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Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

**Including students with special
educational needs arising from disabilities
in post-primary physical education: An
exploration of student and teacher voices**

Una Patricia McGrath

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, School of Education,
National University of Ireland, Cork.

January 2019

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Declaration

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents.

Signed:

Date:

Abstract

Globally, there has been a shift towards a more *inclusive* educational system, particularly in the last 30 years (Cooper and Jacobs 2011; Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013). Current Irish Government policy aims to provide an inclusive educational environment for all individuals (NCSE 2013).

This study focused on the inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) arising from a disability in physical education (PE) in post primary schools in Ireland: specifically, from the perspectives of students and PE teachers.

Internationally, several studies have indicated insufficient initial teacher education in the area of inclusion, resulting in some negative attitudes and lack of perceived competency among practising PE teachers (Smith and Green 2004; Block and Obrusnikova 2007; Ko and Boswell 2013). In the Irish context, Meegan and MacPhail (2006) highlighted the lack of any large scale in-depth study, either quantitative or qualitative, relating to the focus of my inquiry. Additionally, research involving student voice in physical education and inclusion has been sparse (Coates and Vickerman 2010; Wickman 2015).

In my study, depth of information was sought to capture the real life experiences of students' and teachers' perspectives on inclusion and physical education in post-primary schools. Researching PE teachers' experiences and perspectives can inform inclusive policy and may identify how it can be interpreted and implemented in practice. In addition, apprising us of PE teachers' continuing professional development requirements. Capturing and listening to the voice of the student is an integral part of this inquiry and may inform good practice, as they are a central stakeholder in the teaching and learning process.

The current study is a multiple case study design (Stake 2006) based on four schools incorporating seven PE teachers and ten students presenting with different disability categories (autism spectrum disorder – ASD, deaf/hard of hearing and physical disabilities). The data collection methods consisted of two phases of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with PE teachers and one interview with the students. Additionally, these PE teacher research participants maintained a reflective e-journal within a school year, while a researcher diary was maintained throughout the duration of the study.

Research questions related to PE teachers' perspectives on and experiences of their *lived work lives* regarding inclusion and PE in the Irish context, their continuing professional development requirements relating to facilitating inclusion and students' with SEN/disabilities, experiences of their PE classes.

Data were analysed using Miles, Huberman and Saldaña's (2014) framework of qualitative data analysis. Notably, the main theoretical frameworks underpinning this study were sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1978), Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998) and Eteläpelto et al., (2013). While the biopsychosocial model of disability (WHO 2001) and the current perception of inclusive education (UNESCO 2005) conceptually guided the study. Additionally, the framework of the continuum of professional teacher learning (Feiman-Nemser 2001) was used to further inform the journey through the study. Overall the findings revealed that PE teachers portrayed a positive perspective towards inclusion with some caveats and challenges regarding class sizes, demanding school days, differentiation, segregation, category and levels of disability. Teachers in this study have observed an increase in the number of students with SEN arising from a disability in their schools. An unanticipated thematic category arose in relation to teachers' perceived observation of poor fundamental skills and fitness levels amongst all students. Additionally, anxiety amongst students with ASD was voiced as a concern.

Interestingly, PE teachers in this study felt that there is a tangible need for continuing professional development (CPD) specific to inclusive PE. The type of CPD preferred is of a practice based nature, involving students with SEN/disabilities. For the most part teachers articulated that their initial teacher education (ITE) was inadequate to meet their current needs regarding inclusion and PE. In relation to perceived competency, teachers felt somewhat confident and mostly comfortable with inclusion, but the word *challenge* emerged a number of times. Furthermore, teachers indicated that they feel that competitive, fast moving, team games are less conducive to inclusive practice.

On the whole students with SEN/disabilities in this study felt included in PE. However, some students, particularly those with ASD had days when they felt marginalised. The reasons given related to the nature of the activity or uncertainty about the PE class beforehand. Students however voiced the importance of the social interaction aspect of PE. Evidently, the student data identified differentiated needs, supports and adaptations which reflected the students' disability category or type.

The positive perspectives and views of teachers towards inclusion in PE are encouraging, nonetheless, caution is advisable as the challenges identified need to be addressed at both policy and practice levels if these perspectives are to continue. PE as a distinctive subject offers a valuable learning opportunity from a social development perspective. It may have important implications for the child in society and their lifelong learning. Regarding initial teacher education (ITE) and inclusion, the following are suggestions to PE teacher educator (PETE) providers: firstly, a coherent, consistent and collaborative approach to inclusion within programmes across providers is advised. Secondly, the embedding of inclusive values and pedagogic strategies in the majority of modules within PETE programmes is important. Thirdly, practicum type learning experiences with relevant school populations are recommended during ITE.

Currently the Teaching Council is in the process of developing a continuing professional development National framework known as *Cosán* (The Teaching Council 2018). Drawing from the conclusions of this study, *Cosán* provides an ideal opportunity to address areas of professional development identified by teachers both from a policy and practice perspective. The notion of the agentic PE teacher actively seeking adaptations within the curriculum to promote inclusion, and sharing this learning, provides a useful basis towards meaningful CPD. In practice, it is important for PE teachers to actively listen to the student voice regarding selection of content, their differentiated needs and supports according to their disability category or type.

This original study has contributed to a sparsely, under-explored research area in Ireland, helping in some measure to fill an existing lacuna. It is essential to conduct further research to support PE teachers and students in order to optimise the learning experience and sense of belonging for all.

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I would like to thank the students, whose voices are represented in this research. Thank you for sharing your experiences of inclusion in physical education, your voices are important. I would sincerely like to thank the PE teachers who took time out from their busy lives to willingly participate in this research. Sharing your wealth of experiences has made this thesis possible.

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Dedication

To my late parents, Michael and Mary McGrath, for offering me every opportunity in life, and for instilling a strong work ethic and identity. I am forever grateful.

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Glossary of Terms

Adapted Physical Education (APE)

Adapted physical education is a sub-discipline of physical education with an emphasis on physical education for students with disabilities. The term generally refers to school-based programs for students ages 3–21; the more global term adapted physical activity (APA) refers to programs across the life span, including post-school sport and recreation programs. Note that both general and adapted physical education share the same objectives. The major difference between general and adapted physical education is that in the latter, “adjustments” or adaptations are made to the regular offerings to ensure safe, successful, and beneficial participation (IFAPA 2014).

Continuing professional Development (CDP)

Continuing professional development (CPD) refers to life-long teacher learning and comprises the full range of educational experiences designed to enrich teachers’ professional knowledge, understanding and capabilities throughout their careers (Teaching Council 2011, p. 19).

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS): The DEIS Plan 2017 sets out the Department of Education and Skills vision for education to more fully become a proven pathway to better opportunities for those in communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion (Department of Education and Skills 2018a).

Disability

Disability is a complex, multifaceted concept that is problematic to define. It is not a fixed, unchanging entity as no common definition exists across health, education and social welfare (Griffin and Shevlin 2011). The National Disability Authority (NDA) explains that different definitions of disability are used in different contexts – for example to set eligibility for particular services, or to outlaw discrimination on grounds of disability. Furthermore, they expound that there is no definitive list of conditions that constitute a disability. A person’s environment, which includes the supports they have and the physical or social barriers they face, influences the scale of the challenges they face in everyday life (NDA 2014a). The following definitions reflect an Irish and international view. The Disability Act 2005 set out the following definition:

“disability”, in relation to a person, means a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment (Government of Ireland 2005, part 1:2).

Disability is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person’s body and features of the society in which he or she lives. (WHO 2018)

Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) refers to the foundation stage of learning to be a teacher when student teachers are engaged in a recognised teacher education programme provided by a Higher Education Institution (Teaching Council 2011, p. 11).

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is a statutory body of the Department of Education and Skills. The NCCA advises the Minister for Education and Skills on the curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools. In addition, it advises on the assessment procedures used in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum (NCCA 2018a).

National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was set up in Ireland to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children. The Council was first established as an independent statutory body by order of the Minister for Education and Science in December 2003 (NCSE 2014a).

Perceived competence

Perceived competence is a psychological construct based on self-evaluation of one’s effectiveness or capability in a specific context. It is defined as one’s awareness, beliefs, expectancy, or understanding of abilities, skills, or capacities to be effective in interactions with the environment (Boekaerts, 1991). In the context of my study, perceived competence is taken as a subjective construct relating to how PE teachers feel about their knowledge, skills and attitudes towards inclusive physical education.

Physical Education (PE)

In Ireland the post-primary curriculum is determined by the Minister for Education and Skills who is advised by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA 2018a). Physical Education is a curricular subject offered at junior and senior cycle level in post primary schools. Junior cycle “physical education aims to develop students as knowledgeable, skilful and creative participants who are confident and competent to perform in a range of activities safely. The course aims to build students’ appreciation of the importance of health-enhancing and inclusive physical activity and a commitment to it now, and in the future” (Government of Ireland 2016, p.5).

Physical education “is included in two ways in senior cycle: the senior cycle physical education framework provides a planning tool for schools to design a programme for those learners not following a programme in physical education as part of the Leaving Certificate. Leaving Certificate Physical Education, on the other hand, is a full subject that learners study and are assessed in, as part of their Leaving Certificate examinations” (Curriculum online 2018a).

Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI)

The PEAi is an organization which promotes the subject of physical education. The primary objectives of the Association are as follows:

1. To improve standards and performance within Physical Education by providing members with opportunities and materials for professional growth, (through the exchange of information and knowledge in the field and related areas).
2. To keep members up to date on the latest issues, trends, technologies and legislative developments in P.E. and related areas.
3. To support and disseminate outstanding research.
4. To safeguard members’ interest by speaking with a strong unified voice on relevant issues.
5. To provide national leadership and opportunities to influence policy and direction in P.E.
6. To interest public awareness and understanding of the contribution of the Physical Education profession to Irish life (PEAI 2018a).

Special Educational Need (SEN) and disability:

For the purpose of this study it is necessary to clarify the terms “Special Educational Need (SEN)” and “students with disabilities”. The term ‘special educational needs’ is defined in the EPSEN Act 2004 as:

“special educational needs means, in relation to a person, a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition and cognate words shall be construed accordingly”
(EPSEN 2004, p.6)

As seen from this definition, the term SEN also includes students with disabilities. There has been much discussion on the term SEN in special education and its varying purposes (Department of Education and Science 2007; NCSE 2013). From the outset, it is imperative to understand that a student may have a disability but may not have any Special Educational Needs arising from that disability that necessitate additional educational supports (NCSE 2014b). Throughout the study the term special educational needs arising from a disability will be utilised (denoted as SEN/disability) as it is anchored in the Irish context where the research was undertaken. Additionally, a descriptor of disability categories applied by the National Council for Special Education can be viewed in Appendix 2.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Background

The educational provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) arising from disabilities has changed substantially in the last 30 years in Ireland. Historically, students with disabilities were educated in segregated environments comprising of special schools organised according to disability / special educational need category (Smyth et al., 2014). From the nineteen fifties this parallel system to the mainstream was affirmed by the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Government of Ireland 1965). However, in 1991 the government commissioned a report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) which prompted the stimulus towards a more inclusive educational system. The approach is encapsulated; “as saying that we favour as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as is necessary” (Department of Education and Science SERC 1993, p. 22). This report impacted on special educational policy and “has provided a blueprint for the development of special education that continues to influence policy decisions up to the present day” (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007, p. 45). Furthermore, Ireland, at this juncture in time, was influenced greatly by a global movement towards inclusion across many aspects of society (Carey 2005, p. 131; Department of Education and Science 2007, p. 15; Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013, p. 1119).

Subsequently a considerable body of legislation has been enacted with consequences for the education of students with disabilities and special educational needs, the most relevant of these legislative measures being the Education Act 1998, the Equal Status Act 2000 and, most significantly, the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004, albeit not fully enacted. Current Government policy aims to provide an inclusive educational environment for all individuals and this is clearly indicated in the following: “the EPSEN Act provides for the education of pupils with special needs alongside their peers in an inclusive environment, wherever possible” (Winter and O’Raw 2010, p. 11).

My study focuses on the inclusion of students with disabilities in post primary schools in Ireland; specifically, in the physical education (PE) context. The core question for my

research centers on the actuality, i.e. the practice of inclusion in the PE setting. Thus, I intend to explore PE teachers' real life experiences of including students with disabilities in a mainstream setting. This exploration will specifically target the views of physical education teachers and students with disabilities at post primary level in Ireland. It is generally accepted that teachers play a major role in facilitating inclusive learning and that their knowledge, skills and attitudes are central to this process (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education - EADSNE 2010; Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013, p. 1119). Likewise, the essential role of PE teachers in facilitating quality inclusion in physical education is well documented (Morley et al., 2005; Vickerman and Coates 2009; Hodge, Lieberman and Murata 2012). Additionally, the views of students with disabilities in relation to their experiences in PE are sought. Although the study is evolved from the primacy of the PE teacher, representing students' views within the research process was considered essential. Too often the 'student voice' is absent from research involving inclusion and PE (Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk 2003a; Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk 2003b; Fitzgerald and Stride 2012; Coates and Vickerman 2013; Wickman 2015).

1.2: Rationale

The motivation and basis for this thesis is a combination of my theoretical and experiential expertise of working within the field of adapted physical education and indeed, my observation of the need for quantitative and particularly qualitative research in the Irish context. Over the years my thinking in relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities in PE has evolved. I fervently believe that regardless of ability, every student has a right to participate in PE.

From a personal perspective, I worked as a PE teacher throughout the 1990s in a post primary school in Ireland. During this time, I experienced very little interface with students with disabilities. Those that I did encounter presented predominantly with mild general learning disabilities, even though the school was a large community college catering for almost 800 students. According to the National Council for Special Education, in the Irish context, children with general learning disabilities find it more "difficult to learn, understand and do things than other children of the same age" (NCSE 2014b, p. 27).

For the most part, the provision for students with disabilities at that time, despite the SERC (1993) recommendation, was still through the special school system. Towards the end of the 1990s, I took a career break and worked in Kuwait in a mainstream school which also provided classes for students with disabilities. I experienced first-hand an educational system of supportive inclusion. The school operated a system of partial inclusion whereby the students were included in certain classes, such as PE and music. It “tweaked” my interest enormously and the seed of curiosity was sown. On returning to Ireland in 2001, I began to observe a gradual shift of students with disabilities attending mainstream schooling in line with government policy. A change was afoot; “the changes were influenced by sociopolitical factors, educational system reviews, high profile court cases, and parent advocacy groups which led to legislative changes in special education” (Rose et al., 2010 in Kelly et al., 2014, p. 69). Anecdotally, PE colleagues of mine were expressing concern at their lack of ability to cater for the students with varying needs. At this juncture, many PE teachers had received little if any training in *adapted* physical education. Hence, I felt there was a need to formally document and investigate the reality of inclusion in PE in the Irish context from the lived experience of PE teachers and students with disabilities.

In October 2012, I had the opportunity to co-chair a discussion forum on the topic of *Adapted Physical Education* at the National Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI) conference held in Monaghan. A cross section of post primary PE teachers and some pre-service PE teachers attended. The aim of the forum was to initiate discussion on the topic of adapted physical education and to gauge practising teachers’ needs. Delegates highlighted a number of concerns which partially prompted the impetus for this research. Their concerns were anecdotally articulated as follows:

- How do we educate our post-primary students to have empathy and understanding towards peers who have disabilities?
- How do we promote self-confidence and self-esteem in our students with disabilities in the PE environment?
- Where do we access information regarding various categories of disability and their implications for the PE class?

- How do we include students within a class where there is a combination of students both with and without a disability and with varying degrees and categories of disability?

From the discussion which ensued, it was clear that delegates wanted and would welcome information dissemination and guidance on the topic but felt that this was not available to them. They particularly felt that they needed hands-on praxis or experiences working with students with disabilities in an inclusive PE setting.

In the international context the lack of research, particularly qualitative research, in this area of physical education and inclusion has been highlighted (Morley et al. 2005; Block and Obrusnikova 2007; Ko and Boswell 2013).

Additionally, Block and Obrusnikova (2007, p. 120) in their extensive review of literature on *Inclusion in Physical Education from 1995-2005*, concluded that “more naturalistic observations and discussion with General PE (GPE) teachers about issues related to inclusion would perhaps yield richer data that would translate more directly to practice”. Given the increased movement towards inclusive education globally (Bunch and Valeo 2009; Hodge et al., 2009), it is crucial to gain an insight of PE teachers’ real life experiences of the phenomena. Furthermore, research on the voice of the student with a disability in PE is meagre (Coates and Vickerman 2010; Wickman 2015; Wilhelmsen and Sorensen 2017). At the initial stages of this research study the student voice was not present. In 2014 the study began from the primacy of the PE teacher and their perspectives and experiences of inclusion of students with SEN/ disabilities in PE. However, stemming from an extensive literature review and through discussions with my supervisors, it was deemed important to include the students’ experiences. The students are the central stakeholders in the learning process in their physical education class, to not include their voice in this sociocultural study would have been incomplete. Student voice is considered within learning as a social interaction (Fleming 2015). Hence it was decided in 2016 to ensure that the student voice was firmly to the fore of the current study, to inform research, policy and practice going forward.

In the Irish context, Meegan and MacPhail (2006, p. 80) noted that “both quantitative and qualitative research on teachers’ perceptions of teaching students with special educational needs in PE in Ireland is very limited”. They particularly highlighted the lack of any large scale in-depth qualitative study (Meegan and MacPhail 2006). Furthermore, Block and

Obrusnikova (2007) note that much of the recent *attitude* and *perceived competency* related research has focused on undergraduate PE teachers, they call on more research in this area pertaining to practising PE teachers. They felt that it is particularly essential to investigate the impact of in-service training or continuing professional development and support on the attitudes of PE teachers. Likewise, Qi and Ha (2012) in their review of inclusion and physical education, spanning from 1990-2009, found that the most commonly reported studies emanated from the perspective of teachers, at both pre-service and in-service stages. However, Wilhelmsen and Sorensen (2017) in their most recent systematic review (2009-2015), highlighted the importance of seeking information from children with disabilities. Moreover, Haegele and Sutherland (2015), recommend exploration of both the teacher's and student's perspective toward PE experiences within the one context.

Therefore, given what Meegan and MacPhail (2006), Block and Obrusnikova (2007) and Haegele and Sutherland (2015) have recommended in their research, the participants of my study are *practising* PE teachers and students with disabilities. The aim is to capture their real life experiences of their general PE classes. Overall research into the implementation and consequences of inclusion at post primary level appears to be lacking; "in Ireland, there is a dearth of research on the outcomes of inclusion" (Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley in Kelly et al 2014, p. 69). Thus I contend that this scholastic inquiry is indeed very much merited and warranted.

1.3: Significance of the Study

From a scholarly perspective this study is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, this type of in-depth qualitative study on PE teachers' experiences has not been researched in Ireland to date and may provide rich data to inform initial teacher education, continuing professional development, policy development and teaching practice. The gap between inclusive policy objectives and the reality of inclusive provision in PE in Irish schools is central to this study. Arguably, it can be said that delivery of special education in Ireland is in a transitionary stage, as policy and practice have yet to be fully entrenched in Irish schools (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013, p. 1119). Whilst the human right to engage in PE and physical activity is conceptually supported (UNESCO 2015), the 'complexity' of effectively

implementing inclusive PE is poorly addressed (Pocock and Miyahara 2017, p. 752). Examining teacher experiences will inform us of their real life practice which may lead to improved policy and practice.

Secondly, in 2011 the Department of Health (DoH) published a review report of Disability Services and policy across a number of areas including education. In the main, it proposed a reframing of disability services towards a model of individualised supports, underpinned by mainstreaming of all public services (DoH 2011). Although not the focus of the current study, it is worth noting that under the section *Education supports*, it was cited that there has been a growing trend of students with SEN changing from post primary settings to special schools (Kelly and Devitt 2010 in DoH 2011). A variety of reasons were advanced by Kelly and Devitt for this development, including the lack of appropriate curriculum in mainstream educational settings and the availability of a greater level of supports in special schools. The Kelly and Devitt (2010) study involved 2 phases. Phase one comprised of 54 principals of special schools in Ireland responding to a questionnaire. Phase two consisted of focus groups, interviews and meetings with students, parents and teachers (Kelly and Devitt 2010, p. iv). Findings from the study show an increasing trend of new student entrants (12+ years) enrolling in special schools from mainstream schools. The findings appear to conflict with Government policy and divergent to inclusion. Thus it is relevant to be cognizant of the implementation of Government policy in this area. It certainly poses the questions – why are students with disabilities and their parents choosing to move to a special school setting for post primary education and are post primary schools meeting the needs of students with disabilities, particularly in light of the government’s policy on inclusion?

Likewise, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), in their recent Policy Advice report, *Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs* (NCSE 2013), noted a lack of movement of numbers in special schools to mainstream settings. The report points out that; “even though there has been a significant investment in resources to support the inclusion of students in mainstream schools over the last decade, the numbers attending special schools and classes have remained relatively constant” (NCSE 2013, p. 17). Concurring with Kelly and Devitt’s finding, the NCSE (2013) also notes, with some concern, that there is an increasing trend of students transitioning to special schools as they reach the age to transfer to post-primary schools” (NCSE 2013). My research focus is to capture the reality of post-primary teachers’ and students’ views and experiences of inclusive physical education, in mainstream school settings in contemporary Ireland.

Thirdly, my research will create new knowledge in the field of inclusive practices in physical education in Ireland through original research. The originality of the study is underpinned by the recommendations of both international studies (Morley et al., 2005; Block and Obrusnikova 2007; Ko and Boswell 2013; Haegele and Sutherland 2015) and research in the Irish context (Meegan and McPhail 2006) on the need for large scale in-depth qualitative research focusing on PE and inclusion. Additionally, the participants in this study are practising PE teachers and students with disabilities in the post primary sector. Previous key studies in Ireland examined these issues from the perspectives of initial teacher education providers in PE in relation to inclusion (Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a) and adapted physical activity provision in primary and special schools (Crawford 2011). Findings from both of these studies indicated that there is a lack of appropriate training both at initial PE teacher education and primary teacher education in relation to the accommodation of students with disabilities in PE. However, the voices of students with disabilities or PE teachers were not incorporated in these studies. Whilst Meegan and McPhail (2006) did utilise post primary PE teachers, their study was quantitative in approach, investigating four disability types only and the selected variables of gender, academic preparation and previous experience of teaching children with special educational needs. The authors also acknowledged that the PE Attitudes towards Teaching individuals with Disabilities – 111 (PEATID 111) questionnaire used, which is based on US terminology gave “a somewhat negative description of students with special educational needs” (Meegan and McPhail 2006, p. 86). They recommended that future research should contextualise teacher attitudes within a social framework rather than a medical model and to use terminology relevant to an Irish context. These latter points I aim to incorporate within my research. Importantly, students with varying disabilities are active participants in this study, they are given a voice which was often denied in previous research (Rose et al., 2015, p.31).

1.4: Scope of Research

In this study, depth of information rather than breadth of information is sought. Seven practising PE teachers, from four different schools, comprise the research sample. Furthermore, ten students, mostly senior cycle, with varying disabilities are participants in the research process. In Ireland senior cycle students in post primary schools refers to students in transition year, fifth year or sixth year (Leaving Certificate). Generally, students

in senior cycle range in age from 16-19 years and transition year is optional or compulsory depending on school policy (O'Mara et al., 2012). The rationale for selecting senior cycle students was to garner their experiences from junior cycle as well as their current experiences. The research adhered to a replication rather than a sampling logic (Yin 2014). A sampling logic endeavours to reflect a complete universe or pool of potential respondents (Ibid). Whereas, replication across similar and contrasting respondents is pursued in this study (Punch and Oancea 2014). The aim of replication in this instance is to select a small sample which can offer a richness of experiences towards the research focus. Seven PE teachers and ten students from four schools were purposively selected combining both maximum variation and snowball sampling (Patton 1990).

Maximum variation sampling contains individuals with differing experiences (Jones, Brown and Holloway 2013). The PE teachers have varied personal backgrounds (age, gender), educational experiences (initial teacher education, years of teaching PE and teaching students with different categories/ degrees of disabilities) and work environments (type of school, location of school, facilities available, and ethos of school). They, however, all work within post primary or second level schools. The students selected present with three different disability categories: autism spectrum disorder (ASD), physical disability and deafness/hard of hearing. Snowball sampling sources persons of interest from already recruited participants in the study (Punch and Oancea 2014; Berg 2009). The teacher participants selected complied with the following inclusion criteria; (a) the participant is a fully qualified PE teacher (b) the participant has at least 3 years teaching experience and (c) the participant is teaching children with a diagnosed disability in a mainstream PE setting. A minimum of three years of teaching experience embraced Feiman- Nemser's (2001) framework. This framework, comprising of a three stage continuum, firstly a *pre-service* stage, secondly an *induction phase* (which spans the first three years of teaching) and the third stage comprising of *continuing professional development*. Hence, this study focuses on the practising PE teacher within the last stage of Feiman- Nemser's (2001) framework. The Teaching Council of Ireland (2011) has aligned its professional teacher education continuum similarly to Feiman-Nemser's (2001) framework.

1.5: Provision

According to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) “most children with special educational needs attend mainstream schools and are fully included in mainstream classes, with fewer than 1 per cent of students in Ireland attending a special school” (NCSE 2013, p. 113). However, special schools in Ireland are classified as primary/ national schools regardless of the age of the student. Reference is made to special schools in the SERC report “these are national schools which can cater for pupils from 4–18 years of age” (Department of Education and Science 1993, SERC, p.50). This classification situation remains unchanged (Ware et al., 2009). However, as noted earlier there is an increasing trend for students with SEN to transfer at post-primary stage from mainstream primary to a special school (Kelly and Devitt 2010). This finding concurs with Ware et al., (2009, p. 7), who stated that “the majority of pupils in special schools for pupils with mild general learning disability are now of post-primary age”.

Table 1.1: Numbers of students in special schools and classes as % of total school population

Students	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total school pop.	784,460	790,296	775,046	791,600	807,776	819,134	823,430	838,990
No in special schools	6,048	6,059	6,008	6,049	6,078	6,290	6,568	6,812
% of total	0.77	0.77	0.78	0.76	0.75	0.77	0.80	0.81
No in special classes in mainstream schools	3,191	3,072	2,989	2,984	2,931	2,625	3,000	3,286
% of total	0.41	0.39	0.39	0.38	0.36	0.32	0.36	0.39

(NCSE 2013, p. 17)

The most recent figures from the Department of Education and Skills key statistics indicate similar trends as shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.2: Department of Education and Skills Key Statistics

	2015/2016	2016/2017
First Level	553,380	558,314
Primary schools	545,310	550,200
Of which special classes in mainstream schools	4,355	4,836
Special schools	8,070	8,114
Second level (excluding number of post leaving cert students)	345,550	352,257
Secondary	192,808	194,879
Vocational	94,826	97,741
Community & Comprehensive	57,916	59,637
Total first and second level population	898,930	910,571
% in special schools	0.90	0.89

Department of Education and Skills 2018b

It should be noted that special schools in Ireland are classified as primary schools. Additionally, figures were not available for special classes in post-primary schools.

In their review of provision, Rix et al., (2013) suggested the consideration of redefining special education and special educational needs in Ireland. These suggestions are made in light of the current definition of special educational needs which focuses upon the individual deficit. In line with this view it would seem appropriate to “frame special educational needs as the need for special education which emerges because of restrictions within the curriculum, pedagogy and organisational processes” (Rix et al., 2013, p. 206).

1.5.1: Prevalence

As regards ascertaining an estimate of prevalence of special educational need and disability in Ireland it is difficult to give a definitive figure due to differences in language, terminology, definition and methodology. NCSE have cited a “25% prevalence rate” covering all levels of special educational need (NCSE 2013, p. 112). This estimate was derived from an ESRI study (Banks and McCoy 2011) commissioned by the NCSE. The study was based on data from the longitudinal study *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI), which used the EPSEN Act (2004) definition of special educational needs and was based on reports of parents, teachers and students. Banks and McCoy (2011) established their findings on the mid – primary years of 8000 nine year olds from the GUI Study. However, the authors advise caution in their report that there is a disparity between their 25% prevalence rate finding and estimates presented across other government departments and agencies. They recommend that “language and terminology used by policy-makers, government departments and government agencies need to be revised and harmonised” (Banks and McCoy 2011, p. 5). More recently Cosgrove et al., (2014) provide an estimated prevalence rate of 28% (27.8%) which was also based on the GUI nine-year olds study and the broad definition of special educational needs from the EPSEN Act. However, Banks, Maitre, and McCoy (2015, p. viii) published a considerably lower estimate of 4.1% of children 0-17 with a disability. Their finding was based on the data from the 2006 National Disability survey which ascertained a disability based on the level of difficulty experienced in carrying out everyday activities across nine disability categories.

The former studies i.e. Banks and McCoy (2011); Cosgrove et al., (2014), did not take cognisance of the severity of disability in relation to everyday activities in estimating prevalence. These differences indicate a need to establish a consistent approach across departments and agencies in relation to prevalence studies in order to have comparable data. This point is highlighted in the following: “future research needs to focus on obtaining a prevalence rate of students with special educational needs aged 12+ in mainstream post primary education” (Kelly et al., 2014, p.80).

Similarly, there are issues in relation to the use of categories of disabilities amongst various government agencies. For example, the disability categories assumed by the NCSE (Appendix 2) are a function of the resource allocation system rather than a function of the EPSEN Act (Banks and McCoy 2011). For instance, the EPSEN Act definition of special educational need does not take cognisance of high and low incidence disability. Again as in the use of terminology above there is a need to establish a consensus amongst policy makers, government agencies and professionals. It is noteworthy to bear in mind at this juncture that international research is indicating a shift from disability categories as a method of administering resources to children with special educational needs (Banks and McCoy 2011, p. 5). This move away from the allocation of resources linked to a categorical system is strongly evident in the NCSE’s most recent policy advice documents (NCSE 2013; NCSE 2014c); “the level of additional support for students should be linked to their actual level of need rather than category of disability” (NCSE 2013, p. 49). Most recently, the Department of Education and Skills (2017a) has implemented a new allocation model for Special Education Teachers to mainstream post primary schools. The new Special Education Teaching allocation will provide a single unified allocation for special educational teaching needs to each school, based on that school’s educational profile.

1.6: Research Questions

To address the purpose of this study, the following questions guide the data collection and analysis. They are allied with a hierarchy of questions presented in chapter three. The overarching question is: *What are P.E. teachers’ and students’ experiences of inclusion of students with special educational needs arising from disabilities in PE in post primary schools?*

Evolving from this general query the following form the foundation of this research:

1. What are PE teachers' perspectives on their *lived work lives* regarding inclusion and PE in the Irish cultural context?
2. What are PE teachers' continuing professional development requirements for the future in order to support inclusion?
3. What are PE teachers' experiences of inclusion and Physical education, in relation to their perceived sense of competency and initial teacher education?
4. What are students' with disabilities, experiences of their physical education classes?

1.7: Aims of Study

This study aims to investigate the inclusion of students with SEN/disabilities in post-primary curricular PE in the Irish context from the PE teachers' experiences and perspectives. Additionally, cognisance of the student experience is considered a vital component, hence the lived experience and voices of students are included.

- It aims to be an in-depth study of PE teachers' perceived sense of competency and perspectives on including students with SEN/disabilities in the PE class.
- The study aims to identify teachers' views on their continuing professional development requirements in order to support inclusion. Thus identifying coherent implications for initial teacher education and continuing professional development phases of the teacher education continuum.
- An understanding is sought into both the challenges and positive aspects of practising PE teachers regarding inclusion. Emanating from this understanding, it is hoped to ascertain the implications for policy, practice and ongoing research.
- Moreover, the research aims to document the voice of the student with SEN/disability, in relation to their PE experience. Listening to the student voice is

considered integral to the study. Thus, it is anticipated that the findings will impact meaningfully on students with SEN/disabilities in their PE classes.

- It is envisaged to contribute to the body of literature influencing future government policies and legislation around inclusion at post primary level in 21st century Ireland.
- Furthermore, the research findings, through dissemination activities, will inform practising PE teachers, PE teacher Education Universities and colleges, organisations such as the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the Professional Development Service for teachers (PDST), The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the Special Education Support Service (SESS) which is under the remit of NCSE. Equally findings should further inform international research, policy and practice.
- Finally, this research aims to produce and elucidate on new knowledge in the field of inclusive and adapted physical education in Ireland through original research.

The research examines teachers' Initial Teacher Education in adapted physical education, to ascertain their response to such professional development. The research is in line with all Irish Teaching Council documentation and practice, whilst guided by the research questions. The study aims to gain an insight into the continuing professional development requirements from the teachers' perspectives on inclusion in the PE setting. Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan (2012a) conducted research in relation to initial teacher education and inclusion of students with special educational needs in PE. This research involved just four participants from each of the teacher Education provider institutions (Universities and Institutes) in Ireland. The authors acknowledge the small participant size in their study, but the study gives a cogent insight into many aspects of initial teacher education from the *provider's* perspective. However, in my research the key area of interest is from the perspectives of practising PE teachers and students with special educational needs arising from a disability.

1.8: Research Design and Methodology

The choice of study design was influenced predominantly by the research questions (Thomas 2011; Yin 2014). The questions involve seeking the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of PE teacher’s experiences and perspectives in relation to inclusion in physical education in their everyday working lives. Additionally, the voice of the student presenting with SEN/disability was deemed essential to include in this study, as a key stakeholder (Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk 2003a; Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk 2003b; Coates and Vickerman 2008; Fitzgerald and Stride 2012). Accordingly, a case study was selected allowing the researcher to gain a rich and in-depth insight into a phenomenon in its completeness (Thomas 2016, p. 23).

Depth rather than breadth was sought in this study; thus I choose a multiple case study design as the most suitable to answer the research questions (Stake 2006; Yin 2014). Four schools incorporating seven PE teachers and ten students presenting with a SEN/disability constituted the research cohort. The data collection methods involved face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews and the upkeep of reflective e-journals within a school year. Additionally, a researcher diary was maintained adding the dimensional *self* to the research. Evidently, more than one data collection method was deemed essential, as advocated by Thomas (2011) and Punch and Oancea (2014) in case study research. The single ‘once-off’ interview, initially considered, may not fully capture the complexities of inclusion and teaching students with disabilities in PE (Hodge et al., 2009, p. 416). Therefore, a second interview was conducted with a sample of the PE teacher research cohort. Additionally, it was felt that the inclusion of a reflective e-journal afforded the PE teachers time and space to process their experiences, thus, allowing them “to construct meaning and understanding from the experience” (Crawford, O’Reilly and Luttrell 2012b, p.116). Fundamentally, reflective practice is important for teachers to process their many daily interactions in school life, which can impact on future considerations (Pollard 2008).

1.9: Inclusion: Policy and legislation

An overview sketch of the influence of policy and legislation on the development of inclusive education is outlined in the next section.

1.9.1: International Inclusion Policy

Internationally there has been a shift towards inclusive education for all (UNESCO 1994; United Nations 2006; WHO 2011). In the UK, the Warnock Report (1978) “heralded the call for increased mainstreaming, or the integration of children with special educational needs into the mainstream curricular environment” (Morley et al., 2005, p. 85). Many of the recommendations from Baroness Warnock’s report “became law in the UK through the enactment of the Education Act 1981” (Clough and Corbett 2000, p. 4). The return of the Labour Government in 1997, saw “inclusive education rise up the political agenda” (Coates and Vickerman 2008, p. 168). Furthermore, the enactment of legislation such as the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act (2001) in the UK, has guided a move towards more inclusive educational settings. Likewise, in the USA, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, was reauthorized in 1997 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – IDEA (Hodge, Lieberman and Murata, 2012), witnessing a shift towards a right for inclusive education for individuals. Subsequently the latter Act has been amended as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act – 2004, also known as IDEA (Ibid).

The Irish government’s policy of educating students with special educational needs arising from a disability in an inclusive environment is consistent with international policy (Department of Education and Science 2007; Cooper and Jacobs 2011). The government’s commitment to the notion of inclusion is evidenced in being a signatory to the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994). Ireland is one of ninety-two governments and twenty-five international organisations that have pledged to the Salamanca Statement. The Statement opens with the aim of ‘Education for all’ and the principle of inclusion. The *Education for all* vision is based on the belief that it is an individual’s human right to education. It is a belief that, regardless of ability and difference, everyone has an equal right to education.

The UNESCO affirmation was further advanced in Malaga, Spain in 2003 at the Council of Europe conference of Ministers responsible for integration policies for people with disabilities (Council of Europe, 2003).

Subsequent to the Malaga declaration, the “*Council of Europe Action Plan: to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015*” was disseminated to its member states. It set forth strong objectives promoting inclusive education. It aimed to encourage legislation and policy to help prevent discrimination (Council of Europe 2006) towards persons with disabilities in their pursuit of education at all levels of their lifespan. The Council of Europe particularly emphasises the importance of mainstream education for most children with disabilities. They also encourage that disability awareness should be an integral part of any educational institution.

Thus, it appears evident from an international perspective that many governments endorse the notion of inclusion not only in the educational setting but in all aspects of society. In the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006) Article 24 states in relation to Education that:

Parties recognise the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning

(United Nations 2006, article 24)

The Irish Government has only recently (March 2018) ratified this UN Convention. The State will be the last member of the EU to do so despite having signed the framework in 2007 (United Nations, 2013, chapter IV: 15). Hence, the key question arises; is the Irish government really committed to implementing tangible changes regarding inclusive education in practical terms? Furthermore, the World Health Organisation (WHO) World Report on Disability (2011) recommended that children should be educated in a mainstream setting where possible. Most recently, the UNESCO (2015) charter on PE, physical activity and sport is a rights based charter that supports inclusive access to sport for all. Table 1.3 provides a summary of the key international policy milestones in relation to inclusive education.

Table 1.3: Summary of International Inclusion Policy

Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education	UNESCO (1994)
Council of Europe conference of ministers responsible for integration policies for people with disabilities – Malaga Declaration	Council of Europe (2003)
The Council of Europe Action Plan: to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015	Council of Europe (2006)
United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	United Nations (2006)
WHO World Report on Disability	The World Health Organisation – WHO (2011)
The International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport	UNESCO (2015)

1.9.2: Inclusion Policy: Irish Context

From the early 1950s a system of segregation and special schooling for the “handicapped” (term used in that period) was implemented in Ireland. This special school system was affirmed by the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Government of Ireland, 1965) which recommended that special education should be provided in separate special schools. These schools catered for children with “mental handicap” and “physical and sensory handicap”. During this era government policy was to provide for children with disabilities by means of special schools or a parallel system to mainstream (Carey 2005; Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013).

However, by the mid-eighties the global influence of integration and inclusion *slowly* began to impact upon Irish educational policy. Nevertheless, inclusive educational policy was “constrained in the 1980s probably due to a combination of economic difficulties and belief systems favouring segregated education” (Mc Donnell 2003 cited in Smyth et al, 2014, p. 437). Notwithstanding, a major change in policy direction was witnessed in the early 1990s. The Special Education Review Committee (SERC) was established in 1991 by the then Minister for Education, Mary O’Rourke, to review existing educational provision for children with special needs. The Minister requested the Committee to make

recommendations in relation to future developments in special education provision. The Committee reported its recommendations in 1993 (Department of Education and Science SERC 1993). The SERC report advocated a continuum of education delivery for children with special needs, ranging from placement in an ordinary class in a mainstream school with support, part-time or full-time placement in a special school, to full time placement in a residential special school (Department of Education and Science 2007). In essence the Committee favoured “as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as is necessary” (Department of Education and Science SERC 1993, p.22). However, they stressed the importance of the special school, which could be seen as a criticism of the SERC report, as such, not wishing to ‘take on’ the special school system, which at the time was mainly governed by religious communities.

The 1993 SERC report was a seminal document in prompting and influencing the future direction of special education in Ireland. Significantly, it recommended the allocation of substantial increased resources for special educational needs provision (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013), which had not been prioritised heretofore.

1.9.3: Legislative Influence

Internationally, educational legislation such as the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act* (2001) in the United Kingdom and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (2004) in the United States have influenced the shift towards inclusive education. In the context of this study, the focus is on post primary education; specifically relating to physical education and inclusion. In order to understand fully the current milieu, it is important to highlight germane legislation and its potential influence on the inclusion of students with SEN/disabilities in education in the Irish context.

In this review relevant aspects of legislative development relating to this study are highlighted. However, it must be remembered that legislation in itself is not a panacea. One cannot legislate for attitudes both within the school and in society in general regarding appropriate education of students with SEN/disabilities. But legislation does guide our top down approach and informs our ethos as a society. In chronological order the following Acts (Table 1.4) form the key legislative Acts enacted since the 1990s relating to special educational needs in Ireland:

Table 1.4: Key Irish Legislative Chronology

Act and Year	Main purpose of Act
The Education Act 1998	<i>Statutory right to education for all</i>
The National Disabilities Authority Act 1999	<i>Formation of the statutory independent body of the National Disability Authority</i>
The Education Welfare Act 2000	<i>School attendance</i>
Freedom of Information Acts 1997,2003, 2014	<i>Public can access information from a range of public bodies</i>
The Equal Status Act 2000	<i>Prohibits discrimination on a number of grounds including disability</i>
The Teaching Council Act 2001	<i>Regulations and standards for the teaching profession</i>
The Children Act 2001	<i>Child protection and criminal justice</i>
The Equality Act 2004	<i>Workplace protection</i>
The Education for Person's with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN)	<i>Provision of education for students with SEN, in an inclusive environment where possible</i>
The Disability Act 2005	<i>Provides for assessment of educational needs</i>
Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018	<i>Ensures equal and fair access to full education for all children</i>

It is not within the remit of this study or, moreover a necessary contribution to the focus of this study, to critically analyse *all* Acts mentioned above. Nevertheless, the three Acts deemed most relevant are expounded upon. Firstly, the Education Act 1998 is important, as it gives statutory rights to parents in relation to their children's education and legally instructs schools to cater for a range of needs. This Act was the first piece of legislation to legally establish the rights of citizens and obligations of the Government to education. The Education Act deals with all aspects of education, but certain sections are particularly relevant to special education. In relation to functions of the school, the Act stipulates that the school should "ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs are identified and provided for" (Government of Ireland 1998, Part 2, section 9a). In relation to the minister's responsibility in section seven the Education Act specifies the following commitment:

to ensure, subject to the provisions of this Act, that there is made available to each person resident in the State, including a person with a disability or who has other special educational needs, support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person. (Government of Ireland 1998, Part 1, section 7, 1a)

However, the Government free themselves from any real commitment from the above statement with the following proviso "in carrying out his or her functions, the Minister shall have regard to the resources available" (Government of Ireland 1998, Part 1, section 7, 4a). Carey (2005) opines that this proviso is "the single most critical phraseology releasing

the Government from any significant responsibility to children with special needs” (Carey 2005, p. 141). If the real fiscal commitment from the Government is not there, it augurs poorly for the future of special education in Ireland. It is a case of ‘rhetoric’ and not reality, or perhaps the old Irish adage ‘put your money where your mouth is’ comes to mind. Certainly, in practice, parents, teachers and other stakeholders are aware of the lack of resources and funding to meet the needs of children with SEN and disabilities. Thus it could be argued that the Act, whilst aspirational and well-intended, is perhaps lacking in commitment to actual delivery.

Indeed, fiscal constraints are still a major impediment and barrier to special education provision today in Ireland. The financial constraints have been particularly apparent since the recession of 2008 and are now only slightly recovering. The new model of allocating teaching resources for students with special educational needs (NCSE 2014c) may somewhat address this issue. The new model entitled “Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs: A better and more equitable way” was introduced in September 2017 (Department of Education and Skills 2017a). According to Circular No 0014/2017, issued by the Department of Education and Skills, the new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational teaching needs directly to each school, based on that school’s educational profile. Importantly, it affords “schools greater autonomy to allocate teaching resources flexibly, based on students’ needs, without the requirement for a diagnosis of disability” (Department of Education and Skills 2017a, p. 4).

Secondly, The Equal Status Act (2000) was established to improve *equality* for all members of the Irish State. The discriminatory grounds set out in the Equal Status Act (2000) are gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age (for persons over 18), disability, race, and membership of the Traveller community.

In Section 7 of the Act, it deals with providing equal access and admission to all educational establishments for all persons with disabilities. It does make the exception of the following “in relation to a student with a disability would, by virtue of the disability, make impossible, or have a seriously detrimental effect on, the provision by an educational establishment of its services to other students” (Government of Ireland 2000a, section 7.4). This is a very salient point as it has far reaching implications. It suggests that if the inclusion of the student with a disability has a *seriously detrimental* effect on the other students, that particular student will not be catered for in said educational facility.

Also, very importantly, another implication of this Act is in relation to exclusion from an activity because of the student's disability. Take for example a student with a disability in PE who is left sit at the side of a sports hall and no effort is made to include him/her in the activityis this discriminatory? Certainly, in my opinion and interpretation of the Act it would appear so. However, many contextual aspects would have to be considered such as the nature of the activity, the nature of the child's disability, resources available, competency and attitude of PE teacher. These aspects will be explored in-depth within my study.

1.9.4: EPSEN ACT 2004: Significance and Implementation

Arguably the most significant piece of legislation in the history of the State regarding special education provision, is the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 (Carey 2005). The Act provides a statutory framework for the education of children with special educational needs. Two pertinent questions need to be posited here: firstly, why is this Act so significant and secondly, why, 14 years since its inception, has this Act not been fully implemented?

Firstly, regarding significance, the EPSEN Act, containing altogether 53 sections encompasses the entire range of special educational needs provision in Ireland. The relevant sections in the context of this study will be highlighted and commented upon. The Act endorses an inclusive educational system and this is defined in section 2 of the following:

A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with—(a) the best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act, or (b) the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated

(Government of Ireland 2004, section 2, p7)

However, it can be argued that a 'loophole' or even a barrier to full inclusion exists in the above statement. Take the example of a child presenting with challenging behaviour which could be perceived as impeding the learning of others. Under the Act this particular child may be deemed unsuitable for a mainstream setting, thus questioning the true meaning of inclusion.

There are several duties for the ministers (both Education and Health) under this Act. The main focus is in relation to the provision of funding and resourcing for the implementation of an education plan for an individual with special educational needs. It is noteworthy that the act refers to an *education plan* as opposed to an *Individual education plan*; the former would imply a generalised education plan.

Importantly, the Act prompted the establishment of a number of bodies with responsibilities for special education – namely the National Council for Special Education (EPSEN, section 19) and the Special Education Appeals Board (EPSEN, section 36). The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is an independent statutory body, which will “eventually undertake the total responsibility for special education services” (Carey 2005, p. 162). Prophetic words indeed, as on February 10th 2015 the then minister for Education, Jan O’Sullivan announced that a number of support organisations would be incorporated within the remit of the NCSE. The organisations are the Special Education Support Service (SESS), the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) and the Visiting Teacher Service for children who are deaf/hard of hearing and for children who are blind/visually impaired (VTSVHI), all of which, until February 2015, had been managed by the Department of Education and Skills.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was established to improve the delivery of educational services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children. The Council was first established as an independent statutory body by order of the Minister for Education and Science in December 2003 (NCSE 2014a). The NCSE was formally established with effect from 1 October 2005 under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 (EPSEN Act). Therefore, the central and significant role of the NCSE in the provision of special education in Ireland cannot be underestimated, particularly over the coming years.

The reason for the partial implementation of the EPSEN Act is the second question posed in this section. Whilst many feel that the EPSEN Act provides an excellent roadmap and vision for inclusive education in Ireland it has not been implemented fully due to fiscal Government constraints (NCSE 2013). This lack of implementation is having a negative impact on the development of inclusive learning environments (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013; Smyth et al., 2014). The Act was published in 2004 along with the formal establishment of the

NCSE in 2005 (NCSE 2014a). Some sections were enacted, but as the economy started to decline it had a tangible impact on full implementation of the EPSEN Act (Rose et al., 2015).

The Global financial crisis of 2007/2008 impacted greatly on Ireland. The country fell into recession in 2008 and is only now, a decade later, beginning to recover economically (Hardiman and MacCarthaigh 2013). Thus major cuts across all Government Departments were witnessed (Ibid). During the austerity period (2009-2013), the cuts had implications for special and inclusive education in relation to the EPSEN Act (Travers and Savage 2014). The sections of the Act catering for one's right to assessment, individual education plans, the designation of schools, appeals processes and collaboration between the Education and Health services have not been implemented fully (Rose et al., 2015). The previous Government declared its intention in their *Programme for Government* to publish a plan for the Act's implementation (Government of Ireland, 2011), however this did not materialize. Subsequently, the current Government in their *Programme for a Partnership Government* have vowed to "progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis" (Department of Taoiseach 2016, p. 92). But, at the time of writing this has not been realised. This does not reflect well on the commitment part of the Government towards implementing inclusive best practice.

The Department of Education and Skills (2014) published a circular letter 70/2014 called "Guidance for post-primary schools on the provision of resource teaching and learning support". Within this circular are guidelines on the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process from the NCSE. However, it is important to realise that the section of the EPSEN Act pertaining to IEP's has not yet commenced. Research (Rose et al., 2012, p. 110) relating to the use and implementation of IEPs in ten primary schools in Ireland indicated that "schools are taking the initiative in developing IEPs, though there is inconsistency in their use and in perceptions of their usefulness".

This issue was voiced by the Teachers Union of Ireland in November 2014 in an article entitled '*Advice to members regarding planning for Special Needs*': "In budget 2008, Government took a clear decision not to commence these sections (relating to IEPs) at that point in time. Nothing has changed since apart from further cuts in funding" (TUI news 2014, p.28). Thus a legal entitlement to an IEP does not presently exist for children with special educational needs and will not come into effect until the appropriate sections of the Act are commenced by Ministerial order (NCSE 2006).

The NCSE has published a comprehensive document entitled ‘Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools, Policy Advice Paper No.4’. In this policy advice paper the NCSE (2013, p. 3) recommend full implementation of the EPSEN Act (2004) as the “most effective route to the assessment and planning for students with special educational needs”. However, they do stipulate the proviso “as soon as resources permit” (NCSE 2013, p. 3). Thus, the power lies within the Department of Education and Skills and its Minister to make the resourcing policy a reality. The NCSE does not have the power to compel.

As a result of the above mentioned policy advice paper No. 4 (NCSE 2013), the NCSE also advised the then Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn the following:

the current allocation model was inequitable because teaching posts were not allocated to schools in line with their students’ needs, the NCSE also advised the Minister that a model should be developed based on the profiled need of each school, without the need for a diagnosis of disability (NCSE 2014c, v).

As mentioned previously, the new model for allocating teaching resources for students with special educational needs was introduced to primary and post primary schools in Ireland as of September 2017 (Department of Education and Skills 2017a).

1.9.5: Influence of Parental Litigation

A number of high court cases have been taken by parents since the 1990s which have helped shape the country’s provision of special education. Three notable cases were the O’Donoghue case (1992/1993), the Sinnott case (2001) and the O’Cuanachain case (2007). Firstly, the O’Donoghue case was taken by a mother on behalf of her son Paul who had a severe and profound general learning disability. Mrs. O’Donoghue sought enrolment for her son in a number of educational institutions without success. She felt that Paul had a Constitutional right to education and was being discriminated against. She took the case to the high court. The case was heard by Mr. Justice O’Hanlon who found that every child had a Constitutional right to free primary education, even those with the most severe or profound conditions. It is mainly as a consequence of this case that “classes for children with severe and profound general learning disabilities are in place throughout the country” (Carey 2005, p. 212).

The second influential case was the Sinnott case (2001). Kathy Sinnott took a high court case against the Department of Education on behalf of her son, Jamie. In the case Mrs. Sinnott sought to compel the State to provide an appropriate education past the age of 18 for Jamie, who had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and a severe and profound general learning disability. She lost the case after government appeal and the State ruled that it was not obliged to provide free primary education beyond the age of eighteen.

Most recently was the Ó Cuanacháin case (2007). The parents of Sean, a young boy who had ASD, sought a specific type of education – Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) for their son. This proved a very expensive and long running case, which the parents lost. Subsequently, the number of court cases taken by parents dropped off markedly. It was felt that many parents were deterred, as the Department pursued the Ó Cuanacháin's for costs (Cradden 2014), but ultimately they did not pay costs.

The common thread running through the many court cases since the 1990s, is the need for the Irish State to address appropriate educational provision for all on the part of the government. The State has spent millions of euros defending itself against these cases, money which could have been better invested into appropriate resources and programmes for all children with SEN and disabilities.

1.10: Thesis Timeline

2014

January - June: Began relevant readings and started literature review, obtained Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) approval for research, clarified research questions, research design and methodological approach.

August - December: Developed literature review and method chapter.

2015

January - June: Re-drafted introduction, method and literature review chapter.

August - December: Completed introduction, method and literature review chapter. Organised sampling and recruitment of PE teacher participants.

2016

January - June: The completed introduction, literature review and method chapter document was presented to a review panel in early January.

Began data collection: Pilot interviews and interview process with seven PE teachers.

Phase one of interviews, analysis of data, preliminary findings.

Submitted second Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) application for approval to include students with disabilities.

August - December: Data collection: PE teachers participate in reflective e-journal process.

Re-draft work to date, second Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) application approved to include students with disabilities. Organised sampling and recruitment of students with disabilities for participation.

2017

January - June: Teachers complete reflective e-journals. Conduct ten phase two interviews with students with disabilities. Completed data analysis and write up findings of student interviews and teacher reflective e-journals. Update literature review, particularly the new section on student voice.

August - December: Conduct final phase three interviews with a selected cohort of teachers. Analyse and integrate findings from Phase 3 of the research. Draft discussion, implications and conclusion.

2018

Final revision and redraft of all chapters of thesis and prepare to submit during 2018.

1.11: Conclusion

In Irish society there has been a paradigm shift towards inclusive education over the past 30 years. This policy shift has been “underpinned by enabling legislation with a presumption for inclusion” (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013, p. 1119). This change has emerged mainly as a result of international influences (UNESCO, 1994; United Nations 2006; WHO 2011), national educational reviews/task force reports (Department of Education and Science SERC 1993; The Report on The Task Force on Autism 2001; NCSE 2013; NCSE 2014c), and some high profile court cases taken by parents on behalf of their children with SEN/disabilities (such as the O’Donoghue case (1992/1993), the Sinnott case (2001) and the Ó Cuanacháin case (2007), all set within a wider political and social justice context. These factors have led to enabling legislative changes in special education provision (the Education Act 1998, the Equal Status Act 2000, the Education for persons with special needs Act 2004-EPSEN and the Disability Act 2005). These merging influences of international agreements, enabling legislative frameworks, parental advocacy and litigation against the Irish State (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013; Smyth et al 2014) have resulted in a shift from segregated educational provision to an assumption of inclusive education.

However, the question one asks is the rhetoric matching the reality? It would seem that sound policy exists, but due to a lack of implementation of relevant legislation (e.g. EPSEN 2004) and a lack of resources and funding (initial teacher education, continuing professional development), inclusive practice is impeded. Shevlin, Winter and Flynn (2013, p. 1131) highlight this point in the following: “Irish policy and provision in relation to inclusion is in a transitional phase as legislation mandating the development of inclusive learning environments has yet to be fully embedded in schools”. Thus, it appears that there is sound policy and legislation, although not fully implemented as in the case of EPSEN 2004. This leads me to the following question, which is at the heart of discourse of this research; does the inclusive Government policy ethos match the current real life practice of PE teachers and the student experience? The delivery of special education in Ireland is in a transitioning stage, as policy and practice have yet to be fully entrenched in Irish schools (Shevlin, Winter

and Flynn 2013). Examining practising PE teachers' and students' experiences will inform us how inclusive policy is actually interpreted and implemented in practice. Conversely, good practice in physical education will help inform enlightened policy formulation.

This introductory chapter outlined a number of areas pertinent to this study: the rationale, significance and scope of the research. Prevalence of special educational needs and disability in Ireland was examined. The research questions and aims of the study were posited. The research design, methodology and thesis timeline were elucidated upon. Finally, an overview of policy and legislation, internationally, and particularly in the Irish context, was presented. The next chapter will focus on a comprehensive literature review and expound on the theoretical frameworks shaping this inquiry.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of literature, with the aim of providing an informed understanding of existing research and literature surrounding PE teachers' and students' experiences of and perspectives on inclusion in physical education. This review will initially explore the general public's attitude towards disability and inclusion in education. Furthermore, the professional development learning pathway of PE teachers will be appraised, specifically in relation to SEN and inclusion. Current literature pertaining to PE teachers' experiences of and perspectives on the inclusion of students with SEN/disabilities will also be reviewed. In addition, studies relating to the voice of the student with SEN/disability in physical education will be explored. Moreover, literature relating to reflection and reflective practice amongst PE teachers will be elucidated upon. Furthermore, the guiding theoretical frameworks of sociocultural theory, situated learning, adaptation theory and agentic learning will be expounded upon. Lastly, the concepts of the biopsychosocial model of disability and the educational context of inclusion in relation to SEN and disability will be examined.

