Inspiring Inclusion in your Classroom and Beyond

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This article reflects upon teachers' engagement in a Leadership for Inclusion Community of Practice (LIn-CoP), which utilised the Participatory Action Learning Action Research (PALAR) strategy. The study explored if and how engagement could support teachers to develop and exercise leadership for inclusion, using Grudnoff, Haigh, Cochran-Smith, Eil and Ludlow (2017) six facets for equity. Data were drawn from seven early career elementary teachers in the Republic of Ireland over a three-year period. The teachers sought successfully to: 1) develop six facets of equity and, 2) overcome barriers to applying their learning in their contexts. Analysis unveiled many examples of inclusive practices for promoting equity, thus narrowing the values practice gap related to inclusion. The findings also highlight for researchers and professional learning facilitators the potential of the PALAR LIn-CoP model for applying teacher learning in situated environments, in the face of organisational barriers.

Introduction

In educational circles throughout the world, inclusion has been normatively accepted as best practice. Over 92 countries, including the Republic of Ireland, have subscribed to the *Salamanca Statement*, which asked governments to develop policies to promote inclusive education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994). Other organizations, including the United Nations and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development have been influential in promoting the inclusive agenda internationally. The Republic of Ireland, like many other countries, has attempted to enhance teachers' learning about inclusive practice and special education; a commitment shared at the pre-service teacher education phase of the continuum. Whilst significant progress has been made, Hick et al. (2017) point to a knowledge-practice gap in Ireland. Amongst newly qualified and early career teachers, inclusive practices which meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) has been highlighted as an area for development (Hick et al., 2017). This study sought to pick up this challenge.

This article explores seven early career teachers' engagement in and with a Leadership for Inclusion Community of Practice (LIn-CoP) over a three-year period. The aim of the LIn-CoP was to prevent the washout of learning at the pre-service level (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). It explores if and how engagement in and with this learning model could support teachers to: i) develop the six facets of equity (Grudnoff, Haigh, Cochran-Smith, Eil & Ludlow, 2017) and ii) overcome barriers to applying their learning and to being empowered to exercise teacher leadership for inclusion in their contexts.

We begin the article by providing some contextual information about the participants and their school contexts. Then, we explore literature related to leadership for inclusion, focusing on Grudnoff et al.'s (2017) six facets of equity and Communities of Practice as a model of professional learning for teachers. This is followed by an outline of the methodology employed, which elaborates upon the use of the Participatory Action Learning Action Research (PALAR) (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011) approach as a methodological and pedagogical strategy for teacher learning

and leadership. The discussion of findings is presented under each of the six facets. The article concludes with the key implications and recommendations for future research.

Conceptualizing Leadership for Inclusion

Despite the increasing global focus upon inclusion, a universally agreed-upon definition of inclusion remains wanting (Winter & O' Raw, 2010). While the concept of inclusion in many countries initially focused upon including pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, many countries have expanded the concept to include all pupils at risk of exclusion or marginalization (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006; Brennan, King & Travers, 2019). In this article, inclusion refers to the inclusion of pupils with SEN, English as an additional language (EAL) and whom are disadvantaged, reflecting the increased diversity of pupils in mainstream classrooms due to recent, significant policy and legislative changes (McConkey et al., 2016).

Central to inclusion and inclusive practices are teachers' attitudes and beliefs about pupils' capacities to learn, along with teachers' beliefs in their own abilities to support pupils with additional needs (Florian, 2014). As social learning processes have been deemed more important than any program or technique for meeting the needs of pupils, inclusive practices require teachers to collaborate, and share problems and possible solutions (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Teachers' abilities to articulate their personal and educational values (Day, Harris & Hadfield, 2001) related to inclusion are also important as attitudes and beliefs influence practices (Brown, 2006). This articulation of values was a core part of the LIn module, which the teachers in this study engaged in during their 4th year of pre-service education (for further details see King, 2017). However, as noted by Hick et al. (2017), there is often a values and knowledge-to-practice gap related to inclusion.

Teacher leadership for inclusion, as conceptualized in this article, is the enactment of inclusive values (Brown, 2006, King, 2017) where teachers individually and collectively use their agency to 'step up' and "go above and beyond the perceived expectations of [their] role" (Buchanan, 2015, p. 710). While teacher leadership has been described as an elusive concept (Forde & Dickson, 2017), we consider it as a practice, an "organic form of leadership" from teachers on the ground, who use their agency to align their values, knowledge and practice (King & Stevenson, 2017).

Policies, both nationally and internationally advocate for knowledge and practice of the individual education planning (IEP) process for inclusion (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004; Department of Education and Science [DES], 2017). Although IEPs are not mandatory in the Republic of Ireland [RoI], the DES (2017) established a directive to begin the process of individual planning for pupils. The directive states that pupils' support plans should be developed collaboratively and "should include clear, measurable learning targets, and specify the resources and interventions that will be used to address student needs" (DES 2017, p. 21). Assessment is a key component of devising; implementing and reviewing these support plans and it is important that these plans are used by teachers as a pedagogical tool (King, NíBhroin & Prunty, 2018) despite the challenges for teachers to 'cover' the curriculum. The aforementioned pre-service teacher 4th year LIn module focused upon the importance of ensuring learner understanding of content versus providing coverage of curriculum. Additionally, it emphasized equity as distinct from equality for ensuring that all pupils' needs are met.

The PALAR LIn-CoP workshops engaged in during this study, facilitated seven teachers to collaboratively explored the six facets of practice for equity, as derived from Grudnoff et al.'s (2017) synthesis of international research. Their review identified "six interconnected facets of practice for equity [see table 1], which are general principles of practice rather than specific teaching strategies or behaviors" (p. 305). These principles guided the LIn-CoP research in this study, which are further explained in the *findings* section of this article.

Table 1

Six Facets of Equity

Facet	Positive Learning Outcomes
1	Selecting worthwhile content and designing and implementing learning opportunities aligned to valued outcomes
2	Connecting to students as learners, and to their lives and experiences
3	Creating learning-focused, respectful and supportive learning environments
4	Using evidence to scaffold learning and improve teaching
5	Adopting an inquiry stance and taking responsibility for professional engagement and learning
6	Recognizing and seeking to address, classroom, school and societal practices that reproduce inequity

Grudnoff et al. (2017, p. 321)

Equally important to knowledge and beliefs around inclusion, is the ability to exercise leadership for inclusion within schools. This is particularly challenging for early career teachers, such as those in this study, who were developing their confidence in their own abilities both within and beyond the classroom. To help them to stay close to their values and beliefs, the teachers in this study chose to engage in the LIn-CoP. Both CoPs and PALAR are said to enhance teacher empowerment significantly (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013).

