Original Article

**“For everyone, but mission impossible” health and physical educators’
perspectives on inclusive learning environments**

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Abstract

Teachers play significant roles in students’ inclusive learning experiences in health and physical education (HPE) settings. However, there is a lack of empirical knowledge regarding primary/elementary HPE teachers’ understandings in establishing inclusive learning environments. This study examined primary/elementary HPE teachers’ perspectives on inclusive learning environments. The potential contributions of this study would be to provide empirical knowledge regarding the teachers’ understandings of inclusive learning environments, for further cross-cultural comparisons with those of administrators, parents, and students, as well as other HPE educators and those who work in other disciplines. An explorative qualitative research design was employed to study participants’ perspectives ($n=11$). Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, field notes and reflective journal entries, and email correspondences; and analysed thematically employing data analysis spiral. According to participants, establishing inclusive learning environments should be “for everyone,” but it could be “mission impossible”—considering the diversity of students and teachers, as well as the current constructions of the educational system. They also perceived that establishing such environments is “to create a safe place” for everyone. Participants acknowledged the importance of “inclusion for all.” However, their frustrations of achieving such ideal in day-to-day practices were evident. Future policies should focus on improving support systems and educational opportunities for teachers. Furthermore, ways of employing broadened views of inclusion (e.g., enhancing social/cultural acceptance and sustainability) within day-to-day educational practices need to be explored further.

Keywords: inclusion; diversity; health education; physical education; pedagogy

Introduction

Living a life within inclusive environments is a human right, and these environments must exist across several domains of one’s everyday life. Levels of inclusion are present in the built and social environments people experience daily (Layton & Steel, 2015). Exclusive experiences marginalize one’s presence from social aspects of one’s life, which could lead to physical, social, and emotional isolations (Macdonald & Leary, 2005).

Inclusion in primary/elementary health and physical education (HPE) is important for children. HPE can improve a child’s well-being physically, socially, cognitively, and spiritually (Kilborn, 2016). Primary/elementary aged children are in a pivotal developmental stage with regards to their motor skills. Lakusić (2015) states these skills are “responsible for the efficiency of human movement” (p. 200). This efficiency in movement aids young learners to confidently be involved in physical activities and provides opportunities for holistic childhood developments (Kirk, 2005). Accordingly, these benefits of HPE should be equitably accessible to all children. Providing inclusive learning opportunities in primary/elementary HPE thus is a critical act of ensuring human rights for these young learners.

Such environments in primary/elementary HPE are established through the interactions amongst teachers, administrators, parents, and students (Ladda, 2016). Amongst these parties, teachers play significant roles as they plan, design, and implement the learning opportunities for students (Lingard & Mills, 2007). Due to the interactive nature of inclusion in HPE contexts, teachers are involved in complex pedagogic processes in promoting inclusiveness, that might not be foreseen. (Hardman, Pitchford, & Shire, 2013). However, the perspectives of teachers in establishing inclusiveness within HPE contexts are not fully explored in the research literature. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical knowledge regarding primary/elementary educators’

understandings of inclusive learning environments, compared to junior and senior high school teachers (e.g., Hodge, Ammah, Casebolt, Lamaster, & O'Sullivan, 2004).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the ways in which primary/elementary HPE teachers perceive inclusive learning environments. The potential contributions of this study would be to provide empirical knowledge regarding the teachers' understandings of inclusive learning environments, for further cross-cultural comparisons with those of administrators, parents, and students, as well as other HPE educators and those who work in other disciplines. The findings would also inform policies and actions in promoting inclusiveness within various learning environments.

Materials and Methods

An explorative qualitative research design was employed in this study. This approach helped researchers to gain new insights and in-depth understandings about the inclusive learning environments in HPE contexts and to understand perspectives of people whose voices are limited in current empirical research (i.e., primary/elementary HPE teachers) (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2015).

