Inclusive Physical Education

By

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Abstract

Students with disabilities are increasingly included in the mainstream education system. This research focuses on the extent to which special education students are included and supported in the mainstream physical education environment. The objective of this study is to examine what factors influence an educator’s decision to deliver inclusive physical education. Data collection tools include two semi-structured interviews with two experienced physical education teachers in the Greater Toronto Area. Findings suggest that a teacher’s ability to deliver inclusive physical education is influenced by their abilities, limited by their professional development opportunities and poorly defined responsibilities over the delivery of inclusive physical education, and as well, safety parameters and support. Both educators acknowledge the value of practical experience in delivering inclusive physical education, suggesting that with time and practice, they have learned successful practices. The implications of this study suggest that inconsistent practices across schools have resulted in Ontario special education students receiving inadequate physical education at large. With the right tools, teachers are able to provide inclusive physical education to help build best practice.

Key Words: Special Education, Quality Physical Education, Physical Literacy, Inclusion, Mainstream
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context and Problem

There seems to be a contradiction in the field of education on the subject of physical education. Research has demonstrated the numerous benefits of physical education yet the importance of physical education fails to be reflected in the school system (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). With the rising rates of childhood obesity, there is extra attention placed on physical education (Donovan, Mercier, & Phillips, 2015). The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) believes it is the school’s responsibility to teach and encourage healthy and physical behavior (Donovan, Mercier, & Phillips, 2015). The initiatives of the CDC are with the intention of reducing childhood obesity. Nevertheless, they advocate for the school to educate children on the importance of living an active healthy lifestyle.

Educational theories highlight the importance of divulging information to kids in early years as their brain develops (Marsden & Weston, 2007). Physical education is no exception, where teaching physical literacy at a young age is critical. For the purposes of this paper, physical literacy is both “performative” and “sensory cognitive” (Jurbala, 2015). Physical literacy is the knowledge, understanding and application of locomotion, activity and awareness (Jurbala, 2015). It involves knowing how to effectively use your body and move through spaces and the actual performance of those movements. Marsden and Weston (2007) argue “the role of the educator is to provide the best possible environment and physical learning experiences for the child in order to help him/her explore and learn purposefully” (p. 387). Thus, it is critical to perpetuate enjoyment in exploring and moving one’s body to increase participation as children grow. This early critical exposure assists in fostering the process and enhancement of physical
education (Pedro, 2014). Teaching fundamental movements at a young age is essential to establish a foundation to build upon.

Although recent efforts and suggestions push forward to influence the development of a quality physical education program (Marsden & Weston, 2007), the importance of a good physical education program for all is not evident. Children with disabilities are often excluded from this initiative, when research suggests they may have a greater need (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). Physical education is not deemed a priority for kids with special needs (Maher, 2010). McAllister and Hadri (2013) report that it is becoming increasingly common for students with special needs to be placed in a mainstream school setting. These children participate in the mainstream typical classroom with their peers but require additional support to enable children with special needs to successfully participate and be included.

Early pedagogy in elementary years must provide an equitable and inclusive atmosphere for physical education. The Ontario government is committed to delivering an equitable and inclusive education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). They argue this: “An equitable, inclusive education system is one in which all students, parents, and other members of the school community are welcomes and respected, and every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 5). These renewed goals are recent progressions in the field of education. Although progress has been made in advocating for inclusive education, there is still a long journey ahead in going the lengths to ensure these goals are being implemented in the classroom.

The term inclusion has received widespread acceptance (Long, 1995). People are quick to agree that special education students need to be included in mainstream education (Long, 1995). However, the application of this concept falls short. Long (1995) argues, “Budgets get cut, and
good intentions end up empty promises. Inclusion is an innovative, exciting idea to be explored, not a cult to be followed” (p. 26). Long (1995) addresses an important problem: the failed reality of the implementation of inclusion. The theory of inclusion is brilliant as it can provide special education students with highly beneficial experiences. But as suggested by Long (1995), budgetary regulations diminish the implementation of inclusion resulting in the exclusion of special education students from the mainstream classroom. It saddens me to see that all these ideas fail to be applied in the classroom, and the difficulties in actual application of this ideology need a closer examination.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Research is lacking in terms of the integration of special education children in the mainstream physical education program. Much research alludes to the potential benefits that special education children would receive from quality physical education (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015; Menear & Neumeier, 2015; Weiss, Diamond, Demark & Lovald, 2003). However, the reality is children with disabilities are not receiving maximal quality physical education (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). Successful programs are the ones that have been found to segregate all the children with special needs (Maher, 2010). This however is contradictory to successful inclusion.

This study seeks to contribute to the literature in identifying the hesitations physical education teachers have on integrating special education children in the mainstream physical education classroom. The study intends to illustrate a necessity for quality, inclusive physical education in the elementary school system in a Canadian context for all students.

The current research study intends to advocate for teachers that do want to create an inclusive physical education space but struggle as a result of knowledge, support and resources. I interviewed two teachers who share strategies, resources, supports and suggestions they have
found useful in successfully including children with special needs in the mainstream physical education program. The information obtained from this study can hopefully aid other physical educators to make the physical education space more inclusive for children with special needs.

1.2 Research Questions

The guiding research question of this study is; what factors influence teachers in the elementary system to successfully include the active participation of students with disabilities in their mainstream physical education class?

The subsidiary research questions are:

- What resources and training do teachers have currently available to them to incorporate special education children in the physical education program?
- What suggestions do teachers have to successfully integrate special education kids in the physical education classroom?
- What supports are available to teachers to successfully include children of all abilities in the physical education space?
- Who should be responsible for the inclusion of special education in the PE classroom?
- What is the current involvement of the PE teacher in the construction of an IEP? What should the PE teacher’s involvement be?

1.3 Background of the Researcher/ Reflexive Positioning Statement

Physical activity has always been a priority in my life. The importance of a physically active lifestyle stemmed from my parents. My parents encouraged me to participate in every sport. I grew up playing a wide range of sports, excelling in soccer and basketball. Physical education in elementary school came natural to me. Physical education consisted of various
sports and games that focused on physical literacy and coordination that I already had established.

The physical education classroom served as a mental break. Physical separation from the academic space freed the clutter in my mind and I felt free in the gym. My body was no longer confined to the space defined by a desk. My body now had the ability to move and stretch out my muscles without the restraints imposed by the academic classroom.

In high school, I enrolled in physical education every year, although it was not required. I had more exposure to other sources of physical activity in high school. In high school I had more experience with health education. I had been educated on the importance of healthy eating. I struggled with eating in my junior years of high school and was obsessed with looking thin. I learned through health class, the importance of eating protein and providing fuel to enable myself to stay active. This information potentially saved me from an eating disorder. No other subject provided me with the knowledge of living a healthy life. This lesson I believe is a necessity especially with the increasing rise of obesity in the population. The importance of health and physical education needs to be entrenched in our society.

Over the past 5 years, I have been granted the opportunity to coach soccer for kids. My role has expanded and I now coach children with special needs. This recent role has inspired me to work with kids’ abilities. It has been rewarding to observe and promote the inclusion of children with disabilities in a soccer environment. I believe this activity is inclusive as it enables children to be part of a soccer network, a soccer club, and a team. Further, it provides the benefits of developing physical coordination and advocating for active living.

As an individual who was motivated through physical literacy to involve myself in school and succeed academically, I want to advocate for exceptional physical education for students of
all abilities. I witnessed firsthand the benefits of physical participation and want to extend the positive effects to children of all capacities. I believe a heightened focus on physical education for special education children will foster their academic success and improve their self-concept. I anticipate their self-concept will improve through feeling accepted by their peers in the physical education space. I seek to inspire physical educators to make an extra effort to include children with special needs in the classroom. Further, I hope to motivate curriculum changes that will incorporate the needs of children with exceptionalities in the physical education program.

1.4 Overview/ Preview of Whole

This research study is divided into five core chapters. In Chapter one, an introduction to the study is provided, that includes the purpose of this study. Chapter two consists of a comprehensive review on the scholarship in the field. Chapter three provides an overview of the research methodology used. In chapter 4 the findings of the study are revealed. Finally, chapter five discusses the implications of the research findings. The chapter concludes by discussing future directions of research on the inclusion of children with special educational needs in physical education.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction to the chapter

This chapter reviews existing literature pertaining to the areas of special education and physical education. Primarily, I explore the holistic benefits of physical education demonstrating the necessity for quality physical education. Yet, the literature reveals that physical education has not been prioritized resulting in a lack of quality physical education. In hopes to bolster the importance of physical education, I examine teacher attitudes and policies that advocate for quality and inclusive physical education for students of all abilities. Finally I identify various models and programs that have been designed to provide physical education to individuals with special needs.

