Secondary History Teachers’ Methods of Inclusion

By

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Abstract

Education in secondary schools is constantly adapting to meet the modern needs of a diverse society. In Ontario there are policies in place to support these changing needs, including the Individual Education Plan, which is an individualized document itemizing accommodations and/or modifications for students with identified exceptionalities. Using a qualitative research approach and semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with two Ontario secondary History teachers, this study explored secondary History educators’ experiences of implementing Individual Education Plans. This study resulted in findings about teachers’ reported beliefs and experiences of practicing inclusion, as well as what supports and barriers exist in relation to IEP implementation in secondary History. This study addresses some broad implications for important stakeholders, parents, students, but most importantly, teachers.

Key Words: inclusion, Individual Education Plan, secondary History, teachers, students.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

The face of education is constantly changing and reorganizing to adapt modern society. Currently in Ontario there has been put forth a renewed set of goals for education. These include achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being, and enhancing public confidence (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). These are the main over-arching goals we can look forward to seeing in all Ontario secondary schools. Ontario has laws and regulations in place to enable all students to have the opportunity for success; some of these include creating an Individual Education Plan or IEP (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). In order to create an IEP for students, they first must be identified as exceptional pupils by the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC). This committee decides whether a child should be identified as exceptional, where an appropriate placement for the student will be, and reviews the identification and placement yearly (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). The Special Education Program is based on continuous assessment and evaluation of the pupil (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). In order to meet the needs of the student fully, constant adapting and assessing ensures this success. To achieve this each year, the IEP is reviewed by a team and updated to address issues such as the student’s current level of functioning, learning expectations, specific services required, and, as needed, steps for planning transition into high school or the work force (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

To support the process of developing IEPs and the students who require them, Ontario has a policy of inclusive education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). This is aimed at creating a school environment which supports the needs of all students by establishing communities for students, with and without exceptionalities, to be educated together in
appropriate general education classrooms (Kavale & Forness, 2000). When inclusion is successful, “students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 148). To support inclusion in general education classrooms, teachers do have available to them resources and programs to enable their teaching. These resources come in the form of professional training whether by institutions or outside parties (Deshler, Schumaker, Lenz, Bulgren, Hock, Knight, & Ehren, 2008; Griffin, 2015; Idol, 2006). There is also a large variety of instructional approaches and curriculum integration methods that are useful for creating an effective and easy way to approach teaching students with exceptionalities in a general education classroom (Bulgreen, Deshler, & Lenz, 2007).

In regards to research and resources available for teaching students with IEPs in a History class specifically however, there is a gap. Instructional strategies are available for teaching critical thinking skills, which is the foundation for History studies, but specific to a History class, there are not many resources available (Gini-Newman & Case, 2015). Currently this is context in which Ontario secondary schools find themselves, in regards to a teacher’s ability and methods of inclusion, for students with IEPs in History classrooms. And to understand more fully where Ontario currently holds space for special education, supporting IEPs and inclusive practices in the classroom, further research will be looked at surrounding the current government and educational policies in place and the processes for creating and updating an IEP.

The policies and regulations on special education in Ontario are extensive. You could get lost in the vast sea of documents and laws to which educators are meant to follow. The first step to supporting students in the Special Education Program is the identification process. Students are formally identified as exceptional pupils by the Identification, Placement, and Review
Committee (IPRC). This committee researches and communities the students’ exceptionality, appropriate placement, and continues to review the identification and placement yearly (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). The Special Education Program is based on continuous assessment and evaluation of the pupil (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). In the policy document issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2004) titled The Individual Education Plan, there are responsibilities outlined to implement procedures for ongoing and early identification, definitions, appeal process for parents, placement decisions, and no payment of fees by school boards. This is the first step for accommodating and placing students in the Special Education Program.

In order for a school to support the Special Education Program, the foundational law which they rely on is The Education Amendment Act of 1980, or Bill 82. This act is a landmark for special education in Ontario as it includes the various responsibilities school boards, teachers, and parents are held up to in order to provide services based on students’ needs. Ontario is committed to support all students and it is not an option for school boards to decline students with special education needs in their schools (Bennett, Dworet, & Weber, 2013). This is the landscape Ontario secondary school currently finds itself in regards to special education. How teachers and students succeed is aided through the identification, creation, and continual updating of IEPs.

Each student with exceptional learning needs must have an individualized education program tailored around them, an IEP. It is written by the IPRC, special education teachers, educational assistants and other experts, and is updated each year to address issues such as the student’s current level of functioning, goals, specific services required, and hope for transition (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). An IEP will describe a student’s education program and
any accommodations that may be required. All exceptional pupils must then have an IEP to support teachers in modifying for their learning needs, assessment and evaluation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004).

Students who have an IEP are in the Special Education Program either in the resource room and/or integrated in general education classrooms, also known as inclusion. Inclusion is the best practice supported by the current policies of the ministries of all Canadian provinces (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

1.1 Research Problem

Despite Ontario’s pronounced commitment to promoting inclusion and exceptional education for all students, success in the school environments is not always achieved. Students and teachers are rarely provided with the necessary resources and supports to achieve success academically and socially. Evidence shows that students without exceptionalities in inclusive classes do not suffer academically; on the contrary, they succeed and exhibit have more tolerance towards students with disabilities (Brahm & Kelly 2004; Lawerence-Brown, 2004; Wiener & Tardiff, 2004). Similarly, the evidence shows that there are a lack of resources and poor collaboration across departments and administration found in most schools (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). Scholars (e.g., Idol, 2006) have suggested that supports such as resource rooms should match the curriculum used in the general education program; the resource room teacher and the classroom teacher should be working together in planning and monitoring the student’s entire successes. Furthermore, many educators have reported feeling unprepared for teaching students with learning disabilities due to the heavy curriculum demands of secondary school teaching (Deshler, et al., 2008).
And beyond these reasons, the gap in the research around how the History curriculum and teacher integrate students with IEPs, remains the largest problem, an aspect which will explored further in the Literature Review. Therefore, considering there has not been enough substantial studies done on this particular aspect of the teacher experience, qualitative research is required.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how educators experience the method of inclusion for students with IEPs in History classrooms. To explore this topic, I interviewed a small sample of secondary History teachers about their perspectives, experiences, supports and barriers. I hope this study will be used to further inform the educational research community, History teachers and special education teachers, in order to further inform the supports available for students with IEPs.

1.3 Research Questions

The primary question guiding this study was: how are Ontario high school teachers working to include and enable success for students with IEPs in their History classrooms? Sub-questions to further guide this inquiry include:

- What are History teachers’ perspectives and beliefs about inclusion?
- What are their experiences on enforcing policies objects of inclusion?
- What supports do they have to enable success of inclusion in History classrooms?
- What existing barriers have they experienced as deterring their implementation of IEPs in History?

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement
As someone who has had experience in teaching and working with students who have exceptionalities, I have always had a strong passion for learning about their development and those who encounter them. In the last year of my undergraduate degree, I took a service learning course and was exposed to working with people with disabilities. Through experiences in my placement, writing a research paper on my findings, and my personal encounters with those living with disabilities, I came to understand how and why it is important for me to live a life of solidarity and awareness. From here is where I decided to approach my research topic. I believe communities are necessary and they are crucial; they create fellowships versus just gathering people together in a physical space. A community is a place where each person can grow freely in love; to grow, to love, to give and to receive, is all necessary and can be achieved through being with people. I want to know what a school and community can do for students with exceptionalities outside of the resource room. How can more than curriculum modifications support these students?

As someone who has never been taught with, or been exposed as a high school student to students with exceptionalities, I am very curious about what teachers are doing contemporaneously to support these students. Not only supporting them through inclusion, but also academically through their learning, specifically in a History class. History is one of my teaching subjects so I am curious to know how a teacher makes accommodates for students with IEPs. History can be a difficult subject with heavy reading for content, critical thinking concepts and analytical discussions. These are skills that a student in a general education class has trouble with, so I am curious to know how teachers adapt the curriculum for a student with an exceptionality. Therefore, based on the findings here, I want to help fill in the research gap.

1.5 Overview
To respond to the central research question and corresponding sub-questions, I have conducting a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview two to three current or previous Ontario secondary History teachers about their experiences of supporting inclusion for students with IEPs. In Chapter 2, I review the literature in the areas of Ontario’s provincial laws, teaching strategies, and promotion of inclusion. Next, in Chapter 3 I elaborate on the research design. In Chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of the existing literature. And in Chapter 5, I identify the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, and more broadly, for the educational research community. I also articulate a series of questions raised by the research findings and point to areas for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature in the areas pertaining to methods of inclusion in Ontario secondary History classrooms. This chapter is organized based on a range of topics found on the issue. I begin by reviewing existing research on inclusion in general education classrooms. I look into the challenges facing students with exceptionalities in these classrooms. I specifically review the findings on what the benefits of inclusion are for students with and without exceptionalities. Next I review the literature on current education policies in the Special Education Program in Ontario high schools, including policies, regulations and the processes of identifying, implementing and updating an IEP. From there I consider the kinds of support offered to general education teachers who teach students with IEPs. That includes professional training, instructional approaches, administrative supports and additional resources and programs. Finally, I describe the attitudes currently held by a variety of educators towards inclusion. These are the areas of the research supported and found in the educational field on secondary History teachers’ ability and methods of inclusion for students with IEPs.