Methodology

Scholars increasingly encourage teachers to become more involved in research processes (Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). They also assert that research methodologies should better articulate the degree to which teachers are central participants in the construction of their own methods (e.g., data generation, analysis, etc.; Dworski-Riggs & Day Langhout, 2010). To reflect this philosophical and methodological shift, the remaining sections in this article will be expressed through the voice of the teacher researchers themselves.

Context and Participants

We are seven primary (elementary) school teachers, in the early stages of our careers from a variety of settings (see table 2: Pseudonyms are used to comply with ethics and child protection guidelines). We all teach in the greater Dublin area and have undergone a mandatory probation examination in our first or second year of teaching.

Table 2

Participants and Settings: An Outline of Each Teacher's Role in Their School During the Three Years of the Research

Code Name	School Setting	Class Setting	Class Age Group(s)	Notes
Aisling	Designated disadvantaged mainstream primary school in Dublin	2nd Class 4th Class	7-8 year-olds 9-11 year-olds	Some children diagnosed with special educational needs (SEN)
Emily	Designated disadvantaged mainstream primary school in Dublin	3rd Class 1st Class[1] (mainstream)	9-10 year-olds 6-7 year-olds	Some children diagnosed with SEN
Sarah	Designated disadvantaged mainstream primary school in Dublin	Senior Infants 1st Class 2nd Class	5-6 year-olds 6-7 year-olds 7-8 year-olds	Some children diagnosed with SEN
Liz	Designated disadvantaged mainstream primary school in Dublin	Senior Infants	5-6 year-olds	Some children diagnosed with SEN
Edel	Mainstream primary school in Dublin	3rd Class 4th Class (SET)	8-10 year-olds	Some children diagnosed with SEN
Lucia	Mainstream primary school in Co. Kildare	2nd Class ASD preschool class	7-8 year-olds 3-5 year-olds	All children in the preschool class diagnosed with Autism
Gráinne	Designated disadvantaged mainstream primary school in Dublin	1st Class	6-7 year-olds	Some children awaiting SEN assessment and diagnosis

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[1] 1st Class in all schools in Ireland is the third year of schooling

At the beginning of the research, we were newly qualified teachers in our first year of teaching. We were all educated as pre-service teachers together in Dublin, Ireland from 2012-2016, and we completed a major specialism in Special and Inclusive Education as part of our pre-service education. This involved six modules, including a module on Collaborative Practice in year 3 and a module on Leadership for Inclusion in year 4. During the first year of our in-service teaching career, we worked with the third author, Dr. Fiona King (researcher and lecturer at Dublin City University), and Dr. Anna Logan (researcher and lecturer at Dublin City University), who facilitated our meetings, and supported and guided us in our research efforts. We have been working for the past two years with Dr. King and the second author, Eimear Holland (researcher and lecturer at Dublin City University). This article reports findings from the last two years, as we developed a LIn-CoP.

In the Republic of Ireland, the majority of schools are under Catholic patronage (96%), although other forms of patronage exist, such as Educate Together (co-educational for religious and non-religious children, teaching about ethics and different religions rather than teaching religious formation) and Community National Schools (for children of all faiths and none). This arrangement with some schools being multi-denominational is beginning to reflect the growing diversity of Ireland's population, as people from other countries have arrived over the past two decades to make Ireland their home. As a result, many children, especially in certain areas, have EAL, and may be speaking their parents' mother tongue at home.

Most Irish schools are public and count as "mainstream", which means that the majority of classes/year groups in the school are not special classes. However, these schools may still have designated special classes or units for children with SEN. There are also designated schools where all pupils have diagnosed SEN, and the curriculum may be altered to better suit the individual pupils and their learning needs. Many pupils with SEN attend a mainstream school and are part of a mainstream class. Some special needs, when diagnosed, grant extra resources to a pupil even if they attend a mainstream school; such as a Special Needs Assistant (SNA), for care needs or Special Education Teacher (SET), for learning needs, where a teacher in the school supports individual children or groups of children with identified additional learning needs.

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice [CoPs] are comprised of three dimensions: *domain, practice* and *community* (Wenger-Traynor & Wenger-Traynor, 2015). It was hoped that the *domain* dimension being characterized by a shared enterprise, would provide us with a sense of collective identity as leaders for inclusion (Parker et al., 2012) and a sense of common purpose (Saldana, 2014; Holland, 2018). Together, we aimed to build a shared passion and commitment to developing our expertise (Wenger, 2006; Wesely, 2013), as well as developing "a shared practice" (Wesely, 2013, p. 307). We planned to work together to generate a shared bank of resources (Wenger, 1998, 2006) and intended for this *practice* dimension to support our capacity to adopt an inquiry stance, to innovatively and creatively adapt, overcome challenges, refine existing knowledge and co-generate new knowledge (Saldana, 2014). As we iteratively embedded our learning in our schools (Lum Kai Mun, 2016) and reflected together, we hoped that consensus would validate us and that dissensus would lead to the appropriate re-examination of our existing and evolving practice (Wenger et al., 2002; Wesely, 2013; Holland, 2018).

It was hoped that engagement in the community dimension would offer us the opportunity to work with like-minded people who "care[d] about the domain" of leadership for inclusion (McDonald, 2014, p. 328). It is said that the *community* dimension of a CoP helps teachers to feel that they are not alone in their interest in the domain (Holland, 2018). Community also provides the social structure for teachers to interact (Lum Kai Mun, 2016). It can be a place, either in person or via technology, where teachers develop meaningful relationships and learn with and from each other (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The LIn-CoP in this study was facilitated to allow for social learning and bonding (McDonald, 2014). As we engaged in activities and discussions, and shared strategies and solutions, we attempted to build supportive relationships (Wenger, 2006). Such intended outcomes were key given that we were attempting to apply our learning within a challenging organisational culture, which is historically known for exhibiting characteristics of: professional isolation (O'Sullivan, 2011), insulation, competitiveness (Lynch et al., 2013) and hierarchical priorities (Veal & Rickard, 1996), which compounded our efforts to develop and apply our learning (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013).

PALAR

As noted by Van Kruiningen (2013), despite the potential of CoP dimensions, the interactional processes of CoPs and how they support growth are under-researched. Some argue that many models of professional learning, such as CoPs, fail to account for the complexities of professional learning (Armour et al., 2015). To overcome this, Participatory Action Learning and Research (PALAR) was used as a structure to promote the necessary 'critical reflection' and 'critical action' (Watts et al., 2011; Diemer et al., 2018) required to support the experimentation and enactment of professional learning (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). PALAR is especially concerned with supporting members to, identify, evaluate and challenge power asymmetries, which get in the way of desired goals, such as developing as a leader for inclusion. It aims to help foster the cascading of learning and knowledge to others in teams, communities, and organizations (Kearney et al., 2013). PALAR was considered a good fit for this study because it is centered upon developing 'action leaders' who have the ability to enable and empower others (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011).

