RECONCEPTUALIZING A POST-SECONDARY PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

A Thesis Submitted to the Committee of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education in the Faculty of Arts and Science

TRENT UNIVERSITY

Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

Education M.Ed. Graduate Program

January 2023

ABSTRACT

Reconceptualizing a Post-Secondary Program for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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The number of post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities has been on the rise since the early 1990's (Plotner & Marshall, 2015). However, research focused on student experiences within these programs has been predominantly from faculty, mainstream students and parent's perspectives without accounting for what the students themselves are experiencing. This thesis however utilizes critical narrative inquiry as a methodology to listen the stories of students with disabilities, in conjunction with the researcher's personal and professional experiences to reconceptualize the CICE program at Fleming College in Peterborough Ontario in order to provide students with more responsive and inclusive educational experiences. Six themes emerged from interviews conducted in the research: friendship/social opportunities, career/goals, supports, barriers/challenges, independence/freedom and finally identity/inclusion. A critical exploration of these themes is provided to develop programmatic, college and community level changes that forward a reconceptualized view of post-secondary education for adults with disabilities.

Keywords: Post-secondary programs for students with disabilities, student voice, critical disability theory, critical narrative inquiry.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the students (past and present) who I have had the honour of working with throughout their educational journey. This research is for you! I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Dr. Luigi Iannacci who provided me with an amazing experience. Words cannot describe how grateful I am for your support and guidance. Thank you to all the members of my committee, Dr Blair Niblett and my external examiner.

I also would like to acknowledge the unwavering support my family and friends provided me throughout my M.Ed. Thank you to my wonderful husband Jim, and my daughter and son in law Rachel and Jason and my son Ian for always being there for me throughout this process. I would also like to acknowledge the support of amazing CICE team at Fleming College. In particular, I would especially like to thank Julie Wilson for the endless hours spent listening and discussing the program and what is best for our students.

Lastly, I would like to recognize a teacher who has been a mentor and friend for over thirty years. Judy Mather thank you for your inspiration and living a life that respects and honours all individuals.

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Chapter 1: My Story

Joe

My story begins when I was in grade 6 at a rural K-6 public school, where I was introduced to the word 'retarded.' I had observed a student at recess who spent the entire break by the fence looking out to a farmer's field. I also noticed that he was not in any classes. Joe[1] spent time in the principal's office as well as time with the custodian. When I inquired why Joe was not in class, my teacher replied, "He's retarded" and said nothing more. After a few weeks went by, I wandered over to the fence leaving my friends to talk to Joe. His oral language skills were limited but his eyes told me he understood everything I was saying. I remember the day like yesterday when I asked Joe to come to the ball diamond and play three-pitch with us at recess. Although reluctant at first, he came around. I felt a real connection to Joe.

Later, I spoke to the Principal regarding Joe completing the Canadian Participaction test as he had amazing ball playing skills that I witnessed. The principal spoke to Joe's parents who agreed, and the training began. Joe joined my gym class and we worked together during recess time to train for the test. That spring, Joe did all the Canadian Participaction tests. At the June assembly, I noticed Joe and his parents were present, and from my memory, that was the first assembly Joe had attended. At this assembly, Joe received his Participaction pin. I imagined how his family felt when he received his award. Nearing the end of the assembly the principal called me forward with Joe's parents. I received an award for being a helpful student. It didn't feel right to me to be given an award for being someone's friend. Now, I realize the award was given to me

[1] All names used throughout this thesis are pseudonyms.

because I did something that at the time was seen as ‘noble’ or ‘helpful,’ as at the time no one – not even staff members wanted to reach out and help Joe as he was ‘retarded.’ As Dolmage (2014) notes individuals with disabilities are seen to be pitied simply because of their deficits. The pity discourse continues to be dominant in society and education unfortunately.

As I have learned subsequently, the term ‘retarded’ historically has been also associated with other negative terms like imbecile, defective and moron (Ellis, 2019). All of these terms are non-normative, focusing on the deficits that an individual possesses. I have also come to know that these derogatory terms are all rooted in the eugenics movement, a movement that was embraced by society to ‘improve’ the human race by categorization and the elimination of anyone seen as not normal (Baker, 2002).

I found out after the awards ceremony that Joe’s parents had fought the school board so that Joe could attend school as they were both working professionals and did not have childcare for him. Interestingly, three years later in Ontario, Bill 82 was passed that required school boards to provide education for all students. “Before special education support became a right, such services across the province were discretionary” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, p.55). During those years – a time we might call the pre-special education era – school boards were not required to provide any sort of differentiated programming in classrooms, no matter what students’ perceived needs were. I assume that Joe’s parents were reflective of a larger advocacy group/movement that demanded that students with disabilities have equal rights to an education.

Co-op Placement

During grade 12, I completed a co-operative education placement in a Trainable Mentally Retarded (TMR) classroom, which has since had a name change to Learning and Life Skills classrooms, as the TMR designation was deemed as an offensive term. It was there that I met my mentor, Judy Mather. The TMR room that she taught and ran was a segregated classroom for students with IQs below the first percentile. It was in this classroom that I first witnessed an educator who believed in her students and always focused on what they could do. I recall Judy telling me that all children have gifts, and it was our job to honour those gifts and assist the students to use their gifts. As I reflect back on her teaching, it is quite clear to me that Judy was always looking to support students by using their strengths, and she approached her teaching through an asset-orientated lens (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008). An asset-orientated lens can be defined as viewing individuals for the strengths they possess, interests they have and their ways of knowing the world and demonstrate this knowledge. rather than solely focused on their deficits. I saw firsthand how her positive style of teaching, where she focused on students' assets, which led to positive experiences for all students, in the classroom and after they left her classroom. This was abundantly clear throughout the time I spent in Judy Mather's classroom.

Classroom Revelations as an EA

Years later, I returned to the classroom environment as an Educational Assistant. I worked in a classroom much like the one I had been in during my co-operative placement – a segregated classroom with 10 students with disabilities. In this classroom students were labelled as mentally disabled, terms that are now considered to be unacceptable.

The staff consisted of one special education teacher along with me and one other Educational Assistant. This was a very challenging place for me as I quickly learned that teachers like Judy Mather were unique. The other educational assistant insisted on taking on the role of the "bad cop" and assigned me the role of "good cop," something I did not feel was effective for student success. Unfortunately, the teacher in this classroom did not see the gifts the students came in with each day. I can recall the weekly schedule, where the students did worksheet after worksheet. On the worksheets she would mark in red 'erase and do it again.' It was very difficult for the students, and for me, to see someone so focused on this form of "impoverished pedagogy" (Iannacci, 2017, p. 34) rather than understanding that no two students learn the same. It was in this classroom that I realized that if I really wanted to make a difference, I needed to go to university to become a teacher, specifically to become a teacher who valued students in same way Judy Mather did.

Tommy: Teaching in the Field of Special Education

After completing my undergraduate degree and my Bachelor of Education, I began my teaching career as a Learning and Life Skills teacher. The first years of my career were shaped by my past experiences, as Judy Mather was a driving force in my pedagogy. During my 15 years of teaching students labelled with various disabilities, I heard many stories from parents about the challenges they faced with the educational system. One parent's story stood out to me.

Rose, Tommy's mom, shared with me what the doctor said when Tommy was born, "He is a vegetable, nothing good can come from his life, he will never talk or walk." After this parent-teacher meeting, I felt heartbroken that someone in the medical

profession would say something of this magnitude to a parent. Scouring through the student's Ontario Student Record, I was looking for something that would assist me in teaching this young boy who couldn't talk or walk, and I found nothing helpful.

The Ontario Student Record was filled with documents that used deficit language. There was nothing in it that focused on important information about Tommy's gifts. I also could not find the medical diagnosis that identified why he was unable to walk. I therefore questioned the physiotherapist during one of her consultations in the classroom and asked what his medical diagnosis was. Her response shocked me. "He is just lazy," she replied. For 10 years of his life, his mother had no idea that there was potential for Tommy to walk. As I reflected on this situation, it was clear to me that the real laziness could be attributed to the many medical professionals that did not work to see the potential in Tommy.

After sharing this information with an EA within the classroom, the EA asked Tommy if he wanted to learn how to walk. He shook his head yes, and with that his wheelchair spent more time in the hall than in the classroom. We went from Tommy walking assisted, to being able to take a few steps to walking independently. The physiotherapist came to visit and was absolutely shocked at his progress. As Tommy began to walk, he also began to talk and sign. I was fortunate enough to communicate with him as I have my ASL level 203 qualifications. I fully began to see that when students are given the space and opportunity to flourish, many aspects of their lives began to transform.

At his grade 8 graduation I tearfully watched as Tommy walked across the stage to get his certificate of accomplishment. Whenever I think about this story, I am

reminded that as educators we need to challenge the status quo, push past the limits the medical model creates for students and look for students' abilities, rather than focusing on their disabilities. Tommy is one of the many that I encountered in my time in the public school sector, prior to my transition to Fleming College.

First Introductions to Fleming CICE

I was introduced to the Community Integration through Cooperative Education (CICE) program in 2010, when I received a phone call from a Fleming faculty member who was interested in bringing the CICE program to Fleming college in Peterborough, Ontario. This type of program provides students with developmental disabilities an opportunity to attend college in the province of Ontario. The program was in place at both Humber and Durham College, and the Fleming faculty member who reached out to me was passionate about bringing the program to Fleming College as she saw the need in the community to support adults with disabilities.

The faculty member I spoke to did not know me previously, and said that she had heard within the community that I too was an advocate for supporting students with disabilities. With my background experience as a learning and life skills teacher, and even prior to that, as an educational assistant, she felt that I would be an excellent fit as a member of the original Program Advisory Committee (PAC) to bring the CICE program to Fleming College. I had always felt angry about the fact that students with disabilities were able to attend school until age 21, but had no options for post-secondary education after that. This creates a "school to couch pipeline" (Iannacci, 2018 p. 103), and I had witnessed many of my previous students thrive within their time in the school system,

and then flounder after graduating. I spent one year on this Program advisory committee to support the development and establishment of the CICE program at Fleming College.

Needed Change

Six years later, I received news that my special education classroom would be closing, and I was told that I would be teaching a grade 2/3 class. I was devastated by this news as I had spent my 27 years with the school board, first as an EA, then as a teacher - always working with students with diverse needs. Serendipitously, soon after hearing of this news, I was asked to interview at Fleming college for a full-time Faculty and Program Coordinator position in the Educational Support program. After being the successful candidate, I retired from the school board, and took over the Educational Support program at Fleming college in 2017. This opportunity felt like I was able to return to my roots working to support students who would be the next generation of educational assistants who would work with students with diverse needs in Ontario schools.

In 2018, I learned that the CICE program was moving from the School of General Arts and Science to my school, the School of Community Development. With this move, the program coordinator position was posted. I felt that this was my calling, and the timing seemed perfect – to be able to support students with disabilities, now just in a different age bracket than my previous work. I applied for the position and was successful and have been in this role ever since, as well as continuing to be the coordinator of the Educational Support program.

Since my involvement with the initial Program Advisory Committee for the CICE program at Fleming, I have heard from many parents in various contexts related to

community organizations with which I collaborate. These include Community Living Peterborough, Tri-County Behavioural Services, and the Down Syndrome Association of Peterborough. Parents of students within the programs often expressed their disappointment with these programs to me and described the struggles their child faced. I thought to myself as I listened to their stories, this is not what these programs were supposed to be like.

When I began as the CICE Program Coordinator, I took this knowledge and actively engaged in program renewal. Through this process, I examined the program's policies/procedures and learning outcomes. A review of related documents led me to understand that I needed to know more. After speaking with my academic chair, I started to do research on types of programs across the world similar to CICE and started to delve into understanding and learning more about where I could expand my knowledge base about programs for adults with disabilities. It was then that I learned of the Pacific RIM conference on Disability and Diversity. I had the opportunity to attend the conference, and I am forever grateful for the experience. It was at this conference that I met Dr. Luigi Iannacci, a professor at Trent University. I knew after meeting him that I wanted to further my own post-secondary education and complete my Master of Education focusing my thesis on post-secondary education for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The attitudes and barriers that students in the CICE program faced on a daily basis were my central concerns given my personal and professional experiences and history. The first thing I wondered as I thought about pursuing a thesis was what students' goals and desires were during their time in the CICE program at Fleming college.

As I began my master's thesis, I began to further recognize how policies and programs within this field are rooted and riddled in deficit-based approaches that do not account for student voice. I became interested in exploring this dilemma through research as I wanted to understand how to create responsive programming based directly on what students had to say. To start this process, I knew I needed to understand the current structure and frameworks at the root of post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities.

General Context

The literature review revealed that there are 3 dominant models utilized worldwide; full inclusion, substantial separated and mixed hybrid. In programs that use an Inclusive model, students take courses with mainstream peers and have individualized support from student mentors. Substantially separated post-secondary programs are operated within college facilities, however the students attending the program do not have the option to take courses with mainstream college students. This model focuses on life skills and some community-based experiences. The Hybrid model of post-secondary programs is also focused on life skills, yet students with intellectual disabilities have the opportunity to audit mainstream courses and participate in college-wide activities (Causton-Theoharis, Ashby & Declouette, 2009). Programs in Ontario often use a partial integration model (mixed hybrid) with core courses for CICE students only. This means students are integrated into mainstream programs and take courses in which they are interested. The literature also showed that the number of post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities have been on the rise since the early 1990's. Plotner and Marshall (2015) for example have reported that there are over 220 post-secondary

programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities at the college and university level in the United States. After briefly reviewing the literature in this field, it is apparent that the majority of research completed on post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities has been conducted in the United States.

More programs however are being currently developed in many countries world-wide (Corby, Taggart, & Cousins, 2020). Currently, within the province of Ontario, there are thirteen (12 English and 1 French) post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities facilitated by community colleges, including Fleming college. These programs are classified as Community Integration through Co-operative Education (CICE) Programs (CICE College Programs, 2013).

The CICE Program at Fleming College

The CICE program at Fleming College is a two-year program that is focused on providing students with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to attend college. There are core CICE courses that focus on essential skills such as social, computer and life skills. In addition to these courses, students select a 'stream' where they are integrated into a mainstream program for three courses over the course of two years. They also take a mainstream general elective which is not an authentic elective. This will be discussed later in the thesis. Finally, students complete 3 placements within the community. During these courses/placements, students are supported by Learning Facilitators, whose role is to provide students with academic modifications and social opportunities during the students' time at Fleming College.