2.1 Research on Inclusion in General Education Classrooms

Inclusion in general education classrooms has a balance between students being involved in the resource room and in general education classrooms. Idol’s (2006) findings “strongly support the practice of including students with special education challenges in general education programs” (p. 94). Therefore, inclusion is best practiced when exceptional students spend only some of the school day in general education classes; participation rather than placement. “Inclusion is a movement seeking to create schools that meet the needs of all students by establishing learning communities for students with and without disabilities, educated together in
age-appropriate general education classrooms in neighbourhood schools” (Ferguson, 1996 as cited in Kavale & Forness, 2000, p. 279). Currently this is why and how inclusion is performed in secondary schools.

In a study done by the author Csikszentmihalyi and his team to research the theory of flow, they used a theoretical model to conduct interviews and questionnaires with thousands of individuals from many different walks of life. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) found students with exceptionalities have access to general education curriculum through inclusion, but attitudes of general education teachers to successfully teach them, is a huge challenge rarely fulfilled. These teachers need to have access to instructional approaches that are easy to use and effective, in order to successfully implement inclusion. Inclusion is a practice that enables teachers and students to work with and around IEPs. These policies are in place to support teachers and students on their path to success.

I begin with a section on the studies I have found of IEP student experiences in History classrooms and the experiences of their teachers. After that, I will examine what the state of inclusion is, supports offered, and attitudes of teachers.

2.1.1 Challenges facing students with exceptionalities in general education classrooms. To begin, a picture of inclusion in secondary core content classes must be painted. Bulgren, Marquis, Deshler, Schumaker, Lenz, & Davis (2006) studied math, science, history, foreign language, and English instructional approaches in general education classrooms that included students with exceptionalities. They found that a) teachers assumed the responsibility for showing students how to learn while teaching content; b) teachers reported that for students with exceptionalities, success depends on their mastery of basic skills that enable them to succeed in content knowledge; c) teachers reported students with exceptionalities had less
confidence in their success than students without; and d) teachers held lower expectations for 
students with exceptionalities to be successful in learning content or problem-solving skills. 
These findings are consistent across the research on challenges facing students with 
exceptionalities in History classrooms. For example, Deshler et al. (2008) found that: “Many 
educators struggle to prepare students with learning disabilities to successfully respond to heavy 
curriculum demands at the middle-school and high-school levels… the majority of students with 
learning disabilities seem ill-prepared to succeed in high school” (p. 169). Even though teachers 
taught students with IEPs, it was found that they held lower expectations of success for these 
students.

Consistent with the majority of research being discussed in this section, Baker and 
Zigmond (1990) found that in general education classrooms, differentiated instruction was 
absent; large-group instruction dominated the teaching strategies because the teachers were more 
concerned with maintaining routine and not meeting individual needs. In a study conducted by 
McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, & Lee (1993) students with exceptionalities were found to 
be unsupported in the general education classes; there were virtually no adaptations to instruction 
made by the teacher for them. Furthermore, students with IEPs were not being instructed 
individually. The less restrictive the setting, the less individualized the instruction; this is a 

According to Bulgreen, et al., (2007) higher order thinking is demonstrated in the ability 
to manipulate and understand information such as comparing and contrasting, weighing causes 
and effects, and answering critical questions. The authors studied the challenges of engaging 
young students with exceptionalities in higher order thinking, a skill taught in History. He found 
that many teachers in secondary content classes are not convinced that students with
exceptionalities can master higher order thinking requirements in classes such as History. This finding was corroborated by Bulgreen, et al., (2007) and National Research Council (2003). This council conducted a study of students in secondary schools, using a qualitative research method, and found that the overarching goal of textbook and reading material used in general education classes, is to shift the emphasis away from the memorization of facts, and to an understanding of inquiry-based learning, the importance of evidence based claims, and habits of the mind specific to the discipline of History.

Bulgreen, et al., (2007) argued that subject matter courses must teach students how to think and process information, not absorb facts and information based on the extensive literacy demands certain disciplines such as History, require. However, the key to success found by Bulgreen et al. in their study on inclusion is understanding the unique learner characteristics an individual student has, and instructing content based on those needs.

2.1.2 Benefits of inclusion for students with and without exceptionalities. There can be both beneficial and negative effects on students in inclusive teaching environments, here the former will be explored. Students with exceptionalities benefit greatly from interactions with diverse peers and in a diverse classroom (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). This is corroborated in Bunch & Valeo (2004) where evidence shows students in inclusive settings experience academic and social success far more positively, then those in segregated school settings (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). These findings are very important because they prove inclusion is the best practice for students with IEPs even if they struggle at times.

Much of the research surrounding the effects of inclusion on students without exceptionalities is very promising. Evidence shows that students without disabilities in inclusive classes do not suffer academically; on the contrary, they succeed and have more tolerance
towards students with disabilities (Brahm & Kelly 2004; Lawerence-Brown, 2004; Wiener & Tardiff, 2004). Looking specifically at what teaching practices support all learners, Bennett and Gallagher (2013) found differentiated instruction to address the all needs in the therefore creating more room for diversity and growth. Bennett and Gallagher (2013) also found that there are some educators who hold positive attitudes towards structuring a course while supporting differentiation. From the educators interviewed in this study, Bennett and Gallagher found benefits in academic success through the use of effective teaching strategies, with supportive technology when appropriate, educators could effectively create learning opportunities for all students. Furthermore, this study found social success when participation amongst all students had a very positive impact on the group. These findings are also seen in a study conducted by Wiener & Tardif (2004) who found that creating diversity and acceptance for all learners, contributes to both the academic and social success of students.

As seen in much of the research explored on inclusion, there are challenges and benefits facing students with and without exceptionalities in a classroom. The benefits are higher than the negative effects, and rather provide more opportunities for learning and diversity. Moving from what the policy states on inclusion and how it is practiced in schools is the next goal for this literature review.

The attitudes teachers, educational assistants, parents, students, administration and the community hold towards the policy of inclusion are very important to its success. Research shows the majority of people have positive attitudes towards inclusion, but there are also negative attitudes. Some teachers have been found to have more positive feelings about teaching inclusive classrooms when they are provided with the proper resources, support materials, training classes, and professional development opportunities (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013; Ernst
& Rogers, 2009). The extent of professional development on special education, experiences implementing inclusion, and access to instructional resources, are positively related to the attitudes about inclusion for high school teachers (Ernst & Rogers, 2009).

Without a teacher positive attitude towards inclusion, the students with and without exceptionalities suffer. It is important for teachers and assistants to believe that they can make a difference in the life of a child in order to succeed in doing so. These supports training and professional development, or lack of, instructional approaches to support teachers, using collaborative learning as a tool for success and additional strategies to support inclusion.

2.2 Supports for General Education Teachers to Implement Inclusion

The next section examines the research discussing supports available for general education teachers outside and inside the classroom for implementing inclusion. What do these supports look like in practice? Much of the research explores options such as training and professional development options and instructional strategies to support the policy of inclusion.

2.2.1 Supports available beyond the classroom. Teaching students with exceptionalities requires a variety of collaborative techniques, one of the most important ones available are professional training for teachers and educational assistants. Success for students with exceptionalities is only achievable when delivered by a team working together of well-trained professionals (Deshler, et al., 2008; Idol, 2006). Training is required and given on a variety of platforms outside of the classroom. First, school counsellors and leaders are required to assist and train teachers to design more effective teaching strategies (Griffin, 2015). Second, administrative support of the Special Education Program and general education teachers is very important because it has been found to increase teachers’ positive perceptions of inclusion (Idol, 2006).
Professional training must also be sought outside of the school as well. A study done by Griffin (2015) found a need for professional training on the specific nature of the different exceptionalities present in classrooms. These exceptionalities carry across a large range, and affect behavioural and academic challenges that educators need to receive specific training on before entering the classroom. Bennett and Gallagher (2013) conducted a study which found that, despite teachers expressing positive attitudes towards inclusion, they were ill-prepared in professional development and resource support. This is not because these teachers are bad teachers, or bad inclusive teachers, but rather because they were not being trained properly. This is because students with exceptionalities are being placed in general education classes without any hesitation or consolation of the teacher, as found by Hodge, Ammah, Casebolt, Lamaster, and O’Sullivan (2004).