A purposeful maximum-variation sampling strategy was used to recruit participants with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Selected participants had opportunities to identify other potential participants from their acquaintances (i.e., snowball sampling strategy), and those who met the criteria among the identified candidates were invited to the study. Selection criteria included (1) being a current, past, or substitute primary/elementary HPE teacher and (2) having a Bachelor degree in physical education. Overall, 11 participants were recruited. The participants completed signed consent forms, and identifiable information was removed to protect their confidentiality. All names appeared in this article are pseudonyms (Creswell & Poth 2017; Patton, 2015). Detailed information is presented in Table 1. Description of Participants ($n = 11$).

Table 1. Description of Participants ($n = 11$)

Pseudonym	Gender	Years of Teaching	Education	Teaching Status
Alice	F	15	BPE, BEd	Permanent
Barnaby	M	5	BPE, BEd, BRec, MPE	Substitute
Charles	M	4	BPE, BEd, Dip. Tech	Permanent
Dean	M	30+	BPE, BEd	Retired
Emile	F	6	BPE, BEd, MPE	Permanent
Finn	M	7	BPE, BEd	Substitute
Gabe	M	6	BPE, BEd, MPE	Permanent
Helen	F	22	BPE, BEd, MPE	Permanent
James	M	5	BPE, BEd	Permanent
Sarah	F	11	BPE, BEd, MEd	Permanent
Kacy	F	5	BPE, BEd, Dip. Tech	Substitute
BPE: Bachelor of Physical Education			MPE: Master of Physical Education	
BEd: Bachelor of Education			MEd: Master of Education	
BRec: Bachelor of Recreation			Dip. Tech: Diploma of Technology	

Data were collected by conducting face-to-face semi-structured interviews (60 to 90 minutes), writing field notes and reflective journal entries, and gathering email correspondences. During the one-on-one interview, participants were asked open-ended questions, for example, "How would you describe inclusiveness in your HPE programs?" "How do you understand inclusive learning environments in HPE contexts?" Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the transcriptions were checked with the participants for accuracy (i.e., respondent validation). Field notes were taken during and immediately after each interview. Field notes included the contexts of interviews and preliminary observations about interviewees' responses, as well as the researcher's initial analysis. Reflective journal entries noted researcher's personal thoughts and learning during the research process, and email contact was selectively made to clarify participants' responses (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Patton, 2015).

Data were analysed thematically employing *data analysis spiral*, which involved (1) organization and management, (2) reading and coding, (3) classification, (4) interpretation, and (5) representation of the data. To promote trustworthiness of findings, multiple data sources were used, and respondent validation was performed. Furthermore, the entire research process was reviewed by two experts (i.e., expert audit review). Research participants' responses were presented verbatim in the results to increase the resonance for the readers (Creswell & Poth 2017; Patton, 2015).

Results

Participants highlighted that inclusive learning environments should be available for everyone. While discussing the concept, however, participants expressed their frustration in establishing inclusive learning

environments in day-to-day real-world practices, considering the diverse backgrounds of students and teachers, as well as the current constructions of the educational system. Furthermore, they highlighted that creating a safe place would be a fundamental aspect in establishing such environments.

For “everyone”

Each participant described their understandings of inclusive learning environments in their own words, drawing from their personal experiences to frame their understanding, resulting in various articulations about the term. However, most participants described the term concisely: learning environments that are available “for everyone.” For example, Dean articulated, “Inclusion would be providing opportunities for all students regardless of ability.” He continued with this sentiment by describing how inclusive learning environments might look like in HPE contexts through the eyes of an onlooker: “If a stranger were to walk into the gym and were able to justly identify a variety of challenges both physically and perhaps mentally, they would say “that is an inclusion,” because everybody is active and everybody is doing something.”

