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Exploring the Construction of Inclusive Educational Communities in Greece: case studies of secondary schools

Dimitra Tsakalou
PhD in Education

The University of Edinburgh
2015
Abstract

This study sought to utilise social constructionism theory and the case study approach to conceptualise the complexity of building inclusive educational communities in the Greek context. Specifically, it explores the ways in which school stakeholders' narratives of professional self are used to explore and understand the construction of inclusive communities. Additional dimensions influencing this kind of narration include those of family, community, and policy narratives.

The study is drawing on a qualitative instrumental case study design to examine three urban secondary schools with different legal definitions and approaches to inclusion in the suburbs of a large Greek city. The research design included non-participatory classroom observations of school practice, semi-structured interviews with head teachers, subject teachers and parents, and scrutiny of relevant policy documents. Absent a universal definition and approach to inclusion in secondary education, a framework is developed to identify key elements in the construction of inclusive education in these secondary schools. The findings demonstrate that multiple kinds of inclusion may exist in the Greek context, as each school conceptualizes and responds to these elements differently. The nature of school members' decisions about the implementation of inclusive policy was found to be influenced by the nature of these conceptualisations, as well as the relations developed within and beyond school boundaries. This framework has the potential to be applied to other educational contexts.

Key Words

social construction, inclusive education, special educational needs, inclusive school communities, narratives, case study, education policy-making, Greece
Declaration

I, Dimitra Tsakalou, declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that is my own work. I further declare that it has not been submitted for any other degree of professional qualification.

Dimitra Tsakalou

Date 8/9/2015
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Introduction

Setting the scene

Educational policies throughout the world during the last twenty years have increasingly emphasised the need for the inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN). Efforts to include students with SEN in mainstream education have recently shifted from viewing inclusion as an innovation within special education, to conceptualizing it within the broader context of school restructuring (Florian, 2008). This reform movement has proven challenging, as multiple conceptualisations and understandings of inclusion exist. In Greece, a nation in the midst of deep social and economic crisis, these challenges are magnified. Despite the recent passage of legislation entitled “Special Education and Education of Individuals with Disabilities or with Special Educational Needs” (2008) – declaring inclusive education compulsory for all educational stages and students with SEN (Law 3699/2008) – in practice, implementation difficulties persist. Indeed, while inclusion has a prominent place in Greek policy, it does not have an equally prominent place in Greek schools (Zoniou - Sideri & Vlachou, 2006). As a result, many Greek students with SEN – particularly those in secondary education – remain marginalized in special settings or excluded from mainstream schools.

Philosophically and pragmatically, inclusive education requires curriculum adaptations for belonging and acceptance, leading to the elimination of marginalization and exclusion, and encouraging the development of a more just society (Avramidis, 2010; Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012). To understand inclusion as a social construction within school communities, research should move beyond merely identifying what constitutes ‘good inclusive practice’. Instead, it should thoughtfully explore key stakeholders’ conceptualisations, experiences, practices, and relationships, both within and beyond the school community (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Curcic et al., 2011; Soresi et al., 2011).

This study therefore focuses on inclusive education for students with SEN in Greece, through the exploration of the complexities of the construction of inclusive school communities. It incorporates analysis of three Greek secondary schools with different
legal definitions and approaches to inclusion, through the narratives of head teachers, teachers and parents, in light of the recently established inclusive law. Through the development of a framework articulating different kinds of inclusion, I contribute to the understanding of constructing an inclusive school community.

**Rationale**

A global commitment to inclusive education was made explicit in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), acknowledging the diversity of students and the need to accommodate all within mainstream schools. This acknowledgment was accompanied by a growing international consensus that inclusion is a universal right and goal, as evidenced by policy responses throughout Europe (European Agency for the Development of Special Needs Education, 2010) and in the United Nations (2007). Numerous countries have signed international agreements requiring state parties to develop and sustain inclusive education systems, while others have committed to the principle that all children, regardless of their nationality, gender, ethnicity or disability, have the right to participate in education (UNESCO 2009). Despite these commitments, however, “too many children are being left behind, deprived of their right to thrive and grow simply because they were born female, or have a disability, or live in one of the world’s poorest and most isolated places” (UNESCO, 2011). Indeed, one-third of the 72 million primary school-aged children out of school are unable to attend because of a disability (UNICEF, 2011).

While Greece has signed these agreements and made a national commitment to implement inclusion through structural and practical changes, the challenges are great (Angelides, 2008). Indeed, there is no consensus regarding the definition of inclusion, as it can be conceptualized in many different ways (Corbett, 2001; Booth & Ainscow, 2002). As noted by Avramidis and his colleagues (2000, p. 158), “inclusion is a bewildering concept which can have a variety of interpretations and applications”. These different definitions produce different connotations, depending on and influencing, at the same time, the context and aims of the different groups who use them (Sikes et al., 2007). For Meijer (2003, p. 126) “these differences are linked to administrative, financial and procedural regulations rather than reflecting variations in the incidence and the types of special educational needs”.
As inclusion is experienced as a process located within international, national and local policies, conceptualisations, practices and relationships (Carrington & Robinson, 2007), mandates to establish inclusive communities often necessitate major change in schools. These changes aim to improve the effectiveness of school practices, and to transform organizational structures (Ainscow, 2013). To fully understand if this aim is met, however, it is necessary to critically explore the various levels in which inclusion is located, as referenced above.

Within the Greek educational system, tension between inclusive policy and practice, and between legislation and implementation, is rife. In this tension, the progressive rhetoric of policy is translated into reactionary practices. For example, key school stakeholders – head teachers, teachers and parents – cope with the responsibility of designing or implementing inclusive practices, in the absence of shared policy definitions, articulated structures and procedural guidelines. While these stakeholders bear this responsibility, they are not provided with appropriate resources to promote inclusion, and are themselves excluded from decision-making and problem-solving processes. In response to these concerns, this study explores the construction of inclusive educational communities from the perspective of these stakeholders.

This exploration is conducted through critical engagement with international, national and school level debates, including those on the impact of educational policy and politics, community and family involvement in education policy-making, and the nature of decisions made by school stakeholders. In particular, through school stakeholders’ narratives, their perspectives, conceptualisations, and understanding of inclusion are examined. In addition to conceptualisations, decisions about educational structures, school purposes, strategies and classroom practices are explored. Finally, the relationships developed and maintained by school stakeholders both within and beyond schools are examined, as well as the importance of leadership, collaboration, voice and agency.

According to Stake (2006), the purpose of research is not transformation of understanding, but sophistication of the ways in which we behold the world. The present study aims to achieve this objective on a micro and macro level. The micro
level approach focuses on the constructive work of individuals in interaction (Burr, 2004, p. 23), while the macro level approach examines social structures and dynamics, power, and institutionalized practices (Ball, 1987). Both levels apply to wider contexts of education policy, to relationships between contexts and individuals, and to various conceptualisations of disability, inclusion and equality (Soresi et al., 2011). The approach of schools toward students with SEN, the perceptions and conceptualisations of parents and educators, and the practices, structures and strategies adopted in classrooms will therefore be examined in conjunction with the development of special/inclusive policy, the actions of local educational authorities, and the impact of central ministry policy on school level guidelines and regulations.

Given the complexity of this research, a case study approach was believed to offer the greatest insight into conceptualisations, structures and relationships (Stake, 2006). This study relied upon multiple sources of qualitative information (Morgan & Smirich, 1980; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014) and methods of data collection and analysis (Silverman, 2011; Bryman, 2012). I chose Greece as the site of this research because of its recent adoption of inclusive policy. It is also a nation in deep socio-cultural and economic turmoil, relatively under-studied and under-theorized, that can shed light on ever-deepening social and educational inequalities and exclusion-related challenges.

The contribution of this study to the field of inclusive education is significant. Within the Greek context, little research has been conducted in secondary schools, particularly with regard to the construction of inclusive school communities. While extensive research, both internationally and in Greece, has explored the conceptualisations, perceptions and practices of head teachers, teachers and parents, very few have examined the social construction of inclusive communities through key school members’ narratives. As different social actors represent social reality differently, particularly based on their position related to other actors and practice (Fairclough, 2003), this study will also address the rationale school stakeholders provide to justify their perceptions and practices, the influences upon their conceptualisations, and the extent to which their position in the education ‘pyramid of power’ (ibid) affects their construction of inclusion.
Personal motivations

An interest in students with special educational needs began in my primary school years, when I read in a newspaper about young children with severe and profound needs experiencing abuse in asylums in the late 1980s. Even at this young age, I was horrified to learn that doctors, teachers and wider society had failed these children so badly. As the years went on, I came to understand that Greece lacked awareness and information about SEN. Thus, I felt a deep impulse to work with students with SEN, to educate and include them in both the educational system and Greek society. I pursued undergraduate studies in Pedagogy, Philosophy and Psychology, and began working as a special education teacher in Greek mainstream secondary schools. This experience made me aware that schools primarily emphasised academic achievement in an effort to meet the economic needs of the society, at the expense of inclusion and equality. I also gained insight into the marginal support and services offered to students with SEN, and the struggles of parents and teachers to be more involved in decision-making and problem-solving processes. Despite the recent passage of an Inclusive Law (3699/2008) in Greece, I anticipated a multitude of challenges implementing inclusion in Greek schools. To better understand this process, I enrolled in the MSc Inclusive and Special Education course at the University of Edinburgh. It was this post-graduate experience that further fostered my interest in the construction of inclusive educational communities in Greek secondary schools.

Schools were selected to participate in this study based on the different forms of educational provision offered to students with SEN in the Greek context. Special schools have existed in Greece for several decades, while integration units and inclusive classes were introduced in mainstream settings in the late 2000s. Therefore, students with SEN can still be educated in different types of school settings. To gain the most holistic understanding of this experience, I selected one special school, one mainstream school with integration units, and one mainstream school without provision for special and/or inclusive education. I hoped, by investigating inclusion over the entire spectrum of secondary education in Greece, to provide insights which may improve the educational experience for students with SEN and other school stakeholders.
Aim of study and research questions

The overall aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of the construction of inclusive educational communities in Greek secondary schools, by examining the narratives and practices of school stakeholders. This aim is achieved through case studies of three Greek secondary schools with different legal definitions and approaches to special education and inclusion. The study relies upon multiple sources of qualitative data and information (Stake 2006; Thomas, 2011). The main research questions are:

1. What are the key policies concerning inclusive education in Greece? What are the main challenges within the policy process?

2. What is the nature of conceptualisations regarding SEN and inclusion among some stakeholders involved (head teachers, teachers and parents) in Greek secondary schools?

3. What are the key influences upon school stakeholders’ decisions about the implementation of inclusion and the relations constructed within and beyond schools?

Structure of thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters. The first chapter explores different definitions of inclusive education and discusses the Greek context for students with SEN. Studies conducted in different national contexts are examined, and patterns in the construction of inclusive school communities are identified. Theoretical perspectives around disability and inclusion are also explored. In this study, I perceive inclusive education as a social phenomenon emerging through social interaction, constructed and re-constructed through an ongoing process. Thus, to develop a conceptual framework for the construction of inclusive communities, I discuss social constructionism and its application in educational research. Finally, studies that shed light on key aspects of inclusive school communities – including conceptualisations of inclusion, decisions about structures and strategies, as well as notions of leadership and collaboration – are discussed.
Chapter Two examines the Greek education system, special and inclusive education policies, and the influence of European Union (EU) and other international policy agendas. Policies concerning inclusion in Greece are discussed, and the evolution of special education in Greek schools is explored. Chapter Three outlines the research design of this study. It discusses epistemological and methodological issues, introduces the research participants, and describes the data collection process. It also justifies the choice of qualitative methods, including documentary analysis, non-participatory observations, and interviews, and discusses the merits of cross-case analysis. Finally, trustworthiness, dependability, reflexivity, triangulation, and possible methodological limitations are discussed.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present, through thematic analysis, the key themes emerging from interview accounts and classroom observations at 'Acropolis' (a special technical and vocational secondary school), 'Parthenon' (a mainstream-inclusive secondary school with integration units) and 'Caryatids' (a mainstream secondary school without inclusive structures or provision for students with SEN). Demographic information and the context of each case school are also presented. Chapter Seven presents the cross-case analysis and identifies three themes running through and across the case studies. The framework developed in this study is also presented in Chapter Seven. Chapter Eight discusses the relationship between these themes and research questions, summarize findings, and draw conclusions about the study. This chapter also explores the explicit implications of this research for educational policy and practice in Greece. Finally, I conclude with recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER 1: Reviewing Literature

Introduction

In this chapter, the literature on special education, inclusion, and the construction of inclusive school communities is reviewed. Theories and definitions of inclusion, its history, and the rationale that supports inclusive education are explored. Particular attention is paid to inclusion for students with SEN, the perceptions and values of those working in educational settings, the decisions made about school strategies and classroom practices, and the role of leadership in constructing an inclusive school community. The outcome of this literature review will be an analysis of selected research and theories concerning these issues, specifically how they pertain to the research questions posed in the Introduction.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In Part A, the history of special and inclusive education, the principles underlying inclusion, and some of the key considerations and influences upon conceptualisations of inclusion are explored. The nature of inclusive school communities is then discussed, as well as a presentation of some of the multiple frameworks previously developed to conceptualise this issue. Part B examines the key components emerging from these frameworks. In an effort to better clarify the conceptualisations, practices, experiences, and leadership approaches schools take to inclusion, these components are explored in depth.

PART A

1.1 Brief history of special and inclusive education

Historically, the education of students with SEN has been provided on a segregated and special basis (Oliver, 1996). In this system of provision, children with special educational needs were viewed as a tragedy for their families and society, a reflection of cultural values profoundly influenced by the medical discourse on disability (Vlachou, 1997; Shakespeare, 2006). In the medical or traditional approach, disability is perceived as an infirmity inherent to the individual; in other words, persons with disabilities are considered deficient or defective (Oliver, 1996; Vlachou-Balafouti &
This approach bears a great deal of similarity to the guardianship approach, in which persons with disabilities are considered unable to manage anything without the support of a non-disabled individual (Scior, 2003). In addition to being portrayed as weak and dependent, they have also been associated with stereotypes within a society of ‘others’ (Stamou & Padeliadou, 2009; Ainscow, 2013). According to Booth (2003), there has been reluctance to clarity to the meaning of disability and special educational needs, resulting in a variety of different operational concepts within both schools and society.

In societies adopting the medical model of disability, students with special educational needs are often institutionalised in special settings, a measure taken to ‘protect’ them from the academic and social challenges of mainstream schooling (Barton & Tomlinson, 1984). While this approach purports to shelter vulnerable citizens, it instead reinforces segregation and exclusion (Scior, 2003). Critics of this model also note that the whole individual is ignored, as efforts are entirely focused on ‘normalising’ and ‘curing’ their disability (Rieser & Mason, 1994). Indeed, according to Vlachou (1997, p. 23), the medical model primarily involves “caring and treating those characteristics of a person that makes him/her different from the majority”. As a result, students are viewed as needing to be ‘fixed’ before they can participate in education and society.

The movement to change this approach began in the United States and later in Europe, as parents of children with SEN attempted to eliminate the social marginalisation and exclusion of people with disabilities (Shakespeare, 2006). This movement perceived disability as a socially constructed phenomenon, its meaning within policy documents and legislation derived from society’s conceptualisations about people with needs (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010). In this approach, known as the social model, disability is constructed and sustained by social practices that serve the interests of society; in other words, it is a function of the context that people inhabit, not a quality that belongs to them as persons (Burr, 2004).

Given this shift in thought, segregated special education began to appear an injustice, and emerging ideas of integration were introduced (Corbett & Slee, 2000). However,
integration came to be conceptualised as merely alternative placement in an educational setting, with little attention paid to the setting’s quality or to the desirability of normalising students with SEN with their mainstream peers (ibid). This approach was therefore virtually meaningless, as a student functionally integrated in a mainstream class could remain marginalised by peers and still not participate fully in school life. Indeed, as noted by Thomas (1997), students in integrated classrooms are expected to adapt to the system whilst the system retains its previous structure.

Considering the shortcomings of integration, scholars began to explore the concept of inclusion. According to Florian (2008), inclusion is seen in terms of the quality of the learning experience, whereas integration was associated with only physical adaptations and relocation. Although the two terms are often used interchangeably, inclusion has superseded integration as an ultimate goal, as a more radical concept based on the rights of all students to full and not partial, participation in education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). In inclusive educational environments, students with SEN are valued for who they are because of – and not despite – difference; hence, students with SEN possess an identity and not a pathological condition (Slee, 2006). This approach provides students with the opportunity to participate and become actively involved in their school community (Farrell et al., 2007; Norwich, 2007).

The issue of inclusion, thus, took centre stage in global educational debates about access to, and participation in, mainstream schooling (Evans & Lunt, 2002; Rouse & Florian, 2010). At the same time, the international community took a renewed interest in human rights, and the concept of inclusion as an educational right began to influence reforms worldwide (Barton, 1999; Croll & Moses, 2000; Florian, 2008). The first debates about inclusion emerged during the 1970s in the United States (USA) and United Kingdom (UK). In 1978, policy-makers in the UK issued the Warnock Report, a culmination of a five-year investigation into educational support services for children with SEN. The report concluded that the social and academic needs of children with SEN would be best served in mainstream schools, rather than special settings. The right to an education for all learning-disabled children was expanded in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1990, UNESCO took steps to implement this convention, introducing the World Declaration on Education for All.
Four years later, in 1994, 92 governments and 25 international organizations signed the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, entitled ‘Principles, Politics and Practice for Special Education Needs’ (Farrell et al., 2007). This statement confirms the right of every child to be educated in a mainstream school (UNESCO, 1994). Indeed, the Salamanca Statement argued that mainstream schools with an inclusive orientation are “the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all” (UNESCO, 1994, p.1).

In 2000, at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal (UNESCO, 2000), the international community re-confirmed the importance of inclusive education for all children, providing advice for UNESCO’s work in responding to the challenges of education for all.

Policy responses to these statements and declarations are evident across Europe (European Agency for the Development of Special Needs Education, 2010), as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability requires that state parties develop and sustain an inclusive education system at all levels (United Nations, 2007). Indeed, those who ratified this convention have made a national commitment to move toward the implementation of inclusive practices (Thorton & McEntee, 1995; Vislie, 2003; Angelides, 2008; Booth & Ainscow, 2011). However, while UNESCO’s Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2011, p.1) states that no progress has been made regarding the provision of inclusive education worldwide, as “the number of children out of school stood at 67 million in 2008 ... falling too slowly to meet the Education for All target by 2015” (UNESCO, 2011, p. 1). There are a number of reasons for this shortfall; for many students with SEN, inadequate provision remains a deterrent to both enrolment and retention.

In contrast to the all-embracing definitions of inclusion developed by UNESCO, agendas in Western countries, including the UK, focus almost exclusively on students with SEN. Policies addressing inclusion in the UK include the Warnock Report, the 1981 Education Act, and the Green Paper on Excellence for all Children (DFE, 1997). According to Florian and Rouse (2001), the enactment of the Green Paper was followed by a series of changes in policy, suggesting that inclusion is related to raising standards of achievement for all students. While these changes were welcomed in
terms of their recognition of diversity, the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools has been a challenging process. Indeed, although the government encouraged diversity, it did not support the construction of inclusive schools, thus making it difficult for all students to fulfil their potential. Other countries, including Greece, have faced similar challenges, as detailed in the following sections and chapters.

1.2 Definitions of inclusion

Despite the international emphasis on more inclusive educational opportunities for students with SEN, scholars continue to define inclusion in different—and sometimes contradictory—ways (Allan & Slee, 2008; Armstrong et al., 2011). Indeed, there is no universal definition of inclusion, and conceptualisations vary widely (Booth & Ainscow, 1998; Clough & Corbett, 2000). For many scholars, inclusion refers to the acceptance of students with SEN, in a spirit of celebrating diversity (Swain & Cook, 2001). This perspective—which notably informs the definition in this study—is rooted in the social model of disability. In truly inclusive settings, students with SEN feel they belong, actively participate, and mutually support each other (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

Other scholars, however, have adopted a broader definition of inclusion (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), as a process of increasing participation and decreasing exclusion from culture, community and the curriculum of mainstream schools (Booth et al., 2000). According to Barton and Armstrong (2007, p. 6):

Inclusive education is not the end itself, but a means to an end. It is about contributing to the realization of an inclusive society with the demand for a rights approach as a central component of policy making. This, the question of inclusion, is fundamentally about issues of human rights, social justice and the struggle for a non-discriminatory society. These principles are at the heart of inclusive educational policy and practice.

This method requires recognition, acceptance and respect for all those included in an inclusive community.
Ainscow and Miles (2008) identify five distinct perspectives on inclusion. The first perspective views inclusion as an assertion of rights in mainstream education on behalf of disabled students and others labelled as having SEN. The second perspective views inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusions (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), defined as the partial or permanent exclusion of students from mainstream schooling for breaches of school or classroom rules. Like inclusion, exclusion is conceptualised here in a wider sense, referring to constraints that prevent full participation. The third perspective views inclusion as a movement to prevent marginalisation for so-called ‘vulnerable’ groups. According to Campbell (2002), there is an increasing emphasis on overcoming discrimination and disadvantage for groups identified as vulnerable to exclusion. The fourth perspective views inclusion as the promotion of school for all, emphasising the belief that everyone should benefit from the comprehensive/mainstream school experience. This conceptualisation of inclusion “involves creating a single type of school for all which serves a socially diverse community” (Ainscow & Miles, 2008, p. 18). The fifth perspective, a subtle variation of the fourth, views inclusion as an opportunity for all students to access mainstream education as it currently exists.

In the interest of conceptually organizing the multitude of perspectives on inclusion, Farrell (2000) and Kalambouka et al. (2007) identify four common themes: 1) presence, 2) participation, 3) acceptance, and 4) achievement. Presence refers to the physical placement of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms, while participation includes the academic and social interaction of students in school and classroom life. Acceptance, meanwhile, refers to a positive stance on behalf of all school members toward students with SEN, while achievement refers to students’ academic and social development.

In the present study, the term ‘inclusive education’ is used in the context of a human rights approach. This approach suggests that education is a human right, as well as the basis for a more just and equal society. The current study thus conforms to the definition laid out in the UN’s Education for All agenda, which declares that the purpose of inclusive education is to increase the participation of pupils who are marginalised within existing educational arrangements (UNESCO, 2000b). More
specifically, it adopts the following definition cited in the Index of Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 7):

Inclusion in education involves increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, cultures, curricula and communities of local schools ... restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in their locality.

This definition presumes that the purpose of inclusive education is to reduce social exclusion (Clough & Corbett, 2000). It also suggests it is the responsibility of school stakeholders to include all students, encouraging participation in all aspects of social and academic life.

1.3 Conceptualisations of inclusion

Just as people define inclusion in different ways, they also conceptualise it – and its importance and feasibility – in different ways (Ainscow, 2012). Despite extensive use of the term and growing international consensus that it should be a universal goal in education, inclusion remains today a highly contested concept (Ainscow et al., 2006; Riddell, 2009; Allan & Slee, 2008; Florian & Spratt, 2013). Indeed, there is no shared acceptance of its meaning, or understanding of the values underpinning it (Clough & Corbett, 2000; Ainscow, 2013). In this section, the variety of ways people conceptualise inclusion, and possible rationales for its acceptance or rejection, are explored.

As noted in the previous section, the introduction of the Salamanca Statement and UNESCO’s World Declaration on Education for All inspired a renewed interest on behalf of the international community in human rights, equity and inclusion, influencing education reforms worldwide. Indeed, ‘special education’ has been largely redefined; no longer meaning only traditional visions of segregated provision, but also inclusion in mainstream settings for students with SEN (Croll & Moses, 2000; Florian, 2008; Ainscow, 2013). This human rights perspective has been transformative, as segregation encouraged society to envision those with SEN as second-class citizens, not deserving of the same educational and social rights that others enjoy (European Foundation Centre, 2012). In contrast, the ideological basis for inclusive education is
the need to respond to diversity, and to encourage social justice, equity and democratic participation (Vlachou & Barton, 1994; Barton, 1997; Clark et al., 1999; Evans & Lunt, 2002).

Some people challenge the discourse of inclusion as a human right, however, questioning whose rights are really addressed - the parent(s)’, the child’s, or others’ (Riddell, 2002). There are also issues with regard to parental choice. Many parents of students with SEN prefer special schools, expressing concern with the lack (or inadequate allocation) of resources in mainstream schools. If special schools were closed as a result of inclusive policy, parents would likely be left with fewer (or no) options they consider appropriate for their children, particularly those students with severe needs. In this sense, there is a dilemma between freedom of choice and full inclusion.

The conceptualisation of inclusion provided in the Index of Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 3), places great emphasis on participation in the classroom. It suggests inclusion is a

process of increasing learning and participation for all students. It is an ideal to which schools can aspire but which is never fully reached. But inclusion happens as soon as the process of increasing participation is started. An inclusive school supports all students by developing learning strategies regardless of their SEN, age, race or gender, allowing all students to fully participate in school life. An inclusive school is one that is on the move.

An inclusive school, based on this interpretation, accepts and supports all students regardless of age, race, disability, or gender, providing all with the ability to participate in mainstream school life. For some scholars, however, this conceptualisation is incomplete. Indeed, a number of scholars view inclusion from a more empirical perspective, less interested in participation than in the social and academic outcomes of inclusion in schools (Evans, 2002). Still others believe that students with SEN can be best educated outside mainstream classrooms or in non-inclusive settings (Armstrong et al., 2010). As a result, some students remain marginalised, even in mainstream settings deemed ‘inclusive’. 
Social, cultural, and political issues also have a bearing on conceptualisations of inclusion (Slee, 2013; Ainscow et al., 2012). While Western democracies tend to be highly concerned with the exclusion of students with SEN, elsewhere inclusion is perceived as irrelevant or unfeasible, often due to socio-cultural or economic constraints (Vlachou-Balafouti, 2001; Ainscow et al., 2006; Petrou, 2009). In most countries, inclusion is an evolving concept and process – “a product of a system of belief” (Thomas, 2013, p. 475) – focused on valuing and accepting difference and on the rights of students with disabilities to attend local, mainstream schools as equal members of the school community. Thus, while it is possible to have consensus across national and international borders on the meaning of inclusion in a broad sense, “the reality in each national system will be determined by ... history, culture and politics” (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 3).

From a constructivist perspective, Peters (2002) and Laluvein (2010) conceptualise inclusion as a whole-school approach to social relations and the production of meanings, through shared processes and negotiations between school stakeholders. Such an approach relies on the knowledge and contributions of those who participate in the shared creation of meanings. From this perspective, inclusive education is considered a continuous and challenging reform, requiring a social rather than medical understanding of disability, and the deconstruction of special educational needs. It also necessitates a complete reconstruction and reorganisation of mainstream curricula, as well as the development of structures and practices which encourage and value participation.

However, some scholars have raised doubts concerning the extent to which mainstream schools – and their staff – are trained and qualified to include students with SEN, questioning their commitment to inclusive values and their perceptions of inclusion (Armstrong, 2005; Florian, 2007; Norwich, 2007; Petrou, 2009; Whitty & Clarke, 2012). These scholars are also concerned about the academic outcomes of inclusive classrooms, citing the highly complex nature of inclusive implementation (Norwich, 2008). These concerns also reflect tensions in the philosophical foundations of inclusion. Although education is recognised as a human right, educational policy is increasingly rooted in the interests of the labour market, a trend which emphasises
individualism and economic competitiveness, often at the expense of students with SEN and inclusion (Rouse & Florian, 2010).

Indeed, inclusion, often, challenges the goals and values of education. Some academics, including Ainscow et al. (2012), have argued that narrow definitions of educational ‘effectiveness’ have deflected focus away from principles of equity, empowerment, and the wider purposes of education. According to the authors, this approach “run[s] the risk of producing young people who are ethically rounded but otherwise ill-educated and unequipped for adult life” (Hegarty, 2001, p. 246). Other researchers, however, argue that schools place too much emphasis on students’ social awareness, at the expense of measurable achievement outcomes (Lindsay, 2007). However, this argument implicitly runs the risk of stressing ability-based performance and assessment, ignoring the acquisition of unquantifiable skills and knowledge.

As later chapters demonstrate, inclusion has proven to be one of the most contentious educational policy reforms in recent years. Indeed, it remains poorly understood - both internationally and in the Greek context, where this study takes place (Florian, 2008). In Europe, Meijer and colleagues (2003) have identified three different approaches to inclusion. The first is the uni-directional approach, in which one education system encompasses all students – SEN and mainstream alike. The second approach is multi-directional, in which one system exists, but different practices are implemented in mainstream and special schools. The third approach is bi-directional, in which two systems – mainstream and special – co-exist. While Greek policy calls for a uni-directional approach, in reality, the nation’s education system is integrative rather than inclusive; in other words, multi-directional.

According to the analysis of Zoniou-Sideri (2004), the term ‘inclusive education’ in Greek policy documentation often translates to sumperiliptikh ekpaideush/ekpaideush to mh apokleismou, meaning ‘non-exclusion’. This interpretation, however, merely adopts the same meaning and connotations as the term integration. As a result, inclusion in Greece is perceived as just a new type of mainstream schooling, and special schools remain sites of fragmentation, discrimination and segregation (ibid). This singular and narrow perception contradicts international discourse that broadly
conceptualises inclusion as a reform that supports and cherishes diversity in all learners (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).

1.4 Inclusive school communities

The features that make a flourishing, inclusive school community — and the extent to which students with SEN are fully included in their schools — remain the focus of intense scrutiny. Indeed, although numerous countries have committed to more inclusive policy and practice, there are still concerns regarding how to implement inclusion in schools (Ainscow et al., 2006; Florian & Rouse, 2014). Despite some consensus over the recognition of key elements and values in inclusive education, there is still disagreement regarding its implications in practice, as there are clear discrepancies between theoretical notions of inclusion and its practical implementation (Tarr et al., 2012; Hazel & Allen, 2013). For example, in many countries, including Greece, students with SEN remain in segregated settings despite the enactment of inclusive education policies (Coutsocostas & Alborz, 2010).

Curcic et al. (2011) and Ainscow (2012) argue that earlier research identifying what works — and does not — for the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools, addressed student needs individually (Vlachou, 1997), rather than developing whole school approaches and practices (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Thus, for schools to construct truly inclusive communities — where difference is appreciated and exclusion is discouraged — they must move beyond mere curriculum adaptations and modifications in behaviour management. But how are these communities defined, constructed and/or challenged?

Community is defined by Kymlicka (1989) as a group of people living a common life through shared relations. However, community is a complex term with “positive and negative connotations to all who consider themselves a part of one community” (Azzopardi, 2011, p. 180). According to Wenger et al. (2002, p. 28):

[C]ommunity creates the social fabric of learning. It fosters interactions based on mutual respect and trust. It encourages a willingness to share ideas, expose one’s ignorance, ask difficult questions and listen carefully.
The concept of community suggests spatial and temporal relations, as community members are located within specific physical boundaries, interacting through shared experiences (Curcic, 2009; Soresi et al., 2011). The symbolic boundaries of community are signified by shared values, members' identities and their interaction as community members. However, the term also raises questions about who and what belongs in a community with regard to social diversity (Twelvetrees, 2002). Although community is an understanding of collective human life, with shared thinking and expectations (Thompson, 1998; Clark et al., 1999), it is also the struggle of individual community members for life enrichment, identification with others and equal participation in decision-making processes (Azzopardi, 2011).

Applying the concept of community to education – specifically to schools – students are perceived as sharing more or less the same qualities, learning to interact and cooperate together, gaining not only academic but also social skills, and participating in school life (ibid). However, in schools – as in all communities – some members are excluded, as others avoid embracing the full participation of specific groups (Silvers et al., 1998). Thus, it is important to identify what makes a school community inclusive, and also ways to construct and cultivate this type of community.

According to previous research, inclusive school communities are underpinned by democratic values. They accept and celebrate diversity, respect all members' strengths and abilities, and provide opportunities for participation in collaborative decision-making and problem-solving processes. They also develop students' capabilities through a curriculum adapted to the needs of all, and actively engage with the wider educational and social community (Peters, 2002; Ainscow, 2004; Carrington & Robinson, 2008; Tarr et al., 2012). According to Curcic et al. (2011, p. 118), an inclusive community:

... [goes] beyond assuring the spatial requirements of students that they all receive the same education ... to consider how to create a school environment in which students' diversity in culture, talents and needs are reflected in a diversity of options within the curriculum, restructuring the school's operation.

The responsibility for constructing this type of community often falls to head teachers as school leaders. Indeed, they are expected to support and facilitate teacher training
opportunities, to inspire other stakeholders to adopt positive conceptualisations and visions of inclusion, and to encourage collaborative relationships (Bush, 2005; Mortier et al., 2010). However, inclusive change is a challenging, whole school process (Hughes & Anderas, 1995) – an increasingly difficult one considering the emphasis on accountability and achievement in education. This is evident in the Greek context – explored in greater detail in Chapter 2 – where inclusive policies conflict with a rigid, highly academic curriculum designed to meet the labour market needs of society. This conflict, as noted in later chapters, contributes to a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding among school stakeholders.

There is a significant body of literature detailing the successful (or, in some cases, unsuccessful) implementation of inclusion, and the process by which an inclusive community is developed (Bush, 2000; Peters, 2002; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004; Ainscow, 2005; Kugelmass, 2006; Timor & Burton, 2006; Carrington & Robinson, 2007; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Curcic et al., 2011; Ainscow et al., 2012; Florian & Spratt, 2013). In the Greek context, however, there is limited research regarding the construction of inclusive school communities (Mamas, 2012; Strogilos et al., 2012), as literature focuses almost exclusively on specific features of inclusion and the implementation of inclusive policy. Indeed, most studies on this topic have evaluated school members’ attitudes and perceptions toward inclusion, as well as the influences upon their perceptions. The following sections, therefore, explore frameworks developed to conceptualise the construction of inclusive school communities in contexts outside Greece.
1.5 Key components for the construction and development of inclusive school communities

As noted in the previous section, there are many features, factors and conceptualisations that play a role in the construction of an inclusive school community. This section explores frameworks developed by a variety of researchers in different educational contexts.

Carrington and Robinson (2006), in their study of schools in Queensland, Australia, found school communities to struggle in their efforts to respond to diversity in inclusive ways. The authors suggest there is an urgent need both to re-evaluate traditional understandings of learning and teaching, and to address inequalities in educational opportunity. To this point, they specifically note the cultural construction of both difference and school success (and failure), reflected in the personal perceptions, beliefs and values of head teachers, teachers and parents (Carrington & Robinson, 2008). Carrington and Robinson’s study suggests that, to build an inclusive educational community, all school stakeholders should critically engage with inclusive values and practices, moving beyond rigid academic curricula and existing discriminatory school structures. This requires not just adapting teaching practices to students’ needs, but adopting a broader, more holistic approach to inclusion. The study’s authors also highlight the importance of treating students as citizens within the school community, prioritising collaboration, participation and support.

Along the same lines, Peters (2002), Kugelmass & Ainscow, (2004), and Kugelmass (2004) identify common themes that emerged in their analysis of inclusive school communities in the United Kingdom, Portugal and the United States. In particular, Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) link the construction of inclusive school communities with wider social factors. They identify an initial motivation for building an inclusive school community, supported by external forces such as policy and the wider interests of society, while also considering differences among staff and students as resources for change. Collaboration between school stakeholders, students and social community is also identified as an important element in the building of an inclusive school (Ainscow et al., 2012). In this sense, schooling is perceived as a social and
political endeavour that leads to equity and justice, avoiding the reproduction of discrimination and marginalisation (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004; Vlachou, 2004).

Thus, for inclusion to be realized, school members must be prepared to change their values, conceptualisations and practices. Inclusion should be perceived as a philosophy and value system underpinned by an appreciation for all participants. As noted by Lipsky and Gartner (1997, p. 792), inclusive education “in restructured schools both provides benefits for all students and serves as an exemplar for an inclusive society, one that is both diverse and democratic. This requires a school-wide approach, where all school stakeholders reconsider the school’s purpose, policies and practices (Corbett, 1999; Kugelmass, 2006; Timor & Burton, 2006).

Susan Peters (2002), through a socio-political and constructivist perspective, provides yet another conceptual framework for the analysis of inclusive change and the construction of inclusive school communities. Examining the inclusive reform process in two US schools, Peters developed a model for building inclusive schools, addressing changes in school organisation, values, culture, purposes, curriculum and strategies, building on the strengths of students, school members and the community. She found that conceptualisations toward inclusion play a key role, concluding that democratic values should be placed at the core of inclusive change. These findings support those of Thomas et al. (1998, p. 192), who identified the following criteria in the construction of an inclusive school community:

A well-articulated, coordinated range of services and supports; collaboration and teaming; resources, planning, communication, ongoing professional development; leadership that is supportive and backed by financial resources and clear mission and policies; broad involvement and connections between school and community; curriculum and instruction that considers social, academic, and physical needs of students as well as that is characterized by flexibility, innovation, experimentation, and adaptation.

These criteria are in contrast to the rational-technical positivistic standards traditionally held by some in the field of special education, including those that stress assessment, categorisation, placement and provision of special services to individual students. Peters (2002) argues that this narrow rational-technical vision of inclusive change should be abandoned in favour of broader socio-political and constructivist
school reform initiatives. When inclusion is approached from a socio-political perspective, she argues, society is required not only to adopt new educational policies and practices, but to re-evaluate its understanding of why reforms are necessary, delving deeply into the culture of schools and schooling (Peters, 2002; Florian & Rouse, 2014).

Reihl (2000, p. 71), by means of an extensive literature review, argues that school leaders, in order to develop a more inclusive approach to administration and diversity, need to adopt new understandings of disability, to introduce and establish inclusive approaches within schools, and to build connections between schools and communities:

> When wedded to relentless commitment to equity, voice and social justice, administrators’ efforts in the tasks of making sense, as well as promoting inclusive cultures and practices in schools, and building positive relationships outside of the school, may indeed foster a new form of practice.

A number of researchers have emphasised sharing expertise and resources between school members and schools, connecting educational development with wider community development (Hargreaves, 2004). Researchers, particularly those in the English context, reveal that school-to-school collaboration and the sharing of resources can strengthen schools’ capacities to respond to students’ diversity (Ainscow & West, 2006; Soresi et al., 2011; Ainscow et al., 2012).

With regard to inclusive classroom practice, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argue that teachers should shift their focus from reaching only those individuals who have been identified as having SEN, to the learning of all students in the classroom community. They have also identified the importance of rejecting deterministic beliefs about ability, as well as the assumption that the presence of some individuals holds back the progress of others, creating barriers to inclusive practice and the implementation of inclusion (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Thus, shared understandings of inclusion, shared values, and a shared vision and commitment to these values have been identified as key components in the construction of inclusive school communities (Reihl, 2000; Kugelman & Ainscow, 2004; Carrington & Robinson, 2008). This is confirmed by the findings of Hazel and Allen (2013), who
concluded that a shared understanding and commitment to inclusion and equality resulted in a more positive school culture, impacting students' academic achievement and social inclusion. While each school in their study developed differences in culture, structure and expectations, all emphasised a shared vision of inclusion as a means of promoting community and solidarity. Through common vision, collaborative relationships were facilitated – providing a framework for decision making that served to protect the schools from changes due to outside forces. Each school also expressed high expectations for all its members, despite having fewer resources.

However, Cook and Slee (1993) suggest that exclusion cannot be overcome by merely changing perceptions towards inclusion. Following this argument, Hazel and Allen (2013) conclude that school structures, and the responsibility for and expectations that support the implementation of school structures, are also core elements of inclusive communities. Along the same lines, Booth and Ainscow (2002), in their Index of Inclusion, identify a number of indicators in support of inclusive development in schools. This index offers schools a supportive process of self-review and development, which draws on the views of staff, students, and parents, as well as other members of the surrounding community. The indicators cover three dimensions: 1) creating inclusive cultures (building community, establishing inclusive values); 2) producing inclusive policies (developing the school for all, organizing support for diversity); and 3) evolving inclusive practice (orchestrating learning, mobilizing resources) (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 9). Thus, Booth and Ainscow have set out processes for developing inclusive communities, but these have also been found to be challenges, depending upon the existing complexities of each institution.

As a result, Ainscow et al. (2006) encourage social processes of learning in schools. Such processes create space for re-considering existing discourses and focusing on opportunities for moving inclusive practice forward. Indeed, Ainscow believes an 'inclusive turn' is more likely to occur in contexts where a culture of collaboration exists, encouraging shared decision-making and problem-solving (Ainscow, 2007, p. 3; see also Ainscow, 2012). This requires those within a particular context to work collaboratively to address the challenges faced by specific groups of learners, and to demand new relationships between all schools, authorities and community members.
(Ainscow, 2005). In identifying what constitutes an inclusive turn, Ainscow draws on a programme of longitudinal research carried out collaboratively with schools in an effort to develop better responses to the challenges they cope with (Ainscow et al., 2006). Support, expertise and innovation aimed at creating fairer and inclusive schools, as derived from these collaborative working relationships, can theoretically overcome social challenges between and within schools, producing benefits for all. According to Ainscow (2012), new working relationships can realize untapped potential, while school-to-school collaboration can help mobilise it. He also encourages head teachers to accept more responsibility in this process, and new roles and thinking practices on behalf of the local authorities. However, he acknowledges that implementation and sustainability of these strategies is not an easy or direct process, as school networks include tensions and different priorities, values and interests (Tilstone, 2003; Ainscow et al., 2012). Indeed, conflicting priorities and ways of working inhibit the development of relationships between local and national policy makers and between schools and local authorities, particularly as central governments often remain pre-occupied with short term purposes rather than long-term change and innovation (Ainscow, 2013).

Another important aspect of building an inclusive school community is the nature of leadership within that community (Reihl, 2000; Ainscow, 2013; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Oswald & Engelbrect, 2013). Ainscow (1995) identifies distributed leadership as a key element of inclusion, in addition to the involvement of school staff, students and the community in policy making. He also identifies collaboration between school stakeholders as a critical element in building an inclusive school community. The same approach is supported by Simpson et al. (2003), who found that shared responsibility, shared decision-making, and collaboration comprise the philosophic core of inclusion. Indeed, these elements feature prominently in the ‘inclusion collaboration model’ introduced by Myles and Simpson in 2001. This model has five major interwoven components, including: environmental and curricular modifications; mainstream education classroom support and instructional methods; attitudinal and social support; coordinated team commitment; recurrent evaluation of inclusion procedures; and home-school collaboration. This framework is consistent with the framework proposed by Peters (2000) and Reihl (2000) regarding inclusive change in schools,
suggesting that the interaction of participants within a context and process of change must be dynamic, interpretive and reflective (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). In the following section, the key elements of constructing inclusive school communities are discussed further.

**PART B**

The following sections explore in depth some of the key-and most referred-framework components emerged by previous research in order to construct inclusive communities, as discussed in Part A. The component of conceptualisations of inclusion is further examined with regard to head teachers, teachers, and parents. The component of decisions about school structures is explored in the context of school purposes, school strategies, and classroom practices. The nature of relationships both inside and outside schools— including the power, voice and agency of school stakeholders— is examined as another well-researched component for the construction of inclusive school communities.

**1.6 Conceptualisations of inclusion— school stakeholders**

Head teachers’, teachers’ and parents’ conceptualisations are an important part of inclusive discourse (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Kugelmass, 2006). One of the key challenges in current society is the effect of discriminatory perceptions and marginalized thinking on different social relationships (Sapon-Shevin, 2007). School members have been called upon to reduce these challenges, to adopt strong inclusive values and a shared commitment to inclusion, and to respect difference and diversity (Dyson et al., 2004). According to Booth and Ainscow (2002), positive conceptualisations of inclusion on behalf of school stakeholders result in positive approaches to diversity and broader visions of inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Indeed, in both international and Greek scholarship, school stakeholders’ (head teachers, teachers and parents) conceptualisations and perceptions about inclusion are highlighted as significant in its development and implementation (Boutskou, 2007; Kalyva et al., 2007; Symeoniodou, 2009; Antonopoulou, 2010; De Boer et al., 2010; Hazel & Allen, 2013) These conceptualisations are often negatively influenced, however, by cultural stereotypes, lack of experience with or knowledge of SEN, as
well as outdated understandings of disability, reinforcing discrimination toward students with SEN (Biklen, 2000). These conceptions and understandings often reflect values and norms that prevail in society, making the need for shared understanding and vision apparent (Wong, 2010). Given their important role in school communities, the following sub-sections will explore the conceptualisations of head teachers, teachers, and parents with regard to SEN and inclusion.

1.6.1 Head teachers

According to Rouse and Florian (1996), head teachers' perceptions and conceptualisations are incredibly important, as their leadership sets the tone for the whole school community (Male & Male, 2001; Avissar et al., 2003; Horrocks et al., 2008). In order for head teachers to build inclusive school communities, they must show a strong commitment to the philosophy of inclusion – to respect, equality and diversity – and develop a personal vision and positive conceptualisation of change, before communicating change messages to school staff and the wider community (Reihl, 2000; Avissar et al., 2003; Praisner, 2003). Indeed, in order for head teachers to build a truly inclusive educational community, they must develop a keen awareness of the broader educational needs of students without being constrained by narrow perceptions of disability and service provision.

Despite this need, previous research suggests there is no consensus among head teachers in their conceptualisation of inclusion. A number of studies have found head teachers to have positive perceptions and a broad vision of inclusion (Hadjikakou et al., 2008; Khochen & Radford, 2011), accepting all students and ensuring equal opportunities for those with SEN (Frost 2008; Angelides et al., 2012). While other head teachers were found to indicate their commitment to the rhetoric of inclusion, they also expressed concern about its feasibility in practice (Khochen & Radford, 2011; Whitty & Clarke, 2012). Others, also, suggested that Students with SEN should remain in special school settings (Croll & Moses, 2000), assuming their long-term social and academic needs can be better met through specialized preparation in protected environments (Praisner, 2003).
These views are influenced by political and socio-cultural agitations in different social and educational contexts. Previous research indicates that head teachers' perceptions are increasingly impacted by the influences of globalisation and marketization, which place economic concerns at the forefront of national education policies, often at the expense of inclusive education (Abbot, 2006). Even those that accept inclusion are likely to perceive it as a form of remedial support, underpinned by students' ability to achieve academically, rather than as an effort to extend equal opportunities to Students with SEN (Curcic, 2009). This suggests that head teachers are likely to conceptualize inclusion in terms of academic issues such as curriculum or grade modifications, rather than the deeper idea that inclusive education goes beyond school boundaries, extending to social relations with the wider community. Research also indicates that head teachers' conceptualisations of inclusion are influenced by the nature of general "decision-making about the resourcing and positioning of SEN" in schools and society (Bowe & Ball, 1992, p. 135). Indeed, in more centralized educational systems, such as the Greek system, head teachers remain excluded from central policy-making processes, affecting their decisions about the implementation of policies in schools.

Educational policy and politics also impact head teachers' inclusive vision. According to Rouse and Florian (1996), head teachers' vision of inclusion strongly influences implementation, as they set the tone for the whole school community (Avissar et al., 2003; Horrocks et al., 2008). Lipsy and Gartner (1997) believe that an inclusive head teacher, as the school's leader, should initiate and implement "value-driven, vision based inclusion" for it to be successful (Senge, 1994). Head teachers of inclusive schools should therefore have both a personal and an institutional vision that recognizes respect, equality and diversity (Blair, 2002), before communicating messages of acceptance or disapproval to other school stakeholders and the wider community (Male & Male, 2001). These messages, in turn, have a powerful influence on the school-wide acceptance of inclusion. Indeed, Horrocks et al. (2008) stress that, for schools to become inclusive communities, there is a need for head teachers to define and communicate acceptance, creating opportunities and spaces for all students.

A number of other researchers, including Farrell et al. (2007) and Mattson and Hansen (2009), state that inclusive head teachers should encourage cooperation between school stakeholders and the wider community and urge their shared participation in
decision-making and problem-solving processes. As Abbot (2006) suggests, schools with collaborative cultures enable head teachers to facilitate the practical implementation of inclusion.

1.6.2 Teachers

Teachers’ conceptualisations of inclusion are also critically important in the construction of inclusive school communities (Ainscow et al., 2012). Research suggests their perceptions, attitudes and understandings of inclusion are mixed, however. Indeed, studies by Anderson et al. (2007) and Coutsocostas and Alborz (2010) reveal that the perceptions of teachers vary significantly; while many express positive feelings about inclusive values in theory, others have concerns related to policy implementation and practice in mainstream schools. In countries like the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom – those with longer histories developing and implementing inclusive policies – teachers have been found to have more positive perceptions to inclusion and inclusive practice. Studies conducted in Norway (Myklebust, 2002; Pijl, 2010) and Sweden (Jerlinder et al., 2010) indicate that Physical Education teachers, for example, are in favour of inclusion. However, in countries such as Turkey and Greece – where segregated special education remains the dominant form of schooling for SEN children – the concept of inclusion is difficult for many teachers to grasp (Rkap & Kaczmarek, 2010). Teachers also suggest that market-driven achievement standards have impacted their perceptions of inclusion, as academic excellence is increasingly prioritized at the expense of diversity and equality (Slee, 1997; Shakespeare & Watson, 1998; Clark et al., 1999).

In Greece, the traditional, segregated approach to the education of SEN children remains prevalent (Stamou & Padeliadou, 2009). According to Stamou and Padeliadou (2009), written accounts from twenty-nine undergraduate mainstream teachers indicate they conceptualized SEN by drawing upon traditional discourses from a disabled-as-deficient viewpoint. Similarly, Boutskou (2007) found teachers often adopted the “doctor-client discourse” – discussing disability in terms of deficiency – and the “consultancy discourse” – providing advice and intervention to students instead of developing an educator-learner relationship (Boutskou, 2007, p. 295).
In a recent study conducted by Coutsoostas & Alborz (2010) in a northern region of Greece, 47.5% of 600 secondary teachers surveyed expressed disapproval with the concept of full inclusion. Approximately 80% demonstrated restricted perceptions, and one-third self-identified as unfamiliar with the concept, primarily due to the only recent introduction of inclusive legislation. These perceptions, as noted by Avramidis & Kalyva (2007), hinder the development of inclusive practices. Additionally, Greek teachers believe that special education provides secure “shelter” for students with SEN, protecting them a mainstream school’s educational deficiencies (Zoniou-Sideri & Vlachou, 2006, p. 389). Special teachers in particular conceptualize inclusion as merely a new model of special education in mainstream schools, characterized by the development of special classes and integration units (Zoniou-Sideri & Vlachou, 2006).

Contrary to the study of Coutsoostas and Alborz (2010) – referenced in the previous paragraph – Koutrouba et al. (2008) found 52.9% of mainstream secondary teachers in Cyprus to express positive feelings toward inclusion, and a willingness to fight discrimination. This stance was underpinned by humanistic and democratic values, despite the crumbling infrastructure and lack of support they coped with in their classrooms (Nilholm, 2006). These values, as further discussed in the following sections, provide an opportunity for all students to experience equal learning opportunities, and to participate in the academic and social life of the class – key components for the construction of an inclusive school community. In contrast, Orsati and Causton-Theoharis (2012), in their U.S. study, found that teachers perceive specific groups of students as unimportant, particularly those lacking the ability to perform exceptionally well academically. According to this conceptualisation, students with SEN must prove themselves ‘worthy’ of inclusion, a viewpoint completely at odds with the humanistic and democratic values noted above (Curcic et al., 2011).

Those with negative conceptualisations attributed their doubts to concerns about lower academic achievement in inclusive classrooms, as well as strict curriculum standards and a lack of appropriate infrastructure (Koutrouba et al., 2006). Even those in favour of inclusion in theory perceived of themselves as not responsible for the education and inclusion of students with SEN (Angelides, 2008; Batsiou et al., 2008). A possible
explanation for this perception is the vague articulation of both mainstream and special teachers’ roles within Greek education policy documents, as well as the limited knowledge and training of teachers regarding inclusion (Florian, 2009). Avramidis et al. (2000) found approximately one-third of teacher participants in their respective studies to be relatively unfamiliar with the term inclusion, and that both head teachers and teachers aspired to develop an integration model rather than an inclusive one. Indeed, in practical, conceptual and pedagogical terms, they considered integration an appropriate approach for Students with SEN.

Symeonidou and Phtiaka (2014), in their recent study of Greek-Cypriot teachers, found that teachers’ initial education and training does not guarantee a shared understanding of inclusive education, as secondary teachers were particularly found to be unfamiliar with the concept of differentiation. For example, some secondary teachers had never been exposed to the idea of inclusive education, while others had heard about or participated in a special education training course. This disparity likely results from a failure to include teachers in the change process, limiting their ability to take ownership of inclusive reform. Special teachers, although more familiar with special education and inclusion, often bring varied conceptualisations of inclusion to their schools after being trained in different educational contexts abroad (a special education course of study does not exist in Greek universities). In other words, as secondary teachers have different training regarding inclusive education, they also have different perceptions and understandings of inclusion, reflected in their conceptualisations, goals, and teaching practices (Padeliadou & Lampropoulou, 1997; Georgiadis & Zisimos, 2012).

Previous research has also found teachers to have mixed (negative or neutral) feelings about inclusion when taking into consideration the severity of students’ needs – and the nature and degree of their disability – suggesting that pupils with severe and profound difficulties should be provided separate provision (Polychroni et al., 2006; Fyssa et al., 2014). Avramidis et al. (2000) found that while the majority of teachers agree with the concept of inclusive education, a large proportion of mainstream teachers argued that they lacked the requisite knowledge, training and resources to implement inclusion in practice. Similar to these studies – conducted in the United
Kingdom and United States, respectively – Greek teachers also consider themselves unprepared to meet the needs of Students with SEN, as their initial education and in-service training does not equip them with the appropriate skills and knowledge (Coutsocostas & Alborz, 2010). This contributes to a sense of guilt with regard to their inability to teach students effectively (Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2009; Khochen & Radford, 2011). Even those who felt confident, shared concerns about time management, organizational change, a lack of resources and support, instructional adaptations, and the demands of a challenging curriculum (Strogilos et al., 2011; Symeonidou & Mavrou, 2014). These findings suggest that in the Greek context, despite the adoption of new policy, appropriate training opportunities and resources have not yet been made available, prompting teachers to feel negatively about their new responsibilities.

Indeed, both mainstream and special teachers voiced concerns about their responsibility for the education of Students with SEN. Studies investigating the role of mainstream and special teachers in inclusion, conducted in both Greece and abroad, found the lack of shared responsibility to be a significant challenge, impacting teachers’ perceptions and practices (Strogilos, 2012). In the United States, Vaughn et al. (1996) and Van Reusen et al. (2000) found the majority of teachers to have negative perceptions of inclusion, as they expressed concern about shouldering the burden of academic achievement for children with SEN. They also questioned the impact of inclusion on learning quality for all students (ibid).

Lastly, teachers’ perceive their role in teacher-parent collaboration as an important, albeit challenging, component of their practice (Symeou, 2006; Abu-Hamour & Muhaidat, 2014). According to Koutrouba et al. (2008), this collaboration helps teachers gain a better understanding of students’ needs, developing more positive attitudes both to inclusion and parental involvement. Given their role as key school stakeholders – and the importance of fostering inclusive values both within and beyond the school grounds – the conceptualisations of parents are explored in the following sub-section.
1.6.3 Parents

The perceptions of parents, their involvement in decision-making and problem-solving processes, and their support for the school and wider community are also critically important factors in the construction of inclusive school communities (Phtiaka, 1999; Kalyva et al., 2007; Antonopoulou et al., 2010). Indeed, parents play a pivotal role in this construction, as they either support or challenge the inclusive change process and the standards of inclusive practices. Parents are also potential agents of change, a driving force behind lobbying efforts to reform inclusive education (Tafa & Manolitsis, 2009; De Boer et al., 2010; Abu-Hamour & Muhaidat, 2014).

Parents in various countries have been found to have mixed attitudes toward inclusion. According to Leyser and Kirk (2004), 85% of the parent participants in their United States study revealed a commitment to inclusive philosophy, more than half of them responded negatively to the placement of their SEN children in mainstream settings. Their concerns ranged from questions about the resources and support provided in mainstream schools, to the qualifications of teaching personnel, and the highly academic orientation of the school curriculum (Symeou, 2006; Anaxagorou, 2007; Pnevmaticos et al., 2008; Antonopoulou et al., 2010; Isaksson et al., 2010). Along the same lines, in a Scottish study conducted by Swain and Cook (2001), parents of Students with SEN, although supportive of both inclusive practices and placement in mainstream settings, felt that mainstream schools lacked the proper academic and social support for their children (Thornton & McEntee, 1995; Tafa & Manolitsis, 2009). However, in a study conducted by Palmer et al. (2001) in the United States, 70 of 140 parents of Students with SEN suggested that inclusion in a mainstream school would enable their children to develop better academic and social skills, based on higher expectations and additional motivation.

Fuchs & Fuchs (1994), in their study comparing the perceptions of parents with and without SEN children, found those with non-SEN children more positive toward inclusive placement than parents of children with socio-emotional difficulties. Symeou (2006), meanwhile, found parents of students with and without SEN to favour inclusion for students with physical impairments over those with socio-emotional difficulties. In other studies, parents of non-SEN children expressed mixed feelings
about inclusion. While some were positive about the social and academic benefits for all students (Stoiber et al., 1998; Antonopoulou et al., 2010), others shared concerns about the quality of support provided in classrooms, as well as the influence Students with SEN may have on their non-SEN peers (Phtiaka, 1999; Balboni & Pedrabissi, 2000; Swart et al., 2004; Abu-Hanour & Muhaidat, 2014). In addition, both parents of students with and without SEN noted the potential risks of the implementation of inclusion in mainstream settings (Stoiber et al., 1998; Kalyva et al., 2007; Tafa & Manolitsis, 2009).

Greek parents of students with and without SEN support the idea of permanent exclusion as a means of avoiding discrimination, as well as the low attainment and underachievement of Students with SEN in mainstream settings (Vryonides et al., 2012; Georgiou et al., 2013). Greek parents of non-Students with SEN view inclusive education positively, however, identifying both the potential social benefits of inclusion and the right of all students to access equal learning opportunities (Phtiaka, 1999; Kalyva et al., 2007; Koutrouba et al., 2008). Studies in different educational contexts, including the United Kingdom, United States, Scandinavian countries and Thailand, support these findings (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Tsokova & Tarr 2012; Vorapanya & Dunlap, 2014).

In Greece, parental associations are a relatively recent phenomenon, possibly explaining the lack of consensus among parents. These associations often remain individual initiatives, rather than a collective and organized movement of parents seeking collaboration and support (Symeonidou, 2009; Tafa & Manolitsis, 2009). A possible reason for this may be the extremely limited role of parents in the educational system. Parental participation is not included even in recent policy documents (Law 3699/2008); thus, any participation is based on a personal willingness to be involved, rather than on a well-established system to enhance collaboration (Strogilos & Xanthacou, 2006; Tsokova & Tarr, 2012). Even those in parental associations are not provided with opportunities to participate in decision making processes or to construct collaborative relationships with other school stakeholders (Antonopoulou et al., 2010). As discussed in later sections, these circumstances should change, as their involvement in the implementation of inclusion is imperative. Indeed, according to Mortier et al.
(2010), school members are more likely to develop effective problem-solving techniques and a shared understanding of inclusion when parents are actively involved in the process of change.

