wolcott, 2008). Notwithstanding, as explained above, the study did embrace some crucial ethnographic features in its data collection phase.

In addition to the reduction of focusing on interviews and group discussions, contributions by all groups of research participants (principals, teachers, parents, and students) were used merely with regards to the topic of inclusive education (see Chapter Four). With regards to the topic of distributed leadership and the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership (see Chapters Five and Six), the emphasis was given to contributions of school staff members only. There were two main reasons for this decision. After conducting the data analysis, I realised that the issues connected to distributed leadership with regards to parents and students are significantly different to the issues reported by staff members because of their notably different relationship to the school – staff being employed and for a salary being expected to provide services to students/parents; students being perceived as receivers of educational practices; and parents expecting to receive services for their children, being expected to collaborate with the school but being variably interested and available for that. These different relationships of staff,
parents and students to the school would require a substantial specific thematic elaboration, which would be problematic if respecting the current word length requirements of this thesis with regards to the already large scope of the study combining two big academic areas. In addition, I have to acknowledge that for this substantial exploration and scrutiny of the specific topic of distributed leadership for parents and students, I had not gathered enough relevant data. For instance, from all interviewed parents, only one in each school were representatives in parents’ associations and others reported not to be interested or available to influence school life. With regards to students, the group discussion schedule (see Appendix T) was already designed to focus on inclusive education only. Although three questions addressed the topic of leadership, many more and indirect questions would be needed to collect an adequate quality of data. Despite that, the voice of students and parents is substantially represented in reporting on findings about inclusive education (see Chapter Four).

To analyse the data, I employed the constant comparative method that was originally formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). I analysed the data with the assistance of the software NVivo 9. Although I started the data analysis process and coding during the first two stages of my data collection (see Table 2), which included only observations, I fully immersed in the data analysis process primarily after completing the entire data collection phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Green et al., 2007). I then started developing codes for similar chunks of data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 565), constantly comparing them within a single interview (or group discussion), and between interviews (or group discussion) within one school and from the other school (Boeije, 2002).

To demonstrate the process of my coding using a specific example, first I developed broader categories for various parts of the text (Green et al., 2007), for instance “defining inclusive education (IE)”, “practising IE”, “challenging/refusing IE” and “IE and state
policy”. Either simultaneously or in the second reading of the data, I developed more specific codes within these broader categories. Thus, within the text coded by the category of “defining IE”, I identified, for instance, these codes: “students’ success in learning”; “students feeling happy”; “developing students’ potential”; “celebrating students’ diversity”; “students helping each other”; “minimising students’ deficit”, etc. This process could be considered as a form of descriptive coding (information that describes a case) and topic coding (passages allocated under broader topics) (Richards, 2009, pp. 99-102). This led to a more analytical and critical scrutiny of the text clustered into particular codes and categories or topics by developing analytical codes (interpretation and reflection on meaning) (pp. 102-104). To be more specific, when contemplating on particular topic codes I started to realise that they could also be labelled by a more abstract or critical idea. This way the analytical codes such as “goals/purposes of IE” were created. In other case, reading through particular data I started to recognise that interviewees assumed “students as target group of IE” or “deficit in students” (see Appendices AI-AK). Through this process, I finally identified latent or interpretative codes in the data which went beyond what a participant had said (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

The relationship between topic codes and analytical codes was less straightforward than between descriptive codes and topic codes. While in the latter case, topic codes could be relatively easily subsumed under a broader category of descriptive codes. In the former case, the data (e.g., a passage from an interview), which was coded with a particular topic code, could be matched with a number of analytical codes. This coding process was carried out within three main research areas of this thesis – inclusive education, distributed leadership, and the relationship between the two. The complete list of codes within these areas is portrayed in the Appendices AI-AK. As explained above, because I did not treat each source of data equally, I analysed all data from interviews and group discussions this way.
For field notes from my observations or any other written data, I developed merely the *topic codes* to make the process of triangulation and contextualisation of interviews and group discussions feasible.

The described data analysis approach was a rather dynamic process which involved moments of confusion and orderliness, creative and critical thinking, excitement and tedium. It was a process of coming back and forth and changing various codes as new ones were emerging (Miles et al., 2014; Richards, 2009). It was predominantly an *inductive* process or bottom-up way when a descriptive or analytical idea emerged from the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). Nevertheless, this process of generating and identifying codes was also informed by the existing literature and my particular grasp of this literature (see Chapter Two). The fact that my interview schedules (see *Appendix S*) were constructed on the basis of topics verbalised in the academic literature predetermined emergence of some of the codes. Although the inductive approach dominated the data analysis process, the *deductive* approach or top down way was present to some extent, too (Riemer, 2012, p. 177).

**Research Reliability and Validity**

Various scholars discussing the issues of reliability and validity of qualitative research differ on how to conceptualise and assess them in particular research projects. The most radical position refuses these concepts in the context of qualitative research altogether (Miovský, 2006, p. 261), while the moderate position defines them as rigour, credibility, relevance or trustworthiness of inferences drawn from the data (Chan, 2013; Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; Long & Johnson, 2000; Riemer, 2012). In both understandings it is not possible to assess whether the presented findings are true and correspond with reality. As a researcher, I can only attempt to convince a particular reader that this research is trustworthy, legitimate and credible.
In particular, Hammersley (1992, p. 92) defines the concept of reliability as “the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions.” The former is also referred to as inter-rater reliability, while the latter as intra-rater reliability. Nonetheless, reliability can be considered not merely to data analysis but to the data collection process, as well. Specifically, it may refer to ensuring that the data collection is conducted in a consistent manner free of unreasonable variation which might unduly affect the collected data (Long & Johnson, 2000, p. 31). This way it implies being able to replicate the study and gain similar kind of results. The idea of replicability is particularly problematic in any ethnographic study, which is in its very definition immensely context-dependent (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

In contrast, in quantitative terms, the concept of validity is often defined as a goal to use particular research instruments so they actually measure what they are intended to measure (p. 31). In qualitative terms, it can be translated into the following questions:

Are these findings sufficiently authentic (isomorphic to some reality, trustworthy, related to the way others construct their social worlds) that I may trust myself in acting on their implications? More to the point, would I feel sufficiently secure about these findings to construct social policy or legislation based on them? (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 120).

The question of validity and reliability of qualitative research is very much interconnected with the issue of what constitutes high quality evidence in qualitative research (Biklen, 2010; Green et al., 2007; Hammersley, 1995). In line with Biklen’s (2010) claim that evidence is not the same as data, but rather data that has had an added layer of interpretation (p. 489), there were several ways the quality of data and evidence was strengthened and supported in this particular research study. Primarily, I spent an extended
period of time in the researched schools to get thoroughly acquainted with the environment and to build trusting relationships with research participants to support the quality of the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). This was also intended to collect data in the most consistent manner possible to enhance its reliability. Since the data were analysed merely by one researcher – me – the issue of inter-rater reliability is not applicable for this research. To maximise the intra-rater reliability I reviewed and coded the data set of interviews and group discussions three times.

Both during the data collection and data analysis process, I triangulated data from various research methods with different school stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, and principals) to support or challenge various claims made by these participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 184). The triangulation process in the data analysis often surfaced the exact number of interviewees making similar or opposing claims. In some cases I made explicit these exact numbers in this report, or I at least stated “in several” interviews, “in a few”, “in a majority”, “in only one”, etc. (Biklen, 2010, p. 394). While being fully aware that no data is context free (p. 491), it was not possible to inform about the relevant context with respect to every single direct quotation of research participants presented in this thesis. Whenever I considered some contextual information being particularly significant for supporting or challenging various interpretations, I have attempted to make this explicit while balancing this task with respecting the word length constraint on this thesis. On various occasions I have endeavoured to introduce more potential interpretations of the data, making it more obvious that presenting one “true” and “objective” interpretation is not possible (if adopting the interpretivist theoretical position). Last but most importantly, in this chapter I have attempted to make the whole process of data collection, including all research tools (see Appendices S-W), data analysis and interpretation (see Appendices AI-AK), my role as a researcher, and my beliefs and motivation to conduct this study (see also Appendix
A), as transparent and public as possible to enable the readers to make their own judgment about the quality of the data and evidence (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). In addition, in the previous chapter I have scrutinised in detail my specific understanding of existing academic literature which may give an indication to the readers my potential theoretical biases and topics which I consider particularly important and about which I might have a distinct perspective.

**My Position as a Researcher and a Person**

Various personal or “ascribed” characteristics may shape the relationship between the researcher and gatekeepers, informants or research participants. These may include gender, age, “race”, ethnic identification, language capacity, and knowledge of local culture and customs (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 73; Schensul, 2012, p. 86). It is rather problematic to speak about the impact of my characteristics on the collected data and my relationships with research participants in any objective terms. In this respect, I can speak only about my impressions.

In both research sites, women constituted a sound majority of the personnel. I perceived that my “being” a male was welcomed by members of both schools as they often explicitly expressed their dissatisfaction about a lack of males in the primary teaching profession. Reaching the age of thirty during the data collection period might have brought different attitudes from different school members. Some might have perceived me as less experienced and less competent because of my age, while others might have welcomed it as being more enthusiastic and passionate about my work. My “Whiteness” appeared to me as matching the composition of the personnel of both schools. I think a rather significant factor impacting on my relationships and collected data was my “foreignness”. In a way, in both schools I was perceived as a foreigner. In the NSW school, I was a Slovak with a peculiar accent who came to Australia to do this research. This was expressed when research
participants often felt a need to explain to me very basic issues about how they understood and practised various things in NSW or Australia. I always appreciated this, although I might have already been aware of them. I perceived that this foreignness related to my position of an “acceptable incompetent” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 79). In the Slovak school, because my research project was often presented as an “Australian project”, I was often confused with an Australian, and some teachers did not expect me to speak the Slovak language. Nevertheless, after they got to know me, most understood that I grew up in Slovakia and came to Australia primarily for the purpose of conducting this doctoral research.

I perceived that one particular issue about me became very pertinent in various situations, especially with teachers whom I interacted with the most. It was the fact that I did not have a teaching qualification. I always had to explain to them that I studied political science and gender studies before and that I worked at the Czech Ministry of Education, which brought me to this educational research topic. Despite the fact that they somehow made sense of me being in this role and I felt accepted by them, I still perceived this issue as a form of my “disability” and felt some anxiety about it.

Another issue I experienced was a dilemma on how much self-disclosure is appropriate and beneficial for establishing trustful relationships with the research participants and informants, hence, fruitful for my data collection. An ethnographer cannot expect honesty and trust from them if she/he is not open and honest about her/himself (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 72). In particular, I was concerned about how exposing my gay identity and my partnership may affect the school members’ perception of me and our relationship. When it came to the point of being asked a direct question if I have a partner, in the NSW school I decided not to conceal this aspect of my personal life. My impression was that all staff members who knew about it did not have an issue with it.
Nevertheless, in the Slovak cultural context, where in the media the issue of whether gay people should be allowed or not to teach children remains contested and debated (Piško, 2012; TASR, 2012), I decided to avoid talking about my private life completely. Although I was reasonably sure that it would have not been an issue for some school members, I did not disclose this part of my life to anybody. I was trying to balance avoiding this topic by talking about my family and friends as another significant component of my personal life.

**Ethical Concerns**

The primary goal of research is assumed to be production of knowledge. This is, however, not to say that this goal should be pursued at any cost. The process of research and knowledge production introduces various ethical dilemmas to researchers, just as any other form of human activity does (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 209). This research study was not an exception.

This research project was conducted as part of my Ph.D. program at the Faculty of Education and Social Work, the University of Sydney. Because the data collection within my project required dealing with human beings, I had to seek an approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney. This was received on 6 April 2011 (see Appendix A). Due to some minor amendments in data collection tools, the initial application was modified twice – on 11 May 2011 (see Appendix B) and 5 October 2011 (see Appendix D). Because this research included data collection in a NSW government school, it had to undergo the State Education Research Approval Process (SERAP) of NSW DEC as well (approved on 11 July 2011) (see Appendix C). The process of conducting research in Slovak government schools is not specifically institutionalised; hence, it did not require any official approval by the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, the access to a school to be researched needs to be approved by its legal representative – a principal. As elaborated above, the principal expressed her consent in our first meeting together with the deputy
principal after being informed in detail what this project encompassed (on 15 November 2011).

Accepting a researcher in the school – a constant observer – who wants to make her/his findings public, is an issue which can significantly impact on relationships and interactions of people under study (Deyhle, Hess, & LeCompte, 1992). Various scholars writing about ethics and research methods usually refer to three areas which are particularly pertinent to the data collection process and which have an ethical dimension: (1) informed and voluntary consent; (2) anonymity; and (3) harm and exploitation (Deyhle et al., 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Mertens, 2012).

Informed and voluntary consent. All research participants (or their parents/guardians) who were interviewed or participated in a group discussion and drawing activity were given a Participant Information Statement and signed a Participant Consent Form (see Appendices K-R). These forms adhered to the templates presented in the web pages (http://sydney.edu.au/research_support/ethics/human/forms.shtml) of the University of Sydney. The parents/guardians of students in the classrooms that I observed were sent these forms and were given a choice to agree or disagree with these observations. In cases where a parent did not give her/his consent to their child being observed by me as a researcher, I did not take any notes about this child. Before each interview, group discussion and drawing activity, I introduced myself and my research and gave the participants an opportunity to ask any questions. When I interacted with children, I attempted to describe my research in a “child-friendly” way.

In observing parent meetings or whole-school activities involving public and parents, I was always introduced as a researcher who was there to observe the meeting or activity. Because I did not always have the chance to ensure that all these participants were fully
informed or that they freely agreed to participate in the research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 211), I do not report on any details from these meetings or activities in this thesis.

**Anonymity.** In this research, I understand the term *anonymity* to mean that any data gathered in the research would not be linked to any names or to any other information that might identify the research participants (Salkind, 2009). In order to protect anonymity in this research, I have taken several measures. The schools’ names are not exposed, but generic terms – “NSW school” and “Slovak school” – are used instead. The schools are described vaguely and some particular information about them was changed to make it more difficult to identify them. When quoting research participants in this thesis, I used only a general description of the person (e.g., staff member, principal, student, or parent) and the school she/he is part of. I did not assign to these generic descriptors any specific codes (such as numbers or letters). The reason for that was that some particular quotes might be easily identifiable by other school community members. If the person had a specific code descriptor, she/he could be identified throughout the whole thesis.

To keep the anonymity of the principals, deputy principal (in the Slovak school) and non-teaching staff member (in the NSW school) was rather problematic as these positions were represented only by one individual in each school. To keep their anonymity in some quotes, I decided to use a general term “staff member” to include all of them. Nevertheless, I agreed to special arrangements with the principals and deputy principal that they would highlight parts in the interview transcripts in which they did not wish to be identified by their position. This allowed me to refer to them in various parts of the transcripts as the “principal” or “deputy principal” if this was useful or relevant for the data analysis. If the quotes were already identified by this specific descriptor (principal or deputy principal), I also decided to expose their gender as this descriptor would identify them to other school
members anyway. I also exposed the gender of students as I do not consider that it can expose their identity. When quoting parents or teachers, I did not expose their gender.

**Exploitation and harm.** Sometimes researchers are perceived as exploiting the researched individuals or social groups. Their research can be seen as failing to benefit them. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 217). In my data collection, I was constantly trying to give something back to the school community for the time and effort they devoted to my research project. In the NSW school, for instance, I was working as a teacher’s aide, and I made myself available whenever the school needed an extra adult to supervise the students (e.g., at the excursions). In doing that, I felt I went beyond my need for data for my research. In the Slovak school, I felt that the school members really valued hearing about my experiences from the Australian school. They seemed to appreciate this knowledge sharing the most as my form of reciprocation. Besides that, each research participant who requested it in the Consent Form will be provided with a one page lay summary of the findings. The schools will be sent a three page report summary. In addition, I hope that some of the research participants will have a chance to get acquainted with this thesis or other publications ensuing from this research, and will consider them as a valuable contribution to their knowledge.

**Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter scrutinised the rationale for choosing a qualitative research methodology based on interviews and group discussions while employing ethnographic data collection procedures as the most suitable methodology to address the research problem and research questions presented in Chapter Two. Before doing that, this research methodology was put in the context of the particular research epistemology and theoretical perspective relevant for this study. In the following sections, the chapter elaborated on various aspects of the data collection process, including the particular research methods employed in this study.
Subsequently it described the process of analysing the data and securing the validity of this study. In this chapter, I exposed some details about myself as a researcher and a person, which might have affected the process of data collection and analysis in various ways as well. Finally, the chapter scrutinised the ethical concerns this research might pose for its participants.
Chapter Four: Findings on Inclusive Education

The concept of inclusive education is central to this research study. This chapter aims to unpack research participants’ understanding of inclusive education by exploring their statements in the two public primary schools which were identified as good practice examples of inclusive education. To achieve this, the chapter will first briefly describe the two research sites, then it will explore how research participants defined the concept of inclusive education and which goals their definitions entail. Subsequently, practices that were identified as inclusive by research participants will be scrutinised through the prism of the goals of inclusive education that they mentioned in their definitions of inclusive education earlier. Besides discussing the meaning of inclusive practices, also exclusionary practices will be delineated and how our use of language and wider socio-political contexts can contribute to exclusion. Finally, the chapter will introduce some implications for practising inclusive education at a school level.

Introductory Description of Two Research Sites

Before addressing the topic of inclusive education, a brief introductory description of the two researched schools in NSW and Slovakia will be provided here. This description of the two research sites is a summary of the main points raised by adult research participants in interviews before they were asked specifically about inclusive education and distributed leadership. In this first part of all interviews (see Appendix S), participants were asked about the school’s values, differences to other schools and its public image. Group discussions with students also included questions about their school, but these were formulated in a less explicit way (see Appendix T). This description portrays how the school stakeholders – staff, parents, and students – perceived their schools.

NSW public primary school. Research participants in the NSW primary school primarily emphasised that their school is in many ways the same as or similar to any other
regular public primary school in NSW. Nevertheless, they were able to identify a number of unique features of their school as well. Several staff members described their school as unique in the “diversity” of their student community, either in a broad sense or in terms of culture and socio-economic conditions. These staff members generally claimed that they attempt to “celebrate” this diversity and be “inclusive”.

*I think it is that while we are inclusive – there’s a direct link between our inclusivity and our diversity. We are a very diverse community.* (Staff member, NSW school)

*We celebrate differences of all forms – race, ethnicity, socio-economic background, abilities.* (Staff member, NSW school)

In other words, staff did not portray this diversity as a threat but as an asset – as something to be proud of and to celebrate. However, some of them also expressed worries that the public may perceive their school as accommodating too many students with behavioural issues, which may discourage parents to enrol their children in the school.

Besides inclusivity, research participants primarily identified respect, helpfulness and care for others as values that the school endeavours to represent in public and towards which it attempts to educate their students. As one student in the NSW school expressed it:

*I think a good student would be someone that doesn’t hurt anyone, someone that doesn’t make fun of everyone, and someone who cares for all the other students.*

(Year 3-4 Girl, NSW school)

Several other student research participants reported their understanding of a *good student* in line with this quote. For them, a good student is above all someone who is respectful, caring and helpful, and not only someone who achieves good marks. Both student and adult participants on several occasions underscored the objective of “excellence in teaching practice”, high educational achievements, and “success in learning”, too. Adult research participants also reported the school’s paramount value being that children feel happy in the school or “love coming to school”.
The vast majority of research participants in the NSW school reported its small enrolment size as the most unique feature of their school in comparison to average public primary schools in Sydney. They interpreted this feature as bringing a number of positive but also a few negative effects. Among the positive ones, they chiefly mentioned that all teachers know all students not only as “learners” but also as “persons”, which gives the teachers a better opportunity to individualise the curriculum for them. Some parent participants even associated the school with a feeling of “family” or “home”. Staff members claimed that they have to be more engaged and involved in various tasks and responsibilities, and are obliged to collaborate more frequently and intensively than in other schools. Parents stated that they have “better access” to the principal and teachers. Among the negative impacts, they reported that the school receives less funding and has a smaller cohort of teaching personnel, which bring constraints on organising activities for students and allowing professional (learning and other) support for teachers.

**Slovak public primary school.** As in the case of the NSW school, research participants in the Slovak primary school highlighted their similarity to other public primary schools in the country. They also identified a number of unique features of their school. In terms of values, research participants in the Slovak school claimed that the school endeavours to educate children in “ethical” values, helpfulness and “tolerance” for difference. As one student expressed it:

*A good student doesn’t need to have good marks, but helps the teachers, doesn’t behave badly, attempts to get better marks and simply is helpful and supportive. She/he helps other students when they don’t know anything and so on.* (Year 5 Boy, Slovak school)

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15 All data from the Slovak school was collected in the Slovak language. For the purposes of this thesis, I translated them into English.
As in the case of the NSW school, a majority of students in the Slovak school seemed to consider “helpful and supportive” behaviour being at least as important as educational achievements when being asked what it means to be “a good student”. The objective of enhancing students’ educational achievements and their “success in learning”, while particularly referring to students diagnosed with SEN, was very much emphasised by both student and adult research participants. In addition, staff members often highlighted how the school endeavours to provide a pleasant and happy environment for students. They reported a number of examples where students “like” or feel “excited” about attending school.

Research participants highlighted the most distinguishing element in comparison to other public primary schools in Slovakia: its specialisation in teaching students with “disorders” and “special needs” (SEN). The school operated two thirds of classrooms as special (see Table 1 in Chapter Three), which is very atypical for other regular primary schools in Bratislava or Slovakia (ÚIPŠ, 2013c). Research participants emphasised this high representation of students with SEN in their school and teachers’ expertise in working with them. Several staff members referred to instances where teachers from other primary schools visited them to learn from their unique expertise in the area of “integrating” students with SEN in a regular school environment. Research participants also spoke about “inclusion”, but because the school prevailingly runs special classrooms, they interpreted the concept of inclusion in a more spatial sense:

We are really an atypical school in all of Slovakia, because when you think of it, in fact we have a majority of classrooms for students with specific disorders. Hence, somebody could say that we belong under special school system. . . but then I think that this is the best inclusion, that those kids live under one roof. (Staff member, Slovak school)

Despite that, several staff members of the Slovak school worried that the school might be inaccurately viewed by the public, perceived as “a special school” that is mainly attended by “Roma” or “Gypsy” children (see Appendix Y) and “students with low
achievements and bad behaviour”. Staff members, however, were not concerned about having insufficient student enrolment numbers. The capacity of their school is full, and because several institutions across the Bratislava region which assess and diagnose students with SEN – Institutions for Education Guidance and Prevention (see Appendix AE) – often refer students to this school, the demand for enrolling in the school was presented as consistently steady and satisfactory.

**Constructing Goals of Inclusive Education**

When asked about the concept of inclusive education, research participants predominantly defined it in terms of *goals* for students. Their definitions of inclusive education consisted of any of these goals:

- enhancing educational results and skills of all students;
- developing unique potentials of all students;
- educating all students towards good behaviour and ethical values;
- enabling all students to experience belonging, happiness, self-worth; and
- enabling all students’ active participation and engagement.

Each research participant highlighted a different goal or set of goals as most important. Those who mentioned a number of goals, often reported them as interrelated. The most frequent goal was either to enhance students’ educational results and skills or to meet and develop an individual student’s potential. The former appeared primarily in the Slovak school.

*We had a boy who when he arrived, it was really interesting that he was able to articulate only “toto” [this], “teta” [auntie], and “ja” [I]. And in the end of the*
school year he was reciting a poem to his mum. Hence, then one can say to oneself that we did a great deal of work here. (Staff member, Slovak school)

In the context of being asked about the topic of inclusive education, research participants in the Slovak school primarily unpacked the meaning of inclusive education through particular cases of their students. In giving these examples, they implied the primary goal of these practices to be increasing students’ educational results and skills.

In their attempts to define inclusive education, research participants in the NSW school emphasised meeting students’ potential rather than referring to educational results and skills.

I would hope in every day you would see in practice in the way that each and every individual child is treated with respect and fairness given the same opportunities to achieve the potential that each and every one of them has. (Staff member, NSW school)

I think that basically an inclusive environment on a whole school thing is basically where every teacher has an opportunity to interact with every child. And every teacher has an opportunity to bring their particular gifts, talents, interests, passions to the educational life to all the students (Staff member, NSW school)

The development of students’ potential as presented in these statements might include not only educational results and reading or maths skills, but also cultivating any particular “gifts, talents, interests, passions”. The term “potential” might imply, for some people, an unknown, dynamic and limitless possibility of students’ development in various areas. For others, it may mean a particular ceiling or limited prospects or expectations of development, while teachers or other school experts usually decide about what this limit is. I view the latter understanding as problematic for inclusive education.

Acquiring good behaviour and ethical values was another often mentioned goal of inclusive education. Research participants also referred to this goal when describing their school in general, thus, before speaking specifically about inclusive education in the interviews.
When I have them [students with SEN] included in the normal classroom, many people think that they will be pulled forward. Yes, they cooperate. I lead the children towards better achievements, to help each other, and that one side would not perceive that “I am more because I know it” and the other “I am less because I don’t know it”. Hence, it is about cooperation. (Staff member, Slovak school)

This staff member was relating the practice of educating students towards helping each other and cooperation to educational achievements and being “pulled forward” in an inclusive environment. Besides adult research participants, students were also drawing a connection between educational achievements and good behaviour.

Good students they’ll get a good grade because they have good behaviour and they listen to teachers and they don’t talk back to teachers. . . . So bad students are most likely also bad graders because they haven’t listened and it’s therefore their fault they don’t wanna learn and they disobey the teacher. And good student is when they listen to their teacher and they learn things. (Year 3-4 Girls, NSW school)

[Some students get better grades] because they study more, it goes well for them, they understand better. Maybe they do not disturb others and the teacher likes them. . . . Because they listen to and obey. (Year 6 Boys, Slovak school)

In both of these quotes, students from both researched schools perceived that there is a link between their educational attainment and the way they behave.

Various school stakeholders also related good and ethical behaviour with enabling students to experience happiness, belonging and self-worth.

I think the main thing is inclusiveness and they really don’t tolerate any kind of bullying or anything like that. I’ve never seen anything like that and I only see positive acts such as kids interested in how others from other schools are doing it at athletics carnivals, and they’re always more inclined to want everyone to be having a good time and making sure that everyone’s happy than actually winning. Although they like to compete as well, I keep hearing stories about kids just being really polite and looking after other people. (Parent, NSW school)

I think that we sincerely attempt to create for children equal conditions or conditions to experience success in learning, and a good feeling also from the fact that those students with behavioural disorders are able to be included. (Staff member, Slovak school)

The first quote referred to “inclusiveness” as the school’s main value and associated it with ensuring that “everyone’s happy” and with good behaviour such as “being really polite and looking after other people”. She/he seemed to imply here that leading students towards
polite and caring behaviour plays a role in their feeling of happiness. This participant
referred to a particular example of an athletics carnival which was organised by the school a
few days before the interview. In the second quote, the staff member in the Slovak school
related feeling good with “success in learning” and with being “included”. This can also be
interpreted that an outcome or goal of inclusion is “success in learning” and “a good
feeling”.

The goal of active participation and engagement did not come up in the interviews as
frequently as the previously mentioned ones. The goal of active participation, engagement
and involvement represents a crucial aspect of the definition of inclusive education as
formulated by the organisational paradigm theorists (e.g., Ainscow et al., 2006, pp. 24-25;
Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 15). In the interviews it was primarily conveyed as an implied
goal, except by one staff member in the NSW school who verbalised it explicitly.

Inclusive education means that all children are included in mainstream classrooms. It also means that all students are engaged and stimulated and that their needs are met. (Staff member, NSW school)

This staff mentioned not only the goal of inclusive education to be “engaged and
stimulated”, she/he also reported that it means to be included in “mainstream classrooms”.

In the majority of interviews and group discussions, the goal of ensuring students’
presence in a mainstream educational setting was considered of primary importance. Except
for one adult (out of fourteen) and three student (out of eighteen) research participants in the
NSW school who supported full and unconditional inclusion of all students, all the other
participants posed limits and conditions to this goal.

Inclusive education is about providing each student with the most supportive
environment for their current needs. So for example, SSPs schools [Schools for
Special Purposes], so schools for children with extremely challenging behaviour,
that is a better environment for all of them to be in than a mainstream classroom.
(Staff member, NSW school)
I think that it [inclusion] depends on the level of impairment. If the child has a very good intelligence and the impairment is so that she/he is able to bite through various subjects for instance with the help of a special education teacher, then it is the best possible option. (Staff member, Slovak school)

In line with these two quotes and the extensive research on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), all research participants who reported some limitations to inclusion referred to either behavioural issues or unspecified severe forms of disability and impairment. Thus, research participants did perceive inclusion of as many students as possible in a mainstream educational setting as an important goal of inclusive education. They mostly did not agree with the inclusion for all students into mainstream schools. As the first quote explicitly explored, these research participants did not construct the meaning of inclusive education as being intrinsically attached to education in mainstream settings. They subsumed under the concept of inclusive education other forms of education that happen outside of the mainstream.

By regarding the option of educating students outside of mainstream educational path as an inclusive option, research participants did not consider that this practice may significantly compromise the previously mentioned goal of enhancing students’ knowledge and skills. Substantial adjustments and reduction of curriculum content typical in segregated special education settings (Slee, 2011; Tomlinson, 2012) may often limit students’ opportunities for the development of particular knowledge and skills. As a result, educating students in segregated special education settings may also curtail their future educational and employment prospects in many complex ways (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 13). This is why Tomlinson (2000) regards remedial and special education as “a non-education” (p. 132). None of the research participants explicitly mentioned the goal of enhancing students’ future educational and career prospects in their definitions of inclusive education.
To summarise how various research participants constructed the meaning of inclusive education and which goals in particular it should fulfil in practice, they explicitly reported five main goals of inclusive education. Most frequently they mentioned the goal of (1) enhancing students’ educational results and skills and (2) their unique potentials. They also referred to (3) educating students towards good behaviour and ethical values, and (4) enabling students to experience belonging, happiness and self-worth. In addition, one participant reported the goal of (5) enhancing students’ active participation and engagement. None of the research participants mentioned the goal of maximising students’ future educational and employment prospects, or presented the concept of inclusive education as a broader critique of the current schooling system in NSW and Slovakia. The goal of ensuring the presence of all students in mainstream educational settings was undermined by posing particular ability and behavioural conditions on students. In this respect, a question was raised as to whether the option of educating students in segregated special education settings does not compromise other above-mentioned goals.

**Goals of Inclusive Education in Practice**

After identifying the goals of inclusive education, it is now important to discuss what it means to put these goals in practice, or, in other words, what it means to practise inclusive education. First, those practices that research participants identified as “inclusive practices” will simply be listed. These practices will then be scrutinised through the prism of the goals of inclusive education discussed in the previous section of the chapter.

**Identifying inclusive practices.** Research participants in the NSW and the Slovak school identified several similar, and some different, practices that they associated with inclusive education. As the common practices for both schools, participants mentioned an individualised approach to students, differentiating and adjusting curriculum, teaching aids and teaching styles to individual students. To better individualise and address needs or
capabilities of particular students, participants in both schools reported using services of teacher’s aides and two special education teachers in the Slovak school and one ESL teacher in the NSW school. Staff members from both schools also stated that they regularly converse within both formal and informal settings about how to best address needs and capabilities of particular students. As a form of individual learning intervention, they mentioned practising withdrawals of students. In the Slovak school, usually one or a maximum of two students were withdrawn at a time. Besides the withdrawals of single students in the NSW school, a larger group of students were also withdrawn to attend a special reading program in another school. Staff members in both schools reported that they regularly merge two or more classrooms to allow for interactions between students outside of their classmate community. In the case of the Slovak school, it meant also combining regular classrooms with special classrooms. Since the NSW school had only regular classrooms, it meant combining students with various ages.

Research participants also identified “inclusive practices” which were unique to one or the other school. The participants in the NSW school reported that several times a year external experts in numeracy and literacy provide modelling and coaching for teachers in the classroom to demonstrate to teachers how to address diverse strengths and characteristics of students. Staff members in the NSW school also reported that to better individualise their teaching, they often group students with similar abilities together. With the exception of the Art Education class, in my observations of classroom practice in the Slovak school, all teachers applied front-of-room teaching. Students had to work individually or in pairs sitting next to each other. That is why Slovak staff members did not report creating ability groupings at all. In line with the NSW state policy (Martin et al., 2006), staff members in the NSW school also referred to Learning Support Team (LST) meetings as part of their “inclusive practices” (see Appendices AD and AG). LST meetings ordinarily consist of a
relevant parent(s) and a group of staff members responsible for education and planning for the discussed student. In the researched NSW school, LST meetings were organised to discuss cases of several students in one day every two weeks. These meetings addressed a great variety of issues: special educational needs, talents, behaviour, and well-being of students. As an alternative, the Slovak state policies allow primary schools to organise so-called “Disciplinary Commission”\textsuperscript{16} meetings (see Appendix AH). These, however, focus exclusively on behavioural issues of particular students after instigating repeated or particularly severe behavioural incidents in school (MŠ SR, 2011).

Staff members of the Slovak school also identified several “inclusive practices” that did not generally occur in the NSW school. Due to the state policy obligation (NR SR, 2008), staff members of the Slovak school reported preparing Individual Educational Plans (IEP) for every student diagnosed with SEN who is “individually integrated” in a regular classroom. Since the NSW state policies do not oblige schools to prepare any Individual Educational Plans, the researched NSW school does not usually do so unless individual teachers prepare some from their own initiative. The Slovak school also significantly differs from the NSW school in operating special classrooms next to the regular ones. These special classrooms have significantly lower number of students (under ten) which many research participants interpreted as a strategy to adequately address needs of all individual students. Nevertheless, Slovak research participants pointed out that the school allows for student transfers from special to regular classrooms and vice versa. On average, the former happens

\textsuperscript{16} The original name for this meeting in Slovak is “výchovná komisia”. The adjective “výchovná” is not directly translatable to English. Besides “disciplinary”, it can also refer to general “upbringing” or “education”, so it can be also translated as “Educational Commission”.
once or twice per semester, while the latter happens less frequently. Any transfer must be approved by a legal guardian of the particular student (ŠŠI, 2011).

Diverse perceptions of practices of inclusive education. After presenting this list of all practices that research participants consider to be inclusive, I want to examine them through the prism of the goals of inclusive education which were discussed in the previous section of this chapter. Such an exploration will expose that research participants usually associate the practice which they mentioned as inclusive, exclusively with the goal of enhancing students’ educational results and skills, and ignore how it may impact on the other goals. This exploration will also present some contradictions in how different stakeholders perceive individual practices and their effects on students. Exposing contradictory perspectives on the practices identified by some as “inclusive” may also challenge an attempt to consider any practices as “integral” to inclusion (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 26) or to denounce any practices associated with special education as non-inclusive or exclusionary (Slee, 2011). Four practices which were identified as inclusive by participants in one or both research sites will be explored here, as I have gathered the most data about these and participants seemed to stress them the most:\17:  

- withdrawals of students for individual intervention;  
- assistance of teacher’s aide;  
- education in ability groupings; and

\*17 As elaborated in the previous part of this chapter, a number of teachers in both schools identified various curriculum-related practices as their crucial inclusive practices, such as individualised and differentiated teaching approach to students. Nevertheless, because none of the teachers elaborated on in detail what these practices entailed, I did not scrutinise them here. Consequently, it should not be assumed that these practices were non-existent in the two schools or that teachers considered them as less important than the ones explored here.
education in special classrooms.

**Withdrawals of students for individual intervention.** Withdrawals of students for individual intervention were identified as a practice aligned with inclusive education in both researched schools. The adult participants who mentioned it, usually associated it with the goal of enhancing students’ educational attainments and skills without making references to any other goal of inclusive education.

[The special education teacher] withdraws somebody every other day and works with her/him individually. We also talk about what to do with the student, how to better help her/him, we work together on the Individual Educational Plan. I always tell her [special education teacher] where the student has gaps, then she helps her/him to catch up on her/his studies. In turn she tells me what I should do with her/him. (Staff member, Slovak school)

This staff member of the Slovak school, together with all other adult research participants in both schools who mentioned withdrawals, connected them exclusively with the educational goals. Constructing the students who were withdrawn as having a deficit – having “gaps” and needing “help” – this participant completely avoided considering what impacts this practice may have on the goal of students experiencing belonging, happiness and self-worth, or general active participation and engagement. Although adult research participants did not do so, students themselves disclosed their perceptions of this practice in group discussions.

When being asked about the practice of withdrawals, students in both schools also primarily linked these with the educational goals. While many of the students highlighted the positive educational impact of withdrawals on their skills and knowledge, including the ones who experienced them, several students, who never experienced these withdrawals, expressed doubts about them.

*But I don’t know if they will learn from it.* (Year 3-4 boy, NSW school)

*I agree that they should go to reading recovery, but sometimes they miss out and sometimes they take advantage and they have just fun like my cousin all the time. . . . And when they come back in the classroom they don’t know where we are up to in our work and stuff.* (Year 5-6 girl, NSW school)
In the context of being asked specifically about the practice of withdrawals, the student in the first quote expressed doubts whether it has any positive learning impact on students’ learning and skills. The second one pointed out that by being withdrawn, these students may miss out on important new knowledge and skills that were discussed and explained in the classroom during their withdrawal. This may significantly impact on their active participation and engagement in the classroom after their return since they would not be familiar with the subject. None of these doubts have been raised by any adult research participant.

Students in the NSW school also exposed a confronting perception of the practice of withdrawals as stigmatising and negatively impacting on students’ experiences of happiness, friendships, belonging and self-worth.

*I think it’s sad but it’s good that they are gonna learn. . . . They are sometimes afraid. . . . And sometimes just because they go to another place, some people just don’t wanna be their friends, they feel left out. . . . Sometimes people are not very good at work, the people that go to recovery, just because they are a bit not smart, people think that why bother playing with them when they are not smart. Then they feel left out and they become unhappy.* (Year 3-4 girls, NSW school)

*The reason they don’t have that many friends is because they have a problem. And people don’t like playing with people that have problems! . . . So it’s better off if they go to a different school. . . . [They have problems] because they were born that way.* (Year 3-4 girls, NSW school)

The students in the first quote disclosed the discomfort withdrawals may bring to students and how they may experience stigmatisation because they are being withdrawn for a recovery program. The second quote can also be interpreted that the withdrawal practice just confirms and validates to this student that withdrawn students “have a problem” and were “born” as different. That is why other students do not usually befriend them. This perception of individual withdrawals as stigmatising emerged in every other group discussion with students in the NSW school. Hence, it can be considered as a rather common students’ perception of the practice in the school.
The reports of students in the Slovak school significantly differed in respect to the potential impact of withdrawals on their friendships or experiences of happiness and self-worth. Not a single student interpreted this practice as stigmatising or negatively impacting on their friendships.

*In our classroom it is a very common thing. . . . Because in our classroom, quite a lot of students go to her [special education teacher]. So it is normal.* (Year 6 girls, Slovak school)

*It is useful and normal. Hence, it should be done.* (Year 6 boy, Slovak school)

This opinion that the practice of withdrawals is something “normal” and “common” was consistent across all group discussions in the Slovak school. The students did not generally perceive students who are regularly withdrawn as anyhow different or “having a problem” to make it a reason not to befriend them. However, this phenomenon should be interpreted through the specific organisational context of the researched Slovak school, in which as many as half of the students in several regular classrooms are regularly withdrawn by the special education teacher.

It is noteworthy that students who experienced individual withdrawals did not mention any negative attitudes towards these practices. This can be interpreted in a number of ways. These students, if they experience any troubles in learning and maintaining friendships, might not perceive withdrawals as being causally related to these unpleasant experiences. If having any doubts about withdrawals and their positive impact on their learning or friendships, to make these explicit to me as an interviewer might mean devaluing their own time and effort spent during these individual interventions. In contrast, by speaking only positively about being individually withdrawn these students might perceive that these withdrawals really improved their educational achievements and do not negatively impact on their social relationships in the classroom. No data from this research could confidently indicate how to interpret this phenomenon that students in both researched
schools, who experienced withdrawals, did not speak negatively about them. This, however, does not mean that the critical statements of students, who never experienced withdrawals, should be considered as invalid.

**Assistance of a teacher’s aide.** In the same way as with the practice of withdrawals, assistance of a teacher’s aide in the classroom was presented by adult research participants in both schools to fulfil exclusively the goal of enhancing educational attainment and skills of students. Similarly, they did not present any considerations how this practice might impact on other goals of inclusive education.

> For instance, now we had a problem with [student’s name]. I have a teacher’s aide in the classroom because he needs to have one to actually progress. He needs the guidance from her. We also thought with [name of special education teacher] how to help that [student’s name], so he could manage at least something from multiplication or reading, so we discussed which methods to use on [student’s name]. (Staff member, Slovak school)

This staff member, when mentioning the assistance of the teacher’s aide, described this practice exclusively in terms of educational goals – to make the students “actually progress”. The interviewee implied here that without this assistance the student would not be able to progress at all. By saying that, she/he also implied that the role of a teacher’s aide is to sit next to one student only and assist her/him in her/his learning progress.

One student in the NSW school mentioned that a teacher’s aide or “a special teacher” (in the same classroom) may also fulfil the goal of educating particular students towards good behaviour.

> I think that “bad students” should go or need like a special teacher so the teacher could help them and tell them “You can’t do that and all that” and not disturb the other class. (Year 3-4 girl, NSW school)

My observations in the Slovak school confirmed that the teacher’s aide fulfils this goal of educating towards good behaviour in that school as well.
In discussing this practice, research participants were silent about any other possible impacts of having a teacher’s aide assisting with one particular student in a class, which was a common practice in both schools. Just as in case of the withdrawal of students for individual intervention, this practice can be perceived by students as stigmatising or confirming their conviction that some students were born with “a problem” and thus nobody wants to play with them. In addition, none of the research participants expressed any doubts about the role of teacher’s aides in enhancing student achievement and active participation, which are extensively scrutinised in academic literature on inclusive education (e.g., Gerber, Finn, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001; Keating & O’Connor, 2012; Rutherford, 2012).