2.1 Benefits of Physical Education

Physical education offers holistic benefits including a healthy active lifestyle, increased attention span, improved social behavior and a heightened self-esteem. (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015; Menear & Neumeier, 2015; Weiss, Diamond, Demark & Lovald, 2003). Exercising regularly keeps students’ hearts strong and contributes to good health (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). As a result of good health, students will display increased attendance (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). Quality physical education needs to be delivered for all students. Arguably, students with disabilities need to have access to physical education more than students without disabilities due to already diagnosed health and mental difficulties” (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). Physical education serves as a mental break from the classroom. Children with disabilities who feel overwhelmed require extra attention specifically children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), exercise has demonstrated improvements in attention span, behavior and learning ability (Menear & Neumeier, 2015). An enhanced attention span increases students’
ability to stay on task. Exercise has been helpful in keeping children with ASD focused and responsive to school tasks (Menear & Neumeier, 2015). Thus, for children with a relatively short attention span, physical education is critical to refocus and reignite energy and cognition.

Biological benefits are evident in children who participate in physical activity. Physical activity is linked to good blood pressure levels and heart rate viability (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). Menear and Neumeier’s (2015) work demonstrates “that higher fitness levels in children are associated with increased hippocampal and dorsal striatum volume, areas of the brain associated with attention span, focus and problems involving response and motor coordination” (p. 44). These benefits can be extended to children with special needs.

There are numerous benefits to a physical education program for individuals with special needs. Physical education classes are beneficial not only in obtaining the minimal, necessary exercise to improve health but it also teaches these children the importance of a healthy lifestyle (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). The physical education classroom is imperative from a health perspective. The benefits of a structured physical education program have been demonstrated in individuals with ASD. Structured physical education has also been shown to sustain participation in extra-curricular activities such as snowshoeing and walking (Menear & Neumeier, 2015). The benefits obtained from physical education extend beyond mere participation in physical activity. Children can obtain physical activity through recess, however, in the physical education space, educators refine students’ gross motor skills and reinforce movements to develop kinesthetically (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). A structured physical education program is especially important to relay the “necessary skills and knowledge to sustain an active lifestyle” (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015).
The literature demonstrates a positive relationship between physical activity and self-confidence in individuals with disabilities (Weiss, Diamond, Demark, & Lovald, 2003). This suggests a connection between regular participation in physical activity and increased self-esteem. This finding is relevant as a lack of confidence is linked to a lack of success in sports (Block, Taliaferro, Harris, & Krause, 2010). The Special Olympics have been credited to increase self-esteem, confidence and socialization of its participants (Weiss, Diamond, Demark, & Lovald, 2003). Programs such as the Special Olympics enable individuals to work on their coordination through improving self-efficacy. Improved self-efficacy serves as a tool to bolster success (Block, Taliaferro, Harris, & Krause, 2010). High self-efficacy acts as a motivator to encourage students to envision their success and work towards increasing competence. Through similar programs, individuals can gain confidence and enhance their competence to enable them to be active.

2.1.1 Consequences of inactivity

On average students spend six hours sitting during their day at school (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). As a result, a large amount of the day spent is inactive. At school, students are instructed to sit down and listen to the teacher (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). This period of inactivity is difficult for children, especially children with disabilities as this causes them to get off task (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). Individuals with disabilities are at a higher risk of obesity than peers without disabilities (Menear & Neumeier, 2015). The period of inactivity heightens the risk of individuals with disabilities towards obesity. By implementing physical activity this will increase blood flow to the brain (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). This blood flow will help get individuals thinking. During inactivity, the blood flow regresses and it contributes to individuals getting off task (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). With this finding it is especially
important for individuals with disabilities to participate in physical activity, as they will not only experience benefits to their physical and mental health, but will retain attention, promoting their academic success.

2.2 Lack of Teacher Education

It is becoming increasingly common that special education children are entering mainstream schools (Vickerman, 2007). Due to the increased special education population, children with special needs are being included in the mainstream physical education class (Vickerman & Coates, 2009). These mainstream physical education teachers hold strong positive attitudes towards inclusion (Vickerman, 2007). However teachers feel ill prepared to integrate these children into their programs (Vickerman & Coates, 2009). Many teachers discuss the need for a specialized professional development course to teach the practice of inclusive physical education (Simpson & Mandich, 2012). Research demonstrates a failure in equipping teachers with the skill, experience and confidence to create an inclusive physical education program (Maher, 2010). Teachers are expressing an interest in including children with disabilities but lack the knowledge, support and resources to do so effectively.

2.2.1 Ill-equipped/Unprepared

Physical education teachers are often frustrated with their inability to cope and integrate children with disabilities (Vickerman & Coates, 2009). Teachers are often left feeling inadequate, failing to deliver appropriate, inclusive programs. Teachers report that the lack of training they receive was one of the most restricting factors on their ability to successfully teach (Maher, 2010). There is a lack of courses available to inform teachers on best practices of inclusion in the physical education space (Simpson & Mandich, 2012). Teachers need to be given appropriate training and professional development courses to aid them in delivering
effective, inclusive PE. The education that PE teachers receive in inclusion is typically under
general inclusion (Maher, 2010). Consequently, PE teachers are unable to transfer this
knowledge to the PE classroom, as it may not be applicable (Maher, 2010). As a result, limited
training occurs with regards to inclusion in the physical education context. This lack of inclusion
training is partially explained by a restricted time limit allotted to the physical education
department for training purposes (Maher, 2010). Another issue is time constraints. Many
teachers have said due to the time crunch on training, their departments prioritize other training
opportunities in front of inclusion in the physical education space (Maher, 2010).

2.2.2 Lack of resources/equipment

Teachers are restricted to include individuals with disabilities due to a lack of resources.
The schools also may have inaccessible equipment (Simpson & Mandich, 2012). They may also
lack the supports of adapted sports equipment that enables them to participate (Simpson &
Mandich, 2012). Teachers may lack the resources and materials to allow individuals with special
needs the ability to participate safely. Adapted equipment may animate the space and also serve
as a motivation for students with disabilities to integrate and involve themselves. On the
contrary, some equipment may serve as a barrier and consequently needs to be removed to
enable students to access the gym and participate. Also, there may be financial constraints
imposed by the physical education department of that school (Maher, 2010). Much of the
equipment needed may be an additional expense, that the department does not have the budget
for, for example larger, softer or brighter balls (Maher, 2010).

2.2.3 Lack of support

Along with the lack of resources is the lack of support from educational assistants.
Educational assistants usually attend other classes with special education students to provide
greater assistance yet, these educational assistants did not attend physical education class as a support (Simpson & Mandich, 2012). Maher suggests that special education assistants are prioritizing other subjects and PE is not deemed fundamental to the child’s education (Maher, 2010). There could be a staffing issue, or a money issue. Maher (2010) argues that the assistance of special education assistants in the physical education space is non-existent (p. 277). The support received consists of the educational assistant dropping the child off at the physical education class and picking them up (Maher, 2010). Mach (2000) contradicts this claim, suggesting that there is a trend towards including educational assistants in physical education classes to support special needs students. If educational assistants are present in the class, their support may be ineffective due to a lack of training (Mach, 2000; Maher, 2010).

With the increasing need and demand for educational assistants, there needs to be increasing training and education available to them (Abbott, McConkey & Dobbins, 2011). The scope and duties of educational assistants is widening (Abbott, McConkey & Dobbins, 2011; Mach, 2000). Mach notes that “They might go away and do some health and safety stuff, or first aid training, but they’re not given any PE-specific training on how to deal with issues in the lesson” (Mach, 2000). Many physical educators believe that the aid of a special education assistant will benefit and assist the inclusion process and benefit the physical education of children with special needs.

2.3 Educational Policies and Guidelines

Mainstream education, the inclusion of children with special needs in classrooms with their general peers has gotten increasingly popular (Ebersold, 2003; Vickerman, 2007). Policies exist that promote the idea of education for all (Peters, 2007). Many international policies exist to support inclusive education. Principles from larger policies such as The Education for All
(EFA) are finding their ways into school board policies (Peters, 2007; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) defines inclusive education as “education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students” (p. 6). These policies advocate for the inclusion of all, but still individuals with disabilities are faced with decreased opportunities for attending and completing school (UNESCO, 2008). Students with disabilities do spend more time in school than their peers (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). However, these students spend extra time keeping up with the curriculum and focusing on subjects such as numeracy and literacy (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015).

2.3.1 Developing the IEP/ Team Collaboration
Klein and Hollingshead (2015) notes, “The physical educator is not involved in developing the IEP (Individual Education Plan)” (p. 165). Teachers should be permitted to work with other professionals such as physiotherapists, athletic therapists to devise a successful physical education program for that child (Simpson & Mandich, 2012). It is no longer possible for a single teacher to meet all the needs of their students in such a diverse classroom. The collaboration of many professionals in the school system is an asset in providing a comprehensive education. Collaboration among other teachers involved in the education of that child will maximize the success of the student. Regular and clear communication should exist between special and physical educators (Klein, & Hollingshead, 2015). By being active in the development of the IEP, PE teachers can better prepare their physical education program.