PALAR LIn-CoP Workshops

We attended eight PALAR LIn-CoP workshops, facilitated by the second and third authors. These workshops aimed to "(1) promote mutual learning and development; (2) foster the cascading of learning and knowledge to others in the community; and (3) co-create knowledge that is relevant and contextualised" (Kearney et al., 2013, p. 113). Participants engaged in cycles of: reflecting, planning, and acting on targets (Teare, 2013). Activities were shaped by: 1) the 3 CoP dimensions (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015); 2) the 6 'facets of practice for equity' (Grudnoff et al., 2017); and 3) the 11 PALAR processes (Zuber-Skerritt, 2013); 1) defining project goals and mission; 2) setting priorities; 3) developing a resources management proposal; 4) monitoring and evaluating a project (continuous); 5) exploring problems; 6) solving a problem; 7) managing a conflict; 8) managing change; 9) evaluating a project; 10) preparation for presentations and; 11) presentation and celebration. These PALAR processes were increasingly engaged with throughout the study: 'Project goals and mission' were defined and agreed at the outset in terms of a focus on leadership for inclusion. These were recorded and 're-evaluated' using an online 'Trello Reflective Wall', which was also used to facilitate community interaction and development between workshops.
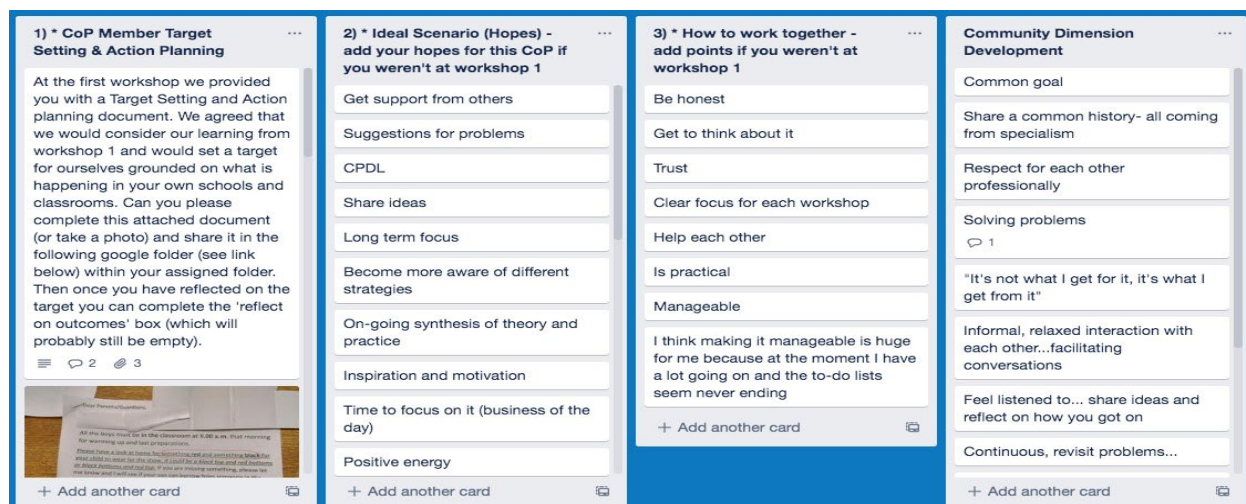
Figure 1. Trello Reflective Wall

To cater to the varied situated contexts, we engaged in the personalised process of 'priority setting'. At each workshop, we reflected upon and recorded our evolving hopes and aims on a post-it and put it in a time capsule. This was revisited at each meeting to see if these had been achieved or still needed to be addressed ('monitoring and evaluating'). 'Exploring problems' and 'selecting and solving a problem' were cyclically addressed both individually and collaboratively, as barriers relating to enacting leadership for inclusion were identified (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013). We shared ideas and supported each other to identify possible solutions (Ruechakul, Erawan & Siwarom, 2015). To support the experimentation and enactment phase of the model, we completed 'Target Setting and Action Plans', which we shared on Trello and discussed at the next workshop, co-reflecting with our community members. PALAR empowered us to 'manage conflict' and 'change' by identifying where power imbalances lay and which stakeholders might be helpful to us in managing change (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). We updated each other on our successes at each LIn-CoP workshop and we collectively designed and prepared a poster presentation of our work in the LIn-CoP, for the annual Teaching Council Féilte [celebration] event where teachers share their work. This offered a "space [...for us] to present [our] work to a wider audience" (Wood & Zuber-Skerrit, 2013, p. 8) and to "showcase [our] knowledge and practical contributions" (Wood & Zuber-Skerrit, 2013, p. 9).

Data Collection

A qualitative data collection design allowed for rich, deep data to be collected, illustrating the contextual nature of this research (Berg, 2004). Qualitative data were gathered through a variety of media to suit the community and our needs. LIn-CoP workshops were audio-visually recorded and transcribed. Engagement in and with PALAR processes generated workshop artefacts, such as the identity wall in Figure 2, which we used to identify facets that we were confident with. We coloured in extra sections on the wall piece at each LIn-CoP workshop if we felt an increase in confidence with the facet. The aforementioned online platform Trello generated further data as we uploaded photos for reflection and planning and to share questions and ideas with the community. We also used Trello to categorize responses to various aspects of our work

together, such as the six facets of inclusion (Grudnoff et al., 2017), and our personal Target Setting and Action Plans [TSAP] (Teare, 2013) (Figure 3).
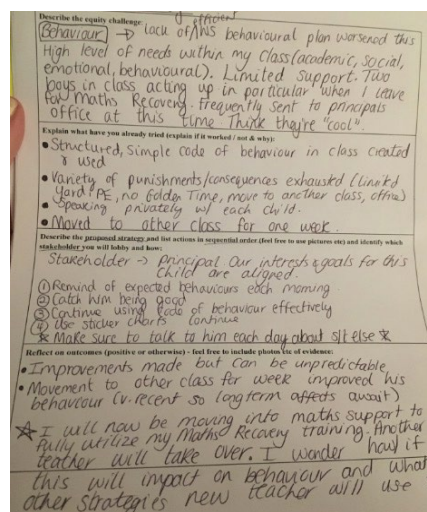

Figure 2. Identity wall

Figure 3. Target Setting and Action Plan

By using the interactive functions of the Trello Wall, we were able to discuss and comment on other members' questions and suggestions while also creating a written record of our work and interactions. We also used a WhatsApp group to stay in touch with the community between meetings. Google Documents were also used as a means of sharing literature and written work for articles, presentations and applications.