As noted by Elkins et al. (2003), head teachers', teachers' and wider community members' perceptions and attitudes toward Students with SEN influence parents' conceptualisations of inclusion. Some parents of students with SEN have struggled to persuade teachers to accept and include their children, while parents of both students with and without SEN have voiced concerns about the qualifications and experience of mainstream teachers to include all students in an educational system steeped in the medical model of disability (Balboni & Pedrabissi, 2000; Antonopoulou et al., 2010; De Boer et al., 2010). Communication between parents and teachers in Greece is also relatively poor. While numerous studies have found communication between parents and teachers to impact academic achievement, social competence and self-esteem (Georgiou et al., 2002; Symeou, 2006; Abu-Hamour & Muhaidat, 2014), these relationships decline sharply between primary and secondary schooling in Greece, as – according to parents – teachers provide fewer opportunities for collaboration and involvement (Kalyva et al., 2007; Georgiou et al., 2013). Moreover, not all parents, as discussed in the following section, are willing to actively participate in school-parent relationships, challenging the inclusion of all students in mainstream schools (Tsokova & Tarr, 2012).
1.7 Decisions about school structures

Decisions about school structures, including the strategies and methods used to implement inclusive policy have been found to influence the construction of inclusive communities (Sharma et al., 2008; Forlin et al., 2010). Physical and learning structures often provide the formal basis through which school purposes, strategies, and practices are negotiated and implemented (Forlin, 1996; Tilstone, 2003). Richl (2000) and Slee (2009) argue that school structures emerge from the meanings and understandings that school stakeholders' give to inclusion, reflecting their shared commitment to inclusive values while also emphasising the connection between strategies and practices, and people's perceptions, decisions and beliefs (Kang, 2009; Forlin, 2010; Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010).

As schools – particularly those in highly centralised educational systems – depend on policies to conceptualise, develop and sustain inclusion, these policies have a significant impact on school structures (Slee, 2007). Head teachers, as gate keepers between official policies and school practice, are often tasked – in collaboration with other school stakeholders – with making decisions about inclusive school structures (Carrington & Robinson, 2004). According to Kugelmass (2006), these collaborative decisions should be underpinned by a shared commitment to inclusion, and carried out with delegated power and authority (Kugelmass, 2004). Previous research suggests that a lack of shared commitment and vision can negatively influence not only stakeholders' conceptualisations of inclusion, but also decisions about school purposes, strategies and teaching practices (Tilstone, 2003; Slee, 2010). The following sub-sections explore this research in depth.

1.7.1 School purposes

School purposes are the practical outcome(s) of school stakeholders' conceptualisations, and the foundations of inclusive school structures and practices (Avramides et al., 2000; Angelides, 2004). At the national and international level, however, educational policies have increasingly positioned schools as business organizations, emphasizing accountability, proficiency, and labour market productivity. Indeed, over the last two decades, school priorities and purposes have
become synonymous with academic outcomes and achievement, often at the expense of the moral and social purposes of education (Curcic, et al., 2011). These outcomes have been criticized in recent years, however, both for emphasising the individual – thereby ignoring the school as a community – and for focusing on narrow conceptions of ability, highlighting failure, exclusion and segregation (Blair, 2002; Carrington & Robinson, 2008; Florian & Rouse, 2014). For schools to be inclusive, all school members must hold high expectations for all students (Horrocks et al., 2008); in addition, emphasis must be placed on both academic opportunities and the school’s commitment to support students with SEN in often complex socialisation processes (Thousand & Villa, 2005; Lindsay, 2007).

In addition to academic skills, the purpose of inclusive education incorporates the moral development and preparation for all students’ participation in the wider social community (Curcic et al., 2011). In inclusive communities, heads teachers and teachers are tasked with facilitating this preparation, viewing schools not only as a reflection of society, but also a means to re-create society and produce citizens with a more inclusive world view (ibid). Male (2000), in his UK-based quantitative study exploring the views of mainstream and special head teachers on the topic of school purpose, recommends that head teachers implement inclusive practices and strategies designed to assess the progress of Students with SEN in both academic and social skills and abilities (Male, 2000). In contrast, Greek teachers perceive social inclusion as the only hope for Students with SEN, ignoring their academic and educational progress (Zoniou-Sideri & Vlachou, 2006). In the Greek study of Coutsocostas & Alborz (2011), nearly half of the secondary teacher participants reported that the inclusion of Students with SEN in mainstream classrooms had a negative impact on teaching and learning processes, expressing concern about delays in curriculum delivery (Balboni & Pedrabissi, 2000; Symeonidou, 2002; Elkins et al., 2003). Thus, school stakeholders in Greece appear more concerned about the potential negative impacts of inclusion on the overall academic achievement of students without SEN, rather than any positive outcomes (Mamas, 2012). This approach perpetuates segregated structures and practices, lower expectations, and the abdication of responsibility to special teachers (Devecchi, 2012). It also simplifies the process of inclusion, prohibiting the development of inclusive practice (Mamas, 2012).
Thus, teachers in inclusive classrooms must overcome their limited expectations of students by providing opportunities for all to achieve their full potential and to participate in a classroom community (Ainscow, 2013). Nakkan and Pijl (2000) claim that studies on the outcomes of inclusive education are inconclusive, as teachers have been found to underestimate the social marginalization of students with SEN. Indeed, their study found this marginalization was common, as Students with SEN engaged in limited social interaction with their non-SEN peers. As previously noted, both head teachers and teachers have also suggested there are academic and social benefits for Students with SEN in more segregated educational settings (Nilholm, 2006). These discourses indicate that stakeholders continue to view school purposes from the perspective of ‘ability’, an approach that ultimately hinders the implementation of inclusive practice (Pnevmaticos et al., 2008).

Other studies, however, suggest there is reason to be hopeful. Florian and Rouse (2014) stress that social inclusion and academic achievements are compatible, although they acknowledge that this relationship is often not straightforward. Indeed, Black-Hawkins et al. (2007, p. 120) describe schools that support both inclusive approaches and academic achievement as “dynamic problem solving organisations”.

1.7.2 School strategies

Previous research suggests that school stakeholders rarely have an active role in theorizing or developing educational policy, due to the centralized nature of education systems (Riehl, 2000; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2006; Vlachou, 2006). As a result, head teachers are often required to adopt policies they have little input in, translate them into practice, and – with varying levels of assistance from teachers, parents, and students – implement them in the classroom. For example, placement decisions are often dependent on the conceptualisations and experiences of head teachers, rather than established guidelines. Because head teachers frequently favour integration units and partial withdrawal as forms of ‘inclusion’, however, not all Students with SEN are given equal opportunities within mainstream settings (Abbot, 2006; Praisner, 2003).
According to Kugelmass (2006) and Farrell et al. (2007), school strategies must change to ensure the equal participation of all students and their acceptance as members of the school community. Indeed, placing students with SEN into existing special classrooms or in mainstream classrooms without any further provision, likely makes them unsure of where they belong. Therefore, head teachers should adopt a more holistic approach to inclusion through the "identification and minimisation of barriers to learning, and the ... maximisation of resources to support learning" (Booth et al., 2000, p.13).

Head teachers, in their role managing "the pace and path of change in schools", have the power to implement strategies aimed at school re-structuring (Reeves, 2009; Carrington & Robinson, 2004, p. 142; see also Ball, 2010; Curcic et al., 2011). According to Riehl (2000) and Gunter (2001), an inclusive leader initiates and implements value-driven inclusion influenced by the school community, in which students are placed at the centre of all school policies, decisions and practices, underpinned by high expectations for all (Blair, 2002; Avissar, 2003). Effective inclusive provision includes suitable accommodation, individualized educational plans, and inclusive teaching methods and services; these, by necessity, require the investment of human, educational, training and material resources in different areas of the school (Khochen & Radford, 2011). Cultivating environments of security and trust is the first priority; according to Angelides et al. (2010), when students feel accepted, they ultimately feel less isolated and marginalized. Curriculum development and pedagogical change are further areas of importance for inclusive leaders (Soukup et al., 2007). Inclusive training for head teachers and teachers is also required to re-structure schools. Inclusive reform is thus a whole-school process, requiring new structures, new practices, and new ways of thinking for all stakeholders involved.

For teachers, this new way of thinking requires broadening their vision beyond instructional and managerial duties, and developing skills that enable them to change the educational and life opportunities of students. However, when inclusive change is implemented without teachers' input or knowledge about the nature of the changes, they experience confusion and uncertainty, developing negative perceptions of this change (Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2006).
1.7.3 Teaching practices

Since the introduction of inclusive policy in schools, mainstream classrooms have become more diverse, including students with special educational needs. Therefore, teachers can no longer afford the luxury of preparing and delivering lessons that are appropriate for only the majority of students in their classrooms, but rather must develop practices that include all learners (Hoover & Patton, 2004).

As noted by Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012), teaching and learning processes are socially constructed within school communities. In other words, these processes are impacted by a variety of personal, socio-cultural and political conceptualisations, which contribute to the meanings stakeholders attribute to their practice (Ainscow et al., 2006). With regard to teaching practice, Vaughn et al. (2000) argue that three elements in particular – perceptions and beliefs, knowledge, and contextual factors – are most influential. Rouse (2008) agree, suggesting that classroom practices are intimately associated with the values underpinning schools, the conceptual framework of school members, and stated school purposes. For example, Hart et al. (2009) and Mamas (2012) found that teachers with deterministic beliefs pose a challenge to the development of inclusive teaching and learning practices, as their low expectations and conceptualisations of students’ ability are reflected in classroom practice. On the other hand, Swain et al. (2012), in their US study, found that teachers with more positive attitudes toward inclusion are more willing to adopt inclusive teaching practices to meet the needs of all students.

According to Biklen and Duchan (1994) and Curcic et al. (2011), teachers’ frustration with increasing policy demands for academic achievement has influenced their decisions about the teaching practices they implement in their classrooms. Indeed, teaching and learning practices have been found to vary between school settings and even in the same school and classroom, as teachers increasingly emphasize accountability and academic excellence rather than structural inequalities, in an effort to conform to current international and national educational standards (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Teachers have also expressed frustration over the difficulty they experience attempting to celebrate students’ differences and incorporate all in
classroom activities, while simultaneously coping with curriculum constraints and limited classroom time (Nilholm, 2006; Booth & Ainscow, 2011). This suggests that teaching practices are determined by teachers' conceptualisations, the circumstances in which they find themselves, and by their decisions about what to prioritize in the classroom (Alexander, 2004).

There are, however, several approaches mainstream teachers can take in their efforts to become more inclusive in their classroom practice. These include developing a positive attitude toward inclusion, adopting flexible and diverse teaching methods, conducting ongoing student assessment, encouraging students to work collaboratively, and developing positive working relationships with other school stakeholders (Alexander, 2004; Rouse, 2008; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This list indicates that classroom practice must go beyond merely integrating students with SEN – in other words, placing them in mainstream classrooms without enabling their equal participation in teaching and learning processes – for it to be truly inclusive (Florian & Spratt, 2013). With regard to special teachers, Devecchi (2012) and Florian and Rouse (2009) have suggested a range of successful inclusive practices. These include in-class cooperative learning strategies, shared problem-solving approaches, and teaching of social skills. Comparing and contrasting these practices with those recommended for mainstream teachers, it is clear that overlap exists, suggesting that aspects of inclusion and inclusive practice can be found and constructed in more restricted and segregated schools (Myles & Simpson, 1992). Indeed, inclusive and exclusive practices can be introduced and experienced in both mainstream and special school classrooms, or in the same setting with the same individual or group of individuals. Thus, in order for inclusion to be effectively constructed throughout an entire educational system, both mainstream and special teachers must be receptive to inclusive principles and committed to inclusive values (Avramidis et al., 2000; Ainscow, 2013).

However, in the reality of many schools, teaching practices are standardized and purposed at middle ability range. Carrington and Robinson (2007) argue that teachers must be flexible in their approaches, develop shared responsibilities, focus on the strengths of students, provide clear instructions, challenge students, and allow them to
participate in collaborative learning opportunities. These teaching methods were also proposed by Booth et al. (2006) in the Index of Inclusion, and by Florian & Linklater (2009). To eliminate barriers to teaching and learning, and to encourage the participation of all students, appropriate support and resources must also be prioritized (Booth, 2002). According to Booth and Ainscow’s (2002) Index of Inclusion, the term ‘support’ refers to all the practices which develop a school’s capacity to respond both to students’ diversity through active and equal participation, and to include all school stakeholders in conceptualizing, planning and implementing inclusive classroom practice.

Previous research suggests that in Greece, however, this practice has been challenging. Given the highly academic nature of the national curriculum, and the use of standardised learning materials in Greek schools, teachers have struggled to adapt to individualised instruction. Indeed, according to Vlachou (2006), teachers feel pressure to conform their teaching practices to the compulsory curriculum. Also, as argued by Rouse (2007) and Florian and Linklater (2009), among others, few teachers have either the time or the knowledge to adapt the curriculum or text books to accommodate the needs of all students, let alone develop individualized teaching practices (Simpson & Tuson, 2003).

The curriculum itself is also perceived as a challenge to individualised instruction in Greece. Ifanti (2007) and Angelides (2008) argue that rigid teaching methods and inaccessible curriculum materials have a negative effect on students’ learning processes. Indeed, the one-size-fits-all approach to curriculum standards, and the limited selection of resources that support the mainstream curriculum, are perceived, and work, as challenges (Vlachou, 2006). As Hadjikakou et al. (2008) and Florian and Spratt (2013) suggest, students who are provided with more individualized support, and/or given the opportunity to complete tasks following different methods, are more likely to achieve the academic purposes set out by their teacher(s). Thus, the strictly academic nature of the Greek mainstream curriculum is often perceived as a barrier to all students reaching their full potential. Under-resourced systems, limited support from school leadership and educational authorities, and a lack of collaboration between school stakeholders also act as barriers to the successful implementation of
inclusive teaching practices in Greece (Matsagouras & Riding, 1996; Zoniou-Sideri, 1997).

In conclusion, the complexity of classroom practice remains a key concern in decisions made about school structures. Florian and Rouse (2009), however, in their study of secondary schools in England, found that those most successful in responding to the conflicting demands of school improvement and inclusion for students with SEN had established clear criteria for both enrolling a diverse student population and improving academic standards for all. In order for classroom practices to be inclusive, a response to individual difference must be prioritized, avoiding both marginalisation and exclusionary approaches to teaching and learning (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012). Teaching practices should not be restricted to the technical, existing skills of teachers, but rather constantly evaluated and re-evaluated in the context of the school’s purposes and institutional values (Boutskou, 2007). All school members should develop and sustain a safe and collaborative classroom environment, taking responsibility and ownership of inclusive change. As noted by Leo and Burton (2006), this type of inclusive change has profound implications for school structures, leadership and overall education policy.

1.8 Power, voice and agency

One of the most critically important elements in the construction of an inclusive school community is the development of collaborative relationships. Collaborative relationships are characterized by equal participation in decision-making processes, a space for all school members to voice their feelings and concerns, and opportunities for individual and group agency. According to Skrtic et al. (1996) and Symeou (2006), these relationships – both within and beyond school boundaries – are crucial, as they help head teachers, teachers, parents and community members develop common purposes and a shared understanding of inclusion.
1.8.1 Relationships within inclusive communities

As schools are "primarily relationships and interactions between people", the construction of an inclusive school community is determined in large part by the nature of relationships and interactions between stakeholders, as well as members' shared understanding and commitment to inclusion (Ainscow, 1991, p. 300; Mattson & Hansen, 2009; Hazel & Allen, 2013). Indeed, inclusive reform is perceived as a collaborative enterprise, linking the realities of classroom practice, key school purposes, and collaboration within and out-with schools (Shepherd & Hasazi, 2007; Ainscow, 2013).

As Students with SEN' education reflects the challenges and tensions of wider society, schools – through collaborative rapports established within and between stakeholders – should be sites challenging exclusion and discrimination, preparing the next generation of more inclusive thinkers (Curcic, 2009). Collaboration supports a shared understanding and commitment to inclusion, while also impacting schools as social subsystems (Polydorou, 1995; Symeou, 2006). In a large scale improvement project in England, the Greater Manchester Challenge, Mel Ainscow (2012) concluded that, in order to establish equity within education systems, the processes of networking and collaboration – specifically, making better use of available expertise – must be emphasised. In his efforts to conceptualize and develop more equitable education systems, Ainscow (2012) adopted interconnected strategies to develop more effective working relationships. He attempted to change the internal conditions of schools by increasing collaboration between national and local governments, and between schools and local communities, through the active involvement of all community members, including universities, local society, and schools. Greater school-to-school collaboration – particularly between schools performing differently – was specifically found to reduce polarization, to the benefit of learners performing relatively poorly (Ainscow et al., 2004; Ainscow, 2010). It does this, he notes, by transferring existing expertise and generating new, context-specific knowledge. The use of evidence as a means of stimulating experimentation, and the development of shared leadership practices within and between schools, was also found to inspire new relationships,
changes in perceptions and beliefs, as well as improvements in practice (Ainscow & Miles, 2008).

While collaborative relationships have the potential to encourage a shared understanding and commitment to inclusion, research suggests the school reality sometimes poses barriers (Carrington & Robinson, 2006; Strogilos et al., 2011). As stated in the previous section, many head teachers and teachers are unaware of their broader role and responsibilities in the communal life of schools and society, limiting their ability to work and think collaboratively (Strogilos & Xanthacou, 2006). Hence, there is a need for more cross-disciplinary collaboration as a means of addressing students’ needs, and the challenges of preparing students for life in an increasingly diverse society. Indeed, relationships between school stakeholders and community members are at the core of inclusive school communities (Strogilos et al., 2011; Hazel & Allen, 2013). In a recent Cypriot study (Anaxagorou, 2007), both teachers and community stakeholders considered school-community collaboration a positive and important element of inclusive change. Likewise, Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004), in their cross case study of educational systems in the United Kingdom, Portugal and the United States, found collective engagement from all school stakeholders to be crucial in the process of developing and sustaining inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Mortier et al., 2010).

In Greece, however, there is a lack of supporting structures for collaboration in both legislation and practice. Greek legislation provides only vague information, guidance and advice on collaboration, which research suggests has negatively impacted school practice (Strogilos, 2012). Strogilos et al. (2011), in their case study exploring collaboration and the integration of services in Greek schools, found, in the absence of a specific framework for collaboration, that schools were left to design their own collaborative protocol. As a result, collaboration was found to be sporadic, as not all schools shared the same information between school members, limiting their ability to collaborate effectively (ibid).

Curcic et al. (2011) suggest that teachers’ professional isolation contributes to the lack of collaboration between special and mainstream teachers. According to Ainscow and
Sandill (2010), mainstream teachers often fail to recognize collective responsibility for the placement and inclusion of students with SEN, placing this responsibility on special teachers alone. This inevitably results in segregated approaches to classroom practice, as well as resentment between colleagues (Mattson & Hansen, 2009; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). In the Greek context, the role of special teachers is particularly challenging. While they are perceived as the only staff members responsible for the education and inclusion of students with SEN, they are also excluded from students’ academic assessment (Agaliotis, 2002; Vlachou, 2006).

Mainstream and special teachers therefore operate in parallel, but not intersecting, roles, providing few opportunities for collaboration. According to Scruggs et al. (2007, p. 411), this dysfunctional dynamic results in the “one teaches one assists” approach. This is at odds, of course, with the core value of inclusive communities; that is, a shared problem-solving approach in “which all must participate” (Mairs, 1996, p. 71). For inclusion to be successful in schools, both mainstream and special teachers must therefore build stronger collaborative bonds, and identify themselves as equally responsible for the education of students with SEN (Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2014). Head teachers, as school leaders, have an important role in this transformative process. Indeed, they should promote the expectation within schools that both mainstream and special teachers are responsible for students with SEN, ensuring open dialogue and collaboration between all school and community stakeholders (Shepherd & Hasazi, 2007). One strategy for establishing this expectation is to develop shared decision-making and problem-solving approaches, bringing all school members together to plan, strategize and implement inclusive policy.

Collaboration between schools and parents is also critically important, as parental involvement in school processes has been found to support the academic and social inclusion of all students (Zoniou-Sideri, 2004; Zafiriadis et al., 2006; Flouri, 2006; Ryan, 2006). Indeed, a close parent-school relationship contributes to a broader understanding of inclusion, implying “mutual respect based on a willingness to learn from one another, a sense of common purpose, shared information and decision-making” (Mittler, 2000, p. 158). Parents of Students with SEN have a special role in the development of inclusive school communities, as they bring understanding of both
the broader community and the needs and strengths of their children (Swart et al., 2004). Schools should therefore offer parents access and support, as well as the opportunity to actively engage, participate and collaborate with other school stakeholders and members of the local educational authorities. Moreover, head teachers – as school leaders – should reinforce the development of collaborative rapports between teachers and parents, and bring parents centre stage in planning efforts (Shepherd & Hasazi, 2007; Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2009). Previous research suggests that school-parent relationships of this type have been consistently identified by all school members as a critical element in an effective response to diversity (Sands et al., 2006).

In particular, teacher-parent collaboration has been found to produce a better understanding of students’ needs, contributing to their academic development, social competence and self-esteem (Pnevmatikos et al., 2008). These relationships have also fostered more positive perceptions of collaboration in general. According to the study of Pnevmatikos et al. (2008), Greek parents believe their children’s school performance improves when they actively collaborate with teachers (Swart, et al., 2004). However, while mainstream secondary teachers in Greece, similar to their colleagues in other countries (Tozer & Horsley, 2006), recognize the importance of parental involvement, they perceive building this relationship to be difficult (Koutrouba et al., 2006). These difficulties are attributed to the impact of the current socio-cultural and economic crisis in Greece, but also to teachers’ lack of time and disinterest (ibid). Because this relationship is not mandated in policy, relying instead on the good will of both parents and school members, it is often sporadic, posing challenges to the development of long-term collaborative partnerships (Boutskou, 2007; Koutrouba et al., 2008; Georgiou et al., 2013).

Some research suggests that teachers would actually prefer a stricter collaborative framework (Anaxagorou, 2007; Poulou & Matsagouras, 2007), as their relationship with parents enhances teachers’ confidence in their ability to address students’ needs. However, in their quantitative study of 581 parents of Greek primary students, Poulou and Matsagouras (2007) found that parents attributed different and separate roles to themselves and school teachers. Participants identified their responsibilities as socio-
emotional development and support outside school, while teachers were perceived as being responsible for classroom management and students’ academic performance and achievement. This perspective perpetuates the traditional “school-cantered” model of education, emphasizing disparate roles for school and family members, strengthening the power and authority of schools while minimizing parental participation in collaborative processes (Matsagouras, 2008, p. 44). Both parents and teachers must adopt new perspectives in their relationships, respecting their roles as equal partners with different areas of expertise in education, negotiating and re-negotiating their boundaries and roles on a regular basis (Phtiaka, 2006; Boutskou, 2007).

1.8.2 Leadership for inclusion

To develop the kind of relationships outlined above, a broader leadership vision and distributed leadership approach is required, in addition to a well-defined vision and understanding of core inclusive values (Riehl, 2000; Avissar et al., 2003; Angelides et al., 2010). Head teachers, as school leaders, are key components in efforts to bring about inclusive change (Thousand & Villa, 2005; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). As argued by Frost (2008) and Angelides et al. (2012), their leadership should provide the opportunity for all school stakeholders to participate in shared decision-making and problem-solving processes.

Historically, however, the head teacher’s role has been largely equated with managerial, administrative, and operational duties (Blair, 2002; Male & Male, 2001). More recent views of leadership identify the challenges of adopting a strictly managerial role, highlighting issues related to diversity and discrimination (Reihl, 2000; Angelides et al., 2010). It is therefore necessary to re-conceptualize the role of head teachers in inclusive school communities. To adopt a more inclusive approach to school leadership, head teachers must

... promote visions and values, and support and encourage positive action on the part of students, teachers, parents and community members. Other new administrative roles include identifying and articulating the needs of inclusive schools and providing an important link between the schools and the larger community. (Falvey, 1995, p. 10, cited in Praisner, 2003, p. 135)
This corresponds to the social justice framework developed by Shepherd and Hasazi (2007) to operationalize inclusive leadership. The authors suggest: 1) developing a shared vision and promoting school structures that lead to inclusive school cultures; 2) promoting inclusive practices through the use of a modified curriculum that reflects sensitivity and is aligned with both students' needs and their right for equal participation in educational opportunities and school life; 3) developing professional learning communities based on collaboration, reflection, and empowerment of all school members; and 4) certifying that students, family and community perspectives are at the core of the school (Shepherd & Hasazi, 2007, p. 475). As a whole, this framework suggests that head teachers, as school leaders, should recognize the importance of distributive leadership, democratic discourse and collaboration between schools and their communities, as well as the purposes, strategies and practices previously outlined (Reihl, 2000; Thousand & Villa, 2005; Frost, 2008). This is, as discussed in later chapters, more easily said than done, as head teachers must ultimately balance an inclusive vision with their own professional best interests, conforming their practice to the purposes and duties assigned by local or central governments (Praisner, 2003; Carrington & Robinson, 2007; Mattson & Hansen, 2009).

Shared conceptualisations of inclusion were found in the previous sections to be critically important for the construction of inclusive school communities. Closely related to this shared vision is the idea that school leaders should develop shared decision-making and problem-solving approaches, in order to value and include the perceptions and experiences of all school stakeholders (Shephed & Hasazi, 2007). Within these approaches, head teachers should develop a deep awareness of, and appreciation for, diversity; they should also inspire interest in change and encourage a culture of cooperation and collaboration (Riehl, 2000; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). Indeed, Angelides et al. (2012) suggest that participatory decision-making processes in schools have a positive impact on both teachers' professional development and parental involvement, to the benefit of all students.

Head teachers' decisions about school structures, the implementation or challenge of these structures, and the relationships developed within and out-with schools are also
important considerations in their leadership strategy (Ryan, 2006; Ainscow et al., 2007). According to Blair (2002) and Reihl (2000), head teachers should adopt a people-centred approach to leadership, motivating school members to construct a positive learning environment and establishing high expectations for all. Indeed, "research and practice increasingly have shown that schools will be most successful...when systematic decisions are made about how best to identify and implement innovative practices in the context of the entire school community" (Greenberg, 2010, p. 471). Ryan (2006) perceives inclusive leadership as promoting collaboration and partnership, instead of a hierarchical relationship between stakeholders. This kind of leadership incorporates different individuals, diverse values, and new ideas in both decision-making processes and the implementation of policy; it is also rooted in a commitment to social justice and equity, not only in schools but in community and society (Ryan, 2006).

Dynamic engagement with all members of the school community is important for constructing the kind of school culture that can support and encourage students' social and academic growth (Raffo & Gunter, 2008). However, the implementation of inclusive strategies has been found to be a challenging and complex process, particularly for mainstream and special teachers who must comply with the objectives assigned by local or central authorities (Farrell et al., 2007; Mattson & Hansen, 2009). In this context, head teachers should provide teachers ongoing support for professional development (Praisner, 2003; Angelides et al., 2010; Slee, 2013). Indeed, according to Khochen and Radford (2011), a significant part of their inclusive responsibilities as school leaders, apart from overseeing the educational development of students with SEN, includes cultivating good relationships and ongoing communication between school members and the wider social community (Angelides et al., 2012).

It is important to note, however, that wider educational and socio-political forces have an impact on head teachers' ability to adopt inclusive leadership strategies. Indeed, schools – and their head teachers – have been described as coping with

a barrage of demands from various sources...demands which focus on numerous aspects of schooling, including curriculum, uses of time, testing,
accountability, management, parent involvement and professional development. (Honig & Hatch, 2004, p. 16)

In the Greek context, for instance, head teachers have a highly restricted role, a consequence of being directly dependent on the central educational authorities (Vlachou, 2006, p 42; Pliatsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). Previous research suggests that, as a result, they rarely provide an opportunity for other school members to be actively involved in decision making and problem-solving (Harris, 2008; Frost, 2008; Muijs et al., 2010; Angelides et al., 2012), raising concerns regarding the nature of relationships established within school communities. As noted by Ainscow and Miles (2008; 2011), leading for inclusion means leading for all, as inclusive schools rarely emerge in authoritative and hierarchical school structures.

1.8.3 Voice and agency

Voice

The concept of power is crucial in the construction of inclusive school communities, as it plays an important role in decision-making processes about school structures, practices, purposes and relationships (Harris, 2003). For inclusion to be established in schools, all voices must be heard and respected. This can be achieved by abandoning traditional, authoritarian approaches to school leadership in favour of more democratic or distributed approaches, characterised by collaborative decision-making and problem-solving (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Male & Male, 2001; Khochen & Radford, 2011). For democratic approaches to be successful, there must be a division of responsibilities and distribution of leadership tasks to parents and teachers across different levels of schooling, ensuring open dialogue and a shared commitment to all students (Shepherd & Hasazi, 2007; Angelides, 2010).

Literature on the topic of distributed leadership suggests it has the potential to be visionary and transformative (Angelides et al., 2012), as shared participation influences school members’ perceptions of inclusion (Vlachou, 1997; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Kang (2009, p. 11) argues that it is important to make power circulate in schools, particularly so teachers can be in “a better position to act against the oppressive regime of disability” within schools. Indeed, according to Harris & Muijs
(2005), delegating power and authority to teachers can help them emerge as inclusive educational leaders. In a Cypriot study conducted by Angelides et al. (2012), special teachers working in secondary school integration units were found to take on multiple leadership roles and responsibilities. Indeed, they revealed a deep commitment to diversity and constant communication with their colleagues and parents. They also prioritized collaboration, had high expectations for all students, and participated actively in strategizing whole-school approaches to inclusion. This all occurred in spite of their school's rigid, authoritative administration (Angelides et al., 2012).

Interestingly, the findings of this study are at odds with previous studies within the Greek-Cypriot context that criticize integration units and the segregated practices adopted by special teachers in mainstream schools (Devecchi, 2012; Angelides, 2004). Yet, they demonstrate that special and mainstream teachers can take on leadership roles that contribute positively to the construction of inclusive school communities (Hargeaves, 2004).

However, there are factors which inhibit teachers’ ability to find a clear voice and play an active role in decision-making processes. These factors include overloaded syllabi, time constraints, and insecurity (Skrtic et al., 1996; Harris, 2008). Additionally, in more hierarchical education systems such as the Greek context, leadership opportunities for teachers are limited, as power is concentrated with head teachers and local educational authorities. Indeed, there is an expectation in Greece that teachers should simply comply with head teachers’ demands (Harris, 2003), reflecting the existence of profoundly unequal power relationships (Angelides, 2004; Boutsikou, 2007). Yet research has revealed that the head teacher cannot serve as the only leader within an inclusive school community, as this merely reinforces a top-down model of leadership that conflicts with collective partnership and decision-making (Gronn, 2003). In order for inclusion to be achieved in mainstream schools, leadership must be exercised by all school members as part of interactive and collaborative processes (Harris, 2003).

The issue of parents’ voice is also significant in inclusive school communities. Although parents are undoubtedly a valuable source of information, in many educational contexts, they play a limited role in decision- and change-making
processes (Stone & Clark, 2001). This is particularly the case for the parents of SEN children. According to Booth (1999) and Zoniou-Sideri and Nteropoulou-Nterou (2008), parents should take a more active role in their child(ren)’s school, joining parental associations, rallying support around important issues, and raising their voices to influence the quality of educational provision. In Greece, however, the role of parents is neglected in inclusive policy, as they have no official right to participate in school-based assessment processes or the placement of SEN children. This reality, as discussed in later chapters, raises serious concerns about parents’ ownership and acceptance of inclusive change.

Agency for change

In the late 1970s, Taylor (1977) defined agency as the capacity to identify the purpose at which one is directing one’s practices, and to evaluate whether they have been successful (Taylor, 1977). In recent years, however, Taylor and other researchers have been cautious about the focus on individual action at the expense of responsibility to and for others. Shifting from this individual approach to agency, Edwards (2005) reveals that relational agency involves the capacity to both offer support and ask for it from others. In other words, in this view, agency is seen as the capacity to align one’s thoughts and practices with those of others in an effort to interpret these practices and respond to these interpretations (Edwards, 2005). In an inclusive educational context, school members should act as agents of change, helping educational colleagues and wider society understand and negotiate the meaning and purposes of inclusion, viewing these parties as thought and resource partners. Collective agency occurs when people act together as a social movement. According to Hegarty (2001), a head teacher who serves as an agent of change should have awareness of the process involved, and accept responsibility for “negotiating with outside agencies, allocating resources internally, and shaping teachers’ attitudes” (Hegarty et al., 1981, p. 83-84). These outside agencies include the public sector, as well as funding bodies, parents and members of the local educational authorities.

Thus, head teachers should adopt new and different strategies to support all school members, particularly teachers, in their efforts both to reconsider deficit perceptions of special education, inclusion, and students with SEN, and to understand the socio-
political basis of diversity (Avissar, 2003; Shepherd & Hasazi, 2007). To overcome discrimination and inequality, those engaged in promoting inclusive education should also take into account the changing role of leadership in mainstream schools, and the need to constantly be responsive to current students’ needs.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter provided an overview of inclusive education, reviewing various conceptualisations and definitions of inclusive education, as well as the construction of inclusive school communities. In particular, the key arguments discussed here referred to the different operational concepts of the definition and meanings of inclusion. As there is no shared definition of inclusion either internationally or in Greece, stakeholders have adopted widely different conceptualizations, suggesting a lack of shared acceptance, understanding and values. Social, cultural and political issues have been found to strongly influence conceptualizations of inclusion, leading to different approaches and practices both in societies and schools. The extent to which students are fully included within the physical and symbolic boundaries of schools also remains a matter of contention. Despite some consensus over the key elements constituting an inclusive school community, previous research suggests there is still disagreement regarding its application, as there are discrepancies between theoretical notions of inclusion and its practical implementation. These discrepancies are apparent in the various frameworks developed by researchers in different educational contexts. Analysing the key features in these frameworks, three main components emerged: the conceptualisations and perceptions of inclusion of those working in educational settings, their decisions made about educational structures, school strategies and classroom practices, and the role of power and voice in constructing an inclusive school community. These components also feature prominently in the framework developed in the present study, as discussed in Chapter 7.

In the following chapter, a brief review of inclusive education in the Greek context is presented, providing an outline of the educational system and its structure as an important foundation for this study. This information will promote a more in-depth
understanding of inclusive educational policies and politics, as well as the extent of their practical implementation.
CHAPTER 2: Critical policy engagement – inclusive education in the Greek context

Introduction

This chapter outlines the socio-economic, political and research context in which this study was situated. Case-study schools are located within macro- and meso-level narratives in relation to inclusion which may influence individuals, institutions and communities in a variety of ways. Firstly, historic conceptualisations of special educational needs and inclusion in Greece are explored. Secondly, a brief outline of the Greek educational system is provided, including the distinct and disparate paths of mainstream and special education. Finally, focus turns to educational legislation impacting upon children and young people with SEN, followed by detailed scrutiny of so-called ‘inclusive’ policies.

It is important to note that the educational issues analysed here are not approached as being detached from the socio-economic and political context of Greece, but rather as constituent parts. A holistic approach to educational policy is thus adopted, in which non-educational influences have been examined and taken into consideration. As Ozga notes:

Education policy is not confined to the formal relationships and processes of government, not only to schools and teachers, and to legislation affecting them. The broad definition requires that we understand it in its political, social and economic contexts, so that they also require study because of the ways in which they shape education policy. (2000, p. 114)

According to Vlachou (2004), the analysis of policy and policy practices regarding disability, special needs and education allows for understanding of the complexity of issues involved when we try to approach the ways in which societies construct, interpret and respond to special and inclusive education. Therefore, it is appropriate, before engaging the educational policy context, to briefly explore concepts of special education and inclusion, the social acceptance and inclusion of individuals with SEN, and their participation in Greek education, the labor market and society.
2.1 Special educational needs in the Greek context

At the international level, efforts to address issues of disability and SEN are largely conceptualised as a political and social responsibility (Slee & Allan, 2001), as, according to Corbett and Barton (1992), the way a society copes with discrimination and disability provides insights into the nature of that society. In order to understand the various ways in which discrimination was experienced by people with disabilities in modern Britain, Barnes (1992) suggests that an understanding of history was important. Acceptance of difference and diversity should, he argue, 'trace its roots' in the community, in education and in the efforts of people with disabilities to participate fully and equally (Booth, 2000).

Based on this assumption, it is worthwhile exploring the conceptualisation of disability within the socio-political and educational development of Greece. Previous research suggests that, when questioned regarding their feelings toward disability, the general Greek population most frequently identified 'empathy' and 'sadness' (ESAMEA, 2013). These feelings were expressed most often by those least familiar with SEN and by those with no personal experience of disability (ibid). Primarily, Greeks were found to understand SEN as a medical phenomenon; reflecting a powerful societal ideology in which needs are reflected as key features of disability, dominating the discourse on educational policy constructs and processes (Vlachou 2006; Chakroun, 2010; Syriopoulou-Delli, 2010; Nusbaum, 2013). Considering this context, it is perhaps not surprising that, in a recent European study, Greek citizens were found to be less familiar with disability than other EU citizens, often associating disability with 'illness' and 'poverty' rather than 'isolation' and 'disadvantage' (European Foundation Centre, 2012).

The 2007 Special Euro-barometer on Discrimination in Europe showed that only 36% of Greek people knew someone with SEN (compared to an EU average of 55%), but that 79% believed having SEN was a disadvantage for society (on par with the EU average). In a later survey (Academic Network of European Disability, 2013), 56% of Greeks (as opposed to 53% of other EU citizens) believed discrimination against disability was widespread. Thirty-one percent believed such discrimination was more widespread than it had been five years prior, while 43% supported that adequate
measures existed to reduce it (ibid). Hence, as the meanings and understanding of special educational needs are products of understanding the legitimized practices that underpin special needs as a phenomenon, the picture that could be generated from the above is the prevalence of segregated and medical model discourses in society (Padeliadou, 1995; Vlachou, 2000). Although the establishment of inclusive education policies, and the enactment of directives regarding human rights both in Greece and internationally, discrimination against individuals is still dominant. Similar to the inconsistency between policy and practice in school settings, in the wider societal community, although there is the acknowledgment of ways to eliminate exclusion, discriminative attitudes continue to replicate and perpetuate an exclusive and marginalizing society.

Nevertheless, a recent Greek survey by EPASI (2012) – Research for the Greek Association of Individuals with Disabilities – found that nearly a quarter of those surveyed had every-day contact with people with disabilities and/or SEN in school settings. Although the survey respondents believed there had been improvements in the living and working conditions of people with SEN over the last decade, a significant portion believed their livelihoods were negatively impacted by the current financial crisis. Approximately 59% of participants stated that people with SEN do not have equal access to the labor market, while 53.7% believed poor support from the state – including limited access to health and social services – diminished social inclusion (ESAMEA 2013). A Eurostat survey indicated the percentage of Greek people at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to the average rate of EU and the other Member States between 2008 and 2010. Thus, in 2010, the percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Greece was 27.7% up from 21.4% in 2005 (Eurostat, 2012). These responses suggest the belief that the Greek government does not prioritise the needs of specific individuals or groups; considering them less deserving of both internal and external funding.

As acknowledgement and acceptance of human diversity has not yet become a key value in Greek society and policies, fears, prejudices and misinformation abound. This often leads to acceptance of a traditional/medical model of disability, as well as misperceptions regarding the purpose of, and educational provision in, special schools.
Indeed, these schools are often perceived as underpinned by the empathy and philanthropy of Greek society, rather than as places of segregation and marginalisation (Padeliadou, 1995; Vlachou, 2006; Liasidou, 2013). Students with SEN, therefore, either dropped out of school when they reached secondary level, or were provided with private tutoring paid for by their parents. Based on research conducted by the European Agency of Development in Special Needs Education (2010), students with SEN comprised only 2.6% of the Greek mainstream student population, with 0.6% of those students being in special schools and the remaining 2.0% in special classes. In addition, there is a lack of structure and strategies to ensure the implementation of political commitments (Liasidou, 2011).

Policies are rarely accompanied by appropriate resources for their implementation at the school level, while the lack of consultation between the Greek state and national disability movement is significant (Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2006; Liasidou, 2013; Symeonidou & Mavrou, 2014). Although there is no punishment or penalty for schools that fail to achieve annual academic progress in Greece, as school governance there is not dependant on standardised testing, similar to the UK or US educational contexts, still the building of inclusive communities ranks low on the agenda of policy makers and educators. Moreover, the lack of training for policy-makers, head teachers, teachers as well as the Greek public on issues related to special education needs and accessibility also plays an important role in the development of Greek perceptions, beliefs and attitudes toward diversity and SEN (ESAMEA, 2013).

All the above issues impact severely on the quality of life for persons with SEN, as education is one of the most important means by which social justice, equity and academic and social inclusion can be achieved (Zoniou-Sideri, 1998; Vlachou, 2006). It is important to note here that, for the Greek context, the terms disability, needs and Special Educational Needs (SEN) are used interchangeably. Greek education policies are intrinsically linked to Greek conceptions about diversity, the national narrative, the past, the present and the future. They are also strongly interwoven with Hellenism, religion, prejudices and local traditions; making discrimination in education the starting point for discrimination at all levels of social life (Liasidou, 2011). The Greek school is also constructed as an amalgam of collective memories, social beliefs and
customs. Despite this sense of shared history and identity, students with SEN remain excluded from mainstream schools in Greece, and are, therefore, unable to take part in the construction of the Greek identity. Dimitrakopoulos (2004), thus, aptly describes the Greek education system as promoting inequality to the extent that it fails to provide equal opportunities for inclusion of students with SEN, while he suggests that this denies them the opportunity to become part of a different narrative of nation, diversity and self.

Although the concept of special and, recently, inclusive education permeates multiple policy documents in Greece (Law 3699/2008), special educational needs have not yet, in practice, been prioritized by the state. This is largely due to the nation’s complex socio-political background, in which mainstream education with a more economic orientation is prioritised (Vlachou, 2006). It follows the solution of segregation for education of students with SEN fore-witting their right to develop their inclinations and personalities in the social and school environment where their peers grow up (Strogilos, 2012). For this reason, the new legislation supports and fosters the transition from Students with SEN’ integration based on an unsupported placement in mainstream school settings, rather than the inclusion of all students in an environment, encouraging and facilitating social interaction, cognitive development and academic achievement (Tilstone et al., 1998; Clough & Barton, 2000). Despite extensive financial support from the EU community for the improvement of inclusive education, Greece remains dedicated to becoming an equal member of the EU with demands for competitive and professional educational services (Nikolopoulou, 1986; Giamouridis & Bagley, 2006; Syriopoulou-Delli, 2010). Furthermore, education policy focuses on a managerial model for schools rather than a model that emphasises on the socio-cultural purposes of schools that would support inclusive education (Mavrou & Symeonidou, 2014). This narrow focus, as demonstrated in later chapters, is often incompatible with meeting the educational and social needs of students with SEN (Leo & Burton, 2006; Piliouras & Evangelou, 2012).

Hence, although policies and structures exist for inclusive education in Greece (Padeliadou, 1995; Zoniou-Sideri, 2000b), there is a need for a greater political will to implement them. Regulations, directives, codes of practice and state circulars,
constitute formal educational policy in Greece, yet the nation’s schools remain discriminatory toward students with SEN (Strogilos et al., 2011; Georgiadis & Zisimos, 2012). This is also reflected in other contexts outside Greece. Indeed, research suggests that policies in different education contexts, such as the UK, Spain, Finland and Israel, are often not implemented consistently in local school contexts, failing to change core specificities of exclusive educational systems promoting structural inequalities within social and educational communities (Curcic et al., 2011; Tarr et al., 2012; Chiner & Cardona 2013). Such discrimination emphasizes and legitimises the perception that students with SEN are biologically impaired, ignoring their strengths, and adopting the medical approach to disability.

To date, limited research has been conducted to examine the impact of the 2008 inclusive law (3699/2008) on ‘compulsory’ special education (special education is compulsory for all students till the 3rd grade of secondary school), likely because the act has only been implemented for seven years. According to the 2008 law, students with disabilities and students with SEN are considered:

- a) people with severe learning difficulties due to sensory, mental, cognitive, developmental problems, psychological and neuropsychological problems during their school life or a period of it. These difficulties, according to assessment, influence the process of school and adaptation to school and learning. The disabled, and those with special educational needs, are individuals with mental and sensory disabilities (visual or hearing), motor disabilities, people with long lasting uncured illnesses, speech disorders, special learning difficulties like dyslexia, ADHD, pervasive developmental disorders (autism spectrum), psychological disorders and multi-handicaps. Students with low achievements due to linguistic or cultural differences are not to be considered disabled students;

- b) students with complex learning, emotional or social difficulties, delinquent behaviour, parental indifference and abandonment or in-family violence;

- c) students with special educational needs also tend to have one or more mental ability or skill developed to a level beyond their age. The Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs is responsible for the assessment and development of teaching programs for these students (article 3).
As the present study evaluated Greek secondary schools operating under this law, references within this thesis to individuals with disabilities or special educational needs are based on the definitions suggested above.

With regard to the occupational profile of individuals with SEN in Greece, the implementation of independent living programs remains a matter of discussion within the government. Although, ministerial decisions (FEK 825/1996) have created the conditions for the establishment, implementation and operation of independent living programs for people with SEN, in reality, individual Greek families continue to provide financial support and care for their loved ones with SEN. In addition, organisations and centres that provide social care and welfare services, cope with serious operational deficiencies due to current financial shortfalls. Meanwhile, the limited number of employment positions available to people with SEN is concentrated at the lowest levels of the service and manufacturing sectors.

In the following section, special education and its inclusion in the Greek context will be briefly presented. Existing policy is critically examined within the nation’s socio-political and educational framework, in order to clarify both the complex tensions which have emerged over the nature of disability within Greek schools and how these tensions affect the ways in which schools are structured.

2.2 The Greek educational system

In this section the defining characteristics of the Greek educational system are discussed, in order to further contextualize this study. Formal education in Greece consists of a compulsory course of study (for students both with and without SEN) in three core subject areas – Greek Language and Literature, Ancient Greek Language, and Maths (Giamouridis & Bagley, 2006). The system is tightly controlled, highly centralized and characterized by inflexibility and uniformity. As a result, both mainstream and special education students follow a single academic curriculum, using the same instructional guidelines, common text books, timetables and goals that are established, maintained and controlled exclusively by the Ministry of Education (Kassiotakis & Lambrakis 1998). According to Ifanti (2007), the national curriculum strongly emphasizes assessment and examination, focusing on exclusion and the
The entrance of students into a university setting after successful completion of the national examination in the third class of upper secondary school.

Mainstream and special education are overseen by the same administrative department(s) within the Greek government. This administrative system is structured in a hierarchy composed of three levels: the Ministry of Education, the local educational authorities (LEAs) and local schools. The centralised Ministry formulates national education policy and oversees the operation of both mainstream and special education at all school levels, both public and private, as well as the local educational authorities. The LEAs, meanwhile, supervise and administer primary and secondary schools within a local area or county jurisdiction. However, their role is limited and often side-lined, as they do not participate in any educational decisions or policy making. At the school level, authority is vested with a head teacher as there are no deans or coordinators in the Greek educational system. The head teacher is the sole person responsible for decision-making relating to policy implementation within each school. As this system is hierarchical, however, the central educational authorities have ultimate decision-making power; leaving LEAs, head teachers and teachers with extremely limited autonomy and flexibility with regard to introducing practices and implementing any policy that might differ from that directed by the central authority.

Indeed, local education policies do not exist, as all bodies are expected to obey the guidelines and regulations enacted by the Ministry of Education. In light of this policy and structural framework, the ideals of collaboration and the importance of community are discouraged. The lack of collaborative working around the building of school communities among the educational policy actors reflects these actors' positioning in separate, distinctive roles within a hierarchy. What derives from the above is a consistent vision regarding school management, resources, curriculum content and teaching arrangements (Vlachou, 2006). Although this uniformity mirrors the current political expression towards the enhancement of equality and establishing democratization and marketization of education, it reveals the reluctance of an inflexible educational system towards developing relationships and processes for addressing the needs of all its students (Papakonstantinou, 2003).
Overloaded syllabi, resource deficiencies and the reluctance of teachers to adapt to new pedagogical approaches have resulted in classrooms where the teacher is authoritative, and learning is standardised and structured along a specific and predetermined path (Matsagouras & Riding, 1996). This may prevent the construction of reciprocal educational communities and retention of exclusivist approaches; limiting dialogue and interaction between students, teachers and parents. Additionally, the Greek education system is focused primarily on academic achievement and has limited opportunities for collaborative work, individualized or active learning (Flouris, 1995; Mavrou & Symeonidou, 2014). It is a system which has not yet succumbed to the market-logic of league-tables, though it has its own idiosyncratic nature (Papakonstantinou 2003; Vlachou, 2006). Indeed, the current financial crisis in Greece deeply impacts both mainstream and special education, particularly with regard to their funding and the priorities imposed by policy makers. In other words, inclusion is seen as a luxury given the current financial strictures. In a recent report entitled “Children in Greece 2012”, UNICEF described the consequences of the financial crisis for Greek children as extremely disappointing. More than half a million children are currently hungry and have no access to very basic goods, many of these being children with disabilities. There are now alarming numbers of Greek children who are malnourished and morbidity and mortality rates, related to food insecurity and poor nutrition, are increasing (European Foundation Centre, 2012).

According to Matsaganis and Leventi (2011), as a result of the austerity and the wider recession, 5% of the Greek population saw their 2010 incomes fall below the 2009 poverty line. The crisis has raised the demand for social protection, but the supply of social benefits has been reduced rather than increased (European Foundation Centre, 2012). In the school context, the financial deprivation of special schools and integration units is prevalent due to the lack of both human and material resources, school infrastructure, and a dearth of specialised personnel, such as school psychologists, therapists etc, along with the lack of special teachers in integration units, due to lack of funding by the Greek state. This situation has impacted on teachers’ motivation to teach and their commitment to values of justice, equity and inclusion.
Despite the compulsory nature of the Greek education system (6 years of primary schooling and 3 years of lower secondary schooling), secondary students with a history of special placements tend to drop out before the age of 15. This often occurs after they fail to pass the standardised school examinations (Dimitropoulos & Kaloussi, 1997; Zafiriadis et al., 2005). Compulsory secondary education for students with SEN includes three school types: Lower Secondary Schools (Gymnasio), Lower Special Secondary Schools (Eidiko Gymnasio) and Technical and Vocational Special Secondary Schools (Eidiko Epaggelmatiko Ergastirio Katartisis). After educational reform was introduced in 1997, post-compulsory secondary education now includes two school types: Comprehensive or Unified Lyceum (Eniaio Lykeio) and the Vocational Lyceum (Epaggelmatiko Lykeio).

In recent decades, there was a scarcity of special education and support programmes available for students with SEN after leaving primary school. Only in the past decade have special secondary schools been founded, and these continue to follow the mainstream education curriculum, with special adaptations made by individual classroom teachers. Students with severe needs, and those who, it was thought, could not follow the mainstream curriculum, attended segregated special schools or special technical school workshops (EEEEK) and were eligible to follow a program of compulsory study up to 23 years of age (European Agency for Special Needs Education, 2010). The purpose of this education was to enable students to be personally and vocationally independent, through the acquisition of social and practical every-day skills, along with their training as skilled workers for different manual employment positions.

According to the 2008 Inclusive law, students with SEN are provided with a range of educational options, including: (1) mainstream classes, supported by a mainstream teacher working in consultation with the LEAs (for students with mild difficulties); (2) special classes in segregated settings (ΣΜΕΑΕ); (3) ‘integration units’ within mainstream schools, following (a) the school timetable with partial withdrawal of students from the classroom for less than 15 hours per week or (b) individualised programs common to and/or different from the mainstream curriculum offered both during and beyond the school timetable (for students with severe needs); (4) one-on-
one tuition – also known as ‘parallel support’ – in the mainstream classroom, supported by a special teacher and paid for by the parents and/or Ministry of Education (for students with mild needs); and (5) home tuition for students with severe needs who are not able to attend or enrol in school settings (Law 3699/2008). Students in integration units follow a special program of study with the help of a special teacher, in a group of at least three (and up to 12) students (Law 3699/2008). Students’ participation in these units is largely dependent on their specific learning difficulties. For example, students can attend a mainstream class for Literature and both the mainstream class and the integration unit for Mathematics (as long as their withdrawal from the mainstream class does not exceed 10 hours per week).

At this point, it is also important to mention that the integration units operate differently from what a special class in other educational contexts is perceived to be. The Greek integration unit is similar to the US resource or pull out programmes, or to part-time classroom withdrawal within the British educational context (Vlachou, 2006; Nusbaum, 2013). In particular, students with SEN are included, for less than 10 hours per week, in an on-site segregated unit, within a mainstream school. They withdraw from the mainstream class, for various portions of the school day, in order to attend remedial support classes, mainly for Language and Literature courses, and Mathematics, rather than being supported in class along with their peers. Students often withdraw from arts, music and physical education classes, a fact that may prevent the development of their socio-emotional skills, aptitudes and talents. However, this ability to be integrated is, often, dependent on an individual student’s ability to do grade-level work, and not on a whole-school reform - with a critical flaw in the mainstream and special educational practice of integration (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008), as it is further discussed in the following chapters. Additionally, there is no systematic review and evaluation of these special education provisions, partly because the operational guidelines that come from the Ministry of Education change regularly (Efstathiou 2003). This often results in deprivation of access to provisions for students with SEN and their co-instruction with typically developing peers. Through this approach, the Greek educational system legitimises exclusion of
students in a segregated classroom, reinforcing ways of thinking about some students that ultimately lead to their marginalisation and exclusion.

For the school year 2011-2012, the total number of compulsory school-aged students with SEN in all Greek public educational settings was 36,011. Of these, 27,341 were in primary schooling, and 8,670 in secondary education. Nearly 8,000 students with SEN attended segregated special schools (3,910 secondary), while over 26,000 were enrolled in segregated special classes in mainstream schools (4,484 secondary). These figures do not entirely represent the participation of students with SEN in mainstream education, however, as they only include those who receive parallel support from a special teacher in a mainstream classroom. Of the 1,800 students who received parallel support, just 276 were in secondary schools. Additionally, in the year 2000, it was estimated that more than 150,000 students with SEN remain excluded from education at all school levels (ESAMEA, 2013).

According to the EU data for 2009, compiled by the Academic Network of European Disability (ANED, 2013), the proportion of individuals with SEN (aged 30-34) who had completed tertiary level education in Greece was 0%, compared to 32.3% for non-SEN individuals. A significant number of students (24%) with SEN, aged 18-24, drop out of school early during their transition from primary to secondary education, compared to 5.9% for students without SEN (European Foundation Centre, 2012; Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2012). The majority of these students do not return to school. Considering the lack of vocational opportunities for students with SEN in Greece, they, often, find themselves marginalised, unemployed and excluded from society and the labour market; perpetuating the cycle of low educational attainment and impoverishment (Stasinos, 1991; Matsaganis & Leventi, 2011; Magoulios & Trichopoulou, 2012). Very few students with SEN go on to institutions of higher learning. For example, in 2006, fewer than 400 students with SEN attended Greek universities (European Foundation Centre, 2012). However, the nature of these special needs and the areas studied are not publicly available.
While scholars emphasise the importance of in-school identification and support of students' needs (Deponio et al., 2000), there is no formal internal school-based assessment for students, or support for establishing individualised education plans (IEPs) in Greece (Protopapas & Skaloumbakas, 2007). Only LEAs – specifically, a service known as KEDDY (Centre for Diagnosis, Assessment and Support) – perform official assessments and make recommendations for placing students in mainstream or special settings, and they do this based on recommendations from the head teachers. A student’s IEP – which is also produced by KEDDY – is designed to result in the modification of teaching and learning methods and classroom practices; a product of collaboration between the head teacher, special and mainstream teachers, and the counsellors of special education. However, in practice, this collaboration is found to be both challenging and problematic. Indeed, head teachers acknowledging the bureaucracy and delays of KEDDY in order to assess students include these students in their mainstream classrooms without the official diagnosis and permission, in order not to leave students unsupported.

As noted previously, in Greek education there are no regional or school-specific policies, including special education policy. As a result, there are significant differences in the way national policies are implemented at the local level, due to unique school circumstances, the attitudes of school members and the multitude of influences on educational vision and practice (Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2010; Coutsocostas & Alborz, 2010). Schools are supervised by the Ministry of Education and directly administrated by local authorities, yet their policies rely on the good-will of teachers and head-teachers in order to be implemented effectively (Zafiriadis et al., 2005; Magoulios & Trichopoulou, 2012). However, there is no special education curriculum within Greek schools, and teachers are responsible for adapting the mainstream curriculum to meet the needs of the class and individual students. Teachers are often poorly trained in curriculum or pedagogical adaptation and this results in national inclusive policies often being misunderstood, or ignored entirely, at the school level (Doulkeridou et al., 2011; Symenonidou & Phtiaka, 2014).
It is also important to note the existence of ‘shadow education’ in Greece. This consists of an informal network of private tutorial schools, institutions and private individual tutors offering home-based schooling (Papakonstantinou, 2003). These shadow bodies operate in parallel with public schools and provide support to students, with and without SEN, mainly attending secondary education. They specifically prepare students for national examinations but also for school examinations in lower secondary institutions. Entrance into a Greek university is often linked to attendance at a particular private tutorial school for at least two years; resulting in a significant expense for individual families. However, students with SEN are systematically excluded from these schools, based on their challenging academic orientation.

Parents of students with SEN do not have the right to choose their public school, as all students attend their local neighbourhood school and it is expected, therefore, that parents should hire qualified private tutors, at high personal expense, in order to provide the best professional support (Boutskou, 2007). As a result, parental expenses on education greatly exceed public expenditure per student (Psacharopoulos, 2003). The underlying implication of this is that public special school units, both special schools and integration units, are not perceived as places where the appropriate support for students with SEN can be provided. Despite the efforts of the Ministry of Education to overcome the medical model of disability, it perpetuates this same model and the market of the medical professionals. According to Papakonstantinou (2003), this reality conflicts with the promise of ‘free and public’ education that is offered by the Greek constitution.

2.3 The ‘inclusive’ turn of Greek schooling

International education policy currently prioritises a managerial model of schooling, rather than one focused on moral, civil and socio-cultural purposes capable of supporting and sustaining inclusive communities (Slee, 2013; Curcic et al., 2011). There has also been a sharp turn towards marketisation in education, through a strict functionalist approach, as local interests are increasingly subsumed by global ones. Indeed, according to Leo and Burton (2006), education at all levels has been influenced by the effect of marketisation and globalisation, in terms of governance, funding,
purpose and implementation. A narrow focus on assessment and achievement has also had the tendency “to de-motivate pupils and increase their anxiety with dysfunctional consequences” (Goldstein, 2004, p 10), at the expense of educational and social inclusion. Indeed, students with SEN, under the pressure of academic excellence and achievement, tend to drop out of mainstream school, or be marginalized in schools if they do remain, as they cannot cope with the overloaded syllabi and the strict examination-oriented system (Symeonidou, 2009).

In order to understand the Greek special and inclusive educational context, the exploration of Greek educational policy is imperative, as policy is commonly defined as a plan for action designed “by government...for identifying human needs and devising the means of meeting them” (Finch, 1984, p 4). In this current study, Greek inclusive educational policies and policy-making decisions are examined to better understand to what extent they conform to pragmatic inclusive policy frameworks and address the needs of students with SEN. According to Ozga (2000), education policy is a field where politics, the economy and culture impose their influence (Vlachou-Balafouti, 2001). Following this assumption, it could be argued that there is a disconnection within Greek education, between the mainstream and special education policies and school practices that inhibit inclusive education attempts, and the lack of a shared meaning and understanding of inclusion (Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2006; Koutrouba et al., 2008). As a result, this study is also designed to explore the relationship between the case-study schools and the political mechanisms and relationships which influence and mold inclusive policy (Ball, 1987; Liasidou, 2011; Strogilos, 2012).