**Education in ability groupings.** The practice of education in ability groupings was reported to be used as an “inclusive” practice only in the NSW school, as front-of-room teaching with individual student work or work in pairs vastly prevailed over group activities in the Slovak school. As in the previously mentioned cases, staff in the NSW school reported that education in ability groupings supports students in their learning without expressing any doubts about this statement or without referring to how this practice may impact on other goals of inclusive education.

*I think probably the main things that are done are differentiated learning, so even things like guided reading, putting students with similar abilities together and using... a support teacher. ... So if we are grouping students, we will not necessarily just randomly group them, but we will go: Okay, if we are going to do this activity and we want students in groups of five, how can we group them? How can we develop those groups so that the kids in those groups are supported in their learning?* (Staff member, NSW school)

This staff member reported that they usually carefully select “students with similar abilities together” to support them “in their learning”. In my observations in the NSW school, ability groupings were commonly formed primarily for reading and math activities. None of the adult research participants expressed any doubts that ability groupings may not necessarily enhance students’ educational results any more than creating mixed-ability groups
In addition, none of them considered that ability groupings may cause discomfort and unhappiness to students (Boaler, Wiliam, & Brown, 2000) or that students within the “lowest” ability group might lack a role model with “higher” abilities to learn from (Allan, 1991).

**Education in special classrooms.** The practice of educating students in special classrooms was identified as “inclusive” only in the Slovak school since the NSW school does not operate any special classrooms. Although running special classrooms in a regular school is often regarded by academics of inclusive education (e.g., Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Graham & Sweller, 2011; Slee, 2011) as a practice of segregation or exclusion, staff members of the Slovak school interpret the concept of inclusion also as a form of spatial inclusion of all students in a regular school.

*In terms of inclusion, special students are together with classical students both in the regular classrooms and also within the building or the whole community.* (Staff member, Slovak school)

This research participant distinguished two forms of inclusion: the one happening within a regular classroom, and the other one which incorporates also the existence of special classrooms within one school building. She/he also stated that both forms are practised in the Slovak school.

Taking into consideration that many academics critique the existence of special classrooms to be an exclusionary practice, a vast majority of Slovak research participants defended it by addressing primarily two goals of inclusive education: enhancing educational results and enabling students to experience belonging and self-worth.

*Principally I consider that special classrooms are very good because children have a chance to progress like other children. [Teachers] deal with them. They don’t have in the classroom, I don’t know, twenty students. Hence, they have opportunities to progress.* (Parent, Slovak school)
In my opinion [students should attend a special classroom/school] to have a special approach so they could do well and they could manage easily, because in the regular classroom it is harder for them. (Year 6 girl, Slovak school)

The parent in the first quote appreciates the existence of special classrooms as a means to enable some children to progress while implying that they would not be able to progress in a regular educational setting. The student in the second quote presents a similar opinion while pointing out that education in special classrooms is less demanding for students. She did not question whether this reduction of curriculum can be viewed as inclusive and supportive of learning in respect to all students educated in special classrooms.

According to a few Slovak adult participants, being in a special classroom can also enable students to experience success in learning which may impact on their self-worth and happiness.

The decision, whether to put a student in a special or regular classroom, should depend on the pace in which the education happens. If the student constantly experienced failure, she/he could close her/himself down. (Parent, Slovak school)

This parent implies that being educated in a special classroom may positively impact on students’ self-perception and learning by preventing them from experiencing failure. This can motivate them in their learning and participation.

A substantial proportion of research participants (staff members, parents and students) in the Slovak school advocated for the existence of special classrooms also as a means to enable students to experience good friendships, belonging and happiness.

Even when they compare themselves, it is a bit different when they are in those normal classrooms, I think, they perceive that handicap, although it is not always that ostentatiously visible. But I can see it and feel it that in that special classroom they feel that they are in a kind of more homogeneous group as in that normal classroom. There it is about: There is something wrong with him. (Staff member, Slovak school)

In a regular classroom when they do not fit in, the kids always point at somebody different. They can start to pick on her/him. She/he may not handle it well. Hence, I think that from that psychological perspective it is better for the kid to withstand it. (Parent, Slovak school)
Because it appears to me that, for instance, everybody is normal there and he is kind of alone, he feels alone and different. Everybody would condemn him. . . . They would be picked on and then they could take it differently and have lifelong memories of that. (Year 6 girls, Slovak school)

All these research participants seemed to agree that being included in a regular classroom may pose substantial hindrances to having good friendships for some students. They point out a high risk for them to “be picked on” or “condemned”. The staff member in the first quote also implies that students just feel better in a “more homogeneous group”.

All research participants in the Slovak school who referred to the practice of education in special classrooms argued that education in regular classrooms does not adequately enhance the educational results of students with SEN. These students might experience failure, lose self-confidence, and feel unhappy because other students usually make fun of them and do not create friendship bonds with them. Participants used all these reasons to justify the practice of segregating particular students in a special classroom as a better place to achieve the goals of inclusive education. In other words, no research participant presented these arguments as a critique of the current mainstream educational system in Slovakia. Instead, they presented the regular education system as given and unchangeable. They did not challenge it; they accepted it as it is, without considering that it might be inadequate in achieving the goals of inclusive education.

Research participants did not consider an option that mainstream educational systems – if appropriately reformed – may better realise the goals of inclusive education. For instance, practising differentiated and individualised teaching in regular classrooms may enable active participation and engagement of all students and provide them with adequate educational opportunities to experience success and progress in their learning (Ashman & Elkins, 2012; Foreman, 2011; Hyde et al., 2010). Teachers may employ particular strategies to avoid stigmatisation and ostracisation of students with SEN in a community of classmates.
in regular classrooms (Dolva, Gustavsson, Borell, & Hemmingsson, 2011; Soodak, 2003; Wendelborg & Tøssebro, 2011; Wiener, 2009). Research participants in the Slovak school also seemed to disregard a potential positive impact of having high achieving role models in a classroom, just as the participants in the NSW school took no notice of this aspect when promoting the practice of educating students in ability groupings. Kunc (1993) raises a critique of segregating students in special classes by calling these “retarded immersion” classes. He argues “[s]tudents are immersed in an environment of ‘retarded behaviour’ and learn how to be retarded” (Kunc, 1993, p. 27). Although in a number of above-mentioned quotes teachers in both schools indicated that they try to differentiate and individualise their teaching for particular students and collaborate with colleagues when planning their classes (Mitchell, 2008), the question remains whether these practices may lead to a reformed and more inclusive school if schools continue practising withdrawals of students and creating ability groupings and special classrooms. No teacher considered that the latter practices may undermine the impact of the former ones.

Only one staff member in the Slovak school expressed certain doubts about how special classrooms really fulfil the goal of enhancing students’ educational outcomes.

For those classical children – maybe because we somehow unconsciously lower the bar of what we require from children – that maybe it does not do them well. Once it happened that one mum came to complain. She came to say that she has a feeling that her kids learn terribly little. That was a classical child. But even a mum of a special student came to say that she would expect that more would be required from them. Hence, for those children who are difficult, it is excellent, but for those relatively skilful, it is maybe too little, I don’t know, or stagnating. I cannot judge what it looks like in classes, but this is the feeling I’ve got from this. (Staff member, Slovak school)

This staff member suggested that the “bar” for the education of all students in the Slovak school might be set too low, but particularly for “those relatively skilful” students who may be educated both in regular or special classrooms, as was implied in the previous quotes as well. Through informal conversations with other teachers in the Slovak school, I was
informed that special classrooms have a bigger proportion of time devoted to art and physical education, while foreign language education is postponed to higher years and reduced in time allocation. This practice presents a challenge to fulfilling the goal of enhancing educational outcomes of all students in the school, and particularly those in a special classroom. Reduction of curriculum content may also significantly compromise the goal of enhancing future educational and professional prospects of students educated in special classrooms (Slee, 2011; Tomlinson, 2000, 2012).

The data from students’ drawings (see Appendices V and W) could also be interpreted through the prism of how school practices achieve the goals of inclusive education. In the drawing activity, students were instructed to divide a circle according to how often they feel certain ways during one usual week in their school. They typically did that by creating a pie chart. Students were offered as examples thirteen positive and thirteen negative feelings. When analysing these drawings, which could also be perceived as a form of survey for children, in a quantitative way (see Table 5), one may observe that students vary significantly in how they experience school life and its practices. In both schools there were students (seven in the NSW school and four in the Slovak school) who allocated bigger proportion of the circle to various negative feelings. At least at some time during their usual week, a vast majority of students in both schools reported an experience of feeling bored and not engaged in their learning, annoyed, disappointed or saddened either by their classmates or a teacher, or lonely. Two NSW students and three Slovak students even indicated loneliness as their main negative experience in the school. Mentioning these negative feelings in the drawing activity may suggest that individual goals of inclusive education, such as active participation and engagement or experiencing belonging, self-worth and happiness, have been compromised on various occasions – in the case of some students more frequently than others.
### Table 5

**Representation* of feelings in the drawing activity in the researched schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW school</th>
<th>Slovak school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of drawings</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>75%-100% of the circle</strong></td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
<td>3 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>51%-74% of the circle</strong></td>
<td>5 (22%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>50%-74% of the circle</strong></td>
<td>6 (26%)</td>
<td>8 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>75%-100% of the circle</strong></td>
<td>10 (43%)</td>
<td>7 (37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average proportion of</strong></td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>negative feelings</strong></td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The most frequent positive</strong></td>
<td>happy (15)</td>
<td>happy (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>feeling(s)† out of all</strong></td>
<td>excited (4)</td>
<td>motivated (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>positive feelings in the</strong></td>
<td>confident (3)</td>
<td>confident (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>circle (number of students)</strong></td>
<td>cheerful (2)</td>
<td>satisfied (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The most frequent negative</strong></td>
<td>annoyed (7)</td>
<td>bored (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>feeling(s)† out of all</strong></td>
<td>sad (3)</td>
<td>sad (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>negative feelings in the</strong></td>
<td>worried (3)</td>
<td>lonely (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>circle (number of students)</strong></td>
<td>disappointed (2)</td>
<td>angry (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lonely (2)</td>
<td>depressed (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>unsatisfied (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>nervous (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Because children approached dividing the circle in various ways and did it by free hand, the percentage proportion representing one feeling was only visually estimated.

† In some cases students identified the same largest proportions for two feelings or they did not mention any positive or negative feeling.

Nonetheless, this data, as well as any other form of written survey, should be interpreted with a particular caution. The students did not have an opportunity to describe
their drawings and written comments and put them in specific contexts. Some students, who reported to predominantly experience negative feelings, might have had a bad day and/or merely used the opportunity to “lambast” the school as a form of practical joke and not being genuine about their experiences, while others might be persistently experiencing negative feelings in relation to their learning, teaching practices, and friendships. In contrast, students, who reported to mostly experience positive feelings at school, might have not been genuine about these either. Unfortunately, the research technique of group discussions with students did not allow speaking about their drawings, since that would compromise the anonymity of the drawings in front of other members of the group discussions. Hence, the purpose of presenting the data from the drawing activity was more to provide an illustrative picture than giving any factual analysis of students’ experiences and feelings at their schools.

To summarise this exploration of practices identified as inclusive through the prism of presented goals of inclusive education, it was demonstrated that all of the scrutinised practices could be perceived and experienced differently by various stakeholders. It was conveyed that some practices could have a contradictory impact on students. While one practice can assist them to improve their skills and knowledge, the same practice can cause them great discomfort, stigmatise them and impact on their relationships with friends. In this respect, a particular cultural, local or organisational context may play a role, too. It was shown that when justifying the use of particular practices, research participants overemphasised the goal of enhancing educational results and skills over all the other goals, despite the fact that the other goals were presented as equally or similarly important to educational results in their definitions of inclusive education. They rarely expressed any doubts in whether these practices undeniably assisted all students to enhance their educational outcomes. Lastly, research participants did not raise any critique of the current
mainstream educational system, but, rather, justified the segregation of students with
disabilities or SEN in special classrooms or schools by its shortcomings.

**Negotiating Inclusive Practice with State Policies**

Just as one practice can fulfil some goals and hinder others, different state policies or
social conditions can support some goals and impede others. In this section of the chapter,
the aim is not to analyse or discuss particular state policies of NSW (Australia) or Slovakia
but, rather, how research participants referred to state policies in general and wider social
context, and which aspects of these they emphasised as influencing their practices. In other
words, it aims to explore how research participants negotiate their practices and
understanding of inclusive education in relation to their socio-political context.

Except for the principals in both schools and the deputy principal in the Slovak
school, adult research participants were not asked directly how they perceived current state
policies. Despite not being asked, most adult participants made a number of references to
state policies or the social context when talking about inclusive education. All these
comments could be grouped in three thematic areas: students’ learning outcomes, learning
support services, and child safety. While the participants in the NSW school referred to all
three thematic areas, participants in the Slovak school referred only to the second one.

**Students’ learning outcomes.** Research participants in the NSW school perceived
policies and practices at the state and national level as introducing a forceful requirement to
enhance students’ learning outcomes. The NSW participants referred to NAPLAN (see
Chapter Two) to be the main means to establish this requirement.

_The other thing you might need to know too is in terms of our NAPLAN results, we
are expected also to monitor some individual programs – individual targets for
individual kids who may not be at a minimum national standard. That’s a
requirement also of our system in terms of monitoring things like that. . . . We would
be required for accountability purposes to show ways that we are setting targets for
kids on minimal levels of achievement and we need to show how we’ve progressed
their development._ (Principal, NSW school)
In this quote, the principal constructs the “system” – policies and practices at national, state and local level – as having a higher authority over the school policies and practices. The “system” presents a “requirement” and “monitors”, or rather controls, its fulfilment in schools. The principal refers to NAPLAN as being the means for this control. This requirement seemed to inform various decisions made in the school, such as which professional learning activities teachers can take.

I listen to the needs of the teachers, but I also have to be very explicit that any decision we are making about professional learning that is funded by the school is to be prioritised around best practice that will enhance our kids’ learning outcomes.

(Principal, NSW school)

Here the goal of enhancing students’ learning outcomes is constructed as the ultimate reference point for making any decisions which regard professional learning of staff.

The explicit references to NAPLAN or the goal of enhancing students’ outcomes were not only reported during the interviews but in a number of informal and formal occasions of school life. For instance, the release of the most recent NAPLAN results prompted a staff meeting to be called, which I had a chance to observe. In this meeting, staff members reviewed the performance of every student. They expressed a worry that these results may be misinterpreted and misunderstood by parents. NAPLAN seemed to worry some staff members especially in relation to parents potentially interested in enrolling their children in the school. It was posing a dilemma for them. While on the one hand they expressed inclusive intentions to accept every single student who applied to their school, on the other hand they worried that accepting too many “low achievers” in NAPLAN might create a negative reputation of the school as being underperforming or failing and discourage some parents to enrol their children there.

**Learning support services.** When talking about practising inclusive education in schools, on numerous occasions research participants in both research sites referred
positively to the “system” in how it supports them in catering for all students. For instance, staff members in the NSW school reported that the NSW DEC makes available expert consultants in literacy, numeracy or behavioural issues, who either provide consultations to the staff or perform demonstration classes in their school. In Slovakia, the system of Institutions for Educational Guidance and Prevention (ZVPP) was reported to provide diagnoses of students and consultations to parents and staff (see Appendix AE). In both countries, the “system” provides numerous opportunities for professional learning for staff members in matters and practices related to inclusive education. The “system” may also define mechanisms or practices at the school level which can support individual students. Learning Support Team meetings in NSW and Disciplinary Commissions in Slovakia can be perceived as examples of these mechanisms (see Chapter Two).

Besides these examples of systemic support, the most prevalent opinion of staff members and parents appeared to be a lack of adequate financial and material support from the “system”. Several research participants in both schools stated the view that in order for inclusive education to be practised adequately on a large scale as well as at their school level, it has to be financially backed up. These resources should be used for professional learning of staff members and hiring extra teachers and teacher’s aides.

Both systems – the NSW (and/or Australian) and Slovak one – allow for extra funding to be received to provide additional learning support for students. In the NSW school, the principal identified two mechanisms to determine the level of additional funding from the “system” to the school. The first mechanism is determined by NAPLAN results on the formula: the worse the NAPLAN results, the more money for the school (Martin et al., 2006). The NSW school was able to finance a “learning assistance teacher” for three days a week based upon their NAPLAN results. The second mechanism is called “funding support” and it is based on identifying a “confirmed disability” in students (NSW DEC, 2013a; NSW
DET, 2004b). In the period of data collection, according to its principal the NSW school was receiving funding on “three or four” students this way. In Slovakia, the deputy principal described the funding mechanism in terms of “normative contributions” per students (Vláda SR, 2008). She explained that in accordance with a particular diagnosis of SEN, the school receives higher normative contributions for students with SEN. For instance, for most students with SEN in the Slovak school, they receive a multiple of one-and-a-half of the regular normative contribution.

In the situation of attempting to provide as high quality level of learning support to particular students as possible, the principals and deputy principal did not seem willing to miss any opportunity to receive any available additional funding. The deputy principal in the Slovak school described their approach to funding this way:

> Why do we accumulate them [students with SEN] this much? It is because we can have good experts; we can make higher financial demands on aids and in fact the spending of the money, which we need, is better when having a higher number of children. (Deputy principal, Slovak school)

As the principals and deputy principal described, however, receiving this additional funding required a procedure of diagnosing a particular “confirmed disability” in NSW or a particular form of “SEN” in Slovakia. This can be also interpreted that the socio-political context or the “system” forces the schools to label and categorise students according to psycho-medical categories, which imply deficit in students (Ainscow et al., 2006; Paugh & Dudley-Marling, 2011; Slee, 2011). In this way, the state policies that are aimed to support students diagnosed with SEN or confirmed disabilities may, in its effect, contribute to various forms of their exclusion (Fulcher, 1989). Nevertheless, none of the research participants recognised this happening. Besides their requests for more funding, none of the research participants challenged the mechanism of allocating the funding itself as potentially creating or preserving instances of segregation or exclusion.
Child safety. In addition to the dilemmas and tensions introduced by NAPLAN and labelling students according to psycho-medical categories, the principal of the NSW school identified one more tension that the “system” presents to them.

*From time to time, there are moments when even the system itself has recognised that there are challenges that sometimes appear to be insurmountable...* The ideal is that mainstream schools can cater for everybody’s needs and that is the ideal. But I think in our experiences there can be some exceptions to that... Because we’ve got to remember that behaviour that may impact on the needs of other learners also have to be considered... In a system which makes very clear that violence is unacceptable, and persistent disobedience is unacceptable, there are procedures I have to follow, you know, if that was to continue... Where that behaviour continues, there may need to be some interventions perhaps, as I say, beyond the mainstream school. And that’s where I think for some kids there may be some value in having a specialised setting. (Principal, NSW school)

In this quote, the principal identified a conflict of policies introduced by the “system”. On the one hand, the “system” stands for the ideal of catering for all students in a mainstream school, but, on the other, it poses an obligation on schools not to accept any incidences of violence or persistent disobedience of students. The argument behind non-acceptance of violence is based on the ideal of child safety. Or as the principal puts it, “the needs of other learners also have to be considered”, one of these needs being also the child’s safety.

The academic literature on inclusive education which critiques segregation of students based on their behaviour seems to gravitate towards the argument that there is no inherent characteristic or deficit in students which makes them behave in a violent way (Graham & Sweller, 2011; Thomas & Loxley, 2007). This literature implies that it is entirely a responsibility of mainstream schools to provide conditions for every child so that any incidences of violence towards other students would not emerge. Nevertheless, in line with the opinion presented by the principal of the NSW school, the “system” introduces certain arrangements and constraints for schools. That is, the schools can do everything possible within these organisational, budgetary and personnel constraints to support all students. Schools can, for instance, engage expert consultants on behaviour, provide psychological...
counselling to students, or closely collaborate with families. Despite all this effort, they still might not be able to guarantee that continuous incidences of violence instigated by particular students would not emerge. In these instances, the “system” usually resolves the situation of conflicting policy objectives – inclusion and child safety – by simply segregating these students without rethinking or redefining the very purpose of education (Armstrong et al., 2010) and fundamental arrangements and constraints of the “system”.

To summarise this section of the chapter, it was demonstrated that the “system” introduces several challenges to research participants to practise inclusive education in schools. The “system”, as it is currently organised, strengthens the construction that enhancing students’ learning outcomes is the most important goal that schools should pursue. Prioritising this goal over other goals of inclusive education may inhibit school community members to reflect on their practices in more complex perspectives. Basing additional funding of schools on diagnosing students into psycho-medical categories may also establish and perpetuate deficit thinking about students, which goes against the values of inclusive education. Finally, the “system” prioritises child safety concerns over inclusive values by allowing the segregation of students on the basis of repeated incidences of violent behaviour.

**Identifying Exclusionary Practices and Use of Language**

This chapter has so far demonstrated that it is problematic to claim that one kind of practice can always and in each context be considered as entirely inclusive, because various participants of this practice may experience and perceive it in different times and contexts as fulfilling some inclusive goals and hindering others. The same principle can be applied to the case of considering some practices as entirely exclusionary. If we adopt the interpretivist theoretical perspective, we cannot claim that one sort of practice is entirely exclusionary – experienced and perceived so by all its participants. This, however, should not restrain us
from recognising and acknowledging that in particular socio-political and organisational contexts some practices might be perceived and experienced by a great number of participants as inhibiting fulfilment of some inclusive goals that are significant for them.

While acknowledging the multilayered complexity of reality, one can identify the use of language or ways of thinking that determine practices which can contribute to experiencing exclusion. In line with the literature on inclusive education (see Chapter Two), various texts of both the organisational paradigm (e.g., Ainscow et al., 2006; Booth & Ainscow, 2011) and the socio-political paradigm (e.g., Fulcher, 1989; Slee, 2011) identify uses of language or ways of thinking which – when put in practice – have a high probability to hinder fulfilment of several goals of inclusive education. Inspired by these texts, I have identified two main areas of exclusionary use of language in the statements of participants in both researched schools: (1) constructing (ab)normal students; and (2) denying responsibility of schools for students’ learning and behaviour.

**Constructing (ab)normal students.** A way of thinking that is not compatible with inclusive education goals and values is considering students to be either normal or abnormal or within a continuum of normality/abnormality. The critique of making this construction comes primarily from the socio-political paradigm theorists of inclusive education (e.g., Fulcher, 1989; Horňáková, 2010a; Tearle, 2012; Thomas & Loxley, 2007). Their main argument stands on the idea that as long as we make the distinction between normal and abnormal or special students, we will have a tendency to perceive the latter as problematic and less valued and to segregate or exclude them from the mainstream schools to address their “abnormality”. Horňáková (2010a) proposes that we should subsume under the banner of “normal” the whole diversity of students, creating a situation where nobody is “abnormal”. This mental shift might also bring a shift in the understanding of the role of mainstream schools to embrace every student, and not just the “normal” ones. However,
even this proposal might be accused of introducing yet another form of norm with its own \textit{normalising} purposes and impacts. The very use of the term \textit{normal} might be perceived as inherently exclusionary as it requires \textit{abnormal} to exist (Tearle, 2012).

One staff member in the Slovak school touched upon the idea of normality and abnormality in one of the interviews.

\begin{quote}
You can’t perceive a kid that has dysgraphia to be something special. How large a percentage of the population is already fighting with anything similar? Sooner or later, an abnormal will be the one who is normal, yeah, because she/he will be in a minority. (Staff member, Slovak school)
\end{quote}

Although this staff member did question whether considering students with “dysgraphia” to be abnormal or “special” makes sense, she/he still kept the criterion for “abnormality” to be a minority in percentage. Hence, she/he still admitted the existence of “abnormality” and “abnormal” students, which can be problematic for inclusive education.

Despite the fact that both researched schools were identified by a number of external expert informants as good practice examples of inclusive education, on numerous occasions – both in informal talks as well as during recorded interviews – staff members in both researched schools did imply this construction of abnormal students.

\begin{quote}
We don’t want to be different. We want to be exactly as all the others are. We just want to teach the children who have problems, either to live with that problem or to reduce that problem to the lowest possible level. (Staff member, Slovak school)
\end{quote}

In this quote, the staff member distinguishes students into those with a “problem” and those without a “problem”. She/he also defines the main mission of their school as to remedy the former to become the latter. Hence, their mission is to assimilate and normalise students who are perceived by some experts as a “problem”. There are two main issues with making this claim. The first one is that by saying that a child has a problem it might also be implied that the child has an inherent deficit, is inadequate, abnormal, or a less valued – needy – member of society. The second issue is that by distinguishing a child with or without a
problem, the interviewee makes the very main characteristic of this child to be this particular problem. She/he ignores the whole complexity and strengths of the child but focuses exclusively on the problem, in fact making the child to be the problem. Making this claim focuses on the negative or deficit rather than on the strengths which reside in every single human being.

In a similar sense, staff members in both schools often used psycho-medical categories to characterise the students or even to represent them.

\textit{At one stage, I had a Down Syndrome, I had a blind child – this is in my class. I had a deaf child. . . . And I had an autistic child all in the one class. Severe autistic.} (Staff member, NSW school)

\textit{That was a typical ADHD and it was into a classical classroom and there it was for integration. But we already had one with ADHD and two like this . . . that is really impossible.} (Staff member, Slovak school)

\textit{I have a feeling that because of some children I cannot pay close attention in that classroom, hence, it is about the possibility to integrate that child. Of course not, those learning disorders or behavioural disorders in one classroom. Learning disorders need their own peace and calmness and space for work. . . . But if you put just one child with a severe behavioural disorder into this classroom, it is not possible to work.} (Staff member, Slovak school)

The main issue with these statements is that these participants reduced describing the children into a psycho-medical diagnosis. In all three instances, they even used a label of diagnosis to represent a person – “a Down Syndrome”, “a typical ADHD”, “those learning disorders and behavioural disorders” – implying that this diagnosis is the main, if not entire, characteristic of the person. One can also claim that these statements contain a construction of abnormality of students with these diagnoses, since they imply that there are also students without these diagnoses who are in the majority and that is why they are normal.

Staff members did not refer to students only by psycho-medical categories to imply their abnormality, but also by their family backgrounds and behaviour.

\textit{There were lots of women’s refuges around here, and a lot of the children that came here, came from domestic violence backgrounds. So they came with a lot of baggage.}
So the kids were really, really damaged and they were violent and they acted out. And the violence of attacking teachers and everything. (Staff member, NSW school)

Some students are pulled towards better results and, luckily, there are such children that are pulled towards those better results [in my classroom]. But then there are also children that I think, unfortunately, they could be just anywhere, and they are not pulled somewhere. Because it is just a feedback on that family. (Staff member, Slovak school)

In the first quote, the staff member described some students as “really really damaged” and “violent” as if these labels represented their most fundamental characteristic beyond which there were only very minor ones or none. The interviewee constructed these characteristics as stable, unchangeable, and being constantly acted out in their behaviour. In the second quote, the staff member was resigned, as if sure that some students could not progress in their learning because of their family background.

As already described in the first section of this chapter, research participants in the Slovak school described their school as being different from other schools in the country because it specialises in special needs. This description and perception of the school – for all the above-mentioned reasons – makes it problematic to consider this particular feature of the school as aligned with inclusive education values. This specialisation expressed itself also in everyday practices which I observed. For instance, in regular classrooms during instruction teachers explicitly and frequently referred to groups of students as “integrated students” and “others”. Because the number of “integrated students” sometimes represented up to a half of the classroom, if taking into consideration the criterion of minority, the boundary between normality and abnormality might have been blurred and disturbed in the context of this particular classroom or school. Besides teachers using the term “integrated” for students, in group discussions students in Year 5 and 6 repeatedly used psycho-medical categories, which might have indicated that these labels were frequently used by staff members and/or parents to address them, too.
So, for instance, a special school should be attended by students that have, for instance, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and that sort of things. And a normal one can be attended by anybody who is, for instance, physically impaired, because she/he has a good intellect. (Year 6 boy, Slovak school)

_Dyslectics, no. Or, for instance, those who have paralysed arms. Or those who are on a wheelchair, so those should not at all . . . because they would need an elevator._ (Year 5 boy, Slovak school)

In contrast, I have never noticed staff members in the NSW school using a psycho-medical category in front of students, or any other term alluding to special needs, and no student used such a category in any of the group discussions. As demonstrated above, however, staff members frequently used them in recorded interviews and on daily basis in informal talks with me and other colleagues.

**Denying responsibility of schools for students’ learning and behaviour.** The academic literature on inclusive education, which is associated with the organisational paradigm (e.g., Ainscow et al., 2006; Ainscow & Howes., 2007; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Skrtic, 1991), claims that there is no deficit in students which causes them to experience difficulties in learning. This claim implies that it is entirely the responsibility of schools as organisations to adjust and organise themselves to be able to address the diversity of children. In numerous instances, however, research participants in both researched schools denied that it was their responsibility to address and develop the learning and behaviour of every child.

_I think there are some situations, perhaps a small percentage of situations, where kids coming completely into an inclusive situation, I would use the word they may not be quite ready for it. . . . There have been challenges of bringing kids into a totally inclusive environment, the school’s ready but the kids might not be ready. And the kids might not be ready for a whole range of reasons. It could relate to home background or it could relate to previous experiences that haven’t worked out for them._ (Staff member, NSW school)

_To make a complete inclusion of all children in classical classrooms is very difficult. If we had well educated teachers so they would be able to work with all problematic and challenging children, then that would not be bad. However, that inclusion depends on the problems of the child._ (Staff member, Slovak school)
In the first quote, the research participant considers some children not to be “ready” to be educated in mainstream schools, while the schools are “ready” to educate every child. This form of argument places the responsibility entirely on the student who just does not fit into a school which is perfectly ready to nurture and cater for any student. The second quote represents a very commonly expressed opinion in both schools that there should be a limit to the inclusion of students depending on the level of their “problems” or severity of their disability and behaviour. This implies that school members deny their responsibility to educate all students instead of only some.

It should be pointed out here that it might not always be an unwillingness or denial of responsibility of individual school members to educate all students, but the way the system of public primary schools is currently set up.

_I don't think all students should be included in a mainstream school just because that I don't feel that the mainstream schools on the whole are set up to support particularly kids with really really severe disabilities or learning needs._ (Staff member, NSW school)

This staff member does not say that she/he doesn’t agree with the inclusion of all students in mainstream schools; she/he claims, instead, that currently the mainstream schools are not set up to support all students. In other words, this research participant implies that some features of the current system of mainstream schools need to be rethought and reorganised in order to become capable of including and supporting all students.

**Comparative Perspective on the Construction of Inclusive Education in the Two Research Sites**

This chapter has demonstrated how research participants within one organisation could perceive and experience the same practices very differently. It also portrayed that one can identify some common trends in statements within one or the other school. These common trends could be informed by a myriad of factors – cultural, historical, social, local,
organisational, and personal. In terms of practices identified by research participants as inclusive, this chapter has already pointed out some noteworthy differences between the two researched schools.

For instance, students in the NSW school reported in half of the group discussions that the practice of students being withdrawn for individual intervention can instigate stigmatisation and isolation for these students. In contrast, students in the Slovak school did not report any instances of stigmatisation based on this practice. To put this phenomenon in context, however, in several regular classrooms in the researched Slovak school as much as half of the students are regularly withdrawn by the special education teacher because of being diagnosed with SEN. This is not the case in the researched NSW school, and not in most public primary schools in Slovakia either (ÚIPŠ, 2013b). This finding offers an indication of how the different organisational context of individual schools may shape perceptions of various school stakeholders. By saying, however, that the practice of withdrawal does not have any stigmatising impact on students’ relationships in the Slovak school, does not resolve the doubts about its impact on enhancing students’ educational attainments and skills, or their active participation and engagement as other goals of inclusive education. Even in the Slovak school, being withdrawn occasionally means missing out on some of the main curriculum, which may negatively impact on students’ active participation, engagement and their learning outcomes. Despite that, exposing this comparative difference that the practice of withdrawing students might not involve having a stigmatising impact on students in some particular organisational contexts can be considered as a valuable contribution to the academic discussion on inclusive practices.

Another difference in terms of practices identified as inclusive was the use of ability groupings in the NSW school and special classrooms in the Slovak school. Although special classes or support classes are established by the NSW DEC in a number of regular schools
in NSW and Sydney (NSW DEC, 2013b), this was not the case in the researched NSW school. While educating students in special classes is proportionately used more in Slovak public primary schools than in NSW (see Appendix AF), the researched Slovak school ran special classes. However, ability groupings are used only very exceptionally in most Slovak public schools. In her historical analysis of teaching styles in Slovakia, Onderčová (2005) claims that front-of-room teaching combined with individual student work has dominated for centuries, and still dominates in public schools in the current territory of Slovakia. Teaching through group activities was used very rarely in the researched Slovak school as well. If this research study involved examining exclusively Slovak schools, the practice of ability groupings would most probably not emerge through the data and would not be scrutinised.

Another difference between the two researched schools were the practices of Learning Support Team (LST) meetings in the NSW school and Disciplinary Commission meetings in the Slovak school. Both of these forms of meetings could be expected in other public schools in the respective countries as they were defined by state policies in NSW (Martin et al., 2006) and Slovakia (MŠ SR, 2011). The fact that LST meetings were designed to involve parents to support a great variety of students while Disciplinary Commissions were established exclusively to manage behavioural matters introduces a number of implications for the practice of inclusive education in public schools in the two countries. Because this study did not focus on the impacts of these practices, it should not be assumed that there is nothing problematic about LST meetings and that they cannot contribute to instances of exclusion (and inclusion), just as in the case of Disciplinary Commissions.

Finally, in this chapter it was demonstrated that adult research participants in both researched schools used the goal of enhancing students’ educational results and skills as a
prevailing justification for using all discussed practices identified as inclusive. This phenomenon could be associated with another systemic difference between the two countries – conducting NAPLAN testing in NSW and Testing 9 in Slovakia. Both of these standardised national tests imply a requirement for schools to enhance students’ learning outcomes, which can be interpreted as explaining why adult research participants overemphasised enhancing students’ educational results and skills as the only goal of inclusive education to justify these practices. Notwithstanding, the significant difference between NAPLAN and Testing 9 is that the latter does not receive as big media or public attention in Slovakia as NAPLAN in NSW does. This fact was expressed also through interviews in which Testing 9 was never mentioned by any Slovak research participant, while NAPLAN was mentioned in several of them and often discussed in informal interactions during the data collection in NSW. Despite this, in the Slovak school the goal of enhancing students’ educational results and skills was still presented as the dominant argument to justify practising withdrawals of students, assistance of teacher’s aide and education in special classrooms. This comparison of the Slovak and NSW schools may lead us to an interpretation that NAPLAN only strengthens something that would be there even without it, which is the prevalent understanding that the education system of public primary schools should most importantly focus on enhancing students’ educational outcomes and skills at the detriment of other goals. This interpretation is another noteworthy contribution of this study which would not have emerged if this was not conducted as a comparative study.

**Implications for Practice of Inclusive Education**

Up to this point the chapter has attempted to demonstrate the multilayered complexity of social reality and the place of practising inclusive education in it. This complexity poses several challenges to school community members on their way to
inclusive goals. The issue is not only that different school stakeholders may perceive and experience one practice differently. Various stakeholders may also prioritise different goals of inclusive education and interpret differently which practices can lead the achievement of those goals. The wider socio-political context may also, in various ways, hinder the practice of inclusion in schools. All these issues make it impossible for schools to ever achieve the ideal of inclusion.

In this respect, one teacher in the NSW school explained how she/he attempts to practise inclusion in her/his classroom.

*I mean, you can’t tailor everything to every single student every single time. But trying things at different times, that is OK. This is something that [child’s name] would do really well and [another child’s name] and whoever would do well and we would try this today. This task, these people would thrive really well. And then just for the kids who need that extra help, making sure they get it. So you know whether it be pairing them up with another student, but trying different things so that it caters for all. And not just, you know, one teaching style – trying different teaching styles . . . So yeah, just catering for all the different styles of learning. And it can be tricky, but you just have to be creative, I think.* (Staff member, NSW school)

This statement illustrates that there is no right or perfectly inclusive answer for every situation in the school or classroom. In this sense, inclusive education simply means to genuinely try and consider which practices might enable everybody to “thrive”. Or, as authors of the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) claim, it is the commitment to inclusive values which makes the school an “inclusive school” (p. 28), not the actual realisation of an ideal of inclusion.

Drawing inspiration from the socio-political paradigm and their focus on language (e.g., Allan, 2008; Fulcher, 1989; Slee, 2011), this process of “trying” and considering which practices might enable every student to “thrive” should also involve an aspect of constant problematisation of the notions of inclusion and exclusion (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 31). Although teachers in both schools reported that they often converse about their practices and how these may impact on students, none of them mentioned that they critically
scrutinise their use of language and ways of thinking about particular concepts and practices. The requirement to critically scrutinise their language should not, however, imply that the outcome of these critical conversations should inevitably be a total avoidance of using any psycho-medical terminology. It might merely lead to exposing its potentially damaging impacts and reflecting on situations when it is more or less appropriate to use it, without limiting the perception of children to a mere label or lowering expectations of them, but, instead, constantly acknowledging their strengths as well.

In attempting to formulate a practical proposal for adult school stakeholders on how to practise inclusive education in their school (at the organisational level), most importantly they should constantly endeavour to critically evaluate any school practices through the prism of goals of inclusive education. As elaborated in detail in this chapter, behind any school practice is a construction of its goal or purpose. The research participants in this study defined the concept of inclusive education to be aimed at fulfilling five main goals. However, each school community may define a different set of inclusive goals, be it three or even eight. For the purposes of demonstrating my proposal, I have decided to focus here on four main goals: (1) enhancing students’ educational attainment; (2) educating them towards good behaviour; (3) enabling them to actively participate; and (4) to experience happiness, belonging and self-worth.

At the risk of oversimplifying the matter, one can distinguish four scenarios of pursuing and achieving each of these four goals of inclusive education: (1) pursuing one goal and achieving it; (2) pursuing one goal, yet achieving its direct opposite (e.g., deterioration of educational attainment, bad behaviour, no participation, experiencing anxiety, alienation, fear and isolation); (3) not pursuing one goal and not achieving its opposite either; and (4) not pursuing one goal, but actually achieving its direct opposite. Because there were four defined goals of inclusive education, these four scenarios need to be
considered against each of the four goals. The first task is to balance practices addressing each of the four goals, while attempting to achieve the first scenario and minimising the second and fourth one. The third scenario can commonly occur, yet this is not a problem so long as practices attempting to address the four goals are balanced throughout the day or over time. If the second scenario emerges in relation to a particular student or a group of students, school staff members have to acknowledge it. As demonstrated in the findings of this study, teachers might avoid critically reflecting on whether some practices really achieve the desired goals. In this process, adult school stakeholders should engage more actively with children’s perspectives about the various practices they commonly use in the classroom or the school as a whole. When they recognise that the second scenario is happening for some students, they should consider trying alternative practices with these students to address the goal. They should also critically evaluate to ensure that the fourth scenario is not occurring in respect to any of the goals. Thus, the most problematic scenarios are the second and fourth one, and school staff members should attempt to minimise their emergence.

Using this rather schematic and simplistic proposal, we can, for instance, reflect on the practice of individually withdrawing students. If a child is withdrawn for the purpose of enhancing her/his educational attainment, we should consider whether this goal is being achieved or not. If so, we should further consider how this practice addresses other goals of inclusive education. It just may not address them and not achieve their direct opposite, either. Particular withdrawals might not affect the student’s active participation, good behaviour and relationships with other students or her/his well-being. This might be considered as an acceptable scenario. Nevertheless, if the practice achieves the direct opposite of at least one of the four goals, we might either consider ceasing to use the practice
with this particular student or somehow differently attempt to minimise its negative consequences, for instance by sensitively discussing the practice with the whole class.

This schematic proposal can, however, be easily critiqued for not taking into consideration the complexity of social reality. Primarily it can be critiqued because different school stakeholders may evaluate differently whether the goal was achieved, or rather its direct opposite, or anywhere in-between the opposites within the multi-layered matrix of complex social reality. Despite this critique, it might still be considered as a useful schema for school stakeholders to reflect on their practices in approaching the unattainable ideal of inclusive education and to minimise the instances of exclusion.

**Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter briefly described how research participants perceived their schools in relation to other schools in the country. Subsequently, it explored how they constructed the meaning of inclusive education and which particular goals inclusive education entails. Then the chapter explored practices identified as inclusive by school stakeholders through the prism of these goals. This revealed that some goals were perpetually omitted from consideration, while one of them – enhancing educational results and skills of all students – was overemphasised. It was also demonstrated that some students perceived that different practices may cause directly opposite results from some of the goals of inclusive education, which were consistently ignored by adult research participants. The chapter then attempted to identify some exclusionary practices, language use, and the wider socio-political conditions which can hinder achieving the inclusive goals. It introduced an understanding of inclusive education as a process of critical evaluation of wider socio-political conditions, language use and school practices through the prism of achieving and balancing various goals of inclusive education.
Chapter Five: Findings on Distributed Leadership

This chapter aims to explore what it means to practise distributed leadership through analysing statements of research participants, staff members in particular, in the two selected primary schools. To achieve this, the chapter will first scrutinise how research participants defined the concept of distributed leadership. This will reveal that when defining the concept, they referred to various *processes* rather than *goals*. Subsequently, it will be explored how various research participants perceived how these processes of distributed leadership were practised in the two schools. Besides discussing the meaning and practices of distributed leadership, the chapter will also elaborate the meanings that research participants attributed to the role of school principals and current state policies on school leadership, and how these may relate to practising distributed leadership.

**Constructing Processes of Distributed Leadership**

Research participants predominantly defined the concepts of distributed leadership in terms of *processes* of influencing school policies and practices or having some impact on other stakeholders in the school community. Their definitions of distributed leadership consisted of any of these processes:

- everybody taking on specific responsibilities (or duties, roles, positions and workloads);
- collaborating to perform specific tasks;
- influencing decision-making processes; and
- identifying oneself or others as leaders.

Each research participant nominated a different process or set of processes as most important. Although none of the participants explicitly mentioned the process of identifying oneself or others as leaders as one of the constituents of their definition of distributed leadership, when talking about practising distributed leadership in their schools, they
frequently explicitly identified themselves or others as (informal or formal) leaders. Hence, this process was also added to the list, but more as a transgressing process which occurs when realising any of the other processes, and the first one in particular.