Data were analyzed across the different datasets using the 'inductive-deductive' approach (Mouly, 1978) to facilitate ongoing comparison of categories and codes. We analysed the data deductively by looking for evidence of the six facets of equity, aspects of community of practice, and PALAR processes. Additionally, we looked at the data sets for any other emerging codes. We opted to learn how to code transcription data, thus adding to our growth as researchers, and reflecting our democratic participation as learners and leaders. Discussion and debate took place around the identified codes. Engaging in the LIn-CoP not only allowed us to listen to individual practices, but also allowed us to reflect on, build and grow on our own teaching leadership practices in each of our contexts, all of which are different. The six facets of inclusion (Grudnoff et al., 2017) were the lenses we looked through as we reflected upon our evolving practice as leadership for inclusion.

Findings

In this section we present each facet of inclusion separately. We provide our own lived examples of teacher leadership in the context of these facets, including elements that hindered and supported our engagement with these facets. Figure 4 shows how we used Trello to interact with each other between our LIn-CoP meetings and how we shared examples of leadership for each of the facets in our own contexts. It also illustrates evidence of our findings related to the facets. We selected examples from Trello and our LIn-CoP meetings for the purpose of exemplification.
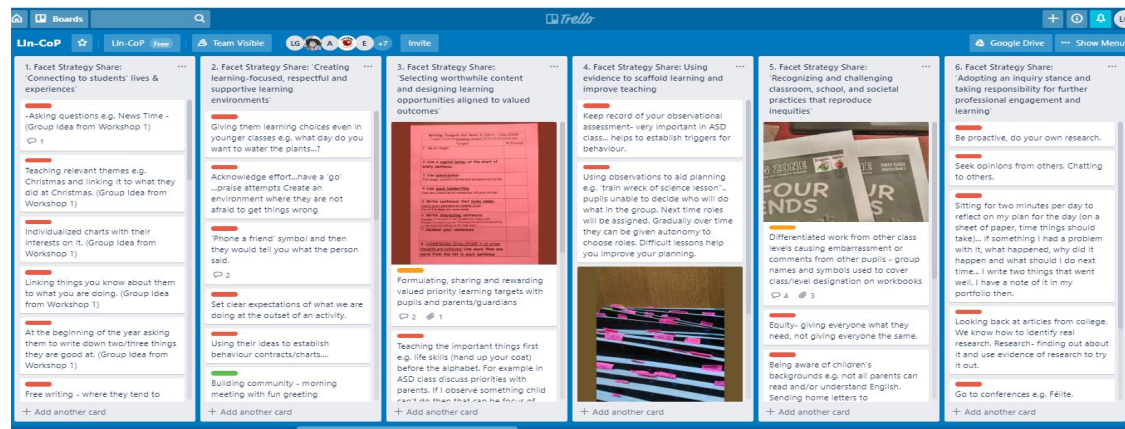
Figure 4. Six Facets of Inclusion on Trello

Selecting Worthwhile Content and Designing and Implementing Learning Opportunities Aligned to Valued Outcomes

This facet highlights that content taught should appeal to a variety of learning modalities and should meet the learning targets of children, which are carefully selected for each child. LIn-CoP members agree that it is our role as educators and facilitators of learning to meet the individual needs of the children in our classes by creating meaningful learning experiences so that they can reach their full potential. Several participants mentioned they believe that the enactment of the values (Brown, 2006; King, 2017) is crucial to creating inclusive education for all within the elementary school setting. Within each participant's class there were a range of abilities and needs and therefore, it is of utmost importance that teachers select valued priority learning targets for every child, especially children with SEN. It is also important to create learning opportunities that will enable the children to succeed and meet the intended targets.

One example of a practice which exercised this facet was the differentiation of classwork so that every child can meet their valued outcomes and experience success. Learning spellings is an important aspect of literacy. However, every child learns differently and at a different pace. Edel (SET) mentioned taking these things into consideration when planning for a child in her class. The child had recently been diagnosed with dyslexia and one of the child's strengths was that they were a visual learner. Every week Edel created visual flashcards to help the child learn a few select words from the spelling list as shown in Figure 5. Although the child was not able to learn the same amount of spellings as the rest of the class, the child wanted to feel included and wanted to learn some of the spellings.
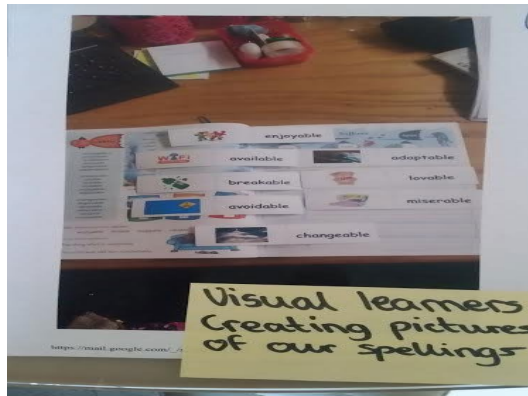
Figure 5. Differentiated visual flashcards for weekly spellings

Differentiating this work to suit the learning style of this child allowed the child to be included in the class and also experience success. It also demonstrates the teacher using her own agency to align her values, knowledge and practice (King & Stevenson, 2017). Differentiating this work took time for the teacher on a weekly basis so the teacher's positive attitude and beliefs (Florian, 2014) supported the implementation of this facet. The teacher felt that it was worthwhile to take this time to alter the work so that the child could feel included in the class and succeed because students can be "in" but not "of" the class, in terms of social and learning membership (Ferguson 2008, p. 111).

Furthermore, in a special education setting, this facet is critical for teaching and learning to take place. Knowing the child and their needs and strengths are key factors to creating inclusive education. Edel greatly valued this facet within her special educational setting as she worked with a child on a one-to-one basis. At the beginning of the year, Edel, along with the child's parents, class teacher and SNA selected the priority learning targets for the child, evidencing the collaborative nature of designing support plans (DES, 2017; King et al., 2018). The teacher then ensured that all valued learning targets were met in a meaningful way by creating activities that suited the child's learning style, thus enhancing the child's interested in the activity. Edel reflected on Benjamin Franklin's statement: "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn," which highlights the importance of involving children in their learning. This child was a kinesthetic learner and loved to be actively involved in activities so Edel created learning opportunities that appealed to this style of learning. One example of an activity she created was vocabulary bowling. As shown in Figure 6, Edel attached pictures of the new vocabulary onto bowling pins and the child had to roll the ball and hit the pins. When the child knocked down a bowling pin, they had to say the word on the pin.

Figure 6. Vocabulary Bowling

The child loved this activity because it was fun and they were actively involved. This was a simple step taken by the teacher to ensure that they created worthwhile learning opportunities for this child to meet the valued learning targets in his literacy lesson. This reflects the support plans being used as a pedagogical tool for inclusion (King et al., 2018).