Additional resources and strategies available outside of the classroom, that have not already been mentioned are outlined in Deshler, et al., (2008). These are: a) communication with general and special education teacher; b) co-teaching between general and special education teachers; and c) various accommodations to general curriculum and assessments based on students’ needs. These services are aimed at helping students with exceptionalities succeed in general education curriculum. Deshler, et. al. found students with exceptionalities who are in an inclusive environment need more services than what is currently available. Most students with IEPs need direct, intensive, systematic instruction to teach them the necessary skills and strategies to cope with where they are struggling in their learning. Accommodations in the organization and service delivery methods are not enough for these students to successfully master content in general education classrooms.
Supports in the form the Special Education Program that are available to teachers outside of the classroom, may not be used properly. Research has shown that supports such as the resource room should match the curriculum used in the general education programs; the resource room teacher and the classroom teacher should be working together in planning for and monitoring student learning (Deshler, et al., 2008; Idol, 2006). However, there can be a lack of resource sharing and poor collaboration across departments and with administrators (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). This is not to say that the current practice and supports in place for teachers and students are drastically failing. This is to say that research reveals a problem in education: there needs to be an improvement in how the resources available outside of the classroom are used.

2.2.2 Supports available within the classroom. Studies have shown different findings on which instructional strategies work best in within the classroom environments. In this section a few of the more popular and well-documented strategies that are available to teachers, will be described. This will create a foundation for what kind of approaches a History teacher can use in an inclusive classroom setting.

To begin with, Content Enhancement Routines (CERs) have been found to be effective and popular approaches among most researchers as an instructional strategy to use in inclusive classrooms (Bulgreen, et al., 2007). CERs help all students succeed because they are based on instructional principles designed to teach diverse learners; while meeting individual and group needs at the same time, CERs allow for collaboration between the teacher and student (Bulgreen, et al., 2007). Teachers hold the information and content matter, while acting as the mediator of any students’ learning. Specifically, CERs are beneficial because they use routines that students learn across subject matters and apply them to one subject at a time. They emphasize student
engagement, construction of knowledge, use of graphics, note taking, student interaction, less heavy textbook reading, more inserted questions and checks for understanding, and strategic cognitive and metacognitive approaches to learning (Bulgreen, et al., 2007).

There have been serious attempts in the researching world to bridge the gap between theory and practice for learning. For example, there has been research done over the past 21 years at the University of Kansas Centre for Research on Learning (KU-CRL) which supports the following strategies: organizing routines, understanding routines, and recalling routines. These are CERs which have been designed by the general education teachers to instruct academically diverse classes (Deshler, et al., 2008). Therefore, CERs is just one instructional approach general education teachers can use within the classroom, as an effective tool to teach students with IEPs.

Another instructional method for supporting inclusion is a strategy called “Slice-of-the-Course-Pie” planning from the Curriculum Planning framework and SMARTER planning steps. Bulgreen et al., (2007) describe SMARTER planning as a way of incorporating into teaching the knowledge gained from thinking about content and curriculum demands, in light of each “slice of the pie”. The slices are: Thinking for Problem Solving & Generalization, Thinking for Manipulating Content, and Acquisition of Facts, Vocabulary, Concepts, Procedures, Principles, and Propositions. SMARTER planning demonstrates how general education teachers can deliver content knowledge while supporting various levels of higher order thinking in all students. “It is assumed that in addition to the use of these routines and devices, critical domain-specific skills must also be taught in those classes, including the exploration of historical documents, family histories, or historical narratives” (p. 126). This research shows through the use of CERs and
SMARTER planning within the classroom, students have the opportunity to be successful in critical content subject areas, but research is lacking in the area of specific History routines.

Inclusion is not only about academic involvement and participation, but the social involvement of peers and teachers. Research (e.g., Avramidis & Wilde, 2009) has shown that social interactions contribute to positive growth and learning in students with exceptionalities. For example, cooperative learning is one of the most effective strategies general education teachers can use in inclusive settings (Idol, 2006). Community, like ones found in inclusive schools, is a beneficial strategy to use within a classroom, for both non-exceptional and exceptional students. These social interactions and development of friendships are crucial for cognitive growth and social development for students with exceptionalities (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). This type of social interaction is succeeded through the physical placement of students with exceptionalities in a general education classroom.

A powerful example of collaborative instruction is seen in Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS). This is a promising alternative to conventional instructional methods because it allows students to work together to support each other’s learning. Teachers can implement this activity in various lessons in order to address a larger range of learning needs in students (Fuchs, Fuchs, Thompson, Svenson, Yen, Otaiba, Yang, McMaster, Prentice, Kazan, & Saenz, 2001). Teachers have reportedly used collaborative learning to help meet the needs of their lower-performing students, including students with IEPs (Jenkins, Antil, Wayne, & Vadasy, 2003). Collaborative learning allows for groups of students to operate on different levels of learning and curriculum, while using alternative instructional approaches.

2.3 Conclusion
In conclusion, I will describe the highlights from what existing literature has learned to date on this topic, and where this study fits into the landscape created in during this literature review. The topic being studied here is an Ontario secondary teachers’ experiences of including students with IEPS in History classrooms. Research has shown that there are policies and regulations in place to promote the Special Education program in Ontario high schools. Inclusion is a policy which most schools follow but it looks different at each school depending on the community, approach and attitudes. Once a student with an IEP has been identified as such by the IPRC and may spend all, most, some or none of their day in the resource room.

Having a positive attitude towards inclusion and creating a collaborative and accepting environment for all students, has been found to facilitate the inclusion of exceptional students. Most teachers and educational assistants do have a positive attitude about inclusion, if they are supported by administration to succeed. The kinds of supports that have been found to foster this attitude include professional training, the Special Education Program, curriculum integration and strategies, and co-teaching or collaboration with other teachers and colleagues. These supports are available, but according to research, are not always used to their full potential.

Regarding the core subject being studied here, there is little research on how to implement these supports effectively in a History classroom. Studies have been conducted on critical thinking skills, reading, literacy, evidence based claims skills, and these skills can be applied to teaching History, but are seldom directly linked to teaching History skills. Overall, the lack of research in this area links to the purpose of this study. This study aims to help fill the gap in the research and hopefully shed light on how History teachers can successfully support students with IEPs in a general education classroom.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I explain the research methodology, identify the various methodological decisions that I have made, and my rationale for these choices given the research purpose and questions. I will start with a discussion of the research approach and procedures, following with the instruments of data collection, which is a semi-structured interview. I then identify the participants of the study, list the sampling criteria, describe the sampling procedures and provide some information on the participants. I continue on to describe how I have analyzed the data, before recognizing the relevant ethical issues that have been considered and addressed. To conclude, I speak to some of the methodological limitations of the study, as well as the strengths.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach and semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with two Ontario secondary History teachers. To state clearly now, my research question is: How are Ontario high school teachers working to include and enable success for students with IEPs in their History classrooms?

Broadly, most qualitative research can be classified as the exploration of meaning and understanding (Merriam, 2002). One of the largest reasons I find this study design to be the most effective, and the reason why I chose it, is because it has an interpretive and humanistic approach. Unlike quantitative research, where many researchers rely on numerical data and a fixed set of questions with forced-choice answers to guide the study, qualitative research relies on in-depth responses with thoughtful reflections based on personal experiences and histories (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007). Maxwell (2013) states qualitative researchers’ practices are valuable in helping them study difficult theoretical, methodological, and political
issues that society faces.

Qualitative research is compatible with a range of philosophies and perspectives that I have witnessed as an interviewer (Maxwell, 2013). This type of research is meant to allow the interviewer to see the world from the participants’ point of view, which may differ from the interviewer’s, or from that of other participants. The goal is to understand how the participants’ perspectives are formed by their physical, social, and cultural contexts and how the processes that are involved in creating these environments are affected. Qualitative research is inductive, open-ended and often relies on textual or visual data rather than numerical data; the primary goal is to understand rather than to generalize (Maxwell, 2013). Due to these aspects of qualitative research, I used this design to conduct my study because it was more personal, relatable, and helped my data analysis as my research questions and purpose were focused on people and their understanding of their practices.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Documents, observations, and interviews are three common sources of data used in a qualitative research study (Merriam, 2002). The primary instrument of data collection being used in this study is a semi-structured interview protocol. This type of data collection provides the opportunity for participants to share their lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). These stories are collected from individual experiences to then shed some light on the research questions. Semi-structured interviews typically include a set of pre-determined questions, but allow for additional questions to arise through dialogue (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This allowed for subjects or experiences I had not thought of before, to emerge in the interview organically. It allowed for interviewees to depart from the planned protocol, and create space for spontaneity and personal experiences. This allowed for more meaningful data to emerge because it came
from the participants’ knowledge and interests (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

A qualitative study is used to understand the context or settings from which the participants come from; we cannot separate what people say from their home, family, or work (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, in my interview questions I began by asking some background information to create a biography for the participant and to support the study’s purpose. The procedures are constantly changing. The interview protocol was merely a guideline telling myself and others how I intended to conduct the study. I have organized my protocol (located in Appendix B) into five sections, beginning with the participant’s background information, followed by questions about their beliefs on accommodations for IEPs in a History classroom, then their practices related to this topic, following with questions regarding supports, challenges, and concluding with next steps for teachers. Example of questions include:

- What professional training have you been provided with in the development of IEPs?
- What kinds of supports are offered in a History classroom specifically to support IEPs?
- What kinds of programs, curriculum practices, or lessons are in place in your classroom to enable the success of student’s with IEPs? If none, what programs interest you?

