Specialist Teachers and the Development of Physical Literacy in Elementary Health and Physical Education

By

Andrew Mannone

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Abstract

This qualitative research study investigates the impact that a trained Health and Physical Education (HPE) specialist teacher has on HPE programs in elementary schools. Two semi-structured interviews with HPE teachers were used to explore strategies that specialists use to promote the legitimacy of HPE as a core subject and develop students’ physical literacy. Four key themes emerged. First, the perception of HPE as a core subject can be improved through the adoption of a more holistic view and by providing students with a wide variety of health and physical activity experiences. Second, the specialist position positively impacts the quality of HPE instruction in elementary schools through improvements in program continuity, regularity of instruction and participation in extracurricular activities. Third, effective teaching strategies for HPE were identified, including the consideration of students’ interests, the inclusion of self-regulation and coping skills, and the use of “Community Walks”. Finally, the importance of professional development opportunities (e.g. workshops and professional mentorship) was addressed. The research findings imply that there is a need to change the perception of HPE both within schools and in the broader parent community and that school boards should consider hiring HPE specialist teachers for each elementary school.

Key Words: Physical Literacy, Physical Education, Specialists
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Over the last decade, there has been growing concern over the declining physical fitness levels of children in Canada. Elementary school aged children are becoming mainly sedentary and these lower levels of physical activity are associated with negative effects on their physical and psychological well-being (Rickwood, 2015). This problem was brought to the forefront in 2004, when Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health released a report stating that the number of obese children in Canada between the ages of seven and thirteen had tripled between 1981 and 1996, and that this was related to significant increases in chronic illnesses like type 2 diabetes and heart disease (Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2004). Due to the large amount of time students spend at school each week, schools were identified as important sites that have the potential to positively influence the lives of students by instilling in them the skills and positive attitudes needed for lifelong participation in physical activity (Hardman & Marshall, 2000).

An examination of the overall quality of elementary Health and Physical Education (HPE) in Canada indicated that there was significant room for improvement within Canadian HPE programs (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2005; Hardman & Marshall, 2000). In response, in 2005, Ontario’s Ministry of Education implemented Policy/Program Memorandum No. 138, “Daily Physical Activity in Elementary Schools, Grades 1–8”. The policy stated that every student in grades 1-8 should be given the opportunity to take part in twenty minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day (Ministry of Education, 2005). The Ministry’s objective was that mandatory daily physical activity (DPA) would help students improve their physical fitness and overall health (Ministry of Education, 2005). More recently, the Ontario HPE curriculum has also placed an increased emphasis on the development of physical literacy, which
it defines as the ability to “move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities in multiple environments that benefit the healthy development of the whole person” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p.7). Scholars have argued that quality Physical Education should have a main focus of teaching students physical literacy to give them the tools to be active throughout their lives and benefit their overall development (Corlett & Mandigo, 2013).

To ensure that quality DPA and Physical Education instruction takes place in elementary schools, it was strongly recommended to school boards that it be taught by individuals trained in Physical Education (Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2004; Spence et al., 2004). In Ontario elementary schools, however, Physical Education is mainly taught by non-specialists (“general” classroom teachers). In 2008, only 37% of Physical Education classes in Ontario elementary schools were taught by HPE specialists (Faulkner et al., 2008). In the last few years, this number has not significantly changed. As of 2015, 45% of elementary schools in Ontario have trained HPE specialists (ParticipACTION, 2015). This is despite strong evidence supporting that specialists are the preferred providers of Physical Education in these settings (Faulkner et al., 2008; Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton, & Ball, 2012; Kaldor & Deutsch, 2013; Randall, Robinson & Fletcher, 2014). They tend to spend more time developing students’ physical skills, and use more current teaching practices (Davis, Burgeson, Brener, McManus, & Wechsler, 2005). As subject knowledge is an important part of effective teaching, there is a need to advocate for more HPE specialist teachers in Ontario elementary schools (Faulkner et al., 2008).

1.1 Research Problem

Despite the evidence in favour of Physical Education specialists, less than half (45%) of Ontario elementary schools have trained PE specialists or even policies for hiring teachers with
qualifications to teach Physical Education (ParticipACTION, 2015). This is a problem since policy-makers require mandatory, daily physical activity across all grades, but often the individuals responsible for teaching both DPA and Health and Physical Education have insufficient training, skills and resources to deliver quality programs (Spence et al., 2004). Many classroom teachers find HPE difficult to teach, citing a lack of time, interest and professional preparation (Fletcher, 2012; Holt et al., 2012). As a result, HPE programs are often dominated by games and “free play” without the teaching of Health or others aspects of the curriculum (Brooks & Thompson, 2015).

Budgetary restrictions, inadequate material, personnel resources and low subject status of HPE are factors that have been identified as barriers to the hiring of specialists (Hardman & Marshall, 2000; Kaldor & Deutsch, 2013; Randall et al., 2014). As a result of pressures to cover more traditionally valued subjects, such as Math and Language, less time often gets dedicated to DPA and Health and Physical Education (Kaldor & Deutsch, 2013). In Ontario, a decline in student enrollment is another factor. Since 2002, enrollment in Ontario’s schools has decreased by 126,000 students (Ministry of Education, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2015). According to Rickwood (2015), fewer students has meant fewer full-time teaching positions and reduced opportunities for HPE specialist positions. Each of these factors influences the quality of elementary Health and Physical Education programs. If school boards are to achieve their goals of providing HPE programs that improve the physical literacy, health and overall well-being of students, these are issues that will need to be addressed.

1.2. Research Purpose

In light of this problem, the goal of my research was to investigate the impact that having a trained Health and Physical Education specialist can have in elementary schools. An examination
of both short-term and long-terms effects has previously been recommended (Spence et al., 2004). Therefore, my research examines the effects HPE specialists can have on students’ attitudes, enjoyment and participation of HPE (short-term), and how they promote and work towards the development of physical literacy (long-term). In addition, I investigate how schools work to establish the importance of Health and Physical Education, with or without specialist teachers. Robinson (2012) argues that if HPE is to be seen as an equal status subject, then advocating for school-wide efforts such as increased instructional time may be necessary.

To support both teachers with no background in HPE and beginner HPE specialists, another goal of this research was to investigate what professional development opportunities exist for teachers to help them deliver the Health and Physical education curriculum. It has been suggested that teachers’ perceptions of HPE and their ability to teach it can be positively altered through professional development opportunities (Humphries & Ashy, 2006). I aim to share my findings with the educational research community in order to further advocate the need for hiring HPE specialist teachers. My findings could also be used to develop new strategies for implementing DPA and providing quality elementary Health and Physical Education in schools both with and without PE specialists.

1.3. Research Questions

The main question that my research attempts to answer asks: Does having a trained, Health and Physical Education specialist on staff affect the overall attitudes towards and participation in HPE programs in elementary schools? In addition, my research project examines the following subsidiary questions:

- What current strategies are Health and Physical Education specialists using to promote and develop physical literacy?
• What strategies are HPE specialists and/or general classroom teachers using to promote the legitimacy of HPE as a core subject?
• What barriers exist for hiring Physical Education specialists?
• What resources currently exist for teachers who do not have a background in physical education to further their professional development?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

Health and Physical Education is a subject area that has been important to me throughout my education. I have been physically active from a young age having participated in sports such as baseball, hockey, cross country running and swimming in both community and school environments. Even to this day, I compete on a university varsity team. I have personally experienced the impact a commitment to regular physical activity can have on one's health and well-being. When I was sixteen, I was diagnosed with a form of Leukemia that required several rounds of chemotherapy to treat. The doctors told me that my relatively quick recovery to each round of treatment was likely related to my active lifestyle and physical fitness level. This experience highlighted the importance of Physical Education to me, so much so that I was motivated to pursue it as an undergraduate degree. As a Health and Physical Education teacher, I would have the opportunity to instill the same love and appreciation for physical activity in my students.

As a camp counsellor and during practicum experiences, I have observed the declining fitness levels of children. On occasion, I have seen adults in their fifties who have greater stamina than the children. As a student, I have also experienced the difference trained physical educators can make. In elementary school, when I had a teacher with a background in Physical Education, the lessons were always well planned. They focused on physical skill development but at the same
time were fun and engaging. There was more to them than simply “free play”. Through those lessons, the teacher helped me develop an affinity for physical activity. As a future educator with Health and Physical Education as a teachable, my goal was to explore the potential impact I could have as a specialist on my students’ attitudes towards physical activity.

1.5 Overview

To respond to these research questions, a qualitative research study was conducted using purposeful sampling to interview two teachers about their experiences teaching Health and Physical Education, their background/training in HPE and their perspective on the value of specialist teachers. The research is organized into five chapters. In chapter 2, literature on Health and Physical Education and specialist teachers in elementary schools is reviewed. Specifically, I investigate the historical contexts of Health and Physical Education, the effects of having a trained HPE specialist in a school and barriers preventing a school from having such a position. In chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design and methodology. This section also includes participant information, information about the data collection and limitations of the study. In chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in connection to the existing literature. Finally, in chapter 5 I identify the implications of the research findings for my own identity and practice, and for the educational research community more broadly. I also articulate questions raised by the research findings and point to areas for future research.

References and appendixes can be found at the end.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature on Health and Physical Education (HPE) and HPE specialist teachers in elementary schools. More specifically, I look into research on the historical and current contexts of HPE, the effects of having a trained, HPE specialist in a school and the barriers which may prevent a school from having such a position. I start by reviewing literature on the social, political and economic contexts of Health and Physical Education. I look into how HPE has been viewed historically and how it is viewed today. I then examine research on the effects of having HPE specialist teachers in elementary schools. Specifically, I look into the current practices observed in schools, the perceptions and practices of non-specialist teachers and finally the influence of specialists on elementary HPE programs. Finally, I review literature on factors that may prevent the hiring of HPE specialists. In particular, I look at the perceived lower subject status of HPE, budgetary restrictions and the influence of declining student enrollment.