A unanimous belief amongst us as LIn-CoP members is that understanding and learning need to be prioritized and that pressure to finish textbooks can hinder inclusion (Brandt, 1993). Edel mentioned that, if teachers value finishing textbooks, actual learning will be hindered. This idea echoes Florian and Spratt's (2013) flexible approach, that teaching should be centered on the learners' needs rather than coverage of material. We believe that meeting individual needs and selected learning outcomes for each child by creating worthwhile content and learning opportunities is far more important than finishing textbooks. This was the facet prioritized by LIn-CoP members at the first meeting and five of us evidenced confidence with enacting this facet on our 'identity wall'. Aisling mentioned discontinuing some of the workbooks to be used in her class because they "sacrificed actual learning happening as the children could not follow the content in the book because it was too word heavy" (Trello, 2019, January 18). Aisling then created learning opportunities such as differentiated worksheets with concrete materials to scaffold learning and hands-on pair activities for the children that enabled them to meet the intended targets in a meaningful way arguably reflecting teachers 'stepping up' (Buchanan, 2015) to ensure their values are enacted (King & Stevenson, 2017). This example is reflective of the many conversations in our LIn-CoP workshops where we felt our commitment to our inclusive values helped us to overcome any hindering factors.

Connecting to Students as Learners, and to their Lives and Experiences

This facet is fundamental to a child's happiness and sense of belonging, particularly in educational settings. The school environment is an empowering foundation for students, in which parents, teachers and multi-disciplinary agencies collaborate and communicate together to share problems and solutions towards creating a welcoming school community for all (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).

Within our LIn-CoP, the importance of leadership within the daily role of a teacher was discussed on numerous occasions. Our beliefs and values reflect the importance of a school ethos based on respect and inclusivity to act as a foundation for a shared sense of inclusive practices. Brown (2006) emphasized the importance of teachers being able to articulate their values and beliefs about inclusion. Our LIn-CoP discussion allowed us to highlight the importance of connecting to students' lives through the creation of respectful and safe spaces such as classrooms. Eimear prompted us during our first Lln-CoP workshop: "What do you want this space to be? What's important about…when we come together in a way in which we're working together to support each other?'' In turn, these questions offered an outlet in school for students to connect with their peers and share their experiences in confidence. LIn-CoP participants agreed that diverse communities all gather as one in each of their schools. Although interests, cultures and languages spoken by students may be unique, the holistic development of everyone is paramount to their ongoing success. We all felt that when an environment was created in which differences between students were valued and acknowledged, students were better able to learn from and with each other. Nevertheless, only four of us evidenced confidence with this facet on our 'identity wall'.

There were several ways participants' schools tried to create a respectful and safe environment. Some of the schools took part in either a 'Self-Expression Day' or a 'Thank You Week'. These events enabled the children to share meaningful traditions and information by taking part in activities. Students shared their appreciation for others, along with information regarding family culture, heritage and personal belongings with others, reflecting a culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning (Lopez, 2014). These events provided opportunities for students to learn by participating in inquiry-based lessons and allowed for the celebration of diversity in our classes. They also promoted discussion and inquiry into the lives and experiences of others in the classroom, primarily through circle-time, student-led lessons and reflection on pieces of Art. One activity such as the 'Rock Your Socks' was used in class to celebrate World Down Syndrome Day (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Artwork connecting to students' lives and their community.

Some LIn-CoP participants aimed to connect to students' lives through various avenues, by using multi-cultural resources and activities. One member of the LIn-CoP sent home differentiated letters with underlined information and illustrations to support parents and guardians for whom English may be an additional language (Figure 8).
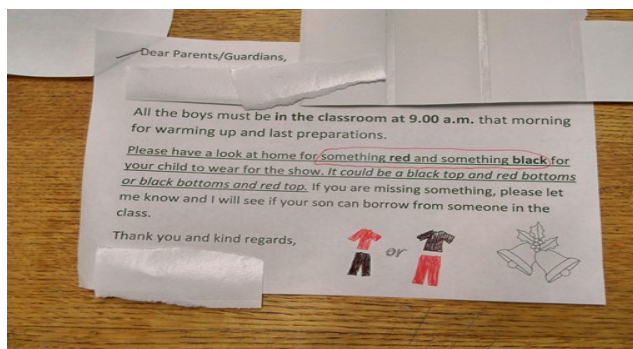
Figure 8. Differentiated note sent home

We aimed to use resources and methods of communication that are in line with the concept of Universal Design for Learning (Rose & Strangman, 2007). We also wanted to connect to the parents and promote effective communication. We continually strove to integrate an accessible curriculum for all in our settings, which enabled us to cater for individual learning styles that promote students to share their own experiences.

As we developed a shared practice (Wesely, 2013) in the LIn-CoP through discussion and the development of a shared practice (e.g., resources), we agreed that listening to the students and asking questions supported them in being open to change. Students may be reluctant to share their feelings and experiences. We found that nurturing a sense of trust in others was critical.

Another value we articulated in our LIn-CoP was the importance of empowering children and parents to enable them to make sense of their roles and responsibilities at multiple levels within their community. Each of the schools in our LIn-CoP have a Parent Council. In Sarah's school the Parent Council organised a range of cultural events for the school community, such as coffee mornings and celebrations. Our aim was for the children to view themselves as role models for others. This was a core value of our community as we strove to narrow the value practice gap for supporting inclusive practice (Hick et al., 2017).

Some of the hindering components we discussed for this facet were common to the other facets. Substitute coverage may be hard to access in school meetings with other members of staff and the Parent Council. Another barrier may be limited multicultural resources such as books and toys due to funding. It may be difficult to utilize support from external agencies if schools are not active within the local and wider community.

We also reflected on the importance of ongoing evaluation and reflection to inform multicultural practices used in the classroom thus supporting our existing knowledge and co-generating new knowledge (Saldana, 2014). Subsequently, it enhanced staff professional development outside of in-class instructional hours. This provided us with support, which may often be necessary during times of change in class.

Creating Learning-Focused, Respectful, and Supportive Learning Environments

This facet can be defined as targeting the learner and making sure the environments that surround the learner are centered on their needs and abilities. It highlights the working relationship between educator and learner to create a respectful and supportive learning environment. Knowing the children and their needs is a key factor to this facet. In our LIn-CoP, one thing that was unanimous amongst the participants was the outlook of creating a learning environment for the children at the very start of the school year that was one of positivity and self-praise, where making mistakes was not seen as a negative but rather the contrary. Acknowledging any effort the children make is important in creating a supportive environment as it encourages them to try, even if they feel their abilities are not as strong as their efforts. As conveyed by Emily, "I just think keeping things positive like catching the time when they do come in on time or if they do their homework, even if it's half done, making a big positive point of it." As participants we found that when this environment was created, the children spoke a lot more highly of themselves and of their efforts, and were more open to participate in activities that took place. Emily commented,

> Acknowledge the kid's efforts and even you know if they get something wrong like a lot of kids really, you know, just let them know that's ok, you tried, well done you... so to praise attempts and to create an environment where they are not afraid to get things wrong.