2.1: Introduction: setting the terrain

This review was based on an in-depth analysis of material published in predominately peer-reviewed journals. Studies were selected based on their relevance to the focus of the study, their findings and the date of data collection/publication. Web-based searches were conducted using the following key terms – *physical education, inclusion, special educational needs, disability, PE teachers' experiences/perspectives and student voice*. The following relevant Databases were systematically searched – SPORTDiscus, ERIC, EBSCO, SCOPUS and also Academic Search Complete. Furthermore, a manual search of all issues since 2000 of the *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly (APAQ)*, the *European Physical Education Review*, the *European Journal of Adapted Physical Activity (EUJAPA)*, the *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* and the *Irish Educational Studies Journal* was performed, to prevent any omission of relevant literature which was not found via computer aided searches. Also the reference lists of the most key articles were considered.

Notably, the review at all times was guided by the relevance to the research questions. Fundamentally, the review sought to highlight gaps in the literature with the aim of addressing these gaps in the study. The researcher has attempted to appraise the literature with a critical eye; “critical treatment of the literature is paramount. Researchers should critically evaluate, rather than simply describe what has already been done in the field” (Jones, Brown and Holloway 2013, p. 30). Thus, critical analysis of the literature was conducted with the aim of building upon existing knowledge.

2.1.1: General public perspective and attitude in relation to inclusive education: Irish context

In November 2017, The National Disability Authority (NDA) launched their findings of a national survey on public attitudes to disability in Ireland. The survey was a follow-up on previous similar studies carried out in 2001, 2006 and 2011. It covered a range of topics including knowledge of disability and attitudes to disability within the workplace, schools and in the neighbourhood. The 2017 study was based on a representative sample of 1294 adults, including 439 people with disabilities. Attitudes to inclusive education for all disability categories were more positive when compared to previous surveys: such as, “children with vision or hearing disabilities, 61% of respondents agreed that they should attend the same school as children without disabilities, an increase from 46% in 2011 and 57% in 2006” (NDA 2017, p. 11). As in previous surveys participants were most supportive of inclusion of children with physical disabilities (75%) and least supportive of children with mental health difficulties (49%) (NDA 2017, p. 11). Similarly, in a survey in the UK (ComRes 2015), involving 2064 adults, 70% of those surveyed agreed that all children should be given the opportunity to attend mainstream schools, regardless of their disabilities.

The findings of the 2017 NDA study are encouraging in relation to attitudes towards children with disabilities in mainstream education. It is interesting to note the less positive attitude in this regard in the 2011 report. The report does not attempt to explain the reasons for this change of attitude. However, one would need to consider the economic changes in Ireland between 2006 and 2011. As highlighted in the introductory chapter, the Republic of Ireland suffered a major economic downturn in 2008, resulting in a number of austerity cuts across all government departments. In relation to my study, society’s attitude is relevant as

teachers' attitudes are reflective of society at large, since attitude is a social construction (Sherrill 2004).

Teacher and student perspective, is of prime interest in this inquiry. It is well established that teacher attitude towards inclusion and disability play a central role in the educational experience of children with disabilities (Kozub and Lienert 2003; NDA 2007; EADSNE 2010; Shelvin, Winter and Flynn 2013). Attitudes are complex and are difficult to define as they encompass cognitive, affective and behavioural evaluations (NDA 2007). In the context of my study I found the following an apt definition: "Attitudes are enduring sets of evaluative beliefs, charged with feelings and emotions, that predispose a person to certain kinds of behaviours" (Sherrill 2004, p. 138). Relating this definition to my study the cognitive component pertains to the thoughts the PE teachers have regarding inclusion. The affective element concerns the teachers' feelings or emotions towards including students with disabilities in PE. Lastly, the behavioural component relates to teachers' actions with respect to inclusion in the general PE setting. Likewise, the cognitive, affective and behavioural evaluations or elements of an attitude can be applied to the student with SEN/disability in their PE class. Attitudes form an essential determinant of behavior in educational settings (Kozub and Lienert 2003).

2.2: Teachers Professional Learning

It is now widely agreed that teachers are among the most, if not the most, significant factors in children's learning and the linchpins in educational reforms of all kinds (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005, p. 1)

Currently, most general teachers work in educational settings with a range of abilities and disabilities (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005). It is *this* general teacher, particularly the general post-primary PE teacher who is of interest to this study. The American Educational Research Association (AERA) panel report, on research and teacher education, call on the need for qualitative studies in general teacher education classes with regard to working with students with disabilities (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005). In the European context, classrooms "now contain a more heterogeneous mix of students" reflecting different backgrounds and different abilities, necessitating teachers not only to "acquire new knowledge and skills but also to develop them continuously" (European Commission DG Education, Culture and Lifelong Learning 2007 cited in EADSNE 2010, p.13).

In Ireland, The National Council for Special Education (NCSE 2013) in their policy advice identify access to qualified teachers as the main factor contributing to student progress. Additionally, the Council further emphasises the need to develop competencies in the areas of attitude, skills, knowledge and understanding required of teachers during their initial and continuing professional development. The professional development of teachers is viewed as a lifelong journey.

2.2.1: Feiman - Nemser Professional Learning Framework

Feiman - Nemser (2001) devised a professional learning continuum for the lifespan of a teacher's career which is used extensively in teacher education. Comprising of a three stage continuum, the framework involves firstly a *pre-service* stage, secondly an *induction phase* (which spans the first 3 years) and the third stage, comprising of *continuing professional development* (early professional development at approximately 3-5 years and later at approximately 7 years onwards). The focus of my study is on the *practising PE teacher* primarily within the last stage of Feiman- Nemser's (2001) framework.

In this continuing professional development phase Feiman -Nemser identifies four central tasks of *learning to teach*:

1. Extend and deepen subject matter knowledge for learning
2. Extend and refine repertoire in curriculum, instruction, and assessment
3. Strengthen skills and dispositions to study and improve teaching
4. Expand responsibilities and develop leadership skills

(Feiman -Nemser 2001, p. 1050)

Whilst typically teacher education providers regard pre-service preparation as their remit and schools often take on the role of new teacher induction, "professional development is everybody's and nobody's responsibility" (Feiman -Nemser 2001, p. 1049). Furthermore, she alludes to the "lack of connective tissue" between the different phases of '*learning to teach*'. In Ireland certainly an attempt to somewhat address this fragmentation may have evolved in the formation of the Teaching Council in 2001. Among its undertakings is its ongoing review of teacher training programmes, as well as recent initiatives such as *Cosán* and *Droichead*, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.2.2: Initial Teacher Education

Teachers' views about the quality of their initial teacher education, influences their beliefs about their perceived ability to work with students with disabilities, showing higher levels of efficacy amongst teachers with a positive view of their pre-service (Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005). Hoban (2004) emphasises the importance of having a clear conceptual framework underpinning good teaching and learning at initial teacher education level. Four key dimensions are identified in the following framework:

- Conceptual links across the university curriculum;
- Theory-practice links between the school and university settings;
- Sociocultural links between the participants in the programme;
- Personal links that help shape the identity of each teacher-educator.

Hoban (2004, p. 117)

Hoban (2004) concludes that the sociocultural aspect permeates all other dimensions. Furthermore, he feels that the social interaction between the participants (teacher educators, student teachers and teachers) enables a programme to be “dynamic and change accordingly to relevant cultural and political needs” (Hoban 2004, p. 130). Indeed, this engagement with sociocultural theory lays the foundational framework for my research inquiry, which will be considered in depth subsequently in this review.

Addressing *physical education* initial teacher education specifically, McEvoy, MacPhail and Heikinaro-Johansson (2015) conducted a scoping review of literature (1990-2014) on *physical educator teacher educators*. A scoping review is similar to a systematic review; perhaps the major difference being that a scoping review does not assess research quality, its focus is “charting rather than evaluating” (McEvoy, MacPhail and Heikinaro-Johansson, 2015, p. 163). Ninety -six papers in all were reviewed, encompassing 15 countries and 25 journals. Of the 96 papers reviewed 57 originated from the United States, indicating a substantial knowledge base on research in that jurisdiction regarding PE teacher educator population. Conversely, it highlights the knowledge gaps regarding this population in other countries. The following captures the essence of this observation; “we know very little about the demographic make-up, biographies, careers, socialisation or work roles of PE teacher

educators beyond North America” (McEvoy, MacPhail and Heikinaro-Johansson, 2015, p. 171).

Surprisingly, only 5 papers emanated solely from Great Britain and 2 from a Great Britain/Canada collaboration. One such paper mentioned was the preparation of teachers for the inclusion of children with special educational needs within PE (Vickerman 2007a); this paper was categorized under the theme of “perspectives”. However, no other studies relating directly to physical educator teacher educator experiences of and perspectives on inclusion were mentioned in the scoping review. Interestingly, from the Irish viewpoint, just 5 studies deriving from Ireland were included. All five studies were published since 2011, showing a lack of research in the area of PE teacher educator’s pre-2011. However, it should be noted that some articles may have been omitted in the review, such as Crawford, O’Reilly and Flanagan (2012a) on initial teacher education and inclusion of students with special educational needs.

Numerous studies (Smith and Green 2004; Morley et al., 2005; Hodge et al., 2009; Ko and Boswell 2013; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017) have indicated that PE teachers perceive their initial teacher education on inclusion as inadequate. Despite government policies which seek to foster inclusion, both internationally (Vickerman 2007a; Vickerman and Coates 2009) and in the Irish context (Meegan and MacPhail 2006; Crawford, O’Reilly and Flanagan 2012a) it would appear that many PE teachers lack adequate professional development in the area. A key factor in addressing this issue is not only to listen to the voices of PE teachers but also to listen to the voices of children with special educational needs (Vickerman and Coates 2009, p. 151). A UK based study by Morley et al., (2005) examined teachers’ views of teaching children with special educational needs and disabilities in PE. The research was a qualitative study involving 43 PE teachers of varying levels and types of experience. Data was collected from 43 semi-structured interviews and analyzed by a process of selective coding followed by a process of cross analysis using NVivo software system. Likewise, the issue of teacher confidence and perceived competency emerged: “specific and general feelings of ‘not knowing’ relate to teachers’ lack of confidence and knowledge of how to adapt activities” (Morley et al., 2005, p. 91). Clearly linked to this last point is the issue of initial teacher education. The overarching finding on this issue was that there was limited provision during initial teacher education and that such training was based mainly on theoretical aspects surrounding the teaching of children with special educational needs with little opportunity for practical experiences (Morley et al., 2005, p. 100). From these findings

the implications are clear; initial teacher education needs to have a stronger practical element of modules relating to inclusive physical education.

In the Irish context educational opportunities for inclusion at both initial teacher education and postgraduate levels in PE were found to be very limited (Meegan and MacPhail 2006). Arguably, the most significant study to date, in relation to PE teacher attitude toward teaching students with special educational needs, is the study by Meegan and MacPhail (2006). However, in this study the authors selected 4 specific disability types (emotional behavioural disorder, specific learning disability, mild-moderate and moderate-severe mental impairment) and 3 specific attributes (gender, academic preparation and previous experience) only. Thus, the study does not provide an insight into teachers' attitude towards many other types of disability e.g. physical disability, sensory impairment, autism spectrum disorder. The study used the PEATID-111 instrument and analysed the disability categories separately. This was to glean as much information as possible about respondents' attitudes towards children with specific special educational needs. Nevertheless, the PEATID-111 survey instrument was based on an American population with American terminology and not a European population, which may have led to ambiguity amongst participants. This last point is acknowledged by the authors and perhaps should have been adapted for the Irish context. According to the authors, the terminology may also have accounted for the poor (25%) response rate as participants may have felt the questionnaire lacked relevance in their setting. In their conclusion, the authors call for further studies regarding PE teachers' attitudes and their perspectives toward inclusive PE. They particularly highlight the need for qualitative studies in order to understand PE teachers' perspectives; "more qualitative research is warranted" (Meegan and MacPhail 2006, p.90).

'Concerning' is how Meegan and MacPhail (2006) describe their findings in relation to academic preparation in the area of special educational needs in physical education in Ireland. From a sample of 186, only 4 participants had completed a special educational needs module during initial teacher education and 9 participants had completed a postgraduate in special education in a PE course (Meegan and MacPhail, 2006, p. 88). Certainly this finding shows a major lack of initial teacher education and indeed continuing professional development in the area of PE and special educational needs at the time of this study. More recently, Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan (2012a) carried out research from the initial teacher educator provider perspective. This study involved participants from the four physical education initial teacher education providers in Ireland; it consisted of a

questionnaire and a follow up interview. It was found that all physical education initial teacher educator providers offered core modules in adapted physical activity (APA) in their PE degrees. Encouragingly, all four institutions presented both a practical and theoretical aspect to their APA modules, but opportunities for undergraduates to gain direct experiential praxis with students with special educational needs and disabilities varied. Accordingly, the authors concluded that “management and coordination of special educational needs appears somewhat ad hoc in each of the Irish institutions” (Crawford, O’Reilly and Flanagan 2012a, p.30).

Vickerman (2007a) proposes an eight step framework for initial teacher educators to identify how the philosophy and practice of inclusion might be considered. The framework is known as the ‘Eight P Inclusive PE Framework’ (Vickerman 2007b, p. 112). It encapsulates the need to educate students on the *philosophy* and context behind inclusion. Thus, teacher trainers/educators must “embrace a *purposeful* approach to fulfilling the requirements of inclusive PE” (Vickerman 2007a, p. 398). Likewise, teacher educators need to be *proactive* in the development and implementation of inclusive PE. A *partnership* (schools, experienced PE teachers, children with special educational needs, etc.) approach to inclusive PE is required. Furthermore, development of inclusive PE should be seen as a *process* that involves adaptation and modification to learning, teaching and assessment strategies. PE teacher educators must ensure that inclusion is reflected in their *policy* documentation. Pre-service and PE teachers should be able to consider their inclusive teaching and learning from a *pedagogical* perspective. Lastly, PE teacher educators must measure the impact their training has in *practice* for the child with SEN and disabilities. The ‘Eight P Inclusive PE Framework’ (Vickerman 2007b) as outlined above offers excellent potential for initial teacher educators in Ireland and could address the somewhat ad hoc approach identified by Crawford, O’Reilly and Flanagan (2012a, p. 30) recently.

In the Oireachtas (2005) report on ‘*The Status of Physical Education*’ a number of recommendations were made in relation to the future development of PE. Amongst these there is a call for “greater training needs (initial teacher education and continuing professional development) to be in place to cater for students with special needs” (Oireachtas 2005, p. 38). Furthermore, an appeal for specialists in adapted physical activity is made by The Department of Education, the PE and Sport Sciences Department University of Limerick and the PE Association of Ireland to integrate with all levels of the education system (Ibid).

However, thirteen years later and this recommendation is still aspirational and far from the coalface of reality. A pertinent question mooted by Vickerman (2007a) is whether special educational needs should be embedded during initial teacher education and also, if it should be compulsory or optional. In his research with PE initial teacher training providers, he found that there is disparity in this area, which concurs with similar findings (Smith and Green 2004; Morley et al., 2005; Meegan and MacPhail 2006; Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a). Research of Kudláček, Jessina and Flanagan (2010) and Ammah and Hodge (2005) as cited in Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan (2012a, p. 32) “firmly support the infusion of special educational needs throughout PE degree programmes”. However, this would require a sea-change in approach across individual PE providers. Dr. Ann McPhail, in her keynote address on *Physical Education policy and practice update* at the PEPAYS 2014 conference in Waterford discussed the same issue but in relation to fundamental movement skills (FMS). The question posed was as follows: should FMS be embedded or infused in all modules relating to PE or should they be taught as separate/stand-alone modules. It produced a hotly divided response from the audience which I surmise may also be the case with SEN. In my study teachers' experiences and views of this dichotomy will be examined.

Feiman-Nemser (2001) posits the initial teacher education stage as a developmental phase of learning to teach. She postulates that some knowledge can be acquired during initial teacher education but that most *learning to teach* takes place in the setting of practice, in the schools and classrooms. This conclusion has strong implications for my study, which is investigating the practising PE teacher's experiences, perspectives and continuing professional development requirements in relation to inclusion.

2.2.3: Induction Phase

The induction phase of a teacher education pathway is seen as the beginning stage of their teaching career, post initial teacher education qualification. Feiman- Nemser (2001) identifies the first 3 years, as the induction phase of learning to teach, whereas, the Teaching Council (2011) deems it to be the first year after qualifying as a teacher. Feiman-Nemser (2001, p. 1026-1027) perceives the induction phase as an “intense and formative time ... a time of survival and discovery, adaptation and learning” in a beginning teacher's career. She concludes that the experiences of beginning teaching derive from a complex mix of personal

and situational factors. Ultimately, this forms a sense of professional identity and the creation of a professional practice.

Currently, the Irish Teaching Council has piloted a new induction model known as *Droichead* (the Irish word for bridge). As of September 2016, over 330 schools (primary and post-primary) registered for *Droichead* and over 400 newly qualified teachers participated in the process for 2015/2016 (Teaching Council 2015). The pilot ran until 2016 and then a new model emerged informed by the feedback from participants. *Droichead* will be the recognised route of induction for all new teachers in primary, post-primary and special school settings by 2020/2021. According to the Council, the aim of induction is to offer systematic professional and personal support to the newly qualified teacher. The impact of *Droichead* for now is uncertain, as it is a new initiative and is at the implementation stage. However, it is a statutory requirement. Nonetheless, the main focus of my study is in relation to the next phase of teacher development encompassing the lifelong practising PE teacher.

2.2.4: Continuing Professional Development – Overview

The Teaching Council in Ireland (2011) envisages a continuum of teacher education, whereby the teacher is considered as a lifelong learner, throughout the course of their teacher career. The phase of continuing professional development is of particular interest in this study as part of the target sample are practising PE teachers with a minimum of 3 years teaching experience. The teachers' real life perspective on inclusion and PE and, importantly, their views on continuing professional development requirements to support said inclusion, is a central focus of this study. The following is offered by way of a definition of continuing professional development from the Teaching Council of Ireland;

Continuing professional development (CPD) refers to life-long teacher learning and comprises the full range of educational experiences designed to enrich teachers' professional knowledge, understanding and capabilities throughout their careers (Teaching Council 2011, p. 19).

Presently, in 2018, the Council is in the process of developing a continuing professional development National framework known as *Cosán*. The Irish word for *pathway*, *Cosán*, was selected to reflect the notion of learning as an on-going journey with the emphasis on the act of travelling, rather than on the destination (Teaching Council 2018). Phase one and two of

the process consisted of consultation with the teaching profession and a number of stakeholders (*inter-alia* The Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland, NCSE, and The Professional Development Service for Teachers) during 2014 and 2015. The next stage consists of an Action Research phase which began in 2016, whereby teachers explored key questions and challenges identified in various contexts. The Action Research phase is seen as a development process and is envisaged to take a number of years to complete (Teaching Council 2018). The development process began in April 2016 and will conclude in 2019 in advance of implementation in 2020 (Teaching Council 2018). The ongoing developments in Cosán will be closely monitored throughout my study, as a key research focus is the exploration of practising PE teachers continuing professional development requirements based on their experiences. Indeed, in the data collection, the PE teachers will be questioned on their thoughts in relation to professional development and subsequently the type of continuing professional development they feel they require (Appendix 7, Q.27/28/29 and Appendix 18, Q.14). This approach aligns closely with the process utilized by the Council enabling “the profession to lead a national conversation on the future of its professional learning” (Teaching Council 2016, p. 2).

Recent findings in the Inclusive Research in Irish Schools (IRIS) project indicated that subject teachers felt that “that they lacked the skills, knowledge and understanding required to provide effective curricular access for their pupils with special educational needs” (Rose et al., 2015, p. 5).

2.2.5: Continuing Professional Development – Inclusive Physical Education

Internationally, continuing professional development in relation to physical education and special educational needs/disability appears to be limited and inadequate (Smith and Green 2004; Morley et al., 2005; Hardin 2005; Vickerman and Coates 2009; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017). Morley et al., (2005), referred to earlier, interviewed 43 practising PE teachers on their views of teaching children with special educational needs in PE. They concluded that continuing professional development was limited, and if made available to teachers as part of an In-Service Training (INSET) programme it was “often perceived to be irrelevant to a PE specific context” (p.102). Additionally, it was felt that continuing professional development opportunities for PE teachers should incorporate subject-specificity and practical orientation (Morley et al., 2005). These findings were echoed in a study by Hardin

(2005). In this study, Hardin conducted a series of in-depth interviews and observations with five newly qualified teachers, notably, he found that practical experiences with individuals with disabilities provided the greatest teacher learning for inclusion. More recently, Ko and Boswell (2013) in their case study involving seven elementary PE teachers, had similar outcomes. Likewise, findings from Qi, Wang and Ha's (2017) study, pertaining to eight secondary PE teachers, indicates teachers' needs for professional knowledge specific to PE and inclusion. From these findings the implication is that continuing professional development should offer subject specific and practically based opportunities for including children with special educational needs and disabilities in the general PE setting.

Likewise, in the Irish context research has shown that continuing professional development in the area of physical education and special educational needs is lacking and fragmented at post primary level (Meegan and MacPhail 2006; Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a) and also at primary level (Crawford 2011). The Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI) holds an annual conference catering primarily for PE teachers, initial PE teacher educators and PE student teachers throughout the country. Only recently (i.e. 2012) has the conference included workshops on inclusive PE. Certainly, it would appear that there is a need for greater engagement between the PEAi and practising PE teachers, considering that most children with special educational needs attend mainstream schools, with less than 1 per cent of students in Ireland attending a special school (NCSE 2013, p. 113). As mentioned in the introductory chapter, I co- chaired a discussion forum on *Adapted Physical Education* at the 2012 National PEAi conference. Delegates at the forum expressed concerns in a number of areas but particularly in relation to continuing professional development and hands-on praxis when including children with disabilities in PE.

Interestingly, since 2011 The Teaching Council in their policy document has identified four key national priority areas for continuing professional development; "literacy, numeracy, ICT and *inclusion*" (Teaching Council 2011, p. 21). However, this prioritisation appears to have been somewhat lost in relation to PE teachers and inclusion. Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan (2012a) conducted a study involving the perspectives of initial PE teacher educator providers in relation to practice, provision and experience of inclusion. The authors concluded that ongoing continuing professional development "should be a must for all newly qualified and experienced teachers to engage with" (Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a, p. 38). In my study, the perspectives of practising PE teachers are examined to gain

an in-depth insight of their experiences and needs in relation to continuing professional development and inclusion.

Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan (2012a) and the PEAi (2018b) have called for the development of communities of practice in the area of adapted physical education/adapted physical activity (APE/APA). However, currently (July 2018) according to the PEAi website, there is just one region in the whole of Ireland with a community of practice and this does not relate to APE or APA. Certainly there is scope for the development of communities of practice but this needs to be a concerted effort from the Department of Education and Skills, the PEAi and The Teaching Council, in line with the government's central policy of inclusion. This concerted effort resonates with Carey (2005 as cited in Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a, p.36) which suggests that change in special education provision and practice needs to come from the top down. Moreover, it also needs to come from the coal face with PE teachers taking ownership (Cairns and Malloch 2011) and contributing in their continuing professional development locally as per their own unique/specific needs.

Additionally, there are a number of agencies related to the training of professionals (separate to initial teacher educators' providers) in the area of inclusive physical activities in Ireland which are worth noting and are relevant to PE teachers. Firstly, the CARA Adapted Physical activity centre in Tralee, Co.Kerry is a national centre supporting developments in Adapted Physical Activity, Adapted Physical Education and Disability Sport. Since 2011 the CARA Centre has put in place a training and education framework to highlight opportunities for the development of standardised training and education programmes in Ireland (CARA 2016). One of five current target strands is '*primary and PE teachers*'; incorporating a European Inclusive Physical Education Training (EIPET) resource, a six-hour disability Inclusion Training (DIT) course and contacts for National Governing Bodies (NGB's) which offer supports to schools in their discipline. Whilst appearing promising, a published evaluation in relation to uptake and effectiveness of these resources from the perspective of PE teachers, to my knowledge, is not currently available. In my study I hope to ascertain if PE teachers are aware of these resources and indeed, if they have had the opportunity to engage with them. Of particular interest is EIPET, which is a European project, financed by the European Commission, launched in 2009 in Dublin. It is aimed at initial teacher educators and lifelong learning in physical education and inclusion. The EIPET resources encompass the EIPET model; EIPET functional map; EIPET delivery model and EIPET resource pack (UNESCO

Chair IT Tralee 2018). As previously mentioned I hope to establish if teachers have engaged in such resources as EIPET. Currently the UNESCO chair in IT Tralee is in the early stages of developing an online resource called Inclusive PE, Physical Activity and Sport (IPEPAS). This resource will be aimed at teachers, coaches and facilitators of PE, physical activity and sport towards inclusion and social change on an international scale (UNESCO Chair IT Tralee 2018).

2.3: Physical Education (PE) Teachers Experiences of Inclusion

Inclusion of children with disabilities in general PE classes, both internationally and in the Irish context, is an ever increasing occurrence (Sideridis and Chandler 1997; Block and Obrusnikova 2007; Vickerman 2007a; Vickerman and Coates 2009; Petkova, Kudláček and Nikolova 2012; Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012; Tant and Watelain 2016). Smith and Green (2004) produced a sociological study of teachers' views of including pupils with special educational needs in secondary school physical education in the U.K. Although it was a small scale study, (7 PE teachers were interviewed), it found that "according to the teachers at least, more pupils with special educational needs were being educated in PE lessons than was the case over the past five years or so" (p.597). In the U.S. most students with disabilities (96%) are educated in general education schools and almost half spend the majority of the school day in the general classroom setting (U.S Department of Education 2005 cited in Block and Obrusnikova 2007, p. 103). Here in Ireland the NCSE (2013) recently reported that "Most children with special educational needs attend mainstream schools and are fully included in mainstream classes, with fewer than 1 per cent of students in Ireland attending a special school" (NCSE 2013, p. 113). Nonetheless, as noted in the introductory chapter there is a worrying trend of students with special educational needs and disabilities, transferring to special schools as they approach the age to transfer to post primary schools (Ware et al., 2009; Kelly and Devitt 2010; NCSE 2013). Accordingly, within this study, I will endeavor to ascertain PE teachers' experiences of whether they feel there has been an increase of students with SEN/disabilities in their particular setting.

Internationally and historically (i.e. pre 1995) there has been a paucity of research on the topic of inclusion in Physical Education. Block and Volger's (1994) review of literature on *inclusion in General Physical Education* (GPE) found only ten studies focusing explicitly on the topic. The studies mainly focused on children with mild disabilities and preliminary

studies on attitudes of general physical education teachers toward inclusion (Block and Obrusnikova 2007). Subsequently, Block and Obrusnikova (2007) compiled a comprehensive critical analysis of relevant research on the topic, using a meta-analysis for the years 1995-2005. Overall they found that there was an increase in the quantity of research on inclusion of students with disabilities in general PE (GPE) and also in the scope, design and nature of studies than in the previous decade:

Table 2.1: Examples of research studies on inclusion of children with disabilities in general PE during 1995-2005.

Focus Area	Examples of research studies
ALT-PE of students with disabilities	Temple & Walkley 1999; Vogler, Koranda & Romance 2000
Attitudes and intentions of children without disabilities	Tripp, French & Sherrill 1995; Murata, Hodge & Little 2000; Hutzler 2003
Support: Use of peer tutors, teacher assistants and APE specialist	Houston-Wilson, Dunn, van der Mars, & McCubbin, 1997; Lieberman, Dunn, van der Mars, & McCubbin, 2000
Effects on peers without disabilities	Kalyvas & Reid 2003; Obrusnikova, Block, & Valkova, 2003
Training and attitudes of general physical educators	Sideridis & Chandler, 1996; Lienert, Sherrill, & Myers, 2001; Smith & Green 2004
Social Interactions	Lisboa 1997; Place & Hodge 2001

(Block and Obrusnikova 2007, p. 104)

The authors of the meta-analysis identified 85 studies and found 38 met their seven a-priori eligibility criteria (Appendix 6). From these 38 studies the authors arranged the studies into six focus areas (Table 2.1). The literature review presented by Block and Obrusnikova (2007) offers a thorough and detailed analysis of pertinent studies on the topic of inclusion in PE from 1995-2005. In relation to the focus area of '*training and attitudes of general PE teachers*,' (Block and Obrusnikova, p. 116) which is of prime interest in my research, 12 studies met their inclusion criteria. Overall they concluded that general PE teachers had negative feelings towards inclusion and that these feelings often stem from teachers' perceptions of insufficient training in the area.

Interestingly, O'Brien, Kudláček, and Howe (2009) reviewed English language literature on the inclusion of students with disabilities in PE spanning 2000-2008. In their review 27 studies were selected, 13 studies pertained to teacher perception. The authors' conclusions

from the aforementioned studies indicated a need for more appropriate training, more assistance from APE specialists and a more supportive PE curriculum.

Likewise, Qi and Ha (2012) conducted a literature review of inclusion in physical education straddling 20 years (1990 – 2009). In their conclusion they indicate that the number of studies relating to inclusive PE has increased over the past 20 years. Additionally, they called for further exploration of “effective inclusive practices in different social and cultural contexts, reporting the actual behaviours of in-service teachers in inclusive PE settings” (Qi and Ha 2012, p. 275). Furthermore, they highlight the need for future studies to investigate the effects of inclusion on students with and without disabilities regarding their attitudes, social interactions, and the acquisition of cognitive and motor skill development.

Most recently, Wilhelmsen and Sorenson (2017), in their systematic review from 2009-2015 concluded that the majority of research on inclusion of children with disabilities in PE was produced in the United States and the United Kingdom. This concurs with Qi and Ha’s (2012) previous review. Notably, Wilhelmsen and Sorenson (2017, p. 329) call on researchers to delve into knowledge generation regarding the “contextual and social mechanisms that seem to be the barriers encountered by the stakeholders”. Importantly, they highlight the knowledge gap resulting from so few studies emanating from student voice (both with and without disabilities).

In Ireland, a report on ‘*The Status of Physical Education*’ was published by the Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science in 2005. In their submission to the report, the Irish Wheelchair Association Sport (IWAS) identified a number of barriers to inclusive PE; “a lack of facilities, reluctance by PE teachers to accept responsibility for a pupil with a disability, transport difficulties and most of all attitudes” (Oireachtas 2005, p. 38). It is interesting to note the emphasis the IWAS has placed on the attitude of the PE teacher as a barrier to inclusion in PE. Meegan and MacPhail (2006) in their study also found an overall negative attitude from PE teachers towards inclusion. Whether there has been a shift in PE teacher perspective since 2006 in Ireland is not clear, as there has not been a subsequent major study published reflecting *post primary PE teachers’* experiences of inclusion.

2.3.1: PE teachers' perspectives on Inclusion

PE teacher perspective and experiences are central areas of exploration and investigation in my research. Block and Obrusnikova (2007) cited a number of studies whereby the PE teachers did not feel prepared to include students with disabilities in general or mainstream PE (Chandler and Green, 1995; Hodge et al., 2004; Lieberman et al., 2002; Liebert et al., 2001; Smith and Green, 2004 cited in Block and Obrusnikova, 2007). Similarly, Sherrill (1994, p. 14) posits that the greatest barriers to inclusive physical education are “negative attitudes and perceived lack of competence” amongst teachers. The negative attitude of teachers presents as a major obstacle to inclusion in general PE. This notion is reinforced by more recent studies (Vickerman and Coates 2009; Petkova, Kudláček and Nikolova 2012). Likewise, attitude seems to be inextricably linked to perceived sense of competence and experience;

these attitudes toward inclusion of children with disabilities can arise from insufficient knowledge or lack of experience. An obvious solution would be to improve these two elements (knowledge and experience) (Petkova, Kudláček and Nikolova 2012, p. 91)

This link, which is prevalent in a number of studies (Smith and Green 2004; Valporidi, Kokaridas and Krommidas 2005; Petkova, Kudláček and Nikolova 2012), is a key area of interest for this study in the Irish context.

Despite the overall trend of negative attitude of teachers towards inclusion in PE, there are some studies which show teachers having a positive concept or at least a positive educational philosophy of inclusive practices. For instance, Hodge et al., (2004) and Hardin (2005) found that the teachers they interviewed had mixed attitudes (some positive, some negative) and participants in both studies supported the concept of inclusion. Hodge et al., (2004) in their study recruited nine experienced high school PE teachers; their research method was *naturalistic inquiry*. They collected qualitative data using observer field notes and interview schedules. Despite their predominantly encouraging beliefs about inclusion as an educational philosophy, almost all of the teachers felt ineptly prepared or lacked support or resources to successfully teach students with more *severe* disabilities: “Teachers in this study indicated they needed more training to teach students with severe disabilities more effectively” (Hodge et al., 2004, p. 415). Teachers were motivated by a sense of professional responsibility within the school and also by a larger societal influence. Similarly, Vaporidi, Kokaridas, and Krommidas (2005) noted a willingness of PE teachers to broaden their

knowledge concerning children with special needs. In their study, entitled ‘Attitudes of Physical Education Teachers toward the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Typical Classes’, 54 Greek PE teachers completed a questionnaire: The Teachers’ Integration Attitudes Questionnaire - TIAQ (Sideridis and Chandler, 1997), which assesses scores for four factors: skills, benefits, acceptance and support. Their key finding from the study was that PE teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion were related to the level of knowledge the teachers felt that they had regarding the various special needs condition. Additionally, teachers felt that inclusion could not succeed due to a lack of professional training and support resources.

More recently, Ko and Boswell (2013, p. 230) present similar findings in relation to teachers’ perceptions as ‘overwhelmingly positive’. Likewise, Campos, Ferreira and Block (2015) and Qi, Wang and Ha (2017) in their studies found that PE teachers in general indicated favourable attitudes to inclusive PE. It does appear that more recent studies encompassing teacher attitude towards inclusion in PE are indicating an overall positivity (Ko and Boswell 2013; Campos, Ferreira and Block 2015; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017).

In the Irish context, Meegan and MacPhail (2006) investigated the relationship between four specific types of special educational need and the selected attributes of gender, academic preparation and previous experience. In this quantitative study, the Physical Educator’s Attitude toward Teaching Individuals with Disabilities -111 (PEATID-111) questionnaire was distributed to PE teachers in all 745 post primary schools listed on the Irish Department of Education’s database, resulting in a response rate of 25% (Meegan and MacPhail 2006, p. 84). Results showed that the majority of teachers surveyed have taught students with special educational needs in their class (Meegan and MacPhail 2006). Attitudes towards students with specific learning disabilities, emotional/behavioural disorder and mild-moderate mental impairment were generally undecided. Conversely, attitudes towards students with moderate to severe mental impairment were found to be unfavourable.

Recently Tant and Watelain (2016) conducted a systematic review traversing forty years from 1975 – 2015. The focus of their review was on inclusion in physical education specifically from a teacher perspective. Sixty studies met their selection criteria from a possible 510 studies. As noted previously, most of the studies emanated from the United States followed by the United Kingdom, as can be seen in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Country of origin of studies selected for review (Tant and Watelain 2016, p. 4)

Country	Number of studies
The United States	34
The United Kingdom	8
Finland, Greece, Ireland, Turkey and Japan	2 each
Australia, China, Germany, Latvia, Israel, Sweden	1 each
2 studies focused on several countries	1 each

Based on their analyses, 28 studies identified factors that influence PE teachers' positive and negative attitudes and predispositions towards inclusion. The other 32 studies represented factors that positively influence inclusion according to PE teachers' representations. In the review the authors found that the factor which most strongly predicted teachers' attitude was their perceived competence in teaching students with disabilities. A strong sense of perceived competency resulted in a more positive attitude toward inclusion.

2.3.2: Category and degree of disability

Research shows that the PE teacher attitude is not only affected by category or type of disability but also the degree or level of disability (Kozub and Lienert 2003; Block and Obrusnikova, 2007; Tant and Watelain 2016). Teachers consider children with emotional and behavioural difficulties to be the most challenging to include across a range of subject areas (Clough and Lindsey 1991; Walker and Bullis, 1991; Yell, 1995 in Morley et al., 2005). More recent research concurs with this finding, resulting in negative attitudes from teachers (Macfarlane and Woolfson 2013). However, some teachers felt more confident teaching children with physical disabilities as opposed to learning difficulties (Rizzo 1984 in Morley et al., 2005). On the other hand, Hodge and Jansma (1997) and Rizzo and Vispoel (1991 cited in Grenier 2007, p. 302) found that PE teachers favoured students with learning disabilities over those with mild 'mental retardation' (note US terminology in article) or 'behavioral disorders' (see Appendix 2 for the NCSE descriptors of categories of disabilities in the Irish context). Hodge et al., (2009) concluded in their explanatory multiple case study

on teachers' beliefs, that children with severe disabilities were perceived to be more difficult to teach in an inclusive PE setting. Their multiple case study involved 29 PE teachers from Africa, Japan, USA and Puerto Rico. This study employed an attitude survey (the *PE teachers' judgments about Inclusion – PEJI*; Hodge et al., 2002, cited in Hodge et al., 2009) and interviews as the data collection methods. Some of the limitations, as highlighted by the authors, were as follows; firstly, the PEJI survey used was valid and reliable only for pre-service PE teachers and it had not been subjected to validity and reliability procedures for practising PE teachers. Hence data from this aspect of the study needs to be viewed with caution. Secondly, single once off, face to face interviews were executed. The authors recommend conducting multiple interviews over an extended period of time to allow the researchers “to more fully examine the complexities of inclusion” (Hodge et al., 2009, p. 416).

The finding, as highlighted by Hodge et al., (2009, p. 417) in relation to degree of disability showed that “those with more severe disabilities were perceived to be more difficult to teach”. This appears to be a trend across a number of studies (Kozub and Lienert 2003; Hodge et al., 2004; Block and Obrusnikova 2007; Campos, Ferreira and Block 2015). Essentially, this finding has important implications for initial teacher education and the present global move away from student categorization. Additionally, Tant and Watelain (2016) concluded in their review that teachers demonstrated a negative attitude towards students with emotional disorders and somewhat favourable attitude towards students with learning disabilities. Moreover, a mixed attitude was evident from teachers towards students with physical, sensory or mental disabilities.

2.3.3: Curricular Nature of Physical Education (PE) Content

The curricular nature of the PE activity and content also influences the PE teachers' perspectives and experiences of inclusive physical education. PE teachers' perspectives and insights have been examined in light of the nature and type of the physical activity offered. In this context the adaptation theory (Kiphard 1983; Sherrill 1994, 2004) offers important linkage relating to the bi-directional process between the individual, the environment and the task. Furthermore, Kozub (2001) advocates for a strong link between the adapted PE

programme and the family context, utilizing family systems theory. Morley et al., (2005) concluded in their study that activities such as swimming, gymnastics and indoor activities were perceived as more conducive to inclusion as opposed to team situations. Smith and Green (2004) refer to the *team games tradition* in PE expressed by their respondents, which may constrain more *inclusive* practice. Moreover, Tant and Watelain (2016, p. 8) in their systematic review referred to a number of studies which found that the “curriculum contents focused too broadly on competitive and collective activities (soccer, basketball)”. Furthermore, the teachers felt that these activities (competitive and collective) were not suitable for inclusion due to their focus on ‘performance, excellence and technical skills’. Similarly, there is a “general belief that PE in Irish schools is far too game-based making it competitive with the emphasis being on winning” (Oireachtas 2005, p.3). Additionally, Woods et al., (2010) found that in practice games dominate the PE curriculum in Irish schools. As outlined earlier in the introductory chapter, the PE curriculum in Ireland is determined by the Minister for Education and Skills who is advised by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA 2018a).

Currently, physical education at both junior and senior cycle is undergoing curricular changes and transitions. Since September 2014, a new phased, junior cycle features revised subjects and short courses (Curriculum online 2018b). At junior cycle stage students must study Physical Education. All schools are required to provide a minimum provision of 135 hours for PE across first, second and third year, as stated in circular letter 0015/2017 (Junior Cycle for Teachers 2018).

PE is being offered within the *wellbeing* framework as well as the option of a 100-hour short course. This short course builds on the Junior Cycle Physical Education Framework which PE teachers currently use to plan their PE programme in junior cycle (Curriculum online 2018c). In the new *Framework for Junior Cycle*, wellbeing is both a principle of junior cycle education and also a curricular area (NCCA 2018c, p. 20). Students will have an opportunity to have their learning in PE recognised in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement. There are seven strands within the 2003 PE syllabus, namely, adventure activities, aquatics, athletics, games, gymnastics, dance and health related activity (NCCA 2003). The new short course consists of four strands: physical activity for health and wellbeing, games, individual/ team challenges, and dance/ gymnastics (Curriculum online 2018c). In the introduction to the 2003 junior cycle PE syllabus a short paragraph is allocated to the “student with special educational needs”, where the emphasis is very much on

inclusion of students with SEN in all physical education activities (NCCA 2003, p. 2). However, for the remainder of the document there is little reference to inclusion or how to adapt activities for the child with special educational needs and disabilities.

The new 2016 junior cycle PE *short course* incorporates inclusivity within its aim; the “course aims to build students’ appreciation of the importance of health-enhancing and *inclusive* physical activity and a commitment to it now and in the future” (Government of Ireland 2016, p.5). Certainly the junior cycle syllabus appears to offer a range of activity types, but it should be noted that the syllabus acts as a guideline, and since ultimately PE is a non-examination subject at junior cycle, adherence is not mandatory. Whether the various strands are implemented equally in practice in each school in Ireland is an interesting question, but beyond the remit of this research study

Similarly, senior cycle physical education is in a transition stage; it is currently proposed to have two curriculum specifications. Firstly, Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE) is being developed as a full Leaving Certificate subject, being optional and examinable. Secondly, Senior Cycle Physical Education (SCPE) is designed to provide schools with a framework within which they can design a physical education programme for those students who do not choose to take physical education as part of their Leaving Certificate examination (NCCA 2012). At the time of writing both LCPE and SCPE are at the pilot phase of implementation (Department of Education and Skills 2018c). A consultation process was held during 2011 in relation to LCPE and SCPE. In the consultation process a meeting was convened specifically to address “the needs and interests of young people with adapted physical activity requirements in senior cycle education” (NCCA 2012, p.33). In the consultation report, it was felt that both LCPE and SCPE were viewed as “providing a wide variety of ways in which young people with adapted physical activity needs could participate in Physical Education” (NCCA 2012, p.33). However, specific examples were not given.

In conclusion, physical education at both junior and senior cycle in Ireland is currently undergoing curricular changes and transitions. The impact and effect of these changes may have far reaching and, hopefully, positive outcomes for students with SEN/disabilities. But, specific reference to adapted physical education and inclusion does not feature strongly in the relevant curriculum documents thus far.

As previously referred to, Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan (2012a) surveyed and interviewed four lecturers (responsible for the delivery of adapted physical activity modules) from each of the PE initial teacher education providers in Ireland. The study examined the provision, practice and experience of initial teacher educator providers preparing pre-service PE teachers for the inclusion of students with special educational needs in PE. The authors found that three of the four respondents “disagreed that the National PE curriculum provided PE teachers with a clear framework for developing inclusive activities” (Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a, p. 35). Clearly, a more comprehensive curricular framework is required to address and accommodate inclusive practices in PE. On a similar note, Meegan and MacPhail (2006) conclude in their study that the PE curriculum at both junior and senior cycle level needs to emphasise the centrality of including all students with special educational needs in PE as a statutory prerequisite within the curriculum.

2.3.4: The special needs assistant's (SNA) support in PE

Teachers' attitude towards support and collaboration with special needs assistants (SNA)/ learning support assistants/teaching assistants is generally favourable (Tant and Watelain 2016). Nevertheless, this collaboration is constrained by the SNAs lack of knowledge in the specific area of inclusive PE (Vickerman and Blundell 2012; Pederson, Cooley and Rottier 2014). In the UK, most (63.3%) learning support assistants have received generic SEN training, but only 5.5% have received PE specific training (Vickerman and Blundell 2012). The Department of Education and Skills Circular 30/2014, outlines the role and responsibilities of the SNA in Ireland in terms of supporting a child with a disability regarding their 'care needs' and does not involve a teaching role. Yet, a review conducted by the Department of Education and Skills (2011, p. 15) on value for money and Policy review of the SNA scheme, found that in practice the role of the SNA was increasingly incorporating “behavioural, therapeutic, pedagogical/teaching and administrative duties”, stretching outside of their defined remit. A number of studies have concurred with this apparent changing role, incorporating an educational remit (Keating and O'Connor 2012; Spens 2013 in Kerins et al., 2018). The role of the SNA in Ireland differs significantly from that of the teaching assistant role in the UK, or the paraprofessional role in the US, in these countries, support staff provide educational assistance, in addition to support for care needs (Kerins et al., 2018). Subsequently, the NCSE has recently published a report of its

Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme (NCSE 2018). In this report, recommendations are made to provide a continuum of support to students with additional care needs and to change the name of special needs assistant (SNA) to inclusion support assistant.

2.4 The Voice of the Student with a SEN arising from a Disability

Respecting the views of the child and taking account of their opinions are enshrined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (Unicef 2016). This convention has been ratified in Ireland since 1992. Similarly, the Irish National Children's Strategy (2000) calls for children's voices to be heard in matters relating to their lives (Government of Ireland 2000b). Furthermore, a National Children's Office within the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs was created in 2001. The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 (2014) forms the "most recent element of the national policy discourse that has informed the emergence of student voice" (Fleming 2015, p. 230). However, research pertaining to practices and teaching children in Ireland has focused on "doing research *on* and *about* children rather than engaging them fully in the investigative process" (Shevlin and Rose 2003, p. 5). The initial focus of my research involved the PE teachers' perspective, on inclusion of students with SEN/disabilities. But it emerged through my scholastic journey that the voice of the child, student in this context, is essential in understanding teaching and learning. Consequently, following discussion with my supervisors and reflection on the overall research, it was considered crucial to elicit the voices of the students with SEN/disabilities on their experiences of physical education. Furthermore, certain groups of children (children under age five, children with special educational needs and children from ethnic minorities) are most often denied a voice (Tangen 2009 cited in Rose et al., 2015, p. 31). In particular, Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk (2003b, p. 176) feel as a "research community we are guilty of ignoring, disregarding and trivialising the voices of young disabled people". Adhering to the sociocultural theoretical frame of my study student voice is conceived within learning as a social interaction (Fleming 2015).

The most commonly reported studies in relation to inclusion and PE emanate from the teacher perspective (Coates and Vickerman 2008; Qi and Ha 2012; Wilhelmsen and Sorensen 2017). However, both Coates and Vickerman (2008) and Wilhelmsen and

Sorensen (2017) in their systematic reviews, highlighted the importance of seeking information from children with SEN and disabilities. In their systematic review of inclusion of children with disabilities in PE from 2009-2015, Wilhelmsen and Sorensen (2017) identify only 6 out of the 112 studies reviewed which explore inclusion from the perspective of the child with a disability. Certainly, this highlights a lacuna in knowledge base from a main stakeholder. Undeniably, research involving the insights and voices of children and young people with SEN and disabilities in physical education is sparse (Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk 2003a; Coates and Vickerman 2010; Wickman 2015). Nonetheless, reviewing the literature reflecting the child's view, indicates positive experiences of PE and sport in contexts where the child feels included (Goodwin and Watkinson 2000; Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk 2003a in Coates and Vickerman 2010). Most recently, Wickman (2015) conducted research with five young women and five young men with physical impairments on their experiences of PE and sport. She utilised a case study approach with semi-structured interviews as her data collection method. Similar to previous studies she found that young people with disabilities had positive experiences of sport in "contexts where they are fully included and can develop their physical, mental and social skills" (Wickman 2015, p. 46).

However, Wickman (2015) found in her study that participants had been dissatisfied with the teaching of PE, particularly in relation to the PE teacher's lack of ability to adapt the teaching to the students' needs. This finding contrasts with Coates and Vickerman (2010, p. 1524) which found that children with special educational needs had positive perceptions of PE teachers, "but they were less favourable about their classmates, reporting bullying as a result of their special educational need". Coates and Vickerman (2010) conducted a study involving 83 children with special educational needs using a mixed method approach. The sample was drawn from a mainstream primary school, post primary school and a special school. In their findings students expressed a preference for athletics and games- type activities and a negativity towards dance. Interestingly, this finding is at variance with teachers' perspective in relation to activities which they feel are most inclusive such as dance and gymnastics (Smith and Green 2004; Morley et al., 2005). Furthermore, Coates and Vickerman (2010, p. 1521) found that their "study shows that children enjoyed PE when they had feelings of social support and were accepted by their peers". Likewise, Rekaa, Hanisch and Ytterhus (2018, p. 15) in their systematic review found that 'making friends' seemed to be the most important feature from the student perspective of inclusion. The latter

is an important point for PE teachers to be cognisant of in order to create positive participation and learning.

Previously, Coates and Vickerman (2008) conducted a review of qualitative studies, traversing 10 years, which focused on children with special educational needs views of their experiences in PE, both in mainstream and in special education settings. The goal of the review was to determine the level to which literature addresses inclusion in PE in mainstream schools, and assess emerging themes arising from consultation with children with special educational needs about PE, attending both mainstream and special schools. Seven research articles were identified which met the authors' inclusion criteria. The authors extracted six key themes as follows: children's experiences of PE; their experiences of PE teachers; discrimination by others; feelings of self-doubt; barriers to inclusion; and empowerment and consultation (Coates and Vickerman 2008, p. 170). The authors concluded that children with special educational needs enjoy PE when they feel fully included; "however, participation is restricted by discrimination (*classmates and adults in the school setting*), limited teacher training and material barriers to inclusion" (Coates and Vickerman 2008, p. 168).

In a more recent qualitative inquiry review, spanning 1995-2014, Haegele and Sutherland (2015) have captured the perspectives of students with disabilities toward PE. Thirteen articles met the authors' inclusion criteria and findings were determined. The findings expand and support suggestions from Coates and Vickerman's 2008 review, which voiced the views of children with mostly physical disabilities. On the other hand, Haegele and Sutherland's (2015) review reflects the views of children with ASD, health related illness, learning disabilities and sensory disabilities. Interestingly, the student participants in my study present with ASD, sensory disability (deaf and hard of hearing) and physical disabilities. In their findings, Haegele and Sutherland (2015, p. 269) suggest that PE may be experienced in "similar fashions across participants with varying disability categorisation". Three thematic clusters emerged from Haegele and Sutherland's (2015, p. 260) review, namely, (a) perspectives toward typically developing peers, (b) perspectives toward physical educators, and (c) perspectives toward inclusion and exclusion. Key findings from the review suggest that a positive attitude from the PE teacher may be a critical feature in creating meaningful learning experiences for students with disabilities. Conversely, discriminatory behaviours by teachers (Coates 2011 cited in Haegele and Sutherland 2015)

and typically developing peers (Fitzgerald, 2005; Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000; Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher 2013; Moola, Fusco and Kirsh 2011 cited in Haegele and Sutherland 2015) toward students with disabilities was highlighted as leading to negative experiences. Additionally, student choice availability, in relation to participation in segregated or inclusive learning environments was voiced. Lastly, opportunities for modification and accommodation of activities was indicated as desirable by students in order to enhance a positive learning experience (Haegele and Sutherland 2015). The latter point related to the teachers' competencies regarding adaptation.

Additionally, studies on the topic of inclusion in PE to date have for the most part sought the PE teachers' views (Morley et al 2005; Hodge et al 2009; Ko and Boswell 2013) or to a lesser extent the students' views (Coates and Vickerman 2010; Fitzgerald and Stride 2012, Wickman 2015) separately. In my inquiry, the aim is to listen and hear both sets of voices in order to inform best practice. Indeed, Haegele and Sutherland (2015, p. 270) recommend that future research could "explore both the teacher's and student's perspective towards PE experiences within one context". However, they proffer the cautionary advice of Fitzgerald (2012) against doing so in separate conversations. In her study Fitzgerald (2012) investigates adult stakeholders' understandings of inclusion. But it is conducted through exploration of the stakeholders' responses to the drawings and commentaries of students with disabilities experiences of general PE. Similarly, in my study I have attempted to connect or link the students with SEN/disabilities experiences' of PE (captured in a vignette), with teacher follow-up interviews during the final phase of data collection.

In her study, Fitzgerald (2012) targeted 40 adult stakeholders (PE teachers, sports development officers and researchers) to complete three task sheets relating to students' experiences of PE, based on their drawings and commentaries. Twenty-two of the stakeholders completed the three task sheets, which were analysed resulting in four main themes emerging as follows; (1) activity setting (2) enjoying PE (3) challenging practice (4) stakeholder empathy. In conclusion, Fitzgerald (2012, p. 458) highlights the 'confusion and contradiction' expressed by stakeholders in relation to their understanding of the concept of inclusion within physical education. Furthermore, she calls for meaningful research approaches with young people that are not disabling and exclusive in their design.

Reflection is central to making sense of one's experiences, the next section examines the role of reflection in teaching and learning.

2.5: Reflection and Reflective Practice

From the perspective of the present, we review the past, in order to make a better future

(Freire 1972, p. 36)

Emanating from Dewey's writings on 'How we think' (1933) the theoretical root of reflection and reflective practice emerges (Valli 1997; Uhrich 2009). Central to reflection is the idea of creating meaning and making sense from experience or action. The notion of the *reflective, thinking* teacher is further espoused in Dewey's 'The relation of theory to practice in education' (1904/1964). Therein he advocates for teacher candidates to learn not only the "how's" but the "why's" of teaching, to think about teacher behaviours and the context in which they happen (Valli 1997). Furthermore, Dewey (1933, p. 9) postulates that "reflective action aims at active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends". The words 'active, persistent and careful consideration' resonate strongly still in contemporary reflection.

Accordingly, a reflective teacher frequently deliberates on their everyday situated practice in relation to their teaching and their students' learning. The notion of situated learning posits that learning mirrors the activity, context and culture in which it happens or is situated (Dirkx 2011). Indeed, reflective practice can be viewed "as a socially situated practice in different contexts emphasizing the critical role that context plays in teachers' learning to teach" (Putnam and Borko 2000 cited in Jung 2012, p. 159).

2.5.1: Typologies of Reflection

Over the years various efforts have been made to categorise reflection and reflective practice (van Manen 1977; Schön 1983, 1987; Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan 1994, 1997; Valli 1997; Uhrich 2009). It is necessary to critically review these in order to inform the reflective framework utilised for my study. However, it is pertinent and appropriate to heed Ovens and Tinning's (2009) advice, that when defining reflection one needs to consider the context of the particular situation and the nature of reflective activity.

To begin with, van Manen (1977) identifies 3 levels of hierarchical reflection, namely, technical, practical and critical reflection. Likewise, Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan (1994) devised the Reflective Framework for Teaching in Physical Education (RFTPE) for student teachers incorporating technical, situational, and sensitizing areas. Additionally, Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan (1997) conducted a study with four experienced physical education teachers on the role of reflective practice. The main findings indicated that the four PE teachers considered student learning as a priority and utilised "critical reflection as part of their situationally driven and context bound teaching practices" (Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan 1997 in Uhrich 2009, p. 502). Evolving from Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan's (1997) study also was the notion of micro and macro reflection. In micro-reflection day to day events are noted, whereas in macro-reflection, reflective practice which occurs over the years, to inform decision making is recorded (Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan 1997).

Accordingly, Valli (1997) has expanded the view of reflection to five different categories or typologies: technical reflection, reflection-in and on-action, deliberate reflection, personalistic reflection and critical reflection. Subsequently, taking cognisance of Valli's perspective, technical reflection relates to teacher management and instruction behaviours, for example active learning, homework review.

Secondly, the terms reflection-in-action and reflection-of/on-action derive from Schön (1983). Essentially reflection-on-action is the process of reviewing teaching and learning occurrences after they have happened; reflection-in-action is the process of considering a teaching or learning event as it is occurring (Schön 1983, 1987). When a teacher has completed the teaching episode the reflective process may take place quite a while later and the action that follows may be days or even weeks later (Uhrich 2009). Thirdly, deliberative reflection focuses on decision making based on a combination of sources for example, experience, school organisation and culture, the advice of other teachers, personal beliefs and values. A number of voices and views are considered.

Fourthly, personalistic reflection involves contemplating personal growth and relational issues, linking personal and professional life (Valli 1997). Lastly, critical reflection involves consideration of broad social and political aspects of equality, social justice and action (van Manen 1977; Valli 1997; Uhrich 2009). Critical reflection is often regarded as the highest form of reflection because of its transformative potential in ameliorating social conditions (Valli 1997).