2.3.2 Policies
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) outlines guidelines for special education children in regards to their physical education. The IDEA states that any child with a disability must be given the opportunity to participate in any physical education program that is
available for their same-aged peers for those in mainstream schools (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). Individuals with disabilities who are in a residential school are still expected to receive quality PE. The IDEA states that “in such cases, the public agency responsible for the education of the child must provide the services directly or make arrangements for those services to be provided through other public or private programs” (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015, p. 164). These mandates highlight the importance and necessity of quality PE for children with disabilities. In Ontario the principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in policy documents. More countries are making greater inclusion and equity a goal in their education (UNESCO, 2009). Equity and inclusion are seen as fundamental goals in the Ontario Education system (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

The ministry principles are embedded in school board policies across the GTA including, Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Peel District School Boards (PDSB) and Halton District School Board (HDSB) policies. TDSB’s policy is all encompassing, in that their equity foundation document speaks to the equity of staff, students, parents, etc. For example TDSB’s document outlines, “We believe that equity of opportunity, and equity of access to our programs, services and resources are critical to the achievement of successful outcomes for all those whom we serve, and for those who serve our school system” (TDSB, 1999, p. 1). PDSB and HDSB’s policies should be commended for envisioning equity as a priority. PDSB and HDSB’s policy documents cite critical policies that describe fundamental human rights. The PDSB reviews the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Ontario human rights code using them as tools to build a policy that is equitable and eliminates discrimination. The mere mention of these central policies credits PDSB and HDSB as actively pursuing and amending practices to create an equitable environment. Peel District School Board’s policy states, “The Board recognizes the
importance of equity of opportunity, and equity of access, to the full range and delivery of programs, services and resources” (PDSB, 2010, p. 1). HDSB’s document provides suggestions in terms of language use to describe various populations to be more inclusive. HDSB’s policy suggests using people first language, “always use people first language, e.g. student with a learning disability, employee on a medical leave, people with disabilities, people who are disabled, etc.” (HDSB, 2013, p. 1). Examples such as using people first language demonstrate the efforts HDSB is making to create an inclusive environment. PDSB and HDSB see equity and inclusion as critical tools in ensuring academic success of students.

A contradiction exists between inclusive policies and the physical education curriculum. According to Maher, (2010) “The physical education curriculum is dominated by team games and competition” (p. 267). Many teachers prioritize team games inhibiting their ability to successfully include individuals with special education needs (Maher, 2010). UNESCO (2009) adds, “Children with disabilities are still combating blatant educational exclusion – they account for one third of all out-of-school children (p. 5). Children with disabilities represent a large population within school populations; thus, efforts and actions need to be done to ensure equitable and genuine inclusion practices.

2.3.3 Practice

Maher (2010) notes that in the physical education classroom, students with disabilities are largely excluded from team games (p. 267). The exclusion results in these individuals and their classmates to have negative perceptions of their bodies and capabilities. Although in a mainstream physical education program, individuals with disabilities are largely segregated, contributing to a poor self concept (Weiss, Diamond, Demark, & Lovald, 2003). This highlights that competitive games in the physical education classroom are exclusive (Maher, 2010). Instead
what has been discovered is that individual activities are more inclusive (Maher, 2010). These individual lessons are more inclusive where teachers are able to tailor the activity to suit individual needs and have the time to provide extra support (Maher, 2010). Haycock and Smith (2011) notes “Children with special education needs that are taught in mainstream schools are often taught separately” (p. 520). As a society, we need to move beyond providing mere access to education. An additional step needs to be made, to ensure resources and supports are available to achieve that equitable education.

2.4 Success Strategies and Suggestions

2.4.1 Collaboration and Education

Ebersold (2003) notes “Tensions may exist between the professionals as they may have different goals and dynamics” (p. 90). Keglon (2011) reveals that a collaborative effort among professionals at camp thunderbird was key in ensuring success of the program. In this program, instructors were given specific training on how to give constructive feedback to students with behavior issues as well as how to develop positive relationships with these students (Keglon, 2011). It is important that all professionals communicate and work together to ensure the student in their care is successful.

2.4.2 Individual and Fun activities

Students with disabilities who are found to participate in extra-curricular activities are found to participate in individualized activities (Haycock & Smith, 2011). Students shy away from competitive team sports as they typically exclude individuals with disabilities. Mainstream physical education classes typically are competitive sport and team based. When individuals with disabilities cannot participate, they are removed from the PE lesson and this has the effect of normalizing and reinforcing segregation (Maher, 2010).
Haycock and Smith (2011) notes that it is evident that individuals with disabilities are less involved when it is a team game, people with disabilities tend to go to an all ability club where there is a lack of pressure. These activities are “Easily adaptable, more individualized and were provided in an environment perceived as less competitive and non-threatening” (Haycock & Smith, 2011, p. 522). Individual sports are seen as more inclusive by design but these activities find themselves at the periphery of physical education (Maher, 2010).

2.5 Conclusion

The scholarship in the field reveals that quality physical education programs in the schools are lacking in meeting the needs of all students. The research reviewed explores the factors that contribute to this issue. Some suggestions were made how to better equip physical education teachers to deliver an inclusive program. The current study aims to contribute to the literature on special education and physical education. The interviews examined factors that influence an educator’s ability to deliver inclusive physical education. The interviews probed teachers to specify the resources and supports that have or have not helped them in their practice.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology, rationalizing the methodological decisions that were made, given the research purpose and questions. First, I review the general approach and procedures. I then analyze the data collection instruments that are used for this study and provide extensive details about the participants in the study. I provide thorough details in reference to the process of sampling and recruiting as well as participant bios. The chapter then consists of a comprehensive account of the data analysis procedure as well as ethical considerations in relation to my study. Lastly I consider the limitations of the study and strengths of this methodological approach.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This study used a qualitative approach. This approach consisted of reviewing current and pertinent literature, in addition to conducting semi-structured interviews. Despite the dichotomous distinction between qualitative and quantitative research, both methods are valuable (Lakshman et al., 2000). Lakshman et al. (2000) argue that both methods are purposeful. My qualitative research reviewed the literature on this topic demonstrating the necessity for additional research in the field. Daly & Lumley (2002) claim that, “Qualitative research, like any research, starts with a systematic review of the literature to show that the topic being studied is significant and unresolved” (p. 299). This literature review is essential to set the context for the study and demonstrate the ultimate purpose and necessity of the current study.

For the purposes of this study, a qualitative approach is valuable in that it goes beyond simply answering the question. Ivey (2012) states, “Qualitative approaches provide not only answers to the researchers questions, but also the participants feelings, perceptions, experiences
and thoughts about the question” (p. 319). Qualitative methods provide additional information preserving the context rather than dismissing this information as external variables (Ivey, 2012). This additional information is critical to addressing the fundamental research question of the experiences of students with disabilities in the physical education classroom. This additional information provides information on the social validity of the issue (Leko, 2014). In a quantitative study, answers are often categorical with selective options. Participants thus can respond with a socially acceptable answer and not be probed to further explain themself. In a qualitative study, the semi-structured format forces participants to construct their own answer instead of choosing from a list of answers. This individually constructed answer speaks to the social validity of the issue.

The additional information that interviewee subjects provide the researcher with may branch off into related but unanticipated findings. The open-ended aspect of the interview creates ample opportunities for the interviewee to take control of the interview. Qualitative research in comparison to quantitative research provides different opportunities for interesting things to emerge (McLoughlin, 2007). Qualitative methods are valuable as they are open-ended leading researchers to discover unanticipated findings and/or alternative avenues/directions they did not anticipate that can be helpful (Leko, 2014). Due to the nature of this method being open-ended, it broadens the scope of the current researcher, having the researcher to consider possibilities that they have not envisioned. These unanticipated findings may be crucial to the fundamental purpose of the study. The teachers for instance could highlight a strategy that they see as successful in their classroom that has minimal research on it. This strategy could open a new avenue to explore in relation to special education and physical education. Alternatively, these
unanticipated findings are additionally critical as it enables future researchers to continue and fill in unexplored gaps in the literature.

The qualitative design of this research study is purposeful as the findings from this study have practical application. This is critical as, “much research conducted by academics [do] not reach the classroom” (Gewirtz et al., 2009, p. 570). In order to bridge this gap and to make research relevant and applicable in the classroom, teachers need to be involved in the research process (Zeichner, 1995; Gewirtz et al., 2009). Social validity, a concept that is found to emerge from qualitative research is a key concept that is relevant in closing the research to practice gap (Leko, 2014). Teachers need to see the practical application of the research to their own classroom. If interventions and implementations are unfeasible it is less likely to be implemented or sustained by a teacher (Leko, 2014). The current qualitative design involves current teachers and the methods they use to ensure successful inclusion of students with disabilities in their physical education classroom. Thus, it is hopeful that other teachers transfer their knowledge to other teachers in order to see the practical and feasible application to their own classrooms. For example in my research as a future educator I could use the strategies that current educators highlight as being successful in including students with special needs in the physical education space.