2.1 The Social, Political and Economic Contexts of Physical Education

I begin my review by examining how the subject of Health and Physical Education and the role and status of a HPE teacher have been heavily influenced by the dominant social, political and economic discourses of a time period. Through an investigation of how Physical Education has been viewed in the past and how these perceptions have changed over time, I aim to shed light on how the significance and priority given to HPE specialist teachers has depended, and continues to depend, on the cultural climate of the time.

2.1.1 Historical context of PE and PE instructors

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the first Physical Education programs in Canada were rooted in military drill activities (Morrow & Wamsley, 2010). According to Brooks and
Thompson (2013), the first specialized Physical Education instructors were considered to be like military drill instructors who led students through fitness activities based on military training. In Ontario schools, the typical HPE teacher was often an ex-British soldier who led students through activities like rifle shooting, calisthenics and gymnastics (Morrow & Wamsley, 2010). The physical educator held a high status in relationship to concerns over the fitness levels in society. According to Robbins (1990), many of the individuals who were enlisting for military service were not fit enough. The main objective for Physical Education instructors was then to help develop individuals to become capable of defending their country (Brooks & Thompson, 2013).

By the 1940s, the focus of Physical Education began to change. Dr. Arthur Stanley Lamb, who Morrow and Wamsley (2010) cite as the “father” of Physical Education in Canada, was critical of the curriculum’s focus on producing “automatic tin soldiers” (p.192) and advocated for the value of play, games and sports. This led to a shift to the teaching of games, team sports, swimming and dance Morrow and Wamsley, 2010). As Brooks and Thompson (2013) note, the Physical Education teacher was to use these types of activities to promote socialization, cooperation and to help develop good, healthy citizens who were able to contribute to society. Finally, in the 1990s, the priority given to Physical Education and the number of opportunities available for PE specialists began to decline. When faced with reductions in overall education budgets, Hardman and Marshall (2000) discuss how provincial Ministries of Education began to place less importance on the value and need for Physical Education. This resulted in significant funding cuts to PE programs across Canada (Hardman &Marshall, 2000). As a result, classroom teachers began to assume more of the responsibility for teaching Physical Education, with specialists becoming more advisors who helped assist and plan programs through workshops.
(Brooks & Thompson, 2013). The impact of these funding cuts can still be seen today with the current lack of elementary school PE specialist positions in Ontario (Faulkner et al, 2008; ParticipACTION, 2015).

2.1.2 Current contextual view of PE and PE instructors

Today, teachers of Physical Education are seen to play a role in helping fight the obesity epidemic. According to Rickwood (2015), elementary school aged children in Canada are mainly sedentary and spend most of their time in front of screens (e.g. TV, computers). These low levels of physical activity are associated with negative effects on both their physical and psychological well-being (Rickwood, 2015). To combat this issue, Ontario’s Ministry of Education (2005) introduced mandatory Daily Physical Activity (DPA) for students. As a result, Brooks & Thompson (2013) note that Physical Education specialists are currently seen as providers of DPA to help develop healthier citizens and reduce costs on the health care system.

At the same time, just like Dr. Lamb argued in the past (Morrow & Wamsley, 2010), current literature supports the idea that quality Physical Education should emphasize more than simply developing physical fitness. Randall et al. (2014) argue that elementary Physical Education is more meaningful for students when it serves as more than just a weight loss clinic by promoting students’ physical, cognitive and affective growth and development. This objective is evident in the updated version of the Ministry of Education’s *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Health and Physical Education* (2015). In addition to developing physical literacy (e.g. physical skills that allow them to move with competence and confidence), the curriculum states that Physical Education programs should also help students develop the living skills to develop resilience, build positive relationships with others and make informed, good decisions for their health (Ministry of Education, 2015).
Current literature also discusses that physical educators should provide students with a physically and emotionally safe environment, and help them to develop a sense of community and personal attachment to the subject (Fletcher & Baker, 2015). HPE programs are often criticized because students find it irrelevant, unenjoyable, and dominated by sports (Fletcher & Baker, 2015). According to Randall et al. (2014), a well-planned, quality HPE program should offer a variety of learning opportunities that promote self-esteem (e.g. group work and leadership opportunities) and movement activities from a number of dimensions, such as dance and gymnastics. Through my research, I investigate how these issues are being addressed in schools and how the presence of HPE specialists can impact them.

2.2 The Effect of a Physical Education Specialist Teacher in Elementary Schools

Here I review literature on the effects of having a trained, HPE specialist on the overall attitudes towards and participation in HPE programs in elementary schools. I also review what practices have been observed in schools with specialists and without specialists.

2.2.1 Practices currently being observed in schools

According to the literature, there is significant room for improvement within HPE programs in Canada (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2005; Hardman & Marshall, 2000; ParticipACTION, 2015; Randall et al., 2014). Since it was created in 2005, the annual Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth has assessed the quality of Physical Education programs in schools. In 2015, Canadian Health and Physical Education programs received a grade of C+ (ParticipACTION, 2015). Predominantly, it is a general classroom teacher’s responsibility for teaching Physical Education in elementary schools. Faulkner et al. (2008) reported that approximately 63% of the Physical Education classes in Ontario elementary schools were taught by “non-specialists”. In addition, ParticipACTION (2015) reported that
only 45% of elementary schools in Ontario have trained HPE specialists. This is despite consensus in the literature that HPE specialist teachers are the preferred providers of HPE in elementary school settings (Faulkner et al., 2008; Holt et al., 2012; Kaldor & Deutsch, 2013; Randall et al., 2014). This means that the responsibility for teaching HPE is most often left to people who lack the training and/or interest to provide quality programs. Robinson (2012) notes that it is difficult for schools to provide quality Physical Education instead of just “physical activity” since there are fewer HPE specialists.

As a result, Brooks and Thompson (2015) explain that HPE programs are often dominated by sports and games without the teaching of health or others aspects of the curriculum. According to Corlett and Mandigo (2013), what should happen is that students are taught basic fundamental movement skills before engaging in competitive sports. They argue that just as students must first learn the ABCs in Language and how to add/subtract in Math before moving on to more complex tasks, individuals must learn their “physical alphabet” (e.g. how to hop, jump, run, throw) before progressing to more complex movements and skills (Corlett & Mandigo, 2013). Investigating strategies that specialists are using to develop physical literacy is a major focus that I aim to address with my research.

2.2.2 Perceptions and practices of non-specialist classroom teachers

A review of the literature on the perceptions of classroom teachers towards Health and Physical Education indicated that many non-specialist teachers perceive HPE as difficult to teach. Fletcher (2012) cites a lack of professional preparation and negative views towards their own HPE experiences as students as contributing factors for these beliefs. Holt et al. (2012) explain that non-specialist teachers also tend to believe that they lack ability to adequately teach HPE because of a lack of sufficient instructional time. While 20 minutes of DPA may seem
reasonable, many classroom teachers find it troublesome. Rickwood (2015) explains that often classroom teachers feel pressures to cover other subject curriculum expectations, such as Math or Language. According to the literature, non-specialist teachers have also been more frequently observed to use the removal of HPE as a deterrent or punishment for poor classroom behaviour (Rickwood 2015). To many classroom teachers, HPE is seen as playtime and a reward that they can use to manage their students’ behaviour. This is a problem because it indicates the lower perceived subject status of HPE.

To address these concerns, one of the aims of this study was to investigate professional development opportunities and supports that exist for teachers who have these attitudes towards Health and Physical Education. Research suggests that teachers’ perceptions of HPE and their ability to teach it can be positively altered (Humphries & Ashy, 2006). Fletcher (2012) suggests that this can be achieved by providing teachers with opportunities to observe specialists and by including a greater variety of activities (such as yoga or dance) into HPE programs depending on the teacher’s personal experiences and interests. With my research, I intend to identify similar strategies that could help teachers develop a positive attitude towards HPE instruction and support them in delivering quality HPE.

2.2.3 Benefits of a physical education specialist

A review of the literature indicates that a HPE specialist can have a significant impact on the quality of elementary HPE programs. A positive relationship has been observed between specialists teaching Physical Education and the amount of time devoted to HPE instruction (Randall et al., 2014). The quality of HPE instruction has also been found to increase when provided by a specialist (Faulkner et al., 2008). According to Davis et al. (2005), HPE specialists generally provide more effective instruction, spending more time developing skills
and using more current teaching practices. This view is supported by Randall et al. (2014), who argue that HPE specialists are associated with lessons that focus more on learning basic movement skills and emphasize social and emotional development in safe and inclusive environments.

There are several examples of effective practices by HPE specialists that have been identified in the literature. Holt et al. (2012) state that quality HPE specialists set clear expectations as to how students will be assessed, establish clear boundaries while providing perceptions of choice, develop caring relationships with the students and support student autonomy. There is evidence that HPE specialists establish procedures for getting equipment and setting it up (Humphries & Ashy, 2006). Humphries and Ashy (2006) explain that this helps specialists more effectively plan for quick transitions to move kids from one activity to another and cope with the “chaotic” nature of HPE. Brooks and Thompson (2015) discuss how effective HPE teachers plan and deliver effective learning programs across multiple strands of HPE, including skill development, health and personal development. Each of these factors is significant because they are elements of quality HPE instruction that can affect students’ attitudes and interests in HPE.

Research supports the notion that HPE specialists can significantly impact attitudes towards Physical Education and physical activity participation rates in schools. Faulkner et al. (2008) noted that school with HPE specialists have higher rates of participation in intramural sports. Similarly, Rickwood (2015) observed that the loss of a HPE specialist on staff contributed to declining DPA levels of students, a diminished importance of DPA in the school and a reduction in school-wide physical activity opportunities. In terms of a HPE specialist’s impact on school staff, Brooks & Thompson (2015) argue that having a HPE specialist on site can result in more opportunities for collaboration, professional development and collegial support. Kaldor &
Deutsch (2013) support this thinking by suggesting that specialists can assist classroom teachers by initiating new ideas, providing feedback and helping them with DPA or Health program planning and curriculum design. In addition, they argue the presence of a specialist can also provide a sense of commonality in terms of curriculum delivery between classes in a school (Kaldor & Deutsch, 2013).