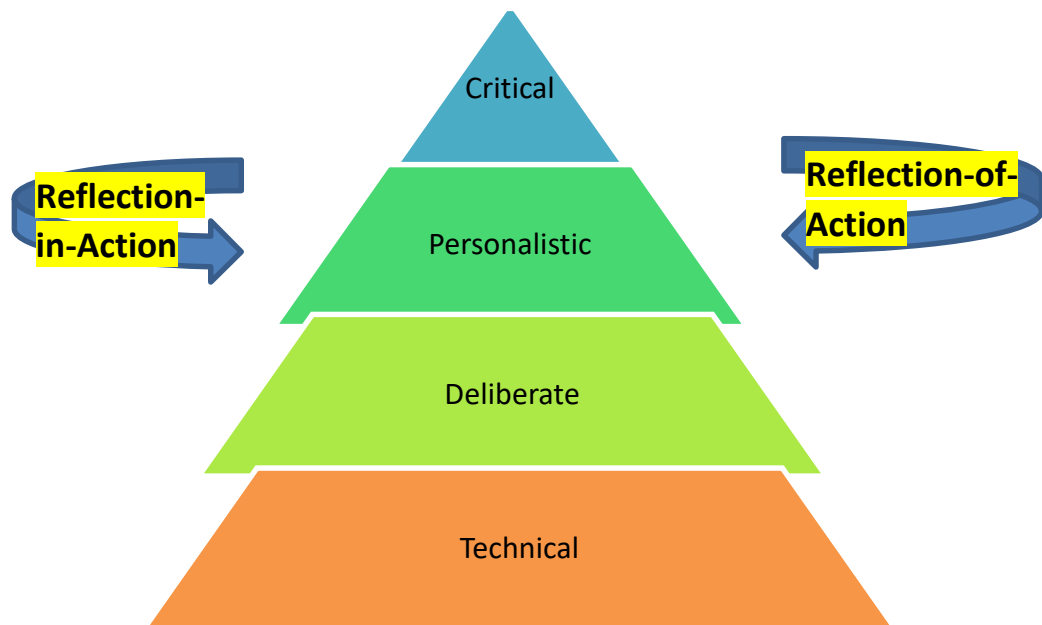
Examining teachers' experiences in their practice with the purpose of determining what they can learn from these experiences is core to the reflective process. Whilst more recently, Pollard (2008) posits evidence informed practice contributing to professional development in reflective practice. On the other hand, Tom (1985 in Valli 1997, p. 74) identifies reflection in teaching as spanning four general areas; "the teaching learning process, the selection of subject matter, political and ethical principles underlying teaching, and the broad social context of teaching". These four areas or domains resonate strongly within my study.

2.5.2: Reflective practice and Physical Education

Whilst reflective practice features strongly in teacher education literature, there seems to be a paucity of research on reflection in the field of physical education (Jung 2012). Additionally, research on reflective practice within physical education has mostly concentrated on the initial teacher education phase, with the exception of a few studies (e.g. Jung, 2012; Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan, 1997 cited in Tsangaridou and Polemitou 2015). Hence it is hoped in my study to address this lacuna to some extent, particularly in the Irish context.

Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan (1997) and Uhrich (2009) have devised frameworks for pre-service physical education (PE) teachers to guide the process of reflective practice. In an effort to devise a more comprehensible approach to the types of reflective practices in PE teacher education, Uhrich (2009, p. 503) developed the 'hierarchy of reflective practice in physical education'. In this she identifies four categories: technical, deliberate, personalistic and critical (Diagram 2.1). She also incorporates reflection-in-action and reflection-of-action. This framework aligns closely to Valli's (1997) work.

Diagram 2.1: The hierarchy of reflective practice in teacher education.



(Uhrich 2009, p. 504)

Furthermore, Crawford, O'Reilly and Luttrell (2012b) conducted a study assessing the use of a reflective framework for teaching in physical education (RFTPE) on the teaching and learning of undergraduate sport studies and physical education students. The RFTPE was devised by Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan (1994). The main findings ascertained in the Crawford, O'Reilly and Luttrell (2012b) study was that reflection can be *learned* for professional growth and development, which concurred with previous research. However, Crawford, O'Reilly and Luttrell (2012b) found that greater emphasis was placed on sensitising reflection, rather than previous research which noted a greater emphasis on technical research (Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan, 1994; 1997, Uhrich 2009). Additionally, Crawford, O'Reilly and Luttrell (2012b) favoured a non-hierarchical, linear framework as mooted by Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan (1994) rather than Uhrich's (2009) hierarchial framework. Moreover, Crawford, O'Reilly and Luttrell (2012b) recommend the development of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) for reflective PE teachers to promote a deeper understanding of reflection and reflective practice.

More recently Standal and Moe (2013) conducted a literature review on reflective practice in PE and PE Teacher Education spanning from 1995- 2011. Thirty- three articles were presented in the review, mostly pertaining to PE teacher education contexts. Nonetheless, it was found that the studies relating to practising PE teachers (eleven in all) indicated a need for reflective communities. Additionally, the review highlighted a number of methodological and theoretical challenges within its study. For example, the concept of reflection and reflective practice are used “interchangeably and quite unsystematically” (Standal and Moe 2013, p. 230). The authors contend that reflection involves considered thinking, whereas reflective practice implies thinking, followed by action. They acknowledge that this mis-representation is not only evident in PE and PE teacher education research, but in the wider educational literature (Fendler 2003; Molander 2008 cited in Standal and Moe 2013, p. 230). Cognisance of this duality is observed in the context of my study, whereby the focus is on reflection of a teacher’s practice/praxis rather than ‘reflective practice’ which would imply subsequent action. Indeed, the process of reflection may prompt some individual teachers to action or change their teaching. This question will be posed to teachers in their follow-up interview post reflective process (Appendix 18, Q.1). Lastly, Standal and Moe (2013, p. 231) emphasise the importance of carefully adhering to a theoretical framework, such as the work by John Dewey, Donald Schön or Max van Manen in order to avoid pitfalls surrounding the concepts of reflection and reflective practice. Crawford, O’Reilly and Luttrell (2012b) identified a positive response from sports studies and physical education undergraduate students regarding the use of guiding questions.

Accordingly, the following readings (Schön 1983, 1987; Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan 1997; Valli 1997; Uhrich 2009; Jung 2012) have informed the guiding reflective framework for practising PE teachers in my study.

2.6: Theoretical Frameworks

Introduction

A number of theoretical frameworks underpin this study. The overarching framework, considered most apposite in the context of my scholastic inquiry draws on the sociocultural theory of learning (Vygotsky 1978). Sociocultural theory attempts to portray the “dynamic contexts in which, and the processes through which, learning and development take place” (De Valenzuela 2007, p. 280). Differences which denote “impairments (bodily, psychologically or educationally) only make sense when social and cultural elements have been included to contextualize a given normality” (Garland-Thomson 1997; Grue 2016 in Rekaa, Hanisch and Ytterhus 2018, p. 3).

A number of theoretical frameworks were considered, discussed and deliberated upon as potential apposite theories in the context of my study. These included the psychological model of the theory of planned behaviour (Azjen 1991, 2001) which was considered in explaining the determinant influences on teacher behaviour. However, my study does not essentially *measure* PE teacher belief and attitude scales towards inclusion. Thus whilst the theory of planned behaviour has been applied to research regarding teachers’ attitudes and beliefs (Kozub and Lienert 2003; Casebolt and Hodge 2010; Hodge et al, 2009) it does not form a theoretical underpinning in my study.

Likewise, Allport’s (1954) contact theory was considered as a possible theoretical framework to this study at the preliminary stages. A central tenet in contact theory is the interaction between members of different groups. Allport’s contact theory posits that prejudices between different groups (in this instance PE teachers and students with SEN/disabilities) can be reduced through contact under specific conditions (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Tindall 2013). However, the main focus of inquiry of my study emanates from a learning and teaching pedagogical perspective.

Additionally, occupational socialization theory (Lawson 1983a: 1983b) was considered. Namely, occupational socialization theory involves three temporally positioned stages: acculturation, professional socialization and organizational socialization (Andrew and Richards 2015) in a PE teacher’s life. The acculturation stage refers to when an individual is still studying in school and their personal experiences. Professional socialization relates to one’s physical education teacher education (PETE) and organizational socialization

involves the ‘on the job’ socialization throughout one’s career (Adamakis and Zounhia 2016, p.282). Whilst occupational socialization theory provides a very useful lens to explore the ways in which PE teachers are prepared for and socialized into their occupational role (Andrew and Richards 2015), it does not provide a required cultural and situated insight into a student with a disability experience. Thus it was deemed not wholly suitable in the overall context of my inquiry.

Lastly, the theory of adaptation (Kiphard 1983; Sherrill 1998, 2004) reverberated in the context of this study. Adaptation theory, or the process of adapting (in PE and physical activity), was first described by Kiphard (1983) as individual and environmental interactions in order to maintain involvement in an activity (Lieberman and Houston 2009). Sherrill (1998, 2004) extended the theory to encompass a dynamic and multi-directional relationship between the individual, the environment and the task. PE teachers need to be able to adapt, modify and change (task, environment, instruction, etc.) according to the needs of the students to create optimal inclusive learning opportunities in PE (Hodge et al., 2004). Adaptation theory provides a useful pragmatic tool in assisting a student with a SEN/disability to participate in PE. Thus it was deemed a relevant theoretical framework to support and guide the interpretation of the data.

Consequently, the sociocultural theory of learning, originating from the works of Vygotsky in the early twentieth century resonates strongly with the philosophy of the research journey and the tenets of what I wish to explore. Hence, it forms the overarching theoretical framing. Additionally, contemporary interpretations of the theory and its use in similar type studies will be appraised. The theory will now be explored in detail.

2.6.1: Sociocultural Theory and Situated Learning

The origin of sociocultural theory is rooted in the early works of the Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896 - 1934). His untimely death at age 38, left much of his theoretical work unfinished, but was continued and interpreted through the work of his colleagues and former students (Sullivan Palincsar 1998; De Valenzuela 2007). Vygotsky’s work has been developed in a number of ways, such as, in North America through the works of Jerome Bruner, Michael Cole and James Wertsch (sociocultural or cultural historical) and in Russia his ideas were interpreted by Luria and Leont’ev, the latter relating to activity theory

(Edwards and Daniels 2004). In Vygotsky's sociocultural theoretical construct, learning is inherent in human interaction influenced by the cultural aspects of an individual (De Valenzuela 2007). Sociocultural views consider the bi-directional interaction between the individual and the environment and with others with whom they interact as central.

As stated there are many interpretations of the original Vygotskian sociocultural theory and they have continued to develop over time. One way of understanding this process is through a sociocultural lens, taking cognisance of new researchers and interpretations in the conversation (De Valenzuela 2007). Fundamental to a Vygotskian framework is the practice of internalization of social interaction in the construction of knowledge (Zapata 2013). Within a sociocultural perspective, learning and development is viewed through a process of cultural and social interaction rather than a biomedical and physical viewpoint (De Valenzuela 2007; Cliff 2012). My study is underpinned by sociocultural theory, framed within a constructivist paradigm. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) links a psychological perspective on child development with a pedagogical perspective on instruction, with an underlying assumption that psychological development and instruction are socially embedded (Hedegaard 2005, p. 223). Children develop information culturally and socially that "develops through internalization and interaction with more knowledgeable others" (Vygotsky 1978 in Aubrey and Riley 2016, p. 51). In sociocultural theory the ZPD is perhaps the most well-known pedagogical construct (De Valenzuela 2007). Essentially, the ZPD is:

The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

(Vygotsky 1978, p. 86)

In relation to inclusive education Vygotsky proffered that whilst the nature of a child's disability may be biological, the educator "is confronted not so much by biological facts as their social consequences ... the goal of the teacher is to help the child live in this world" (Vygotsky 1995 in Vygotskaya 1999, p.331). Similarly, Rodina (2006) interprets Vygotsky's sociocultural theory on dysontogenesis, as the child's development being determined mainly by the social implications of their organic impairment. Likewise, Wertsch (1998, p. 24) purports that a sociocultural approach connects "the relationship between human action, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional and historical contexts in which action occurs on the other".

Furthermore, Quennerstedt et al., (2014) applied sociocultural theory to explore aspects of learning in school physical education. In their research learning is viewed as a continuous interaction between students, teachers and cultural/ institutional aspects of the teaching and learning situation.

Qi, Wang and Ha (2017) explored the perceptions of Hong Kong PE teachers on the inclusion of students with disabilities based on Vygotsky's social constructivism theory. They interpreted the theory as learning processes influenced by social interaction using three concepts: ZPD, inter-subjectivity and enculturation. ZPD has been referred to earlier, but inter-subjectivity relates to the "mutual understanding achieved between people through effective communication" (Jacobs and Eccles 2000 in Qi, Wang and Ha 2017, p. 89). The third concept relates to enculturation, Qi, Wang and Ha (2017, p. 89) view this as the learnt "accepted norms and values of an established culture". The three concepts highlighted resonate within my study and will be drawn upon in the interpretation of my findings.

Additionally, situated learning posits that learning echoes the "activity, context and culture in which it occurs or is situated" (Dirkx 2011, p. 300). In the context of my study it suggests that learning takes place in PE classes within social and collaborative processes between teachers and students within the cultural setting of their schools. Situated learning theory draws on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and is inextricably linked to sociocultural roots. The concept of learning through legitimate peripheral participation originated with Lave and Wenger's (1991) research on craft apprenticeship amongst a community of tailors in Liberia. Their observations of apprentices learning their craft whilst working with skilled tailors in a social, historical and cultural context formed the genesis of their exploration of situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991). Furthermore, the centrality of legitimate peripheral participation within learning in a situated activity context is proffered by Lave and Wenger (1991). Legitimate peripheral participation is viewed "as a descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent" (Lave and Wenger 1991, p. 35). Peripherality and legitimacy are seen as concepts that "involve both a community and its newcomers" (Wenger 1998, p. 101).

Furthermore, in the PE context, McPhail, Kirk and Griffin (2008) refer to the use of situated learning theory. They argue that learning can be explored in relation to student engagement regarding "three dimensions of situativity: perceptual/physical, social/interactive and institutional/cultural" (McPhail, Kirk and Griffin 2008 in Quennerstedt et al., 2014, p. 284).

The perceptual/ physical dimension relates to the students' engagement with the physical environment, whilst the social/interactive dimension pertains to the situated interactions. Individual cultural aspects as well as the schools' values constitute the institutional/ cultural dimension. Likewise, Grenier (2010) advocates for an emphasis on learning and inclusion through joint social activity. She suggests replacing the focus on the "individual to the coordinated actions between participants as social processes in order to reconstruct what it means to include" (Grenier 2010, p. 390).

In this research inquiry the educational community setting of the post-primary school is of primacy. Specifically, the perspective of the PE teacher and student with a disability was sought and documented in relation to the inclusion of students with SEN/disabilities. The interactions between the PE teacher and the students are positioned well within sociocultural theory. Whilst my study began by examining the PE teacher's experience of inclusion it was considered vital to embrace the voice of the student with a SEN/disability as well. Indeed, there has been a continued absence of young people with disabilities' insights within the research process (Priestley, 1997; Harr, 2001; Lewis, 2001 cited in Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk, 2003a). More recently a growing number of researchers have endeavored to include children with disabilities in an effort to glean a more *comprehensive* research insight (Fitzgerald and Stride 2012, p.286).

Furthermore, the social interactions among PE teachers, within a particular school can be positioned within sociocultural theory. Subject specific PE teachers working collaboratively can be viewed as a community of practice (Wenger 1998). The term community of practice is a relatively recent word emanating from Lave and Wenger (1991) and further developed by Wenger (1998) in his work: *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity*. However, the phenomena and notion of community of practice has its roots as far back as humankind have come together in shared learning. The concept of communities of practice being ever present at various stages of our lives is posited by Wenger (1998). He feels that "we all belong to communities of practice – at home, at work, at school, in our hobbies" (Wenger 1998, p. 6). In essence in his theory he views learning as participation encompassing "practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities" (Wenger 1998, p. 4). In doing so the community of practice affords meaning and understanding for the individual's experience. Likewise, Quennerstedt et al., (2014) ascribe to Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of community of practice in knowing and learning in PE. Drawing from the overarching principles of sociocultural theory, the

cultural, political and economic aspects of society influence the everyday interactions of PE teachers. Wenger (1998, p. 3) places learning in the “context of our lived experience of participation in the world”, essentially it is seen as a social phenomenon. Likewise, Grenier (2010) suggests that examining types of interactions that nurture inclusive practices and/or the resistance to such practices is important in developing a community of learning. My study examines the perceptions and experiences of PE teachers and students in relation to including students with SEN/disabilities in physical education. Additionally, it interprets PE teachers’ reflections of their practice. As an integral stakeholder, the voice of the student is important. I would argue that sociocultural theory of learning is a useful lens to inform pedagogical practice and learning within inclusive PE. Indissolubly linked to the sociocultural theory of learning are the theories of situated learning and community of practice.

Lastly, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning encompasses many facets and branches in teaching and learning. In the context of my research the following aspects are specifically drawn upon: the social aspect (interactions with other people), the cultural/ institutional aspect, the zone of proximal development (guided learning) and situated learning. Whilst these aspects are separated in an effort to illustrate clarity, they are inextricably linked and indeed overlap, both theoretically and in practice. The concept of the agentic teacher and student is explored in the next section.

2.6.2: The teacher and student as agents of learning

The evolution of theories of *workplace learning* have developed significantly encompassing psychological theories, sociocultural theories and post-modern theories (Hager 2011, p. 29). Within the area of professional and workplace learning the “concept of agency has become widely used in learning research” (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 45). Four key scholarly lines in which notions of agency are evident were identified in a review by Eteläpelto et al (2013, p. 47):

1. Social science discussion
2. Post-structural discussion
3. Sociocultural learning research
4. Identity and life course approach.

Having reviewed the four lines of research Eteläpelto et al., (2013) propose a conceptualization of professional agency from a subject centered sociocultural perspective. My study emanates from sociocultural theory and fuses with the emerging agentic notion of an individual (PE teacher and student) functioning in a socially collaborative manner. Traditionally research relating to professional agency and learning has stemmed from the teacher perspective but in the true sense of interactive and dynamic sociocultural theory, I would contend that the student voice needs to be heard. Learning can be seen as an “interaction between an agentic individual’s mind and a socially constructed community of practice” (Cairns and Malloch 2011, p. 9). Historically the concept of agency has been evident in educational practice since the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. More recently learning has been viewed as not just an individual’s building of knowledge, but “also as social participation involving the construction of identities in socioculturally determined knowledge communities” (Lave and Wenger 1991; Sfard 1998; Wenger 1998 in Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 46). Furthermore, in the last decade the notion of agency has gained recognition particularly in deliberations on workplace and lifelong learning (Billett 2006; Collin and Billet 2010; Paloniemi and Collin 2012 in Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

The following definition is proffered by Eteläpelto et al., (2013) in relation to professional agency within a subject-centered sociocultural framework.

Professional agency is practiced when professional subjects and/or communities exert influence, make choices and take stances in ways that affect their work and/ or their professional identities (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 61)

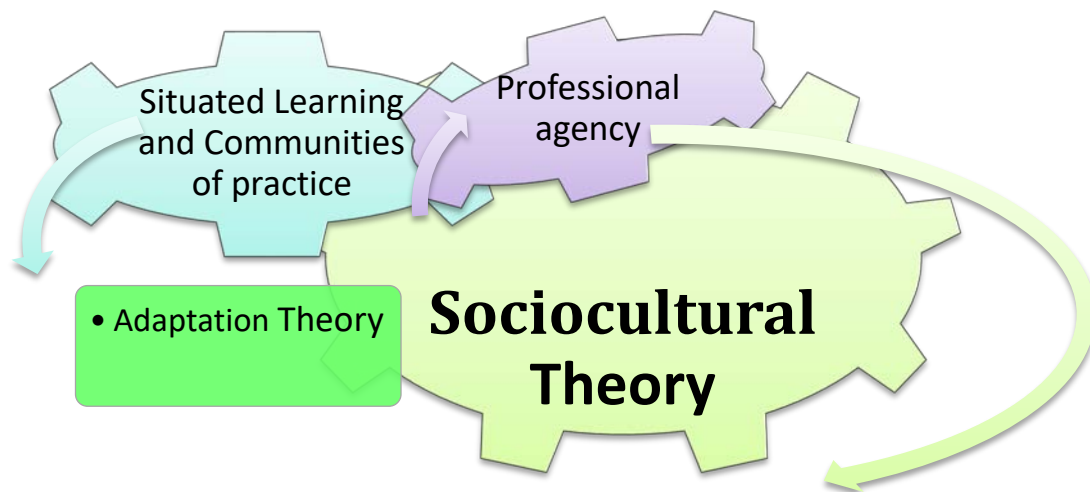
In the context of my study, the above definition provides a suitable theoretical basis for the agentic aspect of the PE teacher and student in their working and educational life. He/she can exercise choice to include and correspondingly the degree to which they include students with SEN/disabilities in their PE class. Likewise, the student may engage fully or very little in the learning process, allowing scope for becoming agents of their learning.

2.6.3: Theoretical Framework Conclusion

In conclusion the central theoretical framework informing this study is the sociocultural theory of learning and practice (Vygotsky 1978). Within this theoretical stance the notion of communities of practice (Wenger 1998), situated learning theory (Lave and Wenger 1991), professional agency in the workplace (Eteläpelto et al., 2013) and adaptation theory

(Kiphard 1983; Sherrill 1998;2004) have emerged. Lastly, the theory of planned behavior (Azjen 1991; 2001), contact theory (Allport 1954) and occupational socialization theory (Lawson 1983a: 1983b) have been referred to, but do not form the basis for the theoretical framework. Diagram 2.2 illustrates a graphic outline of the main theoretical position informing the scholarly inquiry.

Diagram 2.2: Overview of Theoretical Framework.



2.6.4: Biopsychosocial Model of Disability

In order to understand the contemporary viewpoint of inclusive education in the context of my study, the biopsychosocial model of disability and the concept of inclusion are expounded upon in this section. Historically, special education research emanated from a deficit standpoint that viewed the individual as the problem (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004; Florian 2007; EADSNE 2010). This perspective derived from the medical model of disability, which regarded the child with the impairment as a problem to be solved. More recently, perspectives on *inclusive education* view society and the environment as the problem, requiring adaptation to support the child with a disability (Morley et al., 2005; Hodknison 2016). This latter viewpoint pertains to the social model of disability. Likewise, Booth and Ainscow (2002 in Tant and Watelain 2016) view inclusion and heterogeneity not as a problem but as an opportunity for schools to transform in response to student diversity. Furthermore, unlike the medical and social model of disability, the biopsychosocial model is an integrated model incorporating biological, psychological, social and environmental factors contributing interactively to disability (Devecchi 2007).

The biopsychosocial model was originally coined by the psychiatrist George Engel in 1977 and distinguishes between the pathological processes that cause a disease and disability and the individual's view of their health or disability (Devecchi 2007, p. 538). The three models (the medical, the social and the biopsychosocial) provide a useful method of conceptualizing disability but it is also important to realise that they are not mutually exclusive entities.

As highlighted, current thinking has shifted amongst special education researchers towards a sociocultural perspective, focusing on the wider context of the interaction between the individual and the environment (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004). This interactionist/ ecological framework has been aligned with the biopsychosocial model (Hutzler 2007; Deforges and Lindsay 2010). This interactionist/ ecological framework (also referred to as a biopsychosocial model) is recommended in the research report commissioned by the National Council for Special Education (Desforges and Lindsay 2010), which draws on a review conducted on international practice and standards. In their report, the authors recommend the biopsychosocial model as “providing the best fit” to appropriate education to children with special educational needs in the Irish context (Desforges and Lindsay 2010, p. 165). However, Peters and Reid (2009, p.557 cited in EADSNE 2010, p. 17) feel that the

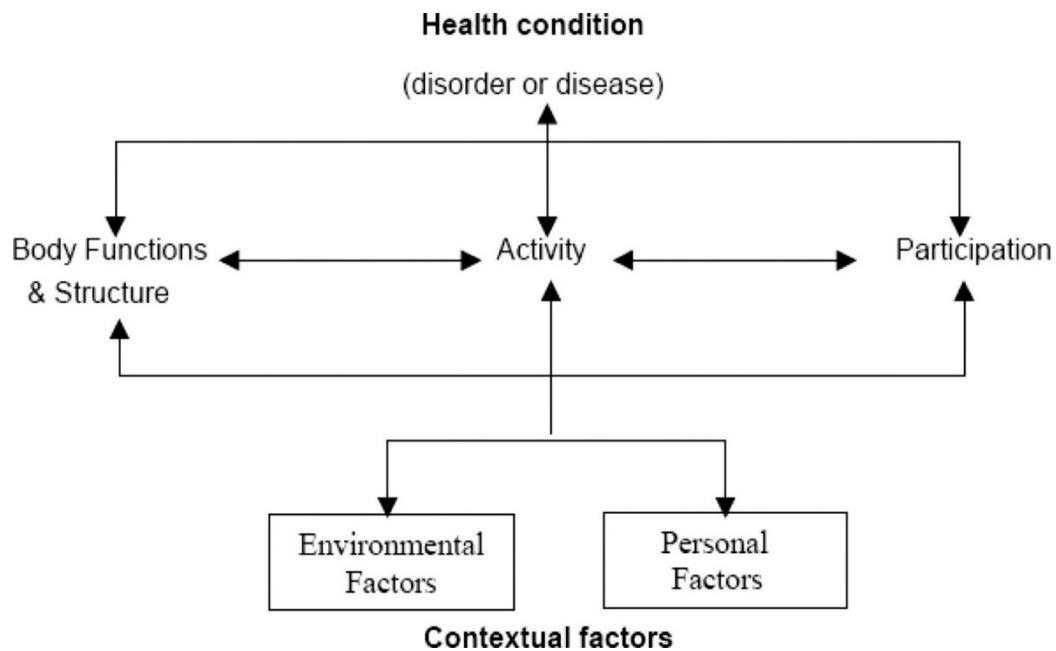
move from the medical, deficit model of special education to a more inclusive educational model will take a long time. They further posit that the deficit model of special education is so “enmeshed in our national psyche, legislation, school procedures and daily classroom practices” (p.557) that major reform is needed in schools and society in order to counteract this perspective. Desforges and Lindsay (2010) refer to the work of Clough (2007) and Norwich (2008) in relation to a *dilemmatic framework*, expressing the value tensions that exist between inclusiveness and equity on one side, and differentiation and special provision on the other.

Within the adapted physical activity context and specifically, within the adapted physical *education* context, the biopsychosocial model has evolved as a current apposite framework for fostering an understanding of how students with SEN/disability are most enlighteningly supported in educational settings. Hutzler and Sherrill (2007) critically reflect on the view that adapted physical activity is an area of study with distinctive theories and a developing research evidence base drawing on a range of “biological, psychosocial, and ecological bodies of practical and scientific knowledge” (p. 17). They also feel that the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) framework adopted by The World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2001, “holds promise as the theoretical framework for integrating disability and movement studies” Hutzler and Sherrill (2007, p. 17). The ICF espouses a bio-psychosocial conceptual framework focusing on an individual’s ability and functionality as opposed to impairment. The ICF integrates the major models of disability - the “medical and social model of disability in a bio-psycho-social- synthesis” (WHO 2013, p.5).

Diagram 2.3 gives an outline of the ICF framework, showing disability and functioning as outcomes of interactions between health conditions (diseases, disorders and injuries) and contextual factors (personal and environment factors).

The ICF as a conceptual framework can help understanding between the “interaction of educational environments and the participation of students with disabilities” (WHO 2013, p. 98). Thus the biopsychosocial model resonates strongly in the context of my study. Furthermore, the interactionist/ecological model or biopsychosocial model aligns with sociocultural theory from the perspective of the individual and environment interface and connection.

Diagram 2.3: The ICF Model: Interaction between ICF components



WHO (2001, p.18)

2.6.5: Concept of Inclusion

The term *inclusion* is defined in a multiplicity of ways as it can be used in many contexts. Inclusive education is seen by many as inseparable from the human rights and equal opportunities debate, and is a political policy goal in most liberal democracies (Bunch and Valeo, 2009; Winter and O’Raw, 2010). The educational context of inclusion in relation to special educational needs and disability is of prime interest in this inquiry. Inclusion means educating children with disabilities in a regular educational setting, whereby their individual needs are met (Winnick 2005; Block 2007). Yet, inclusion is not such a simple and straightforward concept and it would be disingenuous of me to portray it as such. Winter and O’Raw (2010) offer a plethora of definitions of inclusion; some focus on rights, others accentuate values and others focus on school capacity to cater for difference. The definition, which I feel resonates best within this study, is outlined below (UNESCO 2005); it focuses on a process of dynamic, educational practice responding to differences through adaptation and a belief in education for all;

Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. ... [As such,] it involves a range of changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children
(UNESCO, 2005, p.13).

Interestingly, there is no exact definition of the term “inclusive education” in either the Education Act 1998 or EPSEN Act 2004 (Ware et al., 2009, p.19). However, in the EPSEN Act (2004) reference is made to educating a child with special educational needs in ‘an inclusive environment’ unless the ‘nature or degree’ of the child’s needs are inconsistent with the best interests of the child or the effective educational provision of the other children (Government of Ireland 2004, section 2, p.7). The implication here is that some students may benefit from a separate type of education (e.g. special class or special school) depending on their needs. On the other hand, many theorists feel that a separate education is not an equal one, thus contrary to the *purist* philosophy of inclusion (Winnick 2005; Bunch and Valeo 2009). Much debate exists regarding the deconstruction of the *special education* approach in contemporary society and the emergence of inclusive education for all (Bunch and Valeo 2009; Winter and O’Raw 2010). Indeed, Slee (2011, p. 13) advocates that mainstreaming and special schools are “shibboleths to unsatisfactory knowledge and practices of the past”.

Inclusive education can be viewed as a ‘philosophy that supports and celebrates diversity through the active participation of all students in the school culture’ (Kugelmass 2004 in Grenier 2010, p. 388). Notably it is apparent that there has been a shift from terms like special educational needs, special education and integration to terms such as “inclusion, inclusive education and inclusive schools” (Dyson and Millward 2000, Barton 1998, Depauw and Doll-Tepper 2000 cited in Vickerman 2007b, p. 29). As referred to earlier, inclusion in the educational sense is a complex concept and it cannot be viewed in isolation. Vickerman (2007b, p.30) emphasizes the importance of considering inclusion within the context of “government and statutory agencies, professional opinion and practice (teaching pedagogy) and consumer levels of classroom practice involving curriculum structure, experiences and outcomes”. He further critiques two influential authors’ work, namely, ‘Skrtic’s theoretical model of inclusive practice’ and ‘Ainscow’s examination of applied

inclusive practice’ in schools (Vickerman 2007b, p. 31). In combining these two inclusive models, the following characteristics emerge:

Effective leadership, clear vision, dismantling of structures and barriers, response to diversity, senior management responsibility, reliance on in-class support and emphasis on the professional development of staff. (Vickerman 2007b, p. 35)

In conclusion Vickerman (2007b) proffers that special needs education should move towards a more coherent framework reflecting government policy’s deliverance and implementation within a structure that encompasses all agencies and individuals’ vision of inclusive schooling. This notion is further developed in more recent research (Rix et al., 2013; Rix, et al., 2015; Day and Prunty 2015). In their study Day and Prunty (2015) offer practical examples to meet the challenges of implementing inclusion. Their findings focus on three levels: whole school (strong leadership), teacher (meeting individual students’ needs) and child/family/community (collaboration of social and affective issues). Additionally, Rix et al., (2015) query the use of the concept of *continuum*, widely used to describe the child’s needs, provision and services in special education (from special school, to special class, to mainstream). Emanating from their literature search, they have found more recent ‘models have begun to represent the continuum as a collective response rather than a linear process’ (NASDSE, 1998 in Rix et al., 2015, p. 330). Moreover, they propose a reconceptualization of continuum towards a community of provision¹, enabling practitioners, policy makers and theorists to explore new ways of approaching the challenge of delivering effective, universal and support services.

2.6.6: Concluding Remarks

Chapter two has provided an in-depth and current review of pertinent literature. It has encompassed the professional developmental pathway of teachers and inclusion, spanning initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development (Feiman-

¹ Community of Provision: The collective delivery of services broadly related to learning, health, and welfare involving a range of providers within a network of agreements. It is within this community of provision that support for children, families, and practitioners is negotiated, mediated, and experienced. It is within this community that needs, challenges, and opportunities arise and are met. The community of provision requires leadership that coheres and supports practices and strategies that emerge from and enhance collaborative working and planning. It aims, as a whole and within its constituent parts, for the community and organizational structures of each setting and service to be representative and inclusive of a full cross-section of their local communities in all aspects of their provision (Rix et al., 2015, p.341).

Nemser 2001; Teaching Council 2011). Arising from this review is the need for more qualitative research, regarding both teachers in general (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005) and specifically PE teachers (Morley et al., 2005; Block and Obrusnikova 2007; Ko and Boswell 2013) working with students with SEN/disabilities. Findings in the review indicate that PE teachers feel that their initial teacher education was insufficient regarding inclusion (Morley et al., 2005; Meegan and MacPhail 2006; O'Brien, Kudláček, and Howe 2009; Vickerman and Coates 2009). In addition, existing literature notes that PE teachers suggest that continuing professional development should offer subject specific and practically based opportunities for including children with SEN and disabilities in PE (Smith and Green 2004; Meegan and MacPhail 2006; Ko and Boswell 2013).

Historically it appears that PE teacher perspective towards inclusion was somewhat negative (Block and Obrusnikova 2007). However, more recent studies indicate a more favourable attitude towards the notion of inclusion (Ko and Boswell 2013; Campos, Ferreira and Block 2015; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017). Furthermore, Tant and Watelain (2016) in their review of inclusion in physical education, specifically from a teacher perspective, identified perceived competency as the factor which most strongly predicted teachers' attitude. In addition, interlinked with PE teacher perspective are the areas of category and degree of disability. For the most part studies show that teachers had a negative attitude towards emotional disorders, were somewhat favorable towards students with learning disabilities and presented a mixed attitude towards students with physical, sensory or mental disabilities (Tant and Watelain 2016). Moreover, students with more severe type disabilities were perceived to be more difficult to teach in an inclusive setting (Kozub and Lienert 2003; Hodge et al., 2004; Block and Obrusnikova 2007; Hodge et al., 2009). Similarly influencing the PE teacher perspective is the curricular nature of the PE content or activity. PE teachers in a number of previous studies referred to the competitive team game tradition of PE which may certainly present a barrier to inclusive practice (Smith and Green 2004; Morley et al., 2005; Tant and Watelain 2016).

Evidently, my review and critique of existing literature highlights the dearth of studies directly involving students with SEN and disabilities (Coates and Vickerman 2008; Qi and Ha 2012; Wilhelmsen and Sorensen 2017). Particularly, Haegele and Sutherland (2015), recommend the exploration of both the teacher's and student's perspective toward PE experiences within the one context.

Subsequently, the theoretical underpinnings of the thinking, reflective teacher are elucidated upon. The everyday situated practice of teaching and student learning in the context of inclusion and PE is disentangled. Importantly, chapter two has depicted and contextualized the theoretical frameworks used to guide my study. Firstly, the all-encompassing sociocultural theory of learning (Vygotsky 1978) in my study permeates the complex and dynamic interaction between the teacher and the student with a SEN/disability. Secondly, within the sociocultural framework the concept of situated learning theory (Lave and Wenger 1991), community of practice (Wenger 1998) and the teacher and students as agents of their own learning (Cairns and Malloch 2011) are explored. Thus sociocultural principles centering on the situational, participative, and relational nature of human interaction are central to the theoretical framing of this doctoral study.

Lastly, in chapter two an insight and critique is offered on current perspectives on the concepts of the biopsychosocial model of disability and inclusion in the educational context.

In the next chapter, a thorough and robust description of all aspects of the methodological elements of this study are detailed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1: Introduction

Chapter three examines the philosophical assumptions, the paradigmatic framework, the methodological strategies and the ethical considerations that are used in this study. Each aspect will be defined, critically analysed and justified for use in the context of my research. Firstly, the overall philosophical view of research and how it relates to my particular study will be considered, as philosophy relates to the “use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our research” (Creswell, 2013, p. 16). Secondly, the constructivist paradigmatic framework selected to inform my inquiry will be elucidated upon. The constructivist paradigm suggests “that reality is created as a result of a process of social construction” (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p. 99). Thirdly, the qualitative approach applied in this study will be expounded upon in detail. Qualitative research methods have shifted very much into the mainstream of educational research (and research in the social sciences generally) relative to their marginalised status some 30-40 years ago (O’Donoghue 2007; Creswell 2009; Punch and Oancea 2014). Qualitative inquiries seek to ask the type of questions that focus on the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of human interactions (Agee 2009, p. 432).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 91) a paradigm is a “basic set of beliefs that guide action, *dealing* with first principles or ultimate’s, defining the world view of the researcher *encompassing* four terms: ethics (axiology), epistemology, ontology, and methodology”. During the last four decades there has been much debate regarding various paradigms and their influence on educational research (O’Donoghue 2007). Indeed, Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 1; 2018, p. 5) in their opening chapter of the ‘*Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*’ refer to the so called ‘paradigm wars’ or periods of conflict: the postpositivist-constructivist war against positivism (1970-1990); the conflict between competing post-positivist, constructivist and critical theory paradigms (1990 – 2005); and the current conflict between evidence-based methodologists and the mixed methods,

interpretive, and critical theory schools (2005- present). It is not within the scope of this study to review and debate these *tensions* but it is advisable that researchers remain cognisant of these ongoing dynamics.

The research design chosen in my study is that of the multiple-case study or collective case study design (Punch and Oancea 2014). This research is primarily situated in four mainstream post-primary schools. In particular, data is garnered from seven practising PE teachers and ten students with disabilities within these schools, as well as incorporating my own lived experience as a PE teacher. The primary data collection method in this study is that of the in-depth, semi-structured interview. The interview aims at “nuanced accounts of different aspects of the interviewee’s life world; it works with words and not with numbers” (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, p. 30). The secondary method of data collection is a reflective e-journal. This data collection method provides insights into the participating PE teachers’ experiences of teaching PE in mainstream post primary settings during the course of one school year. Thirdly, a detailed researcher diary is cultivated, thus allowing me “to conceptually return to the setting during the analysis of the data” (Jackson 1990 in Ko and Boswell 2013, p. 229). I shall reflect on my positioning within the study and on how my assumptions and beliefs can impact upon the dynamics of the undertaking– “in qualitative research this is called *reflexivity*” (Jones Brown and Holloway 2013, p.6).

In my study data, analysis is guided by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña’s (2014) approach to qualitative data analysis. Their approach has evolved since the initial Miles and Huberman’s 1994 publication on qualitative data analysis. In essence Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) draw from a number of qualitative genres, particularly ethnography and grounded theory. They view qualitative data analysis as three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2014). From the analysis, themes and categories should emerge in two ways. Firstly, those categories which emerge inductively from the participants’ own experience and language. Secondly, categories which the researcher identifies as important to the project’s focus-of-inquiry will be guided, also inductively, utilising the theoretical research. Finally, in this chapter a comprehensive appraisal of ethical considerations relevant to this study is undertaken.

3.2: Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophy of inquiry is based on assumptions (Punch and Oancea 2014) and abstract principles (Bateson 1972 cited in Denzin and Lincoln 2011). These assumptions and principles encapsulate beliefs about the following:

Ontology - what is the nature of reality?

Epistemology - what is the connection between inquirer and the inquired-into?

Methodology - the how of knowledge acquisition in the world

(Punch and Oancea 2014, p.17).

These three fundamental beliefs broadly help to guide my research process. Notably, O'Donoghue (2007) asserts that there are several major paradigms which influence the production of research in education. Some theorists and researchers (e.g. Guba and Lincoln 1994; Denzin and Lincoln 2011) have produced comprehensive charts or typologies illustrating paradigms according to their ontological and epistemological assumptions. These have proved helpful in enabling me, the researcher, to locate and situate the most appropriate paradigm for my research. Correspondingly, these typological illustrations highlight that all educational research is either implicitly or explicitly guided within a framework of theoretical assumptions (O'Donoghue 2007). With this in mind, the constructivist paradigm was primarily selected as a 'best fit' for my study. Fundamentally, a paradigm is defined as a way of regarding the world, consisting of "philosophical assumptions which in turn guide and direct thinking as well as action" (Mertens 2005, p.7). The constructivist paradigm will be further expounded later in this chapter.

Historically, in the 1890's Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) made the distinction between the terms 'erklären' and 'verstehen'. The former referring to 'explanation' pertaining to positivism, and the latter referring to 'understanding' relating to interpretivism (O'Donoghue 2007, p. 21). Many of the concepts in the interpretive approach originate from the German intellectual belief of hermeneutics and the *Verstehen* tradition in sociology, from phenomenology, and from critiques of positivism in the social sciences and humanities (Gregor 2005, p. 8).

Indeed, Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 13) expand that all research is "interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied".

Adopting the theoretical interpretivist/constructivist approach within my study seeks to “uncover people’s perspectives on a phenomenon” (O’Donoghue 2007, p.20). Applied to the context of my study, the perspectives of PE teachers and students on the degree of inclusiveness characterising PE practices in Irish post primary settings, are ‘uncovered’.

3.2.1: Epistemology

Epistemology relates to the study of knowledge and justified belief (Steup 2005). It derives from the Greek word *Episteme* meaning ‘knowledge/understanding’ and *logos* meaning ‘study of’ (Truncellito 2018). In the context of this study the epistemological stance relates to the relationship between the *researcher* and the *researched into* (i.e. *PE teachers, students*) or the *known* (Creswell 2013; Punch and Oancea 2014). Essentially, the intention is to glean knowledge from the subjective experiences of the seven participating PE teachers and ten students in relation to inclusion in PE in post primary settings.

Epistemologically, my study is guided by the constructivist paradigm. It adheres to the notion that individuals construct meaning and reality based on their interactions with their environment. Thus it draws on the “philosophical belief that people construct their own understanding of reality” (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011, p. 103). Hence, this approach can afford opportunities to inductively pursue new or unanticipated lines of inquiry relevant to social and cultural contexts.

Additionally, the knowledge gathered is also guided, utilising conceptual and theoretical frameworks which have been critically presented in chapter two, along with the guiding research questions. Prior to deciding on the most apposite theoretical framework for this study, a number of theoretical frameworks were critically discussed, considered and reviewed. Subsequently, the framework of sociocultural theory’s perspective on teachers’ and students’ *learning* was selected to underpin my study (Vygotsky 1978; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). Likewise, the broad concepts of inclusion and the professional teacher learning continuum of Feiman- Nemser (2001) offer the study a breadth as well as depth of knowledge. Furthermore, critical review of the medical, social and biopsychosocial models of disability informs this scholastic inquiry.

3.2.2: Ontology

Ontology pertains to the “nature of reality and its characteristics” (Creswell 2013, p. 20). Qualitative researchers feel that multiple realities exist and are inextricably linked to the individual and their experiences in society and life (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba 2011; Creswell 2013). Drawing ontologically from the constructivist stance, individuals construct their own personal reality (Guba and Lincoln, 1985; Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011). The constructivist paradigm suggests that reality is created from a process of social construction, unlike the positivist paradigm which feels that there is one reality waiting to be ‘discovered’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1989 cited in Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p. 99). The notion of multiple realities and social construction of reality in special education research implies that a diversity of types of individuals should be sought from whom data is collected (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004). Thus, in my research, acting on the advisability of assembling maximum variation cases (Patton 1990; Flyvbjerg 2006), participants are drawn from a variety of work environments, personal backgrounds, and educational experiences. Hence, my aim within the ontological realm of this study is to understand the multiple realities and social constructions which the participating PE teachers share with me from their interpretation of inclusion in their professional lives. My intention is to derive meaning and understanding from the informants’ descriptions of their experiences of working with students with disabilities in their particular PE settings. Additionally, it is hoped to ascertain their continuing professional development (CPD) needs in order to support inclusion in the future. Furthermore, the voice of the student with a disability was deemed crucial to facilitate a more complete exploration of inclusion in the PE context. Table 3.1 outlines a synopsis of the philosophical assumptions which lie at the heart of this study.

Table 3.1: Philosophical Assumptions with implications for this study

Assumption	Questions (Creswell 2013, p.21)	Characteristics	Implications for my study
Epistemological	What is knowledge, what is the link between researcher and those being researched	Guiding theoretical framework, Subjective, interactive relationship between researcher and participants	Theoretical and conceptual frameworks will guide the research. Also, knowledge is known through the subjective experiences of the participants, crafting opportunities to inductively follow new lines of inquiry
Ontological	What is the nature of reality	Reality is multiple, seen through many views	Varied perspectives of PE teachers from their lived working lives. Student views towards experiences within PE.

In the constructivist paradigm the researcher assumes that there are multiple realities (relativist ontology), that the inquirer and the inquired into, co- create meaning (subjectivist epistemology) and that the research is set in the natural world (naturalistic) (Denzin and Lincoln 2011).

3.3: The Paradigmatic Framework

The net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises may be termed a paradigm or interpretive framework (Guba 1990, p.17)

The constructivist paradigm developed from the philosophy of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey's and other German philosophers' work on interpretive understanding known as hermeneutics (Eichelberger, 1989 cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 16).

Accordingly, in this study the constructivist paradigm was deemed most suitable. Specifically, the *social* constructivist world view pursues understanding of the world, deriving subjective meanings of experiences, within the historical and cultural norms, in

which individuals live (Creswell 2013). The constructivist view encompasses an interpretivist lens, whereby the participants' perspectives on 'things' are considered (O'Donoghue 2007, p. 119).

The basic constructivist premise underpinning my study is that the informants (the PE teachers and students in this context) will give subjective meanings to their experiences of inclusion in PE. The researcher then attempts to understand the intricate and complex lived experience of the informants (Bryman 2012; Creswell 2013). Thus, the fundamental tenet in this paradigm is that knowledge is socially constructed by the individuals actively involved in the research process (Mertens 2005). Hence, 'I', the researcher interprets the PE teachers and students accounts of their experiences of inclusion, as such I am their voice (O'Sullivan 2015). This makes sense as it is from the sum of our collective experiences that we as people inform our perspectives and requirements.

Mertens (2005) comments on the "permeability" (p. 44) and "lines between paradigms become more muddled" (p.43). Indeed, in my research the focus is on PE teachers' perspectives and experiences with students with SEN/disabilities, and understanding of their professional requirements to support inclusion in the future. The student voice is also heard. Thus, it can be argued that some features of the transformative paradigm are apt for my research approach. The transformative paradigm has emerged with the development of a sociocultural view of disability (Mertens 2005). The transformative paradigm places importance on the lives and experiences of marginalised groups such as those with disabilities (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004; Mertens 2005). In doing so it places emphasis "on ways to legitimately involve people with disabilities in the research process" (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p. 101). My research does pursue the notion of equality, inclusion and social justice for all persons, which is a strong feature of the transformative world view.

Social constructivism is often described as interpretivism (Creswell 2013). In the interpretivist paradigm the researcher attempts to understand the individual and society, they are seen as inseparable, "mutually interdependent" (O'Donoghue 2007, p.16). However, it is suitable to distinguish the two units for the purpose of analysis, focusing on the individual/individuals whilst heeding O'Donoghue's advice of never overlooking the societal dimension (O'Donoghue 2007). In my research the goal is to understand the everyday interactions between the PE teacher and the students with SEN/disabilities in their PE setting within the context of the school in society. Blackledge and Hunt (1985, p. 234

cited in O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 17) discuss the assumptions underpinning the interpretivist approach to research, the first assumption they discuss is in relation to the notion of "everyday activity as the block of society". They refer to education and purport that "if we want to understand education we must begin by looking at everyday activity in the different education sectors" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 17).

In conclusion, the overarching paradigmatic approach adopted in my study is constructivism. However, I am cognisant of the 'muddiness' and 'permeability' alluded to by Mertens (2005, p. 43/44), thus warranting reference to the transformative paradigm. In seeking to answer the research questions posed in relation to PE teachers' and students' real life experiences of inclusion, my research is qualitative in nature.

3.4: Qualitative Research

Is a qualitative approach considered the most appropriate to inform my research questions? Perhaps an apt starting point is to ascertain an insight into what constitutes qualitative research.

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them

(Denzin and Lincoln 2011, p. 3).

A qualitative approach does not begin with a hypothesis to be tried, tested and proven but with a direction of inquiry that takes the researcher on a journey of discovery (Creswell 2009; Jones, Brown and Holloway 2013). This study seeks to capture and describe PE teachers' real life experiences of including students with SEN/disabilities in the mainstream PE setting. Additionally, the student voice is sought in relation to their experiences. In this undertaking, I aim to produce depth rather than breadth of data. This is the strength of the qualitative approach, producing richness and depth of explorations and descriptions (Myers 2000; Pocock and Miyahara 2017). Robert. E. Stake delivered an enlightening public lecture in the University of Limerick in June 2014, which I attended. At the time, I was at the beginning stage of my doctoral journey and indeed appraising a number of methodological approaches. Professor Stake spoke of his journey from working mainly in quantitative research and measurement toward the area of qualitative research in education; "unfurling education's story rather than its measurements, representing the quality of education" (Stake

2014, public lecture). Upon reflection, this lecture had a profound influence and affirmed my decision to adopt a qualitative approach.

A considerable volume of research pertaining to general teachers' 'knowledge, skills and dispositions' in relation to inclusive education has employed survey methods (Berry 2011, p. 629). Whilst surveys are beneficial for informing characteristics of a population, qualitative methods, such as interviews glean a depth of insight into 'feelings, thoughts and intentions' of participants (Fraenkel and Wallen 2008 cited in Berry 2011, p. 629). Qualitative researchers strive to study occurrences in their natural location, endeavoring to understand and 'interpret the phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin and Lincoln 2018, p. 10).

3.5: Methodological Strategies

Stake (2014, public lecture) advocates for the use of the case study in educational research highlighting the practice of "naturalistic case studies to give teachers' and students' experiences". The naturalistic aspect refers to the participants in their natural, real life settings, such as the post primary school in the context of my study.

3.5.1: Defining and Disentangling Case Study

Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions or other systems which are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame – within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates

(Thomas 2011, p. 23).

Referring to Thomas' definition above, a case study can be used in many types of research and for many purposes. Fundamentally, Stake (2005, pp. 445-446) distinguishes between three main types of case study:

- The *intrinsic case study*, where the study is undertaken because the researcher wants a better understanding of the particular case, such as in most evaluation studies.
- The *instrumental case study*, where a particular case is examined to give insight into a wider issue, or to refine a theory.

- The *multiple or collective case study*, where the instrumental case study is extended to cover several cases, to learn more about phenomenon, population or general condition.

Intrinsic and instrumental involve single case studies, whereas multiple or collective involve a number of case studies, whereby the attention is within (vertical) and across (horizontal) cases. My research is a multiple case study consisting of individual schools as each instrumental case, interpreting within and across cases. Gary Thomas (2011, p. 14) postulates that case study research consists of two parts, namely, the *subject* and the *analytical frame or object*. Notably, the subject of my research is PE teachers and students with SEN/disabilities in post primary schools and the analytical frame is the interpretation of these actors' perspectives on and experiences of inclusion of these students.

It is important to clarify the meaning of the 'case' in the context of this study. Defining a case is 'tricky', as almost anything can be a case; it can be an individual, a group of people, an organization, policies or institutions (Punch and Oancea 2014). However, throughout the literature the notion of a phenomenon of some sort, within a *bounded* context is prevalent (Stake 1988, Thomas 2011, Thomas 2016). Likewise, the notion of *wholeness* emerges which is encapsulated in Merriam (1998, p. 21): "a qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit". The following definition is offered by Stake (1988, p. 258) – a case study is "a study of a bounded system, emphasising the unity and wholeness of that system, but confining the attention to those aspects that are relevant to the research problem at the time".

Punch and Oancea (2014, p. 150) weave together a number of theorists' ideas on what constitutes the characteristics of the case study. They espouse five characteristics which I will relate to my study. Firstly, they refer to the case as being a 'bounded system'. For me the boundary of my case is the school and the physical education setting, the PE teachers within that setting and their interactions with the students. The second characteristic is that "the case is a case of something, giving focus to the research". The focus in my research is to ascertain the PE teachers' experiences, perspectives, and continuing professional development requirements in relation to inclusion. Furthermore, the student experience is sought. The research hopes to provide an informed account of the challenges and successes of practising PE teachers and to understand the implications for policy, practice and ongoing research in relation to inclusive PE.

Thirdly, Punch and Oancea (2014, p.151) identify the need to “preserve the wholeness, unity and integrity of the case” or each case as in my multiple case design. The term ‘holistic’ is often used in this situation. Since every aspect of PE teachers and students in PE cannot be studied my research questions guide this focus. The fourth characteristic of the case study pertains to the *real-life context* and an *in-depth* account of particular cases. The data gathered in my study reflects the everyday experiences of the practising PE teacher and student, it endeavours to reach an in-depth understanding of inclusion of students with disabilities in PE in Ireland. The final characteristic relates to the idea that multiple sources of data and data collection may be used typically in a naturalistic setting. In my study each individual case comprises of in-depth interviews, a series of entries to a reflective e-journal within the school year and a researcher diary. The aim is to “understand the case in-depth, and in its natural setting, recognising its complexity and its context” (Punch 2014, p. 120). Each PE teacher will draw on their personal experiences of working with students with disabilities in their respective school setting. Furthermore, students with varying disabilities will voice their views on their PE experience.

Thus, the works of the following theorists have influenced and informed my choice of case study design. Table 3.2 provides a synopsis of the main characteristics of each theorist’s view of the case study:

Table 3.2: Characteristics of the case study

Theorist	Holistic	Bounded	Focus	Multiple data collection methods	Real life context
Stake (1988;1995; 2005)	√	√	√	√	√
Thomas (2011; 2016 pp.9-23)	√	√	√	√	√
Punch & Oancea (2014, pp. 150-151)	√	√	√	√	√

In conclusion, Bent Flyvbjerg (2006, 2011) defends the use of the case study in social science research. He echoes the insight of Thomas Kuhn that “a discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without a systematic production of exemplars” (Flyvbjerg 2006, p. 245). Five universally held misconceptions/

misunderstandings regarding case study research are outlined by Flyvberg (2006, 2011), see Table 3.3. He further critiques each misunderstanding and expertly argues in support of their veracity and legitimacy.

Table 3.3: Five misunderstandings about Case Study Research

Misunderstanding No. 1	General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge.
Misunderstanding No. 2	One cannot generalise on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.
Misunderstanding No. 3	The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, while other methods are more suitable for hypotheses test and theory building.
Misunderstanding No. 4	The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions.
Misunderstanding No. 5	It is often difficult to summarise and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies.

(Flyvbjerg 2006, p. 221; Flyvbjerg 2011, p. 302)

Critically analysing these misconceptions/ misunderstandings in the context of my study is essential. From the outset, I am by no means pitting large scale studies against small case studies, as both are immensely valuable in social science research. The selection of approach should depend on the question under focus and its circumstances (Flyvbjerg 2011). Firstly, my study is based on real life experiences of teachers and students representing wholly context dependent knowledge. Secondly, in relation to generalisability, I do not claim such but would argue the veracity of an in-depth insight of each case (Stake 2005). Thirdly, this study is concerned with *understanding and interpreting* rather than *explaining or testing* inclusion in PE. It is aligned with the Germanic intellectual viewpoint of 'Verstehen' referred to earlier in this chapter (O'Donoghue 2007). Fourthly, Campell in Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 237) acknowledges subjective bias, but contends a different rigour in case study, rather than a lesser rigour characteristic of quantitative methods. Lastly, in relation to the fifth misconception, case studies by their nature contain substantial narrative. I would argue that this narrative can offer a rich and thick account of the phenomena.

3.5.2: Multiple Case Study Design:

Following methodological rigour, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken with in-depth consideration and discussion of the research questions. The choice of study design was influenced largely by the nature of the research questions (Thomas 2011; Yin 2014). The questions seek to describe the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of the PE teachers’ and students’ experiences:

The more that your questions seek to explain some present circumstance (e.g. “how” or “why” some social phenomenon works) the more that case study research will be relevant. The method is also relevant the more that your questions require an extensive and “in-depth” description of some social phenomenon (Yin 2014, p. 4).

Likewise, Thomas (2011, p. 27) emphasises the importance of beginning with a research “purpose and question, not a design”. The question determines the method one should utilise (Yin 2014; Thomas 2011). Thus I choose a multiple case study design as the most apposite to answer my research questions. Recent research studies in the area of PE teachers’ experiences of inclusion internationally have utilised a multiple case study design. A good example is Hodge et al., (2009): their research design was an explanatory multiple case study design consisting of 29 participating PE teachers. In their case study the data sources were drawn from attitude surveys and interviews. A limitation they noted was the one-off interview – they felt that “multiple interviews conducted over an extended period of time” (Hodge et al., 2009, p. 416) would have gleaned a much greater insight. Indeed, it is hoped to overcome this issue in my study by conducting a second interview with a selection of the interviewee cohort. Additionally, PE teachers will record entries into their e-journals over a period, allowing the teachers time to reflect on their experiences of including students with disabilities in their PE class. Furthermore, the voice of the student in my study offers a rich and original insight in the setting.

More recently, Ko and Boswell (2013) in the United States employed a case study design for their research entitled: *Teachers’ perceptions, teaching practices, and learning opportunities for Inclusion*. Seven elementary PE teachers participated, the methods employed consisted of semi-structured interviews (two rounds), artifacts (reflective journals and lessons plans/ resources) and the lead investigator’s interview journals. Interestingly, this study made use of Feiman- Nemser’s (2001) professional learning continuum framework as its theoretical underpinning. Indeed, this similar methodological approach to

my research will prove useful as a comparator in the analysis phase. However, it is pertinent to note firstly, the *uniqueness* of my study in the Irish context. Secondly, Ko and Boswell's (2013) study recruited PE teachers from the elementary (primary school equivalent in Ireland) sector, whereas my participants are from the second level sector (high school equivalent in the United States). Furthermore, my study involves students with disabilities as well as PE teachers. Thus the situational, participative and relational context is different.

