

Ms Cathy Boyes, former teacher in charge of the Trinity Learning Centre: (written in 2022)

The Trinity Learning Centre

TLC - Trinity Learning Centre (classroom 1.1) was formed as a result of Catholic Education Centre's model of integration of students with learning disabilities into the mainstream school. The special ingredients were the students, the teacher aides and a teacher all with a vision of being included. Towards the end of 1998 a grant became available to bring in industry from the outside into the school experience; upon successful application for the funding, Table's Cafe was brought into being. This changed the dynamic of students being integrated into the mainstream into one whereby the mainstream school was being included into the integration unit. School staff and other students were invited into the learning centre to experience the many and varied talents of students with disabilities.

Each Friday the classroom was transformed into a cafe with guests booking their place to partake in a feast in the classroom and on the deck. The funding paid for the deck materials and the labour of the builder to come into the school as a work experience placement on-site. During the building of the deck students had to achieve putting together their resume, apply for the position of builder's labourer, be interviewed and then attend the building of the deck - 7am until the builder 'knocked off'. During the week the students would plan, shop, prepare and then serve the various guests attending the weekly Cafe.

This work experience continued beyond the building of the deck to include literacy and numeracy modules that students gained towards achieving Certificate 1 and 2 in Literacy and Numeracy. The students achieved not only completing their modules but also having the fun and laughter of including others into their learning environment. Parents were also invited as guests and were amazed to see the students with an abundance of confidence and enthusiasm while achieving at school.

Table's Cafe allowed for the students to showcase their abilities: we would have various celebrations, inviting parents, an art show and a weekly lunch open to staff to come in, have an opportunity to be served by the students in 1.1 and a chance to talk to each other away from the staffroom. Various classes also booked into the cafe to have their own celebrations.

There were many staff and students who came to have a greater awareness of special needs and to see beyond the disability. The parents delighted in their children growing into young people with confidence and abilities rather than feeling confined by their disabilities.

Toward the end of 1998 a teacher HOD came to me speaking about the difficulty of trying to include one of the students from the integration unit. Feeling stumped by the seeming hopelessness of the situation he was finding himself in, I found myself wishing there was a way to enable him to see the student differently. The teacher explained, 'these students should be in a special school, they're not going to achieve anything here.' It was at this moment that I hoped to find a way to open the integration unit to showcase the students' abilities rather than the teachers only seeing the disabilities and the difficulties. This same teacher was one of our most regular guests who came to participate in the many lunches at Table's Cafe. He had been able to see the students in a different light.

Trinity's Learning Centre transformed from an integration unit to a model of inclusion. It was unfortunate that the funding for this was cut; the students were then to be included under another umbrella of funding. During the few years that TLC and Table's Cafe operated the participating students had grown enough to be able to adapt and the teachers were a special breed who took

them under their wings and saw their potential rather than their disabilities. Mrs B who was with them throughout still looked out for them in the amazing way that she had always done. Lesley Baratta, 'Mrs B', took a position in the library and Deb Pascoe continued as learning support teacher aide. Cathy Boyes transferred to another school. Many of the students from the Learning Centre still keep in touch, having their own successful lives. School life was a rich experience for many of these students who have fond memories of school. Trinity has that special ingredient ... community, the teachers that include and care.

Cathy Boyes