Researcher's Role

My role as a researcher in this study was to provide students with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to share their story of lived experiences in post-secondary programs designed for students with intellectual disabilities. As an invested community member, educator, and a coordinator of a post-secondary education program for students with intellectual disabilities, I feel a responsibility to 'move the needle forward,' to invest time and develop deepened understanding of the educational experiences of individuals with intellectual disabilities studying at post-secondary institutions. I see my role as a researcher originating from a 'people first' orientation, seeing individuals for their strengths, but more importantly listening to their stories, their dreams and goals for their future.

As many educational and life decisions are made for this marginalized group, I feel my role is to hear their stories, try to understand their perspectives and share their hopes, dreams, and desires for their education at post-secondary institutions so that they can have input into decisions that affect them. It is vital in my role as a program coordinator that I fully understand students' perspectives. Ultimately, this project attempts to listen to and understand experiences from these students' perspectives so that needed change can happen. I am guided by the adage in the disability rights movement that insists 'nothing for us, without us.'

General Purpose and Significance

As the program coordinator for the CICE program at Fleming College and through my past experiences, I have grown extremely interested in understanding the existing attitudes as they relate to students with disabilities and current barriers they

experience as they navigate the program. I am also concerned about how inclusive practices can be facilitated and developed at Fleming college. This research study uses CNR to explore the lived experiences of students who have attended or are currently attending a post-secondary program for students with intellectual disabilities. Through the methodology of Critical Narrative Inquiry (CNI), I explore the research at hand using my story of time spent with students with intellectual disabilities in different capacities. I interviewed 8 students that have taken or are taking the Community Integration through Cooperative Education Program (CICE) at Fleming College in Peterborough, Ontario. Research questions are focused on the goals articulated by these students, their experiences with inclusion and barriers they may have encountered during their time within the program. The intent of this research is to explore students lived experiences and from the data, to ascertain future direction and planning for postsecondary programs based directly on information provided by students with intellectual disabilities through a reconceptualization. Reconceptualization can be defined for the purpose of this thesis as a process that is driven by the reconceptualist movement. The reconceptualist movement, driven by scholars such as Bill Pinar, is heavily focused on the process associated with examining structures with a retransformation in sight (Pinar, 1994). Pacini-Ketchabaw and Pence (2005) noted that "reconceptualists talk about 'both/and' rather than 'either/or." This process is never ending and involves a critical examination of context and those who work in and research about them. A reconceptionalist requires a constant critique of the macro, micro and self.

The following questions drive this Critical Narrative Inquiry and reconceptualist oriented research.. These questions are of most importance as they focus on the students

themselves. These questions were designed to enable the students to share their experiences of college life and potentially revise programing, policy and pedagogy based on this information.

Research Questions

From the lived-experience and voices of CICE participants:

1. What are barriers students faced in their time spent transitioning into and attending a post-secondary education program?
2. What are the goals held by students with intellectual disabilities who are attending post-secondary programs?
3. What are the experiences of students with intellectual disabilities attending post-secondary programs? In what ways are they inclusive (or exclusionary)?
4. How might the information ascertained from these questions transform post-secondary program goals and curriculum?

These questions guide my research and understanding of current issues and concerns faced by students within the CICE program at Fleming college. The aim of the research is to garner an understanding of student experiences and analyse them to develop a critical narrative inquiry. This research methodology will be described in later chapters.

In the next chapter, I provide readers with a more thorough review of the current literature on post-secondary programs for students with disabilities. This review will highlight prominent voices in the literature, as well as noting what is missing within this field of research. Key issues and trends associated with post-secondary programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities will be discussed. This chapter will also frame the context using a critical disability studies theory lens as it sheds light on historical

practices and discourses that have affected the ways in which disability is understood generally and within college programs designed for students with disabilities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

For the purpose of this literature review, I examined literature as it relates to post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities. This review begins with an overview of the common models and goals associated with post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities, followed by definitions of key terms in the literature/field. Following these sections, the review of the literature will highlight the research focused on the attitudes, barriers, and inclusionary practices experienced at post-secondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities.

Models of Post-Secondary Programs

The current literature demonstrates that post-secondary education (PSE) programs for students with intellectual disabilities are generally; substantially separated, hybrid, or inclusive (Cook, Hayden, Wilczenski & Poynton, 2015; Causton-Theoharis, Ashby & Declouette, 2009). Substantially separated post-secondary programs are operated within college facilities, however the students attending the program do not have the option to take courses with mainstream college students. This model focuses on life skills and some community-based experiences. The hybrid model of post-secondary programs is also focused on life skills, yet students with intellectual disabilities have the opportunity to audit mainstream courses and participate in college-wide activities. In programs that use an inclusive model, students take courses with mainstream peers and have individualized support from student mentors (Causton-Theoharis, Ashby & Declouette, 2009). The post-secondary program that I coordinate at Fleming College in Peterborough, Ontario is classified as a hybrid model where students take courses with mainstream students in a program of their choice. These courses are in addition to a core set of

courses focused on learning and life skills as well as employment seminars. Students also participate in work placements that align with their program of interest.

Common Goals of PSE Programs

Within the literature, it is well documented that the majority of programs have shared program goals, despite differences in model type or facilitation. Employment and independence are the main goals of post-secondary education programs as detailed in the research (Miller, Schleien, White & Harrington, 2018). These goals will be critically analyzed in this project and linked to ableist discourses that forward the idea that paid employment is considered essential and is linked to problematic understandings of what constitutes personhood. Neoliberalism and how it informs these goals and the link between having employment and 'being normal' (Zafft, Hart & Zimbrich, 2004) will also be examined in this project as they are emerging issues within the post-secondary education field.

Additional goals of post-secondary programs as highlighted by Kleinert, Jones, Sheppard-Jones, Harp & Harrison (2012) are focused on social outcomes, for example making friends, partaking in college social life and gaining independence. Such findings have an impact on research that focuses on students' lived experiences.

Personhood

When exploring the notion of personhood, it is interesting to review the dictionary definition. Personhood is defined as "the state or condition of being a person, or individual human being" (Collins, n.d.). In the context of critical disability theory, many areas of discussion arise related to how this specific definition can put limitations on individuals just because they have a disability. For the purpose of this thesis, and in

accordance with other critical disability theorists, it is important to change the definition of personhood to be seen via an asset-orientated lens (Carlson, 2010). Therefore, I believe that personhood needs to refer to the idea that all people in society, including individuals with disabilities, feel their worth and value as a contributing member to society as a whole rather than being understood as a person by measure and norms that society has constructed to delineate what a human is or does. Personhood is therefore is a diverse state of being and becoming that requires neurodiversity be valued and linked to a person's identity.

Key Term Definitions

For the purpose of this literature review *Inclusion* can be defined as *"*a process of identifying, understanding and breaking down the barriers to participation and belonging" (Folk, Yamamoto, & Stodden, 2012, p. 260). As inclusion is a key term and dominant discourse in higher education, it will be further critically discussed and expanded in this chapter and throughout the thesis. Defining inclusion within the context of higher education often results in complex and problematic issues. For example, if a student with an intellectual disability is fully included within a post-secondary program without their desires and needs being addressed, the student is geographically placed within the classes, but not included in a meaningful or responsive way (Iannacci, 2018). An *Intellectual disability* (referred to throughout this thesis) is typically "characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour that originate before the age of 18" (Folk, Yamamoto, & Stodden, 2012, p. 261-262). Finally, the term *voice*, which is often described as a verb, can be defined for this project as the

opinions, beliefs and experiences expressed (multimodally) by a person or a group. These key terms are frequently used in this field and are discussed within this literature review.

Stakeholders

Faculty, administration, parents, mainstream students, and students with disabilities are considered stakeholders in post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities. Understanding the experiences of all stakeholders is vital for success in all institutions. Establishing attitudes, eliminating barriers and utilizing inclusionary practices promotes positivity within the time a student is attending the post-secondary program. This can in turn benefit all stakeholders involved with the program. Research focused on each stakeholder group will be explored in the sections that follow.

Faculty and College Administration

A study completed by Brewer and Movahedazahoulish (2021) utilized a phenomenological approach to fully conceptualize stakeholders' attitudes on the program being researched as well as general barriers and strengths associated with post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities. Individual interviews were conducted for three groups of stakeholders: students with intellectual disabilities, faculty, and program coordinators. Participants were asked questions regarding perceptions (attitudes), barriers, and strengths in relation to the program.

In regard to faculty/administration, both program coordinators and faculty noted that they had positive perceptions towards the programs for students with intellectual disabilities. However, both coordinators and faculty also highlighted that more training was required to ensure student and faculty satisfaction with the program itself. These findings reveal that although stakeholders' attitudes are often positive towards the

programs where they work, there are various barriers that need to be addressed when facilitating and coordinating a post-secondary program for students with intellectual disabilities.

Additionally, a quantitative study completed by Plotner and Marshall (2015) investigated post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities in the United States. Both barriers and available supports present at the time of program development and operation were assessed via surveys conducted by program coordinators.

Findings from this study highlighted that each program experienced some form of difficulty when establishing itself at the post-secondary level for individuals with intellectual disabilities. These difficulties included adequate funding resources, liability issues, and ensuring student safety during their time at the post-secondary institution. However, many of the barriers noted during the program implementation process tended to resolve over the years after initial program establishment. The authors concluded that most successful programs for students with intellectual disabilities at the post-secondary level made necessary and consistent changes across the years following implementation to address the issues that arose (Plotner & Marshall, 2015).

Findings identified by Brewer & Movahedazahoulish (2021) and Plotner & Marshall (2015) are important, as both emphasized the need for adequate training and resources in order to facilitate a successful program. However, neither of these studies confered with students themselves.

Within past research on post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities, mainstream students are identified as an additional stakeholder group. Some

models of programs for students with intellectual disabilities are facilitated in tandem with college-wide programs, with students with intellectual disaiblities enrolled in courses designated for their mainstream peers (Causton-Theoharis, Ashby & Declouette, 2009). As well, some mainstream students serve as peer mentors, both in paid and volunteer positions within programs for students with intellectual disabilities. (May (2012).

Mainstream Students

Griffin, Summer, McMillan, Day, and Hodapp (2012) using a Likert scale rating system surveyed mainstream students to determine their attitudes towards the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in their classes. The findings indicated that female students held more of a positive attitude towards students with intellectual disabilities, and also appeared to be more comfortable with students with disabilities as their classmates when compared to their male student counterparts. Griffin et al. (2012) noted that due to this difference, providing information about the program for students with disabilities to mainstream students could allow for all students to be informed and ultimately, feel more positive and comfortable with students with disabilities as their peers within classes.

In addition to the work of Griffin et al. (2012), May (2012) also investigated attitudes that were held by college students regarding the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities within a first-year psychology course. This study collected data at both the beginning and the end of the course, using a control group and an experimental group. The experimental group consisted of students within a psychology course that had peers who were students of a post-secondary program for students with intellectual

disabilities. In contrast, the control group consisted of mainstream students. The data was collected through the use of an online survey taken by the students.

Study results indicated that, at the end of the course, students in the experimental group demonstrated a stronger positive attitude toward the inclusion of peers with intellectual disabilities than the control group which had no exposure to students with intellectual disabilities within their course.

The research completed by Griffin et al. (2012) and May (2012), each indicated that mainstream students had positive attitudes towards inclusion of peers with intellectual disabilities. These studies highlight positive attitudes towards inclusion, yet they do not address whether the students with intellectual disabilities within each study felt included as once again they were not interviewed or surveyed as part of the research.

Parents/Guardians of Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Parents and guardians play a very important and essential role in the world of post-secondary education for their children with intellectual disabilities. It is vital to ensure that program information is provided to parents prior to their child attending the program to assist with their transition from the secondary to the post-secondary level. Griffin, McMillan and Hodapp (2010) quantatively outlined experiences parents had while assisting their child with the transition to a post-secondary program for students with intellectual disabilities.

Two significant findings in the study were related to barriers the parents encountered. The first barrier was that parents felt that they were not provided an adequate amount of information regarding the program prior to and during the transition process. The second barrier was fear for their child's safety while enrolled in the

program. These findings are important to highlight as parents have acted as their child's advocate for many years and often continue this role into post-secondary education.

Miller, Schleien, White and Larrington's (2018) quantitative study utilized a phone survey to explore parents' desired and perceived outcomes of post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities. The participants included parents whose children were currently attending programs for students with intellectual disabilities, as well as parents who had children that had graduated from these types of programs. The study determined that independent living, building strong social relationships, and employment opportunities were desired outcomes that parents identified.

As for perceived outcomes, parents felt that independent living skills, use of public transportation, appropriate hygiene, and money management were also important to them. Parents believed that post-secondary programs had an overall positive impact on their child's life, specifically in relation to their social and personal skills. These findings demonstrated that parents were becoming accustomed to their child's independence, experience of college life and attainment of valuable skills within a post-secondary setting.

An additional study completed by Yuan, Ryan and Dague (2018) also looked at parental perceptions of post-secondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities. Using a semi-structured interview approach, the parents of eight students were interviewed to discuss their overall perceptions of their child and their experiences within the program designed for students with intellectual disabilities. The main findings were that parents reported an overall positive view of their child's education at a post-

secondary institution. An additional common parent perception was that their child would attain valuable and meaningful work experience. Importantly, Yuan, Ryan and Dague (2018) noted that the program of focus took into consideration community employers' needs and expectations.

These findings make an important contribution to understanding the experiences of parents whose children are attending a post-secondary education program for students with intellectual disabilities. Once students with intellectual disabilities enter school, parents often have to fight for resources and extra support just to ensure their child has access to a basic human right, their education. Parents of children with intellectual disabilities are typically strong advocates for their child and continue in this role when their child is transitioning into post-secondary education.

As highlighted in the aforementioned studies, difficulties with transitioning to college is a reoccurring concern of parents of students with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, multiple studies indicated that parents are concerned with post-graduation outcomes, such as employment (Yuan, Ryan & Dague, 2018; Griffin, McMillan & Hodapp, 2010).

Parental perceptions of their child's experience at a post-secondary institution are important, yet to fully understand students' experiences with post-secondary education, it is essential to delve deeper into research focused on students' voices. Students need to be able to advocate for themselves, communicate barriers they have experienced firsthand, and to identify what needs to be done to provide inclusionary practices. This information will ultimately shape programs to meet the academic, social and occupational needs of these students.