My review of the literature also uncovered one study that observed a relationship between specialist and non-specialist HPE teachers that opposed the general consensus. According to a study by Robinson (2012), students viewed their non-specialist, classroom teacher to be fairer and less likely to show favoritism. The students surveyed indicated that HPE specialist teachers were viewed as less fair and more likely to share their attention with a select few (Robinson, 2012). It was assumed in the study that the students had developed stronger relationships with their classroom teachers because they saw them more frequently than the specialist HPE teacher (all day, every day vs. two to three times per week) (Robinson, 2012). Robinson (2012) concluded that increased contact time, through increased HPE instructional time, might help students and HPE specialists to build the same positive relationships. This idea of advocating for increased instructional time is another focus that I aim to address with my research.

2.2.4 Strategies for schools without specialists

While reviewing the literature, I also came across several recommendations for potential strategies for schools without HPE specialists. In order to make the content of HPE programs more diverse and to improve students’ interests in the subject, Randall et al. (2014) argues that programs move beyond the traditional domination of sports to include other movement activities such as dance, gymnastics or outdoor education. In addition, Rickwood (2015) suggests that schools without a HPE specialist, could have parents/guardians or community volunteers with
PE expertise (e.g. personal trainer, yoga instructor) come into to run DPA. He argues this could be a strategy that both motivates students and relieves the stress of preparing DPA lessons from classroom teachers (Rickwood, 2015). Finally, Rickwood (2015) also suggests that schools could implement a school-based, teacher-coach mentorship program that connects a classroom teacher with an experienced teacher-coach or HPE specialist. The experienced HPE leader can then mentor the teacher and pass on leadership skills (Rickwood, 2015).

2.3 Barriers to Hiring Physical Education Specialists

In this section, I review the literature on the factors which impede schools from hiring HPE specialists.

2.3.1 Low subject status of physical education

According to the literature, the lower perceived subject status of Physical Education is one of the main barriers for the hiring of HPE specialists in elementary schools. Kaldor & Deutsch (2013) discuss how the curriculum traditionally values certain subjects, such as Math and Language, and that this leads to Physical Education often becoming marginalized and overlooked. With more time devoted to other subjects, Brooks & Thompson (2013) argue that specialist teachers are generally ranked near the bottom in the educational hierarchy and are viewed as simply “classroom teacher relief” in elementary schools. Research indicates that this marginalization in the value of Physical Education seems to be reflected in the budgetary restrictions and governments’ reluctance to finance such as position. Brooks and Thompson (2013) argue that with government’s “private market” approach to education, HPE specialists are viewed as providers of a marginalized product. According to Randall et al. (2014) this particular view by Canadian policy-makers has meant Canadian HPE programs are in fact facing more severe funding cuts than those occurring in most other nations. In light of this information, I
intend to research what strategies schools are currently using to provide quality HPE despite drastic budget cuts.

2.3.2 Declining student enrollment

Declining student enrollment is another identified barrier to the hiring of HPE specialists in elementary schools. In 2009, Ontario’s Ministry of Education reported that from 2002-2008, enrollment in Ontario’s schools decreased by 68,000 students (Ministry of Education, 2009). This trend has continued. As of 2015, enrollment has decreased by another 58,000 students (Ministry of Education, 2015). Fewer students has meant fewer full-time teaching positions and reduced opportunities for HPE specialist positions. As a result, many specialists split their workload with more than one school. This significantly affects HPE programs in these schools. As Rickwood (2015) explains, this impacts the amount of time, effort and commitment specialists can devote to establishing intramurals, coaching teams and building HPE programs in their schools. Further impacting this issue is the current hiring practices by school boards. Rickwood (2015) discusses how schools and administrators are restricted in their ability to replace experienced HPE leaders (e.g. teacher-coaches, intramural leaders, and sport specialists) as they leave or retire because priority is given to teachers higher on the seniority list over individuals with HPE or coaching experiences.

2.4 Conclusion

In this literature review, I looked at research on the historical and current contexts of Physical Education, the effects of having a trained, HPE specialist in a school and the barriers which may prevent a school from having such a position. This review illustrates that Physical Education is an ever changing discipline. It also highlights the significant impact a specialist can have on a school’s HPE program. My review of the literature also points out the need for further
examination of the HPE curriculum and its instruction in order to gain and ensure its legitimacy as a core subject (Kaldor & Deutsch, 2013). If HPE is to be seen as an equal status subject, Robinson (2012) suggests that advocating for institutional efforts such as increased instructional time may be necessary. This review also highlights a need for school boards to provide more professional development in HPE for teachers. Holt et al. (2012) argues that more in-service training is needed for both specialists and non-specialists to help deliver curriculum. In light of this, a goal of my research is to learn what current strategies teachers are using to address these issues.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology used to address my main research question of whether having a trained, Health and Physical Education specialist on staff affects the overall attitudes towards and participation in HPE programs in elementary schools. I begin by reviewing the general research approach and procedures. Specifically, I use scholarship support to elaborate on the value and significance of qualitative research and why it is a suitable approach given my research purpose and questions. Next, I discuss the main instrument used for data collection, semi-structured interviews. Here, I elaborate on what a semi-structured interview protocol is, why this interview style is significant and why it is appropriate given my research purpose and questions. I then elaborate more specifically on participant sampling and recruitment before moving on to explain the procedures I used to analyze the data. After that, I review the ethical procedures that are relevant to my study and discuss both the strengths and limitations of the methodology. I conclude this chapter by providing a brief summary of the key methodological decisions and my rationale for these decisions based on my research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This study was conducted through the use of a qualitative research approach. It includes a review of the existing relevant literature on Health and Physical Education and specialist teachers in elementary schools and the conduction of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with two teachers. A quantitative research approach focuses on looking for cause and effect relationships (Morse, 1994). As noted by Campbell (2014), quantitative research involves the use of precise, objective measurements and statistical analysis to support or refute hypotheses. In
contrast, qualitative research is more interactive and exploratory in nature, and allows the researcher to collect open-ended and emerging data that is used to develop themes (Campbell, 2014). Qualitative approaches have participants share in-depth responses to questions in order to develop understanding of people’s unique experiences and their reflections on those experiences (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007).

As a result, a qualitative research approach is suitable given my research purpose and questions. The main goals of my research are to identify the strategies and resources being used by Health and Physical Education specialists (and generalist teachers) to increase HPE’s legitimacy as a core subject, positively affect students’ attitudes and participation in HPE and develop physical literacy. Through discussions with current teachers on these issues and listening to their stories and experiences, I can generate an understanding regarding what is happening in schools. In addition, a qualitative research approach has been identified as an appropriate approach for studying issues in education because schools and individual classrooms are complicated social systems (Morse, 1994). Teachers have to deal with a variety of behaviours and changing dynamics each day when managing classrooms. A school environment cannot be controlled like a laboratory experiment in order to achieve desired results (Dagenais, Janosz, Abrami, Bernard, & Lysenko, 2009). Therefore, a qualitative approach is more sensible than quantitative approach. A qualitative research approach is also a suitable approach for my research because it has been used successfully by researchers, both in the past and more recently, to examine Physical Education in particular (Locke, 1989; Hopper et al., 2008).

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Interviewing is the most frequently used data collection strategy in qualitative research (Adams, 2010; Baumbusch, 2010). Qualitative research interviews can be structured,
unstructured or semi-structured. Structured interviews have a pre-determined set of questions which the researcher doesn’t stray from and the questions have predetermined answers for participants to choose from (Baumbusch, 2010). Unstructured interviews are similar to normal, spontaneous conversations in that they have a topic but no set questions or responses (Baumbusch, 2010). In this study, I use a semi-structured interview design.

According to Baumbusch (2010) semi-structured interviews are organized around a list of pre-determined, open-ended questions that allow for spontaneous and in-depth responses. Other questions are allowed to emerge as the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee develops (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This technique allows both the interviewer and interviewee to be more flexible and responsive to new themes that emerge during the conversation (Jackson et al., 2007). It also provides the participants with the opportunity to share their personal opinions and experiences (Campbell, 2014). For these reasons, a semi-structured interview is a suitable data collection strategy for my research. My aim is to explore what is happening in schools to increase the legitimacy of Health and Physical Education and motivate students to participate in physical activity. By having participants share their personal experiences and by allowing for open and in-depth discussion, my aim was to discover strategies that can be used by teachers to provide quality elementary Physical Education.

Through descriptive coding, the participants’ responses were used to develop categories and themes to make connections and explore the meanings they attribute to their experiences (Adams, 2010; Baumbusch, 2010). In this way, the semi-structured interview format allows the participants to be the experts and inform the research (Leech, 2002). Semi-structured interviews also involve the development of an interview guide or protocol that addresses the study’s purpose and objectives (Baumbusch, 2010). My interview protocol (Appendix B) is organized
into five sections. The interviews begin with questions about the participant’s background and professional experience. From there, they move on to questions about their perspectives and beliefs about Health and Physical Education and HPE specialists in elementary schools. Next, I ask questions about the observed practices of specialists and generalists and what supports and challenges exist for implementing quality Physical Education. Finally, I conclude by asking questions about future steps for teachers and potential areas of further research.

3.3 Participants

In this section, I address the methodological decisions related to the study’s participants. First, I review the sampling criteria that I established for participant recruitment. I discuss the type of teacher that I hoped to interview and the kind of experience they need to have in order to inform the study and respond to the research questions. Next, I elaborate on the sampling procedures used to locate and recruit the study participants. Finally, I include a short biography of each participant.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

In order to ensure that the data collected was suitable for my research purpose and questions, the following selection criteria was used to select participants:

- Participants should have at least 5 years of teaching experience.
- Participants will work in either the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) or Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB)
- Participants should have experience teaching Physical Education and Health in elementary schools.
- At least one participant should have training as a Physical Education specialist (either a degree in Physical Education or taken specialist Additional Qualification courses).
- Participants may be either male or female.