The process of taking on specific responsibilities, duties, roles, positions, or workloads was primarily mentioned to constitute the definition of distributed leadership in the NSW school.

Distributed leadership is basically every staff member has involvement in every project that the school is doing. . . . So basically distributed leadership is that the leadership is distributed, it’s shared around. And therefore makes a lighter load for people. (Staff member, NSW school)

I think probably to me distributed leadership means that everyone has responsibility and everyone has accountability. So it means that not everything is a single person’s responsibility and everything that does happen, everyone is accountable for. So, you know, it is about people taking on individual programs or individual things that might be happening rather than one person being left to deal with all of it, I guess. (Staff member, NSW school)

In the context of being asked explicitly what the concept of distributed leadership means for them, these research participants defined it as “everybody” or “every staff member” having “responsibility” and taking on particular “programs” or “projects”. When mentioning programs or projects, staff members referred to, for instance, leading a particular extracurricular or curricular activity with students such as netball or a school project on healthy food and growing organic plants in a school garden. Staff members either initiated these programs and projects themselves or the opportunity to accept them emerged from the outside of the school. In this sense, the concept of distributed leadership involves school stakeholders, who may or may not be in an official leadership position, taking on responsibility for leading a program or project relevant to school life. The specification that “every staff member” has responsibility and shares accountability may be interpreted as an obligation or goal, but also as a right for equality of respect. It may be interpreted as
representing a democratic value that everybody has the right to be involved and experience ownership of a particular task or project.

Several research participants reported that this process of taking on specific responsibilities or projects should also encompass the process of collaboration.

> I guess it’s having kind of like a coordinator of a program, so having someone coordinating that program and . . . then getting people involved in that with you but you are kind of leading it. (Staff member, NSW school)

> It’s also giving each individual the opportunity, you know, to have some ownership of that, and to take some individual responsibility for also having those roles of consulting with others and negotiating with others and collaborating with others. (Principal, NSW school)

These research participants intertwined the processes of taking on responsibility for a particular program and involving others in the process of collaboration. The interviewee in the first quote described this meeting point of the two processes as taking on the role of a “coordinator”.

Nevertheless, collaboration does not need to happen only when coordinating a particular program or project. Collaboration can also occur as a form of communication or supportive interaction between any school stakeholders on an everyday basis of school life. For instance, collaboration could include a situation when one teacher seeks advice on a teaching practice from a colleague or when a parent asks about strategies to better support her/his child’s learning.

> Many times I ask for help or I say what would be needed. I don’t have a bad experience with this. Or they [colleagues] come to me and ask me about the children. Hence, I think that it has its place, I think we get on very well, we genuinely collaborate with each other . . . but constantly on an everyday basis: “How is that child? I am going to work with him, tell me.” (Staff member, Slovak school)

> Collaboration with parents often happens, and it depends on the year group that you are teaching, but it often happens more on a necessity basis. So if there is a student who is presenting with a challenging behaviour or is falling behind academically, then that’s when we’ll start to talk to the parents: “Well, you know, this is what’s happening at the school, what’s happening at home?” Well, trying to put our heads together and work out what’s going on. (Staff member, NSW school)
These two interviewees described the processes of collaboration as happening both among staff members and with parents. One may ask, however, why any instance of collaboration should be considered as a form of distributed leadership or which aspects of collaboration can be considered as a practice of leadership. To address these questions, it needs to be emphasised that any instance of collaboration – be it task-driven coordination or just an incidental exchange of knowledge – entails an act of influence of one person on another. If we consider that at the core of most academic definitions of leadership is the idea of exercising “influence” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 2), then any practices of collaboration may be considered also as practices of leadership.

The act of exercising influence also plays a crucial role in another process of distributed leadership – the process of decision-making. Research participants in both schools defined the concept of distributed leadership also as having an impact on school decision-making processes.

So if we’ve agreed to take on a project and to lead the staff and the students and the parents through that, then part of that responsibility is also making sure that everybody is involved in decision-making, in making sure that the project is evaluated with the idea of making recommendations for the future or whatever those responsibilities may be that we’ve all made explicit. (Principal, NSW school)

I think that the era of the authoritarian manners is already over for quite some time and that we are all after a common thing. Hence, it needs to be dealt with it through everybody and not by an order somewhere from one person. (Staff member, Slovak school)

In these two quotes, both research participants presented their stance towards the decision-making processes in their schools being that “everybody” should be involved, that only one person should not make decisions affecting the school life. The second quote should be interpreted through the specific historical context of Slovakia. Its author made an explicit reference to the past Communist era of Czechoslovakia (see Appendix AA) as representing
opposite values to democratic ones which promote and guarantee equality of respect and the right to self-governance (Woods & Gronn, 2009).

**Constructing Benefits of Distributed Leadership**

The important issue to notice here is that the concept of inclusive education was constructed as a set of goals, while the concept of distributed leadership was constructed in two ways. It was either viewed as a set of processes without any particular or inherent goal or as a set of processes which represent also some democratic values such as equality and self-governance. Besides associating distributed leadership with democratic values, research participants mentioned a number of benefits it may bring to teachers, students or the school as a community; specifically:\textsuperscript{18}:

- sharing knowledge and opinions to improve teaching practice (5 NSW and 5 Slovak staff members);
- lightening the workload of the principal and other staff members when sharing responsibilities (6 NSW staff members);
- feeling more motivated and engaged (2 NSW and 1 Slovak staff members);
- bringing about a pleasant climate in the work place (1 Slovak staff member);
- and
- feeling appreciated and recognised if involved in decision-making processes (1 Slovak staff member).

\textsuperscript{18} The particular benefits are listed in order of frequency of being raised, while each point is followed by the number of interviewees who mentioned it. In all interviews with staff members in both schools they were explicitly asked about the relationship between practices of distributed leadership and inclusive education. Hence, every staff member research participant explored how distributed leadership can assist in practising inclusive education. Since this topic will be scrutinised in great detail in the following chapter, it was not included in this list.
One noteworthy aspect of this list is that none of the Slovak research participants mentioned the benefit of lightening workloads when sharing responsibilities, which will be explored later in this chapter.

In listing these benefits of distributed leadership, one can notice some parallels with the goals of inclusive education explored in Chapter Four. Improving teaching practice can be associated with improving students’ educational outcomes and skills. Feeling happy, belonging in a pleasant school climate, and feeling engaged and motivated were mentioned as goals of inclusive education as well. In this understanding of the two concepts, the major difference between them is that the benefits of distributed leadership target primarily staff members (and students only secondarily), while the goals of inclusive education target mostly students. Another difference is that the benefits are usually perceived as mere potential by-products but not as goals or an ultimate purpose. In other words, distributed leadership was constructed primarily as a set of processes with some possible but not indispensable benefits, while inclusive education was constructed as a set of goals which should be achieved by an unspecified set of practices and/or processes.

**Processes of Distributed Leadership in Practice**

After identifying the processes that constitute distributed leadership and the immediate benefits these may bring to school communities, I will now scrutinise how various school stakeholders perceive that these processes are put into practice in their schools. Although various practices of distributed leadership were reported to exist in relation to parents and students as well, due to reasons explored in Chapter Three, only practices of distributed leadership among staff members will be scrutinised here.

**Diverse perceptions of practices of distributed leadership.** As in the case of practising inclusive education (see Chapter Four), the practices of distributed leadership were perceived by various research participants within both schools very differently, or even
contradictorily. One could identify, however, some consistency in opinions or presented perceptions among all interviewed participants, which were distinctive and specific for individual schools. These differences between the two researched schools could be attributed to a complex network of socio-political, local and organisational factors. Nevertheless, the main aim of this part of the chapter is not to judge whether one school practised distributed leadership more or better than the other one, but rather to identify various patterns of arguments and perceptions occurring in the two schools.

The exploration of processes of taking on various responsibilities and projects was more specific to staff of the NSW school. Several staff members expressed their satisfaction with how they had the opportunity to experience various roles of leading a number of projects and programs.

You will have a great time here because what you achieve in a couple of years at [name of the researched school], it would take a teacher about ten years to achieve outside at a bigger school because, you know, there is only five of us. Five or six of us. The roles have to be shared, somebody’s gotta do it. So you end up with three or four programs that you are working on. (Staff member, NSW school)

I lead a netball gifted and talented group on Tuesday afternoons with some of the senior girls. I'm involved in – [name of another teacher] and I work together on debating and public speaking, so that's sort of something that we lead together, we enter a variety of competitions and things like that. In terms of things like Book Week and things to do with the library or with technology, I usually take a role in. I am also the environment coordinator at our school. (Staff member, NSW school)

In these two statements, the research participants identified themselves as being leaders of particular programs, although they did not hold an official leadership position. Even the students were able to identify the respective leadership responsibilities that individual teachers performed.

Like [principal’s name] is really good at art and she controls her class well. She has a loud voice. Yeah. . . . [Teacher 1] is just full on Maths, English, which is good. . . . [Teacher 2] and [teacher 3] are the leaders of art and design. So they are not just leaders of a class, they are like leaders of... [Teacher 1] is a leader of sports. He is really like good. [Teacher 4] controls the Transition to kindie, also [teacher 2]. And
[teacher 5] too. . . And all work together, so it’s really good. (Year 5-6 girls, NSW school)

In contrast to the expressions of satisfaction about the distribution of responsibilities among individual staff members, various staff members in the NSW school also expressed their concerns about its equitability.

*I’d say it is somewhat distributed, but I think it could be distributed more equitably.* (Staff member, NSW school)

*I think it was too much to expect one person to do. And [another staff member] did do it all alone. And it was hard for [her/him]. I just think we need to get in and share more things. And I felt I was the only teacher not included in that. And I was very hurt by that. So I thought what can you do? Sometimes you just have to let things go over your head.* (Staff member, NSW school)

The first quote should be interpreted in the context of the research participant expressing elsewhere to be overwhelmed by all the responsibilities and duties she/he has in the school.

On the contrary, the context of the second participant was that she/he felt inadequately included in a particular program and experienced “hurt” for this reason. In these quotes, the participants were not merely referring “descriptively” to the processes of distributed leadership, but were expressing “normative” views (Harris, 2009, p. 3). They implied that there is a prescribed norm or standard of distributed leadership processes. They reported equal or equitable distribution and sharing of tasks and responsibilities as a normative goal. In doing that, they also implied that their democratic rights to participate and be respected equally as others or the value of equitability were compromised.

With regards to the second process of distributed leadership – collaboration – some staff members presented a perception that all staff members in their school collaborate, help and support each other extensively on an everyday basis in a number of areas, while others expressed their doubts that they could collaborate more than they currently do.

*And I guess as a small school you understand that often we have to do things for each other, because it’s just the nature of a small school that teachers often do 200 things at once. And so I think it’s kind of understood if someone helps you out now,*
you are going to be helping them later down the track. So you know, it's just a matter of, you know, we work as a unit, everyone works together, you've got your own things that you are doing, but you work together at the same time. (Staff member, NSW school)

I think we could collaborate more on different things. And I don't think we do that. I think sometimes we tend to overlook a lot of other people and I think their ideas should be included as well. (Staff member, NSW school)

These two quotes represent another contradictory perception of the way in which distributed leadership is practised in the NSW school. Although the participant in the second quote might partly agree with the first one, she/he did express a normative view that the goal of being equally included is not achieved in their school.

Contradictory perceptions were also presented in the third process of distributed leadership – involvement in decision-making processes.

We genuinely have a stake in the direction of the school and in what happens in the day-to-day sense at the school as well. . . . Ultimately, you know, we don't make the decisions, but if we are steering the direction those decisions are going, that's a huge part of leadership as well. (Staff member, NSW school)

Each principal is different. The other principals I’ve worked with have been more – they’ve included the staff in things more than what [principal’s name] does. We would be more involved in the running of the school. [Principal’s name] tends to do that herself. . . . We wrote the school plan, we did the budget together, so all that was included as a whole staff thing – where [principal’s name] tends to do that herself. I don’t know. (Staff member, NSW school)

Both of these participants expressed a normative view of distributed leadership implying that this should include the democratic rights of self-governance and equality in influencing “the direction of the school”. Although they both acknowledged that the principal is the ultimate decision-maker, the first participant felt that her/his voice is being heard and “has a stake” in school governance or decision-making processes. In contrast, the other staff member expressed dissatisfaction about not being allowed to influence decisions in matters salient to her/him.
In the Slovak school, the processes of distributed leadership were presented as operating in considerably different ways. No research participant in the Slovak school spoke about leading a particular project or program. They referred rather to various officially established leadership or administration roles.

_Not everybody [has a leadership role]. It is approximately 50/50. They [teachers] have, for instance, administrations of particular resource rooms, library, leadership of Methodical Association, Subject Committees, Inventory Commission, but probably every employee is, not probably but for sure, every employee does something. Perhaps they are members of that commission, yes? Hence, it is shared justly._

(Deputy principal, Slovak school)

Besides other officially established leadership roles, in this quote the deputy principal of the Slovak school referred to the leadership of Methodical Association and Subject Committees, which are two crucial school bodies and platforms for sharing knowledge (see Appendix AH). Several other staff members referred to these as platforms for collaboration and sharing expertise and for performing a leadership role if a particular person – not a principal or deputy principal – is designated to lead it. When evaluating these processes, this research participant made reference to the ethical and democratic value of justice, implying that an equal sharing of responsibilities is a “just” process.

Besides taking on these established leadership roles, one staff member also pointed out the existence of informal leaders, who are generally called “coffee organisers”.

_[A colleague] took over my classroom, and schools in nature. She also took over that – we call it a coffee organiser. But in fact at that coffee we deal with the school stuff. Hence, this was like, you could not force the girls, but you need to influence somehow everything, yeah?_ (Staff member, Slovak school)

In this quote, the research participant also identified her/himself to be this kind of informal leader in the past. In the previous section of the chapter, identifying oneself as a leader – regardless of not holding an official leadership position – was listed as one specific process of the definition of distributed leadership. Hypothetically, these coffee meetings might be considered as an informal platform for staff members, which excludes the participation of
the principal and deputy principal, and which may be used to co-ordinate resistance against them in particular matters if considered valuable. Notwithstanding, during my data collection period I have never observed any instance of teachers’ resistance against any of the principal’s or deputy principal’s proposal or request. This could be interpreted that I simply did not have an opportunity to observe them or that they did not in fact occur.

In addition to performing this informal leadership role or the officially established roles – leaders of Methodical Association and Subject Committees – staff members in the Slovak school also referred to instances of problem solving when being asked about distributed leadership.

*I think that for sure when a problem appears, so it is always dealt with, it is not swept under the carpet as one can colloquially say. Some solution must always be looked for, as I have already mentioned, in collaboration with other classroom teachers.* (Staff member, Slovak school)

*When we need something at the primary level [Year 1 – 4], we go through the Methodical Association or we go directly to the leadership. I say what I need, I say this and that happened, and this and that needs to be solved. And I resolve it with the leadership. Potentially a commission is created, if there is something with a child, some serious problem, and it is resolved this way that also parents are invited. Depends what it is, but I don’t have a feeling that problems would not be resolved here.* (Staff member, Slovak school)

These two quotes demonstrate how issues are usually dealt with in the Slovak school. Teachers either talk about them through official school platforms such as the Methodical Association, or informally and directly with the principal or deputy principal. Staff members in the NSW school usually discussed various school issues and problems in one of their staff meetings, too (see Appendix AG), or informally among each other or, if the matter appeared more severe, they discussed it individually with the principal immediately after the incident. In this sense, the process of problem solving appeared similar in both schools. The difference is, however, when being asked about practising distributed leadership, staff members of the Slovak school referred primarily to the topic of problem solving and
decision-making processes, while staff members of the NSW school emphasised their areas of responsibility and leadership of particular programs and projects.

As already indicated, in the Slovak school the process of collaboration occurred either informally or through the official school platforms. In contrast to the NSW school, in which staff members claimed that collaboration happens among everybody because of the school’s small size, in the Slovak school staff members reported the existence of various “groups” or “circles” of collaborating teachers.

You know it is an individual matter, I would say, purely individual. Who has an interest, she/he collaborates, who has less interest, collaborates less. There are groups of people where I have a feeling that if this is fine and when I turn to them, it goes immediately, we find a way. And then there are people, who that it is not to be dealt with, that you have the Classification Council, write it down and good-bye. . . . There is a circle where you know that it goes for sure. I have created such a circle myself, that I know if I go after this or that person, I know that for sure it is possible to solve things. However, I also know that when I tried once, twice, and didn’t succeed, that I will not force it. (Staff member, Slovak school)

Yes, in each team you find that there is some antipathy or something. But the kernel is that when you think of it that they really help each other, they consult each other. (Deputy principal, Slovak school)

These interviewees implied that particular organisational context matters in respect to collaboration. Creating groups of more collaborating teachers is a common phenomenon in schools of their size (employing approximately thirty teaching staff members).

On the matter of the decision-making process, in the Slovak school the principal was predominantly described as being open to listen to others’ ideas in specific areas and to acknowledge her own mistakes. Despite that, it was consistently reported that she firmly directed the decision-making process “her own way”.

[Principal’s name], she is an element, she just gets her own way and does what she thinks is the wisest, not just for the teachers but also for the school. . . . Now, simply, when it is said that it is going to be done this way, then I may snort, I may not agree with it, but that’s about all I can do about it. . . . However, it is better for me because I like it more when I know how and what. (Staff member, Slovak school)
In some moments “Yes”, but in other moments it is like: “What I say is what is going to be valid!” (Staff member, Slovak school)

The principal and deputy principal confirmed this perception of staff members with their own words.

_Actually, what I decide about, [teachers] should have nothing to say about it. I may just ask them about their recommendations, but ultimately it is me who decides._

(Principal, Slovak school)

_I would say that the nation of teachers is rather sheep-like. When something is said, they just follow. Maybe that is a pity that we don’t have more of those rebellions._

(Deputy principal, Slovak school)

In these last four quotes, the research participants consistently confirmed that a portion of decisions made about the school are made exclusively by the principal without any consultation with other staff members. This could be interpreted as practising “solo leadership” (Crawford, 2012) in decision-making processes. Notwithstanding, as indicated in the last quote, staff members in the Slovak school consistently expressed their satisfaction with the current leadership arrangements, including the decision-making processes.

Overall, when speaking about distributed leadership, research participants in both schools made a number of references to the values of democracy and equitability.

_If we didn't have the sort of approach to leadership that we do have, we wouldn't be reflecting what our values are. And if we are not reflecting what our values are, then our practice changes. And our practice starts to become less inclusive and it starts to become more autocratic . . . and if it's becoming autocratic, then that’s gotta be sort of opposing dialectic to inclusivity._ (Staff member, NSW school)

_It is not as democratic as we would imagine that democracy to be. I always say – they jabber all the time that democracy is an amazing thing. You can say where you want and what you want, but you need to be aware of the consequences. Hence, when your whole existence depends on it, whether you will be or will not be, when it determines financial security of your family, then._ (Staff member, Slovak school)

In the first quote, the research participant in the NSW school explicitly connected their practices of distributed leadership to be a manifestation of values opposing autocracy. If considering autocracy as the opposite of democracy, she/he referred to democratic values. In the context of the relatively recent Communist period in the Slovak history (see Appendix
the topic of democracy appeared even more frequently in interviews in the Slovak school and was charged with a range of emotions. As obvious in the second quote, the research participant did not consider the practices of leadership in their school to be “democratic” enough. She/he also pointed out that general public in Slovakia often misinterpret democracy to mean having absolute freedom without taking any responsibility for one’s actions, and that the democratic values do not guarantee “financial security” for people. In other words, democracy might guarantee some human rights, but it does not bring about social equality and social justice (Carr, 2008; Young, 2000).

This part of the chapter scrutinised the ways that staff members perceived how distributed leadership is practised in their schools. It was demonstrated that participants constructed the concept and practices of distributed leadership exclusively in a normative sense. They all implied a norm, extent, frequency or intensity of distributed leadership processes. In some cases they associated these processes with values of democracy and justice. It was also portrayed that particular processes of distributed leadership were often perceived differently by various participants. This finding can be interpreted as confirming the “interpretivist” (Schensul, 2012, p. 76) understanding of social reality – and practising distributed leadership being part of it – as very complex and multi-layered. Hence, it is not possible to speak about any practices of school leadership being objectively more distributed in one school than the other. Despite that, one could notice some common trends specific to individual schools. For instance, due to the specific socio-political, local and organisational contexts, the references to taking on particular responsibilities and projects dominated in interviews in the NSW school when speaking about practising distributed leadership. In contrast, in the Slovak school comments on decision-making processes and collaboration in problem-solving significantly prevailed.
Construction of the principal as delegating distributed leadership. To better understand the phenomenon of cumulating the potential to influence others, or the leadership potential in the hands of one person – the principal – it is also necessary to scrutinise how various school stakeholders construct the meaning of principalship. By doing so, it will be revealed that research participants portrayed the principal as the one who can delegate her powers to others, who brings change to a school environment, who should control and lead others and who ultimately makes final decisions. It will be seen that the principals themselves often contributed to this construction.

School stakeholders in both schools consistently constructed the principals to be in the position to delegate their leadership roles or responsibilities to others.

Yeah, I mean [principal’s name] has always given us opportunities to get involved in things. She is, I know with me, she’ll say: “You know this is a program that is coming up, are you interested?” (Staff member, NSW school)

[Principal’s name] is very open to share leadership. She encourages us to take on various leadership duties and motivates us to consider leadership career choices in the future. She empowers us. (Staff member, NSW school)

Because of those advisory bodies that exist, it is very well possible to manage the workload [of the principal] when the principal has also the ability to distribute the work among others, so she/he only controls, then it is all fine. (Deputy principal, Slovak school)

In the first quote, the principal is presented as the one who “gives” opportunities to be involved in leadership processes. It is implied here that the principal naturally owns these opportunities and she merely gives them to others. It appears from this quote that staff members do not or cannot have them prior to the principal’s consent or initiative. In the second quote, the principal is portrayed as being “very open” about “sharing” the leadership. This verbal construction implies that the principal naturally owns “leadership”, but this particular principal is “very open to share” it. The third quote talks about the principal’s role and suggests that in order to manage the workload, the principal should “distribute the work
among others”. When referring to the “workload”, the interviewee implies leadership related duties or responsibilities; hence the first process of distributed leadership. Since this interviewee did not talk about common teachers needing to distribute their work in order to handle their workload, this quote implies that leadership-related duties and responsibilities are available exclusively to the principal, but that she/he has an option to distribute them to others.

The principal of the NSW school confirmed this construction of principalship as being in a position to delegate and approve processes of distributed leadership.

*So by distributed leadership, I would interpret that to mean identifying the talents and the skills and contributions that everyone makes to making those things happen. And I think my role is being part of that distribution, but it's also, I guess, driving that as well. So making sure that people are involved and are committed and have some empowerment in terms of those goals that we want to achieve and in terms of the values of the school. So, in short, it would be identifying talents, skills and contributions that people can make those things come about.* (Principal, NSW school)

In this statement the principal constructed her role as being responsible for identifying others’ skills so she could “drive” the distribution of leadership responsibilities so the particular staff members would successfully achieve the set tasks. In this sense she constructed this position as being a form of guarantor and coordinator of the processes of distributed leadership, as being permanently above them. This construction conflicts with the idea of individual school stakeholders identifying themselves and, in other times, others as leaders. This understanding of principalship does not allow an alternative model or construction of leadership that would not require any guarantor or coordinator of distributed leadership. In the alternative model, distribution of leadership could occur, for instance, as a result of shared decision-making processes. This way the role of a coordinator of distributed leadership could be shared or constantly shift.
Several staff members in both schools also explicitly acknowledged their desire for a solo leadership model.

*The leadership must come from the top. Okay. The principal must be seen as the leader of the school. That’s really important. They must set the example and the climate for the school. So the children should be a little bit taken back and know that the principal’s the leader of the school. And they can have that slight authoritarian. But at the same time, and [principal’s name] does do this, and she does it well. She can be authoritarian but at the same time she’s very caring.* (Staff member, NSW school)

*Simply, if he [sic] is once a principal, he decided for it, he was selected and won a competition, he presented his vision, then go ahead and let him get the chance to fulfil it. Of course, if it was like that the atmosphere in the school would get really dense, that it would not be possible to work, then steps should be taken to change the situation.* (Staff member, Slovak school)

*It must be something in-between. She/he should be neither an absolute tyrant nor an absolute mollusc.* (Staff member, Slovak school)

Interviewees in these quotes overtly appreciated principals being partly “authoritarian”. By using the terms such as “authoritarian” or “absolute tyrant”, they implicitly referred to democratic values again. When the second interviewee claims that the principal should be given a chance to fulfil her/his vision for the school, the role of other school stakeholders in this construction of leadership seems silent. Is, for instance, any other staff member allowed to be “slightly authoritarian” with her/his colleagues? Or should any other staff member also be given an opportunity to fulfil her/his vision for the school? In this understanding of school leadership, only principals are allowed or, rather, invited to use these opportunities, which seems to be in contradiction with the normative understanding of distributed leadership. The principal in the Slovak school even explicitly acknowledged using this opportunity to be “a little bit authoritative” and “a little bit democratic”.

*I think I have a little bit of everything [in my leadership style] - a little bit authoritative, a little bit democratic, a little bit empathic. I think I have a little bit of everything. I don’t know which bit I have more of, but I think everything is possible when you have a good team.* (Principal, Slovak school)
When discussing how various research participants constructed principals to be in the power position of deciding about practising or not practising distributed leadership, it should be also brought into question whether the concept of distributed leadership itself did not invite these sorts of meaning constructions. To be more specific, the term *distributed* may imply that there is *somebody* who *distributes* roles, duties, tasks or rights. If research participants were asked about “inclusive leadership” (Ryan, 2006a, 2006b) instead of “distributed leadership”, it might have brought significantly different responses. Hence, it should be acknowledged that the term *distributed leadership* may induce particular meanings of its own.

To summarise, although these constructions of principal as being in a position of power to delegate or distribute leadership to others do not completely inhibit the emergence of processes of distributed leadership, in many ways they contradict the definition of distributed leadership as research participants formulated it. Hence, these meaning constructions may strengthen the practices leaning more towards the solo leadership model. While employing the interpretivist paradigm, it should, however, be taken into consideration that these constructions of solo leadership could be perceived both as creators of the social reality and also as products of a wider socio-political contexts (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Watson & Scribner, 2005).

**Negotiating Practices of Distributed Leadership with State Policies**

In line with the interpretivist theoretical paradigm adopted in this thesis, any meaning construction – including the constructions of principalship, school leadership or distributed leadership – are products of social processes and human interactions (Hacking, 1999, p. 25; Miovský, 2006, p. 20). These meanings are being constantly constructed within various social, historical or geographical contexts (Burr, 2003, p. 5). As a result, state policies, including those on school leadership and principalship, can be perceived both as products
and influential co-creators of social reality in schools (Ball, 2012; Fulcher, 1989). In this part of the chapter the aim is not to analyse particular state policies of NSW (Australia) or Slovakia, but, rather, to look at how research participants referred to state policies and the wider social context, and which aspects of these they emphasised as influencing their leadership practices. In other words, it aims to explore how research participants negotiated their practices and understanding of distributed leadership in relation to their socio-political context.

One of the strongest factors which shaped the understanding of principalship and distributed leadership was reported to be the legal power of principals to hire and fire staff members.

_You know, if there is somebody somewhere above me deciding about whether I will be employed and for what salary, hence, how many hours I get and the like, it is quite difficult to participate, yes? There is an attempt that the leadership creates those conditions so it would seem like people participate, but I think it is not yet deep-rooted. Those other proposals may be as good, but the principal’s proposal always wins. Yes, it seems like advisory, but I just think that the leadership is more dominant._ (Staff member, Slovak school)

In this quote, the term “leadership” was used to represent principalship. The interviewee made a claim that as long as there is a person who has superior powers of deciding about whether she/he can work in the school or not, the practices of distributed leadership are not really genuine. In the Slovak context, the exclusive authority of the principal to fire and hire staff members in her/his school was explicitly acknowledged also by several other staff members and the principal herself. In the NSW context, the process of hiring and firing staff members did not emerge in any recorded interviews but was described to me informally by the principal and another staff member. The process was portrayed as a state centralised system, which still provided the principal great manoeuvrability to influence the choice of a
person to be hired. I was also informed that if having serious grounds for questioning the quality of teaching performance of some staff members, while following strict legal procedures, the principal in a NSW public school could also drive the process of firing them.

In addition to the authority of deciding about the composition of the school personnel, the principal in the Slovak school was also legally entitled to reward particular staff members with a bonus salary.

Because we do not have a personal salary bonus every month, I had always done it through the thirteenth month salary. Thus, those responsibilities which are done extra or above had always been taken into account in the thirteenth month salary.

(Deputy principal, Slovak school)

In this quote, the deputy principal – as also a former principal – acknowledged that she was deciding about the level of a bonus salary. As demonstrated in the previous quote, this factor – the principal having the legal power to decide about the level of salary – was perceived by the research participant as inhibiting practising distributed leadership as well.

Besides state policies giving the principals some tools of power over other school members – firing, hiring, and rewarding – the principals perceived state policies also as making them “accountable” for various areas. This way the principals commonly justified making a number of decisions in these areas without consulting or collaborating with the staff.

Well, as an employee of the Department of Education, I mean there are specific responsibilities and accountabilities that I have as a principal. And so they are pretty much outlined as part of my duties and that includes a whole range of leadership roles, you know, including the management of people and the management of resources, the accountability of finance, and those kinds of things. And in the public

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system I would also have a commitment to basically implement the policies of the Department of Education. (Principal, NSW school)

In this quote, the principal of the NSW school acknowledged that a portion of decisions made about the school were made exclusively by her without consulting others. She justified it by claiming that the Department of Education makes her as a principal “accountable” for several areas such as financial issues and the management of people. In addition, she views herself responsible for implementing policies of the NSW Department of Education. The most problematic accountability of the principals in terms of distributed leadership is “management of people”, which is a rather explicit invitation for principals to act as a superior coordinator and manager of the processes of distributed leadership.

The principal of the Slovak school acknowledged making a proportion of her decisions by herself as well.

*When I issue a decision, they [staff] don’t have the right to agree or disagree with it, I just issue it. For instance, I had decided about an individual study – but I merely informed others about it at the Pedagogical Council. It is a decision of the school principal. I would say it is half-half or rather one-third of decisions are made in collaboration with teachers and two-thirds by me – the latter are decisions of the school principal.* (Principal, Slovak school)

The principal of the Slovak school acknowledged that approximately two-thirds of the decisions she made without consultation. In contrast to the NSW school principal, she did not explicitly justify it by any reference to the “system” or state policies. She presented it rather as something taken-for-granted.

Some staff members of the Slovak school also acknowledged that the principal may be “pushed” to implement some policies introduced at the higher level – the state or regional levels.

*But if some resolutions arrive to them [principal and deputy principal] from the establishment, they must push something through. So they simply do it in an authoritative way that “we must” do.* (Staff member, Slovak school)
There are moments when they [principal and deputy principal] must actually decide alone and fast, because they are pushed from above. But I think that in this the girls have managed it well. (Staff member, Slovak school)

In these quotes, the staff members defended the principal and deputy principal that sometimes they might have been forced from above to translate some state policies to the school level “in an authoritative way”. It should be pointed out, however, that putting in practice any particular state policy may still require defining a particular form or way that this will be carried out (Ball, 1994, 2012; Fulcher, 1989). Hence, various school stakeholders can be involved in this process of making a policy at a school level (see Chapter Two). These statements construct state policies as linear top-down mechanisms, which implies that the government is in charge and has the real power (Bowe & Ball, 1992, p. 10; Fulcher, 1989, p. 6). Using the introduction of a new state policy as a justification to make “authoritative” decisions about how it is going to be put in practice may, thus, appear as problematic in terms of the processes of distributed leadership.

The accountability of principals to perform certain duties or reach various goals predefined at the state level is also often presented by the principals to validate their practice of “controlling” other staff members.

At the end of the day, I am also, as I said, accountable for ensuring that people... I use the expression of, you know, “tapping people on the shoulder”, maybe just reminding people from time to time: How are things going? That’s seems to me kind of a human need to have that sense of touching base with how things are going. Because sometimes I think the busyness of working in schools is such that I can get distracted at times and I don’t need necessarily mean those distractions are bad things. It’s just a nature of our work. (Principal, NSW school)

Everybody, be it deputy principal, secretary, leader of school club for children [after-school care] or so, they all have their duties. And as it is colloquially said: Trust, but verify. Hence, each month I control the classroom inspection activities of the deputy principal, the same with the leaders of school club and classroom teachers, and plus I want to know everything about this school, because I should. . . . With regards to some duties of the school principal, there is also a control-inspection activity. (Principal, Slovak school)
Because the state policies define particular “accountabilities” and “duties” for the principals, this is interpreted as allowing them to regularly check on or control other staff members. This practice of control or surveillance puts principals in a professionally superior position, which can function as a hindrance to practise the processes of distributed leadership.

Among other accountabilities, particularly the principal in the NSW school\textsuperscript{20} was considered accountable by herself and others for securing high educational achievements and excellence of students, and attracting enough parents to enrol their children in their school to assure its sustainability or growth.

\begin{quote}
I see a lot of similarity to a very independent school philosophy. The independent school market is very competitive because basically it’s a case of children on seats. And [principal’s name]’s desire to promote the school and to push the school’s best values and deliver the school’s best practice and to make sure that . . . there is excellent teaching happening in every classroom, that is a promotional hook that she uses. And I’ve heard very, very similar sorts of dialogue or rhetoric coming from principals in the independent school system. The motivations are quite similar – wanting to grow the school. And every principal, I think, wants to do that. (Staff member, NSW school)
\end{quote}

This research participant claimed that the circumstances in her/his school, which belongs to a public schooling system, are very similar to the “independent school market” in NSW. Here she/he constructed this schooling system to be a “competitive” market in which schools compete to attract as many students as possible in order for schools to “grow”.

She/he also claimed that the principal of the researched NSW school took on the goal of

\textsuperscript{20}Although the Slovak school staff members prioritised the goal of enhancing students’ educational outcomes as well (see Chapter Four), their primary motivation was not presented as to attract any more students. During the data collection period, the capacity of the Slovak school was full, and because several institutions in the Bratislava region which assess and diagnose students with SEN (Institutions for Education Guidance and Prevention) often refer these students to this school from all around the city, the demand for enrolling them in the school was presented to be consistent and satisfactory.
promoting her school in the “market” of all schools in the region and for this purpose she
adopted a “rhetoric” of “excellence” and “best practice”. Because excellence in teaching can
be assumingly best demonstrated through students’ educational results, one can locate here
the main reasoning why research participants in both schools so overwhelmingly prioritised
the goal of enhancing students’ educational results and skills over all the other goals of
inclusive education (see Chapter Four). On one occasion the principal of the NSW school
explicitly stated that she considered this goal to be an ultimate goal also for distributed
leadership.

*It’s about collective responsibility in bringing out the best outcomes for the kids.*
(Principal, NSW school).

The “market” philosophy might have affected the researched schools not only in
terms of prioritising students’ educational results, but also processes of leadership. For
instance, in one interview the principal of the NSW school used the term “effective” thirteen
times while referring to effective “schools”, “organisations”, “leadership” or “systems”.
Since democratic leadership processes are generally perceived as not conducive to market
dictates of efficiency and effectiveness (Woods & Gronn, 2009, p. 436), this might be one of
the reasons the principal and other school stakeholders consider it desirable to sometimes
prefer autocratic decision-making by the principal.

To summarise, research participants reported that state policies establish various
duties, accountabilities, and rights for principals which may considerably impede practising
the processes of distributed leadership. For instance, having the right to fire a staff member –
although it might never be exercised by a principal – significantly affects the way staff
members construct the meaning of leadership. It invites them to fear, or at least respect, and
perceive the principal’s position as a superior one to theirs. State policies may also establish
particular accountabilities or duties for principals such as managing people, securing the
quality of teaching and high students’ achievements, which invites them to control and coordinate the processes of distributed leadership, hence, again to occupy a superior power position (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998). Being entrusted with these accountabilities, duties, and rights may also invite the principals to decide about various school matters authoritatively, although school stakeholders could be involved in the decision-making process as well. In line with the argument of Hatcher (2005, pp. 256-257), one may question whether it is possible at all to practise distributed leadership in the socio-political context in which state policies delegate to a principal the dominant position in the power structure within the school and therefore the privileged site of influence.

Despite this line of argument, state policies also define practices that can be perceived as conducive to the processes of distributed leadership. As often reported by staff members in both schools, state policies define the obligation for school stakeholders to meet and collaborate within particular school platforms. The NSW school operated two formations of staff meetings (one on professional learning and one on administrative matters), Learning Support Team meetings, Parents and Citizens Association meetings, and student leaders’ meetings (see Appendix AG). The Slovak school ran meetings of Pedagogical Council, Methodical Associations and Subject Committees, Working Meetings, School Council, and Parents’ Association (see Appendix AH). On the one hand, all these school bodies may be perceived as occasions for practising all processes of distributed leadership. To some extent, the mere fact that these platforms are established in schools ensures the emergence or regular running of at least some processes of distributed leadership. In other words, an absolute solo leadership style is not possible in these socio-political contexts. On the other hand, as reported above, all these school bodies can be merely used by principals as platforms to enforce their own visions and ideas, hence, to only mimic the processes of distributed leadership.
Personal and Interpersonal Factors Influencing Practices of Distributed Leadership

Besides social and political context influencing practices of distributed leadership in schools, research participants indicated that various personal and interpersonal factors may play a role, too. With regards to the process of taking on various leadership responsibilities and projects, one research participant expressed a personal preference not to get involved, but to focus exclusively on her/his teaching duties.

*I think it is better when leadership leads and teachers teach than if we all dealt with everything and actually quarrel about various things. . . . At least I have the feeling that in our school it is currently so, that I teach, and whatever I need to know, I go and ask. When I want anything, I say it, and when I need anything, they provide it. Because that’s what they are here for – to actually create those conditions so I could work with the children. I cannot imagine that I would finish teaching and in the afternoon I dig into a computer and deal with some agenda. I really don’t like that.*

(Staff member, Slovak school)

This staff member constructed a firm divide between her/his teaching role and the leadership “agenda” as limited to the principal’s position. She/he also explicitly presented a negative attitude towards getting involved in any leadership “agenda” on top of her/his teaching duties. The implicit justification for this attitude was the heavy workload placed on teachers which arises from teaching duties themselves. This finding aligns with the existing research on shared decision-making in which a substantial number of teachers openly stated a lack of interest or capability in dealing with “schoolwide issues” (Weiss & Cambone, 1994, p. 298).

In the matter of collaboration, research participants in the Slovak school said that practising collaboration is not that straightforward either and depends on people’s interests, personalities and relationships.

*It will always be about that you can find people like this and like that. You will never have that the team will contain many members and all of them are willing to collaborate. That is possible somewhere in a fairy tale. Well, if anybody tells me that it exists somewhere, hats off to them. . . . We all have shortcomings, just as I have them, others have them, too. It might be more difficult for somebody to collaborate with me, just as it might be more difficult for me to collaborate with others.*

(Staff member, Slovak school)
This research participant claims that it is a very common phenomenon that because people have their own characteristics and specificities, not everybody feels happy to collaborate. In other words, hindrances to collaboration may arise not only from the way principalship is constructed and practiced in the school or from the overall size of school personnel, but also from specific individual characteristics, interests and relationships.

In terms of influencing decision-making processes, as already demonstrated in the previous parts of the chapter, research participants presented very contradictory attitudes towards practising distributed (or democratic) leadership and “autocratic” or “authoritarian” leadership. On numerous occasions, opinions were expressed that current practices in their schools are not distributed or democratic enough, while on others they expressed attitudes welcoming manifestations of solo or autocratic leadership. The justifications of their appreciation of solo leadership were mostly implicit, revealing their reasoning only in very few cases. One participant valued autocratic decision-making because she/he *personally* preferred clear and obvious guidelines and directions, even at the cost of not being allowed to influence them. Another participant favoured one person to set an example and the climate for the school instead of too many people getting involved. These participants did not consider as an option that it might be possible to create clear and obvious guidelines and set an example and vision for a school through distributed leadership processes.

**Comparative Perspective on the Construction of Distributed Leadership in the Two Research Sites**

Up to this point the chapter has attempted to display the multilayered complexity of social reality and how practices of distributed leadership may fit into it. It was demonstrated that certain practices could be perceived and experienced as processes of solo leadership by some school stakeholders, and as processes of distributed leadership by others. Despite these
differences within one organisation, some common trends could be observed in statements made in each of the researched schools.

The two schools mainly differed in the frequency of explicit references to democracy and democratic values. While allusions to democracy in the NSW school were primarily implicit, at least half of the interviewed staff members in the Slovak school referred to democracy explicitly. This phenomenon might be explained in that the Slovak participants felt a bigger need to relate to the relatively recently experienced era of autocratic Communist rule. In addition, as elaborated in Chapter Two, the Slovak equivalent of the concept of distributed leadership is not known and used in Slovakia. That is why when I was asking Slovak research participants about their understanding of this concept (see Appendix S), besides using the literal translation (“distribuované vedenie”), I attempted to explain to them that the concept might also be translated as a decentralised leadership (“decentralizované vedenie”). The concept of decentralisation is commonly known in Slovakia because, after the fall of Communism, the political and public administrational reforms were based on the process of decentralisation (Blahó, 2004; Bryson, 2010). This might contribute to the phenomenon of associating distributed leadership more frequently with democracy in the Slovak school. Because democracy is often defined as entailing “political equality, that all members of the polity are included equally in the decision-making process” (Young, 2000, p. 52), this might also influence the frequency of defining distributed leadership in the Slovak school in terms of involvement in decision-making processes. Participants in the NSW school constructed distributed leadership primarily as equitable sharing of responsibilities, duties and various school projects, while Slovak research participants constructed it mainly as involvement in decision-making processes. This is why, when also referring to benefits of distributed leadership, none of the Slovak participants mentioned sharing or lightening the workload of the principal and other staff members.
Staff in the Slovak school also mentioned much more frequently individual one-on-one collaboration between a teacher and principal than did the staff in the NSW school who primarily referred to collaboration among all staff members. This difference might be explained by the specific organisational context of the two schools. Besides the significant difference in the number of staff members in the two schools (see Table 1 in Chapter Three), one could also notice a substantial difference in the frequency of all-staff meetings. While all staff members of the Slovak school meet within their official platforms (see Appendix AH) on average once in every two weeks, staff members in the NSW school officially meet twice a week (see Appendix AG).