This study began examining inclusion solely from the viewpoint of the PE teacher. However, two years into the research it was decided to directly engage with students with SEN/disabilities, in order to capture their experiences in a meaningful way. This decision was influenced by the researcher's reading of the literature, particularly the following works: Goodwin and Watkinson (2000); Coates and Vickerman (2008, 2010); Fitzgerald (2012); Haeghele and Sutherland (2015) and Wickman (2015). Too often studies have focused their research on or about students with disabilities rather than directly with students. Including students with disabilities in the research allows us to understand what is meaningful and important to the student. Furthermore, from a rights based perspective, involving student voice respects the views of the student/ child enshrined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (Unicef 2016). Additionally, the slogan 'nothing about us without us' resonates in this context. Moreover, the decision to include students was prompted through in-depth discussions with my supervisors and critical reflection on the overall research inquiry.

3.6: Indicators of Quality in Qualitative Research

Historically, research from the constructivist paradigm has been regarded as the *poor relation* of the positivist and post-positivist research community (Myers 2000; Mertens 2005; Lincoln, Lynham and Guba 2011). Issues relating to small sample size and subjectivity are frequently postulated as weaknesses in qualitative research. However, the misunderstanding here is that when one tries to view qualitative research from a quantitative viewpoint, the comparison can be both misrepresentative and illogical. Accordingly, both approaches have two very different aims. The qualitative researcher aims to discover meaning and understanding, whereas the quantitative researcher seeks to verify truth or predict outcomes (Myers 2000). Qualitative researchers are not concerned with quantification, numbers and statistical data but deem to "study things in their natural

settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, p. 3).

Consequently, Creswell (2013) poses the question: how do we evaluate the quality of qualitative research? In doing so, he presents a number of perspectives relating to the importance of validation in qualitative research; the definition of it, terms to describe it and procedures for establishing it. Having reviewed the various perspectives, I will align my study to the criteria ascribed by Guba and Lincoln (1985); Guba and Lincoln (2005) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011). The following terms such as “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability replace the positivist-oriented criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity” (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, p.13). However, it is crucial to note that theorists have not simply applied reliability and validity standards to qualitative research. That would presuppose that one absolute explanation of social reality is feasible, whereas Guba and Lincoln argue that there can be more than one and possibly several interpretations (Bryman 2012, p. 390), which aligns with my ontological stance outlined earlier.

3.6.1: Credibility

Before establishing credibility for this scholastic undertaking, it is firstly necessary to inform the reader of the meaning of the term. According to a number of theorists, credibility in qualitative inquiry somewhat parallels internal validity in positivist research (Guba and Lincoln 1985; Denzin and Lincoln 2011). In the positivist context, internal validity relates to “the attribution within the experimental situation that the independent variable caused the observed change in the dependent variable” (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p. 105). Clearly, this definition has little bearing on the qualitative study at hand. Achieving credibility in my study will entail, firstly, that the research is carried out to the standards of best practice. Secondly, it is necessary to collaborate with the respondents in the social world and for me the researcher to engage in that social world (Bryman 2012).

The criterion of triangulation is sometimes used to enhance credibility. In the social sciences triangulation is used in a metaphorical way rather than its original use in geometry and surveying (Thomas 2016). Methodological triangulation involves checking data from two or more methods or sources to show consistency. However, Guba and Lincoln (1989 cited

in Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p. 106) do not support the “notion of triangulation because it implies that it is possible (or desirable) to find consistency across sources, which contradicts the notion of multiple realities”. As previously discussed, my study adheres to the notion of multiple realities as purported by the constructivist paradigm and attendant ontological stance (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). According to Guba and Lincoln (1989 cited in Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p. 106) they support the notion of triangulation for factual data (e.g. how many PE teachers participated in a module in adapted physical education in their initial training), but recommend the use of member checks for other types of data. Similarly, Denzin (in Flick 2018, p. 447) conceived triangulation as a strategy of validation, assuming “one reality and one conception of the subject under study”. This latter view is critiqued by Flick (2018) highlighting the notion of multiple realities and how they relate to more contemporary views of triangulation in qualitative research.

Similarly, Thomas (2016) refers to the term triangulation as viewing from several points rather than one point. He feels that triangulation is “what case studies are all about, looking in from different angles and vantage points” (Thomas 2016, p. 67). In my study semi structured interviews, e-journals and a researcher diary are utilized. Perspectives of PE teachers are garnered through the use of interviews and reflective e-journals. Whilst students’ with disabilities perspectives are gathered using interviews. I bring my experiences and diary notes as an added perspective. Most recently, Flick (2018) refers to increasing the societal relevance of qualitative inquiry through triangulation. He advocates for the need of a “systematic triangulation of perspectives in the encounter of groups and service providers” (Flick 2018, p. 453). This current view (Thomas 2016; Flick 2018) of triangulation aligns with my research focus.

The following research strategies are employed to enhance credibility in my study;

- Peer debriefing involves detailed discussions with a peer/ colleague of data findings.
- Prolonged and considerable engagement in the field (Creswell 2013). There is no ‘rule of thumb’ to say how long a researcher should stay in the field. But, when the researcher feels that the themes and examples are repeating and no longer extending, it may be time to leave (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004). The notion of reaching data saturation as espoused by Fusch and Ness (2015) is adhered to, rich and thick data is sought. Subsequently, producing a situation, wherein the study is transparent and no new additional information is emerging.

- Member checks – the researcher must verify with the participants that the constructions developing are indeed as an outcome of data collected and analysed (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004). A copy of the interview transcript was sent to each participant to check accuracy. The aim is for the researcher to seek confirmation that the findings are congruent with the views of the participants (Bryman 2012).
- Rich, thick description - verbatim transcription of all interviews was undertaken (Creswell 2014), affording credibility to the data. Detailed information on the participants was presented in order to glean a meaningful insight of each individual. The thick description of the results was supported by direct quotes from the participants (Qi, Wang and Ha 2017).
- Triangulation of perspectives (Thomas 2016; Flick 2018). PE teachers presented with varying experiences working with diverse groups of students with and without disabilities. Likewise participating students presented with a variety of disability categories and experiences. I draw on my experiences and researcher diary notes as a supplementary perspective.

3.6.2: Transparency and Dependability

In qualitative research the notion of transparency and dependability is sometimes set akin to *reliability* in quantitative research (Silverman 2011; Bryman 2012; Creswell 2013). Reliability refers “to the stability of observed changes over time in the positivist paradigm” (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p. 107). It deals with replicability; i.e. will the researcher derive the same findings if the study is repeated in the future? However, in the constructivist world view change is anticipated, but it needs to be ‘tracked’ or audited and ‘publicly inspected’ (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p. 107). Dependability is “established through an auditing of the research process” (Creswell 2013, p. 246). In my research, transparency and dependability are enhanced by firstly, describing the research strategy and data analysis methods in a clear, meticulous, detailed manner. A clear, logical audit trail is shown using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), NVivo 11. Secondly, I have considered carefully the ‘theoretical transparency’ of the research and apply this to my interpretations, producing particular interpretations and excluding others (Moisander and Volonen 2006 cited in Silverman 2011, p. 360).

Thus, in this undertaking, transparency and dependability are pursued and reliability is not sought as it lacks relevance to this study. In my research I endeavour to cogently highlight the research process followed to enhance transparency. The theoretical constructs of social constructivism and interpretivism guide the data collection, analysis, interpretation and report writing of this project.

3.6.3: Generalisability and Particularisability

Stake (2006) speaks of the expectations of various audiences and communities to which this type of multiple case study research reaches. He proposes that the multiple case study may act as (1) a guide to influencing policy for similar type cases and (2) that the report will provide the insight for people to transfer the findings from these cases to others (p. 88). These two expectations demonstrate the idea of the *general* and *particular* knowledge. My study adheres to the notion of generalisability in this sense – whilst acknowledging the limitations within. It investigates across seven PE teachers and ten students' experiences in varying post primary level schools in Ireland using three different methods of inquiry. Essentially, the findings may influence future policy in similar type cases of inclusion in PE. The intrinsic value of each of the cases adheres to the principle of particularisability. An in-depth insight of each case is elucidated upon and may provide the opportunity for transferability to other cases. It is important to adhere to Stake's (2005 p. 457) guidance of not losing sight of what is unique to each case, whilst endeavoring to compare to other cases.

Looking at the history of social inquiry, two broad dichotomous lines of thought are apparent (Thomas 2011, p. 17). One school of thought purports to the idea that a large amount of data should be gathered on an issue and *generalised* upon. Conversely, the other line of thought seeks the complexity of a *particular* or specific situation in detail. I will heed Thomas' (2011, p. 17) advice here: "both of these forms of inquiry are perfectly legitimate for their own purposes, but it is important not to get them mixed up". Thomas (2011) also cautions the researcher to remain steadfast to particularisability. He speaks of the "ever present desire to establish, develop and refer to a certain kind of generalising theory among social scientists" (Thomas 2011, p. 186). In the context of my study, an in-depth, detailed knowledge of each case will be pursued, ascribing to the principle of particularisability.

3.6.4: Generalisability and Transferability

In qualitative research the outcomes are not broad generalisations but contextual findings. The notion of ‘transferability’ (from context to context) rather than large scale generalisability tends to be used by qualitative researchers and thus is the situation in my study. Seven individual PE teachers and ten students with SEN/disabilities relate their personal experiences of inclusion; these accounts are not generalisable in the statistical sense to all PE teachers and students, but can be transferable to differing contexts. Qualitative studies like mine do not claim numerical generalisability, but, have many other features relating to depth and richness of data which make them very useful and valuable in the education community (Myers 2000; Stake 2006; Thomas 2011). In my study, detailed information on each participant is offered. Similarly, to Qi, Wang and Ha’s (2017) study, a thick description of the findings was supported by direct quotes from the participants. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) equate transferability to external validity in positivist research. External validity refers to the “degree to which you can generalise the results to other situations” (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p. 107). The contention is, that the burden of transferability is on the reader to determine the amount of similarity between the “study site and the receiving context; whereas the researcher’s responsibility is to provide sufficient detail to enable the reader to make such a judgment” (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p. 107). Hence, it is my task to portray a detailed account of the context in order to offer a rich, thick description to the reader (Creswell 2013).

3.6.5: Confirmability

The final criterion of quality or trustworthiness to be appraised in this research is that of confirmability. Essentially, it relates to objectivity of the researcher (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004; Bryman 2012; Creswell 2013). Nonetheless in social research the “naturalistic researcher seeks confirmability rather than objectivity in establishing the value of the data” (Creswell 2013, p. 246). Put simply, confirmability means that the “data and their interpretation are not figments of the researcher’s imagination” (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p. 107). As with dependability and transparency outlined earlier, it is pertinent to keep a detailed audit trail verifying original source and interpretation of my data. Consequently, confirmability is sought and objectivity will be rejected per se. Thus an “interactive, personally involved style of data collection” (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004,

p.100) is carried out whilst remaining steadfast on clarity and openness of the process. It is noteworthy, at this juncture to take cognisance of the epistemological stance taken within the constructivist paradigm, to which this study adheres. The constructivist paradigm assumes that the inquirer and inquired-into are linked – it is ‘transactional and subjectivist’ (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba 2011, p. 103). It is important to acknowledge that my own background and experiences will ‘shape’ my interpretation of the participants’ descriptions (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba 2011; Creswell 2013). Having worked as a PE teacher in both mainstream and in special education for a number of years, both in Ireland and overseas, my experience and insight influence my interpretation of the data.

In conclusion, I have taken the stance of adhering to the indicators of quality in qualitative research as aforementioned. As such, I reject any notions of reliability, validity and objectivity in a numerical sense. I strive to provide a rich, thick description of data, offering a contextual, particular and situational insight for the reader.

3.7: Research Focus

The purpose of this research is to explore PE teachers’ experiences, perspectives and continuing professional development requirements in relation to including students with SEN/disabilities in the general PE setting in post primary schools. In doing so the voice of the student with a SEN/disability is also explored. Their interpretations of their experiences and their perspectives on inclusion is guided theoretically by sociocultural principles (Vygotsky 1978; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). Additionally, PE teachers’ views of their sense of competency and their requirements and needs, for the future to support inclusion within their professional learning continuum (Feiman – Nemser 2001) will be guided by the theoretical framework aforesaid.

3.7.1: Research Participants

In this study, depth of information is sought to capture PE teachers’ and students’ real life experiences of inclusion. Thus, obtaining a large sample size is not required in this context. Accordingly, a small sample was selected, within which a richness of experiences was investigated. Quantitative and qualitative researches have quite different sampling

strategies, with qualitative research rarely using probability sampling (Punch and Oancea 2014). Thus, the fitting sampling strategy for this research consisted of non- probability, purposive sampling.

Purposive sampling involves “sampling cases/ participants in a strategic way so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed” (Bryman 2012, p. 418) and the focus of the undertaking. There are a number of types of purposive sampling, such as, extreme or deviant case sampling, typical case sampling, critical case sampling, maximum variation sampling, criterion sampling, snowball sampling and opportunistic sampling (Patton 1990 and Palys 2008 cited in Bryman 2012, p. 419). The form of purposive sampling selected for this study incorporates both maximum variation and snowball sampling.

The motivation behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants that will best answer the research questions (Creswell 2009). Essentially two pertinent questions regarding sampling are, firstly, what to sample and secondly, how to sample (Jones, Brown and Holloway 2013). Since the focus of inquiry is to capture the real life experiences of practising PE teachers and students, it is therefore vital to hear (interviews) and record (e-journals) their experiences. The initial approach consisted of a letter of invitation to practising PE teachers to participate in the study. This letter was distributed at the National conference of the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI) held in October 2014. An open invitation letter (Appendix 1) to participate in the research was extended to the delegates at the conference. Inclusion criteria for participation were that (a) the participant was a fully qualified PE teacher (b) that the participant had at least 3 years teaching experience and (c) that the participant is teaching a student with a diagnosed disability in a mainstream PE setting.

Subsequently, subscribing to the use of maximum *variation* cases (Patton, 1990; Flyvbjerg 2006), PE teachers with varying experiences, in several school settings with diverse groups of students with and without disabilities were recruited. Maximum variation sampling is sometimes referred to as a ‘heterogeneous sample’; it “contains individuals with differing experiences” (Jones, Brown and Holloway 2013, p.37). Thus teachers were selected who have varied personal backgrounds, educational experiences and work environments. Their diversity was determined by a range of criteria: (a) gender (b) age (c) years of teaching PE (d) years of teaching students with disabilities, (e) experiences of teaching different

categories and degrees of disability, and (g) educational preparation (see Table 3.4, p.100). They work within different geographic areas (rural, suburban and urban) but all at post primary or second level. Participants were drawn from the south of Ireland.

The post primary education sector in Ireland incorporates three main school types: firstly, post primary schools which are privately owned, specifically, voluntary secondary schools historically run by religious bodies (most are State-funded and charge no fees though some are fee paying); secondly, community colleges which are coordinated by the recently established Education and Training Boards (Government of Ireland, 2013); and thirdly, community and comprehensive schools which are run by boards of management (Department of Education and Skills 2016). It was felt that maximum variation sampling would reflect the diversity of the PE teacher in Ireland.

In this type of study utilising a maximum variation sample, gleans a range of rich data from a diversity of experiences. The initial letter of invitation at the PEA conference (October 2014) generated interest from a small number of delegates. Subsequently, more participants were gradually recruited through snowball sampling, being cognisant of the logic of maximum variation (Patton, 1990; Flyvbjerg 2006) throughout. Snowball sampling identifies people of interest from already recruited actors in the study (Punch and Oancea 2014; Berg 2009). Additionally, consultation with the NCSE website indicating special needs assistant allocations to post primary schools for September 2015 was considered. Relevant students from each of the four schools were invited to participate in the research in consultation with the principal, PE teacher and parent/ guardian. Students presenting with three different categories of disability were sought, again adhering to the logic of maximum variation (Patton, 1990; Flyvbjerg 2006). Students were selected mostly from the senior cycle phase, either transition or 5th year students, permitting them to recall their experiences to date in PE. Gender of the student was not a criteria and was based on availability. Students were purposefully selected to reflect a range of disability categories – students with a physical disability, students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and students with a hearing impairment or deafness. In their review of *Perspectives of students with disabilities towards PE*, Haegele and Sutherland (2015) recommend directions for future research. Firstly, they call for exploration of “both the teacher’s and student’s perspective towards PE experiences within one context” (Haegele and Sutherland 2015, p. 270). Secondly, engaging in research with students with varying categories of disability is endorsed, particularly

students with ASD, due to the increase in the diagnosis rate and research funding (Haegele and Sutherland 2015).

Yin (2014, p. 59) cautions in relation to the multiple case study design and for the need to follow a “replication” as opposed to a “sampling” logic commonly used in surveys. The use of the sampling logic attempts to reflect an entire universe or pool of potential respondents, hence application of this logic to case study research would be misplaced (Yin 2014). By contrast, multiple case sampling is engaged at “replication across similar and contrasting cases” (Punch and Oancea 2014, p. 211).

A pertinent question considered was the number of participant interviewees required for this study. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) offer the following advice: “Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know” (p. 113). This is clearly linked to the aim or purpose of the study. The aim of my study is to explore the real life experiences of PE teachers and students in relation to inclusion. A point of saturation may be reached whereby more interviews glean little new knowledge (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). The design of my study is a multiple case study design, Stake offers the following guideline:

The benefits of multicase study will be limited if fewer than, say, 4 cases are chosen, or more than 10. But for good reason, many multicase studies have fewer than 4 or more than 15 cases
(Stake 2006, p. 22)

Thus, it was deemed that four schools with seven PE teachers and ten students with SEN/disabilities initially would comprise the participants in this study, with the option of *less or more* as the study progressed, taking heed of Stake’s and Kvale and Brinkmann’s advice. A second round of interviews was conducted with a selection of the PE teacher interviewee cohort. This afforded greater in-depth questioning and further probing of areas of interest which emerged from the first interview, the e-journals and the student interviews. Hence the research participant cohort consisted of the following:

- ✓ Case study school one (two PE teachers and two students with a physical type disability)
- ✓ Case study school two (two PE teachers and two students with a sensory type disability)
- ✓ Case study school three (one PE teacher and three students with ASD)
- ✓ Case study school four (two PE teachers and three students with ASD)

Further details of participant PE teachers and students with SEN/disabilities are respectively portrayed in Table 3.4 and table 3.5.

Table 3.4: Participant PE teacher, school type and disability categories

Teacher	Gender	Years of experience & Qualifying University	School type and size	Student disability category
Noel*	M	22 University A	Case study school one is a co-ed Community school, town, 1000 students approx., 5 PE teachers in school	Range of disability categories: Wheelchair users, C.P, ASD, EBD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, GLD, ODD.
Gina*	F	7 University B		
Mona*	F	10 University B	Case study school two is a DEIS, community school, city suburb, 300 students, 2 PE teachers in the school, deaf unit.	Range of disability categories: deaf unit, visual impairment, ASD, GLD, muscular dystrophy, no wheelchair user
Carly*	F	6 University C		
Jane*	F	27 University D	Case study school three is an all- girls, DEIS, religious secondary school in a city, 220 students, 1 PE teacher in the school, ASD unit.	Range of disability categories: GLD, ASD, EBD, no wheelchair user.
Ed*	M	28 University D	Case study school four is an all- boys, DEIS, religious secondary school in a city, 235 students, 3 PE teachers in the school, ASD unit.	Range of disability categories – mostly ASD (35-40), GLD, dyslexia, ADHD, EBD, no wheelchair user
Sam*	M	4 University C		

*Pseudonym used

Note: ASD = autism spectrum disorder, ADHD = attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, C.P = cerebral palsy, EBD = emotional behavioural disturbance, GLD = general learning disability, ODD = oppositional defiant disorder.

Table 3.5: Participant students and nature of disabilities

	Student	Case study School	Gender	Nature of disability and characteristics
1	Dan*, 5 th year,	One	M	<i>Wheelchair user, spina bifida, no lower body sensation and weak upper body.</i>
2	Jim*, 3 rd year	One	M	<i>Cerebral Palsy, ambulant but with poor balance, some hearing loss and has a stammer.</i>
3	Nora*, TY	Two	F	<i>Hard of hearing, can lip read, requires quiet background.</i>
4	Aidan* 5 th year	Two	M	<i>Profoundly deaf, communicates through sign language.</i>
5	Carmen*, TY	Three	F	<i>ASD, dyspraxia, speaks slowly but has good eye contact.</i>
6	Amy*, TY	Three	F	<i>ASD, needs time to process, stilted accent, intense facial expression, has literal responses.</i>
7	Greta* , TY	Three	F	<i>ASD, speech impediment, overweight.</i>
8	Connor*, TY	Four	M	<i>ASD and dyspraxia, poor motor skills.</i>
9	Seamus*, TY	Four	M	<i>ASD, poor eye contact during conversation.</i>
10	Carl*, TY	Four	M	<i>ASD, speech is fast and a little unclear at times, has difficulty with eye contact.</i>

*Pseudonym, TY= Transition Year

The following section now examines the formulation of the research questions.

3.8: Research questions

The centrality of the research questions within a study cannot be underestimated. Accordingly, much consideration and deliberation was afforded to the formulation of the questions. The overall aim of this study was to generate theory regarding PE teachers' and students' perspectives in relation to inclusion in the Irish context. The process was guided by O'Donoghue (2007) and Punch (2014), their thinking focuses on the interaction between the aim of the research, the general research questions and the specific guiding questions.

3.8.1: Hierarchy of Questions

Thus, in formulating the research questions, it proved useful to consider the approach posited by O'Donoghue (2007) and Punch (2014). The research questions were organised hierarchically, beginning with the general research question, transitioning to the specific research questions and concluding with the data collection questions (Table 3.6). The hierarchy suggests that the questions vary systematically in levels of abstraction and generality. Thus, the top level is the most general and abstract (i.e. general research question and the bottom level is the most specific and concrete (i.e. data collection questions).

Table 3.6: Hierarchy of Questions

Question Level		Reason	
General Question	Research	Main research question: Guides/ directs researcher's thinking Provides good organisational structure Too broad to be answered directly – e.g. <i>What are P.E. teachers' and students' experiences of inclusion of students with disabilities in PE in post primary schools?</i>	Each level, in ascending order, epitomizes a progressive development in relation to abstraction and generality. 
Specific Questions	Research	These questions direct the empirical procedure and are the central focus of the in-depth semi- structured interviews. Four main indicators are explored - PE teachers' perspectives on inclusion in the Irish cultural context, PE teachers' continuing professional development requirements for the future to support inclusion, PE teachers' experiences of inclusion: their sense of competency and initial teacher education, students with SEN/disabilities experiences' of their PE classes.	
Data Questions	Collection	Questions asked directly of participant interviewees via interview schedule (Appendix 7, 11 and 18). E-journal vignette and guide (Appendix 8 and 9).	

The general research question acts as a guide to the researcher but is too broad to be answered directly. The following general research question captures the primary direction of this research;

What are P.E. teachers' and students' experiences of inclusion of students with disabilities in post primary schools?

Since *teachers' and students' experiences* are so broad and varying, logical sub-division is necessary to formulate the specific research questions. In a sense, one is 'unpacking' from the general to the more specific (Punch 2014, p. 62). Thus, the next layer of questions is guided by the research focus, an extensive literature review and the theoretical frameworks discussed in chapter two (Vygotsky 1978; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). Additionally, the works of Morley et al., (2005), Hodge et al., (2009), Coates and Vickerman (2010); Ko and Boswell (2013) and Wickman (2015) have influenced the selection of the specific research questions. Four main indicators or components are explored;

- PE teachers' perspectives on inclusion in the Irish cultural context - examines PE teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards the notion of inclusion, Government policy on inclusion, school's philosophy/ view on inclusion and the effect on peers without disabilities.
- PE teachers' continuing professional development requirements for the future to support inclusion – resources and information, nature of continuing professional development needed, PE curriculum, external agencies, special needs assistant support, PE teacher community of practice.
- PE teachers' experiences of inclusion, in relation to their sense of competency and initial teacher education – teacher's confidence, sense of perceived competency, initial teacher education, usage of individual education plans and their experiences and interactions in practice in relation to different categories and degrees of disability.
- Students with SEN/disabilities experiences of PE class – most/ least enjoyable PE activities, sense of inclusion in PE, supports in PE, extracurricular sports, positive/negative experiences in PE and interactions with the PE teacher, special needs assistant and other students.

The data collection questions form the lowest level of the hierarchy posited by Punch (2014). These are questions at the most particular level which are used to help answer the specific and general research questions. The data collection questions are asked directly of the participant PE teachers (Appendix 7; Appendix 8; Appendix 9; Appendix 18) and students (Appendix 11). The data collection methods utilised in this study are expounded upon in the next section.

3.9: Data Collection Methods

In my scholastic journey, data collection occurred between February 2016 and December 2017. The data collection involved three phases. In phase one, seven in-depth PE teacher interviews (Appendix 7) were conducted and seventeen e-journal reflections (Appendices 8 and 9) were elicited from the participating teachers. Phase two involved ten semi-structured interviews (Appendix 11) with ten students with SEN/disabilities (physical disabilities, deaf and hard of hearing, ASD) between March and May 2017. Lastly, phase three involved four in-depth follow-up interviews (Appendix 18) with four of the seven PE teachers from each of the schools during November and December 2017. Interview data were transcribed and analysed from the beginning interview in February 2016. This continuous, iterative process informed the framing of interview questions in phase three of the study. Sociocultural-informed principles also guide the framing of interview questions and the reflective e-journal framework. Drawing from the findings of the first phase teacher interviews and e-journal reflections, questions were formulated in section one of phase three interviews (Appendix 18). Importantly, phase three interviews attempted to ‘connect’ student and teacher conversations about inclusion in PE (Fitzgerald 2012; Haegele and Sutherland 2015). Thus, short vignettes of each school (Appendix 18, section two student voice), based on the students’ views of their experiences were also devised with the aim of stimulating the teachers’ thinking on inclusion (Fitzgerald 2012). Throughout the data collection process I maintained a researcher diary which was systematically completed immediately following each interview (Appendix 10). Additionally, at all stages of the data collection and analysis I endeavoured to reflectively consider my biases, beliefs and experiences in order to accurately interpret the teacher and student voice and view (Jones, Brown and Holloway 2013). Essentially, the general research question: *What are PE teachers’ and students’ experiences of inclusion of students with disabilities in post primary schools?* and attendant specific research questions guide the utilisation of the selected data collection methods (Thomas 2011; Yin 2014; Punch and Oancea 2014).

3.9.1: In-depth semi- structured Interview

The purpose of the interview - the ‘why’ of interviewing - is to uncover the world of the participants, their thoughts and feelings on a phenomenon, and an account of their experience (Jones, Brown and Holloway 2013, p. 47)

The semi-structured interview is widely used in educational research (Stake 1988; Punch and Oancea 2014). Accordingly, the primary data collection method for this study is the, individual, face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interview. This type of interview is considered the most appropriate for this study having “set questions and prompts for discussion, but (also) having in-built flexibility to adapt to particular respondents and situations” (Punch and Oancea 2014, p. 184). As a type of data collection, interviews offer the researcher the opportunity to control the line of questioning and to seek historical information from the participant (Creswell 2009). On the other hand, there are a number of limitations associated with interviews. Firstly, the information is filtered through the views of interviewees, secondly, the researcher’s presence may bias responses and, thirdly, not all people are equally articulate and perceptive (Creswell 2009).

Notably, the teacher participants were interviewed for approximately 45- 60 minutes each. The questions during the phase one interviews addressed PE teachers’ confidence and sense of competency regarding inclusion of students with SEN/disabilities. These questions are underpinned by the principles/concepts of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1978; Wenger 1998) and ideas relating to a professional learning continuum (Feiman- Nemser 2001). These questions are also linked with the PE teachers’ initial teacher education and their experiences in relation to different categories and degrees of disability. Additionally, the questions examined PE teachers’ perspectives of the notion of inclusion, Government policy on inclusion, school’s philosophy on inclusion and the effect on peers without disabilities. Again principles derived from sociocultural theory influenced the genesis of these questions. Lastly, questions focused on teachers’ continuing professional development requirements and needs regarding information and supports for inclusive PE, which link to sociocultural theory (Appendix 7). Furthermore, previous key studies on teachers’ experiences and perspectives on inclusion were reviewed (Morley et al., 2005; Hodge et al., 2009; Ko and Boswell 2013).

The student participants were interviewed for approximately 20-35 minutes each. Initial questions focused on the nature of activities experienced during PE class, the students’ sense

of inclusion in PE class, supports in PE, extracurricular sports, positive/negative experiences in PE and, lastly, the student interactions with the PE teachers, special needs assistant, if applicable, and other students (Appendix 11). The questions were devised in student friendly language. Concepts relating to a sociocultural perspective on learning (Vygotsky 1978) guided the student questions and key previous research studies provided further support (Goodwin and Watkinson 2000; Coates and Vickerman 2010; Fitzgerald and Stride 2012, Coates and Vickerman 2013; Wickman 2015). Additionally, the following reports informed the questions in the Irish context: *Project IRIS – Inclusive Research in Irish Schools: A longitudinal study of the experiences of and outcomes for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in Irish Schools* (Rose et al., 2015) and *A Study of the Experiences of Post Primary Students with Special Educational Needs* (Squires, Kalambouka and Bragg, 2016).

The semi-structured interviews were audio taped using a Sony ICD-PX240 digital recorder and transcribed verbatim. The researcher transcribed the first two interviews and thereafter engaged the use of a reputable and reliable transcription service. The transcription service was recommended by academic colleagues who had previously utilised this service. The audio files were uploaded to a secure password protected link and returned in the same manner. The teacher interviews were conducted in the school of the interviewees in a quiet, comfortable room. One interview was conducted in the researcher's place of work in a quiet meeting room. All student interviews were conducted in the presence of an adult from the school: school one (special needs assistant), school two (teacher who is also a qualified sign language interpreter), school three (special educational needs coordinator) and school four (special needs assistant). During the interview process, the relevant adults were not involved in the interview, but sat unobtrusively at the side. The exception was the interview with Aidan who is profoundly deaf and required the support of a sign language interpreter. I agree with Creswell (2013) that it is important to acquire the knowledge in the 'field', where the participant lives or works, thus allowing for the understanding of contexts of what the individuals say (Creswell 2013, p. 20). As outlined the interviews were executed in three phases: seven interviews with PE teachers comprised phase one. A preliminary analysis of findings was applied to phase one interviews in order to further probe certain areas in phase two and three of the interviews (Morley et al., 2005). Phase two comprised of the student interviews. The principals of the four schools were contacted by email (Appendix 16) and permission to access relevant students was given via email or telephone. A link/ liaison person was established to assist with the recruitment and contact with the students/ parents/

guardians. The following were the liaison persons: school one (special educational needs coordinator), school two (PE teacher), school three (special educational needs coordinator) and school four (PE teacher). An information letter, a consent and assent form (Appendix 16) was sent to the relevant parents and students inviting them to participate in the research, with the assistance of the link person in each school.

In order to gain a deeper understanding, a second, iterative interview was initiated with a small selection of the PE teacher interviewee cohort. This comprised phase three. Phase one interviews took place over a 4-month period (February 2016 – May 2016) and phase 2 took place over a 3-month period (March 2017 – May 2017). Lastly, phase three was executed over a 2-month period (November 2017 – December 2017). Pseudonyms and numbers were used for all participants' names.

When considering the epistemological issues of interviewing, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 47) propose two contrasting metaphors – the interviewer as a *miner* and the interviewer as a *traveler*. The analogy represents the miner as a *collector* of knowledge and the traveler representing a *constructor* of knowledge. Taking cognisance of the constructivist paradigm, my study will primarily follow the steps of the research interviewer as *traveler* rather than that of the *miner*. Principally, the journey will be guided within the theoretical framework presented, with the research questions and interviews acting as a compass to show PE teachers' and students' experiences of inclusion. However, data may also emerge inductively from the participants' own experience, highlighting unanticipated lines of inquiry relevant to social and cultural contexts. Therefore, it is important to note that in this study some aspects of the *miner* approach may also influence the interviewer as the *miner/traveler* approaches are not mutually exclusive.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) highlight seven key features of interview knowledge, which are worthy of consideration in respect of this study: interview knowledge is produced, relational, conversational, contextual, linguistic, narrative, and pragmatic. These intertwined features are taken as a starting point for clarifying the nature of the knowledge yielded by the research interview and for developing its knowledge potential (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

Interview knowledge is produced: it is “actively created through questions and answers and the product is co-authored by the interviewer and the interviewee” (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, p. 54). It is crucial to understand that my study was ‘co-authored’ in the sense that I

influenced the final report, applying procedures and techniques throughout the whole process in the study, but not directly contributing. It is perhaps more correct to ascribe the term ‘contextual interview’ postulated by Horrocks (2010 cited in Punch and Oancea 2014). Thus, interest lies in the “context of the interviewee’s experiences, while acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of the interviewer” (Punch and Oancea 2014, p. 182). Additionally, phase three interviews attempted to connect and link students’ experiences and teachers’ views on inclusion in PE (Fitzgerald 2012; Haeghele and Sutherland 2015). The second data collection method of reflective e-journals provided rich data and was essential to the study.

3.9.2: Reflective E-journals

A number of readings (Schön 1983, 1987; Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan 1997; Valli 1997; Uhrich 2009; Jung 2012) have informed the guiding reflective framework for practising PE teachers in my study. Two guiding frameworks are provided to support the teachers’ internal voice of reflection in-action and of- action in relation to inclusion in PE (Appendices 8 and 9). The goal is to garner an in-depth understanding of the ‘internal conversation’ (Uhrich 2009, p. 511) of the teacher. Participating PE teachers were invited to complete two reflective e-journal entries in relation to reflection-in-action (Appendix 8) between November 2016 and February 2017. Furthermore, they were asked to complete a reflective e-journal focusing on reflection-of-action (Appendix 9) during May and June 2017.

Digital diaries or e-journals are regarded as a type of *documentary* source of data collection (Creswell 2009; Yin 2014). There are advantages and limitations to this type of data collection, as is the situation with any particular source. Indeed, a good case study has multiple sources of evidence (Yin 2014). Thus, the e-journal acted as a second method of data collection in this study. Amongst the strengths of journal use is the opportunity it affords the researcher to acquire the language and dialect of the participant. Additionally, it is an unobtrusive type of data collection, allowing the participant and researcher accessibility at a time suitable to them both. Importantly, in the context of this research, it affords the participant time to reflect thoughtfully on the topic away from the busy everyday happenings of school life. Consequently, it allowed the participating PE teachers time and space to reflect on their experiences and “to construct meaning and understanding from the experience” (Crawford, O’Reilly and Luttrell, 2012b, p. 116). Furthermore, it saves the researcher time transcribing as it is in electronic, written format (Creswell 2009).

The inclusion of the e-journal as a second mode of data collection was deemed worthwhile for a number of reasons. Firstly, as outlined previously in the case study design of this research, multiple sources of data and data collection are recommended (Thomas 2011; Punch and Oancea 2014). Thus, to rely solely on interview evidence would be misguided. Secondly, the 'once-off' interview cannot fully examine the complexities of inclusion and teaching students with various SEN/disabilities. This was highlighted as a limitation in Hodge et al., (2009, p. 416) study on PE teachers' beliefs about inclusion, whereby they recommend multiple interviews conducted over a period of time or, in my case, e-journals over a period of time.

All seven participating PE teachers were requested to submit reflective, electronic entries within the 2016-2017 school year (i.e. November 2016- June 2017). The journal entries were submitted via email to the researcher. The e-journal contained headings to guide the participant's interpretations and also a sample reflective vignette to support the participant. The addition of a sample reflective vignette arose from the pilot study which was based on three reflective e-journal entries from Mona and Noel (pseudonyms). The sample reflective vignette was self-constructed but informed and influenced by Schön (1983, 1987); Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan (1994, 1997); Valli (1997); Uhrich (2009) and Jung (2012). The first reflective e-journal entries (Appendix 8) were based on reflection-in-action (Schön 1983, 1987). Furthermore, the following reflective e-journal entry (Appendix 9) focused on reflection-of-action (Schön 1983, 1987). Moreover, the sample vignette focusing on reflection-of-action was informed by the preliminary findings from phase one interviews. The headings have been established in conjunction with the specific research questions of this study (Appendix 8) and also adapted from the work of Ko and Boswell (2013). Furthermore, the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study (Vygotsky 1978; Wenger 1998) have influenced the headings, as well as consultation and discussion with my doctoral supervisors. The headings consist of (a) Activities and interactions during their PE classes in relation to inclusion (b) Thoughts on successes and what works in the class (c) Reflections of the PE class regarding areas for improvement in relation to inclusion (d) Needs relating to equipment and supports in the school (e) Continuing professional development needs to improve inclusive practice (f) Frustrations within the PE class relating to inclusion (g) Additional thoughts of inclusion in this PE class (Appendix 8). Similar headings are given for the guide on reflection-of-action but in a retrospective and broader sense (Appendix 9). The headings give a guiding structure to the participants, whilst the last heading is open-

ended. This allows the participant to write any thoughts which may not ‘fit’ under the other headings relevant to the topic. Participating PE teachers were instructed on the logistics of the reflective e-journals on the day of the interview and were given a paper copy of the researcher’s contact details. Within the following week the researcher forwarded an email, firstly thanking the participant for contributing to the interview and also requesting engagement in the future reflective e-journal process. There was a certain ‘messiness’ involved with the collection of the e-journals, some teachers engaged fully whereas others did not, despite a number of polite reminder emails. Not wishing to impose on a busy teacher’s life and coming to the realisation that the themes were repeating (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004), I felt it was time to leave this field. Thus, the data collected from twelve in-action e-journals and five of-action e-journals constituted an adequate volume of reflective data. The third and final data collection method of the researcher diary will now be elucidated.

3.9.3: Researcher Diary

The inclusion of a researcher diary adds the dimensional *self* to the research. It allows one to “keep track of the temporal vicissitudes of an interview journey ... as a record of his or her learning throughout the investigation” (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, p. 112). Accordingly, I maintained detailed notes after each interview. Heeding Thomas’ (2011) advice when keeping a researcher diary; “if you are completing a diary yourself, it is best done immediately after your session in the field, recording an assortment of opinions, views, interpretations, remembered conversations and so on” (Thomas 2011, p. 164). The headings for the notes are adapted from Ko and Boswell (2013) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). These encapsulate reflections on (a) the interview process, (b) new understandings of previous experiences, (c) ideas for further probing with future interviewee’s, (d) reflections on what was said and (e) initial considerations on emergent themes from the data (Appendix 10). During the analysis, verification and reporting stage, the interview diary supports the researcher’s understanding and reflections of the developments and variations in the knowledge production during the interview inquiry (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). This final supplementary data collection method enables a triangulation of perspectives (Flick 2018) between the PE teachers, the students with disabilities and ‘I’ the researcher.

3.9.4: Piloting process

Piloting in research may apprise the researcher of any necessary modifications. A pilot case study assists the researcher to refine the data collection plans in relation to both the content and the procedures to be followed (Yin 2014). Two pilot teacher interviews took place during February and March 2016. The interviewees (Noel and Carly) provided feedback on the interview schedule which subsequently involved some minor changes to the questions. Before the first pilot interview Q. 21 (Overall what do you think is the school's philosophy/view towards inclusion) and Q.33 (In your school do you feel that you have adequate resources for inclusion in PE) were added to incorporate the schools' overall philosophy and resourcing regarding special educational needs, disability and inclusion. Following the first pilot interview on February 16th 2016, Q.14 (From your experience what are the main issues around inclusive PE) was reworded to From your experience do you feel that inclusive PE is working? The rationale for this was that the following Q.15 and Q.16 (Appendix 7) probe the area of issues, so in effect it was repeating the question. All continuing professional development-related questions were placed one after the other (Q. 27, 28, 29) for clarity and continuity. An additional question was added in relation to PE teachers within the school working together in a community of practice: Q.34. Do the PE teachers in the school work together in relation to professional development (would this be a formal or informal type of interaction; can you give an example?). Question 26 was adjusted to ensure clarity between SENO (special educational needs organizer) and SENCO (special educational needs coordinator). Interviewee's from school two responded differently, as one was referring to SENO and the other to SENCO.

Two volunteer participants (Noel and Mona) kept a pilot reflective e-journal, writing a monthly entry of their experiences of inclusion in their PE classes. This enabled the researcher to gauge the logistics of the process, as well as considering the effectiveness and appropriateness of the data collection instruments. Three pilot entries were completed between February and May 2016, guided by headings for the participants. Upon analysis it was felt that the reflective entries were descriptive and lacked depth. In discussion with the two participants they felt more guidance and scaffolding would be beneficial. It was decided to support the participants' reflective entries through use of a sample vignette, incorporating

technical, deliberate, personalistic and critical components (Appendices 8 and 9). The guiding reflective framework vignette was self-constructed but informed by the works of Schön (1983, 1987); Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan (1997); Valli (1997); Uhrich (2009) and Jung (2012). In addition, the sample vignette focusing on reflection-of-action (Appendix 8) was informed by the preliminary findings from phase one interviews. The first three student interviews with Jim, Nora and Aidan during March 2017 acted as pilot interviews resulting in minor changes to the student interview guide. Full adherence to ethical guidelines was applied to the pilot process as the data collected was used in the final research report.

Furthermore, following discussion with supervisors and a panel review in January 2016 the overall title of the research was changed to incorporate disabilities rather than inclusion solely. It was felt that inclusion alone could mislead the reader to interpret the all-encompassing meaning of the concept incorporating areas such as ethnicity, gender, etc. Subsequently the voice of the student with disabilities was also included. The original focus of my research involved solely the PE teachers’ perspective on inclusion of students with SEN/disabilities. However, it evolved through my scholastic journey that the voice of the child, student in this context, is vital in understanding teaching and learning meaningfully. Consequently, following discussions with my doctoral supervisors and reflection on the overall research, it was considered crucial to listen to the voices of the students with SEN/disabilities on their experiences of physical education in their schools. Additionally, the works of Coates and Vickerman (2008, 2010), Fitzgerald (2003a, 2003b, 2012) and Haegele and Sutherland (2015) influenced my decision to consult with students with disabilities regarding their education.

Table 3.7: Pilot and Data Collection Timeline:

Data Collection	Date
<u>Phase one</u> Pilot teacher interview 1 and 2 Pilot reflective e-journal 1, 2 and 3	February and March 2016 February - May 2016
<u>Phase one</u> teacher interview 3-7 Reflective e-journal in-action 4-12 Reflective e-journal of-action 13-17	March - May 2016 November 2016 - February 2017 May - June 2017
<u>Phase two</u> Pilot student interviews 1-3 Student interviews 4-10	March - May 2017
<u>Phase three</u> Selected cohort of teachers for second follow-up interview	November - December 2017

3.10: Data Analysis

Analysing data is the heart of building theory from case studies

(Huberman and Miles 2002, p. 17)

In relation to case study, it was noted previously (section 3.5.1) that there are two parts to the case, namely the subject and the analytical frame or ‘object’ (Thomas 2011, p. 14). In the context of this inquiry, the subject relates to PE teachers and students with SEN/disabilities in post primary schools; whereas the analytical frame or ‘object’ equates to the researcher’s interpretation of PE teachers’ and students’ experiences of inclusion. Additionally, the perspectives and continuing professional development needs of teachers

to facilitate the inclusion of students with SEN/disabilities in mainstream PE is interpreted. Whilst the “analytical frame is essential” and at the core of the study, the “way in which one undertakes the analysis is almost equally important” (Thomas 2011, p. 170). In case study research a thorough depiction of the setting (post primary schools) and individuals (PE teachers and students with SEN/disabilities) is then followed by analysis of the data for themes (Creswell 2014).

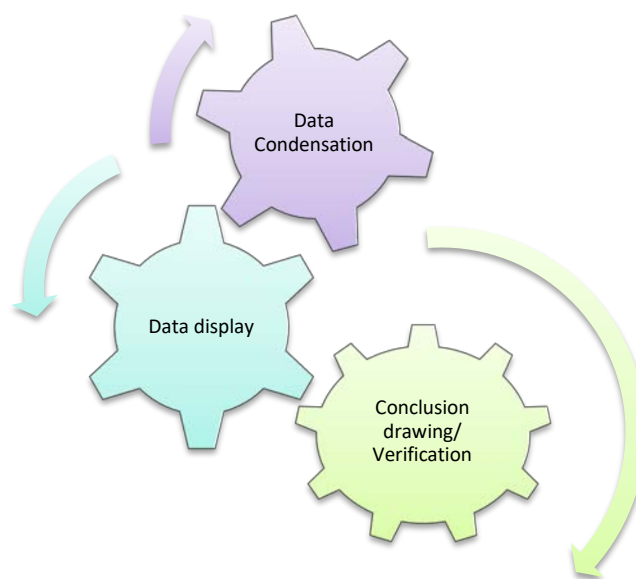
The central question is *how best* to conduct the analysis of data for this particular study. Firstly, I heeded Miles, Huberman and Saldaña’s (2014) advice, which is to conduct data analysis concurrently while the data collection progresses. Completing *all* the fieldwork and then attempting to begin the analysis process, eliminates the opportunity of gathering new data to fill in gaps or areas of interest which may emerge during analysis (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2014). The continuous interplay between the collection and analysis of data can be described as *iterative* (Bryman 2012, p. 566) or recursive. Thus, from the beginning, data collection and analysis was intertwined and fluid.

My inquiry followed a multiple-case study design, adhering to the epistemological assumptions of the constructivist paradigm. From this constructivist paradigmatic viewpoint, there are multiple realities and co-construction (on the parts of both inquirer and the inquired into) of meanings. Also, the research is situated in the natural world. Consequently, the approach to the data analysis was guided by the work of Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) which draw on a number of qualitative genres incorporating the constructivist viewpoint. In order to gain an informed insight into the many qualitative analytical strategies, a review of some approaches was conducted. Grounded Theory (GT) was reviewed as it is arguably the most widely used framework for analyzing qualitative data (Bryman 2012) and some aspects of GT are utilised by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014).

Grounded Theory was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss circa 1967. Subsequently, GT has been developed in different versions, such as “Glaserian GT (e.g. Glaser 1978; 1998; 2005), Straussian GT (e.g. Strauss, 1987), furthered by Corbin and Strauss (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) and constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2009; Thornberg and Charmaz, 2012)” as cited in Flick (2014, p. 153). Grounded Theory requires the analysis to be directed towards theory construction rather than description or application of existing theories (Silverman 2011).

In my study, analysis was guided by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña's (2014) approach to qualitative data analysis. Miles and Huberman's approach to qualitative data analysis was originally developed in 1984 based on a study of school innovation (Punch and Oancea 2014). Subsequently, their approach was developed in their 1994 edition of their jointly authored book, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, which has been recently updated and revised (2014) in its third edition, with Johnny Saldaña as the third co-author. In the most recent edition Saldaña has been tasked with maintaining the overall 'spirit and integrity' of the 1994 edition, whilst endeavoring to reach relevance and accessibility for contemporary researchers (Miles Huberman and Saldaña 2014). Whilst not adhering to any one particular genre of qualitative research, Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) draw on a number of techniques; mainly from ethnographic methods and grounded theory. Their approach essentially involves selectively collecting data, then applying a series of cycles of coding and analytical memos. Additionally, both within-case and cross-case analytical approaches can be applied followed by data display, conclusion and verification. It is pertinent to realise that the overall analytical process in my study was conducted in a constant iterative manner: facilitating modifications, additions and refining when deemed appropriate. Hence, Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) envisage data analysis as three concurrent flows of activity, as portrayed in diagram 3.1.

Diagram 3.1: View of Qualitative Data Analysis (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2014)



(Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2014, p. 12)

3.10.1: Coding

In qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes (Saldaña 2013, p. 4).

Coding of the data is one of the main phases in the overall process of qualitative analysis (Bryman 2012). Essentially, coding involves assigning “tags, names or labels against pieces of data” (Punch and Oancea 2014, p. 225). Moreover, these codes symbolize a cumulative, relevant and essence capturing attribute for a portion of language (Saldaña 2013). However, coding is not an exact science and is chiefly an interpretative act (Saldaña 2013, p. 4). Creswell (2014) envisages codes as three types:

- Codes on topics that readers would expect to find, based on the past literature and common sense.
- Codes that are surprising and that were not anticipated at the beginning of the study.
- Codes that are unusual, and that are, in themselves, of conceptual interest to readers.

(Creswell 2014, p. 198).

Another question to be cognisant of is: whether the researcher should develop codes from only emerging data from participants or to use pre-determined codes? Or perhaps to use a combination of both? Traditionally codes emerge during data analysis in the social sciences (Creswell 2014). Subsequently, pre-determined codes were not utilised in this study. In the context of my study, coding was separated into first cycle coding and second cycle coding (Saldaña 2013; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2014). Table 3.8 portrays the cycles of analysis that are applied to my study. This approach to the data analysis has been influenced strongly by the works of Miles and Huberman (1994), Saldaña (2013), Creswell (2014) and Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014). For the most part a descriptive, narrative, text format for data display is utilized in my study. Miles and Huberman (1984 in Creswell 2014, p. 211) suggest that this is the most frequently used format for data display in naturalistic qualitative research. The aim is to allow the reader to ‘vicariously’ experience the world of the participants through a sociocultural lens (Creswell 2014, p. 211). However, some table formats are utilized where relevant and appropriate, adhering to Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014, p. 13) current advice regarding their usage, rather than solely extended text.

Table 3.8: Overview of the Data Analysis Process

Phase 1	<u>Import</u> interview transcriptions and participant reflective e-journals into computer aided qualitative data analysis system (CAQDAS) known as NVivo. Also transfer demographic and other relevant descriptive information (e.g. type of school, qualification of PE teacher, length of service) into a table format (Creswell 2014, p. 200). <u>Read and re-read</u> all data several times.
Phase 2	<u>First cycle coding</u> (Saldaña 2013; Miles et al 2014). This is sometimes referred to as initial or open coding. First cycle coding methods are codes initially assigned to the data chunks (Miles et al 2014, p. 73).
Phase 3	<u>Second cycle coding</u> (Saldaña 2013; Miles et al 2014). This is sometimes referred to as focused coding, axial coding or selective coding. Second cycle coding methods are advanced ways of re-organising and analysing data coded through first cycle methods (Saldaña 2013, p. 207). The codes are collated into themes.
Phase 4	<u>Analytical Memos</u> (Miles et al 2014, p. 95). The researcher weaves together codes and themes. She seeks links, gaps, usefulness, practical implications and analytic questions of earlier codes.
Phase 5	<u>Within-case and cross-case analysis</u> (Miles et al 2014, p.100). Firstly, within- case analysis allows the researcher to become closely familiar with each case as a stand-alone entity (Huberman and Miles 2002, p.18). Secondly, cross-case analysis affords the researcher to select categories and search for similarities and differences across cases (Huberman and Miles 2002, p.18). This enhances transferability to other contexts and deepens understanding and explanation (Miles et al 2014, p. 101).
Phase 6	<u>Post-coding and pre-writing</u> (Saldaña 2013, p.246). Selection of major themes, categories or concepts.
Phase 7	<u>Data display (in descriptive narrative format), conclusion drawing and verification</u> (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 10; Miles et al 2014, p. 12).
Note	There was a continuous iterative process throughout the phases of analysis

3.10.2: NVivo

In my study, a large corpus of data amassed, eventually consisting of twenty-one interview transcripts (seven from phase one, ten from phase two and four from phase three). Additionally, documents consisting of seventeen (three pilot, nine in-action, five of-action) reflective e-journal entries and my researcher interview diary comprise the total volume of the data set. Therefore, it is necessary to have an efficient and logical systematic approach to data collection and analysis. Accordingly, the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 11 was selected to support efficiency and transparency. However, it is important to realise that the hermeneutic task of analysis remains resolutely within the researcher's grasp. Qualitative software programmes can assist storage, coding, retrieval, connections – “but human beings do the analysis” (Patton 2002, p. 442). As Fielding and Lee (1998) point out, qualitative researchers “want tools which support analysis, but leave the analyst firmly in charge” (p. 126). As mentioned previously, software such as NVivo provides transparency, enabling the researcher to maintain a clear audit trail of analysis in a coherent manner. All stages of my analytical process, outlined in Table 3.8 will be displayed in a traceable and transparent manner rather than manual mapping of this complex task.

3.11: Ethical Considerations

Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict (Stake 2008, p.140).

At all stages of research, ethical issues are important to anticipate and consider (Jones, Brown and Holloway 2013; Creswell 2014; Punch and Oancea 2014). Ethics comes from the Greek word, *ethos*, which denotes character and translates into the Latin *mores* (morality) also signifying character, custom or habit (Annas 2001 cited in Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, p. 62). A number of professional associations in educational research provide detailed guidelines to assist researchers meander through the ethical aspects of their research. Such bodies include the British Educational Research Association (BERA) 2011, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) 2011 and the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) 2014. BERA (2011, p. 4) considers that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of *respect* for the following five

areas; The Person, Knowledge, Democratic Values, The Quality of Educational Research and Academic Freedom. These bodies provide useful principles and general guidelines in relation to ethics but it is vital for the researcher to methodically and carefully contextualise in the light of their own study (Sheehy et al., 2005, p. 2). In interview research it is important to recognise the link between one's ethical judgement and the *situated* context of the interaction (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, p. 61). This *phronesis* as described by Aristotle (1994 cited in Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) allows the researcher to highlight intellectually what is most important in a situation. Therefore, the following ethical fields were considered pertinent and relevant to the context and situation of my study.

3.11.1: Ethics Committee

Firstly, it is crucial ethical protocol for researchers to have their research plans/proposals reviewed by an institutional review board (IRB) in their respective college or university (Creswell, 2014, p, 95). In University College, Cork the body responsible for research ethics is the University Ethics Committee (<https://www.ucc.ie/en/research/ethics/>). Within their remit there are three committees which focus on different research areas, namely, animal research, clinical research or social research. Non-clinical research which involves human participants comes within the responsibility of the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC). In order for my study to progress following good practice, Ethical Approval was sought via SREC in January 2014 (Appendix 3 and 4). The committee deemed no ethical impediment to the proposed research and approval was granted on May 20th 2014 (Appendix 5).

Subsequently (April 2016) it was deemed important to include the voice of the student with SEN/disability in the research (Wickman 2015; Unicef 2016). Consequently, a revised Ethical Approval was sought via SREC in May 2016, taking cognisance of the new direction of the study to include students with SEN/disabilities (Appendix 12 and 13). SREC responded in July 2016, seeking further clarification (Appendix 14) specifically in relation to the selection of student participants and accessibility of Informed Consent forms for the students with disabilities. Re- submission of a revised Ethical Approval form (Appendix 15) and revised Informed Consent forms (Appendix 16) addressed the issues highlighted. The committee deemed no ethical impediment to the proposed research and approval was granted on November 1st 2016 (Appendix 17).

3.11.2: Voluntary Informed Consent

Importantly, informed, voluntary consent is central to research ethics. Essentially this signifies that participation in the study denotes that “participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway” (British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011, p. 5). Likewise, the aim of the study and the use to which the data will be put needs to be conveyed openly to the participants (Punch and Oancea 2014; Jones, Brown and Holloway 2013). Accordingly, participants (PE teachers, principals, parents/ guardians and students) in my study received a letter of information and invitation (Appendix 1 and Appendix 16). The letter outlined the aim of the research and the level of involvement required. Additionally, the participant was made aware of their option to withdraw from the study at any stage without repercussions. Having considered the letter of information the participants were requested to sign in writing the consent form (Appendix 4 and Appendix 16). Parents gave the legal consent for their son/ daughter (student) to participate and the student themselves assented to be part of the study. Parental/guardian consent is necessary for a child to partake in research, but good practice also necessitates the child’s agreement or assent (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2012).

The researcher co-signed and dated the consent form. The participant was afforded time to think and reflect on their decision to become involved in the research (Jones, Brown and Holloway 2013; Creswell 2014). Obtaining signed consent forms provides a formal record of study participants. In order to ensure privacy, storage of these forms received careful consideration and will be expounded upon in the section on ethical storage 3.11.4.

3.11.3: Confidentiality and Anonymity

Likewise, confidentiality in research implies that the private data identifying the participants will not be revealed (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009; Jones, Brown and Holloway 2013). Additionally, confidentiality is a principle which pertains to disclosing information in confidence and trust. It relates also to the participants right to object if they wish, to the

publication of any information which they may have revealed. Consequently, a number of measures are applied in my research in order to ensure confidentiality of participants. Firstly, pseudonyms are used for participants, their school and any names mentioned during the discourse. Secondly, any indicators of possible identification are removed or changed e.g. identifying geographical location of workplace/ school, major identifying features of any student discussed. Thirdly, interviews are transcribed by me and a secure code linked transcription service. Furthermore, the raw data (interview transcripts and e-journal reflections) are stored in a secure location. Access to the raw data was facilitated only to my two supervisors, Dr. Susan Crawford and Dr. Dan O’Sullivan, to seek guidance and peer debriefing.