The study participants needed to have a minimum of five years of teaching experience. Teachers with this level of experience would have more to draw upon and share in response to the research questions compared to beginning teachers. They were also more likely to have experiences in schools with and without HPE specialists. This would allow for a greater examination of the effect specialist teachers have on elementary Health and Physical Education. Study participants worked either in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) or Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). This helped to narrow the focus of my research to a specific geographic location (the Greater Toronto Area). In addition, my existing contacts and connections to potential participants were located within this region.

Study participants also needed to have experience teaching Physical Education in elementary schools. Since the focus of this study is on practices observed and used in elementary schools, interviewing high school teachers would not have been appropriate. Also, in order to effectively answer questions about the strategies and practices currently being used in elementary Physical Education classes, the participants needed to have personal experience teaching elementary Physical Education. In order to examine the practices of trained HPE specialists and the impact they can have on the quality of Physical Education in elementary schools, at least one participant needed to have Health and Physical Education as a teachable and prior training as a specialist. This meant having a degree in Health and Physical Education or the participant had taken HPE specialist Additional Qualification (AQ) courses. Finally, including both male and female participants would hopefully lead to the sharing of different experiences and perspectives which would increase the quality and depth of the data collected.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures
Choosing the most appropriate sampling method is dependent on the aim of the study (Marshall, 1996). Quantitative research generally involves a “random sampling” of participants that statistically should represent a group or population (Campbell, 2014). According to Marshall (1996), the nature of the population is defined and each participant is given an equal chance of being selected so that the results of the study can be generalized back to the population. In comparison, qualitative research often explores the shared understandings of a particular topic or group of individuals (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Since the aim of this study was to investigate teachers’ experiences and understandings of elementary Health and Physical Education, choosing a random sampling method would not be appropriate.

Marshall (1996) identifies convenience, purposeful, and theoretical sampling as the three main approaches for selecting samples in qualitative research studies. In this study, I use a combination of “purposeful sampling” and “convenience sampling” to locate and recruit participants. Purposeful sampling is a technique used in qualitative research which involves selecting a limited number of individuals from within a known population to help maximize the quality and depth of the data collected (Clark, 1997; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The samples of interview subjects often share important similarities, characteristics and experiences which are related to the research question (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The sampling in this study was purposeful. Participants were selected according to the established selection criteria (in the previous section) in order to collect the highest quality of data possible.

Convenience sampling is a technique that involves selecting the most accessible subjects (Marshall, 1996). It is the least challenging method for the researcher in terms of time, effort and money, but may not provide the same quality of data as other sampling methods (Marshall, 1996). In this study, I rely on convenience sampling. As a teacher candidate in a graduate
program, I am immersed in a community of teacher colleagues and mentor teachers. As such, I relied on my existing contacts and connections through fellow teacher candidates.

3.3.3 Participant bios

Two teachers, Laura and Alice (pseudonyms) were interviewed as part of this study. Laura is in her ninth year teaching. Predominantly, her teaching experience has been as a classroom teacher in the Junior Division (Grades 4-6). She is currently the Health and Physical Education specialist at an elementary school, responsible for teaching students in Kindergarten up to Grade six. This is Laura’s first year as a Health and Physical Education specialist. Laura did her training at OISE (U of T) with Primary and Junior qualifications and just recently got her Intermediate Health and Physical Education additional qualification (AQ). Laura has always been actively involved in coaching students and organizing events within the school community. She provides this study with a valuable perspective as someone who has taught Health and Physical as both a classroom teacher and as a specialist teacher. Laura said she became a teacher because of her experiences in high school Phys. Ed. Her teachers instilled in her the importance of leadership and being active for life. She wanted provide her own students with these same values and experiences.

Alice has been teaching for six years. She completed her teacher training at York University with Primary and Junior qualifications. Alice has her Intermediate qualification in English. She is currently in her sixth year as a Health and Physical Education specialist at an elementary school. Like Laura, she is also responsible for teaching students in Kindergarten up to Grade six. Unlike Laura, Alice has not taken additional qualifications in Health and Physical Education. Alice has always been a specialist teacher. Her past teaching experience includes teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) and the Fifth Block Reading Program. Alice is
actively involved in her school running various intramurals during recesses (e.g. cricket, European Handball) and coaching school teams (e.g. W5H). Physical Education was one of Alice’s favourite subjects as a student and believes that it is really important for kids to be physically active throughout their lives.

3.4 Data Analysis

In this section, I begin by comparing and contrasting quantitative and qualitative approaches to data analysis. According to Campbell (2014), a quantitative analysis of data may involve the calculation of a mean, standard deviation and a t-test. The numbers are then analyzed to objectify the data (Campbell, 2014). In contrast, qualitative data is often collected through the tape-recording of interviews and the subsequent transcription of the conversation (Clark, 1997). As a result, qualitative analysis is generally an ongoing process of typing, reading, conceptualizing and re-conceptualizing (Morse, 1994). In this study, the interviews were transcribed prior to analyzing the data.

There is a range in methods of analyzing qualitative data. Content analysis focuses on the content of what was said (Jackson et al., 2007). The researcher looks for “meanings" in what a subject has said and for relationships between subjects’ responses (Morse, 1994). According to Jackson et al. (2007), the data is then broken down into smaller segments that are categorized and coded. Another method, called template analysis, involves the use of pre-determined templates or categories that are based on previous research (Clark, 1997; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The categories are used for selecting and sorting segments of text with similar content and these segments are used to identify major themes in the data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).
A third method of qualitative data analysis is called an editing approach. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) note that this type of analysis occurs at the same time data is being collected. Like an editor, the researcher makes interpretations during the process of identifying patterns and uses these to generate emerging understandings about the research questions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In this study, after transcribing each interview, I coded each one separately and identified categories of data and themes within the categories. Next, I compared the themes and categories from each interview side-by-side and discuss both common and diverging data. I then used my literature review to compare the data collected to existing research.

Good qualitative research analysis uses strategies to test the trustworthiness and validity of the data collected (Clark, 1997; Jackson et al., 2007). The meaning behind what participants said is verified so that the researcher’s interpretations are not just repetitions of their own beliefs (Jackson et al., 2007). One such method, called member-checking, involves taking the identified themes and descriptions back to the participants to confirm if they are accurate (Jackson et al., 2007). After coding the interview data, I checked the validity of my interpretations by taking my findings to the study participants to confirm their accuracy.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

According to Adams (2010), being a researcher means having an ethical responsibility for both the interviewee and oneself. With qualitative research, part of this responsibility involves acknowledging that the researcher is not a neutral, disinterested observer but one with their own values, concerns and biases (Clark, 1997). In addition, DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) identify four main ethical issues commonly associated with qualitative interviews. The first involves reducing the risk of unanticipated harm. When an interviewer listens to and discusses personal information with a participant, unforeseen issues may arise causing unintended harm to
the participant (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In this study, I have attempted to minimize risk due to participation by sending the interview questions to participants ahead of time. The second ethical issue involves protection of the interviewee’s information (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The participant must remain anonymous because they may share information that could negatively impact their position in a system (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). To maintain confidentiality in this study, each participant has been assigned a pseudonym. Participant’s identities will remain confidential and any connections to their school or students have been excluded. Also, all data collected (e.g. audio recordings) has been stored on a password protected device and will be destroyed after five years.

A third consideration is that the researcher should effectively inform participants about the nature of the study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Before the subjects consent to participate, the intent of the study needs to be communicated to them and also that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Prior to their inclusion in this study, each participant was asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A). The consent letter provided an overview of the research, addressed potential ethical implications and specified the expectations of participation (e.g. one 45-60 minute semi-structured interview). In addition, all of the participants were notified of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. Lastly, researchers must ensure that the interviewees are not exploited for personal gain (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). According to Clark (1997), it is reasonable for subjects to expect something in return. Researchers may want to respond to this by giving additional information about the research and explain their motivations for doing it (Clark, 1997). After the interview, participants in this study were given the opportunity to review the transcripts and
clarify or retract any statements before data analysis. As mentioned in the previous section (3.4), member-checking was used to verify the accuracy of each participant’s responses.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

In this section, I address the methodological strengths and limitation of the study. In terms of the methodological strengths, this type of qualitative study generally provides the researcher with more information about a phenomenon and the depth of detail in the data is greater (Jackson et al., 2007). Interviewing teachers allowed me to hear their personal perspectives, opinions and experiences in more depth than a survey would allow for. Another methodological strength of this study is that it will provide an opportunity for teachers to speak to what matters to them and inform future teaching practice. As noted by Adams (2010) and Leech (2002), the use of semi-structured interviews also allows the participants to be the experts, inform the research and the outcome then becomes a co-production between the interviewer and interviewee. This type of interview will also provide the teachers with an opportunity to construct meanings from their personal experiences (Jackson et al., 2007).

The use of purposeful sampling and choosing a small group of teachers with select characteristics will help to maximize the quality and depth of the data collected (Clark, 1997; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Another advantage with this study design is that the researcher is generally more aware of their personal role in the research. Recognizing the subjectivity associated with the interpretation of the data generally leads to precautions for trustworthiness, such as member-checking (Jackson et al., 2007). As previously noted, after coding the data I checked the validity of my interpretations by taking my findings to the study participants to confirm their accuracy.
A limitation of this study is the scope of the research. Given the ethical parameters for this study, the interviews could only involve teachers. It was not possible to interview students or parents so there are a variety of different perspectives, opinions and experiences that are not being heard. It was also not possible to conduct surveys or classroom observations. This limited the type of data that could be collected.