During the 19th and 20th centuries, Greek society and individuals regarded disability as a personal tragedy, and this was accompanied by feelings of guilt and embarrassment (Vlachou, 2004). As reinforced by the tendency of Greek society to highly value ‘fitness’, disability was tainted with restricted and discriminative views. Indeed, people with SEN were often considered ‘abnormal’ or ‘mentally retarded’ and hidden by families or detained by the Ministry of Health in asylums or institutions (Ploumbidis, 1989; Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2006. p. 30). The Greek state insisted upon
naming institutions for young people with SEN 'schools', and their wards as 'students' (Syriopoulou-Delli, 2010).

From 1937 to 1972, the Greek government did not introduce any policies to address the education, vocational training and social rehabilitation of 'mentally retarded' people (Stasinos, 1991). This could, in part, be rationalised by Greece's geographic proximity to major European conflicts during this period, including two World Wars, the Civil War of 1946 and the Junta from 1967 to 1974. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, children with 'pervasive developmental disorders', and other special needs, were largely kept in isolation (Syriopoulou-Delli, 2010). This continued to occur until passage of the Greek Constitution in 1974. According to this document,

> Education is the basic mission of the state, aiming at the moral, spiritual, professional and physical education of the Greeks and their fulfillment as free and responsible citizens. All Greeks have the right to free education in State schools at all levels. The Greek state shall support outstanding students and those who need support or special protection according to their needs (Greek Constitution, 2008).

The constitutional guarantee of respect for and protection of human dignity (article 2), and the principle of equality and equal rights (article 4) was the cornerstones of a regulatory framework for people with disabilities. They were thus equipped with the constitutional right to enjoy measures ensuring their autonomy, professional integration and participation in Greek social and economic life. Although, the Greek Constitution does recognise the rights of all students to have a free education, a number of issues reveal that there is still a need for reconsideration and reconstruction, in order for the rhetoric to become practice. Some of these issues, emerging in the following discussion, voice concerns regarding the inclusive nature and social justice principles underpinning the Greek education system.

In the 1980s, Greek perceptions of special education began to change, as access to information improved with the introduction of new technologies (Syriopoulou-Delli, 2010). Voices calling for the integration of students with SEN into mainstream settings became louder, especially concerning special education being strongly linked with initiatives undertaken by private institutions enrolling as many students as possible -
resembling settlements for ‘mentally retarded’ - due to the lack of schools for students with SEN, yet policies remained weak (Kalatzis & Vakarelli-Kalatzi 1977; Vlachou, 2004). However, a number of stated and written reforms were introduced in an attempt to provide a more student-oriented approach to teaching and learning, focusing on access to participation, active learning and cooperation (Vlachou, 2006). The Law for Special Education (Law 1143/1981) represented the first occasion in which the Greek state expressed political concern about the responsibility of the state for the education of students with SEN in more specific terms. Numbers of students with SEN attending private institutions and special schools were gradually reduced and special classes in mainstream schools were established. However, the government’s preference for ‘segregation’ of students with severe and profound needs remained a priority, and separation between students was enforced, based on the severity and nature of their disabilities (Tafa & Manolitsis, 2009). This occurred despite the publication of the British Warnock Report in 1978, promoting the idea of integration as a universal right (MacKay & MacLarty, 2003). Thus, although Greece recognised the needs of children with SEN, it was not in step with the latest thinking in Europe. It is also important to note that the 1981 law established the Pedagogical Institute, an administrative agency and consultative organisation directly connected with issues regarding special, and later inclusive, education, designed to develop SEN programs, teaching material and school practices and to train special teachers (Constantopoulou, 2002). Unfortunately, due to the nation’s current financial difficulties, the Pedagogical Institute has been merged with the Ministry of Education since 2012, and no longer exists in any sense within the ministry. The responsibilities and role of the Institute have been transferred to the responsibilities of the Special Education Service - a part of the Ministry.

Throughout the early 1980s, the Greek government maintained that special education was an independent part of the education system, with its own legal framework and development. Those individuals with special needs were still largely considered as people diverting from the norm (Syriopoulou-Delli, 2010). Notably, the 1981 Law did not directly refer to the education of students with SEN but to those ‘who deviate from the norm’; focusing in a discriminative way on the term ‘deviant’, that categorised students according to their perceived disabilities (Vlachou, 2000). Four years after the passage of the Special Education Act (Law 1143/1981), the “Structure and Operation
of Primary and Secondary Education Act” was approved, promoting a process of integration (Law 1566/1985). However, this law continued to treat students with SEN unequally. According to the legislation, students with severe needs could be educated (1) in special schools; (2) at home with the support of special teachers; and (3) in special classes within mainstream schools, following the same curriculum and occasionally participating in mainstream classes (Vlachou, 2006). With the institution of Laws 1143/1981 and 1566/1985, students with SEN had access to an education system and were legally considered to be more physically and less educationally ‗integrated‘ in mainstream schools. Although this was not the ideal environment in which to address their needs, it was an important step in the right direction (Syriopoulou-Delli, 2010), as it allowed students with SEN to be spatially included in mainstream schools along with their peers. However, in practice, both the 1981 and 1985 Laws resulted in the increased movement of establishing special schools and classes within mainstream schools (Vlachou & Peter, 2000). Hence, the integration discourse did not focus on pedagogical practices including political economy of schooling and school and curriculum development, but rather focused on issues of disability; constituting the foundation of a diverse discourse that maintains exclusion.

Thus, while in other places, such as the UK and US, the complex notions of ‗segregation‘ and ‗integration‘ were introduced more than a hundred years apart, within Greek society both notions were introduced at almost the same time; thus generating social and practical frustration and misunderstanding regarding what the equality of opportunity in special education actually means (Vlachou & Peter, 2000). It was not until the mid-1990s, and early 2000s, that inclusive education became a priority in the Greek educational policy agenda. In 2000, a policy change occurred in special education - developing the policy of educational integration and based on the ‘one school for all’ model originating in the UK and US. This legislation, entitled the “Education of Persons with Special Education Needs Act” (Law 2817/2000), represented a more substantial effort to integrate persons with disabilities into the nation’s educational system. However, although this policy did not stipulate that special education was compulsory for Students with SEN, it considered special education as a part of mainstream education and, for this reason, the predominant
purpose of the Greek state’s official policy of integration in mainstream schools (Vlachou, 2006).

The law was not built on the understanding of ways in which deficit-focused structural practices had contributed to students’ difficulties and social problems. Hence, it did not reflect the socio-cultural perspective core in the social-constructivist approach followed by other educational systems in order to construct their inclusive curriculum (Dyson & Millward, 2000; Peters, 2002; Kugelmass, 2006). Terminology was also altered; the term ‘individuals with special needs’ was replaced by ‘individuals with special educational needs’ and ‘special classes’ were re-classified as ‘integration units’. This change in terminology suggests the effort being made by Greek policy to move beyond its discriminatory nature and towards a more social-oriented approach to disability and SEN; respecting the rights of all individuals to participate in education and society.

However, the law made integration voluntary rather than mandatory for students over the age of 14 and, while the renaming of ‘special classes’ to ‘integration units’ was one of the ways that education policy responded to the impetus of inclusion (Law 2817/2000), it has introduced no further changes in their deployment. It provided Students with SEN with four educational options, to: (1) attend mainstream classes with the support of the subject teacher (for those students with mild disabilities but not recorded as having SEN); (2) attend integration units or support classes in mainstream settings (for students with mild disabilities who needed additional support); (3) attend separate special classes (for students with severe difficulties); or (4) home tuition (Law 2817/2000). This process reinforced the dominance of the medical model in the education system, by requiring children and young people to be labelled with one of the recognised categories of disability before educational provision, in the form of resources, support and instructional differentiation could become available. In practice, integration units have continued, in most cases, to perform their role as ‘withdrawn rooms’ were students spend significant periods of their school time. This model normalises the management of a part of the school population and “avoids ‘contaminating’ the mainstream educational praxis with special education intervention or differentiation” (Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2006, p. 285).
In both primary and secondary mainstream and special education, each student’s academic progress was monitored individually through the state examination process on academic curriculum and school purposes, rather than a process built on setting goals by teachers, parents and the student at the beginning of the school year. Moreover, research conducted during this period found that special schools and integration units were ill-equipped, technologically, materially and professionally, to meet the needs of Students with SEN. Of 501 special schools and integration units across Greece, just 98 (19%) offered suitable rooms adapted to the needs of disabled students and provided adequate equipment and teaching materials for their learning needs. Only 22% of integration units, and 10% of special schools, were housed in appropriate rooms or buildings. This continued segregation of students reflects wider socio-cultural contexts, where all members of the wider social community remain separated and excluded by their abilities or disabilities, as is also found in different educational contexts in countries such as the UK, Spain and the US (Peters, 2002; Ainscow, 2007b; Chiner & Cardona, 2013). However, while the mainstreaming movement was imitated in these contexts in the 1960’s and 1970’s, through the understanding of a need to provide appropriate education for all students and equal participation, it was not until the last decade or so in Greece that inclusive reforms have been proposed and implemented in schools. However, it is the latter reflected and administrative change, rather than the socio-cultural reforms, which would be needed for the development of a deeply inclusive education approach.

**Legislative and conceptual change in policy approaches to special education**

A new, and the most recent, law addressing special and inclusive education – the “Special Education and Education of Individuals with Disabilities or Special Educational Needs Act” (Law 3699/2008) – was passed in 2008. It consolidated all previous laws and instituted new reforms. It specifically instituted compulsorspecial education for children of all ages, legislating for the first time equal opportunities for educational and social inclusion. It called for the development of a student’s personality, abilities and qualifications, so that their integration or rehabilitation in mainstream settings could occur whenever possible. While social inclusion and professional/vocational developments were prioritised, needs continued to be defined
in medical terms; excluding students with severe difficulties, linguistic and cultural differences. Thus, although the Greek government placed new emphasis on this group of students, they apparently continued to perceive them as non-productive members of society (Symeonidou, 2009).

Hence, the dominance of a deficit model in the Greek context is still prevalent in the new Law. Despite the recognition that disability constitutes a natural part of the human condition (Law 3699/2008, article 1), the dominance of a deficit approach is evident in the statement that “the type and degree of special educational needs defines the form, kind and category of Special Education provision” (Law 3699/2008, article 2, point 1). In the developing world, as in the developed, inclusive education is used in quite different ways that mean different things. Sometimes it is framed in terms of social justice, such as where it is directly linked to the UNESCO’s ‘Education for All’ policy. Thus, despite evolution in both thought and policy, inclusion in Greece lacks coherence and is exclusionary in practice (Strogilos et al., 2012). This has led to a majority of Students with SEN experiencing marginalisation and discrimination (Coutsocostas & Alborz, 2010). In addition, as the assumption remains that integration units – which withdraw students on a part-time basis from mainstream classes – are the most efficient means of promoting inclusion (Vlachou, 2004; 2006), inclusive education in Greece is no longer considered a concern or the subject of broader reforms. It could be argued that this kind of ‘segregated inclusion’ is a highly pragmatic way of including children with additional support needs while still maintaining an element of segregated provision. Inclusive policies have thus become part and parcel of an already crystallised educational system, yet they have failed in many ways to challenge restrictive school cultures and curricula, and to establish relations within schools as well as between schools and communities.

At the end of 2013, in the midst of the current financial crisis and the socio-political upheaval, a new piece of legislation (Law 4114/2013) was passed by the Greek government. Under pressure from the European Union and its funding programmes, the new law aims to protect the rights of all students to quality education, redefining traditional perceptions of special education so that students are no longer categorised on the basis of disability. Under the law, the full inclusion of all students with SEN in
mainstream secondary education is established; indeed, targets are set to reduce numbers of special schools and integrate all students in mainstream education by 2015. The 2013 law also introduced in-school assessments, through the establishment of a Diagnostic Assessment and Training Committee (EDEAY) in every mainstream school. In addition to educational assessments, this committee – supervised by the director of the local educational authority – is also the primary body responsible for provision and support of Students with SEN in schools. For the purposes of this study, however, focus is kept on Law 3699/2008, as the 2013 Act was not introduced until after data collection was complete. Furthermore, this recent law has not yet been implemented in Greek secondary schools.

2.4 Inclusive education: beyond rhetoric

The policies and documents outlined in the previous section have created a discursive framework for inclusive education in Greece. In this section, a critical analytical approach will be used to examine which policy documents promote a deficit vision of disability, through the functionalist approach, resulting in the marginalisation of students with SEN and undermining the inclusive belief in diversity. Instead of being underpinned by a spatial and accessibility vision of inclusive education restricted to access arrangements.

Given the data above, it is clear that the education provision for both mainstream and special education is based on ability and disability of students with SEN, excluding students who are not academically eligible or suited for education in inclusive classrooms. Hence, the understanding of inclusion is found to be underpinned by dominant discourses and views of disability, reinforced through Greek policies. These perceptions of inclusion are contradictory to the values of inclusion that welcome and celebrate difference, perceiving inclusion as a resource and not a problem (Slee, 2013). Moreover, through policy the existence of specific criteria of eligibility is clear; suggesting Students with SEN should ‘earn’ inclusion, in order to be included in integration units with the passage of Law 2817/2000. The establishment of these units, as already mentioned, is still perceived, by education and society communities, as the most suitable way for inclusive education policy to be implemented in Greece. However, although the development and implementation of integration units in
mainstream schools, school purposes, strategies and practices still remains unchallenged, reproducing characteristics of an educational system that promotes segregation and fragmentation (Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2005). Hence, students in integration units remain segregated from their mainstream peers; indicating the failure of the Greek system to conform to any international standard of inclusion. This is at odds with the definition of inclusion, which places equity and quality within the social justice framework (Ainsew et al., 2006).

The segregated nature of special education has proven difficult to change in Greece, even if the values articulated in official documents support more inclusive practices (Isaksson et al., 2010):

> the principles of equality of opportunity in education, the idea of social inter-acceptance of disabled and non-disabled children and the promotion of educational and social mainstreaming practices and policies for children with special needs. (Information Bulletin of Special Education 1991)

However, discrimination remains dominant in both education and society and – as in a vicious circle - it is reproduced by both education and social community members, as well as reflected in policy texts where disability is articulated as difference, and segregation as inclusion (Liasidou, 2011). Despite inclusive rhetoric in Law 3699/2008, the policy text remains based on assumptions of difference; disempowering students, hindering educational practice, and reducing the prospect of real inclusive reform. This law, in practice, merely establishes further provision for students with milder difficulties, while integration units remain the prevalent form of educational support for most students with SEN. These units continue to be based, however, on deficit-oriented perceptions and practices (Zoniou-Sideri & Nteropoulou-Nterou, 2008). Turning to the data from interviews with school members, although a better understanding of the implications of this law was sought, by asking participants, the majority were unaware of the inclusive policy. On its own, this fact was disturbing since one of the most significant components of an inclusive school community is the shared understanding, language and purpose within each participant/stakeholder (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).
Within inclusive policy documents (Law 3699/2008), there is no official definition or code of practice available for inclusive programs, resulting – as demonstrated in later chapters – in frustration, misunderstandings and a multitude of interpretations and educational practices. As previously noted, these policy changes have been primarily enacted by the central educational authorities, while head teachers, mainstream/special teachers and parents have had extremely limited involvement (Strogilos et al., 2012). This approach is consistent with the hierarchical and centralised nature of the education system in Greece; offering few opportunities for shared decision-making and participation. This structure also limits the opportunity to have meaningful dialogue and collaboration between practitioners and stakeholders in special and mainstream education (Kugelmass, 2006; Ainscow et al., 2012; Strogilos et al., 2012). Additionally, Greek society values achievement and ‘intelligence’ highly; inferring increased social status on those who perform well in national examinations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it also perceives education as a ladder leading to prosperity and success. Academic achievement and excellence, credentials and entrance in tertiary education, therefore, dominate the discourse in Greek schools. Within that context, students with SEN remain excluded, even in ‘inclusive’ classrooms, within an educational system that seeks ongoing academic improvement in relation to each individual’s own academic performance.

Inclusivity has also not been introduced as a pedagogical principle that is relevant to all students. In reality, it is depicted as an opportunity for segregation and the separation of students falling into the category of ‘other’ (Vlachou, 2000). Special education in Greece has not evolved - at least chronologically - along the same lines as those in other Western countries, even though the prevalent policies have been highly influenced by the policies and practices of other Western countries (Vlachou, 2000; Liasidou, 2014). This leads failing schools to find blame with the most vulnerable members of their communities, which undermines inclusive values. The Greek government has introduced – some would say uncritically – an EU-driven model of inclusive policy designed to keep up with European - Western - principles and practices of meritocracy and the marketisation of education, without meaningfully exploring the ideological, cultural and social specificities of the Greek educational system (Vlachou-Balafouti et al., 2000; Fryssa et al., 2014). Since Greece joined the
European Union in 1981, very few educational policy projects have been undertaken without EU funding serving as a stimulus. These projects have also been formulated, implemented and controlled by external bodies and parameters that have often originated overseas (Stasinos, 1991; Vlachou, 1997). Although the initial motivation for building inclusive communities, supported by external factors, was seen as a key theme toward the inclusive process, this external pressure within the Greek context was found to be insufficient for sustaining inclusive change, since inclusive communities depend upon intentional and sustained efforts that emerge from collaborative relations between school community members (Ainscow, 2012).

Hence, while in other educational contexts — namely the UK and the US — the development of special and inclusive education has occurred over decades or even centuries (Florian, 1997; Riddell, 2009), in Greece, these reforms have been established only within the last twenty years. They are also imitative, and have been instituted under pressure from the EU. Indeed, it can be argued that the Greek government has introduced terminology and concepts from elsewhere in the European Union through a process of policy-borrowing (Halpin & Troya, 1995; Mavrou & Symeonidou, 2014), without taking context-specific factors that affect processes of policy formulation and implementation into consideration. This has produced contradictory perceptions and policies, as new legislation has attempted to promote diversity and inclusivity in a society and educational system that is unprepared for such deep change (Fryssa et al., 2014; Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2014). It is noteworthy that the philosophical discourse and the sense of inclusive schooling as a social and political venture, underpinning special and inclusive education in other contexts, is largely absent from Greek policy (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2006; Liasidou, 2011).

What constitutes special needs, diversity and inclusion is constructed socially and historically, and is often embedded in financial and political relations of inequality. In the Greek educational policy context, difference is perceived as inferiority and, accordingly, ‘others’ are frequently excluded and ignored. As noted by Corbett (1998):

The language we use to describe behaviours that provoke has changed through the centuries, from ‘delinquent’ to ‘maladjusted’, to ‘emotionally and behaviourally disruptive’, to ‘provocative’. Such a change in meaning might
reflect more professional sensitivity towards the use of certain terminologies rather than reflect recognition of fundamental changes of definition. There have always been contradictory opinions as to whether those having provocative behaviour, should be characterised as ‘mad’ or ‘bad’. (Goudiras 2004, p. 47)

Especially in the field of inclusion, even minor words can transmit the oppressive powers of discourse and potentially contribute to exclusive language and terminology. The uncritical re-classification of terms such as ‘special needs’, ‘learning difficulties’ and ‘inclusion’ risks further differentiation and stigmatisation for some groups of students, as it also awards a label that leads to the lower expectations reflecting the medical model of disability (Vlachou, 2006). In official documentation, these terms include, or are related to, specific learning difficulties and sometimes include students who have difficulties but without any official assessment. This terminology redirects concern from the difficulties experienced by other students without being labelled, and from sources of difficulty in policy, school approaches, teaching and learning practices and relationships, creating barriers in the development of inclusive school communities (ibid). The dominance of the label ‘learning difficulties’ in the Greek context raises dilemmas and concerns about the specific support and professional identity of teachers who may be inflexible or negative towards the inclusion of students with profound and severe SEN (Symeonidou, 2014). However, although for Booth and Ainscow (2002), the change of terminology encourages a broader notion of the group for whom support is sought, for Vlachou (2004), the term ‘special needs’ is overly broad and fails to capture the sentimental power within the Greek language that is necessary to convey the real meaning of disability. Adopting other, non-discriminatory terms is potentially risky as well, however, as it does not solve the problem of labelling but rather encourages the construction of new categories. This argument is supported by the Greek Association of People with Disabilities (ESAMEA, 2013), as well as the Greek Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities (POSGAMEA, 2014).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, a brief review of inclusive education in the Greek context was presented, providing an outline of the educational system and its structure. This information clarifies the macro- and meso- level narratives on inclusive education in
Greece, regarding the socio-political agitations through which educational policies, politics and practices have emerged. These agitations emerged from a range of international, national, local and school level influences, and in turn influenced school stakeholders' conceptualisations, decisions and relationships. As inclusion is perceived in this study as a socially constructed phenomenon, the conceptualisations, decisions and practices of these stakeholders and the Greek population at large are responsible for producing distinct and separate paths of mainstream and special education. Despite the enactment of inclusive legislation, a deficit model of disability and continued misunderstanding of inclusive values and practices remains a significant challenge for the Greek education system.

Indeed, the continued presence of special schools, integration units and one-on-one tutorials raises concerns about policymakers' will to cover gaps in policy implementation. The development of an educational system that commits to both inclusive principles and a social model of disability requires a strong willingness to move beyond rhetorical proclamations about diversity to meaningful attempts to change the educational system. This study explores change efforts by examining the ways in which school communities construct, interpret and respond to inclusive education in the current socio-economic and political climate of Greece. This approach allows an understanding of the complexity of issues involved at the national, local and school level, as further discussed in the following chapters.
CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach taken in this study. It begins by describing the theoretical perspective – social constructionism – upon which the study is based. It also addresses the study’s purpose, research questions, sample characteristics and the approach taken to data collection and analysis. Detailed attention is paid throughout to qualitative case study research, particularly in multiple settings. The chapter concludes with a discussion on reflexivity, ethical considerations and methodological limitations.

3.1 Theoretical perspective: social constructionism

Theory in social research is a powerful tool, used for both clarifying a research topic and making sense of results (Thomas, 2009). According to Sherman and Beck (1979, p. 120):

The purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality. Since the social sciences cannot penetrate what lies behind social reality, they must work directly with one’s definition of reality and with the rules he devises for coping with it!

Social constructionism has become a popular approach in social research. This theoretical perspective focuses on the construction of social phenomena, acceptance of reality as socially constructed and actively (re)produced by human beliefs, perspectives, actions and relationships (Parker, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Reeves, 2009; Creswell, 2013). As noted by Crotty (1998, p. 42):

[A]ll knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.

In the social constructionist view, human beliefs are constructed through social interaction and exposure to socio-cultural norms. They are also considered highly
context-dependent, as no object can be adequately described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it (Pring, 2004; Stake 2006; 2010). ‘Meaning’ is not considered fixed or determined, rather as constantly under construction, since relationships, beliefs, values and experiences change according to one’s context (Crotty, 1998; Flyvebjerg, 2006). Thus, from a constructionist perspective, meaning and truth cannot be described as simply objective or subjective. However, there are voices who articulate the meaning of social constructionism as embedded only in social realities, believing that just social realities have a social origin. They understand social constructionism as indicating the social construction of social reality and not the social construction of reality (Crotty, 1998; Parker, 1998). As a response to this, the social in social constructionism refers to the mode of meaning-generation and not to the kind of object that has meaning. As Greenwood (1994, p. 85) clearly states:

Social realities are constructed and sustained by observation of the social rules which are obtained in any social situation by all the social interactions involved ... Social reality is, therefore, a function of shared meanings; it is constructed, sustained and reproduced through social life.

The emergence of social constructionism was preceded by the development of the general framework of social constructivism and, some indicate that the two terms are synonymous (Guterman, 1994; Parker, 1998). At the core of social constructivism is the concern for lived experience and the world as it is felt and perceived by social actors (Schwandt, 1997; Lit & Shek, 2007), as the social includes a range of phenomena, from historic-political and cultural to interactions reflecting group processed, both explicit and implicit, with consequences (Au, 1998). For constructivists there is not the realism of the positivists, the critical realism of the post-positivists and the historical realism of the critical theorists, but relativism relying on the multiple conceptual meanings given by individuals and groups (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Reality is socially constructed and there are multiple realities, as there are social constructions. Research then converges on people’s “perceptions of reality” where there are no true or false impressions. In this light, the social world is conceptualised as socially constructed (Pring, 2004, p. 60).
Social constructionism focuses on a more collective construction of meaning, supporting the significance of the interaction and interplay between the subject and the object (Lee, 2013), while constructivism suggests that the individual mind is active mainly in the meaning-making activity (Schwandt, 2003). This assumption by Schwandt is also adopted by Crotty (1998), who suggests that in the “accounts of constructionism the social dimension of meaning is at centre stage, unlike constructivism where it is not” (p. 57). According to Lincoln and Guba (2003, p. 227), “the realities are social constructions, selectively built, and embellished by social actors. In this sense, constructions are intensely personal and idiosyncratic and, consequently as plentiful and diverse as the people who hold them”. Following this assumption constructivism deals with knowledge, not as a reflection of objective reality, rather, as the outcome of an individual cognitive process (Watzlawick, 1984). However, the main criticism of constructivism is also the different varieties that exist (Phillips, 1995) between the knowledge and socio-political structures of individual learners. In this approach constructivism employs a subjective epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This term is contested as, according to Crotty (1998), subjectivism indicates the distance between the subjective and the objective in meaning-making. In other words, it would be useful to reserve the term constructivism for epistemological considerations focusing on “the meaning making activity of the individual mind” and to use constructionism where the focus includes “the collective generation and transmission of meaning” (Crotty 1998, p. 58).

The present study follows a social constructionism perspective: understanding the world through the analysis of the socio-cultural contexts of social life and focusing on the social aspects of reality (Lit & Shek, 2007). It seeks to examine the construction of inclusive school communities, through the different constructed meanings of school stakeholders, and to explore how this impacts on community relations and inclusive practice. The study is, also, designed to understand the participants’ perceptions, practices, and relationships with regard to the construction of inclusion in Greek secondary education, as influenced by the socio-cultural and historical context, and affecting how they construct their meanings and practices (Philips & Burbules, 2000; Creswell, 2013). According to Pring (2001), in order to construct a meaning, there should be something to construct meaning for, as reality does not exist independently
of individuals’ creations against which they might assess or evaluate perceptions. Hence, a weakness of this approach could be the challenges regarding how individuals construct meaning and how different meanings can be constructed, as Crotty (1998, p. 47-48) states: “there is no true or valid interpretation. There are useful interpretations to be sure…” and that the “object may be meaningless in itself but has a vital role to play in generating meaning the subjective world of human experience as an insider”. This multiplicity of meanings could be considered to be a weakness of constructionism. Thus, the role of the researcher is to be aware of the issues explored and the possibility of the emergence of new interpretations and meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Social constructionism could address this as it emphasises that culture shapes the way in which individuals perceive things; providing a quite definite view of the world. However, social constructionism adopts criticism, recognising that it is limiting, and warning that, while welcome, it should be open dialogue and called by questions (Bryman, 2012).

The epistemological departure of this study can be located in the paradigm of interpretivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b), as it asks to explore and understand “the subjective world of human experience as an insider”, through the examination of conceptualisations, perceptions, practices, experiences and relations of the stakeholders in the process of inclusion and the construction of inclusive school communities for students with SEN (Mertens, 2004, p. 22). It involves looking at the ways in which inclusive communities are created by school stakeholders. A socially constructed reality is one that is seen as an ongoing, dynamic process, inclusion emerges through a dynamic telling and re-telling of school stakeholder narratives, based on lived experiences that are reproduced by means of acting on their interpretation and their knowledge of it, along with dialectic interaction with society at the time. Indeed, according to constructionism, there is no true or false interpretation, as the world is interpreted through social relations and interactions (Williams & May, 1996). Thus, interpretive researchers understand the particular meaning of the processes and experiences that constitute the knowledge to be gained from an inductive mode of inquiry, as to understand the subjective world within which people operate (Crotty, 1998). For the purposes of this study, special educational needs and inclusion are not perceived and understood as objects and universal truths, but
rather as a deep social matter involving the interpretation of research participants, their historical and socio-cultural context, and issues of power in Greek society (Larochelle et al., 1998; Burr, 2004).

My position within the constructionist approach of this study is distinctive. I could be described as both an 'insider' and 'outsider', based on my history as a special teacher, my time spent in Greek schools, and my professional involvement with some of the parent and teacher participants (despite having no prior, direct involvement with the sample schools). I was therefore able to immerse myself in the research context and to readily understand the concepts, beliefs and attitudes of the participants as an insider (Crotty, 1998). It is important to stress, however, that over the course of the fieldwork I did not, at any time, try to communicate my own beliefs and perceptions about the research topic in my interactions with any participants. On the other hand, an insider perspective can lead to assumptions that are taken for granted; while a critically reflective approach helped to alleviate this issue.

For any research study, the methodological tools used for data collection, as well as techniques of data interpretation and analysis are critically important. The following sections address these issues, as well as the purpose of the study, the research questions, instrumental case study research approach, and the sample population.

3.2 Study purpose

While the topic of special and inclusive education has dominated educational discourse and academic research in many countries around the world, in the Greek context its development and implementation remains poorly understood. This is particularly true in secondary education, as evidenced by the lack of prior research. Thus, I was motivated to examine this topic for a number of reasons. Firstly, inclusion is not merely an abstract idea, but rather a dynamic construct taking different forms and meanings within different socio-economic, historic, physical and political contexts (Alexander, 2001; Peters, 2002; Mitchell, 2005) raising questions regarding the way it has been constructed within the Greek context. This was particularly important given the introduction of EU-generated policies regarding inclusion. Secondly, I believe that developing a better understanding of inclusion for students with SEN in Greece has
been neglected and under-theorised; undermining educational opportunities for these very students. Therefore, the purpose of this study is not to make a contribution to knowledge “for the sake of knowledge” (Patton, 1987, p. 152), but rather to have an applied function, generating and encouraging debate and possibly action.

3.3 Research questions

The following research questions were designed to illuminate the construction of inclusive educational communities in Greece. They explore the development and implementation of special and inclusive education policy, and investigate these policies in light of the multiple approaches in Greece to special educational needs. Significantly, stakeholders’ perceptions and practices at the national, local (community) and school level are examined:

a) What are the key policies concerning inclusive education in Greece? What are the main challenges within the policy process?

b) What is the nature of conceptualisations regarding SEN and inclusion among some of the stakeholders involved (head teachers, teachers and parents) in three Greek secondary schools in an urban location?

c) What are the key influences upon school stakeholders’ decisions about the implementation of inclusion and the relations constructed within and beyond schools?

3.4 Methodological approach

Numerous methodological approaches have been used in the field of inclusive education, including ethnography, quantitative and qualitative research, mixed-methods, case study and observation. Given the significance placed on understanding the exploration of conceptualisations and experiences of school members, in this study, I have gained insights into their social world – their lives, beliefs, and language in school settings (Bassey, 1999; Silverman, 2010; Stake, 2010) – rather than examine the causality between variables (Stake, 2003). This led me to pursue a qualitative approach for data collection and analysis, as this corresponded best with the study’s underlying theoretical foundations and the questions it sought to answer.
3.4.1 Research in the qualitative domain

Qualitative research is contextual, and focuses on the understanding of and accounting for human actions and interactions. It is conducted through intense contact within natural-life environments (Charmaz, 1995; Punch, 1998; Gray, 2010), and is concerned with people and their everyday lives and practices in naturalistic settings (Flyvberg, 2011). According to Denzin & Lincoln (2011, p. 3):

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations ... At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world.

A key feature of qualitative research is interpretation, as there is a heightened degree of interaction between the researcher and participants (Morgan & Smirich, 1980; Erickson, 1986; Williams, 2002). Indeed, qualitative researchers often become part of the study themselves, as naturalistic inquiry demands close interaction between researcher and subject (Savenye & Robinson, 2004). As the researcher is the key instrument of data collection, and cannot be entirely ‘detached’ from the object(s) of study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Gray, 2010), qualitative research is often described as a “process of continual refinement” (Savenye & Robinson, 2004, p. 1050):

The ‘reality’ or the meaning of a situation and setting is negotiated between the researcher and those studied, with the understanding that multiple realities are always present ... the researcher initially chooses methods based on the questions to be addressed; however, the questions, issues and topics of the study themselves may change as the researcher’s conception of the reality of the ‘world’ being studied changes.

Qualitative methods are continually “adjusted, expanded, modified, or restricted, on the basis of the information acquired during the mapping phase of field-work” (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 180). Becker (1996) describes qualitative data – often in the form of opinions, values and beliefs – as a “moving target” (p. 59), as individuals hold different and evolving interpretations and meanings about phenomena in their lives (Williams, 2002). Debates regarding the merits of qualitative research, versus those of quantitative study, are well-documented and rarely – if ever – objective. For different
scholars, these two paradigms stand in contradiction of one another, as qualitative studies seek to “understand the subjective world of human experience”, while quantitative ones “regard human behaviour as passive, essentially determined and controlled; thereby ignoring intention, individualism and freedom” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 22). Although some researchers have chosen to posit qualitative and quantitative research as diametrically opposed constructs, both methodological approaches have considerable value in educational research (Morgan & Smirich, 1980; Pring, 2004; Seale, 2007). Hammersley (1992, p. 196) argues that the conventional distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is misguided, noting “it is not fruitful to think of social research method in terms of contrasting approaches”. Rather, he believes these approaches should be considered “a range of positions located on more than one dimension” (p. 172). While quantitative research and questionnaire data has undoubtedly proven useful in identifying gaps in knowledge and provision of special and inclusive education, qualitative methods have been found to accurately capture meanings and practices, filling these gaps and explaining their existence (Silverman, 2010; Bazeley, 2013).

Given this study is concerned with human conceptualisations, perceptions, understandings, decisions and relationships, – issues which cannot be adequately measured through quantitative methodologies – a qualitative approach was adopted (Seale et al., 2007; Gerring, 2009; Greener, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). Furthermore, as I was not interested in generalisations but, rather, detailed scrutiny of “how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10), qualitative methods were deemed appropriate. Pring (2004) recommends developing a tentative, flexible research plan in which theoretical and practical issues are considered and negotiated. The following sections outline my considerations with regard to data collection and analysis, reflexivity as a researcher, issues of trustworthiness and dependability, as well ethical considerations and methodological limitations.
3.4.2 Multiple instrumental case study approach

Qualitative methods include systematic observations of complex phenomena, interviews, and focus groups, but "may also include case studies, surveys, and historical and document analysis" (Sayenve & Robinson, 2004, p. 1046; Creswell, 2013). Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, or small set of cases, in order to understand its activity within significant circumstances and the interactions between its contexts (Stake, 1995; 1998). Additionally, a case study is a form of social science inquiry that performs an in-depth exploration of a complex phenomenon within its real-life context (Seale et al., 2007; Young, 2008; Yin, 2014). While some scholars consider case study a method, research design and methodology in and of itself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Thomas, 2011; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013), in reality it is not. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013), argue that case study should be seen as an approach to research, as a "research genre", that can be defined as a way of framing a bounded unit; providing guiding principles for the research process (Sweales, 2004). For Stake (1995), case study is a choice of what is to be studied, requiring an understanding of similar cases but also the nature of the examined case alone (Stake, 1998). Yin (2014) tends to pursue case studies within a positivist paradigm, while Stake (1998) follows an interpretive one.

Stenhouse (1995) and Bassey (1999) identify four types of case study – ethnographic, evaluative, educational and action research – however, the kind of case study followed in this current research is articulated by Stake (1995; 1998; 2006; 2010) as being an instrumental case study. In particular, Stake (2006) distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. Intrinsic case studies involve research into a particular situation for its own complexities, notwithstanding outside concerns, while instrumental case studies explore the impact of both inside and outside variables and influences on one or more situations (ibid). Thus, in the present study, the three schools were examined cases as they were "bounded units", each having their own functional regulations and approach towards inclusion influencing and leading their decisions related to school structures; while also being affected by external influences such as the socio-cultural context and international and national policies (Adelman et al., 1980, p. 49).
The strength of case study research is located in the collection of rich and in-depth data. Using multiple instrumental cases provided the present study with a deep understanding of the complexity of inclusive education in different types of schools that were also interrelated with socio-political and historical contexts (Stake, 2010). Thus the use of a multiple case study design in this study contributed to achieving a richer experience and understanding the phenomenon better than from consideration of just one single case (Merriam, 2001). In addition, according to Stake (1995) and Bassey (1999), multiple case design should be preferred over single case design, primarily because it provides readers and researchers with the possibility of replication; while encouraging them to a new understanding of their own context and processes. Second, the researcher can contrast different situations in the case studies. Hence, this current research created three different case-studies to “offer a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2001, p. 84).

During this study, I gained an insight into the Greek educational context. It was clear that the country was still in the process of dealing with inclusion. Through this interpretive, instrumental approach, I, also, gained insight into the construction of inclusive communities, by examining the multiple-realities and different conceptualisations, perceptions, decisions, practices and relationships of key school stakeholders (Pring, 2004; Silverman, 2010). Interpretive inquiry requires a particular approach to research questions, involving deep understanding and immersion in the context of the subject under examination (Thomas, 2011). It involves engagement with the perceptions and practices of participants in order to encourage reflection and to reach valid conclusions (Whyte, 1984). It was used to enhance the quality of the research instruments but also to enhance my own reflexivity as a researcher.

Robert Stake (2006, p. vi) refers to the object of investigation in an instrumental case study as a “quintain”. In this study, the quintain was considered to be inclusive education, studied through both single cases – exploring its manifestation within particular schools – and as a group – exploring its manifestation in Greek secondary education (ibid). Each case school had inside and outside influences and pressures
impacting the quintain (Stake, 2006). Outside influences included the socio-cultural, political, historical and physical environment of the schools. Aspects such as policy, different conceptualisations of inclusion, and the nature of decisions made about school practices and relationships were considered inside tensions and influences. However, as evidenced by later chapters, there is not a clear distinction between what exists ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ schools (Stake, 2000). While this separation is somewhat artificial, it is nonetheless helpful in identifying key components.

The use of a multiple case study approach allowed me to explore the complexity of social truths and situations in three secondary schools in the Greek education system. As the study explored the construction of inclusive communities, the collection of cases included the full variety of institutional options for secondary students with SEN (Stake, 2006). While it is difficult to study society or educational systems as a whole, a clearly defined and varied institutional profile of this kind offers possible typifications which may hold resonance for others in similar institutional contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994; May, 2011).

3.5 Fieldwork

3.5.1 Sampling

Sampling in qualitative research “is often purposive or theoretical rather than random or representative” (Savenye & Robinson, 2004, p. 1049). Likewise, analysis is “typically inductive rather than deductive” (Savenye & Robinson, 2004, p. 1049), as the researcher applies intuitive or propositional knowledge to the examination and interpretation of data. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that multi-case sampling adds confidence, validity and stability to findings; as the study explores contrasting cases, a deeper understanding of single-case findings can be achieved. The selection of cases in this instrumental case study was purposive and reflective of specific Greek secondary school profiles, along with schools’ legal definition and approach to inclusion, as discussed in the following section - 3.5.2 (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 30; May 2011). This process was also guided by the literature and research related to the SEN context in Greece (Kassiotakis & Labrakis, 1998; Giamouridis & Bagley, 2006; Ifanti, 2007). Hence, case study schools and participants were, therefore, not
selected at random, but rather in a deliberate, intentional way, reflecting the research purpose and questions (Punch, 2009; Silverman, 2010). Although some have raised concerns regarding bias in purposive sampling – suggesting it merely verifies a researcher's preconceived ideas – research findings suggest that it more often leads researchers to question and re-evaluate preconceptions (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

In this study, the participants, (head teachers, subject teachers and parents) were chosen as they were considered to be important collaborators in the decision and policy-making processes in the education system. As inclusive policy is seen as socially constructed, it is through participants' in-depth narratives, rather than the number of participants involved or the degree to which their teaching experience, or involvement in inclusion could be generalized (Charmaz, 1995; Punch, 2002; Gray, 2010). Parents are, also, an important part of educational communities and their voices should be heard so as to reveal aspects related to their interactions with all the players of the educational arena. The study is focused not on students – whose voices are very important – but rather on adults (see also section 3.6.2). In the Greek context, students do not have any input in the decision-making process in schools and authorities, regarding their school placement and education. Therefore, I decided to include those adults who have, and are around, students. Moreover, there are challenges of trying to include students in this particular context, considering the ethical restrictions regarding research with children and young people. Additionally, as I mention in the following section, at this time of political and financial crisis, the Greek educational authorities have restricted any kind of research within schools. However, students participated, in a limited way, in this study, as observations were conducted in school classrooms, during the teaching and learning process, and both students and teachers participated in this two-fold process.

The decision to focus on a specific region was made following negotiation of the research topic with schools, in the initial stages of the study’s development. My interest in investigating inclusive practices in secondary schools stemmed from the fact that, until recently, segregated education in special settings was the only official provision for secondary students with SEN (Vlachou, 2006). Additionally, a lack of support for students with SEN has also been found to cause a significant number of
them to drop out of school after the 6th grade of primary school (Dimitropoulos & Kaloussi, 1997; Magoulios & Trichopoulou, 2012). Secondary schools are considered the most appropriate to investigate in this present study, as attendance at these schools has been compulsory, for students both with and without SEN, since 2008. Moreover, integration units are mainly established in lower secondary schools, as there is a scarcity of provision for students with SEN in upper secondary school settings. Additionally, there are only lower secondary special and special vocational schools for students with SEN. It has to be mentioned here that the students at technical and vocational special secondary schools include students with a wide age range—and thus they operate as upper secondary schools as well. In these schools, such as Acropolis, students could gain a technical certificate in order to participate in the labour market. Finally, the secondary education curriculum is challenging and demanding for students with SEN, especially considering its academically-oriented nature. Thus it would be interesting to examine how the school communities respond in order to include, or challenge, the education of students with SEN. I believed these circumstances would make this current study relevant and motivating for schools, educational authorities and policy makers, particularly in light of the current employment, financial and socio-political situation in Greece.

3.5.2 Sources of data

Data collection in this study was extensive, drawing upon multiple sources of information - including observations, interviews, and documents (Gerring 2009; Bryman, 2012; Miles et al., 2014). Sources of data included documents, non-participatory observations in each relevant school classroom, and semi-structured interviews with head teachers, teachers and parents after classroom observations.
3.6 Conducting the research

3.6.1 Choosing the sample case

The choice of case schools was driven by the research questions, the parameters of the sample population, and literature related to inclusive education in the Greek and international context (Giamouridis & Bagley, 2006). Following Denzin and Lincoln’s (1994, p. 202) recommendation that qualitative researchers use purposive and not random sampling – seeking out “groups, settings and individuals ... where the processes being studied are most likely to occur” – I sought out three schools reflecting my specific research purposes (Punch, 2009; Silverman, 2011).

These considerations led to the selection of three Greek case schools with varied institutional profiles and approaches to inclusion: 1) “Acropolis”, a special technical and vocational school where students with both mild and severe needs were educated in a segregated school setting1 (see Table 1); 2) “Parthenon”, a mainstream-inclusive school that welcomed students with mild SEN and offered partial withdrawal from classrooms to integration units in the school; and 3) “Caryatids”, a mainstream non-inclusive school that welcomed students with mild SEN, but offered no official provision or school structures to support them. Each school possessed a unique institutional profile and approach to special education and inclusion. These schools were not selected on the basis of assumed good practice – as in other studies investigating inclusive educational communities – rather because they represented different legal definitions and approaches to inclusive education in the Greek context.

As Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 33) recommend establishing a “sampling frame”, or set of parameters by which case studies are selected, I chose schools in a similar geographic location, with similar financial resources and serving students from similar socio-economic backgrounds, in order for the participants to inhabit similar cultural and socio-political experiences. All three case schools were located in different suburbs, but within the same working-class region in the suburbs of a large city on the Greek mainland. The schools also served students from the same low socio-economic

1 School names are pseudonyms.
background, which followed the same course timeline, and were under the supervision of the same local educational authority. Additional details concerning the schools’ approaches to inclusion, school strategies and classroom practices are provided in the following chapters. However, a brief synopsis of the participants is presented in Table 1 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School name and type</th>
<th>Class(es)</th>
<th>Type of participant(s)</th>
<th>Data collection tool(s)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parthenon (mainstream-inclusive)</td>
<td>Integration units (grade 7-13-14 years old)</td>
<td>1 head teacher, 2 Maths teachers, 2 Greek Literature teachers, 2 special teachers, 1 parent</td>
<td>2 observations in two classes with each subject lesson (Maths and Greek Literature)</td>
<td>16 observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusive classroom/integration units (grade 9, 15-16 years old)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acropolis (special)</td>
<td>Special classroom (grades 7 and 9-13-18 years old)</td>
<td>1 head teacher, 2 Maths teachers (special), 2 Greek Literature teachers (special), 4 parents</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
<td>8 observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9 interviews (with 5 teachers and 4 parents)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caryatids (mainstream non-inclusive)</td>
<td>Mainstream classrooms (grades 7 and 9-13-16 years old)</td>
<td>1 head teacher, 2 Math teachers, 2 Greek Literature teacher, 4 parents</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
<td>8 observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9 interviews (with 5 teachers and 4 parents)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Overview of three case study schools

3.6.2 Study participants

In educational research, adults have traditionally been considered the key informants of students’ lives and experiences. Thus, despite increasing interest in the recognition of students’ rights in education (MacNaughton et al., 2008), adults are still frequently approached by researchers to speak on behalf of children (Christensen & James, 2008). Although inclusive policy affects students, unfortunately, they do not have any input
in either the policy-making process or the implementation of inclusion in Greece. Moreover, there were sensitivities around the involvement of children in this current research on the part of the schools and the parents. This study is, therefore, focused on the adults, who are the only individuals in Greece legally permitted to influence the educational process within schools. This was balanced by observations in classrooms, allowing me to gain insights into the lived experiences of the students and adults in lessons and, to a limited extent, this meant that the research could engage with a broader narrative of teacher-student engagement.

It is also worth noting that policy-makers and members of the central and local educational authorities were originally intended to take part in this study. They were ultimately not included; for two reasons. Firstly, my initial attempts to gain access to these stakeholders were unsuccessful, likely due to their extensive workload - particularly during a time of national crisis. Secondly, as previously highlighted, educational policy is better explored through the eyes of those who implement and experience it in a daily basis (Lipsky, 1980). Since I was interested in the manifestations/constructions of inclusive practices, perceptions and actions within a case, I decided to focus my attention on the immediate key participants within each context and any involvement with policy was through the perceptions and comments of participants, as well as my own interpretations of policy documents.

The participation of the three head teachers was critically important, as they served as key leaders and decision-makers, playing a significant role in initiating and implementing change. They also represented and embodied their schools' culture toward inclusion (Abbot, 2006), and served as gatekeepers between policies and the classroom (Ball, 1981; Avissar, 2012). Moreover, as they had the power to communicate and directly interpret inclusive policies at the administrative and/or managerial level, investigating their views offered a view of inclusive education within a whole school context (Ainscow 2010; 2012). Exploration of the significance of the nature of school head teachers' conceptualisations, commitment to inclusion, and the nature of their decisions made regarding school structures, along with their role as school leaders, was a vital component of this study and are further discussed in the findings chapters (Reihl, 2000; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004; Muijs et al., 2011).
Teachers were also considered to be key actors within the school community, as they implemented or challenged head teachers’ decisions and helped shape their students’ identities (Allan, 1999). Seventeen teachers – four males and thirteen females – participated in the study overall. Eleven were mainstream educators, while the remaining six served as special subject teachers. All had been in the teaching profession between one and forty years, with a range of in-service experience in mainstream and special education. In terms of their educational qualifications, all head teachers and teachers held a 4-year degree from Greek universities in mainstream education. In addition, two special teachers had pursued postgraduate studies and four had attended one-year state-accredited seminars in special education.

Finally, as parental perceptions, involvement and support play an important role in the implementation of inclusion (Elkins et al., 2003; Kalyva et al., 2007; Abu-Hamour & Muhaidat, 2014), interviews were also conducted with parents. All interviews were designed to gain, through their participants’ narratives, a deeper understanding of their conceptualisations, perceptions and understanding of inclusion, the nature of their decisions made regarding school structures and classroom practices, along with the nature of their relationships, both within and beyond school boundaries.

3.7 Data collection within case studies

When performing in depth investigations of complex social phenomena, it is important to carefully consider the strengths and weaknesses of various data collection tools (Seale, 1998; Yin, 2003; Flick, 2006, Greener, 2011). Studies consisting of multiple research questions – like the present study – often require the use of multiple methodological approaches. In the following pages I explore the chosen methods of data collection, as by its very nature, case study tends to use a variety of data collection methods and multiple perspectives whenever possible, to enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of the data, by providing a view of a rich and complex case (Gerring, 2007; Stake, 2010).
3.7.1 Documents

Documents in this study were perceived as “socially situated products” and “objective cultural entities” (Giddens, 1976, p. 123) constructed by policy actors and interpreted by living communities (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 38). According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), their meaning is a matter of interpretation and is embedded in the distinction of literal and interpretive understandings (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Williams, 2002). Changes in all facets of society and issues such as democracy, social justice, equity and citizenship, were included and reflected in educational policy documents (Ozga, 2000). Consequently, through critical engagement and involvement with international and national policy documents, the challenges imposed by globalised changes in societies have necessitated changes in Greek education policy, particularly with regard to the acquisition of specific skills in order to meet the - often economic - needs of the society, at the expense of special education and inclusion. Thus, through policy documents, statistical reviews and research, I explored the relationship that Greek society had with inclusion.

I particularly, sought out documents relevant to inclusion and to my specific research questions. They were collected, and critically examined, from three different sources: EU inclusive policies; the retrospection of the existing Greek special and inclusive education policies over the last thirty years; and local and/or school policies. The documents were reviewed for their relevance to the study, their capacity to inform understanding of inclusive education, considering the role of school as a reflection of society through culture and transmission of traditional knowledge, and their contribution to dominant educational discourses. These discourses included: the narrow conceptualisation of special education as a different part of national education; the understanding of disability and SEN as a personal tragedy underpinned by the medical model of disability.

For example, until recently, the more dominant social discourses perceived SEN as a personal tragedy, underpinned by the medical model of disability (Vlachou, 2006). These discourses were reflected in education with the enactment of policies regarding the special education of students with SEN in segregated settings (Zoniou-Sideri & Nteropoulou-Nterou, 2008). In turn, these policies were implemented or challenged in
schools by school members, influencing the nature of teaching and learning practice. Hence schools, as social constructions, reflected dominant discourses while reproducing them through the development of new citizens.

Greek regulations, circulars, presidential decrees, inspection reports and official statements – as well as the nation’s constitution – were accessed through the ‘Governmental Newspaper’, a collection of official documents developed by the Ministry of Education. Local policy documents were obtained from the local education authority, while students’ official assessments and individualised education plans (IEP) were obtained from through schools. Other sources of documentation included: the National Library of Athens, the Library of the Greek Parliament and academic institutions for current research in the field.

As noted in Chapter 2, there was a lack of local school documentation, most likely due to the centralised nature of the top-down Greek educational system. There was also reluctance on the part of the local educational authority to provide me with access to local circulars, government regulations, complaints and appeals, regarding special and inclusive education policy, located in their libraries. While I was eventually provided access to some information, it did not include anything I had not already accessed within the public domain. Moreover, due to confidentiality concerns, only Caryatids school allowed me to review the assessment reports and IEPs of students with SEN. Table 2 summarizes the documents I was able to access and review.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of document</th>
<th>Interest groups</th>
<th>Documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU inclusive policies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Legislation and regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek national policy</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
<td>Legislation, regulations, circulars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local policy documents</td>
<td>LEAs, Schools</td>
<td>Local regulations, student assessment reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School policy, regulations</td>
<td>Case study schools</td>
<td>Instructions for special and inclusive teaching, IEPs, student assessment reports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. **Documents supporting the case study research**

Documents produced by different policy actors with contradictory perspectives provided a "rich vein for analysis" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 173). Indeed, these documents contained definitions and terminology, language, names, titles, and information that clarified the formal basis of Greek schooling and distinguished official policies from the informal day-to-day workings of secondary schools. They helped me gain a better historical perspective and understanding of the educational policy-making process in Greece and of the challenges facing inclusive education (Duke, 2002). In particular, I was involved in a critical engagement with international, national and local educational policy texts, through the critical examination of education policy definitions and approaches of schools to inclusion, and the impact of policy-decision making on local contexts and school practice.

For the purposes of triangulation, documents were collected in conjunction with semi-structured interviews and non-participatory observations. This strategy was designed to enhance the trustworthiness and dependability of this research (Spradley, 1979; Denzin, 1997; Punch, 2009), as described in greater detail below.
3.7.2 Non-participatory observations

As a method of data collection, observations have a long, rich history in social science research (Bryman, 2012). Punch (1994, p. 84) describes observation as “prolong[ed] immersion in the life of a community or organisation, in order to discern people’s habits and thoughts as well as to decipher the social structure that binds them together”. Observations provide an opportunity for direct access to social interaction, as well as insight into the participants’ realities, interpretations and assessments of their own perceptions and practices (Cohen et al., 2000; Bell, 2005; Thomas, 2009). In other words, observations provided an opportunity to contrast information that the respondents choose to disclose, or not disclose, against lived experiences (Bell, 1993).

Observation was an important strategy for this study, in order to gain a further understanding of school members’ decisions about school purposes and strategies in practice, regarding the implementation of inclusive policy in the school context. Although the interpretation of meaning, and the opportunity to go beyond participants’ perceptions and self-interpretation towards the evaluation of their practices, are benefits of observation, at the same time there are limitations; mostly because the interpretation of what is observed may be influenced by the constructs of the researcher. Thus, as the three examined case studies had different approaches to inclusion, observations allowed me to understand the different responses to inclusive practices, or otherwise, between and within the three schools.

Non-participant observations were conducted in this study, as the purpose of observations was to collect data non-directly (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Gray 2009), observing, understanding and interpreting the implementation of inclusive policy through school strategies, and teaching and learning practices in the classroom (Merriam, 2001). I found multiple advantages to this approach. First, I was able to form a deep understanding of teachers’ practices and interactions without participating in classroom activities (Adler & Adler, 1985). Indeed, non-participant observation allowed me to remain open-minded about what I might discover through fieldwork, instead of relying on documents or narratives alone (Riessman, 1993). I also found that remaining less noticeable allowed Students with SEN to focus on their school...
work (Phillips, 1995; Punch, 2009). Some might suggest that the researcher who remains an outsider may fail to gain the kind of rapport that is appropriate to making this approach work, while still having a subtle influence on participants' behaviours and practices (Gray, 2009; Mason, 2002). I addressed this issue by making initial visits to participating schools and classrooms, in order for students and teachers to get used to my presence in their space – this preparation enhanced researcher sensitivity, commitment and thought towards the observations being made and contributed to the analysis of the findings (Saunders et al., 2007).

I interacted only casually with those in the classroom, observing, understanding and interpreting the learning and teaching process within both mainstream and special classrooms (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 2001). The ways in which classroom life was structured to support or restrict inclusion were examined, offering in-depth understanding of inclusion in practice (Bassey, 1999; Denscombe, 2003; Gerring, 2009). Observing classroom life, school and classroom purposes, strategies for inclusion and learning and teaching practices greatly enhanced my understanding of the social construction of inclusion - since these approaches and practices were influenced by decisions made by school stakeholders as products of their conceptualisations. School practices were reflections of interwoven conceptualisations and decisions, which were reproduced or challenged through the teaching and learning process (May, 2011). Teacher thinking’ behind practice was explored through post-observation interviews. Thus, what I was not able to observe has been observed by participants and been declared through interviews; serving also to support the principle of case study, to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others (Stake, 1995).

Observations were conducted in a manner that was consistent with the principles of interpretivism, open or unstructured, rather than structured (Thomas, 2010). Although open observations have been criticised as being unfocused, my purpose was not to break down social activity into quantifiable elements; rather to immerse myself in a social situation, in order to understand and interpret it (Thomas, 2011; Bryman, 2012). The use of classroom observations as a method of data collection is popular in studies regarding inclusion and inclusive practices within school settings studies (Alexander, 2004; Rouse, 2008; Florian & Black - Hawkins, 2011; Black-Hawkins, 2012). In this
present study, the observational schedule followed non-participant, semi-structured observations because the key purpose of these observations was to understand the interactions between students with SEN and their teachers and peers in the classroom environment, without interrupting the class. These observations were carried out in naturalistic classroom settings and were framed by broad observation categories, in order to guide me to remain focused on the specific classroom segments under investigation. Thus, acknowledging the challenges of conducting an unstructured observation, since it could result in an endless list of quotations and observations, with little to give them integrity or meaning, I used of some pre-fixed broad observation categories. These categories were focused on specific segments of classroom life and school practice, following the sequence and meanings of naturally occurring events, including: teaching practices; the nature of collaboration; engagement; and interactions between and within teachers and students with SEN within the three different school settings (Tizard & Hughes, 1984; Simpson & Tuson, 2003; Silverman, 2010). These categories included:

1) physical space in the school and classrooms, as well as the support network and provision offered to students with SEN;
2) subject lesson content and duration;
3) extent/nature of adaptation of teaching and learning strategies - favouring or against discrimination; promotion of equality and inclusivity in class; effectiveness;
4) particular focus on students with SEN;
5) student-teacher dynamics, focus on the extent and nature of teachers' engagement, interaction/collaboration with students with SEN and initiatives for participation;
6) student - student dynamics, focus on interactions, collaboration with/without teachers' initiative, build of friendship rapports, bullying.

Observations were conducted at two levels within each case study. Informal, non-participant observations of school and classroom layouts – particularly as they pertained to the infrastructure for students with SEN – occurred while touring the school facilities. A number of details stood out in each school setting, including the size and layout of classrooms as well as relationships and interactions between school stakeholders. After initial observations, formal classroom visits were conducted. Notes from my first classroom visits were largely descriptive (Spradley, 1980) and very detailed; featuring accounts of classroom activity and direct quotes from the
participants. It is important to note that, while immediate note-taking was not always feasible, I attempted to record my observations as soon as possible after the observation, being aware of the need for sensitivity, commitment and thought to interpret and analyse the observations in a meaningful manner. Thus, observation notes contained both interpretations and descriptions. During my second visit to classrooms, as I was more familiar with the setting and operational processes, I was able to narrow and focus my observations more, acknowledging— from the first observation—the disturbances within education research settings along with the complexities of social situations. Hence, I was more focused on those aspects which were more important, as far as the key questions of my research were concerned. For example, during my second visit at the Parthenon integration units, I was more focused on understanding and keeping notes on the purpose of the teaching and learning practices. In particular, during my second observation in class, I tried to identify whether the special teacher’s purpose was either to provide remedial support for mainstream classroom lessons, as students were being prepared for the upcoming examination test, or to perceive this kind of support as part of a series of practices developing students’ academic and social skills.

During the observation process I kept more focused notes regarding teaching practices used in order to deliver the curriculum: whether the teacher used lecturing or more creative ways of teaching, collaborative-teaching approaches, participatory teaching etc. However, the one-size-fits-all approach was prevalent in integration units, similarly to mainstream classrooms, maybe due to the restricted time that teachers had to support students individually within their two-hour— and often longer— attendance per week in integration units. Through these observations, I was also able to understand the teacher-student dynamics— limited to some initiatives for collaboration—, student-student dynamics, and being aware of the inconsistency between the purpose of integration units, as proposed in policy documents, and its practical implementation in school classroom reality, closer to additional academic support of the mainstream curriculum.
My field notes also supported my data collection activities and contained a record of dates, times, physical locations, as well as the phenomena being observed. Both verbal and non-verbal communication was recorded, as were descriptions of the participants' tone of voice and body language. Although observations should be recorded systematically, the use of videotape or other kinds of recorder can intimidate people (Merriam, 2001). Therefore, in the interests of the participants, it was decided that observations would not be recorded on videotape. However, all observation sessions were recorded using field notes and digital audio-recording equipment. Throughout the process, I sat in the classroom outside the students' immediate line of sight and subtly separated from the group, so as not to distract the students. Different teachers explained my presence and the purpose of the research to the students. I kept notes of contexts, spaces, objects and resources, people, actions and interactions, activities, events, and documents. Hand-written notes were transferred to my home and/or office computer in such a way that would help me relive the moments and feelings expressed. I also kept notes of the challenges I faced, of my changing thoughts and feelings about the fieldwork, of the relationships between participants but also between the participants and myself, and of how these relationships developed. These observations played an important role in my ability to reflect upon the research and how I was becoming part of the social world I was observing.