From my own experience, I have found that many people often speak for individuals with disabilities out of a desire to support them. Regardless of their good intentions, we need to hear from individuals with intellectual disabilities. Unfortunately, in the literature review I conducted, very few studies were focused on students' experiences. The next section will endeavor to summarize the few studies that did.

Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Corby, Taggart and Cousins (2020) attempted to explore the lived experiences of students with intellectual disabilities at post-secondary institutions. This comprehensive study utilized individual narrative interviews for 11 students with intellectual disabilities who were attending a post-secondary program in Ireland. Findings from the interview data focused on the following: learning, friendships, and perceptions in regards to student life. Students emphasized that they valued college life and demonstrated strong positive self-concepts in terms of their progress within their program. Overall, students noted that they wanted to live in ways that 'typical' college students would.

Brewer and Movahedazahoulish (2021) also examined students with intellectual disabilities perceptions towards post-secondary programs. Students with intellectual disabilities interviewed within this phenomenological study stated that overall they were very pleased with the program. A main theme noted from the student interviews was that students enjoyed the freedom that came with post-secondary life, while another evident theme was that assessments and evaluations caused them great stress.

An additional study completed by Plotner and May (2019) examined both similarities and differences present in the college experiences of three groups of students; students with intellectual disabilities, students with mild learning disabilities and students

without disabilities. Students with intellectual disabilities were enrolled within a hybrid model program at the college level. Students from two post-secondary institutions in the Southwestern United States were selected to complete a survey that focused on four main domains: "(1) motivations for going to college, (2) students' academic experiences, (3) friendships, family, and social activity, and (4) college life with a disability" (Plotner & May, 2019, p. 63).

Study results noted that there were extensive similarities in the reasons for attending college between the groups. All groups noted parental influence from their parents in their decision to attend college. In regard to academic experiences, there were no differences evident in overall academic ability, specifically the ability to keep up with course readings (Plotner & May, 2019). However, differences among groups in so far as their experiences with college faculty. Specifically, students with intellectual disabilities reported better perceptions of faculty teaching practices in comparison to students with mild learning disabilities and students without disabilities (Plotner & May, 2019).

Kubiak (2017) felt that there was a lack of research that explored student voice and formulated a collaborative study with student participants as co-researchers and subsequently improved the teaching and learning process.

Findings from these interviews were broken into two qualitative categories with respect to how students with intellectual disabilities learn at college. A supportive learning environment and self-regulated learning were identified as central themes in the data. Students expressed that having a safe space to learn was essential and was facilitated by a positive learning environment. Students also shared that they appreciated when learning occurred via conversations within the classroom. This study provided

insight into the importance of student focussed data that can inform our practices in meeting the needs of our learners.

In a recent study by Herrero, Gasset & Garcia (2020), student voice was at the forefront of inquiry. The purpose of this research was to understand the voice of students with intellectual disabilities and as such, directly included these students on the study's research team.

Findings demonstrated the importance of higher education for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Student responses focused on the positive impact the university program had on their social relationships, performance in school and employment outcomes. Students identified barriers which detailed the negative impact that either rigid teaching methods or physical barriers that had on their ability to be successful in higher education. This study reinforced the importance of focussing on student experiences in order to transform programs designed for them.

Inclusion

A common element discussed within research related to post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities is the notion of inclusion. Inclusion is a frequently used term within the field of education, yet, it is misunderstood and ubiquitous (Iannacci, 2018). In their discussion of the notion of *inclusionism,* Mitchell & Snyder (2015) noted that through the process of trying to include all bodies who look, sound or act different, individuality is lost by the pressure to conform to a normative discourse. Through this ableist outlook, "the magical resolution of diversity-based integration practices is achieved by 'making bodies that look different' invisible, more normative" (Mitchell & Snyder, 2015, p. 4).

In research completed by Corby, Taggart & Cousins (2020), the importance of understanding the difference between integration and inclusion was emphasized. The researchers argued that the views of individuals with disabilities need to be heard in the process of developing inclusive programs at the post-secondary level. By ensuring that students' voices are heard, opportunities that address barriers these students experience can be addressed.

A Canadian study completed by Aylward and Bruce (2012) discussed different principles of inclusive post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities across Canada. They noted that inclusive programs from province to province vary widely. Despite these differences, the authors highlighted that these programs provide a level of hope for students with disabilities to attend college and belong.

A study conducted by Bjornsdottir (2017) reported that students with intellectual disabilities face many barriers that affect their ability to be included in campus life. The study also noted that students may not experience full inclusion when attending college courses with their peers who do not have disabilities. The study demonstrates that even though students with intellectual disabilities are physically present on campus, they do not necessarily develop a sense of belonging. Bjornsdottir (2017) also mentioned that students with intellectual disabilities in non-inclusive programs (segregated) at the postsecondary level may in fact experience a sense of belonging and develop positive social relationships as they are with peers with whom they can relate. This study gives ordinance to the notion that inclusion goes above and beyond a geographic location.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Disability Theory (CDT)

In order to address issues and gaps that emerge from the literature review, my personal and professional experiences and collected data, I draw upon critical disability theory. CDT explores disability from historical, political and socio-cultural lenses. Instead of viewing disability as a deficit within a person, disability is viewed as a construct created by society (Bacon & Lalvani, 2019).

At a macro level, critical disability advocates are focused on breaking down the ableist structure that is in place in all facets of society (Iannacci, 2018). At a micro level, post-secondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities have continued to operate under a dominant normative discourse by focusing on deficits in students with intellectual disabilities. This focus perpetuates the notion that post-secondary institutions are intended to normalize this population, furthering the marginalization and negative stereotypical views of disability. It is essential that post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities reconceptualize programming that align with an asset-orientated approach (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008).

This approach requires seeing and utilizing the students' strengths to support them in their continuation of their education. Understanding that this population of students have been examined and evaluated, in ways that focus on what they cannot do is key. Rather than defining these students by their deficits, focusing on their assets can support a shift in the narrative, which ultimately furthers their right to personhood.

From a historical standpoint, individuals with intellectual disabilities have faced heinous and barbaric treatment. This is evident through the eugenics movement that

sought to eliminate anyone within society whose existence diverged from what was classified as normal (Baker, 2002). CDT examines these historical contexts and identifies how they have played a role in current discourse that informs how we view disability today.

Critical disability theory also emphasises the importance of political/economic contextualization. Society has defined personhood as dependent on being a contributing member of a capitalist society which means holding a job, engaging in hyper-consumerism and living independently. CDT critically examines how the impact of neoliberalism shapes how individuals navigate their daily life. Neoliberalism as it relates to disability is defined as the dominant economic discourse in society that silence those who fall outside of what society deems to be adequate for a functioning and contributing member in the community (Mitchell & Snyder, 2015). In the eyes of those who embrace these tenets of neoliberalism, people with disabilities are viewed as less than, and disregarded in the context of being a contributing member of society as defined by their ability to produce and consume. These oppressions take place on both a micro and macro level, an example of the micro level could be defining someone by their disability, i.e. "down syndrome boy," thus infantilizing them and solely defining them by their deficits while an example of a macro level would be limiting opportunities for meaningful employment based on the assumption that they are not able to manage this employment.

Within all realms of our society, normative discourses inform inclusive practices and further marginalize individuals with disabilities. This has perpetuated rather than disrupted ableist understandings of inclusion often taken to mean the appearance of what is deemed normal as a goal for people with disabilities. It is important to note that as

demonstrated in this the literature review, inclusive practices may have positive intentions but often lead to exclusion and further marginalization. Critical disability theory aims to name and critique ableism as it exists in even the most well-intentioned initiatives and seemingly focus on human rights and social justice informed practises, policies, and programs (Iannacci, 2018).

The use of Critical disability theory also forwards one of the goals of this research which is to reconceptualize post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities. CDT has the potential to forward this reconceptualization because it takes an anti-ableist view which aims to create a positive space for individuals with intellectual disabilities to participate within society. Rather than reinforcing a segregated narrative, an 'us and them' mentality, critical disability theory disrupts what is typically seen in society, allowing for an examination of biases that are held at the micro to macro level (Iannacci, 2018). This reconceptualization is vital as post-secondary institutions are often connected to multiple levels of government and inherently adopt ableist practices without realizing it.

The next chapter will highlight the methods and methodology utilized in this thesis that aims to understand students with disabilities' attitudes and experiences in programs at post-secondary institutions. As such, Critical Narrative Inquiry will be described and explored in relation to its significance in researching the experiences students with disabilities have in post-secondary institutions.

Chapter 3

This chapter will highlight the methodology and methods used within this thesis. Specifically, it will provide a detailed overview of the Critical narrative inquiry. An introduction to the participants will be included as well. Procedure and research methods related to the design of this study will also be outlined. Finally, context regarding data collection, analysis and ethical considerations will be explored.

Methodology

Critical Narrative Inquiry

Critical narrative inquiry is a methodology that is rooted within the Deweyan principle that education is deeply integrated with life itself (Connolly & Clandinin, 1990). Clandinin (2016) noted that "narrative inquiry is relational in all ways that our Dewey-inspired view of experience make visible; that is, it is relational across time, places and relationships" (p. 19). From this, we can ascertain that narrative inquiry is not one-sided, rather it is an exploration of the stories shared in conjunction with a reflection on our own stories and experiences. As noted by Ricoeur (1990), we can approach narrative inquiries through a three-fold mimesis. Mimesis 1 consists of constructing the data gathered via stories. Mimesis 2 is where the data can be deconstructed and contextualized. Mimesis 3 aims to reconceptualize a future, based on findings from Mimesis 1 and 2.

My own personal and professional experiences from the past 30 years as an educator invested in creating responsive programs to meet the desires and needs articulated by students with disabilities supports the use of critical narrative inquiry for this research. Critical narrative inquiry allows for this intertwining as it can bring forward powerful stories that come directly from those who have been marginalized, and not

heard from. Personally, as an Indigenous Woman, I understand the importance of storytelling and value the work of researchers like Linda Smith who have worked diligently within the academy to decolonise methodologies and to promote the methodological approach of storytelling as a critical tool for elevating voices in research (Smith, 2012).

Using this methodology means critically exploring stories in a reflexive manner. This means moving beyond the surface level to incorporate a critical examination of stories within their socio-economic and political context, as well as offering and critically reflecting on my own autobiographical narrative. Clandinin (2016) reminds researchers to be aware of different ways of thinking, as it relates to stories, the stories shared and the lived experiences of both researcher and participants. As highlighted by Clandinin, Pushor and Orr (2007), narrative inquiry moves beyond telling stories. Rather, this form of methodology encourages researchers to relive these stories shared, so we can conceptualize and contextualize the experiences in tandem with our own stories and the dominant discourses that inform these stories. Contextualization requires placing both the data and the factors that inform the data, in socio-political/economic context. This is furthered by understanding the ways in which the macro factors are influencing micro interactions. Through the process of exploring students' experiences alongside the researcher's narrative, this can provide context to understand where the narrator is speaking from (Clandinin, 2016).

Critical narrative inquiry can allow individuals who have experienced marginalization to raise their voices. As such, it can help to bring forward the voices of adults with disabilities in post-secondary education programs because these are the voices

of those who are enrolled in the program, and just like other programs at the college level, student voice and feedback are driving forces that are supposed to inform recommendations and changes needed within curriculum and policy. As an educator for over 30 years who has worked with and taught individuals with intellectual disabilities, I have firsthand experience seeing how those individuals have been kept quiet. They have been silenced, not valued, not heard or listened to and certainly not acknowledged. I believe that as we reshape our society by building relationships, sharing and analyzing stories, much can be learned, and change can happen. Silence is the result of coercive relations of power that has further marginalized and othered students with disabilities (Nieto & Moriña, 2019).

As previously mentioned, current research about individuals with intellectual disabilities attending postsecondary education programs has left out the voices of the students themselves effectively silencing them in a field purported to be about their betterment. Further, studies in the field of inquiry have often used methods that do not enable rich experiences to be heard. Methodologically these studies have been rooted in quantitative paradigms that have overlooked the experiences of students with disabilities in post-secondary programs. This research has not allowed for necessary rich, meaningful and powerful dialogue that is student focussed. It is important to understand that these students' experiences cannot solely be numerated via statistics and quantitative data.

Critical narrative inquiry can inform a reconceptualized understanding of post-secondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities. It has the potential to do this because stories are powerful and can illuminate lived experiences that cannot be understood through numerical data. CNI allows for the stories of both the

participants and the researcher to be intertwined and inform a reconceptualization of what is needed at the post-secondary level. This study aims to hear and understand students' goals, dreams and the barriers they face while attending a post-secondary institution. Knowledge garnered from these stories, can assist with the development of responsive programming that meets their needs and offers a positive college experience that is attuned to their desires and experiences.

Methods

Upon approval from Trent University's Research Ethics Board, prospective research participants were contacted via phone to inquire if they were interested in participating in the research study. Each participant was provided with an overview of the research study information about the consent process. If the prospective participant was interested, the Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form were emailed to them. These documents can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B. When discussing the research with potential participants, I made them aware that if they would like to meet to discuss or go over any of the forms, I could do so at another time. Once I received a participant's signed informed consent form, I arranged a time to meet with them to conduct an interview over the video conferencing system, WebEx. This was required as a result of safety and health protocols that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. After interviews were conducted, all transcripts were anonymized by changing students' names to pseudonyms, as well as limiting the inclusion of identifiable information as per ethics protocols. Both the transcripts and the video recording files were encrypted and stored on a secured H drive at Trent University. These files will remain on this file for 7 years post-publication, then they will be destroyed.

Interviews were conducted from August to September 2021. The first round of interviews were semi-structured, ranging between 30-60 minutes in length and were based on the interview protocol found in Appendix C. As the interviews were semi-structured, some questions were not listed on the question protocol, rather they were asked of the participant based on their responses to previous questions. All second interviews were conducted on WebEx from October to November 2021. The second round of interviews were semi-structured as well, with some of the questions asked being tailored from the prior data received within interview 1. However, questions followed up on responses provided in the first interview. The second interview focused on expanding the discussion around the barriers and experiences of students within program streams based on what they had previous shared in the first interview.

Once all interviews were completed, all transcripts from the video conferencing platform were downloaded along with the recording of each interview. The recording was listened to and utilized to ensure all transcripts reflected what the researcher and the student said during the interview.