She found that the childrens' own individual attitudes can hinder this practice at times as some children may not have the ability to accept and process this acknowledgment of effort due to emotional difficulties they may have. They consequently spoke less highly of themselves and were unwilling to view the positives in their work. However, Emily found that if a whole-class approach

is taken, so as not to target an individual child, those children who find it more difficult to participate and have a positive outlook may be more motivated in the long run. This approach is consistent with the work of Florian and Spratt (2013) who call for whole class approaches to inclusion and not singling out some as different.

The children we are working with come from different types of backgrounds. As the diversity of the RoI grows, this calls for a greater need to be aware of the tools required to guide and support these children in the best way that we can (Hick et al., 2017). Gráinne found issues such as homelessness and emotional difficulties to be prevalent in her classroom. In order to support these children and create a learning environment where everyone was respected, she created a 'Calm Corner' in her classroom, (see Figures 9-11) a quiet space where children in her class could go to calm down if upset in response to some of the issues mentioned above. There, they could use materials such as a boxing bag if their emotions were becoming heightened. If their home life was unsettled, resulting in a lack of sleep, they could have a little rest on the cushions for a few minutes.

Figure 9. Cozy Corner calm down reflection

Figure 10. Cozy Corner comfortable space

Figure 11. Cozy Corner calm down area

In this area the children were guided to record what was making them feel that way on a behavior chart. Then follow the instructions, they chose their feeling from the poster, selected their 'calm down' tool, and used the sand timer. After this, when the timer ran out, they returned to their seat in class. This whole class approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013) was shared in our LIn-CoP through talk and discussion by Gráinne. This shows us how a thoughtful and reflective step can

have an immense effect on the children in our classrooms. It provides them with a non-judgmental and safe space to help manage and cope with external influences in their lives, supported by our own attitudes and beliefs as teachers, which we know are central to inclusion (Florian, 2014). A factor that may hinder this practice within this facet is the resources that schools may have or indeed, not have. Some schools may face difficulty in acquiring the space and materials for calm spaces such as these, and if this is the case, the spaces may be less effective for the children in question. However, all seven teachers evidenced confidence with this facet on their 'identity wall'.

Using Evidence to Scaffold Learning and Improve Teaching

While there was an agreement amongst all participants that 'using evidence to scaffold learning and improve teaching' is an important and worthwhile facet, only five of the seven LIn-CoP teachers evidenced on their 'identity wall' that they were confident using this facet. Lucia found that it was especially important in her setting, a pre-school class specifically for children with Autism. She argued:

> …to keep a record of your observational assessments… [It is] especially important…say in my room, I'm in an autism pre-school so everything has to be recorded,... so I'd record how many times a day that [behaviour] happens [and] what happened beforehand...so you can...figure out what was the trigger and then you can use that [evidence]…to scaffold learning and improve teaching, and then plan how to reduce [said behavior].

Evidence may be gathered in a variety of ways, all of which come under the title of 'assessment'. Assessment can be anything you observe, notice, record and of course test. Lucia explained how on the first day she learned five out of her six students were non-verbal and she felt completely overwhelmed. She wondered where to start, as a lack of pre-school curriculum and guidelines presented a major barrier. At the end of her first day, Lucia recorded everything she noticed about each child, such as: verbal/ non-verbal, sounds, efforts in communication, toileting, likes/dislikes, and play. She continued to write observation notes every day (Figure 12) until she felt she had gathered enough evidence to start thinking about learning objectives for student support plans (King et al., 2018).
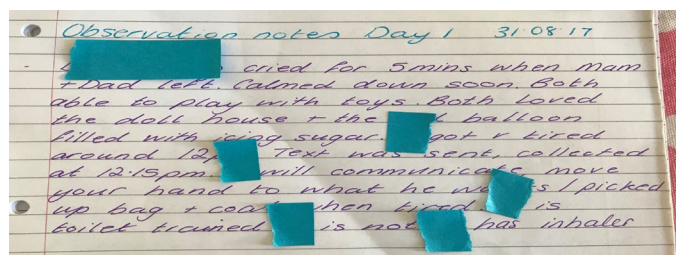

Figure 12. Observation notes

She examined her observation notes, reflected on them and began to look for things the children needed to learn in order to be included and to be part of the class (Ferguson, 2008). A need common amongst most students was the need to communicate their wants, effectively. This teacher's efforts to appropriately scaffold learning and include all pupils were supported by a number of

colleagues including her principal, a well-educated and motivated SNA, a visiting speech and language therapist, and collaborative more-experienced colleagues. This evidences the importance of collaboration for inclusion (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Lucia's ability to scaffold learning and improve teaching was hindered by a lack of preparation to support non-verbal students, the cost of the courses (PECS[2] and Lámh[3]), and the time-off needed to complete the courses. Also, substitute teachers can be difficult to find and can really upset such a class with their routine.

Lucia reflected upon Einstein's claim that, *"Everybody is a genius but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."* This depicts how each individual can be intelligent in their own way. The saying reflects our core belief in the capacity of all children to learn, albeit it in different ways (Florian, 2014). Through group discussion, LIn-CoP participants felt that it is up to us, as educators to ensure our means of assessment allow us to gain relevant evidence about our students. We understand that we should use it effectively in our individual planning (King et al., 2018) to improve our teaching and scaffold the children's learning. We embrace assessment for learning (Black et al., 2004).

Another LIn-CoP participant shared how formal assessments were used in her school as evidence to inform teaching and improve learning in a mainstream setting. Standardized tests are administered and scored in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes in the RoI. LIn-CoP members agreed these results are not an assessment of learning, since the children have not been taught the content or been directly prepared for these tests. Instead, these test results should serve a purpose of assessment for learning. Teachers should use the evidence gathered to inform their planning and use these plans as a pedagogical tool for their teaching (King et al., 2018). Lucia shared that her school uses students' performance to group them into literacy groups for the following year, making differentiation easier for teachers. She added that from her experience, she felt these results should only be used for this purpose if the teachers believe they are accurate. Some children may have failed to answer all of the questions and some children may have been feeling unwell, so it important the teachers use their better judgment in these cases. The fact that these tests only show a snapshot of a child's performance on one particular day can be a hindrance. However, accurate results can help teachers include all students by allowing them to access literacy lessons at their individual level thus, scaffolding learning and improving teaching.

