PARTICIPATION IN AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM:

CLASSROOM MEMBERS’ PERSPECTIVES OF THE SCHOOL PARTICIPATION
OF A STUDENT WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES

by

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Participation in an inclusive classroom: Classroom members’ perspectives of the school participation of a student with significant disabilities

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Abstract

In British Columbia, students with significant disabilities are included in general education classes with their peers. True inclusion goes beyond having a physical presence in the classroom and involves meaningful participation in both the social and academic life of the classroom (Katz, 2012). Meaningful participation consists of three inter-related components: active engagement in a task, the perception of participating, and the context in which it occurs (Eriksson & Granlund, 2004). Participation supports the healthy development and well-being of a child (Law, 2002), yet many students with significant disabilities are not receiving the necessary supports to fully participate at school (Kurth, Morningstar, & Kozleski, 2014; Sokal & Katz, 2015).

The current study used a qualitative case study design to explore how a student with significant disabilities participates in an inclusive classroom. More specifically, the study focused on factors that influenced participation, using the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement (CMOP-E) as a theoretical framework. CMOP-E suggests that interactions between factors relating to the person, the environment, and the activity influence a person’s participation in daily activities (Polatajko, Townsend, & Craik, 2007). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the classroom teacher, education assistant (EA), five students in the class, and from direct observations of the student participating in daily classroom activities and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results of this study suggest key factors that influence participation in an inclusive classroom of a student with significant disabilities include: (a) student’s ability to communicate; (b) classroom culture that respects diversity, fosters a sense of belonging and safety, and values personal and social responsibility; (c) access to adapted materials and
Assistive Technology (AT); (d) elements of Universal Design for Learning (UDL); (e) interactive learning; (f) weaving individualized learning outcomes into classroom activities and routines. Additional findings suggest that interactions of personal factors of all the members of the class influence participation; thus, personal factors of the classroom teacher, EA, and peers must also be considered. Furthermore, these social interactions contribute to the social environment in the classroom, indicating personal factors must always be considered in the context of the social environment.
Lay Summary

In British Columbia, students with significant disabilities are often included in general education classes with their peers. Being fully included means students participate in the social and academic life of the classroom (Katz, 2012), but many students with significant disabilities are not fully participating at school (Kurth, Morningstar, & Kozleski, 2014; Sokal & Katz, 2015). The present study explored how a student with significant disabilities participates in an inclusive classroom, focusing on how the interactions between the person, environment, and the activity influenced participation. Key factors identified in this study include: (a) communication; (b) classroom culture of respect, safety, belonging; (c) personal and social responsibility; (d) access to adapted materials; (d) design of learning activities; (e) interactive learning; (f) weaving individual student goals into daily routines. The people in the class and the way they interact with each other also influences participation. These results can inform inclusive school practices.
Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished, independent work of the author, Sarah Y Skinner, and was supervised by Dr. Jennifer Katz. This research was approved by the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board, certificate number H18-00232, titled “Participation in an inclusive classroom” and all data collection and subsequent analysis was conducted by the author. The research was supported in part by funding through the University of British Columbia Faculty of Education and Counselling Psychology and Special Education Graduate Student Research Grant.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... iii

Lay Summary .................................................................................................................. v

Preface ......................................................................................................................... vi

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................ vii

List of Tables ................................................................................................................. xiii

List of Figures ................................................................................................................ xiv

List of Abbreviations .................................................................................................... xv

Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................... xvi

Dedication ...................................................................................................................... xvii

Chapter 1: Introduction ............................................................................................... 1

   Key Definitions .......................................................................................................... 2

      Students with significant disabilities. .................................................................... 3

      Inclusive classrooms ............................................................................................... 3

      Participation ........................................................................................................... 5

      Occupational therapy (OT). .................................................................................. 6

      Summary of the Problem ....................................................................................... 7

Chapter 2: Literature Review ....................................................................................... 8

   Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................. 8

   Factors Influencing Participation .......................................................................... 9

      Personal factors .................................................................................................... 9

      Environmental factors ......................................................................................... 13

      Activity factors. .................................................................................................. 16

vii
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Participation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaps in Research</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education for students with significant disabilities.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational therapy frameworks of participation in education.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring participation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-based occupational therapy and participation.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Method</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Background</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Underpinnings</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant selection</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality and privacy</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant profiles</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colby, Gwen, Lola, Megan, and Sam</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propositions</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1 Interpretation Guide to Sophie’s Non-Verbal Communication Behaviour…………41
Table 2 List of Themes from Across All Sources of Data……………………………………52
Table 3 Common Themes Between Data Sets………………………………………………116
List of Figures

Figure 1 The Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement ..................8
Figure 2 Initial Conceptual Framework.................................................................................37
Figure 3 Thematic Map 1 (Classroom Teacher).................................................................59
Figure 4 Conceptual Framework 1 (Classroom Teacher).....................................................69
Figure 5 Thematic Map 2 (Education Assistant).................................................................70
Figure 6 Conceptual Framework 2 (Education Assistant).....................................................85
Figure 7 Thematic Map 3 (Peers).........................................................................................86
Figure 8 Conceptual Framework 3 (Peers)..........................................................................97
Figure 9 Thematic Map 4 (Classroom Observations).........................................................98
Figure 10 Final Conceptual Framework..............................................................................115
Figure 11 Comparison of Personal Factors in the Initial and Final Conceptual Frameworks..................................................................................................................121
List of Abbreviations