My aim using this approach was to observe behaviours and teaching strategies, and to develop an account of these practices through the use of descriptive and narrative records (Riessman, 1993; Bryman, 2012). Two hour-long observations took place in each of the school classrooms, after mutual agreement with head teachers and subject teachers. Mathematics and Greek Literature were the observed subjects, as they are mandatory lessons for all students from primary to upper secondary level in mainstream and special schools. As the first (7th) grade, including students between 12 - 14 years old, and third (9th) grade, including students between 14 - 16 years old, of lower secondary education are the most crucial for students –the former serving as a transitional stage from primary to secondary school, and the latter preparation for upper secondary schooling – these were also chosen for observation.
Table 3. Classroom observations

Observations of specific segments of classroom life provided an opportunity to analyse schools’ and school members’ different responses to an inclusive school structure; especially the implementation, or otherwise, of inclusive education in practice. Through my observations, I was able to explore how decisions made by head teachers, and teachers regarding school strategies, influenced, and were influenced by, the other school members and the extent to which they were put into classroom practice. However, despite my best efforts to remain unobtrusive, some teachers altered classroom practices because of my presence, as they informed me after the observation that they used specific collaborative classroom practices and utilised specific methods in order to provide me with specific examples - telling me “this is for you”. Indeed,
some engaged in discussions designed to catch my attention, including those about diversity in education.

Although I reminded teachers that I was not there to judge them but to listen and learn, at times it was clear that their practices—and, as noted in the following section, their interview responses—seemed to be based on what they believed to be 'politically correct' answers; such as revealing commitment to inclusive values, positive perceptions to inclusion, broad vision about inclusion and deep inclusive conceptualisations, along with the use of inclusive-collaborative practices within and beyond school. Observations were enriched by follow-up interviews (McAlpine et al., 1999), so as to ascertain whether there was consistency between what school stakeholders aspired to, or said they did, and their work in the classroom (Nisbet & Watt, 1980; Gray, 2009).

3.7.3 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews took place (after the observations) with head teachers, teachers and parents. According to Maxwell (2005, p.65), this dual approach to data collection allows for deeper exploration of the topic under consideration:

[W]hile interviewing is often an efficient and valid way of understanding someone’s perspectives, observation can enable the researcher to draw on differences about these perspectives that couldn’t be obtained by interview data [alone].

Qualitative studies mostly use interviews as the research method of choice for data collection. Interviews are very helpful in obtaining knowledge from the experiences, views or perceptions of the interviewee (Kvale, 2009). They are social, interpersonal encounters between the interviewer and the interviewee, with each interview being different (Spradley, 1979; Cohen et al., 2007). In the present study, interviews provided rich qualitative data and the opportunity to clarify how school stakeholders interpreted the practices and processes that they participated in. They also allowed me to understand and explore in-depth the meanings that participants gave to special educational needs and inclusion, as well as to elaborate upon the themes and ideas rose during classroom observations (Gray, 2009; Blaikie, 2010; Yin 2014).
There is a wide range of classifications of interviews. However, the most commonly used type of interview is the face-to-face encounter. According to Atkinson and Silverman (2011), face-to-face interviews are introduced for facilitating a ‘special insight’ into subjectivity, voice and lived experience (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). Interviews can be classified according to their purpose, their degree of structure, the extent to which they are exploratory or hypothesis testing, whether one person or a group is interviewed, for example, via a focus group, or whether it is a more-in-depth interview, where the interviewer asks the respondent about facts and perceptions (Kvale, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), the degrees of structure or formality of an interview can range along a continuum from structured to semi structured to non-structured. Structured interviews have predetermined questions in the form of a survey (Thomas, 2009). Non-structured interviews have open questions while the semi-structured interview comprises a mix of predetermined and more flexible questions and it is the latter form that was used in this study. This allowed a clear standardised set of topics which made comparison within and across schools achievable while also allowing flexibility and responsiveness to individuals (Thomas, 2009).

One of the principal advantages of using an interview is its adaptability. You can listen to the response while assessing not only the response but also the feelings and emotions of the respondent. Another advantage is that the interviewer can ask the respondent to clarify his/her answers by asking follow up questions (Newby, 2010). A high quality interview can extract rich data, which other research methods, such as surveys or questionnaires, cannot do. However, the principal challenge of interviews is that they can be time consuming to conduct and to analyse. For the purposes of this research, sufficient time was available for the researcher to carry out face-to-face interviews. Another challenge is that interviews are social interpersonal encounters between the interviewer and the interviewee, with each interview being different and involving subjectivity (Cohen, 2007). Hence, the interviewer’s subjectivity can influence the interview’s dynamic and interpretation of the data; as the researcher is an active agent in gaining knowledge of the processes, language, perceptions and experiences of the research context (Bell, 1993; Thomas, 2009). However, subjectivity in the interviews conducted during this research can be balanced; acknowledging my
own subjectivities and position as a researcher (Rapley, 2004) in the field and experiences as a special secondary teacher.

Open-ended questions, divided into categories, were posed to each participant (Interview schedules – Appendices C, D, and F). The order of the questions varied slightly with each interview, as some respondents preferred to direct the flow of conversation while I used a light touch, to ensure responses to key interview elements. However, it was the content of the narratives that was focused on, rather than the structure or form of the narratives. The structure and order of the questions were designed to encourage participants to express their personal conceptualisations and concerns about inclusive education. Questions, arising from observations, also guided the interview process. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in mutually agreed locations at the participants’ convenience. Each interview was approximately 60 minutes in duration and digitally audio-recorded (with supplemental field notes).

As previously noted, teachers’ practices are shaped by their conceptualisations and experiences, as well as the emphasis they place on different learning and teaching approaches (Rouse, 2008; Florian & Spratt, 2013). Through the interviews in this study, both the specific context of the teachers’ practice and their decision-making processes with regard to inclusion were explored (Alexander, 2001; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). However, it was not always possible to engage teachers in a conversation reflecting on and interpreting their teaching practices during post-observation interviews, particularly when the teacher was observed using both inclusive and exclusive teaching practices. In other words, I often found their interpretations of inclusion at odds with their practices and experiences in the classroom. Therefore, I tried to maintain a delicate balance between examining their conceptualisations and constructions, while also exploring the contradictions in their practice (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Mamas, 2012).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key areas</th>
<th>Interest groups</th>
<th>Key individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schools</strong></td>
<td>1 mainstream school <em>(Caryatids)</em></td>
<td>3 head teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 mainstream school with integration units <em>(Parthenon)</em></td>
<td>4 Maths and 4 Greek Literature teachers (at each school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 special school <em>(Acropolis)</em></td>
<td>+ 2 special teachers - integration units in the same courses as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents</strong></td>
<td>9 parents of students with and without SEN - 4 from Caryatids; 4 from Acropolis, 1 from Parthenon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4. Semi-structured interviews - key participants*

### 3.8 Collecting the data

#### 3.8.1 Access

In order to conduct research in Greek public schools, it is necessary to apply to the government for access. The application process requires submission of a lengthy, detailed form, including a full research proposal (written in Greek and English), to the Ministry of Education. Gaining the Ministry’s approval is a time-consuming process; requiring that all relevant ethical considerations be explored before submission. Following approval, it is then necessary to approach head teachers for access to Greek schools.

In this study, I approached the head teachers by telephone and then in person. Although they were provided with appropriate information regarding the purpose and nature of my research, they were at times reluctant to support me. Due to the limited time allotted by the Ministry of Education for my fieldwork, extreme delays in the
permission process, teachers’ demonstrations and strikes, as well as accommodations for the Greek school timetable, I had significant difficulties accessing my research population. Through this experience, I would like to acknowledge the need for the researcher to be persistent and diplomatic in the face of both individual situations and societal crises. For example, I had to be patient and persistent in order to manage the reluctance on the part of the head teacher of Parthenon school to give me access, despite his initial acceptance and the official permission I had been given for the research by the central educational authorities. After a series of visits at Parthenon, and long discussions with the head teacher, I convinced him to let me in - but for a shorter time than we had initially arranged. Another challenge I faced was generated by the Greek economic crisis. In particular, as Greece has been in a situation of deep economic crisis since 2009, the operation of special schools and integration units, for the years 2011-2012-2013, was under question; due to government’s withdrawal of financial support for both human and material resources.

Due to this instability, the Pedagogical Institute – an independent agency responsible for the organisation and structure of mainstream and special education, had halted educational research in school settings, and thus ejected my application for research approval. However, at the same time, the government had decided that the Pedagogical Institute should be merged with the Ministry of Education. Being diplomatic and having to acknowledge the bureaucracy involved, as well as the vague boundaries between educational authorities’ roles and responsibilities and the marginal cross-agency collaboration, I applied for a second time to the Department of Special Education, within the Ministry of Education. This department was involved with more local and school-oriented special education issues and it provided me with permission to access schools.

3.8.2 Pilot study

Before approaching the schools, during the second semester of 2012, I conducted a pilot study, for one month, to explore the education provided to students with SEN in secondary education in Greece. I specifically focused on the wording and presentation of the interview guide(s) and examined possible issues related to my interview
questions. I conducted pilot interviews with a head teacher and two Greek secondary teachers at both a mainstream school without provision for students with SEN, and a mainstream school with integration units; both with open admissions for students with mild needs. I also observed two subject lessons - Mathematics and Greek Literature, twice, in one class -grade 7- of the first school. The pilot participants recommended changes to the wording of two questions, suggesting they were too long and overly vague. The pilot study served several different functions. First, I learned more about the role of special teachers in integration units and the range of their responsibilities within and out-with their class. Second, it was useful to meet school stakeholders in order for them to help me select the sample, as well as gaining insights into the different ways of approaching participants.

I designed the initial interview schedule for the head teacher and teachers in schools, along with the classroom observation schedule. While discussing their conceptualisations about inclusive policy, and its implementation in Greek mainstream settings, the school stakeholders offered different perspectives and understandings of the notions of ‘inclusion’, ‘integration’, ‘disability’ and SEN. Participants interchangeably used the terms inclusion and integration, and some of them -even in the mainstream schools with integration units- were not familiar with the current inclusive education policies. However, most stakeholders showed positive attitudes towards inclusion of children with SEN, in rhetoric. However, in practice, they found inclusive education unfeasible for the Greek context; considering the vague definition of inclusion in policy documents and the abstract articulation of this policy implementation in secondary school settings. Additionally, students with physical impairments seemed less of a challenge for inclusion than students with mental or emotional and behavioural difficulties. Indeed, they suggested that not all students should be eligible for inclusion, and special education remained the best option that could be offered for their education. Teachers in mainstream schools stated that they were unable to support students with SEN, due to their lack of training, a strictly academic curriculum, the school infrastructure and a lack of support and advisory intervention from authorities. The pilot study, therefore, proved helpful in shaping and revising data collection tools as well as reinforcing the significance of individual and school constructions of inclusion.
3.9 Data analysis

In this section, I present the general procedure I followed to analyse the collected data; then I illustrate the approach taken to the analysis within and across case studies. As demonstrated earlier, qualitative data was drawn from documents, interviews and observations. The methods of analysis focused on interpreting the conceptualisations, perceptions, experiences and relations obtained from participants in the research.

“Qualitative data analysis requires coding and searching for relationships and patterns until a holistic picture can emerge” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 85).

Data from interviews, observations and documents were analysed inductively, using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). This method permits systematic analysis, since data can be described and interpreted and patterns (themes) can be identified, both implicitly and explicitly, within it (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). In particular, as Braun and Clarke (2006) state, thematic analysis is the method for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your dataset in (rich) detail” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79).

Hence, thematic analysis was useful for this study in terms of both describing and capturing the complexities of meanings within specific data and datasets (Guest et al., 2012). Critics of thematic analysis consider it to be too simplistic, arguing that it may degree data and commenting that it provides a simple description of data without appearing as a named or bounded analysis with clear processes and definitions (Attride-Stirling, 2001; McLeod, 2001).

However, it has been widely used in qualitative research, both inductively and deductively, and can be bounded through a detailed report of the analytical process (Boyatzis, 1998; Attride-Stirling, 2001). Additionally, one of its advantages is that it is “independent of theory and epistemology, and can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). It is content-sensitive and flexible in terms of research design and theoretical framework paradigms, including the social constructionist paradigm, - examining how conceptualisations, decisions, practices, and experiences regarding inclusion are influenced by discourses operating within society. Thus, this approach was deemed a...
suitable method for the present study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, thematic analysis is well-suited to large datasets, as in the present study, which can be either complex or simple according to the research purposes, and can be used for interpretation of the content of the data gained from observations, interviews and documents (Guest et al., 2012).

In particular, qualitative data were drawn from documents, interviews and observations and analysed following the analytical process suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994); which contains three separate components: data reduction; data display; and conclusion drawing and verification. The process of analysis was the same for all the case studies, though all three involved an initial holistic approach to analysis in that: I read through field notes, transcriptions and also translations of raw audio data, then repeated the reading of the data, and induced development of codes, categories and themes that emerged in relation to my research questions and used them as a preliminary frame for this process (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). During this dynamic process of engaging deeply with data, there is a moment of clarity, when a new pattern can be discerned. Often, the pattern was adjusted and categories were collapsed, or separated further, before the final themes were developed (Richards & Morse, 2012). Before a more detailed description of the analysis is presented, below is an example of the analytical process followed from codes to themes:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of school members: working beyond/within formal responsibilities</td>
<td>Personal and professional capacity</td>
<td>- Relationships (individuals/groups)</td>
<td>Power, Voice &amp; Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>- Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative relationships</td>
<td>- Voice and agency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibilities</td>
<td>- Leadership style</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permeable barriers of role</td>
<td>- Leadership approach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of mainstream–special teachers</td>
<td>Individual agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration between mainstream and special teachers</td>
<td>Community–institutional agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making/ problem solving processes</td>
<td>Voice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive/ authoritative leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment &amp; networking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lobbying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of voice for individuals and groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of agency for all school members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility by one group of school members</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.** From codes to themes: voice, power and agency
I approached the data with an open, yet cautious, mind and was aware that the data collected from interviews and observations were produced within specific time-frames, and within contexts where specific socio-political and economic agitations were reflected on discourses which might dominate perceptions and arguments (Fairclough, 2003). Acknowledging the relationship of the case to its social context is an integral part of an analysis that is looking at the research findings both historically and in the wider system of inter-dependencies (Dopson, 2003).

3.9.1 Documentary analysis

Through an examination of Greek special education legislation from the 1980s onward, I identified and gained a better understanding of the transitions of Greek political and economic processes which revealed from relevant legislations, policies and the educational discourses continually referred in the different sources of official statements (Vlachou, 2006; Liasidou, 2014). I also achieved a better understanding of how these issues are framed within the Greek economic and socio-political context, and how they impact school practice.

3.9.2 Analysis of data within each case study

In this section, a more detailed account of the analytical process is presented, including data reduction, data display, verification of conclusions and the cross case analysis process.

i) Data reduction

In this stage, twenty-six full interviews, segments of classroom observations and filed notes were organised, transcribed and translated into English. Direct translation was difficult at times, considering the different meanings regarding inclusion and integration along with the different ways of using words between cultures. I translated all the interviews, making every effort to retain the original meaning of the participants’ statements, with the help of bilingual colleagues in order to verify the translation. This assistance was only sought after agreement; paying close attention to confidentiality. The process of transcription is considered by researchers as the stage of familiarisation with data and as “a key phase of data analysis within interpretative
qualitative methodology" (Bird, 2005, p. 227). As data reduction "sharpens, starts, focuses, discards and organises data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 12), I carefully listened to and read all recordings and notes, which included my personal interpretations, comments, and descriptions of phenomena, as well as my observations of non-verbal communication, on multiple occasions during the process of transcribing and took additional notes when necessary.

In this study I managed data and the process of analysis manually. I was concerned about the debatable and inflexible processes of the use of a software analysis package with privileging coding, retrieval methods and reification of data (St John & Johnson, 2000; Suter, 2012). Thus, I chose to avoid focusing on volume and width rather than depth and meaning. Descriptive categories and initial codes, that attributed meaning to particular statements and observations, were developed in the context of each school and reflected the themes that emerged naturally from the interviews and observations. I used a data drive and thematic approach that was based on my previous pilot study.

Next, I used an inductive classification of data, as I was going backward and forward through it. Data were coded line by line and then clustered into groups with similar codes, based on the content connections among codes and coded extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I sorted the codes into categories and potential themes, that might help answer my research questions, and gathered all information or quotes that were important to a potential theme. I then used a mind map to organise the themes. Hence, they were coded into fourteen raw categories with common characteristics and I further sought for recurrent patterns (themes), regularities, meanings and explanations, as well as "contrasts, paradoxes and irregularities" (Wellington, 2006, p. 136); providing supporting arguments and evidence for valid interpretations (Stake, 2006; Silverman, 2010). I then shifted codes and data between categories, as new and different themes emerged (Miles et al., 2014). For example, when I found the patterns (themes) that emerged from several identified codes regarding participants' perceptions and conceptualisations of inclusion, or the way policy texts referred to the implementation of inclusive policy, I recorded the emerged themes and noted the rationales for developing these themes. According to Boyatzis (1998, p. 63), the codes referred to "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that
can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon”, while the development of themes is where the interpretive analysis of the data lies, and how relations between arguments regarding the phenomenon being examined are made.

As this complex process was carried out manually, each piece of data was reviewed in great detail. Some were felt into multiple, over-arching categories; therefore, I rechecked them - returning to the raw data multiple times to ensure accuracy and appropriateness of placement, recounting the significance of the meanings as factors developing reliable themes (Merriam, 2009). This practice continued through to the final stages of analysis. In all stages, I reviewed the data in light of my research questions, re-organising and re-categorising as necessary. While this process was more intense and time-consuming than I had anticipated, I also benefitted from the constant comparison and revision. Indeed, I began to see a story emerging from the data. However, the story changed as I moved deeper into Miles and Huberman’s analytical framework.

2) Data display

The next stage was data display. Data display involves “reducing the information into appropriate and simplified gestalts, or easily understood configurations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.11). This phase comprised two steps. First, I verified whether each theme had enough data to correlate with different coded extracts, or I divided a theme into two, if needed, in order to find a real and appropriate place for each code. In the second step, I developed a thematic map of the analysis of the entire data set, displaying data in order to verify that each theme was related to the extracts that had been coded and in order to explore the relationships between and within the themes and the research questions. Once I had drawn up the thematic map, I needed to refine each theme and understand what they meant before finding the correct name for each of them. Accordingly, I developed a table consisting of each emerging category and a description of its content. I then reviewed the text compared and contrasted elements of the data, and sought to identify key points and themes. I also took the step of reviewing themes, both at the level of the coded data extracts and the whole dataset; seeking for coherent patterns, making certain that the developing sub-themes worked in relation to the datasets and seeking any missed sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
Finally, in a process of layering the themes, I combined more specific sub-themes into overarching ones, and then reviewed the raw data once more, in order to understand them in their context.

Three key themes emerged in each school community: 1) conceptualisations of inclusion, 2) decisions about school structure, and 3) relations within and beyond schools: power, voice and agency. These were then classified as key strands of a narrative framework that was developed regarding the construction of inclusive school communities and, as each school responded differently to these elements, having unique interpretations or engagement with each theme, three different kinds of inclusion emerged. A more detailed analysis of these themes will be featured in later chapters.

3) Verifying conclusions

The above process led to the next step of the analytical framework - drawing and verifying conclusions. The key purpose of theoretical analysis is “to theorise the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). I achieved this purpose through a detailed account of themes within each case. Using the concept of “analytical statements” (Bassey, 1999, p. 83) - the summary of answers to each of my research questions – the present study followed a descriptive reporting approach. Then, data were analysed and similar patterns were gathered into wider and more specific categories, around which I reorganised the data and developed them into broad theories and generalisations; making interpretations of the findings both personally and theoretically (Creswell, 2003). A complete analysis of each case study is provided in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, using vignettes, producing a complete picture of each school’s context, approach and understanding of inclusion. Here, I developed interpretations of the themes with reference to the contexts within which they emerged. Tentative interpretations were reconsidered, through revisiting data collected from different sources, and reviewing selected extracts by analysing research questions and returning to the literature review, in order to write up a report of the full analysis. This approach, providing evidence about the key findings, was used to examine the suitability of the
interpretation in order to establish warrants for the arguments and the conclusions drawn (Stake, 2010).

3.9.3 Cross-case analysis

In this stage, individual cases were analysed further using cross-case analysis in order to find relationships or differences amongst them. This approach involved identifying common themes and sub-themes between cases, but also developing a revised set of themes that applied to them all. The comparative analyses were conducted across the three different case studies. Although each case was unique, the purpose of this cross case analysis was to compare the key themes of case studies from Acropolis, Parthenon and Caryatids schools, to identify possible elements regarding the construction of inclusive school communities in Greek secondary education. This led to the drawing out of themes about school members’ conceptualisations: perceptions, understanding and visions of inclusion, their commitment to inclusive values, visions and barriers of inclusion; the nature of decisions made by school members regarding school structure: purposes, school strategies and classroom practices, along with the relations built within and beyond schools.

In cross-case analysis the framework and procedures followed were introduced by Stake (2006), including reading the individual case study reports, as each case was studied to gain a further understanding of inclusive education. Hence, the quintain- inclusive education- was studied in some of these situations and its complex meanings were understood differently and deeply due to the particular contexts of each case. For example, the inclusive policy change and the exclusion of certain groups of students with SEN were influenced differently by the different contexts and conditions of each case. The cross-case analysis was focused on emphasising case findings and merging case findings, in order to lead to the development of cross-case assertions. Assertions were made about the quintain- inclusive education- through an interpretive process, in order to obtain evidence from the cases regarding the uniformity or inconsistencies that characterises the final conclusions (Stake, 2006).

Placing descriptions of the three cases together, in context, constituted the central findings of the multiple-case study. A thematic approach was also applied to the cross-
case analysis. I carefully read through individual case study reports and kept systematic notes on separate sheets for each case study report, identifying over-arching themes for analysis. I comment on the designation of factors that stimulate interpretation and discuss these in the multiple-case report in Chapter 7. I avoided numbering the key themes, as I listed them through a logical coherence of telling the story across cases, and I repeatedly went back and forth between the cases.

In the final stage, themes revised and determined the conceptual structure of the final report. I had to think dialectically within and across cases and the quintain, writing descriptions concerning each individual case’s themes as illustrations of the data. The following three themes were prominent: 1) conceptualisations and understandings of participants regarding inclusion - that drove their inclusive approach to school practice; 2) the nature of the school stakeholder’s decisions made about school structures as a response to policy implementation: purposes, school structures and classrooms practices; 3) along with the nature of relations developed within and between school members and the wider academic and social community: including the issues of power, voice and agency. As discussed in Chapter 1, through examination of the literature, these themes were also found to be prominent in the frameworks proposed by other researchers. Given their prevalence in all three case schools, these components were used, in this study, became sensitising concepts in the research process. As the analysis progressed these ideas were reinforced and formed the foundation for the development of the key strands of the framework generated here. In turn the analysis helped to shape the detail and complexity of the framework. Hence, through these themes generated from the cross-case analysis, I developed a framework, further analysed in Chapter 7. The following figure illustrates this framework’s key strands:
The origin of these strands came from cross case analysis of the three case-studies, although some initial preconceptions were developed through examination of the literature. While these themes - strands of the framework developed - were found within each one of the school cases, participants were found to respond to them differently - underpinned by socio-political and economic influences, along with each school's idiosyncratic features and the different perceptions, approaches, experiences and practices of different school members, developing the different components within these strands. Hence, an acknowledgment of how inclusion is perceived and worked not only in general terms but also within the different local contexts and conditions, was required. As a result, change and resistance were found to be dependent on these elements; all impacted by interplay of diverse ideological and practical concerns. It was the interplay between school stakeholders - head teachers, teachers and parents - and their tensions and agreements that could create space for the debate required in order to bring about change (Ball, 1981).
Through this process, I sought a better understanding of the quintain – inclusive education – as it was manifested in different institutional contexts. Given my constructionist perspective, I considered meaning and experience as being socially produced and re-produced (Burr, 1995). Thus, the focus was on the socio-cultural context and structural conditions influencing the individual accounts provided by participants in the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The conclusions that emerged within and between cases, either tentative or final, are called ‘assertions’ (Stake, 2006). I once again reviewed the display of multi-case themes and worked towards several cross-case assertions based on the case evidence. Then, the final cross-case report was generated. As noted in Chapter 7, I was also able to compare and contrast my findings with previous studies and frameworks developed by a range of researchers in different educational contexts.

As different manifestations of inclusion were found within the individual schools, as school members revealed different responses and interpretations to the key themes-strands, a framework was developed in this study. This framework included the three strands that emerged from key themes: conceptualisations of inclusion; decisions about structures; and power, voice and agency. The framework is intended to explore in greater depth the different responses and approaches taken by stakeholders in each case school, in an effort to better understand whether and how inclusive communities are constructed. From the responses to these strands, three different kinds of inclusion – surface, segregated, and deep – have been identified, as illustrated in the table below:
Later, in Chapter 7, I will clarify and explain in detail the themes that emerged and how they could be used to deal with the construction of inclusive school communities.

### 3.10 Triangulation, trustworthiness and dependability

As Gerring (2007) explains, the purpose of qualitative research is not the production of standardised, reproducible sets of results, but rather to produce coherent descriptions and results that can be applied to other settings (Thomas, 2009). This current study provides insights into the broader phenomenon of inclusion for students with SEN in these Greek secondary schools. As participating case schools reflected the full range of educational options offered to special needs students in Greece, they...
may be considered theoretically representative of other Greek schools, when considering the nature of the Greek educational system and the provision that is made for students with SEN in secondary education (Bassey, 1999, Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). My aim was to explore the construction of inclusive school communities, through the narratives of key school stakeholders. I was not seeking to generalise this phenomenon to a larger population, but rather, the generalisation of ideas that could be applied in different contexts (Suter, 2012).

Research findings should be trustworthy, regardless of the research method used. Trustworthiness includes the extent to which the research findings are believable and plausible (Koch & Harrington, 1998). I maintained trustworthiness in this research, by using triangulation across the case studies (Mathison, 1998; Merriam, 2009). This was performed through triangulation of the data collection tools and participant perspectives. Trustworthiness was also established by the credibility of the descriptions and findings in the multiple case studies as a whole, including the transparency of processes and the rigorous approach to analysis (Koch & Harrington, 1998; Stake, 2006; 2010). In qualitative studies, the concept of objectivity, or internal validity, is replaced by credibility; external validity is replaced by transferability; reliability is replaced by dependability and objectivity is replaced by confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Accordingly, I assured that these criteria were met, using the procedures outlined below.

Credibility refers to confidence in the whole research; the choice of methodology; how participants were selected; the way data were collected and analysed; and to what extent these addressed the purpose of the study (Suter, 2012). Credibility also involves concerns regarding how categories and themes were developed to fit the data. Credibility was achieved by maintaining good practice and following the same procedure for each case study during the interviewing and observational process. This involved, for example, using the same schedule for all interviews. Moreover, using multiple case studies could demonstrate external validity (transferability) because “by looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases ... we can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29). Case studies can provide rich data and offer a broad knowledge of the situation.
Dependability involves the consistency of data collection and analytical procedures in the research process (Silverman, 2011). According to Stake, reliability or dependability means that, if any of the procedures during data collection are repeated, similar results should be produced (Stake, 2006). Although qualitative inquiry is often explorative and data collection is an evolving process (Granheim & Ludman, 2004), dependability in the study can be achieved by using a case study protocol with particular methodological triangulation.

Transferability involves the possibility of wider application of the findings and ideas in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Although the findings of qualitative research are context-dependent, they may be used to understand similar phenomena in other settings (Suter, 2012). It is important to consider that credibility and transferability were enhanced by triangulation. Triangulation achieved by using multiple methods, as well as different participants and research settings in the research can support trustworthiness through enhancing external validity (transferability) (Merriam, 2001). This current research used three different research methods, including documentary analysis, interviews and observation records. This enabled me to consider the perceptions of different stakeholders. The study also utilised triangulation by data source (Denzin, 1997); in which evidence from different participants in each of the three case schools was compared and contrasted, including the views of head teachers, teachers and parents within each individual school. This was helpful because it allowed me to crosscheck the information using different research methods. Additionally, space triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1994) was also conducted; in which cases were considered to be representative of different legal approaches to special education, while also falling under the jurisdiction of the same local educational authority.

Moreover, transferability of findings involves similarity of context (Larsson, 2009) and, since it is the reader who makes judgements about the transferability of the findings, it is enhanced by the descriptions made by the researcher concerning the features of the context, the participants and the process of analysis; enabling judgements to be made concerning fit with others (Suter, 2012). In the present study,
apart from a detailed description of the three cases, presenting their contexts and key characteristics, cross-case comparisons within and between them also increased transferability (Larsson, 2009). In particular, qualitative research generates interpretations, themes and categories, which can be recognised in other contexts, similar to the research context or otherwise (Suter, 2012). The findings of the three case studies and cross-case analysis could be seen as themes recognised in other settings. Indeed, a framework was generated regarding the different kinds of inclusion within secondary schools. The framework strands: conceptualisations of inclusion; decisions about school structures and power; voice and agency, were found as key in the construction of inclusive school communities. These themes may be found in other educational contexts and settings which facilitate inclusive education.

Ensuring dependability and confirmability requires observational data or interviews to be collected by multiple observers or interviewers, as well as different researchers who can cross-check observational findings. However, this current research was conducted by a single researcher who maintained consistency by conducting and analysing all the interviews. Observations and interviews were also carefully conducted in various settings within the school, at various times of the day and on two to five days of the week in each school. Additionally, as Stake (2006) suggested, I listened to the recorded interviews and observations, checked the notes from the observation several times, and reviewed the notes against the original tape in order to decrease misinterpretation during the transcription and analysis and in order to maintain dependability.
3.11 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an approach that is used to “legitimise, validate and question research practices and representations” (Pillow, 2003, p. 175). It allows the researcher—the only individual responsible for carrying out data collection and interpretation—to reflect critically upon their role and the influences within the research process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It emphasises the potential power-relationships between the researcher and the participants which could shape the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Reflexivity also describes the process by which the researcher comes to terms with their role as a non-neutral observer (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). In this light, I explored meanings of inclusion at the same time as working to link them to contexts and experience; questioning my positions and acknowledging my preconceptions through reflection (Seale, 2007). Thus, being reflexive not only “contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the working of our social world but also provides insight on how this knowledge is produced” (Pillow, 2003, p. 178).

Interpretation is personal in social research; requiring both the participants and the researcher to make sense of reality on the basis of their own knowledge and experience (Thomas, 2009). In this study, underpinned by a constructionist approach, I accepted some degree of subjectivity, both in my position as a researcher and in my findings. Indeed, as there is no such thing as disinterested knowledge, my interpretations of the social world—as well as those of the participants—were influenced by personal experiences, understandings and beliefs (Gray 2009; Thomas 2009). In my process of reflection, I disclosed in writing the preconceptions and values I brought to data collection and analysis. It could be argued that I have asserted my power, as the researcher, in the kind of knowledge production and direction this study is taking; though much of that production has also been through a process of negotiation with the participants. Researcher and participants shared a common purpose, which was to identify, question, explore and progress the cases for the construction of inclusive school communities. In making my identity and beliefs more transparent, participants and readers alike gained both insights into my character and more confidence in my skills and abilities as a researcher.
3.12 Ethical considerations

As a social science researcher, I aimed to maintain a careful balance between my research interests and the rights and dignity of my participants (Marvasti, 2004; Bell, 2005; Silverman, 2010). In all aspects of data collection and analysis – described below – I conformed to the ethical guidelines of the Moray House School of Education (2005), the revised ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004), and SERA’s ethical guidelines (SERA, 2005). Fontana and Frey (2000) have broken down ethical principles in social research into four, main and overlapping, areas: whether there is harm to participants, lack of informed consent, an invasion of privacy, and an involvement of deception. However, I ensured that I preserved the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of participant identities and records. Informed consent forms and cover letters were given to all participants before data was collected, and prior to conducting the research, asking for their voluntary participation (Stake, 1995; Becker & Bryman, 2004). The respect for confidentiality and anonymity of names, individuals and places within the thesis was addressed by the use of pseudonyms, a common resource in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2007).

An initial visit was paid to each participating school, in which I discussed my study’s purpose and research methods with the head teacher. After gaining their verbal consent, we then discussed the selection of teachers, parents, and the classrooms to be observed. While the head teachers of Acropolis (Mrs. Pavlou) and Caryatids (Mr. Kostis) invited participation from specific teachers and parents, acknowledging beforehand their willingness to participate in the study, at Parthenon I had to make these contacts myself. This was due to the head teacher’s (Mr. Petrou) unwillingness to be involved in the study, other than participation in his own interview.

Formal letters of intent, and informed consent forms, were then provided to all participants. These included descriptions of my research aims and methods, information on my role as researcher, promises of anonymity and confidentiality, and assurances their information would be used only for the purposes outlined on the form (see Appendix A). Participants were informed of their right to decline involvement at any stage of the research process, and were provided with a consent form to sign,
following the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2004) and Greek Pedagogical Institute’s guidelines for voluntary participation (Delamont, 2002; Oliver, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007). The consent forms were written in Greek and signed by the participants and myself. Consent for digital recording was included in the forms, and requested at the beginning of each interview (Drever 1995, Porter & Lacey, 2005).

As the Greek government considers students ‘vulnerable individuals’, informed consent forms were also sent to parents of students attending the classrooms I observed. Unfortunately, less than half of parents in each school returned the consent forms signed; as a result, head teachers ultimately took responsibility for allowing me to observe. Despite the ethical dilemma of conducting observations without parental consent, as students were not directly involved in the data collection process, and maintaining anonymity and confidentiality was assured, head teachers’ agreed to give their permission for this process. It is also noteworthy that Mr. Petrou, the head teacher at Parthenon, refused to allow audio recording in the school's classrooms.

In spite of these precautions, I encountered a number of ethical challenges during the data collection process. At Caryatids school, both teachers and students were suspicious of my decision to observe their classroom, apparently fearing stigmatisation. A number of teachers insisted that I show them my field notes, despite my insistence they were confidential. Parents also expressed fears that their identities would be revealed, resulting in them being judged by the school and community. I assured participants that my objective was to understand inclusive processes within schools, without being judgmental or critical of particular individuals or practices. To gain insight into both schools and key stakeholders, I also assured participants that contradictory perceptions and discourses were welcomed and accepted.—This reassured participants and I was very careful to maintain this stance.
3.13 Limitations

This study, as with all research, is not without its limitations. In spite of my efforts to design and conduct an exemplary project, a number of limitations were noted in the design, in the data collection and data analysis process. The main limitations include, first, the fact that these findings were based on a single national context. The propensity to present a single national or school case perspective was criticised by Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) as reflecting a positivist approach of social science. Therefore, they comparatively analysed the leadership practice of three schools in the UK, Portugal and the US where there was evidence of progress regarding the broader meaning of inclusion for students at risk. Here, the emphasis has been placed upon understanding the uniqueness of the national context while also recognising the complexity of individual institutional constructions of inclusion.

Moreover, it would have been ideal to examine this topic over many years, specifically the last three decades, when legislation and thinking on disability were changing fairly rapidly. However, the project explored inclusive education within a limited window of time — the year 2012. Thus, instead of obtaining a longitudinal perspective then, this work has explored the issue over a limited time period; while also acknowledging the temporal and spatial location of the cases and participants. As I am not in a position of making generalisations, I would go with the more limited resonance, or typification, but these understandings of the limited significance of the case is countered by an acknowledgement of the resonance of the findings for those in similar contexts. Generalisation in the social sciences is a contested area but cannot be excluded completely from a discussion about the possible implications of social science research and the possibility of being transferable. However, I cross-analysed three Greek secondary schools, with different legal definitions and approaches to special educational needs and inclusion, enhancing the contribution that an examination of different contexts can make to local/national practice (Peters, 2002).

In the initial stages of this study, I tried to include five members of central and local educational authorities regarding inclusive education, such as the special education counsellors of the schools that participated in the study. Although, I managed to interview one mainstream education counsellor, and the director of a KEDDY -the
stated accredited centre for students’ with SEN assessment- in the area, three of them could not participate owing to their tight work schedule. However, these two interviews will form the basis for further research regarding inclusion in Greece, from the educational authority’s perspectives. Additionally, both observations and interviews took place within a specific time frame, from March to the start of July; indicated by the authorities responsible for the permission to conduct this study in Greek schools. This period was approaching the end of semester, which was a busy period due to the upcoming final year examinations in schools, and thus a busy period for staff and students. This experience highlights that the timescale arrangements are crucial, negotiated and at times challengingly important in research, especially when approaching policy makers and head teachers.

Moreover, the study was focused, not on students – whose voices are important – but rather on adults. As a result, a full multi-dimensional examination of inclusion in secondary schools is lacking. I have attempted to resolve this in a limited way, by including parents within the study and encouraging the voice of the family as well as through the use of classroom observations. Also, this study covers only the two main subject lessons in secondary schools, leaving out those in which Students with SEN could potentially participate and interact more easily. However I managed to gain fruitful information regarding the teaching practices in these two core subjects of Greek education, in students at all school stages, as students had to be examined in them every year in order to pass on to tertiary education.

Although the generally positive stance of parents of students with and without SEN in Greek education towards inclusive change was apparent, there was always the risk that the Greek parents were giving socially accepted responses and it could be difficult to determine whether these positive attitudes were truly an expression of the acceptance of disability (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2006). Despite this, I would argue that Greek research, literature and policy documents regarding inclusive education should be more concerned with the parents’ roles and voice in the construction of inclusive education communities; giving space for their own perceptions and practices within and outside schools.
As a relatively inexperienced researcher, this could be seen as a limitation. However, both my grounding in research at master's level, and my keen rigorous approach - as well my experience of teaching in Greek schools, helped to position me as an informed and self-critical researcher. The trust and understanding I experienced from the participants reflected the fact that stakeholders felt comfortable enough to share their experiences of inclusion with me and let me observe them, even when I was not directly involved in supporting children with SEN and had no authority in the school or in Greece.

Authenticity in data transcription and translation was also a significant challenge. Indeed, it was difficult to translate raw data from Greek to English and maintain both the meaning of statements and the flow of conversation, as this research and data analysis were done in Greek, while for the purposes of this study all quotes were translated from Greek to English or vice versa. The process of translation can impact on the results, as the real meaning can be changed when one is exposed to a different language context and, thus, different interpretations of the data and reflections may be raised (Sheeny et al., 2005). Elliot (2005) warns that if the process of interpretation and analysis is not sensitive to the original aims of the interview/study, then the result could be an undermining of the contribution and ontological security of the interviewee. This, Elliot suggests, would be to engage duplicity. Therefore this study was careful during the analytical stages not to read more than what is presented into the data, and to check back with each participant that the interpretation of certain information was not misguided. The legitimacy of the translation was also checked by colleagues. However, this process was not without challenges, considering the limited time between the data analysis and the writing up of the study.
Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological context considered during the design of this research, as well as the data collection and analysis. First, it briefly explained the different paradigms in educational research and the rationale behind using a specific paradigm for this study. Social constructionism – the notion that there is no ‘truth’, but rather multiple realities and ways of perceiving, understanding and constructing the social world – heavily influenced this inquiry. Second, it reviewed and justified that the research questions and methodological approach were the merits of qualitative and case study research. Third, this chapter has provided details regarding the population samples, data collection tools and the analysis of data collected using different methods. The trustworthiness of this study was also examined, and issues of triangulation and reflexivity explored. Finally, ethical issues in social research, and some of the methodological limitations that were raised, were explained. In the following chapter, the data that was collected and analysed will be presented on a case-by-case basis (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), followed by a discussion and cross case analysis (Chapter 7).
CHAPTER 4: Presentation of the findings - Acropolis

Introduction

The following three chapters include the description and preliminary analysis of data obtained from the interview responses of head teachers, teachers and parents, and classroom observations on a school case-by-case basis. Table 1 in the methodology chapter reviews the methods used for each of the three school cases: Acropolis, Parthenon and Caryatids. Key themes were identified within and across the case studies. Each chapter is structured into three main themes, drawing them together for a cross case analysis and discussion in Chapter 7. The following three themes were identified as prominent in each school:

1) Each head teacher, teacher and parent held a core set of conceptualisations about inclusion that influenced their decisions and approaches to school structures;
2) The nature of decisions about the implementation of inclusive policy was reflected in school structures;
3) Issues of power, voice and agency were important, whether present, absent or negotiated, within school communities

This chapter explores the complex ways in which Acropolis school participants constructed or challenged an inclusive school community, through the presentation and analysis of classroom observations and stakeholders’ narratives. This is the first case study that was conducted as part of this research in secondary schools with different responses to inclusion. This first school was a technical special secondary school located in an urban, working-class town in the western suburbs of a large city in Greece. The presentation and analysis of findings begins with a description of the school setting, in order to share an understanding of the school context, along with school stakeholders’ profiles and continues with an exploration of the emergent themes: 1) conceptualisations of inclusion; 2) decisions about structures; and 3) power, voice and agency. These themes formed the key framework strands that were developed in this study in order to explore the construction of school inclusive
communities, as presented in Chapter 3 (Figure 1). This echoes the areas highlighted by Ainscow as important in the building of inclusion, but here reflects the specific struggles and issues within these components. Emphasis is placed upon an exploration of the conceptualisations regarding inclusive education, along with the dynamic decision making processes within and between the school levels represented by the head teacher - as school leader and decision maker, and teachers and parents. Justification of the school strategies and classroom practices emerged through the decision-making process; influencing and being influenced by, school members’ conceptualisations, the Greek educational system and wider educational and social contexts. Relations within and outside school, along with participation in decision-making and problem-solving processes, were identified as significant components of the construction of an inclusive school community.

4.1 School setting – context and participants

This section provides background information about the school regarding its conceptualisations and practices towards the construction of inclusive communities. Acropolis school (a pseudonym) was a special, technical and vocational, secondary school. Acropolis is one of very few technical and vocational special high schools in Greece and the only one in this area. To date, most of the special secondary schools in Greece are technical in nature; offering multiple technical avenues of study from which students choose and follow a variety of subjects, gaining qualifications and a skills-certificate after graduation. The school offered courses in Gardening, Cooking and Beauty for professional qualifications. The nature of the skills and knowledge imparted at Acropolis was based primarily on acquisition of life skills, professional independence and social acceptance. In parallel with the technical and vocational avenues offered to students, courses from the mainstream curriculum, such as Greek Literature, Language, Maths and Computer science, as well as courses in development of every-day personal skills were provided to students. Young people at Acropolis were being prepared for both the labour market and every-day life, as they gained both a graduation certificate of secondary school studies and a certification of expertise for their knowledge and skills in one of the technical avenues they had followed in school. The nature of students’ needs at the school ranged from severe mobility needs to severe
autism and complex and profound needs. At the time of the study, in 2012, 49 students were enrolled at Acropolis and placed into four grades, based on their age and the sequence of school classes they attended.

Additionally, the geographic area in which Acropolis was located was considered to be economically deprived; with high rates of unemployment even before the current financial crisis. Home to approximately two-thirds of the Greek population, unemployment in this area was nearly 26% in August 2012, a considerable increase from 18.5% in previous years (ESAMEA, 2013). According to the head teacher at Acropolis, only two-thirds of students’ parents were employed; as a result, the students’ general socio-economic status was described as ‘lower than average’. For this reason, teachers were bringing in food for students, and often their families as well, on their own initiative, trying to support students in any way possible.

In 2012, there were 8,900 secondary students in the region where Acropolis was located (Eurostat, 2012). Before foundation of the school in 2008, under pressure from parents of young people with SEN and the current head teacher, there was a scarcity of special schools in the area, as resistance from the local community, in fear of stigma and prejudice towards disability and SEN, was fierce. The only special secondary education setting in the area was EEEEK, a technical/professional training workshop school - established in 2003 to educate and train students between the ages of 13 and 22 with severe SEN – after their graduation from special and mainstream primary education. Consequently, students who were attending a special school had few options for continuation of their studies at the secondary level of technical special or mainstream education. Indeed, the foundation of Acropolis in the same town as another secondary special school was a big step towards accepting two secondary special education units. This situation was challenged by the head teacher, as she explained the recent foundation of the school; she described frequent resistance from local society and hesitation on behalf of parents and educational authorities:

In previous years, we had to convince the local society that [Acropolis] is a school, not an institution. Parents also had difficulties. [They asked] ‘how can you take these kids and go out?’ We couldn’t even take part in parades as parent felt embarrassed. Little by little, both parents and the local community
saw what was going on in the school and they started accepting us. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

As will be shown in later sections, the construction of an inclusive school community at *Acropolis* was different from the other two schools presented in the following chapters. Whilst *Acropolis* was a special school it had a strong social inclusion orientation, established through social interaction with the local community and activities for social inclusion outside school boundaries and sports games with mainstream schools. This could be explained as the head teacher was determined to build social inclusion and strong relations, beyond school boundaries, with the local society and schools. She aimed for respect and acceptance of her students by mainstream peers and local community members in their every-day life. Her upper aim was for her students to be considered as equal members of society, with the same rights and responsibilities, after their graduation from *Acropolis*. The head teacher of *Acropolis* was a powerful figure, with a strong sense of personal and professional agency for attempting to argue, cajole and persuade the school, families and the local community buying into her aspirational vision for an inclusive community. This was to sit in contrast to the almost inevitable in-school conflicts and tensions, between school members, as they played a role in the implementation of inclusive strategies and practices.

*Acropolis*’s three-story building was the typical construction of state authorities and services in Greece, but did not resemble a school in any way, as there was limited outdoor space, no sports courts or a school yard, and an obvious lack of lifts or ramps for students with motor disabilities. It is important to mention here that this school was a temporary solution regarding the building facilities of the schools, as a new building was about to be built by the state in order to house all special education units in the area. Although the physical features of *Acropolis* were clearly not suitable for a special secondary setting; indeed, as highlighted below, all participants unanimously identified the lack of these features as a significant restriction to the construction of an inclusive educational community. The shortage of ground floor classrooms, as well as the presence of staircases, severely limited the mobility of students with motor
difficulties, excluding them from fully participating in school activities and other aspects of school life:

The infrastructure is marginal in general, in all special schools. Specifically in this school there is a student with motor disabilities and a shortage of ramps and lifts within the school. We have, literally, to carry the student on our shoulders. (Moly, Literature teacher)

The profound shortage of resources and institutional infrastructure within Acropolis reflected the challenging situation of special education in Greece. This was verified by all the study participants, who stated the need for new school building facilities as a significant boundary in preventing inclusive practices as the mobility of students with motor difficulties was severely limited. However, it seemed that the infrastructure and shortage of facilities was prioritised more highly by the teachers and parents than the head teacher; influencing their perceptions and practices regarding inclusion. As is further discussed in the following sections, the head teacher found pleasure in what they had earned as school community; being more concerned about the establishment of bonds between the school and society and less about infrastructure. Moreover, while I had been told that the school offered professional Gardening, Cooking and Beauty courses for students, I found no laboratories or facilities to accommodate such courses.

Classrooms were small compared to mainstream classrooms, without enough space for a wheelchair to move freely or to fit in the dimensions of the classroom benches. On average, five to six students attended each class and the duration of each subject lesson was approximately 35-40 minutes; shorter than the mainstream timetable, which was approximately 55-60 minutes, but with the same subject-structure and textbooks as a result of the centralised control of curriculum and practice. However, although some might argue that all students then had access to the same curriculum and free education, this was not totally true, considering that students in the special schools had to prove themselves as being able to follow the mainstream-orientated curriculum, due to the lack of any special education curriculum or modifications being made in order to meet the needs of these students. Hence, although the school had adapted key aspects of the curriculum; following the centralised and academically oriented educational system, teachers found ways to make modifications and changes
to the way the curriculum was delivered. In other words, students with SEN had to confront what was available in terms of their education, not what was appropriate in order to meet their needs and develop their academic and social skills. This is at odds with equity and fairness in education. As Ainscow (2012) argues, there are those who support the idea that for a fair and inclusive community there should be a school-focused approach through better implementation of knowledge. However, there are those who argue that such approaches cannot address the inequalities in societies; making it difficult for some students to overcome the restrictions imposed on them by society (Dyson & Raffo, 2007). Hence any equity in education, through fairness and inclusion, is going to be challenging to implement.

4.2 Participants’ profiles

Interviews were conducted at Acropolis with the head teacher, two Math teachers, two Greek Language teachers and three parents. Although the parental association numbered ten parents as members, and all parents were supportive of the creation of the school and school issues, they were either reluctant to take part in the research presented here or there were technical challenges that prohibited their participation. The two subjects chosen - Maths and Greek Literature - are seen as the ‘main subjects’ in Greece because these are the ones assessed in the lower and upper secondary school entry examination and in the university faculties entry examination. All the interviewed teachers had experience in both mainstream and special education. Although they formed part of a strong academic focus in secondary schools and were linked to high stakes testing, they were committed to inclusive values and managed to evaluate concerns spawned by varied perspectives regarding their personal approach towards the construction of inclusive school communities.

The head teacher, Mrs. Pavlou, was an active and dynamic middle-aged woman. From the onset of her career, she had been involved in special education. Her service in special education began in her second year of teaching (2002) and the history of Acropolis is inseparable from Mrs. Pavlou’s contribution, as she was both a founding member and, at the time of the interview, had been the head teacher of the school since 2010. Although she did not have any personal and family experience of special
education, she became involved in it as she was interested in the struggles that students with SEN, and their parents, encountered; particularly the on-going scarcity of services for them, and in the social development of students’ with SEN, in order to achieve their inclusion and participation in education, society and vocational pursuits. Mrs. Pavlou viewed inclusion from a broad and holistic perspective that went beyond academic inclusion and was a basic human right, underpinned by deep commitment to inclusive values. She aimed for the equality of vocational opportunities and acceptance of her students by the wider academic and social community. Her approach was consistent with the approach that was recently stated by Thomas (2013) who referred to the need of a broad, not narrow, definition of inclusion considering the international changes in both socio-economic and educational fields. She, often, acted beyond the usual boundaries of a head teacher, establishing herself, both in reputation and in practice, as an agent for change within Acropolis and the local community, as she tried to include students in local society as equal members.

Jane was a 27-year-old Maths teacher, who had worked at Acropolis for the last 3 years of her 5-year teaching experience. Her perceptions about special education and inclusion were underpinned by a medical approach. She was in favour of educational and social inclusion for students with SEN based upon the severity and nature of their disability. She was also concerned about the discriminative approaches of mainstream schools to students, highlighting the social marginalisation of students in mainstream classrooms, the social stigma and scarcity of initiatives given to students with SEN for developing their academic skills, considering the strict academic curriculum. Hence, Jane expressed a belief that students with SEN could improve their cognitive, educational and social development through attendance in special school settings; reinforcing the segregated nature of education.

Matthew was a 43-year-old Math teacher, who had served in Acropolis for the last 3 years of his 6-year teaching experience in special education, within a 20 year teaching career. Although he supported educational and social inclusion of students with SEN in both special and mainstream settings, he believed inclusion could be better achieved within special schools. Given his longstanding experience, he tended to follow more traditional teaching methods within his class, such as lecturing, emulating a
mainstream educational model. The implications for his teaching practice led to the exclusion of students with severe SEN as they were not able to participate in this way of curriculum delivery, reinforcing their marginalisation. However, although he did not give initiatives for whole class participation, he aspired for students at *Acropolis* to become productive Greek citizens.

Moly was a 32-year-old Literature teacher, who had served the last 2 years in *Acropolis*, within 10 years’ experience in special education. She was particularly supportive of inclusion for students with milder disabilities, which brought the issue of the nature of students’ needs and the implications for classroom practice in mainstream settings to centre stage. Moly followed a more social approach in her teaching practices and perceptions, as she attempted to make students’ familiar with societal values that underpinned local communities, such as social justice, democracy, citizenship and friendship, and incorporated these virtues into school practice. Hence, through Greek Literature and the narration of didactic stories, she tried to make students understand these values, inspiring them to adopt these values in their lives within and outside school. Moreover, she was interested in teaching students the Greek cultural traditions, in order for students to participate in all facets of social life, in order to feel, and be, accepted.

Andrea was a 42-year-old Literature teacher. She had served in *Acropolis* for 2 years, after 9 years’ experience in mainstream schools. Andrea had a restricted conceptualisation and vision concerning inclusion; insisting upon education in special schools for students with SEN. She was the most pessimistic of all the teachers regarding the feasibility and effectiveness of school purposes – and special education in general – during the Greek financial crisis; doubting the future of students after their graduation. Andrea’s aspirations for students were for them to be technically trained, productive citizens but placed less value on their academic knowledge and performance.

Helen was the mother of an 18 year-old boy with pre-natal brain injuries resulting in paralysis. She was a dynamic independent person with great tenacity and a willingness to fight for the rights of all people with SEN. She had been involved in organisations
for children with SEN for the last fifteen years, and at the time of this research project was president of the Acropolis Parent Association. With her strong inclusive vision, Helen had established herself as an agent for change within school.

Laura was the mother of a 15-year-old boy with multiple educational, social and emotional difficulties. While she and her family lived in a different city and region from where Acropolis was located, Laura chose to enrol George in Acropolis – largely due to its good reputation, and the personality of the head teacher. Although Laura was an active member of the school parent association, until her involvement with Acropolis she had had a more restricted perception about inclusion.

Mary was the mother of an 18-year-old boy in the third grade of this special secondary school. She was offered the position of school bus escort by personal request of the head teacher, in order to financially help her family. Mary was also a member of the school’s parents association. She supported special education; considering Acropolis a “shelter” from the discriminative attitudes, marginalisation and lack of support that had been experienced by her son when he previously attended a mainstream school. She highlighted the relations between the school and parents, along with the support that parents received from the head teacher.

Based on interviews with the above school members, and the classroom observations of teaching practice, the following sections address the different school responses. First, conceptualisations of the head teacher, teachers and parents, towards inclusive education, are discussed, in order to understand their perceptions, vision, understanding of inclusion and commitment to inclusive values. Next, implementation of the current practice of inclusive education policy at Acropolis is presented, through the nature of decisions made by the head teacher regarding school purposes and strategies, along with classroom teaching practices. Then the teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of school strategies and classroom practices are discussed. Finally, relations between and within school members, the Local authority and the wider community are explored, along with the leadership approaches and opportunities provided to teachers and parents for participation in decision-making and problem-solving processes.
4.3 Conceptualisations of inclusion

Mrs. Pavlou, with the following statement, exemplified a broad approach to inclusion, aiming for equality of opportunities and social acceptance of *Acropolis* students within the mainstream:

> It is wrong to have 2 categories of children. It is wrong to categorize students. Even if we are not ready to accept inclusive education, I believe that it would be so much better for all students if they were in the same school unit.

In particular, she perceived inclusive education as a human right - aspiring for respect, acceptance and equal participation of students in both the academic and social life of schools and the wider society, along with the equal vocational and citizenship opportunities provided to all students after their graduation. She perceived inclusion going beyond those with SEN and identified it as being relevant to any who are disruptive and provided for them in the system but in a separate setting:

> There are head-teachers, it has happened to me once, claiming that in their school there are five children with discipline issues and the teachers won’t accept them in their class. Hence, I was told that they will send them to me. I do not know how this head-teacher decided that. (Mrs. Pavlou)

According to this, it was evident that the head teacher did not perceive inclusion as rhetoric regarding the equal education opportunities of lower-attaining students, but as a value underpinning both social and educational inclusion of students with SEN in Greek secondary education. She suggested that all young people should be included in the mainstream - not excluded when inconvenient. However, teachers at *Acropolis* conceptualised inclusion more as rhetoric; arguing that its practical implementation should be under different circumstances, considering the nature and severity of students’ needs, their ability to be part of a mainstream class and the possible academic and social outcomes for all students in mainstream schools. This more restricted approach towards inclusion was expressed by two teachers, who argued that inclusion could be achieved by students with milder SEN and who were able to be included in mainstream schools:
It is good to promote inclusive schooling but under circumstances and conditions, involving also students with no great cognitive differences between them. (Moly, Literature teacher)

The inclusive education scenario is extremely optimistic. I think that there is no right for students with severe SEN themselves to be included, they could be socially included through other ways, as here in Acropolis, why should we put them through that torture? (Andrea, Literature teacher)

Hence, questions regarding ‘failure’ in academic and social inclusion and who was at risk of exclusion in mainstream schools (Nind, 2005), were found to influence teachers’ conceptualisations of inclusion, along with the notion of ability in order for students to receive inclusive provision. Some of the teachers were found to oppose inclusive education in terms of mainstreaming; highlighting the difficulties such students would experience with the academic aspects of the curriculum, as well as contending that it wasn’t feasible in a mainstream class and also expressing the idea that the learning of the more academically able students may be delayed. In particular, both teachers and parents were concerned about the possible academic and social influences of inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream classes upon students without SEN; perceiving special segregated settings as most appropriate for these students. They justified this argument due to possible social marginalisation of students with SEN in mainstream schools. In congruence with these perceptions, some of the parents revealed more restricted approaches and narrow visions of inclusion, supporting the medical education discourse, in fear of children’s marginalisation from mainstream schools and local communities:

Parents often prioritise what society will say and they end up harming their children’s emotional wellbeing. Parents also prevent their education and although their children might have been better educated in a different context, they end up in a different one because parents have decided differently. (Moly, Literature teacher)

Supplementary to the above extract is the following conversation that Mary had with a mainstream head teacher, who said: “you have to take your child out of my school. I just want him to leave. Take him wherever you like”, in order to justify her preference
for a more segregated education experience for her child. She continued by crediting Acropolis for the support her child received from the head teacher:

Mrs. Pavlou cares for more than 50 students. It is important for us to be supported by the head teacher. When my son attended mainstream school the head teacher there forced me to take him out. (Mary, parent)

Hence, parents' conceptualisations about inclusion were also found to be influenced by the perceptions of school stakeholders and their previous experiences in mainstream schools coping with discriminative discourses, the fear of stigma and the lack of understanding and training of teachers regarding special education and inclusion. However, parents justified their favour towards more special settings by the acknowledgement of what their children experienced in society. Yet this acceptance came about through a non-inclusive educational environment. Only one parent, Helen, noted that the social model inspired her approach on education and life:

I am in favour of inclusive education, as we are a significant component of this society. I believe that students in mainstream education are informed about the disabilities of other students. I have never been ashamed of my son. Brian wants to be out of the house every day, to participate in everything. (Helen, parent)

Her standpoint suggests a positive approach regarding special education, along the same lines as the head teacher, being less restricted to an academic and educational perspective of inclusion. Social inclusion and equal opportunities to participate in society as a member was prioritised by Helen. However, Helen stated that, despite her preference for mainstream education, the placement of her son in a special school was her decision in order to protect him from physical harassment due to the large number of students in schools and fear of him being knocked down - by accident. She greatly appreciated the role of mainstream teachers, acknowledging that they should not be responsible for all students in mainstream schools, considering the large number of students and the lack of adequate personnel.