3.3 Participants

In this section I address all methodological decision-making steps pertaining to my research participants. There are several aspects to consider when making these decisions which are divided into the sub-heading below. I will review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment, and a range of possible avenues for teacher recruitment.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria. The following criteria will be applied to teacher participants:

1. Teachers will have experience teaching Ontario high school History.

2. Teachers will have had some experience working with students with IEPs in a History
3. Teacher will have been working in the field of education, or been enrolled in a pre-service teacher education program, prior to September 2011.

In order to address the central research question, I recruited participants with experience in teaching History and in teaching students with IEPs. These are the two largest requirements I looked for in my participants because if it allows for my background knowledge and experience to thoughtfully answer my interview questions. Additionally, participants had to have been working in the field of education since before September 2011 in order to ensure they have had at least five years of teaching experience.

**3.3.2 Sampling procedures.** Qualitative research is usually comprised of a small, selective sample (Carr, 1994). Sampling in qualitative research is a strategy employed for recruiting participants depending on the aim of the study. There are many different kinds of sampling, but purposive sampling is the most common type. Whereas convenience sampling involves finding people who are accessible and readily available, not based on the sampling criteria (Neergaard & Ulhoi, 2007).

I used purposive sampling in this study. To recruit participants, I attended related professional development conferences hosted by school boards, teacher education programs, and subject-area specialization organizations. I also personally sought out participants who may fulfill my sampling criteria and invited them to join my study voluntarily.

**3.3.3 Participant biographies**

At the time of the interview, **Michael** had been teaching at a secondary school in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) for almost 20 years and was acting as the department head of the Canadian World Studies Department. During his teaching time, he has taught a variety of
subjects, those worth mentioning are Grade 10 History Locally Developed and Credit Recovery, where Michael taught many students with IEPs. His experience teaching History, the Applied level, and Locally Developed courses, made him a highly suitable candidate for this research study as his techniques and experiences, directly relate to my research study.

My second participant, **Leo** was professor in an initial teaching trainer program in Ontario at the time of the interview. Previously he taught in elementary and secondary Ontario History classrooms and a few other subject areas. The main reason for selecting this candidate for research is based on his skills in working with students in History classrooms, focusing on assessments, learning and critical thinking which all directly pertain to my research.

**3.4 Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research is fundamentally inductive (Merriam, 2002) which means using the data collected from research a new theory emerges. In the best situation, data analysis takes place at the same time as data collection. As the interview is taking place, the interviewer is responding, reflecting and adding their initial reaction in their notes. This allows researchers to develop an evolving understanding of the research questions, in order to better inform analysis (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

When analyzing data, researchers begin with a unit of data such as a word, narrative, or phrase, which is then compared to others units of data, while looking for overlapping themes throughout the data (Merriam, 2002). These themes are then given codes which are sorted into categories and then further redefined into major themes, a procedure that DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) refer to as a template approach. During my data analysis I transcribed my interviews, coded the transcripts using my research questions as an interpretive tool, then identified categories of data and themes within the categories to conclude my findings.
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

There are some ethical risks generally associated with conducting a qualitative research study; one is dealing with people, their intimate identities, specific personal histories or stories and possible emotional reactions. Although Orb, Eisenhower, and Wynaden (2000), identify all forms of research as containing ethical issues, qualitative research carries its own weight. The awareness and use of appropriate ethical principles, including autonomy, beneficence, and justice, is crucial in order to minimize the occurrence of ethical issues (Orb et. al., 2000).

One of the ethical requirements of most research including qualitative research is respecting the privacy of participants. Researchers must disassociate names from responses or use aliases or pseudonyms for individuals and places during the transcription process to protect the identities of participants (Creswell, 2014). Data will remain on a private, password-protected external hard-drive and will be erased after five years. Another issue Creswell mentions is being academically dishonest by only sharing positive results. Withholding important information or results to cast light on the research favourable ideas is wrong. In qualitative research, reporting the full range of findings is necessary, even those finding contrary to positive themes. “The hallmark of good qualitative research is the report of the diversity of perspectives about the topic” (p. 99).

Another ethical issue to consider is the relationship between the researcher and participant. This relationship can also affect a qualitative study (Orb et. al., 2000). Interviewees may be sharing controversial stories related to personal experiences, students with exceptionalities which can induce emotional responses at times. Being aware of the environment I am creating as a researcher is important; my participants must feel safe and supported during and after the interview. This information is not to be taken lightly; it is important and fully valid.
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Turning now to the limitations this study has, Jackson II et al., (2007) identify one limitation of qualitative research as not generalizing the data to represent all surrounding population due to the limited sample size of some studies. However, this does not mean the findings are not valid. This study allows for a much richer understanding of supporting IEPs in a History classroom because it reflects teachers’ personal experiences (Carr, 1994). The limitations of this study allow me as the researcher, to interview teachers and obtain personal and real experiences. Further, this uplifts the teacher voice and experience, providing them with a platform to share their ideas and what matters most to their teaching practice. Orb et. al., (2000) continues with these ideas by describing some other issues to consider, specifically the advantages of qualitative interviews, including self-awareness, self-acknowledgement, empowerment, catharsis, and healing.

Additionally, another limitation to a qualitative method is the relationship between the participants and research; earlier this was mentioned as benefit (creating an inclusive and safe environment), but it can be issue because, depending on the relationship, data may change or be distorted (Carr, 1994). However, Carr also argues that these risks are worth taking due to the high levels of validity that are achieved by using and applying qualitative methodologies. Having real life experiences, opinions and knowledge is too valuable to avoid this risk. There is a deep significance to interviewing teachers about real life experiences. There are no forced answers, but rather space for participants to speak about what matters most to them using their previous knowledge, not the researchers’ forced answers.

3.7 Conclusion
In this chapter I explained the research methodology. First I described the research approach and procedures including the significance of qualitative research. I identified why it is important and relevant for this study in particular. I described the instruments of data collection, identified semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data and spoke to some of the benefits of semi-structured interviews. I then listed and described the sampling criteria being applied to all interviewees. Further, I describe all potential recruitment procedures. Then I discussed ethical issues such as consent, privacy, risks for participants, data storage, and the interviewee and interviewer relationship. Lastly, I discussed methodological limitations and strengths, concluding that the benefits far out weight the limitations. In the next chapter I report on the findings of the research.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and offers discussions about the findings which emerged through this qualitative research study. While conducting an analysis of the data, I kept in mind my central research question: How are Ontario high school teachers working to include and enable success for students with IEPs in their History classrooms? As a recap, in Chapter One I identified the purpose of this qualitative study as understanding how secondary educators experience the method of inclusion for students with IEPs in History classrooms. In Chapter Two I reviewed the literature in the areas pertaining to methods of inclusion in Ontario high school History classrooms. I reviewed many bodies of literature on this topic such as the challenges facing students with exceptionalities, the benefits inclusion may have for students with and without exceptionalities. I also reviewed the current face of the Special Education Program and the policies in Ontario high schools, and the kinds of supports offered to general education teachers and the attitudes they hold. In Chapter Three I described my methodology: semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with two of Ontario’s secondary History teachers, Michael and Leo.

In what follows, I share my findings which connect back to the literature review highlighting the convergences and divergences from the data. Findings are organized into four main themes:

1. “You are the hunchback’s tailor:” Teacher reported beliefs about inclusion
2. Teachers’ reported experiences practicing inclusion,
3. “Good for all kids:” Supports for inclusion
4. “Well, you’re on an IEP right?” Existing barriers to inclusion
For each theme, I first offer a thorough description of my theme, report on the data collected and its significance to my central research question. I then discuss the importance of each theme within the context of the existing literature previously reviewed. Finally, I summarize my findings and transition to the final chapter.

4.1 Teacher Reported Beliefs About Inclusion

This section will present a collection of data to answer how these teachers perceive the practice of inclusion in secondary History classrooms; their beliefs are important to the success of this specific pedagogy and are relevant to overall success of school culture and its stakeholders.

What my participants noted across the board – the single most important factor for enabling inclusion to work – is the stakeholders must work from an appreciative model, not a deficit one. According to Leo, an appreciative model is having high expectations for students and believing that all are capable of critical thought. The teacher’s attitude must be focused on helping all students become better at doing what they are not strong in, rather than avoiding when they need help in. More specifically, Michael corroborated this belief by saying, teachers should foster a kind of learning that moves past giving students with IEPs worksheets to complete, while giving other students the opportunity to think. For example, in the interview with Leo I asked him to state some final thoughts and beliefs he held about the approach teachers should take when approaching IEPs in a History classroom. He shared the following tip:

My main tip would be to start from the belief of an appreciative model that all kids can think and solve problems and they are more interested in learning if they build their confidence to do it. If we start from there, I think we have a better chance at helping kids and then we can target our strategies to the child, based on that they can solve problems.
That we don’t get caught to devolving to the worksheet mentality because well this kid is an IEP, so we won’t ask him to think like this; that’s the big danger.