AAC – Augmentative and Alternative Communication

ANOVA – Analysis of Variance

AT – Assistive Technology

BC – British Columbia

Co-PID – Collaborative Consultation for Participation of Students with IDD

CP – Cerebral Palsy

CMOP-E – The Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement

EA – Education Assistant

ICF – International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health

ICOT – Inclusive Classroom Observation Tool

IDD – Intellectual and Developmental Disability

IEP – Individualized Education Program

OT – Occupational Therapy

PEM-CY – Participation and Environment Measure for Children and Youth

PIOP – Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program

SDLMI – Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction

SFA – School Function Assessment

UDL – Universal Design for Learning
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Dedicated to all the students I have worked with, who remind me that diversity is beautiful and inclusion is simple.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Inclusive education in British Columbia means that all students have “equitable access to learning, opportunities for achievement, and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs”, including students with disabilities (BC Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 1). Inclusion of students with disabilities in general education is considered best practice, and there is extensive evidence highlighting the benefits of inclusive education for students with significant disabilities (Kurth, Lyon, & Shogren, 2015; Morningstar et al., 2016; Mu & Royeen, 2004; Lyons, Thompson, & Timmons, 2016). For example, students with disabilities who attend inclusive classrooms experience greater academic achievement, increased independence, more communicative interactions with others, and more friendships with their peers (Downing, Spencer, & Cavalloro, 2004; Foreman, Arthur-Kelly, Pascoe, & King, 2004). Inclusion also benefits all students. Students without disabilities who attend inclusive classes and form relationships with students with disabilities experience an increase in their own self-concept, self-esteem, and feelings of acceptance, are typically more tolerant and less fearful of differences in other people, become more aware of and responsive to the needs of others, and show strong academic progress (Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Fisher, 1999; Staub & Peck, 1994).

Since the early 1980s, an increasing number of students with disabilities have been attending their neighborhood schools and are taught in classrooms with their peers (Sokal & Katz, 2015), and more students with disabilities are graduating from high school than ever before (Smith & Lowrey, 2017). However, truly taking part in the social and academic life of the learning community goes beyond having a physical presence in the classroom, and many students are not receiving the necessary educational supports to be fully included (Sokal & Katz, 2015). For example, Morningstar, Shogren, Lee, and Born (2015) suggest that supports for
participation and learning for students with significant disabilities include principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), behavioral interventions, and accommodations and modifications to the materials, environment, classroom activities, and curriculum. However, Sokal and Katz (2015) suggest that not all pre-service teachers receive specific training for teaching students with disabilities. Furthermore, the authors note that in-service teachers may not have access to professional development opportunities that focus on teaching students with disabilities, meaning many classroom teachers do not have the knowledge and resources to implement these supports. Morningstar et al. (2015) also suggest that supports for participation in an inclusive classroom include peer-supported learning. Unfortunately, over-reliance on paraprofessionals who are in constant proximity to students with disabilities leads to separation from classmates and reduces access to peer-supported learning, as well as diminishing social interactions with peers, interfering with the classroom teacher’s engagement and sense of responsibility towards the student, and limiting curricular instruction (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & Macfarland, 1997). Finally, although integrated and collaborative services from a multi-disciplinary team facilitates inclusion, instead of working as one team, members from different government ministries, such as education, health, and child and family services often provide support to students with significant disabilities in separate systems (Sokal & Katz, 2015). As a result, many students with disabilities continue to attend segregated programs (Smith & Lowrey, 2017). This is especially true for students with significant disabilities.

**Key Definitions**

This section is intended to provide the reader with an overview of key terminology encountered in this study, including defining the terms in the context of this study. Key definitions include:
• Students with significant disabilities
• Inclusive classrooms
• Participation
• Occupational therapy (OT)

**Students with significant disabilities.** People with significant disabilities are members of the community who require continuous and extensive support in at least one key aspect of their life (e.g., mobility, hygiene) to actively participate in the community and achieve a full quality of life (Mu & Royeen, 2004). In British Columbia, the Ministry of Education has established categories to assist school districts to determine the needs of their students and the amount of supplementary funding they may access to provide the necessary resources and supports for an appropriate educational program for students with disabilities (BC Ministry of Education, 2016). Students with significant disabilities often fall into Category A and are considered *Physically Dependent*. According to the BC Ministry of Education (2016), a student in this category is “completely dependent on others for meeting all major daily living needs…(and) require(s) assistance at all times” for attendance at school to be possible (p. 63). The BC Ministry of Education estimates that 0.7% of the student population is considered physically dependent. Students who are categorized into Category A have diverse physical, intellectual, and communicative abilities, and each student’s program must be individually designed to achieve maximum participation and learning in school (BC Ministry of Education, 2016). For purposes of this study, a student with significant disabilities will have both a physical and intellectual disability.