Another potential drawback with this type of qualitative design is the potential for intrusion into the lives and privacy of participants, which can cause unintended harm (Locke, 1989). Various measures have been included in the study design to protect this from occurring. These include having participants read and sign the consent letter, allowing them to see the interview questions ahead of time, maintaining their confidentiality through the use of a pseudonym and by reminding them of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. A final potential limitation is the use of convenience sampling. While convenience sampling may be the least challenging sampling method for the researcher, it may not provide the same quality of data as other methods (Marshall, 1996). As a result of using existing contacts to select participants, there is the potential that I missed out on other excellent candidates who could greatly inform the research.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the research methodology. I began by reviewing the general research approach and procedures. Using literature support, I discussed the meaning, significance and value of qualitative research and why it is a suitable approach given the study’s focus on Health and Physical Education in elementary schools. Next, I examined the study’s main instrument for data collection, semi-structured interviews. I elaborated on what a semi-structured interview protocol looks like, the benefits of using this particular interview style and why it is appropriate given my research area and questions. After that, I addressed the methodological
decisions made relating to the study participants. I introduced the selection criteria applied to all the interviewees and the use of both purposeful and convenience sampling methods to maximize the quality of data collected. I then move on to discuss how the data will be analyzed. I explain how I will be coding the interview transcripts to identify themes and categories. Next, I reviewed the ethical considerations for this particular study, such as consent, confidentiality, the risk of participation, how the data will be stored and the right to withdraw at any time. Finally, I outline the strengths of the study (e.g. in-depth personal accounts from teachers) and the limitations of the study (e.g. scope of the research). Next in Chapter 4, I report the research findings.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this section, the research findings are presented and discussed. Transcripts for the two interviews were analyzed and coded for common themes. Both of the teachers interviewed (who will be identified as Laura and Alice), are full-time, Physical Education specialist teachers who are responsible for teaching Physical Education to all of the students from Kindergarten to Grade Six. One of the teachers (Laura) has Intermediate Health and Physical Education qualifications. The other (Alice) does not have additional qualifications in Health and Physical Education. Both teachers value the subject and believe in its importance to one’s health and quality of life.

In the discussion of the research findings, four main themes are identified. First, in order to improve its legitimacy as a core subject, a need to change the perception of Physical Education is addressed. Secondly, there is a discussion of the impact of the specialist position on a school’s Health and Physical Education program. Next, effective teaching strategies for Health and Physical Education are reported. Finally, professional development opportunities that exist for teachers to help them deliver the Health and Physical Education curriculum are highlighted. Each of the themes has further sub-themes related to the teaching of Health and Physical Education. The significance of each of the themes and sub-themes is described and examined in connection with the existing literature.

4.1 Changing the Perception of Health and Physical Education

The need to change how the subject of Health and Physical Education is perceived was a common theme during both interviews. Laura illustrated this point with an example. She said that if you were to call a parent and tell them that their child was misbehaving, so they did not participate in Phys. Ed., the parent would probably be alright with it. However, if you said they
were misbehaving and did not get to have Math today, “the parents would freak out because Math is viewed as a critical life skill. Generally, parents don’t view the fact their kids are physically active as a life skill even though it is.” A contributing factor to the low subject status of HPE, Brooks and Thompson (2015) argue, is that programs are often dominated by sports and games and without the teaching of health or other aspects of the curriculum. In connection to this, both teachers spoke to the need to adopt a more holistic view of Health and Physical Education. Alice emphasized that the subject was “more than just physical activity”. She explained that students need to learn how to build a healthy lifestyle, which “will be important throughout their whole lives”. This included healthy eating, developing positive relationships with others and personal safety. She felt that all of those components “go hand in hand with physical activity” and are important life skills for students. During the interviews, three sub-themes were addressed. These were mental health and wellness, the potential for leadership opportunities and the development of physical literacy for lifelong physical activity.

4.1.1. Mental health and wellness

Laura highlighted the importance of discussing mental health with students. She discussed how Health and Physical Education can be an opportunity to “teach students about mental health and give them coping strategies and wellness tips”. Laura explained how she wanted to give students a base knowledge about mental health so that when they get to the older grades or high school, they are not struggling with the same things. She said that with her Health program, she wanted to help students “who may be feeling stressed or depressed to identify these feelings and not feel that they are weird”. This connects to Randall et al.’s (2014) argument that elementary HPE is more meaningful when it serves as more than just a weight loss clinic by promoting students’ physical, cognitive and affective growth and development.
From personal experience, Laura explained that she had friends who struggled with mental health through high school and they weren’t able to identify it because they didn’t know about it. In her words, “they just thought they were sad”. Laura talked about how research shows that one of the ways people can positively deal with mental health issues is through physical activity. But she said that “if students don’t develop the skills or know how to be physically active, then they won’t be able to use it as an effective strategy”. This connects to Corlett & Mandigo’s (2013) idea of teaching students physical literacy to give them the tools to be active throughout their lives and contribute to their overall health and wellness.

4.1.2 Opportunity for leadership

According to Randall et al. (2014), a well-planned, quality HPE program should offer a variety of learning opportunities that promote self-esteem, such as leadership opportunities. One strategy that came up during both interviews was the idea of using DPA as a leadership opportunity for the older students. Both Laura and Alice talked about having older students serve as DPA leaders for younger students. Alice talked about how at her previous school, there had been a school-wide initiative where the Grade Sevens and Eights were responsible for running activity stations in the classrooms for the younger students. She felt that “it worked really well”. Laura talked about doing DPA with the reading buddies of her Grade Six students. She said “they would read with them for half an hour and then do DPA for twenty minutes with them”. She said this type of partnership was mutually beneficial. The older students got to practice leadership skills and teach the younger students about the importance of being active and the younger students “show them that it is okay to have fun”.

Laura explained that it was also an opportunity for the older students to do activities that they used to enjoy doing when they were younger, like the parachute, but are “too old for now”.

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However, since they had to do it with the reading buddies, “they don’t have to worry about it not looking cool”. Laura stressed how great it was to see her students in the leadership role. She said she felt that there are so many students who would make great school-wide DPA leaders but just aren’t given the opportunity because “they may not be the smartest kids in the class or a Math star”. Laura explained that for older students who generally don’t get chosen to be a leader, DPA is a fantastic opportunity to give them responsibility and “see them flourish in a leadership role they may not get otherwise”. This idea is connected to Brooks and Thompson’s (2013) belief that Health and Physical Education can be used to help students develop social and leadership skills.

4.1.3 Developing physical literacy and becoming active for life

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the idea of helping students to develop physical literacy so that they have the skills and confidence to be active throughout their lives. Due to the large amount of time students spend at school each week, schools have been identified as important sites to positively influence the lives of students by instilling in them the skills and positive attitudes needed for lifelong participation in physical activity (Hardman & Marshall, 2000). With her program, Laura talked about the main focus being getting the students active and “enjoying being active”. She said that she was someone who didn’t necessarily excel at sports, but was fortunate enough to be exposed to a wide variety of skills and experiences that she still uses today. Laura explained that when she was a student, they “had to memorize all the rules of a game and the names of the different types of passes”. But she felt that didn’t help her be active with her friends at recess.

With her own students, she is trying to change the way she teaches skills and games. She wants to teach students how to play a variety of activities so that “when they are older and their friends are going to play a pick-up game of Ultimate Frisbee or beach volleyball, they have the
basic skills so that they know how to play”. This connects to Mandigo et al.’s (2007) suggestion that using a learner-centered approach that helps students to understand why a particular drill or activity is relevant and how the skills are transferable, can increase students’ motivation to participate. Alice also discussed this idea of developing basic skills and knowledge, saying that with her students, they “may not be the best, but I want them to know how to play”. She expressed not wanting her students to “be afraid of participating in something that is going to make them active because they feel are not good at it”.

4.2 Impact of a Health and Physical Education Specialist Position

As of 2015, only 45% of the elementary schools in Ontario have trained Health and Physical Education specialists (ParticipACTION, 2015). As previously mentioned in the literature review, this is despite strong evidence supporting the idea that specialist teachers are the preferred providers of HPE (Faulkner et al., 2008; Holt et al., 2012; Kaldor & Deutsch, 2013; Randall et al., 2014). During the interviews, the teachers were asked to reflect on how their school’s HPE program was impacted by having a specialist teacher at the school. Three main sub-themes emerged which were program continuity, regularly scheduled Health and Physical Education and participation in extracurricular activities.

4.2.1 Program continuity

The establishment of continuity within a Health and Physical Education program was a major idea that was addressed by both teachers. Kaldor and Deutsch (2013) argue that the presence of a specialist can provide a sense of commonality in terms of curriculum delivery between classes in a school. Alice explained that as a specialist teacher, she can plan her program so that all of the students in the same grade will cover the same “Active Living and Health Living” expectations and learn the same movement skills. This way, she knows from year to year what the students
have covered and what they haven’t. Laura also commented on this continuity. She said that as a specialist, she can place more of an emphasis on the skills she is trying to build with the students from year to year. For example, “what the students learn in Grade One, they will hopefully take with them all the way to Grade Six”. Laura also addressed the idea of being able to establish predictability in routine as a specialist teacher. In terms of classroom management, starting in Kindergarten she can teach the students her rules and expectations so that by the time they are in the Junior grades, the kids already know what is expected of them. This goes for skill progression of fundamental movement skills, like running and throwing, too. Knowing what she has covered with the students means that she “doesn’t have to go over the same things every year”.

4.2.2 Regularly scheduled health and physical education

Both teachers interviewed indicated how having a specialist teacher reduces the potential of Physical Education being taken away during the week. According to the literature, non-specialist teachers are frequently observed to use the removal of Physical Education as a deterrent or punishment for poor classroom behaviour (Rickwood, 2015). Laura touched on this idea, saying that as a past classroom teacher, “it was easy for it to be used as a reward or punishment as opposed to being part of the curriculum because it was something the kids enjoyed”. Alice also talked about the removal of Physical Education as a punishment for poor behaviour and how she felt this was “not fair to the students”. Alice discussed how before, when it was taught by the classroom teacher, if Health and Physical Education were not valued by the teacher they would not fit it in and it would not be done. However, now that there are specialist teachers and the association with prep time, “Health and Physical Education are never optional”.

