Food Allergy Management: A Look into the Inclusive Classroom

By:

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Abstract
This Master of Teaching Research Project is a qualitative research study which aims to explore: How is a small sample of elementary school teachers accommodating children with food allergies in their classrooms, and how do they mitigate the stigma, teasing, bullying and harassment that some children face as a result of their food allergy? Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with two elementary school teachers who have experience accommodating and managing food allergies in the classroom. Four main themes emerged including participants’ use of allergen-focused strategies, use of in-school and community based resources, recognition of student and parental awareness and the need for improved understanding and resources to strengthen understanding and support for students with food allergies. Implications of the research for the educational community and Ontario stakeholders, as well as personal practice are discussed. Recommendations are made for increased professional development and educational sessions for the educational community. Student voice and long-term effects of strategy use are suggested as areas for future research in food allergy management in schools.

Key Words: Food Allergy, Management, Inclusion, Students, Educators
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

In September 2003, Sabrina Shannon, a high school student died after having an anaphylactic reaction to French fries she had eaten from her school cafeteria, as a result of cross-contamination. Sabrina was one among many children and youth who attend school every day with the fear and potential risk of becoming exposed to their allergen. In Canada, 7.14% of children report having a food allergy (Soller, Ben-Shoshan, Harrington, Fragapane, Joseph, St. Pierre, Godefroy, La Vieille, Elliot, & Clarke, 2012). The rise of children with food allergies, has resulted in many schools creating “allergen-free” or “allergen-aware” policies, as a means to protect students with food allergies and anaphylaxis.

Guiding Ontario schools in facilitating the safety of children with food allergies, and anaphylaxis, was the introduction of An Act to Protect Anaphylactic Pupils: Sabrina’s Law, entitled after Sabrina Shannon. This law was implemented by the Ontario Ministry of Education to ensure the safety of all students in the Ministry’s care (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Sabrina’s Law set forth a variety of policies that school boards are required to implement. One of these policies is that school staff, primarily the teacher and principal of the child with the food allergy or anaphylaxis are to develop in conjunction with the child and their parent(s) an Individual Plan (IP) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). This IP was to be developed to establish an emergency plan for the child and provide detailed information regarding the child’s medical condition. The second policy established by the law was to ensure ongoing training for school staff, to be able to respond to allergic and/or anaphylactic reactions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). These policies, were to also be used in conjunction with school board established anaphylaxis policies as stipulated by the Ontario Ministry of Education, under
Sabrina’s Law, and, the Ontario Food and Beverage Policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). The policies set in place by the Ontario Ministry of Education and their schools boards, are important to establishing safe and supportive school environments for children with food allergies and anaphylaxis.

Having a food allergy can present a variety of both lifestyle and environmental considerations in the day-to-day management of a food allergy. Children who attend public schools are at an increased risk to the potential exposure of the allergen in which they are constantly trying to avoid, compared to children who are homeschooled. While Sabrina’s Law establishes the importance and need to create safe environments for children with food allergies, Bill 81 – Safe Schools Act sets the standard for safe learning and teaching in school, as well as, promoting the safety of people in the schools (Government of Canada, 2000). As a result, children with food allergies and anaphylaxis are entitled not only to safe environments, but safe learning as well. This means, that classroom teachers may also be responsible for ensuring that classroom learning, and therefore their practices foster, rather than hinder the learning and inclusion of children with food allergies.

1.1 Research Problem

On a policy level children with food allergies and anaphylaxis are protected, in that they are to have access to allergen safe environments and the development of IPs. Even though some children’s environments may be free of their allergen, they may not be free of the teasing, harassment, and bullying that some children face as a direct result of having a food allergy (Lieberman, Weiss, Furlong, Sicherer, & Sicherer, 2010). In turn, some children with food allergies express feelings of exclusion while at school (Pitchforth, Weaver, Willars, Wawrzkowica, Luyt, & Dixon-Woods, 2011). While Sabrina’s Law provides some degree of
protection for children with food allergies, bullying, harassment, and teasing of a child based on their food allergy is not covered. As a result, school staff, including the child’s teacher has a duty under the Ministry of Education Policy No. 144 to provide a positive school climate, where all children learn, develop, feel safe, accepted and included (Government of Ontario - Minister of Education, 2012). This policy is instrumental to understanding the important role that teachers play in fostering the inclusion of children with food allergies.

Understanding the important roles teachers play in fostering inclusion becomes even more apparent when examining the impacts of bullying on children, including social anxiety, withdrawal, low self-esteem, absenteeism, depression, loneliness and diminished academic performance (Office of the Auditor General, 2010). These impacts are also representative of those faced by some children with food allergies. Some of these children with food allergies express feelings of stigma, loneliness, exclusion and isolation (Elliot, Clarke, Fenton, Dean, & Shannon, 2015; Shemesh et al., 2013). Even with the establishment of laws and policies, experiences of bullying related to food allergies remains an important part of ensuring student safety; both physical and psychologically/emotionally by teachers and school staff.

Despite increased understanding of food allergy safety and awareness in elementary schools, research suggests that some children with food allergies are seen by their peers as having a vulnerability, leading to experiences of stigma, bullying, teasing, and harassment (Shemesh et al., 2013; Pitchforth et al., 2011; Lieberman et al., 2010).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

In view of this problem, the purpose of my research is two-fold. The first is to learn how a small sample of elementary school teachers foster the inclusion of students with food allergies
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(mitigate bullying). The second, is to learn how they accommodate children with food allergies. In turn, I aim to share these findings with the broader education community in order to further the knowledge base around accommodation and inclusion practices/strategies for children with food allergies.

1.3 Research Questions

The main question guiding this research study is: How is a small sample of elementary school teachers accommodating children with food allergies in their classrooms, and how do they mitigate the stigma, teasing, bullying, and harassment that some children face as a result of their food allergy?

In relation to the main question, the following subsidiary questions are used to provide further guidance to this study include:

- What strategies do these teachers use to foster the inclusion of children with food allergies in their classroom and to accommodate their needs?
- What resources support these teachers in accommodating students’ food allergies and in facilitating the inclusion of children with food allergies?
- What factors do teachers take into account when facilitating the inclusion of children with food allergies?
- How do teachers feel they can be better supported in accommodating food allergies and in facilitating the inclusion of children with food allergies?

This research project also aims to bring awareness to the important role that teachers play in fostering the inclusion of children with food allergies, as well as the importance in establishing teaching practices that support students beyond their educational needs.
1.4 Background of the Researcher

The topic of bullying is of particular interest to me, as I have experienced on numerous occasions various forms of bullying, teasing and harassment throughout my elementary school, and high school years. These instances were often instigated by peers and the “reasons” for the bullying varied each time they occurred. As a result, I often experienced varying degrees of anxiety and often feared for my safety both in and outside of the school environment. While the “reasons” for which I was being bullied varied, I also played witness to the experiences of a family member who experienced stigma, bullying, teasing and harassment as a direct result of having a food allergy. This form of bullying, “food allergy bullying” tends to be an experience that not many children face, unless they themselves have a diagnosed food allergy. This form of bullying is based on an invisible health condition, one that for some children based on severity means life or death.

While I have not experienced stigma, bullying, teasing, or harassment as a result of a food allergy, my understanding of this topic has been informed by my family member who has had these experiences as a result of their food allergy. It is important for me to acknowledge that the experiences of my family member are a part of their story and are not mine to share. I also note the importance of not generalizing these experiences, as not all children with food allergies encounter these issues. As a future educator, I believe it is important that I understand the various experiences of children with food allergies, as this will help to inform my practices and strategies used to facilitate the inclusion of all students.
1.5 Overview

To respond to the research questions, I will be conducting a qualitative study using purposeful sampling to interview 2 teachers about their strategies for accommodating children with food allergies in their classrooms. In Chapter 2, I review the literature in the areas of food allergy bullying, best practices and challenges for fostering the inclusion of children with food allergies. Next, in Chapter 3 I elaborate on the research design. In Chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in relation to existing research literature, and in Chapter 5, I identify the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice and for the broader educational research community. I also articulate a series of questions raised by the research findings, as well as, areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature in the areas of bullying, food allergies/anaphylaxis, and inclusion practices. More specifically, I review themes related to bullying in schools, the bullying of children with food allergies, the inclusion of these students in their classrooms and school. Next, I review research on the results of having to disclose a food allergy, in order to understand the varying effects that such a disclosure has on students with food allergies. From there, I review research on teachers’ understanding of food allergies, in order to understand the potential impact this has on their inclusion practices. Finally, I overview some of the best practices/strategies, as well as barriers to fostering the inclusion of students with food allergies.
2.1 What is Bullying? - Bullying in Schools

Bullying is defined in a variety of ways, as there are several proposed definitions of this term, each containing a different explanation of what bullying looks like, feels like and sounds like. The definitions vary depending upon the context in which the bullying occurs, as well as with whom and to whom the bullying occurs. The universally accepted definition for bullying that occurs in Ontario schools was developed and approved by the Ontario Government in the *Accepting Schools Act: Bill 13* (Government of Ontario – Minister of Education, 2012). The introduction of Bill 13, represents an amendment to the *Education Act* which addresses gaps in the previous definition to account for the ever changing dynamics of social relationships between students, access to technological tools, and the vast diversity present within schools.