**Inclusive classrooms.** True inclusion goes beyond addressing the ‘special education’ needs of students with disabilities, to creating an environment where all children are accepted,
diversity in the classroom is celebrated, interactions amongst all members are encouraged, and positive attitudes towards universal participation are promoted (Asbjørnslett, Engelsrud, & Helseth, 2015). This means students with disabilities attend their neighborhood schools, learn in classrooms with and alongside their peers, and fully participate in both the social and the academic life of the classroom. Social inclusion facilitates a sense of self-worth and belonging in students and promotes opportunities to take part in the social life of the classroom and develop relationships with peers (Katz, 2012; Katz, Porath, Bendu, & Epp, 2012). Academic inclusion provides cognitive challenge, interactive learning with teachers and peers, and engagement in the curriculum (Katz et al., 2012; Katz, 2013). For purposes of this study, participation in an inclusive classroom includes:

- holding valued social roles in the classroom
- taking part in the daily classroom routines
- engagement in learning activities that present a cognitive challenge
- taking part in learning activities that are linked to grade-level curriculum
- interaction with same-age peers

Although federal and provincial legislation and policies promote inclusive education for all students, many students in Canada do not experience a fully inclusive educational program (Lyons et al., 2016). In most Canadian provinces only one-third of students with disabilities attend fully inclusive classrooms, and students with significant disabilities are the least likely to be included (Timmons & Wagner, 2008). Similar trends occur in other countries. For example, in the United States, students who are most likely to attend segregated programs are students with significant disabilities (Kurth, Morningstar, & Kozleski, 2014). In Norway, results of a longitudinal study of classroom participation indicate that many students with disabilities are not
full participants in their classrooms, and as they move into higher grades their participation decreases (Wendelborg & Tøssebro, 2010). The authors attribute this decline partly to the increasing gap between students with intellectual disabilities and their peers, and how the organization and structure of the educational system responds to this gap. As a result, as students become older, the intellectual gap between students with disabilities and their peers widens, and students with disabilities receive more and more of their education outside of the classroom. This is cause for concern, because to participate in the academic and social life of the classroom, students need to actually be present in the classroom. In sum, placement in inclusive classrooms is not sufficient, but is a necessary first step – inclusive classrooms go beyond placement to provide opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in social and academic activities.

**Participation.** Research from the 1970s and 1980s found that as people with disabilities moved out of institutions and became physically present in their communities, they did not necessarily form meaningful relationships with their peers and often did not experience a sense of belonging and membership in the community (Novak Amado, Stancliffe, McCarron, & McCallion, 2013). This indicated a need for research that looked beyond physical integration and focused on social inclusion and community participation.

Davis and Hill (2006) suggest that inclusion is linked to participation – inclusion exists when a person is given the opportunity to take part, and participation is the actual act of taking part. The *International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health – Children & Youth Version*, which provides a universal framework and language to describe health and well-being, includes participation as one of its major domains, and defines it as “a person’s involvement in a life situation” (World Health Organization, 2007, p. xvi). King (2004) describes three ways in
which meaning in life is constructed: doing, belonging, and understanding. The author views participating in life experiences as taking part in an activity, having a sense of belonging and contribution, and the understanding of one’s self and how one fits in the world. Eriksson and Granlund (2004) defined participation as a “dynamic ecological construct…dependent on several factors situated on different ecological levels” (p. 242), consisting of three inter-related components: active engagement in a task, the perception of participating, and the context in which the participation occurs. In other words, participation is a complex phenomenon involving the act of taking part, the feelings of belonging and contribution associated with this act, and a meaningful life situation in which it occurs.

For example, consider kicking a ball. If a student is in a Phys. Ed. class and they kick a ball to a peer (the act of taking part) during a soccer game (context), and the student feels as though they are part of the game and are contributing to their team (perception of participating), they are likely to experience a sense of meaningful participation. On the other hand, if the student is ‘working on gross motor skills’ and kicks a ball to an education assistant (EA) in an empty gym, they are not going to feel as if they belong or are contributing to a group, and this act is not likely to have any meaning for them; in other words, they are not experiencing meaningful participation. Even though the student is engaged in the same task in both situations, the context determines where or not a sense of belonging and contribution is experienced.

**Occupational therapy (OT).** Occupational therapists provide services in schools as part of the school-based team to support students to function and participate at school (Causton & Tracy-Bronson, 2014). The purpose of OT is to “support people to actively participate in the meaningful and functional occupations that make up their everyday lives” (Townsend, Polatajko, & Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 2007, p. 17), and occupations are defined as
the groups of meaningful activities and tasks that make up a person’s daily life (Townsend & Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 2002). In other words, school-based occupational therapists can enable students to participate in meaningful tasks and activities in their classroom.

**Summary of the Problem**

Participation in structured and unstructured life situations supports the healthy development and well-being of a child and enhances their overall quality of life (Law, 2002). Thus, students who are actively participating in the classroom are more likely to develop into healthy, competent, and social adults. Despite the positive outcomes of participation in meaningful activities, children with disabilities participate in fewer, less diverse activities than children without disabilities (Engel-Yeger, Jarus, Anaby, & Law, 2009; King, Petrenchik, Law, & Hurley, 2009; Schenker, Coster, & Parush, 2005). This is particularly true for children with significant disabilities, and studies have shown that levels of participation in school decrease with greater levels of disability (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Schenker et al., 2005). Therefore, students with significant disabilities likely experience minimal participation in the activities that take place in the general classroom with their peers, which perhaps explains why these students are less likely to be included in general education – as it is difficult to see the benefit of inclusion when students are not actively participating. To promote social and academic inclusion in a classroom that includes students with significant disabilities, educators need to understand more about how participation in an inclusive classroom occurs for this group of students.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The present study was guided by literature on participation using an occupational therapy framework and on school participation of students with significant disabilities. In the following section, I begin by discussing a theoretical framework of occupational therapy, which considers how the interaction of factors within the person, occupation, and environment influence participation. Next, I review literature that explores the factors within the person, occupation, and environment that facilitate and limit participation, focusing on factors that influence school participation for students with disabilities. Finally, I identify gaps in the research, discuss how an occupational therapy framework can support participation in inclusive classrooms, and state the purpose of this study.