Notably, most participants’ perceptions of inclusive learning environments were not limited to only including students with disabilities. According to Finn, “Inclusion will be more so adapting your current curriculum to suit those who are in need of alternate settings, or alternate means of learning, so everyone is able to participate in the classroom with other students.” Several participants, however, pointed out that some primary/elementary HPE teachers tended to think that inclusive pedagogy would be required merely for students with disabilities. For example, Charles mentioned:

A lot of people would not think about ESL [English as a second language], or ethnic diversity, or LGBTQ. They think about the ones [i.e., students with disabilities] that have been talked about for years. They do not think about the child who is transgendered, or the child who is very bright but who can only speak English at a grade two level but he is a Grade six. We have a lot of Aboriginal students, we have white people, and then we have children who are of Innu [i.e., Indigenous peoples who lived traditionally in the Labrador region of Canada] descent and children who are Métis [i.e., a group of Canadian peoples who are the descendants between the First Nations peoples and European settlers], and we are all here in the same class. Inclusion is much more than that.

Barnaby also noted that this “limited or narrow diverse perspective” and “old-school [i.e., out dated] and obsolete” views in inclusion still exist, because some teachers “never had education about diversity and inclusion” and “had segregation at the beginning of their careers.” However, he predicted that “this mentality, kind of the missed potential and even the lack of respect in a lot of ways, will die off with the teachers who are coming out fresh and want to teach it with more diverse manner.” Kacy also expected that “Newer teachers may have a better understanding where we have been exposed to it from the beginning of our career.”

With such anticipation, these participants perceived alternatively that, as articulated by Charles, “Everything and anything that falls under diversity,” including the aspects of diverse backgrounds, needs, abilities, and aspirations, should be considered in creating inclusive learning environments. James and Helen further explained about the idea:

Inclusion is that, regardless of where they come from, based on their own perspectives and their own strengths and weaknesses, everyone is involved as much as they are capable of being involved and working to the best of their ability. The environment is not geared towards one group of students over another, or it is not aimed at students with certain strengths to the exclusion of groups with other strengths or weaknesses (James).

I guess when I think of inclusiveness, I think of the general classroom, where you actually need to look at each child, and [observe] who is not performing as well as the others and then you try to gear it to meet the needs of every student (Helen).

For this reason, according to these participants, inclusive learning environments can be understood as a broader meaning: a place of learning for every student with *diversity* (instead of merely understanding the place as an environment where students with a *disability* are accommodated).

Some participants further discussed that promoting an “equal” or “same” opportunity for everyone does not always promote “equity” in inclusive HPE settings. They argued that some students would need extra supports to meaningfully participate in HPE and might require an alternative setting to fully participate in certain circumstances. For example, Charles addressed this notion, “They can all still learn, they can all still meet the curriculum outcomes, but they do not have to do necessarily what everyone else is doing.” As such, these participants articulated that establishing inclusive learning environments involves a practice of ensuring *equity* for everyone (instead of merely promoting *equality* of learning opportunities).

But “mission impossible”

Participants understood that establishing inclusive learning environments would be a critical aspect for ensuring students’ human rights. They thus acknowledged that such environments should be available fairly and equitably for all students in their classroom. Nevertheless, participants also perceived simultaneously that creating and sustaining inclusive learning environments could be “very hard”—considering the diversity of students and teachers, as well as the current constructions of the educational system. Charles highlighted the difficulty of being inclusive, considering the diverse educational needs, preferences, and aspirations within his HPE classroom:

You might have a class where there is a language barrier, there is a child with autism, there is a child with a physical disability. It is not always possible to do an activity that includes all three of them. You might be doing something to try to accommodate the child with autism, but sometimes for every action, there is an opposite reaction. You might be sort of making it more difficult for a different child of diversity, a completely different unique challenge within the same activity. So, the actual concept of diversity often can be a negative influence on inclusion.

Alice also explained such complexity within inclusive learning environments using an example about the potential implications of diverse cultural/religious backgrounds on inclusive HPE teaching practices:

Well I have had with religion, with Jehovah’s witness for example. You are doing activities you put on Christmas music, you add a Christmas theme to a game, and I mean that is part of the common general culture. But you know they do not participate. There are the religious sides, cultural things, people and children not speaking the language. Culture, this is interesting, because I say physical education is a lot to deal with social interactions. Sometimes there are attitudes toward females from certain cultures, like I had certain students who did not listen to me, because they sort of disregard females in that kind of authoritative position. Sometimes, they treat other people very physical and aggressive. I had one student hit another student, and I took him aside to talk to him while the game continued. When I spoke to him, his response was, “Miss, in my country, brother kills brother.”