Bill 13 defines bullying as “aggressive, and typically repeated behaviour by a pupil, where the behaviour is intended to have an effect, or the pupil knows it to have an effect of causing harm, fear, and distress in another individual” (Government of Ontario – Minister of Education, 2012, p. 2). This definition also takes into account that bullying by another pupil cannot only be physical, but psychological, social, academic, reputational, as well as proprietorial (Ibid). The most important consideration that is taken into account in this definition, is the real or perceived power imbalance between pupils. Bill 13 lists a variety of factors in which this may be the case, including but not limited to, strength, size, economic status, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender/identity/expression, race and disability (Ibid). Similarly, the Government of Canada – National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC) (2006) defines bullying as a relationship between a dominant and a less dominant person or group that includes; an imbalance of power, negative interactions and actions taken with intention to harm and the repeated nature of such interactions.
Most pertinent to the discussion of these definition, is that some of the cases noted in Bill 13 and the NCPC represent broad terms, that account for groups of students to which one might not think that bullying would occur. It is also of importance to reflect upon and acknowledge whether all students who may be subject to bullying are represented in this definition. For these reasons, it is important to consider that bullying does not look like, nor does it affect all students in the same way and for the same “reasons”.

2.1.1 Bullying and children with food allergies

As noted in Bill 13’s (2012) and the NCPC (2006), definitions of bullying, not every student’s experience of bullying occurs based upon the same factors/“reasons” for the bully’s behaviour. A key factor noted in the definition is the term “disability”. This term, is most likely the one in which a child with food allergies would fall under. A child with a food allergy is one who has an immune response (or in a case of anaphylaxis a serious immune response) to eating one or more specific foods (Branum & Lukacs, 2009). Examples of these food allergies are, but not limited to, milk, eggs, peanuts, and tree nuts. The reactions children have to these foods range from hives, to vomiting, to even death dependent upon the severity of the child’s allergy (Branum & Lukacs, 2009). Given these reasons, children with food allergies while their medical condition is one that is considered invisible, can be viewed as having a disability and/or chronic illness with specific daily life and environmental considerations to take into account both within, and outside the school environment.

Due to the unique considerations, and the complexity of their food allergy, many of these children are predisposed to a form of bullying known as “allergy bullying” that tends to only be experienced by these children (Shemesh et al., 2013). Several population-based studies assessing the school experiences of elementary-aged (4-13 years old) children with food allergies, and/or
parental reports of their children’s experiences, found that many children commonly experienced bullying, teasing, or harassment directly related to their food allergy (Shemesh et al., 2013; Rubes, 2015; Lieberman et al., 2010; Avery, King, Knight, & Hourihane, 2003). It is important to note that many of the studies mentioned used survey and/or interviews that were completed by children. However, in the case in which a child was deemed to be too young to partake, parental reports were used. As a result, one may call into question the authenticity and reliability of such parental reports as they share the experiences/stories of their child, rather than obtaining reports directly from the child whose experience is pertinent to the study. These reports remain important to understanding the experiences of children with food allergies in the school environment, though it remains imperative to reflect upon whose voices are sharing the experiences.

These experiences denote the singling out of children based upon an unobservable medical condition, making some children with food allergies vulnerable to allergy bullying. In this view, there is a social vulnerability associated with a food allergy and the experiences of bullying, teasing, or harassment may also be repetitive, varying in the degree of severity in which they occur (Russell & Huber, 2013; Lieberman et al., 2010; Van Cleave & Davis, 2006). With such a social vulnerability, children with food allergies may be subject to experiencing allergy bullying in school, which may come directly from their peers, as well as school staff. The food allergy-related bullying experienced in the school setting tends to come from three main sources, the children’s peers, teachers and other school staff (Russell & Huber, 2013; Shemesh et al., 2013; Lieberman et al., 2010). This leads some children with food allergies to experience food allergy-related bullying at the hands of their peers, but also at the hands of those they trust,
respect and the ones who are to provide them with safe and supportive environments; their teachers.

Although allergy bullying has been found to come from mainly three sources within the school environment, the majority (80%) of allergy bullying that occurs is usually perpetrated by peers/classmates (Shemesh et al., 2013; Lieberman et al., 2010). The food allergy bullying that some children have reported experiencing most frequently occurs in two forms, physical and/or verbal. When physical bullying is experienced children with food allergies are often threatened with their allergen, by having it smeared/thrown/waved at them, being forced to touch it, and/or having their lunch and snacks contaminated with their allergen (Russell & Huber, 2013; Shemesh et al., 2013; Lieberman et al., 2010; Avery et al., 2003).

The physical bullying that some children experience, is often intertwined with verbal bullying in the form of threats. Children with food allergies may also experience teasing and taunts by their peers, often related to having a food allergy (difference) and being teased out of resent (Thelen & Cameron, 2012; Lieberman et al., 2010). Being teased out of resent, may occur as a result of a classroom, or school-wide policies that ban an allergen from being brought to school. As a result, other children may tease a child with a food allergy for not being able to bring an allergen to school. These results call into question the practices occurring in the classroom in relation to safety, and the inclusion of all students, as well as the level of knowledge and understanding of the other children (peers), teachers and school staff. The effects that these types of bullying have on children who experience them should not be undermined. Many children with food allergies report feelings of isolation, sadness, embarrassment and nervousness (Lieberman et al., 2010; Muraro, Clark, Beyer, Borrego, Borres, Lodrup-Carlsen, Carrer, Mazon, Rance, Valovirta, Wickman, & Zanchetti, 2010; Hay, Harper, & Moore, 2006).
These feelings and emotional states have the potential to create a discourse in the classroom of an unsafe and unsupportive environment. Therefore, it is paramount to continuously discern the implications that certain classroom practices and school policies have on the children who makeup one’s classroom and school.

### 2.1.2 The stigma of disclosing food allergies

Children with food allergies have a medical condition that is invisible to others. As a result, children and their parents/guardians must disclose their child’s food allergy to school staff, including the child’s teacher, in order to facilitate keeping that child safe from their allergen. However, this process can be quite complex and overwhelming. As previously mentioned, some children experience bullying that is directly related to their food allergy. As some researchers argue, this bullying occurs simply for the fact that these children have to disclose their allergy to begin with (Elliot et al., 2015; Pitchforth et al., 2011). Elliot et al. (2015), and Pitchforth et al. (2011) have found through conducting in-depth interviews with parents and children, that the interviewees in their studies often experienced stigma related to disclosing their food allergy to school staff.

These studies raise findings that many of the other studies have not. It is often accepted as fact that if a child has a food allergy the school must be informed in order to ensure the safety of that student (i.e. Sabrina’s Law). However, the parents and children in the Elliot et al. (2015), and Pitchforth et al. (2011) studies raise an important consideration, in that having to make their child’s invisible health condition known, they and their children are often met with public scrutiny and discrimination, by other parents, school staff and children who did not believe food allergies to be a real condition. Particularly in the Pitchforth et al. (2011) study, parents talked about the challenge of having to disclose their child’s food allergy. Since their child’s food
allergy was invisible, their child often passed too easily as “normal”, so when claims were made for this “special vulnerability” parents felt that this exposed them and their child to stigma and feelings of discomfort (Pitchforth et al., 2011). Parents also discussed how some of the practices and policies implemented by teachers and school staff to ensure the safety of their child resulted in some children feeling stigmatized. Examples provided by parents included having their child removed from the classroom when an activity/lesson involved the child’s allergen and posting the photos of children with food allergies in view of the whole school (Elliot et al., 2015). These findings suggest the importance in examining the policies and practices teachers and school staff use in their classrooms and schools, and reflecting on the implications that they may have for various students.

The children who were interviewed in these two studies discussed in great detail feelings of stigma. The main type of stigma these children reported in relation to their allergies was enacted stigma (i.e. done onto them by others), which included bullying, discrimination, physical threats/harm (Elliot et al., 2015; Pitchforth et al., 2011). They also discussed feelings of felt stigma, including feeling different and worrying about fitting in (Elliot et al., 2015; Pitchforth et al., 2011). These experiences of stigma at the hands of their peers, build upon the previous studies discussed (Shemesh et al., 2013; Rubes, 2015; Lieberman et al., 2010; Avery et al., 2003), in which many children with food allergies experienced bullying directly related to their food allergy and as a result may experience feelings of being worried and embarrassed. Knowing that these are the experiences of many children with food allergies, it is important that educators and school staff actively and frequently engage in reflexivity with their policies and practices within both the classroom and school environment. We must ask ourselves, are we fostering or hindering the inclusion of students with food allergies?
2.1.3 The impact of food allergy management and bullying at school

Being a child with a food allergy is often associated with being bullied as a result of it, and potentially experiencing stigma in having to disclose the allergy. Nonetheless, children may also experience bullying and varying emotional states in having to manage their food allergy at school. In having to manage their food allergy at school, some children face a variety of challenges such as, deciding if a school field trip is safe to participate in, or whether they can eat certain foods during classroom celebrations (i.e. birthday cake, potluck food), and simply managing the fear of eating their allergen at school (Bacal, 2013; Mandell, Curtis, Gold, & Hardie, 2005; Avery et al., 2003). Creating social relationships with peers may already be a daunting experience for many children, having to navigate their safety within those relationships and having to deal with potential bullying, may bring forth emotional states that impact the child’s day-to-day life. Some of the emotional states noted in, in-depth interviews, included anxiety, depression and stress, which are most often related to the emotional burdens that some children feel in trying to manage their safety, not being accepted by their peers, socially isolated and feeling like they are a burden in the classroom due to their allergy (Portnoy & Shroba, 2014; Russell & Huber, 2013; Shemesh et al., 2013; Cummings, Knibb, King, & Lucas, 2010b).

The findings from these studies raise an important consideration. It is not only important to factor in the potential impact of a child having to disclose their food allergy (Elliot et al., 2015; Pitchforth et al., 2011), but it must also be taken into account how stressful it may be as a child to manage a food allergy and the emotional state that is produced when a child feels unsafe in their classroom and/or school. As educators, it is important to support students in managing their food allergy, so they do not feel alone in this process, in turn, establishing a climate where both the students (peers) and classroom teacher remove the sentiment of a child with a food
allergy as “being a burden”. The classroom environment is instrumental to lessening the psychosocial and emotional impact that a restrictive environment could have for a child with a food allergy (i.e. barriers to learning, conflicts between peers) (Portnoy & Shroba, 2014).