Theoretical Framework

The Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement or CMOP-E (Figure 1) considers factors within the environment (i.e., physical, social, cultural, and institutional), the person (i.e., physical, affective, social, and spiritual), and the activity that influence a person’s participation in daily activities (Polatajko, Townsend, & Craik, 2007). Within this model, the relationship between these three areas is considered dynamic, interdependent, and specific to context (Law et al., 1996).

The CMOP-E was developed from the work of many environmental-behavioural theorists, including Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Model (Law et al., 1996), which suggests an individual’s development and learning is the result of a dynamic interaction between the person and their environments at different levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, the microsystem level includes the individual and their relationships within their immediate surroundings (e.g., family, friends, teachers), whereas the macrosystem level consists of the overall values and beliefs of the society and culture the individual lives in. Embedded between the micro and macro systems, is the mesosystem level, which refers to the interactions which occur within the microsystem, and the exosystem, which involves aspects of the microsystem which do not directly affect the individual (e.g., funding for school supports and services).

Participation is influenced by all levels; for example, within the micro and mesosystems, participation is influenced by peer interactions in the classroom, and at the macro and exosystem level, participation is influenced by the attitudes of the school and school district staff. In other words, an individual’s participation is influenced by personal skills and traits, characteristics of the activity itself, and factors within the environment, in a multi-level system.

Factors Influencing Participation

An extensive body of research exploring participation exists in occupational therapy and education literature. As children and youth with disabilities typically participate less than children and youth without disabilities (Engel-Yeger et al., 2009; King et al., 2009; Schenker et al., 2005), several studies have focused on facilitators of participation, which include factors attributed to the person, the environment, and the activity.

Personal factors. Personal factors and strategies, such as will, motivation, resilience (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009), self-confidence, and self-determination (Eriksson & Granlund,
2004) can affect participation. A study by Agran, Cavin, Wehmeyer, and Palmer (2006) explored the effects of the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) on academic outcomes of three students in middle or junior high school, who had moderate to severe disabilities. The researchers used an experimental, multiple baseline across individuals design, which included three experimental conditions: baseline, intervention, and maintenance. Before the data collection occurred, each student chose an academic goal from a list of academic skills related to the general education standards; this academic goal served as the dependent variable in the study. The independent variable, the SDLMI, “involves teaching students a self-regulated problem-solving process to allow them to set goals, plan a course of action, self-evaluate their performance, and adjust their goals or plans accordingly as needed” (p. 235). Results of the study indicated all three students increased their performance and eventually achieved mastery (i.e., 80%) on their chosen academic skills after SDLMI strategies were introduced, and all three students maintained their behaviours after training had ended. While these findings are specific to the three participants and the academic goals they selected, they suggest that students with moderate to severe disabilities can participate in the standard curriculum when it is augmented with self-determination strategies of goal-setting, self-monitoring, and self-instruction. This study supports the idea that personal skills and strategies (such as self-determination and motivation) play a role in influencing school participation.

Other personal factors, such as cognitive and interpersonal skills (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Kramer, Olsen, Mermelstein, Balcells, & Liljenquist, 2012) and communication skills (Calculator, 2009) also influence a person’s participation. For example, Raghavendra, Olsson, Sampson, Mcinerney, and Connell (2012) used a cross-sectional, matched, multi-group, comparative study design to compare school participation and social networks of
children ages 10-15 with physical and complex communication difficulties, children with physical disabilities only, and children with typical development. The authors were specifically interested in understanding the school participation patterns and the social networks of children with physical disabilities with and without complex communication needs, and the relationship between school participation and social networks. Results of their study indicated students with physical disabilities and complex communication needs engaged in fewer activities at school, had less opportunities to communicate with others, and had fewer friends and acquaintances than their peers with physical disabilities only or those who were typically developing. An important finding from this study was that even though alternative and augmentative forms of communication (AAC), such as a communication board or speech-generating device were available, they were used very minimally by both students with complex communication needs and their communication partners. Instead, communication skills were “limited to facial expression, body language, gestures, and some basic signing” (p. 40). The authors suggest that providing opportunities to communicate with peers and facilitating the development of AAC skills in both students with complex communicative needs and their communicative partners can facilitate school participation for students with complex communication needs. The authors acknowledge the study is limited by a small sample size, considerable differences in the physical, communication, and intellectual abilities of each student in the complex communication needs group, and the fact that many of the students with complex communication needs attended segregated schools or classrooms, which likely affected participation. However, these findings support the suggestion that merely having technology (e.g., AAC devices) available for students will not facilitate participation, and students need to be taught specific communication skills and
be presented with the opportunity and expectation that they will use these skills during daily activities to enhance school participation (Calculator, 2009).

The nature and severity of disability also influences a student’s participation (Coster & Mancini, 2004; Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Raghavendra et al., 2012; Schenker et al., 2005; Simeonsson, Carlson, Huntington, McMillan, & Brent, 2002). Raghavendra et al. (2012) suggest students with physical disabilities and complex communication needs engage in fewer activities at school than their peers with physical disabilities only or those who were typically developing. Schenker et al. (2005) studied participation levels and activity performance levels of students with cerebral palsy (CP) in inclusive primary schools, to explore relationships between activity performance and participation, and identify factors that facilitate participation in school activities. The authors compared 100 fully included students with CP with 100 typical students (matched by class and gender) and 48 students with CP who attended segregated classes, using the School Function Assessment (SFA) to measure levels of participation across six different school environments (e.g., classroom, gym, hallway) and activity performance in twenty-one school related tasks (including both physical and cognitive-behavioural tasks). The mean levels of participation in the six different environments and the performance scores of both the physical and the cognitive-behavioural scores were analyzed using multivariate and univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) analyses. Results of the analysis suggested that typical students participate significantly more in all settings than students with CP, and students with CP who attended segregated programs had the lowest levels of participation. The group of students attending segregated programs also had the highest percentage of students with the greatest severity of disability (i.e., levels III or IV on the Gross Motor Function Classification System). The authors suggested, “it is possible to infer from these findings that participation is increased as severity of
motor disability decreases although no causal relationship can be implied” (p. 549). However, the researchers also saw that the level of participation for the same group of students with cerebral palsy (e.g., students attending a segregated program) varied across settings. Furthermore, they noticed that both the lowest and the highest levels of participation occurred in the same setting for both groups of students with CP (i.e., students who were fully included and students attending segregated programs). This important finding suggests that while the nature and severity of a student’s disability may affect their participation, characteristics of the environment also play a role.