Qualitative research for this study on special education and physical education is particularly important as in the area of special education, literature using these methods are lacking (Trainor & Leko, 2014). Trainor and Leko (2014) found that “only 6% of research across the field’s 11 most widely read journals, over nearly two decades has been qualitative” (p. 263). The current study contributes to the limited qualitative research in the field of special education. The lack of qualitative research is shocking considering the complexity and diversity within
special educations. Leko (2014) argues, “Qualitative methods are instrumental when attempting to understand enduring challenges and issues that are multifaceted and complex” (p. 276). The underlying research question in this study examines the challenges that students with disabilities face in being included in the physical education space with their mainstream peers. This is a multifaceted and complex question as there are numerous challenges and barriers to be explored.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary source of data collection for this research study is semi-structured interviews. Interviews are the most common source of qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews consist of a mix of predetermined, open ended questions and other subsidiary questions that arise during the interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The individual in-depth semi-structured interview enables the interviewer to thoroughly examine the social and personal matters of the issue (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The nature of an interview provides the interviewee with the freedom to express themselves and engage in deep conversation (Aleandria & Russo, 2015). I, the researcher through a semi-structured interview encouraged the interviewee “to share as much as information as possible, unselfconsciously and in his or her own words” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 317).

A critical component of the interview process is establishing rapport with the interviewee. The openness of the interviewee is contingent upon the establishment of rapport (Aleandria & Russo, 2015). This involves creating a safe environment where the participant feels comfortable to share their experiences openly and honestly (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The atmosphere should feel relaxed, and the interviewee should get lost in conversation. The encounter is meant to be personal and intimate. The design of a semi-structured interview elicits
strong emotional impact (Aleandria & Russo, 2015). The open-ended aspect liberates the interviewee allowing them to construct their own answer as opposed to selecting a pre-determined answer. I am interested in the perspectives of teachers over a period of time in terms of attention directed to special education and physical education. I want teachers’ perspectives in relation to the evolution of the school system in terms of policy, resources and supports available in this specialized area. I want an insiders’ perspective and hope to gain insight on the “organizational culture from different individuals’ points of view thus bringing into the open an often hidden environment” (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 246).

3.3 Participants

Obtaining an appropriate sample is critical in ensuring rich data related to the research question (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The population sample should be relatively homogenous sharing key commonalities to adequately address the research question (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This sample is meant to be a slice of the population in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) who have experience teaching physical education and have had students with disabilities participate in their mainstream physical education class. Although, the sample needs to be relatively homogenous, it needs to be diverse (Daly & Lumley, 2002). The sample needs to be diverse in order to capture different opinions, experiences and strategies used in the same board to be a good representation of the efforts and experiences in that area. Below, I outline the sampling criteria and procedures used to create a diverse but yet homogenous sample. I provide detailed information of the interviews below.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

The following criteria was applied to teacher interviewees:

1. Teachers all have experience working in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)
2. Teachers need a minimum of 5 years teaching experience in the physical education space.

3. Teachers have experience of working with students with disabilities/IEPs concurrently with mainstream peers in the physical education space.

4. All teachers completed their teacher education in Canada.

The above criteria are mandated to obtain a small but representative slice of the population. First and foremost, it is critical that all teachers are from the same area. This criterion is useful in ensuring homogeneity of participants. Additionally, my research examined the inclusivity of board policies in the area. My research commends the policies and documents created to promote inclusivity in schools and my interviews examined teacher’s application and understanding of these policies. Furthermore, to explore the changes and recent supports, I interviewed teachers who have substantial teaching experience in the GTA who can explain the actions the board has taken to implement their policy and support inclusion. This experience needs to be in the physical education space with mainstream classes that have students with disabilities. This is pertinent to adequately address the application of including students of all abilities in the physical education classroom. Extensive experience is required again to report changes and efforts made over time. Lastly, I interviewed teachers who have come from teacher-education programs in Canada to examine the effectiveness of teacher education programs nationally in addressing the enduring challenge of inclusion of all abilities in physical education.

3.3.2 Participant Recruitment

The study uses a combination of sampling techniques, as it is important to employ a “flexible, pragmatic approach” (Marshall, 1996, p. 524). The sample size for this research project is small. This small sample however is appropriate for qualitative research as it adequately addresses the research question (Marshall, 1996). The sampling techniques involved are
convenience, purposeful and snowball sampling. In determining a sample, I initially consulted my current network to find participants. This convenience sampling I used as a starting point (Marshall, 1996). After establishing contacts through convenience sampling I then used a purposeful snowball sampling technique (Creswell, 2011). This technique consisted of identifying and collaborating with educators in the field, this referred me to other educators and participants that had rich knowledge to add to my research (Creswell, 2011). The technique is purposeful in that I am actively searching for the most productive sample (Marshall, 1996).

3.3.3 Participant Biographies

Aara is currently a teacher educator working in the province of Ontario. Previously Aara has worked as a high school teacher teaching health and physical education. Aara is highly passionate about physical education and has pursued her career accordingly. Aara has worked as a department head in a high school, taught, coached and now works with teacher candidates. Aara also teaches additional qualification (AQ) courses in health and physical education.

James has been a teacher for more than 10 years working in the GTA. He has worked solely in elementary schools. James has taught a range of grades and subjects. James has taught health and physical education consistently over the years. James has continued his professional development and has AQ courses in special education. In addition to this education, James fulfilled a role in his elementary school as a primary teacher for special education students.

3.4 Data Analysis

In qualitative data analysis, data collection and data analysis occur together (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interviewer assesses the responses of the interviewee and then decides how to proceed and what questions to ask. The information I analyzed is data that I saw as relevant to identifying key barriers to successful inclusion of students with disabilities in the
physical education space as well and alternatively successful strategies identified to assist in genuine inclusion. Weston et al. (2000) suggest, “how researchers see data and the meaning attributed to it is what makes data useful, interesting and a contribution to knowledge” (p. 384). It is thus important to note that data I perceived as relevant and interesting received analysis. The interview had mass amounts of audio and field notes to sift through. However the points I noted as most interesting receive the most attention and analysis.

The first step in data analysis is organizing the data (Creswell, 2011). The organization of data includes sorting the recorded interview and converting the audio to text. The transcribing process is difficult to document (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). After transcribing and reviewing the interviews, I studied the interview line-by-line, searching for themes (Ivey, 2012). I searched for key themes among the interviews as well as highlighting successful experiences and noting failed strategies.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Creswell (2011) argues that in any qualitative study, a researcher is subject to many ethical issues in all stages of the process. These ethical considerations emerge during data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2011). Many ethical considerations are inherent by nature of the mere process of the interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). I examine the ethical considerations in the interview process.

An imperative ethical issue is ensuring participant confidentiality (Creswell, 2011). Due to the nature of the research question, educators may be providing information that could jeopardize their employment as they may be portraying the school system in a negative light (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). To protect participant’s privacy, each participant has been assigned a pseudonym and any identity indicators have been excluded. Furthermore, to ensure
participants feel comfortable, they have been reassured that at any time they can withdraw from participation in the study. To ensure that the participant’s privacy is protected, I have been careful in storing the data (Creswell, 2011). All data is backed up and multiple copies are saved (Creswell, 2011). This data is stored on my password protected computer. The data is also associated with a pseudonym on the computer as an extra privacy measure.

Another ethical consideration by the qualitative design is the potential unintended risk to participants (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The risk is minimal in this study. However, in asking to share experiences this could elicit an unanticipated emotional response. Sharing experiences can release unpleasant feelings that could cause potential emotional harm to participants (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). I made a conscious effort to reduce this risk, by providing verbal reassurance that a participant can refuse to answer any questions. Additionally, I emailed participants the questions in advance so that they are prepared. Before data analysis, participants were able to review the interview transcript to retract any statements.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

An immense shortcoming to the study is the small sample size. The small sample size of this qualitative design is concerning in relation to generalizability (Trotter, 2012). As the sample is small, it is hard to generalize the findings to the entire population. However, much thought goes into selecting each participant in the qualitative study (Morse, 1999). This careful selection is to ensure a diverse sample for a comprehensive picture. A diverse sample permits a generalization of the findings (Morse, 1999). However, the findings do not necessarily have to be extended to the entire population. Due to limitations, I have condensed the scope of the study to educators solely in the GTA.
An inherent problem in the qualitative design is the high potential for bias (Ivey, 2012). Bias can occur at several different stages of the process (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). At the beginning of the process there is a potential for selection bias where participants are not randomly selected (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). By nature of the interview design, there is a high potential for both observer and confirmation bias (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). The researcher is supposed to be encouraging the participant to share as much information as possible (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Thus the researchers’ overt and hidden response to the interviewees’ answers may bias the responses. Additionally, the researcher may choose to analyze and select data that supports individual beliefs leading to confirmation bias (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). In sampling I made a conscious effort to use a wide range of sampling techniques to avoid selection bias. Additionally, I was highly conscientious of my body language during the interview. I did my best to refrain from commenting and providing nods or other signals that can be interpreted as approval or disapproval by participants.