Here Leo defines that teachers should be reflexive and understand that their perception of how inclusion works in a secondary History classroom, rests solely on starting them from an appreciative model. Their beliefs are important to the success of implementing IEPs into their pedagogy and are relevant to overall success of school culture and its stakeholders.

For the purpose of this study, and from the perspective of the teachers interviewed, here I am working from a broad landscape of what the majority of IEPs teachers will experience in the classroom. Therefore, most of the IEPs experienced by my participant’s label students with disabilities as functioning lower cognitively or developmentally. The consensus from my interviews here is, teachers must view these students not as harder to deal with because of their exceptionality, but instead as thinkers who are struggling with a specific aspect of their thinking and needs specific modifications to lessons in order to succeed.

For example, Leo suggests how teachers can cope with these varying exceptionalities they encounter because at times teachers may feel overwhelmed by work, and may tend to lean towards a deficit model of teaching because it may be easier to ignore an IEP. Therefore, these teachers from my study believe that the approach a teacher takes, is essential to the success of students’ growth. The appreciative model was a defined by Leo in that way, but Michael on the other hand defined it in this way, using a quote by Giovanni Giolitti, the Prime Minister of Italy in 1911:

You know there’s an old saying, “that when the tailor makes a suit for the hunchback, he makes a hunchback for the suit” … It’s what we do as teachers, it really is what we do. A lot of teachers … figure, I’m going to make the suit and you’re going to wear it,
whether you like it or not. Even if the shoulders are too baggy or the pants are too long and the arms are too short, it doesn’t matter, you all have to fit into this suit. You know, you have to remember, we are not here to breed conformity, we’re here to help students learn and to take into account that they don't all learn the same way, they don’t all have the same interests or the same strengths so recognize you are the hunchback’s tailor; that is your job.

This quote is telling because it comes directly from a teacher working in a Locally Developed Grade 10 History course. Each student in this LD class learns in significantly different ways and in order to successful handle the reality of a class like this, Michael believes that teachers must view the whole class as individual learners. For Michael, teachers must be the “hunchback’s tailor” by combining their weaknesses as well as their strengths, in order to accommodate for the reality of inclusion. The failure is teaching in a deficit way; having an IEP does not make the student their weakness, rather it makes them someone who needs more attention in a few areas. Leo described having an IEP as a tool for using differentiation in your classroom; so flipping the label of an IEP around and talking about the strengths this student has as a learner to then cope with their weaknesses.

The claim being made here, based on the data presented above is that in order for a teacher to successfully support a student who has an IEP in a History classroom, teachers must adjust their lens and believe all students are individual learners capable of growth, and tailor content to fit students’ needs. Conversely, Bulgren at al. (2006) studied Math, Science, History, Foreign Language, and English instructional approaches that included students with exceptionalities; two of their most important findings were teachers reported that they had less confidence in the success of students with exceptionalities than students without, and that
teachers held lower expectations for students with exceptionalities to be successful in learning content or problem solving skills. This lens on students is what teachers need to move away from, and according to the literature reviewed here, it is where many teachers beliefs are starting from.

But on the other hand, the practice described by my participants is in line with some of the existing literature such as found in Kavale and Forness (2000), which states that successful inclusion is a movement which looks to create schools that meet the needs of all students’ learning. All of my participants stated inclusion could work, if the viewpoint of teachers corresponded with this movement. Participants reportedly came to have this belief, based on two kinds of experiences: with individual stakeholders and in teaching History. I will now discuss each of these in turn.

4.2 Teachers’ Reported Experiences Practicing Inclusion

In this section I report my findings on teachers’ experiences of implementing IEPs in practice. First, teachers report that policy differs from the practice of inclusion. Second, teachers have identified three different stakeholders who heavily impact their IEP implementation practice. Another factor affecting teacher practice is the permeating school culture. The last factor is the implication for a History-specific classroom.

4.2.1 Importance of having informed stakeholders. Within a school many people play a role in the development of students; according to my participants, there are three stakeholders who most heavily influence that development: parents, students, and teachers. Noting first, all of these experiences vary from person to person, but the unifying factor found in the data, is that in order for inclusion to be successful, each stakeholder must be informed about an IEP’s use and purpose.
For example, in my interview with Michael, he made a bold statement about how inclusion is not as successful as it can be because it needs all cooperating elements to act cohesively: “with the right teachers, the right mindset, beliefs that you’re heading towards, it can [work].” This was Michael’s answer to a question about whether or not inclusion works. He said it makes a big difference if teachers are invested in the students and how much, or little, parents are invested as well.

An informed parent and/or guardian is, first, one who cares for their child and who hopefully has some understanding of what the IEP entails, but this is not always the case as teachers’ in this study reported: some parents are not there to support their children. As stated by my participants, in a teacher’s ideal world, parents: would be actively involved and well-informed; would know when the child comes home; how to continue the kinds of support done in class and why these accommodations are being made. Continuing with this thought, Leo said:

But if the child is going home to parents that are offering little support anyway … we have to be ready for even if home support is not there, that we’ve got a plan in place to help this child be successful. And if home support is there even better, but if we naively assume home supports’ always there, then we’re setting some kids up to failure.

Teachers cannot assume that a student’s IEP is being supported at home; support is not always present outside of school, or outside of that teacher’s classroom. My participants stated that teachers are very important stakeholders to an IEP’s success.

These teachers believe that students also need to be informed about their IEP because in order for appropriate supports to be offered, teachers need the help of the student’s own perception of what their IEP entails, so they can learn from its benefits. Across the board my participants noted that students should know what works and what does not work for them
because ultimately an IEP is a personal thing and when teachers use that student as their own best tool for improvement and learning, then growth can be obtained. Michael explained this as a student themselves, play into their own success more than any stakeholder.

In a study of high-school students’ perceptions of teacher adaptations to meet the special learning needs of students in the general education classroom, Haager and Lee (1993) found that teachers were not providing any adaptations to instruction for students with exceptionalities. But my data suggests something quite on the contrary: that without a teachers input, knowledge and adaption of the IEP in the classroom, students cannot be helped. If this is the case, why are teachers not doing this as Haager & Lee suggest? According to my participants, they may not be informed. For example, Michael said that, “The informed teacher is the one who will be able to help or jump start a student with an IEP or without one, and developing those thinking skills.”

Therefore, teachers need to know their students and take time to read through and understand an IEP to then target supports, interventions and interactions around knowing the student. Therefore, going back to that appreciative model, when used well, an IEP can develop the child as a learner, but used poorly it is used as a label. Therefore, supporting IEPs in a History classroom, depends on the time and effort a teacher takes to adjust the content, curriculum and lessons to suit the learner.

4.2.2 Significance of school culture for implementing inclusion. This small section deals with a larger factor affecting inclusion, that being a school’s culture. According to my data, the culture of an institution is important for establishing an inclusive community that hopefully permeates into the student. The stakeholders of a school must contribute to the policy and practice of inclusion in order to grow and work from that appreciative model. Leo said that a school’s culture can be either a space of two kinds of assumptions, one that students do not
perform well or two that they do. Leo said, “If there’s that sense, then kids play to that level. But I find at a school where’s there’s high expectations of academic achievement, it tends to have an upward pressure. So I think the culture is actually quite important.” Therefore, this data suggests, secondary teachers should be encouraged to enable the success of students with IEPs with the support of their school.

4.2.3 Reported experiences of supporting IEPs in History. This section will speak to the specificity of this study in a History classroom and will highlight the gap found in the research reviewed in Chapter Two. It is a small section in my findings, because it holds the least amount of data; this portion of the data was meant to fill the gap and it does so by highlighting that supporting IEPs in a History classroom, is not much different than supporting them in an English classroom. My participants will outline the specifics reasons why to come.

In this section I will discuss what teachers in my study have experienced when implementing IEPs into a History classroom. When asking Leo about this, he said:

If I’m trying to see if a child has a deep understanding of historical concepts and an understanding of a historical time period, and the only option I give them is to write an essay … well my conclusion might be, you don’t know the period well, but it might be that you don’t know how to write an essay well. I could be a struggling writer and not be a struggling thinker. So I think that as we look at inclusion in the History classroom we need to pay attention to the medium, because in History we read a lot of text. So do I need to find audio, do I need to use more visual and so on. So I think in a History classroom it’s how they show. In a typical History classroom, you see a lot of writing, are there alternate ways kids can show their thinking? But again, many of those are just good for all kids.
According to Leo, many of the accommodations teachers see for students with IEPs are really just good teaching for all students. Across my participants, they stated good teaching is more important than teaching to specific History skills. It is more important to support IEPs in a History classroom by providing good accommodations strategies and methods of assessment.