Bullying can bring forth a variety of emotional states for any child. It is often thought that the longer the bullying goes on, the greater the impact it has on a person. However, bullying of any duration in length can affect a child’s quality of life (Annunziato, Rubes, Ambrose, Mullarkey, Shemesh, & Sicherer, 2014; Cummings, Knibb, Erlewyn-Lajeunesse, King, & Roberts, 2010a). Longitudinal studies by Annunziato et al. (2014), and Cummings et al. (2010a), compared children with food allergies to their healthy peers and found that the children in their studies who have food allergies had poorer overall emotional, social and psychosocial quality of life than their healthy peers. However, this is not to say that all children with food allergies have lower qualities of life. Contrary to those studies, Valentine and Knibb (2011) compared children with food allergies to their healthy peers and found that the children with food allergies in their study had similar or higher quality of life scores than their healthy peers. Therefore, it is plausible to say that some children with food allergies experience a lower quality of life than their healthy peers, but this is not the case for all children with food allergies. The experiences of children with food allergies are complex and multifaceted. In turn, it is important to recognize that a shared food allergy does not denote the same or similar experience. In order to best support children with food allergies, it is critical to determine what strategies and practices educators can use to help mitigate the bullying experienced by some children and how to effectively reduce the stress that may be experienced as a result of managing their food allergy.
2.2 Fostering the Inclusion of Children with Food Allergies

Fostering the inclusion of children with food allergies can seem quite overwhelming and daunting. A food allergy is multifaceted: impacts of their peers on their emotional states (Shemesh et al., 2013; Lieberman et al., 2010), experiences in the school and classroom (Russell & Huber, 2013; Hay et al., 2006), and the stigma of disclosing a food allergy (Elliot et al., 2015; Pitchforth et al., 2011). Despite this, as an educator the need and desire to foster the inclusion of our students should remain at the forefront of our practices. Inclusion in relation to children with food allergies, takes on a comprehensive approach to food allergy management (Muraro et al., 2010). This refers to both classroom and school wide initiatives to promote equity among children with food allergies and their peers. It is suggested that this inclusion process may begin with fostering a school-wide tone of empathy, kindness and compassion, in order to build community (Russell & Huber, 2013; Thelen & Cameron, 2012). Several best practices and challenges are noted and will be discussed in how to foster the inclusion of children with food allergies in both the classroom and school environment.

2.2.1 Best practices and strategies for fostering inclusion

Bullying, teasing, or harassment can be indicative of some of the experiences that children with food allergies may face (Shemesh et al., 2013; Lieberman et al., 2010). Several strategies and best practices are noted for fostering the inclusion of children with food allergies. Some of these strategies and best practices as suggested by the literature (researchers) are practical suggestions that teachers can easily implement in their classrooms. Education is noted as the key to helping to minimize the negative experiences that children with food allergies may face. Muñoz-Furlong (2004) suggests that educating students without food allergies can help to minimize the bullying that may occur. As a teacher, through this process you may be able to help
to positively promote understanding and decreases in bullying behaviours (Pistiner & Lee, 2012). In fostering understanding, it is of immense importance to not create a dichotomy between children with and without food allergies (us versus them) or a singling out/targeting of children with food allergies, but rather to foster a whole group (community) understanding.

The main education strategy suggested is to use literacy to foster understanding, such as using children’s picture books about food allergies to talk to other children about what a food allergy is and build understanding (e.g. *The Peanut-Free Café* by Gloria Koster) (Russell & Huber, 2013; Thelen & Cameron, 2012). Doing this form of community building and education about food allergies can be extremely important to developing understanding and explaining the importance of everyone feeling included (Thelen & Cameron, 2012). Reading books to students, creating discussions and lessons around food allergies, also gives students the tools and opportunities to inquire about a topic that may be unfamiliar to them and develop ways in which they can make sure their peers are included and feel safe in their classroom and school. Allergy awareness lessons can also be beneficial to promoting positive social interactions among students, while at the same time emphasizing and discussing the importance in acceptance in order to help prevent misunderstandings and ridicule (Hay et al., 2006). While it is important as an educator to use such lessons to foster inclusion and understanding, it is also beneficial to recognize the ways in which the lessons we already conduct may hinder the inclusion of students with food allergies. If a lesson or field trip is to include food, make sure that the allergen is not present in any of the food being used and if a substitution is to be used, it should be used for the whole class, so as to not single out the child with the food allergy (Hay et al., 2006). In doing so, the child with a food allergy is able to participate to the same degree as their peers, ensuring safety, reducing stress and anxiety that tends to be associated with their allergen being present.
Another strategy suggested to foster the inclusion of children with food allergies, is to empower the child with the food allergy. The idea of empowering the child with the food allergy is to essentially “bully-proof” them, by teaching them self-advocacy, role-playing potential scenarios they may encounter and how to identify and report bullying (Russell & Huber, 2013). While this is suggested as a practice/strategy, it does bring into question where the onus lies in relation to reducing/preventing bullying. Is it the responsibility of the child with the food allergy or that of the teacher and parents of the other children to foster and develop understanding for differences? It is important that in using such a strategy that the child with the food allergy is not further “victimized” by having the onus placed on them for preventing the bullying they may encounter, or feel singled out and/or stigmatized if they are the only one experiencing “bully-proofing”.

The final best practice strategy noted throughout the literature is education for teachers and school staff. This education consists of food allergy training on the identification and prevention of food allergy-related bullying and inclusion best practices (Russell & Huber, 2013; Cummings et al., 2010a; Leo & Clark, 2007). This education can include where possible, workshops, online modules and other professional development opportunities. It is also quite important that teachers and school staff include the families of the child with the food allergy in all planning and decisions that affect their child (Leo & Clark, 2007). Families of children with food allergies can also provide a wealth of knowledge about their child’s food allergies and may be able to provide effective strategies for building understanding. Many of the practices and strategies suggested within the literature are important to fostering inclusion and understanding and may provide a considerable way to help minimize the bullying of children with food allergies. In spite of these suggestions, it still remains important to discern what strategies and
practices teachers find to be most effective and are using to foster the inclusion of children with food allergies.

### 2.2.2 Challenges and barriers to fostering inclusion

Education for both students and school staff was noted in the literature as an important factor in fostering the inclusion of children with food allergies (Russell & Huber, 2013; Cummings et al., 2010a; Leo & Clark, 2007). However, research has noted that a key challenge to fostering inclusion is the lack of education around food allergies. Studies conducted with teachers and school staff through surveys and interviews have found that some teachers and school staff are not well informed/have limited knowledge of food allergies (Polloni, Lazzarotto, Toniolo, Ducolin, & Muraro, 2013; Ercan, Ozen, Karatepe, Berber, & Cengizlier, 2012). The challenge of some teachers and school staff not having sufficient knowledge of food allergies, is said to be overcome through education (i.e. workshops). Though this is an important point, we must also consider what education around food allergies is available to teachers and whether the schools in which they work and the boards they work for highly prioritize education about food allergies. When education such as workshops are available to teachers there does tend to be an increase in knowledge and concern for ensuring the safety and psychological well-being of children with food allergies (Polloni et al., 2013).

Lack of teacher and school staff education is not the only challenge acknowledged throughout the literature. In Russell and Huber’s (2013) interviews of elementary school teachers, they identified some challenges they felt they faced in trying to foster the inclusion of students with food allergies. The first of these challenges was they felt like they lacked a sense of control over the school environment (Russell & Huber, 2013). The teachers in Russell and Huber’s (2013) study felt that certain environmental considerations were out of their control,
such as trying to implement policies in their classrooms to ensure student safety, that were not supported on a school-wide level. The second challenge that teachers identified in the study was that if they were to use certain strategies in their classrooms, they wanted the child with the food allergy’s clinic team to support their strategies (Russell & Huber, 2013). Teacher’s in this study felt that if a child with a food allergy’s clinic team were to “back-up” the strategies they used in the classroom, this would give more credit to their strategies and in turn, would be better supported by school staff (Russell & Huber, 2013). These challenges bring forth the immense importance of having other school staff, administration and families support and champion your inclusion practices. Though it still remains important even if the support is lacking to foster inclusion as much as possible.

School-wide initiated policies may also present specific challenges and barriers to facilitating inclusion. Within the last several years, several policies have been implemented in schools to try to ensure the safety of children with food allergies. These include creating “allergen-free” schools (e.g. nut free school) or “allergen aware” schools. In doing so, certain allergens have been banned from entering schools, as the number of children with food allergies rises. Arguments have been made against such bans and have been meet with much controversy. It has been argued that in declaring schools to be “allergen free”, such as a nut-free school, you create conflict among families (Thelen & Cameron, 2012; Leo & Clark, 2007). These bans are said to be difficult for families whose child does not have an allergy and may also create a false sense of security for the children that do, while at the same time infringing on the personal rights of other children (Thelen & Cameron, 2012; Leo & Clark, 2007). The exclusion argument tends to be used by some parents of children without food allergies, who feel that not being able to
bring certain foods to school is unfair to their child. This can make facilitating and ensuring the inclusion of students with food allergies especially hard for teachers and school staff.

Though various studies have identified a wide range of challenges and barriers to teachers fostering the inclusion of children with food allergies, research in this area remains limited. What remains even more limited is the voices of teachers within the research. Most of the research focuses on what teachers are lacking (i.e. knowledge), their challenges, or it suggests what teachers could be doing better. Research has yet to look to the voices of teachers, to utilize their knowledge, to understand how and what they are doing to facilitate the inclusion of children with food allergies. The knowledge and experiences of these teachers are important to further establishing how we can continue to best foster the inclusion of children with food allergies.