Another difference in distributed leadership processes between the two schools was reported by research participants as related to the size of their school and the number of personnel. The participants in the NSW school argued that because they are such a small school (six teaching personnel), they all collaborate with everybody. In contrast, the participants in the Slovak school considered it commonplace to create particular groupings or fractions of teachers within which they collaborate frequently, rather than across these groupings.

Another noticeable difference between the two schools was the level of satisfaction by research participants with the processes of distributed leadership. All interviewed participants in the Slovak school reported a high level of satisfaction with the current leadership practices there. In contrast, at least three respondents in the NSW school (out of seven interviewed staff members) expressed doubts and aspects of frustration. However, this difference should not be interpreted that leadership processes are better and more equitably distributed in the Slovak school than in the NSW school. The fact that Slovak participants expressed this level of satisfaction to me, might have been influenced by the social desirability bias (Norwood & Lusk, 2011). In addition, this difference might have been
shaped by the different cultural and social contexts. To give an example, in one hypothetical Western country, all public universities have very well established Disability Services which negotiate adjustments for students with disabilities. In contrast, in a hypothetical developing country, universities do not usually have any office of disability services, and disabilities of students are not taken into considerations at all or only on an arbitrary basis. Despite that, students with disabilities in the hypothetical Western country might present a much higher level of dissatisfaction with the services for students with disabilities because of their nuanced understanding of their rights and common practices across all universities in the country to accommodate and adjust to diverse capabilities of students. That is why the level of dis/satisfaction with distributed leadership processes in either of the researched schools should not be considered as a representation of some objective extent, frequency or authenticity of distributed leadership.

Because this study was not engaged in exploring practices in any other primary schools in the two countries, it is not possible to claim that these differences in conceptualising and practising distributed leadership between the two researched schools are common in other primary schools in the respective countries. If we assume that, for instance, conceptualising distributed leadership in terms of taking on responsibilities, duties and projects would be very common in other NSW primary schools as well, and rather uncommon in schools in Slovakia, conducting this particular study only in Slovakia, for instance, would present limited results in terms of conceptualising the processes of distributed leadership. In that case, distributed leadership would be conceptualised primarily as a decision-making process, and collaboration and all the other processes might most probably pass unnoticed. Hence, conducting this study as a comparative study might have added to a broader understanding and conceptualisation of particular concepts such as distributed leadership.
**Implications for Practice of Distributed Leadership**

After exploring the various social, political, local, organisational, personal and interpersonal factors which inform the complex reality of practising distributed leadership, one can still ask what should be done at the organisational level to maximise it. This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that to enhance practising distributed leadership, school stakeholders need to critically scrutinise the role of state policies and their content, various social discourses and language they use to describe school leadership. All these may invite school stakeholders to construct a hierarchy of power by placing the principal in a superior managerial position. In order to practise distributed leadership, this construction needs to be challenged and problematised. It needs to be problematised not only by the principal her/himself, but by the other school stakeholders as well. On the one hand, the principal has to free her/himself from the construction of power associated with her/his role and interpret her/his accountabilities as requiring involvement of every staff member. On the other hand, staff members or other school stakeholders have to challenge the construction of solo leadership and better own their power position of resistance in case they are not adequately enabled to participate in the processes of distributed leadership.

**Summary of the Chapter**

To summarise, this chapter attempted first to identify how research participants defined the concept of distributed leadership. It was revealed that they primarily constructed it as a set of processes with no particular goals. In addition, participants constructed distributed leadership as a “normative” concept implying that there is a prescribed norm or standard of extent and frequency of distributed leadership processes (Harris, 2009, p. 3). In doing so, some of the participants also conflated it with the concept of democracy and democratic leadership. This gave their understanding of distributed leadership a new dimension which also incorporated the values of human rights, justice, equitability and
equality, making distributed leadership more than a process to become a goal in and of itself. Then it was scrutinised how research participants perceived that these processes were put into practice in the two researched schools. This showed diverse and contradictory perceptions of various school stakeholders about leadership processes in their school. It was also demonstrated that individual participants often held contradictory attitudes. On the one hand, they required maximising the processes of distributed leadership (and/or democratic leadership). On the other hand, they reported favourable attitudes towards using some “autocratic” or “authoritative” practices by the principal. It was argued here that these attitudes might be informed by state policies prescribing particular roles, competitive performance targets and accountabilities to the principal and other school actors.
Chapter Six: Findings on Relationship between Inclusive Education and Distributed Leadership

The relationship between the concepts of inclusive education and distributed leadership is the central topic of this thesis. This chapter aims to explore how staff members in the two researched primary schools constructed the meaning of this relationship, and how they perceived that it manifested in their school practices. Through this exploration, three understandings of the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership will be identified: (1) inclusive education and distributed leadership as non-related; (2) distributed leadership as a means to practice inclusive education; and (3) distributed leadership as an indispensable component of inclusive education. Along with differing in the way these understandings portray the relationship between inclusion and distributed leadership, they also differ in the way they construct the target group and whether they prioritise the goals or processes. A brief comparison of the two researched schools will also be delivered while discussing the socio-political contexts these schools are situated in.

When reflecting on the quality of data for this chapter, a possible criticism is that this data might be particularly impacted by social desirability bias (Norwood & Lusk, 2011). Since research participants were informed before each interview that the topic of this study is the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership they might feel a need to please me and support my research by claiming that there is some relationship. This criticism can be challenged, however, by two arguments. First, some research participants

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21 Only staff members – seven staff members in the NSW school, and eight staff members in the Slovak school – were asked specifically about the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership (see Appendix S). Hence, parents and students did not address this question.
explicitly disagreed that there is any necessary relationship between the two concepts.

Second, if they did agree, they often provided a number of very concrete examples of practices to support their claim. They did this not only when being explicitly asked the question about the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership in the interview (see Appendix S), but in many cases also before the interview reached this question. This chapter aims to map out various existing understandings of this relationship and their implications for practice.

**Constructing Inclusive Education and Distributed Leadership as Non-related**

Before exploring research participants’ ideas on the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership, certain aspects of their understanding of the two concepts need to be recapitulated (as explored in Chapters Four and Five). Most importantly, it needs to be emphasised that research participants consistently constructed the meaning of inclusive education as a set of goals or aims to be attained or fulfilled, while they understood the concept of distributed leadership as a set of processes without any inherent specific goal or aim. It also needs to be pointed out that research participants constructed inclusive education to mean targeting exclusively students.

The fact that research participants perceived the concept of inclusive education as addressing only students needs to be taken into account when exploring statements of some participants who expressed an opinion that the concepts of inclusive education and distributed leadership are not related in practice.

*So, I don’t know if it’s based on leadership or if it’s based on your own values. So and your own opinion from whether it be studies or just yourself, so I am not sure. I don’t know. For me I think I would still be really inclusive whether I had a leadership position or not. So, yeah, I am not too sure if they do relate. But that is for me. . . . It might be – it’s a personal thing. And what you are taught, what your own values are. I am not too sure if... For myself I don’t think it would make a difference, I mean, if I didn’t lead programs in school. But I mean it is an extra opportunity to get kids involved. Because I think there are all these programs that I am doing, it’s like okay, well, this person, they might not be involved in too many things. This is a*
great program for them to be in. So, you know, I think it adds to it but I don’t think if it really matters if it’s there or not. (Staff member, NSW school)

In the context of being explicitly asked whether she/he sees any relationship between practicing inclusive education and distributed leadership, this research participant expressed an opinion that practising inclusive education depends on a particular teacher, that it is “a personal thing”. In this way, she/he implied that practising inclusive education depends entirely on her/him as a teacher who interacts with the sole recipients or target group of inclusive education – the students. In this quote, one can also notice a limited understanding of distributed leadership. It is constructed to signify only one process – taking on specific “programs” or a “leadership position”. It does not take into account any of the other processes of distributed leadership such as collaboration and knowledge sharing or influencing decision-making processes. Notwithstanding, by admitting that taking on programs by teachers “adds” to a greater inclusion of students, she/he did also recognise a certain level of relationship between distributed leadership and inclusive education.

Another school stakeholder also expressed doubts about the relatedness of inclusive education and distributed leadership.

I think there is a very direct relationship and I think the more autocratic the leadership style is, I think, the less inclusive the school will be. But, however, if autocracy was highlighting that inclusivity has to happen and is making it happen by force, then you can guarantee damn well it would happen... . Like autocracy from my point of view implies fear. It implies “I said this has to be done. It’s not done. Why not? Get into my office”. But if autocratically on high was said along the lines of “We need to be more inclusive. What are your inclusive practices?” You’d damn well come up with some really quickly. You know what I mean? To make sure that it would happen. It depends on what that autocracy is focusing on. (Staff member, NSW school)

On the one hand, this research participant acknowledged the “direct relationship” between distributed leadership and inclusive education while constructing “autocratic” leadership as the opposite to distributed leadership. On the other hand, she/he presented an exception to that relationship. She/he introduced a scenario in which the “autocratic leader” – the
principal – would be a proponent of inclusive education and would “make it happen by force”. This understanding leaves a scenario of an autocratic leader who would not promote inclusive education as the only one which would hinder achieving inclusive goals.

Nevertheless, as in case of the preceding quote, in the last quote the construction of inclusive education is implied to be limited to target students only.

In addition, in the last quote the research participant did not take into consideration the possible detrimental impact of autocratic leadership practices on the benefits that distributed leadership practices might bring about and which might be crucial for practising inclusive education as well. As explored in Chapter Five, distributed leadership can be very conducive to sharing knowledge among teaching staff members, and feeling motivated and engaged. In other words, an autocratic leadership approach may negatively impact on job satisfaction of teachers (Bhatti, Maitlo, Shaikh, Hashmi, & Shaikh, 2012) and their work commitment to enthusiastically attempt to approach inclusive goals. Autocratic leadership may also negatively impact on relationships between staff members (Van Vugt, 2004), which may affect their work engagement and willingness to share knowledge about inclusive practices, or on staff members’ innovative and creative thinking (Wagner, 1995) which may play a role in their attempts to approach inclusive goals as well.

One staff member in the Slovak school also expressed a view that practising inclusive education does not require distributed leadership but can be achieved by an autocratic leader.

* I think that [autocratic leadership and inclusive education] are not mutually exclusive. . . . If she/he is erudite, has experiences, and listens. I decide myself, but I listen to others and whether I take your opinion or not, I decide. Why shouldn’t it be possible? (Staff member, Slovak school) *

In this quote, the research participant constructed distributed leadership as being exclusively about the process of decision-making. She/he did not include the process of collaboration
and knowledge sharing or “listening to others” in her/his definition of distributed leadership. Her/his understanding of inclusive education was also limited to the area of decisions made only by the principal. She/he claimed that making decisions autocratically does not contradict practicing inclusive education if the principal is “erudite” and “experienced” and “listens to others”. If accepting the definition of inclusive education presented by other staff members (see Chapter Four), one can ask whether any principal’s decision can really secure inclusive engagement, enhancement of knowledge and skills, or experiences of happiness and belonging of students with whom the principal never directly interacts. All these goals are primarily being addressed in classroom situations where the principal is not present, and where a myriad of decisions of the particular classroom teacher, which go beyond the principal’s reach, matter.

In the context of being explicitly asked about the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership, one staff member in the NSW school and one in the Slovak school alluded to a balancing act between practicing distributed and autocratic leadership as well.

_The leadership must come from the top. Okay. The principal must be seen as the leader of the school. . . And they can have that slight authoritarian. But at the same time, and [principal’s name] does do this, and she does it well. She can be authoritarian but at the same time she’s very caring. And I think that is a happy combination. . . . And that way everybody’s inclusive. Everybody is included in everything._ (Staff member, NSW school)

_It must be something in-between. [The principal] should be neither an absolute tyrant nor an absolute mollusc. Simply, she/he must find the reasonable extent, when to decide by her/himself and when to involve parents and teachers._ (Staff member, Slovak school)

These two quotes, which were also used in Chapter Five to demonstrate a different point, acknowledged the possibility of “balancing” the practices of distributed leadership with the “authoritarian” ones. They claimed that leadership does not need to be perfectly distributed to support inclusion. By saying that, they did not deny the possibility that putting some
processes of distributed leadership in practice may assist in bringing about more inclusion in schools. They simply challenged the idea that absolute equality between all stakeholders in all aspects of school leadership is necessary for inclusion to emerge. Consequently, they did not refute that the two concepts would be completely unrelated in practice. They also implied the construction of inclusive education as exclusively targeting students, and presumed the condition that the principal is also supportive of inclusive goals.

**Constructing Distributed Leadership as a Means to Practise Inclusive Education**

Despite the presented doubts and objections to see practices of inclusive education and distributed leadership as related, most staff members in both schools perceived these two concepts and the practices associated with them as closely intertwined. To be more exact, most of the staff members constructed distributed leadership as a means to practise inclusive education. They perceived all of the main processes of distributed leadership – taking on responsibilities and projects, collaboration, and involvement in decision-making – as extensively conducive and beneficial for practising inclusive education.

As explored in Chapter Five, the process of taking on various leadership responsibilities and projects emerged primarily in interviews conducted in the NSW school. It was here where staff members associated this process with practising inclusive education.

> The more people, I think, that you’ve got involved in projects and programs for our kids, it stands to reason that the more you are going to be able to diversify the opportunities. So I think it works for the kids, because you are getting increased expertise and access for the children. (Principal, NSW school)

> I think from a purely pragmatic point of view it is too much for one person to handle. I also think that it’s important as, if we believe in inclusive practice, then we believe in providing students with opportunities that extend beyond the classroom. And in order for those opportunities to be realised and to be realised across the school, it involves us working together as teachers to provide those opportunities. So a lot of what distributed leadership is about comes back to what we value as a school. So if we value inclusivity, then there are certain measures that we have to take in our practice such as distributive leadership to ensure that what we value is reflected in our practice. (Staff member, NSW school)
Both of these statements were conveyed in the context of being enquired about distributed leadership, not about its relationship with inclusive education. In both of them, the research participants argued that the more staff members become involved in projects and programs, the more the school will be able to “diversify opportunities” for students. By diversifying opportunities for students, they implied the inclusive goal of enabling students’ active participation and engagement. In the second quote, the participant expressed an opinion that to provide various opportunities “beyond the classroom” for students, responsibilities should not be assigned only to the principal, but have to be distributed among teachers as well who should also “work together. . . to provide those opportunities”. Hence, she/he alluded here also to the process of collaboration.

Staff members in both schools explicitly linked the processes of collaboration with practising inclusive education.

*It is also about when they [teachers] see, for instance, that a child is thriving when working in this particular way, they share it among each other. And in our school the work would not be possible without mutual collaboration, because what we do here is really teamwork. That special education teacher, parent, teacher, there really must be collaboration. We see that with children, where there is no collaboration, they do not prosper. It is enough that one of those people drops out and it is a problem.* (Deputy principal, Slovak school)

*I am convinced that we discuss issues of inclusive education to a great extent here. We usually do so at professional development meetings, but also during informal break times. At staff meetings we discuss individual cases of students so all teachers are informed about various students, even if we are not part of their classrooms. In this sense all teachers act as a resource for each other. They give particular advice to each other by saying, for instance, “You can try this or that”.* (Staff member, NSW school)

Again, both of these statements were delivered in the context of being asked about distributed leadership, thus, before being explicitly interviewed about the relationship between inclusion and distributed leadership. In the first quote, the deputy principal of the Slovak school expressed a view that collaboration among teachers and between staff members and parents plays a crucial part in attempting to achieve the inclusive goal of
enabling students to “thrive”. In this way, the interviewee alluded to the goal of enhancing students’ educational outcomes and skills. In both quotes, the participants also explicitly referred to sharing knowledge as a particular benefit of distributed leadership that is viewed as important in enabling students to “prosper”. The participant in the second quote specified that the collaboration may happen either through a formal school platform – “professional development meetings” (see Appendix AG) – or informally during “informal break times”.

Almost all staff members in the Slovak school also referred to Methodical Associations and Subject Committees (see Appendix AH) as two main platforms for sharing knowledge to better address individual students’ “problems”.

Staff members in the Slovak school often related the process of involvement in decision-making – as the third process of distributed leadership – and practising inclusive education.

>You [as a principal] simply cannot direct and encompass everything, you have no chance to encompass what happens in the classroom... Because when you sit in the principal’s office, you cannot decide about, for instance, what the teacher should reduce in the education for a particular student or to expand or if she/he should be sent for... I just can’t imagine that. Or how to adjust her/his plans. It must be in the jurisdiction of that teacher and dependent on her/his decisions whether the child should be sent for an assessment or whether that child should be transferred to another [classroom]. (Staff member, Slovak school)

It would be different if I imagine that the principal is some kind of a taskmaster who just claims something of her/his own. Because, also with regards to those transfers of children and placements, to a great extent it is communicated with the teacher who teaches the child – what are the child’s abilities, what would benefit her/him, what would not benefit, support, and wouldn’t support. And for this purpose, a discussion between the leadership and the teacher is necessary. . . . Hence, I think it has a great impact on the success of inclusion. . . . Then also assessments are often discussed, whether to use a verbal assessment or by a mark, whether it will help the child when having an assistant or no assistant. All this is dealt with collectively, it is never the decision of one person. (Staff member, Slovak school)

In the context of being asked explicitly about the relationship between practices of inclusive education and distributed leadership, these research participants aptly pointed out that practising inclusive education involves a myriad of little decisions which are not only made
by the principal, but which have to be made by individual teachers in plenty of teaching situations in classrooms. In this sense, the distribution of decision-making processes in any school is unavoidable, not only in relation to practising inclusive education, but merely to working as a teacher. Notwithstanding, the research participants also reported that decisions, which extended beyond everyday teaching situations such as placing or transferring a child in a special or regular classroom or using a teacher’s aide or not, have to be made by more school stakeholders, and not just the principal to ensure “the success of inclusion”. In this case, research participants did not specifically refer to any particular goal of inclusive education. In the first quote, however, the participant talked about reducing or expanding educational content, which might be interpreted that her/his main concern was yet again the goal of enhancing students’ educational outcomes and skills.

One staff member of the NSW school did not refer to a particular process of distributed leadership as being relevant for practising inclusive education, but to a particular benefit distributed leadership can bring.

*I think that only distributed leadership can make teachers feel happy, and as a result they will have the tendency to bring the same feeling in the classrooms. I think that teachers need to be role models for children. If the principal was a dictator, teachers would not feel as happy and devoted to their jobs.* (Staff member, NSW school)

This research participant argued that in order to achieve the goal of inclusive education of enabling children to experience happiness and engagement, staff members have to feel the same and model it to students. The point about modelling teachers’ experiences to students was raised by other staff members in the NSW school as well.

*Everything starts from the top-down and what is modelled for us, we then model to the children. I mean we are learners ourselves.* (Staff member, NSW school)

*I think if we are expecting kids to learn those skills for team work and cooperation and problem solving which are being identified as the skills of the future as well, then that, I think, is a model by the practice of our staff. And I think you know that’s the case with, I guess, if there are other values as well. If we are going to promote an*
inclusive approach to teaching and learning for our kids, then that means we embrace an inclusive approach. (Principal, NSW school)

The argument about modelling experiences, feelings, “skills” and “values” for students has a significant implication for the construction of inclusive education and distributed leadership. It implies that to achieve any of the goals of inclusive education that target students – enhancing their knowledge and skills, experiencing engagement, belonging, happiness and self-worth or actively participating – these have to be primarily attained at the level of school staff members, and the processes of distributed leadership are constructed as a means to achieve that. Research participants constructed the concept of distributed leadership as one that mirrors – at the level of staff members – inclusive education (understood as targeting students only).

Constructing distributed leadership as one of the means to attain the goals of inclusive education implies that the processes of distributed leadership are distinct and external to practices and goals of inclusive education. This understanding also implies the existence of further means to attain the goals of inclusive education, such as professional learning or support services of the Ministry of Education (see Figure 2). Hence, attaining the goals of inclusive education does not depend entirely on the processes of distributed leadership. The latter can be considered as merely conducive to the former, hence, not necessary or unavoidable.
Figure 2. Schematic representation of constructing distributed leadership as a means to practise inclusive education

This conduciveness of processes of distributed leadership to practising inclusive education could be demonstrated by one situation which occurred in the Slovak school. In this situation, a student diagnosed with ADHD was transferred from a regular classroom to a special classroom but, after negotiations between school representatives and his parents, the student’s timetable was adjusted so he could attend English language classes in the regular classroom.
First I was irritated about that [child’s name], so now they infiltrated him at least to my English class. Hence, he is in the special classroom because he has his problems, but now he actually attends that English class because children in the special classroom do not have an option of English class. He is deprived of information technologies there, but since he comfortably deals with computers at home, he is not losing much, but he did not want to be deprived of English. So we somehow mutually agreed that I will endure it and he will not be deprived of English. (Staff member, Slovak school)

This whole situation of transferring a student diagnosed with ADHD to a special classroom can be interpreted as an example of compromising the inclusive goal of enhancing student’s educational results and his future educational and career prospects by placing him in the special classroom. The deficit model of thinking about the student was expressed in the quote when justifying this transfer with an argument that “he has his problems”. This particular situation can also be interpreted that through the processes of distributed leadership – involving the student’s parents in the decision-making process about the particular arrangement of his transfer – the extent of compromising the goals of inclusive education was reduced. In other words, the involvement of parents particularly influenced and changed the initial decision made by school experts to transfer the child to a special classroom. Hence, in this particular example, the processes of distributed leadership could be interpreted as partially conducive to challenging the power of special education expertise and as supportive of the goals of inclusive education.

Nonetheless, this construction of distributed leadership as merely one of the means of, and distinct and external to inclusive education, also allows a scenario that the former would work against the latter. To be more specific, for instance it allows a scenario to emerge in which teachers holding disapproving attitudes towards inclusive education would put their position into practice through the distributed decision-making processes. Hence, a regular classroom teacher might, for instance, instigate and bring about a transfer of student diagnosed with SEN or disability to a special classroom because she/he would be denying
her/his responsibility to educate the student. This demonstrates how policies and practices are made at all levels, be it the classroom, school or state (Fulcher, 1989, p. 16).

So far this chapter has explored two forms of understanding the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership. The first one, which attempted to portray the two concepts as non-related, was considerably challenged, demonstrating that research participants admitted some relationship between them or did not deny the possibility of influencing each other. In the second understanding, particular processes of distributed leadership were constructed as a means of practising inclusive education. In some instances employing these processes could overpower the voice of special education experts and serve the inclusive goals. On other occasions, the processes of distributed leadership understood as mere processes without a particular goal may also function as conducive to segregation and exclusion of students.

**Constructing Distributed Leadership as a Component of Inclusive Education**

Besides constructing distributed leadership as unrelated or as a means to attaining goals of inclusive education, some research participants also constructed it as an indispensable component of inclusive education.

*I think if you value that people are going to be respected, that they are going to be treated fairly, they are going to at least be included – that to me is part of what we are defining as an inclusive school, that people have to feel that they are involved in the process of evaluation and of comment and of providing ideas.* (Principal, NSW school)

*I think they are very intertwined that without [distributed leadership] inclusion would not work as it should. I think it is very intertwined that without everybody being involved it would not work.* (Principal, Slovak school)

In the first quote, the principal of the NSW school constructed the meaning of inclusive education, or an “inclusive school”, to encompass as its component the involvement of all school stakeholders, including adults, in decision-making processes. In other words, inclusive education was constructed here to incorporate involvement of school stakeholders
in decision-making as one of the processes of distributed leadership. In the second quote, the
principal of the Slovak school did not specify a particular process of distributed leadership,
but made a claim that “inclusion”, or inclusive education, cannot work without distributed
leadership. Hence, she constructed the latter as an indispensable component of the former.

In addition to the decision-making processes, the principal of the NSW school and
one staff member in the Slovak school also referred to the teamwork and collaboration
process as an indispensable component of inclusion.

I would have to identify teamwork as a crucial component of successful inclusive
schools. I truly believe that, but I would also have some evidence to also show that’s
the case. (Principal, NSW school)

The inclusion should be like that we live as in one family, that the people have those
mutual relationships. At least I imagine it this way. . . that the leadership would
closely collaborate with teachers and the teacher with leadership. (Staff member,
Slovak school)

In the first quote, which significantly preceded the question on relationship between
inclusion and distributed leadership, the principal identified “teamwork” or collaboration
between staff members as “a crucial component” of inclusive education or “inclusive
schools”. In the second quote, the collaboration between school staff members as a process
of distributed leadership was subsumed under the concept of “inclusion” or inclusive
education also by one research participant in the Slovak school. In other words, these
research participants constructed the meaning of distributed leadership as overlapping with
the meaning of inclusive education; hence, not as a conducive and inconsequential means,
but as an indispensable component.

Without referring to particular processes of distributed leadership or goals of
inclusive education, another staff member in the NSW school conveyed the meanings of
distributed leadership and inclusive education as overlapping.

But I think based on that, if we didn’t have the sort of approach to leadership that we
do have, we wouldn’t be reflecting what our values are. And if we are not reflecting
what our values are, then our practice changes. And our practice starts to become less inclusive and it starts to become more autocratic. . . and if it’s becoming autocratic then that’s gotta be sort of opposing dialectic to inclusivity. (Staff member, NSW school)

This research participant implied that inclusive education and distributed leadership are based on the same “values”. If perceiving autocracy as opposite to democracy, she/he also implied an overlap between inclusive and democratic values.

As a manifestation of understanding distributed leadership as a component of inclusive education could also be considered in staff members’ references to their collaboration and Learning Support Team meetings when being asked to identify inclusive practices in their schools (see Chapter Four). Research participants identified several practices in their schools as inclusive, for instance, an individualised and differentiated teaching approach to particular students using services of teacher’s aides, and others. The fact that they also identified as inclusive the practice of collaboration between staff members as one process of distributed leadership could be interpreted as an overlap in meanings of inclusive education and distributed leadership.

This meaning construction of distributed leadership as a component of inclusive education can be interpreted that all expressions of distributed leadership are at the same time manifestations of inclusive education. In other words, practices of distributed leadership represent a subset of practices of inclusive education (see Figure 3). In this sense, all practices of distributed leadership should also be considered as a manifestation of inclusive education in a way. Hence, even if, for instance, the process of collaboration (distributed leadership) leads to a situation of student’s exclusion, it should still be considered in some aspects as inclusive because the process of collaboration is understood as a manifestation of inclusivity as well. This complexity and multilayered aspects of practices
of distributed leadership and inclusive education are represented in Figure 3 by shades of colour which fill the two circles signifying the two concepts.

Figure 3. Schematic representation of constructing distributed leadership as a subset of practices of inclusive education

Nonetheless, as elaborated in Chapter Five, research participants distinguished various forms of processes of distributed leadership, some incorporating the aspect of certain values or goals such as democracy, equity or inclusivity, and some not. If taking this construction into consideration, one can distinguish two forms of processes of distributed leadership: (1) those that incorporate the inclusive goals, thus, they are directed towards inclusive (and democratic) goals; and (2) those that are not directed towards any value system, thus, they can lead even to instances of exclusion. In other words, the first form of distributed leadership is understood not only in terms of processes, but also as a set of values and goals. The second form of distributed leadership is constructed as a mere set of processes without any directedness towards any values or inclusive values in particular. In
this respect, only the first form of distributed leadership should be considered as a component of inclusive education and overlapping with it (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Schematic representation of two forms of distributed leadership and their relationship to inclusive education

In this redefined understanding of inclusive education – represented in both Figure 3 and Figure 4 – the process becomes as important as the goal. In this sense, the process itself becomes one of the goals, which makes the boundaries between the concepts of a goal and process blurry and malleable. The overlap in meanings of inclusive education and distributed leadership becomes even more extended if taking into consideration the situations when students participate in the processes of distributed leadership of the school – when they take on responsibilities and leadership roles; when they collaborate not only with other schoolmates but also adult school stakeholders; when they influence school’s decision-
making processes; or when they identify themselves as informal or formal leaders (see Appendices AG and AH).

This construction of distributed leadership as an indispensable component of inclusive education introduces also another major redefinition of the concept of inclusive education. It challenges the dominant construction of inclusive education as targeting exclusively students. If distributed leadership represents an indispensable component of inclusive education, the latter targets not only students but also adult school stakeholders. This change in meaning of inclusive education requires a redefinition of its goals, too. This can be expresses by adding “other school stakeholders” in the list of goals of inclusive education as it was presented in Chapter Four:

- enhancing knowledge, skills, ethical values, educational and career prospects of students and other school stakeholders;
- enabling students and other school stakeholders to experience belonging, happiness, and self-worth; and
- enabling active participation and engagement of students and other school stakeholders in learning and school life in general.

In contrast to constructing distributed leadership as a means, and a distinct and external process to inclusive education, the redefined meaning of inclusive education also introduces significant implications for situations when processes of distributed leadership are compromised. In this understanding of inclusive education, autocratic or solo leadership practices do not represent only a confrontation to the principles of distributed leadership, but also of inclusive education. In other words, compromising practices of distributed leadership inevitably compromises practising inclusive education as well.
Comparative Perspective on the Constructions of Inclusive Education and Distributed Leadership in the Two Research Sites

Before exploring the implications for practice of the redefined understanding of inclusive education, it might be useful to point out some comparative characteristics of the two researched schools situated in the two different socio-political contexts. In this chapter, there have been identified three types of understanding of the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership presented by staff members of both schools. The first type of understanding that conceived inclusive education as unrelated to distributed leadership was demonstrated to be problematic. The authors of this position constructed either of the two concepts as too narrow, or implied that they do relate and influence each other, but just not inevitably in all situations due to the complexity of social reality. In the second type of understanding the relationship between the two concepts, distributed leadership signified one of the means of practising inclusive education. A few participants also transgressed from this second type of understanding to the third one in which distributed leadership represented an indispensable component of inclusive education. The frequency of references to the three understandings can be expressed by the following list:\(^{22}\):

- inclusive education and distributed leadership as non-related (3 NSW and 2 Slovak staff members);
- distributed leadership as a means to inclusive education (5 NSW and 6 Slovak staff members); and

\(^{22}\) It should be noted that at different stages of the interviews, several participants embraced different types of understanding of the relationship between distributed leadership and inclusive education. Hence, one participant might adopt the second type of understanding on one occasion, and the third type at another stage of an interview.
distributed leadership as an indispensable component of inclusive education

(2 NSW and 2 Slovak staff members).

From these numbers, one can infer that the two schools did not differ significantly.

The differences become more visible when unpacking the individual statements in accordance to references to particular goals of inclusive education or processes of distributed leadership. When talking about the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership, staff members in the NSW school referred to the three main goals of inclusive education: enhancing students’ educational outcomes, enabling their engagement and active participation and enabling them to experience happiness. References to the first goal dominated. Staff members of the Slovak school referred exclusively to the first goal, or talked generally and did not specify any particular goal of inclusive education.

The schools differed a bit more visibly when referring to the processes of distributed leadership. In line with the findings presented in Chapter Five, staff of the Slovak school did not refer to sharing and taking on responsibilities and various projects when talking about the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership. They constructed the meaning of distributed leadership primarily as a process of decision-making and collaboration. In the NSW school, staff members constructed distributed leadership predominantly as a process of sharing and taking on various leadership responsibilities and projects, but referred also to the processes of collaboration and decision-making. This difference can be interpreted as an expression of organisational differences which could be informed also by some wider socio-political conditions.

**Implications for Practice of the Different Constructions of Inclusive Education and Distributed Leadership**

Constructing distributed leadership as an indispensable component of inclusive education introduces a range of dilemmatic implications for practice. For instance, how
should we interpret the practical situations when processes of distributed leadership primarily concerned with adult school stakeholders work against inclusion targeted at students, or when a principal uses autocratic leadership processes to strengthen and support the inclusion of students? Can any aspect of these two situations be considered as a manifestation of inclusive education?

With regards to the first situation when employing of distributed leadership processes works against inclusion of students, it can be interpreted in two ways. First – as represented in Figure 3 – this particular practice of distributed leadership that led also to an exclusion of student should be understood in some aspects as inclusive, in others as exclusive. To be more specific, because in this interpretation practices of distributed leadership are themselves considered as a manifestation of inclusive education, in this one aspect the situation should be considered as inclusive. Notwithstanding, it should also be seen as exclusionary in the aspect that it led to the student’s exclusion. In the second interpretation – as represented in Figure 4 – when the processes of distributed leadership lack the directedness towards inclusive values and work against inclusive goals, this situation should not be considered as a manifestation of inclusive practices. Because these processes of distributed leadership are not directed towards inclusive values, they should not be considered as a manifestation of the redefined meaning of inclusive education. Only processes of distributed leadership which are directed towards achieving inclusive goals should be considered as such.

In respect to the second situation where autocratic or solo leadership practices are used with an intention to strengthen or pursue achieving inclusive goals (understood as targeting exclusively students), the deputy principal of the Slovak school expressed her opinion this way:
If I was a principal at some other school – hence, not here where people [teachers] are already educated – I think I would not push too much. Because you have to understand, when somebody knows from within about himself [sic] that “I don’t know how to work with this child”, you would pressure him in vain, when he just doesn’t know it. Yeah? He doesn’t have the knowledge, and some people actually avoid it. (Deputy principal, Slovak school)

In this quote, the deputy principal stated that she would not “push” or “pressure” any staff members to practise inclusive education, understood as targeting students. She implied that it would make the particular teachers very uncomfortable, and their lack of competence and experience might harm particular students more than benefit them.

This last quote also implies, however, that achieving inclusive education understood broadly as encompassing also distributed leadership is not always – if ever – fully possible. For instance, addressing the situation when a teacher refuses to teach a particular student diagnosed with SEN or a disability in a mainstream environment because she/he feels incompetent and unwilling to do so, involves considering and balancing several issues. At the socio-political level, both countries – NSW and Slovakia – allow the education of a student diagnosed with a disability or SEN in a segregated environment, which may support the teacher’s position, although parental views are of significance in both countries, too. At the school level, if attempting to practise distributed leadership as an indispensable component of inclusive education and in this way also fulfilling democratic values by allowing the teacher to have a voice in the decision-making process, this voice should be heard and somehow translated into practice. Nevertheless, the voice of parents who may wish their child to be educated in the mainstream setting should not be neglected either. In terms of the goals of inclusive education, the aspect of a teacher’s (self-perceived) incompetence and unwillingness to appropriately address the unique characteristics and strengths of the student should be taken into account, too, since this can have a profound impact on achieving the goals of inclusive education if she/he is forced to do so. In the
situation when the teacher is unwilling to teach the particular student and to undergo a professional development to increase her/his teaching abilities, no solution appears to be entirely inclusive.

To speak more generally, first, it is not always possible to involve all relevant stakeholders when making a decision. Second, even if all of the relevant stakeholders were involved, it is not always possible to reach a compromise satisfactory for everybody. As was explored in Chapter Five, the very same processes of distributed leadership can be perceived and experienced by different stakeholders very differently. Third, even if the stakeholders reach a compromise about using certain arrangements or practices, all these practices can still be perceived and experienced by various stakeholders – especially students – very differently, as was demonstrated in Chapter Four. They might perceive and experience particular practices as inhibiting to reach some of the inclusive education goals. Adding to the picture, diverse individual interests, knowledge and life circumstance of involved stakeholders, and the specific socio-political context, reminds us again of the complex and multilayered social reality. All these factors hinder practising inclusive education and distributed leadership in various ways. In Figures 2-4, this complexity of social reality in practising inclusive education and distributed leadership is expressed by the texture filling the areas which represent these two concepts, the shades of darker and lighter colours.

While acknowledging this complexity of social reality, one may still ask whether the adults’ or students’ interests should be prioritised in a similar problematic situation as explored above. As the dominant meaning construction of distributed leadership is about processes that target adults (see Chapter Five), and the dominant construction of inclusive education is about goals which target students (see Chapter Four), one may ask not only whether the process is more important than the goal, but also whether the interests and wellbeing of adults or children should be prioritised. One might claim that because schools
as such were established for the purpose of educating students not for the purpose of employing adults, the interests of the former should always be prioritised. One might also claim that needs and interests of students, staff members, and parents as distinct groups of school stakeholders significantly differ in any school environment, which should be recognised, too. Even if we do not perceive distributed leadership as an indispensable component of inclusive education and the process being as important as the goal, the answer to the issue of constantly prioritising students’ interests and needs over teachers’ cannot be that straightforward. As was demonstrated in the previous parts of the chapter, targeting students’ interests is often not perceived as unrelated to how adults’ interests are catered for. Curtailing adult school stakeholders from collaboration, involvement in decision-making and sharing various responsibilities and projects, may significantly impact on their job satisfaction and happiness, on their engagement and on sharing their knowledge. As a result, this may weaken the quality of their teaching and their willingness to creatively attain inclusive goals that target students. Hence, making a simplistic claim that students’ interest must always be a school’s superior concern, and that is why it should take priority over adults’ interests, might prove itself as a short-sighted strategy. In a broader perspective, this strategy of prioritising students’ interests at the cost of neglecting to practice distributed leadership with adult school stakeholders may negatively impact on students themselves.

This interconnectedness of various aspects and layers of social reality – processes, goals, people’s characteristics, interests, needs, knowledge and skills, and socio-political contexts – makes the endeavours to practise inclusive education an act of their constant problematisation and questioning. If speaking about the “arenas” of struggle at the school level (Fulcher, 1989, p. 4), school stakeholders might start with critically scrutinising and challenging existing state policies on inclusive education and school leadership, and constantly question the practices and leadership processes that they employ and consider
them in relation to goals they aspire to attain. They might problematise the interests, characteristics, and needs of school staff members on the one side, and students and their parents on the other. While endeavouring to practise inclusive education which encompasses distributed leadership as well, school stakeholders should be aware of the multilayered complexity of social reality which simply makes practising inclusion challenging, complex and contextual, without any straight-forward or black and white solutions.

**Summary of the Chapter**

To summarise, this chapter primarily attempted to distinguish different understandings of inclusive education and distributed leadership, and their relationship. Three types of understanding were identified here. The first, which portrayed inclusive education and distributed leadership as unrelated, was considerably challenged. It was demonstrated that authors of this understanding constructed either of the two concepts as too narrow, or implied that they do relate and influence each other, but just not inevitably in all situations due to the complexity of social reality. In the second understanding, distributed leadership was constructed merely as a means of practising inclusive education while having a considerable impact on the latter. The second understanding prevailed in both schools. Lastly, a few staff members in both schools fundamentally redefined the construction of inclusive education and distributed leadership, perceiving the latter as an indispensable component of the former. This redefined understanding of inclusive education destabilised its dominant construction as prioritising goals over processes, and targeting students’ interests and wellbeing over those of adult stakeholders. Because the first understanding was theoretically challenged, it could be considered as overlapping with the second understanding instead. This leaves us with two main understandings: distributed leadership either as a means versus an indispensable component of inclusive education.
Chapter Seven: Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to summarise the findings of this research study – explored in Chapters Four, Five and Six – and position them in relation to existing academic literature on inclusive education and distributed leadership. This chapter will discuss the areas in which findings of this study confirm and strengthen, but also challenge and question, some of the conclusions and claims of existing research literature. Namely, this chapter primarily aims to address the research problem of whether distributed leadership may, in any way, assist in making a school a more inclusive environment, and how research participants perceive the relationship between practising distributed leadership and inclusive education. Because this research problem is inspired by academic literature framed in the organisational paradigm, it will also scrutinise some of the theoretical limitations and contradictions of this paradigm. Subsequently, the issue of practising inclusive education and distributed leadership will be discussed through the socio-political paradigm, which will also lead to theorising the limitations of this paradigm and of the concept of inclusion itself.

**Distributed Leadership Does (Not) Assist Schools in Becoming More Inclusive**

The research problem of this thesis, as was presented in Chapter Two, pointed out an ambiguous relationship between the concepts of inclusive education and distributed leadership in academic literature, predominantly framed within the organisational paradigm. On the one hand, the literature portrays various practices of distributed leadership as closely related to inclusive education. It recommends collaborative and non-hierarchical approaches to leadership as a precondition to successfully practising inclusion in schools (e.g., Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Ferguson et al., 2005). On the other hand, since school stakeholders generally hold neutral or negative attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010; de Boer et al., 2011), practising distributed leadership and giving stakeholders even a bigger voice might, in fact,
not be that favourable for practising inclusive education. This paradox led some of these academics who adopted the organisational paradigm to advise school principals to use rather autocratic practices to secure the inclusion happening in their schools (Keyes et al., 1999; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). Hence, the key question of this research study is whether practising distributed leadership inhibits, assists or is irrelevant for schools in becoming more inclusive environments.

In order to address this research problem, the study had to first examine how research participants understood or defined the concepts of inclusive education and distributed leadership individually. This research study exposed that school stakeholders in the two research sites primarily constructed inclusive education as a set of goals that exclusively target students. When defining inclusive education and its goals, they did not identify a single goal that would address other school stakeholders besides the students, nor would explicitly address the school culture or vision related to the interests of non-student school stakeholders. They did refer to the importance of inclusive values and school culture. Notwithstanding, they understood the values and school culture as welcoming of diversity of students only.

In light of the existing literature on inclusive education, this finding is in the same instance both surprising and expected. The organisational paradigm texts put a great emphasis on the whole school culture (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Carrington, 1999; Corbett, 1999), on inclusive values being put in place throughout all levels of the school as an organisation, and on collaboration of teachers working as problem-solving teams (Clark et al., 1999b; Skrtic et al., 2008). As Ainscow et al. (2006) expressed it: “we will not get very far in supporting the participation and learning of students if we reject their identities and family backgrounds, or if we choose not to encourage the participation of staff in schools in decisions about teaching and learning activities” (p. 25).
In the sense that the existing literature on inclusion puts so much emphasis on whole-school values and cultures, which address not only students but other school stakeholders as well, the finding of this research study may appear surprising.