A feature of this design is the holistic approach of the research study (Lakshman et al., 2000). The phenomenon being studied is complex. Thus a holistic approach is critical to understand and “preserve the complexities of human behavior” (Lakshman et al., 2000, p. 371). This enduring and complex research question cannot be simplified or reduced it needs to be explored. There needs to be an extensively detailed understanding of the issue “that can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature” (Creswell, 2011, p. 56). The qualitative design crowns teachers voices as the pillar of this study. Putting the participants in the hot seat is beneficial as it ensures social validity (Leko, 2014). The benefits of this extend to the unlimited and unanticipated findings that will result
This design is intended to empower teachers to share their stories and experiences (Leko, 2014). This sharing from teachers is envisioned to inspire other educators to employ strategies and seek our resources to aid their practice. The sharing is especially relevant for this topic as inclusion strategies in relation to the physical education space are limited. Teacher insights in this study add to the literature on inclusion in the physical education classroom.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I rationalized the research methodology. I explained the value of qualitative research for the purposes of this research study. I then proceeded to explain the main instrument of data collection and the utility of this instrument. I attested to the value of the semi-structured interview and explain its purpose in relation to the research study. After explaining the instruments and research design, I identified the population of this study and the participants. I listed the sampling procedures and criteria that would be used to gather participation for this study. I explained the techniques used to recruit participants and how this was purposeful for the scope of my research. After explaining data collection I described the process of my data analysis. After the procedural explications, I considered the ethical issues such as privacy, storage and consent. I addressed the ethical issues and discussed my efforts to combat them. I concluded this chapter by revealing the important limitations of the study and highlighting the strengths of my research design as it takes a holistic perspective on the inclusion of special education children in the physical education classroom. Subsequently, in Chapter 4 I report the research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

Chapter 4.0 Introduction to the chapter

This chapter reveals the findings that surfaced through the data analysis of two research interviews. The themes that emerged from the interviews are in relation to answering the guiding research question of the study: what factors influence teachers in the elementary system to successfully include the active participation of students with disabilities in their mainstream physical education class? The findings are organized into the following overarching themes: teacher abilities, professional development, roles and barriers. I delve deeper into each of these themes, creating sub-themes. I first define each theme, report on the findings from the data analysis and finally discuss the connection of the theme to existing research. I conclude the chapter by consolidating the findings and making suggestions for next steps.

4.1 Teacher Abilities

The personal abilities that a teacher possesses are highly influential in successfully fostering inclusion into the classroom. My participants highlighted three characteristics that they see as critical in fostering an inclusive space. According to my participants, the principal abilities that are central to being inclusive are teacher initiative, self-reflection and a commitment to ongoing learning. I explore each of these qualities in more detail through the lens of Aara and James.

4.1.1 Teacher Initiative

Only Aara spoke to the importance of teacher initiative in creating an inclusive environment. Aara’s experience and knowledge around inclusive physical education can be credited towards her own personal initiatives. Throughout the interview, Aara mentioned several valuable resources and various kinds of resources that aid her in creating an inclusive physical
education program. When speaking, Aara mentioned the resources she uses, she has discovered on her own. Her success to learning about adaptive physical education can be credited to her individual pursuits. When I asked Aara about how her practice has evolved in reference to inclusion she refers to her personal will. She commented, “I think I always from the get go I just had that sense maybe, but later on probably 5 and 6 years in, as I started to get connected with OPHEA and I just as a teacher wanted to become a leader and strive for more.” Aara did not wait for the resources to find her, or for the school to connect her to resources. Aara sought out the opportunities and resources herself.

Teacher initiative is at the foundation of cultivating an inclusive space. Again it is more than just agreeing that inclusion is important, it is taking the responsibility to ensure that the environment is inclusive by taking action. In order for inclusion to take place, a teacher must first hold a positive attitude and that does not seem to be an issue (Vickerman, 2007). Vickerman (2007) says that physical education teachers generally have a positive attitude around inclusion in physical education. Both participants through their interviews appeared to value inclusion through their demeanor and tone. Although teachers generally agree that inclusion is important, the actual implementation of inclusion falls short (Long, 1999). This gap can be reduced by teacher’s taking initiative. Teachers need to move beyond valuing inclusiveness; teachers need to take action. Aara is an extremely passionate teacher about health and physical education. Aara stated that, “a good physical education teacher is one who really imparts the philosophy and vision of inclusiveness.” It is one thing to value inclusion, but it is imperative that teacher’s translate that philosophy into action by embodying that philosophy as Aara does.

4.1.2 Commitment to ongoing learning
Both participants indicated that they do not feel equipped to deliver inclusive physical education consistently. Aara commented on her preparedness, “I don’t think I would ever feel adequate right? I think every scenario is different.” James shared similar thoughts about his preparedness when I asked if he felt adequately prepared. He responded, “sometimes yes, sometimes no I guess.” James and Aara’s feelings about preparedness are shared in the scholarship as well (Vickerman & Coates, 2009). Physical education teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach in teaching inclusive physical education (Vickerman & Coates, 2009). Participants attributed this lack of preparedness due to the wide scope of special education.

Inclusive physical education is complex because all special education students are different. There is not a single approach that will work for every special education student. Aara stated, “I think all teachers are going to have some questions and concerns because as I said every student is different and every case is different and we can’t paint each student with the same brush. Saying oh this student has ASD and is low functioning so this is what I ought to do.” As Aara explained, one single approach is insufficient to reach all students with disabilities as these individuals are highly different. The scope and range for students with disabilities is extensive and teachers cannot expect to be an expert in every aspect. Vickerman (2007) speaks to the need for teachers to develop their practice by consulting with other individuals to adapt their practice. There needs to be a “recognition and obligation to modify and adapt existing teaching, learning and assessment strategies in order to facilitate full access and entitlement to the curriculum, alongside a commitment to engage in mutual partnerships and consultative discussion” (Vickerman, 2007, p. 398). Educators need to understand the gaps in their knowledge and continue their learning by accessing professional development opportunities.
4.2 Professional Development

In conversing with participants about their knowledge around inclusive physical education both participants referred to various professional development opportunities. Both participants shared their ideas on the benefits of workshops, educational documents/policies and personal experiences. Aara for instance when asked about how she feels supported to include special education students credits her experience. She stated, “And then just the experiences I have had with students with disabilities and exceptionalities.” The literature suggests that initial teacher training and continued professional development fails to equip educators to include special education students in physical education (Maher, 2010). In the next few sections, I will add the interviewees’ perceptions on the quality and benefits of the professional development opportunities they have participated in.

4.2.1 Official Education/ Workshops

Both participants were asked to speak about their formal teacher education. They both provided a brief synopsis of their educational background including their teaching degree, any Additional Qualification (AQ) courses they took and any other formal education in physical education or special education. Their brief synopsis and tone indicated that their teacher education was insufficient at providing them with the appropriate knowledge to deliver inclusive physical education. Aara took AQ courses in health and physical education as well as guidance part 1 and part 2 but did not speak to its relevance or application to inclusive instruction. James took community-coaching courses and AQS in special education but again did not give it much significance. From the conversations with participants they did not seem impressed with their teacher education in terms of teaching with inclusion as indicated by their brevity and tone. This lack of satisfaction with teacher education is consistent with the literature. Vickerman (2007)
suggests that, “university-based training acts as the grounding and preparation for including children with Special Educational Needs; however, the practical application, development and experience begin once trainees enter schools and start to work with pupils” (p. 396). In this manner, teachers are learning through their experiences on the job and not through their formal education.

Both participants made reference to the benefit of practical experience. Aara said, “that hands on opportunity has really informed my understanding.” Through doing and experiencing Aara is able to put the theory into practice. James made a similar comment suggesting that the use of “some sort of hands on workshop, extracurricular examples of how to do it” [what strategies to support special education students]. Teachers have vocalized the need to bridge the understanding between theory and practice (Vickerman & Coates, 2009). Teachers need to be given situations and opportunities to see the theory in practice. There needs to be an appropriate balance between theoretical and practical education (Vickerman, 2007) to deliver inclusive physical education.