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In addition, Laura felt that teachers who are not comfortable managing a class in “that type of environment”, just won’t do it. Alice said Phys. Ed can be intimidating because “it is not a situation where students are just sitting at their desks. It can be chaotic when they are running around in the same space”. As a result, Laura said Phys. Ed becomes free-time or “you can just play dodgeball”. This connects to Brooks and Thompson’s (2015) argument that programs are often dominated by games and “free play” without the teaching of health or others aspects of the curriculum. Both teachers indicated that because of their position as a specialist, they can plan and devote more time to covering all aspects of the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

4.2.3 Extracurricular activities

According to Faulkner et al. (2008), schools with Physical Education specialists have higher rates of participation in intramural and extracurricular sports. This idea was addressed in both of the interviews. Alice discussed organizing intramurals in the school around what she was teaching during her lessons. For example, if she was teaching European handball to the Junior Divisions, she would run a European handball intramural at recess for them. Alice felt that because the students were familiar with the game and the basic skills from class, they were more likely to sign up for the intramurals.

Laura talked about how she coaches different school teams and that as a specialist, the position could be used to expose students to potential extra-curricular opportunities. She talked about being able to work with and teach students in the early grades the basic knowledge of sports, like volleyball, and help them develop basic skills. Then by the time they progress to the Junior and Intermediate divisions, “they would be ready for intramurals or the school teams”. Instead of having students at try-outs who have no experience with games, “they would already
have the basic fundamentals from Phys. Ed. class and practices could be spent more on strategies and refining skills”.

**4.3 Teaching Strategies for Health and Physical Education**

According to Davis et al. (2005), specialist teachers generally provide more effective instruction, and use more current teaching practices. In each of the interviews, the teacher was asked about effective teaching strategies for Health and Physical Education that they have observed or used. Several sub-themes emerged which included providing a variety of experiences, the consideration of student’s interests, self-regulation and coping skills, the use of community walks and classroom management strategies.

4.3.1 Providing a variety of experiences

Physical Education programs are often criticized because they are dominated by sports (Fletcher & Baker, 2015). As a recommendation for teachers of Physical Education, Alice talked about first deciding ahead of time what you want your program to look like. She explained that “you must decide whether you want it to be skill-based, game-based, cooperative or competitive”. Laura explained that she wants her students to view physical activity as “fun and something that they will want to do outside of school on their own time”. That is why she tries to expose her students to a wide variety of potential activities.

Laura described how she does “Mind Games” with her students, which are active scavenger hunts with mental puzzles. She said that she likes them because even if a student is not a spectacular athlete, they can still be an important member of a team by reading the question cards and helping solve the puzzles. Laura also talked about taking her students up to Muskoka Woods for outdoor education trips. She does this so that “the students get to do activities that they would not get the opportunity to do normally”, like cross-country skiing, snowshoeing or
going on a zip-line. The challenge of doing this though is the extra cost involved. The school may not have the budget for them and parents may not like or be able to pay for an additional fee.

4.3.2 Considering student interests

Another important theme that arose during the interviews was the importance of taking into consideration the interests of the students. To try to engage students who are resistant to participate, Alice talked about first asking the student what they are interested in. She said, during the first term, she will even talk to parents about what their children are doing outside of school. Alice then discussed talking to the students about compromising and being considerate of others. She tells them that “since you like soccer, you get your choice now, but then we are going to do basketball because somebody else may like that more”. This connects to Holt et al.’s (2012) suggestion that quality Health and Physical Education specialists provide students with perceptions of choice and support student autonomy. Her strategy allows students to feel a sense of ownership about what the class will be doing.

Laura also addressed considering the students’ interests. She said, for example, if a student “comes in with a game that they learned at a birthday party which they are really excited about”, she will try to find a way to build it into the schedule. Laura also emphasized the importance of providing students with choice, especially when it comes to DPA. She felt the ability to choose your activity was important because individuals “need to be able to decide what they enjoy doing to be active if they are going to do it. It can’t always be what an adult tells you what to do”. For her, the importance of DPA is helping kids to identify activities that they enjoy that they can play with friends at recess and that they can do on their own time.

4.3.3 Self-regulation and coping skills
In an effort to provide a more holistic approach to Health and Physical Education at her school, Laura has implemented “Focus Friday” into her program. For the first five to ten minutes of the class, she leads the students through a guided meditation. Laura explained that for her, mental health and well-being are just as important as physical health and well-being. So she wants to use the Phys. Ed. program to teach students about self-regulation and coping skills. This supports Randall et al.’s (2014) suggestion that quality Physical Education should emphasize social and emotional development. Laura felt that it is important for students to be able to identify when they are not coping with stress or frustration well. She said she hopes to give them strategies that they can use. For example, teaching them to recognize signs of stress and getting them to “think about things like taking deep breaths and focusing on breathing to help them relax”. Laura viewed her role as a Physical Education specialist as providing support for the classroom teacher in this respect. She hopes that in the brief period of time that she sees the students, she can get them active and “in a different head space”, so that when they return to class they are more focused and relaxed, then she has done a good job.

4.3.4 Community walks

As an alternative to traditional sport and game based activities, Laura does a weekly activity called, “Walking Wednesdays” with all of her Physical Education classes. Each Wednesday, she takes her class for a walk around the local neighbourhood. Laura explains that part of the Health curriculum is learning about personal safety skills. For instance, “not talking to strangers or running in the middle of the street”. Laura says she could stand at the front of the classroom and tell them these things or show them a video about the topic. However, she feels the best way for the students to learn is “to go out into the environment where they will apply the skills”. In
addition, Laura says that a lot of the students don’t go for walks with their families or ride their bikes in the neighbourhood. They just “stay in their condos and play video games”.

The idea of elementary school aged children becoming increasingly sedentary has been suggested in the literature (Rickwood, 2015). Laura discussed how she is amazed by the number of times students will say, “oh, I didn’t realize the ravine was there or I didn't know there was a park here”, despite the fact that they are only a two minute walk from their homes. When talking to parents at Curriculum night or during Parent-Teacher interviews, she has realized that a lot of families don’t know where things are in the community. Laura explained that another function of “Walking Wednesdays” has become showing the students different parts of the community. She said she tries to take the classes on different routes so they can learn more about what their community has to offer. For example, where there are local playgrounds, trails to ride a bike or hills to go tobogganing in the winter. It is Laura’s hope that the students will learn about these potential opportunities and use them to be active in their lives outside of school.

4.3.5 Classroom management

In terms of classroom management in Physical Education, Laura emphasized the importance of establishing predictability for the students. She said that it is important for the kids to “know when they come in that they are going to sit in the same spot, do the same basic warm-up” and then move on to the skill or game that they will be doing that day. Alice also touched on developing predictability in the routine. She described the use of what she calls, “Squads”. Alice explained that it involves organizing the students into groups called “Squads” that have a corresponding number and colour (e.g. Squad 1 = red). When the students come into the gymnasium, they sit in a row behind their squad’s cone. When groups are needed for activities, the students already have their “squads”. Eventually, it becomes a normal part of the routine and
“makes transitions smoother because you don’t have to spend time dividing the students”. This connects to Humphries and Ashy’s (2006) suggestion that quality HPE specialists establish procedures for setting up and quickly transitioning kids from one activity to another.

Both teachers also touched on the importance of working in concert with the classroom teacher. Laura said that you should be comfortable sharing with the classroom teacher what is going on and vice versa. She explained, “if you notice that a student is acting out, ask what strategies they have tried with them or if they are aware of specific triggers that cause behaviours”. Since the classroom teacher is the one who spends the majority of time with them, it is important to see them as an ally for support and not a separate entity. Alice talked about how “the classroom teacher will know if a student has trouble with activities where there is a winner and a loser”. She said that once you know this information, you can focus on teaching skills to help them work through their frustration. According to the curriculum, in addition to learning physical skills, Physical Education programs should also help students develop the living skills to develop resilience, build positive relationships with others and make informed, good decisions (Ministry of Education, 2015). As a result, Alice felt that part of your mandate as a specialist is to help students develop good sportsmanship and teamwork skills.

4.4 Professional Development Opportunities

Another major theme that arose in the discussions with both Physical Education specialists was the importance of professional development opportunities. The literature suggests that teacher’s perceptions of Health and Physical Education can be positively altered through professional development (Humphries & Ashy, 2006). Both teachers discussed the fact that Additional Qualification (AQ) courses are available in Physical Education. The two main sub-
themes of professional development that were identified were attending workshops and professional mentorship.

4.4.1 Workshops

Holt et al. (2012) argue that more in-service training is needed for both specialists and classroom teachers to help deliver the Health and Physical Education curriculum. Alice discussed attending annual, day-long Physical Education workshops that were run by the school board. She explained that the sessions were beneficial for multiple reasons. They were opportunities where you could talk to other specialist teachers and “share tips for activities and effective teaching strategies specific to Physical Education”. Alice described how there were four workshop periods and you could select from activities like cricket, track and field, cooperative games and competitive games. She really enjoyed the aspect of learning new games, like cricket, because it allowed to her to add more variety to her program. This connects to Fletcher’s (2012) suggestion of increasing the variety of movement based activities to improve the quality of Physical Education programs. Laura talked about the DPA workshops that were organized by the school board. She enjoyed them because they “would give you lots of ideas for activities and bags of resources for you to take”.

Both teachers also brought up the annual OPHEA conference but neither has attended it. The cost of the event was cited as a deterrent (“it’s like $300”), in addition to the difficulty of not getting a supply teacher to cover their classes for the day. Laura talked about the inconvenience of having to take sick-days to attend a conference that she was paying for. Both teachers discussed the difficulty, as a prep teacher, of getting a supply in order to attend professional development opportunities.

4.4.2 Mentorship
When asked what advice they would give to beginning teachers of Physical Education or ones who may be uncomfortable with teaching it, both teachers addressed the importance of mentorship. Alice suggested getting a mentor, either a veteran classroom teacher or an experienced HPE specialist in the board. In connection with what was suggested by Fletcher (2012), Alice talked about observing them and finding out what strategies they use. For example, she said when she first started, her colleague taught her about using “Squads”. She showed her different coloured cones and explained how it involved organizing the students into groups. It was a simple solution that made classroom management and transitions easier. She explained that, “when they come in, they know where to go”. Eventually, it becomes a natural part of the students’ routine. Alice also explained that the school board had a designated Physical Education and Health resource person for their region. She said that they were wonderful for providing support online and in person.