Notwithstanding, if unpacking the above-mentioned quote by Ainscow et al. (2006, p. 25), one may notice that they still construct the ultimate goal of inclusion to be “the participation and learning of students”. As part of this construction, this is the reason the participation of staff in school decision-making processes should be encouraged. In addition, a large amount of literature within the inclusive education field has been produced on inclusive pedagogy, curriculum and classroom related practices supporting inclusion of all students (Berlach & Chambers, 2011; Black-Hawkins, 2012; Lechta, 2010b), which construct the concept of inclusive education as exclusively targeting students as well. In this sense, the finding of this research study revealing the tendency of research participants to define inclusive education as targeting only students can be considered as expected.

With regards to the concept of distributed leadership, research participants in both research sites defined it as merely a set of processes without a particular definitive goal, yet having potential side benefits. They all perceived these processes in a “normative” sense (Harris, 2009, p. 3), implying an ideal that all school stakeholders are equally involved. At the same time, many of these participants were willing to compromise on this ideal by welcoming and supporting autocratic practices of the principals. This finding reflects academic literature on normative understanding of distributed leadership which generally claims that maximising processes of distributed leadership does not mean eliminating all forms of solo leadership (e.g., Bush & Glover, 2012; Crawford, 2012; Robinson, 2009; Woods & Gronn, 2009). As Bolden (2011) holds, various forms of distributed leadership networks and collaboration always co-exist with hierarchical structures and division of authority, which can be manifested both as formal and informal, thus, in more fluid
arrangements. A number of research participants also conflated the concept of distributed leadership with democracy and democratic leadership despite the prevalent understanding of these two concepts as distinct and specific in academic literature (Crawford, 2012; Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Woods & Woods, 2008; Woods, 2004; Woods & Gronn, 2009). In doing so, they were constructing distributed leadership not only as a set of processes, but also as values and goals including democracy, justice and equality.

On the matter of the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership, research participants presented two main understandings which offer two different answers to the research problem of this thesis. I will refer to the first understanding of the two terms as narrow, and the second as broad. In the narrow understanding, research participants constructed the concept of distributed leadership to be a mere set of processes. These processes may have very diverse goals or final products. They can be perceived as a means to attain inclusive goals, just as they can achieve discriminatory and exclusionary ones. In the narrow understanding, research participants also constructed inclusive education to target only students (see Chapter Six).

To address the research problem explicitly in this narrow understanding of the terms, practising distributed leadership principally neither assists nor hinders achieving goals of inclusive education. Or, to put it more precisely, processes of distributed leadership may in some instances and contexts assist, while in others hinder, attaining inclusive goals. If the processes of distributed leadership are not connected to any democratic and inclusive values or goals, then these processes may merely “open doors” to democratising (Woods & Gronn, 2009, p. 442) and inclusive features. Notwithstanding, it is problematic to consider these processes as assisting, supporting or guaranteeing the achievement of any goals of inclusive education.
The vast majority of research participants in both research sites presented this narrow understanding of inclusive education, distributed leadership and their relationship. When doing so, they portrayed every process of distributed leadership: taking on various responsibilities and projects; involvement in decision-making processes; and collaboration – as conducive to practising inclusive education. Taking on responsibilities and projects by every school staff member was presented to “diversify” opportunities for students to enable them to experience active participation and engagement both in and beyond the classroom. Involvement of key stakeholders – such as special education teacher, classroom teacher and/or parents – in the decision-making processes about how to best address individual students’ characteristics and interests was also presented as crucial to ensure “success of inclusion”. Lastly, the process of collaboration between staff members and, in some cases, also with parents, either unofficially and casually or through official school platforms such as staff meetings and Learning Support Team meetings in the NSW school or Methodical Associations and Subject Committees in the Slovak school, was reported as one of the most important processes to share knowledge in order to enable the “thriving” of individual students. Unfortunately, only this last process of distributed leadership – collaboration – is extensively discussed and scrutinised in academic literature as a means to support inclusive education (e.g., Ainscow & West, 2006; Flem et al., 2004; Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008; Peercy & Martin-Beltran, 2012). The other two processes of distributed leadership may partially appear in academic literature on inclusive education (e.g., York-Barr, Sommersness, Duke, & Ghere, 2005), but no research study particularly focuses on them and how they relate to inclusion.

Research participants did not present any instances when processes of distributed leadership hinder practising inclusive education or bring about exclusion. The main reason for that is that in neither of the two researched schools did adult research participants
acknowledge that any instances of exclusion occurred there at all. The fact is that I never asked them explicitly about exclusion. However, they might also simply not be aware of these instances and might not perceive any practices in their schools as exclusionary. It could also be explained by the social desirability bias when respondents might have answered in ways to avoid embarrassment or to “look good”, which might have caused misrepresentation of their genuine perceptions (Norwood & Lusk, 2011, p. 528). As demonstrated in Chapter Four, students reported various experiences of exclusion in the regular classrooms of both schools, which should not be ignored when discussing the research problem of this thesis. If referring to these particular instances, it is a common practice in the Slovak school to exclude students to segregated special classrooms, or to practise the withdrawal of students for specialised individual intervention in the NSW school through the distributed decision-making processes and collaboration of various stakeholders, including students’ parents. Therefore, one could claim that instances of exclusion can also be channelled through the processes of distributed leadership.

By contrast, in the broad understanding of inclusive education, distributed leadership, and their relationship, research participants constructed distributed leadership not as a mere means – among several other ones – but as an unavoidable component of inclusive education. In this sense, the meaning of both concepts of inclusive education and distributed leadership are significantly shifted, expanded and intermingled with each other. The meaning of inclusive education is shifted to signify both goals and processes. Seeing distributed leadership as a component of inclusive education inevitably extends the target group of inclusive education from students to all school stakeholders. Although students still represent a key position in this meaning construction of inclusion, the process of including adult school stakeholders becomes much more important than in the narrow understanding of inclusive education, and perhaps just as important as the inclusion of students. This
extension of target group from students to other school stakeholders introduces a new important aspect to existing literature on inclusive education, which seems to primarily focus on the question whether inclusive education should be defined as addressing only students with disabilities or SEN or all students (e.g., Ainscow et al., 2006; Erten & Savage, 2012; Slee, 2011).

In this broad understanding, distributed leadership can be interpreted in two ways. In the first interpretation, all practices of distributed leadership should be considered also as a manifestation of inclusive education. In the second interpretation, two forms of distributed leadership could be distinguished: those directed towards inclusive values and goals, and those without any value orientation. Within this second interpretation, only processes of distributed leadership, which incorporate and focus on pursuing inclusive values and goals, should be considered as an indispensable component of inclusive education. In this sense, the meaning of distributed leadership is also extended to signify both processes and goals as it incorporates also ethical and democratic values, which involve inclusive and social justice goals, too.

The question of whether practising distributed leadership in this broad understanding in any way hinders or assists practising inclusive education becomes partially illogical. If practices of distributed leadership – either as a whole (first interpretation) or those directed towards inclusive goals (second interpretation) – are perceived as an indispensable component of inclusive education practice, then the question whether they assist inclusion is somewhat irrelevant and meaningless. This is just as meaningless as asking whether an indispensable component, such as a human brain, assists the functioning of the whole, such as a living human body. This has profound implications how practices of inclusive education can be understood. If inclusive education is perceived to encompass both goals and processes, the use of autocratic or solo leadership processes in a school significantly
undermines practising inclusive education itself. No matter what the goal or product of these autocratic processes is intended to be or attained – even if it is inclusion of students – it is problematic to associate these goals with inclusive education anymore.

This broad understanding of inclusive education and distributed leadership seems to parallel with the concept of “inclusive leadership” introduced by Ryan (2006a, 2006b). Ryan defines the concept of inclusive leadership as encompassing three elements: influence, process and ends. In this understanding, inclusive leadership provides all school stakeholders “a fair chance to influence decisions, practices, and policies” (Ryan, 2006a, p. 17). The process involves many different individuals contributing and working together in a variety of ways to attain a very definite end or goal, which is inclusion. In other words, not only the ends or goals should be inclusive, but the process itself should also be inclusive (p. 18). Although Ryan does not use the terms distributed leadership and inclusive education, the way he theorises the concept of inclusive leadership very much parallels with the broad understanding of inclusive education and distributed leadership. The problem with Ryan’s merging of the two concepts without fully acknowledging the complexity and theoretical background of both of them, is his tendency to emphasise the role of a principal as the most important figure in an endeavour to achieve “inclusive ends” (p. 93). This theoretical emphasis of the principal’s role in being the ultimate gatekeeper for inclusion undermines the very theoretical basis of the concept of distributed leadership. It may disempower other school stakeholders from becoming informal leaders and opinion-makers in their promotion and support of inclusion or inclusive goals.

Besides the narrow and broad understandings of the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership, one may also ask whether distributed leadership in the broad sense does assist achieving inclusive goals in the narrow sense. In other words, can distributed leadership understood as democratic leadership assist in bringing about the
inclusion of all students? Before answering this question, one may notice some important parallels between the concepts of inclusive education and democratic leadership. As Woods and Gronn (2009) define democratic leadership, it involves “individuals creating a culture that reflects ethical aspirations and developing themselves (individually and collectively) as people better able to transcend narrow interests and develop their higher potentialities” (p. 446). In this definition one can discern the goals of developing people’s unique potentials and acquiring ethical values. These two goals – if targeting students in particular – were declared by research participants as part of their understanding of inclusive education as well.

Nevertheless, claiming that democratic involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making processes guarantees inclusion of all students is problematic. If employing processes of distributed leadership and, in this way, democratically giving the same voice to students and their parents as it is routinely and unthinkingly given to the expertise of special education teachers or other professionals (Armstrong et al., 2011; Fulcher, 1989; Slee, 2011; Tomlinson, 1982), the voice of the experts, who often prioritise segregational solutions, might be overruled. This scenario corresponds to the argument of Nilholm (2006) who theorises the relationship between inclusive education and democracy and claims that democracy should be considered as being of analytical priority over the issues of inclusion. He argues that the question of “Who is going to decide?” should have priority over the question “What is the right thing to decide?” (p. 441). In line with the broad understanding of inclusive education as presented in this chapter, he claims that inclusion ceases to be inclusion if it has not been arrived at in decision-making processes which are inclusive and democratic in nature (p. 442).

The academics who adopted the socio-political paradigm might see the relationship between democratic leadership and inclusive education in a similar way. As a number of
these theorists argue, the deficit model of viewing particular students and the discourse of professionalism, which institutionalises practices of exclusion of these students in order to treat them by professional experts in the field of special education, shape not only thinking of these experts but the general public, including students and parents, as well (Armstrong et al., 2010; Fulcher, 1989; Slee, 2011). This claim was also strongly supported in the findings of this study. As a result, parents (and students) often routinely and unquestioningly bestow power to the professional experts to make the decisions about the students’ education. Hence, democratic involvement of students and parents in the decision-making processes might not prevent situations of exclusion and segregation. However, as demonstrated in the findings of this thesis (see Chapter Six), sometimes a situation occurs when the mere opportunity to voice parents and students’ wishes and interests may somewhat steer the final decision in a more inclusive direction which would have led to exclusion if following only the professional expert’s advice. In other words, employing democratic processes of decision-making may at least “open doors” for inclusion, if not secure it.

Because the whole research problem was inspired by academic literature framed in the organisational paradigm, it might be a worthwhile task to position this literature in relation to the narrow and broad understandings of the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership as presented in this chapter. It might also be an important task because the definitions of these concepts stated by research participants could be considered as being framed in thinking and assumptions of the organisational paradigm, as will be discussed in the following section of this chapter. Collaboration between various school stakeholders, the creation of problem-solving teams, and their participation in the decision-making processes are presented by organisational paradigm theorists as very crucial, or even indispensable, for practising inclusion and putting inclusive values into action (Ainscow et al., 2006; Skrtic et al., 2008). One may infer from this that they deem the
processes of distributed leadership to be an indispensable component of inclusive education.

Including an indicator in the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 99) which states that “the school has an inclusive approach to leadership” (collaborative instead of autocratic, avoiding rigid hierarchy, and involving teachers and community in decision making), creates an impression that the authors of the Index construct the processes of distributed leadership to be a component of inclusive education.

Nevertheless, as presented above, these academics still deem the students’ learning and participation being the ultimate goal, while positioning the collaboration of staff and their participation in the decision-making processes merely as a means to attain this goal (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 25). Putting so much emphasis on collaboration and involvement in decision-making may imply that the authors consider distributed leadership processes to be at least an indispensable means to inclusion. However, they undermine even this indispensability when they advise school principals to use autocratic practices to secure the inclusion happening in their schools (Keyes et al., 1999; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004).

From this it can be inferred that academic literature framed in organisational paradigm predominantly understands the concepts of inclusive education, distributed leadership and their relationship in a *narrow* sense. Having said that, the *broad* understanding of distributed leadership as an indispensable component of inclusive education – as presented by some research participants of this study – might be in a way perceived as original.

The advice by authors of the organisational paradigm (e.g., Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004) for principals to act autocratically in order to secure inclusive education in their school if other stakeholders hold negative attitudes towards inclusion, is problematic in a number of ways. This proposal is based on a flawed assumption that assumes principals hold positive and welcoming attitudes towards inclusion while others do not. As current research on attitudes of principals towards inclusion shows, this assumption is, in most cases,
inaccurate (Bailey & du Plessis, 1997; Center, Ward, Parmenter, & Nash, 1985; Graham & Spandagou, 2011; Praisner, 2003). More importantly, this proposal leaves an impression that without the principal’s support for inclusion, the school has no or little chance to pursue it. It disempowers other school community members from the possibility of pursuing inclusive goals if the principal is not supportive of it. Thus, it contributes to the dominant construction of school leadership being about one person who is in the principalship position, and nobody else. In other words, this proposal goes against the very kernel of the definition of distributed leadership (in both narrow and broad understanding). I identify this proposal to be a major contradiction in the conceptualisation of inclusive education and distributed leadership in academic literature framed in the organisational paradigm. I would attribute the emergence of this theoretical contradiction to the insufficient theorisation of the concept of distributed leadership in the literature on inclusive education.

In the current social and political context in which a majority of school stakeholders generally hold neutral or negative attitudes towards inclusion, if interrelating the concepts of inclusive education and distributed leadership and not undermining the theoretical background of any of them, the proposal to support inclusive goals should not be to invite a principal to act autocratically. The proposal, which is loyal to the definition of both concepts, should invite any school community member supportive of inclusion regardless of her/his organisational position to become an informal leader and opinion-maker on this issue. As the concept of distributed leadership allows any school stakeholder to become an informal leader and influence other community members, the role of supporting and promoting inclusive goals can be held by the principal, teachers or parents. Only this kind of proposal of relating the concepts of inclusive education and distributed leadership, which invites any school community member to become an opinion-making leader on inclusive issues, does not undermine the very theoretical basis of the concept of distributed leadership.
Introducing this proposal to support the inclusive goals, which is in line with this theoretical basis of distributed leadership, can be perceived as another noteworthy contribution of this thesis.

**Inclusion as (Not) an Organisational Problem**

While the previous part of the chapter addressed the research problem from the organisational paradigm, this part will address it through the socio-political paradigm. The organisational paradigm locates the problem not within a child – as the psycho-medical paradigm does – but within a school as an organisation, and curriculum that is not adapted to the diversity of children (Clark et al., 1995, p. 78; Nilholm, 2006, p. 433). As demonstrated in Chapter Four, research participants in both schools oscillated between psycho-medical and organisational paradigms in their understandings of inclusion and students categorised as having SEN or disabilities. On the one hand, the vast majority of teachers, parents and students in both schools framed their thinking in the psycho-medical paradigm or “deficit model” (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 78) when they located the problem within a student, and, in this way, contributed to the construction of “abnormality” of these students. In numerous instances they also denied responsibility of regular schools to include and educate all students. In this sense, their understanding of inclusive education rather overlapped with the concept of integration (Graham & Spandagou, 2011; Slee, 2011). On the other hand, they expressed a great interest in the question of how regular schools as organisations, or how they as teachers in particular might best include all students and celebrate and develop their unique strengths, characteristics and interests. This way they adopted the premises of the organisational paradigm.

Dealing with the research problem of whether distributed leadership may assist in bringing about inclusive practices in schools was interpreted by research participants solely as an organisational problem. In this question they conceptualised inclusion as an endeavour
to continually improve and change the school. Hence, in addressing this research problem they embraced the organisational paradigm framework.

With regards to the instances when research participants denied responsibility of regular schools to educate all students, this finding confirmed the extensive research on attitudes towards inclusive education. In this research, teachers (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), principals (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Graham & Spandagou, 2011; Praisner, 2003), parents (de Boer et al., 2010) and students (Ferguson, 1999; Siperstein, Parker, Bardon, & Widaman, 2007) primarily expressed either neutral or negative attitudes towards inclusion of all students in mainstream educational environment. Participants in this research study offered various sorts of arguments to support this position. To name but a few: the mainstream school environment might not benefit the learning of students with particularly severe disabilities; students with disabilities or SEN might experience ostracisation by other students; the needs and rights of some children might be compromised by violent behaviour or disruption in learning instigated by particular students; or that there is inadequate resourcing and number of staff members per student to sufficiently support all students.

In other words, research participants reported all these reasons as a justification to limit and constrain the presence of particular students, rather than as a critique of the current arrangement of the mainstream schooling systems in NSW and Slovakia. They did not criticise the mainstream educational system as not adequately creating conditions for students with disabilities or SEN to build meaningful friendship relationships with students without a disability (Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl, & Petry, 2013; Prince & Hadwin, 2013). Instead, they presented it as a given and unchangeable condition of mainstream schooling, and used it as a reason not to support inclusion of students with severe disabilities. All the reasons participants mentioned against inclusion could be seen as a critique of current mainstream
schooling, but none of the participants presented them as such. They did not express an opinion that the educational system is not currently set up to support inclusive education of all students and that it requires a profound redefinition and reform.

In addition, research participants generally perceived the impact of state policies on their practices through a linear top-down model. When referring to particular state policies, they presented them as provided from above, which must be implemented by those below. By this top-down “linear understanding” of policy processes, they constructed the government as being in charge (Bowe & Ball, 1992, pp. 6-7; Fulcher, 1989, p. 3) and steadily disempowered themselves, resigned to perceive themselves as “highly powerful policy makers” (Fulcher, 1989, p. 265).

Because research participants in both schools primarily oscillated between the psycho-medical and organisational paradigm, in neither of the researched schools did they express deeper critical reflection of their practices and perceptions of inclusive education from a wider social, political or philosophical perspective. Only one participant identified a clash between a political imperative for educational excellence and the inclusive goals; other participants merely complained about the lack of financial resources, and inadequate staffing and training support. No adult research participant recognised any other social, political or philosophical hindrances to practising inclusive education.

In contrast to this limited understanding of inclusion presented by research participants that the problem resides either within students or schools, the academics who adopted the socio-political paradigm offer a different interpretation. Put simply, they claim that the main problem can be found beyond the realms of schools in the complexity of society and politics (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2010; Fulcher, 1989; Slee, 2011). Hence, they do not see that inclusion is only a matter of particular organisational adjustments at a school level, but as “a theory and tactic for education and social reform” (Slee, 2011, p. 110), a
“political struggle” (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 33), and a continuous one without any fixed outcome (Allan, 2008).

In the light of the socio-political paradigm literature, all the statements of research participants framed in the psycho-medical (or eventually organisational) paradigm could be interpreted as a manifestation of the dominant language discourses used in common everyday social interactions or also present in state policies (Slee, 2011; Tearle, 2012). As explored in Chapter Two, the current state policies both in NSW (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011; Tearle, 2012) and Slovakia (Lechta, 2011; Žovinec & Seidler, 2010) imply the existence of “normal” or “average” students, and “abnormal” or “special” students who require special or professional support to remedy their intrinsic “deficit”. Nevertheless, as claimed by the theorists of the socio-political paradigm, people are not usually fully conscious of the discourses they use as frameworks within which they are thinking, speaking and acting (Ball, 2012; Fulcher, 1989; Thomas & Loxley, 2007). They are also often not conscious of the impacts particular discourses may have on people’s lives (Hacking, 1999). The academic work of socio-political paradigm theorists can be considered as endeavouring to scrutinise and expose all these discourses. As Fulcher (1989, p. 278) claims, in order for change to happen – for instance towards a greater inclusion in schools – people need to learn to “decode” various discourses in state policies and verbal statements in general.

Although not using the terminology of discourses, as shown in Chapter Four, to some extent one participant in the NSW school identified conflicting state policies with the policies supporting inclusion. The participant deemed the requirement of constantly enhancing students’ learning outcomes measured by nationally standardised tests – NAPLAN – as conflicting with the goals of inclusion. On the one hand, state policies invite schools to accept all students, including a number of “low achievers”, who can significantly skew downwards the overall school performance in the NAPLAN testing and, in that way,
degrade the school’s image. On the other hand, the state policy of school choice requires schools to attract and fight for parents to enrol their children there, and the image of a “low performing” school in NAPLAN definitely does not help in this task. This finding confirms the current research framed in the socio-political paradigm which critiques the discourses of “school improvement, performativity, and standardisation” as impeding inclusion and social justice (Grimaldi, 2012, p. 1131). It is in line with the statement of Curcic, Gabel, Zeitlin, Cribaro-DiFatta, and Glarner (2011) that “the international policy attention to test performance in education, with a focus on proficiency over learning, claims educational equity as a purpose but perpetuates social inequality instead” (p. 117). This discourse of educational excellence, high performativity and high standards is considered by a number of inclusive education academics to be one of the expressions of “neoliberalism” or “neoliberal” ideology (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 22; Grimaldi, 2012, p. 1131; Slee, 2011, p. 151).

The participants’ overemphasis on enhancing students’ educational outcomes as one of the goals of inclusive education when justifying the use of particular practices identified as “inclusive”, could be interpreted as a manifestation of the dominance of this educational excellence discourse. When attempting to define the concept of inclusive education, research participants proposed at least four main goals of inclusive education: enhancing students’ educational results; educating them in good and ethical behaviour; enabling them to actively participate in education; and enabling them to experience belonging, happiness and self-worth. Despite that, when justifying their use of particular practices, research participants in both schools privileged the goal of enhancing students’ educational achievements over all the other inclusive education goals. They did not seem to be aware of this privileging and, even if they were, they did not deem it problematic. They did not present it as an issue worth problematising, although – as was demonstrated in Chapter Four – this overemphasis of one
goal in several cases directly compromised or opposed achieving other goal(s) of inclusive
education. Looking through the socio-political paradigm, this phenomenon could be
interpreted as an effect of the educational excellence and neoliberal discourse. The most
disconcerting aspect of this is the probable lack of awareness of research participants about
the dominance of this discourse, and accepting it as a given without problematising it. That
is why the academics adopting a socio-political paradigm deem it crucial to raise awareness
about existing dominant discourses and their potential impact on everyday practices of
schools (Allan, 2008; Ball, 1994, 2012; Fulcher, 1989; Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011; Slee,
2011; Thomas & Loxley, 2007).

The collected data also revealed an interesting comparative difference between the
two researched schools. Although national standardised tests – Testing 9 – are organised in
each primary school in Slovakia (as is the case with NAPLAN in Australia), they do not
usually get any media and academic attention (V. Lechta, personal communication, August
16, 2013), and none of the research participant ever referred to it in an interview. Hence,
despite the absence of league tables in Slovakia and any particular eagerness to attract
parents in the researched Slovak school (due to its full capacity and steady demand for
enrolment), the deficit thinking about students and the prioritisation of the goal on
enhancing students’ educational results still prevailed in statements of research participants
in the Slovak school. One could infer from this that the elimination of national standardised
testing would not solve the issue of inclusion as long as there are all the other social and
political mechanisms in place which preserve the existence of segregated educational
settings. As Ewald Feyerer (2010) claims: “integration in Central and Eastern Europe is in
principle segregating because an unjust and exclusionist school system is ingrained in its
society” (p. 22). In other words, in Slovakia there is a strong tradition of special education
professionals assessing SEN and advising segregation of particular students in a specialised
educational setting (Žovinec & Seidler, 2010). Hence, if one adopts the socio-political paradigm as a theoretical prism, these social and political mechanisms, and many others, may be considered as hindering schools to become more inclusive environments, regardless of the excellence discourse embodied in the national standardised testing. Nevertheless, that is not to say that league tables and national standardised testing may not exacerbate the problem of social exclusion in schools (Curcic et al., 2011; Leo & Barton, 2006; Slee, 2011).

Despite the myriad of differences between the educational systems, cultures, and historical developments of NSW (Australia) and Slovakia (see Appendices Z-AH), several academics in the field of education point out that neoliberal ideology or values, with all their implications, shape the current arrangements and purpose of education in Australia (Forsey, 2007, 2009; Welch, 2010a, 2010b) and Slovakia (Kaščák & Pupala, 2010; Kaščák & Pupala, 2011). Due to the dominance of neoliberal values in society and acceptance of personal choice theories, education has become a commodity to be traded in the marketplace of schools in which parents become customers to compete over (Armstrong et al., 2011, p. 20; Slee, 2011, p. 94). This perception of schools constituting a competitive market was also confirmed in the findings of this study (see Chapters Four and Five). In the logic of neoliberalism, personal choice was intended to improve outcomes of schools. Nevertheless, as the critics of neoliberal ideology claim, it turned education into mass production (Grimaldi, 2012; Kaščák & Pupala, 2011; Welch, 2010a). In this production process, the field of special education was developed to manage any disturbance and chaos instigated by “dysfunctional” individuals and communities through the assessment and segregation processes determined by experts in special education (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 96). In this way, not only students experiencing learning difficulties can become excluded from the mainstream educational system, it can also become a mechanism for the exclusion of
Indigenous students and boys, in particular, as is the case in NSW (Graham, 2012), or Roma (Gypsy) students in Slovakia (Hapalová & Daniel, 2008; Rafael, 2011; Salner, 2004). In other words, because neoliberal values based on free market ideals became predominant in the mainstream value system of today’s societies – including NSW and Slovakia – the main issue of inclusive education from the socio-political paradigm perspective is that “the mainstream values and practices of society and its education system themselves lead to exclusion” (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 97).

In the same line of argument, neoliberal values may be interpreted as one of the main constraints to practising distributed leadership as well. As Hatcher (2005) argues, there is a “tension – I would say a fundamental contradiction – between distributed leadership and government-driven headteacher managerialism” (p. 255). This tension was also demonstrated through the collected data as reported in Chapter Five. The principals in both schools identified various “accountabilities” connected with their professional position that were prescribed by state policies. These accountabilities required them to “manage”, “control” and influence others to perform certain tasks that they were held responsible for. Among many administrative and managerial tasks, principals were considered responsible, by themselves and others, for securing high educational achievements and excellence of students, and attracting enough parents to enrol their children in their school to assure its sustainability or growth. To a great extent, in NSW considerably less than in Slovakia, principals were also bestowed with the powers of firing, hiring and rewarding teachers in order to fulfil these accountabilities. All these conditions determined by the social and political contexts could be interpreted as constraining the practice of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2008; Hatcher, 2005; Watson & Scribner, 2005; Welch, 2010a).

The obligations of securing high educational achievements and an attractive school image are also closely related to the topic of effectiveness and efficiency, which emerged in
the collected data as well. Various academics argue that school leadership is generally 
“trapped within a discourse of efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness that makes
problematization or critical reflection difficult” (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998, p. 334) or the
neoliberal “cult of efficiency” (Welch, 1998) and “managerialism” (Welch, 2010a). Because
procedures of distributed leadership and democratic rights – if perceiving distributed
leadership as partly overlapping with democratic leadership – are often perceived as making
organisations less efficient (Woods & Gronn, 2009, p. 436), the discourse of effectiveness
and efficiency literally invites school principals to be also “slightly authoritarian”, as
research participants in this study described it. This can also be one of the reasons school
stakeholders welcomed, encouraged or expected the principal to act also in an
“authoritative” or “autocratic” way.

Coming back to the research problem of this thesis, the socio-political paradigm
might offer different answers to address the issue of the relationship between distributed
leadership and inclusive education than the organisational paradigm can provide. Although
the academic literature which adopted the socio-political paradigm and addressed this
particular topic (e.g., Leo & Barton, 2006) is very limited, one might still infer some
suggestions from their theoretical premises and findings of this study. In this sense, both
concepts of inclusion and democracy – if conflating distributed and democratic leadership,
as many participants of this study did – can be perceived as mere political concepts or
projects. As explored above, hence, also inferring from the data of this thesis, one can
observe several meeting points between the concepts and goals of inclusive education and
distributed/democratic leadership. Following up on these, one could also claim that
practising or realising inclusive education and democracy in school leadership is
significantly constrained by wider social pressures, values and practices. In this wider social
and political context, practising distributed or democratic leadership is necessarily
incomplete and, as a result, can only partially support inclusive education goals, just as inclusive education may only partially support democratic and distributed processes involving all school stakeholders. In other words, this wider social and political environment has to be radically reformed in order to bring about a sustainable change towards more inclusion at a school level. To support this claim, one could also refer to academic literature which has already theorised the parallels and connections between the concepts of inclusion and democracy (e.g., Allan, 2003; Bernstein, 2000; Carr, 2008; Halpin, 1999; Nilholm, 2006; Young, 2000). Otherwise we can merely refer to the study by Leo and Barton (2006) which claims that inclusion and distributed leadership are difficult to sustain in the socio-political context of trying to “reconcile opposing agendas of inclusion and standards” (p. 174).

So far this chapter demonstrated that research participants primarily adopted the psycho-medical or organisational paradigm when speaking about inclusive education. They limited their understanding of inclusion to the level of individual children or schools as organisations. Afterwards – through the prism of the socio-political paradigm – it was exposed that this limited understanding of inclusion could be attributed to the dominant values and practices in society in which either the child or schools are deemed responsible for students’ experiences of difficulties in learning. When looking through the socio-political paradigm, it has been argued that the inclusive project is not going to be sustainable and large-scale if it is not addressed also at the wider social and political level. In the following parts of the chapter, the concepts of inclusion itself will be challenged and theoretically problematised while also exposing some of the limitations of the socio-political paradigm.

**Inclusion as a Theoretically (Un)Sound Concept**

In addition to the already explored contradictions and limitations of the organisational paradigm, there is another limitation that is perhaps the most significant one.
Texts framed within the organisational paradigm do not substantially theorise on the concept of inclusion itself. These texts use the term inclusion as a concept that is theoretically unproblematic and sound. When referring, for instance, to the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) as one of the most crucial representations of the organisational paradigm, the authors define inclusion as a “never-ending process”, and propose to consider a school as inclusive only “when it is committed to a development journey guided by inclusive values” (p. 28). In other words, they seem to perceive inclusion not as a condition, but a process that never ends. By introducing particular indicators of inclusion, they prescribe particular goals and practices of inclusion that can be perceived as an ideal and vision to aspire to. In this way, they do define inclusion also as an ideal or visionary condition, thus not only as a process. They construct inclusion as an organisational problem, a matter of school improvement towards this ideal condition. However, they do not theorise why inclusion should be considered only as a “never-ending process”; the theoretical reason being that it is not possible to be fully achieved. They do not answer the question: “Into what do we seek to include?” (Graham & Slee, 2008, p. 277). Theorising this aspect of inclusive education might relieve teachers and other school stakeholders of the “frustration” and “anxiety” (Allan, 2008, pp. 14-18) which they might experience when their hard work and well-meaning efforts persistently do not bring the expected ideal of inclusion.

In contrast, although academics who adopted the socio-political paradigm do not deny the possibility of school improvement and change towards a more inclusive environment, some of them do problematise the very concept of inclusion and inclusive education (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2010; Graham & Slee, 2008; Hansen, 2012). One could distinguish three main lines of argument challenging the concept of inclusion from within the academic field of inclusive education:
(1) if perceiving inclusion as limitless, it invites to include also intolerance and exclusionary attitudes;

(2) it is problematic to force inclusion on people who prefer self-exclusion; and

(3) the mere use of the term inclusion may perpetuate the existence of exclusion.

With respect to the first theoretical challenge of inclusion, it was raised by a number of research participants in this study. Specifically, research participants in the NSW school perceived as problematic to include and welcome instances of aggressive behaviour of some students in their school environment. These instances might have caused that some of the students affected by this behaviour were not able to participate in the education process; that they were practically excluded. Can a tolerant environment to exclusion and discrimination be perceived as an inclusive environment? In this respect, Hansen (2012) aptly points out that, for instance, the *Index for Inclusion* makes demands on teachers’, parents’, and students’ behaviour and values who are not allowed to exclude in order to realise inclusion. They are demanded to pursue limitless inclusion. By doing so, however, they might run into a paradox of being inclusive of intolerance and exclusionary attitudes as well. Hansen (2012, p. 93) claims that exclusionary processes are an internal part of inclusive processes.

Inclusion as a concept cannot exist without its opposite or its “otherness”: exclusion. Inclusion is also theoretically problematic if being forced on people. In this respect, Armstrong et al. (2010) refer to the Deaf community that often expresses a preference to educate students in an environment where students and teachers share a common language and culture. Therefore, members of Deaf community may assert a preference for self-exclusion or, rather, “inclusion within the Deaf community itself” (p. 38). Similarly, Shakespeare (2006, p. 49) raises the same concern with regards to people with autism who might prefer self-exclusion over inclusion. If ignoring people’s preferences and diverse
requirements for learning and feeling comfortable by imposing inclusion in the mainstream environment on them, one might ask if such an approach can still be considered as inclusive.

The third theoretical challenge is based on the critical poststructuralist perspective of Foucault and Derrida. Using this perspective, Graham and Slee (2008) argue that the term *inclusion* implicitly constructs a pre-existing and naturalised space of centred-ness which is always dependent and relational to the abnormal, the pathological, the Other. The term *inclusion* privileges the “ghostly centre”, the “normality” which is dependent upon the marginalisation of the Other (p. 284). “This results in an illusory interiority; an apprehended inclusion, where the maintenance of notions relating to normality, mainstream, natural and majority ensures that certain children lead a marginal existence as representatives of ‘the included’” (p. 285). Because of maintaining the notion of normality, the educational goal of inclusion does not achieve that the Other is suddenly granted a position in the centre, but results in the exercise of disciplinary power which aims to rehabilitate, normalise and subjugate. In this sense, the concept of inclusion is inextricably linked to exclusion – one cannot exist without the other (Graham & Slee, 2008; Hansen, 2012) – while both success and failure of inclusion are necessarily partial (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 111).

If accepting the idea that the concept of inclusion and inclusive education is problematic, what should it signify? Or how should it be understood? These academics within the socio-political paradigm propose to understand inclusion more as a “project of political struggle and cultural change . . . and a tactic for education and social reform” (Slee, 2011, p. 110). They understand it as “a struggle for change, a struggle for justice and fairness, and a struggle for the value and valuing of human life” (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 135). Although they admit the illusionary and contestable grounds of the notion of inclusion, they still use it but refer to it rather as a political concept calling for a radical social reform. In other words, they do not appeal to reform merely the field of education. They imply that
the whole society and its values have to be changed in order for change in education to happen.

The relationship between social change and education is a complex one. Education is often perceived as fulfilling two dichotomous aims. On the one hand, education carries and passes on dominant values and cultural traditions of the region, and, on the other hand, it is often required to bring social change for larger prosperity or a more equal and fair society through educating all individuals. In other words, schools might be perceived just as a mere reflection of society that only mirror and solidify or even widen existing social inequalities. Then again, schools might be viewed as having the potential to bring about a social change – the potential to advance the country’s well-being and minimise the social disparities (Matějů et al., 2006; Rury, 2005). In the context of this dichotomy, the theorists who adopted the socio-political paradigm seem to argue that expecting the field of education to merely bring about a social change is an unreasonable demand. In addition, a radical change cannot happen solely in the field of education which exists within a particular society and is infused with all its dominant values and practices.

In this respect, inclusion and inclusive education can be considered as a political project which surpasses the realm of education. Education and schooling systems are only one component and expression of the currently dominant society-wide values and priorities. The values such as consumerism, material prosperity, economic efficiency, effectiveness and growth, managerialism, individualism, competition and competitiveness outweigh values like empathy, compassion, spirituality, respect for environment, respectful communication, creativity and love. The measurable outcomes often outweigh the importance of respectful processes. Unfortunately, the current social and political system – including the schooling system – and their practices are determined by the former set of values. As a result, expecting a large scale sustainable change at a level of particular schools,
which are part of these wider social values and practices, may be considered as a rather unreasonable demand. This line of argument makes the political project of inclusion also a “grand reform movement” (Slee, 2011, p. 122) that attends to all aspects of social life. In this respect, a critique of the socio-political paradigm can be raised that the “grandness” of this political project may appear to some as paralysing or utopian, and, as a result, its critics may prefer to focus on the grassroots level of regular schools (Ainscow et al., 2006). Despite that, as already pointed out, the academics of the socio-political paradigm do not deny the possibility and worthiness of attempting to make schools more inclusive environments. In my understanding of their argument, they merely emphasise that this grand reform movement should arise from various sources, levels and platforms – primary school environments and academic debates being just two of them.

The trouble with redefining and re-prioritising societal values is that all these values can be perceived as worthwhile and noble. The goal of increasing students’ knowledge and skills can be considered as being worthwhile and noble, just as the goal of enhancing social and communication skills or ability to empathise is. As explored in the last part of Chapter Four, the trouble comes when we systemically prioritise particular goals over others while justifying to ourselves that we are just attempting to achieve the particular noble goals. For example, we do not usually interpret that because spinach is healthy and good for us to eat, that we should only eat spinach and nothing else. If we did so, our bodies might lack some other nutrients vital for our organisms. Nevertheless, it seems that when it comes to education we got stuck in favouring spinach and nothing else, consoling ourselves that we are merely trying to eat healthy. Biesta (2009) seems to confirm this claim when saying that we now live in age in which discussions about education are dominated by measurement and comparisons of educational outcomes and that these measurements as such seem to direct much of educational policy and, through this, also much of
educational practice. The danger here is that we end up valuing what is measured, rather than that we engage in measurement of what we value (p. 43).

Hence, what should we value in education? What should be the primary purpose of education?

To point out another limitation of the socio-political paradigm, none of the academic texts framed in this paradigm attempted to define or propose exactly what this redefinition of arrangements of the current educational system and its purposes should look like. Except for some partial and moderate proposals expressed by Thomas and Loxley (2007) and Slee (2011), the socio-political paradigm theorists avoid specifying the exact contours of their “radical project” (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 113). If we cannot find satisfying answers to these questions within the field of inclusive education, we might need to look into other academic areas of education. For instance, the study conducted by Pirrie and Lowden (2004) in Scotland attempted to address the question on the purpose of education by asking people who live “on the margins of society” (p. 518). This study demonstrated that the current educational system which privileges academic achievements and prowess, provides very little for young people to support their self-belief and confidence to meet the demands of the ever-changing world of today. The participants of this study perceived the notions of global competitiveness and radical changes in the ICT sector as absolutely irrelevant to their lives. They generally presented a view that developing social skills and “the promotion of positive, active citizenship based on mutual esteem and respect between ‘decent’ citizens” (p. 525) should become one of the fundamental purposes of education instead of the overemphasis on academic achievements. In contrast to this proposal, Robinson (2011) argues that it is the creativity and the creative potential in people that should be unlocked and developed through schooling. The purpose of developing all this creative potential, however, still
seems to be directed to satisfy and contribute to the demands of this world of global competitiveness rather than making this world a better and more socially just place to live.

Another interesting contribution to the debate on the purpose of schooling is offered by the cofounder of the Institute for Humane Education, Zoe Weil (2004, 2009), in her *TEDxDirigo* (2011) presentation. Here she proposes that “we provide every student with the knowledge, tools and motivation to be conscientious choice-makers and engaged change-makers for a restored and healthy and humane world for all”. She proposes to shift the purpose of education from merely preparing students for a job market to teaching students to figure out the most viable, cost-effective, innovative solutions to the social, environmental and political problems persisting in the today’s world. She proposes to educate students in becoming “solutionaries”. Although her vision implies the possibility of attaining a perfect solution for every single problem, which may be easily problematised, I consider her proposal a valuable contribution to the debate on the purpose of schooling and how to align the arrangements of the schooling system with this redefined purpose.

This debate should also constantly negotiate how societal values and practices have to be re-prioritised in order for the redefined purpose of education to be congruent with its wider social and political setting. The neoliberal values of individualism and market-driven competitiveness have dominated Slovak society and politics for more than two decades (Kaščák & Pupala, 2010; Kaščák & Pupala, 2011), and in Australia even longer (Cranston, Kimber, Mulford, Reid, & Keating, 2010; Welch, 2010a). Although these values might have served some members of society well, they have not managed to satisfactorily provide everyone with equal opportunities to education, resources, or particular life experiences. Notwithstanding, it might be appropriate to acknowledge and recognise the neoliberal values as the “best” that society at the time was able to come up with. I prefer to respect them for what they brought to the world, especially to the Slovak society after four decades of
socialist values being dominant, which – I would say – have not served all members of society any better. Nevertheless, I hope the time has arrived when we can revisit these values and maybe find new ones, or re-prioritise the existing ones to provide more equal chances for all people to live fulfilled and happy lives.

**Summary of the Chapter**

The chapter primarily attempted to address the research problem whether practising distributed leadership in any way hinders, assists or is irrelevant to practices of inclusive education in schools. First it attempted to do so by looking through the prism of the organisational paradigm. It introduced narrow and broad understandings of the concepts of inclusive education, distributed leadership and their relationship. In the narrow understanding, distributed leadership may in various occasions assist and, in others, hinder practising inclusion of students. In the broad understanding, the concept of distributed leadership is constructed as an indispensable component of inclusive education, which extends the meaning of inclusion to encompass adult school stakeholders in addition to students. The chapter then scrutinised the research problem through the prism of the socio-political paradigm. It was exposed that research participants presented a limited understanding of inclusion by positioning the main problem either in individual children or schools as organisations, and did not raise any critique of the wider socio-political context. In the last part of the chapter, the concept of inclusion itself was theoretically problematised while also discussing some limitations of the socio-political paradigm. This led to a proposal to launch an academic and public debate on the redefinition of the purpose of education and reprioritisation of societal values.
Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This chapter aims to summarise the overall findings of the thesis. Besides succinctly summing up the main findings, this chapter will also highlight the aspects which can be considered as valuable contributions to academic knowledge in the fields of inclusive education and distributed leadership. The limitations of this study will be acknowledged here, too. Since this thesis could not cover all the possible aspects of the research problem due to the time constrains of the research project and length limit of this thesis, the chapter will also propose various potential areas for future research in this topic which have not been discussed. In this sense, the thesis has attempted to not only introduce some new ideas, but also to instigate an academic discussion on the relationship between the concepts of inclusive education and distributed leadership.