### 2.3 Conclusion

In this literature review I examined the research related to bullying, children with food allergies and inclusion practices/strategies. This review focused on the extent to which research has focused on the experiences of children with food allergies in school, the stigma associated with having to disclosing a food allergy and the challenges faced in developing classroom and school-wide inclusion. It also raises questions about how best to minimize the bullying, teasing or harassment children with food allergies may face, as a direct result of having a food allergy and points to the need for further research to determine what practices and strategies teachers use to build understanding, bring awareness to food allergies and foster the inclusion of their students.
In light of this, the purpose of my research is to learn how elementary school teachers foster the inclusion of (mitigate bullying) and accommodate children with food allergies. I hope to contribute to the existing research focused on teachers’ knowledge of inclusion, and accommodation practices/strategies for children with food allergies. This research study uses semi-structured interviews with elementary school educators (JK- Gr.6) in Ontario, Canada. The study addresses how teachers are accommodating, and mitigating the bullying that some children face as a result of their food allergy and what strategies, practices, and resources they use to support them in this process. Through gaining insight from educators about their inclusion practices and strategies, I hope to add further understanding to the inclusion practices and process for children with food allergies. In turn, informing both pre-service and in-service teacher education on food allergy inclusion in schools.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review the research methodology, identify the research procedures and data collection instruments. I then further elaborate on participant sampling and recruitment. Next, I explain the data analysis procedures and review the ethical procedures/considerations pertinent to my study. I also identify a range of methodological limitations using qualitative research, but also speak to the strengths of the methodology. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of key methodological decisions and my rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions.
3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach, including an in-depth literature review examining current research in the field, as well as semi-structured interviews with two teachers, currently teaching in Ontario. The qualitative approach to research is characterized by the search for meaning and understanding of a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). In turn, this allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding, through which there is an attempt to make sense of, or interpret said phenomena through the lens of those participating in the research (Creswell, 2007; Jones, 1995). As a result of conducting qualitative research, a wealth of descriptive data is produced. The descriptive data is important to having a clearer picture of the phenomenon at hand. The purpose of qualitative research is to generate knowledge in regards to common themes and patterns prevalent within the human experience either through talk, observation, or documentation (Throne, 2000; Kitto, Chester, & Grbich, 2008).

Given my research purpose and questions which is to look at the lived experiences of teachers, having used a qualitative research study was appropriate to discern through “talk” the thoughts, feelings and meanings to which the participants viewed the phenomena. Qualitative research not only allows researchers to access the thoughts and feelings of research participants, but to strive for depth of understanding of the complex meaning in which participants ascribe to their experiences (Merriam, 2002; Sutton & Austin, 2015). My research looked to delve into the lived experiences of teachers who accommodate and foster the inclusion of students with food allergies. Employing a qualitative research study provides the opportunity to speak directly to those who are connected to and concerned with the phenomena. Speaking to teachers who are directly connected to and concerned with the well-being of students with food allergies has
provided a more detailed understanding of a seldom explored issue. Using a qualitative method through interviewing, gives participants a stake in the research at hand; it provides the opportunity to empower individuals, have their voices heard and share their stories (Creswell, 2007). As a result, my research looked to empower the often silenced voices of teachers in food allergy accommodating and bullying research.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Talk (interviews), observation and documentation provides the means in which to conduct qualitative studies (Kitto, Chester, & Grbich, 2008). The primary instrument for data collection employed in this study is the semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B). Semi-structured interview protocol contains a mix of more and less structured questions. The questions are prepared prior to the interview to act as a guide in facilitating the conversation around the phenomena. Probing questions are also prepared to be used to elicit more elaborate responses (Qu & Dumay, 2011). As questions are asked of the interviewee, the interviewer records what is being said often through audio or video recording (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Given the parameters of this research study only an audio recording of the interview was used.

Semi-structured interview protocol allows for face-to-face interviews in which the researcher is able to explore the research phenomena and through this process the interviewee helps in clarifying a less well understood problem, situation or context (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The evident benefits of a flexible interview grants the researcher access to explore the research phenomena from a new lens. By using a semi-structured interview, I could explore my research problem from the lens of teachers connected to and committed to students with food allergies; their lived experiences lead to more breadth and depth of understanding on this topic. However, semi-structured interviews also allow participants space to provide their own responses, on their
own terms and in their own way (Qu & Dumay, 2011). This speaks to the flexibility and accessibility of using semi-structured interviews. Since semi-structured interviews are more flexible in nature than a structured interview, I was able to arrange my research protocol directly around my main research and related research questions. I was able to delve into teacher’s beliefs/understanding of students with food allergies and how they are able to accommodate and foster the inclusion of students with food allergies. While at the same time there was room left for teachers to elaborate and respond in a way that is authentic to their lived experiences.

3.3 Participants

Here I review the sampling criteria I have established for participant recruitment, as well as review the possible avenues for recruiting teachers. I have also included a section in which I introduce each participant through a participant biography.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The following criteria was applied in the selection process of teacher participants.

Criteria #1: At the time of the research, teachers will teaching at the Elementary level (Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6) in Ontario, Canada.

Teachers must be currently teaching, as they will be able to provide the most current and relevant experiences and knowledge in the field. Teachers must be teaching in Ontario, Canada as they will be knowledgeable about Sabrina’s Law (important to the topic of children with food allergies) and Ontario Ministry of Education regulations regarding safe schools, and specific regulations and protocol concerning students with food allergies. This knowledge and awareness is important to understanding teacher’s beliefs and practices regarding students with food allergies in the Ontario context.
Criteria #2: Teachers have had experience teaching and accommodating a student with a food allergy. Teachers need to have experience working with a student with food allergies in their classroom, to be able to speak to how they foster the inclusion of students with food allergies and how they make accommodations for these students. This provides direct-lived experiences with students with food allergies.

Criteria #3: Teachers have had a minimum of 5 years of experience working in an elementary school setting (Kindergarten to Grade 6). Teachers need to have sufficient experience working in the elementary school setting to ensure that they have had a variety of experiences and knowledge of the school system and policies. This criterion is also important to recruiting teachers who have worked with a primary/junior population of students similarly to the population of students researched in relevant studies looking at students with food allergies.

Criteria #4: Teachers have demonstrated a commitment and/or leadership in the area of inclusion, and accommodation for children with food allergies. Showing a commitment and/or leadership in this area demonstrates that teachers are not only passionate about this topic, but also knowledgeable. This may be in the form of professional development via workshops and/or courses, advocacy, anaphylaxis or allergy training, centered on food allergies, and inclusion.
3.3.2 Participant recruitment

To recruit participants for this research study purposeful/purposive sampling and convenience sampling was used. Purposeful/purposive sampling is a sampling method used to select participants for a study, because they are able to directly speak to and inform one’s understanding of the research problem and phenomenon in the study (Horsburgh, 2003; Creswell, 2007). Having applied purposeful/purposive sampling, I was able to specifically recruit teachers who had the lived experience needed to speak to the strategies and resources used to facilitate and accommodate students with food allergies. This ensured that the teachers recruited have current knowledge on this phenomenon. Convenience sampling was also used to recruit teacher participants for this study. Convenience sampling allows researchers to draw on their existing network, to recruit participants with ease of access and proximity (Creswell, 2007). Having applied convenience sampling to this study, I was able to access a large community of teacher colleagues, mentor teachers, existing contacts and networks to recruit participants with ease of access. As well as, contacting teacher associations and school boards.

Besides drawing on teacher colleagues, mentors and existing contacts, I contacted organizations such as Food Allergy Canada who had a large database in which I was able to draw participants from. When I contacted these associations and organizations, I provided them with the participant criteria and asked that my information was provided to teachers who they feel best fulfill the established criteria. I provided my information to these individuals/organizations, as opposed to seeking the contact information of people who these individuals/organization think may be suitable. This was done in order to ensure that teachers were volunteering to participate and do not feel pressured and/or obligated to participate.
3.3.3 Participant biographies

Kristen: Kristen has a Bachelor of Arts in History and Psychology, as well as a Bachelor of Education. Kristen has been teaching children and/or youth for the past 18 years. Currently, Kristen is the teacher of a Grade 2 classroom teaching all core subjects. Kristen has previously taught Grades 2-6. Kristen also fulfills other roles including being the primary lead teacher, coaching various sports and leads various committees. Kristen currently teaches at a school of 420 students with mixed demographics and program priorities of math, and literacy. Over her career, Kristen has taught dozens of students with food allergies and her son is also allergic to peanuts.

Sally: Sally has a Bachelor of Arts in French and English Literature. Sally has been teaching children and/or youth for the last 22 years. Currently, Sally teaches Kindergarten to Grade 6 French Immersion. Sally has previously taught Core French and Extended French for Grades1-8. Sally currently teaches in a school with mixed demographics, with many newcomer families and ELL students. Sally has taught countless students with food allergies and has a grandson who is anaphylactic to peanuts, nuts and gluten.

3.4 Data Analysis

Due to the qualitative nature of the study and the semi-structured interviews employed, the data analysis process began by transcribing the interviews verbatim. This process ensures the preparation, and organization of the data, leading to increased ease in which to interpret it (Creswell, 2007; Sutton & Austin, 2015). After the process of transcribing the interviews, each transcript was thoroughly coded. Coding refers to the identification of similarities and differences revealed through participant responses as interpreted by the researcher (Sutton &
This process, essentially reduces data into themes that interpret/make sense of the data relevant to the research questions (Creswell, 2007; Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007; Sutton & Austin, 2015). Using coding in the analysis of the interviews was essential to establishing the similarities and differences between the teacher’s narratives; to see where they converge and diverge as relevant to the research questions. Both processes were immensely significant to the formation of the research findings.