However, similar to the responses in the other two case studies, at Acropolis there were voices stating that special education seemed to be preferred by parents as the easiest way for them to obtain a secondary education certification for their children, due to
the vague definition of inclusion in educational policy and the different way of performance assessment:

Usually, students who come here have been rejected from mainstream schools for a number of reasons. Hence, parents believe that their child will surely graduate from the special school, whereas he/she will not be able to get one from the mainstream school as exams are more challenging there. (Andrea, Literature teacher)

Hence, from the participants' responses, it can be seen that there were different conceptualisations of inclusion by school stakeholders, along with a lack of a clear understanding by the authorities. This finding was reflected by the vague articulation of inclusion within policy texts in both education and society, while influencing the construction of a shared understanding and commitment to inclusion (Wenger, 1998). These different understandings were expressed by teachers as follows:

We do not have a clear idea of what is special education in Greece. When the school counsellor informs me that Acropolis, should educate only students with school failure in mainstream settings, it is clear that there is no knowledge of what we are doing in this school. The counsellor said that here only students with school failure in mainstreaming should be included.
(Andrea, Literature teacher)

She highlighted the fact that Acropolis had different purposes from those proposed by local authorities but, following the regulations, enacted within the inclusive legislation about the purposes of special schools (see Chapter 2). This was due to the lack of shared understanding regarding the notion of special education and the nature of school failure. In particular, within Acropolis, three school purposes emerged, including: 1) academic development; 2) social inclusion; and 3) educational inclusion defining and shaping at the same time participants' practices, in order for these purposes to be implemented. These purposes were contradictory to what the school counsellor suggested regarding a narrow focus on academic achievement, marginalising students, both educationally and socially, as pedagogy came to be replaced by achievement:

Today, the only goal of Greek education is students' entrance to higher education and nothing else. This is not students' fault that they want to get high
grades just to pass their exams and enter a university. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

This argument was representative of the wider social and cultural context in Greece; influencing the decisions made about school strategies, purposes and classroom practices in order to implement inclusive policy structures, implying a deficit model for these young people. Finally, teachers at Acropolis, expressed their concerns about engaging with inclusion because of the lack of training of their colleagues in special and inclusive education involved with students with SEN, and the support they provided in order to address students’ needs:

There is a lack of teachers’ education, knowledge and training to special and inclusive education. If you are not qualified problems grow and you can’t find solutions. And then you lose students. (Jane, Maths teacher)

Additionally, at Acropolis there was a shortage of resources and institutional infrastructure - reflecting the challenging situation of special education in Greece. However, it seemed that the infrastructure and shortage of facilities were prioritised more highly by teachers and parents, since it influenced their perceptions and practices of inclusion, than the head teacher; as the school had succeeded in finding a place in the local educational and wider community:

Money and infrastructure is not the problem comparing to significant change of conceptualisations towards Acropolis within local community. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

This is a stark reminder of the fundamental issues facing Greece at this time and reinforces a view of inclusion as a luxury rather than an essential quality of an education system.

4.4 Decisions about structures

School Purposes

As has emerged from the findings mentioned above, the different perceptions, understandings and commitment to the inclusive values of the school influenced the decisions teachers made regarding the implementation of inclusive policy. Hence,
school purposes revealed by the head teacher indicated academic development, social inclusion and vocational rehabilitation as being the key purposes for students with SEN at *Acropolis*. In particular, Mrs. Pavlou was concerned about acquisition of life skills, professional independence and the social acceptance of her students, which were aimed at replacing the strictly achievement-oriented mainstream system with a more inclusive environment:

> My students could not cope with mainstream education. I would like them to be able to have a job, although this is difficult as some things slowly collapse due to the financial crisis... to be able to work in a fast food restaurant, in a garden, to earn their wage, to be able to read, to write, to carry themselves properly in society. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

Along the same lines, teachers emphasised the social inclusion of students with SEN as the core purpose of special and mainstream schools. However, teachers and parents articulated their awareness regarding the academically-oriented mainstream curriculum, with its narrow focus on examinations, arguing about the support provided within mainstream settings to students with SEN at the expense of inclusive pedagogical practices:

> Today, the only goal of Greek education is students' entrance to higher education and nothing else. We as teachers don't let students' understand how they can be in the society or what they should ask from and for themselves. This is not students' fault that they want to get high grades just to pass their exams and enter a university. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

The head teacher, probably due to the technical and vocational orientation of her school, was concerned regarding the social inclusion and equal participation of students with SEN in Greek society and the labour market. For that reason, she raised the issues that people with SEN face when finding a job in the midst of the Greek financial crisis. However, while the head teacher had a strong inclusive vision and willpower to achieve her school’s purposes, she was at a loss regarding how to handle the current financial crisis and its impacts on the school community.

In turn, social inclusion and vocational rehabilitation of students with SEN were pursued by all teachers and parents revealing concerns about the implementation of these purposes within mainstream schools and in the current Greek socio-economic
context. Moreover, parents credited school purposes relating to the acquisition of basic life and social skills for work and survival, along with societal inclusion; undoubtedly influenced by Mrs. Pavlou:

Let’s put the education and academic achievements aside, as no matter what, our children have difficulties. My son despite his learning difficulties, he could gain a lot from his social inclusion in the local community. He could listen to different opinions, comparing them with his own, discuss and express his own opinion. (Helen, parent)

Although school members prioritised social inclusion as the main purpose for children with additional support needs in mainstream and special schools, there were voices arguing that the intense focus on social inclusion left students academically and vocationally unprepared to face the reality of life in Greece:

We as a school, as a teaching society and the society in general, hide behind our finger. We only do things to show off, but in reality, when you have a child with a cognitive or any other kind of problem and you have to educate students and not merely socialise them. (Moly, Literature teacher)

Thus, although not all school members conceptualised Acropolis as a place of education and a chance for students to develop their social abilities beyond traditional school-academic purposes, the outcome of these purposes was clear:

In this last decade, speaking about the local community here, we are better. For the first few years, sometimes I went out with the children to a cafe ... when we entered, some people took their children and left. Nowadays they do not leave scared just because we went in. (Mrs. Pavlou)

School members’ perceptions regarding school purposes indicated the different conceptualisations of inclusion for students with SEN in the different educational settings. Hence, the decisions made, in order for Acropolis to respond to these different purposes, were articulated through school strategies and classroom practices, influencing teaching and learning methods.
School strategies

The head teacher’s perceptions and understanding of inclusion, her deep commitment to inclusive values and broad inclusive vision that went beyond school boundaries influenced the way she tried to respond to the purposes she aspired to for her school. Indeed, I observed Mrs. Pavlou’s purposes and strategies in practice when, during my first observation of the C2 Greek language class, the teacher tried to motivate students to finish their task by telling them that they would go for coffee the very next hour. To my surprise, both the teacher and Mrs. Pavlou informed me of the students’ proposed visit to a nearby cafe, with the guidance and escort of three teachers. I considered it more interesting for my data, to devote my second observation of their class to their visit to the cafe. The students were very excited about ordering their own soft drinks and coffees; to my biggest surprise, one student even informed the waitress he would have his ‘usual’. The escort teachers noted that students learned social skills, enhanced their self-confidence and prepared themselves to be members of the community by demonstrating appropriate societal behaviours.

Furthermore, Mrs. Pavlou, initiated activities for the educational and societal inclusion of her students with their peers in a non-academic-achievement field. Through this strategy, she tried to achieve social school purposes; introducing Acropolis to the wider community as a place of education and a chance for students to be socially included; seeking for respect, value and acceptance of her students:

Both students with and without SEN benefited from inclusive schooling. One of the most important initiatives [of Acropolis], is that my students communicate with students from mainstream education; that is the reason why we organize football games with them, because this is a field where we can be good as well. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

However, despite these inclusive strategies, Mrs. Pavlou did not have an open admission of all students with SEN in her school, as she aimed to develop a ‘model’ school implementing more inclusive practices within a segregated setting. Hence, she was aware of students with SEN that either could not be supported at school or might create issues during school processes, and also academically weak students who wanted to attend Acropolis in order to enter higher education more easily.
Acropolis is viewed as a step for weaker students to get higher grades and then access higher education. I have to assess all of these parameters before I accept a student at Acropolis. We do not have any laws to protect us, we have to assure all of that. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

As far as school strategies towards academic school purposes were concerned, the focus of the head teacher was more on the nature of learning; being aware about the knowledge transfer approach that prioritised academic performance while students “learn or fail to learn” at mainstream school (Thomas, 2013, p. 486). Thus, Mrs. Pavlou tried to influence changes in the teaching and learning processes, establishing a community of learning based on mutual respect between and within all school members. Hence, within Acropolis, learning approaches avoided withdrawal through assessment of academic performance, while the school enabled a broader understanding of education:

The way the teacher delivers curriculum may leave gaps of knowledge to students making them consider themselves as having SEN because they could not follow the school workload. This is not the students' fault but there is a problem regarding teaching approaches and the way that the lessons are being taught. We have stopped being educators. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

In the above extract, the head teacher revealed the nature of the Greek education system and curriculum that is based on the acquisition of academic and technical knowledge for those who are able to follow, at the expense of students with different needs. This approach, articulated in policy, was also reflected in school strategies and teaching practices; reinforcing the medical model of education, as students with SEN remained marginalised. Mrs. Pavlou was opposed to the reinforcement of this kind of education, and necessitated a change in the purpose and delivery of the traditional school strategies and teaching practices, in order to include all students - both academically and socially. However, despite the head teacher's efforts to encourage inclusive teaching practices, she failed to pass her message to all her teachers, as some of them still followed traditional and exclusionary paths, instead of using teaching practices based on modifications of curriculum and material according to the needs of students:
Secondary education mathematicians or philologists cannot understand the correlation between the class and the cognitive level of students when working at Acropolis. You can’t get into a special class and deliver the curriculum as if you were in college, because you aren’t, you have to adjust it. (Moly, Literature teacher)

Moly, in congruence with Mrs. Pavlou’s statement, revealed that the dominant academic orientation of the curriculum, the different understandings of the school and classroom purposes by some of the teachers and, consequently, the nature of the teaching practices that were followed, were at odds with the school inclusive strategies. Hence, although the school tried to implement more social inclusive strategies for students, along with their academic development through modification of the curriculum in order to meet their needs, some of the teachers still remained focused on more traditional ways of delivering curriculum. Curriculum modifications are regarded as essential for the social and academic progress of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Rouse, 2008). According to Soukoup, et al., (2007) curriculum modifications include adaptations and augmentations. This questions the understanding of school and classroom purposes by all Acropolis members, along with the qualifications and training of teachers in special education, considering that there was no university faculty for secondary special teachers. Thus, mainstream teachers had filled these placements after their attendance in special education seminars. It could be revealed that teachers, as parts of an already strictly academic educational system, found it challenging to follow a non-strictly-academic school strategy and classroom practices, apart from achievement measures and modifying their practices to achieve these purposes.

Classroom practices

Decisions regarding classroom teaching and learning practices were found to be influenced not only by teachers, but also by the head teacher according to her conceptualisations of inclusion, school purposes and strategies. Although there was initial will from all teachers to include students in the teaching and learning process, in 3 of the 4 observed classes, there was at least one student who remained behind the others, without participating or being included - both academically and socially, in classroom life. Indeed, although teachers followed different teaching methods and
were providing individualized support to some students, while trying to keep the rest of students motivated, there were incidents of marginalisation and exclusion. Teachers justified and acknowledged these challenges due to the different cognitive and educational level of students in classrooms, the infrastructure and lack of resources, along with their lack of training. Hence, both classroom observations and teachers’ narratives revealed that the teaching practices that they followed did not fully support school and classroom purposes in practice.

For example, in the A1 class in Maths, Jane (teacher) individualised her way of teaching with two of her students, but then she provided less space for classroom discussion and participation for the rest of the students. Consequently, there was a lack of concentration in the majority of students, due to their lack of motivation. Just two teachers were observed adapting their practices in order to include all their students in classroom activities, while others did not differentiate their teaching methods but retained a lecturing approach. For example, in the C1 class in Maths, Matthew followed an academically oriented way of curriculum delivery, including a theory lecture followed by problem solving on the board, excluding students from participation and interaction during the teaching process. However, within his interview responses, he argued that, in special schools, teachers had the luxury of time to deliver the curriculum giving initiatives for participation to all students; practices that did not appear during the observation period within his class:

You adapt your curriculum material to the student material you have in class, with the needs of your students in mind. I have to choose what to include in my teaching practice, as I have to follow the mainstream curriculum and even if I try to exemplify the theory and exercises from the mainstream textbook, the level of students in special schools is not in the books that we have to teach. (Mathew, Maths teacher)

Some teachers at Acropolis highlighted the practices followed by their colleagues, arguing for a different way of teaching, in order to support all students:

The cognitive level of the students in this school is about the upper classes of primary school. There are teachers who could not fully understand the correspondence between the grade of the class and the cognitive level of students. You are not in a class of a private college; rather you have to adapt
you teaching practices in order to meet the needs of students with SEN (Moly, Literature teacher)

In this context, Andrea (Literature teacher) noticed the limited academic achievements of her students despite the academic hours she devoted in order to make them understand. Concerning her professional efficacy in class:

Some of the students are not able to write or read. We are in the same lesson for 2 weeks, as we have to follow the curriculum, but you have to be in the same lesson for 2 months and after 5 months none of the students will remember what they have already been taught! (Andrea, Literature teacher)

On the other hand, other teachers made an effort to include all their students but without having any specific guidelines or advice of how to do that. They based their teaching on their own previous experience and training, without being supported by authorities. It should be remembered that, within the Greek context, there was not a special education curriculum, but teachers had to adapt and modify the mainstream curriculum, textbooks and materials to the needs of their students in special classrooms:

The law is not the mirror of what is actually being practiced. There is a common line and a basic framework within which you can implement teaching practice and deliver curriculum, but there are few ways in which you can adapt your teaching approaches and goals, both in mainstream and special education. (Jane, Maths teacher)

Thus, in order to support students academically and socially, special teachers faced challenges adapting the mainstream curriculum to the needs of their students with SEN; while they planned and implemented their own teaching and learning processes suitably for the multiple levels of students within their classrooms:

There are no particular books, as we do not have a clear idea of what is special education in Greece. Educators have to teach whatever they consider as suitable, but this could be different from what you or someone else considers as suitable. In that context of not knowing what students with SEN should be educated, it is very unrealistic to talk about inclusive education. (Andrea, Literature teacher).
Thus, the teaching and learning practice was influenced by a strong need for conformity of teaching practices within the traditional model of schooling and the exam-driven educational system:

My students could not cope with mainstream education due to the educational system which leads students to educational and social isolation. The only purpose of Greek education is students' entrance to higher education. Teachers don't let students' understand how they can be in the society. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

Moreover, the number of students in mainstream classrooms; their different cognitive and educational levels; the restricted time for individualised support in order to address students’ needs; the shortage of school professionals; the stakeholders’ frustration about the lack of advisory intervention and support by educational authorities were all mentioned by teachers as influences upon the decisions made regarding classroom practices. Furthermore, the teachers highlighted the rigid nature of the Greek education system and standardised national curriculum. The perceived rigidity of the system and the curriculum, as well as the lack of understanding of inclusion, reinforced a sense of lack of agency on the teachers’ part. Ainscow (2012) similarly argues for individual needs, rather than seeing distinct groups - some of whom are included and some excluded.

However, apart from the limited response to academic purposes and learning, teachers at Acropolis focused on developing students’ social and life skills: for example, the learning of “societal customs” in order for students to be integrated into societal traditions, history, culture and values. Another concrete example was given by Moly (Literature teacher), who – through her Literature course – developed values of friendship, unconditional love and respect, incorporating these virtues into school practice:

Sending away labels and opening our eyes to see the problem, having the will to deal with it, not just trying to carry it through as we have to contribute in the development of young people. I am not saying that they have to leave this place without knowledge, but they should at least learn social rules and values. (Moly, Literature teacher)
Although this could be seen by some as a reflection of a particular view of these students which is narrow with low expectations, within the Acropolis context, this approach comes in line with the prioritisation of social inclusion of the students, along with their academic development. Hence, it could be revealed that despite the efforts of the head teacher and teachers, there was not a balance between the lower academic expectations and the same higher social expectations for all students; bringing centre stage the segregated nature of the school.

Additionally, the ‘knowledge’ referred to in the head teacher’s previous argument was interpreted differently by teachers; ranging from academic development to vocational abilities and social skills of students and being a little unclear. Andrea (Literature teacher), interpreted ‘knowledge’ as skills for vocational rehabilitation, and students’ personal and professional independence, underpinning the teaching and learning practices she followed in her C2 class:

Students graduating from Acropolis should have special knowledge in order to gain a profession but above all, they should be civilized, informed social beings. Acropolis provides a little bit of everything. Mainstream school provides a little of nothing. (Andrea, Literature teacher)

Hence, although there should be consistency between school purposes and the teaching practices followed, in order to achieve these purposes, and an effort should be made to encourage critical thinking and adapt teaching material to everyday life, in practice teachers argued that students perceived the academic curriculum as irrelevant. According to teachers, students were more interested in technical subjects and viewed grammar and syntax as unimportant. These statements highlighted the difficulty in helping students graduate from Acropolis with both technical training and an acquisition of basic academic skills.
4.5 Power, voice and agency

Relationships

It has been observed that the relations of participants was influenced, to a greater or lesser extent, by the head teacher’s dominant personality and leadership approaches, underpinned by her strong inclusive vision that has been practically translated within her role as agent for change, in an educational system that could be seen as conservative. In this section the relations within the different groups of participants are discussed, in the light of influencing and being influenced by conceptualisations of inclusion, school purposes and teaching strategies.

In particular, the accounts of Mrs. Pavlou, the parents and the teachers, provided a model of networking and working together which described a shared repertoire among the school stakeholders, the central and local authorities and the local community, as a group that was in constant communication and contact. Through this networking, the position of Mrs. Pavlou was empowered. She used her personal connections, community skills and ability to act beyond formal responsibilities and contractual obligations, in order to both include Acropolis within the local educational and societal community and raise her voice in order to lobby LEAs at policy level. The autonomy and flexibility of her role emerged from the lack of specific legislation and regulations concerning the operation of special schools and head teachers’ roles, and gave her spaces for engaging with inclusion in her own way.

Thus, the collaborative nature of these relationships was underpinned and developed by the distinctive role and initiatives of the head teacher, without a legal framework. However, although she tried to establish a collaborative rapport outside school, the in-school relations were found to be more challenging. While the head teacher reinforced the distinct roles of teachers and parents, this resulted in their collaboration in the problem-solving process and in-school decision making being limited by the head teacher (Poulou & Marsagouras, 2005; Angelides et al., 2006).

Although teachers sought an inter-agency collaboration, in order to meet the needs of students more efficiently, there was only limited collaboration with school
psychologists and social workers. This was explained by the teachers as being a consequence of the current financial crisis, due to the limited number of school specialists provided in special education. This type of funding seemed to be seen as a 'luxury' - both by educational authorities and the head teacher, who was found to be pleased regarding the support offered by the authorities to the school. However, this lack of collaboration had an impact on teachers' decisions about school practices, as it prevented them from implementing individual plans for students in order to support them:

No, I have never collaborated with psychologist in school as there is not one on a permanent basis. Yes, there should be. I have asked for information for certain students' behaviours so that I can deal with them, but this is mainly in the beginning, at the beginning of the school year. (Jane, Maths teacher)

At the school level, the head teacher wished Acropolis to operate as an inclusive community, with strong family bonds. She tried to establish positive and cooperative relations within and between herself, the teachers and parents. However, she was more focused on the establishment of functional relations between school, parents and local authorities, and there was a lack of collaborative rapport between the head teacher and the teachers. In particular, in her responses about collaboration, Mrs. Pavlou was focused on LEAs and parents; at the same time avoiding the issue of providing space for collaboration with teachers and excluding them from the collaboration processes. Hence, although there was not a competitive, but rather collective, atmosphere within the school, teachers were found not to establish strong collaborative bonds within and between themselves and the school. Additionally, despite Mrs. Pavlou's accounts regarding her collaboration with parents, in practice, she struggled to convince all parents to actively participate in school issues. Thus, although parents at Acropolis had created a school-parent association, not all parents or members of the parental association were actively involved in the decision-making processes and school issues:

Although I have a parental association of 50 parents who seem to be interested in the school, I have to convince them to work for important matters and make the appropriate efforts. I had to present myself as a parent - even though I did not have a child in the school - in front of authorities in order to fight for the
foundation of Acropolis. Nowadays parental collaboration with the school has improved. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

The head teacher appeared to see the parents as being slightly passive, but at the same time she recognised the potential strength in being such a key stakeholder. So much so that she had pretended to be a parent in order to get a response from the authorities. This was indicative of the nature of relations established with the parents. It further underpinned her authoritative role within the school and questioned the nature of relations established with parents, in order to achieve her personal purposes for Acropolis. In turn, the teachers revealed that they experienced challenging relationships with parents, while they did not mention any collaboration and support from the head teacher. Although they mentioned collaborative practices with some of the parents, they also stated that the majority remained disengaged from the school. Different explanations were given by teachers regarding this lack of relationships with parents, including their perception of the devaluation of their role by parents:

With a minority of the parents we ‘collaborate’ fine. Most of parents do not come often to the school. I do not know if parents are not interested in special education or if they are interested but do not show up. Others perceive Acropolis as a day care station. Others are parents with SEN themselves. What collaboration can you expect from those parents? (Andrea, Literature teacher)

However, collaboration here seems to be seen as talking to/with parents and then only with those who don’t have special needs themselves. Hence, parents found to be characterised in terms of deficits here, reveals concerns regarding the inclusive approach the head teacher aimed for her school, and questions her statements regarding the collaborative relations she has constructed with parents. This is at odds with the open dialogue and shared decision-making processes that were proposed by the head teacher, as she seemed to lobby a small group of parents, in order to empower and support her and to achieve her school purposes.

From the parental perspective, the parents that were interviewed mentioned a lack of support and collaboration with LEAs, while crediting the head teacher for their positive relationships with the school. Although parents argued about mutual respect and lack of communication between students, parents, teachers and the head teacher,
in practice, there was an ongoing dialogue and empowerment for some of the parents, especially those involved in school parental association. As Laura (parent) argued:

Mrs. Pavlou gives all of herself. She is protective towards all students and is really close to them. Whatever problems they face, both the head teacher and teachers discuss it with parents first in order to find a common solution. That makes me happy.

According to this extract, Laura’s view suggests something different from what the teachers and the head teacher argued. She suggested there was an on-going dialogue and engagement for parents by school members. However, it has to be mentioned here that Laura was also a member of the school parent association and very close to the head teacher. Additionally, parents also had their own concrete role, less individually and more as members of the Parent Association, taking collective action for issues ranging from daily school operations to educational rights demonstrations about education and society. However, not all parents were actively involved in the administrative and educational affairs of the school. As analysed below, the parental voice remained silenced and marginalised; enhanced by the lack of an enacted parental role within Greek legislation and the scarcity of enacted parental initiatives and opportunities for participation in decision making regarding their children’s education, both in special and mainstream school:

Acropolis parent association has a very significant role – equally important to that of teachers – as we fight for everything from students’ rights to education to the new school, money, activities and even the janitorial staff. (Mary, parent)

Teachers continued to look for more participation from the parents within the school, through the reciprocal exchange of information. Parental collaboration that contributed to pupils’ development was valued and recognised. Thus, although there were no dysfunctional relationships between school members, there tended to be limited collaboration in terms of responsibility, decision-making and problem-solving processes. The collaborative approach between school stakeholders involved a few opportunities extended to some parents, in decision-making and problem-solving processes, but teachers found themselves to be excluded from these processes,
discouraging *deep* inclusion but encouraging *segregated* inclusion - as is further analysed in Chapter 7.

**Leadership, voice and agency**

The crucial role of a head teacher in a school regarding inclusive educational change is well established within the literature (Fullan 2001; Rouse, 2007), as discussed in Chapter 1. In particular, the key elements needed from a head teacher in inclusive school settings can be summarised as: a focus on achievement; barriers to achievement and socialisation and capacities; a more distributive approach to leadership; collaborative networking; an outward looking approach of a school that constructs a school environment; links with wider society; and positive beliefs to inclusion that are underpinned by inclusive values (Muijs et al., 2010).

However, the role of head teachers in Greek special and inclusive schools was particularly challenging, as inclusion was a quite new process within the Greek educational context and confronted specific budgetary constraints in light of the current Greek financial crisis (Vlachou, 2006). Although there was an established legislative document identifying the multi-dimensional role and responsibilities of head teachers in special education (Law 3699/2008) that allowed head teachers to implement policies within schools, in practice there was a shortage of policies and advisory intervention practices to support head teachers in their role. Hence, head teachers of special secondary schools in Greece were the key decision-makers and implementers of the purposes of special education.

Within *Acropolis*, Mrs. Pavlou was a constant presence and always multi-tasking, taking an active role including: administration; managerial and teaching duties; pastoral care; and engagement with key stakeholders - aiming for the construction of a school underpinned by social inclusive values and orientation. She had direct involvement with her students, offering her pastoral care, when necessary, in an effort to develop a school environment of respect, trust and security. However, this multi-dimensional role was not perceived as a privilege by the head teacher. Instead she sought fewer administrative and managerial duties; aspiring to have more classroom
involvement and to gain in-depth knowledge of the school reality. She seemed to be frustrated with school bureaucracy:

Head teachers have many responsibilities, especially in special schools. You have to do everything on your own: school timetables, meetings, individualised educational programs, teachers' calls during school breaks. The head-teacher must be present at all times and not deal with administration duties. In my opinion, head teachers should participate in the teaching and learning process! (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

Although she was concerned about the lonely nature of her position and the workload of her responsibilities, she followed a traditional and hierarchical form of leadership. The organisational structure of the school was based on a traditional, top-down oriented model of leadership, with the head teacher having overall control. Although Mrs. Pavlou was an innovative leader, her leadership style was characterised as a combination of proactive approaches outside school and strict, demanding and controlled approaches within school. However, she conceptualised her way of leadership as self-sacrificing; aiming for the construction of a "model school" for other learning institutions to view, through constant hard work.

In her special school, she found spaces for inclusion through encouraging professional autonomy and flexibility derived from a lack of specific guidelines for inclusive practice. However, these spaces for autonomy were not synonymous with a distributive leadership, as she did not provide opportunities to teachers and parents for participation in decision-making and problem-solving processes in practice, despite parental belief that they were part of the process. Instead, she acted as the sole authority within her school and considered this as the only way for problem-solving:

I need to solve the problem immediately. It is just that if it is a very important issue, since there are no laws for me to consult, I will inform the head of the local education authority, but the problem has to be solved on the spot. I will solve it in my way. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

This centralised and dominant way of leading Acropolis could be justified when considering the challenges the head teacher had to face, the lack of strong rapport with authorities, and her exclusion by central education policy-making, along with the
tough practical decisions she had to make regarding the implementation of inclusive practice.

According to Ainscow et al., (2006) head teachers are those “who can exercise positional power and other forms of influence on those attitudes and values”. Mrs. Pavlou certainly made use of her positional power in order to affect change with regard to her school within the system. Nonetheless the assumption of such a powerful role did lead to her making assumptions about the orthodoxy of her own beliefs and decisions. Consequently, Mrs. Pavlou was the voice of the school and others had limited opportunities to actively be heard within this context.

Due to a centralised educational system and the educational legislations and regulations followed by all Greek schools, school members moved beyond official responsibilities in order to overcome boundaries and challenges at different levels, so that Acropolis could have a more inclusive approach. In particular, as Mrs. Pavlou had a perception of herself through her role within school, as Acropolis was her only passion, her “third baby”, she went beyond her official responsibilities; being motivated by her own inclusive values and devoting her personal time to establishing her personal choice and personal and professional efficacy. Hence, the head teacher was struggling to implement an inclusive school culture and her reward, both at a professional and personal level, related to the acceptance of her students beyond Acropolis’s boundaries by parents and local and educational communities:

I believe that members from authorities and the Ministry understand, maybe not when they were in their office, before coming here, but after seeing our work they had a different more positive opinion, after they come here they change their minds. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

Mrs. Pavlou worked hard to persuade teachers, parents, authorities and the local community about the purposes of inclusion for students with SEN and the broader community. Eager to avoid isolation, she tried to establish links with the educational and social community members at every possibly opportunity - through the constant involvement of the school in community activities, as an effective way of eliminating discrimination concerning the role of special schools and increasing acceptance:
I had faced difficulties and parental restrictions about my inclusive practices: “how can you take these children and go out?” We could not even take part in national parades, the students themselves did not feel embarrassed and they wanted to take part but their parents did not allow it. Little by little, both parents and the local community realised what is going on in the school and they started accepting us. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

From these extracts, it was evident that Mrs. Pavlou was empowered by the leadership spaces for inclusion, and attempted to exert pressure on central and local educational authorities by any means, in order to favour Acropolis. She perceived herself as an agent of change, developing and sustaining a personal network of people willing to participate, using her personal connections, community skills and ability to act beyond formal responsibilities and contractual obligations in order to achieve the best for her students. The progress of this networking became the “linchpin in the forming and sustaining of a network of relationships” (Laluvein, 2010, p. 37):

I couldn’t do it by myself (the proposal for Acropolis’s foundation to LEAs) as I am a teacher and only parents can suggest ideas to authorities. I started this process with some parents who have realized the need not to have in the same school students with milder and, profound and multiple SEN. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

Hence, she argued for inclusion, but within a segregated environment, and that highlights the confusion within the school members and authorities. Another example of this agency was the fact that she convinced Mary (a parent) to talk in front of television cameras as she wanted to fight for the same educational opportunities and social respect for all students. Through these efforts, she tried to include Acropolis within the local educational and social community, raising her voice in order to lobby LEAs and society; making her school widely known:

LEAs are not the only ones to blame about the non-implementation of inclusion. If we can convince policy makers about our job in schools towards inclusion, then things will be easier. It begins from whether we are head teachers or teachers in a special school unit. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

In practice, this autonomy adopted by the head teacher translated in to practice as she enrolled students without any official assessment by state organisations, due to time
consuming bureaucracies, and she did not want to exclude students from the school context, considering the different challenges that adolescents face in current society and some of them being in mainstream schools without the appropriate support:

I do this, because I do not want the child to be on the streets or included in a mainstream school without any provision. Some teachers do not even ask themselves what to do with this student! You cannot have a child in your class and give him 2 as a grade, something wrong is going on there. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

Being influenced by the head teacher, Helen (parent), was constantly chasing all the possible opportunities she had to gain a place in society for herself, her son and Acropolis; always maintaining a positive approach to SEN and life, with great tenacity and willingness to fight for the rights of people with SEN. Helen had had 15 years of experience as an active member of SEN associations, fighting on parents’ behalf at both the local and national level. Helen, in accordance with her beliefs about the role and responsibilities of parents, acted as an initiator and agent - trying to bring together a network of communication and practice through different kinds of participation and having insight into the struggles that students with SEN had to overcome in terms of discrimination and exclusion:

Students with SEN in inclusive classrooms learn a lot about life, become more tolerant to difference and better people in the society. Probably students with SEN face difficulties with the mainstream curriculum but all students gain experiences about life. (Helen, parent)

However, from this extract Helen’s idea of inclusion seemed different from that of the head teacher’s. Helen seemed to be suggesting that having Students with SEN in mainstream contexts would be an inclusive way forward, but the head teacher wanted inclusion of her school and the students and parents in the school system as well as in the community. However, the head teacher didn’t see her students as being able to be included in mainstream schools, due to the different constraints in infrastructure and the nature of the curriculum. Although the head teacher highlighted the social benefits to all students when they participated in common sports activities, she had concerns about inclusion in mainstream school settings. Her approach was found to be similar
to segregated inclusion, with a more segregated character but with social inclusion initiatives.

Helen did not expect schools to be proactive by themselves - either by possessing knowledge and expertise on SEN or giving solutions to their children - but collaboratively with authorities, school and parents. Within Acropolis, she found a space to be the leader of the parents, as other parents were not actively involved. Hence, in a similar manner to the head teacher, Helen (parent) used her personal connections to obtain funding and revealed that parents did have a voice, particularly through associations and parental organisations, to convince members of the local community to support Acropolis. She had also influenced movements for the rights of people with SEN to construct inclusive communities as well:

Parents have voice and power, especially the parents of children with SEN, but sometimes we cannot understand that. We want everything to be done by someone else on our behalf. (Helen, parent)

According to Laluvein (2010), participation permits experiences to be shared between school stakeholders; overcoming the imbalance of power relations within school through the exchange of ideas and the construction of active engagement that acknowledges the different voices. However, within Acropolis, Mrs. Pavlou was the dominant voice to be heard; marginalising the voices of teachers and parents, both within and outside school. As Jane (Maths teacher) argued:

Teachers don’t have the voice or the power to influence the education process. Their role is side-lined. I don’t think that teachers are being heard, the same as parents. They have just voice and power in matters within school. Our voices are marginalised. (Jane, Maths teacher)

Another interesting statement made by Andrea (Literature teacher), asserted that “teachers do have a voice, but the people above them are deaf”. In other words, teachers remained excluded from the collective decision making within school, while their perceptions and voices were not heard if they differed from those of the head teacher. In contrast with the strong voice of the head teacher, parents also found themselves powerless and voiceless in the face of the authorities when it came to
participating in the school’s decision-making process. However, some of them argued that they did have an input in the school’s decisions. Parents argued that they put the blame on their weak organisation and the reluctance of the majority of parents to participate:

Parents have the power and voice to change things. But they do not have the will to participate and unfortunately they do not use this power collectively but individually. (Laura, parent)

Conclusion

In this chapter, a picture of the Acropolis school has been presented, capturing aspects of inclusive thinking and practice and looking across these key strands, which are important elements in the creation of inclusive communities. Acropolis school, although it was a special school setting, provided, by legal definition, segregated provision to students - yet projected inclusive initiatives and approaches that were sometimes contradictory. In particular, the head teacher had a positive conceptualisation of inclusion, underpinned by her commitment to inclusive values and her broad vision of inclusion that went beyond the school boundaries but from a segregated positioning. However, despite the head teachers’ conceptualisations, not all teachers and parents shared the same understanding, commitment and conceptualisations. Indeed, some of them perceived inclusion as unfeasible for mainstream schools or wider Greek society. Regarding the decisions about school structures, there was a focus on social inclusion. These purposes were reflected in school strategies - mainly the construction of relations with the wider educational and social community - and teaching practices adapted, but also restricted, to basic literacy skills along with more life skills and social inclusion approaches.

The head teacher, following a traditional-centralised form of leadership, was acting as an agent for change beyond her official role, responsibilities and case boundaries. She constructed collaborative rapports with parents, policy and social community members. However, she did not such construct collaboration with teachers; excluding them from the decision-making and problem-solving processes. Thus, teachers remained powerless and voiceless, without having the opportunity, or the will, to act as agents for change. Although there were aspirations for a deep inclusion from all
school members, the tensions and conflicts between the head teacher and teachers inhibited this aspiration. The following figure (2) illustrates the responses of Acropolis school to the key elements:

![Figure 2. Acropolis response to framework strands for the construction of inclusion](image)

Finally, although Acropolis school members' struggled for a special school with an inclusive orientation, they were concerned about the shortage of after-graduation provision for students with SEN in Greek society. They doubted that possible opportunities for social inclusion and vocational rehabilitation would be given to people with SEN, as had been promised. In the following chapters (5 and 6), the findings emerging from the Parthenon and Caryatids case schools are presented; providing a view and understanding of the other two Greek secondary case study schools' responses to the construction of inclusive education communities.
CHAPTER 5: Presentation of the findings - Parthenon

Introduction

This chapter explores the complex ways in which Parthenon, a mainstream secondary school with integration units, engaged with inclusion. In this chapter, the different perceptions and practices of those within the Parthenon community are examined - including the head teacher, teachers, and parents - and their roles as part of a socially constructed inclusive education community are explored. This is the second case study that was conducted as part of this research. As at Acropolis case study, the presentation of findings begins with a description of the school setting, in order to understand the socio-political context of the school along with school members’ profiles. Data is organised under the key themes that emerged: 1) conceptualisations of inclusion; 2) decisions about structures and 3) power, voice and agency.

5.1 School Setting – Context and participants

Contrary to Acropolis, very few people – including the head teachers of Acropolis and Caryatids schools – were informed about the operation of integration units within Parthenon; one of the few mainstream secondary schools with integration units in Greece and the only one in the area of my study. It is important to mention here that the term ‘integration unit’ has different meanings and connotations within Greek inclusive policy. It is defined as: a) the practice of inclusive education within mainstream settings, including partial withdrawal from mainstream classes in order to attend special classes/units; b) the place where inclusion takes place within mainstream schools; and c) the special classes that students with SEN partially attend when they are in mainstream education. This school was seen as inclusive within the Greek context as a particular range of students with SEN were allowed to attend it, albeit within an integration unit. I have called this ‘segregated inclusion’, as the separateness or otherness of these children is maintained, and perhaps even reinforced, by this kind of approach to inclusive practice. In integration units students were only taught by special teachers.
Parthenon school (a pseudonym) was an inclusive mainstream school with integration units in a semi-urban, working-class town in the suburbs of a large city in Greece. The area in which Parthenon was located was considered economically deprived, with high rates of unemployment in existence even before the current financial crisis. The school was founded in 1995, but integration units have only been implemented since 2008, following pressure from the current head teacher, Mr. Petrou, on the local educational authorities. However, as Mr. Petrou stated, this initiative was not fully appreciated or supported by all teachers, parents and local community members - in fear of stigma for the school.

Mainstream secondary head teachers were responsible for the initial foundation, implementation and operation of integration units within schools, as they expressed their intention to enrol students with SEN in their schools to the LEAs. Often, students with SEN either dropped out of school when they reached secondary level, or were provided with private tutoring paid for by their parents. Based on research conducted by the European Agency of Development in Special Needs Education (2010), Students with SEN comprised only 2.6% of the Greek mainstream student population, with 0.6% being in special schools and the remaining 2.0% in special classes. Although by law integration units were considered the most preferred approach to facilitate inclusion within the Greek educational system (Vlachou, 2006), only a few schools in the country operate units of this type. Indeed, while five secondary schools with integration units have been planned in the area by the central education authority, only Parthenon was operational. The local educational and societal community welcomed the efforts of Parthenon to include students with SEN; perceiving this practice as an innovative reform for both national and local school standards, considering the limited knowledge and information about inclusive policy and practice.

At the time of the study, in 2012, 350 students were enrolled at Parthenon, placed in three grades that were based on the sequence of the school classes they attended. However, students were observed to have different cognitive abilities and educational levels, making inclusive practice challenging for both mainstream and special teachers. A lack of special teachers and limited teaching hours also made the
implementation and operation of integration units difficult, raising questions about the nature of support provided to students:

The integration unit programs were scheduled by law to operate 20 hours per week. But essentially we are now only three people coming here for one day and four hours means one hour per class. A special education program for 20 hours means that students are at least four hours a day out of the mainstream. (Vassilis, special Literature teacher)

Parthenon's two-story building was of typical Greek construction; a school in a complex of buildings including the upper secondary school and the kindergarten, with an impressive landscape - including pine trees and coastal views. The physical features of Parthenon were sufficient to meet the needs of students with SEN. For example, a student with cerebral palsy – Philipos – required the use of a wheelchair within the school, and appropriate adaptations had been made. However, the situation was quite different in the integration unit classroom. In my tour of the school, I found the medium-sized room to have a multi-functional role; serving as both a library and storage room, in addition to its use as a makeshift space for educating Students with SEN. There was also a clear lack of classroom benches for students, but rather a large, wooden kitchen table surrounded by six school chairs.

Classroom observations were focused on two classes from the first grade and two classes from the third grade. In these classes, there were integration unit classes in Maths and Greek Literature, respectively. An average of twenty to twenty five students attended each mainstream class and two to four students attended integration units from each grade, mostly seated in pairs. There was not a specific ratio of boys and girls within the observed classrooms. The duration of each subject lesson was approximately 55-60 minutes, for both mainstream and integration classes, while the latter followed a different school timetable but with the same subject, structure and textbooks. However, while interactive boards were used in mainstream classrooms, the integration units lacked both a black board and interactive board, limiting the full range of support possible in the learning-teaching process. This was evident in my observation of the A4 integration unit, as Vassilis, the special Literature teacher, tried to teach students Ancient Greek grammar by dictating informational material and
notes. Nikos, a 13 year-old boy in this integration unit, mentioned his frustration regarding the lack of a black board:

Nikos: Sir, they have to put a black board here, in this class.
Vassilis: ...
Nikos: What do you say?
Vassilis: ... Maybe next year...

Thus, while integration units were implemented within the school, their operation was not without challenges, as in many cases the curriculum was not adapted to students, rather students tried to adapt themselves to the curriculum while receiving remedial support. Moreover, integration units were only provided to students with SEN in the subjects of Mathematics and Greek Literature. Despite students being promised 15-20 hours of support per week in each unit and course, only a total 16 hours of support was provided:

I can honestly say that with the classes we have, according to the law we need four teachers for 20 hours each, 80 hours total, but instead we have four teachers with four hours. We have 16 hours instead of 80. It makes sense that many children do not get a proper education, meaning that each child should have a special teacher for six, seven, eight hours and now they are only getting one to two hours. Still it is better than nothing. (Mr. Petrou, head teacher)

Integration units were established by the head teacher and special teachers based on criteria such as the number of students and those who attended the same mainstream class together. According to Vassilis, a special Literature teacher:

The head teacher really tried to formulate the integration units, even if he is a mathematician without any particular knowledge of special education. He tried to take into consideration the different needs and level of students, to include students in the same integration unit who do not fight each other but could cooperate, and to provide support based also on the previous special teacher’s reviews.

If there were a few students with needs, only one integration unit was run per course and class. The method for separating the units proved to be complicated, however. George, a Maths teacher, served within Parthenon only once per week; every Wednesday. Katerina and Vassilis, both special Literature teachers, served for only four hours every Tuesday and Thursday, respectively. A lack of infrastructure, the
absence of qualified special teachers, and restricted hours of attendance in the integration units were commonly identified as barriers to inclusion within the observations and interview sessions conducted for this research. Interview participants also noted a lack of collaboration between teachers and poor parental involvement as further barriers to inclusive education.

As it is also discussed in the following sections, there was a misunderstanding regarding the message that students might get about how they were perceived and valued regarding their attendance in integration units. Students attending integration units were perceived by peers as those who needed extra support in ‘difficult’ courses, such as Maths and Literature, in order to achieve better grades in exams. Thus, some students without SEN asked to participate in integration units, in order to be supported more and obtain higher grades. This sense of remedial support for students with needs had two facets; on one hand, there was an inclusive way of Students with SEN to be included, but on the other hand, it reflected the limited acceptance of diversity within the school and the dominant academic orientation of the Greek education system. Some students with SEN perceived themselves as ‘lucky’ to be helped and have their homework done with the support of the special teachers, while others found it a means of punishment for their delinquent behaviour in mainstream class. Additionally, special teachers were seen by their mainstream colleagues as the only people responsible for the education of students with SEN. They perceived their role as different from those of the special teachers, although their students were attending both mainstream and integration classes. Thus, their relations and collaboration were marginal and superficial, with some of the mainstream teachers not even recognising or meeting the special teachers.

5.2 Participants’ profiles

The participants interviewed at Parthenon included the head teacher, two Maths teachers, three Greek Literature teachers (two special), and one parent. A number of fieldwork challenges arose during data collection at this school; forcing the initial research plan to be revised. These challenges included the timing of the study – at the end of the school year, during the annual examination period – and restrictions placed
upon collection by the head teacher. During classroom observations and interviews, all participants responded positively to my questions, explaining and clarifying their role and practices within the school. Parthenon’s mainstream and special teaching staff had professional experience only in mainstream education. While the special teachers expressed positive feelings regarding inclusion on a theoretical level, mainstream teachers adopted a more neutral stance. All six educators referenced concerns about the practical implementation of inclusion within the current Greek educational system.

Attempts to recruit study participants at Parthenon differed considerably from the experience at Acropolis. Parthenon’s head teacher, Mr. Petrou, refused to support my inclusion of both parents and staff in the study. While my intent was to interview five parents, only one parent ultimately participated, after Katerina - the special Literature teacher, kindly put me in contact with Ioannis, the parent of Philipos; a student with cerebral palsy. Mr. Petrou’s lack of motivation to support the study, despite his initial acceptance, probably derived from his particular leadership style and formal relationships with the teaching staff and parents, as well as the timing of my research. During collection of the data, it emerged that very few parents were actively involved in the school - either individually or as members of the parent association. Indeed, none of the interview participants mentioned the existence of a parent association within the school, or any kind of relationship between the school and the parents. They also referenced the lack of cooperation between the school and the parents.

The head teacher of Parthenon, Mr. Petrou, was a strict, middle-aged man. He had, on the occasion of our meeting, been in the teaching profession for more than thirty years, serving in Parthenon as a Maths teacher from 1995 until 2000, when he became the school’s head teacher. Although he was aware of, and interested in, special education and inclusion, he approached both from a discriminative and deficit perspective. Indeed, he was found to have an exclusivist approach to students with SEN; being in favour of mainstream education and academic achievement, as well as little understanding of the purpose of integration units. Mr. Petrou also viewed his role and responsibilities as strictly defined by policy, following a medical approach to special needs and inclusion. He was focused on the technical aspects of school operation,
following educational regulations, and did not prioritise the development of personal relations and connections between school, parents and the local community.

Katerina was a 27-year-old special Literature teacher and had been serving in *Parthenon's* integration units for the past 2 years. She did not have any prior knowledge or experience of SEN. She was supportive of inclusive education for students with milder difficulties but mentioned that she believed inclusion in mainstream settings was unfeasible; due to the discrepancies in the Greek education system. Restricted hours of student attendance in the integration units, compared to those enacted by the Greek inclusive policy influenced both her conceptualisations of inclusion and implementation of inclusive classroom practices. Observations and interviews revealed her tendency to offer academic support to students with curriculum difficulties rather than appropriate provision related to their individual needs.

Dimitris was a 43-year-old Maths teacher, with 25 years of private tutoring experience before his 5 year tenure at *Parthenon*, as it was difficult for mainstream teachers to find a job in the public sector. This background information is important, as the longstanding experience of teachers in private tutoring, in order to increase students' academic achievement, had an input in their inclusive classroom practices. He did not have any interaction with the integration unit, and he had only limited interaction with Students with SEN in his classes. He expressed the most discriminative approach to inclusion of all the participants, favouring the segregation of students in a separate institution. He also noted a preference for teaching students who were academically able to enter university faculties; believing Students with SEN should be offered alternative professional options - such as labour workers. Dimitris stated he did not have any knowledge of special education; declaring he lacked experience with students with SEN - despite their being two students in his class who were attending an integration unit.

Thanos was a 43-year-old Literature teacher with 10 years teaching experience and 2 years of service at *Parthenon*. He acknowledged he had limited experience with Students with SEN. While he was in favour of inclusion in rhetoric, he was concerned
about both the social and academic outcomes of students with SEN attending integrations units, due to the academic nature of the curriculum and the challenge of meeting the needs of all students. He also stated that the presence of students with SEN in mainstream classes would not benefit students with, or without, SEN - as both remained unsupported in a class of 25 students with different needs; along with the necessity of delivering the curriculum in order for students to achieve academic excellence. Thanos still perceived integration units as a place for weaker students and under-achievers, instead of students with SEN, as for him students with SEN should be educated separately and mainstream classrooms were for those able to follow the curriculum, or those that needed to be 'fixed' in order to be able to attend the mainstream class once again.

Stella was a 42-year-old Maths teacher, who had been serving in Parthenon for 5 years. Despite 20 years of experience in education, and theoretical support for inclusion, she insisted that students, both with and without SEN, were not benefitting academically or socially from their inclusion in the same mainstream class; considering that the ultimate mainstream school purpose was academic achievement. Hence, in an inclusive class, Students with SEN were not supported, due to the number of students in the class and the need to keep up with the strict curriculum, while some of the mainstream students lost interest and lagged behind. She recognised, however, that integration units were important places where students with difficulties could gain life skills and remedial support. Hence, she valued inclusive education as an idea, but through her experiences she argued that it was unfeasible within the Greek context, due to the nature of the Greek curriculum. She also mentioned the challenging relations among students with and without SEN in her class; highlighting the competitive nature of these relations.

Vassilis was a 31-year-old special Literature teacher with only 7 months of experience in special education at Parthenon. He stated that both mainstream and special teachers were not informed about inclusion. Without more hours of students' attendance and more special teachers, he argued, integration units could not offer students with SEN more than limited remedial support. He stated that he could not be responsible for the support of students with SEN in mainstream classes, as there was a misunderstanding
about who was eligible for this assistance. Vassilis supported the special education of students with SEN in a separate institutional environment as being the most effective approach to their social and academic development.

Ioannis, an 80-year-old man, was the parent of Philipos, a student with paralysis due to cerebral palsy. Ioannis and his wife were motivated by humanistic values and they had adopted Philipos when they had visited a state institute for abandoned children. Philipos had previously attended a mainstream primary school and had neither been enrolled in integration units nor offered one-on-one support at Parthenon. With his strong inclusive ethos and vision, Ioannis accepted his role and tried to meet his son’s needs alone.

These brief profiles provide an insight into the participants’ lives and views. In this chapter, their voices will be heard at different points, to illustrate aspects of their school case study. The following sections address the conceptualisations and practices of Parthenon school members regarding inclusive education. Despite having a legal requirement to support inclusion, the school’s approach was discriminatory in nature. While students with SEN were physically present within mainstream classes, there were concerns, from both mainstream and special teachers, regarding the purposes of integration units. In the following sections, themes are identified towards the school’s attempt to construct an inclusive school community.

5.3 Conceptualisations of inclusion

Parthenon participants were found to have similar conceptualisations toward the policy and practice of inclusive education, both on a theoretical as well as a practical level. Contrary to Acropolis school members, Parthenon stakeholders revealed only a limited understanding of the nature of special educational needs and inclusion; voicing concerns about both the academic and social benefits for students with and without SEN. There were teachers who considered it unrealistic to even to talk about special or inclusive education within mainstream schools, given the way inclusion was currently implemented. These teachers believed on the one hand that through the remedial support provided in the units; the limited teaching hours, and the lack of in-depth provision students with SEN remained still excluded and unsupported within
mainstream schools. On the other hand, they believed increasing hours of students' attendance in the units would produce more separation and segregation, defeating the purpose of inclusion.

In particular, from the very beginning of our interview, the head teacher made references to discriminatory and deficit attitudes towards needs and inclusion. This means that he supported education in segregated settings for students with SEN, while expressing highly negative feelings regarding the construction of inclusive communities within secondary schools. These feelings existed despite his involvement in special education and the enrolment of Students with SEN in his school. He admitted to lacking information on the role, purpose and operation of integration units, and described students with special needs as "sad and pathetic". He favoured mainstream education and academic achievement for those without SEN and saw the integration unit as a mechanism for inclusion within the physical body of the school but without an ideological positioning in relation to a fuller sense of inclusion. These statements revealed a discrepancy between Parthenon's stated purpose on a theoretical level and its exclusionary approach in practice.

He also attached emphasis on dealing with discipline issues or school failure through students' placement in integration units - perceiving inclusion as a form of punishment and revealing an exclusionary approach to education. The main aim of this kind of segregated inclusion seemed to be allowing the academic mainstream classes to progress with fewer interruptions:

In reality, if the mainstream teacher loses time dealing with the difficulties of the students with SEN, this time is stolen from the students without such difficulties. So, the problem is in the implementation of inclusive practices within the mainstream class. There is inclusive policy but its implementation is equally important. (Mr. Petrou, head teacher)

When further exploring what special education meant to the head teacher, he suggested a labelling of students with 'special needs'. When he was questioned regarding the nature of the term 'special', he related it to the ability or disability of students and the severity of their needs, referencing the absence of students with 'severe' needs, such as Down's syndrome or autistic spectrum. He termed these as severe, regarding the
challenging inclusion of these students in an academically oriented school classroom and the efforts needed in order to include these students, considering also their cognitive and mental condition. He considered them as barriers to the operation of his school, hindering the delivery of the curriculum, arguing also that teachers, parents and students would be against the placement of these students in his school, due to the lack of knowledge about special education and inclusion, training and the dominant discriminative discourses and prejudices in society. As the following extract illustrates:

We do not have such problems here... it should be educators with greater expertise than mine and they should decide if students with severe needs should be included. (Mr. Petrou, head teacher)

This quote captures the disengagement of the head teacher with inclusive education practices, as he suggests that his teaching judgement is lacking in this area. This finding is contradictory to the argument made by Ainscow (2012), referring the argument that all teachers should be able to respond to individual needs irrespective of the nature of these needs. Regarding the strictly academic dimensions and interpretations of Mr. Petrou’s account of the personal meaning attached to inclusion and Students with SEN, he added a further layer when he conceptualised the integration unit as a means of punishment for students with milder SEN; reinforcing the norm of special education as a way to ‘fix’ students before they could be re-included in mainstream classrooms. This further reinforced the idea of the integration unit as a place apart, with negative connotations.

Teachers and parents revealed quite similar perceptions to Mr. Petrou’s conceptualisations regarding inclusive education, both as rhetoric and in practice. In particular, while mainstream and special teachers voiced an understanding of inclusive values and neutral feelings toward inclusive policy and practice in rhetoric, they were negative about its practical implementation and heavily influenced by the nature and degree of students’ learning difficulties. Moreover, some suggested that intelligent, high-achieving and charismatic students were losing motivation and interest in an inclusive environment, while teachers were forced to focus on lower achievers and those with special needs. Hence, in a similar way to the head teacher’s narrow,
academic conceptualisation of inclusion within the school boundaries, teachers and parents put forward the arguments that lower-achieving students were perceived as students with SEN, and were concerned about both the academic and social outcomes for all students:

I think that inclusion within a mainstream school, when students with needs are included, ultimately does not help anyone and social inclusion is not achieved as well. The education of students with needs in special settings would benefit both sides, if we consider students with and without SEN as two different sides. (Thanos, Literature teacher)

What the above exchange illustrates is that this teacher did not support the idea of inclusion for Students with SEN, both in an education system and at school. However, he argued about a ‘segregated’ way of inclusion in the school, but that was contained as much as possible within the integration unit, marginalising students. It has to be mentioned that, from the findings derived, there was no clear distinction made between the views of special teachers and those of the main class teachers, as both were found to support the challenging implementation of inclusion in mainstream classrooms; arguing that more segregated settings may be more beneficial for students’ academic and social development and support. Additionally, there were teachers who considered inclusion unrealistic within mainstream schools. It was difficult for them to articulate the notion of inclusion as they conceptualised remedial support as an inclusive practice. The nature of remedial support in Greece was denoted as special teaching for backward or slow learners in order to support them in specific curriculum courses, as well as prepare their daily homework and exams; aiming for academic achievement. The majority of teachers, in common with the head teacher’s understanding of SEN, conceptualized SEN as dyslexia, either because this was most commonly met within the Greek school population (Didaskalou & Millward, 2010), or because teachers believed students with more profound difficulties were educated in segregated school settings elsewhere (Coutsocostas & Alborz, 2010):

No, I have never been in a class with students with special needs. Moreover, if you ask me what is dyslexia? I do not know. I do not have that kind of qualification. (Dimitris, Maths teacher)
This reveals the lack of knowledge and expertise of mainstream teachers regarding special education and inclusion. According to the above extract, the interesting part is that, within Dimitris' class, there were two students who attended integration units and two others on the margins of academic and social exclusion. In other words, the teacher did not seem to understand the difference between academically weak students and students with SEN in need of support; rising concerns about mainstream teachers' understanding, training and qualifications regarding SEN, while questioning the ways that teachers' meet and address the needs of all students in mainstream classrooms. Hence, a traditional transmission model of teaching was adopted by all mainstream teachers, and there was a narrow reliance of one teaching style and one learning approach - which alienated a broad range of students, including those with SEN.

In congruence with the aforementioned finding, data revealed that there were also influences on the understanding of integration units as a result of the different discourses and definitions given to them by the school stakeholders. In actual fact, students were often observed using the terms 'special tutorial,' 'private tutorial,' or frontistirio to describe integration units; 'masking' both the nature and purposes of the units and prioritising the academic support offered in the units regarding school courses. Mr. Petrou encouraged the use of these terms, so that students without SEN did not 'understand' the units' purposes, and students with SEN to avoid the marginalisation and stigma brought about by the assumption of negativity around the integration units. As a consequence, a misunderstanding about the role and purposes of students' attendance in the units occurred. Stella (Maths teacher) argued that students without SEN asked to be included within the integration units in order to receive further academic support or to be assessed orally in final exams, as students with SEN:

Students without SEN cope with students attending integration units very well. Both of them call it - the integration unit - a 'special class'. For them it seems to be a private tutorial or a frontistirio. However, a few times lately I'm listening to students with SEN stating that they are going to attend the integration unit; mostly they informed me that they must leave to attend frontistirio with the other teacher or they have been in their private tutorials in Maths. Occasionally students ask how they can attend integration units as they feel that they have difficulties in Maths. (Stella, Maths teacher)
Here, in the integration unit students with SEN are not being made aware of the reason for their attendance, as they see the unit as a way of escaping from the core course in class. They do not understand the meaning of the integration unit. (Vassilis, special Literature teacher)

The above passages shed light on the lack of shared conceptualisations and understanding of school members regarding the role of integration units; reinforced by the lack of a clear and shared definition of integration units and an understanding of their role within policy documents. Hence, although integration units were the only way of implementing inclusion in this secondary education context, the different connotations of the role of integration units, and students’ eligibility to enrol in it, led to a misuse of the integration unit and a narrow understanding by teachers. The vague language and guidelines featured in the inclusive education policy reinforced these understandings and left teachers conceptualize that inclusion was problematic at best:

To tell you the truth, for me here, from the little I’ve seen, inclusion is not feasible. (Vassilis, special Literature teacher)

Additionally, teachers’ perceptions and concerns were derived from the deficiencies of the educational system, rather than Parthenon itself. Indeed, most teachers expressed a belief that the integration units should be reorganised and re-structured, in order to better support the students. Given a lack of special teachers and the limited hours of students’ attendance, as well as the disputed benefits for students with and without SEN, most teachers continued to express doubts:

I think that on a theoretical basis, integration units could support students...considering they could follow their own teaching and learning styles through more individualised approaches by special teachers...but I do not know if the authorities could support these units and special teachers. This is something that we have to assess and reconsider. (Thanos, Literature teacher)

As far as parents were concerned, Ioannis (parent) favoured inclusive education rather than segregated schooling. This view was likely due to the incidents of abuse and neglect of children with special needs -in private institutions- which had been highlighted in the media and reflected the still dominant deficit approach of SEN in Greek society:
We chose mainstream education as ... we did not want Philip to live and be educated in a segregated environment... We wanted for him to be in a 'clean' environment, away from all these kinds of disabilities. (Ioannis, parent)

Even the parent with a child with SEN did not want his son to be with other students with special needs; making a distinction between students with cognitive and motor difficulties as, according to his view, the latter could be included in mainstream schools, while the former need to be placed in segregated institutions - reinforcing stigma.

What can be summarised here is that there were contradictory ideas of what inclusion might mean, even within a school which has agreed to house an integration unit. The head teacher wished to engage with students with SEN and had invited the unit’s creation but, at the same time, saw it as a space not only for SEN pupils but also for low achievers and behaviour issues. For some there was a stigma associated with attendance in the unit, while others wished to participate in it as a means of gaining academic support. The unit was both part of the school and yet apart; a shameful secret or an academic boon. The special teacher did not differ from the other teachers in conceptualising inclusion; arguing that students with SEN were better off being educated in more specialist settings.