4.2.2 Educational Documents/Policies

In terms of educational documents influencing teacher practice, the participants had contrasting opinions. I asked both Aara and James how board policies, Ministry documents and curriculum has influenced their practice. Aara identified numerous mandates, policies, and documents such as the curriculum as informative and influential in shaping her teaching practice. Aara listed policies such as the safe schools act, the academic vision of excellence, and the new health and physical education program as beneficial in “helping teachers think about their role and purpose in health and phys ed.”
James on the other hand did not feel that the documents had any influence on his practice. When I asked him how policy and ministry documents informed his practice, James commented, “I would say not much really.” James did not list any policies or any significant takeaways that has altered his practice. James later commented that “the documents we are given, curriculum documents and things and what not, there are some ways to modify the programs in there.” James emphasized the word some. Simpson and Mandich (2012) agree with the lack of applicable support James alludes to. “Within the curriculum, a teacher noted the lack of resource support for inclusive physical education saying “sometimes… there’s that little paragraph at the bottom… but it’s very general” (Simpson & Mandich, 2012, p. 21). The educational policies and official education are great theoretical practices that promote inclusion, but ultimately teachers require more hands on experience where they can observe and apply strategies (Vickerman & Coates, 2009).

4.2.3 Experiences

Both interviewees spoke to the value of experience as enhancing their education and knowledge around inclusive physical education. The scholarship indicates that educators lack the experience among other factors to deliver inclusive physical education lessons (Maher, 2010). Practical experience in the physical education role is a form of professional development that both participants regarded highly. Aara did not complete any formal education in special education whereas James did. Aara attributed her knowledge to her numerous and varied experiences. “So I haven’t per say done anything formally in the area of special ed, but just my experiences with colleagues and also some of the ambassadors… has really informed my thinking.” Throughout the interview, Aara mentioned several community partnerships, organizations and agencies that she has accessed to provide her with knowledge such as OPHEA.
Aara’s information stems from the network she has created around special education, obtaining practical experiences from places such as variety village, which is an accessible and inclusive fitness centre. Unlike Aara, James completed his additional qualifications in special education, completing special education part 1 and part 2. Despite James’s formal education, James continually praised and credited his knowledge like Aara to his experiences: “I think as you gain experience you learn new ways to work with students with any needs…” This experience provides educators the ability to do and experiment with different strategies enhancing their knowledge and ability to be inclusive.

James firmly believes in the value of experience. In asking him what would be the best way to prepare new physical educators to deliver inclusive physical education, he cited experience. He said, “Almost like placement. Placing teachers sorry placing prospective teachers in situations where they can maybe shadow a teacher or being in a situation where they can work or observe how teachers with experience work with students that are special needs.” Vickerman and Coates (2009) share a similar idea where they propose that student teacher’s could benefit from experiencing inclusion and having increased interactions with special education students. Simpson & Mandich’s (2012) research links teachers’ confidence in teaching inclusive physical education with their experiences with special education students. The literature also shows the power of experiences in shaping the attitudes around inclusion (Vickerman & Coates, 2009). For example, if a teacher has a negative experience with a special education student, they are “more likely to be reluctant to adopt flexible approaches to learning and teaching, particularly in areas where they are lacking in confidence” (Vickerman & Coates, 2009, p. 149). The participants are in agreement with the literature advocating for the benefit of experience.

4.3 Roles
According to Aara, a teacher educator and the scholarship, the inclusion of special education students in the physical education space is inconsistent across schools. The roles around inclusive physical education are not well defined. Vickerman (2007) comments on the issue by stating that there is ‘no universally accepted definition of the term inclusion and the related terms mainstreaming and integration’ and this lack of clarity can be problematic for PE teacher trainers if they are to fully prepare for and appreciate the issues and implications of including children with SEN (p. 385). This lack of clarity around roles makes it difficult to have a consistent approach and an effective program. Establishing an inclusive physical education program is a holistic responsibility involving the support of administration, parents, students and teachers (Bebetsos et al., 2014).

4.3.1 Role of the school

Aara as a teacher educator has the opportunity to visit various schools and observe programs. She finds that the role of the school is unclear resulting in inconsistent practices across schools. She feels the schools need to do a better job in ensuring and implementing inclusion. Aara commented,

…I feel there is a real role to be more inclusive. In my experiences particularly when I have gone out to support my students during practicum, I have been in environments where I do see some inclusion. But often too often there is a separate class for those students on their own who are maybe low functioning.

Vickerman and Coates (2009) suggests that a “clear context needs to be established as to what inclusive physical education for children with special education needs means in practice” (p.138). By clarifying the roles, schools can provide the adequate support to their teachers to ensure inclusive physical education. Aara suggested the role of the school should be more to
motivate and push teachers to continue their learning. In contrast, the literature says the role of the school is to ensure that special education policies are being implemented (Vickerman & Coates, 2009). James spoke about providing Educational Resource Worker’s (ERW) to provide additional support during physical education class. The literature had mixed comments about the benefits of an ERW (Mach, 2000; Maher, 2010; Simpson & Mandich, 2012). James offered various benefits of having an ERW from developing part of the program to being an authority figure. The collaboration between the ERW and physical education teacher can be powerful in designing an effective program.

Due to the lack of specific training for ERW’s as of now, a primary benefit that James pointed out is the authority. A role for the ERW is to act as behavioral support to the physical education teacher (Mach, 2000). In this role, the ERW can provide behaviorally interventions to keep the student safe and on task (Mach, 2000). This aid is essential because as James pointed out “in most cases you only have the student maybe once a week or twice a week so that student is not with you all the time whereas the ERW tends to be more of an authority to the student, so with their presence they’ll tend to listen more.” It is difficult to develop a relationship when a teacher sees the student occasionally. The ERW is a consistent figure and has more potential to be an authority figure to the student with special needs.

4.3.2 Role of the student

Students have a role in creating an inclusive physical education program. The student with special education needs has the role of advocating for themselves whereas the other students in the classroom have a role to be inclusive. Aara expressed the value of using the students as a resource “the best thing was asking the students themselves, what can I do that will help support
your learning?” Using students is highly valuable as they know themselves and their needs best so are a primary resource.

Not only is the special education student a key component in fostering inclusion but also the student culture of the class is a critical piece. Aara and James both alluded to the importance of student culture. James spoke about having students in the classroom paired off with the student and rotating the job:

Having students that are open minded to working with the individuals. So you don’t have to use the same student every time so that way they are participating in the event that everyone else is doing and at the same time they can feel that they are giving back to the other student.

Inclusive physical education is beneficial for all students (Bebetsos et al., 2014). The other students learn how to respond to other’s needs and develop empathy (Bebetsos et al., 2014). This opportunity helps with the character development of the mainstream students.

Aara alluded to the importance of student culture in a tangent about a commercial that advertised the Panam games. She said, “And I just thought wow that is so fantastic to see these boys outside of school in their own community to be compassionate and inclusive of others of disabilities.” Aara here discussed the role that all students have in creating an inclusive program. She begins by talking about empowering students themselves to advocate for themselves. She then continued to discuss the positive implications of an inclusive student culture. But, with respect to student roles, Aara sees the individual student with special needs as most influential, “…but as I said the biggest resources for us as teachers is our students themselves. Teachers need to listen and be open to their students. The student can be a powerful tool but it is the will and initiative of the teacher to ask and listen to their students.
4.3.3 Role of the teacher

Both of my participants highlighted the importance of the role of the teacher. Both alluded to the practices of the teacher that are relevant. At the end of the day, it is the teacher’s duty to deliver inclusive physical education. Aara postulated that the teacher is responsible for seeking out resources. Aara stated, “But being able to know where to go and ask for the right and answers and resources I think is key.” Vickerman (2007) supports this view putting the onus on the teachers to be proactive in the design of their program and “consult activity with schools, experience physical education teachers, schools, mentors and children with special education needs” (p. 398). The teacher should not passively wait for the resources to come to them teachers need to take initiative. A part of the teacher’s role is to reflect and pursue ongoing learning to better their practice.

Teachers need to critique their own practice and recognize where they need to grow. Aara shared, “I think it is recognizing that there are gaps in my knowledge and experience and just being aware of okay, where, who can I go to?” There needs to be a continual reflection on one’s practice. In order to make adjustments, a physical education teacher needs to be able to recognize good and successful practices (Vickerman, 2007). Whether it is good or bad a teacher should evaluate their program and make adjustments accordingly.

James referenced the value of the IEP as an effective teaching tool particularly in regard to assessment. “Depends if they have an IEP or not, so an individual program. It’s easier to evaluate them in that sense because then its almost like a checklist as opposed to grading skills that the other students are doing.” When I asked James about his involvement with the IEP construction, he confirmed that he is involved and has access to the child’s IEP. This need for collaboration in regards to the IEP is replicated in the literature. Teachers need to collaborate
with other professionals such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists and other organizations (Simpson & Mandich, 2012). Teachers need to be professional in their collaboration process and have clear communication with the other professionals to ensure a quality program is developed (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). Teachers can accept support from the school such as ERW’s and EA’s, listen to their students. However it is up to the teacher to take the initiative and ensure that their physical education program is inclusive.