During my analysis of the data, I drew on coding and thematic analysis to synthesize the findings of the data in relation to my research questions. Once this process was complete themes were synthesized. I also spoke to the “null data”; what teacher participants did not speak to. This was important in understanding the silences in teacher participant narratives. Once the themes were established, the importance of these themes (findings) in relation to the existing research reviewed was discussed.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

According to Sutton & Austin, the primary responsibility of the researcher is to safeguard participants and their data (2015). For these reasons, several ethical review procedures were implemented to ensure this. Each participant was provided with a consent letter (Appendix A), which gave an overview of the study, ethical implications and expectations of participants. Participants than signed the letter to ensure they understood the scope of participation and gave their consent to be interviewed and audio-recorded. This was an important safeguard in establishing informed consent (Carr, 1994). Another safeguard in place was to ensure the confidentiality of participants. Participant’s identities remain confidential and all identifying markers related to their school and students have been excluded. Participants were also assigned a pseudonym to further ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The raw data obtained from
participants was only accessible to myself and my course instructor, Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. The data, including the audio recording is to be kept on a password protected computer for up to 5 years, before it is destroyed. As well, any conflicts of interest (if any) were addressed.

There were minimal risks associated with participation in this study. Given the topic, it was possible that certain questions could have elicited an emotional response and/or memory. This may have occurred if the participant has a food allergy, and/or has a child, and/or family member with a food allergy, and/or has experienced and/or witnessed food allergy bullying. To minimize this risk I had spoken to the participants prior to the interview to readdress the minimal risk and topics the research questions addressed. I also reassured participants throughout the interview that they had the right to refrain from answering any questions and their right to withdraw from participation at any point. Lastly, participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts in order to clarify or retract any statements made before I conducted the data analysis.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Utilizing a qualitative method to conduct research, entails a variety of limitations and strengths. The most prominent drawback of this study was the limitation of only being able to interview 2-3 educators. In turn, the small sample of teachers interviewed were able to inform the research topic, but their experiences are not generalizable to the broader population (Carr, 1994). While this is a limitation, this was also a strength in that due to the small sample the data collected is more in-depth and complex. Due to the scope of the ethical review, this study was limited to conducting semi-structured interviews. As a result, this study lacked the benefit of a mixed methods study in incorporating quantitative methods. Even though I was unable to incorporate a quantitative method, it is important to acknowledge the importance of such in research; in aiming to establish a relationship between variables under investigation (Carr, 1994).
Furthermore, the breadth of who was considered a participant/interviewee was likewise another limitation. Educators could only be interviewed, which included adults working in different contexts in an educator’s role. However, parents and students could not be interviewed due to the ethical parameters that had been preapproved for this study. Though these particular participants could not be interviewed, it is imperative to recognize that these participants would still have been important to discerning the lived experiences of children/youth who have food allergies and are directly impacted by food allergy bullying.

While there were several limitations to this study, there are also many strengths which outweigh them. As previously mentioned, there was a small sample of participants in this study, and as a direct result the researcher is able to gain a wealth of data from participants and is able to explore any unusual or unanticipated responses from participants (Merriam, 2002; Sutton & Austin, 2015). Thus, since the data is in-depth I had the benefit of hearing teachers lived experiences in detail. It allowed participants to raise issues and topics important to them and their lived experiences, which I may not have thought to include. In much of the research I reviewed, teacher’s voices were silenced; when teachers were discussed it was most often in relation to what they were doing wrong and could be doing better. This study recruited only teacher participants and gave them the opportunity to speak to what matters most to them; validating their voices and experiences. It also provided teachers an opportunity to engage in reflexivity, reflecting on their lived experiences, practices and challenges.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained and described the research procedures used. I began by discussing what qualitative research is, its importance, and appropriateness to understanding the lived experiences of teachers in relation to children with food allergies. I then detailed the
instruments of data collection; semi-structured interview protocol, in order to demonstrate the importance in using a protocol that allowed for flexibility in questioning and for further probing of participant experiences. Furthermore, I identified the sampling criteria and rationale for participant recruitment, along with sampling strategies, in order to make the most out of using convenience and purposeful sampling in a manner that allowed me to reach participants who can speak to food allergy accommodation and bullying first hand. I also provided brief participant biographies that provide readers with background knowledge of those who were selected for the study. Next, I delineated the path and process in which the data is analyzed through transcription, to coding and finally theming in order to establish patterns from, and between participants relevant to the research purpose. The ethical review procedures were also addressed to establish how participants and their data were safeguarded, as well as ethical issues related to consent, risk, participation, data storage, and right to withdraw in order to ensure that participants in the study remained at the forefront of the researcher’s study in order to have ensured their confidentiality. Finally, I discussed the methodological limitations of the study, such as a small sample of participants and only being able to interview educators. I also highlighted some of the strengths, such as being able to hear directly from teachers, validating their voices and lived experiences. These were important to addressing the strengths, weaknesses and areas of improvement for present and future research surrounding this topic. Next, in Chapter 4, I report the findings of the research.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present and discuss my findings based on the data collected from two-semi-structured interviews with educators who have experience with food allergy management in
school settings. Throughout the analysis, I remained cognizant of my research question: How is a small sample of elementary school teachers accommodating children with food allergies in their classrooms, and how do they mitigate the stigma, teasing, bullying and harassment that some children face because of their food allergy, while examining the lived experiences and practices of the participants. The findings are organized into four main themes:

1. Participants indicated that the key to accommodating students with food allergies is the use of various allergen-focused strategies to build a safe and supportive community,
2. Participants noted the use of in-school and community based resources as important avenues in seeking information to facilitate food allergy awareness and accommodations,
3. Participants recognized student and parental awareness as important factors to consider when developing awareness and understanding of the complexities of food allergies and supporting students with food allergies, and
4. Participants indicated that there is a need for improved understanding and resources in order to strengthen understanding and support for students with food allergies.

These themes are presented with the related subthemes following. For each theme, I will describe it, present participant’s voices and share the significance of each theme in relation to the existing research. Finally, I summarize the key findings and contributions to existing literature.

4.1 Participants Indicated that the Key to Accommodating Students with Food Allergies is the Use of Various Allergen-focused Strategies to Build a Safe and Supportive Community

Both participants addressed the need to accommodate students with food allergies in the classroom and broader school community. The importance in this comes from the need to build a safe and supportive community for students with food allergies. Specifically, participants indicated that the key to the accommodations was using various allergen-focused strategies. To
do this, they adopted various allergen-focused strategies including upholding the rights of the students with food allergies, as well as maintaining an allergen-aware environment where students with food allergies feel safe and supported. Furthermore, both participants explained the importance of frequent communication as necessary in broadening awareness and understanding around the need for accommodations.

4.1.1 Participants indicated an essential strategy in accommodating students with food allergies is upholding the rights of these students

Both participants acknowledged the importance of fostering safe and supportive environments for students with food allergies. They pointed directly to the need to ensure safety in the classroom as a primary accommodation. To ensure student safety in the classroom, both participants acknowledged the importance of upholding the rights of students with food allergies as a necessary step to accommodation. To facilitate them in this process, both participants noted that students with food allergies have a right to a safe environment, to be in the classroom and to not be singled out because of their allergy. Further, both participants noted that in upholding these rights, others who infringed upon the rights of students with food allergies were the ones to be removed from the classroom, or have their food taken away. As Sally stated, “they have a right to be in the classroom so the one who brought the food they’re not supposed to, they’re the ones we take out of the class, and they will go to the office.” Similarly, Kristen also spoke to the importance of upholding rights. She stated,

and if someone brings in a snack I take it away and put it in a sealed bag, they get it at the end of the day with a note to their parents saying ‘remember no peanut or nut products you are endangering [students lives]."
In upholding the rights of students with food allergies, it is understandable that certain actions must be taken to create safe environments. Given that many food allergies can be life-threatening, the removal of unsafe food products is an imperative measure. The importance in upholding the rights of students with food allergies is a necessary step in establishing an environment of safety and security. This approach to unsafe food removal is noted as a key to creating the least restrictive environment for students with food allergies, as well as establishing an environment where students with food allergies do not feel singled out (Portnoy & Shroba, 2014; Hay et al., 2006). To best accommodate students with food allergies in the classroom, it is crucial that educators uphold the rights of these students to ensure their overall well-being in the classroom.

4.1.2 Participants indicated an essential strategy in accommodating students with food allergies is maintaining an allergen-aware environment

Creating an environment of safety and security for students with food allergies is an essential part of viewing and caring for students beyond the academics. In doing so, educators view the classroom and school environment as integral to this holistic endeavor. Both participants indicated that maintaining an allergen-aware environment is a vital strategy to accommodating these students. In addition to removing unsafe food products from the classroom, both participants also indicated that an important part in maintaining an allergen-aware environment is to have the teacher review food products that students bring in their lunches and those brought for celebrations, as well as establishing classroom rules and norms regarding food sharing.

Sally acknowledged the importance of establishing classroom rules and norms regarding food sharing. She noted, “Again the rules apply, like, all the time you’re sitting at your desk,
everybody is eating, you know? You’re not supposed to share, okay? We all know that.”

Limiting the sharing of food is used to not only maintain an allergen-aware environment, but to protect the safety and well-being of the students. Kristen shared that she takes a direct role in reviewing food products, stating, “parents do bring in treats and it’s always packaged and they need to show me the sign the peanut and nut free sign, and then it’s good to go.” Both participants acknowledged that in maintaining an allergen-aware environment, it is essential that teachers, students and parents take on responsibility for ensuring that products brought into the classroom and school are safe and allergen-free. This is important in considering how stressful it can be for children to manage their food allergies at school and the emotional state that is produced when they feel unsafe in their classroom/school environment (Elliot et al., 2015; Pitchforth et al., 2011). Therefore, teachers, students and parents must work collaboratively to maintain allergen-aware environments as the forefront of school-wide food allergy management practices.