Data acquired confidentially should be subsequently verified with participants regarding public release. In my study *member checks* are conducted to verify with the participants that the constructions developing are indeed as an outcome of data collected (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p. 106). A copy of the interview transcript was sent to each participant to check accuracy. Participants had the right to amend the transcript if they felt it inaccurately reflected their account. However, they did not have any input regarding the *interpretation* of the agreed statements thereafter. Participants agreed or not, to have extracts from their interview and reflections to be quoted in the final thesis and possible future publications (Appendix 4 and Appendix 16).

Research interactions, via interviews or reflective e-journals, as in the case of my study, are based on the participants’ choice to disclose information, some of which may be sensitive (Punch and Oancea 2014). In my study disclosure is made in confidence, with my assurance to the participants that every effort is made to ensure anonymity. However, a limitation exists in child-related research if a child-protection issue emerges. Removing any information from the data which makes the participants easily identifiable and traceable is a strategy known as anonymisation (Punch and Oancea 2014). This strategy is used by researchers to ensure confidentiality. As mentioned earlier, anonymisation techniques such as use of pseudonyms for participants, names of students and names of school are utilised. Specific geographical locations and any other information deemed relevant are replaced with aliases. At all times I am cognisant of confidentiality and *respect* for the person (BERA 2011, p. 4).

3.11.4: Ethical Storage and Destruction of Data

It is necessary to ensure secure storage of recordings and transcripts, and delete the recordings when they are no longer of use (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). In my study interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim. Similarly, data arising from the reflective e-journals were catalogued. The recordings and reflections were stored in a password protected computer which the researcher only has access to. Respect for the privacy of research participants is a key ethical consideration in this inquiry.

3.11.5: Child protection protocol

Full Garda/ police vetting was obtained by the researcher in January 2014 as a requirement by University College Cork, in the current field of study and adhering to best practice principles. In addition, the researcher consulted and adhered to guidelines issued by the following organisations: Ethical Guidance for Research with People with Disabilities (NDA 2009), Research with Children with Disabilities, Guidelines and Checklist for Good Practice (Whyte 2005) and lastly, Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2012).

Full compliance with Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (DCYA, 2011) was adhered to. A child is defined in the *Children First: National Guidance*, as “a child means a person under the age of 18 years, excluding a person who is or has been married” (DCYA 2011, p. 8).

3.11.6: Conclusion

In this chapter a comprehensive description of all aspects of the methodological components of this study have been detailed. Firstly, the epistemological and ontological stance of constructivism adhered to in my study, was expounded upon. Secondly, justification of the use of qualitative inquiry was explicated. Thirdly, the methodological intricacies of case study design, research questions and participant selection were disentangled and clarified.

The choice of study design was defended. Importantly, indicators of quality in qualitative research in the context of my study were evaluated. Acknowledgement of my researcher role, in a reflexive manner within the research is present. Fourthly, the strengths and limitations of the data collection methods (in-depth semi-structured interview, reflective e-journal and researcher diary) employed were explored. Additionally, the step-by-step procedural process of the data collection was cogently documented. Lastly, the craft of data analysis and the ethical considerations of the research were deliberated upon.

The next four chapters detail the findings from the data garnered from the teacher and student participants. Additionally, the nuances from my researcher diary are interspersed throughout the chapters. Chapter Four provides an overview of the analysis and findings emanating from the study. Chapter Five addresses the lived experience of PE teachers in relation to inclusion. The following chapter, Chapter Six, charts a lifelong learning pathway for the inclusive PE teacher. In articulating their experiences of inclusion in PE, Chapter Seven foregrounds the voices of the participating students.

Chapter 4: Introduction to analysis and findings.

4.1: Overview

This chapter displays an overview of the analysis and findings arising from the study. Notably this data analysis was guided by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña's (2014) systematic approach to qualitative data analysis. The analysis of the data set, assembled during the fieldwork phase of the study, involved;

- Individual in-depth interviews with seven PE teachers
- Individual in-depth interviews with ten students with SEN/disabilities
- Seventeen digital e-journal reflections from participating PE teachers
- Four in-depth follow-up interviews with a cohort of the PE teachers

Additionally, my researcher diary was consulted to support my understanding and reflections on my developing knowledge throughout the course of the study (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Likewise, it allowed me to “to conceptually return to the setting during the analysis of the data” (Jackson 1990 in Ko and Boswell 2013, p. 229). Reflecting on my location in the study and how my assumptions and beliefs can impact upon it in a reflexive manner is indeed invaluable (Jones, Brown and Holloway 2013).

From the analysis, codes were assigned and resultant sub-themes/categories emerged. Firstly, sub-themes which the researcher identified as important to the project's focus-of-inquiry were garnered, utilising the theoretical frameworks of the study and the research questions. Secondly, sub-themes emerged inductively from the participants' own experience and language. The computer aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) known as NVivo 11 was selected to support the analysis aspect of my research study. It was utilised primarily to support the efficiency and transparency of the research journey.

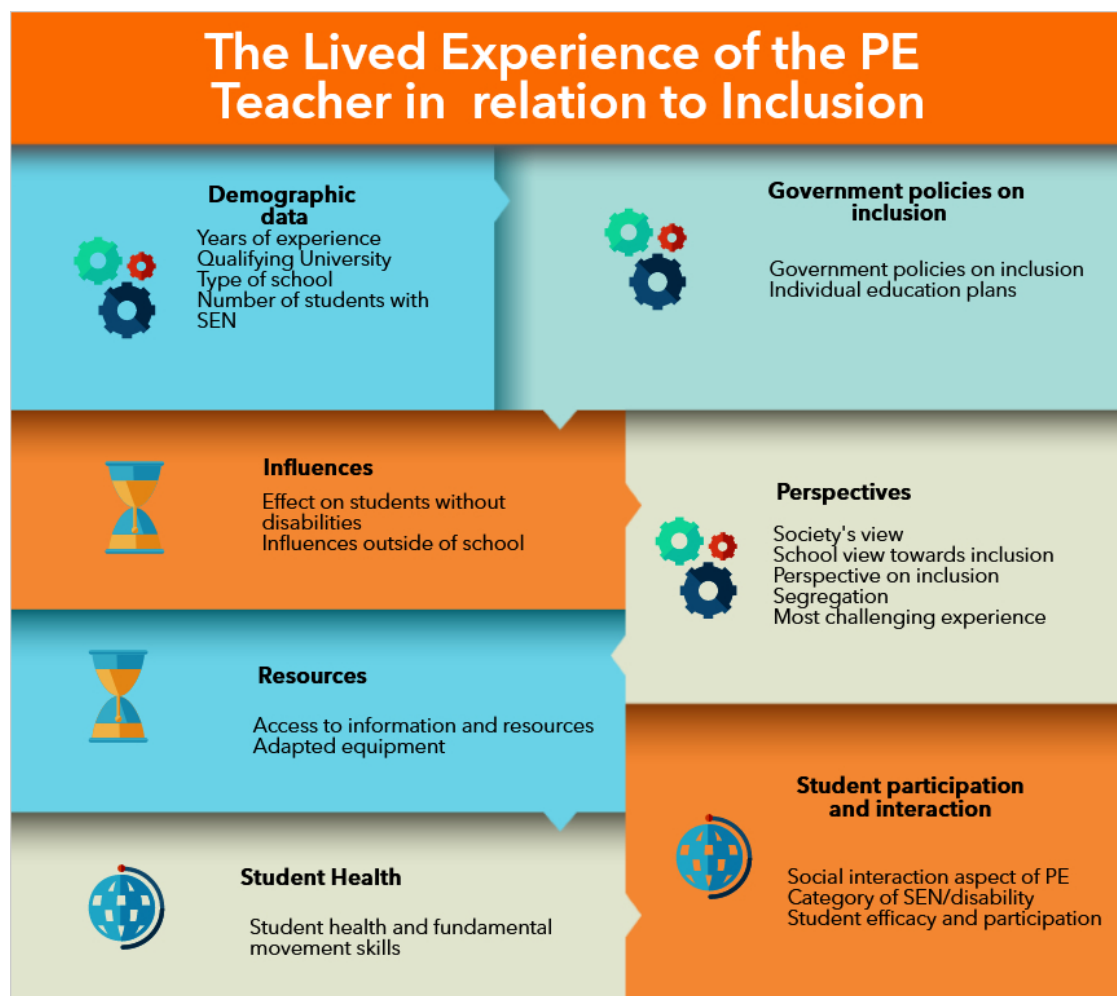
4.2: Thematic analysis of PE teacher data

Table 4.1 and table 4.2 illustrate tabulated displays of my thematic analysis of the PE teacher interviews (phase one and three interviews) and reflective e-journals. First cycle coding identified 30 codes, which were then grouped and collated into 11 sub-themes. These 11 sub-themes were then placed into two broad main themes:

- The lived experience of the PE teacher in relation to inclusion
- The pathway of lifelong learning for the inclusive PE teacher.

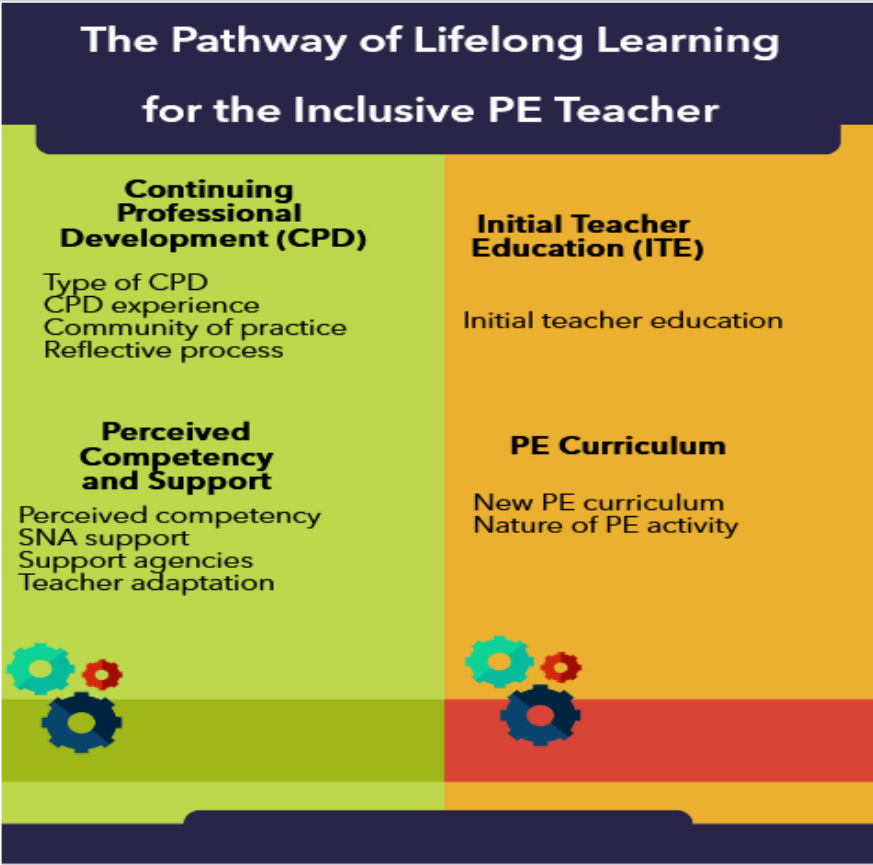
The two themes are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, there is an overlap occasionally, reflecting the complexities of the participants' lived experiences. Respectively, these two themes are presented and discussed in-depth in chapters 5 and 6.

Table 4.1: Overview display of the thematic analysis of the PE teacher Interviews and Reflective e-journals: chapter 5.



The overarching theme of *the lived experience of the PE teacher in relation to inclusion*, incorporates seven sub-themes, as displayed in Table 4.1. Each of these sub-themes (demographic data, government policies on inclusion, influences, perspectives, resources, student health and lastly, student participation and interaction) are presented and discussed in detail in chapter 5. The next main theme relates to *the pathway of lifelong learning for the inclusive PE teacher*.

Table 4.2: Overview display of the thematic analysis of the PE teacher Interviews and Reflective e-journals: chapter 6



The predominant theme of *the pathway of lifelong learning for the inclusive PE teacher*, incorporates four sub-themes, as displayed in Table 4.2. Each of these sub-themes (CPD, perceived competency/support, ITE and PE curriculum) are presented and discussed in detail in chapter 6.

Similar codes from phase one interviews, emerged also from the reflective e-journals. Additionally, the following four new codes emanated from the reflective e-journals:

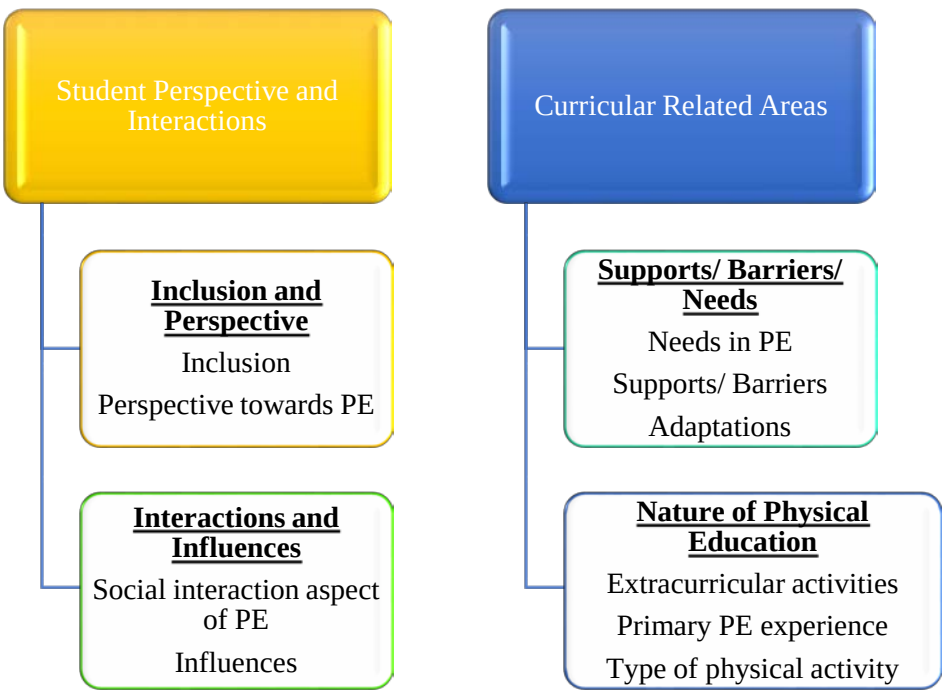
- Teacher adaptation
- Social interaction aspect of Physical Education
- Category of SEN/disability
- Student self-efficacy and participation

Teacher adaptation was placed within the theme of *the pathway of lifelong learning for the inclusive PE teacher* under the sub-theme of *perceived competency and support*. The other three codes: social interaction aspect of PE, category of SEN/disability, and student self-efficacy and participation were positioned within the theme of *the lived experience of the PE teacher on inclusion* under a new sub-theme of *student participation and interaction*. Lastly, similarly related codes emerged from phase three, second interviews. One new code emerged and was assigned as *reflective process*. This code was placed within the category of CPD. An overview of the analysis and findings of the student voice will now be presented.

4.3: Thematic analysis of student voice data

Table 4.3 explicates a tabulated display of my thematic analysis from the ten student interviews, which constituted phase two of the research journey. First cycle coding identified eleven codes, these were then grouped into four sub-themes/categories. The four thematic categories were then placed into two broad themes; firstly, student perspectives and interactions in PE and secondly, curricular related areas.

Table 4.3: Overview display of the thematic analysis of the student interviews: chapter 7



Each of the four thematic categories in table 4.3 are presented and discussed in detail in chapter 7. Thus, my main task in the following three chapters (chapters 5, 6 and 7) is to elucidate and interpret the PE teachers’ and the students’ lived experience of inclusion in physical education. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on analysis and discussion of PE teacher-derived data. In Chapter 7, the focus is on student-derived data.

Chapter 5: The lived experience of the PE teacher in relation to inclusion

5.1: Introduction

The following seven sub-themes, outlined in Table 4.1 in the previous chapter, form the foundation of this chapter within the main theme of *the lived experience of the PE teacher in relation to inclusion*. The sub-themes encompass: demographic data, government policies on inclusion, influences, perspectives, resources, student health and, lastly student participation and interaction. My main undertaking in this chapter is to interpret and understand PE teachers' experiences of inclusion in great depth. This chapter focuses upon the first research question: What are PE teachers' perspectives on their *lived work lives* regarding inclusion and PE in the Irish cultural context?

5.2: Demographic data

Table 5.1 represents an overview of the seven PE teachers' demographic data, the four types of school denoting each case and the range of disability categories within each school. It should be noted at this juncture that the four schools involved in this study fall under the following post-primary type. All schools are located in the south of Ireland. Case school one is a large community school in a town (only post primary school in the town) in a rural area, it is an amalgamation of 3 former post-primary schools. Established now over a decade, this large school portrays a pragmatic view towards inclusion: *for me it just hasn't been an issue in any way, every student has the right to an education. That seems to be our (school's) line. We are a community school with a community based ethos* [Noel, interview 1, school one].

Case school two is also a community school, albeit much smaller than school one, it is in a city suburb with DEIS designation. Delivering equality of opportunity in schools or more commonly referred to as DEIS, is the Department of Education and Skills policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. The DEIS action plan focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities (Department of Education and Skills 2018a). The DEIS designation was expounded upon by Mona: *we would be a DEIS school so we would have a lot of students who would come from disadvantaged backgrounds and we would have students as well that*

would have special educational needs. We have a Deaf unit in the school so we have a large number of ... I think it's around 20 students who would be in that unit [Mona, interview 1, school two]. Both Mona and Carly in school two articulated that their school is open to students of all abilities, however, both indicated caveats in relation to levels of ability:

I think we try and make it (inclusion) work as best as possible and we accept any student that wants to come here basically, but there have been one or two students that probably would be better suited in a different educational setting [Mona, interview 1].

So it's very difficult for a child with moderate learning difficulty to be in a mainstream school [Carly, interview 1].

Case study school three is an all-girls religious school in a city centre, having just recently retrieved its DEIS designation. School three had lost its DEIS status, much to the surprise of its PE teacher.

We would have been a DEIS school, we lost our DEIS status, our DEIS provisions, I suppose a number of years ago, to our complete astonishment. We would have a lot of girls here whose brothers would be walking into the school nearby, which has a DEIS status. So money would be very tight, we would have a lot of social problems really, the new way of allocating special needs hours is that one-year group is surveyed. And when we surveyed the year group that were chosen for us by the Department of Education the results were unbelievably astonishing [Jane, Interview 1, school three].

Certainly, Jane's comment raises a question regarding the Department of Education and Skills method of DEIS designation, which is beyond the scope of this research. Subsequently, Jane mentioned in her follow-up interview 2, that her school had just regained DEIS status, *we've just thankfully got back our DEIS status which we should have never lost.*

Case study school four is an all-boys religious school in a city suburb with DEIS designation. It is a school with a long history, but has evolved with changing times. Overall, school numbers have reduced: *in the seventies, and the eighties, I think there could have been four or five hundred boys here. Now I think we are down to about 235, 240 boys* [Ed, interview 1, school four]. In the broad sense of inclusion, the school embraces multi-culturalism with students of many nationalities forming the school community, in addition it was one of the first Catholic schools to display the rainbow flag. Both teachers, Sam and Ed articulated a positive school view towards inclusion of students with disabilities: *the school's philosophy is that all students have available support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to their needs and abilities* [Sam, interview 1, school four]. In this case study school four has a large ASD programme with almost 40 students attending.

All PE teachers in the four schools listed a range of presenting SEN/disabilities. School one presented with the largest range of disability categories, possibly indicative of its size and also it is the only school in the particular town. Interestingly, it is the only school of the four which has wheelchair users. Both school three and four have ASD units and school two has a deaf unit.

Table 5.1: Demographic data of PE teachers, school type and student disability categories.

Teacher	Gender	Years of experience & Qualifying University	School type and size	Student disability category
Noel*	M	22 University A	School one is a co-ed Community school, town, 1000 students approx., 5 PE teachers in school	Range of disability categories: Wheelchair users, C.P, ASD, EBD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, GLD, ODD.
Gina*	F	7 University B		
Mona*	F	10 University B	School two is a DEIS, community school, city suburb, 300 students, 2 PE teachers in the school, deaf unit.	Range of disability categories: deaf unit, visual impairment, ASD, GLD, muscular dystrophy, no wheelchair user
Carly*	F	6 University C		
Jane*	F	27 University D	School three is an all- girls, DEIS, religious secondary school in a city, 220 students, 1 PE teacher in the school, ASD unit.	Range of disability categories: GLD, ASD, EBD, no wheelchair user.
Ed*	M	28 University D	School four is an all- boys, DEIS, religious secondary school in a city, 235 students, 3 PE teachers in the school, ASD unit.	Range of disability categories – mostly ASD (35-40), dyslexia, ADHD, EBD, no wheelchair user
Sam*	M	4 University C		

*= pseudonym used

Note: ASD = autism spectrum disorder, ADHD = attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, C.P = cerebral palsy, EBD = emotional behavioural disturbance, GLD = general learning disability, ODD = oppositional defiant disorder.

Four female PE teachers and three male PE teachers participated in this study. The teachers' teaching experience ranged from 4 years to 28 years. Most participating teachers received their qualifying degree from Universities in Ireland, with Noel qualifying in the UK. The post- primary schools ranged in size from just over 200 students to 1000 students.

5.3: Number of students with SEN

All seven PE teachers indicated that they have observed an increase in the number of students presenting with SEN/disabilities:

There has certainly been an increase in the number of diagnosed conditions that students are being labelled with [Noel, interview 1].

I think the number has increased definitely yeah [Gina, interview 1].

Yeah I do think there is a big increase in general there is definitely at least one person in every class. But I don't think it is just our school, it's across the way there is someone in every class [Carly, interview 1].

Certainly this trend concurs with both international and national findings (Sideridis and Chandler 1997; Smith and Green 2004; Block and Obrusnikova 2007; Vickerman 2007a; Vickerman and Coates 2009; Petkova, Kudláček and Nikolova 2012; Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012). Likewise, the NCSE (2013, p. 113) noted that most children with SEN attend mainstream schools with less "than 1% of students in Ireland attending a special school".

Some teachers linked this observation (increase in the number of students with SEN/disabilities) with the broader concept of inclusive education for all in a general setting, reflected in the literature (UNESCO 2005; Winter and O'Raw 2010):

But I suppose there is an increase and as well our classes are bigger than they would have been, so there is an increase, there probably are some parents that they want their child to go to a mainstream educational school [Mona, interview 1].

I suppose we have more children with we will say obvious disabilities now. I mean a lot of parents now are moving away from the special school situation, and want their child to go to a mainstream school. And so therefore, I think all schools are I would say probably have students with special educational needs yeah [Jane, interview 1].

Well there has been an increase, for example the ASD Programme started in 2007 with four students. There now are forty students on the programme, though this will be reduced to 24 within the next few years, and the amount of students with SEN, maybe learning difficulties has increased as well [Sam, interview 1].

Additionally, the shift towards inclusive education in relation to SEN emerged from three of the five teachers' of-action reflective e-journals:

There are many more students with SEN and disabilities in mainstream education and I really think this is a good thing [Carly, reflective entry of-action].

I have noticed a large change in the cohort of students that arrive in a school now compared with when I first qualified (10 years ago) and I think a lot of this is down to the policies of Inclusive Education [Mona, reflective entry of-action].

The latter comment from Mona resonates with Qi, Wang and Ha (2017), whereby the teachers in their study, reported that the execution of educational policy was important for their perception of inclusion. Interestingly both Mona and Jane referred to the phenomenon that parents may nowadays wish to send their child with an SEN to a mainstream school rather than a special school. This point reflects a sociocultural shift towards inclusivity in society in general (United Nations 2006; WHO 2011). Likewise, Travers and Savage (2014, p. 13) have commented on "the mainstreaming of many special education concerns within a wider educational, social, economic and political context".

However, emanating from the data were trepidations expressed by some teachers, by the increase in the numbers of students with SEN/disabilities. These concerns were voiced through a lack of resourcing and ability to cope with increased numbers:

I would definitely say there are more students coming in and it's a challenge [Ed, interview 1].

Due largely to the success of the ASD programme, we have become recognised as a school that caters very well for students with SEN and ASD. As a result, an increasing number of students with various needs are enrolling. While additional supports are given to academic subjects, I feel the requirement to match this in PE class is often overlooked. Therefore, it is possible that we will soon have a situation where students with SEN and disabilities are in the majority [Sam, reflective entry of-action].

I mean we're at full capacity here now with known special needs in our autistic unit so we're at 10 per cent of our population and the school is very definitely special needs apart from the other children who need special help along the way, that's the problem [Jane, interview 2].

The increased numbers of students with SEN/disabilities, especially in the DEIS schools appears to be viewed as a ‘problem’ for teachers. In the follow-up interview with Sam, it was clear that he felt, that all schools should be catering for students with SEN/disabilities. In the case of his school (case four), he suggests that it has developed a reputation for supporting students with SEN very well, but it seems to be the victim of its success:

Whereas we are now seen as a school that is very good at catering for kids with needs and therefore we are ... the balance is tilting a small bit maybe. Whereby the students with needs could at some point outnumber the mainstream students. So what I would say is that every school should be catering for children with needs and schools shouldn’t be, for example, discouraging parents from sending their children to their school (in their locality) if they have needs and pointing them to another school. So my attitude would be that, yes we’ve been very good at dealing with the kids with special needs because we have it under control but if it gets to the point where there are too many children with special needs it’s stressful for the staff then and it could collapse, you know [Sam, interview 2].

In essence, Sam feels that every school should be catering for students with SEN/disabilities within their own locality. These sentiments resonate with developing research relating to the notion of a community of provision (Vickerman 2007b; Rix et al 2013; Rix et al 2015; Day and Prunty 2015), entailing a collective rather than a continuum or linear response to provision. Rix et al., (2013, p.178) proffer the idea of a community of provision as “the settings and services which work together to provide learning and support for all children and young people within their locality”. Entrenched in this belief are government policies, their deliverance and implementation within a structure that encompasses all agencies and individuals’ vision of inclusive schooling (Vickerman 2007b). Additionally, giving legal strength to Sam’s view, is the recently (May 2018) proposed amendment to the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 by the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton. This amendment will afford the Minister the power to require a school to open a special class or classes, where the National Council for Special Education has recognised a need for such provision within an area (Department of Education and Skills 2018d). This amendment has immense significance for *all* schools and special education provision.

5.4: Government policies on inclusion

Government policy in relation to SEN provision in Ireland has evolved from a system of segregation and special schooling to a more inclusive education for all. This is evident from the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (1993), The Education Act (1998),

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN 2004), the establishment of The National Council for Special Education in 2005 and the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016. When participants were questioned on their knowledge regarding the government's policies of inclusion and their views on it, most were not familiar with the policies and legislation per se, but felt inclusion was working in the school. The teachers from school one to three all gave similar responses.

I wouldn't be overly familiar with it. I know it's there [Mona, interview 1].

I am not aware of the policy other than the fact that it seems to be happening. Our school seems to be getting on with it and it seems to have the resources to support it [Noel, interview 1].

However, both teachers in school four appeared more knowledgeable, citing The Education Act (1998), with Sam also referring to the EPSEN Act (2004), *I think it's (inclusion) better than what it was, like I know I'm aware of the ... is it 1998 the Education Act and you know, it sounds good inclusion, it's a great buzz word* [Ed, interview 1].

Well I'm familiar with the 1998 Education Act which sought to provide inclusivity and equality of access with emphasis on ensuring provision, and for people with disabilities or other special educational needs to support the development of inclusive school environments for students with special educational needs. And the school here has endorsed this and it seems to be working. However, a failure to implement in full the 2004 EPSEN Act, I suppose remains a concern which needs to be addressed by Government alright [Sam, interview 1].

Certainly, the lack of implementation of the EPSEN Act (2004) is impacting adversely on the progression of inclusive learning environments in Ireland (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013; Smyth et al., 2014). The very pertinent point on the partial implementation of the EPSEN Act, highlighted by Sam leads us to the issue of individual education plans (IEPs). Research into the development and implementation of IEPs in an "Irish context have been limited in scope" (Nugent, 2002; Ring and Travers, 2005 in Rose et al., 2015, p. 29). A legal entitlement to an IEP does not currently exist for students with SEN and will not come into effect until the appropriate sections of the EPSEN Act are commenced by ministerial order (Department of Education and Science 2007). Thus, I was keen to discover if the participating teachers in the schools were familiar with IEPs and if they currently use them. Once more the teachers from school one to three presented similar findings. For the most part they do not use IEPs in physical education.

I don't use them anyway, I know what they are but I haven't used them [Carly, interview 1].

I am familiar with the concept yes, I suppose no (use of IEPs) because any of the students with special needs are in with their class group for PE [Jane, interview 1].

Not for PE no but maybe for their resource I'm pretty sure they do yeah [Gina, interview 1].

Again the PE teachers in school four seemed most familiar with the use of IEPs in PE. Particularly, Sam appeared to be very aware of IEPs as he also has the role as an ASD teacher within the school.

Yes I've prepared those (IEPs) for the ASD students and the main challenge I find is to identify goals that are achievable [Ed, interview1].

The IEP's are prepared for the ASD students they would be prepared by the ASD teachers, and I'm one of those. The SEN IEP's would be prepared by the SEN teachers. There's a specific team and when both are complete IEPs for all those students have been prepared, they are bound and placed in the staffroom, so all the teachers then can access them, and become familiar with the goals [Sam, interview 1].

Interestingly, Noel from school one was familiar with the use of IEPs when he worked in the UK but stated that he did not use them here in his current school.

IEPs were a day to day occurrence in the UK. We were working with them on a daily basis; they were regularly reviewed and updated. I haven't seen one in Ireland (laugh) although there are generic strategies readily available to help with specific needs [Noel, interview1].

Noel expressed a positive and worthwhile experience of IEP usage whilst working in the UK.

Any student (in the UK) with SEN had one (IEP) and all staff at the school had input to them and they were very, very valuable [Noel, interview 2].

Due to the lack of statutory requirement to utilise IEP's currently, it does appear that teachers and schools vary enormously in their implementation and understanding. This finding concurs with Rose et al., (2012, p.110) study, which identified "inconsistency in their (IEP's) use and in perceptions of their usefulness". Mona expressed some frustration at the notion of IEP's becoming statutory. Then again, the following comment from her suggests a lack of understanding around IEP's, as she appears to imply that all students that she teaches would require them:

It (use of IEP's) could be quite difficult in a secondary school in one way because how are you going to go through them all, like from my own perspective, I have ... there's 300 kids in our school and I see, I would say 250 of them every week. So how am I going to be involved in the IEPs of 250 kids? [Mona, interview 2].

The NCSE (2013, p. 3) recommend full implementation of the EPSEN Act (2004) as the “most effective route to the assessment and planning for students with SEN”. Likewise, the Government in a recent *Programme for a Partnership Government* have vowed to “progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis” (Department of Taoiseach 2016, p. 92). However, the reality is that we are now 14 years on from the publication of the EPSEN Act and full implementation remains intangible. The Global financial crisis of 2007/2008 impacted greatly on Ireland with major cuts across all Government Departments being implemented (Hardiman and MacCarthaigh 2013). During the austerity period (2009-2013), the cuts had implications for special and inclusive education in relation to the EPSEN Act (Travers and Savage 2014). Emerging from Mona’s reflective e-journal was the issue of Government cutbacks:

Regarding the education system itself I think the need to give more resources for students with special educational needs to be granted. In our school over the last 6 years SNA hours are being cut, students that were granted SNA access in 1st year were no longer eligible in 2nd and 3rd. Yet their conditions still exist but the measuring tool has become tighter and aims to cut the cost down [Mona, reflective entry of-action].

However, the Department of Education and Skills have decided to introduce a revised allocation model for all mainstream schools with effect from September 2017. This decision follows policy advice from the NCSE and piloting of the new model in 47 primary and post-primary schools. Under the revised model, the Department provides special education teaching supports directly to schools based on their educational profiles (Department of Education and Skills 2017a). The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Report *Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs* (NCSE 2014c), highlighted a number of deficiencies associated with the previous system for allocating special education teaching resources to schools. Thus the NCSE endorsed the introduction of a revised allocation model. An additional 900 teaching posts was provided to support the introduction of this new allocation model which commenced in September 2017 (Department of Education and Skills 2017b).

5.5: Influences

Drawing on current sociocultural theories, learning has been regarded as not only the construction and generation of knowledge but as a social participation in “socioculturally determined knowledge of communities” (Lave and Wenger 1991; Sfard 1998; Wenger 1998 cited in Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p.46). Participating PE teachers were asked if they knew

people with disabilities outside of their school setting. Both Noel and Sam had childhood experiences which have influenced them.

I grew up playing table tennis with wheelchair users. I was young at the time but I suppose it made me aware of the challenges that some people face. It was made perfectly clear to me at that early stage in my life that they *resented* pity and being treated differently to anyone else. Everyone should be treated the same [Noel, interview 1].

Yes, when I was growing up my next door neighbour had cerebral palsy, but competed and won medals at the Paralympics. Therefore, from an early age it was clear to me that disability was not an obstacle to participation in sport. And I suppose to some degree that influenced me [Sam, interview 1].

Deriving from both Noel and Sam is a sense that this social interaction and contact with people with disabilities during childhood has influenced their attitude in a positive way. Both statements have resonance with sociocultural theory, linking interaction between individuals and their environment (De Valenzuela 2007). Likewise, the concept of inter-subjectivity as highlighted by Qi, Wang and Ha (2017, p. 89), incorporating “mutual understanding” through “effective communication” is applicable. However, Carly who had little interaction as a child with people with disabilities expressed the fear she previously held.

Yeah because I remember when I was younger I was terrified of people (with disabilities) I remember my friend’s cousin who was severe special needs at parties and she was there and I didn’t know what to expect [Carly, interview1].

From a different viewpoint, Ed who has a family member with a disability spoke about the influence and effect this has for him.

On a personal note, when it comes to dealing with lads with you know ASD, autistic, yeah very much so, very much so. You would just be thinking of strategies, just different ways of making the programme, making the activities more relevant, more enjoyable to them [Ed, interview 1].

The vital influence of a student’s family on their participation was also apparent from both Jane’s and Noel’s reflections and interview 2:

I believe that the family expectations were directly related to whether the girls were willing to participate or not. I found it frustrating that some girls missed out in class activities and socialisation as they opted out due to lack of encouragement from home [Jane, reflective entry of-action].

How I choose to work with a student with severe movement difficulties therefore depends on many complex factors.....their experiences of P.E so far, how important their involvement in physical activity is in the family, the group they are in, their own motivation to improve, their personality and willingness to include themselves [Noel, reflective entry of-action].

Parents are so important it's unbelievable. Like if parents have brought that child to other activities outside of school, that child will just row in behind what you're doing, hopefully [Jane, interview 2].

Kozub (2001) applies the principles of family systems theory to adapted physical education programming for children with disabilities. In this situation, he advocates for a strong link to be forged between the adapted PE programme and the family context. The participating teachers' reflections and comments highlight the need for such a link, as suggested by Kozub (2001). From a wider community perspective, Gina recalled the impact of the Special Olympics World Games which were held for the first time in Ireland in 2003. She spoke of the positive effect it generated in the whole community.

I suppose thinking back to our time in primary school, Special Olympics became very big in our area. And like we had people like just a mile or two from us at home who were winning gold medals, and like the joy and the, I suppose the happiness it just brought to everybody around the place, I think that was huge [Gina, interview 1].

Certainly this statement epitomises the core tenet of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory between human interaction influenced by the cultural aspects of an individual (De Valenzuela 2007). Likewise, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory resonates here linking holistically the child, family and environment (Aubrey and Riley 2016). Looking through the sociocultural lens in relation to the effect of inclusion on peers without disabilities illustrated a mostly positive response. A common thread expressed by the participating teachers was the notion of 'acceptance' of difference and the benefit of this for students in general:

I am an advocate of peer mentoring. Ideally, I would like to partner an ASD student with a neuro-typical student. This would further promote inclusion and the ASD students may receive more help learning motor skills and it would benefit the neuro-typical student also through the development of greater empathy and affective skills [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

The latter quote from Ed exemplifies Vygotsky's zone of proximal development whereby the student develops knowledge and learns through internalisation and interaction with more knowledgeable others (Aubrey and Riley 2016). Likewise, the notion of empathy emerged from the teachers' reflections:

Donna's * classmates accept her autism and want her included. I believe that her classmates have a feel good attitude towards her inclusion [Jane, reflective entry of-action].

I think it (inclusion) is very valuable. It teaches students that maybe not everyone is like them or that other people struggle with some aspects of things [Mona, reflective entry in-action].

This idea of acceptance and empathy in relation to students without disabilities was reinforced by Jane in her second interview: *I think there's a huge ... a far better understanding and acceptance among our mainstream students now, that people have difficulties, that they have no control over, that they were born with that makes them think in a different way* [Jane, interview 2]. Likewise, Sam offers an insight into his school's view of good inclusive culture:

They (the students) know from the word go when they come into the school that the culture is that we cater for children who have needs. It was in particular this year I noticed with that cohort of students that came in after Junior Cert that they had less empathy maybe and they weren't prepared to give the extra allowances or time to the students with the needs [Sam, interview 2].

The inclusive culture generated in school four clearly exudes from speaking with Sam and Ed. Nonetheless, Noel, Carly and Jane highlighted an issue in the PE context, in relation to competitive games. Noel stated that occasionally some students felt that the students with disabilities: *have been seen as detracting from their own experiences and enjoyment in the class* [Noel, interview 1]. The latter point was reiterated by Noel again in his reflections:

The full inclusion of a student with severe movement difficulties changes totally the dynamic of the classroom. Students have to be willing to change their involvement and experience to include these students. They are not always willing to do so. They are sometimes not willing to do so on a consistent basis. I can understand it when P.E is one of the very few non-academic subjects which is viewed as their down time and for many, a time to really express themselves. They want and need to move to the best of their abilities and challenge themselves [Noel, reflective entry of-action].

This dilemmatic scenario facing teachers has been noted previously, particularly in schools with a strong team games/competitive focus within physical education (Green and Smith 2004; Morley et al., 2005). Interestingly, Sam pondered on the occurrence of students with ASD migrating towards each other:

Traditionally, the physically dominant alpha male will thrive in PE class, to the detriment of the weaker student. It is my job to find ways of levelling the playing field. Despite this, during inclusive PE classes the neuro-typical students are tolerant of those with ASD but inevitably the students with autism tend to gravitate towards one another. It is difficult to determine if this is a natural consequence of their friendships or if they are conscious of their shared differences and merely find comfort from being with each other [Sam, reflective entry of-action].

The students played Olympic Handball for the main part of the class. I selected the four five-a-side teams rather than allowing students choose. If I had left it up to the students, the ASD boys would be last to be picked [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

Certainly considering the nature of ASD and its associated impairment in social communication and interaction (American Psychiatric Association 2013), the reflections offered by Sam and Ed are not surprising. However, the broad response in relation to the effect of inclusion on peers without SEN/disabilities was encouraging. This contrasts with previous research, indicating PE teachers' concerns about the negative attitude of students without disabilities towards students with disabilities (Qi, Wang and Ha 2017).

5.6: Perspectives

Interpreting PE teachers' viewpoints and perspectives on inclusion are central and core to the focus of this inquiry. Thus to encapsulate a comprehensive picture I have attempted to glean not only the participants' personal viewpoint but also their interpretation of their schools' perspective. Interestingly, the teachers' interpretation of society's perspective additionally emanated inductively from the data in some cases. This interlocking triad (society, school, individual teacher) of viewpoint is guided by the overarching framework of this study namely sociocultural theory. Fundamental to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is the recognition that an "interplay between learning and development take place in socially and culturally shaped contexts" (Zapata 2013, p. 781). Notably, both Gina and Jane felt that society has progressed in its perspective towards people with disabilities.

They (the students) kind of take no notice of it, you know it's a bit like how far racism has come, you know and how far we've come with that. I think you know people with Down syndrome, and people with different forms of disability are looked after in society way better now. I suppose we are all a little bit more educated on it. I think we all know how well they can perform and how well they can do things. I don't think people are that negative about it (disability) anymore, and thankfully I have seen very little of it, even comments and stuff I can't see that I'd hear a lot of it [Gina, interview 1].

Overall I think it (inclusion) is a very good concept, yeah absolutely and you know I wouldn't necessarily have had a strong opinion either way before, but I can really see that it is important for society in general. And thankfully I think the public is responding better to that now. I think things are moving forward greatly yes [Jane, interview 1].

In her follow-up interview, Jane revealed her perspective in relation to the impact of inclusion and how it has developed in her lifetime, reflecting today's contemporary society,

I suppose it has made me think of people that I know from when I was younger, people my own age or even neighbours that were older, and I now see that they have missed out on so much. So I feel there's a lot of people out there who if they were born now would have had a completely different life, a far more positive life. And you know they wouldn't have the stigma attached to their learning difficulties [Jane, interview 2].

As referred to earlier, their points reflect a sociocultural shift towards inclusivity in society in general (United Nations 2006; WHO 2011). Clough and Corbett (2000, p. 6) highlight the right of individuals to education; "as a basic tenet of belief, should not everybody have the same rights of access to education? Of course". Overall the interviewees' interpretation of the school's view towards inclusive practice was positive, reflecting a whole school/institutional culture.

The school will try and include all students [Mona, interview 1].

For me it just hasn't been an issue in any way, every student has the right to an education. That seems to be our (the school's) line [Noel, interview 1].

The school's philosophy is that all students have available support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to their needs and abilities [Sam, interview 1].

These findings echo Hodge et al., (2004), who found that teachers were motivated by a sense of professional responsibility within their school, however, Jane highlighted the issue of PE being used as a resource time, since to date in Ireland, it has not been an exam subject: *Unfortunately for me because I have 10 per cent of the school population with special needs when they need resource, when they need extra help, it tends to happen during P.E. for a lot of students because it's a non-exam subject* [Jane, interview 2]. This situation may be somewhat ameliorated as PE has recently been allocated Leaving Cert exam status, which is currently being piloted in schools (Department of Education and Skills 2018c).

However, delving deeper into the participants own perspective revealed some issues relating to differentiation and levels of ability. Some teachers felt that students presenting with more moderate to severe to profound type general learning disability (GLD) may not be suitable in the general school setting.

I do remember there's one child that I will feel where is she out there now. I remember thinking like she couldn't learn here, there was no way she could learn anything here. She just, she was at the time before people were you know diagnosed, and I was thinking back and I was saying like she must have had the most frustrating primary school, and secondary school. Because she actually could not put a sentence together, and it didn't matter what subject it was [Jane, interview 1].

We have one student now in x year as I say that really I feel we are not serving her needs here. And I suppose actually the student I mentioned to you that had Down syndrome, she

was profound really in terms of like she wouldn't have known my name after six years. She really only responded with sounds rather than words [Jane, interview 1].

Segregation I think should happen depending on the learning disabilities so it's very difficult for a child with moderate learning difficulty to be in a mainstream school [Carly, interview 1].

This finding concurs with previous research conducted (Kozub and Lienert 2003; Hodge et al., 2004; Hodge et al., 2009) indicating that students with more severe disabilities were considered to be more challenging to teach. Emanating from the teacher e-journal reflections were a number of caveats or provisos concerning inclusion:

Inclusion in P.E. must be carefully planned. For example, it is pointless bringing six ASD students into a larger group just for the sake of being able to claim we promote inclusion. If those six students fear P.E. and worry in advance of the classes, then inclusion has done more harm than good [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

I feel that this approach (inclusive education) is welcomed but has some pit falls that need to be catered for to make sure that it a positive move. I would like to highlight I don't think that this move (inclusion) is for every student. Some students will flourish much more in special education setting where time tables are reduced and tailored and where they have more in common with peers. One of my major issues with pushing inclusion is, students feeling lonely and not having friends as they have different developmental ages [Mona, reflective entry of-action].

When viewed through a sociocultural lens this latter reflection from Mona highlights the difficulty for students with more severe disabilities to learn through the social interaction process. Participants also felt that students may need to be segregated for some aspect of the class at the discretion of the PE teacher.

To make real progress physically I feel that this (segregation) has to happen in some cases. I think sometimes, em ..., people say that, it's like at least they are being socially integrated into the class but, you know at the end of day it is a physical education class and they got to improve physically in some way [Noel, interview 1].

I wouldn't (segregate), but I mean just from the whole notion of physique and challenging students, and just being fair, I think you have to use common sense [Ed, interview 1].

Well pro-inclusion, but I am conscious that teenage boys mature at different stages. For example, it is inevitable that in every class there will be students that are physically bigger and stronger than their peers. This will help them to dominate in PE class, and this can be intimidating, not just for students with disabilities, but also for students who are physically smaller. Therefore, segregation can be appropriate in some circumstances in order that everybody gets an opportunity to learn skills and to play and to have fun [Sam, interview 1].

In the follow-up interviews with Noel, Mona, Jane and Sam, their perspectives on inclusion in PE were further probed. Sam emerged with the most proactive and agentic view in relation

to inclusion: *I think it would be detrimental to withdraw a student from the class based on their disability. I think the onus is on us to include the student because I mean, okay the psychomotor development is very important but the affective skills are just as crucial you know. I think it's up to teachers themselves* [Sam, interview 2]. This view articulated by Sam, links to professional agency within a subject-centered sociocultural framework. It highlights the need for teachers to “exert influence, make choices and take stances in ways that affect their work” (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 61).

Of the seven participants Noel demonstrated the strongest view with respect to segregation, both at interview and reflective phases. He drew on his experience of working with a student who is a wheelchair user:

My issue is one of physical development versus social inclusion. Can both be achieved consistently in every class across a year? The best work that I have done in terms of physical development with a wheelchair user is on a one to one basis, improving skills, strength, flexibility, posture and competencies etc. The physical benefits of full social inclusion in a P.E class can be very limited depending on the activity. I have just been lucky to work in schools that have been able to put one to one provision in place when required [Noel, reflective entry of-action].

Noel further develops his thoughts on segregation in his in-action reflective entry:

The student (who was a wheelchair user) wanted to remain with the group and was wary of one to one work, however, I felt that for him to progress withdrawal was necessary with an aim to give him more success and confidence in game scenarios. From observation the student is significantly less active when in the group. Sometimes the teacher must take the student out of their comfort zone in order to progress and make the physical education experience worthwhile. In order to improve the inclusion experience, a period of withdrawal may be beneficial [Noel, reflective entry in-action].

In his final follow-up interview, Noel reiterated his view on segregation:

I think we've got that balance, I wouldn't say perfect at this school, but where we have withdrawn a student to improve their skills we've actually then ... after we've gone through that process we have obviously gone back to full class teaching as well. So just to withdraw them for a while, improve their skills so that then they can enjoy themselves more than in a full class environment [Noel, interview 2].

On the whole, however, participating PE teachers in this study indicated an overall positive perspective towards inclusion. This finding concurs with research conducted by Ko and Boswell (2013, p. 236) which concluded that teachers showed “positive perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in their general PE classes”. It does appear that more recent studies encompassing teacher attitude towards inclusion in PE are indicating an

overall positivity (Ko and Boswell 2013; Campos, Ferreira and Block 2015; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017). These findings contrast with earlier research (Block and Obrusnikova 2007, p.116) in which “general PE teachers possess negative feelings toward inclusion”.

Teachers identified a number of challenges they face whilst attempting to include students with SEN/disabilities in PE. The demanding school day and class sizes emerged as issues:

Every day in school is busy and not enough time is available to meet with resource teacher's and SNA's to discuss each student's needs and goals as outlined in their respective IEP's. This can be frustrating [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

Last year I had six special needs girls in one X year class. I found this overwhelming as a teacher especially as there was friction between two of the girls. While I would benefit from CPD, I think it is important to place the girls in a group that will respond positively to their needs [Jane, reflective entry of-action].

Students with special educational needs are simply another student with ‘individual’ needs in the classroom. The main challenge today is the increase in class sizes. The sheer number of students arriving in my area is so huge it is an impossibility to ensure that the physical needs of every individual are met. In one hour a week? [Noel, reflective entry of-action].

I find the school week stressful as I also teach exam subjects and have little time to reflect on my practice as a PE teacher [Sam, reflective entry of-action].

Similarly, Hodge et al (2004, p. 415) identified issues relating to “large class sizes, increased time demands, and behaviour management difficulties”, as impacting on teachers’ perceived behavioural control in teaching students with disabilities in PE. Likewise, my findings support earlier studies (Smith and Green 2004; Hodge et al 2009; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017), indicating challenges relating to class sizes and busy school days, impacting on inclusive practice in PE.

5.7: Resources

It was clear from the first phase interviews that PE teachers felt that their respective schools provided satisfactory information and files on each student with a SEN/disability. School four differed slightly in that it provided student files for all staff to observe in the staff room, whereas in the other three schools, files were accessed through a SEN coordinator.

When I started here first all the files were locked away in drawers, and generally speaking you would have to be one of the SEN or ASD teachers in order to access them. But last year in fairness to the principal he made the decision to actually make them a lot more accessible, leave them in the staff room, and so that any teacher could quickly identify you know what different disabilities or learning difficulties that students had [Sam, interview 1].

Sam's articulation epitomises the strong proactive and agentic view towards inclusion in school four, resonating with professional agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). For the most part, participating teachers felt that they can access background information in relation to the students with SEN/disabilities, however, the information is not PE specific.

We have complete support from management, special educational needs department, I've never felt wanting for anything really, only information and specialist help [Noel, interview 1].

But physical education wise you wouldn't get a huge amount of information, it's more academic, and it's more the type of disability they have. How they are performing academically, and what's their attendance like [Gina, interview 1].

Mona having completed a master's degree in adapted physical activity, appeared most confident in relation to sourcing information regarding SEN/disability and PE in general: *I would have gained a lot of experience and knowledge from there (Masters) and then where to get it (information) and kind of what organisations are there* [interview 1]. Whereas others felt they weren't aware of specific information on SEN and disability in the PE context.

I am aware of a few publications by the NCCA related solely to PE and SEN [Noel, interview 1].

I can't say I've seen a huge amount on that (information) [Gina, interview 1].

I don't think there is much really [Carly, interview1].

I'd love more (information) [Ed, interview 1].

I can do as much research as I like but there still doesn't seem to be much help out there [Noel, interview 2].

Ed reflected on the benefits of technology and its use as a resource for working with students with autism:

I am constantly researching more effective ways of delivering PE lessons to the boys with autism. Technology is a great help and there are practical aids on You Tube which I have used. I regularly browse a Facebook page called "coaching movement" and I have adapted many of their exercises when teaching students with autism [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

Most participating teachers felt that their specialised, adapted PE equipment in their schools could be improved.

But like the equipment could be improved a lot [Mona, interview 1].

Equipment wise I don't have any specific equipment for children with special needs [Jane, interview 1].

Funding for specialised equipment or just equipment that just grabs their attention [Jane, interview 2].

Likewise, Qi, Wang and Ha (2017) in their study highlighted the need for specialised equipment to improve the motor abilities of students with disabilities. School two has a specialised sound system for the students who are hard of hearing.

sound wise for the hearing impaired sometimes they wear an FM system so we clip something on here they connect up to their hearing aids, that works out well they can pick up just our voice through all the noise [Carly, interview 1].

Both Jane (school three) and Noel (school one) had also used a microphone when working with students who were hard of hearing: *yeah it was a fantastic piece of equipment* [Noel, interview 2] and *I have used the microphones alright and you just need to be careful that they're on and off at the right times* [Jane, interview 2].

Mona reflected on the necessity to provide individualised, specialised equipment to meet students' unique needs:

With regard to specialised equipment, I do feel there are some pieces of equipment that need to be developed. For one suggestion instead of just a bleep test sound equipment is it possible to get it in *light* form to work for the students who have impaired hearing? I think that individual students' needs will dictate what is needed in PE e.g. this year we have a student who is visually impaired so when they play soccer, his PE teacher has told me, they need to use a red or pink ball as he can see these colours easily [Mona, reflective entry of-action].

Likewise, school four has specialised equipment to meet the needs of students with ASD. Once more the teachers in school four exhibit strong agentic and proactive traits to meet the needs of their students with ASD:

We got some extra equipment, so we got I suppose it's a lot of the stuff is sensory stuff, is relevant to the ASD lads. We were a little bit proactive in that we converted a *small area* into a gym, a little gym for the lads, because while they like PE, sometimes maybe they feel a little bit you know overcome by the whole situation. So this is their little area where they can do their work-out. We've got treadmills, we've got stationary bikes, we have weights, we have different things, so yeah the school and they are quite supportive you know [Ed, interview 1].

If they (students with ASD) find the class in the hall overwhelming they can go to the gym and use the equipment there such as the exercise bike or therapy ball under supervision of the SNA [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

In her reflections Jane alluded to the need to communicate with her colleagues in relation to shared specialised equipment: *Our Autistic unit has equipment that could be used in PE class. There is a need for more communication and sharing of equipment* [Jane, reflective

entry in-action]. Additionally, Sam referred to the issue of funding of equipment: *School funds are not readily available and so often I bring in my equipment from home or try to be creative* [reflection in-action], demonstrating strong teacher agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

Whilst the participating teachers felt that their respective schools provide adequate, general information regarding the nature of a student's disability, it is not PE specific. Additionally, teachers felt that specialist equipment to meet the various needs of students was inadequate, this finding concurs with Qi, Wang and Ha (2017).

5.8: Student Health

Whilst not the focus or indeed within the scope of this study, the general area of student health emerged as an unanticipated thematic category. Firstly, fundamental movement skills (FMS) and fitness levels of all students were voiced as a concern.

I think we take everybody coming into first year as having a basic level of your throwing and your catching, your fundamental skills. But I don't think they have them [Gina, interview 1].

I mean there are some students that I mean they come in, they are already unfit at twelve years of age, and you can see it going steadily downhill [Jane, interview 1].

So even just now we're getting kids that struggle to catch a soccer size ball when it's thrown gently to them so kind of how ... I suppose that's not something we would have had in the past [Mona, interview 1].

Even some of the first year groups, you could see you know motor skills, they wouldn't have done much [Ed, interview 1].

Specifically, Ed reflected on FMS and skills acquisition amongst students with ASD. Reid and Collier (2002) noted that movement skills are often poorly delayed in persons with ASD. Furthermore, Pan (2014) identified lower scores in relation to motor proficiency and fitness measures for adolescents with ASD, compared to those without ASD.

I am always conscious of the ASD students when jogging as their under developed gross motor skills means they are more susceptible to falls than their neuro-typical class mates [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

Depending on the flexibility of the timetable, we aspire to provide additional movement classes for ASD students. During these classes the students receive an opportunity to develop fundamental motor movements and practice to improve skills acquisition [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

All four teachers (Noel, Mona, Jane and Sam) in their follow-up interviews, felt strongly in relation to the poor level of FMS and fitness among incoming students. They all advocated for the addition of a specialist PE teacher in primary schools to develop FMS from a young age:

In terms of fundamental skills, that has to start from age 4 and 5 and primary schools just don't seem to be doing the right things. If primary schools did anything to get an expert in to work on those fundamental skills from an early stage, that's the way to go. Primary school teachers need to be educated. P.E. needs to happen daily or at least once every 2 days in a primary school [Noel, interview 2].

I'm noticing now fundamental skills are dropping across the board.... kicking, striking, catching and reaction to a ball is shocking like. Fitness levels across the board are atrocious [Mona, interview 2].

But fundamental movement skills are probably not being taught in most primary schools really [Jane, interview 2].

I feel that it's amazing it hasn't been done by now but there should be specialist P.E. teachers in primary schools [Sam, interview 2].

In addition, Sam critically reflected on the broader societal influence, *there's societal problems as well I suppose. A lot of students that I find in first year that should be naturally fit aren't because they're not ... exercise isn't a part of their daily routine. They're sitting down for the best part of the day here in school and maybe they're going home and watching too much television and on their phones that bit too much, even at lunch time* [Sam, interview 2]. This level of critical reflection shown by Sam indicates an awareness of broad societal issues (Valli 1997).

Secondly, both PE teachers in school four identified the issue of anxiety amongst their students with SEN/disabilities, particularly those presenting with ASD.

What I find with the students, first of all that when they come into first year the students with disabilities, especially the ASD students, is that they are nervous about PE. With some of them I get the impression that they've done very little sport maybe at primary school or maybe at home [Sam, interview1].

ASD, ADHD, anxiety and I think they come in and they just, it's terrible really, but they come across as being so anxious about different things. We do our best to put them at ease, and make them realise that PE isn't all just about games, games and more games. It's about you know psycho-motor, it's about just the good feeling, just experiencing different activities, be it gymnastics, a little bit of dance, movement, basic movement you know. So you know I think that to me is anxiety, reducing anxiety reducing stress and involvement you know [Ed, interview 1].