**Environmental factors.** A person’s environment influences their participation in activities of daily living. In a scoping review, Anaby et al. (2013) reviewed 31 peer-reviewed articles published between 1990 and 2011 that investigated the effect of the environment on participation in out-of-school activities for children and youth with disabilities. The reviewers used the environmental domains of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to organize their data, and results indicated environmental factors that influence participation include: (a) access to the physical environment (including the availability of assistive devices); (b) family and peer support; (c) positive attitudes and values towards the participation of children with disabilities in the community and culture; and (d) the services, systems and policies that exist in society. Of these factors, social supports, especially from peers, and geographic location, were considered the largest facilitators of participation.

Social support, such as interaction with peers, facilitates participation of students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2016; Feldman, Carter, Asmus, & Brock, 2016). Feldman et al. (2016) argue that students with disabilities must not only be physically present in classrooms but must also be in close proximity to same-age peers, so they can “practice communication and social
skills in authentic contexts” and participate in the social life of the classroom (p. 193). Classroom teachers can use social supports, such as peer-mediated interventions (e.g., peer support arrangements and cooperative learning groups) to facilitate meaningful participation of students with disabilities. Carter et al. (2016) used a randomized controlled experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of peer support arrangements on increasing academic and social outcomes in high school students with significant disabilities, who attend general education classes. Participants were randomly assigned to either a group receiving peer support or a control group of paraprofessional/adult support only. Each student in the peer support group received peer support from one or more peers from the same classroom; peer support arrangements were facilitated by educational paraprofessionals and special educators. Classroom observations were used to collect data on the duration of academic engagement, instructional format, and proximity to peers, and the frequency of social interactions, and surveys were completed by all participants at the end of the intervention to measure social validity. Data also was collected on student skills and levels of participation, using teacher-reported measures. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze observational data, social validity findings, and fidelity measures, and a series of hierarchical linear models were used to evaluate the intervention (i.e., peer support arrangements) compared to the control group (i.e., adult support only). Results of this study indicated peer support arrangements substantially increased interactions between students, promoted social participation, and led to the development of more friendships for students with significant disabilities. Furthermore, results also indicated an increase in academic inclusion, as students with disabilities engaged in the same tasks as their peers. The researchers stated their study was limited by their measurement of learning, which was restricted to observation of academic engagement and teacher-reported ratings on one goal related to academic skill.
development, the rating of friendship gains by adults rather than the students themselves, and the possible effects of collaboration between paraprofessionals, special educators, and classroom teachers in the group receiving peer support. Despite these limitations, the findings from this study suggest that natural interactions with peers and the use of peer-mediated interventions can enhance participation in the classroom for students with disabilities.

The educational team also plays a role in facilitating participation. First, the classroom teacher’s ability to adjust curriculum, instructional methods, and learning activities, and adapt the physical aspects of classroom activities influences a student’s participation (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Morningstar et al., 2015). Second, school services, such as support from the members of a school-based team can promote participation in the classroom (Villeneuve, 2009; Villeneuve & Hutchinson, 2012). For example, co-teaching arrangements, such as a classroom teacher and a special educator jointly providing instruction to a group of students in a single space (Cook & Friend, 1995), are effective in increasing student participation (Kurth et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015). Interestingly, the presence of school-based team members, such as therapists, counsellors, and education assistants does not enhance student participation (Eriksson, 2005), but the way each member fulfills their role and works on the team does (Dymond et al., 2006; Morningstar et al., 2015). As noted earlier, the presence of education assistants and other adults can actually present a barrier to participation. On the other hand, collaborative practice amongst the adults that builds capacity can be supportive of participation. For example, collaborative consultation from a multi-disciplinary team, combined with in-services and training has been found to be effective in facilitating participation for students with disabilities (Calculator, 2009; Morningstar et al., 2015; Selanikyo, Yalon-Chamovitz, & Weintraub, 2017). To investigate the effects of a combined in-service and collaborative consultation model on
classroom participation of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), Selanikyo et al. (2017) used a pre postintervention case-control design to compare two intervention groups. Each intervention program took place in a different school, which were randomly assigned to one of two programs. The experimental group consisted of 35 students with IDD from eight classrooms, who received the Collaborative Consultation for Participation of Students with IDD (Co-PID) program. This program involved two in-services for the classroom teacher from an occupational therapist, followed by ongoing collaborative consultation between the teacher and therapist for a period of twenty weeks. Classroom teachers in the control group, which included 34 students with IDD from seven classrooms, only received the two in-services from an occupational therapist, which occurred at the same time as the in-services in the experimental group. Three components of classroom participation: communicating, choosing, and initiating, were measured pre- and postintervention, using the Structured Observations of Students’ Participation in Classroom tool. Data was analyzed using statistical analysis, and results of the study indicated that the levels of participation of students who received the Co-PID program significantly improved, compared to the levels of participation of students in the control group. However, the authors note a significant limitation of their study is the fact that the two interventions had very different periods of duration. Nevertheless, this study supports the suggestion that the practices of the educational team and the way they fulfill their roles and responsibilities can positively influence school participation of students with disabilities.