4.1.3 Participants indicated an essential strategy in accommodating students with food allergies is frequent communication about food allergies

In keeping with the strategy of maintaining an allergen-aware environment, both Kristen and Sally indicated the need to develop and maintain frequent communication regarding food allergies as “necessary”, “needed” and “important”. More specifically, Kristen describes,

in my monthly newsletter, I remind parents all the time that we are an allergen-aware school, no nuts or nut products in the school… there’s a sign outside my door [and] during curriculum night I talk about it with the parents as a reminder or refresher.
Establishing a culture of frequent communication is noted as a significant strategy to accommodating students with food allergies. Sally also addressed the significance in establishing frequent communication. She indicated, that it is importance for both the homeroom teacher and principal to establish communication using monthly newsletters that define the expectations of the school community in supporting students with food allergies, such as refraining from bringing in certain food products.

Sally and Kristen noted that a variety of communication forms, including monthly newsletters, signs outside their door and reminders on curriculum nights, are all essential ways to keep frequent communication with the school community regarding the needs of students with food allergies. Frequent communication is important to developing a shared understanding of school norms and fostering a community mindset of safety and well-being for all. Similarly, Leo & Clark (2007) suggest that communication amongst staff and families is crucial to creating an environment of mutual understanding. In turn, both Sally and Kristen indicated frequent communication as an important strategy to developing support and understanding around food allergy accommodations.

4.2 Participants Noted the Use of In-school and Community-based Resources as Important Avenues in Seeking Information to Facilitate Food Allergy Awareness and Accommodations

Resources play a considerable role in fostering and furthering teacher development and knowledge-building of various subject matters. Both Sally and Kristen acknowledged the use of various in-school and community-based resources to develop understanding of food allergies and to develop accommodations. The importance in accessing these resources is the need for ongoing professional development and personal growth, and the potential avenues for information
seeking and support networks educators must maintain. Specifically, Sally and Kristen indicated the use of various in-school resources in developing accommodations. They also touched upon the use of board-based policies in developing allergen awareness and accommodations. Furthermore, both Sally and Kristen acknowledged the utilization of community-based resources in seeking general information regarding food allergies.

4.2.1 Participants noted the use of in-school resource supports in helping to develop accommodations for students with food allergies

Sally and Kristen approached the utilization of in-school resource supports in three ways: professional development through in-services, the resource teacher and other school staff. They acknowledged that professional development plays a key role in the continued growth and understanding around food allergy knowledge, as well as how to best support students with food allergies. Kristen acknowledged that teachers at her school have access to in-services every year around food allergies, she stated that professional development about food allergies occurs with two in-services each school year. These in-services are important as they help to keep teachers up to date on current food allergy information and ways to best support these students. Sally also acknowledged the use of in-services and resource teachers to develop accommodations, but also noted that in-services are not always available to all teachers, she shared, “Yes, definitely there have been in-services and sometimes we’re invited to them, sometimes only some [teachers] get chosen because of budget and then they will relay to staff their findings.”

Access to in-services and resource teachers assists participants in their continued growth in developing both classroom and school-wide accommodations. Yet in some circumstances, as noted by Sally, not all have access to these in-services and are then left to rely more so on resource teachers and other staff for needed support. In contrast, Russell & Huber (2013) indicate
food allergy training on inclusionary best practices as needed education for all teachers. Through the value of sources indicated by participants, the use of in-school support services plays a vital role in facilitating the development of accommodations and growth in participants’ knowledge.

4.2.2 Participants noted the use of school-based and board-based policies in helping to develop accommodations for students with food allergies, and foster allergen awareness

While Sally and Kristen indicated the use of in-school resource supports they also pointed to the importance of using established school-based and board-based policies in not only developing accommodations, but using such policies to foster allergen awareness. Participants noted two ways in which they do this; by using Sabrina’s Law (an Ontario Law enacted to protect the rights of students with food allergies in school settings) and following board-based policies. Kristen specifically addressed the effectiveness of Sabrina’s Law, she explained, “Oh they’re effective, when you tell a parent that it’s a law that they cannot be bringing in this…[trails] it’s great that we have this because you can actually give it to a parent who opposes you.” In this same sentiment, Kristen acknowledges the importance in having policies outside the school that support allergen awareness initiatives. Similarly, Sally addressed board-based policies, she stated that her board specifically has a policy in place which dictates that certain foods cannot be brought into the school setting to protect students with food allergies.

Both participants indicated the effectiveness of using school and board-based policies to support the development of their accommodations, but also to raise food allergy awareness among parents. In this way, classroom and school-wide initiatives help develop understanding and promote equity among students (Russell & Huber, 2013; Thelen & Cameron, 2012), which can be facilitated using established and accepted policies. Furthermore, such policies establish
necessary expectations in keeping students safe, as well as promoting understanding about food allergies.

4.2.3 Participants noted the use of community-based resources to seek general information about food allergies and accommodations

While participants noted the use of school and board-based policies to assist them in fostering allergen awareness, participants also acknowledged the use of community-based resources. These resources are used to seek general information around food allergies and accommodations. Both Sally and Kristen indicated that they relied on knowledge gained from students they had previously taught, as well as family members, to facilitate their understanding of food allergies and possible accommodations they may adopt. Kristen acknowledged the immense role that her former students and her own son play in her understanding of food allergies. She described,

I’ve always had students in my classroom with food allergies so we’ve had to deal with that… in the last few years I usually have 1 or 2 students in my class with food allergies as well as my 12-year-old son, um, is allergic to peanuts as well.

Similarly, Sally also acknowledged the important role her family plays in furthering her understanding about food allergies. She expressed,

I have a grandson who is really allergic to things and I really comprehend the importance. I mean, before I understood it. I understood it as a teacher, as an educator, as a caretaker for the kids. But, you know, having been involved in it now, it’s more like, ‘oh wow’.

In both instances, participants point to the importance in utilizing the knowledge and experiences of their previous students and family members to enhance their knowledge. Similarly, Leo &
Clark (2007) note the importance in teachers, school staff and families working together to develop understanding and accommodations for students with food allergies. Moreover, community-based resources provide for first-hand knowledge as told through the experiences of those directly impacted by food allergies, in turn positively influencing accommodations.

4.3 Participants Recognized Student and Parental Awareness as Important Factors to Consider When Developing Awareness and Understanding of the Complexities of Food Allergies and Supporting Students with Food Allergies

Participants pointed to, in many instances the need to work with both students and parents to develop understanding about food allergies. This is crucial in developing a school-wide understanding and tone of respect and understanding, as well as embracing students in a holistic manner. Specifically, Sally and Kristen indicated the need to meet the socio-emotional needs of their students to develop awareness, understanding and support. Sally and Kristen also acknowledged the need to work directly with the parent community to address both misunderstandings and further education about food allergies. Furthermore, participants pointed to the need to work on reinforcing existing understanding and awareness about food allergies.

4.3.1 Participants recognized that meeting the socio-emotional needs of students with food allergies is an important factor in supporting these students

Students with food allergies deal with a multitude of emotional factors when having to manage their food allergies at school. Mentioned most often is food allergy anxiety. Both Sally and Kristen acknowledged their commitment to meeting the socio-emotional needs of their students with food allergies. Most importantly, both participants noted food allergy anxiety as being a major concern they needed to tackle to better support these students. Kristen indicated
this as a common experience for many of her students with food allergies. She stated, “I’d say the biggest challenge is that if all of a sudden someone comes in with something they get anxious over the idea that there is something in the classroom that might harm them.” With a similar sentiment, Sally noted,

because the whole idea of teaching now is inclusion in every which way, and that’s one of … because again I think those children do feel a burden already on their own, they don’t need any other people to single them out.

Both participants’ experiences align with research that states that students with food allergies often experience anxiety and emotional burdens in trying to manage their safety at school and feeling like a burden in the classroom due to their allergy (Portnoy & Shroba, 2014; Russell & Huber, 2013; Shemesh et al., 2013; Cummings, Knibb, King, & Lucas, 2010b). Both participant’s knowledge of the anxiety and emotional burden of managing a food allergy in the classroom students may have, plays a vital role in the steps they take in their daily practice to create environments where students feel safe and relieved of such experiences. As such, it is important that educators take the steps necessary to support student’s well-being.

Surprisingly, both participants noted that bullying is a “non-issue”, rather it is an issue of the past. This contrast is surprising as it also quite drastically contrasts recent research studies which have found that many children with food allergies are predisposed to experiencing “allergy bullying”, social isolation and harassment from peers because of having a food allergy (Portnoy & Shroba, 2014; Russell & Huber, 2013; Shemesh et al., 2013; Cummings, Knibb, King, & Lucas, 2010b). Rather, the participants focused more on food allergy anxiety as a key to supporting students with food allergies socio-emotional needs. Additionally, these participants
highlighted the importance in recognizing the socio-emotional needs of these students and addressing them as part of their continual work to better support these students.

4.3.2 Participants recognized that parental misunderstandings and lack of awareness is a key challenge in developing understanding and awareness of food allergies

Both participants pointed to the importance of working with the parent community to better support students with food allergies. However, both participants acknowledged that this can be made difficult by parents who do not have children with food allergies who often advocate for the “unfairness” of allergen policies. Participants referred to these parents as “ignorant” and “forgetful”. In particular Kristen explained, “I think it’s just the occasional, and it’s very rare, the occasional parent that will insist that their child has…the right to bring in a peanut butter sandwich, and it’s very rare but [we deal with] the occasional ignorant parent.” Sally also noted similar issues with parents, but also recognized that there may be cultural factors that hinder understanding, she explained,

it’s not their fault they’re ignorant about certain things. Maybe they’ve never encountered that in their country I mean we have people from the Philippines, um from China, from India, I mean obviously Spanish, Latinos, you know what I mean, maybe they have not encountered things like that, in their families don’t have allergies.

Thelen & Cameron (2012) argued that, for many families who do not have a food allergy, creating such policies and rules regarding food is seen as infringing on the personal rights of non-allergic students. Such parental beliefs and misunderstandings of the role of policies and rules creates a major challenge for participants in establishing and implementing important rules and policies needed to ensure the safety of students with a life-threatening allergy. Thus, it is
important to consider the many dimensions and parties impacted, try to balance their rights yet still maintain safety and security for those who need it.