5.4 Decisions about structures

The aforementioned conceptualisations, perceptions and understandings of inclusion were found to influence decisions regarding the implementation of inclusive policy at Parthenon. In turn, some of the school strategies and classroom practices that were implemented were found to influence school members’ conceptualisations of inclusion. Indeed, although Parthenon was an inclusive school, and it purported to support the academic and social inclusion of students with SEN, both Mr. Petrou and teachers failed to prioritize the acquisition of life skills, professional independence or the social acceptance of students with SEN through school strategies and classroom practices. Instead, they followed the achievement-oriented Greek curriculum and observed few inclusive practices, such as physical placement of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms, the participation of all students in sports competitions and
shared outdoor activities. Hence, in relation to the academic needs and interests of students with better academic performance, the head teacher, and indeed all teachers, argued that if time was spent following individualized practices in inclusive classrooms, the class “lost the good students”, as they were not given the level of attention they needed:

In reality, if the mainstream teacher loses time dealing with the difficulties of the students with SEN, this time is stolen from the students without such difficulties. So, the problem is in the implementation of inclusive practices within the mainstream class. There is inclusive policy but its implementation is equally important. (Mr. Petrou, head teacher)

These concerns regarding school purposes were also found to be reflected in school strategies -integration units- and classroom practices. In the following section the school purposes, strategies and practices are presented.

School purposes

The head teacher aspired to generating a sense of citizenship as a core school purpose but without taking any initiatives or pointing school strategies in that direction. His arguments revealed a discrepancy between Parthenon’s stated inclusive purposes in rhetoric and its exclusionary academic approach in practice, as he considered inclusive practices as a barrier to the academic achievement of students without SEN. The quote below, provided by the head teacher, depicts how school members valued academic performance and their concerns about dealing with SEN issues. He said:

In reality, if the mainstream teacher loses time dealing with the difficulties of the students with SEN, this time is stolen from the students without such difficulties. So, the problem is in the implementation of inclusive practices within the mainstream class. There is inclusive policy but its implementation is equally important. (Mr. Petrou, head teacher)

Along the same lines, teachers were found to be influenced by the head teacher’s perceptions and expressed concerns regarding both the academic and societal purposes at Parthenon. Both the head teacher and teachers indicated that the purpose of integration units was to increase students’ chances of getting a place at the highest-ranking faculties and universities. Emphasis was placed upon performance in final
exams and studies in higher education as being the only path to social acceptance. Indeed the dominant ideology within Greek society, that linked academic achievement to vocational rehabilitation and social acceptance, was reflected in secondary education and at Parthenon - as a reflection of the society and so-called ‘traditional’ knowledge. Thanos, a Literature teacher, perceived Parthenon as a place where dominant community norms, societal values and ideologies were reflected and reproduced:

The role of the school is challenging. On the one hand, school reproduces societal norms and ideas, and on the other hand, it is also a tool to change society. So this has to do with what values society, government and authorities want to implement and reproduce and ultimately what values they want to cultivate and enhance in students. (Thanos, Literature teacher)

Other participants echoed Thanos’ statement, linking the school’s purpose with educational achievement, vocational rehabilitation and societal acceptance. Dimitris, a Maths teacher, adopted a medically-oriented perspective, believing the school should produce citizens who were able to work and contribute meaningfully to Greek society. Students with SEN, he argued, did not have the appropriate knowledge and qualifications in mainstream schools, and should be educated in different and segregated school settings, in order to gain technical skills and be competitive in the labour market. For many years this perspective dominated Greek education and society; the prevailing mindset was that all students should be educated in university faculties without engaging in manual labour. Participants at Parthenon continued to clearly differentiate between the academic and vocational abilities of students:

If in Parthenon some students are not able to follow the curriculum, they have to be somewhere else, in another educational setting where they could acquire some basic skills in order to access vocational rehabilitation. So the students who are willing and can continue their education further will enter university faculties... for the others, as it is not necessary for all to go to the University, including students with SEN, they could have the support of specialised teachers and develop other talents and abilities. (Dimitris, Maths teacher).

This argument, although exclusivist and discriminatory regarding students with SEN, was reflected, to an extent, by the head teacher, as he acknowledged that school structures - integration units with partial withdrawal and remedial support for
academic learning - prevented students with SEN from developing their academic and social skills, talents and inclinations. Yet, for the majority of teachers, social inclusion was difficult to achieve within Parthenon, even for students with milder difficulties:

Inclusive schools and integration units provide socialisation mostly to students with SEN but still I have concerns regarding the difficulties of each student. Inclusion could have some good results; however I have not seen any yet. I think that inclusion within a mainstream school when students with severe difficulties are included, ultimately does not help anyone and social inclusion is not achieved as well. (Thanos, Literature teacher)

In addition to these concerns, there was a misperception regarding the purpose and operation of the integration units within the school. As noted previously, the units at Parthenon operated differently than the inclusive law envisioned. Students with SEN at the school were partially withdrawn from courses such as English language, music, physical education and art; all considered by the educational system and school as being less important than the core courses. Missing these classes, however, prevented Students with SEN from developing their non-academic abilities, life and social skills, inclinations and talents. Students therefore came to devalue and resent their participation in the units:

As integration units happen during core courses, students withdraw from courses such as physical education, music and arts which are considered by the educational system and the school to be minor courses. In my opinion they should attend these courses as they come to the unit very disappointed and unmotivated because they miss interesting courses. (Katerina, special Literature teacher)

This way of operating the integration units was reinforcing the notion of punishment or penalty of some kind, since students were deprived of subjects they might have enjoyed. Hence, there was a lack of provision within the Greek curriculum and school timetable for integration unit classes.

Indicative of the inconsistency between abstract aspirations for inclusion and its practical implementation was the case of Philipos. Mr. Petrou had suggested that, through integration units, the social inclusion of students with SEN could be achieved, but little could be done to improve their academic progress. In the case of Philipos,
neither social acceptance nor academic developments were found to be achieved. Specifically, although the teaching staff was informed and in favour of Philipos’ enrolment at Parthenon, Stella, a Maths teacher, argued that now, after 3 years, she considered her decision to accept Philipos at school a mistake due to the challenges for the student regarding being accepted by his peers, along with his increasing difficulties at the cognitive level. Although Stella was mentioned as the most supportive teacher by Philipos’ father, she excluded him from the teaching process as he was not as productive as he used to be, both academically and socially.

Stella’s argument was an example of this inconsistency, as she supported students with SEN being educated in special schools. Her reasoning differed from her colleagues, however. She appeared to genuinely believe that Students with SEN would benefit from gaining more individualised support and acquiring knowledge of ‘everyday skills’ rather than following a strictly academic curriculum. Through this approach, she claimed, students with SEN could enhance their self-esteem and confidence; something that had been lost within mainstream classes at Parthenon:

Probably students such as Philipos should be included in a special school with other students with SEN. There, among other students with difficulties, he would not be excluded or receive hostility from peers. Philipos is clever but he learns at a slower pace than his peers and he should be somewhere else in order to have time to develop his academic and other abilities such as painting or crafting, as here there is nothing for these students apart from the standard curriculum. It will be better for students’ confidence and emotional well-being. (Stella, Maths teacher)

She highlighted that Philipos was clever, but he could develop his academic and non-academic skills in another school environment, as the academic nature of the mainstream school did not meet all his needs. However, this would probably meet the needs of other students who place an emphasis on the academic. However, the development of non-academic skills for all students remained a low priority within this school. Additionally, Stella argued that his fellow students did not include him, even though they had been in the same class for 3 years, as they considered him responsible for their placement in a ground floor class or resented the extra support he had in written examinations. This revealed exclusionary approaches to those who were
different, arousing concerns about the construction of societal inclusion even within Parthenon school classes:

The truth is that there were some students who considered Philip as a child of a lesser God. Students are always critical towards people with SEN. (Ioannis, parent)

Ioannis’ perception of the cruelty of students towards their fellows with special needs was also supported by Dimitris, who stated that the only social benefit that could be achieved through inclusion was a sense of superiority in the students without SEN in an inclusive class:

The only thing that students without SEN could take from inclusion in mainstream classes is the satisfaction that there are students who are worse than them. (Dimitris, Maths teacher)

The lack of teachers’, or head teachers’, input to challenge this exclusion was not mentioned or observed in classrooms. Hence, there was no suggestion that the adults in the school might play a part in changing these perceptions. The school purposes involved clear articulation of a wish to comply with legislation and education policy in relation to SEN. Yet it was clear that a dominant view of the integration unit was of a place to temporarily exclude those creating problems or hindering teaching and learning in the classroom. In this next section, school strategies and classroom practices at Parthenon are explored.
School strategies

Mr. Petrou was the core decision maker of Parthenon and, due to the traditional and hierarchical structure of Greek schools, he had established strategies influenced by his compliance with existing education policies as well as those enacted by the central and local authorities. As he perceived his role and responsibilities as strictly defined by policy, the decisions and implementation of school strategies were underpinned by a formal approach to the school’s operation. As a result of this focus on formality, he did not appear to inspire the relationships and connections between school members and the wider social community that were necessary to support both educational and social inclusion or to bring about change. Despite teachers’ and parents’ disappointment regarding the lack of support by central and local educational authorities, the head teacher remained silent on this issue. Although he acknowledged their disappointment, he did not appear to use his personal and professional connections to lobby the local municipality and LEA; instead expressing gratitude for what they had already provided for the school. An explanation for his stance was his aspiration for Parthenon to be accepted as a mainstream school, and not a school for students with SEN, by the authorities and social community. Although he did not actively promote inclusive attitudes, he was concerned about the possible stigma of his school being labelled as a special school; thereby ruining its reputation.

However, as stated above regarding the pseudonyms given to integration units, in practice, he operated integration units as a backdoor way of grouping lower achievers - rather than providing support to students with SEN. This approach revealed the frustration of the students who attended the integration units regarding the purpose of their attendance and the time given to this attendance. The following extract from a classroom observation is indicative of this finding as, after attending a full academic year in the unit, the students still did not understand why they had to withdraw from the English language course; revealing also a lack of appreciation for the role of the special teacher:

Student 1: Are we in this class? Nice, we are losing the English language course! I cannot stand the teacher!
Student 2: Yes! We are lucky!
Student 3: Sorry sir, I would like to ask you something. What is your name?
Vassilis, special Literature teacher: This is the very last class of the year...
Student 3: Yes, really what is your name?
Student 1: George... (Laughs)
Vassilis: Never mind. You will find out my name next year.
Student 1: Please really, what is your name?
Vassilis: My name is Vassilis...
Student 2: Oh really? I did not know it.

It is surprising that the relationship between a small number of students and this teacher could have been developing across the whole year but yet there seemed to be a real lack of connection between them. This incident could be seen as a reflection of the devaluation and lack of appreciation of the role of integrating units and special teachers by all school members, questioning their relation to the mainstream classes and mainstream teachers, as is discussed in the following section. Moreover, the implementation of integration units at Parthenon as a response to policy and ostensibly in the interests of fairness was not without challenges, illustrated in the following extract, due to inconsistency between policy implementation purposes and practices:

It should be clear what we want from integration units and students with SEN, in which direction we need to move and follow. If we want to keep this model of inclusive education with integration units we need to see how we can enhance it in order to operate. Now it is just to provide additional support in core courses. (Thanos, Literature teacher)

Thanos highlighted the fact that the inclusion created here was a form of remedial support which needed to be revisited. Others saw the integration unit as a place of punishment or for time out. The organisation and structure of the unit was planned by the head teacher, based on the number of students with SEN and the trouble-makers’ in each class. If there were just a few students with SEN, only one integration unit was run per course and class. The process for organising the unit sessions proved to be complicated and was run exclusively by the head teacher, who provided marginal opportunities for participation in this problem-solving to special teachers; excluding both mainstream teachers and parents:

The head teacher tried to organise the integration units without any knowledge of special education. He took into consideration the different needs and levels of students, providing also support based on some of the previous special teachers’ reviews. (Vassilis, special Literature teacher)
A lack of infrastructure, the absence of qualified special teachers, and students' restricted hours of attendance in the integration units were found to be the common concerns between school members; rising questions about the support provided to the students. Indeed, despite the policy-promised support of 15-20 hours per week in each unit and course, a total of only 16 hours of support each week, for all grades and classes, were provided at Parthenon. The head teacher argued:

I can honestly say that with the classes we have, according to the law we need four teachers for 20 hours each, 80 hours total, but instead we have four teachers with four hours. We have 16 hours instead of 80. It makes sense that many children do not get a proper education, meaning that each child should have a special teacher for six, seven, eight hours and now there are only getting one to two hours. (Mr. Petrou, head teacher)

Thus, despite the recently-enacted inclusive education policy regarding the compulsory inclusion of all students in secondary education, integration units were perceived by school members as a way of leaving mainstream classrooms undisrupted by low achievers. This was reinforced by the discrepancies between enacted policy practices and the implementation of these practices by the central authorities in schools; providing only limited and marginal remedial support to those included in the units and preventing them from experiencing participation in school academic and social life. Teachers, as the main implementers of both policy and strategies in classrooms, were found to play a key role regarding the implementation of inclusion. However, the concerns of the strict, academically-oriented curriculum over inclusive classroom purposes and practices influenced teachers' perceptions and vision for more segregated approaches to the education of students with SEN.

Classroom practices

Classroom practices were found to be influenced by school purposes and strategies. The head teachers' conceptualisations and practices were reflected in the decisions made by teachers regarding the classroom practices adopted and followed in mainstream classes and integration units, along with the financial restraints affecting practice. A narrow focus on examinations, according to the teachers, intruded upon the inclusive teaching process; leaving less time and space for deep pedagogical
approaches and the implementation of inclusive values. Students were therefore marginalised, both educationally and socially, as pedagogy came to be replaced by achievement. This way of thinking was linked to exclusionary teaching practices by mainstream teachers, who preferred educating high-achievers.

According to the special teachers’ responses, the learning and teaching practices followed in the integration units were influenced by their limited service hours, due to the state’s financial discrepancies. The limited teaching hours in the units constrained the teachers’ roles to fully respond to the academic and social purposes of inclusion, forcing them to provide only remedial support to the students:

My role within school is to come here every Thursday for four hours. The integration unit programs were scheduled by law to operate 20 hours per week. That is what Katerina and I do. Just do remedial teaching supporting them academically in order to pass the class and they know it, but we did not sign up for this when we first came here. (Vassilis, special Literature teacher)

From the above extract it can be seen that the decisions about implementation of teaching and learning practices in the integration units were primarily influenced by school infrastructure and a lack of resources. Teachers had to make decisions under these circumstances, about classroom practices that addressed their students’ needs efficiently, in order to meet the most urgent challenges around the difficulties in dealing with the academically oriented curriculum. In addition, a common observation within Parthenon was the limited use of special education materials and textbooks - along with the absence of a special education curriculum and advisory intervention by authorities or the head teacher for the teachers.

Hence, as both special and mainstream teachers were unsupported in terms of implementing inclusive practices, they decided to implement their own teaching practices. In particular, teachers within the integration tried to adapt the mainstream curriculum in order to make it accessible for the students. Katerina (special Literature teacher) claimed that it relied on the personal choice and will of special teachers to determine whether they moved beyond the modifications of curriculum and remedial support. This argument was evident through classroom observations. Vassilis (special Literature teacher) was observed to provide his own teaching material to students;
basing his practice on classroom discussion and collaborative learning. However, the majority of mainstream teachers followed more traditional learning and teaching practices - mainly through the use of lectures, with limited initiatives for classroom discussion and participation of all students.

Considering the limited understanding of inclusion by the mainstream teachers and the questions regarding their role in the education of students with SEN, Stella (Maths teacher) was the only one who valued the teaching and learning practices in the units. In particular, she valued the special teachers’ practices; stating that, after their attendance in the units, her students with SEN were more confident and willing to participate in the mainstream class. She said “even if I have neglected these students in class, with the knowledge they gain from the units, they encourage me to include them more”. Unfortunately, this argument, although underpinned by a view regarding the strict academic and remedial support of students and challenging the purposes of the integration units, was not shared by the other teachers interviewed in the study. Thanos (Literature teacher) did not identify any improvement in the academic skills of his students attending integration units:

Unfortunately, in my class what I see is that students just come and go from integration units without getting any support. I do not know if it has to do with these specific students lacking interest in integration units but what I realise is that they do not receive substantial support apart from remedial support in order to pass the tests. (Thanos, Literature teacher)

Hence, for mainstream teachers, inclusive education at Parthenon was not beneficial; questioning the teaching and learning practices followed in the units, but without challenging and reflecting on their own practices with regard to the inclusion of students with SEN in their mainstream class. An example of this argument came through the observation of the C4 mainstream class in Maths. In this class, Philipos, a student with SEN, was excluded both by the teachers and his peers and remained both academically and socially marginalised. Despite Stella’s (Maths teacher) acknowledgment of the challenges of including him, she did not change her classroom practice in order to initiate any kind of engagement and interaction between students; leaving Philipos excluded. Stella justified her practice by revealing her dilemma during the teaching process: if she tried to include Philipos, she would probably fall
behind in the curriculum; losing the interest of the better students. Although she had tried to reinforce classroom discussion and participation in the past, her practices were unsuccessful - leaving the students with SEN, and the academically weaker ones, behind without offering substantial support and the high-achievers without any interest in the subject lesson:

You have to teach specific parts of the course curriculum for all students and maybe you are not on schedule, being delayed, because there are students with difficulties and you have to make them understand. Hence, these students are never going to learn from you as you are obliged to go forwards with the course curriculum. (Stella, Maths teacher)

Another example regarding teachers’ decisions about teaching and learning practices was the A2 Maths mainstream class. Dimitris, the subject teacher, followed an academically-oriented method of curriculum delivery, including a theory-based lecture followed by problem solving on the board, which excluded participation for all students. While he tried to include Stefanos, a boy assessed as having lower intelligence, he totally excluded Maria, a girl with severe dyslexia, during both classroom observations in the same class. His teaching practices were strictly academic; he claimed that in a 25-student class with varying skills and abilities, if he devoted his time exclusively to below average students the others would lose their motivation and interest. Although he used group discussions for a more interactive way of teaching – with constant questions to academically weak students forcing them to participate – the same high-achieving students responded repeatedly. However, asking questions only to those who struggled, marginalised and stigmatised them even more:

Dimitris, Maths teacher: The following days I am not going to ask questions to you Lena, you are a very good student.
Lena, student: Why sir?
Dimitris, Maths teacher: Because I know that you are going to study. I am going to assess weaker students to be sure they are going to make an effort in order to pass the class. However, I informed them that each month I will assess those who are not participating orally.

Dimitris (Maths teacher) also excluded Spyros, a student who attended the integration unit as he faced difficulties following the class curriculum. The teacher often singled
him out and embarrassed him. It was evident, from observations, that the teacher excluded the weaker students and those with SEN within the class, but considered his practices effective anyway:

I believe that my teaching and learning practices are effective, and there is progress within my class. Within the Greek school there are exceptional students and those who are under the standard. So it is very difficult to include all, as I would risk losing the rest. I just assess students who did not participate through a written examination. (Dimitris, Maths teacher)

On the other hand, the two special teachers, Vassilis and Katerina, adapted their teaching practices so as to include all students in classroom discussions. Due to the lack of specific materials and a special education curriculum, this process was challenging:

We have interactive boards in Parthenon but we use them rarely. Photocopies are a classic way to enrich your learning and teaching approaches in order to support everyone. But again this is just about the experience and qualification of each teacher. (Thanos, Literature teacher)

Moreover, teachers expressed concerns regarding the highly diverse and challenging needs of their students; stating that they were not prepared to teach students according to their individual needs. They also noted the large number of students in each class, the mainstream teachers’ lack of knowledge, the restricted hours of operation for integration units and a lack of advisory intervention as further concerns:

There are no directions on how to deliver the curriculum within inclusive classrooms. The Ministry of Education did not publish new books with specific indications of how to teach courses in order to develop goals, purposes and guidelines in the learning and teaching process. There are not some clear paths to follow from the Ministry or educational authorities. (Dimitris, Maths teacher)

Additionally, all teachers acknowledged their limited training of special education and inclusion; highlighting their marginal information about inclusion and limited knowledge about inclusive practices. Even special teachers were not aware of inclusive structures and practices within mainstream schools, despite the enactment of Greek legislation and their special education training and qualifications:
I am not familiar with the Greek inclusive law... I learned about it mostly from informative web pages out of my own initiative. To tell you the truth, I had not thought about it much before coming here. (Vassilis, special Literature teacher)

As revealed above, mainstream teachers marginalised students with SEN as they did not differentiate or modify their teaching and learning processes in order to include all students; being concerned about losing the high-achievers. They followed traditional classroom practices for the ‘middle’ of the class, considering the workload of curriculum material, the lack of time to provide individualised support or provide initiatives and opportunities to all students to participate. Special teachers implemented differentiated teaching practices, providing individualised instruction to students and classroom interaction in order for all students to participate equally in classroom life. Moreover, there were also differences regarding the way mainstream teachers evaluated the outcomes of teaching and learning practices implemented in integration units. Hence, within teachers’ narratives, there were no references regarding the collaborative design and implementation of teaching and learning practices within- and between-mainstream and special teachers, parents and the head teacher.

The primacy of the academic curriculum and the need to support the successful students in the classroom were major constraints in relation to possible inclusive practice. Beyond this, it was evident that teachers felt they lacked knowledge, understanding and skills with regard to students with a range of abilities and learning challenges. Special education teachers, however, with limited resources, attempted to meet the needs of diverse learners while acknowledging that this had to occur within the framework of the academic curriculum and the need to try to pass the test. There was an obvious divide between the two sets of teachers in their perceptions of young people in the unit and how they should and could be supported. The relationships between those involved in the possible creation of an inclusive school community are obviously important and in this next section, ideas of the nature of such relationships in this context will be engaged with. Further, the ways in which power, voice and agency come into play will be discussed.
5.5 Power, Voice and Agency

Relationships

In this section, the nature of power, voice and agency within Parthenon school will be presented. It is worth remembering that in the wider literature (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2006; Carrington & Robinson, 2007; Strogilos et al., 2011) we have learned that right kind of internal relations and collaborative rapport are required in order to establish inclusive education practices in schools and especially through integration units. The accounts of Parthenon's school members mentioned, limited dialogue between the school, the local educational authorities and the societal community. There were no guidelines stated by policy or the authorities regarding collaboration between the school and parents or between mainstream and special teachers. Furthermore, the power within Parthenon exhibited by the head teacher, through an authoritative leadership, followed non-distributive approaches and thus provided no opportunities to school members for participation in decision-making and problem-solving processes. Only the head teacher was a potential agent of change, but his role was still constrained within the boundaries of his role and responsibilities and his perceptions of agency within that context.

As already mentioned, an important finding revealed by the collected data was a lack of strong collaborative rapports and relationships between school members. Moreover, there was a notable absence of relationships between the school, the local authorities and the wider community. This absence could be justified by a lack of enacted policy guidelines and advice provided by the authorities regarding the development of collaborative relations between and within schools. In particular, the head teacher, contrary to Mrs. Pavlou, the head teacher at Acropolis, did not mention any kind of relationships or collaborations in the school and between the school, educational authorities and the local community in his interview responses. Specifically, despite policy regulations regarding the need for the head teacher's collaboration with educational agencies and authorities, Mr. Petrou disclosed the challenging nature of this collaboration being due to a variety of bureaucratic discrepancies. These discrepancies were evident in the lack of support for students, although school members clearly stressed the need for school specialists:
Do you see any psychologist? I am serving as a special teacher two years at Parthenon and I have not seen any psychologist or other specialists. (Katerina, special Literature teacher)

However, this lack of collaboration between the school and external agencies could be seen as being due to the financial issues of the central authorities, who had difficulties supporting students with SEN and the school inclusive structures. Within the immediate local community, there was no obvious on-going discussion and engagement with parents. This contrasted sharply with the Acropolis school, where the head teacher worked hard to engage with parents and to use the views of parents to help support her arguments with those in the wider educational community.

Furthermore, there was no evidence of constructive and collaborative relations between school members within the school itself. In fact, neither the teachers nor the parents pointed out any collaboration or relationships that had developed between themselves and the head teacher. This lack of collaboration probably stemmed from the traditional approach to leadership taken by the head teacher. The head teacher did not distribute responsibilities to school members; excluding teachers and parents from participation in the decision-making and problem-solving processes. Considering his leadership approaches and his conceptualisations of inclusion, along with his decisions regarding the implementation of inclusive structures in school, the head teacher, through his power role, encouraged the separateness of the roles and responsibilities between the mainstream and special teachers. Hence, the dominant perception, within Parthenon, of integration units and the education of students with SEN as being separated from mainstream education was illustrated by the head teacher’s words:

Inclusive education is positive for both students with and without SEN. However, we have to follow two different approaches. The mainstream teacher could not deal with students with SEN and those without difficulties in the same class. (Mr. Petrou, head teacher)

This was also supported by the mainstream teachers, who overwhelmingly refused to accept responsibility for the education of students with SEN; placing this role firmly with the special teachers:
I am not interested in teaching again the basic Mathematics from primary school to students in secondary. I am here for those who want to go further and not to take on the role of the nurse. Teachers do not respect themselves as we have to play different roles now. (Dimitris, Maths teacher)

In turn, special teachers challenged their multi-faceted role within Parthenon. Vassilis, defended himself from the role and expectations mainstream teachers had assigned to special teachers. He argued that they were not the only ones responsible for the implementation of inclusive policy in schools, or for the nature of the support provided to students with SEN. However, according to Thanos, they followed “parallel” – but apparently separate – “paths with special teachers”. In practice, mainstream teachers were found to leave students with SEN unsupported, while special teachers believed they could not ‘do miracles’ given their restricted hours of service within the school:

I am not the solution to the problem. I do not do miracles. (Vassilis, special Literature teacher)

These dysfunctional relationships, reinforced by the arrival of special teachers in schools in the middle of the academic year, made teachers’ collaboration challenging for them to build practices and support plans for students together:

For this year the truth is that I have not even met with the special Maths teacher, because he took time to be sent here. When I saw him around I did not realize that he was my colleague for the integration unit. However, he has done good work with some students. (Stella, Maths teacher)

As far as parents were concerned, they were not observed to individually or collectively participate at school by any means. However, none of the participants mentioned any kind of collaboration with parents or their participation in the school’s decisions and approaches. Indeed, none of the interview participants mentioned the existence of a parent association within the school, or any kind of relationship between the school and parents. Parent-school collaboration was, therefore, marginal, as neither the school nor the parents attempted to build relationships apart from the formal, and often superficial, information provided to parents regarding their children’s attainment and academic progress:
We have communication limited to parental school visits to ask about their child’s progress, to take the semester grades and if there is a problem the head teacher will contact them. Our relations are in a more technocratic stage. (Thanos, Literature teacher)

Leadership, voice and agency

The organisational structure of Parthenon was based on a traditional, top-down oriented model, with the head teacher serving as the sole authority. Mr. Petrou followed a traditional, authoritative leadership approach, without providing opportunities to teachers and parents for participation in shared decision-making or problem-solving processes. His leadership was influenced by his dependence on the central authorities and the policy commitment letter; making him more focused on his managerial and administrational duties. However, despite the flexibility of his role, due to the lack of specific guidelines for head teachers’ responsibilities regarding the implementation of inclusive policy and the lack of assessment of head teachers and schools, he engaged with the letter of policy but did not necessarily go beyond this.

The head teacher was found to have limited direct involvement with students, usually limited to disciplinary purposes and, despite the fact that Parthenon was housed within the confines of an upper secondary school, he did not develop any collaborative rapport between the two schools or the local community. Although Mr. Petrou argued that students with SEN should be socially in school as a reflection of society, in order to be prepared for their future life, he had not taken any initiatives in this direction so far:

Tomorrow in real life they will face similar situations, so they have to understand that they should be tolerant, and anyway, that’s the way life is. Some people have more qualifications, other have less, things happen which we have to learn to accept. (Mr. Petrou, head teacher)

Indeed, he prioritised academic achievement over inclusion, even within integration units, as evidenced by the practice of re-naming the units ‘private tutorials’. However, he perceived himself to be influential over others; believing he had created an inclusive climate in his school. In reality, the voices of the teachers and parents were marginalised, and lacked both opportunities and initiatives for autonomy. Thus, what
has been learned about the relationships in this school is that, although there were dysfunctional relationships between school members, there tended to be limited collaboration in terms of responsibility, decision-making and problem-solving processes. The collaborative approach between school stakeholders, especially mainstream and special teachers, involved no opportunities being extended to all teachers and parents - who were found to be excluded by these processes; discouraging deep inclusion but encouraging segregated inclusion, as is further discussed in Chapter 7.

Despite having pursued integration units of his own volition – and despite being responsible for the units’ operation and resourcing – Mr. Petrou did not exercise his professional autonomy in order to be an agent of change. Although he made reference to his struggles to convince authorities and parents to accept the implementation of integration units at Parthenon, he did not actively promote parental involvement or cooperation within the school:

I do not know what the other head teachers did but here we fought very hard with parents in order to consolidate the letter of the law and implement it in practice. (Mr. Petrou, head teacher)

He considered the construction of an inclusive environment within his school a personal achievement. Mr. Petrou did not seem to share the benefits of inclusion between- and within- school members, authorities and the community. In fact, he refused to go beyond his formal authorisation in order to further support the implementation and operation of inclusive education within his school. Compared to Mrs. Pavlou (head teacher of Acropolis), he remained within the context of his formal responsibilities, recognising the importance of inclusion but avoiding extra initiatives to fully enact it. However, as all state-accredited organisations for the assessments of students, had an excessive number of referrals seeking assessment, a significant degree of bureaucracy and backlog (Zafiriadis, 2005), Mr. Petrou responded to this delay by enrolling students with SEN without the official assessment, in order for them to be supported within the integration units:
When a student is not assessed formally, according to the law you shouldn't include the student within integration units. But here we try including them, otherwise what will become of this child? (Mr. Petrou, head teacher)

Hence, while he expressed a preference for more autonomy and independence in his role, he did not approve of going beyond official boundaries; perceiving his role as an isolated school coordinator within a formal context and following a pre-determined organisational and managerial path:

The head teacher plays an important role in the school, within the boundaries that the ministry allows him to. It is a framework of only a few important initiatives, but still they are limited. The head teacher should be free from bureaucratic duties and able to follow his own way of leadership and initiatives, in constant cooperation with the supervisors and authorities. (Mr. Petrou, head teacher)

In turn, considering the traditional and non-distributive leadership of the head teacher, the teachers and parents argued that they did not have the power to change educational processes or influence decisions within and outside school. While their voices were marginalised, both in authority and at school level, they did not have the opportunity to act as agents of inclusive change. Although they stated they had autonomy and flexibility within classrooms and were decision-makers regarding the teaching and learning practices they followed, the teachers found themselves to be excluded from decision-making processes and followed school purposes as decided by the head teacher. Additionally, both mainstream and special teachers were concerned that they were not valued by the head teacher; making reference to disempowerment in their role. Along the same lines, although Mr. Petrou and the teachers mentioned the importance of parental involvement, acknowledging their power and ability to place pressure upon the authorities, the parents’ voices were also noted as going unheard:

Parents have the power to demand and change things, both in special and mainstream education, but their voice is not heard louder than policy stakeholders. (Stella, Maths teacher)

Parental voices were excluded from authorities’ and school’s decision-making processes and problem-solving approaches. (Ioannis, parent)
Conclusion

In this chapter, the picture of Parthenon school has been presented; capturing and looking at the key strands involved in the construction of an inclusive school community. These were the school members' conceptualisations of inclusion, including their perceptions, understanding and commitment to inclusive values; the nature of decisions made by school members about school structures, in order to implement inclusive policy through the components of school purposes, strategies and classroom practices; and the relations developed between school members and the wider community. All of these strands were found to be interwoven in complex, and sometimes contradictory, narratives of inclusion.

Parthenon school, although an inclusive school setting by legal definition, provided inclusive provision to students with their attendance in integration units, yet projected inclusive initiatives and approaches in sometimes contradictory ways. In particular, although the head teacher and teachers were positive towards inclusion as a concept, they saw integration as similar to inclusion and with it conflated remedial support for weak students and students with needs. Additionally, the head teacher and some of the mainstream teachers conceptualised the attendance of students in integration units as a means of punishment, school failure or remedial support, while ostensibly viewing this approach as inclusion. However, although Mr. Petrou initiated and established, under his own volition, integration units within the school, the provision of students with SEN was limited to their physical relocation. Tensions between school members regarding the understanding of the nature of inclusion and commitment to inclusive values, reinforced the lack of shared commitment; prohibiting the implementation of inclusive classrooms practices and the development of collaborative rapports.

Regarding the decisions about school structures, there was a focus on academic excellence that was supported by all school members. Students with SEN in mainstream classrooms remained excluded, while in integration units they received more individual support in order to be competitive within the academic curriculum. Furthermore, the head teacher, following a traditional-centralised form of leadership, disengaged from having an input in both central and local decision-making processes and thus did not act as an agent for change, as well as leaving other school members
both voiceless and powerless. The head teacher did not construct collaborative rapproches with teachers, parents and social community members within- and beyond-the school, while teachers were reluctant to take responsibility and ownership of inclusive practice. The following figure illustrates Parthenon school’s approaches, in order to construct, according to the framework developed in this study, an illustration of the schools inclusive practice. A detailed discussion of this framework is provided in chapter 7:

![Diagram showing the framework of Parthenon school's approaches to inclusion]

Figure 3. Parthenon response to framework strands for the construction of inclusion

Finally, the picture generated here has been defined as ‘segregated inclusion’ in this school case. Hence, although there were inclusive initiatives –integration units-, there was also a prevalence of the deficit model, both in school members’ conceptualisations and in school structures. Students with severe SEN were excluded from mainstream education, while students with milder educational needs remained unsupported in mainstream classrooms and were partially integrated in integration units. However, teachers had doubts regarding the opportunities provided to all students for academic
and social inclusion; due to the focus on academic curriculum and excellence. As a result of this focus, more segregated practices were applied in mainstream classrooms and inclusive teaching was -often- experienced in integration units. Mainstream teachers separated their roles from those of special teachers, considering them as being the only teachers responsible for students with SEN, and having limited collaborative relations with them. However, both mainstream and special teachers were found to have similar perceptions regarding the unfeasibility of inclusive education in mainstream classrooms. In addition, within Parthenon, there were marginal relations with parents, authorities and the social community; reflecting the in-school vision of the head teacher who, with his authoritative approach to leadership, did not provide any opportunities to school members in order for their voices to be heard.

These findings appear to replicate those from the study of Clough and Lindsay (1991). The focus of the latter was on integration, as school members were encultured into integration instead of inclusion; arguing for a more segregated provision, or mainstreaming but only under certain conditions. As suggested earlier, this is more like a 'segregated' kind of inclusion that attempts to 'fit' students in mainstream classrooms, without developing critical thinking and reinforcing the narrow vision of inclusive education instead (Avramidis, 2000).

In the following chapter, the findings emerging from the Caryatids case school are presented, providing a view and understanding of a mainstream school without official provision for students with SEN, although allowing for the free admission of all students.
CHAPTER 6: Presentation of the findings - Caryatids

Introduction

This chapter explores the complex ways in which Caryatids, a mainstream secondary school without official state provision for students with SEN - integration units and/or one-on-one support- established, and engaged with inclusion. Here, the different perceptions and practices of those within the Caryatids community are examined – including the head teacher, teachers, and parents – and their roles are explored as part of a socially constructed inclusive education community. This is the third case study that was conducted as part of the current research. This school contrasts with the other two; both in terms of its remit and the broad range of young people including Students with SEN, ethnic minorities and bilingual students. As in the Acropolis and Parthenon case studies, the presentation of findings begins with a description of the school setting, in order to understand the socio-political context of the school, along with school members’ profiles. Data is organised under the key themes that emerged: 1) conceptualisations of inclusion; 2) decisions about structures and 3) power, voice and agency. Similarities and differences between stakeholders are also highlighted and discussed. Within school, a type of inclusion that has been called ‘surface’ inclusion was discovered. However, some elements of ‘segregated’ inclusion were noted as well. The nature of the school profile - a mainstream school without any provision for Students with SEN - involved a lack of understanding and shared conceptualisation to inclusion, limited inclusive school strategies and dysfunctional relations within and outside school boundaries.

6.1 School setting

Caryatids (a pseudonym) was a mainstream school in an urban, working-class town in the suburbs of a large city in Greece. The area was similar to Acropolis, with high rates of unemployment and poverty being in evidence, even before the current financial crisis. However, there was no official provision for free school meals in Greek schools due to low family income or other reasons. Only Acropolis school, due to the initiative of the head teacher, offered this provision. The school was the first
secondary school established in the city but a new building was constructed in the early 1990's. Caryatids' new two-story building was of typical Greek construction - rectangular concrete walls; a school in a complex of buildings, set in the centre of the town. Although at the time of the study, in 2012, 400 students were enrolled, the physical features of school were not sufficient to meet the needs of all students with SEN, as the head teacher, teachers and parents argued. Twenty five students, on average, attended each class. The duration of each subject lesson was approximately 45-50 minutes. Although there were interactive boards in all classrooms, teachers never used them - due to the lack of time or knowledge about their use, as there were no training sessions available. Most of the teachers were not familiar with new technologies, which limited the full range of support possible in the learning-teaching process. Within the school there was a range of students with SEN, along with bilingual students and immigrants. Some of the students with SEN had been officially assessed by the local authorities, while others had not:

Children we have met so far in this school have borderline intelligence, dyslexia, they are mainly students from foreign countries, having many attitude problems, delinquent behaviour and ADHD. (Vasiliki, Maths teacher)

However, these students, were, intentionally or otherwise, ignored within the teaching process and despite the state inclusive policy that was in place, the school and teachers accommodated students within classroom spaces but without any further apparent school strategy being followed for their educational or social inclusion. According to the head teacher, Mr. Kostis, integration units had not been established, due to the limited number of students with SEN who were officially assessed and attended the same grade; leaving them unsupported. During the course of this study, it was noted that a significant number of students were officially assessed and individual support had been highly recommended as part of their individual educational plans. However, as stated both by Mr. Kostis and the teachers, after the official assessment there was a lack of further practices implemented to support students. Moreover, there was also an absence of collaboration between the school and the educational authorities, along with a great distance between the suggested practices and their implementation.
6.2 Participants’ profiles

Participants’ profiles are presented in the following paragraphs as background information for the following discussions. Interviews at Caryatids included the head teacher, two Maths teachers, two Greek Literature teachers, and four parents. All teachers in the school were mainstream class teachers. It was found that none of the teachers, or the head teacher, had experience of special education or teaching in inclusive classrooms. Further, teachers did not have any training or qualifications in special and inclusive education.

The head teacher of Caryatids, Mr. Kostis, was a middle-aged man with long service experience who was nearing retirement. He had, on the occasion of our meeting, been in the teaching profession for more than forty years; serving as a head teacher since 1990. In 2009 he had become the head teacher of Caryatids. Mr. Kostis had not been involved in inclusive practice, as he was not trained or qualified in special education, although through his long experience he had tried to cope with students with SEN in his school.

Penelope was a 45-year-old special Literature teacher who had served in Caryatids for the past 10 years. She was supportive of inclusive education for students with milder difficulties but mentioned the impracticalities of inclusion in mainstream settings, due to discrepancies - infrastructure, financial constraints, lack of specialised personnel, lack of teachers’ training, the strictly academic curriculum - in the Greek education system. Observations and interviews revealed her tendency to offer academic support to students with curriculum difficulties in order to help them pass the class rather than appropriate provision related to their individual needs. This echoes work at Parthenon, where some teachers saw inclusion as a means of giving remedial support in order to pass tests.

Konstantina, was a 43-year-old Maths teacher with 10 years of private tutoring experience before her six year tenure at Caryatids. From the very beginning of the interview she stated her lack of knowledge about the Greek inclusive policy, along with her lack of interest and training regarding special education and inclusion as she felt that it wasn’t relevant to her. She also noted the limited role and voice of teachers
in secondary education policy. Although she revealed some positive perceptions regarding inclusion, she found it unfeasible in practice. She also noted that students with SEN should be offered alternative professional rehabilitation options, such as being builders, craftsmen or manual workers. By this she meant that there was no need for all students to attend mainstream secondary schools, following the strict academic curriculum, as there were different professional avenues where they could be occupied instead.

Thalia was a 55-year-old Literature teacher with 31 years of teaching experience. She acknowledged having limited experience of students with SEN, but she was in favour of inclusion in theory. Similar to the head teacher's view, she was concerned about her ignorance of inclusive policy; acknowledging that teachers' training and knowledge could be the most significant aspect in order for inclusive school communities to be constructed.

Vasiliki was a 55-year-old Maths teacher who had served in Caryatids for 15 years. Despite having 30 years of experience in education, she pointed to the lack of training and knowledge of teachers, regarding special education and inclusion, and the reluctance of school stakeholders and authorities to implement inclusive practices in secondary education. However, she argued that students, both with and without SEN, could not reach their highest academic or social potentials in inclusive classrooms considering the strictly academic nature of the Greek curriculum.

Fanis was a 44-year-old parent of a student attending the second grade of Caryatids and had been a member of the school parents association since 2010. He perceived inclusion as an educational innovation that was difficult to implement in Greek secondary schools, due to the academic nature of the system and the lack of willing and trained teachers.

Claire was a 42-year-old parent of a student in the third grade at Caryatids. Claire was not a Greek native speaker as she was from the United Kingdom and used to work as an English teacher. She had been trained and was experienced in special education and was a member of the school parents association. She clearly argued that, in order for
inclusive education to be implemented, teachers should be committed to inclusive values and respect the right of all students to an education.

Kate was a 45-year-old parent of two students at Caryatids and she had been involved for years in the school parents association. She was very positive about the notion of inclusion. However, she highlighted the challenges of establishing inclusion in school practice due to the different educational levels of students in the same class.

Christos was a 49-year-old parent of a student in the third grade at Caryatids. As a former member of the school parents association, he revealed his negative and challenging experiences from this involvement; mainly due to parents’ reluctance to participate. He argued that the school and social community were not ready to accept difference and, thus, inclusion was only a far-off utopia for both Greek education and the wider society.

The following sections address school members’ conceptualisations towards inclusion. Then, the decisions about school purposes, strategies and classroom practices are presented. Next, the relations between and within school members and the wider educational and social community are discussed, through consideration of the role of leadership and the spaces available to all school members for participation in decision-making and problem-solving processes.

6.3 Conceptualisation of inclusion

Analysis of interview data revealed that school members held different attitudes towards the idea of including students in mainstream classes. Overall, the majority held quite positive attitudes towards inclusion of students with SEN at an abstract level. However, all of the participants were negative regarding the implementation of inclusion in secondary schools. Mr. Kostis was aware of special education and inclusion but without adopting an inclusive approach in his school. He agreed with the rhetoric of inclusion but found it impractical and not suitable for the reality of Greek schools. In a similar manner to Mr. Petrou (head teacher, Parthenon), Mr. Kostis conceptualised inclusion from a disciplinary and academic perspective, influenced by the academic nature of the Greek education system and a curriculum supporting the
high-achievers, through academic measurement rather the development of students’ life skills:

Secondary school does not give students the opportunity to develop their inclinations that do not concern the lesson itself. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

Justifying his argument, the head teacher acknowledged his disengagement from the current inclusive policy, due to the continuing controversies in central policy, local authorities and school level over the inclusive policy and politics. A lack of trust revealed by the head teacher, in terms of the politics of education, was aroused by concerns regarding the purpose behind the enactment of inclusive policy and practice. These purposes were referenced as ways for the reduction of educational expenses, sacrificing education values, and were enforced by Mr. Kostis’ previous negative experiences with local educational authorities, regarding the support of students with SEN and their reluctance to provide Caryatids with advisory intervention and support. Moreover, his exclusion from the policy-making processes by central and local authorities prevented him from putting forward his arguments and made him more reluctant to be involved. These concerns were reinforced by the discrepancies between enacted policies and the practical implementation of inclusion; adopting both an understanding of inclusion that was strictly defined by policy and a passive stance to exclusion. In other words, emphasis had been on children adapting to fit in with the system and the system simply accepting their presence with little or no change in practice and with no opportunities to consider individual, institutional and societal values and young people with specific needs:

Just papers. No support or guidelines, or something that may help you to implement their recommendations within their report. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

This finding is consistent with research suggesting that school members’ perceptions can be affected by the level and nature of support they receive in order to implement inclusion (Avramidis et al., 2000). In a study conducted by Avissar et al. (2003), it has been argued that there might be variation in teachers’ perceptions and conceptualisations within the UK, reflecting the levels and history of support in each LEA. However, justifying the reluctant approach of authorities to support inclusive
education, the head teacher went further, stressing his concerns about how Greek society perceived special education and inclusion - reflecting this approach in his school:

No one cares for anything. The only concern of the society is to have fun individually and nothing more in all the fields, areas and levels of society not only in education. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

He also indicated teachers' lack of motivation to adopt inclusive practices, as no one would appraise or advise them for their practice. Additionally, the head teacher found the implementation of inclusive practice untenable, since he thought that it would mean sacrificing good students to the lower-attainment students in the same class. This was confusing considering the free admission, co-education and accommodation of students with SEN within the classrooms of the school. Thus, he seemed to be very negative about the impact of inclusion and relied on compliance with policy through allowing such children a place in his school – but without engaging with these pupils beyond their positioning within a mainstream school.

Along the same lines, teachers and parents, although positive about the idea of inclusion, were wary of the challenges of the implementation of inclusion in practice within the school. Moreover, through their responses, a lack of shared understanding about special education and inclusion within the school was observed. For the majority of teachers and parents, special needs were perceived as profound; mobility difficulties and dyslexia also causing confusion regarding identifying which of the special needs could be addressed within a mainstream school. Thalia, a Literature teacher, asked whether students with both mental and mobility difficulties could be embedded in inclusion; reflecting the misunderstanding and lack of knowledge from mainstream teachers regarding special education. Questioning Fanis, a parent and member of school parent association, regarding the nature of 'speciality', he related it to mobility difficulties, referencing the absence of students with SEN at school, and categorising them as being students with low average intelligence, dyslexia and brain damage, along with those assessed as having psychological problems:
We do not have students with needs here...just with some problems... let's say emotional or psychological. I do not know if there is something else here. (Fanis, parent).

Moreover, the school population consisted of students with SEN, bilinguales and gypsy travellers, who were all referenced as being a challenge to include academically and socially, in fear of delaying academic progress for the rest of the class and of losing the motivation and interest of high-achieving students within the academic, competitive and centralised structure of Greek secondary curriculum. Thus, the exclusion of students from mainstream education was found to be justified by participants by the nature and severity of their needs.

As far as the understanding of inclusion is concerned, the co-education of students with SEN in the mainstream classes of Caryatids without any further provision was perceived by teachers as inclusion:

Inclusive education does – often - happen in our school. Teachers do not know and they haven’t been educated. They form their opinion based on their experience and sensitivity. Some teachers isolate students, others include them in the process, those who can be included. Not all of them. I think it depends on the knowledge or sensitivity each one has. (Thalia, Literature teacher)

Or suggesting a more integrative model as inclusion:

I believe that if children with SEN coexisted in a secondary school they should have a special curriculum and teaching practices in all courses and they should follow different courses from all the other students as they need more time that the other children to perform a task. (Konstantina, Maths teacher)

These perceptions could be justified as teachers and parents were not informed, qualified or trained in special education and inclusion and they perceived integration and inclusion interchangeably. Additionally, this finding was also reflected in the statements of Konstantina, a Maths teacher, who acknowledged her ignorance about the current inclusive policy, referring to herself as disengaged as she used to lack interest in special education and avoided being engaged, although students assessed as having SEN were observed in her class:
I am not interested in the way things are. I believe it takes special knowledge, moral and ethical strength for someone to be able to do that. I do not know anything about the law or the possible outcomes from the implementation of inclusion. (Konstantina, Maths teacher)

Thus, they conceptualised inclusion as new, innovative educational change without scope for practical implementation in classrooms; although classroom observations conducted for this study revealed that at least one student with SEN was in attendance. This finding, in conjunction with other Greek studies (Coutsoostas & Alborz, 2010), shows that through Caryatids stakeholders’ conceptualisations of inclusion there was a misunderstanding of the meaning and nature of inclusion.

Moreover, as all school members were aware of the concerns and conflicts over the practical implementation of inclusion, they justified their negative perceptions towards inclusion as a carefully weighed up choice. They were not against inclusion, they said, but the restricted conditions within secondary schools, namely the strict academic nature of the system and curriculum, the lack of pre-service and in-service training, support and advisory intervention from central and local educational authorities, prevented them from adopting a positive perception. Hence, although some teachers and parents acknowledged the unequal learning environment and opportunities for students with SEN, they perceived them as low-achievers with a need for more remedial support (Avramidis et al., 2000). Concluding, an unclear message was delivered with regard to the nature of inclusion and this meant that there was no sense of promoting equality of opportunities within schools. Instead, inclusion was seen as an attempt to involve children with special needs in the same place as their peers without providing them with any further support to develop their social and academic skills. Nonetheless, it could be argued from the aforementioned findings that for students, both with and without SEN, academic performance was crucial for the Greek secondary school; influencing not only school members’ conceptualisations about inclusion, but also the possible decisions made about inclusive practice. In this school inclusion was only possible for a limited range of possible needs and any such children still had to work and succeed within the same curriculum, traditional teaching and exam-focused experience.
This case study stands out from the others in terms of conceptualisations of inclusion, as although the wide range of students in the school – bilingual children, gipsy travellers, students with milder and more severe needs - school members held the most restricted perceptions of inclusion, also declaring a lack of understanding of inclusion and commitment to inclusive values. There was no shared understanding of inclusion, and it was perceived as being closer to integration, as well as being a new and innovative ‘luxury’ unfeasible in the Greek context (surface). Thus, although the placement of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms was in evidence, no other provision was offered to them by teachers, who acknowledged this inequality but did not undertake any initiatives to include these students. In the next section the nature of the decision-making process, with regard to inclusive practice at Caryatids school is presented. It is demonstrated that the head teacher made the key decisions regarding the school’s physical and learning structures, adopting a surface inclusive approach with the co-education and accommodation of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms. The prominence of a surface inclusive approach here suggests that there was a narrow conceptualisation of inclusion, underpinned by the medical model of disability, while school structures towards inclusive practice were limited or absent. There was an absence of initiatives, flexibility and engagement of the head teacher with educational policy and politics, while relations could be characterised as dysfunctional within this kind of inclusion, with limited opportunities for collaboration between school members, the community and the authorities. The process, rationales and disputes over the inclusive practice at Caryatids are presented in the following paragraphs.

6.4 Decisions about structure

School purposes

At the time of the study, Caryatids school did not use any special provision for students with SEN who were located in the school classrooms. Although the head teacher had an open admissions policy to all students, academic achievement was the key aim of the school and was pursued by teachers and parents as its main purpose. Consequently any children with particular needs had to try to adapt to, and deal with, this particular aim within a highly structured, even rigid, curriculum. School purposes were
influenced by the various socio-cultural and financial agitations of Greek society; which valued highly respected professions. Through this social context, there was an orientation towards performance and measurement as students were expected to achieve their entrance to respected university faculties: their ticket to a socially respected profession:

It is not fair or useful for a society to have a great percentage of educated citizens following the professions of doctors or lawyers in order to be considered as achievers in life. There are so many other useful professions for our society. The school ought to provide better educational and professional orientation. (Fanis, parent)

Although socialisation and the development of students' personalities, life skills and self-esteem were most referenced by all participants as the ideal core school purposes for students, with and without SEN, these purposes were acknowledged as merely rhetoric within the Greek academic educational system and within this school. Caryatids reflected an acceptance of such a narrow purpose; reducing the opportunities available to students with SEN for participation in school and the wider community:

School should produce multi-dimensional personalities with different interests, ready to support their ideas, beliefs and values. School should not only produce scientists but educated, civilised citizens with complete personalities. (Kate, parent)

The head teacher and teachers had practical concerns regarding the socialisation and development of the social skills of all students in school. They argued that parents sought academic achievement and high performance for students and this affected the way they conceptualised the positive or negative effects of curriculum delivery on the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms. Moreover, the cognitive and academic development of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms were not mentioned; probably due to the lack of practical implementation of inclusion and limited knowledge about that aspect of inclusion, by both teachers and parents. Hence, Caryatids' school purposes did not include the academic and social development of students with SEN, but instead appeared to rest on the traditional school structure; curriculum and test-focused system. Once more, the significance of the curriculum
and strong academic purpose supported by both school staff and parents meant that any discursive support for SEN provision remained simply at an abstract level.

**School strategies**

Indeed, the school did not provide any support to students with SEN, as it was purported to support more academic achievement and vocational development than social inclusion. Whilst the head teacher was well informed about the national inclusive policy, and the opportunity to establish integration units, he did not adopt any strategies or practices in order to implement inclusion. Instead, Mr. Kostis focused on a formal and traditional approach to the school's operation. He referenced the discrepancies between policies and practical implementation, while avoiding taking initiatives or challenging the impacts of the current educational system in his school. Although it is argued that head teachers should support the moral and ethical shift required for the implementation of inclusive structures and practices in school communities (Armstrong, 2003), at Caryatids school, the head teacher approached inclusion from a critical perspective - which prevented him from moving towards inclusive practice. However, he justified being prevented from implementing integration units in his school by referring to the restricted number of students with SEN required in each grade and class in order for the authorities to give permission for this implementation. Without such a unit, he did not believe that support could be given; leaving the SEN children to survive the best they could.

However, one school document that was accessed suggested that there were a significant number of students, officially assessed as having SEN, who required support through integration units or even more individual provision. It is worthwhile mentioning that the number of these students was sufficient for an integration unit to be implemented. However, as argued by both Mr. Kostis and his teachers, after students’ with SEN had been officially assessed by the educational authorities, there was a lack of further practices implemented in order to support these students. These practices included the absence of collaboration between school and educational authorities, along with a distance between the suggested practices and their
implementation. The head teacher justified this lack of implementation by characterising these practices as “out of school reality”:

Inclusive policy is well written in policy documents but there is none put into practice. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

By this he meant that inclusive education, as in the previous cases, on the one hand was perceived as a luxury for the Greek context, considering the financial discrepancies of the country. On the other hand, the authorities suggested a range of practices that were unfeasible - according to Caryatids school members - due to the strict academic nature of Greek education and curriculum. These practices included arrangements such as integration units, one-on-one individualised support, more time devoted to students with difficulties within the curriculum delivery, and modified teaching practices, in order for all students to participate. The above extract should be seen within the context of the Greek educational system - that valued the highest-ranking university entry rate at the expense of inclusive practice within the school. According to the head teacher at Caryatids, concern over the high-achievers made mainstream secondary schools contribute to the marginalisation of students with SEN. This was contrary to the directives of inclusive legislation. In this light, the head teacher argued that, due to these discrepancies in policy and practice, inclusive education was difficult to implement in schools:

It is not fair to sacrifice the one in favour of the many. I just can’t leave 25 students and deal with the 26th. There is no support and we run out of time. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

Additionally, the head teacher credited his teachers as good scientists but not good teachers; reinforcing the need for teacher education in dealing with diverse needs. Similar points were made by teachers and parents regarding their perceptions and decisions regarding the implementation of inclusive classroom practices at Caryatids.
Classroom practices

Most of the teachers did not have a clear understanding of inclusive classroom practices - reflecting their lack of clear and shared understanding of what inclusion might mean for their professional selves. This was reflected in the fact that none of the teachers identified their teaching methods until the questions were elaborated. Instead, they mentioned the curriculum materials that they used, such as textbooks, instead of the teaching methods they adopted. Moreover, the only adaptation would have been to teach to the middle range of ‘ability’. However, they made this concession while still adhering to support for academic performance. This could be explained as the main concern of the teachers was to keep a balance between academic achievement and inclusive purposes in classrooms, with students of different academic and cognitive levels, as they had to prepare all students for in-school and national examinations. As regards teaching and learning school practices; teachers at Caryatids were observed to use more whole-class teaching in Literature subjects and less in Maths, in order to encourage all students to participate. However, the main teaching practice followed by all teachers was lecturing, while the interaction between teachers and students was confined to students answering questions. They justified their decision for using dictation and limited whole-class teaching as being a consequence of a lack of time, along with the large amount of textbook materials and large class sizes; preventing them from using more inclusive practices.

Teachers also commented on their lack of training in special education and inclusion as reasons for the use of limited teaching and learning related to inclusive practices. Furthermore, their decisions about classroom practices were influenced by the diversity of the school population. Teachers had to decide between the non-marginalisation of the ‘minority of students’ with SEN’, but at the same time they could not delay academic progress for the rest of the class, and the possibility of losing the motivation of the high-achieving students. Hence, as at Parthenon school, the level of curriculum materials chosen, and the teaching methods, were adapted to the ‘middle’ student population; leaving the needs of most of the students unaddressed:

Teachers always have the dilemma if they should work only with the good students or with children who have problems. The point is that we lose the
good students so we have to find the happy medium. But by taking care of good students we have lost many others through the years. (Konstantina, Maths teacher)

However, these concerns were reinforced due to a lack of advisory intervention and support from the authorities, while they argued about the lack of up-dated material in order to reflect the current socio-political changes and norms, rather than the strict academic knowledge:

The school counsellors come once a year, and either the one said to be mainly focused on the curriculum, the other suggested to follow more inclusive teaching practices with interactive approaches as he taught in a model school with just 10 students in the class! We have had the same book for 20 years and a class with 26 students! How students could follow changes of society? Who may help us on how to adopt inclusive teaching practices? It is just impossible. (Konstantina, Maths teacher)

According to the above quotation, teachers were in dispute over several issues. One dispute, from the teachers’ viewpoint, was related to classroom management. They made continuing references to the challenges of academically including students with SEN in the curriculum-delivery process, due to the academic school orientation, the number of students in each class and the lack of time for curriculum modifications or individualised support. This point was articulated by Thalia (Literature teacher), regarding the teaching and assessment modifications made in classrooms and their unfeasibility in practice:

We can only use oral or written examinations in the semester exams but mainly in the final exams. This is the only curriculum modification the school can officially implement for students with needs. And this applies only for dyslexia.

As emphasis was placed upon performance on final exams and studies in higher secondary and tertiary education, the main aim of Caryatids for all students was academic achievement in the school exams. However, the state provision for students with SEN was restricted to modifications of written exams so that they were oral instead. Paradoxically, the suggestions of individual plans for students with SEN, enacted by the local assessment authorities, were found to be contradictory to what the Greek law stated regarding the same subjects and ways of academic examination:
There are very specific suggestions, like oral exams, but even if we suggest different ways of dealing with the problem, they cannot be applied. For example they suggest that we should give to students with SEN multiple choice questions, but the law states that you cannot use different questions for children who are examined in the same way. You only have the right to examine orally or in writing. (Penelope, Literature teacher)

This way of examination for students with SEN was acknowledged by the head teacher and teachers as the only school purpose for parents of students with SEN in order to gain high marks:

Parents’ main concern is to find a way for their child to be assessed orally in school examinations, so as to gain better grades and pass the class. Nothing more. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

On the other hand, in an attempt to construct an inclusive class, Vasiliki (Maths teacher), through her own in-service experience and commitment to inclusive values, implemented inclusive practices in Maths; linking theory with practical paradigms from everyday practice and life. Through this method, she found it easier to keep all students motivated:

I have come to the conclusion that many times students with problems have better performance in lessons that are directly linked to real life. They feel that they will deal with it in the job they will have following school and this interests them. (Vassiliki, Maths teacher)

Along the same lines, Thalia in her Literature class was observed including all students through open-ended and closed questions, in order to help them answer questions. Due to the nature of the course, -mythology and poetry- all students were motivated and keen to attend, while she adopted an interactive way of evaluating previous knowledge and delivering new material. However, the teacher raised concerns regarding the inclusion and participation of students in other Literature courses; acknowledging her lack of ability to include students in these courses:

We shouldn’t change the way we teach children by lowering the teaching level. We should do, probably using more interactive teaching approaches. But when a more difficult analysis comes up, some participate but others are left behind
not because they are different but because they lack ability. (Thalia, Literature teacher)

Thalia acknowledged the marginal efficacy of the school system, and herself, in order to academically support all students in her class, she credited the work done with the two students assessed as having with SEN in her class; valuing the support offered by frontistiria to her students. However, all students stated that they were realistic and acknowledged that they could not include all students in the teaching and learning practice when adapting an academically-oriented method of curriculum delivery, including a theory-based lecture or having high expectations for all of them regarding their academic achievement and performance. However, this comprises a significant constraint in the construction of school inclusive communities, as within a school community all students should be equally valued and supported, in order to achieve their potentials.