4.4 Barriers

Participants spoke about safety and support as factors that restrict their ability to deliver inclusive physical education. Delivering an inclusive physical education can be negatively impacted by safety and support. It is important to recognize the factors that are hindering the inclusivity of a physical education class to find solutions to combat them.

4.4.1 Safety

Safety is a principal concern for both participants when considering including special education students in the physical education class. Aara indicated, “a concern for me would be the safety, physical and emotional safety.” Aara continued on explaining that she wants to meet the needs of her students. The physical education space needs to be safe in terms of not causing any physical or emotional harm to the child. The scholarship has referenced the importance of spaces being safe physically and the emotional wellbeing in terms of self-concept. The literature spoke about bolstering a student’s self-concept through physical education that improves competency and social acceptance simultaneously (Weiss, Diamond, Demark & Lovald, 2003). Thus active integration in an appropriate environment can help improve the student’s self concept and aid the student with their emotional safety as Aara alluded to. Aara also referenced the issue of safety with regard to scheduling and ratios. Aara explained, “we are still seeing time
tabled phys ed with 60 kids and that is not going to create a safe space for inclusion and integration of mainstream students with disabilities or exceptionalities.” The literature is in agreement suggesting that these large class sizes are difficult, as it does not create a safe facility that is needed for inclusive physical education (Simpson & Mandich, 2012). With such high numbers it might be difficult to provide individual activities and sports that benefit special education children (Haycock & Smith, 2011).

In contrast, James spoke about the safety of the entire class, not just the student with special needs. He discussed how when special education students are resisting an activity and start to do something else this is unsafe for the rest of the class. Adapted equipment can be a resource that helps make the environment safer (Simpson & Mandich, 2012). Teachers need to collaborate with other professionals such as ERW’s to ensure that the physical education space is safe (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). Teachers need to be knowledgeable about their students and mindful of the environment they are creating. The use of appropriate equipment and collaboration are important efforts to take to generate a safe space.

4.4.2 Support

Participants alluded to the significance of support in delivering an inclusive physical education program. In the prior section, I referenced Aara’s complaint about scheduling and the physical education space being crowded. This is a safety issue; but it also comes with lack of support from administration. Administration support is key as they are such a powerful governing body that partly organizes the physical education program specifically with the scheduling. Simpson and Mandich (2012) reported on the concern of safety, with teachers saying they needed more safe and accessible facilities. Administration needs to provide the support to create these safe spaces.
Aara not only advocates for administrative support but also support from the entire community. She spoke to the necessity of educating the community about the benefits of mainstream education,

I think the other part is education and awareness for the community and parents because you may have some parents who feel they don’t support the mainstream class if their kid is physically able, they may not support that and we need to educate and inform our students that this is a win-win situation for all of us to learn from each other.

Teachers are also hindered by the community and parent complaints. This lack of support negatively impacts the delivery of inclusive physical education.

A component of the network is the support from the community. I think this educational role of the community does not receive enough attention and it is crucial to get everyone on board with mainstream education to obtain the maximum benefits. The scholarship is in agreement; Bebetsos et al., (2014) discuss the role that parents and the community has in creating an inclusive school. Through education, these parties can learn of the widespread benefits to mainstream inclusive physical education (Bebetsos et al., 2014; Klein & Hollingshead, 2015). Teachers should be able to have a holistic support network including administrative and communal support to provide them with resources and confidence to successfully include students with special needs.

4.5 Conclusion

My participants highlighted that teacher abilities, professional development, roles and barriers are factors that influence an educator’s ability to deliver inclusive physical education. These findings are largely consistent with the scholarship in the field. In some areas, participants added to the literature making suggestions on how to better foster inclusion. To create an
inclusive physical education program many factors need to be in place. Two significant abilities of an inclusive physical education teacher include initiative and a commitment to ongoing learning. The literature cited the importance of a good attitude. Aara added to this by arguing that yes a positive attitude is important but teachers also need to take initiative. Many people are quick to agree that inclusion is important, however, it is essential to take the extra step by taking action and implementing inclusion. The other pieces such as pursuing professional development and accumulating resources stem from initiative.

Professional development around inclusive physical education is insufficient. Teachers do not report their theoretical knowledge as being helpful in aiding their inclusive practice. Both participants highly valued their personal experiences and credited their knowledge to their experience. I think this is a key suggestion for potential hands on workshop or placement as suggested to provide teachers with opportunities to experience inclusive physical education.

Although the literature and educational policies are strong in promoting inclusion, the roles and terminology are unclear resulting in inconsistent practices. The role of the school, teacher and students needs to be clarified to ensure inclusion. A key finding was using the students themselves as resources as this is empowering for students and informative for teachers.

Safety and a lack of support are two barriers to delivering an inclusive physical education program. Teachers need support from staff and administration to create a safe environment for students. Providing teachers with safe, accessible facilities and equipment are important to creating a safe space. Creating inclusive physical education is a shared responsibility. The teacher is critical in the formula, however the support of administration, parents, staff and students are significant contributors to deliver inclusive physical education. In Chapter 5 I reveal the implications of the findings in this study and speak to its significance.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction to the chapter/overview

The objective of the present study is to examine what factors influence teachers to create an inclusive physical education space for special education students. This chapter consolidates the research findings drawing final conclusions about the study. First, I summarize the key findings and their significance in relation to the research study. Then, I explore the implications of the research through the lens of the broader educational research community and through a personal reflective lens as a teacher professional. I address the scope of the present study and provide recommendations for future research. I conclude the chapter by emphasizing the significance of this research study.

5.1 Overview of key findings and their significance

My research findings revealed teacher abilities that participants viewed as critical to creating an inclusive classroom. These abilities include teacher initiative and commitment to ongoing learning. I perceive these abilities as fundamental to the actual implementation of inclusion, as the findings suggest that the application of inclusive physical education is highly inconsistent. This inconsistency can be linked to a number of other factors revealed through this study such as the role of the school, support from the community. However, I see that teacher initiative and commitment to ongoing learning are central to the educator’s efforts to implement inclusion.

The study focused on the quality of ongoing learning by asking teachers to discuss their valued professional development experiences. The results indicate that practical experience was highly beneficial in advancing one’s practice. Teachers did not acknowledge the benefit of theoretical education and/or workshops. This finding suggests that teachers need to be provided
with more opportunities to work in the specific environment of a physical education class with special education needs.

The roles of various people involved in delivering inclusive physical education are discussed, which include teachers, students and schools. Across schools, the implementation of inclusive physical education is inconsistent. This is partially explained by the school board’s lack of delegation in clarifying responsibilities for all parties for successful delivery of inclusive physical education. As the roles are not clearly defined, a lack of accountability exists, where responsibility for inclusive education is diffused among members. This suggests that all parties need to take an active role in ensuring inclusive physical education is delivered. The school board needs to designate explicit responsibilities for administration, teachers, teaching assistants, support staff, students and parents in the implementation of inclusive physical education.

Finally the study discovered barriers that educators face in delivering an inclusive physical education program. This revealed that student safety is a principal concern and lack of support from administration and the community can have a negative impact. In terms of safety, teachers need to consider both the physical and emotional safety of their students. Teachers need to build in modifications and accommodations to enable all students to safely participate. As well, teachers need to ensure students are successfully included to promote their self-concept. Additionally, teachers need to identify the beliefs that surrounds inclusive physical education and combat any resistance in the community and administration.

5.2 Implications

This section highlights the implications of this study. First, I consider the broader education community, exploring how the present research study impacts this community. Then, I focus on how these findings impact my professional practice as a teacher.
5.2.1 Broad: The Educational Research Community

This research impacts the broad educational community as my participants highlight the inconsistencies in terms of inclusive practice across schools. This suggests that the policies that advocate for inclusion are not being implemented consistently. This inconsistent practice could be a result of the policies being interpreted differently and/or a lack of accountability. The research literature suggests that policies exist that advocate for quality inclusive physical education yet, as my participant revealed, in different schools, inclusive physical education appears vastly different and unfortunately it is not always inclusive. The policies around inclusion can be fairly vague leading to a misinterpretation. Policies need to clarify what inclusion truly looks like. In addition, there needs to be greater accountability. Responsibilities and expectations need to be clear and school boards need to clarify everyone’s roles for delivering inclusive physical education. Clarification in roles instills a sense of ownership making someone accountable for delivering inclusive physical education.

My research findings imply that initial teacher education does not adequately prepare teachers to deliver inclusive physical education. This is implied through participants’ lack of reference to their teacher education when talking about their knowledge around inclusive physical education. There is a gap between theory and practice. Teacher candidates are taught the concept of inclusion within the context of teaching. However teacher candidates are not given ample opportunity to apply this knowledge in the physical education environment. Both participants referred to the value of experience in enhancing their ability to deliver inclusive physical education. Teacher candidates need to be given direct experience to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Teacher education needs to provide
increased experiences for students to observe successful inclusive physical education and have an opportunity to teach and implement inclusive physical education.