4.3.3 Participants recognized that reinforcing existing student understanding about food allergies is an important factor in furthering understanding and awareness

Food allergies are no longer as uncommon as they once were. In the eyes of the participants, students’ understanding has increased as the commonality of food allergies has increased as well. Thus, both Sally and Kristen recognized that there is a need to discuss food allergies, but this does not need to occur daily. As Kristen stated, “it’s not something that we need to um talk about every day.” When it is discussed, the message should be positive and uplifting. Sally expressed, “We are educating the children themselves and they are becoming aware and um they’re not seeing it as a negative thing.” These discussions and lessons are beneficial as they work to promote positive social interactions among students and emphasize the importance of acceptance. While participants may not see a need for daily discussions about food allergies, their experiences indicate that reinforcing existing understanding is necessary to ensure understanding and positivity continues.

4.4 Participants Indicated That There is a Need for Improved Understanding and Resources in order to Strengthen Understanding and Support for Students with Food Allergies

Participants explained a variety of ways in which they could be better supported in their work to foster understanding around food allergies. Better support is crucial to establishing school-wide understanding and educating the broader school community. Participants explicitly indicated the need for better support in accommodating students with food allergies through
direct education of the parent community. Moreover, participants pointed to the need for better support in regards to in-services and resources around food allergies.

4.4.1 Participants indicated that better support in accommodating students with food allergies can be developed through increasing understanding and knowledge about food allergies within the parent community

Throughout the interview, both participants were drawn to discussions regarding the parent community. Both Sally and Kristen pointed to the parent community as their biggest challenge in implementing accommodations and fostering awareness. Consequently, they also note that the parent community is an area in need of education and a community from which they wish they had better support. Kristen spoke directly to this, noting, “I’d like it to be 100% compliance with the parent community. That would be my goal.” Kristen’s goal for better support was echoed by Sally, however she built upon this sentiment by pointing to the collective nature of schooling. She stated, “Well, excuse me! Hate to tell you, we are in a collective situation! And you know what? Your child is not going to die that he doesn’t have [that food] that one day.” Both participants recognized that the parent community is a challenge in need of addressing, from which they wish they could garner more support for their initiatives with food allergies. In alignment with this, Muñoz-Furlong (2004) notes that education is the key to helping to minimize the negative experiences children with food allergies may face. In addressing these challenges through education, there is the potential to develop understanding and increase awareness to support initiatives to protect students’ overall well-being.
4.4.2 Participants indicated that better support in accommodating students with food allergies be developed through increased teacher support resources around food allergies

While participants indicated that they could benefit from increased support in regards to the parent community, Kristen noted the need for no further support other than that and felt that she was sufficiently supported in other areas. She stated, “I don’t see anything that would assist me even more so. Not at all, no.” In contrast, Sally felt that she could be better supported in regards to having access to workshops for all teachers and better support from her superiors in terms of follow through with students who violate the allergen policy consistently. She explained,

You can’t just say no. Well, you phone the parent. Yeah, I did that already, and if I see it’s a second time, and a third time—like anything else I would like the support of my superiors and my resource teachers.

Here, Sally spoke from her experiences surrounding a lack of follow-through for those students who continuously violate the school and board-based allergen policies. Support of ones’ superiors is crucial in being able to champion ones’ causes.

Sally’s experiences also denote the urgency with which allergy education is needed, such as workshops, online modules and professional development for all teachers in staying current with food allergy knowledge and inclusionary best practices (Russell & Huber, 2013; Cummings et al., 2010a; Leo & Clark, 2007). Thus, improved areas for support is contingent upon the teacher and administrative staff and participants’ experiences reflect the need for further education on a school-wide basis.
4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that participants who work towards fostering food allergy awareness and accommodations are using a variety of allergen-focused strategies to build safe and supportive communities in their schools. These strategies included upholding the rights of students with food allergies, maintaining an allergen-aware environment and maintaining frequent communication about food allergies. Participants were also found to be using a variety of in-school and community-based resources to seek information regarding food allergies from avenues such as resource teachers, in-services, school and board-based policies and family members. Furthermore, participants in this study recognized student and parental factors as important in furthering awareness and understanding through meeting the socio-emotional needs of students, addressing parental misunderstandings and reinforcing existing knowledge. Finally, findings from this study show that participants felt that they could be better supported in regards to the parent community and support from superiors/administration.

These findings contribute to existing literature by focusing on how teachers work to foster inclusion and how in the face of many challenges strive to accommodate and support students with food allergies. Furthermore, findings from this study work to build upon the portion of existing literature that focuses on teacher-generated strategies by furthering understanding regarding the need for constant communication and knowledge building for both teachers and parents about food allergies. These findings also ask us to consider the need to address stronger guidelines for food allergy management and community focused education about food allergies.

Next in Chapter 5, I discuss the overall implications for these findings in regards to both the education community and myself as a teacher-researcher, as well as provide
recommendations for what teachers can do to support students with food allergies in their classroom and address potential areas for future food allergy management research in school settings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter I provide an overview of the key findings on food allergy management in classrooms and the significance of this to existing research. I then discuss the implications of the findings for both the educational community and myself as a teacher-researcher. Based on these implications I make recommendations for teachers, parents, principals, Ontario school boards and the Ontario Ministry of Education. Finally, I suggest areas of future research and discussion for food allergy management in schools.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

As discussed in the previous chapter, participants foster the inclusion of students with food allergies using various strategies. Participants noted that in creating safe and supportive environments for students with food allergies that it is essential to uphold their rights. Furthermore, both participants acknowledged that maintaining allergen-aware environments helps to ensure the safety of students and support their overall well-being. In turn, participants also indicated that constant and frequent communication between all members of the school community is essential in developing a community mindset of safety. These findings are significant as they add to the existing repertoire of strategies that can be used to foster communication about food allergies and support emotional well-being of students with food
allergies (Leo & Clark, 2007; Elliot et al., 2015; Pitchforth et al., 2011; Portnoy & Shroba, 2014; Hay et al., 2006).

Participants also noted the use of various in-school and community-based resources to utilize in facilitating food allergy awareness and accommodations. Both participants highlighted in-services, resources teachers and other school staff as key sources of information. School-based and board-based policies such as Sabrina’s Law (an Ontario Law enacted to protect the rights of students with food allergies in school settings) were also noted as effective in fostering allergen awareness initiatives. Participants also stated that community-based resources such as previous students and family members are facilitators in understanding how to accommodate students’ food allergies. These findings are significant as they add to the existing understanding of the importance in education for all teachers on how to create safe environments (Leo & Clark, 2007; Russell & Huber, 2013; Thelen & Cameron, 2012), however these findings also establish the importance in drawing on school and community resources in the inclusion process.

In the inclusion and food allergy management process participants recognized the need to work with students and parents to develop understanding of food allergies. Both participants noted their commitment to meeting the socio-emotional needs of students with food allergies, but noted that allergy bullying from their experiences was a non-issue. Participants also found that misunderstandings in the parental community made it difficult to ensure student safety. In turn, both participants felt the need to reinforce existing student understanding as well as parental understanding. These findings are significant as they diverge from the current literature that suggests food allergy bullying to be a primary concern in school environments (Portnoy & Shroba, 2014; Russell & Huber, 2013; Shemesh et al., 2013; Cummings, Knibb, King, & Lucas, 2010b).
While there are many resources participants drew on for support, they acknowledged a further need for improved understanding in the parental community and better access to resources. Participants indicated the need for more education in the parent community to garner support for food allergy initiatives. Only one participant indicated the need for access to workshops for all teachers as an area for improvement. These findings are significant as they affirm existing literature that states that education for both teachers and members of the school community is a key inclusionary best practice in food allergy management (Muñoz-Furlong, 2004; Russell & Huber, 2013; Cummings et al., 2010a; Leo & Clark, 2007).

5.2 Implications

In this section, I outline the implications of my research for both the educational community – including teachers, parents, principals, Ontario school boards and the Ontario Ministry of Education, as well as my own practice as a teacher-researcher.

5.2.1 Broad: The educational research community

Participants in this study acknowledged various strategies used to support students with food allergies in the classroom both confirming and extending existing literature. Both the participants and research indicate that in supporting students with food allergies it is crucial to take into account the anxiety present in food allergy management (Muñoz-Furlong, 2004). As a result, teachers should be aware of the needs of students with food allergies and the importance in supporting them in managing their food allergy at school. Participants also stressed that teachers should work in unison with the parents of students with food allergies in the management process. Moreover, strategies that were utilized by participants were noted by them to be effective in creating inclusive environments. Therefore, teachers should be aware of the
allergen-based strategies that can be used in fostering inclusion and accommodations of students with food allergies.

Parents play a vital role in the school community and its functionality. Participants saw the parent community as integral in the food allergy management process. As such, parents of students who have food allergies should be aware of the need to be in constant communication with their child’s teacher and school administrator regarding the health needs of their child. Both participants also highlighted the difficulty incurred with parental misunderstandings. Parents who do not have a child with a food allergy should be aware of school policies. It is crucial that parents see the importance in being onboard with food allergy policies, as this will help prevent further misunderstanding and create a collective mindset of safety and security for all.