As previously stated, this study examines research questions through the use of Critical Narrative Inquiry as this methodology respects the lived experiences of participants and attempts to bring forward the voices of those who have been marginalized (Clandinin, 2016). This methodology enables the use of my story as an educator, learner, and a coordinator of a post-secondary program for students with intellectual disabilities in exploring student voice at the post-secondary level. Several texts were created that were drawn on the document, my story, a book, personal reflections and a journal. First, I wrote a book as an assessment piece in my disability in

education course, the book detailed my story with reference to my own reflections and experiences. As well, I documented both personal memories and reflections that emerged as I conducted the research in a researcher's journal kept throughout the research process. My story and journals became another way to critically reflect on how individuals with disabilities have been historically met with opposition when trying to find their place in our society.

Participants

Participants involved in this research study are students who are either currently or previously enrolled in a postsecondary program for students with intellectual disabilities. Recruitment took place through a direct phone call invitation to participate in the study. Participants who expressed interest were then contacted to discuss the research study in greater detail and to arrange for a time to hold the first of two interviews. A total of 8 students were interviewed twice, with 4 current students and 4 past students taking part in the study. A preliminary sense of who these students are offered below.

Cam

Cam is a first-year student. He was very excited to start college in another city however the pandemic changed the nature of the CICE program as it occurred online, forcing him to spend his first year of the program virtually. I vividly recall my first-time meeting Cam during one of the initial information sessions prior to enrolling in the program. His positive and polite nature along with his enthusiasm for attending college was impressive. Cam is a student that always is focused on the positives in each situation he encounters. His is an active community member in a large city, as he has extensive volunteer experiences where he is focused on bettering his community.

Cara

Cara, a 2020 graduate of the CICE program, was a very active member of the Fleming College community. In her role as a peer mentor, Cara was there to support her classmates and engaged in organizing college-wide activities. She regularly attended meetings and was dedicated to her role. She was a strong advocate for her peers, and was recognized by both faculty and students for her actions.

Dan

Dan is a 2020 graduate of the CICE program. Dan's disposition was quiet yet confident. Dan was an advocate for the CICE program within community recruitment events, including Fleming's Open House and visits to local high schools. Dan had his first relationship as well as his first breakup during his time at college.

Doug

I had previously known Doug, as he attended a camp I ran for teens with neurodiverse abilities years prior to beginning the CICE program. Doug is a current CICE student who is both outgoing and kind spirted. He was a driving force behind student-planned socials in the campus pub and in the community. It is apparent that Doug's strengths are connecting others and networking.

Ethan

Ethan is a CICE graduate from 2020 who moved from a big city to attend the CICE program at Fleming college. During this transition, his parents expressed their concern about him moving as this was the first time Ethan had lived away from home. Ethan thrived in his two years within the program. He won the President's Award while also making new friends and building independence. Ethan is an accomplished

sportswriter with a publication in a peer-reviewed journal. One of Ethan's strengths is his writing.

Greg

Greg is a graduate of the CICE program who has a passion for basketball, he is a team player within the local Special Olympics basketball league**.** Greg decided within his first year, to change his program stream selection from culinary to business. Greg was very aware of what strategies he could utilize when faced with challenges in and outside the classroom.

Mya

Mya is a 2022 graduate of the CICE program. I have known Mya for several years, as I taught Mya from grades 4-8. She also attended my summer camp for teens with neurodiverse abilities. Mya is a gentle and caring student, who prior to coming to college was concerned about not being able to take city transit. The summer prior to attending college, Mya practiced using the city bus in order to prepare for attending college. I have personally seen Mya's independence grow exponentially over the course of 2 years.

Sara

Sara is a 2020 CICE graduate. Sara joined the program after moving from a big city to the Peterborough area. Sara lived in residence on campus and was both independent and regarded as a kind and thoughtful student.

These students' stories are all unique and diverse. Each story will be expanded on and contextualized within chapter 4 of this thesis. Further details about these participants will bring forward their voices within this research. My story will also be interwoven

throughout the next chapters to further researcher/research connections and inform a reconceptualized understanding of post-secondary programs for adults with disabilities that will eventually be offered.

Data

Data for this research study was collected in the form of observations, interviews, program documentation, autobiography and journaling. Observations were made during the interviews, through anecdotal notes written about the participant's non-verbal communication and body language. Interviews were conducted online via a video conferencing platform. Program documentation was reviewed to connect each participant's story shared in their interview back to their time within the CICE program at Fleming College.

The research site was originally scheduled to be at Fleming College in Peterborough, Ontario, however due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were completed online through the secure video conferencing platform session, WebEx. The interviews were recorded and stored on a private, password protected cloud storage platform. Sharing of lived experiences as it pertains to postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities was facilitated through a two-phase interview approach, The first interview focused on questions related to their experiences, attitudes and barriers associated with their time in the CICE program. The second interview focused on discussion questions related to the ideal of inclusion and their program streams, and their next pathways for the graduates. It is important to note that questions that were not in the interview protocol but were linked directly to what I missed in the first interview, or something that occurred to me after reflecting on the first interview.

In addition to the interview transcripts, I documented observations while the interviews were taking place. Common observations such as non-verbal cues made by each participant were documented. Specific examples of this were documented were when the student expressed emotion, paused or required support. Each of these forms of 'field texts' (observations/interview transcripts/program documentation/autobiographical narrative/journals) were used within the data analysis and interwoven within the final 'research text' (Clandinin, 2016).

Data Analysis

The interviews were thematically analyzed by specifically looking for commonalities in the participants' responses to the research questions (Peel, 2020). This was done via a review of all interviews simultaneously to explore any similar feelings, comments, and notions present within the texts. After reviewing these texts, I determined common themes within the recorded interviews and field notes. I did this by reflecting on the codes across the interviews, where 6 themes arose amongst the common elements in the data. Throughout this process, I recorded my personal stories that emerged alongside findings as they appeared. It is important to note that as I completed this analysis, other research questions came to light, and these will be discussed in later chapters. Contradictions and complexities in the themes' findings also emerged during the analysis process and these will also be highlighted rather than supressed as this is also vital in conducting valid critical narrative inquiry (Iannacci, 2007).

Ethics

Critical narrative inquiry requires researchers to attend to both procedural and relational ethics (Caine, Chung, Steeves & Clandinin, 2020). As a researcher, it is

imperative to explore the ethical considerations of this study. Researchers have an ethical responsibility to ensure that safety, security and confidentiality are all in place as the research participants have entrusted the researcher with their story. It is therefore not sufficient to solely consider procedural ethics, but rather the relational ethics that need to be considered when working with individual's stories, this type of ethical consideration is imperative to be aware of, forward and explore. Both of these forms of ethics are discussed in the next section.

Procedural Ethics

Upon approval of the research proposal, an application to the Trent Research Ethics Board was submitted. It is important to note that Fleming College has an agreement with Trent University for ethical considerations of projects and as such, ethics approval from one institution applied to the other. Multiple edits were requested on behalf of the Trent ethics board. One of the main issues that arose focussed on the capacity for the participants to give informed consent. I explained to the board that students enrolled in the CICE program possess the capacity to consent as demonstrated by the application and interview process required for them to be admitted into the program. It became apparent that the ethics board was evaluating this issue from a deficit-based lens, as they saw the term 'intellectual disability' and therefore assumed that these participants would automatically require parental or guardian consent in order to understand what they were being asked of. Further, the ethics board required that the information letter and consent form be written at a lower reading level, without fully understanding the capacity that each of my prospective participants possess. All of the participants for example were required to meet a literacy proficiency level to be admitted

into the program that was actually well beyond the reading level of the original information letter and consent form that was submitted and rejected on the basis that it was too complex for potential participants. Despite making this apparent, multiple rounds of revisions and edits continued to be required; eventually the application was approved.

As for anonymity of the participants, transcription of interviews was anonymized. This was completed by removing all identifiable information as well as giving each participant a pseudonym. All informed consent forms and any other documentation with the participants' given names have been stored on a secure password protected database to protect privacy.

Relational Ethics

Upon review of current research, it is evident that the subject of obtaining informed consent from individuals with intellectual disabilities is rooted in the medical model. This is apparent as many articles are heavily focused on the idea of measuring an individual's 'capacity,' or in other terms, determining the ability for the individual to understand what is being asked of them (Coons & Watson, 2013). I believe that instead of measuring capacity, it was important for me as the researcher to focus on my relationships with participants in order to provide them with the supports they required to provide informed consent to participate.

Outlining the importance of ethics is vital when completing research on a population that has been marginalized, especially when these individuals are putting their trust in me to honour their stories. Caine, Chung, Steeves & Clandinin (2020) emphasize the importance of being responsive and attentive to relationships when considering ethics as a narrative inquiry is being developed "As we move to co-composing the educative

spaces embodied in narrative inquiry that carry the possibilities of retelling and reliving lives, … we are called to move with an ethics of care into what we are calling relational ethics" (p. 274). This rings true in terms of the relationships we develop when engaging with our participants. Researchers must have positive regard for individuals involved in the study along with setting in place relational boundaries. Relational boundaries in the context of this thesis are directly related to my role as the program coordinator of the CICE program at Fleming College. In this role, I do not teach nor specifically assess or evaluate any CICE students. I primarily oversee the program curriculum and advising, therefore relational boundaries were set via my role as program coordinator. This is important to note as students understood that they were free to share their thoughts openly without having to be concerned that I was teaching or grading them.

In the next chapter some core themes that emerge from the data will be discussed, deconstructed and contextualized. The students' stories will be thoroughly examined using a critical lens as it relates to their experiences and attitudes as well as the barriers they faced during their time at college.

Chapter 4

In this chapter and the following chapter,I will be discussing themes that emerged from the research interviews. The 6 main themes noted in the data focussed on friendship/social opportunities, career/goals, supports, barriers/challenges, independence/freedom and finally identity/inclusion. This chapter will focus solely on the following themes: social/friendship, career/goals and independence/freedom. Chapter five will discuss the themes of Support, Barriers/Challenges and Identity/Inclusion.

Friendships/Social Opportunities

The theme of friendships and social opportunities was apparent across the reflections made by students in both interviews. Almost all students made mention of the friendships they made in the CICE program with nearly all regarding these relationships in a positive light. Dan for example stated, “I loved hanging out with my friends, making friends” while Greg noted his favourite memory of CICE was “meeting new people … during orientation, … before school starts.” Sarah expressed that she was nervous at the start of the school year but “then I met all these wonderful people and I was like, Okay, this is perfect for me, I fit right in.”

These students accounts of their social life at college were very positive and hopeful. They were significant to me as I have countless memories witnessing social inequalities either my students in my special education classroom or students with intellectual disabilities placed in mainstream classrooms encountered. These injustices were always driven by the discourse that being anything but what society deems as normal was unacceptable. It has become clear to me that the ableism that is dominant in society manifests in daily interactions students with disabilities have.

One specific memory that demonstrates this and that I remembered and recorded as I analyzed interview data for this project with respect to friendships/social opportunities was when one of my students in my special education classroom made the school basketball team. This student was a natural athlete, with amazing skills in many different sports. I went to watch his first game and I overheard some of the other students on the team say in reference to my student "I didn't know they let 'sped' students play on our teams." As a learning and life skills teacher, I've heard stories of students with ID in LLS classrooms and mainstream classes not being provided social opportunities. As such, hearing CICE students speak to the social opportunities and friendships they had and formed at a post-secondary level leaves me feeling optimistic.

It is imperative to highlight that students within the research further commented on the quality and nature of the friendships made during their time in the CICE program. Cara described her friendships from her time at Fleming as:

> loyal, for sure, definitely definitely loyal, trustworthy, very good to communicate with, easy to communicate with, you know, very open minded for sure. You know, we would listen to each other's ideas and we would share them. So that was helpful.

She also noted a time when a close friend supported her:

> [talking about fitting in] Yes, that was always hard, What I liked about it was when, you were feeling, well for me, there was one day where I was feeling left out, and one of my amazing friends said 'hey come on hang out with me' so I did that … and we were very happy.

Ethan also went into more detail about the friendships he made, stating his friends "were really nice and really understanding what my needs were and we've become great friends ever since." Cam expressed how he describes his social connections at the college as

indicative of a "college family" while also noting **"**I feel like this is my second chance at high school, social experience that I never got."

Also evident within the theme of friendships and social opportunities, was the lasting impact of social college life. Dan talked about how even after graduating and throughout the pandemic, he was still in contact with friends from the CICE program and connected through social media (E.g. "We chat on Facebook"). Cara, who graduated in 2020, moved to a new city after graduating, where she noted that she did not know anyone in her new environment. She talked about how she too has been staying connected to friends she made during her time in the CICE program over social media and via text: **"**I still talk with some of them back and forth you know so keep[ing] in touch with them."

Throughout the past year, the CICE program has implemented additional periodic social events. Within the past year, these events have taken place online. Cam noted that he "Loved the online socials that the LF's (learning facilitators) [organized]." Ethan noted that during the CICE program, he felt that he learned strategies that enhanced his social skills "I learned a lot about having good social skills with people."

Moving beyond program organized events, students talked about the social opportunities they created for themselves during their time at Fleming college. Doug discussed at length the social group his cohort created to play cards with and hang out in the college pub during their breaks. In reference to this group, he stated:

> Oh, it was a huge group, … and the way that we had the groups, mainly at the Steele Centre, it was people just come and go all the time, … like people had different classes to go to. So we expected people to get up and leave when they had to, …, we just sat around and ate lunch or stuff did homework together.

Doug also made note of his intentions to create an off campus social group, stating “next year we are already talking about a coffee group, … what we are going to do is when it starts [the semester] and everyone gets their schedule, we’re gonna, we’re gonna do a WebEx call.”

What was clear across the interviews was that students in the CICE program made meaningful and lasting friendships with other students within the program, rather than students in their stream courses. I recall from my time as a Learning and Life Skills teacher, when there was a push for more inclusion in mainstream classes. I found with each incident the students were geographically placed in the classroom, yet always sat alone not connecting with other peers, as they were only there for one or two periods a day. Any connections they did form were often with their EA who supported them in this mainstream classroom. However, when the students were in my LLS classroom, they made connections with their peers and maintained lasting friendships. When I think about the people I personally want to hang out with, I often think of people who I have similar interests and commonalities. This was also reflected in the data– the students I interviewed found lasting friendships with classmates with whom they could identify. This notion is also found in the literature, specifically that students with intellectual disabilities often have friendships with other individuals with disabilities (Fridman & Rizzolo, 2018).