In addition to improving teacher education, education for the Educational Resource Workers (ERW’s) needs to be improved. One of the participants in this study noted the beneficial support received from ERW’s. The ERW is important, as they are a consistent support for the special education student so serve as an authority figure. To maximize effectiveness of the ERW, appropriate training needs to be provided to the ERW’s in relation to inclusive physical education. The ERW spends much time with the special education student and can serve as a critical support in fostering that inclusive community in the physical education space. ERW’s can provide crucial support in the classroom; this can be extended to the gymnasium if they are given adequate training. Physical education specific training for ERW’s would largely benefit the co-teaching and design of a successful inclusive program. In this way, the ERW can provide more than just an authority figure by repeating or reinforcing. The ERW can aid in providing/suggesting accommodations and modifications to make the program inclusive for special education students. As there are various roles the ERW can provide to the student, the school board needs to be explicit in what the role is of the ERW in delivering inclusive physical education, whether that is being an authority figure or co-teaching.

The present study reveals the complexity of inclusive physical education. Successful implementation of inclusive physical education involves the coordination of multiple parties including staff, students and parents. Participants alluded to the benefit of support from the students and the community. Lack of support from the community particularly puts a lot of stress on the teacher, negatively impacting their ability to deliver inclusive physical education. The community can attach a stigma to inclusive physical education arguing that it is a disservice to
other students in the mainstream program. The support from the community can alleviate pressure off the teacher that aids the teacher in delivering inclusive physical education. The community needs to be educated on the widespread benefits of inclusive physical education. By increasing the education of the community the implication is the added accountability on the teacher to deliver inclusive physical education. Successful delivery can serve as evidence to the community as to the importance and benefits of inclusive physical education for all children.

In order to maximize effective and consistent implementation of inclusive physical education, the school board needs to clearly delegate explicit roles to each of the members accountable for the delivery. Once the roles are defined, efforts can be made in order to ensure all parties are equipped to fulfill their responsibilities, whether its providing education, workshops, resources, and/or information to the responsible person.

5.2.2 Narrow: Your Professional Identity and Practice

The findings directly impact me, as a future educator. Both participants referenced the value of experience as critical to delivering inclusive physical education. One participant spoke to the issue of some veteran teachers who are stuck in their ways refusing to evolve their practice. As special education has a broad scope and knowledge is always advancing, it is important to evolve practice alongside it. Teachers need to keep an open mind, experimenting with new strategies. It is important to employ different approaches as all students are unique and no strategy is perfect in meeting the needs of all students. The research inspires me to engage in ongoing critical self-reflection, evaluating the effectiveness of strategies and activities in my classroom. There are certain approaches that I am more familiar with but that should not restrict me from incorporating other strategies. I need to seek opportunities to enhance my practice whether through professional development opportunities, additional research, or collaboration.
with other teachers. I am inspired to open my mind to ideas I am unfamiliar with trying to integrate these novel approaches in my classroom and seeking opportunities to continually improve my knowledge and ability to deliver inclusive physical education.

Resources around inclusive physical education are available and accessible. As physical education teachers design their own physical education program, these resources should be consulted to develop a program inclusive of all abilities. Physical education teachers can accept support from the school such as ERW’s and EA’s, and consider input from their students when creating their program. However it is up to the teacher to take the initiative and ensure that their physical education program is inclusive. The teacher is at the forefront as they lead the physical education class and I am inspired as an educator to take that initiative. As a teacher I seek to be resourceful and actively seek for supports and activities that will create an inclusive physical education class. I want all of my students to obtain the same enjoyment and benefits that I received as a student. In order to do so, I need to ensure that there are modifications and accommodations to my program that enable all students to experience success and enjoyment. I need to do everything that I can, and if my knowledge is lacking in a particular skill/sport, I need to take the initiative to find resources that will provide appropriate modifications and accommodations to the program.

5.3 Recommendations

In order to deliver inclusive physical education, I recommend that the school board clarify the roles for those involved in the delivery of inclusive physical education. I suggest that the school board have a conversation with schools around the responsibilities of all parties. The school can then reiterate this information to all members when constructing the IEP to ensure all
parties are on the same page in regards to child’s physical education. In this way the special education student can obtain the maximum benefits of physical education.

Additionally I recommend that schools provide training to ERW’s and physical education teachers to enhance their ability to deliver inclusive physical education. The training should consist of hands on experience where the teachers and ERW’s can have the opportunity to put theory into practice and experiment with various strategies and activities that they can use in their own practice.

For policy makers, my recommendation is to be explicit around the implementation of inclusive physical education. It is apparent that policies can be misinterpreted. Policies should specify the roles for each person involved in the delivery of inclusive physical education. These policies need to paint a clear picture as to the expectation and mandate in the delivery of inclusive physical education, and outline the consequences for a failure to comply with policy.

5.4 Areas for future research

My research findings largely align with the scholarship. Some areas in the literature appeared underdeveloped and were not addressed with the scope of this study leaving me with three suggestions for future research. One issue relates to the lack of clarity in regards to roles around delivering inclusive physical education. I think future research could focus on the allocation of responsibilities and the various roles that different parties can take on in delivering inclusive physical education.

Another area I see as needing future research is the teacher-student relationship. As students do not receive physical education on a daily basis, their contact with the physical education teacher is minimized, thus the use of the ERW can be critical to echo instruction, as the child is familiar with the ERW. Research can be done to examine how the strength of the
physical education teacher’s relationship to the special education student, and the perception of
the inclusivity of the program from the perspective of the student and teacher.

Lastly, I think research around the individual student through case study work could
benefit the research in this field, specially related to student self-advocacy. Both the scholarship
and participants regarded that students are valuable resources in suggesting ways to modify an
activity so that it is inclusive.

5.5 Concluding comments

My research findings highlighted the numerous factors that affect an educator’s ability to
deliver inclusive physical education. Teachers generally have a positive attitude and support the
inclusion of special education students. However the actual implementation often falls short and
this can be a result of a number of factors.

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that influence a teacher’s ability to
deliver inclusive physical education. The study identified several factors that contributed to the
delivery of inclusive physical education including teacher qualities, professional development
opportunities, roles of those involved and the barriers of safety and lack of support. The findings
demonstrate that inclusive physical education is possible. I am inspired as an educator to deliver
inclusive physical education through taking that initiative. The research demonstrates that
resources are plentiful despite some barriers. There are various resources that provide
information on how to overcome these barriers. The physical education teacher can consult a
variety of resources to overcome barriers and provide modifications/accommodations to their
program. It is my hope that teachers will take on this initiative and overcome any obstacles to
meet the needs of special education students in mainstream physical education.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

[Image]

Date:
Dear ___________________

I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on examining the experiences and opportunities available to students with disabilities in the physical education classroom. I think findings from this study will inform current and future physical education teachers as well as other professionals in the education community. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic. I would appreciate it if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you, outside of school time.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded.

The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Samantha Pereira
Samantha.pereira@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer
Contact Info: rose.fine.meyer@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 Samantha Pereira and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name: (printed) _______________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in my research study. The purpose of this research is to learn how schools and educators are supporting special education students in the mainstream physical education space. This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes. 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 start?

Background information

1. How long have you been teaching?
   a) How long have you taught physical education?

2. Where did you attend your teacher education?

3. In addition to teaching physical education, have you fulfilled a role as a coach?

4. What are your experiences with attending professional development courses/AQ’s in special education and/or physical education?

5. What qualities do you consider imperative to being a good physical education teacher?

Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

1. What do you believe the role of the school is in supporting special education students in their physical education?

2. What are your thoughts on the physical education students with exceptionalities should receive? Should it be mainstream or segregated?

3. How are you supported to provide an inclusive physical education class with resources?

4. Do you believe there is sufficient education available to assist new physical educators to deliver an effective and inclusive physical education program?

5. Do you feel adequately prepared to successfully include students with disabilities in your physical education classroom?

Teacher Practices
1. How do you assess and evaluate special education students in your physical education classroom?

2. What strategies do you find helpful in including special education students in your classroom?

3. How has your teaching practice changed in terms of inclusion over the years?

4. How has board policies/ministry documents on inclusion influenced your teaching approach?

5. What concerns/hesitations do you have that would limit your ability to include special education students in physical education class?

6. What type of support do you see as critical in including students with disabilities in your physical education classroom?

Supports and Challenges

1. What factors limit your ability to successfully include special education students in the physical education space?

2. In what ways do you feel supported to successfully include students with disabilities in the physical education classroom?

Next Steps

1. What resources will help you support special education students in the physical education space?

2. How can we prepare new physical educators to successfully include students with disabilities in their classroom?

Thank you for your participation in this study.