**Activity factors.** Characteristics of the activity itself can influence participation in meaningful activities. One of the findings from a study by Egilson and Traustadottir (2009) indicated flexibility and modifications to the way an activity is executed and performed
facilitates student participation. A second finding suggested that modifying the curriculum or the instructional methods and providing adaptations or alternative strategies to tasks also had a positive influence on participation. Other characteristics of the task, such as the way learning activities and instruction are designed, can also affect participation of students with disabilities. For example, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (i.e., multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression) and the use of a variety of instructional formats (i.e., whole group instruction, learning in a flexible grouping, and individual work) have been shown to benefit students with significant disabilities (Dymond et al., 2006, Kurth et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015). The use of individualized supports and specialized materials (e.g., devices to support augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), switches, specialized seating, etc.) and adaptations to the curriculum, instructional methods, and learning activities also facilitate student participation in classroom activities (Kurth et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015). Kurth et al. (2015) studied practices that support the inclusion of students with significant disabilities in the academic and social life of an inclusive classroom, using an exploratory appreciative inquiry approach to guide the design and analysis of their research. Their study involved observations of eighteen students with significant disabilities who attended general education classrooms in elementary and middle schools that were considered to be highly inclusive. Qualitative analysis was used to analyze the data, which included an open-coding method to interpret observation data. Seven main themes emerged from the data, and themes relating to factors of learning activities included: (a) general classroom supports (e.g., UDL, visual supports); (b) student supports to “address unique learning or participation needs, including behaviour communication, physical, and sensory” (p. 267), such as specialized seating or speech-generating devices; (c) types of activities (e.g., students with disabilities primarily participate in the same activity as
their peers without modifications); (d) activities that allowed students to access the material in a different way; (e) activities that are adapted to their individual needs; and (f) opportunities to make choices. Limitations of the study included: (a) the use of nominations to select the sites and participants; (b) minimal time in the field; (c) over-representation of elementary schools (five out of six schools were elementary schools); (d) over-representation of students who were male and had a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder; and (e) a lack of data on duration and frequency of activities. Despite the limitations of this study, the evidence in the literature supports the suggestion that the characteristics of activities influence a student’s participation.

**Barriers to Participation**

Barriers to participation for children and youth with disabilities have been identified in the literature. Anaby et al. (2013) suggest “attitudes, physical environment, transportation, policies, and the lack of support from staff and service providers” present some of the largest barriers to participation in out-of-school activities for children and youth with disabilities (p. 1589). Many barriers to school participation also exist. For example, Egilson and Traustadottir (2009) suggest a student’s impairment occasionally affects participation, and “children who (have) a combination of limited manipulation skills, lack of verbal expression, and restricted mobility (are) least likely to participate” (p. 268). However, they also indicate “impairment effects”, such as pain or fatigue, have more of an impact on participation than impairment (p. 268).

Barriers to participation are evident in the environment. Difficulty accessing the physical environment, a lack of resources and services, and the school’s culture, values, and attitudes have a major impact on a student’s participation (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009). While the social environment can facilitate participation, such as the use of peer supports, it also presents barriers.
A descriptive study by Feldman et al. (2016) explored the presence and proximity of peers to high school students with significant disabilities who attended general education classrooms. The authors completed three observations of 108 students over the course of one semester, and momentary time sampling was used to determine how their presence in the classroom and proximity to peers changed over the course of a class. Results of their study found that students with significant disabilities were absent from their classrooms for a significant amount of time during the day. When students were present in their classroom, they were rarely close enough to engage with their peers, limiting their opportunities for social interaction and participation. The authors note, “when students with severe disabilities work on the periphery of the classroom with individually assigned paraprofessionals and away from peers, opportunities to interact with peers are severely restricted” (p. 205). These results support the findings from a study by Giangreco et al. (1997) that indicated close, constant proximity of educational assistants to students with disabilities greatly reduces student participation.

Characteristics of the activity can also present barriers to participation. Egilson and Traustadottir (2009) suggest the lack of individualized supports, adaptations, and alternative strategies can limit student participation. Coster et al. (2013) compared school participation of students with and without disabilities to identify characteristics that facilitated and limited participation. Parents of children with and without disabilities, ages 5-17, completed the Participation and Environment Measure for Children and Youth (PEM-CY) online. Statistical analyses compared the group of students with disabilities and those without disabilities. One of the findings indicated parents of children with disabilities often described physical, cognitive, and social demands of activities as barriers to school participation. The authors noted a major
limitation of the study was that the sample was not randomly selected, so may not be representative of the entire population.

**Gaps in Research**

**Education for students with significant disabilities.** Over the past decade there has been significant contributions to research on education for students with significant disabilities (Carter et al., 2016; Feldman et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2013; Kurth et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015). For example, Morningstar et al. (2015) used descriptive study methodologies to analyze observational data from inclusive classrooms in six elementary and middle schools. Data were collected over one school-year, and involved two, multi-day visits at each site. Researchers used a semi-structured protocol, the Inclusive Classroom Observation Tool (ICOT), which was developed for the study and designed to examine indicators of classroom participation and learning of all students, including those with significant disabilities. Descriptive analysis focused on identifying patterns across and within classrooms and schools. Findings from this study revealed several classroom practices that support participation and learning for students with significant disabilities. These included: (a) the roles and structure of the school-based team; (b) methods of instruction; (c) peer support; (d) UDL; and (e) accommodations and modifications.