Leo said that the medium of our teaching, or the method of inclusion, are more important than the content being taught; it is how we present information to students that allow them to develop good thinking skills and become good learners, not through the actual content itself. Therefore, when comes to an IEP, in History and/or English for example, they are not all that different; they are both literacy courses in equal measures. Michael said in both courses teachers are dealing with a lot of the same issues in terms of a student being able to read and write to grade level. Bulgren et al., (2006) made two findings in their study, one being teachers assumed the responsibility for showing students how to learn while teaching content, but that this content was too difficult for students with an exceptionality to achieve. So the main concern claimed by teachers in this study, is that History content specifically, is not as important as developing the culture of thought in a student, in a school and in its stakeholders.

This supports what Dara (2005) found in another study taking historical thinking skills, such as reading for understanding or analyzing the historical significance of an event or person, and applying them to teaching IEPs across subject areas. There is little research on how to teach these skills in a History class (as supported in my data), but these skills can be adopted for teaching History because it is relevant across subject areas. Dara found that the overarching goal of textbook and reading material used in content classes, is to shift the emphasis away from the memorization of facts and to an understanding of inquiry-based learning instead; the importance of evidence-based claims, and habits of the mind specific to the discipline such as History. This
is exactly what all my participants were suggesting doing: moving away from worrying about content and memorization, and towards critical thinking which then gives the teacher space to include History thinking as well. While the previous section clarified what the experiences of second History teachers were, the next section will present what specific supports are available to them in instruction and in outside stakeholders.

4.3 “Good For All Kids:” Supports for Inclusion

Three specific supports for IEP implementation were identified by my participants: the Special Education Department, early identification for students with exceptionalities, and other available supports, such as instructional strategies and assessment pieces. In this section these supports are reported by my participants as the most helpful in accommodating for IEPs in their classrooms.

Methods of supporting IEPs come in a number of ways, but the first way my participants noted is important, is through the Special Education department and the tactics used to promote and enable inclusion by theme. First, placement is key; for these History teachers, where a student is placed in general education classrooms is very important for their growth. “So much of it depends on if the students are being placed in the right classes,” as Michael stated, which is also consistent with Deshler, et al.’s (2008) findings previously cited in this chapter. A second support identified by my participants is professional development opportunities such as staff meetings or voluntary programs. In this way, the Special Education department helps teachers develop strategies for accommodating the student. Teachers have reported that IEPs are useful but sometimes “quite complicated” and it can be difficult to actualize it and make it work for the student; the Special Education department acts as a tool for supporting teachers in this way.
In the interviews, I asked my participants to think about a specific student with an IEP and their experiences supporting them in the History classroom, they stated that it is important for early identification of students with exceptionalities, rather than later on. Leo recalled a student and said, “I’m glad that the IEP was put in place early on in Elementary so he had not developed a sense that ‘I can’t do.’ Putting that in place by Grade 10, it would have been in response to repeated failures and by that point the battle is not so much whatever the disability might be, it is the belief ‘I can’t do.’” This point is crucial to answering how teachers can successfully modify for IEPs in a classroom as it deals with the issue of, the earlier the better. If teachers can identify students and their learning exceptionalities early on, they can respond to their needs before it comes to a place where they feel they have been at a disadvantage their whole lives. IEPs can of course still work as both participants stated, but providing accommodations and other supports to encourage the development of students’ literacy or numeracy in Grade 2 or 3, rather than in Grade 10, makes it easier for the student to develop good habits early on. Therefore, according to my data, teachers should use and promote available supports and encourage students to finding methods that cope with their exceptionality and hopefully learn from it.

4.3.1 Specific supports. According to my participants, another method of accommodation is through assessment pieces. By creating assessments that are individualized in some way to the student and “that kids are actually excited about,” as Leo stated. This is where the teacher can really use their skills to adjust methods to support a student by tailoring assignments to the them. For example, Leo also said:

When I narrow the opportunities that students have to show their learning, and then I make the conclusion that they don’t know the content, it may be a false conclusion that
I’m drawing. So where I found it works, in particular, that we have targeted what we want to know about kids, and then we’ve thought about different ways in which kids might access that.

Narrowing the opportunities to show learning means for example, only allowing students to write an essay, but some students are struggling writers so both participants held importance to differentiating assessment. Teachers should allow students to show their thinking in ways that supports their strengths in their actual thinking.

Another important point about assessment which emerged from my data is how in reality teachers can tailor assessment tasks to students with IEPs. So Michael gave me multiple examples of what that may look like on a test, for example by restructuring them. In his Locally Developed class, a big problem he faced was studying and retention of information so he made the tests open book with more thinking questions instead of recall questions. “In today’s day and age, whether you can remember 60 facts doesn’t make a difference, what matters is whether you can apply it; can you get the information where and when you need it.” Therefore, an open book test allows a teacher to mark students based on organization of notes while also reducing anxiety for students. They all have the information in front of them, but the way in which they communicate it and organize it on the test is the important part. For example, Michael’s History tests were not, who is this or what is that or give me three causes of World War I. They were questions like, “Brainstorm 5 important events from World War I and choose which one is the most important and why.” Students were being asked to look at their content notes and think about how they can relate in a critical and historical sense. According to Michael and Leo, this area of accommodation is probably the most important when developing students as individual thinkers and learners.
In divergence with the literature found, many teachers in secondary content classes are not confident students with exceptionalities can master higher order thinking requirements in classes such as History (Bulgren, et al., 2006). This is not what Michael experienced. Higher order thinking is a manipulation and understanding of information such as comparing and contrasting, weighing causes and effects, and answering critical questions (Bulgreen, et al., 2007). These are the skills Michael found important to assess using tests. Although, the modifications made on that test were great, are they just “good for all kids?” as Leo asked me during our interview.

Accommodations such as these are actually just good tactics for all kids; as Michael asked me, what are some things teachers do for accommodations that would just be good for all kids? Taking a text and converting it from hard copy to an audio file or a visual, may just be a good accommodation for all learners’ differentiation. Michael explained it as, making that difference clear for teachers between specific accommodations for a student with an IEP, and simply just practicing differentiated instruction is needed. Michael offered an example, perhaps a student has trouble with motor skills, then having a scribe with them is truly an accommodation because teachers are not going to bring in a scribe for every student.

Though some specific examples of accommodations, as stated by both my participants, are huge in the area of assistive technologies. For example, using the dictation function on Microsoft Word or programs like “Dragon Fire” or “Read and Write”. Even pairing students that are stronger with those that are struggling helps both of them because the student with better reading comprehension was learning as they were teaching, and the other student feels more comfortable working with a peer. The research found in literature has shown that social interactions contribute to positive growth and learning in students with exceptionalities.
(Avramidis & Wilde, 2009). As explained by Leo, true accommodations like these, look like this in a classroom:

So as a teacher, I’ve got a class of 30 kids, 8 of them have IEPs and let’s say 4 of those deal with reading and they need more time. So as a teacher, I’m going to say to you, well what do I do? I give out a reading and these four kids need extra time but these 20 kids are done and now they’re sitting around bored like what are they doing? And this is where I think the differentiation comes in, can I select a reading that’s shorter, can I pull an excerpt, can I summarize it and provide the point form key ideas. Like I think one of the realities is of a teacher, but I got 30 kids I’m dealing with. I can’t give these kids an extra 20 minutes to finish a reading and these guys sit around and twiddle their thumbs for 20 minutes. But I can say I’m going to give you a different medium. I’m going to pull out key ideas [trails off] I have to look at how do I manage a class that ranges. And my primary interest is how do I do it in a way that doesn’t say well, you’ll fill in a work sheet and you’ll think. No, you’re all going to think, but the complexity, the length and so on, I’m going to vary to meet the kids. So I think those are things teachers have to do in a realistic way.

In this quotation here you can see how, for Leo, one of the most important takeaways from the data is to achieve success, good teaching must be done well. Although participants acknowledge the need for accommodations for students with IEPs, they also mentioned that most of them are just good teaching methods to be used for all students.

4.4 “Well, You’re on an IEP Right?” Existing Barriers to Inclusion

History teachers reported the following barriers to supporting IEPs in a secondary classroom: labelling students and a lack of preparation for teachers. I will claim in this thematic
section that there are barriers which exist to implementing IEPs in a History classroom and those barriers can harm a students’ learning and development. The first and most important is, the assumptions and labels teachers place on students. Leo made a comment that most teachers approach IEPs in a deficit way by saying:

‘I’ve got 8 kids on IEPs.’ Well, what are the IEPs? Are you just saying I’ve just got a high bunch of special needs and they can’t learn? When teachers do that, then I say the IEP has now become a label that kids wear and it’s probably doing more harm than good.

Here Leo is making the claim that when teachers label a class, or a student, as a problem because of their exceptionality of need, we are harming them and their potential growth.