An explanation to the above exclusion approaches in class could be the fact that all teachers revealed having limited knowledge about inclusion and inclusive practices in mainstream settings as they had only superficial information about special education and inclusive policy as a theoretical educational change, despite the enactment of Greek legislation. Hence, the experiences of teachers were influenced by a lack of information, advice, support and guidelines for inclusive education by the local authorities. Each teacher prioritised and applied different teaching practices without offering individualised instructions and motivation to all students.

An example of these courses referred to, and the upcoming challenges to be faced in order to include students with SEN, was observed in the C3 Maths class. Konstantina, the Maths teacher, followed more exclusionary teaching methods without individualising her teaching practices or giving opportunities for all students to participate. While she tried to make Tasos, a student with severe dyslexia, understand the complex issues discussed in the course, she singled him out in order to make him answer questions; initiating verbal bullying by his peers but without the teacher intervening. Although she adopted some classroom discussion and collaborative practices, the students with SEN still remained excluded. However, Konstantina (Maths teacher), reflecting on her practice, pointed out that the lack of time and the
academic curriculum were the main reasons she had decided to use these practices, in order for students without SEN not to lose motivation, while she was trying to include students with SEN in the class.

Moreover, she refused to use visual aids, interactive boards or computers in order to help Tasos be included, as she was not familiar with technology:

I am not in favour of using new technology in class. The combination of computer and lecturing would help those children more to realise some things, such as school subjects have become more difficult in the first classes and time is not enough. However, it depends on our free time otherwise we stick to this barren way of teaching. (Konstantina, Maths teacher)

This argument indicates the perspective from which teachers approach inclusion; influencing their teaching methods and approaches. It also suggests the continued use of mainstream teaching techniques and resources without appropriate adaptation to the needs and interests of students with SEN; reflecting also the strictly academic school orientation:

By the time they reach the third grade, we are fed up with those children because they do not understand that we have helped them so much so as to get through those three classes, and despite that they do not do anything. I do not know if it is our fault but I believe it is mostly the family’s fault because some of those children have parents who never showed up in school. (Konstantina, Maths teacher)

However, some of the teachers did not acknowledge their responsibility regarding students’ exclusion; reflecting and reinforcing their narrow conceptualisation of inclusion along with the misunderstanding regarding their role in classroom. Additionally, the lack of knowledge and training for special education and inclusive practices were clearly observed through teacher practice, while others referenced the challenges they faced due to a lack of qualifications:

No, if we grade it from 0 to 10 my knowledge in inclusive education would be below 0. I mean I cannot understand dyslexia. The university did not give me any guidelines on the way I could teach students. I had to learn everything on my own, find different ways to teach a lesson. (Vassiliki, Maths teacher)
Additionally, the majority of teachers acknowledged these challenges as being difficult to overcome. Similar to Acropolis and Parthenon schools, Caryatids teachers made reference to isolation in their profession; feeling unsupported by the authorities and especially school counsellors:

As far as I know there is a counsellor in this local educational authority but I do not know if she is for students with SEN. When there is a problem with a student in the school, the head teacher prompts parents to visit KEDDY or a private centre for assessment and nothing more. We do not do anything more as a school beyond that. (Konstantina, Maths teacher)

Caryatids parents were found to have contradictory perceptions regarding the role of teachers in class, especially regarding inclusive practices. Some of the parents trusted teachers as educators, underpinned by teachers’ pedagogical values, while other did not even cooperate or ask for support from the classroom teachers in the face of the difficulties that their children may have. However, all parents agreed that teachers should be trained in special education, psychology and pedagogy, apart from their scientific direction, in order to support students:

I believe that teachers should be educated apart from their own science in fields related to school psychology in order to support both students and parents. To have a holistic knowledge. I also consider the in-service training very important in order for teachers to be efficient in their role. Parents trust teachers and their role but we need more from them. (Kate, parent)

Concluding, teachers focused on mainstream classroom practices and the traditional way of curriculum delivery at Caryatids, as both school strategies and teaching practices did not include the establishment of inclusive initiatives. However, it is difficult to conclude whether teachers’ decisions, with regard to teaching practices, influenced their conceptualisations of inclusion, or whether the practice of policy influenced their conceptualisations of teaching. In the following section, relations within- and between- school members, authorities and community are presented. Leadership approaches and the limited agency of inclusive change of the head teacher were also found to influence school relations within and outside school boundaries.
6.5 Power, Voice and Agency

Relationships

Although literature underlines the fact that collaboration is at the centre of the construction of inclusive school communities (Smith & Leonard, 2005; Curcic et al., 2011), the accounts of Caryatids' school members did not reveal any collaborative efforts between school members, authorities, education and the local community. As stated in the previous sections, the head teacher was not involved in the policy and politics of education; impacting on the lack of relationships and collaboration developed between the school and the educational authorities. However, the head teacher insisted that the issue was the reluctance of the authorities to contribute to the support of students with SEN in mainstream schools, while all school members would welcome collaboration with special teachers and psychologists:

I do not even know who those people in KEEDY are and they do not know me either. There is nothing organised. If there is a problem with a student and it has to be formally assessed, I cannot advise parents what to do as I do not have an address or a name to recommend. I do not know which process they have to follow or which authority is in charge. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

Mr. Kostis made no effort to lobby the Greek authorities for a more inclusive cultural and practical framework in his school. His approaches were influenced by his dependence on and compliance with the existing policies and regulations that were enacted by the central and local authorities. Despite teachers' and parents' disappointment and frustration with the lack of support from the authorities, Mr. Kostis remained silent. He did not appear to have, or use, any personal and professional connections to lobby the local municipality and LEAs, instead expressing his disappointment for the way authorities approach school:

It is all a matter of appearances and making a good impression. They do not actually do anything. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

Studies stressed that collaboration is at the centre of the construction of inclusive school communities (Smith & Leonard, 2005; Curcic et al., 2011). However, within Caryatids there were no official collaborative relations or initiatives between school and parents of students, with and without SEN, and their cooperation was described
by the teachers and head teacher as superficial - due to the fear of stigma, as parents tried to hide their children’s difficulties from school - or even from the parent association, out of concern about for their attainment and academic progress:

We are still in the stage of parental denial to accept the problem. They are afraid of stigma and are not willing to collaborate at any level. There is nothing close to collaboration in school - parent relations. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

When the class ends, we do not have time to deal with students and their parents as we have bureaucratic duties to deal with. The time we have available for the student himself is so little. However, there are colleagues who stay in school even after their timetable to get in contact with parents, even beg them to come to school. (Konstantina, Maths teacher)

Inter-agency collaboration was found to be absent within Caryatids. However, all stakeholders would have welcomed and cherished collaboration with special teachers and psychologists in an effort to support the students. However, none of the teachers mentioned any collaboration between- and within- themselves and Mr. Kostis. This most likely stemmed from the head teacher’s formal leadership style and their limited service hours in the school. On the other hand, Mr. Kostis did not reveal any concerns about his teachers’ lack of collaboration or their efficacy in the classroom.

Parents of Caryatids students created a parental association that was struggling to build collaborative bonds with all the parents, the school and the authorities regarding the challenging range of school issues. However, not all parents were actively participating. As disclosed by both teaching staff and parents, parents were interested in their children’s attainment and academic progress, and their collaboration with school was formulated under this superficial way of involvement:

The one and only concern of parents is to examine their children orally and nothing more. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

No, unfortunately each one is walking alone. Parents want to hide the problem, because they do not want teachers to tell me so that their child doesn’t get stigmatised, there is no communication. Neither with parents nor with teachers. (Fanis, parent)

In turn, parents appeared to have contradictory perspectives about their relationships with the head teacher and teachers. Although some of the parents credited their
collaboration with teachers, others were concerned about the quality of knowledge provided in classrooms, due to the reluctance of teachers to be further trained and collaborate with parents:

The teacher is supposed to be the third parent of a child in class. However, teachers’ exclusivist and discriminative teaching practices could cause damage to students’ emotional well-being. I believe that teachers should be educated in order to support both students and parents. (Claire, parent)

Claire argued about the practices followed by teachers in classrooms; questioning the nature and outcome of these practices for all students. The traditional way of curriculum delivery, and the strict exam orientation and achievement often had a negative impact on students’ emotional well-being, as they felt insufficient for the mainstream school level and as if they were being marginalised. Nonetheless, although parents made complaints to the school on an individual basis, they were not found to be actively involved in the school parents association in order to have their voices heard. The role of the parents association was also disregarded by the school, authorities and even the parents themselves:

Each parent perceives the role of the school parents association differently. Some participate so as to excuse their children’s absences; others participate so as to solve school problems. The point is that they do not really participate. There are many capable people who could join the association but they don’t. (Fanis, parent)

Interestingly, parents did not represent the group of the parents association, but instead they wanted to influence things for their own children. Moreover, neither mainstream nor special teachers mentioned any collaboration between them and the head teacher; considering their roles as distinct. This probably stemmed from the head teacher’s traditional leadership approach, which avoided sharing responsibilities and opportunities for decision-making with teachers and parents and constrained the building of inclusive communities within the school.

Leadership

The organisational structure of Caryatids was based on a traditional form of leadership and a top-down oriented model, with the head teacher having overall control without
leaving initiatives for the distribution of power to the other school members. The head teacher, as the school leader, conceptualised his role and responsibilities through the lenses of authoritarianism and the technical management of school tasks; thereby narrowing spaces for inclusive initiatives. He led in this institutional role without having any direct involvement with students, apart from for disciplinary purposes. Moreover, Mr. Kostis did not appear to take advantage of the available opportunities for professional autonomy and flexibility within the boundaries of his role and duties, in order to further support students with SEN. Instead, his leadership style reflected his dependence on compliance with official legislation and authorities but at the same the head teacher found himself less determined to seek support from outside his school boundaries to support his students:

I believe that the head teacher should have the freedom and autonomy to solve alone their internal problems. We have a centralised education system implemented the same to all schools from the ministry of education which commands us to implement policies and strategies without even asking our opinions about the particular needs, and ways of operation of each school. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

Hence, Mr. Kostis’ approach to problem solving was underpinned by restricted spaces for leadership, and used limited autonomy and flexibility within his role. There were dilemmas for him at times on whether to follow the enacted legislation or to operate beyond official responsibilities:

I have a report from a local authority regarding the diagnosis and suggested support of a student with SEN. What they recommend cannot ever be applied in my school or in any mainstream. In order to initiate the inclusive procedure, in order to start an integration unit I have to have a certain number of students in each class, for example three, if there are two I can’t. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

Indeed, although the head teacher asked for more freedom and flexibility to interpret inclusive policy and implement its practice within his school, in reality he worked strictly within school considerations and the strict boundaries of his role. His strict adherence to a hierarchical structure did not provide opportunities for teachers and parents to actively participate in the processes of decision-making and problem-solving within school.
Voice and agency

Mr. Kostis did not exercise his professional autonomy and flexibility in order to be an agent of change, instead acting more as the government’s representative. Although he made reference to the policy discrepancies preventing the implementation of inclusive practice, he did not look for opportunities to implement inclusion at policy level and did not reveal any personal or political overtures to obtaining funding or staffing assistance. Despite the teachers’ and parents’ frustration with the lack of support from the authorities, Mr. Kostis remained silent. He did not appear to have, or use, any personal and professional connections to lobby the local municipality and LEAs; instead expressing his disappointment over the way that the authorities approached the school. At school level, he did not promote teacher and parent involvement or cooperation within and outside school. Thus, Mr. Kostis did not act as an agent for change, and appeared more interested in maintaining the status quo and his placement within the school hierarchy.

It is also noteworthy that, despite the fact Caryatids school was housed within the confines of another secondary school, there was little involvement or collaboration between the two schools. The head teacher argued that this housing was a barrier to the implementation of inclusive practices and any change to the school’s physical structures, as he did not have the approval of the other school. Furthermore, he did not establish bonds between school members, or between Caryatids and the other school or the local community, as he did not seem convinced about the feasibility and efficiency of social inclusion. This doubt spread to the other school and community members.

Mr. Kostis also claimed that he had no relationship with the local educational authorities for the implementation of the individual plans suggested for assessed students in his school, or for students with difficulties who needed support but had not yet been assessed and were waiting in the lists of KEDDY, due to the excessive number of referrals seeking assessment and a significant degree of bureaucracy and backlog; enhancing the frustration of the head teacher and his passive stance to problem solving:
I will be retired soon and I will leave the education service with this complaint, that no one supported or came in my way to advise me that I did this right or try something differently. I use my own experiences to move on and develop my own teaching strategies. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

This activity of the head teacher could be seen as subversive to a small extent, as he took the initiative to go beyond his formal role and responsibilities in order to include all students (deep). In turn, teachers did not move beyond their official responsibilities, following a more restrictive and traditional approach to teaching and learning processes. There were individual initiatives by two teachers and one parent who went beyond their role within the school in order to further support the building of an inclusive school community. Specifically, Vasiliki, (Maths teacher), offered herself voluntarily for tutorials within school, after the school timetable, in order to give students with SEN the opportunity to be further supported. However, this initiative was not common among the teachers, who complained about the lack of time to include and support all students within their working timetable:

I personally teach 2 hours per week after the timetable hours, as I want to help those children more, since letting them fail is not a solution. The solution is to help them as much as you can and let them understand their opportunities to become mature people. I do it voluntarily and students appreciate it. As I do not want to do charity and help them pass the class, I help them achieve it by themselves. (Vasiliki, Maths teacher)

On the other side, parents did not act as agents for change either. Christos (parent) commented that, although parents had the power to influence education policies and change, they did not apply any pressure in that direction. He further addressed his concerns, revealing that parental reluctance to collaborate in school practices influenced their role within the school. Hence, parental and teachers’ voices remained silenced, within and outside school, as the head teacher or educational authorities did not provide them with opportunities to participate in school decisions but, in addition, there did not seem to be a strong impetus from parents and teachers to be heard. Thalia argued that teachers did not have an input regarding an inclusive education decision processes in order to raise school-wide issues and make demands. This had a crucial influence on the decisions about school strategies and classroom practices:
I have never been asked my opinion on the subject, not just mine, every teacher’s opinion, what we suggest. We are not acting as agents in any educational stage at all. So I do not have any role. But even when we do know, no one will ask us what to do with those children. (Thalia, Literature teacher)

However, the influences of politics were stated by parents and teachers regarding the lack of parental voices within and outside school. Although the head teacher, and the teachers, stressed the significance of parental involvement; acknowledging their potential power and ability to place pressure upon the authorities, parents’ voices were noted by some as being somewhat absent in this school:

Parents could demand more for their children, demand equal rights in education and society could demand acceptance! But they do not use their voices as they are considering us as their representatives. We, as teachers, cannot do much” (Thalia, Literature teacher)

From the parents’ point of view, this lack of voice could be explained by a lack of distributive leadership and collaborative opportunities within the school. They perhaps could not achieve much, due to the illegal existence and role of parental associations. Specifically, in order for school parent associations to have a legal presence and power in school and central education, 60% parental participation was required. Hence, due to the limited number of parents participating in the Caryatids parent association, parents did not have a legal right to raise their voices. As explained by Fanis (parent):

I would like to inform you that there is a legal gap that restricts the legal participation of parents in the policy process and school. For a parent association to be legal, 60% of parents should participate. Unfortunately, we do not have that percentage of participation. In Greece 90% of parent associations are illegal, without an official and distinct role. Hence, when we demand our rights, educators and authorities use this law and we do not have a voice.

This important statement by Fanis reveals the nature of the opportunities offered to parents, by policy and schools, for participating in school life. Parents were not found to be silenced by this rule within schools, rather mainly when they sought for support by local and central authorities or in order to ask something about their child’s rights, benefits or academic issues. Here, it is important to be reminded that, because of this
rule, the head teacher of Acropolis had presented herself as a parent in order to complete the number of parents required in order for the Acropolis parental association to be legal and ask for a new school and more support for her students. However, in even the Caryatids school context, parents stated that they had tried to be involved in school matters and decision-making processes. However, all interview participants referenced their disappointment, as the head teacher did not provide any initiatives and opportunities for shared problem-solving approaches and this was reinforced by the local authorities. Hence parents remained again without voice and were disheartened and unlikely to be able to resolve problems:

I am not taking part in school problem solving any more. I have tried it but all the time I heard the same excuse - that nothing could be done as the system is centralised and school, teachers or LEAs could not interfere. (Christos, parent)

Conclusion

In this chapter, a picture of Caryatids school has been presented, capturing and examining the key strands involved in the construction of an inclusive school community. These were school members’ conceptualisations to inclusion, including their perceptions, understanding and commitment to inclusive values; the nature of the decisions made by school members about school structures, in order to implement inclusive policy through the components of school purposes, strategies and classroom practices; and the relations developed within- and between- school members and the wider educational and social community. All of these were strands found to be interweaved.

In particular, Caryatids school, although it was a mainstream school with open admission to all students with and without SEN, had no provision or support for these students. Both the head teacher and school members remained disengaged from inclusive policy and politics, as they saw themselves as voiceless and powerless towards implementation of inclusive policy within the school. The head teacher’s mistrust of the educational authorities and the lack of support and advisory intervention by authorities, along with the discriminative approach of the authorities and society towards inclusion and SEN, influenced his conceptualisations and
decisions about the construction of inclusion. In particular, the head teacher had a positive conceptualisation of inclusion as an abstract idea. However, he did not reveal any commitment to inclusive values, as inclusion was perceived as irrelevant or unfeasible for mainstreaming, due to moral, ethical and practical considerations of the head teacher; enhancing a deficit model of education. However, as with the head teachers' perceptions and conceptualisations, the majority of teachers and parents did not reveal any understanding of, or commitment to, inclusion in mainstream settings.

Regarding decisions about school structures, there was a focus on the delivery of the traditional academic curriculum and achievement, reflected in segregated school structures and the absence of inclusive strategies and classroom practices - except from the co-education of students with SEN as a location but without curriculum adaptation. Thus, although parents supported both the academic and social purposes of school in having all students included in mainstream classrooms, they were concerned about high-attaining students' academic progress. Hence, Caryatids school did not establish any special arrangements, such as integration units or one-on-one support in classes, in order to support students with SEN. At the classroom level, there were no notable changes to the teaching and learning practices followed by the mainstream teachers, although there was an intention to put more effort into including students with both higher and lower attainment. In other words, classroom practices, such as class discussion and some individual initiatives, were observed, but implemented individually by teachers. Hence, although the co-education and accommodation of students with SEN in Caryatids' mainstream classrooms did occur, this did not involve any inclusive ethos or accessible learning and curriculum.

The head teacher followed a traditional-centralised form of leadership; excluding teachers and parents from the decision-making and problem-solving processes, both within the school and without, as well as from any collaborative rapport between any of the school groups or the local authority and from community members, within and beyond school. Thus, teachers and parents remained silent within the school, while they expressed their concerns regarding their lack of voice in both the school and the wider socio-educational context.
The figure below illustrates the approach of Caryatids school to the construction of an inclusive school community:

![Diagram showing Caryatids response to framework strands for the construction of inclusion](image.png)

**Figure 4. Caryatids response to framework strands for the construction of inclusion**

The presentation of findings in the three school case studies has revealed that each individual school had a unique engagement with, or challenge to, inclusive and exclusive strands of the framework developed in this study. A cross-case analysis of these strands, and a discussion regarding the construction, or otherwise, of inclusion within the school cases is discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 7: Cross Case Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

Following the presentation of findings from Acropolis, Parthenon and Caryatids schools, this chapter explores and discusses the key findings of the cross case analysis, in conjunction with literature presented in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. I will separate this chapter into two parts. In Part A, I will revisit some of the considerations and influences upon conceptualisations of inclusion in national and international policy documents, in local communities, and in schools. I will then present the framework developed in this study, including the three framework strands that emerged from themes developed in previous chapters and within previous research and literature. According to the different responses and approaches of the case schools to these framework strands, three different kinds of inclusion are identified: surface, segregated and deep inclusion. In Part B, I take each strand in turn, discussing and analysing the different responses of schools and school members, identifying and exploring the different kinds of inclusion constructed in these Greek secondary schools.

The process of developing cross case themes began with my research questions, which provided the flexibility to explore the construction of inclusive communities within and across schools. Themes from existing case studies were also used as sensitising concepts. The following three themes were identified as prominent in each school:

1) Each head teacher, teacher and parent held a core set of conceptualisations about inclusion that influenced their decisions and approaches to school structures;
2) The nature of decisions about the implementation of inclusive policy were reflected in school structures;
3) Issues of power, voice and agency were important, whether present, absent or negotiated, within school communities

While some overlap exists between these themes, this was not perceived as an analytical challenge. Indeed, they are not intended to serve as a check list of elements
found in an inclusive school community, as participants' conceptualisations, decisions and relationships were analysed within a constructionist framework. Previous research on inclusive school reforms has led to an aspirational list of activities or elements that, if followed, will produce inclusive schools (Peters, 2000). This study, however, does not compare schools to these aspirational elements in an attempt to identify commonalities and differences, or to claim which approach and school is 'better'. Rather, it suggests that the interactions of participants within a change process is dynamic, interpretive and reflective (Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Curcic, 2009; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010) and that, at this stage in the emergence of the concept of inclusion in policy and schools, there is an inherent messiness resonating with contradictions as well as aspirations for/or challenges to inclusion. This study makes connections between and across sample schools in order to explore how inclusion in such schools is constructed or rejected, and to identify how different aspects of inclusivity emerged in each context.

The following sections lay out a framework to inform consideration of the aforementioned themes. It is important to note that this framework has emerged through a method of constant comparison, revisiting thematic overlaps and the raw data, and may continue to be refined further in the future. Before outlining the emerging framework, the following pages revisit some of the essential considerations and influences when conceptualizing inclusion and, in particular, inclusive communities.

PART A – Considering inclusion

7.1 Conceptualisations of, and influences on, inclusion

Inclusion, as a form of educational change, is heavily influenced by national and international policy agendas, politics, social influences, and local dialogues and debates (Ball, 1981; Barton, 1999; Benjamin, 2002; Ainscow & Milles, 2008). In order to build inclusive communities, it is necessary to understand the contexts in which inclusive policy and practice are embedded, as well as the implications for developing inclusive schools (Tisdall & Ridell, 2006; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). The figure below represents different levels of influence upon inclusion in the Greek context:
International (specifically EU) policies, as well as global dialogues about inclusion, were found in this study – and in previous research – to have a strong impact on educational policy-making (Chakroun, 2010; Liasidou, 2013). These policies and dialogues have, in the twenty-first century, been increasingly shaped by the economic forces of globalization (Ifanti, 2007; Curcic et al., 2011). Leo and Burton (2006, p. 168), describing this phenomenon in the British context, note that “all levels of the educational system have been influenced to varying degrees by the effect of marketization and globalization in terms of governance, funding, purpose and function.” Indeed, while policies and directives at the international level purport to address the rights of students with SEN, promising equality of opportunity and inclusion, they often position education as a business organization, one with interests in measurement and achievement rather than the construction of inclusive communities (Ozga, 2000; Slee, 2007; Graham & Harwood, 2011). This results in an educational agenda that focuses on students’ academic performance and proficiency at the expense of social justice and equality. As noted by Curcic et al. (2011), this agenda often perpetuates marginalization and inequality for students with SEN.
This study found that international policy agendas influenced national policy in a unilateral, top-down manner. In other words, attempts at inclusive educational reform in Greece have not been initiated and encouraged by local or national politicians with awareness of local and national needs, but rather by pressure to align systems with international and EU agendas (Ifanti, 2007). Inclusion has long been viewed in Greece as a Western concept, pushed by the European Union in an effort to align social justice and inclusive educational services with labour market needs. This perception existed even before the current Greek financial crisis (Angelides, 2004; Philippou, 2005; OECD, 2011). While these external pressures influenced national policy, they failed to take into consideration the unique historical and socio-cultural features of the Greek education system and society. As a result, inclusive education policy remains narrowly focused on the medical nature of special needs, exacerbating challenges to the promotion of inclusive values and educational rights. Indeed, while Greek policies refer to inclusion and equality, they continue to focus on students' abilities, revealing deep misconceptions about inclusion and a lack of shared meaning and understanding (Mittler, 2000; Liasidou, 2011). This may partly explain why some inclusive initiatives, including the construction of an inclusive educational system, were vaguely articulated both in Greek policy texts and in the approaches schools take to policy implementation (Phtiaka, 2006; Liasidou, 2014), as further discussed in Part B of this chapter.

It is also important to note that, in Greece, powerful political groups have heavily influenced educational policy change. According to Zoniou-Sideri et al. (2006), however, these groups have acted as a buffer between the educational ministry and schools, providing no support to schools, enhancing no collaborative exchange between schools, resisting change and leaving no space for local authorities, community members, and school stakeholders to impact inclusive policy, preventing inclusive change (Zoniou-Sideri, 2000b). Indeed, while local actors maintain their role as policy mediators, they remain disconnected from the central educational authorities in terms of decision-making authority (Ainscow et al., 2012). Although Fulcher (1989) describes policy as a result of interaction between different social and political actors whose beliefs collide and thereby render policy, only certain actors in Greece are
included in the development of national policy frameworks. This finding is illustrated in the figure below:

**Figure 6. Greek education policy structure**

At the school level, each participating institution was found to interpret inclusive policy differently. Indeed, the construction of inclusive school communities has proven to be an incredibly complex process and constant interchange of ideas and dynamics; each case school experienced this construction not as a continuum of inclusion or exclusion, but as different levels within an inclusive discourse, constructing different types of inclusion.

School narratives, as well as those of individual school stakeholders, also sharply influenced the adoption or otherwise of inclusion (Tsakalou, Hamilton & Brown 2015). This supports the findings of Ainscow et al. (2005), who noted that inclusion is about attempts to embody particular views in particular contexts, acknowledging decisions about how to improve schools, embracing moral and political rationales, and accepting technical considerations.

Key framework strands emerged through the narratives of school stakeholders. The following figure illustrates these strands, including school stakeholders’ conceptualisations of inclusion, their decisions about school structures in relation to inclusion, and their understanding of relationships developed both inside and outside school boundaries. Acceptance of, and resistance to, inclusion were found to be dependent on these strands, as all were impacted by an interplay of diverse ideological
and practical concerns. This interplay between school stakeholders – including the tensions and agreements that played out between them – created space for the dissension and debate necessary to bring about inclusive change (Ball, 1981; Carrington & Robinson, 2006; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).

**Figure 7. Strands identified in the construction of inclusive communities**

Given that schools bear different influences, tensions and pressures, it is important to explore policy implementation in the context of local conditions, internal operations, and relationships between stakeholders. In each case school, as stated above, three different levels were found to impact the construction of inclusive communities (see Figure 8, below). I would put the figure here immediately after the statement *Provision* for students with SEN was at the core, influencing conceptualisations and decisions about the implementation of inclusive policy. Each school’s overall approach to inclusion was also found to be strongly influenced by the conceptualisations, understanding, vision and commitment of head teachers, largely due to their role as
key decision makers. Head teachers, as mediators/gatekeepers, as well as potential challengers, of policy were found to make the lion’s share of decisions regarding their school’s physical and learning structures. Teachers and parents constitute another component of each school. As implementers of inclusive policy and practice, they were found to play a significant role in long-term implementation or resistance to inclusion. Parents’ and teachers’ conceptualisations, understanding of and commitment to special education and inclusion were found to influence, and be influenced, by national policies and local politics, as well as head teachers’ conceptualisations, decisions about school structures, and relationships both inside and outside school boundaries (Vlachou-Balafouti, 2001; Praisner, 2003; Leo & Barton, 2006). In turn, teaching practices were often based on purposes and strategies developed or modelled by inclusive policy provision and the head teacher. It is important to note that these components cannot operate effectively in isolation or without affecting others. Indeed, the way they intersect and interact was found to have a significant impact on the construction of inclusive school communities, as supported by previous frameworks developed by Peters (2002), Ainscow (2005), Curcic et al. (2011) and Ainscow and Sandill (2010).

The following section will discuss the key elements of the framework developed in this study. It will first revisit the approaches taken by other researchers, as presented in Chapter 1, and will detail why an alternative model is necessary. The remainder will explore the concepts of surface, segregated, and deep inclusion.

7.2 Developing a framework identifying key components of inclusive communities

The framework proposed in this study utilises three overarching principles used by Peters (2000) in his US case study of two school reform movements examining the process of inclusive education, providing paradigms of good inclusive practice and re-evaluating changes in school organization, curriculum and strategies building on students’ strengths, staff and community. The first principle – a philosophical commitment to inclusion – is believed to form the foundation of school approaches to inclusivity; the second principle is that of the conceptualisation of diversity, which demands a shift from a focus on diverse students to diversity in action; the third
principle is collaboration and shared decision-making in order to build an inclusive school culture. In Peters’ study, teachers identified five specific criteria for effective inclusion, including 1) collaboration between school stakeholders; 2) ownership and leadership on behalf of teachers in curriculum adaptations and school improvements; 3) broad-based learning communities with parental involvement; 4) high expectations for academic excellence; and 5) a balance of focus on academic and social needs. However, the role of the head teacher as decision maker is neglected by Peters (see also Reihl, 2000; Kugelmass, 2006; Timor & Burton, 2006). Elements of power, voice and agency are also not addressed in depth in Peters’ study, despite Hazel and Allen’s (2013) contention that the process of developing an inclusive school community requires collaborative relationships and a framework for shared decision making. In the developed framework of the present study – discussed in greater detail below – the voice and perceived agency of head teachers, teachers and parents was found to deeply impact their commitment to inclusive change.

Other frameworks, including those developed by Booth (2000), and Mamas (2012), advocate values-based planning to develop an inclusive school’s vision, purpose and structures. This approach requires a shared understanding and commitment to inclusive values on behalf of teachers, parents and community members (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). This aspect is also suggested by the frameworks of Dyson et al. (2004), Hazel & Allan (2013), and Curcic et al. (2009), as well as the framework developed in this study. Carrington and Robinson (2006), in their Australian study exploring the complexity of diverse school communities, offer a framework for the development of a more inclusive school community to address traditional assumptions of learning and inequality. Their framework embraces four guiding principles to support the development of an inclusive community of parents, teachers, school leaders and students: 1) develop a learning community incorporating a ‘critical friend’; 2) value and collaborate with parents and the broader community; 3) engage with students in school development and review; and 4) support teachers’ critical engagement with inclusive practices and ideals (p. 326). Moreover, according to the study’s authors, inclusive school communities should respect all members, providing an environment of trust. Their effectiveness depends on the nature of decisions of head teachers about school structures, their willingness to embrace teachers’ perceptions, and the support
they provide teachers to adjust their practices to the needs of a diverse student population (Clough & Corbett, 2000; Brandon, 2011). In this study, however, collaboration was less evident. While head teachers influenced – to an extent – teachers’ perceptions and practices, head teachers were found to be less open to the influences of teachers and parents, influencing the nature of their conceptualisations, decisions and relationships with other school members.

The concept of relationships and collaboration, both within and between school members, schools, authorities and communities, is stressed as a key component of inclusive education within multiple frameworks, highlighting its significance (Busher, 2005; Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Miles & Ainscow, 2011; Ainscow et al., 2012; Hazel & Allan, 2013). In addition, Ainscow (2012) argues that a shared understanding of the purpose of inclusive education, as well as the consistent use of language, is significant if Education for All strategies are to become more inclusive. According to a series of studies conducted by the author and his colleagues (Ainscow et al., 2007; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010), this does not require the introduction of new techniques, but rather involves collaboration within and between schools, collaboration between schools and communities, networking across contexts and the collection and use of contextually relevant evidence. These strategies should be underpinned by a new way of thinking, away from explanations of educational failure that focus on the characteristics of individual students and their families, towards the barrier and challenges to participation and learning experienced by students in different educational systems (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). In these schools, all stakeholders, including teachers and special teachers, are committed to collaborative planning, working and shared responsibility for all students. The finding of Clark et al., (1999) is similar but also more nuanced, revealing the complex and sometimes problematic nature of the relations developed in schools (Ainscow et al., 2012).

An overall framework for the practice of change within schools is provided by Booth and Ainscow (2002). In their Index of Inclusion, they have developed a number of indicators to support the inclusive development of schools. This index offers schools a supportive process of self-review and development, which draws on the knowledge and views of staff, students, parents and community members about challenges to
learning and participation within existing cultures, policies and practices, in order to identify priorities for change. The indicators cover three dimensions: 1) creating inclusive cultures (building community, establishing inclusive values); 2) producing inclusive policies (developing the school for all, organizing support for diversity); and 3) evolving inclusive practice (orchestrating learning, mobilizing resources) (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 9). Through these indicators, Booth and Ainscow have set out processes for developing inclusive communities while also recognizing the challenges inherent in the existing complexities of each institution. In connecting inclusion with policy and practice, the Index reinforces those who use it to construct their own view of inclusion, related to their experiences and values, as they work out what policies and practices they wish to promote or reject (Ainscow, 2008).

The concept of relations as a key component for inclusive education is stressed within different frameworks (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004; Hazel & Allan, 2013) highlighting its significance. In particular, Kugelmass (2006) revealed that the collaborative nature of inclusive schools has implications for both leadership and decision-making. Hence, leadership for inclusion should be distributed, reinforcing a deep sense of community between school members participating in decision making and problem solving approaches (Dyson & Millward, 2000; Reihl, 2000; Avissar et al., 2003; Praisner, 2003). In their study, Florian and Rouse, (2001) identify a number of attributes of effective inclusive schools, as well as barriers undermining inclusive practice. In addition, in a more recent study, Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012) argue that effective inclusive schools are problem-solving organizations with shared purposes that emphasized learning for all students through the development of inclusive practice (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). In these schools, all stakeholders, including teachers and special teachers, are committed to collaborative planning, working and shared responsibility for both mainstream and Students with SEN.

Taking into consideration these frameworks (see also Chapter 1), the key themes arising from these studies were used as sensitising concepts when approaching the analysis of data in this study. However, I felt that they did not fully capture the struggle over inclusion within Greek secondary schools. As a result, informed by these previous studies, I determined it was necessary to develop an alternative framework using the data from these case studies to capture the complex nature of inclusion in these three
educational communities. Although previous studies addressed the process of identifying the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of inclusion in schools characterized as inclusive – often through organizational arrangements – the present framework attempts to illustrate the complexity of this process and the identification of different types of what may be termed ‘inclusion’ in the Greek context. As inclusive education is perceived, in this study, as socially constructed, and considering all the aspects, components and preconceptions addressed in previous research, constructing inclusion in schools was found to be an incredibly challenging process, especially in a centralised educational system. Indeed, in all the three case schools, both inclusive and exclusive components were found to be present. While these components were not solely adequate to construct an inclusive community, they were each school’s present response to inclusive policy and practice. Thus, three different types of inclusion — surface, segregated and deep — were identified.

*Surface inclusion* is characterized by an absence of provision for students with SEN in mainstream settings, for example inclusion is acknowledged as policy but any engagement with the concept is superficial with no intention of engagement. It involves negative conceptualisations of inclusion, often based on a narrow, one-dimensional understanding of special needs. This type of inclusion is also characterized by a lack of shared commitment to inclusive values on behalf of school stakeholders, and frequently involves the systematic exclusion of students based mainly on academic expectations. Dysfunctional relationships between school members, and between school members and community members, are prevalent. There tends to be limited collaboration in responsibility, decision-making and problem-solving processes, as well as a lack of voice and agency for individuals and groups. In policy documents adopting a surface approach to inclusion, special and inclusive education are seen as both practically and discursively separate from mainstream education. In such a school, inclusion is perceived as irrelevant or unfeasible. Surface inclusion is illustrated in the figure below:
In other words, inclusion is part of the story of schooling in a surface environment, but only insofar as it is acknowledged as policy but rejected for pupil involvement. Indeed, the relationships and structures appear to be the antithesis of the key elements proposed for effective inclusion. The lack of agency for any of the individuals involved, as well as the lack of discussion and collaboration reinforces, that there are few if any pathways available for change to occur.

*Segregated inclusion* is characterized by segregated provision and limited physical accommodation for students with SEN in mainstream settings. It involves conflicting and conflicted conceptualisations of inclusion, and – like surface inclusion – is based upon a narrow, one-dimensional understanding of special needs. In this approach, behavioural problems and poor academic achievement are frequently conflated with special needs, and inclusion is often perceived as a means of punishment or remedial support. School stakeholders adopting a segregated approach often adopt a narrow *consensus* on inclusion rather than a shared understanding of inclusive values and
purposes. Decisions about structures primarily address physical relocation and minor pedagogic adaptations, largely through the introduction of integration units. While this approach involves some collaboration between school staff, few opportunities are extended to parents in decision-making and problem-solving processes. Individual initiatives for agency exist, but are not prevalent. Segregated inclusion is illustrated in the figure below:

![Figure 9. Segregated inclusion in schools](image)

*Deep inclusion* is characterized by full academic and social provision for students with SEN in mainstream settings. It involves positive perceptions of inclusion, shared understanding and commitment to inclusive values – including diversity, equality, and social justice – and a strong belief that inclusion is a universal right. In this approach, both mainstream and Students with SEN are encouraged to engage inside and outside the school, and academic initiatives are balanced with social purposes. Collaborative activities are common, functional relationships between school stakeholders are
prevalent, and all participate equally in decision-making and problem-solving processes. A dynamic voice and strong agency for change, both within and beyond the school community, are exhibited by school members. Deep inclusion is illustrated in the figure below:

![Diagram of deep inclusion in schools]

**Figure 10. Deep inclusion in schools**

Figure 10 draws on work by Iano (2000), Peters (2000), Dyson et al., (2004), Kugelmass (2006), Ainscow and Sandill (2010), Booth and Ainscow (2011), Razer et al., (2013), reflecting a depth of understanding and engagement with inclusion that sees this process as enhancing all aspects of school processes and relationships. The following table illustrates how conceptualisations about inclusion, decisions about structures, and relationships manifested themselves in surface, segregated and deep approaches to inclusion within this framework.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headings/Themes</th>
<th>Surface Inclusion</th>
<th>Segregated Inclusion</th>
<th>Deep Inclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Conceptualisations of inclusion | • Negative/neutral perceptions  
• Narrow conceptualisation within school boundaries  
• Irrelevant/unfeasible for school  
• Criteria of eligibility and sacrifice of the minority with needs to the majority of academically able  
• Lack of shared understanding and commitment | • Negative/neutral perceptions  
• Tensions/disconnections between school stakeholders  
• Questions about feasibility  
• Criteria of eligibility and sacrifice of the minority with needs to the majority of academically able  
• Limited shared understanding  
• Limited commitment | • Positive perceptions  
• Broad and full vision of inclusion out of school both academically and socially  
• Respect for diversity and differentiation, inclusion as universal right, rejection of exclusion/marginalization  
• Commitment to inclusive values |
| Decisions about structures (physical/learning) | • Physical relocation through physical separation: systematic exclusion  
• Strict academic purposes: no provision for equal learning opportunities  
• No or low expectations  
• Rhetoric of inclusion with no practical implementation or no commitment to future academic excellence  
• Impermeable structural challenges  
• Lack of inclusive classroom practices  
• Lack of evaluation of structures/practices | • Segregated inclusive strategies/practices: physical relocation and limited academic adaptations: misconceptions about the role of integration units  
• Limited expectations  
• Academic purposes but spaces for equal learning opportunities  
• Strategies to integration: inclusion implemented through partial withdrawal  
• Merely permeable structural challenges  
• Inclusive practice solid in integration units  
• Inclusive practice within/out-with special class  
• Evaluation of structures/practices | • Encouraging systematic social inclusion within/out-with school but still a segregated school settings  
• Prioritization of social purposes; equal learning opportunities  
• High expectations  
• Strategies to inclusion: commitment to future social and academic excellence: child-centered practices  
• Permeable structural challenges  
• Inclusive practices within/out-with special class  
• Evaluation of structures/practices |


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power, Voice &amp; Agency</th>
<th>Dysfunctional relationships between stakeholders</th>
<th>Functional relationships within one school group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of collaboration</td>
<td>Shared responsibility by one group of school members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of responsibility: side-lined role of school members</td>
<td>Head teachers voice and power to LEAs, social community and school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited collaborative problem solving</td>
<td>Voice to parents but still limited to teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of autonomy and flexibility; inclusion viewed as a limited/irrelevant part to stakeholders' roles</td>
<td>Parental agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of voice and agency for individuals and groups, particularly parents and teachers</td>
<td>Individual initiatives for agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of agency for all school members</td>
<td>Functional relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Active parental engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shared responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Autonomy and flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School boundaries viewed as permeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Value and empowerment between school members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Distributive leadership; shared decision-making/problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dynamic voice of all school members to demand inclusive rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong agency for change exhibited by all school members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7. Schools' constructions or challenges to inclusion**

Within my case schools, evidence of all three kinds of inclusive practice, processes and relationships existed; indeed, all schools shared complex and at times contradictory profiles of inclusion. For example, Acropolis represented segregated provision but was nonetheless ahead of local mainstream schools in its efforts to include SEN children within the education system. Mrs. Pavlou, the head teacher, was a powerful advocate for inclusivity within this segregated setting, but lacked support for distributed leadership and collaborative decision-making. Understanding the nature of these contexts – and the diverse interconnections and disconnects within them – provides what Ainscow (2006) suggests is fundamental to taking steps forward on an inclusive pathway.
Part B discusses the strands and components presented in this table in greater depth. I first explore conceptualisations of inclusion, and how these differ in *surface*, *segregated* and *deep* approaches. I then do the same with both decisions on structures and relationships within and beyond schools.

**PART B – Elements in the construction of inclusive school communities**

This part will discuss and analyse the responses of each case school to the framework strands articulated in Part A, revealing specific components of different types of inclusion. As this study aims to explore the construction of inclusive school communities in Greece, these components will be discussed in depth in an effort to better clarify the different approaches the Greek schools in this study took to inclusion.

**7.3 Conceptualisations of inclusion**

The first strand in the construction of inclusive communities, *conceptualisations of inclusion*, was applied on two different levels (head teachers and teachers/parents) in each school. This sub-section explores the ways in which these conceptualisations were adopted and expressed in each case school.

The findings of this study suggest that conceptualisations about inclusion are influenced by a number of different sources, including international dialogues and discourse, national inclusive policy and politics, local community debates, and a variety of ideological and practical concerns within schools (Frost, 2008). As each school adopted a different legal approach to inclusion, it was not surprising that conceptualisations of key school stakeholders were also found to differ. These differences were studied in relation to different schools, as well as the narratives of school members within and across cases. The following table illustrates how conceptualisations of inclusion may appear in circumstances of surface, segregated and deep inclusion:
In particular, the findings suggest that while the majority of participants were in favour of inclusion on a theoretical level, most held negative or neutral perceptions of inclusive education in practice. All head teachers agreed that inclusive policy had a positive rhetorical influence on education; however, their perceptions were more influenced by practical concerns such as feasibility. This was one of the only points on which they agreed. Indeed, significant differences in conceptualisations were detected between the head teachers of the two mainstream schools – *Parthenon* and *Caryatids* – and those of the head teacher at *Acropolis*. Mr. Petrou (*Parthenon*) and Mr. Kostis (*Caryatids*) adopted a narrow vision and understanding of inclusion, often aligning the concept with integration (*segregated*). For Mr. Petrou (*Parthenon*), inclusion was synonymous with remedial support, or viewed as a means of punishment for low-achievers (*surface*). For Mr. Kostis (*Caryatids*), inclusion was perceived as totally unfeasible in the Greek school

Table 8. *Conceptualisations of inclusion within schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptualisations of inclusion</th>
<th>Surface Inclusion</th>
<th>Segregated Inclusion</th>
<th>Deep Inclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Negative/neutral perceptions</td>
<td>• Negative/neutral perceptions</td>
<td>• Positive perceptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Narrow conceptualisations within school boundaries</td>
<td>• Tensions/disconnections between school stakeholders</td>
<td>• Broad and full vision of inclusion, both academically and socially</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Irrelevant/unfeasible for school</td>
<td>• Questions about feasibility</td>
<td>• Respect for diversity and differentiation; inclusion as universal right; rejection of exclusion/marginalization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of shared understanding and commitment</td>
<td>• Limited shared understanding</td>
<td>• Commitment to inclusive values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

262
reality (surface). They both viewed disability as a personal tragedy, arguing that students with SEN are not eligible or suited for education in inclusive settings, a belief strongly underpinned by a medical approach to SEN (surface). Hence, the understanding of inclusion was underpinned by dominant discourses and views of disability, reinforced through current policies (Vlachou, 2006). These perceptions of inclusion were contradictory to the values of inclusion that welcome and celebrate difference, perceiving inclusion as a resource and not a problem (Slee, 2007). In addition, they supported the existence of specific criteria of eligibility, suggesting students should 'earn' inclusion. This is at odds with the definition of inclusion which places equity and quality within the social justice framework (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Ball, 2010). The mainstream head teachers in this study therefore appeared to largely define inclusion in terms of whether a student needs curriculum modifications (segregated), rather than the broader idea that inclusion extended to social relationships, membership in a community, and a sense of belonging on behalf of all students (Azzopardi, 2011). This narrow conceptualisation of inclusion not only simplifies its meaning, but also reduces inclusion to a form of punishment or assimilation, as reflected in Slee’s (1997, p. 407) argument that such attitudes “reduce inclusive education to the functionalist endeavour of assimilation”.

Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) was found to adopt a very different approach to inclusion, however. She expressed a strong commitment to inclusive values, and a broad vision of inclusion both inside and outside her school’s boundaries (deep). Unlike her mainstream counterparts, Mrs. Pavlou viewed disability as a socially constructed phenomenon, arguing that Students with SEN should not be placed on the margins of either school or society. She was also the only head teacher to support the existence of an ongoing and dynamic telling and retelling of the notion of inclusion, with a deep commitment to inclusive values, rejecting the categorization and labelling of students in an attempt to minimize the deficit-based public narrative about her school (deep) but in a segregated environment within the system. This approach is reflected in Sebba and Ainscow’s (1996, p. 9) perception of inclusion as
The process by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering its curricular organization and provision. Through this process, the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend and, in doing so, reduces the need to exclude pupils.

The majority of teachers and parents in all three case schools adopted the attitude(s) of their respective head teachers, perceiving inclusion as merely physical relocation and additional academic practice out of the mainstream class (Padeliadou & Lampropoulou, 1997; Florian & Black-Hawkings, 2011). Teachers and parents at Caryatids interpreted inclusion as an educational innovation underpinned by humanistic values, but also viewed it as unfeasible due to a lack of financial and material resources. Acropolis teachers, on the other hand, shared neutral perceptions of inclusion, still questioning both its feasibility and eligibility criteria (segregated). Parthenon teachers accommodated the addition of integration units into their definitional boundaries of being an inclusive school, but didn’t make many other significant conceptual alterations (surface). Thus, even in the same school, different perceptions and levels of commitment to inclusive values existed, indicating the presence of both deep and segregated inclusion. The same findings were revealed by Nusbaum (2013), who found that mainstream teachers in an elementary school with a special class for students with disabilities, attached variable and elastic meanings to the concept of inclusion, lacking awareness that segregating students in this way legitimizes exclusion. These findings appear to reinforce the fragmentation of inclusion given different viewpoints, and the tendency then towards exclusionary practices. Indeed, according to Blair (2002) and Angelides et al. (2012), inclusive philosophy must be adopted by all school actors for inclusive change to occur, as exclusion often results when restricted perceptions are present (Ainscow, 2005).

Teachers and parents also stressed the challenge of teaching students with different educational and cognitive levels in the same mainstream class, again mirroring the perceptions of Mr. Petrou and Mr. Kostis. In particular, special teachers at Parthenon reported that their mainstream colleagues held narrow understandings of integration units, perceiving them as either punishment or a ‘quick fix’ for underachievement (surface). This finding supports that of Munn and Lloyd (2005), who found that most teachers have
a narrow understanding and view of students with difficulties, despite the great need these students have for others to understand their individual circumstances. In a recent study conducted by Coutsocostas & Alborz (2010) in a northern region of Greece, 47.5% of 600 secondary teachers rejected the practice of full inclusion, while 79.5% expressed doubts about the feasibility and development of inclusive practices for all students (Zoniou-Sideri & Vlachou, 2006; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2006). This may be due to limited pre-service and in-service training in special education for mainstream teachers in Greece. Indeed, Koutrouba et al. (2008) found that a lack of knowledge of special needs resulted in teachers’ reluctance to accept inclusion, increased negative feelings, and produced more restricted conceptualisations. Angelides and Ainscow (2000), however, suggests that it is not about specialised teaching but rather effective teaching for individual needs, as a lack of training is often seen as a barrier but perhaps represents an unnecessary fear. According to Symeonidou and Phtiaka (2014), in their recent study with Greek-Cypriot teachers exploring their understanding of inclusion, found that teachers’ initial education and training does not guarantee a shared understanding of inclusive education, as secondary teachers were particularly found to be unfamiliar with the concept of differentiation. This negativity likely derives from both a lack of training, and a failure to include teachers in the change process, limiting their ability to take ownership of inclusive reform. For example, stakeholders at the three schools surveyed in this study were found to have different initial education and training, which ultimately was reflected in their conceptualisations, purposes and teaching practices. Indeed, one group of teacher participants had never been exposed to inclusive educational philosophy, while others never secured a basic understanding of it despite attending a course in special or inclusive education. It is important to note that none of the head teacher and teacher participants in the present study had taken part in an in-service training programme in inclusive education, as they depend on personal initiative rather than being mandatory (Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2014).

In both Parthenon and Caryatids, teachers’ and parents’ conceptualisations about inclusion were found to strongly mirror those of Mr. Petrou and Mr. Kostis, influencing
the criteria they developed for eligibility in an integration unit (Padeliadou & Lampropoulou, 1997; Nusbaum, 2013). Indeed, parents at the two mainstream schools perceived inclusion as a ‘quick fix’ for students’ shortcomings, and believed these should be addressed in a segregated setting within the school before returning to the mainstream class (segregated). Hence, despite an academic movement to re-define special education as a social rather than medical phenomenon, the traditional approach remains the principal resource by which disability is professionally constructed in mainstream settings (Stamou & Padeliadou, 2009). In other words,

[S]pecial education thinking and deficit-oriented imperatives are still rife, albeit in more subtle and opaque ways, thereby impeding the attempts towards the realization of an inclusive discourse predicated on a human rights approach to disability and special educational needs. (Liasidou, 2011, p. 892)

Acropolis teachers also expressed a narrow, aspirational vision of inclusivity rather than demonstrating an attainable understanding of inclusion. Both teachers’ and parents’ responses suggested they did not share the same broad vision and understanding of inclusion as Mrs. Pavlou, indicating that she had not shared her values and commitment effectively within the school community. These findings are important, as previous studies found that a shared understanding and commitment to inclusion was a prerequisite for the construction of an inclusive school community (Carrington & Robinson, 2007; Rouse & Florian, 2010) and the head teacher as a key driver in encouraging a shared understanding. However, Ainscow (2005) argues that for this kind of transformation of understanding there need to be levers or interruptions used which help to disrupt current thinking in a way which can challenge deeply felt beliefs.

This understanding and commitment, along with a broad vision of inclusion reflecting the expansion of educational and social opportunities for all students (Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2010), was not supported by the majority of head teachers, teachers and parents in this study (D’Alonzo & Ledon, 1992; Stoiber et al., 1998). This finding also reflects the issue of understanding and defining inclusion, which arises from the ambiguities in inclusive policy, particularly whether inclusion refers to all or most students. Further, the
acceptance of silence, by *Parthenon* teachers and parents, on the implementation of education in segregated classrooms meant that normalising discourses, which affirmed particular students, became the dominant way of understanding students' disability and diversity by a number of teachers in the study (Nusbaum, 2013). Indeed, despite a socio-ethical discourse underpinning the discussion of inclusion in Greece, this study revealed that participants were firmly enculturated in a model of integration (*segregated*), particularly with regard to categorizations of SEN and students' placement. This could be partially explained by the vague articulation of inclusion in policy documents, while Ainscow's (2005) argument about the clarity of the definition tracking it back to the central national policy texts highlights the need for common language, understanding and consequently a common purpose when trying to bring about this kind of change. There was a strong feeling among all participants in the three case schools that, while they supported the rhetoric of inclusion, this value could not be applied to students with severe and profound needs (Coutsokostas & Alborz, 2010). This suggests a narrow understanding of inclusion and a lack of shared commitment to inclusive values on behalf of the participants.

**7.4 Decisions about structures**

This section explores how decisions about school structures – both physical and learning – impact the construction of an inclusive school community. It will discuss three important issues – school purposes, school strategies, and classroom practices – separately and in depth.

As structures offer a formal framework in which organisational practices take place (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Gray, 2009), I began analysing this topic by examining the influence of national and local policies on decisions about structures within schools. It is important to highlight, however, that very few guidelines and structures for secondary schools exist in either national or local education policy; as a result, decisions about inclusive structures – both learning arrangements and physical accommodations – were based mainly on the conceptualisations of head teachers. They were also influenced by
their commitment to inclusive values, political, and technical considerations, and the context unique to each school. Teachers and parents, in turn, served as the implementers of these decisions, albeit through the lens of their own conceptualisations. The table below illustrates how decisions about school structures manifested themselves in surface, segregated and deep inclusion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decisions about structures (physical/learning)</th>
<th>Surface Inclusion</th>
<th>Segregated Inclusion</th>
<th>Deep Inclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o School purposes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Strategies for access and provision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o Practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student relocation through physical separation: systematic exclusion</td>
<td>Segregated inclusive strategies/practices, physical relocation and limited academic adaptations, misconceptions about the role of integration units</td>
<td>Encouraging systematic social inclusion within/out-with school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strict academic purposes: no provision for equal learning opportunities</td>
<td>Limited expectations</td>
<td>Prioritization of social purposes; equal learning opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No or low expectations</td>
<td>Academic purposes but spaces for equal learning opportunities</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rhetoric of inclusion with no practical implementation/no commitment to future academic excellence</td>
<td>Strategies for integration: inclusion implemented through partial withdrawal</td>
<td>Strategies for inclusion: commitment to future social and academic excellence; child-centred practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impermeable structural challenges</td>
<td>Academic purposes but spaces for equal learning opportunities</td>
<td>Permeable structural challenges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of inclusive classroom practices</td>
<td>Limited opportunity to address structural challenges</td>
<td>Inclusive classroom practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of evaluation of structures and practices</td>
<td>Inclusive practice solid in integration units</td>
<td>Evaluation of structures and practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Structures and the implementation of or challenges to inclusion
School purposes

As previously noted, discussions about school purposes at the international policy level prioritize students' academic performance and proficiency over the moral, social and ethical purposes of education (Curcic et al., 2011). As the national policy was found to be heavily influenced by international and European policy discourse, national policy documents were also found to emphasize academic excellence. As a result, mainstream schools like Parthenon and Caryatids were oriented more toward academic attainment than special needs. Indeed, Caryatids' head teacher, Mr. Kostis, reportedly rejected students who did not "fit in [his] school" in terms of academic outcomes (surface). Both Mr. Petrou (Parthenon) and Mr. Kostis (Caryatids) viewed students with SEN as constraints upon curriculum delivery, arguing that it was better to "sacrifice" one special needs student in favour of the rest of the class (surface). These viewpoints resulted in the exclusion of those students unable to merge with the academically 'able' in their school.

On the other hand, Acropolis appeared ambivalent, trying to address both academic and social purposes without emphasizing excellence. Indeed, while subjective indicators at Parthenon and Caryatids revealed a lack of progress on behalf of students with SEN, at Acropolis students followed a more inclusive curriculum adapted to their needs. Teachers at Acropolis also adopted more flexible assessment criteria. However, Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) was also found to exclude students who did not "fit in [the school] community", including those with severe socio-emotional difficulties (segregated). The findings from all three case schools should be treated with some caution, however, as the data was focused on a generalized notion of SEN rather than specific students.

The evidence regarding the social impact of inclusion was not clear. While all head teachers acknowledged the potentially positive social outcomes of inclusion for students with SEN (Praisner, 2003), they did not prioritize social inclusion in the school's agenda - except for Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis). The mainstream head teachers were more focused on academic achievement than social development, which previous research suggests is incompatible with the construction of an inclusive school community. Indeed, Avissar et
al. (2003), exploring head teachers' perceptions, argue that the social outcomes of inclusion should take precedence over academic outcomes for Students with SEN. Ainscow (2007) maintains that academic and social purposes should be intertwined, as the term social inclusion is linked with improving attendance and reducing the rate of exclusion from schools. In other words, successful social inclusion – based on those factors – underpins successful academic inclusion (Koutrouba et al., 2008).

Ideally, schools should attempt to redress this imbalance by supporting social initiatives both within and out-with schools, without marginalizing the academic outcomes of education (Kalambouka et al., 2007; Rouse & Florian, 2010). This was the approach taken by Mrs. Pavlou at Acropolis. Her decisions about the school's purpose mainly focused on social inclusion, social cohesion, and building a sense of community both within and outside the school. Students at Acropolis did not participate in national examinations, as their school performance was considered adequate for the acquisition of a professional certification in one of the technical subject avenues offered. However, Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) ultimately failed to achieve this ideal balance, as no specific strategies for the academic inclusion of Students with SEN were observed (segregated).

Additionally, all three teachers touched on the issue of citizenship as a purpose of schooling. This is in congruence with scholars, who understand schooling as students' interaction with wider society, as through schooling they prepare for life in that society (Curcic et al., 2011). However, despite these aspirations, no initiatives were developed in any case institution to foster better connections between schools and Greek society.

Mainstream teachers and parents appeared to largely agree with the perceptions of head teachers regarding school purposes. Teachers at Parthenon and Caryatids were found to hold different expectations for students with and without SEN, placing greater emphasis on academic achievement for mainstream students. Indeed, they reported having limited or no expectations for students with SEN, excluding these pupils from their classrooms (surface). Those at Parthenon expressed reluctance to change their attitudes about academic purposes, ignoring their shared responsibility with special teachers to provide
adequate academic and social support to all students (Kalyva et al., 2007). Special teachers, although charged with imparting skills, critical thinking, and the development of social values, were observed to focus in practice on remedial support (segregated). This may be partially attributed to the sharpened market orientation of the educational system and increasing competition between students, even in integration units. Hence, the picture emerged from these findings regarding school purposes of learning expectations for students with SEN and the curriculum itself that fell short of harmonizing education with both economic development and social justice (Ifanti, 1995). At Acropolis, both teachers and parents were found to prioritize academic purposes, but also to offer limited space for equal opportunity learning (segregated). This occurred despite Mrs. Pavlou’s efforts to prioritize social school purposes and equal learning opportunities for all.

Given the strictly academic nature of the Greek curriculum and examination system, parents in all three case schools were found to prefer more segregated provision for their children. This preference was based on a widespread belief that their children could perform better academically in a less competitive setting, as the curriculum workload in special schools was limited in comparison to mainstream education. This belief persisted despite an acknowledgment on their behalf that social inclusion was better achieved within inclusive classrooms. These findings contrast with those of Ferrante (2012), who found in his Maltese mixed case study exploring a whole school approach to inclusion based on the social model of disability, that 95% of parents in an inclusive school – including those of students with and without SEN – prioritized “learning skills for life” as the most important school purpose.