As described above, the consensus among LIn-CoP participants was that using evidence to scaffold learning and improve learning is relevant for inclusion in both special and mainstream settings. It includes evidence from both informal and formal assessment applies to non-verbal preschool age children up to and including every child in the 6th level class settings. LIn-CoP members unanimously agreed that teachers need to believe they can meet the needs of all learners (Florian, 2014) and be leaders for inclusion of all children, regardless of their pupils' abilities.

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[2] PECS is a Picture Exchange Communication System where children will hand pictures as a means of requesting things.

[3] Lámh is is a manual sign system used by children and adults with intellectual disability and communication needs in the RoI. Lámh is a type of augmentative or alternative communication system (AAC). (NCSE, 2019)

Adopting an inquiry stance and taking responsibility for further professional engagement

As LIn-CoP members, we recognized that actively engaging with our own learning and pursuing our own knowledge expansion by engaging in research and/or professional development is consistent with the 'adopting an inquiry stance and taking responsibility for further professional engagement' facet. As a community, we agreed that the importance and benefit of further professional learning and research should not be overlooked. The adoption of an inquiry stance and a reflective mindset by the teacher is fundamental in teaching and learning and this was supported by the adoption of PALAR processes within our LIn-CoP (Zuber-Skerritt, 2013). We valued proactively conducting our own 'research' and 'seeking the opinions of others' and believe that this facilitated our professional learning model (Wenger-Traynor & Wenger-Traynor, 2015).

In Gráinne's school, this facet was valued greatly by herself and others. An inquiry stance led her to better understand that many children in her classroom and within the whole school were having a difficult time at home. Having experienced trauma and feeling stress, they were struggling to concentrate in class. In addition to focus being affected, some children were expressing their frustration through aggressive behavior, negatively impacting the teaching and learning of those around them. Gráinne did some research into trauma informed curricula and contacted a professional association in this domain; Barnardos. She also received support from school management in carrying out this research. Following a meeting between Gráinne and the principal, a professional learning session for all teachers in the school on 'trauma informed teaching' was arranged. This is just one example of how an individual in our LIn-CoP took an inquiry stance and conducted research, which resulted whole school benefits being accrued. It also evidences the importance of ongoing professional learning for teachers (King et al., 2018). Target setting in our LIn-CoP prompted us to exercise agency in our own settings. We exercised leadership by: initiating collaborative interactions with others (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010); becoming aware of where the power is in our schools; and lobbying powerful stakeholders to support professional learning for all staff in our schools (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011).

Gráinne's research into trauma informed teaching was just the beginning of her school's efforts to combat these problems. Continuous research by the principal and teachers led to the establishment of a Nurture Room, which aimed "to improve children and young people's social, emotional and behavioural difficulties" (Nurture United Kingdom, 2019, p. 4). After the principal and vice principal engaged in the professional learning, the teacher in our LIn-CoP took on the role of Nurture Group Teacher, thus exercising a sense of leadership. When met with this new role, she began to conduct some more research, reading various social and emotional programs and curriculum and selecting the content that best suited the needs of her group while meeting the aim of the Nurture Groups. This involved providing a warm safe environment with a strong focus on "emotional literacy, language development and communication" (Nurture UK, 2019, p.2). Figures 15-17 show how Gráinne enacted this in her own school.

Figure 15. Nurture room layout

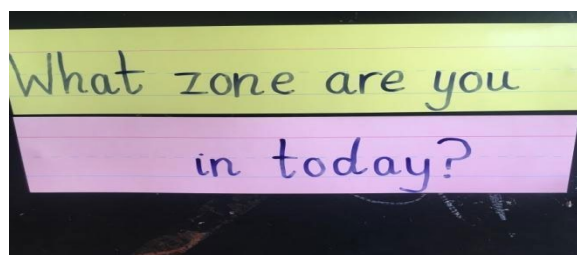*Figure 16.* Nurture room traffic light zones for emotion

Figure 17. Nurture room 'zone' labels

In this case, Gráinne was supported greatly and encouraged by her principal to adopt an inquiry stance and to continue to be curious. Though Gráinne admits that she was fortunate with supportive colleagues and an open-minded principal, she acknowledges that being involved in the LIn-CoP gave her the perceived competence required to approach them and lobby for their support.

Our experience from participating in the LIn-CoP has led us to believe that for teachers to be encouraged and inspired to research; to be reflective and to inquire; it is important that this support is in place. Five of us evidenced confidence in this facet on our 'identity wall'. On reflection, we found that principals need to believe in the value of teacher professional learning and development. They need to think with the long term in mind. For example, sending a teacher on training may cause the principal hassle of having to find a substitute teacher, but the long-term benefit of that teacher being developed will likely outweigh the short-term difficulty.

Recognizing and Challenging Classroom, School and Societal Practices That Reproduce Inequities

'Recognizing and challenging classroom, school and societal practices that reproduce inequities' is an important facet for inclusion. Despite all of the members of this LIn-CoP having completed a thorough four-year course of initial teacher education, many felt unprepared initially for the reality of school life (Hick et al., 2017). Those who began teaching in disadvantaged schools, quickly realized that the children in our classroom faced issues such as absenteeism, homelessness and other socioeconomic challenges. Although many of these issues are outside of our control as teachers, we agreed that we needed to include all learners by recognizing and challenging practices, which might hinder a child's ability to reach their full potential. Our LIn-

CoP provided a space for us to express and feel solidarity in our concerns and facilitated us to articulate and challenge our thinking (Wesley, 2013; Holland, 2018).

All LIn-CoP members agreed that there was a wide range of abilities within their class. An example of a practice, which may reproduce inequities, is the differentiation of classwork. In order to ensure that each child is working within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), it may be necessary for some to access textbooks used by younger class levels. LIn-CoP members expressed concern that lower level books cause feelings of shame, embarrassment and ultimately can negatively impact a child's self-esteem, if not considered carefully. Aisling chose to re-label all books to ensure that the children in question did not feel 'singled out' in their own class reflecting Florian and Spratt's (2012) concept of differentiating for all and not just some. This relatively simple step, taken at the beginning of the year (Figure 18) helped to create a sense of fairness among the children.

Figure 18. Books labelled by group rather than age level

One factor we agreed could hinder leadership for inclusion in the school context was teacher burnout. All LIn-CoP members, particularly those that have taught in disadvantaged schools, found that it is not uncommon for teachers to feel overwhelmed with their workload. Navigating new initiatives, new curriculums and the day-to-day challenges of teaching within their classrooms can be stressful for new teachers. An Irish National Teachers Organization (Teacher Union) survey of primary teachers' workload, stress and resilience found that 94% of respondents felt that the requirement of teachers to cater for individual differences was a major change that made teaching more challenging (Morgan, 2015). The same survey found that 99% of teachers agreed that better support services for children with SEN would make teaching less stressful.