Conclusions from the Study

This thesis explored how research participants understood the concepts of inclusive education, distributed leadership and their relationship in practice in two public primary schools – one in New South Wales (Australia) and one in Slovakia. These two schools were identified by external informants as good practice examples of inclusive education. To explore participants’ understanding of these concepts, their relationship and how they perceived that these concepts manifest in practice in the two schools, the study used qualitative research methods based on interviews and group discussions collected through ethnographic procedures. It was framed within an interpretivist theoretical perspective and constructionist epistemology (see Chapter Three).

Inclusive education and distributed leadership at the school level. Researching the topic of the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership was inspired by the academic literature on inclusive education framed within the organisational paradigm (Clark et al., 1999b; Clark et al., 1995). In Chapter Two, it was demonstrated that
this literature presents a theoretical contradiction. On the one hand, it invites for an “inclusive approach to leadership”, which is defined as a form of collaborative rather than autocratic leadership, as knowledge sharing amongst staff, and as a practice of staff members being enabled to contribute to a decision-making process (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 99). In other words, this literature recommends minimising the autocratic aspects of school leadership and enhancing the processes of “distributed leadership” (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010, p. 405). Particularly the process of collaboration between school stakeholders is presented as a crucial aspect of practising inclusive education in this literature on inclusion (e.g., Ferguson et al., 2005; Flem et al., 2004; Peercy & Martin-Beltran, 2012; Yeung, 2012). On the other hand, some of these authors – while stressing the importance of distributed leadership for inclusive education – also recommend to principals that in instances when other school staff members do not adhere to values of inclusion, they can also act autocratically to force it on them (e.g., Keyes et al., 1999; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). In addition, a number of the academic texts framed in the organisational paradigm overemphasise the role of principals in making schools a more inclusive environment (e.g., Guzmán, 1997; Ingram, 1997; Mattson & Hansen, 2009; Riehl, 2000). This can imply that without principals’ support of inclusion, there is a low chance to practise inclusive education in schools. The uncovering of this theoretical contradiction inspired focusing this research study on the relationship between practices of distributed leadership and inclusive education.

**Narrow understanding of inclusive education and distributed leadership.** The analysis and interpretation of the data collected in the primary school in NSW and Slovakia exposed two main understandings of inclusive education, distributed leadership and their relationship (see Chapters Four, Five and Six). The first one was named as narrow, and the second one as broad (see Chapter Seven). With regards to the narrow understanding of inclusive education, research participants constructed the concept in terms of several goals:
(1) enhancing their educational results and skills; (2) developing unique potentials of all students; (3) educating them towards good behaviour and ethical values; (4) enabling them to experience belonging, happiness and self-worth; and (5) ensuring their active participation and engagement. In other words, they understood inclusive education as targeting exclusively students. When matching this definition of inclusive education with how research participants talked about how they *practise* inclusive education, it was exposed that they overly emphasise pursuing the goal of enhancing educational result and skills. As demonstrated by students’ statements, this overemphasis of one goal often compromised achieving other goals (see Chapter Four).

In the narrow understanding of distributed leadership, research participants defined it as a set of processes without encompassing any particular goal or values. These processes included (1) taking on specific responsibilities, duties or projects and sharing the workload equitably; (2) collaborating to perform various specific tasks; (3) influencing decision-making processes; and (4) identifying oneself or others as leaders. When matching this definition of distributed leadership with how research participants talked about that they *practise* distributed leadership, some significant differences between perceptions of various school stakeholders were exposed, not only within one school, but also between the two researched schools (see Chapter Five).

With regards to the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership understood in this narrow sense, the latter was constructed as one of the means for practising the former. In other words, distributed leadership was understood as a set of external and distinct processes, some of which may lead to achieving inclusive goals as well. Some processes of distributed leadership may, however, lead to instances of exclusion and discrimination.
**Broad understanding of inclusive education and distributed leadership.** By contrast, a few research participants in both schools went beyond this narrow understanding and constructed distributed leadership as an indispensable component of inclusive education. In this broad understanding of inclusive education, practices of distributed leadership should not be viewed as external, but as inherent aspects of inclusive education. This construction, however, allows two interpretations. The first one is that all practices of distributed leadership should be considered also as a manifestation of inclusive education. The second interpretation is that we can distinguish two forms of processes of distributed leadership: those directed towards inclusive values and goals and those without any value orientation. In this sense, only the first form of distributed leadership should be understood as an indispensable component of inclusive education (see Chapter Six).

Constructing distributed leadership as an indispensable component of inclusive education destabilised the narrow understanding of these two concepts – the former being understood solely in terms of processes, and the latter as a set of goals. In the broad understanding of the two concepts, the boundary between processes and goals is blurred. Because of that, processes might be considered as important as goals and vice versa. In addition, this broad understanding introduced a significant redefinition of goals of inclusive education. While in the narrow understanding inclusive goals target exclusively students, in the broad understanding they are aimed at adult school stakeholders as well.

**Inclusive education and distributed leadership at the socio-political level.** Employing the *socio-political paradigm* (Clark et al., 1999b; Clark et al., 1995) exposed some significant limitations in research participants’ understanding of the concept of inclusive education. The data revealed that they constructed inclusive education only as a matter of reducing various *deficits* within students, or as an issue of organisational change towards being more able to address, develop and celebrate students’ diverse strengths.
Although the latter understanding can be considered as relevant and important to the field of inclusive education, none of the research participants presented the concept as a political critique of the current arrangements of the educational systems of NSW and Slovakia. When justifying their preference for educating some students in segregated special educational environment, research participants in both schools presented arguments which could rather be used as a critique of the current educational setting than reasons to segregate these students. Nonetheless, none of them presented them as such (see Chapter Four).

Although the deficit model, as it appeared in research participants’ statements about students with SEN or disabilities, could be critiqued by both the organisational and socio-political paradigms, it is the latter that offers an explanation as to why it is still so prevalent in the two researched schools and beyond. The authors within the socio-political paradigm identify dominant discourses present in language of state policies, wider social context and everyday social interactions, which hinder practising inclusive education (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2011; Graham & Spandagou, 2011; Slee, 2011; Tearle, 2012; Žovinec & Seidler, 2010) or distributed leadership (e.g., Anderson & Grinberg, 1998; Gronn, 2002a; Hartley, 2010; Hatcher, 2005). Only one participant in the NSW school explicitly acknowledged that the policy of national standardised testing may constrain and hinder their attempts to practise inclusion in their school.

Despite the prevalent limited understanding of inclusive education in both researched schools, some research participants critiqued the concept of inclusion in a way that is acknowledged also by some academics scrutinising the concept of inclusive education through the socio-political paradigm (Graham & Slee, 2008; Hansen, 2012). Namely, they criticised inclusion as a problematic concept in instances of aggressive behaviour, intolerance or exclusionary attitudes. Including these instances into school life unavoidably introduces exclusion of some other members of the school community.
Contributions to Knowledge

Despite the huge and constantly growing amount of academic texts on inclusive education produced since its emergence in mid-1980s and early 1990s (Erten & Savage, 2012), the topic of how school stakeholders construct and match the goals and practices of inclusive education has not received much attention. Many academics are concerned with formulating the most adequate definition(s) of inclusive education (Ainscow et al., 2006; Erten & Savage, 2012; Slee, 2011), which all incorporate some particular goals. These goals can be about maximising “presence, participation and achievement” of all children and young people in schools (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 25); about “all students actively participating in schools that are organized in such ways that all students are valued” (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 29); about enhancing educational achievements of all students (Black-Hawkins et al., 2007; Lloyd, 2008; Rouse & Florian, 2006); or about enabling all students to experience satisfactory social and friendship relationship with other students (Morrison & Burgman, 2009; Webster & Carter, 2007). Many academics are also concerned about how to practise inclusive education or how various practices at the school or the classroom level may enable inclusion of all learners and/or particularly learners with disabilities or SEN (Black-Hawkins, 2012; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Mitchell, 2008). When talking about inclusive practices, all these texts refer to practices related, for instance, to adaptations of curriculum and instruction, school and classroom organisation, individual intervention by special education teachers, or assistance of teacher’s aides. Nevertheless, these texts on inclusive practices do not usually scrutinise them in relation to the goals of inclusive education. By revealing that the goal of enhancing students’ educational achievements is often uncritically prioritised by school stakeholders at the cost of compromising other goals of inclusion, Chapter Four of this thesis can be considered as an important contribution to the field of inclusive education to fill this gap in knowledge.
This study also partly contributes to the area of researching school stakeholders’ attitudes towards inclusive education. In this respect, the findings of the study can be perceived as confirming the previous research on attitudes towards inclusion which exposes that various school stakeholders in the majority of cases support the segregation of students with challenging behaviour and severe disabilities into special educational settings (e.g., Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2010, 2011; Graham & Spandagou, 2011; Wood et al., 2012). The findings of this study also demonstrate that no research participant perceived the concept of inclusive education as a political concept challenging the current educational systems in NSW and Slovakia.

To some it might appear as surprising, but in contrast to the academic field of inclusive education, research on attitudes towards practising distributed leadership is very limited. By attempting to also partly scrutinise school stakeholders’ attitudes towards distributed leadership, this study (and Chapter Five in particular) can be viewed as a considerable contribution to the academic area of distributed leadership. In this respect, it was revealed that school stakeholders were willing to compromise on democratic aspects of distributed leadership to try and accommodate the wider social and political pressures which dictate the neoliberal competitive market values of efficiency and effectiveness (Woods & Gronn, 2009, p. 436). Since the field of inclusive education researches attitudes of school stakeholders so extensively (de Boer et al., 2010, 2011), this contribution to the academic area of distributed leadership can be also perceived as an inspiration from the field of inclusive education.

This study can also be considered as a unique contribution to the field of inclusive education and distributed leadership for its comparative education perspective of being conducted in two different countries – NSW (Australia) and Slovakia. The study presented a number of similarities, but also significant differences in the understandings and practices of
inclusive education, distributed leadership and their relationship in the two researched schools. Although it is not possible to generalise findings from one school to all schools in the country, if we assumed that some of these findings would be more common in other schools in the same region than in different countries, conducting this study in one country might have presented more limited results. To demonstrate this through an example, when defining the concept of distributed leadership and its practices in the Slovak school, school stakeholders did not mention the processes of taking on leadership responsibilities, duties and projects. If we assume that this would be the case in other Slovak schools as well, this process would have not been incorporated into the definition of distributed leadership. Nonetheless, it was included in this particular study because in the NSW school it represented perhaps the most frequently mentioned process of distributed leadership.

As a comparative education study, this research also revealed some considerable differences in the wider socio-political conditions shaping the practices in the two researched schools. These involved, for instance, the differences in perceptions of national standardised testings – NAPLAN in NSW and Testing 9 in Slovakia – or in platforms of collaboration to support students with SEN or disability – Learning Support Team meetings in NSW and Disciplinary Commission meetings in Slovakia – defined by state policies as well. Comparative education academic Michael Crossley (2008) claims that some of these aspects of school practices, and meanings that school stakeholders attach to them, might have passed as unnoticed if not being exposed to the significant difference that conducting a research study in two countries usually brings. In line with the call of several other academics in comparative education to conduct research in a context-sensitive manner (e.g., Crossley, 2010; Crossley & Watson, 2009; Masemann, 1990, 1999; Welch, 1993, 2001, 2003), this study also avoided passing any judgments on one school being more inclusive.
than the other, or one practising distributed leadership to a greater extent than the other, while exposing that the social reality of practising these is very complex and multilayered.

In terms of shedding some light on the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership from an organisational paradigm perspective, this study presented two ideas which can be considered as a noteworthy contribution to the academic field of inclusive education. The first idea challenged the proposal of academics who, on the one hand, present distributed leadership as conducive to inclusion while, on the other hand, also recommend that principals be autocratic if other staff members do not support inclusion (e.g., Keyes et al., 1999; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). This thesis proposed that literature on inclusive education should not be advising principals to be autocratic but, rather, be advising any school (staff) member – even if not being in an official position within a school organisational hierarchy – who are passionate about and support inclusive education values, to become an informal leader and opinion-maker in the school in order to promote inclusion there (see Chapter Seven). The second idea, which can be considered as a valuable contribution to the field, is the broad understanding of inclusive education as presented above. Although a number of academics in the field of inclusive education present processes of distributed leadership as crucial for inclusion (e.g., Ainscow et al., 2006; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2011), these still define inclusive education as targeting only students. The redefined or broad understanding of inclusive education explicitly targets all school stakeholders, including adults. By redefining the concept of inclusive education in which the inclusion of adult school stakeholders becomes as (or similarly) important as the inclusion of students, this thesis introduces a noteworthy alternative understanding of the concept, which should be considered in future academic discussions in the field of inclusive education.
Limitations of the Study

It is important to acknowledge limitations within any research study. This particular research presents some limitations as well. Perhaps the most obvious ones are connected to the choice of research methodology for this study. Although qualitative research studies can introduce very valuable complex understandings of various social phenomena, they usually focus on a small sample of sites or subjects (Miovský, 2006; Riemer, 2012). This is why these findings cannot be generalised to all schools in the region or globally. Being very transparent about the selection process of particular research sites, research participants and research methods in general might have, to some extent, addressed this issue, which gives the readers themselves a chance to make judgements about the validity of the research. Nonetheless, presenting a very localised and detailed depiction and analysis of a research problem – as this study attempted to do – may still present some very valuable implications for other schools and contexts as well (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Another limitation of the qualitative research methodology, which can be considered by some as an asset and others as a shortcoming, is the unconcealed subjective nature of research (Jansen & Peshkin, 1992; Miovský, 2006). My presence as a researcher might have stirred some bias in behaviour of various members of the researched school communities, and most probably have impacted on relations among staff members. Notwithstanding, this bias should have been partly minimised by being immersed for a substantially long period in their environments (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The subjective aspect was most probably transferred into the data analysis and data interpretation process as well. To address this issue, I have attempted to be as transparent as possible about these processes and my experiences and position as a researcher (see Chapter Three), and about my motivation to research inclusion and inclusive education (see Appendix A).
There are also various areas this study could have developed more if there had been either more time for data collection or no constraints on the word limit of this thesis. In terms of inclusive education, this study might have been improved by also scrutinising the *curriculum* aspects of schools’ inclusive practices. With regards to distributed leadership, more data from parents and students could have been collected on this topic and used in this thesis – not just data from staff members. In addition, the thesis could have used the observational data to a greater extent. The rationale of responding to some of these limitations is presented in Chapter Three.

**Future Research**

This research study has exposed and discussed several new ideas which might invite further research exploration while using similar or completely different research methodologies and methods. To identify some of the specific areas which would very well complement and develop the findings of this research study, one can look at three thematic directions: inclusive education, distributed leadership or the relationship between the two concepts. With regards to the concept of inclusive education, this study proposed a framework of scrutinising various school *practices* in relation to the identified *goals* of inclusive education (see Chapter Four). A potential future research might scrutinise *practices* related to curriculum through in relation to *goals* of inclusion. In addition, although this framework was aimed at addressing the diversity of all students, research participants referred primarily to students with SEN or/and disabilities. It might be valuable to employ this framework and potentially critique it if focusing on exclusion/inclusion of students self-identifying and/or labelled by others with a particular gender, “race”, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.

In terms of researching inclusive education from a wider social and political perspective, a robust academic debate on the purpose of education and schooling should be
launched in order to support the inclusion as a political concept on a systemic level. There should be more research on what people from various social groups consider as the important purposes of education worth pursuing by schooling systems. A critical analysis of current state policies or public policy declarations on education could be conducted to investigate the underlying purposes of education and implied hierarchy between them. Some of these critical analyses should also propose very concrete suggestions for alternative purposes and arrangements of schooling which could become mainstream one day.

In shifting attention to the academic area of distributed leadership, this research study might be followed up in future research on various issues, too. For instance, since this study focused only on school staff members and their perceptions of the concept and practices of distributed leadership, it might be valuable to explore understandings of other relevant school stakeholders as well, such as students and parents. Future research in the area of distributed leadership might also engage more with the attitudes of all groups of school stakeholders towards distributed leadership and its democratic aspects, putting these in wider social and political context.

Future research in the area of distributed leadership could examine in greater depth the various factors, or even strategies, where a school staff member who is not in a hierarchical accountability position could become an informal leader or opinion-maker in her/his school. This topic becomes especially relevant for the topic of relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership. In particular, future research could focus on exploring cases of school members – not in any official hierarchical positions – becoming opinion-makers on the issues of inclusive education. To explore which particular factors may play a role in their endeavours to influence other staff members about the issues of inclusion and challenge the deficit model of their language and thinking about students, might be valuable not only for the academic knowledge, but it might also introduce some
important implications for practice of school stakeholders who are passionate about inclusive values. Future research can also investigate, in more depth, the cases when the processes of distributed leadership (in both the narrower or broader sense) overpower the voice of expertise or a professional expert to segregate a student or use individual interventions that may stigmatise students.

Finally, if unpacking the concept of distributed leadership into particular processes, it might be valuable for future research to investigate how these individually relate to practices of inclusive education. To be more precise, collaboration as a process of distributed leadership is extensively explored with regards to how and why it may support inclusion in schools (e.g., Ferguson et al., 2005; Flem et al., 2004; Peercy & Martin-Beltran, 2012; Yeung, 2012). Outside of this thesis, there has been very limited research into how for instance the process of involvement in school decision-making or taking on different responsibilities, projects and programs might relate to inclusive practices. These few suggestions definitely do not exhaust all the possible areas that research on inclusive education and distributed leadership can extend into. Notwithstanding, I hope this thesis instigated some more interest in the relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership to the extent that it will result in future research that may refer to and build on this study.

Final Words

Inclusion or inclusive education is a very complex concept that introduces a number of worthwhile implications for practice and policy at all levels of the educational system, but which can also be challenged by various internal contradictions. Despite the contradictions, I see the usefulness and worthiness of the concept of inclusion in two main messages: the first one being related to the wider social and policy level, and the second one to any form of interactions between two or more human beings. With regards to the first message, I fully
agree with Stephen Ball (2007) and academics in the inclusive education field who adopted the socio-political paradigm when they claim that

[we need to struggle to think differently about education policy before it is too late.]

We need to move beyond the tyrannies of improvement, efficiency and standards, to recover a language of and for education articulated in terms of ethics, moral obligation and values (Ball, 2007, p. 191).

The aspect of ethics and moral values connects the first message with the second one. In the second message, I understand the main objective of the field of inclusive education to be an improvement of relationships between human beings, thus, an endeavour to minimise instances of any form of exclusion, discrimination and social injustice. If using the words of Martin Buber (2004), I interpret the concept of inclusive education as aspiring to bring about more of I-Thou relationships among people and among teachers and students labelled with SEN, disability or other stigmatising identity category in particular. In the I-Thou or Subject-to-Subject relationship, human beings are aware of each other as having a unity of being. They do not perceive each other as consisting of any specific and isolated qualities, as is the case of the I-It or Subject-to-Object relationships, but engage in a dialogue involving each other’s whole being. I-Thou is a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity, while I-It is a relationship of separateness and disconnection in which the Other becomes merely a means or Object for the Subject.

The relation to the Thou is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between I and Thou. The memory itself is transformed, as it plunges out of its isolation into the unity of the whole. No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between I and Thou. . . . Every means is an obstacle. Only when every means has collapsed does the meeting come about (Buber, 2004, p. 17)
I hope this thesis managed to deliver and support these two messages of inclusive education...
References


ŠŠI. (2011). *Školská integrácia žiakov so špeciálnymi výchovno-vzdelávacími potrebami (ŠVVP) a vzdelávanie žiakov so ŠVVP v špeciálnych triedach ZŠ (Interný metodický
materiál ŠŠI) [School integration of students with special educational needs (SEN) and education of students with SEN in special classrooms of primary schools (Internal methodical material of State School Inspection)]. Bratislava: Štátna školská inšpekcia. Retrieved July 5, 2013, from http://www.ssiba.sk/admin/fckeditor/editor/userfiles/file/Dokumenty/Metod_material_k_sk_integracji_2011%281%29.pdf


Zelina, M. (2010). Riadenie a jeden z pilierov reformy školstva [Leadership as one of the pillars of the educational reform] *Manažment školy v praxi, 9*, 1, 14.

Appendices
Appendix A: Ethics Approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

This letter represents the initial ethics approval granted by the HREC of the University of Sydney on 6 April 2011.

Ref: [SA/KFG]
6 April 2011

Professor Derrick Armstrong
Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education
Quadrangle – A14
The University of Sydney
Email: derrick.armstrong@sydney.edu.au

Dear Professor Armstrong

Thank you for your correspondence dated 25 March 2011 and 5 April 2011 addressing comments made to you by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

I am pleased to inform you that with the matters now addressed your protocol entitled “Inclusive Education and School Leadership: Comparative and Ethnographic Study of Primary Schools in New South Wales and Slovakia” has been approved.

Details of the approval are as follows:

- Protocol No.: 04-2011/13596
- Approval Period: April 2011 to April 2012
- Authorised Personnel: Professor Derrick Armstrong
  - Dr Iklera Spandagou
  - Mr Jozef Miskolc

Documents Approved (both English & Slovak versions, unless indicated):

1. General Information Statement (version 1.0, 15/02/2011)
2. Parent/Caregiver Information Statement - Observations (version 1.0, 15/02/2011)
3. Parent/Caregiver Information Statement - Observations & Interview (version 1.0, 15/02/2011)
4. Participant Information Statement - Interview (version 2.0, 23/03/2011)
5. Participant Information Statement - Group Discussion (version 2.0, 23/03/2011)
6. Participant Information Statement - Principal (version 1.0, 15/02/2011)
7. Participant Consent Form - Interview (version 1.0, 15/02/2011)
8. Participant Consent Form - Group Discussion (version 1.0, 15/02/2011)
9. Parent/Guardian Consent Form - Observation & Interview (version 1.0, 15/02/2011)
10. Parent/Guardian Consent Form - Observation (version 1.0, 15/02/2011)
11. Invitation letter to Principal
12. Interview Schedules
13. Observation Schedules (English only)

The HREC is a fully constituted Ethics Committee in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans-March 2007 under Section 5.1.29.

The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans. A report on this research must be submitted every 12 months from the date of the approval or on completion of the project, whichever occurs first. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of consent for the project to proceed. Your report is due by 30 April 2012.
Special Conditions of Approval

1. Please provide a copy of the SERAP approval/recognition from the Department of Education and Training prior to commencing research activities in NSW Schools.

2. Please forward permission/s from the relevant School Principal's prior to commencing research at each site.

Chief Investigator/Supervisor's responsibilities to ensure that:

1. All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC within 72 hours for clinical trials/interventional research.

2. All unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.

3. Any changes to the protocol must be approved by the HREC before the research project can proceed.

4. All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Statement and Consent Form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee. The following statement must appear on the bottom of the Participant Information Statement: Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Manager, Human Ethics, University of Sydney on +61 2 8627 8176 (Telephone); + 61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile) or ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).

5. You must retain copies of all signed Consent Forms and provide these to the HREC on request.

6. It is your responsibility to provide a copy of this letter to any internal/external granting agencies if requested.

7. The HREC approval is valid for four (4) years from the Approval Period stated in this letter. Investigators are requested to submit a progress report annually.

8. A report and a copy of any published material should be provided at the completion of the Project.

Please do not hesitate to contact Research Integrity (Human Ethics) should you require further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely

Dr Stephen Assinder
Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee

cc: Mr Jozef Misikolci
jmis3032b@uni.sydney.edu.au
Appendix B: Ethics Approval by the HREC for the First Modification of the Research Project

After thorough discussions with my supervisors about the practicalities of individual research methods and their usefulness for this particular research project, the first modification of the research project was proposed. This modification included changing the research method of individual semi-structured interviews with students into conducting six group discussions each with three students in each research site, and a drawing activity. This modification was approved by HREC on 11 May 2011.
Appendix C: Ethics Approval by the NSW Department of Education and Communities

Conducting any research in NSW government schools requires an ethics approval through the State Education Research Application Process (SERAP) by the NSW DEC as well. The approval for this research project was granted on 11 July 2011.

Dear Professor Armstrong,

SERAP Number 2011051

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in New South Wales government schools entitled *Inclusive Education and School Leadership: Comparative and Ethnographic Study of Primary Schools in New South Wales and Slovakia*. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved. You may now contact the Principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation. **You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to schools.**

This approval will remain valid until 06/04/2012.

The following researchers or research assistants have fulfilled the Working with Children screening requirements to interact with or observe children for the purposes of this research for the period indicated:

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Approval expires</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jozef Miskolci</td>
<td>24/05/2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in New South Wales government schools:

- School Principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the Principal for the specific method of gathering information for the school must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school’s convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the Research Approvals Officer before publication proceeds.

When your study is completed please forward your report marked to Manager, Schooling Research, Department of Education and Training, Locked Bag 53, Darlington, NSW 2010.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr Max Smith
Senior Manager
Student Engagement and Program Evaluation

// July 2011

Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau NSW Department of Education and Communities
Level 3, 1 Oxford Street, Darlington NSW 2010 – Locked Bag 53, Darlington NSW 1300 Telephone: 02 9244 5010 – Fax: 02 9244 5033 – Email: scrap@det.nsw.edu.au
Appendix D: Ethics Approval by the HREC for the Second Modification of the Research Project

This modification primarily included some minor amendments regarding the individual semi-structured interview, which reflected particular circumstances of the researched NSW school. It also informed the HREC about abandoning the initial plan to conduct a group discussion with teachers because the data from individual interviews with teachers were considered as sufficient. This modification was approved by the HREC on 5 October 2011.

![Ethics Approval Form]

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<tr>
<td>Title: (e.g. Mr, Ms, Dr, Associate Professor):</td>
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<td>Discipline/Department:</td>
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<td>Role in the project:</td>
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Appendix E: Sample Letter/Email Requesting the Identification of a Good Practice Example of Inclusive School in Sydney (NSW): English Version

Subject: Request for the identification of a successful inclusive primary public school in New South Wales

Dear Mr/Ms ____,

As an academic you have been dealing with the topic of inclusive education in primary schools in New South Wales. I would like to acknowledge and honour your contribution in this area. I am a PhD student in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney, and as part of my studies I would like to conduct a comparative ethnographic research study in two primary schools that can be identified as successful inclusive schools; one in New South Wales and the other in Slovakia. The chief investigator of this research and my supervisor is Professor Derrick Armstrong, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Education, University of Sydney. I also cooperate with my associate supervisor Dr Ilektra Spandagou from the Faculty of Education at the University of Sydney. My research will focus on the relationship between inclusive education practices and distributed school leadership from a comparative perspective.

In this respect, I would like to kindly ask you to identify at least one (or a maximum of three) primary public school(s) in New South Wales (preferably in Greater Sydney), which you would qualify as a good practice example of successful inclusion of students assessed as having ‘additional educational needs’ or students from disadvantaged socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds; hence schools that achieve high educational results and at the same time include a diverse population of students in terms of abilities and background. In addition, I would like to ask you to briefly indicate your reasons which led you to identify this (these) school(s) in particular as an example(s) of successful inclusive school(s).

On the basis of your identification and identification of various organisations and public administration institutions dealing with inclusive education, I will address one school with a request to enable me to conduct my ethnographic research in its environment. In case you would be interested I can inform you about the progress and outcomes of my research.

I hope my research will contribute not only to enhancing academic knowledge but also to supporting the practice of inclusive education principles in primary schools in NSW and Slovakia. I would be very grateful if you could send me your reply in an electronic form to my e-mail address jmis3628@uni.sydney.edu.au.

Sincerely yours,

JOZEF MISKOLCI | Research Higher Degree Student
Faculty of Education and Social Work

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
Rm 2a05, Education Annex A36 | The University of Sydney | NSW | 2006
T +61 2 9351 5136 | GSM +61 450 119 233
E jmis3628@uni.sydney.edu.au | W http://sydney.edu.au
Appendix F: Sample Letter/Email Requesting the Identification of a Good Practice Example of Inclusive School in Bratislava (Slovakia): Slovak Version

VEC: Žiadosť o identifikáciu úspešnej inkluzívnej základnej školy na Slovensku

Vážený pán/ Vážená pani ____,

Vaša organizácia je zapojená do aktivít súvisiacich s podporou inkluzívneho vzdelávania na Slovensku. Rád by som týmto ocenil Vašu prácu v tejto oblasti. Som doktorandským študentom na Univerzite v Sydney v Austrálii, Fakulte vzdelávania a sociálnej práce, a v rámci svojho štúdia sa taktiež zaobierám konceptom inkluzívneho vzdelávania. Konkrétne tento rok plánujem previesť komparatívny etnografický výskum o vzťahu medzi inkluzívnom vzdelávaním a školským vedením na jednej základnej škole na Slovensku a jednej v Austrálii (Novom Južnom Walese), ktoré by mohli byť identifikované ako príklady úspešných inkluzívnych škôl. Hlavným výskumníkom tejto štúdie a mojím vedúcim dizertačnej práce je profesor Derrick Armstrong, prorektor Univerzity v Sydney pre oblast vzdelávania. Taktiež na tomto projekte spolupracujem s docentkou Ilektronou Spandagou z Fakulty vzdelávania a sociálnej práce Univerzity v Sydney.

V tejto súvislosti sa na Vás obraciam s prosbou o identifikáciu základnej školy na Slovensku, prípadne viacerých škôl (aspoň jednej v bratislavskom kraji), ktoré by ste označili za príklady dobrej praxe v úspešnej integrácii žiakov so špeciálnymi výchovno-vzdelávacími potrebami (ŠVVP) či žiakov zo sociálne znevýhodneného prostredia. Inými slovami, chcet by som Vás pekné požiadať o identifikáciu škôl, ktoré dosahujú výborné vzdělávacie výsledky a zároveň integrujú nadpriemerné množstvo žiakov so ŠVVP či žiakov zo sociálne znevýhodneného prostredia. Taktiež by som Vás poprosil o stručné naznačenie Vašich dôvodov, ktoré Vás viedli k označeniu práve týchto škôl za príkladné školy úspešnej inklúzie. Na základe Vašej identifikácie a identifikácie ďalších štátových a neštátových inštitúcií a akademických pracovníkov v oblasti inkluzívneho vzdelávania oslovím školu so žiadost'ou o možnosť previesť na jej pôde etnografický výskum. V prípade Vášho záujmu Vás môžem informovať o priebehú môjho výskumu.

Pevne dúfam a verím, že môj výskum prispeje nielen novými zisteniami pre akademickej obec ale aj pre realizáciu princípov inkluzívneho vzdelávania v praxi základných škôl na Slovensku a Austrálii. Bol by som veľmi vd'äcný, keby ste mi mohli zaslať Vašu odpoveď elektronicky na e-mailovú adresu jmis3628@uni.sydney.edu.au.

Za Vašu spoluprácu Vám vopred veľmi pekne ďakujem.

S pozdravom,

JOZEF MISKOLCI | Research Higher Degree Student
Faculty of Education and Social Work

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Appendix G: Letter Inviting the Principal of the Selected NSW School to Participate in the Research Project: English Version

Professor Derrick Armstrong  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education and Registrar  

Date  

School address  

LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT  

Inclusive education and school leadership in New South Wales and Slovakia  

Dear Ms_________,  

I am undertaking a social research project and your school – _______________ – has been identified as a good practice example of a successful inclusive primary school in Sydney, catering for students from diverse cultural and social backgrounds with different educational needs and talents. I also note that within the last two years ______________ has achieved above average results in the NAPLAN tests and I would like to express my congratulations.  

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in a research project named Inclusive Education and School Leadership in New South Wales and Slovakia. The project is planned to be undertaken this year under the supervision of myself and Dr Ilektra Spandagou, from the Faculty of Education of the University of Sydney. The fieldwork research will be conducted by our PhD student, Mr Jozef Miskolci. More detailed information on the project can be found in the attachment: General Information Statement on the Study “Inclusive Education and School Leadership in New South Wales and Slovakia”. Since your school represents one of the best schools for this research it would be the project’s main research site.  

In practice your participation in the research would mean that you would accept the presence of Mr Miskolci as a researcher in the environment of your school for a period of approximately four months (end of June – mid-November) in 2011. He would primarily conduct observations of classroom practice (of 2 classrooms, twice a week, up to 4 lessons a day), staff meetings, P&C meetings, and other relevant school events. He would also conduct interviews (app. 60 minutes each) with you, (app. 7) teachers, and (app. 7) parents and group discussions with approximately 18 randomly selected students of two classrooms and with approximately 7 teachers. The conditions and extent of the researcher’s involvement in your school community would be completely negotiable with you. The number of observations and interviews can be reduced or extended in accordance to your...
wishes and possibilities. I believe that with your help the research would not impose an undue burden on the school and school personnel.

I would be very pleased if you and ______________ would consider participating in this research project. If you accept this proposal, I would request that you confirm your interest in writing. Subsequently Mr Miskolci will contact you to negotiate the details of conducting the research project in your school.

In case of any further questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me or Mr Miskolci on his e-mail address jmis3628@uni.sydney.edu.au or mobile phone 0450119233.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Derrick Armstrong
Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education and Registrar
Vážená pani riaditeľka,

obraciam sa na Vás po predchádzajúcej komunikácii s ____________, ktorý/á ma prednášanom informoval/a, že ako riaditeľka základnej školy ____________ máte záujem participovať na mojom výskumnom projekte, ktorý zastrešuje Univerzita v Sydney v Austrálii. Týmto emailom Vás iba chceme priamo informovať o tomto výskume.


Mohla by ste mi potvrdiť Vaš záujem o spoluprácu na tomto výskumnom projekte? Pokiaľ máte akékoľvek ďalšie otázky, rád Vám ich prostredníctvom emailu zodpoviem. Taktiež sa môžem s Vami spojiť telefónicky.

S pozdravom,

JOZEF MISKOLCI | Research Higher Degree Student
Faculty of Education and Social Work

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
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T +61 2 9351 5136 | GSM +61 450 119 233
E jmis3628@uni.sydney.edu.au | W http://sydney.edu.au
Appendix I: General Information Statement on the Study: English Version

GENERAL INFORMATION STATEMENT ON THE STUDY

Inclusive education and school leadership in New South Wales and Slovakia.

(1) What is the study about?

The study will investigate inclusive education practices at selected public primary schools in New South Wales and Slovakia, which have been identified as good practice examples. In doing this it will focus on exploring the relationship between the implementation of inclusive education principles at a school level and the ways school stakeholders – especially teachers and parents – are being involved in school leadership activities and decision-making processes.

(2) What is the significance of the study?

The major significance of this study lies in exploring the limits and paradoxes of processes of involving stakeholders in school leadership in everyday practice of inclusive schools. The research is also significant for its cross-cultural comparative perspective as it will explore the specific socio-cultural and systemic contexts of New South Wales and Slovakia. Such a study might prove to be a valuable feedback to the researched schools and a source of guidance for other primary schools in the two cultural contexts.

(3) Who is carrying out the study?

The chief investigator in this research is Professor Derrick Armstrong, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Education at the University of Sydney. The co-researchers are Dr Ilektra Spandagou, Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education, and Jozef Miskolci, PhD student at the Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney.

(4) What does the study involve?

The study involves collecting ethnographic data in one public primary school in New South Wales and one public primary school in Slovakia over the period of 4 months at each school (July-October 2011 in NSW and November 2011-February 2012 in Slovakia). The following data collection techniques will be used:
• Observations of classroom practice (2 days a week), staff meetings, parent meetings, school assemblies, principal’s activities, etc.;
• Semi-structured interviews (approximately 60 minutes each) with the principal, assistant principal, and mostly randomly selected representatives of teachers, parents;
• Group discussions with students (approximately 60 minutes);
• Drawing activity for students (approximately 25 minutes).

(5) What will be the outcome of the study?

The outcome of this study will be a Doctoral Thesis, which may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. The report may also take the form of academic journal articles, book chapters and conference proceedings.

(6) Will the study benefit me?

The outcomes of the study might be considered as a valuable feedback to the school community in the field of inclusive education and school leadership. Nevertheless, we cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from the study.

(7) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you may tell other people about the research.

(8) What if I require further information?

When you have read this information, the co-researcher, Jozef Miskolci, will be happy to answer any questions you may have. You can contact him on +61 2 9351 5136 (Telephone); +61 450 119 233 (Mobile phone); jmis3628@uni.sydney.edu.au (Email).

(9) What if I have a complaint or concerns?

If you have any concerns you can contact the Deputy Manager of the Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney.

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Deputy Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on +61 2 8627 8176 (Telephone); +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile) or ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).

This information sheet is for you to keep
O čom je táto štúdia?
Táto štúdia bude skúmať praktiky inkluzívneho vzdelávania či školskej integrácie na vybranej základnej škole na Slovensku a v Austrálii, ktoré boli identifikované ako príklady dobrej praxe. Bude sa pritom zameriavať na skúmanie vzťahu medzi realizáciou princípov inkluzívneho vzdelávania na úrovni školy a spôsobmi zapojenia rôznych školských aktérov – hlavne učiteľov a rodičov – do aktivít školského vedenia a rozhodovacieho procesu školy.

Čím je táto štúdia významná a dôležitá?
Hlavný význam tejto štúdie spočíva v tom, že skúma komplexnosť procesov zapájania rôznych aktérov do školského vedenia v každodennej praxi inkluzívnych škôl. Táto témia nebola ešte dostatočne preskúmaná. Štúdia je taktiež významná pre jej medzinárodný komparatívny prístup, kedže bude skúmať špecifický socio-kultúrny a systémový kontext Slovenska a Austrálie. Výstupy tejto štúdie sa môžu osvedčiť ako cenná spätná väzba skúmaným školám ale tiež ako návod pre ďalšie základné školy v týchto dvoch kultúrnych kontextoch.

Kto realizuje túto štúdiu?
Hlavným výskumníkom tejto štúdie je profesor Derrick Armstrong, prorektor Univerzity v Sydney pre oblasť vzdelávania. Spolu-výskumníkmi sú Dr. Ilektra Spandagou, docentka v oblasti inkluzívneho vzdelávania, a Jozef Miškolci, doktorand na Fakulte vzdelávania a sociálnej práce Univerzity v Sydney.

Čo táto štúdia zahrňuje?
Štúdia zahrňuje etnografický zber dát na jednej verejnej základnej škole v Austrálii (júl – november 2011) a jednej verejnej základnej škole na Slovensku (november 2011 – marec 2012) v období 4 mesiacov na každej škole. Nasledujúce techniky zberu dát budú použité:
- Pozorovanie vyučovania v triedach (2-krát týždenne), stretnutí učiteľského zboru, rodičovských stretnutí, aktivít riaditeľa/ky, atď.;
- Pološtandardizované rozhovory (približne 60 minútové) s riaditeľom/kou, zástupcom/kyňou riaditeľa a prevažne náhodne vybranými reprezentantmi vyučujúcich a rodičov;
- Skupinové diskusie so žiakmi (približne 60 minútové);
- Kresliača aktivita pre žiakov (približne 25 minút).

5) Čo bude výstupom štúdie?


6) Budem mať z tejto štúdie nejaký úžitok?

Výstupy tejto štúdie môžu byť považované za cennú spätnú väzbu školskej komunite v oblasti inkluzívneho vzdelávania a školského vedenia. Napriek tomu nemôžeme garantovať či slúbiť, že budete mať z tejto štúdie úžitok.

7) Môžem povedať o tejto štúdii ostatným ľuďom?

Áno, môžete povedať ostatným ľuďom o tomto výskume.

8) Čo v prípade, že požadujem ďalšie informácie?

Keď ste si prečítali tieto informácie, výskumník Jozef Miškolci Vám rád zodpovie akékoľvek ďalšie otázky. Môžete ho kontaktovať na telefónnom čísle 0949115728 (Slovensko), prípadne +61 450 119 233 (Austrália); či emailovej adrese jmis3628@uni.sydney.edu.au.

9) Čo v prípade, keď budem mať stážnosť alebo pochyby?

Pokial budete mať nejaké pochyby alebo stážnosť, môžete kontaktovať zástupcu riaditeľa Úradu pre ľudskú etiku Univerzity v Sydney.

Tento informačný list si môžete ponechať.
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT (INTERVIEW)

Inclusive education and school leadership in New South Wales and Slovakia.

(1) What is the study about?

The study will investigate inclusive education practices at selected public primary schools in New South Wales and Slovakia, which have been identified as good practice examples. In doing this it will focus on exploring the relationship between the implementation of inclusive education principles at a school level and the ways school stakeholders – especially teachers and parents – are being involved in school leadership activities and decision-making processes.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?

The chief investigator in this research is Professor Derrick Armstrong, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Education at the University of Sydney. The co-researchers are Dr Ilektra Spandagou, Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education, and Jozef Miskolci, PhD student at the Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney.

(3) What does the study involve?

The study involves collecting ethnographic data in one public primary school in New South Wales and one public primary school in Slovakia over the period of 4 months at each school. The following data collection techniques will be used:

- Observations of classroom practice (2 days a week), staff meetings, parent meetings, school assemblies, etc.;
- Semi-structured interviews (approximately 60 minutes, will be audio-recorded) with the principal, school administrative manager, teachers, and mostly randomly selected representatives of parents;

23 The presented version of the Participant Information Statement was designed for teachers and parents only. The other versions – for the principal and school administration manager – were not included here, because there were only very minor differences between each version.
• Group discussions with students (approximately 60 minutes, will be audio-recorded);
• Drawing activity for students (approximately 25 minutes).

(4) **How much time will the study take?**

The interview will last approximately 60 minutes (maximum 75 minutes).

(5) **Can I withdraw from the study?**

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to be interviewed. If you take part in the interview you may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. A transcript of the interview will be returned to you for checking and you have the right to request the removal of, or change, any of your responses.

You are free to withdraw from the research at any time without affecting your relationship with the researchers or the University of Sydney.