School stakeholders’ perceptions indicated that, while inclusion may not be rejected, it is certainly not prioritized highly as a school purpose. This finding is confirmed by the limited inclusive modifications offered in schools. Indeed, Students with SEN were not offered any structures specifically made or adapted for them at Caryatids, while at Parthenon, only poorly designed integration units were offered. Neither mainstream nor Students with SEN benefitted from this structure, as it often resulted in confusion, exclusion and marginalization.
School strategies

Each participating school was found to differ in the ways they strategically integrated Students with SEN and responded to the wide range of challenges these students posed in terms of curriculum implementation. Decisions regarding strategic approaches to inclusion were found to be influenced in large part by inclusive policy and the participants' conceptualisations.

While Mr. Petrou (Parthenon) at times practised a broad form of inclusion in which all students with SEN were permitted entry and accommodated in integration units (deep), he also forced segregation upon those who disrupted what was perceived as the norm. This suggested adherence to a very traditional model of educational needs and provision (surface), while at the same time presenting a segregated acceptance of inclusion limited to access to an institutional environment. Mr. Petrou (Parthenon) strictly adhered to the legal definition of inclusion proposed in policy documents, providing physical housing for Students with SEN with no curriculum modifications. In addition, he conflated academically weak and special needs students, placing the former group in integration units as a means of punishment for poor academic achievement. Very few meaningful academic opportunities – and even fewer opportunities for social interaction – were offered to students with SEN (segregated). These strategies failed to develop an inclusive community; on the contrary, they maintained and exacerbated exclusion and marginalization (McDonnell et al., 2007; Thurlow et al., 2008).

Contrary to the perceived ‘inclusive’ strategies adopted by Mr. Petrou (Parthenon), Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) welcomed new curriculum initiatives designed to improve learning outcomes for her students, and implemented her own initiatives for community involvement and awareness (deep). While these strategies were generally welcomed by other special and mainstream schools, they were not adopted by mainstream colleagues like Mr. Petrou (Parthenon) or Mr. Kostis (Caryatids). Her efforts, however, were found to be focused almost exclusively on social inclusion without offering practical academic initiatives, likely due to the segregated nature of the school (segregated). Ainscow (1995)
identifies this type of approach as a form of integration rather than inclusion; however, it is characterised here as inclusion because it is perceived as inclusive within this context.

*Caryatids* mainstream school differed from both *Parthenon* and *Acropolis*, failing to offer integration units or any inclusive programs or services (*surface*). This design was intentional, as Mr. Kostis purposely separated himself from any and all engagement with inclusion. In justifying his lack of engagement, he referenced both moral and practical considerations. He particularly noted a lack of trust in the educational authorities, stressing that their policy decisions were out of touch with the reality of Greek classrooms (Vaughn et al., 1996):

[They are] just papers. Nothing is implemented in practice.

Mr. Kostis (*Caryatids*) also expressed concern regarding teachers’ negative perceptions of inclusion, in addition to their lack of knowledge, training, and resources. He indicated that the emphasis at *Caryatids* was on catering for high-achievers, rather than both vulnerable populations and students with SEN (*surface*). Similar to Mr. Petrou (*Parthenon*), Mr. Kostis adhered to the minimal guidelines and requirements of the Ministry of Education, failing to bring change to the exclusionary and discriminatory structure of his school.

*As a result of these decisions, the majority of Students with SEN at Parthenon and Caryatids were provided with only marginal or non-existent support. Indeed, I observed a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and a lack of inclusive pedagogy (*surface*). Only Mrs. Pavlou (*Acropolis*), acting beyond the boundaries of her traditional role, initiated and developed an in-school assessment system for teachers, evaluating inclusive practices in her school (*deep*). Despite this, all three head teachers supported the continuation of special schools as a means of educating Students with SEN considered ‘unfit’ for mainstream institutions. This finding is similar to the research of Croll and Moses (2000), who found – in their study of forty-eight head teachers in the UK – that most participants supported the continuing role of special schools for children with severe needs.*
This study found that the placement of Students with SEN often relates more to policies and politics than it does disability (Biklen & Duchan, 1994; Thorton & McEntee, 1995). Considering this finding, political implications were reflected in the purposes of inclusive strategies, found also to be political issues where the personal and the political interwove (Denzin, 1992). In other words, the decisions made by head teachers about physical structures and learning strategies prioritized educational policy and political discourse instead of students' needs (Allan, 2003). To date, these strategies have amounted to little more than physical integration; with very few exceptions, structures have not been tailored to the social or academic needs of Students with SEN. At Parthenon and Caryatids, this has resulted in both exclusion and marginalization. At Acropolis, efforts were clearly made to fill gaps in policy implementation and to build relationships with the community (deep). Despite the strong will and best interests of the head teacher, however, Students with SEN at Acropolis remained institutionally separated from their mainstream peers (segregated).

Teaching practices

Viewed from a constructionist perspective, teaching practice is a social practice, constructed by the meaning educators assign to it within specific contexts. In the present study, decisions about teaching practices were interwoven with classroom priorities, school purposes and stakeholders’ conceptualisations of inclusion (Mitchell, 2005; Rouse 2008; Hart et al., 2009).

Indeed, teachers’ conceptualisations of inclusion were found to have a strong influence on their teaching practice. Teachers at Parthenon and Caryatids were observed to prioritize curriculum delivery, following traditional processes of teaching and learning, excluding – consciously or unconsciously – students who were not able to participate (surface). This approach revealed the dominant ideology of (dis)ability. Teachers at the mainstream schools surveyed were not observed to modify the curriculum to different learning styles, demonstrating a failure to appreciate and respond to diversity in their classrooms, probably due to their lack of training and previous experience with Students.
with SEN. Ballard (2003) argues that teacher education, training and experience should support teachers to conceptualise inclusive education – and make decisions about classroom practices – as a matter of social justice. This finding is troubling, as previous research suggests that, in order for classroom practices to be inclusive, teachers must respond to individual differences with a commitment to equality and learning for all (Dereka, 2001; Georgiadis & Zisimos, 2012; Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Razer et al, 2013).

Observations at Parthenon and Caryatids revealed that teaching practices emphasized the outcome of learning and not the learning process. While stakeholders at both institutions acknowledged the diversity of needs of Students with SEN, they failed to identify the diversity of learning styles. Indeed, there were no pedagogic alterations or curriculum modifications, even in integration units, and no diversified teaching for different learning styles. In Parthenon classrooms, inclusive and exclusive practices were observed to co-exist in the same setting with the same students or group of students. This reality was underpinned by the multiple meanings and conceptualisations assigned to the term 'inclusive education', as – generally speaking – the head teacher and teachers only poorly understood special needs. With little consensus on these concepts, students with SEN in Parthenon’s mainstream classrooms remained excluded, as teaching practices focused on providing "education for the most able with additional experiences for some" (Florian & Spratt, 2013, p. 121).

Indeed, through observations at Parthenon and Caryatids, mainstream teachers were found to emphasise curriculum delivery and academic excellence for students without SEN, excluding those with SEN from teaching and learning practice and failing to develop opportunities for interaction and collaboration (Florian & Rouse, 2014). Students with special needs remained largely unsupported, as they were required to complete assignments just as quickly as their mainstream peers without flexibility or additional assistance (surface). Under these circumstances, individualized support gave way to standardization both in mainstream classrooms and integration units (Graham & Harwood, 2011). Interestingly, some of the teachers admitted their exclusionary practices.
suggesting they were not allowed to alter their teaching practices due to the structure of the national system and curriculum (in which lecturing is considered the core instructional approach). They also justified their practices by referencing the limited time in class for more individualized approaches.

In spite of these justifications, mainstream teachers appeared to believe that the academic and social benefits of inclusion would be better achieved through more individualised approaches. At Parthenon, this belief was underpinned by misperceptions and misunderstandings about the purpose of integration units, as well as the lack of shared responsibility teachers felt for the education of students with SEN (discussed in further detail in the following section). This is in contrast to the findings of Spratt & Florian (2014), who found that teachers cited a lack of knowledge and professional development for any misconceptions, rather than actual responsibility.

Teachers at Parthenon and Caryatids also repeatedly referenced the physical presence of students with SEN and the proportion of these students in their classrooms. They acknowledged that they did not have the same academic or social expectations for all students, as their focus was on the ability of students to respond to the curriculum and achieve academically (surface). These concerns about ability were underpinned by deeply held deficit beliefs (Coutsocostas & Alborz, 2010). Yet, overall findings demonstrated discrepancies between these schools’ entitlement to intervene and the reality of non-intervention, even within integration units. Each school was observed to respond differently to this challenge. For example, Caryatids intervened when the need arose, particularly when examination recommendations were unclear. These findings indicated that instructions on the part of the central and local educational authorities were not clear for Students with SEN, and that further steps should be taken to standardise these procedures. Indeed, the head teacher at Caryatids admitted he did not know the procedure to send students to an assessment centre, despite the presence of these centres on the school’s premises. This fact, in addition to previous findings, suggests the school’s lack of intervention likely stems from a desire to avoid making hard decisions and to outsource those decisions to off-site assessors. This stands in sharp contrast to the actions of the
head teacher at Acropolis, who — in the absence of effective assessment procedures — developed and adopted her own.

Indeed, Acropolis teachers were observed to respect and appreciate diversity, demonstrating a commitment to inclusion through curriculum modifications. For example, teachers arranged outdoor excursions for students, ensuring engagement with the local community and providing the basis for more inclusive practices (deep). Acropolis teachers were also found to adopt more inclusive pedagogical approaches emphasizing constant teacher-student interaction, dialogue and collaboration, and scaffolding of clear expectations and instructions (deep). Although a special school by definition, Acropolis adopted more inclusive practices and flexible approaches to teaching and learning, while also demonstrating a desire to address the interests and needs of all students (Kugelmass, 2006). The majority of students were consistently involved in classroom practice and engaged through opportunities for participation. Special teachers in these segregated settings established relationships of trust, care, and love through ongoing interactions with students (deep). This finding supports that of Mamas (2012), who found in his recent Cypriot study that, as pedagogy plays a significant role in promoting inclusion, the social and academic development of students with SEN should be the focus of teaching and learning practices.

Notably, none of the parents interviewed referenced dissatisfaction with the teaching practices utilised by schools, instead focusing on the outcome of the teaching process. Caryatids parents expressed concern about the provision offered to students with SEN in mainstream classrooms, about teachers’ training and qualifications, and about the behaviour of their child(ren)’s mainstream peers. They also questioned the impact of inclusive practices, particularly the possibility they may lower educational standards. These parents did not reveal, however, any familiarity or experience with an inclusive classroom. On the other hand, Acropolis parents expressed satisfaction with the teaching practices and support offered to their children, referencing the appreciation and respect of students’ needs as well as the school’s inclusive approach.
Although teachers are theoretically key components of inclusive change in schools – particularly given their responsibility for the implementation of school strategies in classrooms – in the present study, most were found to be disinterested in altering existing practice, particularly in mainstream schools. This may, however, be a systematic rather than individual problem. Indeed, teachers adapted their teaching practices to the purposes and strategies outlined by head teachers, having limited opportunities for autonomy and flexibility. This finding mirrors that of previous research, which found that teachers are unable to make inclusive educational innovations when heavily restricted by national policies and head teachers (Skrtic, 1991). It is evident that teachers’ flexibility and autonomy are indeed restricted in Greece, but also that many teachers in this study were unwilling to challenge or change this dynamic. To accommodate students with disabilities, there is a profound need to evaluate and carefully plan teaching practices, to abandon deterministic beliefs about (dis)ability, and to respect and value all learners as full-fledged members of the school community (Simpson et al., 2003).

7.5 Power, voice and agency

Relationships, defined here as the wide range of contributions made by groups and individuals – rather than traditional notions of superficial support or community sponsorship (Carrington & Robinson, 2007) – play a particularly important role in the construction, or rejection, of inclusive school communities. For that reason, the nature of relationships both inside and outside schools – including the power, voice and agency of head teachers, teachers and parents – is considered here as a key component of the construction of inclusive school communities. In this section, these relationships and components are analysed. The following table illustrates how components of power, voice and agency manifest themselves in surface, segregated and deep approaches to inclusion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power, voice &amp; agency</th>
<th>Surface Inclusion</th>
<th>Segregated Inclusion</th>
<th>Deep Inclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Relationships (individuals/</td>
<td>• Dysfunctional relationships</td>
<td>• Functional relationships within only one school group</td>
<td>• Functional relationships between all school members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Poor communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10. Relationships, voice and power elements in schools

Relationships were found to play an extremely important role in the construction of inclusive school communities. Numerous frameworks identify relationships as a key component of inclusive education, highlighting their significance (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010, Hazel & Allan, 2013). The following subsection explores power, voice and agency within the various relationships in this study.

Relationships

As noted previously, educational policy-making in Greece is denoted by unequal formal and informal power relationships (Duke, 2002; Muijs et al., 2011). In the context of special and inclusive education, policies exist within this discursive upheaval of unequal
distributions of power and authority (Foucault, 1995). This discursive constitution of reality is a pervasive means of power that renders special and inclusive education policymaking an essentially political issue (Liasidou, 2011). For example, while the head teachers in this study articulated a need for more collaboration between and within schools, as well as support from the local and central educational authorities, my findings revealed a lack of support, collaboration and advisory intervention from the very same authorities. This lack of mentoring, support and intervention made head teachers, especially those in special schools, feel unprepared in terms of understanding and awareness, developing skills, attitudes and values regarding inclusive education (Male & Male, 2001). This dysfunctional dynamic between authorities and head teachers resulted from inherently unequal power relationships in Greek policy and politics, influencing the orientation and structure of each school, along with the need of head teachers to conform their leadership approaches to meet government expectations in terms of school improvement rather than inclusion (Gronn, 2003; Harris, 2008).

The relationships head teachers developed both within and beyond schools were found to be influenced by their commitment to inclusive values and their conceptualisations about inclusion, as well as their problem-solving and decision-making experiences (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004; Eacott, 2013). The head teachers that demonstrated a lack of commitment to inclusive values – including those at Parthenon and Caryatids – were found to develop few positive collaborative relationships with members of their local community. On the other hand, Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) cited the beneficial collaborative bonds she made with community members, based largely on her commitment to inclusive values. In all three case schools, however, the development of positive relationships was found to be a challenging process, as few shared understandings of inclusion existed. According to Riehl (2000) and Gunter (2010), these relationships should be underpinned by mutual respect and a common understanding of inclusion, in order for school members to respond collaboratively to their students’ needs (Hergeaves, 2004; Gunter, 2010).

The relationships forged between head teachers, teachers and parents did not establish this type of shared understanding (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004; Harris, 2008). For example,
Mr. Petrou (*Parthenon*) and Mr. Kostis (*Caryatids*) suggested that a lack of collaboration between school members emerged from a lack of a shared understanding and commitment to inclusion (*segregated*). While Mrs. Pavlou (*Acropolis*) adopted a shared problem-solving approach outside of *Acropolis* (*deep*), she maintained an authoritative relationship with teachers and parents, limiting their participation in decision-making processes. This approach was unfortunate, as it ultimately held her back from achieving deep inclusion.

The dysfunctional nature of these relationships is particularly illustrated at *Parthenon*, where integration units brought to the fore challenges between special and mainstream teachers. Mainstream teachers argued that they would lose their status as teachers of academic subjects if forced to take responsibility for Students with SEN, thus abdicating this responsibility to special teachers. On the other hand, special teachers were also dissatisfied due to the devaluation of their role and the restrictions placed on their ability to provide appropriate support to students with SEN. The special teachers at *Parthenon* (Vassilis and Katerina) particularly referenced their limited in-service hours, late placement in schools and lack of educational preparation as responsible for limited communication and the lack of collaborative relationships between mainstream and special teachers. These statements mirrored those of teacher participants in the Greek study of Zoniou-Sideri *et al.* (2005), and the UK study of Simpson *et al.* (2003). In both studies, teachers noted a lack of time as an impediment to the development of collaborative practices in schools and in classrooms.

This finding may be partially attributed to the fact that, until recently, mainstream and special secondary education operated as separate, independent systems in Greece. In these systems, special teachers historically assumed responsibility for students with SEN, and — to the great dismay of mainstream teachers — assumed principal responsibility for determining which courses and practices better met students’ needs. Robinson and Riddle (2007) suggest that a separate culture developed between mainstream and special teachers in this two-track system, which was also evident in the present study. Consequently, mainstream teachers in all schools did not perceive themselves as integral parts of inclusive change, as they did not appear to have a sense of ownership in inclusive practice.
This was also reflected on a classroom level, as teacher-student collaboration was strained by the lack of responsibility and ownership mainstream teachers adopted for Students with SEN.

Another finding that emerged from the cross-case analysis was a lack of professional development activities for inclusive teaching and learning. While teachers repeatedly referenced a need for advice regarding the teaching of basic academic skills, professional skills and expertise, as well as information about the various categories of SEN, this was not forthcoming (Black-Hawkins, 2012). Not surprisingly, this failure was found to weaken mainstream teachers’ motivation for inclusion.

Parent-school collaboration was found to vary between schools. At Acropolis, I observed parental involvement to provide a unity of purpose for inclusive practices (Peters, 2003). While teachers and parents at Acropolis expressed positive feelings about teacher-parent collaboration in theory, in practice they did not actively engage with each other, revealing a need for better communication and mutual understanding (Tozer & Horsley, 2006; Antonopoulou et al., 2010). Mainstream teachers at Parthenon and Caryatids revealed only superficial relationships with parents. These relationships were underpinned by a surface level of communication about academic progress and achievement. Indeed, academic interests were found to determine parent-school relationships, which in turn influenced parents’ relationships with teachers. This finding may explain why parents of students with SEN revealed closer relationships and collaborative dialogues with special teachers, both in special schools and integration units. The prioritization of social goals instead of academic outcomes in these settings was acknowledged by both special teachers and parents as crucial in building their relationships.

Additionally, head teachers and teachers at Parthenon and Caryatids argued that parents were part of the problem instead of the solution in terms of parent-school collaboration. They attributed communication challenges to parents’ lack of time, the absence of guidelines about the nature of their involvement in school, as well as parents’ supposed reluctance to collaborate (Georgiou, 1996; Patrikakou, 2005; Boutskou, 2007; Lawson,
Ironically, parents at these institutions expressed a desire for more collaboration and participation in school affairs, indicating a serious lack of communication between these groups of stakeholders. At Acropolis, several parents were more actively involved, lobbying the head teacher and acting as agents of change. They remained, however, unable to take part in decision making. In order to construct a truly inclusive community, parents should be offered a range of ways to meaningfully contribute, and to build collaborative rapports with other school stakeholders (Swart et al., 2004).

Leadership

Another important element that emerged in this study was leadership. According to Kugelmass (2006) and Shepherd and Hasazi (2007), the collaborative nature of inclusive schools has implications for both leadership and decision-making. Therefore, leadership for inclusion should be distributed, reinforcing a deep sense of community between school members, participating in decision making and problem solving approaches (Dyson & Millward, 2000; Praisner, 2003; Avissar, 2012). Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012) argue that effective inclusive schools are problem-solving organizations with shared purposes that emphasize learning for all students through the development of inclusive practice (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). In these schools, all stakeholders, including teachers and special teachers, are committed to collaborative planning, working and shared responsibility for both mainstream and Students with SEN.

On a policy level, it may be argued that all the three head teachers were captives of their socio-cultural environment (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In other words, their leadership decisions were influenced by their exclusion from educational policy-making processes, as well as their extremely limited input in the selection and placement of teachers in their schools. Indeed, the central educational authorities placed responsibility and pressure on secondary head teachers, as school leaders, to initiate, implement and develop inclusive structures, while simultaneously failing to empower them with decision-making authority. These restrictions on their leadership were found to strongly impact their
conceptualisations and commitment to inclusion, as well as their approach to school strategies and inclusive practice.

At the school level, mainstream head teachers' restricted perceptions and narrow conceptualisations of inclusion were found to have a significant role in their interpretation and exercise of inclusive leadership. According to Shepherd and Hasazi (2007), school leadership should be clearly defined and distributed in order to reinforce a deep sense of community and mutual trust between school members. Mainstream teachers in the present study, however, were found to primarily undertake managerial and administrative duties within their leadership role (Ainscow, 2006; Curcic et al., 2011; Eacott, 2013). Indeed, both Mr. Petrou (Parthenon) and Mr. Kostis (Caryatids) followed a less responsive and more centralized approach to school leadership and decision making, without constructing bridges between and within school members and society (segregated). Mr. Kostis (Caryatids) particularly adopted a bureaucratic form of leadership, resisting any and all forms of inclusive change within his school (surface). This led to more traditional and autocratic methods of leadership, focused on head teachers' managerial, administrative and bureaucratic responsibilities, rather than their role as inclusive change-makers (Reeves, 2009; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Blair 2002).

Moreover, this study confirmed that head teachers' active involvement and engagement in school activities contributed to his or her ability to create change for Students with SEN (Riehl, 2000). Indeed, Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) was observed to be highly involved in a variety of school responsibilities and activities, ranging from teaching duties to management, from administrative duties to pastoral care. This involvement demonstrated the highest level of inclusive leadership (Senge, 1994). Additionally, Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) remained consistently open to new ideas, enthusiastically launching new initiatives and acting as an agent for change (deep). However, Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) did not communicate this vision to other school members, maintaining a rigid, hierarchical and authoritative leadership approach without distributing leadership or delegating authority. While she shared limited responsibility with parents, teachers were left in a largely side-lined role (segregated). Similarly, when Mr. Petrou (Parthenon) swiftly
transitioned his school from a mainstream to inclusive (integrated) institution, he failed to
provide opportunities for teachers to develop a personal understanding of the meaning of
change, choosing instead to impose his own view on teachers and parents, claiming “I
know what is best for [this] school”. In doing so, he failed to maintain balance between
change and continuity.

Timor & Burton (2006) and Sergiovanni (1984) express the importance of leaders in the
following statement:

The net effect of the cultural force of leadership is to bond together students,
teachers, and others as believers in the work of the school...As persons become
members of this strong and binding culture, they are provided with opportunities for
enjoying a special sense of personal importance and significance. (Sergiovanni,
1984)

Ryan (2006) approaches leadership as a collective-influence process, one that expands the
role of ‘leader’ to encompass issues of participation, representation and inclusion of
different groups and individuals. Ainscow et al. (2012) revealed that the collaborative
nature of inclusive schools has implications for both leadership and decision-making.
Therefore, leadership for inclusion should be distributed, reinforcing a deep sense of
community between school members participating in decision making and problem
solving approaches (Kugelmass, 2006; Ainscow, 2007b). In this context, head teachers
must build a trusting environment by encouraging openness, facilitating participation and
sharing power between all stakeholders (Dyson & Millward, 2000; Praisner, 2003).
However, in this study, teachers and parents were not afforded responsibility and
participation in decision-making and problem-solving efforts, as head teachers took
complete ownership of school decisions (Kugelmas, 2004; Avissar, 2012). Leadership
methods were not based on a collaborative or distributive model, as head teachers largely
refused to delegate power, following a traditional top-down leadership approach and
failing to establish dialogues, opportunities and spaces for equal participation (Laluvein,
2010).
The lack of shared ownership of decision-making and problem-solving approaches was found, in this study, to result from the lack of collaborative rapportts between school members, as discussed in the previous sub-section. For example, Mr. Petrou (Parthenon) appeared to lose a degree of respect from other school staff after introducing structural changes (integration units), as teachers did not support these changes and remained voiceless in the decision-making and implementation process. Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis), despite appearing the stronger leader, also failed to motivate school members to look beyond academic and school boundaries, thereby inspiring inclusion only through her authoritative leadership style, leaving teachers excluded from the process of change. This finding is supported by Kugelmass (2006), who argued that the collaborative nature of inclusive schools has implications for both leadership and decision-making. These findings are also similar to other researchers who report the shared problem-solving approach as a key component of inclusive schools (Ainscow, 2000; Dyson & Millward, 2000).

These findings are perhaps not surprising in the Greek context, however, as Greek schools rely on the distinction of roles and responsibilities between school members, placing barriers on the distribution of leadership (Harris & Muijis, 2005). Due to the hierarchical nature of the Greek education system – a system in which leadership responsibilities are clearly defined – democratic or distributive leadership approaches were not adopted in any participating school (Harris, 2008). As a result, the leader-follower model of leadership was present in all school relationships. This model was characterized by domain-centric power relationships with few opportunities to move vertically or laterally between domains (Gunter, 2010). Additionally, teachers revealed a lack of support from head teachers in the implementation of inclusive practices, stressing the direct link between successful inclusion and in-school support (Scruggs et al., 2007). Indeed, in Parthenon and Caryatids, teachers were denied participation and responsibilities for inclusive reform, limiting their ability to take ownership of this change.
Voice and Agency

Bearing in mind the findings above, within the present study, I observed a rigid hierarchical structure and lack of distributed responsibilities in both schools and the local educational authorities. This was particularly evident with the local authorities, which had a very limited role in inclusive education policy-making and implementation within schools. Indeed, as all three participating schools were under the jurisdiction of the same LEA, its role and influence upon school decisions were limited in theory to hands-off practice (Saitis et al., 2003). However, even these responsibilities were rarely taken up, reinforcing the concerns of head teachers regarding the level of support they were offered by the LEA. In other words, although the local authority served as a theoretical link between the central government and schools, in practice, there was a policy vacuum.

This vacuum was experienced by each head teacher in different ways. According to Mr. Petrou, the head teacher of Parthenon:

If we look at it on the whole, [head teachers] should be liberated from bureaucratic things and set our own course ... of course cooperating with supervisors and the ministry, but having choices and being judged by them. We should be judged both by the success of our work and by our courage to follow paths which the educational authorities are not used to taking.

According to the above statement, Mr. Petrou considered his decision-making authority, power and voice to be limited within the Greek context, linking inclusive education with political issues and power. Power and agency were interpreted differently by Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis); however, as she increased her voice until ‘loud’ enough to be heard by the central government, local authorities and society. Indeed, she enthusiastically accepted the role of change agent, also inspiring agency in others, generating inclusive discourse.

Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) also argued that if school and community members committed to inclusion, then its implementation would be successful. She expended a great deal of effort to present herself and her school in a positive light to gain funding, respect and appraisal from parents, community members, and educational authorities. Through these
efforts, she revealed that special schools should be included in debates and dialogues about inclusion. Instead of being limited by them, as Mr. Petrou (Parthenon) was, she took advantage of unspecified regulations about head teachers’ autonomy and flexibility, and moved beyond the constraints of her role to help students with SEN equally participate in social and vocational opportunities. She fostered the role of ‘leader-initiator’ (Ben-Peretz & Schonmann, 2000) through her initiation and implementation of an in-school evaluation and assessment process for teachers, as well as the establishment of communication channels and inclusive activities within and between Acropolis and mainstream schools. She also attempted to develop a network between special and mainstream education head teachers, in an effort to exchange ideas, discuss concerns, and solve challenges collaboratively (Ainscow et al., 2012). This type of collaboration within and between schools, and between schools and their local communities, has been identified by several researchers as a key component in inclusive educational change (Male, 2000; Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Ainscow, 2010).

On the other hand, Mr. Petrou (Parthenon) and Mr. Kostis (Caryatids) refused to move beyond the constraints of their formal role, carrying out only managerial and administrative responsibilities. Although they both acknowledged inclusion as a “forced mandate to change”, they did not try to overcome intrinsic school and socio-economic challenges to implement it. While Parthenon’s head teacher advocated gradual and partial implementation of inclusive change, he blamed both teachers and parents, along with a lack of support, training and infrastructure, as reasons for its ultimate failure. Hence, the way that school leaders conceptualized their role and power was found to drive their sense of agency. The two mainstream head teachers were found to consider themselves voiceless and without agency, while Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) lobbied extensively for a ‘seat at the table’.

Avisser et al. (2003), in their quantitative study of 110 elementary school head teachers in Israel, found that, in order for a school leader to act as an agent of educational change, he/she must adopt both a clear vision of inclusion and practices to promote inclusive change. However, in this study, the two mainstream head teachers did not articulate a
clear view of inclusion, and adopted few practices to promote it. Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis), however, articulated a broad vision of inclusion, and launched numerous initiatives to break both the “cycle of exclusion” and deficit thinking about students’ (dis)ability. However, although Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) and Mr. Petrou (Parthenon) were sensitive to school members’ concerns, and - to some extent - willing to discuss in ideas emerging from inclusive practice, they failed to hear school members’ voices. For example, Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) forced teachers’ participation in her inclusive initiatives without developing shared problem-solving approaches or encouraging collaborative decision-making, following a centralized form of leadership (Male, 2000). Acropolis, Parthenon and Caryatids were therefore found to resist change in practice due to their respective head teachers’ inability to envision, cultivate or maintain inclusive change (Duignan & Macpherson, 1993).

The contribution of teachers in the construction of an inclusive school community was found to be limited, as they were largely voiceless and powerless in decision-making and problem-solving processes. While Mr. Petrou (Parthenon) considered the views of teachers overbearing, teachers at Parthenon perceived of themselves as disempowered on multiple levels. Teachers in all three schools suggested that although teacher leadership “is a form of agency that can be widely shared or distributed within and across an organization”, they remained excluded from decision making processes and agency due to traditional, hierarchical models of school leadership (Harris, 2003).

Although parents believed in their power to change the educational system, those at Parthenon and Caryatids also considered their role to be limited, often feeling side-lined, marginalized and unable to engage in the decision-making process. Parents at Parthenon and Caryatids were not actively engaged in parental associations, instead adopting a more passive role, derived from a lack of interest and involvement with special needs. At Acropolis, however, parents revealed greater self-accomplishment through their participation in the school’s parent association, playing an active role in negotiating school purposes, priorities and strategies. Interestingly, Greek law dictates that head teachers do not have the right to make proposals to educational authorities without the
consent and support of a parent association. Yet, at the same time, parents do not have the right to offer input in decision-making processes, and are not guaranteed opportunities for participation and collaboration.

Conclusion

Based on the recommendation of Clark et al. (1999, p.173), that “instead of examining schools to see whether they are or are not inclusive, we should focus on understanding the processes of inclusion and exclusion which operate in all schools”, the discussion in this chapter has revealed that the construction of inclusive school communities is not a straightforward process. Through the framework developed in the present study, case-schools and school participants were found to interpret and respond very differently to the three strands of building an inclusive school community, leading to the existence of three different kinds of inclusion within schools.

The first theme-strand identified in the present study, school stakeholders’ conceptualisations, perceptions and understanding of inclusion, as well as their commitment to inclusive values – was found to be heavily influenced by the central educational authorities, inclusive policy, and the politics of educational change. Indeed, it has been noted that there are misconceptions and misinterpretations about inclusion within policies, both internationally and in Greece, leading to a lack of shared meaning and understanding from the outset (Liasidou, 2014). In turn, these conceptualisations were found to play a key role in the construction of inclusive communities, as they echoed or challenged those expressed by head teachers, teachers and parents. Hence, in some schools, inclusion was promoted only rhetorically and was not met with requisite levels of commitment and shared understanding. Given their failure to implement inclusive structures, others developed these commitments only partially (surface) or were challenged by a lack of willingness to engage with initiatives developed by individual school members (segregated).

Due to the impermeable nature of the national education policy system, head teachers, teachers and parents were prevented from participating in the policy-making process at
any level, compounding implementation challenges. This unidirectional, hierarchical structure was also found in schools, as head teachers strongly influenced teachers and parents, but were less influenced by these constituencies themselves. Indeed, the three head teachers in this study were found to serve as the primary decision makers about inclusive values, structures, and policies within their schools. Elements of *surface*, *segregated* and *deep* inclusion were easily traced to the decisions made by head teachers, but also to the conceptualisations of teachers and parents, making the construction of an inclusive school community even more challenging.

These findings clearly indicate, there was no (*surface*) or limited (*segregated*) emphasis within case schools on either collective action or decision making, resulting in the disempowerment of teachers, special teachers and parents (*surface*). When one of these groups was empowered, it often came at the expense of others (*segregated*). According to Rice (2006) and Carrington and Robinson (2006), these dynamics constitute a barrier to the construction of inclusive school communities, as school members should share participation in leadership, dialogue, and responsibilities. In particular, while parents at *Acropolis* revealed a sense of empowerment within a special school setting, this feeling was not shared by parents in the two mainstream schools (*segregated*). On the other hand, *Acropolis* teachers felt both belittled and disempowered, repeatedly referencing the diminishment of their role by mainstream colleagues. They suggested that this perception sustained deficit beliefs about students with SEN, and eroded support for special institutions. Although special teachers were valued and empowered by parents and community members due to their “humanistic duty” to educate students with SEN – a perception itself underpinned by deficit beliefs – mainstream teachers considered themselves to be undervalued by policy makers, other school stakeholders, and Greek society. The limited collaborative rapports established between school members is likely the result of these disparate beliefs, as well as the low priority placed on SEN issues within schools. Thus, although previous research has indicated that collaborative relationships form the basis of inclusive reform efforts, encouraging shared ownership of decision-making and problem solving (Ryan, 2006; Reeves, 2009), findings in this study evidenced
only asymmetrical power relationships, individual efforts but little collaboration, and limited shared ownership for inclusion change.

This finding likely results from the absence of a common inclusive vision and commitment in schools. A possible remedy exists, however, in the form of enhanced communication and collaboration within and between schools, as well as the establishment of clear purposes and roles for school stakeholders. This will ultimately require increased awareness of disability, inclusion, and professional responsibilities. Indeed, I contend that much discontent amongst school members resulted from a lack of role clarification, shared ownership, and misinterpretation of boundaries. Related to the commitment to inclusion and inclusive structures, conceptualisations and shared understanding form the basis for developing collaborative relationships, key components in the construction of inclusive communities.
CHAPTER 8: Conclusion

Introduction

This final chapter explores the interrelationship between the main findings and my research questions, and discusses the implications for policy, practice, and future research. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this research, and some personal reflections about the research process.

8.1 Relationships between research questions and study findings

As this study aimed to explore the social construction of inclusive school communities, I have chosen to understand inclusion as an ongoing change process within schools, influenced by the conceptualisations, practices, experiences and relationships of key school stakeholders, including head teachers, teachers and parents. The standard of inclusion used in this study is based on a definition cited in the Index of Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 7):

Inclusion in education involves increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, cultures, curricula and communities of local schools ... [and] restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in their locality.

Findings from the three case studies suggest that the academic and social inclusion of students with SEN has been challenging in Greece. The following pages explore this conclusion in depth, in the context of my research questions.

1) What are the key policies concerning inclusive education in Greece? What are the main challenges within the policy process?

This study found the construction of inclusive school communities a challenging and complex process for Greek secondary education. While I remain relatively optimistic about the future implementation of inclusive education over the longer term, the strong top-down orientation of the Greek education system raises serious concerns. Indeed, the
state appears to ‘dictate’ policies to schools and local authorities, rather than encourage a ground-up movement for authentic reform. As the framework I developed suggested, each school responds differently to inclusive policy, primarily to a lack of clear definitions and guidelines regarding inclusion and special educational needs. The key policies concerning inclusive education are directly related to the 2008 law. Within this process, although inclusive education is mandatory for all students till the last class of lower secondary school (approximately at the age of 15), not all mainstream secondary schools provide integration units or/and one-on-one support to students with SEN. Hence, despite the obligatory nature of inclusive and special education in schools, in practice, it was based on the good will and commitment of the head teacher to make decisions regarding the support provided to students with SEN along with their mainstream peers (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000). Moreover, within this law there was a vague articulation of the definition of ‘special education needs’ and inclusive education, along with a limited number of rules regarding the implementation of inclusive practice. The medical model of disability and education was found to be prevalent within the language used in the policy texts regarding identification and definition of inclusion, deeply influencing the conceptualisations, visions and understanding of school members regarding inclusion. This was probably due to the fact that inclusive policy process was still amenable to change, as it has been recently implemented without a structured and organized way.

Another significant challenge identified was that LEA’s or schools’ education policies were lacking, as all regulations, circulars and policy documents were generated and enacted by the central authorities, leaving limited opportunities for local authorities and school members to take part in the policy and decision making processes, and for that reason they have struggled to implement inclusion. Thus, the local educational authorities and school members were not able to share power and responsibility with central education administration and schools (Liasidou, 2011), in order to have voice and input in the inclusive education decisions made by policy-makers.

Hence, the policy vacuum at the local policy level and the non-specific regulations regarding school authority posed barriers for the school members, marginalizing their
perceptions and experience of the process of the construction of inclusive school communities. This had implications for at school level since a key finding of this study was that two of the head teachers were resistant to change and reluctant to be involved in the politics of inclusion, as they acknowledged their limited and side-lined role in the construction of inclusion and the decision-making processes. In this study, head teachers were excluded from this process, despite their important role as gate keepers and decision-makers in building school inclusive communities.

2) What is the nature of conceptualisations regarding special education and inclusion among some stakeholders involved – head teachers, teachers and parents – in Greek secondary schools?

In this study, stakeholders’ conceptualisations, understandings of, and commitment to inclusion were found to differ both within and between the three case schools. These conceptualisations were heavily influenced by inclusive policy and the politics of education, as well as local community debates and ideological and practical concerns within schools and society. The various legal definitions of inclusion adopted in the case schools also informed and reinforced stakeholders’ conceptualisations.

While head teachers, teachers and parents suggested they were in favour of inclusion on a theoretical level, they tended to exhibit negative or neutral attitudes toward the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms. Most participants in Acropolis, Parthenon, and Caryatids conceptualized inclusion as a form of integration, and on occasions a ‘quick fix’ or means of punishment for low-achievers or Students with SEN. These views are influenced, to an extent, by the dominant ideological discourse about disability in Greece, and are reinforced by vague definitions and articulations of inclusion in policy documents. These perceptions are contradictory, however, to the values of inclusion (Slee, 2006); indeed, this study suggests that they ultimately contribute to marginalization and discrimination, as well as a lack of shared understanding and commitment.
Head teachers and teachers in this study expressed concern about the impact of inclusive legislation on the overall academic achievement of students with and without SEN. The academic nature of the Greek educational system and the prioritization of academic achievement and excellence likely contribute to these concerns. Indeed, head teachers and teachers in the three case schools were found to largely define inclusion in terms of whether a student needed curriculum modifications, rather than the broader idea and philosophy that inclusion extends to social relations, equality, and opportunities for all. Head teachers’ and teachers’ training in special education and inclusion – or lack of – was also found to influence their perceptions, in addition to the shortage of human and material resources, the lack of support and advice from local educational authorities, and the absence of collaborative relationships. Parents of students both with and without SEN were also influenced by the nature of the Greek curriculum, excluding students considered unable to meet high achievement standards. Even those stakeholders with more positive conceptualisations and a broader vision of inclusion were found to have doubts about the practical implementation of inclusion in mainstream schools.

3) What are the key influences upon school stakeholders’ decisions about the implementation of inclusion and the relations constructed within and beyond schools?

The present study found a strong link between school stakeholders’ conceptualisations of inclusion, and their decisions about school structures. For example, head teachers with negative conceptualisations and little commitment to inclusive values were found to implement inclusive policy in more restricted ways, and to establish few opportunities for collaboration and distributive leadership (Ainscow, 1997; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Angelides, 2010). On the other hand, head teachers with broader views and understandings of inclusion were found to implement more inclusive school purposes and strategies, and to further support inclusive classroom practices, moving beyond the traditional boundaries of their role. While teachers in all three case schools responded positively to the idea of adopting more inclusive purposes and practices, they ultimately perceived inclusion as reducing the efficiency and effectiveness of their
teaching practice. As a result, they did not provide all students with equal academic and social opportunities.

The nature of relationships both inside and outside schools – including the power, voice and agency of head teachers, teachers and parents – was also found to be a key component in the construction of inclusive school communities. Educational policy-making in Greece is characterised by unequal formal and informal power relationships (Liasidou, 2011); this inequality was found to impact both on decisions made about school structures, and the relationships developed within schools. Head teachers, as school leaders, held greater share of power and authority within each case school surveyed. As there was an unequal distribution of authority to head teachers, or a flexibility to be taken according to each of the head teachers' will, in the school with the more inclusive structures, even as a special setting, the head teacher found to have closer relations with authorities and an active involvement with the politics of education. Hence, the analysis of decisions about structures, as a key element in the construction of inclusive communities, revealed that – overall – schools offered limited inclusive structures to students with SEN (segregated). Head teachers’ decisions about school purposes, strategies and classroom practices were heavily influenced by national and international policy discourse, which provided a vague and inadequate definition of inclusion and inclusive practice.

Collaboration between school stakeholders and communities – or the lack thereof – was found to have profound implications for school leadership and decision-making (Kugelmass & Aincow, 2004; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Avissar, 2012). While previous scholarship suggests that collaboration helps school stakeholders define and conceptualize inclusion (Dyson et al., 2004; Ainscow et al., 2012), developing collaborative relationships was challenging for the school members surveyed. Indeed, the lack of shared ownership in decision-making and problem-solving processes was found to result from a failure on the part of all stakeholders to establish collaborative rapport. The contribution of teachers and parents in the construction of inclusive school communities was found to be particularly limited, as they were largely voiceless and powerless in decision-making and problem-solving processes. Although both groups of stakeholders believed in their
power to change the educational system, their role was limited; indeed, they often expressed feeling side-lined, marginalized and unable to engage other stakeholders and authorities. While Greek law dictates that head teachers must obtain the consent and support of a parent association before making a proposal to the local educational authorities, parents are not guaranteed opportunities for participation and collaboration. New spaces for cooperation and partnership, as well as a renewed sense of agency, are therefore needed to resist dominant ideologies and traditional, authoritative systems of leadership in Greek secondary education.

Finally, it is important to highlight the ways in which education – particularly inclusive education – has been affected by the financial crisis in Greece. The recession has reduced teacher salaries, resulted in a hiring freeze for special teachers, and limited the availability of resources in both special and mainstream schools. Vocational opportunities and support services for individuals with SEN have also been cut. Thus, as the nation’s economy slowly recovers, it is important to both raise awareness of disability and SEN, and to strategically increase investment in social services.

8.2 Implications for policy and practice

This study provides a deeper understanding of the complexity of inclusive education in Greece. The framework developed in this study revealed that schools implement or challenge inclusion in a variety of ways, responding differently to the key framework strands: conceptualisations of inclusion, decisions about school structures, and issues of power, voice and agency within schools. In doing so, they generated different types of inclusion – surface, segregated, and deep – with specific characteristics and components. While all three types appeared to varying degrees within my case schools, deep inclusion remained elusive within the Greek context. This framework may be useful for the future development of inclusive school communities, as both policy-makers and school stakeholders would benefit from a better understanding of inclusive policy and practice within Greek secondary education which has hitherto been neglected.
It is important to note, however, that this framework should not be used as a blueprint, or applied indiscriminately to other school contexts. Rather, it should be used as a tool of self-reflection for both educational authorities and schools, in their efforts to construct communities steeped in deep inclusive values. It was also not my intent to create a framework designed to inspire the development of inclusive policies, practices, and cultures within schools. In other words, I did not attempt to develop an alternative to the ‘Index of Inclusion’ (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). The present framework is distinctive in that it was generated from within schools, based on their unique conceptualisations, decision-making arrangements, and existing relationships. As noted previously, however, school stakeholders assumed somewhat traditional roles, with head teachers serving as decision-makers, while mainstream teachers, special teachers, and parents have much less input in this process. Therefore, I believe this framework can be helpful in sensitising those, in other contexts with similar educational systems, organizational arrangements, and management structures, to the challenges and issues faced.

These findings have clear implications for policy-makers and school stakeholders. Indeed, they indicate that inclusive policies must become more than inspirational rhetoric or symbolic gestures to the EU community. While for many years, inclusive policy in Greece was developed to ‘fit’ into certain mainstream educational ideologies, this approach now appears to have undermined its implementation. It is therefore necessary to investigate the complexity of both mainstream educational ideologies and dominant societal beliefs about disability, ultimately developing policies explicitly designed to address and resolve these issues in a meaningful way.

It is important that policy-makers see themselves as active participants, with school stakeholders and members of the local educational authorities, in this process of change, sharing responsibility for inclusion. Viewing school members and the authorities as partners in policy-making allows these groups and individuals to be heard, valued, and respected. The central authorities in particular should encourage distributed leadership, provide more opportunities for flexibility, autonomy and collaboration, and encourage shared expertise, support, and more efficient approaches to problem-solving.
For schools to be inclusive, they must develop a culture that encourages collaboration, partnership and supports diversity. The lack of collaboration in all three case schools had clear implications for leadership and decision-making, influencing the implementation of inclusion. Central and local educational authorities, as well as head teachers, should be aware that strong democratic leadership, committed to inclusive values, is necessary to foster, promote, and support trusting relationships and participatory approaches to decision-making.

Moreover, all school stakeholders should engage more deeply with the concept of inclusion, and the goals of inclusive policy, within schools. Head teachers, as school leaders and decision makers, and teachers and parents, as implementers and supporters of inclusion, must re-consider the meaning and definition of inclusion, their own understanding of disability, and their commitment to inclusive values. Furthermore, both mainstream head teachers and teachers should see themselves as having responsibility for the education of all students, including those with SEN. This will have implications for school purposes, as well as the teaching and learning process, as mainstream teachers currently leave students with SEN unsupported, considering them the sole responsibility of special teachers. Thus, all school members should develop patterns of thinking and working that enable flexibility, and collaboration with colleagues, parents, educational authorities, and members of the local community. Head teachers should also adjust their priorities and leadership approaches to improve collaborative efforts.

Furthermore, both mainstream and special teachers should make efforts to adapt the curriculum to include children with SEN. These curriculum innovations should focus on both academic and social purposes, and involve differentiated teaching practices and learning methods, to enhance the education and participation of all students. It is also important to include informal activities where students with SEN can learn vital social skills. If possible, schools should encourage other teachers and specialists to participate in curriculum design and modification. Lastly, both pre- and in-service training for mainstream and special teachers should include practical information about inclusion and
special needs. This is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive policy, as it will break the cycle of frustration and anxiety that often leads teachers to exclude and marginalize Students with SEN. It will require, however, a considerable commitment and investment from both the government and teacher training organisations to incorporate and emphasise inclusive values. The role of central authorities in this process is also crucial, as they must disseminate expectations for good practice, and support local stakeholders in their efforts to generate positive outcomes.

The framework developed in this study emphasises the importance of policy actors developing more constructive ways of approaching and coping with the inclusive policy process. It is my intention, then, that the ideas discussed here will contribute to new considerations and perceptions of inclusion, to shared understanding based on a deep commitment to inclusive values, and to new methods and practices within secondary schools in Greece.

8.3 Future research

This study raised questions that require further investigation and analysis, serving as a spring board for future studies on inclusive education in Greece. I particularly recommend that future research incorporate the voices of students, as their conceptualisations of inclusive education remain poorly understood in Greece. This research should explore the conceptualisations of Students with SEN regarding their own inclusive experience; it should also compare the conceptualisations of students with and without SEN, to provide a more holistic vision of inclusive education in Greek secondary schools. This kind of research would help policy makers, school stakeholders and educational authorities improve inclusive provision, revise school purposes, and re-consider academic and social outcomes for all students in mainstream settings.

As the voices of the central and local educational authorities were also omitted from this study, future research should incorporate their perspectives and conceptualisations of inclusion, to better understand the values and beliefs underpinning their decisions. This
research would also clarify the nature of their perceived relationships with schools and school stakeholders.

Additionally, future studies should be conducted with a larger sample of school stakeholders from a broader range of areas, backgrounds and institutional profiles. Ideally this research could be supported by the Greek Ministry of Education, to increase policy makers’ awareness of inclusive provision in Greece. Further enquiry is also needed to establish whether students with SEN are academically and socially engaged in integration units. It may also be worthwhile to investigate the role of special schools in the construction of inclusive educational communities in Greece, through school-by-school collaboration with other special and mainstream schools (Ainscow et al., 2012).

Moreover, as Greece is experiencing the aftershock of a deep financial crisis, the implications of this crisis for inclusion need to be further examined, through the framework generated in this study. An examination of the post-crisis era of inclusive education in Greece, as well as comparison between the Greek context and other countries in crisis – would shed important light on the evolution of inclusive change. Indeed, for countries coping with similar economic and social difficulties, the framework developed in this study can serve as the foundation of further research.

8.4 Study limitations

While methodological limitations of this research were addressed in Chapter 3, it is important to reiterate that this study focused on the perceptions of adults and professionals instead of students, whose voices are admittedly critically important. As a result, to date a multi-dimensional examination of inclusion in secondary schools is currently lacking. I attempted to tackle the need for a multi-perspective approach by including parents of children with special needs, thus exploring the voice of the family. Also, this study examines only two subjects – Maths and Greek Literature – in secondary schools, omitting those in which Students with SEN could potentially participate and interact in more easily. However, this approach produced valuable information about the teaching practices in core subjects within the curriculum.
While the parents of students with and without SEN expressed generally positive feelings toward inclusive change, there is always the risk that Greek parents will give socially acceptable rather than genuine responses to questions. It can also be difficult to determine whether these positive attitudes are truly an expression of acceptance of disability (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2006). I would argue that Greek research, literature and policy documents should focus more on the role and voice of parents in the construction of inclusive educational communities, giving these important stakeholders space to share and cultivate their perceptions and practices within and out-with schools.

8.5 Final reflections

I believe that my cultural background, as well as with my experience in the Greek educational system – both as a student and a secondary teacher – were advantageous in this research. I am a citizen and lifelong resident of Greece, and thus have an intimate understanding of dominant societal values and discourses. I am also a native speaker, which allowed me to communicate effectively with my research participants, relate to their experiences in the education system, and understand the meaning of their statements and expressions as an ‘insider’.

It is also important to note that school stakeholders in this study – particularly head teachers and teachers – viewed me as a researcher from a ‘foreign’ university, rather than a Greek colleague. These perceptions made head teachers and teachers initially suspicious of my presence, as they assumed I was there to judge their work performance, comparing it to the Scottish educational system. After repeated assurances, however, I was able to establish a collaborative rapport with school stakeholders, based on mutual trust and honesty. This rapport is reflected in the access they ultimately permitted me to both their schools and their lives.

This study made me acutely aware of the great need for many students to have access to inclusive education. It also made me realize the extent to which inclusive education is a challenging and complex process. While strands of deep inclusion were found to exist
within the case study schools, it was rarely pervasive or integrated evenly across school structures. As inclusion is socially constructed, inclusive change must therefore ultimately originate in stakeholders' conceptualisations, decisions, and relationships. There must also be political will at both the national and international level to move educational discourses and agendas beyond economic considerations alone, to encompass issues of social justice, equality, and opportunity for all.


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Swain, J. & Cook, T. (2001) In the name of inclusion: We all, at the end of the day, have the needs of the children at hart. *Critical Social Policy*, 21 (2), pp. 185-207.


Appendix A: Research Consent Forms

Head teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Exploring the construction of inclusive educational communities in Greece: case studies of Greek secondary schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education Department of Education and Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Dimitra Tsakalou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors</td>
<td>Professors Lorna Hamilton and Jane Brown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Purpose

This research is about the implementation of special and inclusive policy in Greek secondary education. The purpose of the research is to better understand both the policy process and school practice, through an exploration of the perceptions and constructions of school stakeholders with regard to special education, disability and inclusion.

I agree to give permission for this research project to take place in my school. I have read the Explanatory Statement, and have had the project explained to me by the researcher. I understand that through my written permission, I consent to the above-named researcher conducting interviews with head teachers, teachers and parents, and to recording classroom observations. I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and will be anonymously coded and securely stored. Observation and interview data will be held and processed for this PhD research only. No information that could lead to identification of any individual, place or school will be disclosed in any part of the project or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published or shared with any other organization.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw my consent for this research at any stage of the project without being penalized or disadvantaged.

Name: __________________________ Signature: __________________________

Date: ___________ Researcher’s Signature: __________________________

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Parents

<table>
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<th>Research</th>
<th>Exploring the construction of inclusive educational communities in Greece: case studies of Greek secondary schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| School   | University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education  
Department of Education and Society |
| Researcher | Dimitra Tsakalou |
| Supervisors | Professors Lorna Hamilton and Jane Brown |
| Purpose   | This research is about the implementation of special and inclusive policy in Greek secondary education. The purpose of the research is to better understand both the policy process and school practice, through an exploration of the perceptions and constructions of school stakeholders with regard to special education, disability and inclusion. |

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement, which I may keep for my records, and have had the project explained to me by the researcher. I understand that through my written permission, I voluntarily consent to the above-named researcher conducting audio-recorded, non-participant observations in classrooms where my child is present.

I understand that any information will be confidential, and will be anonymously coded and securely stored. Observation data will be held and processed for the present research and no information that could lead to identification of any individual, place or school will be disclosed. No identifiable personal data will be published or shared with any other organization. I understand that my consent may be freely withdrawn at any time, and that this research will not affect my child's future schooling or treatment in any way. I also understand that my child has the right to refuse to participate even with my consent.

Name: __________________________ Signature: __________________________

Date: __________ Researcher’s Signature: __________________________
Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Exploring the construction of inclusive educational communities in Greece: case studies of Greek secondary schools</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I agree to take part voluntarily in the project outlined above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement, which I may keep for my records, and have had the project explained to me by the researcher. Through my written permission, I voluntarily consent to be interviewed by the above-named researcher, and to allow the interview to be recorded. I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential, anonymously coded and securely stored. Interview and observation data will be held and processed only for the purposes of the present PhD research. No information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any part of the project or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published or shared with any other organization.

I understand that I will be given a written transcript of my interview responses (both in Greek and English) for approval prior to being submitted for marking or publication. I understand that I have the right to withdraw my consent for this research at any stage of the project without being penalized or disadvantaged.

Name: __________________________ Signature: __________________________
Date: _______________ Researcher’s Signature: __________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions for head teachers

Attitudes and Perspectives

1. As different people often have different (and sometimes contradictory) views about the definition and meaning of inclusion, what does inclusive education mean to you?
2. Are you aware of the current inclusive education policy in secondary education?
   • What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of this policy?
3. In general, how do you think educators and head teachers view and value the current inclusive education policy?
4. How do you view current head teachers’ role in the process of inclusive education policy?

Implementation: Barriers and Challenges

5. Are there resources and structures in place to help your school adopt inclusive/special education practices?
6. What are the barriers/factors that you consider as hindering/influencing the implementation of inclusive educational policy in secondary schools? In your school? How has it been presented and dealt with?
7. Which of these barriers affect your attitudes towards inclusive policy? How?
8. What influence, if any, do parents have on the implementation of inclusive education policy?

Practice and Support

9. How are inclusive/special education practices delivered within your school?
10. How does the Greek educational system affect the practices of inclusive education policy, if at all?
11. What do you think may improve the implementation of inclusion in practice?
12. How does the local educational authority assess and support inclusion in your school?
   • How is your collaboration with staff, parents, local educational authorities, including KEDDY, and the Ministry of Education?
13. In your opinion, how will the Greek financial crisis influence inclusive education policy and practice within schools?
14. If a government official sought your advice on the best way to precede with the new inclusion law, what would you advise?
15. In the end, what kind of people do you want to produce?

Do you have anything else to add?
Appendix C: Interview Questions for Teachers

Teachers' Attitudes and Perspectives

16. As different people often have different (and sometimes contradictory) views about the definition and meaning of inclusion, what does inclusive education mean to you?

17. Are you aware of the current inclusive education policy in secondary education?
   - What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of this policy?

18. In general, how do your mainstream/special teaching colleagues view and value the current inclusive education policy?

19. How do you view current teachers' role in the process of inclusive education policy?
   - How and to what extent can teachers influence the implementation of inclusive policy?

Implementation: Barriers and Challenges

20. Are there resources in place for the implementation of inclusive/special education policy in your school? Are they helpful in adopting inclusive/special education practices?
   - Is inclusive/special education policy feasible in Greek secondary schools?

21. What are the barriers/factors that you consider as hindering/influencing the implementation of inclusive educational policy in secondary schools? In your school? How has it been presented and dealt with?

22. Do these barriers affect your attitudes toward inclusive policy? How?

23. What influence, if any, do parents have on the adoption of inclusive policy?

Teacher Practices and Support

24. Do you feel you have the skills and knowledge to teach in inclusive/special classrooms?

25. Do you feel supported by the local educational authorities?

26. What are your experiences collaborating and working with special/mainstream educators in an inclusive/special class?

27. What do you think may improve the implementation of inclusion in practice?

28. In what ways does inclusion in mainstream classrooms with the use of integration units affects students with and without SEN (communication with classmates and teacher, academic progress, participation in classroom activities)?

29. If a government official sought your advice on the best way to proceed with inclusive policy, what would you advise?

30. In the end, what kind of people do you want schools to produce?

Do you have anything else to add?
Appendix D: Interview Questions for Parents

Parents' Attitudes and Perspectives

31. As different people often have different (and sometime contradictory) views about the definition and meaning of inclusion, what does inclusive education mean to you?
32. Are you aware of the current inclusive education policy in secondary education?
   • What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of this policy?
33. How do you value current inclusive/special education policy in secondary education?
34. How do you view and value the current role of parents in the process of inclusive education?
   • How, and to what extent, can parents be involved and influence the implementation of inclusive policy? To what extent are they involved in decision making about placements/support?
35. How do you value the role of secondary schools (mainstream/inclusive/special) in addressing special educational needs? If your child had special needs, in which type of school would you like them to be educated?
36. Has there ever been a child with SEN in your child's classroom (mainstream, inclusive, special)? How have you dealt with it? How has your child dealt with it?

Implementation: Barriers and Challenges

37. Are there resources in place for the implementation of inclusive/special education policy in your child's school? Are they helpful in adopting inclusive/special education practices?
   • Is inclusive/special education policy feasible in Greek secondary schools?
38. What are the barriers/factors that you consider as hindering/influencing the implementation of inclusive educational policy in secondary schools? In your child’s school? Are you informed about how has it been presented and dealt with?
39. Do these barriers affect your attitudes towards inclusive policy? How?

Practices and Support

40. Do you feel supported by the local educational authorities?
41. What do you think may improve the implementation of inclusion in practice?
42. If a government official sought your advice on the best way to proceed with inclusive policy, what would you advise?
43. In the end, what kind of people do you want schools to produce?

Do you have anything else to add?
Appendix E: Observation Schedule

Class / school: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
Other factual info: ___________________________________________________________

Headings  Narratives:

Physical space/provision:
size of the class,
Instructional materials,
student-t-desk ratio, student
materials, classroom layout,
school/classroom
atmosphere

Teacher characteristics:
age of the teacher (s),
years of teaching
experience, general attitude,
gender of teacher (s),
years of experience with
Students with SEN,
pedagogical techniques,
cooperation between
regular/special teachers,
cooperation between
teachers and parents

Lesson content:
topics addressed/covered,
instructional (lecture) time,
full-class discussion,
duration of class, in-class
student activity time, small
group discussion

Student characteristics:
gender composition of
classroom, SEN/without
Students with SEN
composition in classroom,
age of students, gender
division/separation in
classroom, grade level(s)
represented

**Student-teacher dynamics:**
pedagogical techniques,
discipline techniques,
student responsiveness,
teaching differentiation,
ratio of teacher engagement,
teachers' expectations from
students, interaction
between teacher(s) and full
class, interaction between
teacher(s) and Students with
SEN, communication
between teacher(s) and
Students with SEN,
initiatives for interaction to
Students with SEN

**Student-student dynamics:**
interaction between students
with/without SEN,
cooperation between
students with/without SEN,
bulling, teasing,
supportive/abusive
language, mutual
assistance/sharing