The PE hall can be an intimidating environment for anyone with a disability or high anxiety, a trait exhibited by several of my students who participate on the school's ASD programme [Sam, reflective entry of-action].

I recently attended a Sensational Kids special needs conference in Blanchardstown where the keynote speaker, Jerome Schultz, noted how excellence has become the new average, you're perceived as inferior if not achieving the best and stress and anxiety levels are heightened for all students. If I can just reduce it a little bit, practice some Noodle breathing and give the lads (with ASD) little potential moments of success throughout the year, I'll be content, as I hope they will be [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

Likewise, three of the follow-up interviewees (Mona, Jane and Sam), when questioned regarding anxiety, indicated observing increased levels, particularly among students with ASD. They all felt that the nature of PE as a subject may contribute to this issue, *the slight craziness that goes on, the louder noises, the unpredictability, the changing – everything – like it's quite a stimulation overload for them (students with ASD)* [Mona, interview 2]. This concurs with research conducted by Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher (2013), identifying the PE environment as a challenging sensory setting for children with ASD. The authors specifically indicate the high noise volume and heat sensitivity as issues in PE for children with ASD. Having read the vignette based on student data in the final phase of collection, teachers were questioned on their opinions relating to previewing with students with ASD. Most teachers felt that it would be logistically difficult to implement within their numbers and timetabling constraints: *because you know 60 students coming down wanting to be taught P.E. previewing is very, very difficult* [Noel, interview 2] and *probably no (previewing) because timetables* [Mona, interview 2]. However, in case school four the opportunity to practise PE skills for students with ASD in a movement class, before the larger PE class is available.

5.9: Student participation and interaction

Emanating from the teacher reflective e-journals, was the distinctive opportunity that PE as a subject appeared to afford to students, from a social interaction perspective. This learning opportunity was seen by most teachers as important for the students' overall development. A similar view derived from Campos, Ferreira and Block (2015, p. 4) research, highlighting the importance of inclusive PE through developing the students' "more human and social side of life". The practice of internalisation of social interaction in the construction of knowledge is fundamental to Vygotskian theory (Zapata 2013). Sam reflected on the importance of the social benefits gained during PE for his students with ASD:

I try to use this insight (additional role as ASD teacher) positively during PE class and at times explicitly try to engineer scenarios where the students (with ASD) will experience success. I gain as much satisfaction from seeing them having fun, participating in games

and forming friendships as I do from watching as they improve motor skills [Sam, reflective entry of-action].

Carly highlighted, both in her reflective-in-action and of-action e-journals, the significant role of relationship building for all students in PE, particularly those with disabilities, *Paul (has a visual impairment) was paired with another student who really understood Paul's abilities and they worked really well together. I really was pleased with seeing how Paul is developing socially with the others and I do feel this group work does help that* [Carly, reflective entry in-action]. The broader social importance of relationship building was evident in Carly's of-action reflection, *PE, for me, is an extremely important subject for all students, but especially those with a disability as it allows the barriers for the formal classroom setting to come down and to build different relationships with their peers* [Carly, reflective entry of-action]. Good relationship building for students with disabilities has implications for everyday life. With respect to inclusive education Vygotsky alludes to 'the social consequences' and helping 'the child live in this world' (Vygotsky 1995 in Vygotskaya 1999, p. 331).

Mona expressed the challenge she felt, supporting a student with ASD and a severe overweight issue, in relation to participation in PE and engagement on a social level with his peers, *next week I will try and get David (who has a severe overweight issue and has ASD) to work with a partner on the weights machines also. This will help him socially interact with others and get him talking to other peers. It is hard to both get David to engage in the PE class and to get his class to involve him due to his weight and his engagement* [Mona, reflective entry in-action].

The dilemma Noel faces in relation to the social and physical outcomes in PE for students with physical disabilities is apparent. He feels that the student, who is a wheelchair user may be better served choosing an activity other than soccer, in order to help his physical development. However, the student appears to enjoy the social interactive nature of the soccer game and selects it as his preference, *Nathan (who is a wheelchair user) regularly chooses soccer when presented with 3 options. He supports a premiership team and likes to feel part of a team when participating in P.E. He chooses soccer because he enjoys the game and the interaction with other students. I am unsure as to whether it best suits his physical development with other activities available* [Noel, reflective entry in-action]. Taking the students' views and voices into consideration is a shift in thinking for some teachers (Zapata 2013).

However, Sam mentioned another aspect of social interaction which he has observed presenting as a difficulty for students with ASD and challenging for the PE teacher to manage:

PE class offers students a forum for “banter”. I have seen students with autism become compromised in these situations. For example, their difficulty in interpreting cues and body language means sometimes they do not recognise when interaction from other students is not genuine. This makes them vulnerable to teasing and I find it challenging to deliver a PE class while simultaneously watching for any signs of bullying of vulnerable students [Sam, reflective entry of-action].

Sam reiterated this view in his follow-up interview, in relation to questions on the student voice (vignette-school one - Appendix 18), *the social aspect of P.E. is important but... we don't compromise safety or behaviourso there is a line that can't be crossed* [Sam, interview 2]. Research indicates that students with ASD report victimisation in PE (Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher 2013). Similarly, both Mona and Jane felt that the social interaction aspect of PE is important, *the social side is hugely important for every student but obviously very important for the inclusion of students with special needs* [Jane, interview 2]. Again Noel emphasised the importance of not detracting from the physical aspect of PE, *engaging them socially in a P.E. class is obviously extremely important as well, however, there is a balance between that – the social aspect of P.E. – and improving them physically as well* [Noel, interview 2]. Correspondingly, Qi, Wang and Ha (2017) highlight the value PE teachers place on the social benefits of inclusive PE.

The level of a students' participation and self-efficacy appears to be related to the category of disability the student presents with (Goodwin and Watkinson 2000). In my findings, the teachers enunciated that the students with ASD struggle to participate for the complete PE lesson, not only because of fitness levels but rather psychological issues, *during the Olympic Handball the ASD boys appeared to enjoy themselves. I noticed how at times some of them opted out in the middle of games and sat on the stage for a few minutes before re-joining the action. This is quite normal. I like that they can self-regulate and opt in and out. I am satisfied once they are active and enjoying themselves* [Ed, reflective entry in-action]. Here, Ed demonstrates a personalistic level of reflection, considering personal growth and relational issues (Valli 1997; Uhrich 2009). In his next reflection, Ed reveals deliberative reflection (Uhrich 2009), focusing on decision making based on experience, school organisation and culture, and collaboration with other PE teachers:

if we are completing a module on Volleyball during the mainstream class, the ASD students may have an opportunity to practice Volleyball skills during a movement class prior to the mainstream class. The movement classes are confined only to the ASD students. Ideally, what we then like to see are ASD students approaching the conventional P.E. classes with greater confidence and less anxiety, as a consequence of the additional practice time [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

Likewise, Sam (in the same school as Ed) iterates a similar type deliberative reflection:

currently, the students are completing a module on Rugby during the mainstream P.E. class, so at the moment I incorporate a rugby practice into the ASD movement class. The practice helps improve self-efficacy and gives the students greater confidence for the next mainstream P.E. class [Sam, reflective entry in-action].

Arising from Sam and Ed's reflections is the notion of strong agentic professionalism, making choices and taking stances which affect their teaching and students' learning (Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

Jane identified an issue with teenage girls' lack of participation, particularly in senior cycle. This issue has been well documented for all teenage girls, not just those with disabilities in research in Ireland (Woods et al., 2010).

Over the years I have had girls with a physical disability with limited use of one of their hands. Some have participated fully and covered up their hand to hide their disability. Others have opted out, particularly at senior cycle [Jane, reflective entry of-action].

Interestingly, after a student interview in school one, in conversation with the SENCO, a similar observation was made. The SENCO was disappointed that the three female students who are wheelchair users in the school did not agree to do an interview with me. She said: *they stopped doing PE which is typical of female girls of this age (5th and 6th year)* [SENCO, school one]. Additionally, Noel contemplated on the 'games' type nature of PE in Ireland and how that may impact on girl's participation, *I just wonder if they (girls) have a negative opinion of P.E. or a negative opinion of games* [Noel, interview 2].

Some challenges that teachers identified regarding inclusion, related specifically to the category or type of SEN/disability that the student presented with. Carly and Noel identified challenges they encountered working with students with a physical type disability.

While I have tried my best to include everyone I have found it difficult to adapt some lessons, such as dance and gymnastics to include a child with a physical disability [Carly, reflective entry of-action].

The full inclusion of a student with severe movement difficulties changes totally the dynamic of the classroom [Noel, reflective entry of-action].

Tant and Watelain (2016) concluded in their review that teachers demonstrated a negative attitude towards students with emotional disorders and a somewhat favourable attitude towards students with learning disabilities. Furthermore, they asserted that a mixed attitude was evident from teachers towards students with physical, sensory or mental disabilities. Noel's reflection regarding the level of a disability, is in agreement with Hodge et al., (2009) indicating that teachers felt it was more difficult to teach students with more severe disabilities in an inclusive PE setting. This appears to be a trend across a number of studies (Kozub and Lienert 2003; Block and Obrusnikova 2007), it has important implications for initial teacher education. In particular, a number of challenges were experienced by teachers, when working with students with ASD. Ed referred to issues regarding communication, *A few years ago there was an incident in the yard when one of the lads (with ASD) fell and it struck me how in the immediate aftermath he struggled to communicate to me how severe the pain was and the exact location of the pain* [Ed, reflective entry in-action]. Both Jane and Sam iterated challenges regarding sensory issues:

Amy (who has ASD) is one of four special need girls in a group of twenty girls in X Year. She is getting on better in PE this year than last year. In the previous year there were thirty in her class and there were a number of girls who were very loud and always sounded like they were arguing. Amy got frightened and upset by this and would need to be taken away by her SNA [Jane, reflective entry in-action].

One of the students from today's class is hypo-sensitive to pain and will run himself to exhaustion unless I or an SNA do not tell him to ease off. No two students on the autism spectrum are the same [Sam, reflective entry in-action].

Likewise, Mona and Sam referred to issues relating to routine and lack of eye contact.

David is a TY student with a severe weight issue and on the Autism spectrum. He would be very set in his ways and find exercise difficult and would not be engaged in Physical activity [Mona, reflective entry in-action].

I introduced Badminton to the movement class last year because one of the students (who has ASD) has difficulty maintaining eye contact during conversations. However, playing Badminton is a productive exercise for him since he is forced to focus on the shuttlecock [Sam, reflective entry in-action].

Individuals with ASD may exhibit communication deficits, lack of social interaction, and dependency on routine and sensory regulation (American Psychiatric Association 2013). It would appear important for the PE teacher to be aware of these unique characteristics associated with ASD, in order to fully support the individual student's participation (Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher 2013).

5.10: Conclusion

Essentially, all teachers indicated that they have witnessed an increase in students with SEN/disabilities in their respective schools. Evidently, this may reflect a societal move towards inclusion. With the increased numbers, teachers have asserted a lack of support in the PE context. For the most part, teachers did not seem familiar with the government's inclusion policies (with the exception of case school four), but they all declared that inclusion was working in their school. However, only one school (case four) was implementing IEP's in PE. Nonetheless, overall teachers portrayed a positive perspective towards inclusion with some caveats regarding class sizes, demanding school days, differentiation, segregation and levels of ability. Fundamentally, the need for inclusive PE specific resources was highlighted by the participants. An unanticipated thematic category of perceived poor fundamental movement skills and fitness levels amongst students emerged. Additionally, anxiety amongst students with ASD was voiced as a concern. Emanating from the participants reflective e-journals was the opportunity that PE as a subject, offered towards promoting social interaction and development. However, Sam highlighted possible difficulties for some students with ASD in this regard. Lastly, teachers identified a number of challenges they encounter regarding inclusion, arising specifically from the category or type of SEN/disability, the student presents with. The next chapter traces the pathway of lifelong learning for the inclusive PE teacher.

Chapter 6: The Pathway of Lifelong learning for the Inclusive PE Teacher

6.1: Introduction

The broad theme of *the pathway of lifelong learning for the inclusive PE Teacher* is presented and discussed in this chapter. The theme focuses around the following four sub-themes, outlined in chapter four in table 4.2, namely; continuing professional development (CPD), initial teacher education (ITE), perceived competency and support and, lastly the PE curriculum. The focus is on the practising PE teacher, particularly within the last stage of Feiman-Nemser's (2001) professional learning framework. This chapter centres on the second and third research questions:

- What are PE teachers' continuing professional development requirements for the future in order to support inclusion?
- What are PE teachers' experiences of inclusion and Physical education, in relation to their perceived sense of competency and initial teacher education?

6.2: Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

In the CPD phase of Feiman-Nemser's (2001, p. 1049) continuum *learning to teach* she alludes to the conundrum that "professional development is everybody's and nobody's responsibility".

Indeed, most participating teachers did not have experience of CPD specific to inclusive PE or adapted physical education. However, they did have experience of special educational needs CPD in general.

We had in-service training on a regular basis in England and we've had it in Ireland on various subjects and various SEN, kinda mild general learning difficulties, dyslexia etc., but nothing specifically related to PE [Noel, interview 1].

Yes, but in relation to Special Ed... No, not in relation to PE [Gina, interview 1].

We would have had a number of courses here that would be for you know it's across the board for the staff, and just I suppose just informing people and up-skilling people in teaching students with special needs. So I've had that training, not specific to PE [Jane, interview 1].

In relation to overall PE, Ed felt that CPD in PE has decreased over the years; *when I started here first there was a wide array of Junior Cert PE in-service, and they all to me, they've all dried up now* [Interview 1]. Sam was the only teacher who had attended a practical workshop specific to APE; *on a practical level I did attend a workshop that would have been about I'd say a year or maybe two years ago, and that was autism specific in relation to PE* [interview 1]. Thus it would seem from interpreting teachers' experiences that there is a lack of CPD specific to inclusive PE. This finding concurs with previous research both internationally (Smith and Green 2004; Morley et al., 2005; Ko and Boswell 2013; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017) and nationally (Meegan and McPhail 2006; Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a).

All teachers in this study expressed an interest in participating in CPD specific to inclusive PE. They felt that there is a need for it currently: *... like there are so many more students that have special educational needs going into mainstream schools I think teachers need it (CPD)* [Mona, interview 1]. A central element arising from Tant and Watelain's (2016) systematic review on inclusion in PE was the need for adapted PE professional development throughout the teachers' career. This need was identified by participating teachers in my study, both at interview and reflective entry phase: *Like I would say if you asked any PE teacher, they would say that they don't know enough about (adapted PE)* [Gina, interview 1] and *I do think there is a big need for more training in this area (inclusion)* [Carly, reflective entry of-action].

Particular areas of need within CPD were identified amongst teachers. Inextricably linked to this need is the institutional and cultural dimension of situated learning (McPhail, Kirk and Griffin 2008; Quennerstedt et al., 2014; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017). This need was reflected by the school's SEN profile, for example school one is the only school with wheelchair users. Noel in this school stated, *it would be useful to see how other teachers include wheelchair users in soccer games* [reflective entry in-action]. Noel further developed this thought in his of-action reflections:

Help has not been in good supply over the years when looking for ideas on how to include students with movement difficulties. Even from professionals who work with these students every day. A practical guide would be useful. A handbook without philosophy, sociology and psychology. Just a book full of good ideas on how to successfully include students with a variety of issues from dyspraxia to severe cerebral palsy [Noel, reflective entry of-action].

Whereas, school three and four both have ASD units and teachers spoke of the need for CPD in this area specifically:

CPD needs to be continually updated and improved and available. Students with autism may present with different issues from week to week and sometimes within the one class period [Jane, reflective entry of-action].

The need to further educate myself on understanding the needs of children with autism is essential [Sam, school four, reflective entry in-action].

These findings are echoed in Ko and Boswell (2013, p. 234) who found that participants called for 'learning opportunities' related to 'specific instructional content' for inclusive PE. However, school two which has a deaf unit, also identified CPD in autism as an area of need rather than hard of hearing or deafness.

With regards to classes with Hearing Impaired (HI) students we have been given good professional development already and supports from the school [Mona, reflective entry in-action].

Mona further expounded on professional development within her reflections of-action:

I think areas of improvement are definitely needed, an area that I think I would need more help would be challenging behaviour in autism. How to engage the student in the activities more positively and to reduce the challenging behaviours [Mona, reflective entry of-action].

The need for further research relating to students with ASD is highlighted by Haegele and Sutherland (2015). Notably, this is of particular interest due to the increase in the rate of diagnosis and research funding for students with ASD (Obrusnikova and Rocco Dillon 2011, in Haegele and Sutherland 2015). The type of the CPD desired was typically of a practice based workshop rather than a theoretical one. Morley et al., (2005, p. 103) indicate similar findings calling for CPD to be "subject specific, department based and practically orientated". This finding links with Hager's (2011, p. 18) view that important learning for practice in the workplace can only be gleaned from 'practicum experiences'. Additionally, Allport's (1954) contact theory resonates with participants calling for practical workshops directly with students with SEN/ disabilities.

I think practical workshops run by teachers who have done it or professionals who have done it because I think sometimes the theory can be too good on paper. I think you want to know how it goes in practice [Mona, interview 1].

See it (inclusion) working in practice, so somebody to actually come into school and work with the student, as part of a big group, that would be the best way [Noel, interview 2].

Not a manual no, people are very busy in their lives, the manual will get put somewhere, either I'm released from my teaching duties to go to a workshop, or that a workshop happens in the school [Jane, interview 1].

For me personally during the school day which isn't ideal, yeah a workshop would be good, a practical workshop [Ed, interview 1].

I would be interested again in maybe more practical workshops, as opposed to learning more theory [Sam, interview 1].

In the second follow-up interviews teachers reiterated the idea of CPD in real-life PE teaching situations with students with disabilities: *so a specialist, an expert in the field, to come in and work with the students as part of class and give me practical examples about how I can go forward* [Noel, interview 2]. Noel's comment resonates with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) illustrating the potential for learning with a more knowledgeable other. The notion of CPD during school time, emanated strongly from the two most experienced teachers. Undoubtedly providers of CPD need to be aware of teachers' busy lives and to incorporate this viewpoint to ensure engagement. Interestingly just one teacher spoke about the possibilities of unified sports. Mona who holds a master's degree in APA spoke of the potential benefits she felt that unified sport could present for all.

I suppose what I think would be great at the moment would be unified sport and kind of just bringing ... increasing education for students in mainstream schools, which might actually open opportunities to students who maybe should fit in around the adapted sport setting just to bring things into school, the unifiedness, so that then all of a sudden everyone has tried it and it's not just one student on their own that you're suggesting to go and try it [Mona, interview 1].

Tant and Watelain (2016) in their systematic review highlighted a study by Grenier et al., (2014), which indicated the effectiveness of incorporating unified sports on both teachers and typically developing peers. More flexible programmes offering 'adapted and disabled physical activities' appear to be a positive strategy for teachers and students both with and without disabilities (Tant and Watelain 2016, p. 9).

Schools one, two and four have 2 PE teachers or more, whereas school three has just one. Regarding the notion of community of practice (COP) teachers spoke about the idea of informally interacting or 'bouncing ideas' off each other concerning various PE issues.

Yeah we'd talk away if there's something we need to discuss with each other or struggling with, we'd talk about it, informally mainly [Mona, interview 1].

Yeah like we would bounce ideas off each other, I would often ask her for advice on what to do and she would ask me as well [Carly, Interview 1].

Like even colleagues here, I mean I'm lucky in that the two colleagues I have they have probably more up to date experience, relevant experience than I would have. So it's good to bounce things off them [Ed, interview 1].

There's three, yeah there's E and N came in last year as well and myself, and I suppose we all come from different backgrounds and we do, we've a positive relationship. We bounce ideas off each other [Sam, interview 1].

From the interviews conducted it does seem that it is uncommon for PE teachers to meet outside of the school day on a professional level. The notion of developing communities of practice (COP) in the area of APE has been mooted by Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan (2012a) and the PEAI (2018b). However, it does appear from this study that most teachers would prefer CPD to be within school time. This is an important point to be aware of in the current development process of Cosán – the CPD national framework coordinated by The Teaching Council of Ireland. The community of practice as envisaged by Wenger (1998) may need to be re-contextualised in light of the busy lifestyles of teachers of the 21st century.

I suppose when you are talking to other colleagues, you are under time pressure, and usually it's to arrange matches or you are catching up socially and people don't want to talk about work necessarily [Jane, interview 1].

But very rarely would I really meet a PE teacher outside the school you know [Sam, interview 1].

Teachers further expounded on the notion of COP in their reflective e-journals. Mona and Sam spoke about learning with and from other PE teachers;

I think small clustered in-services in PE inclusion, where teachers have found things that work and share those successes would be a positive and would work well. What other things they tried and didn't go so well and it will give ideas. I think different sessions should be held for different needs requirements. You cannot deal with a large volume of needs in a single session as there is too much information [Mona, reflective entry of-action].

I am always open to hearing how other PE teachers meet the challenges of teaching students with disabilities. I am fortunate that I work alongside another PE teacher who has many years' experience and I lean on him at times [Sam, reflective entry of-action].

Again these findings exemplify the ZPD construct of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1978; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017). The notion of learning with and from more knowledgeable others is central to the ZPD construct. Likewise, Ed felt that his experience and his colleagues more recent qualifications, are a successful combination:

The more I have worked with the students my knowledge of autism has increased. I collaborate with the other P.E. teacher. I have twenty years more experience of teaching P.E. than him while he has done the formal autism courses. We make a good team and regularly swap ideas on how to better deliver P.E. to the students with autism. Sometimes I cringe at the notion of the resource or autistic teacher, really, we're all resourceful. One should always be looking at ways of maximising students' enjoyment and participation and devising potential moments of success [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

Pocock and Miyahara (2017, p. 757) in their meta-analysis found that "PE teachers consulted and worked collaboratively with other teachers, teacher aides, specialists, parents and students with disabilities to enhance their teaching instruction and develop valuable support networks". All teachers in the second follow-up interviews, declared that they found the process of maintaining a reflective e-journal useful: *Yeah I found it (reflective process) extremely useful to look at how I approach teaching students with SEN* [Noel, interview 2] and *Yeah I think it (reflective process) was useful to kind of think back, to actually sit and think about what you were doing and why you were doing it* [Mona, interview 2]. Additionally, teachers felt that the reflective process influenced their practice: *It does change your practice, I think it does* [Mona, interview 2] and *I suppose it changed my practice in so far as it made me think about it a bit more deeply* [Sam, interview 2].

When teaching in the UK, Noel was required to maintain a professional portfolio: *It was a positive thing, because self-reflection is something a teacher does...well should do...at the end of every day, but it doesn't seem to be coordinated here (in Ireland) that a teacher would be doing that over a period of a year or 2 years or over their career* [Noel, interview 2]. However, this process may be imminent as central to Cosán, the developing National Framework for Teachers Learning in Ireland, is reflective practice (Teaching Council 2018). Currently, Cosán is undertaking a development process between 2016 and 2020, whereby they are engaging with the teaching profession regarding the proposed framework, "in the reality of the contexts in which they practice" (Teaching Council 2018). Furthermore, in the second follow-up interviews teachers articulated a desirability around the idea of a community of practice or shared learning: *It's (COP) probably the most realistic way* [Mona, interview 2] and *if a new member of staff is paired with a more experienced member of staff there's a lot of learning that goes on* [Noel, interview 2]. Learning from, with and about each other's practice strongly emanates from the findings, grounded in the theoretical framework of socioculturalism (Vygotsky 1978; Grenier 2010) and communities of practice (Wenger 1998). A number of the PE teachers referred to the positive engagement and interaction with student PE teachers during their professional teaching practice. Jane in particular found this engagement useful as she is the only PE teacher in her school.

I'd say my most engaging really is with students that are doing their teaching practice with the local University, and I mean they are probably way ahead of where I am really because they are being trained in that (APA) now. And I would always try and learn anything I can from them as well [Jane, interview 1].

We have A who is a Higher diploma student who is here for the year she comes to us for advice and then because she comes from college she has loads of fresh new ideas and passes them onto us which is brilliant [Carly, interview 1].

Wenger (1998) identifies practice as a process whereby we experience and engage in the world in a meaningful way. He expounds on the community and practice connection through describing three dimensions of the liaison. These three dimensions: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire resonates well with the PE teacher and student teacher interaction as portrayed by the participants.

6.3: Initial Teacher Education

Table 6.1 presents an outline summary of the participating PE teachers' recollection of their formal training in Adapted Physical Education (APE). As to be expected the most experienced teachers, Noel, Jane and Ed did not receive any formal training in APE. Jane and Ed completed their degrees during the eighties and Noel during the 1990s. The field of APA and inclusive PE in Ireland really only started to develop towards the end of the 1990s and early 2000s with the emergence of the Education Act (1998) and the EPSEN Act (2004).

Noel who trained in the UK, whilst not receiving any formal training in APA, felt that his college provided a positive grounding in differentiation: *but what I will say about the college that I went to was that differentiation was a very, very important and integral part of my training* [Noel, interview 1]

Table 6.1: Summary of Teachers’ specific training in adapted physical education (APE)/ adapted physical activity (APA)

PE teacher & school	Years of experience	Qualifying University and APE/ APA specific training
Noel – 1	22	University A - No
Gina - 1	7	University B - One module during undergraduate degree
Mona - 2	10	University B - One module during undergraduate degree and holds a masters in APA
Carly – 2	6	University C - Doesn’t remember doing a module in APA/APE
Jane – 3	27	University D - No
Ed – 4	28	University D - No
Sam - 4	4	University C - A number of modules on APA/APE and holds a diploma in autism studies

Carly could not recollect a module on APA even though she is a recent graduate and the particular University she attended does offer training in APA.

I’d say maybe a week, I don’t remember it (APA) I don’t remember doing a module in it. No, but as I say we were the first year but I know they have since I know they do wheelchair basketball tournaments and stuff like [Carly, interview 1].

However, as a PE teacher I have never been trained in inclusion for students with SEN and for me it really is a case of trial and error. So far there have been more successes than error but each week I am learning something new about how to work with Paul (who has a visual and hearing impairment). I will keep an eye out for courses on inclusion for students with SEN in PE as this is my first year really needing that extra help and I’m surprised at the lack of training I did in college for this area [Carly, reflective entry in-action].

Gina and Mona attended the same university and both completed one module on APA. As part of the APA module Gina attended a residential setting and planned physical activities for the individuals there. However, both felt it was not adequate to meet their current needs.

My primary degree definitely not [Mona, interview 1].

No - some were severely intellectually and physically... they had physical needs, so you know I suppose they wouldn't be in a school setting. And so classes, so people did get a good experience, but I suppose it wasn't like a school setting either [Gina, interview 1].

The last point articulated by Gina is salient, highlighting the requisite to offer practicum ITE experiences on inclusion, closely resembling a post-primary school culture and context. This resonates with the construct of enculturation of accepted norms and values within a school setting (Qi, Wang and Ha 2017). Lastly, Sam is the most recent graduate, albeit a mature student. He portrays the strongest image of his ITE in relation to APE and also of the infusion aspect throughout all his modules studied.

Yes, during the course of studying for my degree, I studied modules on adapted physical activity, this was mandatory and very practical. There can never be enough training to prepare teaching students with disabilities, however the training I received provided a practical foundation for working with students with disabilities. Also during the course of the four-year degree, while studying various sports, we were regularly reminded to be cognisant of developing a plan for including students with disabilities [Sam, interview 1].

Nonetheless, it would appear that the majority of PE teachers in this study feel that their ITE was inadequate as regards inclusion. Similar findings were evident with Qi, Wang and Ha (2017, p. 98) whereby participating teachers indicated that their ITE was “insufficient for them to meet the standards of the actual inclusive teaching environment”. Megan and McPhail (2006) highlighted alarming statistics regarding ITE and inclusion in Ireland. In their study only four participants from a sample of 186 had completed a module in SEN. Currently, recent PE graduates have completed mandatory modules in APE (Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a). However, in my study it does appear that completion of one module in APE is not adequate. Even with the government policy of inclusion, both internationally (Vickerman 2007a; Vickerman and Coates 2009) and in the Irish context (Meegan and MacPhail 2006; Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a) it would seem that many PE teachers lack adequate professional development in the area.

Selected teachers were probed further during the second follow-up interviews, regarding their views on how inclusion or APE should be delivered at ITE stage. Studies relating to PE teacher trainer providers (Vickerman 2007a; Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a), indicated that providers support inclusion, but policies, procedures and practices vary widely. Certainly, this was reflected with the varied experiences of the participating teachers

in my study. Teachers were asked regarding their views on whether inclusion of students with disabilities in PE should be infused into all modules or taught as stand-alone modules in ITE stage. Interestingly, both Jane and Mona felt that inclusion should be infused or embedded: *with the way teaching is going it (inclusion) probably should be infused into everything and you're going to have to deal with it in everything just to ingrain it more as a reflex rather than as a think about how do I do this* [Mona, interview 2] and *so I suppose really it (inclusion) has to be included in all aspects of teaching* [Jane, interview 2]. Noel and Sam felt that initial training should include a combination of both stand-alone and infusion type modules. Infusion or embedding of SEN within PE training is strongly supported within the literature (Vickerman 2007a; Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a).

Furthermore, emanating from Tant and Watelain's (2016) systematic review, studies that examined the relationship between training in APE and teachers' attitudes towards inclusion were contradictory. In the review, studies on attitude were quantitative, based on a questionnaire. Similar findings emerged in relation to PE teachers' age and their attitude, however they do highlight one study (Rizzo 1985, in Tant and Watelain 2016, p. 6) which found "that younger teachers showed a more favourable attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities". Interestingly, in my study Carly was the only teacher when asked about their attitude towards inclusion, who highlighted an age related difference:

I think some teachers are probably afraid alright of what's out there it's awful to say but maybe older teachers are a bit more reluctant than younger teachers [Carly, interview 1].

When probed on why she felt this way she stated that it was "probably lack of experience and training... it's a new enough thing to colleges to have that (adapted PE) included" [Carly, interview 1]. Evidently, in this study participating teachers felt that their ITE in relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities was inadequate. Teachers' views regarding the quality of their ITE, influences their beliefs about their perceived ability to work with students with disabilities, indicating higher levels of efficacy amongst teachers with a positive view of their ITE (Avramidas and Norwich 2002; Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005).

6.4: Perceived Competency and Support

Perceived competency in the context of this study is a subjective concept pertaining to the participating teachers' feelings regarding their knowledge, skills and attitudes towards inclusive PE. For the most part teachers appear to be somewhat confident with inclusion, however the word 'challenge' emerged from a number of the interviewees.

It's (inclusion) challenging but I kind of try and take it on as much as I can [Mona, interview 1].

I have never felt uncomfortable in my teaching. Including all students in every class can be challenging whether they have a specific need or not. Differentiated work is part and parcel of the daily routine [Noel, interview 1].

I think it (inclusion) is hard in a PE setting, especially when its skill base, I find it yeah quite challenging at times [Gina, interview 1].

I do (feel competent) if I knew the child's background and they're very good here we have great special needs teacher coordinator [Carly, interview 1].

These feelings expressed by teachers have resonance with the findings from Morley et al., (2005) and Ko and Boswell (2013). Delving deeper into the participating teachers' e-journal reflections indicated a perceived sense of improved practice from the experience of inclusion. This echoes strongly with the very roots of reflection and the importance of reflective practice as espoused by Dewey (1933); Freire (1972); van Manen (1977):

Overall I really think working with students with SEN and other disabilities has really made me a better teacher. It has made me think outside the box and it has opened my eyes to the many possibilities that PE class can offer [Carly, reflective entry of-action].

As these challenges are overcome, I become more confident and as a consequence my teaching practice improves. For example, several students with autism also have dyspraxia which has implications for how I plan and deliver the movement classes [Sam, reflective entry in-action].

A strong sense of perceived competence appears to be the key factor which predicts a positive teacher attitude towards inclusion in PE (Tant and Watelain 2016). Ed spoke of the importance of teachers' empathy and the individual attitude of a person. Similar sentiments were articulated by Jane: *I don't feel apprehensive to be honest, because I feel I just want to help them (students with a disability) really, to be honest* [Jane, interview 2]. This view represents the importance of the social-relational interaction between the teacher and the student (Grenier 2010).

I would yeah (feel comfortable), I think a lot of it is, it comes down to your own make-up too. You know it's easy to use the term inclusion and have PE, have sport for everyone and

activities, but a lot of it comes down to your own attitude. I don't think there's any one strategy, or even two, or three, but a lot of it comes down to your own individual take, your own attitude, your own empathy [Ed, interview 1].

Likewise, the interactionist, sociocultural process through which learning develops resonates with Ed's view (De Valenzuela 2007), highlighting 'attitude, empathy and one's own individual take'. Sam appeared to be most comfortable with including students with SEN/disabilities in PE: *Yeah I'd feel comfortable with it (inclusion)* [Sam, interview 1]. Mona felt reasonably competent, but identified an issue with a particular type of disability: *In certain aspects of inclusiveness I feel quite competent. This year I have a student who has a visual impairment and I'm finding that quite difficult* [Mona, interview 2]. Similarly, Campos, Ferreira and Block (2015, p. 4) found that their teacher participants identified "visual impairment as the most difficult disability to accommodate in PE classes". Drawing from sociocultural theory and interaction, the strategy of peer support and the zone of proximal development (Aubrey and Riley 2016; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017) may be useful in this scenario.

Emanating strongly from the PE teachers reflective e-journals was the view of teacher adaptation. Interestingly, Ko and Boswell (2013, p. 231) highlighted this same theme in their findings: "necessity of adaptations of teaching practices was discussed repeatedly". In the context of physical education, adaptation theory (Kiphard 1983; Sherrill 1998; 2004) posits that by adjusting features such as equipment, environment, teaching style and rules to meet diverse needs, positive outcomes can be achieved. From the analysis of the teachers' reflections the category of teacher adaptation emerged as the most recurrent. Participating teachers gave specific examples of their everyday adaptations:

The next section of the class was devoted to High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) exercises. This was challenging for the ASD students because it involved agility challenges using hurdles, ladders and cones. In fairness, they all attempted the exercises but they struggled to match the speed and quality of the other students. This was due to their coordination difficulties. I differentiated their tasks when appropriate. For example, I adjusted the hurdles for them to make them lower and easier to jump [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

ASD students are more vulnerable to physical contact and also the lights and noise can impact on their sensory difficulties. I try to be mindful of this. For example, I try to minimise use of the whistle as much as possible and have plenty of yoga mats on site [Ed, reflective entry in-action].

I as a PE teacher must be aware of the language I use as Amy (who has ASD) understands English in its literal sense. I asked the girls to jump as high as they could and to touch the roof!! Amy said that was impossible!! [Jane, reflective entry in-action].

As a teacher I often modify game rules to include Donna (who has autism) and I find that the other students are receptive [Jane, reflective entry of-action].

Class of mixed Hearing impaired and non-Hearing impaired students: just making sure that I am always facing the students giving instructions and likewise if I ask the students to run something that they use gestures for 'go' and 'stop' rather than shouts [Mona, Reflective entry in-action].

Susan is a student with a hearing impairment and a general learning disability. She is an unwilling participant to PE and would struggle with co-ordination. I modify the movement of walking lunges to static lunges, this gives Susan more time to gain her balance and figure out what to do. We also do this together so she has someone to follow [Mona, Reflective entry in-action].

We do not implement the official rules when playing Badminton. Instead, the students (with ASD) pair off and strike the shuttlecock over the net to each other [Sam, reflective entry in-action].

I try to ensure smooth transitions between activities in my PE classes. I find that this helps to prevent a loss of structure to the lesson and minimises the space when vulnerable students (students with ASD) are exposed [Sam, reflective entry of-action].

Certainly, from the reflections it would appear that teachers are continuously adapting in practice to meet the individual needs of students with SEN/disabilities. Adaptation theory indicates that many activities will be accessible to students with SEN/disabilities only if they are adapted (Lieberman and Houston- Wilson 2009).

There are a number of support agencies available to post primary teachers in Ireland in relation to SEN/disabilities. Additionally, there are some specific organisations which promote physical activity/physical education for persons with disabilities. I was keen to ascertain participating teachers' knowledge and possible interface with such agencies and organisations. Table 6.2 illustrates a summary outline of teacher responses in relation to these.

Table 6.2: Knowledge of selected agencies and organisations.

Name	NCSE	PDST	SENO	EIPET	CARA	SIDO	PEAI
1-Noel	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓
1-Gina	X	✓	X	X	X	X	✓
2-Mona	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓
2-Carly	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓
3-Jane	X	✓	X	X	X	X	✓
4-Ed	X	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓
4-Sam	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓

Note: NCSE: National Council for Special education. PDST: Professional Development Service for teachers. SENO: Special Education Needs Organiser. EIPET: European Inclusive Physical Education Training. CARA: is a national organisation promoting sport and physical activity opportunities for people with disabilities in Ireland. SIDO: Sports Inclusion Disability officer. PEA: Physical Education Association of Ireland.

All teachers were familiar with the PEA, however only one teacher had heard of EIPET (Noel) and NCSE (Sam). Just under half (three teachers) had heard of CARA and SIDO. Most (six) teachers were familiar with PDST. On the other hand, only the two teachers in school four were aware of the SENO role. Additionally, two teachers highlighted support from the Irish Wheelchair Association Sport and one teacher mentioned the National Behaviour Support Service.

We have had wheelchair basketball eh, reverse inclusion sessions in the school. I think it was run by The Irish Wheelchair Association [Noel, interview 1].

I suppose one thing that is worth mentioning is that the Irish Wheelchair Association do workshops with fourth years [Jane, interview 1].

I would have dealt with the National Behaviour Support service (NBSS) but that would be behavioural support [Mona, interview 1].

During the second round interviews teachers were further probed in relation to support agencies. The general consensus was that external organisations could engage more with teachers: *I think they (external organisations) probably all could do a little bit more* [Mona, interview 2]. Jane was particularly scathing of the Teaching Council: *All I know is that I'm obliged to pay x amount of money and I'm threatened with not getting paid my salary if I don't pay the money. And it's a negative experience for me unfortunately* [Jane, interview 2]. Furthermore, she felt external organisations were not in touch with the day to day reality of school life: *a lot of organisations they have no idea how a school runs unfortunately. They have no idea that a bell goes at quarter to nine, you see x amount of students for x amount of time and then you may not see them again for ... until next week* [Jane, interview 2]. It is imperative that the Teaching Council are aware of these frustrations in order to create a meaningful professional development pathway for teachers. The Teaching Council (2018) in their Cosán development process document (2016-2020), suggest engaging with the teaching profession regarding the proposed framework, “in the reality of the contexts in which they practice”. It would appear that this engagement has not permeated into the coalface of practising teachers as of yet.

Though not the primary focus of this research I was interested in capturing the PE teachers' experience of working with special needs assistants (SNA) as a support. The response was varied, mostly positive albeit with a number of issues and concerns emerging. Qi, Wang and Ha (2017) in their findings identified SNAs or Teaching assistants (TA) as a good method of support to aid student learning. However, they caution that “differences in background, previous training attended, and personal experiences of TAs must be considered” in relation to training (Qi, Wang and Ha 2017, p. 98).

Both teachers in school four presented an encouraging account of their experiences with SNAs in PE.

Yeah well the SNA's attend every PE class. There's at least one SNA at every PE class. Their support is very practical, for example helping students to tie laces on their runners, or helping to identify a student in their care would need a sensory break. I might miss something, I might just not cop that one student is having a bad day, and I rely on the SNA's as a crutch there to tip me off if they are [Sam, interview 1].

I think you should look upon each other as professionals as a support, especially when it comes to (student) anxiety.... On a more practical note of course, when it comes to actual laces, kit, notes home, medical concerns, it's great to have somebody a liaison. Whereas like when you are dealing with 15, 20, 25 lads you can forget something. So it's good to have somebody that can liaise with the parents as well, but in most cases yeah they are quite supportive [Ed, interview 1].

Jane in school three presented a contrasting view. She felt that some SNAs have developed poor habits in relation to their involvement and their own attire for a practical PE class.

Mixed, very mixed, very mixed, I suppose you live and learn kind of a situation, people (SNAs) can get into bad habits, and very hard to break bad habits. So I suppose going forward I've said to the principal there needs to be a policy, is there a policy number one, and if there isn't that we need a policy going forward. And I'm not the only person that has happened to really because I'm speaking to other people in practical classes as well, and there are just issues around health and safety [Jane, interview 1].

The teachers in school two presented slightly different views. Carly was very positive. Whereas Mona whilst finding the SNA interaction helpful, favoured peer assistance as a more inclusive strategy in PE.

Absolutely 100% I have an SNA in my X years due to a kid leaving in the class and she's fantastic with everyone not just this kid [Carly, interview 1].

I found it (SNA support) very helpful but I'm quite happy to kind of get on my own as well. I suppose it depends on the student and like I will work ... if it is someone who has very poor coordination sometimes I will work with them but you don't want them ... I think it segregates them more if the adult works with them. So a lot of the time I would try not to do that. I just try and pair them with a weaker student or else a very caring, kind, stronger student who will actually help them. I think if they work too much with the adults they don't get the interaction of working with other students [Mona, interview 1].

Interestingly, Mona has epitomised learning through peer collaborative interaction. This type of learning interaction can be more facilitative than student and adult interaction or a student working alone in certain scenarios (Sullivan Palincsar 1998). Likewise, the PE teachers in school one presented a varied perspective. Noel's experience was positive with an addendum relating to the individual SNA. Interestingly, Gina found the SNA support good in other subjects but not in PE as the SNAs did not stay for the PE class. This latter point emanated also from Morley et al., (2005) study, whereby PE teachers felt that the support from SNAs was more forthcoming in other subjects rather than PE, where it was greatly needed.

It completely totally depends on the SNA (slight laugh) with the type of support and success. It depends on the relationship with the student and the SNA. I would say generally the support that I've had is very, very positive [Noel, interview 1].

It's amazing how different they (SNA) are from school to school. But I do think it's a lot of is set from management, it's either tolerated that they can drop off their student and then go, or it's not tolerated.....not in the PE context I wouldn't say, but I find the SNA's here are brilliant with the students (in other subjects) [Gina, interview 1].

On the other hand, Mona emphasised the important role of the SNA in order for the student to thrive in certain activities:

For some classes this (adaptation) is made much easier by the presence of a SNA with me during the class so we can help the student succeed in the activity or modify it accordingly. Where there is no SNA if a student struggles then it can be much more difficult if the student needs continuous individual help as I also need to consider getting to the other students, and leading the session [Mona, reflective entry of-action].

Likewise, Sam spoke of the nature of support given by the SNA: *In these circumstances (adaptation) I am also dependent upon the quality and support of the SNA on duty during the lesson* [Sam, reflective entry of-action]. In his follow-up interview Sam referred to the vital role of the SNA regarding issues around changing for students with ASD.

An issue we have in P.E. especially with the younger students is that some of the students with autism don't want to change in the bigger changing room. Also a lot of them would have motor difficulties so when it comes to putting on their uniform afterwards they can't put on their ties and the SNA is critical to be around to be able to do things like that [Sam, interview 2].

Teacher's attitude towards support and collaboration with special educational needs assistants (SNA) or teaching assistants is generally favourable (Tant and Watelain 2016). However, this collaboration is restricted by the SNAs lack of knowledge in the specific area of inclusive PE (Vickerman and Blundell 2012; Pederson, Cooley and Rottier 2014). These findings concur with my study for the most part. As outlined in the Department of Education and Skills Circular 30/2014, the role of the SNA in Ireland is defined in terms of supporting a child with a disability regarding their 'care needs' and does not involve a teaching role. Mona was very definite on this: *they're (SNAs) legally supposed to be in a class for personal and care skills, the Department have made that very clear in certain cases* [Mona, interview 2]. However, a review conducted by the Department of Education and Skills (2011, p. 15) on value for money and Policy review of the SNA scheme, found that in practice the role of the SNA was increasingly incorporating "behavioural, therapeutic, pedagogical/teaching and administrative duties", stretching outside of their defined remit. This reality was reflected by Jane: *I mean if you have a SNA who will turn up in a tracksuit, in her runners and wants to take part it's like having a second PE teacher* [Jane, interview 2]. Subsequently, the NCSE has recently published a report of its Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme (NCSE 2018).

In this report, recommendations are made to provide a continuum of support to students with additional care needs and to change the name of special needs assistant (SNA) to inclusion support assistant, reflecting a focus on developing independence.

6.5: Physical Education Curriculum

Currently the PE curricula in Ireland at both junior and senior cycle is at a transition stage with new curricula being introduced (NCCA 2012; Government of Ireland 2016). Participating teachers were asked if they were aware of the new courses and specifically if they felt they would be useful for students with SEN/disabilities. Most teachers were aware of the new courses albeit somewhat sceptical.

I think it's not quite as easy as they're (curricular planners) making it out to be to deliver. I think they've aimed it at students who are in the high achieving schools who are very get up and go and do it all themselves, whereas I don't think a lot of students ... looking at my own students that we have here I see huge problems. I remembered talking with the other P.E. teacher here and the two of us just going 'that assessment would never work here' [Mona, interview 1].

Similarly, Mona's concern regarding assessment was also evident in Qi, Wang and Ha (2017, p. 99) findings, whereby "teachers indicated their uncertainty about the assessment and grading of students with disabilities". Furthermore, teachers in my study indicated an overall negativity towards the new curricula.

I am aware of the new courses, I have read the syllabuses, but I don't see them any more useful for APE than the courses that have gone before them [Noel, interview 1].

Personally I think it's probably too broad, the short courses are not specific enough. I think we were making great strides with our strands, and I think it's too loose at the moment, and there isn't enough guidelines there. But just from reading up on the short courses, I thought it was very vague and I didn't like it [Gina, interview 1].

In the UK The New National Curriculum was introduced in 2008, it aimed to provide more flexible teaching opportunities for individualised curricula for children with SEN (QCA 2007 cited in Coates and Vickerman 2008, p. 174). However, as noted by Coates and Vickerman (2008) appropriate training of teachers is required to implement such individualised curricula. Evidently, this latter observation by Coates and Vickerman (2008) has strong relevance in the current Irish context. Likewise, Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan (2012a, p. 35) in their study found that PE initial teacher educators felt that the then Irish

National PE curriculum did not provide “PE teachers with a clear framework for developing inclusive activities”. Whether the new curricula will accomplish inclusive best practice remains to be seen upon implementation, however the preliminary response from practising teachers appears to not be encouraging. Furthermore, whilst discussing the curricula the issue of inadequate time allocated to PE emerged.

It must be what an hours’ activity for each child, you know that doesn’t really make sense to me. So I mean there isn’t enough PE really [Jane, interview 1].

Well the curricula are fine, but the problem I find is that not enough time is devoted to PE [Sam, interview 1].

Additionally, the centrality of the teacher to adapt curricula was emphasised. Again, this resonates strongly with the adaptation theory posited by Kiphard (1983) and further developed by Sherrill (1994, 2004). Adaptation theory postulates that teachers need to be able to adapt and modify (task, environment, instruction, etc.) according to the needs of the individual student to create optimal inclusive learning opportunities. Furthermore, the concept of teacher agency permeates from Sam and Carly’s iterations.

But again I think with any curricula especially PE, its fine but I think it’s up to each individual teacher to be open and eager to, and to be interested enough to develop. I suppose to look at the curriculum and adapt it where required to meet any students that they cater for with disabilities [Sam, interview 1].

I suppose a lot of adapting a lesson is down to the PE teacher really, what the teacher wants to do and how the teacher approaches it [Carly, interview 1].

Indeed, central to learning is the notion of the agentic teacher interacting in a social and situated context (Cairns and Malloch 2011). Most recently the notion of agency has gained momentum particularly in deliberations on workplace and lifelong learning (Billett 2006; Collin and Billet 2010; Paloniemi and Collin 2012 in Eteläpelto et al, 2013). In the second follow-up interview Sam reiterated his belief on the centrality of the agentic PE teacher to facilitate best practice inclusion.

I think that ultimately the onus is on the P.E. teacher, I think to look at the curriculum and interpret it and be the one responsible for making sure that all students are included, because no matter what curriculum I think you’re presented with it will be pretty broad and generic [Sam, interview 2].

Similar to previous findings (Smith and Green 2004; Morley et al., 2005) participating teachers felt that competitive team activities are less conducive to inclusive practice. Teachers mentioned activities such as dance, gymnastics, mini games and health related activities (HRA) as most suitable to inclusion.

I think the very competitive games, I think basketball and soccer are ones that students with most disabilities will fall back on. I would see that it becomes very obvious that there are differences between people is when you go into a competitive game and especially as the students become a little bit older. Mini games work well because the teams are small and you can divide them up. I think Gymnastics, aquatics and HRA can work well. Athletics can work well because you can do a lot of individual stuff. I wouldn't be a major teacher of dance I have to admit but I can see that that would be a great benefit [Mona, interview 1].

It should be wrong to say that you can't include a student in *any* activity really. Although sometimes the level of inclusion, the type of inclusion is obviously going to change for certain activities [Noel, interview 1].

My findings concur with Tant and Watelain's (2016) systematic review indicating that PE teachers feel that competitive and large scale game type activities may not be conducive to inclusion, as the focus is on performance, excellence and technical skill.

I mean some activities are more conducive to inclusion, for example activities like orienteering I find, and maybe even gymnastics, they level the playing field, because it even with soccer in PE you will have some students who are playing every week with their clubs, and they are very competent [Sam, interview 1].

Amy (who has ASD) doesn't feel safe in a traditional fast moving team game like Basketball or soccer. She is afraid that she will get knocked over or hit with the ball. She is happy to take on another role like team manager or scorekeeper. Amy loves colourful things and responds positively. I recently did a fun warm up game with balloons. She was delighted and expressed this with glee. We also worked with a colourful parachute and created a routine to music. Amy was ecstatic [Jane, reflective entry in-action].

Traditionally in Ireland the PE curriculum has tended towards games based activities with an emphasis on winning (Oireachtas 2005; Woods et al., 2010). Ed reiterated this point: *but too often you know we associate PE with games and sport and competition* [Ed, interview one]. Likewise, Noel in his follow-up interview reiterated this phenomenon: *I'm guilty of this as well, especially with the numbers that are coming down to you at the minute, it's easy to organise a team game, so games would be taught I'd guess 75 per cent maybe. I'd say it's probably higher, that 75 per cent of the time in Ireland would be spent on team games* [Noel, interview 2]. This over-reliance on games within PE is concerning, particularly as the consensus in the literature cites that large type, competitive games are not conducive to inclusion (Smith and Green 2004; Morley et al., 2005; Tant and Watelain 2016).

6.6: Conclusion

In summation, PE teachers in this study felt that there is a tangible need for continuing professional development specific to inclusive PE. The type of continuing professional development preferred is of a practice based nature, directly involving students with SEN/disabilities. Furthermore, the majority (six) of teachers opined that their initial teacher education was inadequate to meet their current needs regarding inclusion and PE. Exploring the area of perceived competency, teachers felt somewhat comfortable with inclusion, but the word *challenge* emerged a number of times. Moreover, a rather negative consensus arose in relation to the new PE curricula and their impact on inclusion. Interestingly, participating teachers view towards SNA support was generally favourable with some caveats in relation to the individual SNA and their lack of specialised knowledge in the area of inclusive PE. Similar to previous research findings, teachers felt that competitive, fast moving, team games are less conducive to inclusive practice. As a final point, recurrently emanating from teacher reflections was the continuous need for adaptations to optimise inclusive learning opportunities. The next chapter explores experiences in PE articulated by the voices of students with SEN/disabilities.

Chapter 7: The Student Voice: Are You Included

7.1: Introduction

In this chapter the voices of students with SEN/disabilities are articulated and interpreted. The students' voices are important, as they are the central stakeholders in the learning process in their PE class (Haegele and Sutherland 2015). A previous absence of student voice signifies a gap in the literature (Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk 2003a; Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk 2003b; Fitzgerald and Stride 2012; Haegele and Sutherland 2015; Wickman 2015). My main aim in this chapter is to interpret the students' experiences of their PE class:

- The first theme explores student perspectives and interactions, encompassing the students' perspective on inclusion, social interactions and influences within PE (Table 4.3, chapter four).
- The second theme examines curricular related areas in PE such as supports, barriers, needs and the nature of physical activities (Table 4.3, chapter four).

Gaining this student insight provides both empowerment for the student and provides researchers with a rich understanding into the students' lived experiences in their education (Coates and Vickerman 2010). A key finding identified by Squires, Kalamvouka and Bragg (2016) was that students want to be involved in decisions about their education and support arrangements. Indeed, this real life insight into students' perspectives may provide useful ideas to support appropriate strategies to enhance inclusion in PE. This chapter focuses on the fourth research question: What are students' with disabilities, experiences of their physical education classes?

7.2: Background Data

A descriptor of each student (using a pseudonym) is presented in Table 7.1. The information relating to the students was offered by the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) in schools one and three, by the PE teacher in school two and by the PE/ ASD teacher in school four. Additionally, reflections drawn from my researcher diary contributed towards the student descriptor.

The students ranged in age from 15 years (3rd year) to 17 years (5th year) approximately. TY refers to Transition Year, which is the year between 3rd year and 5th year in Irish post primary schools.

Students diagnosed with a range of categories of SEN/disabilities were sought in line with Haegele's and Sutherland's (2015, p. 270) recommendation of exploring "the perspectives of students with various disabilities". Thus, students with sensory impairment (deaf and hard of hearing), students with physical disabilities and students with ASD volunteered and contributed to the data. Furthermore, the importance of conducting research with students with ASD has been highlighted "due to increases in the rate of diagnosis and research funding" (Obrusnikova and Rocco Dillon 2011, cited in Haegele and Sutherland 2015, p. 270).

Table 7.1: An overview of the students’ stage of schooling, gender, nature of disabilities and characteristics observed

	Student	School	Gender	Nature of disability and characteristics
1	Dan*, 5 th year,	One	M	<i>Wheelchair user, spina bifida</i> , no lower body sensation and weak upper body. Outgoing and positive with good humour. Good communicator
2	Jim*, 3 rd year	One	M	<i>Cerebral Palsy</i> , ambulant but with poor balance, some hearing loss and has a stammer. Needed time to verbalise his answers. Sociable student.
3	Nora*, TY	Two	F	<i>Hard of hearing</i> , can lip read, requires quiet background, voice was slightly unclear but understandable, friendly and enthusiastic.
4	Aidan* 5 th year	Two	M	<i>Profoundly deaf</i> , communicates through sign language, quietly confident, good communication with body gesture, facial expression and eye contact.
5	Carmen*, TY	Three	F	ASD, dyspraxia, spoke slowly but had good eye contact. Concentration seemed to wane a little.
6	Amy*, TY	Three	F	ASD, needs time to process, stilted accent, intense facial expression, literal responses.
7	Greta* TY	Three	F	ASD, speech impediment, overweight, pleasant demeanour with good humour.
8	Connor*, TY	Four	M	ASD and dyspraxia, poor motor skills, keen soccer fan, is sociable and popular with classmates. Responses to questions were short and literal.
9	Seamus*, TY	Four	M	ASD, no eye contact during conversation, but was willing to talk at length, had a slightly accentuated voice.
10	Carl*, TY	Four	M	ASD, speech was fast and a little unclear at times, quiet student, can become nervous and has difficulty with eye contact.

*Pseudonym used, TY= Transition Year

7.3: Student perspectives and interactions

Data derived from the ten student interviews generated two main themes. Student perspectives and interactions constitute the first theme, drawing from sociocultural concepts of inter-subjectivity (Qi, Wang and Ha 2017) and learning through social interaction (Quennerstedt et al., 2014). The theme encompasses students' sense of inclusion in PE class and their perspective/view towards PE. Additionally, the theme incorporates student interactions between the PE teacher, the SNA (if applicable) and other students. Lastly, influencers on student participation are included within the theme of student perspectives and interactions, guided by a sociocultural approach connecting relationships within cultural contexts (Wertsch 1998).

7.3.1: Inclusion and perspective

Arising from the thematic category of inclusion and perspective, the students' feelings concerning their sense of belonging or inclusion in PE is interpreted. With respect to school two, both students, Nora (hard of hearing) and Aidan (profoundly deaf) generally felt included in PE. However, occasionally an issue arose regarding communication.

Yeah sometimes I wouldn't be able to hear and I feel a bit left out but I'd be like its grand, I'll just watch them or I'll ask the student [Nora, interview].

Just one time before (negative experience) when I was in second year. The teacher tried to sign but the hearing people were making noise and were very, very loud and they were just doing horseplay and the teacher couldn't sign to me because she was too busy disciplining the other students so the message wasn't conveyed clearly to me because the teacher was too busy [Aidan, interview].

For the most part students felt included in PE. When I posed the question: Do you ever feel left out in PE ...? The following students proffered a definite "no" response: Dan, Jim [school one], Greta, Amy [school three] and Connor [school four]. However, some students, particularly those with ASD depicted a different viewpoint.

Because I'm nervous of kind of doing P.E. and you don't know what she's (the PE teacher) going to do like in the class [Carmen, interview].

Not too much [feeling left out], a little bit, yeah [Carl, interview].