When discussing limitations of their study, the authors noted they only used observational data, had little time in the field, and observational data was general, rather than taking time sampling or duration data of specific inclusive practices. The authors also indicated “no specific efforts were made to systematically observe students with disabilities in the classroom” (p. 207) and noted a need for future research that studies the experiences of students with significant disabilities in inclusive contexts. This presents an opportunity for qualitative case study methodology, which allows researchers to study complex phenomena in context (Baxter & Jack,
2008), and supports the use of multiple sources of data, including semi-structured interviews and observations.

**Occupational therapy frameworks of participation in education.** As noted, literature on inclusive education practices for students with significant disabilities has increased in recent years, but few of these studies have looked at participation of students using a person-environment-occupation framework. Frameworks similar to the CMOP-E, which considers how factors related to the person, environment, and activity influence active participation in meaningful activities, have been used to investigate the participation of students with disabilities (Asbjørnslett & Hemmingsson, 2008; Asbjørnslett et al., 2015; Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Selankiyo et al., 2017). For example, Egilson and Traustadottir (2009) used a mixed-methods design to investigate factors in the person, environment, and activity that facilitate or limit school participation of students with physical disabilities and explore relationships between those factors. The authors analyzed qualitative data from observations and interviews from students, parents, and teachers using a grounded theory approach. They also analyzed quantitative data from the standardized School Function Assessment (SFA). Results of their study indicated certain contexts within the school environment facilitated participation, whereas other settings presented barriers to participation. For example, students experienced less participation in classrooms that used “traditional curricula and methods of instruction” and when there was a “lack of accommodations” (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009, p. 270). This indicates the specific environment has a stronger influence on participation than the overall school environment. The authors also noted changes in participation were observed because of the interaction between a particular child, the activity they were engaged in, and the environment they were in. Although the study is limited by a small sample, it further supports the definition of participation of being
specific to context (Eriksson & Granlund, 2004). While numerous studies using a person-environment-occupation framework to investigate participation of students with disabilities exist, such as the study by Egilson and Traustadottir (2009), representation of students with significant disabilities in this literature is lacking and more research using this framework to study participation of students with significant disabilities is warranted (Kramer et al., 2012; Selanikyo et al., 2017).

**Measuring participation.** When studying participation, the issue of how participation is measured presents many challenges. Numerous researchers have measured participation using standardized tools that rely on parent, teacher and/or therapist observation and perceptions of the child’s participation (Taheri, Perry, & Minnes, 2016; Rosenberg, Jacobi, & Bart, 2017; Chien, Rodger, & Copley, 2017; Selanikyo et al., 2017). Other studies have used standardized measurement tools that rely on the child’s perception of participating (Eriksson, 2005; King et al., 2009; Livingston, Stewart, Rosenbaum, & Russell, 2011; Thirumanickam, Raghavendra, & Olsson, 2011). However, participation is a complex phenomenon and is difficult to measure using standardized questionnaires. Studies that measure participation for children with disabilities using standardized tools look at a combination of many different factors, including, but not limited to: (a) the degree of active involvement (Eriksson, 2005; Selanikyo et al., 2017); (b) the degree of independence the child has (or the amount of assistance required) in the completion of an activity (Rosenberg et al., 2017); (c) the diversity of activities the child participates in (Chien et al., 2017; King et al., 2009; Rosenberg et al., 2017; Thirumanickam et al., 2011); (d) the frequency the child engages in an activity (Chien et al. 2017; King et al., 2009; Taheri et al., 2016; Thirumanickam et al., 2011); and (e) the child’s enjoyment (Chien et al., 2017; King et al., 2009; Thirumanickam et al., 2011). The extensive number of different
combinations that are possible with these factors means that it is impossible to directly compare participation from one study to the next. In addition, the complexity of the process of participation is easily lost when using standardized questionnaires or rating scales alone.

Even though a vast number of measurement tools exist, each tool measures different elements of participation, and many lack evidence of high levels of reliability and validity (Field, Miller, Ryan, Jarus, & Abundo, 2016). Given this, and the complex nature of participation, it is not surprising that some researchers are using mixed method (Egilsson & Traustadottir, 2009; Eriksson & Granlund, 2004) or qualitative (Asbjørnslett & Hemmingsson, 2008; Asbjørnslett et al., 2015; Specht et al., 2011) methodologies to study participation. Not only does the use of qualitative methods allow for a more in-depth understanding of a complex phenomenon in context (Braun & Clarke, 2013), but it assumes that children with disabilities and their peers are competent and able to provide insight to their life experiences (Kramer et al., 2012).

Asking about the perspectives and experiences of children and youth with disabilities provides important insight on how this population defines participation. A scoping review by Willis et al. (2017) exploring the elements that contribute to meaningful participation for children and youth with disabilities revealed important components of participation, including: (a) having fun; (b) belonging; (c) experiencing success; (d) experiencing freedom; and (e) having an identity. Kramer et al. (2012) used qualitative meta-synthesis to explore school-aged youth with disabilities’ perspectives of the environment and modifications on their participation at home, school, and in the community. The authors used an iterative, constant comparative approach to analyze data from fifteen qualitative studies. Results of their meta-synthesis indicated three major factors that influence the participation of youth with disabilities are: (a) adult and peer understanding of their abilities and needs; (b) decisions about accommodations;
and (c) the quality of services and policies. The authors noted their study was limited by the quality of the studies used in their meta-synthesis, and other limitations associated with using secondary data. However, results of this study highlight the social environment as having a significant influence on participation. This study also supports the suggestion that “not all levels of participation are created equal” and indicates youth with disabilities described quality participation as having opportunities to engage in meaningful activities in a “flexible, dynamic way, and meaningful way” and to be authentically included in activities with their peers (p. 774).