One important aspect to note that is apparent in the literature is that people with intellectual disabilities are not provided the same level of opportunity to establish friendships in comparison to people in society without disabilities (Fridman & Rizzolo, 2018). In addition, Fridman & Rizzolo (2018) have brought to light a controversial issue

within the field. They discuss how paid staff are often regarded as close friends to someone with a disability. This issue brings to the surface many societal issues that underlay this notion of a friendship. I ask myself, what qualifies as a friendship, when one is being renumerated for providing support? Many post-secondary programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities utilize paid peer-mentorship whereby mainstream college students are hired to spend time with and/or attend class with students with intellectual disaiblities under the pretense of supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities at college, while also under a façade that these mentors are 'friends' This practice is problematic as it compromises individuals with intellectual disabilities ability to have authentic, valuable and meaningful relationships.

One of the final components noted within the theme of friendships and social opportunities were recommendations made by students to enhance the social aspects of the program. Dan said an event called "Fun Fridays" would be a way to always have social time throughout the week within the CICE program. Mya suggested that the cohorts could possibly do trips together, for example suggesting "a class trip to like the wellness centre, like, work out or something."

The students' suggestions reminded me of when we had a group of students from a school board tour Fleming College. The CICE students were in class and discussing what they thought the best part of the CICE program was. I recall Cara saying to the group of potential students that making friends was the best part. Another student commented that before college they had no friends and now they have so many friends. This was reaffirming as it indicated to me that the CICE program can be a place where friendships and social opportunities are able to flourish.

Although this data was affirming, other data suggested that these relationships were not devoid of complexity. Navigating friendships for example arose as a common thread in different interviews. Ethan noted that he experienced difficulty with other students during his time in the classes within the CICE program, stating "sometimes there [was] drama that happen[ed], and sometimes there [was] some not so great moments that happen[ed] where there [was] yelling." He expanded on how these experiences impacted him, highlighting that "I cried sometimes in class and that's where, sometimes I used to be bullied a bit as an adult." As well, Cara spoke about the conflict she was met with and how she would handle it:

> If there's a problem with someone I would go talk to them and say 'can I just talk to you about something, we need to discuss what happened,' because it made me feel bad. So, like, we would, like sit down, … [and] communicate one on one to try to fix up whatever the issue was.

Finally, Dan recalled difficulties in relationships he formed in college, specifically that he went through his first break-up. As the program coordinator, it was not within my role to specifically discuss personal issues that arose during the students' time at Fleming College, therefore this was the first time I had heard about the break-up Dan experienced. When reflecting back on my field texts about Dan's interview, I noted non-verbal cues when Dan mentioned the break-up, that made me think this was a stressful part of his memories of the CICE program. It is noted in the literature that students with disabilities like any other member of society, are interested in having relationships. However, due to factors including lack of access to information, Pedgrift & Sparapani (2022) noted that this population is often at an elevated risk of sexual abuse and/or exploitation. There are ways that I believe the CICE program can further support the students by providing

access to important information regarding healthy relationships and sexuality. These avenues will be highlighted and further expanded on within chapter 6.

It was interesting to read about how these young adults were encountering the complexities of relationships. There was much to be derived from what they were saying and communicating about their struggles. I was humbled by what I clearly could not be privy to during their time within the CICE program and also grateful that the interviews and research process gave me much to think about in terms of how programming can be furthered to help CICE students navigate the complexities of adult relationships.

The next theme within this chapter is centred around both the goals students discussed and their associations with future career or next steps in their lives.

Career/Goals

Another major theme that was evident from both sets of interview data was related to students' goals and their future careers. It is important however to note that what was shared was not limited solely to students' careers. Understanding the importance of students' varied goals that are not just career focussed is integral in forwarding an asset-orientated lens when thinking about post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities.

A major finding that became evident in the data about careers/goals focussed on the opportunities co-op placement provided students. For example, Cam astutely offered this, "I think it's imperative for all students to do Co-op that way they get to learn which careers they want to do and which careers they don't want to do." Sarah noted that while she was nervous at first, her co-op became a great experience: "Going from classes to

having co-op, that was a really big transition for me … I was nervous to try a co-op placement and then I was like fine doing it."

Some students noted how they appreciated having stream courses[2] and co-op placements that aligned. Mya talked about the reason she selected culinary as a stream, stating her goal was to "get a job in a restaurant." Mya was successful in achieving employment at a restaurant, working as a line cook. Cam spoke about the strengths of the business stream and what it provided him, "business is something that you could, the skills to get organized, the skills for presenting, the skills for talking to people, it's transferable no matter what job you choose." Greg, who is currently employed at a local grocery store, talked about his goals within the CICE program: "I just wanted to be better prepared for the, uh workforce."

When reflecting on what all the students spoke about in regard to goals they had set during the CICE program, some students discussed their future career. Greg talked about his goal of employment: "Well I feel like I've achieved most of them [his goals] just by having a job and just living somewhere where I feel most comfortable."

However, not all students expressed a future goal related to a career. Cara spoke about the goals she had when coming to Fleming, mentioning "I want[ed] to get more involved in community work, or, like [the] school community." She also stated that "developing myself as a person" was a prime goal she had for herself. The goals Sarah discussed were related to being able to successfully transition to college: "One of my goals was transitioning from high school to college life."

[2] Stream courses are a component of the CICE curriculum, where students take 3 courses in a selected field. Students are able to select from 5 different streams.

What also stood out in the data was the sense of pride they had in going to college. Sarah's interviews were very clear about this. "My goal was to go to college, for at least a year, if not two years. And I achieved the goal of going for two years.**"** When asked why she thought potential students should hear from her about the program, Mya stated that it is important "so people can look up to me."

When I reflect on my time as an EA in a high school, co-op placements were often viewed as 'time-fillers.' Students were provided with placements in fields where they never be able to achieve a career within that field because of the way society viewed their disability. In this view, co-op placements were never intended to be a steppingstone to meaningful employment but rather a way to complete a program credential. In contrast, the CICE students I interviewed seemed to indicate a connection between their co-op placements and the streams they were enrolled in.

Doug for example spoke about a specific goal he shared with other CICE students in his cohort. He talked about the mutual goal he shared with other CICE students to open their own business, "[we want to] group up all the students, and make our own business, using each other's skills from each stream … I got 10 students saying that they would do it." He then elaborated on the business plan they decided on: "We're going to do a restaurant for the culinary, [a] kids area for the … ECE, and one for hospitality, … and the business people would do all the … business work for us.**"** Doug is enrolled in the culinary stream and his placement enabled him to develop some of the skills evident in his planning and careful thinking about this future venture.

Although many successes were highlighted in data about with future careers and goals, some students commented on challenges they experienced during co-op that made

it difficult for them to move toward attaining their future careers/goals. Dan spoke about two incidences: His attempt to attend a mainstream program at Fleming after graduating from the CICE program was one of these difficulties, “I wasn’t really a big fan of the program. I was just there for something to do … it was too hard for me.” The second challenge Dan discussed was applying to a hardware store at their job fair, and being unsuccessful: “I actually went to a job fair there … I didn’t get the job.”

The challenges Dan spoke about in his interview resonated with me, specifically thinking about many past experiences I have had interacting with parents of potential CICE students. During school fairs, information sessions and open houses, I have been met with questions from parents such as, ‘How quickly will my child get into a real job after graduating the CICE program?” Another common question is “How can they transfer from the CICE program to a real college program?” I would be lying to say these questions do not affect me, as I feel that the CICE program is a ***real*** program that provides students with intellectual disabilities their right to a ***real*** education, specifically in the post-secondary field. Equating this right to an education with employment is a tension in the field and indicative of larger discourses that I will discuss later in this chapter.

Career/Goal focussed data also made it apparent to me that some students felt pressure to continue their education after secondary school, with Cam, Doug and Sarah mentioning that they were told to pursue a CICE program by a guidance counsellor or a teacher at their high school. This notion of needing to complete a post-secondary program falls in line with what parents, the education system and society deem to be a “normal” steppingstone in order to become a functioning member of society. This is indicative of a

neoliberal discourse rather than the valuing of an individual's personhood (Miller, Schleien, White & Harrington, 2018). Students are viewed and measured through the lens of "achieving" rather than "being." Although the CICE program was helpful to these students, the links between achieving program certification, job attainment and personhood/normalcy that were present in the data made me uneasy. As the coordinator of the program and the recipient of complex information the CICE students gave to me throughout the interviews, it became clear to me that the program's purpose must be communicated and focussed on much more than validating notions of normalcy even when it is designed not to do so. "Normalizing" discourses related to people with intellectual disabilities are so powerful that responsive/respectful programming for students with disabilities must honour in an explicit way the varied reasons why they enrol in the CICE program.

What was also particularly interesting to note was a suggestion made by Ethan about including a job coach to help manage career goals students had. After Ethan graduated and the new model of the support staff was implemented, job coaching was added to the facilitator job description. The value of job coaching within programs for students with intellectual disabilities has been reinforced in the literature. Gibson & Carter (2016) for example note that the presence of a job coach within placement settings can assist with multiple facets of the student's experience within their placement environment. Ethan also suggested adding additional streams to the program. "I just want the program to have more inclusive and that means like offer more courses and make the CICE program a better place and try and add more electives." This suggestion certainly reinforces the need for additional program streams to ensure that all students are provided

with learning and cooperative education/placement opportunities that match their personal goals and interests.

This need for enhanced program stream availability is reinforced by incidences discussed in the interviews regarding mismatched program streams and placements held by students. One example of this was where Dan mentioned his interest in heavy equipment operation yet was placed in a business stream with a placement in a computer repair shop. This took place when there were only 3 stream options available for students to select. This finding speaks to the need to allow for differentiated interests to be recognized and supported throughout students' time at Fleming College. It is not surprising that limited student choice is a mainstay in programming for adults with disabilities, when the literature itself seems to reflect this type of practice as it is focused on programs for students with disabilities that are reflective of full inclusion models (Causton-Theoharis, Ashby & Declouette, 2009). Responsiveness to the students clearly requires more far-reaching courses than the ones presently offered to CICE students at Fleming College. This is definitely one way to become more authentically inclusive. The theme of inclusion also featured dominantly in the literature and will be discussed and focussed on in the next chapter.

The final theme explored in this chapter is focused on the topic of independence and freedom as it relates to being a student with an intellectual disability enrolled in a post-secondary program.

Independence/Freedom

Independence was a predominate theme throughout both sets of interviews as many participants discussed the freedom they had at college and how different this was

from high school. Similar to the research completed by Brewer and Movahedazahoulish (2021), most participants noted that this new form of independence within the CICE program and at Fleming College was a positive experience. Cam, Cara and Dan made it clear in their interviews that they loved the freedom they experienced at college. Cara spoke about the differences she found between college and high school noting "In college, you get more freedom, and in high school, you don't have that privilege to get freedom. So that helped me to feel, I guess, more open to where I was so, it's definitely more … of like a freeing kind of feeling." Mya gave a specific example of her independence during her college experience, with a great deal of pride: "I went up to the college yesterday to get my OneCard … took the bus on my own." This sense of freedom is also supported in the literature, as Brewer & Movahedazarhouligh (2021) have also found that students enjoy freedoms that college life provides.

When asked what they loved about the CICE program or their favourite memory, Dan replied "basically freedom … [to] do whatever…in reason." He then discussed how he liked the ability to hang out with friends between classes. Although these findings seem unequivocally positive when contextualized upon further reflection, they demonstrate how society has deemed people with disabilities as incapable of being independent and supporting themselves. Dolmage (2017) highlights:

> We must all evaluate the ways in which we ourselves continue to decide which bodies and which minds will have access to the considerable resources, privileges, and advantages we have and we bestow—and as we ask this question, we must wonder whether what we have to offer is truly worthwhile if it translates into policies of exclusion, programs of incarceration, and reductive definitions of human worth.(p.65)

Within this quote, Dolmage (2017) speaks to the notion that people with disabilities have decisions made for them, without their input. It is clear that

independence needs to be fostered in order to ensure that transitions are successful and allow the student to understand their right to live independently. What is also at stake is the disruption of a discourse that positions people with disabilities as dependant, reliant, incapable and as such in need of being overly managed.

This necessary disruption was apparent in reflections Sarah shared regarding her newfound independence as she transitioned from high school to college: “Once I finished high school, I finally realized, I said, okay, it’s time to actually get ready to move out of my home and go to residence.” Cam also mentioned how he looked forward to living on his own in residence, saying “when I got my acceptance letter … I [said] oh my God, I’m going to go away to residence, like, this will be excit[ing].” He followed this up in his second interview as he discussed how important it was to him to be independent, “I don’t want … to be supported by my parents for the rest of my life.”

Cam also shared a story from a time in high school where his independence was limited due to his physical disability:

> I had to use the elevator [in high school] because everyone thought that it would be a safety hazard for me using the stairs. … Sometimes I would … sneak to my classes using the stairs because I wanted to be like everybody else. … [and] I can walk up stairs at my house.

What I know from my past experience is that often times students with intellectual disabilities are ‘infantilized’ and overly managed, with decisions made for them as they are deemed incapable (Safta-Zecheria, 2018). I recall a specific time when I was out for dinner with my friend Mike, who has an intellectual disability. The waiter approached our table and without looking at Mike, he asked me ‘what does he want?’ My response was simple and almost involuntary, “I don’t know - ask him.” Then the waiter, seemingly annoyed, turned to Mike and said “do you know what you want to eat” with

each word yelled loudly and slowly. It was as if he thought there was no way Mike could understand him based on his visible disability. Mike looked up at the waiter and said “I’ll have chicken with rice and a diet coke – please.” I know that for CICE students, they too have experienced this type of treatment in their day-to-day life, or similar situations.

Historically we see that people with disabilities are often spoken about but not to when they are present, as if they are invisible. As a special education teacher, I witnessed this firsthand at IPRC (Individual Placement Review Committee) and IEP (Individual Education Plan) meetings. Sometimes students were not even invited to attend these meetings when they were of age to do so and when they were, they were disregarded, and spoken about as if they were not present.