(6) **Will anyone else know the results?**

All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. All participants will have pseudonyms. The outcome of this study will be a Doctoral Thesis, which may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. The report may also take the form of academic journal articles, book chapters and conference proceedings.

(7) **Will the study benefit me?**

The study will provide you with an opportunity to talk about your school, its values and practices, and about school leadership. It will also enable you to comment on these practices and values. The outcomes of the study might be considered as a valuable feedback to the school community in the field of inclusive education and school leadership. Nevertheless, we cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from the study.

(8) **Can I tell other people about the study?**

Yes, you may tell other people about the research.

(9) **What if I require further information?**

When you have read this information, the co-researcher, Jozef Misko, will be happy to answer any questions you may have. You can contact him on +61 2 9351 5136 (Telephone); +61 450 119 233 (Mobile phone); jmis3628@uni.sydney.edu.au (Email).

(10) **What if I have a complaint or concerns?**

If you have any concerns you can contact the Deputy Manager of the Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney.

This information sheet is for you to keep.
Appendix L: Sample Participant Information Statement for Adult Research Participants: Slovak Version

Faculty of Education & Social Work
Fakulta vzdelávania a sociálnej práce

ABN 15 211 513 464

Professor Derrick Armstrong B.A., M. A., PhD
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INFORMAČNÝ LIST PRE ÚČASTNÍKA/ČKU (ROZHOVOR)
Inkluzívne vzdelávanie a školské vedenie na Slovensku a v Austrálii

(1) O čom je táto štúdia?

Táto štúdia bude skúmať praktiky inkluzívneho vzdelávania či školskej integrácie na vybranej základnej škole na Slovensku a v Austrálii, ktoré boli identifikované ako príklady dobrej praxe. Bude sa pritom zamierať na skúmanie vzťahu medzi realizáciou princípov inkluzívneho vzdelávania na úrovni školy a spôsobmi zapojenia rôznych školských aktérov – hlavne učiteľov a rodičov – do aktivít školského vedenia a rozhodovacieho procesu školy.

(2) Kto realizuje túto štúdiu?

Hlavným výskumníkom tejto štúdie je profesor Derrick Armstrong, prorektor Univerzity v Sydney pre oblasť vzdelávania. Spolu-výskumníkmi sú Dr. Ilektra Spandagou, docentka v oblasti inkluzívneho vzdelávania, a Jozef Miškolci, doktorand na Fakulte vzdelávania a sociálnej práce Univerzity v Sydney.

(3) Čo táto štúdia zahrňuje?

Štúdia zahrňuje etnografický zber dát na jednej verejnnej základnej škole v Austrálii (júl – november 2011) a jednej verejnnej základnej škole na Slovensku (november 2011 – marec 2012) v období 4 mesiacov na každej škole. Nasledujúce techniky zberu dát budú použité:

- Pozorovanie vyučovania v triedách (2-krát týždenne), stretnutí učiteľského zboru, rodičovských stretnutí, aktivít riaditeľa, atď.;
- Pološtandardizované rozhovory (približne 60 minútov) s riaditeľom/kou, zástupcom/kynou riaditeľa a prevážne náhodne vybranými reprezentantmi vyučujúcich a rodičov;
- Skupinové diskusie so žiakmi (približne 60 minútov);
- Kresliačca aktivity pre žiakov (približne 25 minút).

(4) Ako dlho bude táto štúdia prebiehať?
Tento rozhovor bude trvať približne 60 minút (maximálne 75 minút).

(5) Môžem odstúpiť z tejto štúdie?


Môžete kedykoľvek odstúpiť zo štúdie bez toho, aby to ovplyvnilo Váš vzťah s výskumníkmi alebo Univerzitou v Sydney.

(6) Bude ešte niekto iný oboznámený o výsledkoch štúdie?


(7) Budem mať z tejto štúdie nejaký úžitok?

Táto štúdia Vám poskytne možnosť hovoriť o Vašej škole, jej hodnotách a praktikách a o školskom vedení. Umožní Vám tieto prípravky a hodnoty taktiež kritizovať. Výsledky tejto štúdie môžu byť považované za cennú spätnú väzbu školskej komunity v oblasti inkluzívneho vzdelávania a školského vedenia. Napriek tomu Vám nemôžeme a ani negarantujeme, že budete mať z tejto štúdie nejaký úžitok.

(8) Môžem povedať o tejto štúdii ostatným ľuďom?

Áno, môžete povedať ostatným ľuďom o tomto výskume.

(9) Čo v prípade, že požadujem ďalšie informácie?

Keď ste si prečítali tieto informácie, výskumník Jozef Miškolci Vám rád zodpovie akékoľvek ďalšie otázky. Môžete ho kontaktovať na telefónnom čísle 0949115728 (Slovensko), prípadne +61 450 119 233 (Austrália); či emailovej adrese jmis3628@uni.sydney.edu.au.

(10) Čo v prípade, keď budem mať stíhať a pochyby?

Pokiaľ budete mať nejaké pochyby alebo stíhať a pochyby, môžete kontaktovať zástupcu riaditeľa Úradu pre ľudskú etiku Univerzity v Sydney.

Ktokoľvek s pochybami a stíhať a pochyby o realizácii tejto výskumnej štúdie môže kontaktovať zástupcu riaditeľa Úradu pre ľudskú etiku Univerzity v Sydney na +61 2 8627 8176 (Tel); +61 2 8627 8177 (Fax) alebo ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).

Tento informačný list si môžete ponechať.
Appendix M: Sample Participant Consent Form for Adult Research Participants: English Version

Professor Derrick Armstrong B.A., M. A., PhD
Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education

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Web: http://www.usyd.edu.au/

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (INTERVIEW)

I, ............................................................[PRINT NAME], give consent to my participation in
the research project

TITLE: Inclusive education and school leadership in New South Wales and Slovakia

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to
me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity
to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researchers.

3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my
relationship with the researchers or the University of Sydney now or in the future.

4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will
be used in any way that reveals my identity.

5. I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary – I am not under any
obligation to consent.

6. I understand that I can stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, the
audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the
study. A transcript of the interview will be returned to me for checking and I understand
that I have the right to request the removal of, or change, any of my responses.
7. I consent to: –

i) Audio recording  YES □  NO □
ii) Receiving Feedback  YES □  NO □

If you answered YES to the “Receiving Feedback Question (ii)”, please provide your details i.e. mailing address or email address.

Feedback Option

Address: __________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

OR

Email: __________________________________________________________

Signed: ...........................................................................................................

Name: ...............................................................................................................

Date: ..............................................................................................................
Appendix N: Sample Participant Consent Form for Adult Research Participants: Slovak Version

Faculty of Education & Social Work
Fakulta vzdelávania a sociálnej práce

Professor Derrick Armstrong B.A., M. A., PhD
Prorektor univerzity, oblasť vzdelávania

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INFORMOVANÝ SÚHLAS ÚČASTNÍKA/ČKY (ROZHOVOR)

Ja, .............................................................................[NAPÍŠTE MENO], dávam svoj súhlas o účasti na výskumnom projekte

NÁZOV: Inkluzívne vzdelávanie a školské vedenie na Slovensku a v Austrálii.

Svojim súhlasom potvrďujem, že:

1. Proces pre realizáciu výskumného projektu a potrebný čas mi boli vysvetlené a akékoľvek otázky ohľadom projektu mi boli dostatočne zodpovedané.

2. Prečítal/a som si Informačný list pre účastníka/čku a mal/a som možnosť prediskutovať tieto informácie a moje zapojenie do projektu s výskumníkom.

3. Rozumiem, že môžem kedykoľvek odstúpiť zo štúdie bez toho, aby to ovplyvnilo môj vzťah s výskumníkmi alebo Univerzitou v Sydney teraz alebo v budúcnosti.

4. Rozumiem, že moje zapojenie v tejto štúdii je úplne dobrovoľné – nie som vôbec nútený/á s ním súhlasíť.

5. Rozumiem, že môžem kedykoľvek rozhovor prerušiť, pokiaľ si neželám pokračovať, audio záznam bude vymazaný a poskytnuté informácie nebúdú do štúdie zahrnuté. Prepis rozhovoru mi bude zaslaný na skontrolovanie a rozumiem, že mám právo žiadať vymazanie alebo zmenu ktorejkoľvek z mojich odpovedí.
7. Dávam súhlas k: –

i) Audio nahrávaniu  
   ÁNO  □  NIE  □ 

ii) Zaslaniu spätnej informácie  
    ÁNO  □  NIE  □ 

Pokiaľ ste odpovedal/a ÁNO v otázke (ii) o „Zaslaní spätnej informácie“, prosím o poskytnutie Vašich kontaktných údajov, t.j. emailovej, prípadne poštovej adresy.

**Možnosti pre zaslanie spätnej informácie**

**Adresa:**

_______________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________

**ALEBO**

**Email:**

______________________________________________

Podpis: ........................................................................................................

Meno: ........................................................................................................

Dátum: ........................................................................................................
Appendix O: Sample Parent/Caregiver Information Statement\textsuperscript{24} for Student Research Participants: English Version

PARENT/CAREGIVER INFORMATION STATEMENT
(OBSERVATION, GROUP DISCUSSION, DRAWING ACTIVITY)

Inclusive education and school leadership in New South Wales and Slovakia.

(1) What is the study about?

The study will investigate inclusive education practices at selected public primary schools in New South Wales and Slovakia, which have been identified as good practice examples. In doing this it will focus on exploring the relationship between the implementation of inclusive education principles at a school level and the ways school stakeholders – especially teachers and parents – are being involved in school leadership activities and decision-making processes.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?

The chief investigator in this research is Professor Derrick Armstrong, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Education at the University of Sydney. The co-researchers are Dr Ilektra Spandagou, Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education, and Jozef Miskolci, PhD student at the Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney.

(3) What does the study involve?

The study involves collecting ethnographic data in one public primary school in New South Wales and one public primary school in Slovakia over the period of 4 months at each school. The following data collection techniques will be used:

\textsuperscript{24} The presented version of the Parent/Caregiver Information Statement was designed for students who might participate in all three research methods – observations, group discussions and drawing activity. Because I did not plan to conduct a drawing activity and group discussions with all students, especially the younger ones in K-2 classes, there was also one more version of this Information Statement and Consent Form which mentioned only the relevant research methods. The other version was not included here, because there were only very minor differences between them.
- Observations of classroom practice (2 days a week), staff meetings, parent meetings, school assemblies, etc.;
- Semi-structured interviews (approximately 60 minutes, will be audio-recorded) with the principal, school administrative manager, teachers, and mostly randomly selected representatives of parents;
- Group discussions with students (approximately 60 minutes, will be audio-recorded);
- Drawing activity for students (approximately 25 minutes).

(4) **How much time will the study take?**

Here you are invited to permit your child to participate in classroom observations, group discussion with other students, and drawing activity. The researcher will observe the teaching practice up to 4 classes a day in average twice a week over the period of 4 months. The group discussion will last approximately 60 minutes (maximum 75 minutes). The drawing activity will last approximately 25 minutes.

(5) **Can I withdraw from the study?**

The participation in this research project is completely voluntary. If you do not wish your child to be observed, the researcher will not take any notes about your child’s classroom participation. Your child is also not obliged to participate in group discussion and drawing activity. If he/she takes part in the group discussion he/she may leave the discussion at any time if he/she does not wish to continue. However, as it is a group discussion and it will be audio-recorded, it will not be possible to exclude individual data once the session has commenced.

Your decision whether or not to permit your child to participate in the research will not prejudice you or your child’s future relations with the University of Sydney. If you decide to permit your child to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue your child’s participation at any time without affecting your relationship with the University of Sydney.

(6) **Will anyone else know the results?**

All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. All participants will have pseudonyms. The outcome of this study will be a Doctoral Thesis, which may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. The report may also take the form of academic journal articles, book chapters and conference proceedings.

(7) **Will the study benefit me or my child?**

The outcomes of the study might be considered as a valuable feedback to the school community in the field of inclusive education and school leadership. Nevertheless, we cannot and do not guarantee or promise that your child will receive any benefits from the study.

(8) **Can I tell other people about the study?**

Yes, you may tell other people about the research.

(9) **What if I require further information?**

When you have read this information, the co-researcher, Jozef Miskolci, will be happy to answer any questions you may have. You can contact him on +61 2 9351 5136 (Telephone); +61 450 119 233 (Mobile phone); jmis3628@uni.sydney.edu.au (Email).
What if I have a complaint or concerns?

If you have any concerns you can contact the Deputy Manager of the Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney.

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Deputy Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on +61 2 8627 8176 (Telephone); +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile) or ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).

This information sheet is for you to keep.
Appendix P: Sample Parent/Caregiver Information Statement for Student Research Participants: Slovak Version

Faculty of Education & Social Work
Fakulta vzdelávania a sociálnej práce

ABN 15 211 513 464

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INFORMAČNÝ LIST PRE RODIČOV
(POZOROVANIE, SKUPINOVÁ DISKUSIA A KRESLIACA AKTIVITA)

Inkluzívne vzdelávanie a školské vedenie na Slovensku a v Austrálii

(1) O čom je táto štúdia?
Táto štúdia bude skúmať praktiky inkluzívneho vzdelávania či školskej integrácie na vybranej základnej škole na Slovensku a v Austrálii, ktoré boli identifikované ako príklady dobrej praxe. Bude sa pritom zameriavať na skúmanie vztahu medzi realizáciou princípov inkluzívneho vzdelávania na úrovni školy a spôsobmi zapojenia rôznych školských aktérov – hlavné učitele a rodičov – do aktivít školského vedenia a rozhodovacieho procesu školy.

(2) Kto realizuje túto štúdiu?
Hlavným výskumníkom tejto štúdie je profesor Derrick Armstrong, prorektor Univerzity v Sydney pre oblasť vzdelávania. Spolu-výskumníkmi sú Dr. Ilektra Spandagou, docentka v oblasti inkluzívneho vzdelávania, a Jozef Miškolci, doktorand na Fakulte vzdelávania a sociálnej práce Univerzity v Sydney.

(3) Čo táto štúdia zahrňuje?
Štúdia zahrňuje etnografický zber dát na jednej verejnej základnej škole v Austrálii (júl – november 2011) a jednej verejnej základnej škole na Slovensku (november 2011 – marec 2012) v období 4 mesiacov na každej škole. Nasledujúce techniky zberu dát budú použité:
- Pozorovanie vyučovania v triedach (2-krát týždeň), stretnutí učiteľského zboru, rodičovských stretnutí, aktivít riaditeľa/ky, atď.;
- Pološtandardizované rozhovory (približne 60 minútové) s riaditeľom/kou, zástupcom/kyňou riaditeľa a prevažne náhodne vybranými reprezentantmi vyučujúcich a rodičov;
- Skupinové diskusie so žiakmi (približne 60 minútové);
- Kresliaca activita pre žiakov (približne 25 minút).

(4) Ako dlho bude táto štúdia prebiehať?
Týmto Vás vyzývame dať Váš súhlas, aby sa Vaše dieťa mohlo účastniť kresliacej aktivity a skupinovej diskusie s výskumníkom a ostatnými žiakmi, a aby mohlo byť i Vaše dieťa pozorované na vyučovaniu v triedach. Výskumník bude pozorovať vyučovanie maximálne na 4 vyučovacích hodinách denne v rôznych triedach v priemere dva-krát za týždeň v období 4 mesiacov. Skupinová diskusia potrvá približne 60 minút (maximálne 75 minút). Kresliaca aktivity potrvá približne 25 minút.

(5) Môžem odvolat' účasť svojho dieťa'a z tejto štúdie?

Účasť v tomto výskumnom projekte je úplne dobrovoľná. Pokiaľ si neželáte, aby výskumník pozoroval Vaše dieťa, nebude si výskumník robiť žiadne písomné záznamy o správaní či vyjadrovaniu vašeho dieťa a na vyučovanie. Vaše dieťa sa tak tiež nie je povinné sa účasťť skupinovej diskusie a kresliacej aktivity. Pokiaľ sa bude Vaše dieťa účasťť skupinovej diskusie, môže svoju účasť kedykoľvek prerušiť v prípade, že si neželá pokračovať. Keďže sa však jedná o skupinovú diskusiu, ktorá bude nahrávaná na diktafon, nebude možné vymazať už nahraté dáta.

Vaše dovolenie alebo nedovolenie svojmu dieťa'amu sa účasťť na výskume nebude mať žiadny vplyv na Váš vzťah alebo budúce vzťahy Vášho dieťa'amu s Univerzitou v Sydney. Pokiaľ sa rozhodnete dovoliť svojmu dieťa'amu účasťť sa, môžete svoj súhlas kedykoľvek odvoliť a prerušiť tak jeho účasť bez toho, aby to nejakovo nezmenilo Vaše vztah s výskumníkom alebo Univerzitou v Sydney.

(6) Bude ešte niekoľko iný oboznámený o výsledkoch štúdie?


(7) Budem mať moje dieťa'amu z tejto štúdie nejaký úžitok?

Výstupy tejto štúdie môžu byť považované za cennú spätť vázu školskej komunite v oblasti inkluzívneho vzdelávania a školského vedenia. Naprieč tomu Vám nemôžeme a ani negarantujeme, že Vaše dieťa a mať z tejto štúdie nejaký úžitok.

(8) Môžem povedať o tejto štúdii ostatným ľuďom?

Áno, môžete povedať ostatným ľuďom o tomto výskume.

(9) Čo v prípade, že požadujem ďalšie informácie?

Keď ste si prečítali tieto informácie, výskumník Jozef Miškolci Vám rád zodpovie akékoľvek ďalšie otázky. Môžete ho kontaktovať na telefónnom čísle 0949115728 (Slovensko), prípadne +61 450 119 233 (Austrália); či emailovej adrese jmis3628@uni.sydney.edu.au.

(10) Čo v prípade, keď budem mať st'ažnosť alebo pochyby?

Pokiaľ budete mať nejaké pochyby alebo st'ažnosť, môžete kontaktovať zástupcu riaditeľa Úradu pre ľudskú etiku Univerzity v Sydney. Ktokoľvek s pochybami a st'ažnosťami o realizácii tejto výskumnjej štúdie môže kontaktovať zástupcu riaditeľa Úradu pre ľudskú etiku Univerzity v Sydney na +61 2 8627 8176 (Tel); +61 2 8627 8177 (Fax) alebo ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).
Appendix Q: Sample Parent/Caregiver Consent Form for Student Research Participants: English Version

PARENT/CAREGIVER CONSENT FORM
(OBSERVATION, GROUP DISCUSSION, DRAWING ACTIVITY)

I, .............................................................................[PRINT NAME], agree to permit
......................................................................[PRINT NAME], who is aged ................... years, to
participate in the research project –

TITLE: Inclusive education and school leadership in New South Wales and Slovakia

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. I have read the Parent/Caregiver Information Statement and the time involved for my child’s participation in the project. The researcher/s has given me the opportunity to discuss the information and ask any questions I have about the project and they have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I have discussed participation in the project with my child and my child assents to his/her participation in the project.

3. I understand that I can withdraw participation of my child from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researchers or the University of Sydney now or in the future.

4. I agree that research data gathered from the results of the study may be published provided that neither my child nor I can be identified.
5. I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary – I am not under any obligation to consent.

6. I understand that if I have any questions relating to my child's participation in this research I may contact the researcher/s who will be happy to answer them.

7. I consent to:
   
   i) Classroom observation  YES  □  NO  □
   ii) Group discussion (recorded)  YES  □  NO  □
   iii) Drawing activity  YES  □  NO  □
   iv) Receiving Feedback  YES  □  NO  □

   If you answered YES to the “Receiving Feedback Question (iv)”, please provide your details i.e. mailing address or email address.

**Feedback Option**

*Address:_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

OR

*Email:_________________________________________________________

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Name of the parent/caregiver: .................................................................

Signature of the parent/caregiver: ..........................................................

Name of the child: ..............................................................................

Signature of the child: ......................................................................

Date: .................................................................................................
INFORMOVANÝ SÚHLAS RODIČA / OPATROVATEĽA
(POZOROVANIE, SKUPINOVÁ DISKUSIA A KRESLIACA AKTIVITA)

Ja, .................................................................[NAPÍŠTE MENO], dávam svoj súhlas, aby
.................................................................[NAPÍŠTE MENO], vo veku ........ rokov, sa zúčastnil
na výskumnom projekte

NÁZOV: Inkluzívne vzdelávanie a školské vedenie na Slovensku a v Austrálii.

Svojim súhlasom potvrdzujem, že:

1. Prečítal/a som si Informačný list pre rodičov a o požadovanom čase pre účasť môjho
dieťaťa na projekte. Výskumník mi dal možnosť prediskutovať tieto informácie
a akékoľvek otázky ohľadom projektu mi boli dostatočne zodpovedané.

2. Účasť na projekte som so svojim dieťaťom prediskutoval/a a moje dieťa súhlasilo na
projekte sa účasťať.

3. Rozumiem, že môžem kedykoľvek odvolat' účasť svojho dieťaťa zo štúdie bez toho, aby
to ovplyvnilo môj vzťah s výskumníkmi alebo Univerzitou v Sydney teraz alebo
v budúcnosti.

4. Súhlasím, že výskumná štúdia z nazbieraných dát môže byť publikovaná s tým, že mňa
alebo moje dieťa nebude možné v tejto štúdii identifikovať.

5. Rozumiem, že moje zapojenie v tejto štúdie je úplne dobrovoľné – nie som vôbec
nútený/á s ním súhlasíť.
Rozumiem, že ak budem mať akékoľvek ďalšie otázky ohľadom účasti môjho dieťaťa v tomto výskume, budem sa môcť kedykoľvek obrátiť na výskumníkov, ktorí mi radi moje otázky zodpovedajú.

7. Súhlasím s: –

   i) Pozorovaním vyučovania  ĽANO  ☐  NIE  ☐
   ii) Skupinová diskusia (nahrávaná)  ĽANO  ☐  NIE  ☐
   iii) Kresliačna aktivita  ĽANO  ☐  NIE  ☐
   iv) Zaslaním štátnej informácie  ĽANO  ☐  NIE  ☐

Pokiaľ ste odpovedal/a ĽANO v otázke (iv) o „Zaslaní štátnej informácie“, prosím o poskytnutie Vašich kontaktných údajov, t.j. emailovej, prípadne poštovej adresy.

Možnosť pre zaslanie štátnej informácie

Adresa:  ____________________________________________________________
         ____________________________________________________________

ALEBO

Email:  ____________________________________________________________

Meno rodiča / opatrovateľa:  .................................................................................................

Podpis rodiča / opatrovateľa:  .................................................................................................

Meno dieťaťa:  .............................................................................................................................

Podpis dieťaťa:  ............................................................................................................................

Dátum:  .......................................................................................................................................
Appendix S: Interview Schedules: English & Slovak Version

Each interview started with a short introduction including these points:

- Thank you very much for this opportunity to interview you;
- I will be asking you various questions concerning your profession, everyday life at your school and your opinions about inclusive education and school leadership;
- there are no right or wrong answers but rather differing points of view;
- feel free to share your opinion even if it differs from what others might say;
- the school will not be identifiable;
- you will not be identified in the report of this research (the principal might be identified as the “principal”, but she may determine which statements she would like to be kept in anonymity and be identified only as a “staff member”; teachers will be described by a generic term “staff members” and parents by “parents”);
- I will record the interview;
- the interview will then be transcribed and I will send it to you for eventual additions or corrections;
- at any point you can interrupt and end this interview;
- the interview will last approximately sixty minutes;
- I will ask you to be as concise as possible in your answers, since we have a lot of questions to go through;
- do you agree with these conditions?

Interview schedule with the principal and deputy principal.

Biographical information

- Education (initial, in-service)
- *Kvalifikácia alebo vzdelanie v oblasti špeciálnej pedagogiky*
- Years of teaching
- *Roky praxe ako učitel/ka*
- Years as a principal
- *Roky praxe ako riaditeľka (na tejto škole)*

Principal’s work and beliefs

- What are your roles, functions and responsibilities as a principal?
- *Aké sú Vaše hlavné role, funkcie a povinnosti ako riaditeľky tejto školy?*
- What changes did you make during your principalship?
- *Podarilo sa Vám zaviesť do školy nejaké zmeny počas Vášho riaditeľovania?*
- What influences you to make your decisions related to school affairs?
- *Čo podľa Vás vplyva na Vaše rozhodovanie v riadení školských záležitostí?*

Philosophy and values of the school

- What are the main values and principles that underpin education in this school?
- *Ako by ste popísal/a hlavné hodnoty a princípy tejto školy?*
- How do you try to translate these values and vision into practice?
- *Ako sa snažíte tieto hodnoty a víziu previesť do praxe?*
Identity of school

- In what ways do you see this school as unique (similar and different) to all other schools?
- *V akom zmysle myslíte, že je táto škola špecifická (iná alebo podobná) ako ostatné školy na Slovensku?*
- How do you think is your school perceived by public?
- *Ako myslíte, že je Vaša škola vnímaná verejnosťou, čo podľa Vás predstavuje?*
- Which current practices of your school do you think would be much more difficult to maintain in a bigger school? How do you think the small size of the school actually affects the life, inclusiveness and quality of this school?
- *A čo sa týka veľkosti tejto školy, v čom podľa Vás ovplyvňuje veľkosť tejto školy jej život a praktiky?*

Functioning of the school

- How is the funding of the school determined?
- *Ako je určované financovanie školy? Čo podmieňuje výšku rozpočtu?*
- Is there any additional funding in the form of projects the school receives?
- *Existuje nejaké doplnkové financovanie školy formou projektov, príspevkov, sponzoringu?*
- How is the spending of the budget determined?
- *Ako je určované čerpanie školského rozpočtu?*
- Is there any established professional development strategy in the school? How is professional development organised for staff members?
- *Ako je na Vašej škole organizované ďalšie vzdelávanie pedagogických pracovníkov?*
- How are new teachers recruited to the school?
- *Ako sú prijímaní noví učitelia?*
- Is there any system of recruiting casual teachers? Is there any strategy in place to integrate casual teachers into collaboration with other teachers?
- *Akým spôsobom je zabezpečované zastupovanie (suplovanie) pri absencii niektorých učitelov? Vypomáhajú aj učitelia bez úväzku zvonku?*

Inclusive education

- Do you think that all students should be included in mainstream classrooms without any exception? If not, for which students do you think it might be more beneficial to be educated in a special setting?
- *Myslíte si, že by mali byť všetci žiaci bez výnimky začlenení do hlavného vzdelávacieho prúdu? Pokiaľ nie, pre ktorých žiacov a čím si myslíte, že by bolo špeciálne prostredie pre nich prospešnejšie?*
- What is your understanding of the term *inclusive education*?
- *Ako rozumiete termínu inkluzívne vzdelávanie?*
- In what sense would you say that inclusive education is practiced at your school?
- *Je podľa Vás v nejakom zmysle alebo v niektorých oblastiach inkluzívne vzdelávanie realizované na Vašej škole? V akom?*
- Why or which factors would you say play the most important role in determining whether or how inclusive education is really happening in your school? (e.g., collaboration level, just luck that high quality teachers happen to gather in one school, leadership of the principal, etc.)
Aké faktory podľa vás hrajú rolu v realizácii inkluzívneho vzdelávania na vašej škole? (napr. úroveň spolupráce, šťastie na kvalitných učiteľov, spôsob riadenia,..)

Do teachers discuss what inclusive education should mean in practice?

Diskutujú u vás učitelia ako by malo byť inkluzívne vzdelávanie realizované na Vašej škole?

How are teachers supported to work in mainstream classrooms with students with additional needs?

Ako sú učiteľia podporovaní v prácí v bežných triedach so žiakmi so špeciálnymi vzdelávacími potrebami?

How would you describe the overall attitudes of the staff, parents, and students towards the principles of inclusive education?

Aké sú obecné postoje zamestnancov, rodičov a žiakov k princípom inkluzívneho vzdelávania?

Which particular interventions are practiced with individual students at your school?

Aké rôzne druhy individuálnej intervencie sú realizované so žiakmi na Vašej škole?

Who can be admitted to the school?

Kto všetko môže byť prijatý do školy?

What are the criteria for exclusion from the school? What is the practice?

Môže byť niekoľko zo školy i vylúčený?

How often does the Learning Support Team meet? Does the school counsellor participate in all of the meetings? What is the usual process?

Akým spôsobom fungujú metodické združenia (či predmetové komisie) a výchovné komisie? (Kto je členom, ako často sa stretávajú? Čo je ich funkciu či cieľom?)

How is the NSW DEC helping your school to deal with practicing inclusive education?

Akým spôsobom prispieva Ministerstvo školstva SR k úspešnej inklúzii na vašej škole?

What is the practice of Individual Educational Plans at your school? (who, how, when constructs them)

Aká je prax Individuálnych vzdelávacích plánov na vašej škole? (povinné pre všetky deti, kto zostavuje, ako a kedy?)

Distributed leadership

- What do you understand by the term distributed leadership?
- V odbornej anglickej literatúre na tému školského vedenia sa často hovorí o „decentralizácii“ alebo „distribuovaniu“ školského vedenia na všetkých zainteresovaných aktérov, hlavne učiteľov, že by mali byť títo aktéri v rôznych formách zapojení do školského vedenia. Čo pre Vás znamená tento koncept distribuovaného vedenia v praxi?

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25 Slovak primary schools do not have an equivalent of Learning and Support Team. Hence, the Slovak version of the question asks about Methodical Associations, Subject Committees and Disciplinary Commissions.

26 The concept of distributed leadership is not easily translatable into Slovak language. It is not theorised in Slovak academic literature at all (see Chapter Two). Hence, the Slovak version of the question is more descriptive. It can be translated into English this way: Academic English literature about school leadership often talks about “decentralisation” and “distribution” of school leadership.
Do you feel that school leadership in your school is distributed enough (particularly to the teachers)?

Ako funguje školské vedenie na Vašej škole v tomto ohľade? Je podľa Vás dostatočne distribuované, decentralizované, či zdieľané?

Why is it beneficial (for you) to distribute the leadership?

V čom je to vlastne podľa Vás prínosné/prospešné vedenie distribuovat/decentralizovať?

Do you feel that every teacher performs in any way a leadership role in this school? Could you give an example?

Myslite, že každý učiteľ na vašej škole vykonáva nejakú vedúcu rolu (v širšom zmysle, nielen ako nejakú funkciu)? Mohli by ste uviesť nejaké príklady?

Do you perceive that teachers themselves usually initiate new activities and practices? Or is it mostly you who initiates anything new?

Myslite, že i učitelia samotní iniciujú nové activity a praktiky alebo ste to zvyčajne vy ako riaditeľka, kto plní túto rolu?

How would you describe your leadership style?

Ako by ste popísala váš štýl vedenia?

How do you collaborate with other principals?

Spolupracujete v nejakej forme aj inými riaditeľmi/kami škôl?

Collaboration

What do you understand by the term collaboration? In which particular areas does collaboration happen between teachers?

Myslite si, že učitelia vo Vašej škole spolupracujú a vzájomne sa podporujú v dostatočnej miere? V akých oblastiach sa to deje?

Why is it good to collaborate?

V čom je to vlastne podľa Vás prínosné/prospešné spolupracovať?

Are teachers encouraged to cooperate with students’ parents? If yes, how?

Vakej miere sa podľa Vás snaží škola spolupracovať s rodičmi (akým spôsobom, v akých prípadoch konkrétnie)?

Decision-making process

How are decisions usually made in your school?

Akými spôsobmi sa obvyčajne rozhoduje na Vašej škole?

What kind of decisions do you usually make without any consultation with staff or other stakeholders?

Aký druh rozhodnutí obvyčajne robíte bez konzultácie so zamestnancami školy či inými zainteresovanými aktéri?

Do you remember any instance when you made a decision about something that went against the will of most of the staff (or students, parents)? Describe how it was implemented.

Prijali ste už nejaké rozhodnutia, s ktorým by mnohí učitelia nesúhlasili (či rodičia alebo žiaci)? Ako bolo toto rozhodnutie nakoniec implementované?

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to all school stakeholders, primarily teachers, that these stakeholders should be involved in various forms to school leadership. What does this concept of distributed leadership mean to you in practice?
Relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership

- Do you think there is any relationship between inclusive practices at your school and distribution of school leadership? How would you describe it? In other words, if the school leadership wasn’t distributed in your school, if it was cumulated in the hands of the principal only, do you think inclusive practices would be still happening in your school?

- Myslíte, že existuje nejaký vzťah medzi inkluzívnym vzdelávaním na Vašej škole a distribuovaným školským vedením? Ako by ste ho popísali? Inými slovami, myslíte, že čím sa viac vedenie školy sústreďuje v rukách riaditeľ/ky školy, tým je vzdelávanie na škole menej inkluzívne?

Feedback

- What do you think about the structure of the interview and its content?
- Čo si myslíte o štruktúre tohto rozhovoru a jeho obsahu?
- What other questions would you ask yourself in terms of inclusive education and school leadership?
- Aké iné otázky by ste sa opýtali na tému inkluzívneho vzdelávania a školského vedenia?

Interview schedule with teachers.

Role in the school

- Years of teaching
- Roky praxe ako učiteľ/ka
- Years of teaching in this school
- Roky praxe ako učiteľ/ka na tejto škole
- Special education qualification, in-service training
- Kvalifikácia alebo vzdelanie v oblasti špeciálnej pedagogiky
- Responsibilities in the school
- Povinnosti a úlohy na škole

Identity of the school

- What do you think are the main values and vision that underpin education in this school?
- Aké myslíte, že sú hlavné hodnoty, ktoré tvoria základ vzdelávania na tejto škole?
- How do you think your school is perceived by the public?
- Ako myslíte, že je Vaša škola vnímaná verejnosťou, čo podľa Vás predstavuje?
- In what ways do you see this school as unique (different and similar) to all other schools in NSW?
- V akom zmysle myslíte, že je táto škola špecifická (iná alebo podobná) ako ostatné školy na Slovensku?
- Can any of these features be attributed particularly to the small size of your school? Which current practices of your school would be much more difficult to keep in a bigger school?
- A čo sa týka veľkosti tejto školy? V čom podľa Vás ovplyvňuje veľkosť tejto školy jej život a praktiky?
Inclusion practices

- Do you think that all students should be included in the mainstream classrooms without any exception? If not, for which students do you think it might be more beneficial to be educated in a special setting?

- *Myslíte si, že by mali byť všetci žiaci bez výnimky začlenení do hlavného vzdelávacieho prúdu? Pokiaľ nie, pre ktorých žiakov a čím si myslíte, že by bolo špeciálne prostredie pre nich prospěšnejšie?*

- What is your understanding of the term inclusive education?

- *Ako rozumiete termín inkluzívne vzdelávanie?*

- Would you say that inclusive education is practiced at your school? In what sense?

- *Je podľa Vás v nejakom zmysle alebo v niektorých oblastiach inkluzívne vzdelávanie realizované na Vašej škole? V akom?*

- Do you feel that you have received and still have an access to sufficient training and support in this respect?

- *Cítíte, že dostávate alebo máte prístup k nejakému školeniu alebo podpore zo strany školy v tomto ohľade?*

- Do you discuss if and how inclusive education should be practiced at your school?

- *Diskutujete či a ako by malo byť inkluzívne vzdelávanie realizované na Vašej škole?*

Leadership

- What do you understand by the term distributed leadership?

- *V odbornej anglickej literatúre na tému školského vedenia sa často hovorí o „decentralizácii“ alebo „distribuovanej“ školského vedenia na všetkých zainteresovaných aktérov, hlavne učiteľov, že by mali byť tito aktéri v rôznych formách zapájaní do školského vedenia. Čo pre Vás znamená tento koncept distribuovaného vedenia v praxi?*

- Do you feel that school leadership in your school is distributed enough (particularly to teachers)?

- *Ako funguje školské vedenie na Vašej škole v tomto ohľade? Je podľa Vás dostatočne distribuované, decentralizované, či zdieľané?*

- Why is it beneficial (for you) that leadership is distributed?

- *V čom je to vlastne podľa Vás prínosné/prospešné vedenie distribuovat/decentralizovať?*

- Do you feel that you perform, in any sense, a leadership role in this school?

- *Vnímate, že sama/sám na škole vykonávate nejakú vedúcu rolu (v širšom zmysle, nielen ako nejakú funkciu)?*

- What do you think about the principal’s leadership style?

- *Ako by ste popísal/a riaditeľkin štýl vedenia?*

Relationship between inclusive education and distributed leadership

- Do you think there is any relationship between inclusive practices at your school and distribution of school leadership? How would you describe it? In other words, if the school leadership wasn’t distributed in your school, if it was cumulated in the hands of the principal only, do you think inclusive practices would be still happening in your school?

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27 See comment in the previous footnote.
Myslíte, že existuje nejaký vzťah medzi inkluzívnym vzdelávaním na Vašej škole a distribuovaným školským vedením? Ako by ste ho popíšali? Inými slovami, myslíte, že čím sa viacej vedenie školy sústreďuje v rukách riaditeľ/ky školy, tým je vzdelávanie na škole menej inkluzívne?

In the cases where there was enough time and interviewee did not mention these aspects at all within the previous answers, I also asked these questions:

Collaboration
- Do you feel that the teachers in your school collaborate and support each other (primarily in teaching matters) to a sufficient extent? In which particular areas does collaboration happen between teachers?
- Myslíte si, že učitelia vo Vašej škole spolupracujú a vzájomne sa podporujú v dostatočnej miere? V akých oblastiach sa to deje?
- Why is it good (for you) to collaborate?
- V čom je to vlastne podľa Vás prísnosné/prospešné spolupracovať?
- In which areas do teachers collaborate with parents?
- V akéj miere sa podľa Vás snaží škola spolupracovať s rodičmi (akým spôsobom, v akých prípadoch konkrétne)?

Decision-making
- Do you feel that you can influence any decisions made in the school? Could you give an example? Would you like to have a bigger influence on the policy of the school?
- Cítite, že môžete ovplyvniť niektoré rozhodnutia ohľadom Vašej školy? Mohli by ste dať nejaký príklad, kedy sa Vám podarilo ovplyvniť nejaké rozhodnutie? Malí/a by ste radi/a väčší vplyv na politiku a dianie v škole?
- Do you feel you can initiate any activity / practice / policy at your school and that you would be supported?
- Cítite, že môžete iniciovať nejaké aktivity / praktiky / pravidlá na Vašej škole a že by ste bol/a v tom podporený/a?
- Does it happen often that decisions (by the school) would be taken that you do not agree with? Do you still try to follow them in practice?
- Stáva sa to často, že by boli prijaté na škole rozhodnutia, s ktorými by ste nesúhlasila? Snažíte sa napriek tomu ich realizovať v praxi?

Interview schedule with parents.

General questions
- How many of your children attend this school? In which school year?
- Kolko Vašich detí navštevuje túto školu? V ktorom ročníku?
- Did your son/daughter attend any other school before becoming a student of this school?
- Navštevoval Váš syn/dcéra pred touto školou nejakú inú?
- Is your son/daughter receiving any additional support from the school? How would you describe it?
- Dostáva Váš syn/dcéra nejakú špecializovanú podporu na škole?
- Why did you decide to enrol your child specifically in this school? (How do you perceive this school?)
- Why did you decide to enrol your child specifically in this school? (How do you perceive this school?)
Prečo ste sa rozhodli Vaše dieťa/ti zapísať práve do tejto školy? (Ako vnímate túto školu?)

Philosophy and values of the school
- What do you think are the main values and vision that underpin education in this school?
- Z Vašej skúsenosti, ako by ste popísali hlavné hodnoty (ideály), ktoré tvoria základ vzdelávania na tejto škole?
- Do you think these values are adequately translated into practice?
- Myslíte, že sa pracovníkom tejto školy darí v dostatočnej miere premieňať tieto hodnoty v realitu?
- In what ways do you see this school as unique (different and similar) to all other schools in NSW?
- V akom zmysle mysíte, že je táto škola špecifická (iná alebo podobná) ako ostatné školy na Slovensku?

Opinion about school’s practices
- Do you think that all students should be included in the mainstream classrooms without any exception? Why do you think so?
- Myslíte si, že by malí byť všetci žiaci bez výnimky začlenení do hlavného vzdelávacieho prúdu (v bežných nie špeciálnych triedach či školách)? Prečo si to mysíte?
- Do you think that teachers at your school adequately address all the different needs of all students? Do you think that teachers are doing a good job in engaging each child in learning so each child can gain new knowledge and skills?
- Myslíte, že učitelia na tejto škole v dostatočnej miere napĺňajú rôzne potreby všetkých žiakov? Myslíte, že učitelia sú úspešní v zapájaní každého dieťaťa do učenia, aby každý dieťa získalo nové vedomosti a zručnosti?

Collaboration
- How would you describe the approach of the school towards you as parents?
- Ako by ste popíšali prístup školy voči Vám ako rodičom?
- Do you feel that the school tries to collaborate with you? In which particular areas? (Could you be more specific?)
- Citíte, že sa škola snaží s Vami (rodičmi obecne) spolupracovat? V akých presne oblastiach? Akou formou?
- Who do you usually communicate with from the school?
- S kým obyčajne komunikujete zo školy?
- Do you feel welcome in the school?
- Citíte sa v škole vitaná/ý/i?

Leadership
- What do you think about the current school leadership?
- Ako vnímate súčasné školské vedenie?

Other involvement
- Do you get involved in any way in school matters?
• Zapájate sa nejakým spôsobom do činnosti školy?
• Do you feel that you can anyhow influence practices/running of the school? (How?)
• Cítíte, že by ste mohli nejakým spôsobom ovplyvniť ako rodič praktiky a fungovanie školy?
Appendix T: Group Discussion Schedule\textsuperscript{28} with Students: English & Slovak Version

Each group discussion started with a short introduction including these points:

- Thank you very much for the opportunity to have this group discussion with you;
- I will be asking you about your opinions, experiences and attitudes towards your school, classes and learning;
- there are no right or wrong answers but rather differing points of view;
- feel free to share your opinion even if it differs from what others might say;
- the school will not be identifiable;
- you will not be identified in the report of this research;
- I will record this group discussion;
- it will last approximately twenty minutes;
- let’s agree on some rules during this discussion now:
  - only one person speaks at a time;
  - we all listen to a speaker;
  - we respect each others’ opinions;
  - we speak truthfully.

About the school

- What do you think is good about this school? How would you try to persuade a friend to attend your school? How would you praise your school?