These findings are consistent with current literature indicating that students with SEN/disabilities have positive experiences of PE when they are fully included in classes (Coates and Vickerman 2008). However, emanating from Carmen's and Carl's response, there are days when they feel left out. Goodwin and Watkinson (2000, p. 151) refer to these as "bad days" in PE, whereby the student has negative feelings arising from social isolation, restricted participation and questioning of competency. Whilst not feeling left out of PE per se, Seamus said it depended on the nature of the activity; *If I was playing football or a sport that I'm not used to, yes,... but I don't choose to play football with the other guys, I would feel left out then so that's why I don't play it.* This occurrence of self-removal or requested exclusion was highlighted by Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher (2013) particularly during ball games in relation to students with ASD.

Emanating from the thematic category of inclusion and student perspective, the individual student viewpoint towards PE class was explored. All students interviewed had a positive viewpoint and perspective towards PE with the exception of Amy and Carmen.

No I don't like P.E. I think it's very boring [Amy, interview].

But I struggle in P.E. a lot. Because like I don't really like to run a lot of the time [Carmen, interview].

The remaining eight students all liked PE, particularly from the fun and social aspect, for example Aidan said: *I like it (PE) yes, because we have fun with my friends and we have a chat and we do sport together so yes.* Drawing from sociocultural principles, learning through the social aspect (Quennerstedt et al., 2014) is evident from the data. Seamus has ASD and participates in a Movement class with four other students with ASD as well as the larger, general PE class: *Yes, it (PE) gives people breaks in between and when we have Movement that's really fun as well, even despite the fact that there's only 5 of us running around in a big hall, I mean what's not to love.* This finding concurs with Coates and Vickerman's (2010, p. 1521) study, indicating "that children with SEN enjoy PE in mainstream schools", this was confirmed within their study by the survey data showing 86.2% of the sample enjoyed PE. Additionally, students enjoy PE when they feel socially supported and accepted by their peers (Goodwin and Watkinson 2002; Coates and Vickerman 2010). Moreover, all students, including Amy and Carmen were aware of the health benefits of PE:

Well it's (PE) important for people like myself and for the other students in a wheelchair because it helps them build up their strength and just their independence basically [Dan, interview].

Because you see it would inform your personal health you know to learn what not to do, how to keep healthy and exercise [Carl, interview].

It's because the other classes just have us sitting down in chairs just writing things down while P.E. gets us active and we still learn [Greta].

Similar to previous research, students with SEN/disabilities indicated an awareness of the physical benefits of PE (Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk 2003a; Coates and Vickerman 2008).

7.3.2: Interactions and influences

Drawing from the thematic category of interactions and influences, the notion of interactions between individuals within PE is positioned well within sociocultural theory and situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991; McPhail, Kirk and Griffin 2008). It was evident from the participants' responses that some students preferred to work in PE in individual or smaller type group settings. This preference emanated from three of the participants with ASD, namely, Amy, Carmen and Carl.

First of all, I prefer Movement class because that way there's less people to work with, so everyone gets ... and its fun to work on [Carl, interview].

Yeah (I prefer to work on my own rather than with other students) [Carmen, interview].

Cognisance of the nature of ASD is crucial to understanding such preferences. Impairment in the areas of social communication and interaction is one of the defining criteria for ASD (American Psychiatric Association 2013). When Seamus was asked if he preferred PE in the small movement class or the larger general class, he considered the question difficult, but showing good self-awareness, opted for the general PE class: *That would be quite hard for me. I think the Movement class would suit my need more but I think overall P.E. is really cool and just the amount of activities that we do in it and plus its three classes so I would choose P.E.* Similarly, when asked, Connor felt he liked both classes equally well. Greta was the only student with ASD who clearly preferred the large group interaction in PE.

I like big groups more but I'm terrible with names so it's kind of like big groups have a disadvantage but doing it on my own had a disadvantage too so. Big groups (I prefer) because then if I get confused I can just look around and see what they're doing [Greta, interview].

Interestingly, the students from school one (physical disabilities) and two (deaf and hard of hearing) all indicated a preference towards the larger group type setting and spoke of the importance of the social interaction aspect for them.

I prefer the big group. I prefer the hearing group. But I want the deaf and hard of hearing to be in that big group as well because I like making friends and I like chatting with hearing people and deaf people equally [Aidan, interview].

Taking part is one of the best things I can actually do and interacting with the other students is even better [Dan, interview].

Both positive and negative experiences emerged from the social interaction aspect. Amy recalled an experience whereby she felt another student had been unkind to her in PE: *well there were sometimes over the past few years when student X was mean to me and bossed me about in P.E.* It is worth noting that student X is also a student with SEN. However, Aidan spoke of a positive social interaction encounter: *One of the hearing students knows sign and got me involved in the games so I thought that was very positive.* Both positive and negative interactions experienced by students with SEN/disabilities are consistent with research (Haegele and Sutherland 2015).

When asked about influencing participation in PE, most of the students (four: Greta, Aidan, Amy and Jim) cited “friends”. Subsequently, “parents” were mentioned by three students (Nora, Dan and Seamus). On the other hand, Connor identified his primary teacher as his biggest influence. Whilst Carl identified his PE teacher and coaches (in an ASD sports club), as his main influencers in his participation. Lastly, Carmen stated “everyone (parents, teachers and friends)” try to encourage her to take part in PE. Research shows that adults (parents, teachers, coaches) close to children with disabilities provide the strongest support and apply influence on their participation (Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk 2003a; Wickman 2015).

The findings concerning interactions and influences resonate strongly with sociocultural views, involving the bi-directional interaction between the individual and the environment (De Valenzuela 2007). Likewise, the findings link with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, identifying the central role of family, school, community and society (Aubrey and Riley 2016). Certainly, I would agree with Wickman’s (2015, p. 43) assertion that much “meaningful learning is an unavoidable part of social life and participation in practice”, which goes beyond merely acquiring a sport specific technique. Furthermore, Grenier (2010) opines the importance of the social-relational interactions between

individuals in the teaching learning process in inclusive PE. Additionally, she highlights within this social-relational interaction, the significance of embedding ‘culturally specific practices’ (Grenier 2010, p. 398). This social-relational process immersed culturally, has strong resonance with sociocultural theory and situated learning (Vygotsky 1978; Lave and Wenger 1991; Quennerstedt et al., 2014).

7.4: Curricular related areas

The second main theme derived from the student data comprises curricular related areas. This theme incorporates student supports, needs, barriers and adaptations within PE. Additionally, the category of the nature of PE is explored, encompassing areas such as extracurricular activities, the students’ primary school PE experience and lastly, type of physical activity preferences.

7.4.1: Supports, needs, barriers and adaptations

Students were questioned on their specific needs, supports and possible barriers or difficulties in PE. Aidan (profoundly deaf), in school two identified the requirement for the PE teacher to be able to sign as his main support needed.

No (I don't need supports) not really, just only need the teacher to talk in sign. The teacher's sign is good yes. It is really helpful because now I understand everything and I know what to do and its experience as well and I know what to do in sport now [Aidan, interview].

However, Nora who is hard of hearing and lip reads, identified the teacher’s position as very important for her understanding: *I’d be trying to read her (the PE teacher) lips and she’d turn to call a student or she’d be like looking at all the students sometimes and I won’t be able to catch her lip when I’m trying to read it.* The ability of the teacher to sign in a class with deaf students seems to be essential in the teaching and learning process, as well as awareness of their positioning for the students who are hard of hearing. Children who are deaf develop their communication chiefly through sight, whereas, children who are hard of hearing receive their speech and language primarily through their hearing (Reich and Lavay 2009). It is also important to note that most individuals with hearing loss do not use sign language (Hearing Loss Association of America 1997 in Reich and Lavay 2009). As a result, it is important for teachers to be absolutely clear about the distinctive needs between

individuals with hard of hearing and deafness. The practical difficulties of signing from the side of an outdoor pitch were highlighted in Aidan's recollection of his primary school experience.

Because the teacher in primary school didn't bother to learn sign, he was a busy man, so I was happy, look, for the SNA that would have signed for me but yeah it was a big pitch and it was very hard to see the SNA signing at the side-lines [Aidan, interview].

Likewise, cognisance of the teacher's position in relation to students who are hard of hearing is essential (Schultz et al., 2013). Additionally, Nora gleans much support from her friends.

I have found some friends that have the same problems as me and they understand what it's like being hearing impaired or have the same difficulties as me, so I wouldn't be alone or anything like that. If I can't hear (the teacher) properly, I'd probably turn to my friend and ask her what she's saying or if I can't hear them I'll just go along with what's happening and then I'll get it [Nora, interview].

This direct quote from Nora links to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development signifying learning through interaction with more knowledgeable others (Aubrey and Riley 2016). Furthermore, Nora suggested the need for a room adjacent to the large sports hall to enhance communication. This is a unique need for Nora and those who are hard of hearing, as background noise or poor acoustics does not impact on someone who is deaf (Reich and Lavay 2009).

Maybe build on or get an extra room that's not really echoey (echoic) or very empty and then the teacher could bring us into the room, talk about what we're going to do and explain the game and then we could go into hall and then start doing the games [Nora, interview].

In school one, both students (Dan and Jim) interviewed, have a physical type disability. Dan who is a wheelchair user identified examples of support he receives from friends in PE: *Well if something is too low down on the ground for me to reach it, they'll (friends) pick it up for me like* [Dan, interview 1]. While, Jim who has cerebral palsy, resulting in spasticity on his right side cited difficulties with gripping equipment such as rackets and hurleys: *so I get help with the grip*, and also bouncing a basketball: *yeah, the ball is actually hard* [Jim, interview 1]. Once more, these articulations from Dan and Jim highlight aspects of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development in learning embedded in social interaction. Additionally, Dan spoke of the difficulty regarding accessibility for a wheelchair user to the outdoor pitch area: *yeah, it's accessibility-wise very difficult, well if I built this school I wouldn't put the pitch there ... it's about 700 or 800 yards away*. Similar findings were evident with Goodwin and Watkinson's (2000) study, in which children with physical

disabilities identified issues with participation, due to difficulty accessing grassy areas and outdoor play structures.

School three is an all-girls school with an ASD unit. The need for predictability and knowing what's ahead was evident from both Carmen and Greta in this school.

I would want to know like what's coming up ahead (the activity) [Carmen, interview].

I like to know what we're doing beforehand just so I could just so I could prepare for it and and if there's something I don't know I could look up the rules and and do it beforehand because the echoes interrupt and you don't really hear the rules [Greta, interview].

Strategies such as previewing have been identified as helpful for students with ASD to prepare them for events that may arise in their PE class (Grenier and Yeaton 2011; Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher 2013). One of the main objectives of previewing is to reduce anxiety levels for the student with ASD (Grenier and Yeaton 2011). Likewise, Greta indicated some sensory issues regarding sound: *Yeah the P.E. hall is so empty that even your voice echoes. So whenever the teacher tries to talk, her own voice rebounds and interrupts her* [Greta, interview 1]. Processing of sensory information for persons with ASD can have a hypo- or hyper-reactivity (American Psychiatric Association 2013). These sensory issues can be challenging in a PE setting, particularly in relation to auditory, heat and tactile sensitivity (Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher 2013).

Carl in school four doesn't like team game activities like soccer, but has worked out a solution with his PE teacher when the other students are playing soccer.

Well sometimes they (the other students) do soccer and we're (students with ASD) allowed to do something else like go for a walk or run around the field, so that's kind of a solution, we've worked around it yeah [Carl, interview].

This latter, direct quote from Carl gives an interesting insight into how he perceives a somewhat disparity between the students with ASD and the other students in the class. Whilst, this occurrence may be viewed as social isolation (Qi, Wang and Ha 2017) it would appear that the students with ASD express an inclination towards it. Similarly, Seamus has a preference towards individual type activities, like the gym or walking. The teacher accepts this need by allowing individual preferences with the assistance of an SNA.

But I don't choose to play football with the other guys, I would feel left out then so that's why I don't play it. We have triple P.E. and for the second half of P.E. we can do what we want and mainly what I do is I go to the gym, a very small gym, or I just

walk around the pitch talking to myself, that's ... so ... and I'm not a sporty person [Seamus, interview].

This finding concurs with Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher (2013) study involving students with ASD. In their research they found that students requested and were allowed to be excluded, particularly during ball games.

7.4.2: Nature of physical education

In this thematic category section, areas such as extracurricular sports, primary school PE experiences and preferences regarding different types of physical activities are explored. None of the students interviewed take part in afterschool sports clubs. In relation to sporting clubs outside of school four of the students are involved in various clubs.

Every Saturday I go to a club called X for Autistic people who can do sports [Carl, interview].

I'm in the GAA. I'm in it with a few of my friends from primary school [Connor, interview].

I'm actually coaching (X team in soccer), yeah ... and I put out the cones and all that [Jim, interview].

I do Archery [Seamus, interview].

Interestingly, none of the four girls in this study are currently involved in any sporting club. A number of health and well-being strategies by the Irish Government have been introduced to combat growing levels of obesity and lack of physical activity. The Healthy Ireland Framework (2013) aims to improve the health and well-being of all Irish people. The framework spans from 2013- 2025, incorporating a National Physical Activity Plan and an Obesity and Policy Action Plan, both launched during 2016.

An insight into the students' experience of primary school PE was deemed worthwhile. The majority of the students (eight) preferred the PE experience at post primary level. Nora was the only student who seemed to really enjoy her primary school experience.

In primary school I liked playing rounders, where you get the ball and you hit the ball with the bat and catching, my strongest point, catching the ball. It was really fun chatting with my friends. P.E. classes we would do a load of different things. We could do basketball which was fun. Rounders, rounders were very popular. Catching, I was probably the ... not bragging or anything (laughter) ... the first pick on a team for catching because I'd probably be the only girl catching the ball [Nora, interview].

On the other hand, Seamus found the two experiences somewhat similar: *it (primary school) was exactly pretty much the same and it was still equally as fun when I went into secondary school.*

However, the remaining eight students in this study all indicated a preference towards post primary PE.

I remember in primary school I always went to the boys' school (for PE) because I was in the deaf facility in the girls' school so I used to go to the boys' school and the boys were very rough. They didn't know sign. I had an SNA with me who interpreted for me all of the time so really I prefer here [Aidan, interview].

It was okay (PE in primary). Usually on Fridays a coach would come in to do football but I didn't like it so usually I would do other things with an SNA I had in the room, you know like ...social skills. I think the secondary school, I prefer the P.E. here, yeah [Carl, interview].

P.E. in primary school was well more different than P.E. here. In P.E. in primary school we didn't really do much like, we didn't even ... we only played basketball every single P.E. class and it was getting very, very boring [Dan, interview].

It (attitude to PE) hasn't changed much but I would say that it's more positive compared to the last school I went to (primary). Because there was some boys (in primary) there that brought down my attitude because they were saying that sports are a boys' thing and I ended up throwing a bin at one of those guy's heads (laughs) For two reasons the P.E. stuff and he kept calling me a stupid nickname [Greta, interview].

In relation to the type of PE activities which the students liked most, the responses were varied. Nora likes the social aspect of PE and participating in large game type activities.

I prefer like socialising with my friends, doing a bit of soccer or rounders, something nearly outside of the school in a field or whatever and then be doing a bit of soccer instead of walking to a place and doing the gym work. I just prefer something to do with balls or a bat [Nora, interview].

Conversely, Aidan prefers a more individual based type activity: *Okay, what I like most in the P.E. is walking around the school grounds, I like that. I like walking around a lot.* He seems to have had a negative experience when playing soccer: *Because before a hearing boy always got rough and I tried my best to tackle him and he was very quick and he wouldn't pass the ball to me, so yeah ever since then I didn't like soccer* [Aidan, interview]. However, he would like to do basketball as he feels that signing has helped his motor skills in this area: *I wish we'd do more basketball. I'm really good at basketball because I'm really good with my hands. I use sign all the time.*

Jim and Dan both tended towards game type activities. Jim cited soccer and rounders, whilst Dan indicated basketball and soccer (indoors). Both students said they would really like to do rugby in PE but it has not been offered to them as of yet. Dan also mentioned using the gym: *Well we have a gym in the school and I like going up there from time to time*, but when questioned further on usage and specialised equipment for wheelchair users, he admitted that: *actually, I can only use the weights*.

In school three, the female students with ASD generally preferred individual type activities, with the exception of Greta. She preferred rounders and helping with games for first years and primary school children. As referred to earlier, some students with ASD have issues with respect to sensory processing and participating in large group, game type activities (Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher 2013).

Soccer and rugby tag, they are my least favourite sports. Volley ball, tennis, badminton, frisbee (favourite activities in PE). I love the parachuteyeah I love the sensation [Amy, interview].

We sometimes go upstairs to the gym and I like doing that. I think we did yoga before and I kind of liked it [Carmen, interview].

It does seem that the type of activity within PE is a strong determinant of student preferences and participation, as typified by Carmen: *lately it's been most days (I don't participate in PE) because because of the activities that the teacher is doing*.

Emanating from school four, the boys with ASD presented a variety of preferences regarding type of activities within PE. First of all, Connor gave a very definite preference towards soccer. Seamus was a little unsure but stated: *tag rugby I guess. It's really fun doing and ... yeah P.E. is pretty much a God subject*.

Nonetheless, Carl presented a different outlook, tending towards individual based activities.

I like Badminton, I don't really like soccer. I think using the gym to do an activity by myself first (preference) [Carl, interview].

Thus the student responses in relation to the type of activity are quite varied, indicating the unique needs of each individual.

7.5: Conclusion

For the most part students with SEN/disabilities in this study felt included in PE. However, some students, particularly those with ASD had days when they indicated feeling left out. The reasons given related to the nature of the activity or uncertainty about the PE class beforehand. All students except two girls (with ASD) had a positive perspective towards PE. The remainder eight students liked PE, particularly from the fun and social aspect. In addition, all students were aware of the health benefits of PE. A preference towards individual or small group activities emerged from three students with ASD, whereas the other students opted for the large group type activities, again citing the importance of the social interaction aspect for them. Most students identified parents and friends as the biggest influence on their participation in PE.

Clearly, emerging from the data are the differentiated needs, supports, barriers and adaptations according to the students' disability category or type. In school one (physical disability) the main needs, supports and barriers related to adapting the task (grip on racket) and environment (accessibility), drawing on adaptation theory (Sherrill 2004). While in school two (sensory disability – deaf and hard of hearing), the primary issue expressed by the students related to communication, resonating with interactions and inter-subjectivity in sociocultural views (De Valenzuela 2007; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017).

School three (all girls) and four (all boys) both cater for students with ASD. Once more the relevance of adaptation theory (Sherrill 2004) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1978; Lave and Wenger 1991) are evident, exemplified by modifying the variables of task, individual, environment and interactions during the learning process. The students from school three and four indicated issues vis-à-vis previewing, sensory processing and participating in large group activities.

Furthermore, the lack of participation in sporting clubs either within the school or outside of school is a concern. However, the students' view of post primary PE versus primary PE is encouraging. It is relevant to note at this juncture that PE teachers at post primary level are specialised in their discipline whereas Primary teachers in Ireland are generalised teachers in all subject areas. Lastly, cognisance of the type of activity offered within PE is very pertinent, in order to enhance students' interest and participation.

The next chapter brings together conclusions, anchored in the key findings and endeavours to understand the issues therein. In doing so, responses to the research questions are given. Additionally, implications of the research claims relating to policy, practice and future directions in research are identified. Furthermore, the study contributions are identified. Lastly, a reflexive iteration of my doctoral journey is portrayed.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1: Introduction

This final chapter encapsulates the main conclusions of this doctoral thesis. These conclusions are derived from the key findings and discussion from chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. Arising from the conclusions, suggestions are tendered regarding implications in relation to policy and practice. Section 8.2 comprises of the following nine overall conclusions with their attendant implications:

- Shift towards inclusive education
- Perspective positive but challenging
- Situated and relational student participation in PE
- Initial teacher education (ITE)
- Perceived competency: confident but with uncertainties
- Continuing professional development (CPD)
- Teacher supports for inclusion
- Student voice: needs and supports
- Curricular issues

Subsequently, possible future directions of research emanating from this study are offered. Additionally, overall contributions of this study to the educational landscape of inclusion and students with SEN/disabilities in physical education in Ireland are proffered. Furthermore, a reflexive iteration of my doctoral journey in ‘getting to this point’ is depicted, adding meaning and depth to this study. Finally, concluding remarks provide closure to this scholastic inquiry.

The overarching research question of this doctoral thesis is: *what are students’ and PE teachers’ experiences of inclusion of students with special educational needs arising from disabilities in PE in post primary schools?* Evolving from this general query, specific research questions garnered PE teachers’ views on their initial teacher education, perceived sense of competency, their lived working lives and continuing professional development specifically in relation to inclusion. Importantly, in this study the voice of the student with SEN/disability was heard and interpreted. An insight into the students’ experiences of their PE classes was gleaned. A number of theoretical constructs emanating from broad sociocultural principles constitute the theoretical stance espoused in my study. These

theoretical constructs such as situated learning, communities of practice, zone of proximal development, inter-subjectivity, enculturation and professional agency inform the findings and the following conclusions. Ontologically and epistemologically the research study adheres to the constructivist paradigm portraying reality as a process of social construction (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004; Lincoln, Lynham and Guba 2011; Creswell 2013), tracing the everyday experiences and interactions between students with SEN/disabilities and their PE teachers in the cultural context of their schools and lives.

8.2.1: Shift towards inclusive education

The shift towards the inclusion of students with SEN/disabilities in education both nationally (Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a) and internationally (Block and Obrusnikova 2007; Vickerman and Coates 2009; Petkova, Kudláček and Nikolova 2012) was reflected in all cases in my study. All participating teachers have observed an increase in the number of students with SEN/disabilities in their schools. This phenomenon echoes a wider sociocultural move towards inclusivity in society in general (United Nations 2006; WHO 2011). However, participating teachers identified a lack of support with increased student numbers in their general educational setting. Delving deeper into participating teachers' views from their reflective e-journals and second interviews, revealed concerns for the future. The notion that some schools have reached 'full capacity' regarding supporting students with SEN/ disabilities was presented. This phenomenon was voiced as potentially stressful, challenging and problematic for the teachers.

Furthermore, PE specific information and resources for inclusion were voiced as a necessity for teachers. The implications of increased numbers of students with SEN/disabilities in general education have ramifications at research, policy and practice levels. In relation to policy and practice, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) needs to be proactive in its response to the effect of increased numbers in post primary schools in relation to supporting teachers. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which advises the Minister for Education and Skills in all matters concerning special educational needs, set a goal in relation to providing "independent, expert and evidence informed policy and practice advice" (NCSE 2017, p. 15) in their current Strategy Statement 2017-2021. The issue of increased numbers of students with disabilities in general education and its resultant impact

on practicing teachers needs to be realized within the NCSE's policy and practice advice. However, it is a complex scenario, not only in the educational context but within a wider social, economic and political context (Travers and Savage 2014).

Thus, a collaborative and integrated effort across all relevant Government Departments is recommended, recognizing and responding to the increased numbers in mainstream education reflective of inclusion in society. This recommendation is in line with the vision outlined by Rix et al., (2015) concerning a community of provision resulting in a collective rather than a linear process. Whilst teachers in my study have observed an increase in the numbers of students with SEN/disabilities, some felt that students with more severe disabilities may be better served in a special school setting. Inclusive education is often viewed as a human rights and equal opportunity issue (Bunch and Valeo 2009; Winter and O'Raw 2010). The EPSEN Act (2004) endorses an inclusive system. Nonetheless, it makes stipulations (Government of Ireland 2004, section 2), which, it could be argued, act as a loophole or barrier to full inclusion. The right of a student with SEN/disability to attend a school in their own locality was highlighted by Sam in his second teacher interview. This view is endorsed in current literature (Rix et al., 2013; Rix et al., 2015; Day and Prunty 2015) and given legal strength in the recent proposed amendment to the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016, which should have a tangible impact on practice. The implementation of good, inclusive practice in Ireland is challenging (Day and Prunty 2015). Despite participating teachers broadly positive view of inclusion in PE, a number of challenges emerged which are addressed in the next section.

8.2.2: Perspective: positive but challenging

Broadly speaking teachers indicated an overall positive perspective towards inclusion in PE, concurring with recent similar type studies (Ko and Boswell 2013; Campos, Ferreira and Block 2015; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017) but contrasting with Block and Obrusnikova's (2007) earlier review of literature. However, a number of challenges were identified such as class sizes, demanding school days, differentiation, segregation and levels of ability. The predominantly positive perspectives and views of teachers towards inclusion in PE are encouraging. Nevertheless, caution is advisable as the challenges identified need to be addressed at both policy and practice levels if these perspectives are to continue to be articulated by teachers. The Department of Education and Skills (2017a) has implemented a new allocation model for Special Education Teachers to mainstream post primary schools

in Ireland. The new Special Education Teaching allocation model will provide a single unified allocation for special educational teaching needs to each school, based on that school's educational profile. The new allocation model certainly allows greater autonomy to schools to decide on how to distribute and deploy their resources and may ameliorate some of the challenges voiced by the teachers in this study.

Most students interviewed felt their experience was inclusive in their PE classes, concurring with current literature (Coates and Vickerman 2008). However, some students with ASD did feel somewhat marginalised. The implications for practice here are evident. Teachers need to be familiar with strategies for effectively working with specific disability categories, such as that of requested exclusion and pre-viewing for students with ASD (Grenier and Yeaton 2011; Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher 2013). Likewise, Nora, who is hard-of-hearing identified teacher position and reduction of background noise as important to her understanding of the class and feeling included. In this context aspects of professional agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013) and zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978; De Valenzuela 2007) are pertinent. The situated, relational and participative engagement of students in PE will be considered in the next section.

8.2.3: Situated and relational student participation in PE

Arising from both student and teacher data is the conclusion that PE as a distinctive subject offers a valuable learning opportunity from a social development perspective. This relationship building within inclusive PE is particularly important for students with SEN/disabilities (Campos, Ferreira and Block 2015; Qi, Wang and Ha 2017). It has important implications for the child in society and their lifelong learning (Vygotsky 1995 in Vygotskaya 1999). The practice of internalisation of social interaction in the construction of knowledge is fundamental to Vygotskian- informed sociocultural theory (Zapata 2013).

The role of the social interaction aspect of PE emanated from the student interviews, with most students preferring the large PE type class, citing the fun and social aspect of the subject. However, three students with ASD favoured the individual or small group settings. Teachers' awareness and cognisance of the significance inclusive PE affords social development in a child's life is important for practice. Furthermore, Grenier (2010) emphasises the importance of the social-relational interactions between individuals in the

teaching learning process in inclusive PE. The need for constant collaboration between students and teachers in the learning process exemplifies the inter-subjectivity and institutional/ cultural (Quennerstedt et al., 2014) aspects of sociocultural theory. Furthermore, in practice, it is vital also that teachers have a well-informed understanding of the characteristics of various disability categories. For example, the traits of ASD appear to affect student participation and engagement. Additionally, students mentioned ‘parents, teachers and friends’ as the strongest influencers on their participation in PE, linking with broad sociocultural principles.

Furthermore, teachers stated poor fitness levels, delayed fundamental movement skill development and increased anxiety were common amongst all students, particularly those with disabilities. This finding emerged as an unanticipated sub-theme particularly related to students’ health. Specifically, teachers felt strongly that a specialised PE teacher was necessary in primary schools to address fundamental movement skill development. Early intervention in relation to fundamental skill development with ongoing positive impacts on health and sport specific participation has been documented (Gallahue and Ozmun 2006). Certainly, it may improve fundamental skill development and general fitness levels of children if the Department of Education and Skills were to include PE specialism at an earlier developmental stage as the optimum time to develop such skills.

Emanating from the student interviews was the view that most of the participants favoured their post primary PE experience rather than their experience of PE at primary level. In relation to increased levels of anxiety, this was particularly highlighted by teachers for those students with ASD. Teachers asserted that the nature of PE as a subject may contribute to this issue, due to its challenging sensory environment (Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher 2013). For teachers working with students with ASD, it is pertinent for practice that teachers endeavour to reduce sensory overload in the PE environment. Again the concept of situated learning (Dirkx 2011; McPhail, Kirk and Griffin 2008) and community of practice (Wenger 1998) are relevant in this context, sharing teaching and learning experiences. Conclusions relating to teachers’ experiences of the inclusion of students with SEN/disabilities during their initial teacher education are now addressed.

8.2.4: Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

Drawing from the teacher data, it can be concluded that teachers in this study found that their ITE regarding inclusion in PE was inadequate. This conclusion concurs with previous Irish (Meegan and MacPhail 2006) and international research (Qi, Wang and Ha 2017). The provision of one standalone module on adapted physical activity was deemed insufficient. During round two interviews, it emerged that half of the participants felt that inclusion should be embedded into all modules in an ITE programme, whilst the others felt a combination of stand-alone and embedded modules would be most useful.

Hoban (2004) highlights the importance of having a clear conceptual framework underpinning good teaching and learning at ITE stage. He particularly highlights the sociocultural facet of such a framework between participants (teacher educators, student teachers and teachers). Currently, it appears that PE Teacher Education (PETE) providers, whilst supporting the philosophy of inclusion, vary in their policy, procedures and practice (Vickerman 2007a; Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a). Undoubtedly, this was echoed by the varied experiences of the participating teachers in my study. There are strong implications here for PETE providers to take cognizance of this in their programmatic reviews, in order to enhance the inclusion of students with SEN/disabilities in their programmes. Consequently, from this study the following can be suggested to PETE providers: firstly, a coherent, consistent and collaborative approach to inclusion within programmes across providers is advised. Secondly, embedding of inclusion in the majority of modules within PETE programmes is important. Thirdly, practicum type learning experiences with relevant school populations is recommended during ITE. Lastly, guiding frameworks such as 'Eight P inclusive PE framework' (Vickerman 2007b) or the European Inclusive Physical Education Training - EIPET, (UNESCO Chair IT Tralee 2018) may help direct a more concerted approach to enhancing teachers' preparation for including students with SEN/disabilities.

Furthermore, teachers' views regarding the value of their ITE impacts upon their beliefs about their perceived capability to work with students with disabilities. These perceived views show higher levels of efficacy amongst teachers who have a positive perspective of their ITE (Avramidas and Norwich 2002; Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005). On the other hand, deriving from Tant and Watelain's (2016, p. 7) systematic review, studies that examined the relationship between ITE in APE and teachers' attitudes towards inclusion

were contradictory. Conclusions in my study pertaining to perceived competency are now deliberated upon.

8.2.5: Perceived competency: confident but with uncertainties

On the whole, teachers' perceived competency regarding their knowledge, skills and attitudes in relation to inclusion appeared somewhat confident. Nonetheless, challenges and uncertainties emerged from the data. This key finding is in line with previous research (Morley et al 2005; Ko and Boswell 2013). Moreover, in this thesis, it was concluded that teachers in their reflective e-journals cited a sense of improved practice from the experience of inclusion. This conclusion has germane implications for practice. As a central philosophy of reflective practice, is that of making sense of one's experiences (Dewey 1933; Freire 1972; van Manen 1977) and learning from them. The notion of a community of practice model (Wenger 1998) for teachers, using shared reflections from their various experiences, as mooted by Crawford, O'Reilly and Luttrell (2012b), could be incorporated into teachers' professional development to address the challenges they experience. Likewise, the concept of professional agency and community of practice (Cairns and Malloch 2011) in the workplace resonates in this context. Currently, Cosán, the CPD national framework is undertaking a development process between 2016 and 2020, whereby it is engaging with the teaching profession regarding the proposed framework, "in the reality of the contexts in which they practice" (Teaching Council 2018). This will be an ideal opportunity for PE teachers to work meaningfully with the Teaching Council's Cosán framework to develop their sense of competency around inclusion. Moreover, inclusion has been identified as a priority learning area in Cosán (Teaching Council 2018).

The category of "teacher adaptation" emerged as the most recurrent sub-theme in the reflective e-journals. Teachers gave everyday examples of the continuous adaptations they make in order to facilitate inclusion of students with various types/categories of disabilities (section 6.4). Consequently, the richness of teachers' reflections, identifying specific examples of adaptations, could be utilised in a shared learning process both within a school and amongst colleagues in other schools. Again, these valuable shared learning experiences could be incorporated into Cosán to give PE teachers a meaningful learning outcome.

Accordingly, a strong sense of perceived competence seems to be the vital factor which predicts a positive teacher attitude towards inclusion in PE (Tant and Watelain 2016). In this thesis drawing from the conclusions in section 8.2.5 (Perceived competency) and section 8.2.2 (Perspective), it would seem that this is the case, albeit peppered with challenges. Conclusions reached in relation to continuing professional development and their implications to policy and practice are now considered.

8.2.6: Continuing professional development (CPD)

It can be concluded from this study that PE teachers feel they lack CPD that is specific to inclusive PE. Continuing professional development addressing various categories of disability in PE was voiced, such as working with students with ASD diagnoses and students who are wheelchair users. Furthermore, teachers expressed a willingness and interest in participating in CPD specific to inclusive PE. The preferred model of CPD provision on the part of teachers was that of a practice based workshop involving students with SEN/disabilities, rather than a theoretical session. In addition, teachers articulated that they would prefer CPD within school time. The notion of practicum experiences is echoed by Morley et al., (2005) in the PE context and Hager (2011) in the general workplace learning setting. Additionally, CPD should be as closely aligned to real PE settings in post primary schools as possible.

These conclusions present a number of opportunities for policy and practice. Most relevant, perhaps is the Special Education Support Service (under the remit of the NCSE) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), which both offer CPD for practising post-primary teachers. In order to make CPD meaningful and relevant to teachers within inclusive PE, it needs to be subject specific in a school type setting. As referred to earlier, The Teaching Council's Cosán professional development framework shows promising opportunities for teachers' learning. Central to Cosán's vision is teacher reflection. Drawing from the second round of interviews in my study, it was concluded that teachers found the process of maintaining a reflective e-journal useful and that it has influenced their practice. Additionally, teachers voiced their preference towards a community of practice (Wenger 1998) or shared learning type of interaction. A sharing of reflections, relating to inclusion in PE amongst a group of PE teachers is a meaningful and

realistic approach to practice. The notion of a community of practice as envisaged by Wenger (1998) could be adapted to contemporary life, using an online interactive forum of reflections and experiences. This interactive type learning resonates strongly with the theoretical framework of professional agency within an interactive and collaborative context. Eteläpelto et al., (2013) propose such a conceptualization of professional agency from a subject centered sociocultural perspective.

Most recently, learning has been regarded as not just an individual's building of knowledge, but "also as social participation involving the construction of identities in socio-culturally determined knowledge communities" (Lave and Wenger 1991; Sfard 1998; Wenger 1998 in Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 46). In the past, research relating to professional agency and learning has originated from the teacher perspective. In light of my own research and as reflected by others in the field, it would seem that the presence of the student voice would enhance a more comprehensive learning opportunity for all.

8.2.7: Teacher supports for inclusion

The researcher concludes that the interface between PE teachers in this study and external support agencies is limited. The general consensus from teachers was that external agencies could engage more with teachers. In particular, Jane portrayed a negative experience regarding her interface with The Teaching Council. She felt that they were not in touch with the day to day reality of school life. It is important that external support agencies are aware of these frustrations and endeavour to ameliorate their relationship, in order to create a positive and meaningful professional pathway for teachers. It is especially significant for The Teaching Council to 'get teachers on board' with the impending implementation of Cosán in 2020.

It can be concluded that the PE teachers' experiences of working with special needs assistants (SNA) as a support were mostly positive, despite emerging concerns. In Ireland, the role of the SNA is defined in terms of supporting a child with a disability regarding their 'care needs' and does not involve a teaching role. However, a review conducted by the Department of Education and Skills (2011, p. 15) on value for money and policy review of the SNA scheme, found that in practice the role of the SNA was increasingly seen to incorporate "behavioural, therapeutic, pedagogical/teaching and administrative duties",

beyond the intended remit or qualifications. In my research, some teachers were very clear about the ‘care needs’ role of the SNA, whilst others were not.

Currently, the NCSE has recently published a report of its Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme (NCSE 2018). In this report, recommendations are made to provide a continuum of support to students with additional care needs and to change the name of special needs assistant (SNA) to inclusion support assistant. Moreover, in the context of PE specifically, some teachers in my study felt that the SNA support was less forthcoming than in other subjects, similar to Morley et al., (2005) findings. This may indicate a need for PE specific training for SNAs, within the new proposed model of support for students with additional care needs (NCSE 2018). Moreover, Mona favoured peer support as opposed to adult SNA support. Interestingly, there is evolving evidence that in some situations, “students who receive peer support do better on certain measures (e.g. achievement of social goals) than those who received adult support alone” (NCSE 2018, p. 4). This notion of learning through social interaction and enhancing one’s social development has strong resonance with the underpinning sociocultural framework of my study. Further informing the concept of peer support is the theoretical and pedagogical construct of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development. The idea of collaborative learning with more capable peers has its roots in sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1978; Rodina 2006).

8.2.8: Student voice: needs and supports

It can be concluded from the data relating to students’ needs and supports, that the nature of their disability uniquely influences their requirements. Distinctive needs arose from the various categories of disability. For example, deaf students’ main requirement is for the teacher to be able to sign, whereas, students who are hard of hearing need a quiet background and need to be able to see the teacher. Likewise, the students in school one, who present with a physical type disability identified accessibility for wheelchair users and support with gripping (spasticity in hand). Furthermore, the students with ASD cited previewing, sensory issues and requested exclusion from large group activities as pertinent to them. These needs and supports have been identified by students themselves. It is vital that PE teachers communicate in practice directly with students with disabilities, in relation to their unique needs and supports. Theoretically the constructs of situated learning (Lave and Wenger

1991; McPhail, Kirk and Griffin 2008; Grenier 2010) and inter- subjectivity (Qi, Wang and Ha 2017) can inform the process of student and teacher interaction and learning. On a policy level, professional development at both ITE and CPD phases needs to incorporate the differentiated and unique needs of various categories of disability. Additionally, the professional development should be PE specific, in light of the characteristic environment of a physical education class as opposed to a classroom setting.

None of the student participants in my research are involved in extracurricular physical activity clubs. Moreover, only four (all boys) students are involved in clubs outside of school, one specifically for people with disabilities. A number of conclusions can be drawn from this data. Firstly, participation levels in physical activity appear to be low amongst this group of students with disabilities. This is reflected in literature: “children with disabilities are more restricted in their participation, have lower levels of fitness, and have higher levels of obesity than their peers without disabilities” (Murphy and Carbone, 2008, p. 1057). Secondly, participation levels among girls are particularly concerning. The issue of non-participation in PE amongst girls, especially in senior cycle was also highlighted by Jane (PE teacher). Likewise, in school one, the SENCO commented on the drop-off in participation amongst teenage girls in senior cycle. This trend concurs with Woods et al., (2010) in their large scale study, where girls were less likely to meet the daily physical activity recommendations. Additionally, boys were more likely to engage in extracurricular sport than girls (Woods et al., 2010).

From a policy perspective, the Government has introduced some welcome initiatives as part of The Healthy Ireland Framework (2013) which aims to improve the health and well-being of all Irish people. The framework spanning from 2013- 2025, incorporates a National Physical Activity Plan and an Obesity and Policy Action Plan, both launched during 2016. However, in the National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland, whereby eight action areas are outlined, only three (Health, environment and physical activity in the community) refer to promoting physical activity for persons with disabilities (Get Ireland Active 2018). Disappointingly, the action area relating to children and young people does not refer specifically to disability. Nevertheless, Sport Ireland (2018) have recently (November 2017) published the first policy document on the *Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities*. The document aims to provide a “clear policy context for the promotion of sport for people with disabilities” (Sport Ireland 2018, p. 3). Conclusions regarding curricular areas within PE in the context of inclusion will now be explored.

8.2.9: Curricular issues

Drawing from the data, the overall consensus from teachers in my study was somewhat negative towards the new PE curricula. Concerns were raised in relation to assessment formats for students with disabilities and also the broad nature of the new curricula. Additionally, teachers felt that there is too little time allocated to PE. The concerns voiced are important to address at CPD level with agencies such as the Special Education Support Service (under the remit of the NCSE) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). In addition, the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI) annual conference is an opportunity to discuss such relevant concerns and issues affecting practising PE teachers. Furthermore, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), which is a statutory body of the Department of Education and Skills, could address such teacher concerns during the review process following the implementation of new curricula.

A conclusion arising from the data was the centrality of the agentic PE teacher to adapt the curriculum to their specific needs to facilitate inclusive best practice. Undoubtedly, fundamental to learning is the notion of the agentic teacher interacting in a social and situational context (Cairns and Malloch 2011). The implications for practice can be envisaged by using a sharing learning experience within a COP or as part of the Cosán process. The notion of the agentic PE teacher actively seeking adaptations within the curriculum to promote inclusion, and sharing this learning, provides a useful basis towards meaningful CPD. This type of learning is underpinned by the theoretical frameworks of this scholastic enquiry: sociocultural theory of learning and practice (Vygotsky 1978), communities of practice (Wenger 1998), situated learning theory (Lave and Wenger 1991) and professional agency in the workplace (Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

Similar to previous studies (Morley et al., 2005; Woods et al., 2010; Tant and Watelain 2016), this study found that teachers overly rely on competitive games type activities within PE. Moreover, teachers felt that competitive large type games were not conducive to inclusion as the focus tends to be on performance and technical skill. There was a varied response from the student voice in relation to the preferred type of physical activity within PE. Case setting one and two mostly favoured large games type activities, whereas case setting three opted for individual type activities with the exception of Greta. Case setting

four varied between team games and individual activities. Arising from these findings, it can be concluded that PE teachers are overly relying on large team game type activities despite knowing that they are less conducive to inclusion. Clearly for good inclusive practice teachers need to endeavor, where possible, to implement more individual type activities from the curriculum. Likewise, teachers would be well advised to listen to the student voice regarding selection of PE content. Theoretically, the construct of inter-subjectivity between teacher and student has strong currency in this scenario.

The practice of individual education plans (IEPs) within the PE curriculum in this study was inconsistent, with only one school (case four) implementing their usage. As referred to earlier in the study, the application of IEPs is not statutory. Nonetheless, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) recommends their use as good educational practice (NCSE 2006). Likewise, Noel expressed a very positive and valuable experience of using IEPs within PE in the United Kingdom. Thus, it can be concluded that IEPs for the most part, are not being implemented in schools in this study. Accordingly, on a policy level there is a critical need for the Department of Education and Skills to fully implement the EPSEN Act (2004) in order to legally require schools to implement IEP usage. On a good practice level, school four exhibits proactive, agentic initiative and process on their method of IEP usage. These findings are informed by the theoretical framework of professional agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013) from a subject centered sociocultural viewpoint. In the next section, suggestions regarding future research directions arising from the study are presented.

8.3: Future research directions

This scholastic inquiry has provided an initial insight into the everyday experiences of inclusion in physical education from both the teacher and student with a disability perspective in the Irish context.

Firstly, further studies exploring both PE teacher and student voice within one context are recommended, as suggested by Haegele and Sutherland (2015). This type of research is at an exploratory stage, requiring careful consideration and reflection (Fitzgerald 2012). In this study I developed four student voice vignettes of their experiences of PE based on their interviews. These vignettes informed and prompted the final phase of the data collection in the follow up interviews with teachers. As a result, this connectivity and linkage generates

rich and meaningful data. The sociocultural theory underpinning this research, which focuses on the situational, participative, and relational nature of human interaction provided the permeating context.

Secondly, both internationally and in Ireland there is a dearth of research directly involving the voices of students with disabilities regarding physical education (Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher 2013; Haegele and Sutherland 2015; Wilhelmsen and Sorensen 2017). Enabling and empowering students to be active agents in the research process is paramount in order to meaningfully influence policy and practice. Coates and Vickerman (2008; 2010), Wickman (2015) and Wilhelmsen and Sorensen (2017) highlight the importance of listening to the voice of the student with a disability as they are the central stakeholder in the learning process in physical education. Likewise, researcher engagement with students presenting with various categories and levels of disability is to be welcomed and encouraged. Whilst acknowledging the challenges researchers may encounter when working with such a wide range of student disabilities and needs, it is imperative to listen to the voices of all (Coates and Vickerman 2013). Strategies and guidelines have been proffered by Coates and Vickerman (2013, p. 343-344) to support PE researchers and practitioners when working with students with SEN in relation to their physical education experiences. In these guidelines the authors utilise the acronym V.O.I.C.E, to represent the research principles encapsulated by the following words: versatile, opportunity, inclusive, creative, and empower. These guidelines present an excellent basis for research with students with SEN/disabilities, ensuring their voices are heard and included.

Thirdly, there is a need to develop studies which would consider incorporating a wider participant scope to encompass further ‘contextual and social mechanisms’ (Wilhelmsen and Sorensen 2017, p. 329). These studies would include participants such as inclusion support assistants (hitherto special needs assistants – SNAs), parents, special educational needs coordinators (SENCO) and students without disabilities. From a methodological perspective, an in-depth qualitative case study involving the various participants would yield rich contextual data. It is suggested that this research would incorporate reflective e-journals, observations, focus groups and a series of interviews across a school year.

The following constitute future research directions, specifically in the Irish context, arising from the study. Notably, however, these suggestions may be applied internationally if deemed relevant. In the final phase of data collection in the study, all teachers articulated

that they found the reflective process useful and that it affected and influenced their practice. Reflection and reflective practice within physical education has mostly concentrated on the initial teacher education phase, with the exception of a few studies (e.g. Jung, 2012; Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan, 1997 cited in Tsangaridou and Polemitou 2015). Furthermore, reflection specifically within the realm of inclusion and PE is sparse (Crawford, O’Reilly and Luttrell 2012b). Thus, further research relating to documenting and guiding PE teachers’ reflections on inclusion is warranted. There is a need for a reflective community amongst practising PE teachers (Sandal and Moe 2013). The community of practice as visualised by Wenger (1998) may need to be re-contextualised in light of the busy lifestyles of teachers in the 21st century. The significance of “online communities of practice as a model for professional development to support teachers and educators in reflecting on their practice” has gained traction (Kirscher and Lai 2007, p. 129). The National Framework for Teachers Learning in Ireland is Cosán, the Irish word for pathway (Teaching Council 2018). Central to Cosán is the notion of reflective practice; furthermore, inclusion is one of the learning areas. The use of reflective electronic journals towards shared learning in PE is timely with the imminent implementation of Cosán in 2020. The sharing of PE teachers’ reflections on inclusion in PE in a collaborative and supportive online environment may provide a useful and meaningful knowledge resource for teachers. Further research on the design and implementation of online communities of practice to enhance professional development is required (Kirschner and Lai 2007).

An unanticipated sub-theme which emerged in the research was the issue of student anxiety (particularly amongst students with ASD). Furthermore, poor fitness levels and fundamental movement skills (FMS) in children with disabilities was voiced by teachers. Whilst not the main focus of this study or indeed within its scope, this is an area of study which would warrant further research in Ireland in light of teachers’ observations. International research indicates that children with disabilities have lower levels of fitness and have lower participation in physical activity than children without disabilities (Murphy and Carbone, 2008).

Currently, physical education in Ireland, at both junior and senior cycle is undergoing curricular changes and transitions. The impact and effect of these changes may have far reaching and, hopefully, positive outcomes for students with SEN/disabilities. Nonetheless, teachers in my study were slightly negative towards the new PE curricula in relation to inclusion. Their concerns centered on assessment formats, the broad nature of the curricula

and the time allocated to PE. Future research incorporating an evaluation of the new curricula in relation to inclusion would be worthwhile and useful. Research involving teachers' views on the positives and challenges of the curricula for students with SEN/disabilities could give a valuable insight into its implementation. Finally incorporating the student voice is also essential on any evaluation of new curricula or approaches (Wilhelmsen and Sorensen 2017).

8.4: Study Contributions

In Ireland there is a dearth of research pertaining to inclusion of students with disabilities in physical education. Both International studies (Morley et al., 2005; Block and Obrusnikova 2007; Ko and Boswell 2013; Haegele and Sutherland 2015) and research in the Irish context (Meegan and McPhail 2006) have identified a need for large scale in-depth qualitative research focusing on PE and inclusion. My research has attempted to contribute to the gap in this field of knowledge.

Furthermore, the participants in my research were practising PE teachers and students with disabilities in the post primary sector. Previous recent key studies in Ireland examined inclusion and PE from the perspectives of initial teacher education providers in PE (Crawford, O'Reilly and Flanagan 2012a) and adapted physical activity provision in primary and special schools (Crawford 2011). Formerly, Meegan and McPhail (2006) did utilise post primary PE teachers, however, their study was quantitative in approach. Nonetheless the voices of students with disabilities were not incorporated into these studies. Internationally, Qi and Ha (2012) in their review of inclusion and physical education, straddling from 1990-2009, found that the most commonly reported studies emanated from the perspective of teachers, at both pre-service and in-service stages. However, Wilhelmsen and Sorensen (2017) in their most recent systematic review (2009-2015), highlighted the prominence of seeking information from children with disabilities. Certainly a call echoed previously (Coates and Vickerman 2010; Fitzgerald and Stride 2012; Wickman 2015). In addition, Haegele and Sutherland (2015), recommend exploration of both the teacher's and student's perspective toward PE experiences within the one context. Thus in my research I have endeavoured to heed contemporary and international recommendations, incorporating both student and teacher experiences. It is envisaged that this new approach, foregrounding both

teacher and student voices will meaningfully contribute to the under researched body of knowledge in physical education and inclusion in Ireland.

Unquestionably, research involving the insights and voices of children and young people with SEN and disabilities in physical education is sparse (Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk 2003a; Coates and Vickerman 2010; Wickman 2015; Wilhelmsen and Sorensen 2017). Furthermore, research aimed at students with disabilities in physical education has tended to focus mostly on physical type disabilities, such as Coates and Vickerman's (2008) review and Wickman (2015). Through a sociocultural lens, my research presented the voices of students with a range of disabilities (ASD, physical disabilities and deaf/ hard of hearing). The importance of hearing different perspectives should be encouraged amongst researchers (Haegele and Sutherland 2015). Listening to the voices of students with a range of disabilities contributes to a comprehensive understanding and insight of their learning experiences in PE. Notably, six of the ten student participants in the research presented with ASD. This links with Haegele and Sutherland's (2015) observation on the importance of research involving students with ASD in light of increases in diagnosis and funding in this area. The knowledge generated in my study contributes and builds on a scarcity of previous studies involving student voice in the Irish context such as Healy, Msetfi and Gallagher (2013).

Methodologically a constructivist paradigmatic framework has guided my study, seeking the everyday realities and perspectives of PE teachers and students on the degree of inclusiveness characterising PE practices in Irish post primary settings. The knowledge produced offers a situated analysis of PE teacher and student interactions on the reality of the Government's policy of inclusion. The complexity of inclusion within physical education is revealed both at practice and policy levels. Within this context, the necessity for meaningful and apposite professional development and support for PE teachers is apparent. Equally, the prominence of the social developmental opportunity immersed in PE as a subject may have far reaching implications for the student with a disability in society and their lifelong learning. The knowledge generated in my study may contribute to inclusive policy within initial teacher education and continuing professional development for physical education. The roll out of Cosán in 2020 offers a notable opportunity for this research to contribute to PE teachers' learning in order to promote effective inclusion. Furthermore, the knowledge produced may contribute to everyday practice highlighting supports and engagement identified by students.

A continuous iterative process was applied throughout the data collection and analysis phases informing each step (Bryman 2012; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2014). Additionally, I have attempted to connect or link the students with SEN/disabilities experiences' of PE (captured in a vignette), with teacher follow-up interviews during the final phase of data collection adhering to Fitzgerald's (2012) advice. This methodological approach has contributed to developing rich and emerging knowledge both from the student and teacher voice on inclusion.

Moreover, the knowledge gathered in my study is similarly guided theoretically, utilising conceptual (inclusion, professional teacher continuum and biopsychosocial model of disability) and theoretical frameworks (sociocultural theory, situated learning and professional agency) which have been critically presented in chapter two, along with the guiding research questions. Bearing in mind that the concept of transferability rather than generalisability is most applicable to the study at hand, the knowledge production offers a fresh lens contribution on the connectivity of sociocultural theory on the student / teacher interaction in physical education and inclusion. In my study the belief that learning takes place in PE classes within social and collaborative processes between teachers and students within the cultural setting of their schools is central.

8.5: My journey thus far: a reflexive view

Thirty years ago I started out as a young PE and science teacher, graduating from Thomond College of Education, Limerick. The Degree at the time provided a solid foundation in teaching and learning, but terms like inclusion and integration did not feature. At this stage in Ireland (late 1980s, early 1990s), the educational focus for children with SEN/disabilities was still very much orientated towards the special school model. Though the Special Education Review Committee (SERC 1993) prompted the initial stimulus towards a more inclusive educational system (Griffin and Shevlin 2007), retrospectively, I think it was a slow trickle of change. Towards the end of the 1990s, I took a career break from my teaching position in Ireland and worked overseas. The school in Kuwait was a mainstream school, but also provided classes for children with disabilities and operated a partial inclusion or perhaps more correctly at times, integration system. So for non-academic subjects like PE, the mainstream classes and the special classes were joined together. This was a new practice for me. From a cultural viewpoint, many of the teachers in the school were American or

British and seemed quite familiar with this type of arrangement. This new learning experience had a profound and seminal effect on my career.

Upon returning to Ireland in 2001, I noticed changes on many levels in relation to disability. The global movement towards inclusion across a number of aspects of Irish society was apparent (Carey 2005; Department of Education and Science 2007; Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013). My views in relation to disability and education were evolving and changing, reflecting society and indeed research and theory also. The rights of individuals with disabilities were being foregrounded politically, socially, culturally and educationally. I was keen to pursue my interest in special education and inclusion. A teaching opportunity in a special school and some lecturing hours became available. But I yearned to gain more knowledge and skills in the area. Consequently, I completed an Erasmus Master's Degree in the Katholieke University of Leuven in Belgium, on adapted physical activity (APA). The post graduates on the Master's programme consisted of PE teachers, sports scientists, physiotherapists and a medical doctor drawn from over 20 countries around the world. The learning experience was enriching intellectually, culturally and socially. Equipped with my Master's and a multitude of teaching experiences I became a full-time lecturer in Cork Institute of Technology. As a third level educator and as a researcher the completion of a doctoral study seemed a natural progression for me.

January 2014 was the beginning of my formal doctoral studies. The journey has been challenging, with peaks and troughs, joy and doubts. At times, it seemed like an intellectual and emotional rollercoaster voyage of growth. The 'troughs' were long periods of self-imposed isolation, spent reading and writing, with somewhat guilty feelings of abandoning family and friends. But arising from the many required hours of work was the satisfaction and increased level of critical thinking and knowledge production. A number of opportunities to present my ongoing work constituted 'peaks' in the journey. I presented preliminary findings at four research conferences: Postgraduate Research Conference, College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences (2015), All Ireland Postgraduate Conference in Sport Sciences, Physical Activity and Physical Education, Waterford (2016), UNESCO Physical Education, Physical Activity and Youth Sport Conference, IT Tralee (2016), All Ireland Postgraduate Conference in Sport Sciences, Physical Activity and Physical Education, Carlow (2017). Most recently I presented the completed findings of the research at the Physical Education, Physical Activity and Youth Sport Ireland Forum, University of Limerick (2018).

Undoubtedly, the greatest joy of this scholastic journey has been engaging directly with students and PE teachers in their work environments. The time, effort and enthusiasm afforded by the participants was admirable. As “qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world” (Stake 2008, p. 140), it was a privilege to listen, read and interpret the participants’ experiences of inclusion in PE. Heeding the advice of O’Sullivan (2015, p. 233), ensuring that the research participants trusted me to articulate, interpret, voice and represent their authentic views, remained my abiding priority at all times. Throughout the initial stages of the doctoral journey feelings of self-doubt and lack of self-belief emerged at times. But, reassurance, support and encouragement from my supervisors, work colleagues and family have prevailed. Moreover, the emerging richness of the data and the rigour applied throughout the research process influenced my growing authorial sense.

The current (2016-2020) ongoing Cosán Framework for Teachers’ Learning Development Process (The Teaching Council 2018) offers opportunities for dissemination of research. I was invited to participate in a national workshop hosted by the Teaching Council of Ireland on the proposed new framework in Dublin during 2017. Later in the same year, I participated in a regional meeting at Cork Education Support Centre. Most recently, I participated in a national shared learning day related to the development of Cosán, in Mullingar during 2018. It is an exciting time for teachers and lifelong professional learning in Ireland. I plan to continue my involvement with Cosán and The Teaching Council with a view to contributing to the lifelong professional development of post-primary PE teachers. The passion and motivation I feel about inclusion and physical education started as a small flame, but has grown into a burning fire, which I will endeavour to keep alight in my life.

At present, an article grounded in the first phase of data collection, involving the teacher voice has been submitted to the *European Journal of Adapted Physical Activity*. With a view to future dissemination and communication of the research, further articles will be submitted for publication to peer-reviewed journals, inter alia, *European Physical Education Review*, *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, *Irish Educational Studies* and *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. An article based solely on student voice is envisaged, as well as an article encapsulating the complete research claims. Furthermore, a summation of the research will be forwarded to the professional body, the *Physical Education Association of Ireland* (PEAI), to communicate to their members, via their newsletter and website. Likewise, engagement with professional agencies, such as the

Special Education Support Service (under the remit of the NCSE) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) is envisaged.