This disregard for personhood is one of the many barriers individuals with disabilities often face when they navigate society. Notions of incapability and invisibility will be further expanded on in chapter 5, within the theme of barriers. In the next chapter, I will also explore both the barriers students experienced and the support they were provided in the CICE program.

Chapter 5

This specific chapter will focus on the following final themes: barriers and challenges, support, and identity and inclusion. All participants described some form of barriers and challenges they faced during their time in the CICE program. Barriers for the purpose of this thesis can be defined but are not limited to, societal, physical, attitudinal difficulties reported by the students interviewed. Challenges can be defined as experiences students reported where they faced issues that caused them frustration during their time at college.

Barriers/Challenges

When discussing the barriers mentioned within the student interviews, it is important to note that barriers present within the data were both visible and invisible and related to both physical and societal barriers the students faced on a day-to-day basis.

Physical Barriers

In terms of physical barriers noted, the size of the college was mentioned frequently throughout student interviews. Cara noted that "[I thought] the college would be a lot smaller than it was and then I realized that it was a lot bigger than I thought." As well, Sarah discussed her first experience with navigating the college and how she used a specific coping strategy:

> I mean, I had to like find my classes for the first … find the CICE room, find my classes … and I just kind of did it as like, A, B, C, D, I kind of did it like fruits, like apples, bananas, all different things like that.

Throughout these reflections, the size of the college appears to be a barrier that caused a common overwhelming feeling.

As this theme came to the surface frequently, it made me question what is perpetuating this feeling adding to a sense of being overwhelmed. One explanation as to why size seems to be an overwhelming component of CICE can be linked to preparedness to transition. I know from my experience as an EA that there has always been a focus within the field of special education with respect to ensuring student safety. Yet, this notion leads to situations where students are smothered in the sense that they are restricted from making their own decisions and choices thus limiting their opportunities to learn navigational strategies, like Sarah with her use of mnemonics around fruit to remember to classes and wings at the college.

Students who face this 'smothering' can be overwhelmed with the opportunities provided to them as they experience college life. Navigating the spaces that they encounter then become a barrier in of itself. Returning to findings previously highlighted by Griffin, McMillan and Hodapp (2010), parents felt a major barrier their children faced when coming to college was around the transition from high school to post-secondary education. This then escalated into serious concerns about the safety of their child. These concerns clearly call for extensive transition focussed instruction and planning in order to ensure student success. This will be elaborated on within the theme of supports, and further discussed within chapter 6.

Societal Barriers

Cam shared an occurrence that spoke to societal barriers he encountered:

> When I was first born, everybody said that I wouldn't walk. I wouldn't talk. I wouldn't amount to much and then my mom said [made a middle finger gesture] like raised her middle finger … and here I am walking, talking and actually having a life.

Cam's story of being forced to use the school elevator in high school was included in relation to independence, but it is also an instance of societal barriers:

> I had to use the elevator [in high school] because everyone thought that it would be a safety hazard for me using the stairs. … Sometimes I would … sneak to my classes using the stairs because I wanted to be like everybody else. … [and] I can walk up stairs at my house.

It is clear through Cam's story that the people around him in secondary school viewed him with a deficit lens, one that has been perpetrated through societal norms and discourses about disability and ability.

Cam's story reminded me of a time where I was cognizant of the societal barriers present within the college environment at Fleming. I was asked by senior management to present during the faculty showcase organized by the learning design and support team, for all faculty and staff. I presented on the CICE program and the current successes held by the students in the program. I was surprised by the feedback I received from my colleagues and fellow staff at the college. Two main themes that arose within their feedback focussed on the fact that many people had never heard of the CICE program before and did not know Fleming actually had this program. The second overarching theme within the feedback was inherently positive, yet reflective of a pity discourse of disability (Dolmage, 2014), I was told repeatedly that "It was great that Fleming has program for *those* kinds of people." These comments contribute to 'othering' of people with disabilities, as my colleagues unknowingly classified CICE students as individuals who are not like them, or their students. This is further supported in the literature, as Higbee, Katz, & Schultz (2010) pick up on this problematic discourse:

> It is difficult to provide welcoming and respectful spaces for learning when administrators, faculty, and staff use "othering" language to describe students who are considered mainstream versus "the others" (i.e., everyone else). The

> underlying attitude conveyed by othering language is that students with disabilities are deficient rather than merely different. (p. 13)

As noted above, this mentality or thought process causes undue harm, as it unknowingly labels the students in the CICE program as 'deficient' and a sub species without recognizing their unique strengths and gifts these students possess and the personhood and rights they are owed. In chapter 6, I will discuss how awareness of this program can be increased and done so in a way that combats this detrimental discourse head on.

COVID-19

The last category focussed on barriers is related specifically to the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced students in March of 2020 to move online studies at the post-secondary level. This had a drastic impact on the delivery of the CICE program at Fleming college. Placements were cancelled, face-to-face classes were held strictly over WebEx (Fleming's web conferencing platform), and student services were interrupted. During the 2020-2021 school year, the CICE program was then put on pause for one full year. Mya highlighted specifically how the pandemic effected her studies, stating "it is hard too because some them [other students] have their cameras off." Covid-19 also made Mya worrisome about what protocols would be in place when she would return to in person learning, "it'll be hard too, probably because we have to wear masks." Cam summarized how the pandemic made him feel, stating "Covid drained me." He expressed that although Covid and online learning made him feel this way, he was hopeful and looking forward to this Fall where he would join the CICE program in person.

When I reflect back on the past two years of the pandemic, the CICE program has been met with different forms of barriers that were put in place for the sake of public health. While these measures were necessary, they did cause undue stress on the students

who started in the 2021 school year. This is due to the fact that the program was held completely online. This delivery model put stress on the students, but also on the parents. As highlighted previously by Mya, some students did not turn on their cameras during virtual classes, which made it hard for other students to feel socially connected to their peers in their cohort. These feelings of isolation were unique to this cohort, as this had only affected the previous cohort for half of their final semester. I acknowledge this barrier was a result of a public health crisis, yet students' academic and social opportunities were undeniably compromised during this time. Research completed by Fisher, Sung, Kammes, Okyere & Park (2022) found that people with intellectual disabilities were particularly negatively impacted by the pandemic. The study demonstrates how participants stress levels were affected as well as their life satisfaction levels. However, the researchers also found that quality social support was a mediator between stress levels and life satisfaction indicators. The research reinforces the importance of having structured effective supports for students with intellectual disabilities. This will be further elaborated on in the next theme.

Challenges

In addition to barriers faced, students spoke within their interviews about some of the challenges they were met with during their time as a student in the CICE program at Fleming College. One of the first challenges noted was in regards to the social aspect of the program. Cara mentioned within her interview, "meeting people was a challenge because I wasn't sure if I was going to be liked or not." I recall when attending Cara's graduation, she spoke about how she initially did not want to come to the program, because she was shy and nervous about forming friendships. Her mother also at her

graduation shared this with me. Cara also mentioned at graduation that she was very happy she came to Fleming, as she felt she had grown as a person and made lifelong friendships.

Cara was not the only student who expressed this form of challenge, Doug shared his experiences related to social interactions:

> I have trouble meeting new people, I'm going to be honest. It's kind of hard for me to … start the conversation. … It's kind of a pain because there's always a time where I want to like say something but then I'm like, should I? Could I just keep my head down?

I know from my past experience interacting with Doug at a summer camp I ran that he found it challenging to meet new people. This was exacerbated in Doug's first year as the program was held online. He expressed frustrations with online learning, stating "the hardest challenges were I think was … the technology, non-stop technology … I'm not good with technology." Some students discussed the challenges they faced within the classroom. Some challenges were related to educational content, with Dan highlighting that the first aid class the students are required to take was very difficult. Other challenges noted were in reference to classroom management with faculty. Greg discussed a story in his interview about a time he felt excluded when working on group projects as students were asked by the faculty to pick their own groups:

> There shouldn't have been people picking their own groups. … I was on this group [where] we [couldn't] even cooperate because we … were more individual workers and we [didn't] work as much as a group. … Even though we're trying to like work our own ways like the teacher would be telling us to communicate and that really set me off.

While he was sharing this story, I noted within my field notes that Greg appeared visibly upset about this specific event and that it still had a lasting effect on him.

Drawing on my own experiences as a special education teacher, I have found that it is extremely important to be cognizant of the supports needed during group work. When we allow students to pick their own groups, this can lead to students feeling excluded. In my practice, I believe that forming groups for students can ensure that all students feel included. I will elaborate on strategies that can be utilized to establish group work in chapter 6.

The next theme will focus solely on the support within the CICE program and the community mentioned by the students throughout their interviews.

Supports

Most of the students within the study highlighted positive memories about the support they received during their time as a student in the CICE program. Supports in the context of this study refer to assistance provided by facilitators within the program. I would like to note that some students were provided support via Integration Facilitators (IF), while the most recent cohorts are supported by Learning Facilitators (LF). To clarify, the model of support changed within the CICE program in the 2021 school year. With the previous model, there were 5 IFs, which were full-time support positions that were mainly responsible for academics, where they would attend all classes and modify assessments. In the new model introduced in 2021, there are now 12 LFs, that support students in their academics, while also supporting students with social opportunities and job coaching. It also differs from what can be found in the literature, where some college programs for students with disabilities utilize peers as mentors (May, 2012). This model is problematic as it posits these peers as ‘friends’ when in actual fact they are being renumerated for the ‘friendship.’ This also can be limiting to the success of the program,

as many of these peer mentors are inexperienced and lack the skills to truly support these learners.

In comparison, the hybrid model at Fleming college has provided students with more varied types of support throughout their college experience. Doug confirmed this by discussing his experience with the two models stating "I've found [the LFs] a lot more helpful, [for example] I seem to get a lot more information lately than I think I did when I was [in first year]."

To provide context, when I took over as the program coordinator in the CICE program in 2018, I very quickly realized that the kind of support offered for students was academically focused. I knew that it was necessary for this to shift in order to incorporate changes to the support model that encompassed a more dynamic and holistic approach. Cam discussed his experiences with learning facilitators:

> I love the fact that everybody is so supportive and everybody is … working together for the benefit of the students and I love the fact that … we have the 1 on 1 learning facilitators, and the fact that we can get so much of our homework done during tutorial and the learning facilitators are really thorough in keeping us organized and keeping us on track.

Ethan noted that he "got all the help I needed and it was best supported." Cara was asked what she would share with others about the program. Her reply also speaks to the level of supports the program provides she said "I want to let people know that it's not as hard as you think it is, … I mean yes, it's a challenge but you are not alone."

In addition to discussing the supports provided, students also highlighted where they saw the difference between college and secondary school. Cam mentioned differences between the co-op placements he had in secondary school and at college:

> I love how there's the 5 different streams of co-op, and I love how … the employers are well versed with working with people with learning

> exceptionalities and being in high school, my co-op placement managers, they weren't really trained to work with people with disabilities.

Sarah discussed the support she received at college, stating "when I was in high school the work was a bit harder, but in college you get more support on your work if you need help." When Cam and Sarah mentioned these differences, it made me think of the model of support that is in place in secondary school. As previously mentioned in the theme of barriers, students with disabilities in secondary school are often infantilized and smothered with supervision throughout their school day (Safta-Zecheria, 2018). I think that when coming to college, where they are exposed to a more interdependent model of support, students feel a major shift. This shift I believe is key the student's path to establish their personhood.

Moving beyond the supports at college, some students mentioned that they received support from outside the college as well. Dan talked about how he had a dual support system "if I had any problems my parents could help." Cara discussed her experiences with Fleming services and the support they provided "they [Fleming] also have counselling there. They have a lot of resources there." Finally, Doug highlighted the supports he received from outside agencies, "we [Doug and his worker] do weekly meetings … and she would take me to Fleming, … she also helped me with all the paperwork." These incidences and levels of supports clearly demonstrated the need for increased collaboration with agencies within the community. We in the CICE program provide support during the two-year program, yet supports within the community especially during the post-graduation transition period are vital to ensure and secure in order for students to feel and continue to build interdependence. Within the literature, there is limited research completed on the transition period *from* post-secondary

education to adult life for students with intellectual disabilities. What is further disconcerting is that any research in this field is heavily focused on employment outcomes, or how successful students are at obtaining post-graduation employment. This gap found in the current field will be of focus within chapter 6. This discussion will be informed by students' suggestions on how CICE program support could be enhanced. Dan for example noted that it would be beneficial to have more homework help. Ethan talked about how he felt there needed to be more support beyond the IFs in the classroom:

> Maybe there could be … support workers in the classroom that could help them [students] with their work in the classroom that can make it a better place … They need more advocates that have the experience to work with someone with [a] disability.

Finally, Sarah noted her experience with stream selection and how she felt pressure from her IF: **"**I was considering doing business, but then she [the IF] wanted me to do culinary." This specific incidence Sarah mentioned, was directly related to the lack of choice within the program streams. At the time, there were only 3 streams to select from: Business, Culinary and Developmental Support Worker.

The final theme to be discussed within this chapter is focused on both Identity and Inclusion, and how students' sense of belonging at the college was expressed throughout their interviews.

Identity/Inclusion

As previously mentioned, *Inclusion* can be defined as *"*a process of identifying, understanding and breaking down the barriers to participation and belonging" (Folk, Yamamoto, & Stodden, 2012, p. 260). After reflecting on the experiences and comments made by the students, the concept of identity fit hand in hand with inclusion.

Identity

What I have noticed in the past, is that students with intellectual disabilities, both at the college and in the public-school sector for years have been othered and talked about as if they were not there. As a result these students come to understand that having a disability in this society is considered a bad thing, a deficit. Many students have struggled to overcome hurdles that are perpetrated via this deficit disability discourse that negatively impacts every aspect of their lives. The focus has always been on what they can't do, rather than what they can do.

In contrast, some of the students in the interviews highlighted their understanding of their identity within the community of the CICE program specifically.
One example is when Ethan stated, "I am an asset in the CICE program, not a liability." He then spoke about his understanding about disability and ability, highlighting that "there is no dis in ability, and you got to respect … the abilities, not the disabilities." Cam also supported this statement "we need to take the dis out of disability. We are not disabled – we are able."

As well, Cam noted that "we are all unique and different, and we [people with disabilities] don't want to be defined by our disabilities and the things that we can't do, we want people to see us as individuals." This made me think about how disability is viewed across society. For example, I wear glasses, yet no one would ever refer to me as "sight-challenged Patty." Cam's reflections highlight that people feel like they can describe a person based on what their diagnosis or disability says about them. However there is clearly so much more that needs to be the focus of language, thought, practice pedagogy and programming when it comes to people with disabilities.