On the flip side, teachers should work from that appreciative model and if the informed teachers take the time to read through and understand, then they can start to target supports around knowing the child not the IEP. The label can backfire when teachers look at a student and say, “Well, you’re on an IEP right?” My participants reported that the objective is for teachers to make sure every student achieves their potential and an IEP should not be an impediment to your potential. For example, Michael believes that when we assume something about our students, we are failing them. He argued that if teachers think having an IEP makes students a struggling learner that we have failed them, if we take the IEP as a helpful tool in identifying the particular aspect of learning that they struggle with, then those are the most successful teachers, those are the teachers who see all kids as learners and not label them. In this way, Leo’s worry is that, “by Grade 10 school has failed the kid, kids aren’t failing school.” It can be a struggle convincing a student they are good at math in Grade 10 when they have been told their whole life they are not.

Perhaps for these reasons, my participants also expressed that teacher preparation is essential for the implementation of IEPs. As my participants stated, Special Education is a
qualification all teachers should obtain, if not be required to have, and it currently is a requirement in Ontario teacher certification programs. Mandatory teacher training around supporting students with exceptionalities is changing, but it cannot be the job of the teacher alone, schools must do more as Michael stated to, “[h]elp teachers understand how a child with autism experiences the learning. Or how a dyslexic child, when they’re sitting in your class; what is the frustration they have?” Michael made it clear that many of these supports are voluntary, meaning educators can choose to attend sessions or workshops to further their research and knowledge just as he did voluntarily. Furthermore, in a study by Griffin (2015), findings showed the need for professional training in the area of specific exceptionalities present in schools, such as autism or dyslexia.

My data supports the findings from both Deshler, et al., (2008) and Idol (2006) that success for students with exceptionalities is only achievable when delivered by a team of well-trained professionals, particularly general education teachers. But these well-trained professionals may not be easy to come by in the Special Education area and that is also supported by the findings of Deshler, et al. (2008) who, in their interviews, found that most educators feel ill-prepared to support students with learning disabilities. Therefore, my participants also understand the existing barriers to supporting IEPs as mainly a failure in two central ways: the teacher’s labelling and assumptions made on students, and a lack of teacher preparation for IEP implementation.

4.5 Conclusion

I found the majority of my findings to be consistent between my participants and the literature. Secondary History teachers believe in order for IEPs to work as a policy in practice, teachers need to take an attitude that works towards the success of students. This attitude is
essential and must start from the teacher using an appreciative model. This is a model where teachers believe that all students have the ability to think and solve problems, but not all teachers do this in the same way.

The beliefs my participants described above, come from how the policy of inclusion is implemented in the school and classroom. I have found there are three stakeholders which reportedly affect teachers’ IEP implementation: parents, students, and teachers. The level of understanding each stakeholder holds about the use of an IEP, and why it is in place, can reportedly affect the success of it. The IEP cannot act as a shield of accommodations against students being challenged or exposed to new material, but rather as a stepping stone. The school’s culture also reportedly contributes to this point, as it plays a huge role on the individuality of each stakeholder. The last finding affecting a teacher’s IEP implementation is the specificity of a History classroom. The teachers interviewed, believe that teaching Historical content is not as important as the development of a culture of thought in a student.

In order for inclusion to be successful in general education classrooms, teachers identified three specific supports. The Special Education Program itself and the information or programs provided are important. Second, the earlier the placement is made by Special Education Department, the better. And third, specific instructional strategies and assessment pieces need to be differentiated. The key takeaway from the data here is that supports come in many forms and what is most important is, how and if the student is learning.

The data showed that there are existing barriers to IEPs and the two perceived of these are labeling students and a lack of professional training. An IEP is not a label students wear so teachers can avoid giving them a reading task or a section on a test; rather, an IEP is a way teacher can further know their students and their learning needs. Teachers must be invested more
in students evolving as thinkers; if one student shows their learning through a paper and one through a poster, does that mean the student who demonstrated their thinking in a poster does not think? Next in Chapter Five, I discuss broad and narrow implications for these findings, give recommendations and note potential areas of further research.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this final chapter, I will be communicating a comprehensive conclusion summarizing my findings and discussing further implications and recommendations for educators and students. First, I will offer a brief overview of my key research findings and their significance from the data collected and discussed in Chapter Four. Second, I will outline the implications of this study, one for the educational community and another for myself as a researcher and as a future teacher. Third, I will discuss recommendations I have based on the implications of my findings. Fourth and finally, I will offer questions and final thoughts for considerations I have based on my findings, which should be addressed by researchers in the future.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

In summarizing the key findings of this qualitative study, I will be explaining in brief the data that was collected on reported teacher beliefs on the policies of inclusion and their experiences practicing this in a History classroom. I will also be looking at what supports are available on a mandatory basis, or volunteer basis, and what barriers exist to enable the success of supporting IEPs and the policy of inclusion.

Participants believe that the single most important fact enabling IEPs to be properly and successfully supported in History classrooms is teachers and significant stakeholders working from an appreciative model. The teacher’s direction must be taken towards helping students become better at doing what they are not strong in, rather than avoiding it. Teachers must view these students not as harder to deal with because of their exceptionality, but instead as students who are struggling with a specific aspect of their thinking and needs specific modifications to lessons and assessments in order to succeed.
Moving onto teachers’ reported experiences practicing inclusion and implementing IEPs in History classrooms, in sum their experiences are that policies on IEPs differs from practice, there are three stakeholders who are heavily impacted by implementing IEPs, and what this means for a History teacher. These are the three major themes that reoccurred in my interviews when discussing teachers’ experiences. The stakeholders: students, teachers and parents need to be informed about an IEP’s use and purpose, but the reality is that not all of these people will be informed and it is mainly the teachers’ job to monitor the supports there and work best with what is given. For History teachers specifically, their experiences reflect what most research is lacking; there are not mandatory skills or regulations that students with IEPs need to gain from a History classroom in specific. What that student needs to gain, is the help where they are lacking it and that is not necessarily found in a History classroom, but in thinking developed in any class.

In the next section of my findings, an analysis of the support and barriers teachers’ report on implementing IEPs in a secondary History classroom. The supports my participants identified are: The Special Education Department, early identification for students with exceptionalities, and other pedagogical supports such as instructional strategies and assessment pieces. For example, teachers should be creating assessment pieces that students are excited about which are specifically tailored to individual student’s needs. This was described by Michael as modeling the content, assessments, activities, lessons and thinking skills around the student and their needs. These supports are reportedly the most successful in helping teachers’ support IEPs. The two main barriers to supporting IEPs are labelling students as their disability or ability and a lack of preparation for teachers on a professional level. These are the main findings from my qualitative research study.

5.2 Implications
In this next section I will be explaining some implications broadly and more narrowly. First for the broader educational community with particular stakeholders in education. Second for myself as a researcher, reflexive thinker and as a future teacher. These implications are things that might be happening already in the field of education and are suggested by my findings.

5.2.1 Broad: The educational community. The broad implications found in this study for the educational community and its specific stakeholders will be explained in detail here. These implications are something that might be happening in schools and based on my findings, I found they can be divided into three specific groups of stakeholders: parents, students, and teachers.

The broad implications for parents of students with IEPs in a secondary History classroom fall on two different sides of a spectrum. Parents may be involved in their child’s life and education, but also may not be. This is dependent on a case per case basis, as the teachers in my study have noted. As a teacher you may have an overbearing parent, too heavily involved in their child’s work and/or the teacher’s duties. But you may also have a parent who is completely absent in their child’s life and might not be available for support. This is the situation teachers, students and schools may find themselves in when community with parents about the role of supporting IEPs. Parents are not obligated to be a part of their child’s education and therefore may not be present, or may be to present in the classroom.

For students we find ourselves in a different scenario; in order for an IEP to be successfully supported in a History classroom, students must be informed about their place in this story. To ensure success, students should know what their IEP says, does, and its purpose. I found that teachers reported if a student themselves, does not know how an IEP helps their learning, then it defeats the purpose. A student should be aware of the strategies that can help
improve the areas they are struggling in. A student may want to search for coping methods to support their IEP.

The last broad implication of this study is the most important, a teacher. Teachers may experience IEPs to high degree or low, meaning a range of exceptionalities. Based on my findings, it is the teachers’ job to be informed about what the IEP labels the student as and how it can be best supported in their History classroom. A teacher should read through and understand IEPs and do further research on the specific exceptionality. It also may be the teachers job to update that IEP if necessary for the student’s future learning. A teacher takes responsibility for the students IEP and its implementation into a classroom.

5.2.2 Narrow: Your professional identity and practice. In this section I will reflect about how these findings will affect my beliefs about teaching, learning, and school culture. I believe that these findings have affected my teaching philosophy and specifically how IEPs can work and be supported in a History classroom. As a future History teacher, and teacher of other subjects, I will be thinking very deeply about the individual students in my classrooms and how I can best support their learning needs - how I as a teacher can use the research and subsequent findings here, to become better at helping students learn and develop coping methods to areas where they are suffering in their learning.