As a relatively new Physical Education specialist, Laura discussed her desire to observe experienced Physical Educators for her own professional development. She recommended that when teachers begin teaching Physical Education, there should be a day or two where they are able to go and observe someone. She referenced having something similar to the “New Teacher Induction Program” for classroom teachers. This connects to the idea of a teacher mentorship program for Physical Education recommended by Rickwood (2015). Laura explained that “you can read as much as you want or find activities on Pinterest or OPHEA, but getting to see how other teachers organize and manage things would be beneficial”. However, the issue of having to take a sick-day and book a supply was again cited as a barrier.

4.5 Conclusion
Following the analysis of the teacher interviews, four main themes emerged. First, the need to change how the subject of Health and Physical Education are perceived arose during both interviews. The findings indicate that this can be addressed through the adoption of a more holistic approach to Physical Education instruction. In particular, placing an emphasis on teaching mental health and wellness is recommended. Providing opportunities for students to take on leadership roles is also highlighted, including having older students organize and run DPA for younger students. It is also suggested that Health and Physical Education programs change their focus to helping students develop physical literacy so that they have the skills to be active throughout their lives.

The second theme that arose focused on the impact that the specialist position has on the quality of Health and Physical Education programs in elementary schools. The findings indicate that the presence of a Physical Education specialist allows for greater continuity and commonality in terms of curriculum delivery. Having a specialist teacher also meant that Physical Education was a regularly scheduled, mandatory subject. It was not left to the discretion of a classroom teacher. Finally, the research findings also indicated that the presence of the specialist position positively influenced participation rates in extracurricular activities, such as intramurals and school teams.

A third theme that emerged from the interviews focused on effective teaching strategies for Health and Physical Education. The findings suggest that best practices in Physical Education involve the inclusion of a variety of movement activities. Quality physical educators also support student autonomy and take into consideration the personal interests of the students when program planning. As previously mentioned, programs should incorporate discussions of mental health and wellness into the curriculum. As a result, the findings suggest that self-regulation and
coping skills should be included as part of Health lessons. As an alternative to traditional sport and game based activities, the use of “Community Walks” as a strategy to teach personal safety skills and point out what local communities have to offer is suggested. In terms of classroom management, the establishment of predictability in routine, open communication with the classroom teacher and an emphasis on teaching good sportsmanship and teamwork skills are recommended.

The fourth and final theme discussed dealt with professional development opportunities. The importance of Physical Education and DPA workshops was highlighted because of their potential for sharing ideas, strategies and resources with other Physical Education specialists. Also, both interviewees suggested that new teachers should have the opportunity to observe and work with a Physical Education mentor. In the next section, Chapter Five, the broad and narrow implications of the research findings are discussed. It also includes recommendations for teaching practice in Health and Physical Education as well as potential areas for future research.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact that a trained, Health and Physical Education specialist teacher has on the overall attitude towards and participation in HPE programs in elementary schools. Specifically, it was designed to examine strategies that Health and Physical Education specialists are using to promote the legitimacy of HPE as a core subject and develop physical literacy with students. After reviewing existing Health and Physical Education literature on the perceptions and teaching practices of both specialists and general classroom teachers, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers. Both teachers had been teaching for a minimum of six years and had experience both as a Health and Physical Education specialist and other teaching positions. The interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed into key themes and sub-themes related to the teaching of Health and Physical Education.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the key findings from Chapter Four. Next, I discuss the implications of the research. I include both broad implications for the greater educational community and narrow implications for my own development as a teacher-researcher. Finally, I provide some recommendations for the future teaching practice of Health and Physical Education and areas for further research.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings

Following the coding and analysis of the two teacher interviews, four main themes were identified. First, in order to promote its legitimacy as a core subject, the teachers addressed a need to change the perception of Health and Physical Education. The research indicated that Physical Education is often viewed as “play time” instead of as a subject where students learn
how to build a healthy lifestyle and life skills that will be important throughout their entire lives. The adoption of a more holistic approach to Health and Physical Education was recommended, including an increased emphasis on teaching students about mental health and wellness. In addition, both participants discussed the idea of using HPE to provide students with opportunities to take on leadership roles, such as having older students organize and run DPA for younger students. The participants also recommended that Physical Education programs should change their focus to teaching a wide variety of skills and activities in order to help students develop physical literacy and an affinity for being active.

The second major theme dealt with the impact of the specialist position on an elementary school’s Health and Physical Education program. The findings indicated that the presence of a Physical Education specialist allows for greater continuity and commonality in terms of curriculum delivery. The participants described how these factors allow them to work on proper skill progression of the fundamental movement skills at each grade level and also establish predictability in routine to help with classroom management. The presence of a specialist teacher also meant that Physical Education was regularly scheduled and was not left to the discretion of the classroom teacher. The findings also indicated that the presence of an HPE specialist positively influenced participation rates in extracurricular activities, such as intramurals and school teams. The participants discussed using Physical Education lessons to expose students to potential extra-curricular activities that their schools would be offering such as intramurals or school teams.

The third major theme in the research findings was effective teaching strategies for Health and Physical Education. When discussing best practices in Physical Education, the participants recommended first deciding what you want your program to look like (e.g. skill-based,
cooperative, competitive). When program planning, they also advocated for the inclusion of a variety of movement activities and the importance of taking into consideration the personal interests of the students. In connection with the earlier discussion of mental health and wellness, the participants recommended that self-regulation and coping skills should be included as part of Health lessons. As an alternative to traditional sport and game based activities, one of the participants described the use of “Community Walks” as a strategy to teach personal safety skills and point out what local communities have to offer. In terms of classroom management, the teachers discussed the importance of establishing predictability in routine (e.g. where to line up, what warm-up to do), maintaining regular communication with classroom teachers and placing an emphasis on teaching students good sportsmanship and teamwork skills.

The final theme focused on professional development opportunities that exist for teachers to support them in delivering the Health and Physical Education curriculum. The participants highlighted the importance of attending Physical Education and DPA workshops, citing them as opportunities for the sharing of ideas, strategies and resources with other Physical Education specialists and teachers. Both teachers enjoyed attending the school-board organized workshops and felt disappointed that they are no longer offered regularly. The opportunity to observe and work with a Health and Physical Education mentor (e.g. an experienced specialist) was also recommended by both teachers. Both argued that teacher mentorship would be beneficial. However, the issue of having to take a sick-day and book a supply was cited as a barrier.

5.2 Implications

In this section, I address the implications of my research findings. Specifically, I discuss both the broad implications for the greater educational community and the narrow implications for my own development as a teacher-researcher.
5.2.1 Broad implications

This study’s findings have several implications for the broader educational community. First, the research reinforced the idea that the subject of Health and Physical Education is perceived to be less important than other core subjects (e.g. Math and Language) by educational institutions. Despite the Ministry of Education’s (2005) DPA mandate stating that all students in Grades 1-8 should receive 20 minutes of physical activity every day, the research indicated that the amount students actually receive is nowhere close to this amount. Both participants indicated that Grades 1-4 receive an hour of Physical Education per week (2 half hour blocks) and Grades 5-6 receive only half an hour of Physical Education per week. It is expected that the classroom teachers make up the deficit with DPA, but this is not always the case. As such, the research findings suggest a need to advocate for increased instructional time for Health and Physical Education. This may require an examination of the volume of curriculum content in other subject areas.

The research findings also imply that there is a need to change the perception of Health and Physical Education in the broader parent community. Both participants discussed parents/guardians not viewing HPE to be as important as other subjects, citing rarely having them sign up for teacher interviews as evidence. One of the participants said that if you were to call a parent and tell them that their child was removed from Phys. Ed because they were misbehaving, they would probably be alright with it. However, if you were to tell a parent that their child was removed from Math, the parent would likely get angry. The participants felt that Health and Physical Education are not viewed as critical life skills in the same way that subjects such as Math and Science are. Most students will not go on to be scientists or mathematicians, but a person’s health and well-being will always be a part of their everyday life. The research
suggests a need for Physical Educators and schools to educate both students and their families about the significance of HPE to their daily lives.

Finally, the present study indicates that school boards should strongly consider hiring Health and Physical Education specialist teachers for each elementary school. Similar to the way that core French is taught, the findings imply that it would be beneficial for elementary schools to have an HPE specialist that visits each class daily and is responsible for a 20-30 minute lesson. The research literature and the participants’ responses indicate that this would allow for greater continuity in terms of curriculum delivery and age appropriate skill progression/development at each grade (Kaldor & Deutsch, 2013). In addition, it would help to reduce the potential for a classroom teacher to remove Health and Physical Education from a weekly schedule because they feel uncomfortable teaching it or feel pressure to cover other curriculum areas. If HPE is connected to a teacher’s prep time and someone else is in charge of running it, teachers will be more amenable if it is a regular part of the weekly schedule.

5.2.2 Narrow implications

The research findings also have several implications for my own development as a teacher-researcher. The literature and the participants’ responses have highlighted the need for me to expand my own perspective of Health and Physical Education beyond my own experience as a student. I recall a significant portion of the Phys. Ed. I received involving the playing of sports and other games like dodgeball and tag. The research has informed me of the importance of adopting a more substantial and holistic view of Health and Physical Education. This involves changing how I view the role of a physical educator. My focus needs to evolve beyond just simply being a provider of physical activity, to one of an educator who teaches the “Healthy Living” and “Personal Skills” that are equally important components of the HPE curriculum.
(Ministry of Education, 2015). In terms of health skills, the research has taught me about the necessity of including mental health and wellness content (e.g. such as guided meditations) into my teaching practice. One of the participants discussed her role as helping students to relieve stress and “get in a different headspace” before returning to class. I would like to adopt this philosophy in my own teaching practice.