Given this complex nature of learning environments in HPE, however, participants perceived that there was a lack of opportunities for professional development in the area of diversity and inclusion within HPE contexts. According to Finn,

This year I had a one PD [professional development] session, and that was it, you know I have not had the opportunity to get out there and really talk to other Phys Ed teachers, especially primary/elementary. I was definitely at a disadvantage in that sense, I guess I was left to my own, and I tried as many things as I could, but I do not think I have mastered it by any means.

Participants thus called to an attention for adequate diversity education opportunities for teachers to improve inclusiveness in establishing inclusive learning environments. For example, Charles stated that “I think the most important thing is to continually educate our teachers on everything that falls under diversity and inclusion and then just trying to provide them with as many possible resources and tools as we can.” James also stated that “If teachers have more positive experiences with the properly supported inclusive environments run by people with some experiences and can see an inclusive environment runs well, they will have more confidence in their own abilities to implement these.”

Additionally, some participants identified that the current constructions of the educational system could negatively influence the establishment of inclusive learning environments. James stated that “I try to make my space in my program as inclusive as possible, but I do not think that it is feasible for a teacher to have a truly inclusive program in the way that the school system is currently set up.” Kacy further noted that the problem could not only be with the teachers’ preferences and willingness to have inclusiveness in their HPE, but also be with the larger educational system:

The big issue with our inclusion is that it is promoted, but it is not backed up. In the school system, they want us to provide a fully inclusive environment which we do not have a problem with. But we do not have enough resources to do so.

Most participants pointed out that they are often assigned with extra responsibilities as aHPE teacher, which lead them to experience a “burnout.” Dean described such situations: “I had the jogging club, I had the gardening club, I had all the intramural groups and ski group, and I was burning out. It is very hard when that is the expectation from your school.” For this reason, participants perceived that establishing inclusive learning environments is a desirable ideal, but it can be beyond a teacher’s capacity, feeling pessimistic that pursuing

“full inclusion” in HPE can be “mission impossible.” Dean articulated that, considering such circumstances, establishing inclusive learning environments can be “mission impossible, perhaps you have to pick your situations. Maybe, you have to limit yourself. It is really unfortunate that it has come down to that, but you have to be a realist too.”

Some participants also highlighted that limited time and supports could make such establishments mission impossible. Finn clearly stated that “If you do not have the support, there is always going to be students that are going to suffer.” James echoed this sentiment:

You have limited time with students. We do not always get the full timeframe. Sometimes students with diversity need extra time to get acclimated to a setting. You cannot just tell kids to do something. You cannot have an inclusive classroom without a few supports involved. You need people. You need time, equipment, and supports. You need all those things together to have an inclusion.

Participants also described their concerns about current constructions of the educational system. For example, “class sizes were getting bigger” to address all students’ educational needs, and teachers “did not have the opportunity to work one-on-one with some students who need it” due to the bigger class size. Insufficient resources such as having only “three student assistances for 750 kids,” limited space where “40 to 50 sometimes up to 55 students were in a gym at a time,” and inaccessible built environments where “students were struggling to get in and out of the gym on their own” were also identified as factors negatively influencing their inclusive pedagogy. Sarah, therefore, called to an attention to reform the constructions of the current educational system and provide educators to have “the wherewithal to have an inclusive environment,” thereby inclusive pedagogy becomes a “mission possible.”