Last year, Fleming College arranged for a guest speaker, Tracy Schmitt, an award-winning motivational speaker, World cup sailor and four-way amputee. Within her talk, she discussed her past experiences and how she navigates society through an asset-focused lens. During her talk, Cam asked Tracy a poignant question: 'How do you not let your disability define you?' She responded in a way that I was not expecting, stating that in fact her disability *does* define her, and she sees herself through an asset-orientated lens. This to me was exactly what I felt the students needed to hear – that even though society has deemed disability to be a negative, Tracy herself did not. She understood her identity and worth and was not afraid to speak up about it. Her talk affirmed the importance of avoiding the erasure of disability and repositioning it as a strength or asset, and an important part of identity.

Cam discussed a phrase that he likes to use frequently: "labels are for clothing – not people." I shared with Cam that I have had a jar on my desk since I was as a special education teacher twenty years ago that says "Labels are for jars – not people." This has always been my focus in whatever classroom I have taught in, as I wanted students to know they are people first and riddled with assets that their disability has given them. It is a monumental shift in language, thinking and practice that continues to be necessary if we are to ensure that students are valued, provided with their rights and personhood.

Inclusion

In addition to the reflections of identity, some students spoke about what inclusion at Fleming College means to them. Cam mentioned that from the beginning of his time at Fleming he thought to himself "this is where I belong."

Students also offered suggestions regarding how the CICE program could be more inclusive. Dan mentioned that it would be better to have more choice through differentiated streams. He was part of the cohort that only had 3 choices of streams. As well, Ethan stated "I just want the program to be more inclusive and that means … offer more courses and make the CICE program a better place and try [to] … add more electives." Electives are an important aspect of post-secondary education, as they provide students with choice and flexibility to learn what interests them. Unfortunately, the CICE program does not currently afford the students with this choice, as the general education elective is preselected, and is taught specifically to a section with only CICE students.

When I became the program coordinator in 2018, the students had the ability to choose their elective, yet the following year I was told that management made the decision to revoke the choice and have all CICE students take the same elective. This does not sit well with me, as this goes against the idea of an elective, which is to provide choice to students and an opportunity to take part in mainstream college classes. Research completed by Nieto & Moriña (2019) highlighted the importance of using recommendations from students with intellectual disabilities to further shape the program into a "more humane and inclusive environments" (p. 1555). This is directly connected to the notions of choice as student autonomy is something that can be fostered through responsive programming that values the right to an education that allows for individualized choice.

In the next chapter, data and analysis provided in chapter 4 and 5 will be used to forward reconceptualized understandings and future programming in relation to the Fleming CICE program. This reconceptualization of what can be has broader

implications for college programs that also are focused on individualized responsive educational programming for students with disabilities.

Chapter 6: Reconceptualization

Within this chapter, the themes and key findings that emerged from the interviews with students will be discussed and used to reconceptualize what needs to take place in order for the CICE program at Fleming college to further responsive programming for students with intellectual disabilities. As noted in previous chapters, critical narrative inquiry is a methodology that moves beyond simply telling stories. Rather, this methodology supports the interweaving of the experiences shared by students with my experiences (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007). Through authentically listening to student voice, this research is able to draw on findings to make suggested general changes that may better serve students in post-secondary programs for adults with disabilities. In addition to focusing on student voice, critical narrative inquiry, has enabled me to use my own stories and experiences to fully understand the changes required at the program, college and community level.

Similar to the work of Corby, Taggart and Cousins (2020), as well as Kubiak (2017), this study allows for this reconceptualization driven by the students themselves. Findings in this study provide information that inform concrete changes. This chapter will highlight these findings for each of the themes covered in chapters 4 and 5 and provide a reconceptualized approach to address key issues that were present in the findings. Across each theme area, I divide my recommendations from micro to macro by organizing each section around recommended changes at the program, college, and community level in order to improve outcomes and experience for students registered in the CICE program.

Friendship/Social Opportunities

Changes at the Program Level

The first area where I feel the CICE program needs to be reconceptualized is enhancing current and additional curriculum that focuses on identity, personhood and authentic relationships/sexuality. A finding noted within the data focused on this theme, which demonstrated how students highlighted their experience of their first romantic relationship and breakup during college. Society often views individuals with disabilities as asexual and/or aromantic, which is not the case. As stated by Pedgrift & Sparapani (2022), these opinions, as well as lack of information, are what drive a higher risk of sexual abuse/exploitation within the population of individuals with disabilities. Therefore, incorporating healthy relationship focused curriculum and expanding the current course material around sexuality will provide students with content focused on the complexities of authentic relationships and how to navigate them in ways that are healthy, safe and positive.

Specific components that I believe would benefit this form of redevelopment would be the inclusion of social stories or role-playing activities into current and new course material. I believe that this will provide students within the CICE program access to this vital information that can support and foster skills that will promote prosocial behaviour in a variety of settings.

Career/Goals

The findings from within the theme of career/goals led to various areas that required extended thought and reflection.

Changes at the College Level

One finding within this theme focused on the lack of program stream choices. It was evident that the limited selection of streams impeded students and their ability to have meaningful job placements during their time in the CICE program as their program stream should align with their field of interest and therefore where they complete their placement. For example, if a CICE student chooses culinary as their program stream, they would ideally complete their placement in a restaurant setting with various roles being front of house, line cooks or dishwashers. During the annual program review, in my capacity as the program coordinator, I will work with the CICE team along with academic management to increase the number of program streams offered to students within the Fleming CICE program, to ensure that students are afforded the ability to complete work placements in a variety of settings that would align with their own interests.

Further to this, the lack of choice affected student's ability to have work placements within a field that was of interest to them. In order to support expanded program streams in the CICE program, I believe that two changes are required. The first change that could be accomplished is increasing the amount of support at work placements. This can be completed by increasing the number of job coaches within the CICE team. Having more job coaches can provide students with programming that specifically focuses on the transition to and dealing with placement and provides support for students to learn the necessary job skills to be successful at a potential place of employment.

The second area of change required when increasing the amount of program streams is related to the capacity of the Field Placement Faculty Liaison. This faculty is responsible for developing placement sites and working to maintain partnerships with various employers within the region. I believe that with the expansion of more program streams, this individual would require more time to complete the responsibilities of the position. This is due to the intricacies of the placements in CICE, which are coordinated by the Liaison with care and consideration of each student's gifts and potential challenges in order to provide students with meaningful and successful work experiences.

Changes at the Community Level

Another finding in chapter 4 highlighted views parents and community members often have regarding reasons for attending the CICE program which heavily focused on the attainment of employment. It is clear that there needs to be changes set in place to ensure that personhood and personal development is acknowledged first and foremost, as an integral part of the goals/dreams of students with disabilitieswhen attending post-secondary institutions. This can combat discourses that equate success with job attainment and as such conflate personhood with the ability to produce and consume. This may work to disrupt the status quo set in place by neoliberalism that underlies the landscape of the post-secondary sector (Mitchell & Snyder, 2015). This neoliberal sensibility has confused adults with disabilities as people who are unfit for the workforce, and as such reduced goals and desires in a way that are normative and ableist.

One final area that needs to be reconceptualized in the context of career/goals is focussed on a neoliberal view that purports that individuals must attain employment in order to be deemed valuable and successful in the program and society. This is

problematic as it forwards a hyper capitalistic framework that devalues personhood and it also directly places individuals with disabilities at a disadvantage. Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) is the only funding model and support network for people with disabilities in the province of Ontario. With this model in place, people who receive OSDP support are limited to a specific number of hours they can work each week. If the individual goes over the hour limit, their funding is deducted significantly. Therefore, this problematic model of support restricts the individual receiving support and further marginalizes them from society. As such the singular view of success as being work dependent and the lack of contextualization/responsiveness to the individual and their ability to seek out, attain, be successful in and fully benefit from work needs to be questioned on an individual basis as rather than viewing work as the ultimate goal and benchmark of success post-graduation from the CICE program.

Other pressures around employment stem from both community agencies and family members. Community agencies supporting people with disabilities tend to heavily focus on employability skills, while family members can reinforce problematic notions that reinforce the idea that success in life is about acquiring a job. The CICE program can work to shift this narrative towards an understanding of personhood rather than employability by ensuring that programming is responsive to individualized student's needs, and honours their choices for their future dreams/goals. This can be operationalized through program review that restructures the language of the CICE program page, while also making changes to program documents related to goals and dreams that are in line with respectful and responsive definitions of success, goals and personhood.

Independence/Freedom

Changes at the College Level

One of the findings within the theme of independence/freedom illustrated how students had previous experiences where they were micro-managed and provided with limited amount of freedom. College can be a place where student can enhance this level of freedom, especially for students with intellectual disabilities. However, as people with disabilities are often infantilized, it is vital that the Fleming College and the CICE program do not fall into this problematic discourse of dictating what students with disabilities can and cannot do. How we can combat this is to raise awareness both within the college setting and the surrounding community. Fleming has started this process, with one example being a guest speaker during Diversity and Inclusion Week, Unstoppable Tracy. Yet, we need to look at how we can continue this momentum to ensure that we can advance and shift people's views and further acknowledge and celebrate CICE students' accomplishments. We can forward independence and freedom within the CICE program by ensuring specific content works to build confidence and skills associated with formulating independence. A concrete example of this is the incorporation of Rent Smart, a certificate program that assists students in understanding the landlord/tenant act, their rights within it and builds on skills of independence.

Barriers/Challenges

There were multiple barriers highlighted within interviews with students, many of which can be examined within a different framework or context to instigate change.

Changes at the Program Level

One barrier that was very apparent in the interviews was that students were overwhelmed when they arrived at the college. Specifically, they had difficulties navigating large spaces. I believe that we as a program can address this barrier in two specific ways. The first way is by dedicating more time at both information nights and orientation sessions to focus on transition skills needed to navigate larger educational spaces.

The second strategy would be to ensure that effective transition plans from secondary school to college are in place. This can be done by speaking with guidance counsellors and special education teachers early on to provide them with support around what they can do for students that want to come to college and how to prepare for the transition. Professional development sessions, facilitating communication and partnering with secondary schools must be done much earlier and more methodically than it is has been done in order to lessen the overwhelming transition students entering college from secondary school are presently experiencing.

We currently have a partnership with Durham District School Board, where I attend transition meetings with students who are interested in Fleming's CICE program. I have personally found this very helpful for all involved. I believe that this should be an option for students at our local high schools also as it provides them with information about their local college and opportunities available to them. For these partnerships to be developed, time must be allocated in order to foster intentional and meaningful engagement within these transition meetings at the local school boards. This means that

in order for these partnerships to flourish, time must be allotted within faculty schedules to be able to accomplish these relationships.

As well, some of the barriers that emerged in the data were specifically related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in changes to how the CICE program was delivered as mandated by public health. Data demonstrated how offering the program virtually by necessity was far from ideal. However, Fisher, Sung, Kammes, Okyere & Park (2022) noted within their research that individuals with disabilities experienced less stress associated with the pandemic when provided with structured effective supports. At Fleming, we acknowledge that we are going back to a face to face, however in the face of a public health crisis in the future, our goal is to have a contingency plan in place that is documented and will ensure that students are aware of the supports and services that are available to them as a Fleming student. In general terms, technology has been noted in the literature as a general barrier that students with disabilities face (Burgstahler, 2003). As such it is important to note that regardless of a pandemic, students clearly need increased support in navigating technology. As such it will be essential for Fleming to ensure that the Learning Facilitators are well versed in the college wide technology software that can support students. A specific example of this is the software, Read and Write Gold, which is text-to-speech program that can assist students when working online, as well as in person.

In chapter 5, Greg spoke of a time when he felt excluded during group work mandated by faculty teaching the CICE course he was taking. Another required change that became apparent with respect to barriers was related to how group work is utilized within the program. This reflection from Greg made me realize that it would be beneficial

to provide education on best practices for classroom management within the CICE program. An example of what could be covered within this education could be, information on group selection/creation, managing classroom conflict and navigating safe spaces. Further to this, the information could also be disseminated to faculty via a CICE Best Practices Handbook. I feel that this initiative could ensure that all faculty are understanding of practices that promote a positive and safe learning environment focused that forwards an asset-orientated lens. This necessary handbook could be developed utilizing the research from this thesis to guide current and new faculty within this program.

Changes at the College Level

Another change required is increasing awareness and recognition of the CICE program and its students in response to the lack of awareness of the program at the college. In chapter 5 it was evident that faculty were not always aware that 'this kind of program' existed at Fleming College. In the past, the CICE program has done an interdisciplinary activity with students in the Justice stream that was very engaging. Both students from the justice stream and CICE spoke highly of this event, and during a faculty debrief we discussed the possibility of this being an annual event. The faculty and the staff in the CICE program saw this as an opportunity to raise awareness and promote our program. Increasing awareness of the program and its students can also be furthered by increased connections with other programs and departments at the college to ensure that representation of the CICE program occurs in a respectful manner. Specific examples of this operationalized are partnerships with programs across the different schools at the college, as well as connections with varsity and intermural sports teams.

These opportunities need to be organized with faculty from both programs, so that the CICE staff/faculty can ensure that students in the program are not othered and seen in a positive light. I have come to realize that to raise awareness, events like this need to happen college wide rather than just within one program. In addition to this, via program review and having students engaged in the Student Administrative Council, I believe students and faculty in the CICE program can work to ensure that language is respectful and inclusive not just within all program documents, but also throughout the college. This can be developed through further collaborative meetings between student representatives in the CICE program with the CICE team. I believe that having these types of meetings at least once per semester will guide the reconceptualization of the CICE program.

I also feel that awareness and representation can be further expanded at the college by having CICE students included in authentic leadership positions. These could potentially include committees, such as the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee as well as the Student Administrative Council. This notion of authentic leadership was highlighted in work completed by Procknow, Tonette, Rocco & Munn (2017). These researchers examined how leadership can be shaped through a critical disability lens. They concluded that benefits for all involved take place when leaders with differences are recognized and supported. Therefore, by ensuring that this shift takes place at Fleming, we would potentially be a model for other programs for individuals with disabilities, through advocacy and structures that enable our students to be authentic leaders.