Leo and Clark (2007) note the importance of teachers, school staff and families working together to develop shared understanding about food allergies, a sentiment participants also spoke to. In turn, principals should consider how a lack of parental support makes it difficult to facilitate inclusion and keep students safe. Participants also noted the need for more professional development around food allergies. Principals, Ontario school boards and the Ontario Ministry of Education should consider their importance and be aware of teachers’ desire for more universal access. These findings are not just of significance to the educational community but the broader community in general. Inclusion for those with food allergies is important in raising awareness and understanding around food allergies for all. Inclusive practices used in schools around food allergies will help to instill values of acceptance and understanding that students can transfer to their broader community. Mostly importantly these practices and teaching help to facilitate acceptance outside of school.
5.2.2 Narrow: My professional identity and practice

I have always had a strong desire to foster the inclusion of all students. My personal knowledge and experiences of families’ members with food allergies has helped me to understand the significance of food allergy inclusion as a forefront of my classroom practices. After conducting research on food allergy management, I am certain that I have furthered my own understanding and repertoire of effective strategies that will assist me in fostering the inclusion of students with food allergies. In hearing from a small sample of teachers about the necessity in creating safe and supportive environments for students with food allergies, I will strive to create such environments in my own practice. Both participants highlighted that food allergy bullying was a non-issue, however given the small sample of teachers it is not to say food allergy bullying does not exist. Therefore, as an educator I will be aware of what such bullying looks like but also be proactive and responsive in order for such bullying to not occur.

I am also committed to working collaboratively with the parent community to develop and enhance understanding of the imperative need to keep students with food allergies safe from their allergen. I will create opportunities to develop my students’ awareness of food allergies through lessons and discussions, as well as develop awareness in the school community by providing educational materials and workshops. This means being an advocate for more professional development and training for educators about food allergies and also means being a source of support for those with whom I work. Furthermore, as a teacher-researcher I will keep up-to-date with the latest inclusionary best practices for food allergy management and stay as an active member and advocate for food allergy awareness.
5.3 Recommendations

Given the collective nature of schooling and the importance that all community members play in fostering students’ safety, teachers need to be working collaboratively with students with food allergies and their parents in the management process. This means keeping open and constant communication with parents and the parent community by using newsletters, signs, reminder notes, workshops and parent night discussions. Parents of children with food allergies must also ensure that they are providing the school with the needed health information for their child and that this information is up-to-date. In this way both parents and teachers need to be advocates for these students. Parents of children who do not have food allergies need to support board-based, school-based policies and laws, adhering to the rules put in place to ensure the safety of students with life-threatening allergies. To assist in developing this parental understanding, principals should be providing education sessions for the parent community that focuses on what food allergies are, the importance in keeping students safe and how to be a supportive ally. Thus, for policy makers in Ontario, Sabrina’s Law (2005) should be amended to include instruction on food allergies for all school community members including parents in addition to school staff.

The parental community is not the only community that can benefit from education sessions. As a community of lifelong learners, teachers should also be engaging in professional development both inside and outside of the school. Teachers need to actively seek out other sources of professional development on food allergies such as taking free courses through Food Allergy Canada and receiving Epi-Pen training through their local hospital and/or First Aid/CPR course. Additionally, Ontario school boards and the Ontario Ministry of Education need to reconceptualize their support efforts by increasing funding for professional development to
ensure staff are provided with the adequate instruction to support students with food allergies as per *Sabrina’s Law* (2005). From my research, it is clear that education for all parties is a key first step in developing understanding and awareness about food allergies.

### 5.4 Areas for Future Research

Research regarding food allergies and how to manage them in the classroom is limited, as is the understanding of the impact and effectiveness of these strategies in the long-term. Participants spoke to a variety of strategies that they found to be effective in fostering inclusion, but I wonder how effective is the continual use of these strategies in the long-term? Future research should discern the effectiveness of teacher’s continual strategy use to determine whether positives and/or negatives effects result. Furthermore, existing research is limited in addressing the voices of the students themselves. How supported do students with food allergies feel in their classroom and allergy management? How do they feel about the strategies that their teachers use; do they see them as inclusive or exclusionary? Future research should focus on the voices of students to discern the effectiveness of the strategies teachers employ and their impact in the long-term. Future research should seek to understand the first-hand experiences of students and their feeling towards food allergy management and their comfort level in the classroom. Moreover, a larger-scale study looking at teachers’ inclusionary best practices for food allergy management would add to strengthening existing research.

Education was highlighted by participants and existing research (Muñoz-Furlong, 2004) as vital in developing understanding and awareness of food allergies. I previously recommended that education on food allergies be provided to all school community members including parents. Additionally, educational researcher scholars should direct their attention to the effects of increased education such as workshops in bolstering understanding. If parental communities are
provided with educational sessions on food allergy awareness does this increase their compliance with board-based and school-based policies; do information sessions help to combat parental misunderstandings? As both participants acknowledged the need for parental compliance; understanding how exactly educational sessions effect this would be beneficial.

5.5 Concluding Comments

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the key findings as outlined in Chapter 4, including strategies, resources, concerns and areas for better support managing and supporting students with food allergies in their classrooms. Both participants demonstrated a commitment to fostering the inclusion of students with food allergies and a drive to raise awareness and understanding even with barriers in their way. My research found that teachers benefit from the support of the whole school community in meeting the needs of students with food allergies. This speaks to the collective and collaborative nature of schooling in which all parties have shared responsibility for establishing a safe and supportive environment for all.

The implications for the broader education community including teachers, parents, principals and the broader educational community in general speak to all parties’ obligation to know the needs of students with food allergies and the needs of the teachers who support them. The significance of this rests in the fact that all school community members need to feel supported in order to be effective in supporting others. Inclusion cannot be facilitated in isolation but rather within a community; as a teacher-researcher I understand this more so now than before. Findings from this study have cemented for me the value of food allergy management and inclusionary practices in supporting students with food allergies. This research highlights the need for educators to address and meet the needs of the whole child in fostering their well-being.
Based upon these insights it was recommended that additional education be provided to teachers and the parent community in forming partnerships in food allergy initiatives. This includes Ontario school boards and the Ontario Ministry of Education increasing funding for professional development. In turn, further research should seek to understand the impact and effectiveness of educational sessions in fostering understanding about food allergies, as well as students with food allergies perspective of how effective and inclusive their teacher’s practices are. Gaining more information in these areas will help to solidify effective strategies educators can use in ensuring that all students with food allergies feel safe and protected in their school environments. Thus, this study has made strides in advancing understanding of food allergy management and inclusionary best practices in schools, by shedding light on an issue often overlooked and rarely deemed to be important.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

Date:

Dear ________________________________,

My Name is Lauren Nero and 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 inclusion for students with food allergies. I am interested in interviewing teachers who foster the inclusion of, and accommodate students with food allergies. 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 Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. 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,

Lauren Nero

Lauren Nero
Phone: (---) ---- ----
Email: lauren.nero@mail.utoronto.ca
Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic
Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

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 Lauren Nero and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions

Introductory Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn how teachers foster the inclusion of, and accommodate, students with food allergies, for the purpose of learning how to best support students with food allergies. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your background in education, experiences accommodating student(s) with food allergies; supports, resources, and challenges in doing this, and finally 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?

To begin can you state your name for the recording?

Section A - Background Information
1. What is your background in education?
2. How many years have you been teaching children and/or youth?
3. What does your current teaching position entail?
   a. What grades and subjects do you currently teach?
   b. Which have you taught previously?
   c. Do you fulfill any other roles in your school?
4. What is the school like where you are currently teaching? *e.g. size, demographics, program priorities)
   a. How does your school keep a record of and support students with food allergies?
   b. What policies related to food allergies are in place at your school?
   c. Approximately what percentage of students at your school has a food allergy?
5. What experiences have contributed to developing your commitment to fostering the inclusion of students with food allergies?
   a. Personal experiences? (Do you have a food allergy? Have you and/or anyone you know experienced bullying related to a food allergy?)
   b. Educational experiences? (Did you learn about supporting students with food allergies in teachers college? Through professional development?)
   c. Professional experiences? (Have you had considerable experience teaching students with food allergies?)
Section B - Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs
1. In your view, what is the role of schools in fostering awareness and understanding of food allergies?
2. What do you see as some of the significant challenges facing students with food allergies?
3. How well do you think schools do in addressing those challenges?
4. In your experience, what are some of the barriers that get in their way?
5. What do feel about having a student with a food allergy/allergies in your classroom?
6. How do you feel about some classroom, and schools being “allergen free” or “allergen aware”?
7. What do you think about having to accommodate students with food allergies?
8. How do you feel about implementing allergy related policies like Sabrina’s Law?
   a. How effective do you think these policies are?
9. Why do you believe it is important teachers to foster the inclusion of students with food allergies?
10. In your experience, is bullying one of the challenges facing students with food allergies?
    a. If yes, why do you think students with food allergies are bullied?
11. What does bullying mean to you?
12. What indicators of bullying have you seen when it comes to students with food allergies?
13. In your experience, who is it that bullies these students?

Section C - Teacher Practices
1. How do you foster the inclusion of students with food allergies in your classroom?
2. How do you facilitate other students understanding of food allergies? What are some examples of lessons, and/or experiences you have designed to foster understanding about food allergies?
   a. What curriculum do you connect this topic to?
   b. What are your learning goals?
   c. What opportunities for learning do you create?
   d. What resources support you in this work? (e.g. children’s literature, websites, videos, music)
   e. How do your students respond to learning about this topic? What outcomes of learning do you observe from them?
   f. What, if anything, do you assess when teaching this topic? How do you assess?
3. How, if at all, do you address the topic of bullying when teaching students about food allergies?
4. When a student with a food allergy is being bullied, what is your response?
5. What strategies do you use to mitigate the bullying of students with food allergies?
6. What kinds of accommodations do you make for students’ with food allergies?
7. What do you take into consideration when accommodating students with food allergies?
8. How do you create a safe classroom environment for students with food allergies?

Section D - Supports and Challenges
1. What resources do you use to support you in accommodating students with food allergies?
   a. Where did you learn about these resources?
2. What are some challenges (if any) you have encountered in fostering the inclusion of students with food allergies?
   a. How do you respond to these challenges?
   b. How do you feel you could be better supported in your work in this area?

**Section E - Next Steps**

1. What are your professional goals, and/or next steps when it comes to supporting students with food allergies?
2. What advice would you give to beginning teachers who are committed to fostering the inclusion of, and accommodating students with food allergies?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.