Create a “safe” place

Participants perceived that promoting “safety” within HPE contexts would be a fundamental aspect in establishing inclusive learning environments. Kacy described a safe HPE environment as a place where “Everyone feels welcome and is treated with dignity.” Dean perceived that a lowered sense of safety within HPE contexts could negatively contribute to the motivation in HPE participation: “If you are not comfortable in that environment, you are more likely to do less, and it becomes an afterthought as opposed to something first and foremost in your mind.” According to participants, it is important to create a place where students can develop a heightened sense of belonging to promote inclusiveness. James also described a safe environment:

It is a place for students, and that this area is a place where they can go, and they feel like they are part of something, and where they try to get the meaningful product out of it, try to get enjoyment, try to be better themselves, and try to learn a few new things along the way.

Charles further described this place by highlighting the welcoming atmosphere of this environment:

The most important part is making them feel comfortable and welcomed. I try to always promote acceptance, and how it is okay to make mistakes, or it is okay to not be the best. If it is a game where you score a goal, there are other ways to do that, there is other ways you can contribute, there is other ways that you can develop skills or you can participate in activity regardless of what the challenge is. So just trying to make the gym a place of comfort for everybody, so they feel included and welcomed in the gym.

For this reason, participants understood that a broadened idea of “safety”—that is, understanding the term by considering various areas within HPE contexts such as physical, emotional, spiritual, and cultural domains—should be considered in establishing inclusive learning environments. Dean explained this holistic notion by highlighting the importance of acknowledging and accepting students’ individual differences:

It is a space where it does not matter what comes between the doors. You allow students to come in and participate in a meaningful way and enjoy a variety of experiences. It does not matter about physical limitations, mental limitations, or cultural limitations. All who come should be welcomed.

Participants further pointed out that “student-tailored” approaches should be emphasized in establishing inclusive learning environments. Helen stated: “Tailor it to the child, so they can get to different levels, so that they can actually achieve success, and that is the ultimate.” Then, according to James, establishing such environments involves creating safe spaces, where the educational focuses are not on students’ deficits or weaknesses, but on strengths:

If you know you have a population of students that have some strengths in one area, I think really

inclusion means gearing your program towards strength the students have and highlighting the strengths, instead of always try to correct deficits, or focusing on what students cannot do, or are not able to do. We need to switch our focus, so students have success in their own way to participate a lot more or have a lot more fun.

Several participants indicated that welcoming and safe environment in HPE can be created by students themselves, thereby creating and encouraging those opportunities are also important. Charles observed this aspect during his HPE class: “When there is an uneven number, someone is left out. My students say, ‘You can join our group,’ and calling them in and say, ‘We will work in a triangle [group of three, instead of pairs].’ They reached out and they have included other students in that way.” Charles further discussed the importance of encouraging students as a way of fostering a “trickle-down effect from teacher”—that is, a positive educational outcome, that inclusive culture becomes a norm within the learning environments. He articulated that “You can see that even within students that there is teaching and learning happening, and there is inclusion amongst themselves.”

Some participants highlighted that creating safe environments can be a complex task, considering the diverse upbringings or situations among students. Alice provided an example of exclusionary attitudes among students, that were created by unfamiliar and intimidating factors:

Sometimes, students are intimidated by other students so they do not want to work with certain individuals in the gym. Sometimes, students are not very clean, and they come from a certain background where hygiene is not something that is dealt properly. Sometimes, students do not work with other students because of physical appearance or body odor.

Due to this complexity, according to these participants, establishing inclusive learning environments often involves dealing with students who have negative experiences in inclusion, such as: students who are “not comfortable with their body shape or size” or “feel body-shamed and judged;” students who “always feel like an outsider” due to their perceived lack of bodily abilities; and students who are embarrassed and “othered” by peers due to the perceived differences in appearance and abilities.

According to participants, exclusion in HPE could also happen at various levels and contexts. James provided an example—that is, the hidden and “invisible” consequences of current policy on HPE attire:

Clothing is a social justice kind of stuff. Kids do not need to be, or do not need to feel bad about themselves when they need to change. I think we really need to get away from the need to wear ‘gym clothes’ to gym. I grew up in an economically depressed area. Most students did not change to go to gym class, because you only had two or three pairs clothes anywhere.... The change room can also be a hard place for a lot of students, and getting changed in there for different reasons, like body-image reasons. There are students who come in with different experiences from home. Some kids could have traumatic experiences.