Additionally, CICE students need to be able to see themselves represented throughout the college. This includes alumni correspondence, viewbooks, social media and other marketing aspects the college uses for many other programs. By doing so, we

can destabilize the ableist culture that persists throughout society, specifically within post-secondary institutions where all students are seen, accepted and valued for who they are.

In addition to these changes, two learning facilitators I am currently working with have also proposed an interactive map for the Fleming safe application. This would not only benefit the CICE students but all college students in navigating the different sections of the college. This idea needs to be further explored and implemented to ensure that students are able to locate classrooms and areas of the college with ease and independence.

Supports

Changes at the Program Level

Within the theme of Supports, reconceptualizing the whole process of transitioning from a CICE college student to adult life is a vital issue that emerged throughout the research. There are two ways I believe we can achieve positive change in program with respect to this transition. The first is related to enhancing curriculum that we currently deliver. In the final CICE semester students take a course called Career Explorations and Community Pathways. This course works to provide skills related to transitioning to work/community life while also exploring different options students can explore after they graduate from Fleming College. By enhancing this course through redevelopment, we can ensure that students are provided with a multi-faceted approach to transitioning into adult life that does not over-emphasize employment as a measure of personhood.

The development of a Community Services and Support Guidebook could also support the changes needed to address limited transitioning resources available to students. This guidebook could contain valuable information in the form of resources, organizations and support services that are available to students as they transition into life after college. I believe that this would also provide parents/guardians with concrete resources to understand what is currently available to their child and family. This enhancement would focus on current agencies and support services in the local area, including Community Living, Agilec, Canopy Support Services and Alternatives, and will allow parents and student to have direct contact information for these specific agencies.

Changes at the Community Level

Within data that spoke to the theme of supports, it was evident that there is limited knowledge regarding how to support individuals with disabilities post-graduation from a college program. The CICE Full time faculty and I have coordinated social get togethers for all CICE graduates to attend over the past 3 years. The goal of these socials has been to support past students' networking and social connections long after they have left Fleming. This is not a required component of the program, rather it is something that we feel compelled to organize. We have been made aware by some parents and past students that these social opportunities have been vital, especially within the past two years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic as it has served to further isolate adults with disabilities.

Identity/Inclusion

Changes at the Program Level

Students also felt that they were missing out by not being able to choose their elective in the CICE program. This needs to be addressed to ensure that students in the program are able to complete a true general elective at the college. In the past, CICE students were able to select one of the many general education electives offered by the college. However, currently students are not afforded the choice, and are placed in a course with all other CICE students preselected by administration. This is not a true elective and does not allow students to select a course that aligns with their interests and/or program. As well, no other student in any other program at the college is limited in this way.

This furthers the notion that students with disabilities need to be managed, specifically through picking what courses they can take, therefore excluding them from the college experience all other students receive. This can be changed by ensuring that programming is shifted to allow for CICE students to have the freedom to choose which elective they wish to take, so they can have the same experience as every other student at Fleming College.

Changes at the College Level

One of the mail goals stated in Fleming College's Strategic Plan for 2019-2024 is for Fleming to be a welcoming place (Fleming College, 2022). How can Fleming strive to meet this goal, yet still have faculty/students unaware that the CICE program even exists?

It is essential to critically consider representations of disability at Fleming College and what this means in terms of identities available for students with disabilities enrolled

in the CICE program. This need made me think of another marginalized group that is often highlighted at the college. Students, staff and faculty can self-disclose if they identify as Indigenous, and this information is collected by the Institutional Research department. This information is often shared in a positive light. For example the department will state "we have X number of students who are Indigenous, therefore we are a welcoming place for all." Students/staff/faculty who have a disability all belong to a marginalized group, yet there is not a check box for them to self-identify and therefore be seen and acknowledged by the institution.

As an Indigenous woman myself, I understand the importance of self-disclosure to demonstrate diversity at the college level. However, I would be amiss if I did not state my thoughts on missing the diversity that is represented within the CICE program, as it is always seen as a negative to have or identify with a disability. As Ethan noted, "I am an asset, not a liability in the program." If we are to focus on the bigger picture, specifically at a macro level, there needs to be a shift in thinking if we want to see a change in how we view individuals with disabilities.

One group of researchers have begun the conversation of how we can conceptualize this form of thinking. De Schauwer, Daelman, Vandenbussche, Sargeant, Van de Putte and Davies (2021) have highlighted that "everybody is different, and that we all change and become able in different ways" (p.286). They also noted that "we are all vulnerable and we all desire to belong in the same world, irrespective of the categories we are placed in" (De Schauwer et al., 2021, p. 286). This quote is significant, as it highlights the necessity for the college and the CICE program to be an inclusive environment that allows for diversity to be embraced to just accepted.

Changes at the Community Level

I believe it is research like this and programs like the CICE program at Fleming that work to move the needle forward, and with more support from students, parents and stakeholders in the community, we can focus on personhood rather than ableist notions of what a normal adulthood must look life. One way that we at Fleming in the CICE program can work to address this is how we present the program to prospective students and families, especially via marketing resources. This can be done through annual program review, where the Fleming CICE team carefully evaluates and makes necessary changes to promote the program respectfully and in support of varied goals for our graduates. Specifically, these changes could be completed through altering language in marketing resources in ways that shift the focus of employability and language that emphasizes the importance of personal goals and personhood.

A critical disability theoretical lens highlights changes that need to be addressed at both micro and macro levels. Changes at the micro level are related to the changes the CICE team can conduct at a college and program level. As previously highlighted, critical disability theory purports that we must work to demolish the structures that further an ableist agenda in different areas of society (Iannacci, 2018). The Fleming CICE team can utilize this research and the findings within to be able to address the changes required on all levels as it relates to the CICE program at Fleming College. Although these changes are institutional and programmatic, they signal support and further societal shifts with respect to disability that are becoming more evident and necessary at the macro level.

Researcher Reflexivity

In terms of an actual limitation the WebEx platform was clearly not as ideal as being able to conduct interviews in person. Although I was attentive to body language, face to face interviews with participants directly in front of me would have potentially produced more and different information due to body and other forms of communication that students would have utilized.

As this is a thesis guided by critical narrative inquiry and a reconceptualist orientation, it is vital to use this space to serve as a point of reflexivity for the researcher. I have come to understand about my own internal limitations as the program coordinator of the CICE program at Fleming. In this section, I will share and describe these reflections about myself in my role.

I have come to understand my personal ability to regulate my time and energy as it pertains to my work as a coordinator. I have found that I am often driven to complete tasks, even if this negatively impacts to my own well-being. I acknowledge that I have experienced this in previous roles, specifically as a Learning and Life Skills teacher. Although this can be beneficial for the program, it can also be detrimental physical and mental wellbeing.

It has become clear that I have to enhance the awareness of the CICE program at Fleming college. As previously mentioned, I have interacted with other faculty at the college who were unaware that the CICE program exists. Using specific examples highlighted in the reconceptualization of needed change within chapter 6, I believe that as program coordinator, I have the capacity to raise awareness and further develop a culture

of equity, diversity and inclusion not just within the CICE program, but at post-secondary education and community levels.

I have also realized internal challenges that I now recognized were rooted in the beginning of my story with my experiences with Joe. This experience was the first of many awards I have received in my life associated with supporting, coordinating and teaching individuals with disabilities. As previously mentioned, I remember wondering why would I be getting an award for hanging out with my friend Joe? After careful reflection, I see that the notion of receiving awards for working with people with disabilities can be problematic in nature, as it perpetuates the idea that people who work with disabilities are heroes because they chose to interact with those deemed less than.

I have also come to realize that my personal understandings about personhood were limited prior to beginning this starting my Master of Education. noted within my reflexivity with the data was surrounding my personal ideals about personhood. I believe that I have been caught up in wanting the best for the students and have always adhered to what parents wanted for their children as well. I can now see from the what students expressed during the interviews that my own view of personhood had to be reconceptualized in order to account for the varied goals and reasons of why the CICE students attended college in the first place. Cara for example spoke about wanting to be part of a community, while other students were interested in the co-op placements. These varied goals expressed by students made me stop and think about how as the program coordinator, I can work to support students in their ventures to gain independence and social connections rather than solely focusing on outcomes related to employment.

I have also come to realize something I had never thought to be a barrier yet it was very much a concern that students articulated. Many students expressed difficulties with the size of the college. I am grateful for these students sharing these experiences, as it has opened my eyes to understand the need for more support and responsive programming around transitioning to and from college. As someone who is able bodied and considered neurotypical, I have come to see these limitations I have had as a result of ablism and ableist discourses I have unconsciously internalized for years. Conversely, I have also become more aware of my own assets as a result of this research. I am a strong communicator which makes me effective at the process of networking. As well, my level of organization along with my ability to problem solve have aided me in my role. However, I believe the most important strength I possess is my passion to see the best in all my students, seeing them as able rather than the deficient.

Conclusion

I feel very honoured to have had this opportunity to learn alongside students in the CICE program at Fleming College to whom I am grateful for their time, reflections, stories, and shared experiences. Their voices and opinions will be the driving force in making necessary changes in the program at Fleming and within the community. By listening to and using their voices along with my experience, I believe that the CICE program can develop meaningful programming that will be respectful, supportive and responsive to what they have generously shared with me. On a macro level, I hope that this research will contribute to the ongoing shift in viewing individuals with disabilities as possessing valuable assets and gifts, rather than perceived deficits.

This research has implications for not only Fleming College, but also other programs at other post-secondary institutions. Reconceptualized understandings related to each of the themes that emerged in the data as explored in this last chapter can be applied to other programs across North America experiencing the same issues explored in this thesis. Understanding the value of student voice along with past research that supports the view that individuals with disabilities as valuable and capable, is essential in advancing educational opportunities and human rights for adults with disabilities.

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Appendix A: Letter of Information

Patty Thompson
pathompson@trentu.ca
(705) 559-4923
Information Letter
College programs for students with intellectual disabilities

Dear CICE Student,

My name is Patty Thompson and I am the Program Coordinator for the CICE program at Fleming College. I am completing my Master of Education at Trent University. The purpose of my research is to learn about the experiences students have at college. I would like you to be a part of my research by doing two interviews.

You will take part in 2 one-hour WebEx interviews that will be audio/video recorded. These interviews will be scheduled at times that work best for you. You will talk about your time as a CICE student.

The benefit of taking part in this study is that you will help to make the CICE program focused on what students need and want. There are no major risks related to completing this study. There is a small risk that you may feel uncomfortable talking about of your time in the CICE program. Please note that you can choose not to answer any questions you don't want to answer.

To ensure confidentiality of your identity, I will change your name to an invented name to use in the study. Recordings will only be used for research purposes. Documents will be stored in a protected file on the researcher's computer. After a five-year period, all interview documents will be destroyed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you want to withdraw, you can without any penalty. You can choose to not answer questions that you do not want to answer. Please know that your participation within this research study will not affect any part of your studies or grades in the CICE program. You can withdraw from the study at any time and there will be no effect on your studies or grades in the CICE program.

If you agree to participate, please complete the informed consent form and send it to me. I will discuss the form with you before we begin the interview to answer any questions you may have. If you have any questions about this research study, please contact myself, my supervisor or the REB Officer.

Thanks for your interest in this study.

Principal Researcher	**Supervisor**	**REB Officer**
Patty Thompson	Luigi Iannacci	Jamie Muckle
(705) 559-4923	705-748-1011 ext.	705-748-1011 ext. 789
pathompson@trentu.ca	luigiiannacci@trentu.ca	jmuckle@trentu.ca

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Patty Thompson
pathompson@trentu.ca
(705) 559-4923

Consent Form

College Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Overview of the Study:
The purpose of this research is to learn more about the experiences students have at college. This will help me ensure that the program is designed to support students and the goals they want for themselves. This research study is the focus of my Master's Thesis.

What you will be asked to do in this study:
I will ask that you take part in 2 one-hour WebEx interviews that will be audio and video recorded. These interviews will be scheduled at times that works best for you and will allow you to talk about your time as a CICE student.

Benefits and Risks:
The benefit of taking part in this research study is that you will help to make the CICE program better. There are no major risks related to completing this study. There is a small risk that you may feel uncomfortable talking about your time in the CICE program. Please note that you can choose to not answer any questions that you do not want to.

Confidentiality:
To ensure confidentiality of your identity, I will change your name to a pseudonym (invented name) for use throughout the study in the transcripts, published research and presentations. WebEx Recordings will only be used for research purposes. WebEx recordings and transcripts will be stored within a password protected file on the researcher's computer. After a five-year period, all of the data will be destroyed.

Withdrawal from the Study:
Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you want to withdraw, you can do without penalty. You can also choose not to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Please know that your participation within this research study will not impact any part of your studies or grades within the CICE program. You can withdraw from the study at any point and in doing so, there will be no impact on your studies or grades within the CICE program.

College Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Please check:

- ☐ I have read the study letter and I understand that I will be taking part in the study.
- ☐ I understand that I will be asked to do 2 one-hour interviews on WebEx and that these interviews will be recorded. I consent to this recording.
- ☐ I understand that I am volunteering to be in this study and that I can chose to leave at any time. I can choose not to answer any questions that I do not want to.
- ☐ I understand that the researcher will use an invented name to provide confidentiality.

I know that I can contact Patty Thompson, if I have any questions about the study.

I have reviewed these statements and by signing this paper, I fully consent to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name: _____ (please print)

Principal Researcher	**Supervisor**	**REB Officer**
Patty Thompson	Luigi Iannacci	Jamie Muckle
(705) 559-4923	705-748-1011 ext.	705-748-1011 ext. 789
pathompson@trentu.ca	luigiiannacci@trentu.ca	jmuckle@trentu.ca

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a bit about yourself.
2. Why did you choose to come to college?
    a Was it your idea?
    b Was it your goal?
3. What did you expect college to be like?
4. When you got to college how was your experience?
    a Can you share a story of something you love/loved about college. Favourite memory?
5. Was it different than what you expected?
    a If so how?
6. Do you think it is important that others hear about your experiences at college?
    a If so why?
7. How is college different than High School?
    a Is/was the work harder than you expected?
    b Who helps/helped you with this work?
    c Do/did you feel you get the help you need?
8. Did/have you experience/d any challenges or barriers at college?
    a If so, how did/have they affect/ed your learning?
    b What would [have] made/make it better?
    c What would you change?

9. Do/did you feel included in college life?

10. Is there anything you would like to share with me about your college experience?