As newly qualified teachers experiencing these challenges for the first time, all LIn-CoP members felt it was difficult to feel confident challenging the practices that may reproduce inequities within our schools. Only three of us evidenced confidence in this facet on our identity walls. This finding is consistent with Hick et al.'s, (2017) findings, which highlighted teacher self-efficacy as an issue. To counteract our lack of confidence, most of us focused initially on recognizing and challenging these practices within our own classrooms. This alternative approach allowed us to grow in confidence by showing that we did 'step up' (Buchanan, 2015) and use our own agency to exercise leadership in our own classrooms (King & Stevenson, 2017).

As LIn-CoP members, we all recognized the importance of collaboration with parents and staff to enhance the development and implementation of support plans (King et al., 2018). Liz shared that she sought the advice of the Home School Community Liaison teacher when faced with parents who were reluctant to engage with the school community. Liz was encouraged to

develop relationships with the parents. Together, they met with the parents in their home context and began to open a dialogue about the reasons behind their perceived reluctance to engage with the school staff. We agreed that drawing on the experience of other teachers and the resources available to us as newly qualified teachers, helped us to learn more about the school practices, which in turn can help us to challenge them in the future.

Conclusion

The overall findings from our PALAR LIn-CoP study on Grudnoff et al.'s (2017) six facets of equity highlight five main points for consideration. *Firstly*, this paper highlights examples of leadership for inclusion practice as early career teachers in their own school context. The six facets of equity provided a framework for discussion within the community where teachers engaged in what they meant and what they could look like in practice. Practical examples of each of the six facets of equity (Grudnoff et al., 2017) were shared. These examples may be of interest to teachers in a variety of contexts working in diverse classrooms. It is prudent to acknowledge that: "there's some of them [facets] that are kind of more straight forward I think to talk about, and like to make relevant, and then, some that were like a little bit more out there maybe" (Liz). This was reflected in the individual 'identity wall' of each teacher with all seven teachers feeling confident in "Creating learning – focused, respectful and supportive learning environments" and "Recognizing and seeking to address, classroom, school and societal practices that reproduce inequity" proving to be the one with least people evidencing confidence. It is important to recognize that we were developing confidence through the LIn-CoP model. Unlike one-off incidental professional development episodes typical of the RoI's professional development provision, the PALAR LIn-CoP allowed for sustained and iterative opportunities for teachers to treat their learning as an evolving process, focusing upon more achievable outcomes first before targeting more challenging ones (Boylan et al., 2018). This is evidenced in teachers' growth across the facets.

Secondly, participants unanimously agreed that the LIn-CoP model of professional learning was effective in supporting them to share their values and practices thereby helping them to narrow the knowledge and values practice gap related to inclusion (Hick et al., 2017). The processes which allowed for adopting an inquiry stance and planning a way forward were central to this LIn-CoP, as it supported the teachers to develop research skills. It is important to remember that the participants knew each other from their pre-service program and continued their focus on leadership for inclusion under the guidance of university faculty. This may have impacted their engagement with and effectiveness of the LIn-CoP. A limitation here may be the sustainability of such LIn-CoPs whereby teachers engage with university lecturers to enhance their professional learning.

Thirdly, while the beginning teachers did evidence leadership for inclusion under the six facets for equity most examples were from within their own classrooms. The teachers stated this allowed them to grow in confidence before embarking on more leadership outside the classroom. Nevertheless, they did evidence some examples of collaborating with others outside of the classroom (e.g., parents, a public body). This collaboration is a central tenet of inclusive practice (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Noteworthy was the heightened awareness and willingness of the teachers in seeking support from the principal and colleagues (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013).

Fourthly, the teachers mentioned a number of hindering factors to exercising leadership for inclusion, for example resources and time. Nevertheless, they also evidence their own resourcefulness in terms of how they navigated this to align their practice with their values, for example, collaborating with parents through the Home School Community Liaison teacher, exercising leadership within their own classrooms initially as they were gaining confidence and seeking the support of principals. Having a commitment to inclusion supported them to be resourceful and find a way to enact their values (King & Stevenson, 2017). This commitment and resourcefulness highlights the importance of teachers being able to articulate their values and beliefs (Brown, 2006) so that they can work towards enacting them.

Finally, participants' examples convey the need for developing teacher leadership for inclusion to be included at the pre-service level so teachers can develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes around leadership for inclusion. This echoes earlier findings by King (2017) who outlined pre-service teachers' readiness for, and self-efficacy related to leadership for inclusion at the end of pre-service education. All of the teachers in our LIn-CoP had engaged in leadership learning for inclusion as part of their pre-service education and were committed to continued professional learning to prevent the washout of this learning (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). Arguably these teachers were committed to inclusion prior to engagement in this professional learning. The LIn-CoP participants' pre-service experiences likely contributed to their core values and beliefs about inclusion as evidenced by their initial choice to join the LIn-CoP and continued commitment to these efforts. Yet, other teachers who had not engaged in leadership learning for inclusion as part of their pre-service education, likely would not have been as open to this approach. Additionally, the teachers knew each other prior to engagement in the LIn-CoP and this may have supported their engagement also.

Having drawn our conclusions, this article will now outline implications, limitations and directions for future research. This article reports findings from one LIn-CoP exploring leadership for inclusion in seven elementary schools in the RoI. While these teachers evidence practical examples of how to exercise leadership for inclusion, which may be of interest to other teachers, it is important to note the support of the LIn-CoP in this regard and in particular the PALAR processes. Additionally the focus on the six facets of equity provided the focus for the PALAR processes. This collaborative model of professional learning may help teachers to prevent the washout of teacher education and narrow the values practice gap (Hick et al., 2017). Findings also have potential implications for teacher education programmes to prioritize developing teacher leadership competencies for pre-service teachers and to seek to continue to forge links with teachers as they embark on their first years of teaching. A possible limitation is that these teachers knew each other well, trusted each other and were comfortable engaging in the LIn-CoP. Arguably teachers in the RoI have more autonomy than in many other countries and may be more inclined to take risks, perhaps due to the vast majority of elementary teachers having the security of tenure. However, not all teachers embrace this autonomy and teaching is still considered somewhat of an individualised profession. Future research might explore a LIn-CoP where teachers did not previously know each other. It might also look to explore if and how such LIn-CoPs can be sustained over time. Additionally, further research could explore how PALAR processes could be developed to support teachers to more diplomatically cascade their learning to more reluctant colleagues and partners.

Our aim as a LIn-CoP was to reflect and promote leadership for inclusion in our various educational settings. We hope that our lived examples of the six facets above have underlined how vital teacher leadership is in overcoming hindering factors. We also hope by reading our experiences, you may reflect on your practice and become leaders for inclusion in your setting.

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