As such, participants highlighted that fostering “mindfulness” is an important aspect in establishing inclusive learning environments, as Emile remarked: “Halloween-based activities, Christmas-based activities, Easter-based activities, some students are not allowed to participate in those. So, you got to be mindful. This is where you need to know your students and their culture, their race and what not.” Finally, Charles noted that the complexity in establishing inclusive learning environments make it a “very open-ended process,” thereby creating such environments “is a continual work in progress.”

Discussion

The perspectives of participants have revealed insights on inclusive learning environments within primary and elementary HPE contexts. Participants emphasized a broadened view of inclusion from a diversity and equity lens. They also perceived that creating inclusive learning environments can be “mission impossible,” considering the diverse and complex nature of inclusion, as well as the unsupportive realities within the educational contexts. They also understood that establishing such environments involves fostering social acceptance and cultural safety within teaching and learning processes.

Broadened view of inclusive learning environments: diversity-focused

The findings of this study clearly revealed that establishing inclusive learning environments should not focus merely on working with students with disabilities. They perceived that all students in HPE contexts arrive with different personal experiences that shape their identities and worldviews. Thus, students’ value systems, social and cultural backgrounds, and identities would not be uniform (Flintoff, Dowling, & Fitzgerald, 2015). For this reason, as noted by the participants, HPE is for all students, and the learning environments should thus be inclusive to everyone in the programs. Florian (2015) also notes that *inclusive pedagogy* seeks to accommodate *everyone* “by extending what is ordinarily available to all rather than by differentiating for some”

(p. 13) and refers to attitudes and approaches that embrace diversity and promote equal opportunities for all learners (Deppeler, Loreman, Smith, & Florian, 2015).

The findings further suggest that establishing such environments involves celebrating the various cultural landscapes of students and their individual differences, and accommodate such diversity in the program. Several authors also have claimed that quality HPE is characterized by having inclusiveness within the programs, and this can be exemplified by offering educational programs that are respectful and representative of all students (Casey & Kentel, 2014; Vickerman, 2007).

Broadened view of inclusive learning environments: equity-focused

Equality refers to the quality or state of being equal, whereas *equity* refers to “giving value to, and celebrating social and cultural differences of individuals and in society” (Penney, 2000). Ensuring equality within HPE contexts thus involves providing equal educational opportunities to all students in the program. For example, *integrated* physical education was provided for students with disabilities under the service-based approaches, which focused on the placement (i.e., placing all students in regular physical education programs to provide same educational opportunities) without careful considerations on the support systems (e.g., equipment, built environments, instructional resources, and individualized education plans) (Goodwin, Watkinson, & Fitzpatrick, 2003). Such integration approach thus categorized, grouped, and placed students with disabilities in the same HPE programs and generalized the supports, which did not guarantee the implementation of appropriate educational aids (Goodwin *et al.*, 2003).

Whereas, equity within HPE contexts refers to providing fair and equitable opportunities for all students to learn and participate in HPE programs with appropriate educational supports, which was emphasized under the support-based approaches (Goodwin *et al.*, 2003). According to Goodwin *et al.* (2003), *inclusive* physical education can be defined as:

Providing all students with disabilities with the opportunity to participate in regular physical education with their peers, with supplementary aides and support services as needed to take full advantage of the goals of motor skill acquisition, fitness, knowledge of movement, and psycho-social well-being, toward the outcome of preparing all students for an active lifestyle appropriate to their abilities and interests (p. 193).

The findings of this research thus highlighted that focusing on providing equitable, fair, and supportive opportunities in HPE programs—moving beyond from providing merely the equal placement opportunities—is more appropriate for the establishment and sustainability of inclusion.