Epistemologically, this study was steered by the constructivist paradigm. In the constructivist world view, the researcher assumes that there are multiple realities (relativist ontology), that the inquirer and the inquired into, co-create meaning (subjectivist epistemology) and that the research is set in the natural world (naturalistic) (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). In the context of this study, the researcher (myself) and the researched-into (the participants) have a subjective and interactive relationship. Thus, the methodological paradigm selected inextricably links the personal writer's presence and situated 'me', the researcher, throughout the doctoral study (Kamler and Thomson 2006). The choice of case study was influenced principally by Stake (1988) and Thomas (2011; 2016), emphasising the holistic and real life context of the participants. Obviously, one cannot generalise from a case study, but "generalisation is not always what is wanted from the inquiry process ...case study is especially good for getting a rich picture and gaining analytical insights from it" (Thomas 2016, p. 23). The aim of this thesis was indeed to present this 'rich' picture and insight of the participants' everyday lives in physical education. Finally, some parting comments are offered to conclude this scholastic inquiry.

8.6: Concluding remarks

This thesis endeavours to articulate the voices of students with disabilities and PE teachers, in relation to their real life experiences of inclusion in physical education settings in post primary schools. In doing so it is hoped that it will impact meaningfully towards contributing to more effective inclusive teaching and learning practice for both student and teacher. Within this context, the need for relevant professional development and support for PE teachers is evident. Likewise, the importance of the social developmental opportunity immersed in PE as a subject may have far reaching implications for the student with a disability in society and their lifelong learning. Implications for inclusive policy can be taken from the conclusions, incorporating initial teacher education, continuing professional development, and support and engagement with students. The primacy of involving students with SEN/disabilities in educational research should not be underestimated. This original

study has contributed to a sparsely, under-explored research area in Ireland, helping in some measure to fill an existing lacuna.

Inclusion within Irish schools, like society, is now an everyday reality, albeit presenting challenges for students and teachers alike. The thesis highlighted both the complexity and connectivity of the topic of inclusion of students with SEN/disabilities. It is essential to conduct further research to support teachers and students in order to optimise the learning experience and sense of belonging for all. The contribution of this research is important because inclusion matters. It matters for everyone who struggles with some difference that affects their learning. It matters for teachers' everyday working environments, whilst encountering an increasing diversity of students. It matters for society – everyone has a right to education to help optimise their lives.

The Cosán pathway envisaged for Irish teachers in 2020 offers a clear possibility for PE teachers to engage in learning for promoting effective inclusion. I look forward to travelling this pathway and engaging with PE teachers and the disability community. Can we see a future whereby we speak of inclusive education for all in their locality or community, with the correct supports, rather than archaic terms like segregated special education?

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APPENDIX 1: Invitation letter to participate in a research study on PE teachers & inclusion



Date

Dear PE Teacher,

As part of the requirements for my PhD degree in UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The title of the study is ***Physical Education Teachers and the Inclusion of Students in Post Primary Schools: Experiences, Perspectives and Continuing Professional Development Requirements***

The study will involve interviewing a number of PE teachers about their experiences of working with children with special educational needs and/ or disabilities in the general PE class setting.

I would appreciate it greatly if you would consider partaking in an interview for this research. The interview will involve approximately 45 - 60 minutes of your time. I can arrange a time and place suitable to you. Additionally, participants will be requested to submit 3 reflective diary entries via email between February and May 2016.

Participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any stage. I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous. The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis, they will be retained for a further six months and then destroyed.

The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be seen by my supervisors, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may be read by future students in the Boole library and through CORA- Cork Open Research Archive. The study may be published in a research journal.

To take part in this research you must be a qualified PE teacher and have 3 years' experience of teaching. You must be working with children with special educational needs and/ or disabilities in a mainstream PE setting.

If you are interested in taking part in this research, please contact me (phone and email details given below) at your convenience.

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Ona McGrath,

Mobile: 087*****, **Email:** [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time,

Ona McGrath

APPENDIX 2: Statistics and description of disability categories (NCSE 2015, p.54)

Appendix 2

Statistical information for the school year 2014/15

Students accessing resource teaching by category of disability.

Over 48,000 students received extra teaching from resource teachers in schools with 25,647 students in mainstream primary and 22,777 students in post primary schools.

Disability Category	No of Students	
	Primary	Post-Primary
Assessed syndrome	208	59
Autism/autistic spectrum disorders	5,709	2,917
Emotional/behavioural disturbance	4,617	3,313
Hearing impairment	751	480
Moderate general learning disability	585	178
Multiple disabilities	2,003	993
Other	46	9
Physical disability	4,076	2,924
Severe emotional/behavioural disturbance	814	458
Severe/profound general learning disability	35	1
Specific speech and language disorder	6,494	1,204
Visual impairment	309	231
Students with a borderline or mild general learning disability or a specific learning disability (estimate)		10,010*
Total	25,647	22,777

* This figure reflects the number of students with a high incidence disability in post-primary schools. In the 2012 NCSE annual report, the figures for the disability categories included a figure of 10,010 students in post-primary schools with a mild general learning disability, borderline mild general learning disability and specific learning disability. From 2012, some 700 resource teaching posts were pre-allocated to post-primary schools to support students with these learning disabilities and schools no longer made individual applications for these students.

Description of Disability Categories⁸

High Incidence Disabilities	
Disability category	Description
Borderline mild general learning disability	Such pupils have been assessed by a psychologist as having a borderline mild general learning disability. The pupil's full scale IQ will have been assessed in the range of 70 to 79
Mild general learning disability	Such pupils have been assessed by a psychologist as having a mild general learning disability. The pupil's full scale IQ will have been assessed in the range 50 to 69
Specific learning disability	Such children have been assessed by a psychologist as: ► Being of average intelligence or higher. ► Having a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics which places them at or below the second percentile on suitable, standardised, norm-referenced tests.
Low Incidence Disabilities	
Disability category	Description
Autism/autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)	A psychiatrist or psychologist will have assessed and classified such pupils as having autism or autistic spectrum disorder according to DSM-IV, DSM-V, or ICD-10 criteria.
Emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems	Such pupils are being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for such conditions as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and conduct disorders that are significantly impairing their socialisation and/or learning in school
Hearing impairment	Such pupils have a hearing disability that is so serious it impairs significantly their capacity to hear and understand human speech, thus preventing them from participating fully in classroom interaction and from benefiting adequately from school instruction. Most of them have been prescribed hearing aids and are availing of the services of a visiting teacher

⁸ Department of Education and Skills Circular SP ED 02/05

Low Incidence Disabilities	
Disability category	Description
Moderate general learning disability	Such pupils have been assessed by a psychologist as having a moderate general learning disability. The pupil's full scale IQ will have been assessed in the range 35 to 49
Multiple disabilities	Pupils assessed with multiple disabilities meet the criteria for two or more of the low incidence disabilities described
Pupils with special educational needs arising from an assessed syndrome	Such pupils with an assessed syndrome, eg Down syndrome, William's syndrome and Tourette's syndrome in addition to any of the other low-incidence disabilities
Physical disability	Such pupils have permanent or protracted disabilities arising from such conditions as congenital deformities, spina bifida, dyspraxia, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, brittle bones or severe accidental injury. Because of the impairment of their physical function, they require special additional intervention and support if they are to have available to them a level and quality of education appropriate to their needs and abilities. Many require the use of a wheelchair, mobility or seating aid, or other technological support. They may suffer from a lack of muscular control and co-ordination and may have difficulties in communication, particularly in oral articulation, as for example severe dyspraxia
Severe and profound general learning disability	Such pupils have been assessed by a psychologist as having a severe or profound general learning disability. The pupil's full scale IQ will have been assessed as being below 35. In addition, such pupils may have physical disabilities
Severe emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems	The criteria for severe EBD are that the pupil is in the care of a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist for a severe clinical disorder. A very small number of pupils would be expected to fall within this category

Low Incidence Disabilities	
Disability category	Description
Specific speech and language disorder	Such pupils should meet each of the following criteria: ▶ non-verbal or performance ability that must be within the average range or above. (i.e. non-verbal or performance IQ of 90, or above). ▶ assessed by a speech and language therapist and found to be at two or more standard deviations (S.D.) below the mean, or at a generally equivalent level (i.e. - 2 S.D. or below, at or below a standard score of 70) in one or more of the main areas of speech and language development. ▶ Two assessments, a psychological assessment and a speech and language assessment are necessary.
Visual impairment	Such pupils have a visual disability which is so serious as to impair significantly their capacity to see, thus interfering with their capacity to perceive visually presented materials, such as pictures, diagrams and the written word. Some will have been diagnosed as suffering from such conditions as congenital blindness, cataracts, albinism and retinitis pigmentosa. Most require the use of low-vision aids and are availing of the services of a visiting teacher.

APPENDIX 3: SREC: Ethics application form (January 2014)

UCC Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC): ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

Name of applicant	Una McGrath	Date: 21/1/2014
Contact Details	Phone: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]	
Department/Unit	Sports Studies & Physical Education, School of Education, UCC	
Title of project	Teachers' experiences of including children with special educational needs and/or disabilities in physical education	

		YES	NO
1	Do you consider that this project has significant ethical implications?		√
2	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	√	
3	Will participation be voluntary?	√	
4	Will you obtain informed consent in writing from participants?	√	
5	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason, and (where relevant) omit questionnaire items to which they do not wish to respond?	√	
6	Will data be treated with full confidentiality / anonymity (as appropriate)?	√	
7	If results are published, will anonymity be maintained and participants not identified?	√	
8	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)?	√	
9	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way?		√
10	Will your participants include schoolchildren (under 18 years of age)?		√
11	Will your participants include people with learning or communication difficulties?		√
12	Will your participants include patients?		√
13	Will your participants include people in custody?		√
14	Will your participants include people engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug taking; illegal Internet behaviour)?		√
15	Is there a realistic risk of participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress?		√
16	If yes to 15, has a proposed procedure, including the name of a contact person, been given? (see no 23)		

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

17. Aims of the project

This research aims to produce and elucidate new knowledge in the field of adapted physical education in Ireland through original research

The research aims to ascertain the level of understanding of practising teachers in relation to including children with SEN in the PE setting

It seeks to investigate teachers' level of confidence and perceived competence in teaching children with SEN in the PE setting

The research hopes to examine teachers' training in adapted physical education (if any), ascertain their response to such training and explore future training opportunities.

The research aims to gain a clear insight into the needs and supports from the teachers' perspective to inclusion in the PE setting

18. Brief description and justification of methods and measures to be used (attach copy of questionnaire / interview protocol / discussion guide / etc.)

The proposed design for this research is a large scale Case study. A qualitative approach is deemed to be the best method to glean the required material. The researcher proposes to carry out 33 semi structured, in depth interviews with practising PE teachers throughout Ireland.

Based on the findings from the interviews the researcher will invite 5 of the teachers to participate in maintaining a reflective journal of their experiences of inclusion in the PE setting.

19. Participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria

33 PE teachers will be invited to participate in the research. Their selection will be based on the Department of Education and Skills database of second level schools in Ireland representing a geographical range and school type. The inclusion criteria are that the teacher must be a qualified PE teacher and have 3 years' experience of working with children with disabilities in a mainstream PE setting. The nature of the child's disability or (SEN) will be clearly defined. The gender balance of participants will reflect the current balance with the PE profession in Ireland.

20. Concise statement of ethical issues raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them

The researcher will be interviewing adult, qualified & experienced PE teachers and cannot foresee any major ethical issues. I will inform participants that I am available to deal with any queries should they arise. An information support sheet may be offered in this type of scenario. Full compliance and adherence of ethical guidelines as per the National Disability Authority (2009) *Ethical Guidance for Research with People with Disabilities* will be ensured.

21. Arrangements for informing participants about the nature of the study (cf. Question 3)

A letter of invitation to participate and an information sheet on the study will be sent to the PE teacher. A follow up phone call will be made to see if the participant is willing to partake. Following verbal consent arrangements will be made to sign the consent form and to schedule interview proceedings suitable to the participant and researcher.

22. How you will obtain Informed Consent - cf. Question 4 (attach relevant form[s])

The PE teacher will receive an invitation to participate in the research along with an information letter. A follow up phone call will be made to see if the participant is willing to contribute. Following verbal consent, arrangements will be made to sign the consent form and to schedule interview proceedings suitable to the participant and researcher.

23. Outline of debriefing process (cf. Question 8). If you answered YES to Question 15, give details here. State what you will advise participants to do if they should experience problems (e.g. who to contact for help).

The debriefing process will involve an offer of information and resources relating to adapted physical education. Relevant organisations will be highlighted also e.g. Physical Education association of Ireland and The Special Education support Service,

24. Estimated start date and duration of project.

March 2014 – March 2018

Signed _____ *Una McGrath*
Applicant

Date _21/1/2014

Notes

1. Please submit this form and any attachments to Dr. S. Hammond, Chair, SREC, c/o Miriam Collins, Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation, Block E, 4th Floor, Food Science Building, University College Cork, College Road, Cork. Please also forward an electronic copy to srec@ucc.ie

2. Research proposals can receive only provisional approval from SREC in the absence of approval from any agency where you intend to recruit participants. If you have already secured the relevant consent, please enclose a copy with this form.

3. SREC is not primarily concerned with methodological issues but may comment on such issues in so far as they have ethical implications.

This form is adapted from pp. 13-14 of Guidelines for Minimum Standards of Ethical Approval in Psychological Research (British Psychological Society, July, 2004)

Last update: 2011-07-19

APPENDIX 4: Informed consent form January 2014

Consent Form

I.....agree to participate in the research study being undertaken by Ona McGrath.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Ona McGrath to be digitally recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications

Participant:

Signed.....

Date.....

Researcher:

Signed.....

Date.....

APPENDIX 5: Receipt of Ethical approval letter from SREC (May 2014)



Ona McGrath,
Sports Studies & Physical Education,
School of Education

20th May 2014

Oifig an Leas - Uachtarán Taighde
agus Nuálaíochta
Office of the Vice President
for Research and Innovation

4th Floor, Block E,
Food Science Building,
University College Cork,
College Road, Cork, Ireland.

T +353 (0)21 4903500
E vpresearch@ucc.ie
www.ucc.ie

Dear Ona,

Thank you for submitting your research (project entitled: Teachers' experiences of including children with special educational needs and/ or disabilities in physical education) to SREC for ethical perusal. I am pleased to say that we see no ethical impediment to your research as proposed and we are happy to grant approval.

We wish you every success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'S Hammond'.

Sean Hammond
Chair of Social Research Ethics Committee

Professor Anita R Maguire BSc PhD CChem MRSC
Vice President for Research and Innovation

Ollscoil na hÉireann, Corcaigh
National University of Ireland, Cork

APPENDIX 6: Seven eligibility criteria (Block and Obrusnikova 2007)

Inclusion in Physical Education: A Review of the Literature from 1995-2005

Martin E. Block

University of Virginia

Iva Obrusnikova

University of Delaware

The following seven eligibility criteria were selected by the two authors: (a) must be original study published from January 1995 to July 2005; (b) must be published in the English language; (c) must be located in periodical publications (i.e., studies located in books, unpublished papers [e.g., doctoral dissertations, master's theses], conference proceedings, or in book chapters were excluded); (d) must consist of field based research or research that examined inclusion practices (i.e., studies aimed merely at developing new instruments or laboratory based were excluded); (e) must provide a clear definition of the sample selected, the independent and dependent variables measured, the assessment instruments employed, and the data analyzes used; (f) must focus on GPE students (kindergarten through twelfth grade, K-12) or on certified GPE teachers (i.e., studies on athletes, team or league players, coaches, pre-service GPE teachers, or paraprofessionals were excluded); and (g) must focus on inclusion of at least one student (K-12) who was clinically diagnosed with a disability (i.e., studies on preschoolers or adults with a disability were excluded).

To determine reliability of the coding process, the two authors independently assessed all selected studies according to the seven eligibility criteria. Each study was scored on a dichotomized scale with respect to meeting or not meeting each of the criteria. Thereafter, in instances of disagreement, articles were reassessed to reach an inter-rater consensus of 100%.

(Block and Obrusnikova 2007, p.104)

APPENDIX 7: PE teacher interview guide questions

Interview Guide Questions

Inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities in post-primary physical education: a socio-cultural interpretation of teachers' voices

APE: adapted physical education, CPD: continuing professional development

SNA: special needs assistant

Opening Questions:

1. So how long have you worked as a PE teacher
2. And what University did you qualify from
3. Tell me about your school (*co-ed, size, community, rural/ urban*)
4. Tell me about your school population (*Do you have many children with SEN/ disabilities in your school*)
5. Have you seen an increase/decrease in students with SEN/disabilities in your school in the last 5yrs/ 10yrs (*develop this*)

Section one: Experiences in relation to perceived sense of competency and initial teacher education (ITE)

6. How do you feel about including children with SEN/disabilities in PE (*competent, able, comfortable, capable or otherwise*)
7. Did you receive training in Adapted Physical Education (APE), if yes, what was the nature of that training (*initial teacher education, elective or mandatory module, did training include 'hands on' experience with children with SEN/disabilities, was it a stand-alone module or infused within other modules*)
8. Do you feel the training was adequate to meet your current needs, was it effective?
9. Have you worked with different categories/ types of disability (*physical, sensory, intellectual, and behavioral, etc?*), explain
10. Have you worked with various different levels (*mild, moderate, severe, profound*) of disability?

11. Which of the above in Q.9 or Q.10 have been the most challenging / rewarding
(*develop answer, which do you prefer*)
12. Are you familiar with Individual Education Plans for children with disabilities/
SEN (*do you use them in your school, what are the challenges around them*)

Section two: Perspectives on inclusion

13. What do you think is your attitude towards inclusion in PE (*why do you feel this way*)?
14. From your experience do you feel that inclusive PE is working
15. What do you think are the main positives regarding inclusion in PE?
16. What do you think are the main negatives regarding inclusion in PE?
17. What are your views on segregation – if and when it should happen in the PE class
18. Do you know people with disabilities outside of the school setting (*yes/no, family, friends, community, do you think this influence's your attitude and perspective towards disability, how*)?
19. What do you feel is the effect of including children with SEN/ disabilities on peers without SEN/ disabilities in PE (*positive/ negative, awareness, appreciation of differences, social interaction*)?
20. The Government has a policy of inclusion in education, are you familiar with the policy. Does the school endorse it? Do you think it is working (*if yes – why, if no – why not*)
21. Overall what do you think is the school's philosophy/view towards inclusion?

Section three: Needs and requirements

22. What are your views on the availability of information regarding various types of SEN/ disabilities and their implications for PE (*can you access information easily in your context, is it PE specific*)?
23. What type of background information (if any) are you given regarding a students' abilities/ functionality in your school when a student presents with a diagnosed SEN/ disability?
24. What do you need to learn more about in order to teach children with SEN/disabilities more effectively?

25. Are you aware of the newly introduced PE curriculum (*both junior and senior level*), what do you think of it, is it useful for APE, how?
26. What, if any, supports from outside agencies have you received (*like The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the Professional Development Service for teachers (PDST), Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) and Special Education Support Service (SESS)*).
27. Have you participated in a CPD or in-service course in SEN since qualifying (*was it specific to PE, how useful was it*)?
28. What are your thoughts about participating in further professional development in APE?
29. What type of professional development would best suit your needs (*practical workshop, lecture from an expert in the field, meeting other PE teachers with similar needs, APE manual in the Irish context, dissemination of literature and web sources*)
30. Are you aware of any specific supports in Ireland for APE (e.g. *EIPET, CARA website & their disability inclusion training courses, Sports Inclusion Disability officers, PEAI website*)
31. Do you utilize the national PE syllabus as a guide in your PE classes? Do you find some activities more conducive to inclusive practice (Yes/ no, which ones)?
32. What is your experience of working with Special Needs Assistants (SNA) to support students, did you find this support useful in the PE context?
33. In your school do you feel that you have adequate resources for inclusion in PE (examples)?
34. Do the PE teachers in the school work together in relation to professional development (would this be a formal or informal type of interaction, can you give an example, do you meet up with any other PE teachers outside of the school)

Thank you so much for your time and telling me about your experiences.

APPENDIX 8: Reflective e-journal in-action

Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities in Post Primary physical education: a socio-cultural interpretation of teachers' and students' voices.

Reflective Digital Diary

Teacher Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Email to [REDACTED]

Framework Guide:

Identify your reflections/ thoughts on inclusion **immediately after** your PE class. What are the everyday occurrences in your PE class with students with SEN and disabilities that influence your teaching and the students learning? Use the sample and optional headings below to guide you.

The following is a **sample** of the type of reflections based on day to day occurrences in a PE class:

Jamie is the only wheelchair user in a general PE class of 25 students. I just need to check if he is well enough to participate today as he was out sick for the last 2 weeks. All is ok, we do a general warm-up, everyone is moving, and Jamie propels his own chair but needs to be careful not to collide with anyone. This is a concern for me – do I ask Jamie to move in a designated area separate to the other students or allow him to move freely amongst everyone? Is this a health and safety issue – I need some advice on this one. We do some stretches but I need to think up of alternative ones for Jamie as he cannot do a lot of the ones I had planned which involve using one's legs. I will need to look this up.

The main body of the class involves basketball skills culminating in 2 mini games. We continue with some passing skills (pass and go) in groups of 5 - Jamie demonstrates good accuracy. He seems to be enjoying this practice. This is great as it has been highlighted in his IEP that Jamie is a little socially isolated and needs to work on his social interaction. Thinking about it..... this is very important for the future for Jamie – working on his social skills and being part of a group. I remember my own personal experience when I was in school the profound impact PE and sport had on my whole social development and identity. I split the group into 5 teams and am still wondering about how it will work with everyone moving so quickly and the potential collision with Jamie's chair. I decide to err on the side of caution and instruct Jamie to stay in a parallel designated area to the courthis head

drops, he is not happy with this. He says he doesn't want to play, I persuade him to give it a go. Reluctantly he plays – the other students find Jamie a very useful person to pass to since he is not being marked. He now begins to see himself as a key player moving parallel to the game. Thinking about this he is not really being segregated but playing the game in a different way.

Optional prompts to guide your reflections:

- A. **Activities and interactions** during the PE class in relation to inclusion.
- B. Thoughts on **successes and what works** in the class.
- C. Reflections of the PE class regarding **areas for improvement** in relation to inclusion.
- D. **Needs** relating to equipment and supports in my school.
- E. **Continuing professional development** (CPD) needs to improve inclusive practice.
- F. **Frustrations** within the PE class relating to inclusion.
- G. Additional thoughts on inclusion in this PE class.

APPENDIX 9: Reflective e-journal of-action

Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities in Post Primary physical education: a socio-cultural interpretation of teachers' and students' voices.

Reflective Digital Diary

Teacher Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Email to [REDACTED]

Framework Guide:

Identify your reflections/ thoughts on inclusion **retrospectively** in physical education. What occurrences/ events in your PE classes with students with SEN and disabilities have influenced your teaching and the students learning over the years? Use the sample and optional headings below to guide you.

The following is a **sample** of the type of reflection/ thoughts based on looking back on PE and inclusion:

I have been working now as a PE teacher for 20 years. I've seen many changes happening particularly in the last few years. More and more students with disabilities and a diversity of needs are coming to school. Perhaps some may have gone to special schools in the past, but now the buzz word seems to be inclusion. I think it's goodwe all learn from each other and everyone has a right to education, but we need the correct support. It is challenging working with such a diversity of needs. Certainly I could do with some training in this area as I didn't get any when I did my PE degree. You want all your students to participate but it is difficult sometimes. I find students with physical disabilities, particularly wheelchair users difficult to involve without losing the integrity of some activities. Working with students with challenging behavior and some students with ASD can be trying. Also I feel concerned about other students' learning if student behavior is impacting on others learning, which can be a common occurrence.

Having more students with disabilities in general physical education has had a deep effect on my teaching. Certainly I have become more aware and accepting of differences. I think inclusion also has a great influence on students without disabilities – it helps their awareness of differences, acceptance of others and their overall social interaction. PE as a subject in Ireland seems to be changing – new curriculums coming down the track. I'm unsure how it will all pan out in a class with many different abilities, there seems to be a lot of paperwork involved. I really feel that I could learn a lot from other PE teachers about their experiences, but we have such busy days in school. I think it would be good to meet up and discuss different scenarios. For example exchanging ideas about working with a student who is a wheelchair user or has ASD. It would have to be in school time though and I'm not sure if that is going to happen in the current political climate.

Optional prompts to guide your reflections:

- A. Retrospective recollection of **activities and interactions** during inclusive PE classes;
- B. Retrospective reflections of the inclusive classes regarding **successes**;
- C. Retrospective reflections of the inclusive classes regarding **areas for improvement**;
- D. Overview of **Needs** relating to equipment and supports.
- E. **Continuing professional development** needs to improve inclusive practice;
- F. Persistent **frustrations** of the inclusive PE class;
- G. Additional thoughts of inclusion in PE in a broad societal, cultural and political sense.

APPENDIX 10: Researcher Interviewer Diary Headings

Researcher Interviewer Diary:

(a) The interview process

(b) New understandings of previous experiences

(c) Ideas for further probing with future interviewee's

(d) Reflections on what was said

(e) Initial considerations on emergent themes from the data

APPENDIX 11: Student Interview Guide Questions

Interview Guide Questions: students

1. So tell me a little about your school (*size of school, co-ed*)
2. What is your favourite subject (*why do you like this subject, what is your least favourite*)
3. I'm really interested in finding out about your experiences of PE class, do you like participating in PE (*yes/no, why*)
4. Do you find PE very different to other subjects (*explain, how*)?
5. Which PE activities do you enjoy most/ least (*why do you think this is*)
6. Do you need any extra support to participate in PE (*peer assist, special needs assistant*)?
7. Do you find the support helpful (*can you give examples*)?
8. Do you ever feel isolated/ marginalized (*left out*) in PE (*tell me about this*)?
9. What can the PE teacher do to help you participate more in PE
10. Are you involved in any extra-curricular sports activities in school (*Yes- tell me about these? No – would you like to become involved*)
11. What about any sporting clubs outside of school (*Yes- tell me about these? No – would you like to become involved*)
12. Who influences you mostly to take part in PE (*parent, teacher, friend, other*)
13. Is there any area in PE that you would like to do that you haven't done so far in school (*is there an opportunity for you to request this*)?
14. In PE do you get to work with other students (*team type activities*) or is it mainly in pairs or on your own, which do you prefer.
15. If there's one thing you could change about PE what would it be.
16. Is there any negative experience you had in PE that you could describe?
17. Is there any strong positive experience in PE you would like to describe?

Is there anything else you would like to add in relation to your PE class?

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with me

APPENDIX 12: SREC Application May 2016

ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC)



Introduction

UCC academic staff and postgraduate research students who are seeking ethical approval should use this approval form. Ethical review by SREC is strongly recommended where the methodology is not clinical or therapeutic in nature and proposes to involve:

- direct interaction with human participants for the purpose of data collection using research methods such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, focus groups etc
- indirect observation with human participant for example using observation, web surveys etc
- access to, or utilisation of, data concerning identifiable individuals.

Application Checklist

This checklist includes all of the items that are required for an application to be deemed complete. In the event that any of these are not present, the application will be returned to the applicant without having been sent to review. Please ensure that your application includes all of these prior to submission. Thank you.

Completed Application Checklist	☐ ✓
Completed Ethical Approval Self-Evaluation	☐ ✓
Completed Description of Project	☐ ✓
Information Sheet(s)	☐ ✓
Consent Sheet(s)	☐ ✓
Psychometric Instruments / Interview / Focus Group Schedules	☐ ✓
I have consulted the UCC <i>Code of Research Conduct</i> and believe my proposal is in line with its requirements	☐ ✓
If you are under academic supervision, your supervisor has approved the wording of and co-signed this application prior to submission	☐ ✓

Please note that you must confirm you have taken account of the University's Code of Research Conduct in order for your application to be considered by SREC

(http://www.ucc.ie/en/media/research/researchatucc/documents/CodeofGoodConductinResearch_000.pdf)

APPLICANT DETAILS

Name of applicant	Una McGrath Date: 22/5/2016
Contact Details	Phone: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]
Department/Unit	Sports Studies & Physical Education, School of Education, UCC
Title of project	Inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities in post- primary physical education: a socio-cultural interpretation of teachers' voices

ETHICAL APPROVAL SELF-EVALUATION

		YES	NO
1	Do you consider that this project has significant ethical implications?		√
2	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	√	
3	Will participation be voluntary?	√	
4	Will you obtain informed consent in writing from participants?	√	
5	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason, and (where relevant) omit questionnaire items to which they do not wish to respond?	√	
6	Will data be treated with full confidentiality / anonymity (as appropriate)?	√	
7	Will data be securely held for a minimum period of seven years after the completion of a research project, in line with the University's Code of Research Conduct?	√	
8	If results are published, will anonymity be maintained and participants not identified?	√	
9	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)?	√	
10	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way?		√
11	Will your participants include children (under 18 years of age)?	√	
12	Will your participants include people with learning or communication difficulties?	√	
13	Will your participants include patients?		√

14	Will your participants include people in custody?		√
15	Will your participants include people engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug taking; illegal Internet behaviour)?		√
16	Is there a realistic risk of participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress?		√
17	If yes to 16, has a proposed procedure, including the name of a contact person, been given? (see no 25)		
18	If yes to 11, is your research informed by the UCC Child Protection Policy? http://www.ucc.ie/en/ocla/policy/	√	

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

19. Aims of the project (briefly)

This research aims to produce and elucidate new knowledge in the field of adapted physical education (PE) in Ireland through original research.

The project aims to ascertain the experiences and perspectives of teachers in relation to including children with SEN and disabilities in the PE setting.

The research intends to gain a clear insight into the needs and supports from the teachers' perspective to inclusion in the PE setting.

Additionally the project seeks to take account of the child's voice and insight in relation to inclusion and PE.

20. Brief description and justification of methods and measures to be used (attach research questions / copy of questionnaire / interview protocol / discussion guide / etc.)

The current study is a multiple case study design based on five schools, ten practising PE teachers and five children with SEN/ disabilities. A qualitative approach is deemed to be the best method to glean the required material. The data collection methods consist of two phases of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the teachers and one semi-structured interview with the children. Additionally, teacher participants maintain a reflective digital diary over a three month period within a school year and a researcher interview journal is maintained throughout the duration of the study.

21. Participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria, detail permissions

10 PE teachers and 5 children with SEN/ disabilities will be invited to participate in the research. The school selection is based on the database of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) post primary schools in ■■■■■, representing a range of mainstream school type and their special needs assistants' allocation. For the teachers the inclusion criteria specify that they must be a qualified PE teacher and have 3 years' experience of working with children with disabilities in a mainstream PE setting. One child with a SEN/ disability will be invited from each school in consultation with the principal, PE teacher and parent/ guardian. Gender and age selection of the PE teacher are not criteria and will be based on

convenience and availability. Children will be selected from the senior cycle phase, either transition or 5th year children. Children will be selected to reflect a range of disability categories – a child with a physical disability, a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a child with a mild general learning (MLD) disability and a child with a hearing or visual impairment.

22. Concise statement of ethical issues raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them

The researcher will be interviewing adult, qualified and experienced PE teachers and cannot foresee any major ethical issues. In relation to interviewing the children the researcher will be aware of any sensitive issues that may arise in relation to the child's experience of PE. I will inform participants that I am available to deal with any queries should they arise. An information support sheet may be offered in this type of scenario. Full compliance and adherence of ethical guidelines as per the National Disability Authority (2009) *Ethical Guidance for Research with People with Disabilities* will be ensured. Additionally the research is informed by the UCC Child Protection Policy <http://www.ucc.ie/en/ocla/policy/>

.

23. Arrangements for informing participants about the nature of the study (cf. Question 3)

A letter of invitation to participate and an information sheet on the study will be sent to the PE teacher, the principal, the parent/ guardian and the child with a disability/ SEN. A follow up phone call will be made to see if the participant is willing to partake. Following verbal consent, arrangements will be made to sign the consent form and to schedule interview proceedings suitable to the participant and researcher.

24. How you will obtain Informed Consent - cf. Question 4 (attach relevant form[s])

A letter of invitation to participate and an information sheet on the study will be sent to the PE teacher, the principal, the parent/ guardian and the child with a disability/ SEN. A follow up phone call will be made to see if the participant is willing to partake. Following verbal consent, arrangements will be made to sign the consent form and to schedule interview proceedings suitable to the participant and researcher

25. Outline of debriefing process (cf. Question 9). If you answered YES to Question 16, give details here. State what you will advise participants to do if they should experience problems (e.g. who to contact for help).

For the teachers the debriefing process will involve an offer of information and resources relating to adapted physical education. Relevant organisations will be highlighted also e.g. Physical Education Association of Ireland, The Special Education Support Service and the Professional Development Service for Teachers. Likewise, for the children appropriate clubs and organisations in relation to physical activity in Cork will be highlighted in relation to their disability category e.g. Rebel wheelers, Special Olympics, Cork autism sport together, Cork sports partnership and sports ability.

26. Estimated start date and duration of project

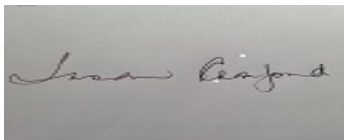
September 2016, two years

Signed
Applicant



Date: 22/5/2016

Signed _____



Date 22.05.16

Research Supervisor/Principal Investigator (if applicable)

Notes

1. Please submit this form and any attachments to srec@ucc.ie (including **a scanned signed copy**). No hard copies are required.
2. Research proposals can receive only provisional approval from SREC in the absence of approval from any agency where you intend to recruit participants. If you have already secured the relevant consent, please enclose a copy with this form.
3. SREC is not primarily concerned with methodological issues but may comment on such issues in so far as they have ethical implications.

This form is adapted from pp. 13-14 of Guidelines for Minimum Standards of Ethical Approval in Psychological Research (British Psychological Society, July, 2004)

Last update: September 2015

APPENDIX 13: Informed Consent May 2016

Information Letter (School Principal)

Dear Principal,

As part of the requirements for my PhD degree in UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The title of the study is: **Inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities in post- primary physical education: a socio-cultural interpretation of students' and teachers' voices.**

The study will involve interviewing a number of students with special educational needs and/ or disabilities about their experiences of inclusion in the general PE class setting. I would appreciate it greatly if your school would consider partaking in this research. The interview will involve approximately 30 - 45 minutes of the students' time. I can arrange a time and place suitable to them.

Participation in this research is totally voluntary and participants are free to withdraw at any stage. I will ensure that no clues to the school or the participants' identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what they say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous. The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis, data will be securely stored for seven years before disposal.

The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may be read by future students in the Boole library and through CORA- Cork Open Research Archive. The study may be published in a research journal.

Attached please find an information letter for parents and children. I would appreciate it if you could distribute the letter to *relevant* parents and children in transition year or 5th year.

I will make a follow-up phone call to you within the next 2 weeks to ascertain if your school is interested in taking part.

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Una McGrath,

Mobile: [REDACTED], Email: [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time,

Una McGrath

Information Letter (Parent/ guardian and student)

Dear parent and student,

As part of the requirements for my PhD degree in UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The title of the study is: **Inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities in post- primary physical education: a socio-cultural interpretation of teachers' voices.**

The study will involve interviewing a number of students with special educational needs and/ or disabilities about their experiences of inclusion in the general PE class setting. I would appreciate it greatly if you would consider partaking in this research. The interview will involve approximately 30 - 45 minutes of your time. I can arrange a time and place suitable to you.

Participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any stage. I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous. The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis, data will be securely stored for seven years before disposal.

The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may be read by future students in the Boole library and through CORA- Cork Open Research Archive. The study may be published in a research journal.

Please sign the consent form below if you are interested in participating.

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Una McGrath,

Mobile [REDACTED], Email: [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time,

Una McGrath

Consent Form (Parent and child)

I..... [Child's name] agree to participate in the research study being undertaken by Una McGrath.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Una McGrath to be digitally recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications

Participant (child)

Signed.....

Date.....

Parent

Signed.....

Date.....

Researcher

Signed

Date.....

APPENDIX 14: SREC Response to Application July 2016

From: Murphy, Mike (Applied Psychology) <Mike.Murphy@ucc.ie>
Sent: Monday, July 25, 2016 5:37 PM
To: Ona McGrath
Cc: Ethics Committee, Social Research
Subject: SREC application 2016-072

Dear Una

I email in relation to the above application, which has been reviewed by SREC. We do not feel we can offer approval to the application in its current form, and would like to invite a resubmission. The issues we feel need to be addressed are:

- It is not clear how the children will be selected – is there a risk of their being singled out impacting them negatively? For example, is it possible that their involvement in such research will be known among their peers?
- Are you confident that the information sheet and consent form, designed for both parents/guardians and young people, will be sufficiently clear for the teenagers involved? Might it be appropriate to use a different form with more accessible language?
- In Q16 & 17, the answer given is no, but further on, in Q22, it is suggested that children may, in fact, experience a level of distress. This should be indicated in Qs 16 and 17.
- There seems to be a gender element missing in this – literature suggests that girls' experiences of PE are significantly different from boys', especially after puberty. This might or might not be an ethical issue, or it may simply be an epistemological/methodological one.

We look forward to your resubmission, and wish you the best with your work

Sincerely

Mike Murphy
Chair, Social Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX 15: SREC Re-submission August 2016

ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC)



Introduction

UCC academic staff and postgraduate research students who are seeking ethical approval should use this approval form. Ethical review by SREC is strongly recommended where the methodology is not clinical or therapeutic in nature and proposes to involve:

- direct interaction with human participants for the purpose of data collection using research methods such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, focus groups etc
- indirect observation with human participant for example using observation, web surveys etc
- access to, or utilisation of, data concerning identifiable individuals.

Application Checklist

This checklist includes all of the items that are required for an application to be deemed complete. In the event that any of these are not present, the application will be returned to the applicant without having been sent to review. Please ensure that your application includes all of these prior to submission. Thank you.

Completed Application Checklist	☐ ✓
Completed Ethical Approval Self-Evaluation	☐ ✓
Completed Description of Project	☐ ✓
Information Sheet(s)	☐ ✓
Consent Sheet(s)	☐ ✓
Psychometric Instruments / Interview / Focus Group Schedules	☐ ✓
I have consulted the UCC <i>Code of Research Conduct</i> and believe my proposal is in line with its requirements	☐ ✓

If you are under academic supervision, your supervisor has approved the wording of and co-signed this application prior to submission ☐ ✓

Please note that you must confirm you have taken account of the University's Code of Research Conduct in order for your application to be considered by SREC

(http://www.ucc.ie/en/media/research/researchatucc/documents/CodeofGoodConductinResearch_000.pdf)

APPLICANT DETAILS

Name of applicant	Una McGrath	Date: 10/8/2016
Contact Details	Phone: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]	
Department/Unit	Sports Studies & Physical Education, School of Education, UCC	
Title of project	Inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities in post- primary physical education: a socio-cultural interpretation of teachers' voices	

ETHICAL APPROVAL SELF-EVALUATION

		YES	NO
1	Do you consider that this project has significant ethical implications?		✓
2	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	✓	
3	Will participation be voluntary?	✓	
4	Will you obtain informed consent in writing from participants?	✓	
5	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason, and (where relevant) omit questionnaire items to which they do not wish to respond?	✓	
6	Will data be treated with full confidentiality / anonymity (as appropriate)?	✓	
7	Will data be securely held for a minimum period of seven years after the completion of a research project, in line with the University's Code of Research Conduct?	✓	
8	If results are published, will anonymity be maintained and participants not identified?	✓	
9	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)?	✓	
10	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way?		✓
11	Will your participants include children (under 18 years of age)?	✓	

12	Will your participants include people with learning or communication difficulties?	√	
13	Will your participants include patients?		√
14	Will your participants include people in custody?		√
15	Will your participants include people engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug taking; illegal Internet behaviour)?		√
16	Is there a realistic risk of participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress?	√	
17	If yes to 16, has a proposed procedure, including the name of a contact person, been given? (see no 25)	√	
18	If yes to 11, is your research informed by the UCC Child Protection Policy? http://www.ucc.ie/en/ocla/policy/	√	

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

19. Aims of the project (briefly)

This research aims to produce and elucidate new knowledge in the field of adapted physical education (PE) in Ireland through original research.

The project aims to ascertain the experiences and perspectives of teachers in relation to including students with SEN and disabilities in the PE setting.

The research intends to gain a clear insight into the needs and supports from the teachers' perspective to inclusion in the PE setting.

Additionally the project seeks to take account of the student's voice and insight in relation to inclusion and PE.

20. Brief description and justification of methods and measures to be used (attach research questions / copy of questionnaire / interview protocol / discussion guide / etc.)

The current study is a multiple case study design based on four schools, eight practising PE teachers and four students with SEN/ disabilities. A qualitative approach is deemed to be the best method to glean the required material. The data collection methods consist of two phases of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the teachers and one semi-structured interview with the students. Additionally, teacher participants maintain a reflective digital diary over a three month period within a school year and a researcher interview journal is maintained throughout the duration of the study.

21. Participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria, detail permissions

8 PE teachers and 4 students with SEN/ disabilities will be invited to participate in the research. The school selection is based on the database of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) post primary schools in [REDACTED], representing a range of mainstream school

type and their special needs assistants' allocation. For the teachers the inclusion criteria specify that they must be a qualified PE teacher and have 3 years' experience of working with children with SEN/ disabilities in a mainstream PE setting. One student with a SEN/ disability will be invited from each school in consultation with the principal, PE teacher and parent/ guardian. Gender and age selection of the PE teacher are not criteria and will be based on convenience and availability. Students will be selected from the senior cycle phase, either transition or 5th year students, permitting them to recall their experiences to date in PE. Gender of the student is not a criteria and will be based on availability. Students will be purposefully selected to reflect a range of disability categories – a student with a physical disability, a student with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a student with a mild/ moderate general learning (MLD) disability and a student with a hearing or visual impairment.

22. Concise statement of ethical issues raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them

The researcher will be interviewing adult, qualified and experienced PE teachers and cannot foresee any major ethical issues. In relation to interviewing the students the researcher will be aware of any sensitive issues that may arise in relation to the student's experience of PE. I will inform participants that I am available to deal with any queries should they arise. I have many years of experience working as a PE teacher and working with students with disabilities. An information support sheet may be offered in this type of scenario. Full compliance and adherence of ethical guidelines as per the National Disability Authority (2009) *Ethical Guidance for Research with People with Disabilities* will be ensured. Additionally the research is informed by the UCC Child Protection Policy <http://www.ucc.ie/en/ocla/policy/>. Participants' real names will not be used in this study in order to avoid any risk of disclosing identities. Every effort will be made to remove any identifying features such as names and geographical location.

23. Arrangements for informing participants about the nature of the study (cf. Question 3)

A letter of invitation to participate and an information sheet on the study will be sent to the PE teacher. A follow up phone call will be made to see if the participant is willing to partake. Following verbal consent, arrangements will be made to sign the consent form and to schedule interview proceedings suitable to the participant and researcher. An information letter and a request for permission to approach parents/ guardians of a child with a disability in the school will be sent to the principal. Following approval and discussion with the principal an information letter and an invitation to participate will be sent to relevant parents and children with SEN/ disability. The information letter for the child will be worded appropriately to their level of cognition and to meet any specific communication needs. The information letter will only be sent to the relevant parents and children and they will contact me directly.

24. How you will obtain Informed Consent - cf. Question 4 (attach relevant form[s])

A letter of invitation to participate and an information sheet on the study will be sent to the PE teacher. A follow up phone call will be made to see if the participant is willing to partake.

Following verbal consent, arrangements will be made to sign the consent form and to schedule interview proceedings suitable to the participant and researcher. Parents/ guardians and the child with SEN/disability will complete signed consent forms. Assistance and support will be provided to the children if needed.

25. Outline of debriefing process (cf. Question 9). If you answered YES to Question 16, give details here. State what you will advise participants to do if they should experience problems (e.g. who to contact for help).

For the teachers the debriefing process will involve an offer of information and resources relating to adapted physical education. Relevant organisations will be highlighted also e.g. Physical Education Association of Ireland, The Special Education Support Service and the Professional Development Service for Teachers. Likewise, for the student's appropriate clubs and organisations in relation to physical activity in their area will be highlighted in relation to their disability category e.g. Irish wheelchair association sport, Special Olympics, Local sports partnership and sports ability. I personally will conduct all interviews. All interviewee's will be given the opportunity to review their transcripts and make any additions/ retractions as they see fit.

26. Estimated start date and duration of project

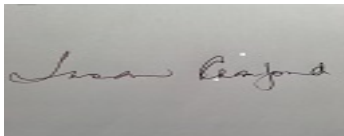
September 2016, two years

Signed
Applicant



Date: 10/8/2016

Signed _____



Date 10.08.16

Research Supervisor/Principal Investigator (if applicable)

Notes

1. Please submit this form and any attachments to srec@ucc.ie (including **a scanned signed copy**). No hard copies are required.
2. Research proposals can receive only provisional approval from SREC in the absence of approval from any agency where you intend to recruit participants. If you have already secured the relevant consent, please enclose a copy with this form.
3. SREC is not primarily concerned with methodological issues but may comment on such issues in so far as they have ethical implications.

This form is adapted from pp. 13-14 of Guidelines for Minimum Standards of Ethical Approval in Psychological Research (British Psychological Society, July, 2004)

Last update: September 2015

APPENDIX 16: Informed Consent Re-submission August 2016
Information Letter (School Principal)

Dear Principal,

As part of the requirements for my PhD degree in UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The title of the study is: **Inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities in post- primary physical education: a socio-cultural interpretation of teachers' and students' voices.**

The study will involve interviewing a number of students with special educational needs and/ or disabilities about their experiences of inclusion in the general PE class setting. I would appreciate it greatly if your school would consider partaking in this research. The interview will involve approximately 30 - 45 minutes of the students' time. I can arrange a time and place suitable to them.

Participation in this research is totally voluntary and participants are free to withdraw at any stage. I will ensure that no clues to the school or the participants' identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what they say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous. The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis, data will be securely stored for seven years before disposal.

The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may be read by future students in the Boole library and through CORA- Cork Open Research Archive. The study may be published in a research journal.

I will make a follow-up phone call to you within the next week to ascertain if your school is interested in taking part.

Attached please find an information letter for parents and students. I would appreciate it if you could distribute the letter to *relevant* parents and children in transition year or 5th year.

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Una McGrath,

Mobile: [REDACTED], Email: [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time,

Una McGrath

Information Letter (Parent/ guardian)

Dear parent,

As part of the requirements for my PhD degree in UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The title of the study is: **Inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities in post- primary physical education: a socio-cultural interpretation of teachers' voices.**

The study will involve interviewing a number of students with special educational needs and/ or disabilities about their experiences of inclusion in the general PE class setting. I feel it is very important to hear the student voice in this research. I would appreciate it greatly if your son/daughter would consider partaking in this research. The interview will involve approximately 30 - 45 minutes of their time. I can arrange a time and place suitable to them. Participation in this research is totally voluntary and your son/daughter is free to withdraw at any stage. I will ensure that no clues to their identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what they say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous. The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis, data will be securely stored for seven years before disposal.

The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may be read by future students in the Boole library and through CORA- Cork Open Research Archive. The study may be published in a research journal.

Please sign the consent form below if your son/ daughter is interested in participating.

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Una McGrath,

Mobile: [REDACTED], Email: [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time,

Una McGrath

Consent Form (Parent)

I..... agree for my son/daughter [Child's name] to participate in the research study being undertaken by Una McGrath.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for the interview with Una McGrath to be digitally recorded.

I understand that my son/daughter can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while they are participating.

I understand that they can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my child's identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from the interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications

Parent

Signed.....

Date.....

Researcher

Signed

Date.....

Information Letter (student)

Dear student,

My name is Una McGrath and I am really interested in finding out about your experiences in physical education (PE) class. I am conducting research on: **Inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities in post- primary physical education.**

My study will involve interviewing a number of students with special educational needs and/ or disabilities in different schools about their experiences in their PE class. I feel it is very important to hear your voice in this research. I would appreciate it greatly if you would consider partaking. The interview will involve approximately 30 - 45 minutes of your time. I can arrange a time and place suitable to you.

Taking part in this research is totally of your free will and you are free to withdraw at any stage. I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis/ book. Any parts from what you say, that are quoted in the thesis/ book will be entirely unknown. The information will be kept private for the duration of the study. On completion of the study, information will be securely stored for seven years before deletion.

The results will be presented in the thesis/ book. They will be seen by my supervisor, and 2 other examiners. The thesis/ book may be read by future students in the Boole library and through CORA- Cork Open Research Archive in UCC. The study may be published in a research journal.

Please sign the consent form below if you are interested in participating.

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Una McGrath,

Mobile: [REDACTED], Email: [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time,

Una McGrath



Consent Form (student)

I..... agree to participate in the research study being undertaken by Una McGrath.

The aim and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.



I am participating of my own accord.

I give permission for the interview with Una McGrath to be digitally recorded.



I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without effects, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the information within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts of what I say from the interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications

Student

Signed.....

Date.....

Researcher

Signed

Date.....

APPENDIX 17: Ethical Approval November 2016

Tue 01/11/2016 12:18

Ethics Committee, Social Research <srec@ucc.ie>

RE: SREC application

Ona McGrath <Ona.McGrath@cit.ie>; Ethics Committee, Social Research <srec@ucc.ie>

Dear Ona

The Social Research & Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved your revised application.

The committee wishes you every success with your research.

Kind regards

Liz

Assistant to the University Ethics Committee

Ext 3234

APPENDIX 18: Phase three PE teacher interview guide questions

Questions for follow up interviews with selected teachers (Phase 3)

Section 1:

1. Tell me your experience of the reflective process (*Did it influence you in planning or thought, did it bring about change in your practice?*)
2. Tell me what your thoughts are regarding the increased numbers with SEN in schools (*how, why, when and where it affects practice*)
3. What would you like to see most in the future to support your teaching in PE in an inclusive setting? Describe any changes you would like to see.
4. On a societal level where do you think inclusive education is going? (*What are your thoughts on inclusive education from your past experiences, currently and going forward?*)
5. Perceived competency: The word *challenge* emerged from a number of the interviewees. What are your thoughts on the notion of perceived competency?
6. How do you feel when a new student with a disability joins the class (*excited, challenged, afraid, apprehensive*)?
7. From the interviews, external support organisations (*NCSE, PDST, SENO, EIPET, CARA, SIDO, and PEAI*) did not appear to impact greatly on the PE teacher..... What are your thoughts on the existing external organisations?
8. Response to SNA support was mixed – explain (*relate to each individual teacher*). Talk to me about your views of the **role** of the SNA in PE.
9. Generally, there was a negative response from PE teachers to the new PE curriculum in relation to inclusion – (*develop in relation to types of activities and assessment*) What are your thoughts on the new PE curriculum in relation to inclusion and adapted activities?
10. Time allocated to PE is an issue for some PE teachers – what do you think the immediate impact of this is for our children? And the long term impact?
11. Lack of FMS and fitness levels of students was voiced – what is your experience of each of these issues, how can this be improved? Also an increase in the number of children showing anxiety, particularly those with ASD came across– what are your experiences of this and any ideas on how it can be addressed.... What practical solutions have you used?
12. Do you think full implementation of the EPSEN Act with statutory IEP's will improve outcomes for PE? (*What are the issues e.g. the paperwork involved, meetings about each student*)
13. In your previous interview you felt your school showed a positive view towards inclusion, can you describe this more and what do you think could challenge this in the future, what do you think will facilitate this.

14. Have you participated in the JCT training for well-being/ PE? Did it address children with SEN/ disabilities and inclusion? The Teaching Council are establishing a new CPD framework called Cosán, what are your thoughts on being a part of this.... would you like Inclusive PE to be part of this? How would you like to see it being facilitated (inclusion in general or subject specific)? What type of CPD would you like (formal/ informal)? Would you be interested in being involved in a PE community of Practice – how would you see that rolling out (meeting face to face, an online forum). You stated that you had positive engagement and interaction with student PE teachers, what are the opportunities for developing CPD with universities/ third level institutions? Looking at CPD in the broad sense what aspect of your working life do you feel you would like to develop?
15. You felt that your ITE was adequate/ inadequate (*relate to specific teacher*) in relation to inclusion in PE. Do you think it has changed since your training? How do you know this? Do you think inclusion should be infused into all modules in teacher pre-service or taught as stand- alone modules?
16. Noel felt very strongly about the necessity of withdrawal for some students to improve on a physical level e.g. a wheelchair user. What are your thoughts on the aims of PE? Do you view the main aim of PE as physical, what about the emotional, social aspect? What is more important for a student with a disability (*without a disability*) social/ physical?
17. What opportunities do you have to consult directly with the student with SEN regarding preferences, likes/ dislikes, needs? Do you individualise programmes for some students with differences?

Section 2:

The student voice:

School one: Jim has cerebral palsy and is ambulant. He finds gripping difficult with his right hand, especially playing basketball and hurling. However, he loves PE, particularly the social aspect and would like more PE on the curriculum. Dan is a wheelchair user, he finds accessibility an issue regarding outdoor activities and the pitch: *yeah, it's (accessibility) very difficult, well if I built this school I wouldn't put the pitch thereit's about 700 or 800 yards away.* Again the social aspect of PE is very strong for him: *Taking part is one of the best things I can actually do and interacting with the other students is even better.* He is more positive regarding PE in post primary than primary.

Questions: What are your views on accessibility in PE for wheelchair users in your school? In a broad sense, what are your thoughts on how teachers perceive the social aspect of PE as a subject? What learning occurs in your view through the social interaction process in PE? What are your feelings about having specialist PE teachers for PE in primary schools?

School two: Nora is hard of hearing. She finds surround sound and acoustics of hall difficult sometimes, she suggested having a small room next to the PE hall to listen to instructions: *Maybe build on or get an extra room that's not really echoey (echoic) or very empty and then the teacher could bring us into the room, talk about what we're going to do and explain the game and then we could go into hall and then start doing the games.* Aidan is profoundly deaf. He stated that the social aspect of PE is very strong for him: *I prefer the big group. I prefer the hearing group. But I want the deaf and hard of hearing to be in that big group as well because I like making friends and I like chatting with hearing people and deaf people equally.* He is more positive regarding PE in post primary. Both students generally felt included in PE. However occasionally an issue arose regarding communication. For Aidan the ability of the teacher to talk in sign is vital.

Questions: What are your experiences of working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing? Can you describe this, tell me about communication? How did you communicate? *Teacher in school two only:* Tell me about your training specific to working with deaf students....Where did you learn to sign, Does the school/ DES provide training, what are the experiences and training of your colleagues here in the school in relation to deaf students? Can most teachers in the school two sign? You have a masters in APA would you be willing to share your knowledge and expertise in a CoP? How would you feel about sharing your expertise in relation to working with students with disabilities in a CoP?

School three: Carmen has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and dyspraxia, she doesn't like PE, and she feels she would like to know beforehand what she is going to do: *I would want to know like what's coming up ahead (the activity).* Amy has ASD, again she doesn't like PE, and she sometimes prefers to work on her own rather than a big group: *but sometimes I prefer to work alone.* Greta has ASD and is overweight, she was the only student from school three and four who clearly preferred the large group interaction in PE. However, she indicated some sensory issues regarding processing of sound in the PE hall: *Yeah the P.E. hall is so empty that even your voice echoes. So whenever the teacher tries to talk, her own voice rebounds and interrupts her.* None of the four girls in this study are involved in any sporting club.

School four: In school four students with ASD are offered the opportunity to participate in a small movement class as well as their larger PE class. Connor has ASD and dyspraxia, he highlighted the attitude of other typically developing students in PE (they laugh at the way he runs- skipping type action): *funny, especially the way I run, I like to skip.* Seamus has ASD, he likes PE both with the large group and in a small group: *That would be quite hard for me. I think the Movement class would suit my need more but I think overall P.E. is really cool and just the amount of activities that we do in it and plus its three classes so I would choose P.E.* Carl has ASD, he likes small movement class rather than the large PE class: *First of all I prefer Movement class because that way there's less*

people to work with so everyone gets ... and it's fun to work on. Overall all three students have a positive perspective towards PE.

Questions: What are your thoughts on using *previewing* (practising of social and motor skills before the PE class) for students with ASD? have you ever considered previewing? What do you feel might be the difficulties with it? Is there an opportunity for requested exclusion, whereby the student can do an alternative activity of their choice? Again what are your feelings about this – on a practical level, on a wider philosophical level (is this contrary to the true sense of inclusion). Tell me about your experience of any sensory related issues with students with ASD, how do you address these? What are your thoughts on participation amongst girls in sporting activities? What attitudes and reactions have you observed from typically developing peers towards students with ASD? Can you describe any difference between these attitudes and that of other categories of disability?