Another implication of the study is that it has provided me with tips and strategies to inform my practice as a beginner teacher of Health and Physical Education. The research has indicated to me that I will need to include a wide variety of activities in a HPE program, not just sports and games. One strategy from the research that I would like to use in future practice is the use of “Mind Game” scavenger hunts. One of the participants described how the inclusion of both physical and mental challenges gives students the opportunity to collaborate and make use of each person’s unique strengths. The research literature and the participants also cited reaching out to other resources in the community (e.g. yoga and dance instructors) as a strategy to expose students to a greater variety of activities (Rickwood, 2015). According to the research findings, the development of physical literacy should be a main focus of HPE instruction. Therefore, as research-informed teacher, my role as a Physical Educator will involve teaching and exposing students to a variety of potential physical activity pursuits in order to help them discover what activities they enjoy and engage in regularly outside of school.

The research has also informed me about how I can use Health and Physical Education to influence students’ participation in extra-curricular physical activities. The study’s participants talked about structuring their lessons to coincide with school sports teams or recess intramurals that were being offered at the same time (e.g. planning a volleyball unit at the same time as volleyball tryouts). By adopting this mindset, I could potentially help students develop specific
skills and interests in activities that would encourage their participation in these opportunities.

The research literature and the findings also discussed the importance of considering the interests of the students. If I were to notice that a particular activity was popular with a class, then I could use this information to organize and run an intramural that I know the students would enjoy.

A final implication of this study for my development as a teacher-researcher involves the use of Health and Physical Education to educate students and their families about opportunities that exist within the local community to be physically active. The use of “Community Walks” was a strategy identified in the research findings as an alternative to traditional sports and games. The research literature and the study’s participants discussed how many students are predominantly sedentary (Rickwood, 2015). For various reasons, they do not participate in community sports or even participate in leisure activities in their neighbourhoods (e.g. walking, cycling). As a future educator, I would like to adopt the use of “Community Walks” in my own practice to teach students personal safety skills and point out playgrounds, parks or community centres where they could go and be active with friends or family members.

5.3 Recommendations

In light of this study’s key findings and implications, there are several recommendations that I would like to make to the broader educational community. In order to improve the quality and quantity of Health and Physical Education programs in elementary schools, I recommend that school boards in Ontario aim to hire a HPE specialist teacher for each elementary school and increase the HPE instructional hours students receive per week. In addition, both participants in the study discussed the importance of professional development opportunities such as attending workshops or opportunities to work with a teacher-mentor. However, the lack of regularly offered HPE workshops and the fact that it would require them to use one of their personal sick
days were cited as barriers. I recommend to Ontario school boards that they provide teachers with more frequent in-service training for HPE and adjust their policies to allow teachers to attend a greater number of PD opportunities without penalty to sick days.

At the individual school level, I recommend changes in how Daily Physical Activity is implemented. In the light of the research findings, I recommend that schools make DPA a school wide initiative. Instead of having each individual classroom teacher be responsible for DPA, the school HPE specialist could work with the older students in the school to organize activities for the younger students. According to the literature and the study’s key findings, HPE can be used as an opportunity to provide students with leadership opportunities (Randall et al., 2014). Both participants in the study had experience with this strategy in the past and identified it as a successful strategy that benefited all parties involved. To address the earlier broad implication of educating families about the importance of Health and Physical Education, I also recommend that schools establish school community based physical activity events. One participant discussed how she helps organize “Family Fitness Nights” at her school where parents/guardian can come and participate in activities with the students. If students are to develop physical literacy, then encouraging parental support through such events would be beneficial.

For individual teachers of Health and Physical Education, I recommend the adoption of a holistic view of HPE when program planning. The research indicates that teachers should include a wide variety of Health and Physical Activity related experiences. In order to address this, it is recommended that teachers assign each day of the week a different theme (e.g. “Mindfulness/Meditation Mondays”, “Walking Wednesdays”, “Fitness Fridays”). In addition, I recommend that the main focus of HPE teachers should be to develop students’ physical literacy and promote an active lifestyle. The message that should be communicated to students is that
they find and choose the activities they enjoy. Whether it is team sports such as basketball, recreational pursuits such as cycling, or working out at a gym, no one style of physical activity should be promoted over another. By supporting student autonomy with respect to activity choice, this will hopefully increase the likelihood of participation in everyday life.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

In the present study, the findings have highlighted potential areas for future research. First, future research could examine whether HPE specialists could ultimately take over the responsibility for DPA through daily Physical Education lessons and increased instructional hours. The feasibility of expanding the role of an HPE specialist in terms of budgetary and personnel issues could be investigated. If the role of an HPE specialist was expanded and the consistent instruction of self-regulation skills was included, future research could examine its potential impact on student behaviour and academic performance.

In my review of the research literature, I also came across a study that examined the profile of who is teaching Physical Education in elementary schools in Atlantic Canada (Randall et al., 2014). The study reported that PE was taught by mostly white teachers, with varying qualifications and experiences in teaching the subject (Randall et al., 2014). The authors argued that this likely has an impact on both students’ attitudes toward PE and what content is being taught (Randall et al., 2014). The demographic of Atlantic Canada is likely different from the ethnic diversity that exists within school boards in the GTA. A similar examination of the profile of HPE specialist teachers in the GTA could be an area of future research interest. Future research could look into how this impacts students’ attitudes and perceptions towards HPE in the GTA, why there may be a similar lack of diversity among Physical Education specialists and how more individuals of visible minorities could be attracted to the profession.
5.5 Concluding Comments

The subject of Health and Physical Education has been important to me both as a student and as a developing teacher-researcher. With an interest in teaching HPE in the future, this study was designed to examine the impact that a trained, specialist teacher has on HPE programs in elementary schools. The research findings indicate that school boards should strongly consider hiring HPE specialist teachers for each elementary school. On a broad scale, the research has informed me of the significant impact an HPE specialist can have in shaping the perception of HPE both within schools and in the broader parent community. Within schools, the specialist position positively impacts the quality of HPE instruction in elementary schools through improvements in program continuity and regularity of instruction. The HPE specialist can also influence students’ participation in extra-curricular physical activities and be used to educate families about opportunities that exist within the local community to be physically active.

On a personal note, the research findings also have several implications for my own development as a teacher-researcher. They have highlighted the need for me to expand my perspective of HPE and adopt a more holistic view of the subject. HPE should include a wide variety of health and physical activity experiences, not just sports and games. The research has informed me of the benefits of teaching self-regulation and coping skills and the use of alternative activities like scavenger hunts and “Community Walks”. As a result, the study has provided me with valuable tips and strategies to inform my practice as a beginner teacher of Health and Physical Education and it is hoped that it can provide the same for others.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

Date: ______________________________________

Dear ______________________________,

I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on investigating the strategies teachers are using to increase the legitimacy of Physical Education as a core subject and positively impact students’ overall attitudes towards participation in PE programs. I will also be examining the impact PE specialist teachers have on elementary PE programs. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have experience teaching physical education in elementary schools. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.
Sincerely,
Andrew Mannone
Phone Number:
Email:
Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer
Contact Info:

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 from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Andrew Mannone 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

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to investigate the strategies teachers are using to positively impact students’ overall attitudes towards participation in PE programs for the purpose of increasing the legitimacy of Physical Education as a core subject. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your professional background and experience, your perspectives and beliefs towards the quality of elementary Physical Education programs, and your own instructional practices and strategies for teaching Physical Education. We will finish with questions related to supports, challenges and next steps for teachers. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information

1. How long have you been teaching?

2. What grade do you currently teach? What grades do you have experience teaching in the past?

3. Where did you complete your teacher training? Is your background in Physical Education? If not, what is/are your teachable subjects?

4. What were your feelings towards Physical Education as a student? How do you feel about Physical Education now as a teacher? Has Physical Education in elementary school changed from when you were a student?

5. Are you currently responsible for teaching physical education or does your school have a Physical Education Specialist? (If they do have a background in Physical Education) Have you ever been a Physical Education Specialist?

Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

6. What are your thoughts on the quality of physical education students are receiving in elementary schools? Do you feel students receive adequate PE time? Do schools have sufficient equipment/resources to provide quality PE?
7. In the literature and in the media, there is concern over the increasing sedentary behaviour and declining fitness levels of children. In your teaching career, have you seen a decline in the fitness level of your students? Do you see yourself as playing a role in fighting an obesity epidemic?

8. When there are time constraints because of other curriculum demands or when students misbehave, why do you think PE is often one of the first subjects to be removed from a day’s schedule?

9. Why do you think Physical Education is not as highly valued as other more traditionally valued subjects, such as math and language? In your experience, how are schools working towards establishing the importance of physical education?

10. Often the responsibility for teaching PE is left to someone who may lack the prior training and/or interest to do so. Do you think this impacts the type of PE students receive?

11. Do you feel that having a trained, Physical Education Specialist on staff affects the students’ attitudes towards and participation in physical education programs in elementary schools? Do you prefer having a Physical Education specialist in the school?

12. Do you feel that DPA and Physical Education can positively affect student learning? Do you see a difference in students when they get opportunities to be physically active? (E.g. more focused, less stressed, etc.)

Teacher Practices

13. Among your students, you may have individuals who find PE irrelevant and unenjoyable. What strategies have you used to motivate these students and encourage their participation?

14. As you are aware, the Ministry of Education mandates that every student in grades 1-8 should be given the opportunity to take part in twenty minutes of Daily Physical Activity. What are your thoughts towards DPA? Do you feel it is important to include in your daily schedule?

15. What strategies/methods have you found to be useful for implementing DPA?

16. Are there specific teaching styles and strategies that you have found to be successful for teaching Physical Education?
17. Quality PE can help students develop in a variety of ways (e.g. building positive relationships with others and making informed, good decisions for their health). Are there any strategies that you have used to make Physical Education more than just playing “sports/games”?

18. Are there specific assessment tools and strategies that you have found to be effective particularly for Physical Education?

Supports and Challenges

19. What challenges have you faced in terms of being able to provide both DPA and quality Physical Education Instruction?

20. What supports, resources and professional development opportunities currently exist for teachers (with or without a background in PE) to help them deliver the Health and Physical Education curriculum?

21. What barriers exist for administrators to hire Physical Education Specialists?

Next Steps

22. What advice would you give to a beginning teacher who was anxious or nervous about teaching Physical Education? How would you guide them if they were interested in furthering their professional development in Physical Education?

23. Do you have any recommendations for future areas of research in Physical Education?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.