Frustration: working with diverse students

All students in HPE programs have their own backgrounds and individualities. Statistics can extend on this notion and help describe the diversity of people. In Canada for example, nearly 20% of the population was foreign-born in 2006, and is projected to increase to over 25% by year 2030. Approximately 20% of the Canadian population is belonging to a visible minority group and over 65% of the total population reported as being affiliated with a Christian religion, whereas 33% of population reported as being either affiliated with a non-Christian religion or no affiliation to any religion. Estimated 10% of the entire population reported as having some type of disabilities and diagnosed medical conditions without including the *invisible disabilities* (i.e., medical conditions that are not immediately observable such as fibromyalgia and diabetes). Approximately 4% of the population reported having Indigenous identities (i.e., First Nations Peoples, Métis, and Inuit) and 16% of people in Canada are from lone-parent families (Statistics Canada, 2016). As briefly highlighted in the statistics, all people are different in nature, and such diverse nature would also be presented in HPE contexts (Jacobsen, Frankenberg, & Lenhoff, 2012).

The findings of this study highlighted educators' frustrations in creating and sustaining inclusive learning environments working with diverse students. Nevertheless, participants perceived that there is a lack of educational opportunities to improve their awareness of diversity and build capacity for appropriate practices. This finding suggests that there is an urgency to provide adequate diversity training opportunities for educators (Casey & Kentel, 2014; Palla-Kane & Block, 2016).

Frustration: working within realities

The results of this study highlighted that the current constructions of the educational system could negatively influence in establishing inclusive learning environments. Kasserand Lytle (2013) also argues that creating such environments may be hindered due to systematic barriers and/or realities of current HPE contexts. According to them, these factors can be categorized as *context-related* and *person-related* barriers. *Context-related* issues refer to external barriers such as inappropriate built environments, as well as a lack of educational resources and administrative supports from the school and/or school board. Participants of this study identified that those factors could be: overburden tasks as an educator, limited time, a lack of funding and administrative supports, inaccessibility, overcrowding in the programs, and limited personnel resources.

Person-related barriers refer to educators' internal aspects such as limited knowledge, as well as a lack of perceived value and motivation in inclusion (Kasser&Lytle, 2013). Block and Obrusnikova (2016) states that these person-related barriers can be developed from educators' negative previous experiences in inclusive teaching practices, as well as insufficient pre-service teacher education and professional development opportunities; and can be intensified by the interactions with context-related barriers. Hodge, Murata, and Kozub(2002) also note that these educational opportunities can shape HPE teachers' preconceived notions and biases against inclusion. As such, teacher education and professional development opportunities should focus on enhancing educators' knowledge, competency, behaviors, and attitudes comprehensively.

Inclusive pedagogy: ensuring social acceptance

The built environment and support systems are important to establishing inclusive environments. The findings of this study, however, revealed that promoting and sustaining positive societal attitudes within educational environments are another fundamental aspect for inclusion. Participants stated that socially unwelcoming environments can evoke students' feelings of marginalization in the programs and even unenthusiastic receptions against HPE.

Hay (1998) states that a persons' *sense of place* can be described as a collection of meanings associated with an area. In HPE contexts, this concept can be shaped by the social and physical atmosphere of the program (Block, Klavina, & McKay,2016). As observed by participants of this study, a sense of place can be enhanced when students feel welcomed in their participation. Furthermore, the participants highlighted that perceived social acceptance can develop a heightened *sense of belonging*. This concept refers to the extent that people feel personally accepted, included, appreciated, and supported in a social context. Such feeling can be promoted when students perceive that they are the part of the learning community (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000).

This study also highlighted that such enhanced sense of belonging can safeguard and promote students' *dignity* in learning. *Dignity* refers to an indispensable human right and a valued quality for human beings and can be described as respected and appreciated, and is "realized through individual freedom that is brought to bear in the course of the self's participation in meaningful decision making and exercise of individual responsibility" (Shannon, 2007, p. 17). Johnston, Goodwin, and Leo (2015) note that experiences of socially supportive environments and sense of community can promote persons' dignity.