- Čo si myslíte, že je dobré na tejto škole? Keby ste mali nejakého kamaráta, ktorý by prišiel do Bratislavy a vy by ste ho chceli presvedčiť, aby prišiel na túto školu, ako by ste sa ho snažili presviedčať?

- Is there anything you do not feel satisfied about your school? What wouldn’t you mention about the school to the friend if you wanted to persuade him to attend your school?

- Je niečo na tejto škole, s čím nie ste úplne spokojní? Čo by ste radšej tomuto kamarátovi nezmieňovali, pokial’by ste ho presvedčiť, aby sa stal žiakom tejto školy?

Attitudes towards inclusive education

- Do you think that all students should be included in the mainstream school such as your school without any exception – coming from various national backgrounds, being less smart, with some kind of disability?

- Myslíte si, že by mali byť všetci žiaci začlenení do bežných tried bežných základných škôl, alebo že by niektorí žiaci mali navštevovať radšej špeciálne triedy alebo špeciálne školy? (I žiaci z nejakým telesným alebo mentálnym postihnutím, žiaci s problematickým správaním, veľmi chudobní a nezaopatrení žiaci, atď.) Prečo si to myslíte?

\textsuperscript{28} Several questions in this group discussion schedule were inspired by the interview schedule in another ethnographic and comparative research on inclusive education conducted by Ilektra Spandagou (2002).
Participation

- How often does it happen that students in your classroom are not interested in learning, not paying attention or interrupting the class? Why does it happen? Do you find it OK when it happens?
- Ako často sa stáva, že žiakov vo vašej triede učivo nezaujíma, nedávajú pozor a vyrušujú? Prečo si myslíte, že sa to deje? Ako to vnímate vy, keď sa to deje?
- What do you think about the practice when some students are withdrawn from the class to receive a special instruction?
- Čo si myslíte o praxi, že niektorí žiak odíde na celú hodinu s nejakou druhou pani učiteľkou, aby sa mu/jej špeciálne venovala?
- How are you usually grouped to work together during class? Why do you think you are divided into particular groups?
- Akým spôsobom ste usádzaní? Prečo si myslíte, že sedíte tam, kde sedíte?

Achievements

- What makes a student a bad student in your classroom? What makes a student a good student?
- Čo robí žiaka dobrým žiakom vo vašej triede podľa vás? A aký je to zlý žiak?
- What would you say usually helps students to learn better? What makes you learn better in the classroom?
- Čo by ste povedali, že vám najviac pomáha sa učiť? Čo vám v triede vyhovuje, aby ste sa učili lepšie?
- Why do you think some students have better grades than others?
- Prečo si myslíte, že majú niektorí žiaci lepšie známky než iný?

Social interactions

- What can make a student less popular or have less friends in your classroom?
- Čo robí podľa vás niektorých žiakov viac populárnymi, že má niekoľko viac priateľov než ostatní?
- Have you ever noticed any students being bullied by other students in your school?
- Myslíte, že i na vašej škole sa deje šikana? Všimli ste si niekedy, že by boli niekedy na vašej škole nejaký žiak alebo žiacka šikanovaní?

School leadership

- How do you perceive the principal as a school leader?
- Ako vnímate súčasnú pani riaditeľku ako vodcu?
- Do you think that other teachers are leaders in any areas of the school as well?
- Myslíte, že i ostatní učitelia sú v niektorých oblastiach vodcami tu v škole?
- How do you perceive student leaders?
- A ako vnímate žiackých vodcov? (Ako napr. žiacky parlament)
Appendix U: Observation Schedules

Observation of classroom practice.

Within the observations of classroom practice I did not focus on individual children for a particular period of time but on the selected events and situations in the classroom, which appeared somehow relevant for the topic of inclusive and exclusionary practices in the classroom. These events and situations might include:

Teacher – Student interactions
- how does the teacher address / treat / approach each child?
- does the teacher attempt to involve quieter children / children with SEN to speak and express? does s/he attempt to involve all children equally?
- does the teacher openly express higher and lower expectations about individual children’s work?
- how does the teacher attempt to develop positive relationships among all children? e.g., does s/he uses collaborative learning?
- how does the teacher react to unfriendly / aggressive / adverse behaviour among children?
- how does the teacher react to students’ disruptive behaviour?
- etc.

Teacher’s Aide – Student interactions
- is the teacher's aide involved in helping only particular students or all?
- how does the teacher’s aide attempt to develop positive relationships among all children (especially between SEN students and non-SEN students)?
- which supporting roles does s/he usually fulfil?
- etc.

Student – Student interactions
- what are the friendship relationships among students?
- do any children seem to be more isolated than others? what might be reason for this?
- is there any non-friendly / aggressive / adverse behaviour between children? what might be causes for this behaviour?
- how popular and involved in friendship ties are the children with SEN or from minority ethnic background?
- etc.

Atmosphere
- students seeming involved / excited / bored / sad / not involved / isolated / angry etc.
- teacher seeming enthusiastic / happy / sad / burnt out / angry etc.
- etc.

Observations of staff meetings.

At staff meetings I primarily acted as a non-participant observer. Within the observations of staff meetings I focused on these aspects:
Inclusive education
- teachers expressing attitudes about students with SEN
- attitudes on inclusive education
- do teachers often collaborate?
- etc.

Leadership
- who talks the most?
- who usually agrees/disagrees with whom?
- cliques and friendship relations among various staff members
- who seems closest to the principal and in which matters?
- what is the atmosphere in the staff meetings? (friendly, tense, etc.)
- how are various leadership functions and activities distributed?
- who usually initiates the agenda or aspects of the agenda?
- what does the decision-making process look like? (voting, principal making the decisions, etc.)
- etc.

Observation of parent meetings and other school community meetings.

At all these meetings I primarily acted as a non-participant observer. Within the observations of parent meetings I focused on these aspects:

Inclusive education
- participants expressing attitudes on students with SEN
- is criticism of inclusive education accepted?
- etc.

Leadership
- who talks the most?
- who usually agrees/disagrees with whom?
- cliques and friendship relations among various participants;
- who seems closest to the principal and in which matters?
- what is the atmosphere in the meetings? (friendly, tense, etc.)
- how are various leadership functions and activities distributed?
- who usually initiates agenda?
- what does the decision-making process look like? (voting, principal making the decisions, etc.)
- etc.
Appendix V: Drawing Activity\textsuperscript{29} with Students: English Version

NAME:_______________________
CLASS:_______________________

How do you usually feel at school during one week?

Divide the chart into sections each representing a feeling. The size of each section should represent an estimated time you feel this way at school during one usual week. Give two examples of events or situations when you felt this way.

Possible feelings: amused, cheerful, confident, curious, excited, happy, interested, joyful, loved, motivated, proud, relaxed, satisfied, afraid, angry, annoyed, bored, depressive, desperate, disappointed, dissatisfied, guilty, lonely, nervous, sad, worried, and others.

\textsuperscript{29} This activity was inspired by the research technique called \textit{My Week} chart (Christensen & James, 2000), in which the primary school students were asked to divide up the circle in such a way that it would represent their weekly activities and how much time they thought they used on each activity.
Appendix W: Drawing Activity with Students: Slovak Version

MENO: ______________________
TRIEDA: ____________________

Ako sa váčšinou cítiš v škole počas jedného týždňa?
Rozdeľ tento kruh na časti, aby každá časť predstavovala jeden tvoj pocit. Veľkosť každej časti by mala približne odpovedať času, kedy sa takto v škole cítiš v priebehu jedného obyčajného týždňa. Uveď dva príklady udalostí alebo situácií, kedy si sa takto v škole cítíš.

Možné pocity: veselý, radostný, sebavedomý, zvedavý, nadšený, šťastný, zaujatý, potešený, milovaný, motivovaný, hrdý, uvoľnený, spokojný, vystrašený, nahnevaný, podráždený, znudený, depresívny, zúfalý, nespokojný, sklamnaný, vinný, osamelý, nervózny, smutný, ustarostený, a iné.
### Appendix X: Basic Information about Australia and NSW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>New South Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Inhabitants</strong> (in 2012)</td>
<td>22,906,400</td>
<td>7,348,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capital (Number of Inhabitants)</strong> (in 2011)</td>
<td>Canberra – Australian Capital Territory (367,800)</td>
<td>Sydney - Greater Sydney area (4,391,674)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gross Domestic/State Product</strong> (in 2011-12)</td>
<td>$1,451,120,000,000</td>
<td>$446,169,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gross Domestic/State Product per Capita</strong> (in 2011-12)</td>
<td>$64,725</td>
<td>$62,049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neighbouring States</strong></td>
<td>no mainland neighbouring countries</td>
<td>Queensland, Victoria, South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Official Language</strong></td>
<td>English does not have de jure status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country of Birth</strong> (Census in 2011)</td>
<td>• Australia 69.8%</td>
<td>• Australia 68.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Not stated 5.6%</td>
<td>• Not stated 5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• England 4.2%</td>
<td>• England 3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• New Zealand 2.2%</td>
<td>• China 2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• China 1.5%</td>
<td>• New Zealand 1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• India 1.4%</td>
<td>• India 1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Italy 0.9%</td>
<td>• Vietnam 1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vietnam 0.9%</td>
<td>• Philippines 1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Philippines 0.8%</td>
<td>• Lebanon 0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• South Africa 0.7%</td>
<td>• Italy 0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Other</td>
<td>• Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ancestry</strong> (Census in 2011)</td>
<td>• English 25.9%</td>
<td>• Australian 25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Australian 25.4%</td>
<td>• English 24.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Irish 7.5%</td>
<td>• Irish 7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Scottish 6.4%</td>
<td>• Scottish 6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Chinese 3.1%</td>
<td>• Chinese 4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Other &amp; not stated</td>
<td>• Other &amp; not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birthplace of Parents</strong> (Census in 2011)</td>
<td>• Both parents born overseas 32%</td>
<td>• Both parents born overseas 34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Father born overseas 6.5%</td>
<td>• Father born overseas 6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mother born overseas 4.6%</td>
<td>• Mother born overseas 4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Both parents born in Australia 50%</td>
<td>• Both parents born in Australia 48.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Not stated 6.9%</td>
<td>• Not stated 7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Spoken at Home (Census in 2011)</td>
<td>English 76.8%</td>
<td>Not stated 5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English 72.5%</td>
<td>Not stated 5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Affiliation</strong> (Census in 2011)</td>
<td>Western Catholic 25.1%</td>
<td>No Religion 21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Western Catholic 27.0%</td>
<td>Anglican Church of Australia 19.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix Y: Basic Information about Slovakia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Inhabitants</strong> (in 2012)</td>
<td>5,405,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capital (Number of Inhabitants)</strong> (in 2012)</td>
<td>Bratislava (414,500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gross Domestic Product</strong> (in 2011)</td>
<td>$94,552,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gross Domestic Product per Capita</strong> (in 2010)</td>
<td>$24,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neighbouring States</strong></td>
<td>Austria, Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine, Hungary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Official Language</strong></td>
<td>Slovak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Nationality** (Census in 2011) | • Slovak 80.7%  
• Hungarian 8.5%  
• Roma 2% (*unofficial estimate 7%)*  
• Czech 0.6%  
• Ruthenian 0.6%  
• Ukrainian 0.1%  
• Other 0.5%  
• Not stated 7% |
| **Language Spoken at Home** (Census in 2011) | • Slovak 73.3%  
• Hungarian 8.7%  
• Roma 2.4%  
• Ruthenian 0.9%  
• Czech 0.3%  
• Ukrainian 0.1%  
• Other 0.8%  
• Not stated 13.5% |
| **Religious Affiliation** (Census in 2011) | • Roman Catholic 62%  
• Protestant 5.9%  
• Greek Catholic 3.8%  
• Reformed Christian 1.8%  
• Orthodox 0.9%  
• Other 1.6%  
• No Religion 13.4%  
• Not stated 10.6% |

* It is rather problematic to arrive at an exact number of Roma population in Slovakia as in census self-identified members of Roma minority often indicate as their national background being “Slovak” instead of “Roma” (Boccagni & Rappel, 2004). Nevertheless, using elaborate statistical methods Infostat – Institute for Informatics and Statistics, Research Demographic Centre came to the estimate of 350,000-380,000 (6.5%-7%) people of Roma ethnic origin currently living in the Slovak Republic (Vaňo, 2001, p. 13).

**Note.** Information retrieved from Global Finance (2013); ŠÚ SR (2013a, 2013b); Vaňo (2001).
# Appendix Z: Brief Depiction of Historical Development of Educational Policies in Australia and NSW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Significant Events of Australian History</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Significant Educational Policies of General Character*</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Significant Educational Policies Related to Inclusive Education*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>James Cook claimed the east coast of today’s Australia for Britain</td>
<td>1788</td>
<td>Arrival of first permanent European settlers to today’s Sydney</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Australia’s first parliamentary elections were conducted for the NSW Legislative Council</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>Public education offered for the first time in NSW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>late 19th c.</td>
<td>NS government passed compulsory education legislation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Foundation of the Commonwealth of Australia after the <em>Federal Constitution</em> being proclaimed, while NSW being part of it</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Women given the right to vote</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td><em>Truancy Act (NSW)</em> – full-time school attendance made compulsory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>First special school (Glenfield Special School) established in NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>Increase in special schools and support classes in NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td><em>Commonwealth Electoral Act</em> provided that all Indigenous people have the right to vote at federal elections</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Australian Constitution amended after Referendum to recognise Indigenous people as citizens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data sourced from various historical texts and education policy documents.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td><strong>Anti-Discrimination Act (NSW)</strong> prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race and disability amongst other things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td><em>Education Act 1990 (NSW)</em> defines the educational system of NSW and includes that every child has the right to receive an education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td><strong>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</strong> (Fed) which states as unlawful to discriminate on the basis of a person’s disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td><strong>NSW Special Education Policy</strong> – supports inclusion where practical and in the best interest of the child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td><strong>The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century</strong> (Fed) states that schooling should be socially just and free from discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td><strong>McRae Report (NSW)</strong> – calls for inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td><strong>Funding Support (NSW)</strong> formula established based on various categories of disability and the frequency of assistance required. The formula altered to reduce categories of disability but remains in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Students with learning difficulties supported through <strong>Learning Assistance Program (NSW)</strong> – non-categorical mechanism of support of students with learning difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td><strong>Disability Standards for Education 2005</strong> (Fed) address enrolment, participation, curriculum, student support services, and elimination of harassment and victimisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td><strong>Assisting Students with Learning Difficulties policy (NSW)</strong> policy on non-categorical support of students with learning difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Parliamentary Apology to the Stolen Generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td><em>Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians</em> (Fed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td><strong>UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</strong>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td><em>Gonski Report</em> – recommends reviewing school funding and points out link between low levels of achievement and low socioeconomic and Indigenous background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td><strong>Every Student, Every School initiative† (NSW)</strong> substituting LAP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Individual policies or any relevant policy documents, which relate to the federal level of Australia, are marked by the abbreviation “Fed”. Individual policies or any relevant policy documents, which relate to the state level of New South Wales, are marked by the abbreviation “NSW”.

†The initiative *Every Student, Every School* was introduced after the data collection in the NSW school. Therefore, the data and findings of this study do not reflect it.

*Note*: Information retrieved from Foreman (2011); Gonski et al. (2011); Graham and Jahnukainen (2011); Hirst (2002); Martin et al. (2006); Peel and Twomey (2011); Swain (2011); Tearle (2012).
Appendix A: Brief Depiction of Historical Development of Educational Policies in Slovakia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Significant Events of General History</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Significant Educational Policies of General Character</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Significant Educational Policies Related to Inclusive Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-19(^{th}) c.</td>
<td>Present day territory of Slovakia part of the Habsburg Empire</td>
<td>1774</td>
<td>Education reform by Empress Maria Theresa introduced compulsory primary education for all children aged 6-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1777</td>
<td>1777 \textit{Ratio educationis} unified the educational system in the country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Codification of the standard Slovak language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary formally established; Slovakia incorporated into the Hungarian part</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>\textbf{CREATION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA} (federation) after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after its defeat in WWI</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>\textit{Little Education Act} reinforced compulsory school attendance; the Slovak language was introduced in schools</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Occupation of the Czech territory by Nazi Germany; the First Slovak Republic established (in reality a Nazi puppet state)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Czechoslovakia re-established</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Czechoslovak Communist Party in power; Czechoslovakia became a satellite state of the Soviet Union</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>\textit{School Act} (amended several times): the educational system was nationalised (all private schools were abolished), the party’s ideology was projected into curriculum and textbooks and the Russian language became an obligatory subject; the centralised public administration was deciding about distribution of 14 year old youths into particular vocational paths according to the planned needs of industry</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>An experimental project: introduction of special classrooms in the environment of regular schools – before then, all students diagnosed as having SEN were exclusively educated in segregated special schools; in 1967, special classrooms in regular schools became a common component of the school system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Prague Spring: occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops (Soviet, East German, Hungarian, Polish, Bulgarian) after attempts to democratise; Normalisation (tighter socialist policies) followed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Velvet Revolution: breakdown of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1993</td>
<td>Amendments of the School Act from 1984: de-ideologising the educational system; terminating the monopoly on state education – allowing private schools; the Russian language no longer compulsory; introducing a possibility for alternative textbooks.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Regulation No. 409/1990 (amendment of the School Act from 1984) gives principals of regular primary schools authority to accept also children with disabilities and/or SEN to be educated in regular classrooms – before then they could be educated either in special schools or special classrooms of regular schools.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Velvet Divorce: CREATION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>The Slovak Republic became a member state of the European Union</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>School Act No. 245/2008: introduces the first comprehensive reform of the educational system since the fall of Communism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>School Act No. 245/2008 confirms the possibility of educating students with SEN in special schools, special classrooms of regular schools or regular classrooms of regular schools and defines details of these arrangements.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Anti-discrimination Act No. 365/2004: includes equal treatment in education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: ratified; obliges State Parties to “ensure an inclusive education system at all levels”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Information retrieved from Gaňo (1965); Horňák et al. (2002); Horváthová, Hargaš, and Brťková (2006); Lechta (2011); Lechta and Balážová (2011); Teich, Kováč, and Brown (2011).
### Appendix AB: Diagram Representing the Education and Training System in NSW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Students</th>
<th>School (Years of Study)</th>
<th>Type of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>High School (2 Years)</td>
<td>Upper secondary general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>High School (4 Years)</td>
<td>Upper secondary general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Lower secondary general</td>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Primary School (6 Years)</td>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Kindergarten (1 Year)</td>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>TAFE (Technical and Further Education) college or a private college (1-6 Years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** This diagram should be considered as a schematic and simplified representation of the educational and training system in NSW, which does not take into account the full variety of formal educational possibilities and their span. The age of students for pre-primary, primary and secondary education may vary to some extent but not substantially, especially because children are legally required to be enrolled at and attending school until they complete Year 10 (compulsory school attendance). Children in NSW start usually to attend primary schools in the age of six. After six years, they move to a high school. After four years, they may discontinue their education, they may continue two more years in high school to achieve NSW Higher School Certificate, or they can go for a vocational education course. Vocational education and training in TAFE or private college may lead to achieving Certificate I, II, III, IV, Diploma, and Advanced Diploma. Students may continue to a university tertiary education either after completing six years of high school or, on some occasions, also from vocational education. For instance, achieving Advanced Diploma in a vocational education institution may lead into a transfer to a university undergraduate programme recognising part of their previous education. Generalising the age of students for post-secondary and tertiary education is much more problematic because students may work or travel for various periods of time between different university degrees or stages of education, or they may often study part-time and work. The original diagrams were altered and additional information was retrieved from Australian Education International (2012); UNESCO (2011).
Appendix AC: Diagram Representing the Education and Training System in Slovakia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Students</th>
<th>School (Years of Study)</th>
<th>Type of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Grammar School (4 Years)</td>
<td>Upper secondary general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2nd Level of Primary School (5 Years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1st Level of Primary School (4 Years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kindergarten (3 Years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College (2 Years)</td>
<td>Post-secondary non-tertiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary Vocational School (4 Years)</td>
<td>Upper secondary vocational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This diagram should be considered as a schematic and simplified representation of the educational and training system in Slovakia, which does not take into account the full variety of formal educational possibilities and their span. The age of students for pre-primary, primary and secondary education may vary to some extent but not substantially, especially because children are legally required to be enrolled at and attending school for at least ten years (compulsory school attendance). Vast majority of primary schools in Slovakia are established into nine year single structure school attendance, consisting of two levels: primary level lasting four years, and lower secondary level in the length of five years. Children start to attend primary schools in the age of six. In a few cases, students can leave primary schools after five years and attend eight-year grammar schools where they can conclude education at the upper secondary level. It is possible to enter the tertiary (university) education both from grammar schools or secondary vocational schools if the students pass particular entry requirements. Generalising the age of students for post-secondary and tertiary education is much more problematic because students may work or travel for various periods of time between different university degrees or stages of education, or they may often study part-time and work. The original diagram was altered and additional information was retrieved from Slovak Eurydice Unit (2009, pp. 6-7).
Appendix AD: The Process of Assessment of Disability and Deciding about Educational Path in NSW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHEN can disability be assessed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In preschools or other early childhood education and care institutions (pre-primary education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the enrolment process to a primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anytime in the course of attending a primary school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO assesses disability?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school counsellor of the relevant primary school – the one approached for enrolment or the one already attended by the student – is responsible to confirm that the student meets the criteria for a disability. The school counsellor arranges for the Disability Confirmation Sheet. Nevertheless, prior to this confirmation the assessment of disability is on most occasions done by an external specialist including for instance medical, audiologist, registered psychologist, psychiatrist, speech pathologist and paediatrician.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO recommends various educational options for students with disability?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The principal in conjunction with the school counsellor and members of the Learning and Support Team (see Appendix AG) consults with the parent to make a choice whether to educate the child in a regular class, support class of regular school or special school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT are the educational options after being diagnosed with disability?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a regular class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the request, the principal is responsible to use this extra funding for
- training and development activities
- additional teacher time
- teachers aide (special) time
- teacher release
- transfer of duty
- program co-ordination time.

The school is not required to create and follow an **Individual Educational Plan** (IEP) for this student. It is voluntary.

| In a special school | If the Learning and Support Team of the relevant regular primary school with the parent decide to enrol the student in a special school, this is done through a regional process known as **Regional Placement Panel**. In this process, the parent’s choice, child's specific additional learning and support needs and proximity to local specialist services are taken into account.

In the stage of enrolling a child in a primary school, parents may bypass applying to any regular school and apply directly to a particular special school. Because each child experiences her/his disability uniquely and there are only a certain number of places at each special school, there is still a formal application/assessment procedure required through the Regional Placement Panel to determine which children may be enrolled in a particular special school.

The school is not required to create and follow an IEP for any student. |
|---|---|
| In a support class of regular school | If the Learning and Support Team with the parent decide to enrol the student in a support class of regular school, this is also done through the Regional Placement Panel. In this process, the parent’s choice, child's specific additional learning and support needs and proximity to local specialist services are taken into account.

The school is not required to create and follow an IEP for any student. |

**Note.** This table should be considered merely as a simplistic description of a very complex and contextual process of assessing students’ disability and deciding about their future educational path within the system of government primary schools in NSW: being educated in a regular class, support class of regular school, or special school. Information was retrieved from interviews, observations and NSW DEC (2013a); NSW Department of Family and Community Services (2013); NSW DET (1998, 2004b).
Appendix AE: The Process of Assessment of SEN and Deciding about Educational Path in Slovakia

**WHEN** can SEN be assessed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In kindergarten (pre-primary education)</td>
<td>A purposeful screening or search for children who might have some SEN is usually conducted in kindergartens (“depistáž” in Slovak language). After this screening, particular children are recommended to undergo assessment of their educational capacity or SEN conducted by an <strong>Institution for Educational Guidance and Prevention</strong> (ZVPP from the Slovak original name <em>Zariadenie výchovného poradenstva a prevencie</em>). Assessment can be conducted only with consent of parents/guardians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the primary school enrolment process</td>
<td>A school might recommend conducting the assessment of SEN, which can be carried out by the ZVPP only with consent of parents/guardians. The parent/guardian might request the assessment without the school prompting it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anytime in the course of attending a primary school</td>
<td>A school might recommend conducting the assessment of SEN, which can be carried out by the ZVPP only with consent of parents/guardians. The parent/guardian might request the assessment without the school prompting it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WHO** assesses SEN?

Regardless of the stage of students’ education, assessment of their SEN is conducted exclusively by the external institution of ZVPP. No staff member of kindergarten or primary schools – including school counsellors or special education teachers – is eligible to conduct this assessment.

**WHO** recommends various educational options for students with SEN?

ZVPP not only assesses/diagnoses SEN in particular students but also recommends to their parents/guardians various educational options. This recommendation is part of the official assessment. Hence, ZVPP may not recommend “individual integration” in a regular class.

**WHAT** are the educational options after being diagnosed with SEN?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a regular class</td>
<td>The principal of the regular school decides whether to enrol the child. If the regular school belongs to a catchment area of the student’s residency address, the principal is obliged to accept her/him. The regular school usually receives about twice as much</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
financial contribution for students with SEN than for students without SEN, depending on their particular category of SEN. The school is required to create, follow and regularly update **Individual Educational Plan** (IEP) for each diagnosed student.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In a special class of a regular school</th>
<th>The consent of the parent/guardian is obligatory for this educational option. The school principal decides about the acceptance or refusal to enrol the student to the special class. If the regular school belongs to a catchment area of the student’s residency address, the principal is obliged to accept her/him. The regular school usually receives about twice as much financial contribution for students with SEN than for students without SEN, depending on their particular category of SEN. The school is not required to create and follow an IEP for any student.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In special school</td>
<td>The consent of the parent/guardian is obligatory for this educational option. The parents/guardians might decide for this option already in kindergarten, hence, they might pursue an enrolment of their child to a particular special school (often recommended by ZVPP) directly without addressing a regular school in their catchment area. If the special school belongs to a catchment area of the student’s residency address, the principal is obliged to accept her/him. The special school receives a lower financial contribution than a regular school for students with SEN than regular schools – usually a multiple of 1.5 of the usual contribution for students without SEN. The school is not required to create and follow an IEP for any student.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The School Act (NR SR, 2008) distinguishes two kinds of Institution for Educational Guidance and Prevention: (1) Centres for Special-Pedagogical Guidance (currently around 80 public and 50 private of these all around Slovakia); and (2) Centres for Pedagogical-Psychological Guidance and Prevention (around 70 public and 6 private) (ÚIPŠ, 2013a). The former provide complex special educational services: psychological, diagnostic, guidance, rehabilitation, prevention, and others. The latter are concerned with complex expert intervention services for students and guidance services for parents and teachers in educational matters. To put it simply, while the former focuses on diagnosing a disability or SEN, the latter advises teachers and parents how to work with diagnosed students (Schmidtová, 2009).

**Note.** This table should be considered merely as a simplistic description of a very complex and contextual process of assessing students’ SEN and deciding about their future educational path within the system of government primary schools in Slovakia: being educated in a regular class, special class of regular school, or special school. Information was retrieved from interviews, observations and NR SR (2008); Schmidtová (2009); ŠŠI (2011); Vláda SR (2008).
Appendix AF: Statistical Data on Students in Regular Schools, Special Schools and Special Classes of Regular Schools in NSW and Slovakia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Students in Primary Schools</strong> (Percentage) (in 2011)</td>
<td>Government Schools: 435,749 (69.5%)</td>
<td>Government Schools: 431,206 (94%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-government Schools: 191,665 (30.5%)</td>
<td>Non-governmental Schools: 27,491 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total: 627,414</td>
<td>Total: 458,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Students in Public Special Primary Schools</strong> (Percentage from all Students in Public Schooling System) (in 2011)</td>
<td>4,774 (1.1%)</td>
<td>22,918 (5.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Students in Special Classes of Regular Schools</strong> (Percentage from all Students in Public Schooling System) (in 2011)</td>
<td>6,098 (1.4%)</td>
<td>10,260 (2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ratio of Students in Regular Classes versus Special Schools or Special Classes in Public Schooling System</strong> (Percentage) (in 2011)</td>
<td>429,651 / 10,872</td>
<td>398,028 / 33,178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* When interpreting differences between the numbers of students in primary schools in NSW and Slovakia, it should be taken into account that by *primary school* in NSW is understood as education within K-6 Years (seven years of education) (see *Appendix AB*), while in Slovakia education in primary schools happens from Year 1 to Year 9 (nine years of education) (see *Appendix AC*). Information for this tables retrieved from ABS (2013c); NSW DEC (2012a); ÚIPŠ (2013b, 2013c).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Meeting Platforms</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Frequency of Meetings</th>
<th>Agenda / Functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Staff Meeting* on Administrative Matters** | • principal  
• all teachers  
• school administrative (non-teaching) staff | • usually once a week  
(regularly on Mondays) | • staff members decide about and/or advise the principal on various administrative non-pedagogical matters: e.g., financial, organisational, extra-curricular activities, strategic planning and reviewing |
| **Staff Meetings on Professional Learning** | • principal  
• all teachers | • usually once a week  
(regularly on Wednesdays) | • teachers inform each other about their professional learning activities (if a teacher took part in some teacher in-service training course, she/he informs about it in this platform)  
• external experts/consultants deliver presentations or workshops to teachers on various relevant topics  
• teachers discuss, decide about and/or advise the principal on various teaching-related matters |
| **Parents & Citizens Association** | • voluntary representatives of parents  
• principal is an ex-officio member (eligible to vote but cannot veto) | • approx. once a month | • articulates needs and aspirations of parents for their children  
• is informed on a regular basis of the school’s financial management and principals are required to inform, consult and seek advice in relation to school financial priorities  
• fulfils a fundraising role |
| **Individual Parent-Teacher Interviews** | • classroom teacher  
• parent | • twice a year  
(for every individual student) | • discussing child’s learning, development or behaviour  
• discussing strategies to support the child at home |
| **Learning Support Team (LST) Meetings** | • principal  
• classroom teacher  
• school counsellor  
• parent  
• sometimes: student, external expert consultant | • approx. 4 meetings fortnightly | • it may discuss cases of individual students with additional needs, talents or any other students that might benefit from the meeting while inviting a relevant parent (sometimes also the student); members discuss and decide about various ways to support the individual student; they may also recommend enrolment in a special school  
• it may discuss issues of learning support in the school as a whole (without parents being present in the meeting) to co-ordinate services for students needing additional assistance and to decide about how to use the resources that they have been allocated to plan support for these students |
Student Representative Council

- students elected by their peers:
  - 2 Captains
  - 2 Vice Captains
  - 2 Student leaders per each class (total 8)
  - principal

School Council†

- representatives of parents
- representatives of teachers
- representatives of the local community
- representatives of students (sometimes)
- principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Representative Council</th>
<th>approx. once in 2-3 weeks</th>
<th>School Council†</th>
<th>usually 8 times a year</th>
<th>represents students and promotes their views and participation in school decision making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>discusses various student issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>assists schools to implement various departmental policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>co-ordinates school assemblies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in terms of NSW state policies, there is no specific advice for principals or primary schools in general around the frequency of meetings, formations and functions of staff meetings other than the expectation that principals have in place effective practices for communication and decision making (NSW DET, 2000).

† In the researched NSW school there was no School Council established. Parents & Citizens Association was in various areas fulfilling or substituting its roles. In other NSW public primary schools both Parents & Citizens Association and School Council can be established (Director-General of Education and Training, 2007; NSW DEC, 2013d).

Note: This table is a representation of official meeting platforms in the NSW public primary school, which participated in this research only. Nevertheless, these platforms are also commonly established in other NSW public primary schools since they often follow policy guidelines introduced at a state level (e.g., Director-General of Education and Training, 2007; Martin et al., 2006; NSW DEC, 2012b, 2013a, 2013c, 2013d; NSW DET, 1998, 2003, 2004a). The membership, frequency of meetings, agendas and functions of individual meeting platforms may differ significantly between various NSW public primary schools depending on their location, number of enrolled students, initiative of various school stakeholders and other contextual factors. Information for this table was collected through interviews, observations and was also supported by the above-mentioned policy guidelines.
Appendix AII: Official Meeting Platforms in the Researched Slovak School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Meeting Platforms</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Frequency of Meetings</th>
<th>Agenda / Functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Interim Council of School Leadership** | • principal  
   • deputy principal  
   • employee of the economic department  
   • head of Children’s School Club  
   • head of Methodological Associations  
   • head of Subject Committees  
   • and others relevant to the discussed topic. | • at the beginning of the school year  
   • whenever needed | • it has no legal basis; it is a customary body  
   • enables the principal to pre-negotiate issues that she/he is obliged to discuss with all staff members |
| **Pedagogical Council** | • principal  
   • deputy principal  
   • all other pedagogical staff members  
   • others can be invited but without a voting right: representatives of School Council, Parents’ Association, municipality, inspection, etc. | • usually 5 times a year  
   • plus whenever needed | • it is the highest advisory body of the principal  
   • agenda is prepared by the principal together with the deputy principal, Heads of Methodological Associations, Subject Committees & Children’s School Club  
   • it informs about current educational issues happening at school and regional and state level  
   • it adopts decisions in form of recommendations for the principal  
   • it discusses vision, goals and profile of the school and various school policies and documents  
   • it follows and assesses progress and results of educational processes, successes and failures |
| **Methodical Association** | • teachers of Years 1-4  
   (they all teach every subject) | • 6 times a year | • it primarily focuses on exchange of expert knowledge in the field of teaching in Years 1-4  
   • it is a discussion forum on educational legislation and expert literature in their specialisation  
   • it deals with particular educational problems arisen at school  
   • it coordinates relevant educational activities and projects at school  
   • it participates at formulating School Educational Program |
<p>| <strong>Subject Committees</strong> | • minimum of 3 teachers of Years 5-9 of one subject or a group of related subjects (social sciences, natural sciences, Maths &amp; IT, etc.) | • 6 times a year | • the same functions and agendas as for Methodical Association but related to teaching of specific subjects or groups of subjects in Years 5-9 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Working Meeting</strong></th>
<th>• it can have various formats and participating members</th>
<th>• in average once a month for all staff members</th>
<th>• it discusses various current educational and organisational issues at school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Disciplinary Commission** | • principal  
• educational counsellor  
• classroom teacher  
• parent  
• sometimes: student, special education teacher, or external expert consultant | • whenever needed | • it deals exclusively with behavioural matters: discusses individual instances of aggressive behaviour, bullying, neglecting compulsory education, violating school rules, addiction, or child abuse  
• informs parents about these instances  
• provides advice and counselling to parents, students, and teachers  
• coordinates prevention strategies to support the student |
| **School Council** | • elected representatives of pedagogical employees  
• elected non-pedagogical employee  
• elected parents  
• delegated representatives of the school district  
• the principal cannot be a member  
• number of members who are not school’s employees must be bigger | • whenever needed (approx. 3 times a year) | • it executes selection procedure to appoint a principal – it selects and proposes a principal  
• it proposes to dismiss a principal  
• it expresses itself on  
  o conception of school’s development  
  o activities of the school district  
  o list of financial resources  
  o personal, material and social conditions of staff members  
  o requirements to improve educational services  
  o report of educational results |
| **Student Parliament*** | • elected representatives of students in the second level of the primary school | • approx. once a month | • represents students’ interests  
• organises various school activities  
• formulates standpoints and recommendations |
| **Parents’ Association** | • representatives of parents | • usually 4 times a year | • represents parents’ interests in relation to the principal  
• formulates standpoints and recommendations  
• helps with organising free-time activities for students  
• technically and financially supports the school |
| **Parent-Teacher Meetings** | • all parents  
• all classroom teachers | • usually 4 times a year | • all parents of students in one classroom are first informed by the relevant classroom teacher about students’ educational and other achievements  
• after the classroom group meeting parents may consult individually with the teachers about their child’s learning, development or behaviour |

* Student Parliament is not established in all Slovak public primary schools. Its membership, roles and functions are not defined in any policy document. Hence, it is an exclusively voluntary activity by particular primary schools. In contrast, in Slovak
secondary schools (grammar schools or vocational schools) Student Councils are often established, which are defined in detail in the state law (NR SR, 2003, Article 26).

Note: This table is a representation of official meeting platforms in the Slovak public primary school, which participated in this research only. Nevertheless, these platforms are also commonly established in other Slovak public primary schools since several of them are defined in the state law (NR SR, 2003). The membership, frequency of meetings, agendas and functions of individual meeting platforms may differ significantly between various Slovak public primary schools depending on their location, number of enrolled students, initiative of various school stakeholders and other contextual factors. Information for this table was collected through interviews, observations and was also retrieved from Hanuliaková (2010); Horváthová et al. (2006); Laššák and Hašková (2009); Miklóssy (2007); NR SR (2003); Pasternáková (2009a, 2009b); Pavlov (2001).
Appendix AJ: Schematic Representation of Codes Related to Distributed Leadership

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<th>DESCRIPITIVE CODES</th>
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<td><strong>Collaboration &amp; sharing responsibilities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Influencing decision-making process</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Experiencing DL in their school</strong></td>
<td><strong>Feeling excluded from DL practices</strong></td>
<td><strong>Improving teaching practice (sharing)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Principals’</strong></td>
<td><strong>Feeling recognised/appreciated</strong></td>
<td><strong>Involvement in problem-solving</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Increasing motivation &amp; engagement</strong></td>
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**Defining DL**

- Collaboration & sharing responsibilities
- Influencing decision-making process
- Processes of DL

**Codes related to Distributed Leadership**

- DL, overlapping with democracy/ DL, constructed as a goal
- DL, initiated by the teachers
- DL, delegated by the suite
Appendix A: Schematic Representation of Codes Related to the Relationship between Inclusive Education and Distributed Leadership

**Analytical Codes**

- DL as well as goals
- DL as an outcome of processes
- DL as a process
- DL as a set of goals
- DL as a set of goals

**Topical Codes**

- DL = Distributed Leadership
- IE = Inclusive Education
- IE = Inclusive Education
- IE = Inclusive Education
- IE = Inclusive Education
- IE = Inclusive Education
- IE = Inclusive Education

**Descriptive Codes**

- IE = Inclusive Education
- IE = Inclusive Education
- IE = Inclusive Education
- IE = Inclusive Education
- IE = Inclusive Education
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- IE = Inclusive Education
Appendix A: Researcher’s Journey to Inclusive Education

If I had to decide on the most prominent factor that has led me to engage myself with the area of education and inclusive education in particular, I would say it was my grammar school experience. My studies at the Bilingual English-Slovak Grammar School in Sučany (Slovakia), which is a highly selective public grammar school, were one of the most joyous and inspiring experiences of my life. For the first time in life, it was there that I experienced as a student that I could be treated and valued as a partner to teachers. I was encouraged to formulate my own position, be critical and challenge taken-for-granted knowledge. There I established the strongest friendship bonds which constitute the kernel of my social relations until today. Last but not least, a few particular teachers immensely impacted on my ethical belief system showing me that I have a social responsibility to fulfil in this world. When comparing my educational experiences from this school with experiences of some other friends in Slovakia I realised how precious and unique that experience of mine was. This made me determined to devote my life to enabling as many people as possible to have a similar kind of enriching experience with formal education.

Perhaps as the second factor – but not less important than the first one – which brought me to the inclusive education field, I would mention my spiritual conviction. I happened to find my spiritual path in the age of 17 when I admitted to myself that every deed and thought of mine in this world and lifetime will come back to me at some point – maybe in this or next life. Some religions and spiritual movements call this karma. On the one hand, karma as a concept can be used to justify and understand why instances of discrimination and oppression happen to their victims in the first place. On the other hand, after genuinely integrating this concept in my own worldview I could not accept any more my own participation in socially acceptable and taken-for-granted practices which I perceived as ethically problematic and harmful to some people, such as segregational educational arrangements common in many educational systems. Participating in these discriminatory practices in any way would mean creating new negative karma for my own future. Thus, I embarked on a demanding journey of constant self-questioning and self-reflecting in order to have greater empathy for others and myself. Although over years I expanded my understanding of karma to signify not only a punishing or rewarding spiritual law but something much more and complex, integrating this concept into my belief system has been definitely shaping my understanding of social reality until now.

As the third most influential factor I would mention my own battles and difficult life experiences with my sexuality and gender identity. I happened to realise in my early childhood years that I am not good at football (soccer) and that I prefer knitting with my kindergarten teachers or playing with my female friends than running after some ball and kicking it. These preferences of mine attracted lots of judgement and humiliation especially from my male peers. I compensated this with getting the best marks in class so I could prove to myself and everybody else my own worth. In my path to fully embrace and accept my gay identity I consider my grammar school experience to be crucial. The open and liberal school culture, in which my gay-identified classmates openlyouted themselves together with my classroom teacher, definitely contributed to this.

30 Including this appendix in the thesis was inspired by the Epilogue in Armstrong et al. (2010, pp. 139-150), which explored how individual authors of this book positioned themselves in the field of inclusive education.
I think these three factors also determined that I decided to study politics and international relations for my Bachelor Degree at the Charles University in Prague (Czech Republic) and gender studies for my Master Degree at the Central European University in Budapest (Hungary). In these studies I wished to unpack the psychological, social and political roots of oppression and discrimination based on national or ethnic identity (BA degree) and gender or sexuality identity (MA degree). My education led to work in a non-for-profit organisation training teachers in gender sensitive teaching practices and then at the Ministry of Education, while dealing with European Union policies in education. Primarily working with EU educational policies made me acquainted with the concept of inclusive education and its theoretical and practical importance. When dealing with educational policies at state and EU level I was realising more and more acutely that I lacked an academic expertise in pedagogy and educational matters per se. Therefore, I decided to fill this gap in my knowledge and work experience. I decided to devote three and half years of my life to explore existing academic literature in education and inclusive education in particular, while also gaining relevant practical experience by being immersed in a real school environment for a substantial period of time. In other words, I made a commitment to learn about inclusive education as much as possible not only from a theoretical perspective but also a very practical one. Conducting this research study can be perceived as a manifestation of this commitment. As this study demonstrates, three and half years of researching inclusive education brought me to an understanding of this concept which is very practical and related to teaching practices in classrooms. In addition, it introduced to me its much bigger dimension – its political and ethical dimension for social change towards a more reflective, empathic and equitable social world.