In my interviews, my participants made some very good points about what it means for teachers to adjust their instruction and assessments to each individual student. As a teacher I will make the course to fit the student, not the student to fit the course. As a teacher I will be aware of my student’s needs and how my instruction can best serve their strengths and weaknesses. As a teacher I will form my assessments to fit the students, and not in a way that least serves them, but best serves them. I do believe it is a service to students to tailor instruction to their needs; to
differentiate. My own professional practice demands me to a special duty to using the learner to support my teaching.

5.3 Recommendations

Previously I outlined the broad and narrow implications of this research study as the current state of affairs the educational community, and myself, finds itself in. Based on this state, the recommendations are what is to follow.

First I will begin with what can be done about the parent’s role in supporting their child’s IEPs. The role a parent plays is very dependent on that parent; they do not have any obligation to be a part of their child’s education. Maybe a type of information session can be held in the school at the beginning of the year to educate parents on what IEPs do and their purpose in the classroom and at home. If parents do not see fit to attend those sessions, the teachers should be made mandatory to do so and can inform specific parents whose child is on an IEP about the information, whether in an email, telephone call or parent-teacher interview. If parents are already informed about IEPs then their role can be even further integrated by supporting their child at home with specific homework tasks the teacher provides students with.

For students the recommendations look a little bit different. Students need to be informed about their IEPs through teachers, guidance counsellors and the Special Education Department. If a student is on an IEP, then meetings need to be held with that student about what they think can be added or taken away to better support their learning. One-on-one time with students and teachers is probably what will work best to help students succeed and grow in their learning. These meetings can be ongoing throughout the year or if that is unrealistic then once a semester is a start. I understand that the constraint of time is one of the largest issues teachers face on daily basis, but a proactive approach must be taken to support students.
For teachers, the recommendations are more extensive. Teachers need more mandatory professional development sessions to support and understand IEPs, and specifically in History classrooms. According to the teacher’s interviewed, all workshops are voluntary. The only workshops that are mandatory are P.D. Days where the topic may be focused on IEPs or in current teacher education programs where Special Education is a course taken. If the goal of a teacher in supporting an IEP is to have that child understand their exceptionality and work through it, then teachers need to also be informed about what those exceptionalities are. If a student in your class has autism, then the teacher must know what autism is and how it may affect learning. Policy makers could institute more professional development opportunities for those teachers to learn about how to implement IEPs. Principals could allocate money for IEPs implementation and further research. But mainly, it seems as though it is the teacher’s role to understand and support IEPs and this is where the field of education needs to bridge the gap between policy and practice. If it is up to the teacher to help students with IEPs in their History classroom, more supports need to be provided in this area if we want to improve student success.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Given what I have found, areas of future research need to be directed towards more teacher development opportunities in supporting IEPs in a History classroom. More educational research should be done around how morale can be improved in school culture and in individual teachers. Teachers need to feel they are supported by colleagues and policy makers to implement IEPs. If the most important fact that my participants stated in supporting IEPs is that teachers are working for an appreciative model of teaching, then research needs to analyze how and why teachers are doing this. If students with IEPs need proper teacher morale to be successful, then research needs to analyze how that morale can be boosted. How can we allow teachers to not
look at a class list and say as Leo stated in my interviews, “Well look at this, I’ve got 8 IEPs again in my History class?” We need teachers who are motivated to improve their students’ growth and foster a sense of learning and curiosity about who are the students are. More research should also be done in the area of assessment and how that can be used to support students in their growth and learning. This seems to be an area that is lacking in research to support IEPs.

Some final questions I have for future researchers are around the possibility of moving IEPs away from specific students who struggle or excel in an aspect of their learning, and towards all students. Can all students have a piece of paperwork that identifies something about their learning, not only the students who have an IEP? Would this decrease the marginalization that some students may feel towards having an IEP? How can we move away from the negative notion of “well, I’ve got 8 IEPs in my class?” Research needs to focus on what motivates a teachers’ personal commitment towards successful inclusion while in line with the proper resources supported by policy makers.

5.5 Concluding Comments

In thinking about what I want to conclude my research findings with, I want to summarize what I have learned most from my findings and why they matter to me. First I have learned that IEPs are an ongoing process; it begins with identification and diagnosis of the student by a teacher, parent or student. These are the three most affected and important stakeholders in the process of handling an IEP. Identification follows with ongoing consideration and development of the paperwork as the student grows and learns. It ends when a student moves away from what they were labelled as on their IEP. Second I have learned that IEPs can be used very easily negatively by teachers as labels on students. IEPs can hinder the implementation of inclusion in general education classrooms because of the stigma teachers and other students
perceive it as. Lastly, I have learned that IEPs in a History classroom do not seem to be handled or thought of very differently than in any other subject. Helping a student with an IEP in a History classroom does not seem to be any different then helping them in an English class. This is an area of research that surprised me the most and will continue to perplex me as I move forward in my work.

All of this work matters very deeply to me because I want to help my future students with have IEPs and who do not reach their highest potential. I want to encourage growth, learning and community in students who may feel labelled or alienated by their IEP. I hope that as a future teacher, I will continue to stay passionate about tailor my teaching, to suit the students’ learning.
References


Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Date:

Dear ____________________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at University of Toronto. I am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate in the Intermediate/Senior section and my teaching subjects are Religion and History. I have had previous experience working with students with exceptionalities therefore, I am very interested in learning how Ontario secondary History teachers are accommodating and experiencing their support of students with Individual Education Plans, IEPs. I think that your knowledge, experience and background will provide helpful insights into this topic.

I am conducting this interview with you to gather data and information for my MTRP, (Master of Teaching Research Project). I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 45-60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you, but outside of school and not on school property.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written
work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no other known risks to participation in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Del Vasto
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Jacqueline Del Vasto and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________________________________

Name (printed): ___________________________ Date: ___________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. The aim of this research study is to learn how a sample of History teachers is experiencing and accommodating for students with IEPs in their classroom. This interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes and I will ask you a series of questions. I want to remind you that you can choose not to answer any question, and can remove yourself from participation at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded.

Background Information

1) What is your current job title and responsibilities in your current position?

2) So I want to get a feel for the current school that you’re working in, if any.
   1) What grades and subjects do you currently teach?
   2) What grades and subjects have you previously taught related to History?

3) How long have you been teaching History?

4) Do you have any other qualifications or previous experiences that would be relevant to mention (e.g. an Additional Qualification, involvement in a Best Buddies program, work at an outside organization such as L’Arche)?

5) Are you a part of an extra-curricular activities at your school (e.g. coach, advisor, resource teacher)?
6) Can you describe the community your school is situated in (e.g. diversity or socioeconomic status)?

7) How long have you taught as this school?

8) Can you describe how inclusion plays out at your school?
   1) What is the size, demographic or background information?
   2) Is there a special education program?
   3) Is there a support staff to help general subject teachers?

**Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs**

1) Overall, do you think inclusion at your school is successful? If you are not currently teaching, describe the school which supported inclusion more successfully?

2) Do you believe that the values of a specific school determine whether students with IEPs are included?
   1) Is an IEP enough to support inclusion?

3) Do you believe IEPs, enable teachers to adequately support students with exceptionalities?

**Teacher Experiences**

1) I’m going to ask you to describe your experiences supporting a few History students with IEPs who have stood out to you. Can you take a moment and think of 1-2?
   1) Overall, what accommodations did their IEP require?
   2) If you can recall, how long have they had this IEP?
      1) Does length of time matter?
   3) Was this student in an Academic or Applied class?
   4) Were they in all general subject courses or the resource program mostly?
   5) How did this student interact with the other students?
6) Did this student accept appropriate help when needed?

7) How did the parents/guardians play a role in the child’s education?

8) What strategies did you use to support this student?

9) Did you seek out support from colleagues or parents/guardians?

10) Which accommodations were harder to implement than others? Which were easier?

11) Do you think you were successful in accommodating this student? Why or why not?

12) How do you feel your experience with this student has affected your teaching practice?

2) Why did you select this student to talk about?

3) How has teaching a History student with an IEP different for you as an educator?

**Supports and Challenges**

1) What professional development have you been provided with applying IEPs?

   1) More specifically, professional development with applying IEPs in a History classroom?

2) What supports do you receive to help you in implementing IEPs and support inclusion?

   1) Special education department?

   2) Have you been encouraged or supported by administration to promote inclusion?

   3) If none, what kinds of supports would be helpful?

3) In your view, what are some particular challenges or advantages of supporting inclusion in a History classroom?

   1) Do you feel like History is a particularly difficult subject in which to support students with IEPs? Why or why not?

4) On a scale from very little, somewhat, or very much so, what is the current History curriculum doing to prepare students with IEPs to learn and succeed in History?
Next Steps

1) What are some helpful tips or next steps, you have for myself, a future History teacher, who will work with students with IEPs?

2) Do you have any final thoughts?

Thank you sincerely for your time and considered responses.