Wilson and Lieberman (2000) discuss further that enhancing students' awareness and acceptance of inclusion can be achieved through *exposure* (e.g., introducing diverse abilities, backgrounds, and belief systems to students), *experience* (e.g., providing opportunities to experience different ways of pursuing movement tasks such as playing wheelchair basketball), and *ownership* (e.g., encouraging students to be advocates in accommodating other students' educational needs). The findings of this study also suggest that creating and encouraging those educational opportunities for students are important for the establishment and sustainability of inclusive learning environments, highlighting that such inclusive culture and social acceptance could become the norm within the educational programs if continual emphasis on inclusion is visible to the students.

Inclusive pedagogy: ensuring cultural safety

The findings of this study highlighted that promoting a sense of cultural safety is an important aspect of creating inclusive learning environments. Participants understood the meanings of safety as a broadened idea—that is, understanding safety by considering various areas within HPE contexts such as cultural and spiritual domains. Such holistic notion emphasizes the appreciation and acceptance of students' social diversity and cultural pluralism within HPE contexts (O'Connor & Graber, 2014).

Studies suggest that promoting cultural safety can be achieved by having *cultural competence*. According to Whaley and Davis (2007), *cultural competence* refers to:

A set of problem-solving skills that include (a) the ability to recognize and understand the dynamic interplay between heritage and adaptation dimensions of culture in shaping human behavior; (b) the ability to use knowledge acquired about an individual's heritage and adaptational challenges to maximize the effectiveness of assessment, diagnosis, and treatment; (c) internalization (i.e. incorporation into one's clinical problem-solving repertoire) of process of recognition, acquisition, and use of cultural dynamics so that it can be routinely applied to diverse groups. (p. 565)

Culturally-competent practices in HPE would involve, for example, increasing cultural literacy (e.g., acquiring a deeper understanding of students' cultural backgrounds such as gender-specific restrictions of certain culture in participating swimming), transforming current teaching methods (e.g., altering current pedagogies to be more conducive to different learning styles of different cultures such as using a visual aid to explain a movement instead of using instructional techniques requiring body contacts), and communicating continually to address the culture-specific needs (e.g., communicating with students' families to gain more insight about cultural restrictions in learning).

Cultural relevancy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and *sustainability* (Paris, 2012) within HPE teachers' pedagogy should also be ensured. The findings suggest that culturally inappropriate and irrelevant practices in

HPE could happen at various levels and contexts (e.g., using a Christmas theme in a lesson for certain students with specific religious background and changing aHPE attire in a public change room for a student who follows religious restrictions). To promote cultural appropriateness and relevancy, Ladson-Billings (1995) and Paris (2012) suggest that teachers continually review and modify their programs to value students' cultural landscapes and maintain their cultural identities consistently. Palla-Kane and Block (2016) also notes that educators need to provide opportunities for students to experience and be educated on multiple cultures and other diverse backgrounds, thereby they can positively interact with each other in learning situations.

Conclusion

Learning environments should be appropriate and available for all students in diversity contexts, and the educational benefits need to be accessible to everyone equitably and fairly. Furthermore, a heightened sense of safety was seen to contribute to students' receptiveness in learning. Although, participants acknowledged the importance of "inclusion for all," they did admit that complex nature of diversity and inclusion, as well as the current constructions of the educational system were not conducive to such an ideal. Especially, their frustrations of achieving such ideal in day-to-day real-world practices were evident. Policies and actions should focus on improving support systems and educational opportunities for teachers. Furthermore, practical ways of employing broadened views of inclusion within day-to-day educational encounters needs to be further explored through research and practices.

This research captured the understandings of inclusive learning environments from the perspectives of under-represented educators and provided an outlet for them to voice their perspectives. These shared insights would encourage other educators to reflect upon their own practices to ensure inclusiveness in their own educational programs. Additionally, further studies should be conducted to understand the perspectives of parents, administrators, and students, as well as to synthesize those findings through cross-cultural comparisons. Notably, several studies in this context have been completed. However, those voices from the field should be updated continually to represent the understandings that are reflective to the current educational environments.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics Approval

This study obtained an institutional review board approval from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at the Memorial University.

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