In another qualitative study, Asbjørnslett and Hemmingsson (2008) used individual and focus-group interviews with teenagers with physical disabilities to explore how they experienced participation in mainstream schools. Results of their study indicated students with physical disabilities experienced participation when they felt as though they were ‘like’ their classmates. Important factors in this experience of participation included: (a) being provided with individual accommodations to engage meaningfully in activities; (b) having the opportunity to be with peers and to be where class activities were happening; and (c) having a collaborative relationship with teachers who were flexible and willing to adapt their teaching. Findings from these studies further support the definition of participation as an act of taking part, feelings of belonging and contribution, and the meaningful life situation in which it occurs (Eriksson & Granlund, 2004; King, 2004). While these findings provide key insight into participation of students with disabilities, most of these studies included students with physical disabilities only (Asbjørnslett & Hemmingsson, 2008). Given this, qualitative studies exploring participation of students with significant disabilities (i.e. with comorbid intellectual disabilities) will add an important contribution to the field.
**School-based occupational therapy and participation.** School-based occupational therapists are in a position to support the inclusion of students with significant disabilities by considering the relationship between personal, environmental, and occupational factors to facilitate participation in meaningful activities and tasks in the classroom. However, there is a lack of evidence of how this occurs in practice (Bonnard & Anaby, 2016). Traditionally, occupational therapists have provided therapy services using a ‘pull-out’ model, working with students outside of their general classroom (Causton & Tracy-Bronson, 2014; Kurth et al., 2015). Furthermore, school-based occupational therapy services often focus on interventions targeting personal factors, typically motor and sensory skills with less emphasis on environmental factors (Spencer, Turkett, Vaughan, & Koenig, 2006).

School-based occupational therapists are now moving towards consultative service delivery models that involves working collaboratively with the school-based team to support student participation in the classroom (Causton & Tracy-Bronson, 2014; Kennedy & Stewart, 2011; Missiuna, et al., 2012; Mu & Royeen, 2004; Villeneuve & Hutchinson, 2012; Villeneuve & Shulha, 2012). Given this, continued research in collaborative consultation practices in school-based occupational therapy is warranted (Villeneuve, 2009; Villeneuve & Hutchinson, 2012; Villeneuve & Shulha, 2012).

In the United States, the TASH Inclusive Education National Committee exists to “transform school communities based on social justice principles in which all students (a) are presumed competent, (b) are welcomed as valued members of all general education classes and extra-curricular activities in their local schools, (c) fully participate and learn alongside their same age peers in general education instruction based on the general education curriculum and (d) experience reciprocal social relationships” (TASH, n.d.). An Inclusive Education Workgroup
made up of TASH Inclusive National Committee members identified priority areas for future research in inclusive education using a systematic, iterative process and focus group data collection methods. They published their findings in *Inclusive Education National Research Advocacy Agenda: A Call to Action* (Morningstar et al., 2016). Their report highlighted fifteen areas of research, including how adults (i.e., educators) in the classroom support meaningful participation of students with significant disabilities in the general curriculum and practices regarding team collaboration. This publication further supports the need for continued research in the areas of meaningful classroom participation of students with significant disabilities and collaborative practices between therapists and educators.

**Purpose of Study**

Overall, the research on participation in inclusive classrooms for students with significant disabilities suggests that personal factors, such as self-determination, motivation, and interpersonal skills; and environmental factors, such peer supports, a collaborative school-based team, and positive attitudes towards inclusion facilitate participation in the classroom. Characteristics of the activity (i.e., occupation), such as flexibility and alternatives to activities, elements of Universal Design for Learning, the use of specialized equipment, and adaptations to the materials and curriculum also support participation. However, we still do not have a good understanding of how the interaction of factors relating to the person, environment, and occupation influences participation of students with significant disabilities in an inclusive classroom. Studying participation through an occupational therapy can framework provide insight into this area.

Existing research supports the definition of participation as the act of taking part, feelings of belonging and contribution, and the meaningful life situation in which it occurs. Numerous
studies have relied on standardized tools to measure participation, but these tools have limits to what they are able to measure and cannot capture the complexity of participation. There are very few qualitative studies that look at classroom participation of students with significant disabilities. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the participation of a student with significant disabilities using case study methodology. The following research questions were investigated:

1. How does a student with significant disabilities participate in the social and academic life of an inclusive classroom?

2. How do personal, environmental, and activity factors influence participation in an inclusive classroom for a student with significant disabilities?

Using an occupational therapy framework to study participation within an inclusive classroom provides a unique perspective of how students with significant disabilities participate and can then be used to inform the practice of both occupational therapists and educators. It also can bridge the understanding of participation between these two fields, and further support collaborative working relationships between therapists and teachers. While the aims of this study are not to further the development of a model of collaborative practice between therapists and educators, studying participation in an inclusive classroom using an occupational therapy framework can contribute to a shared understanding of participation between therapists and educators – a starting point to developing collaborative practices.
Chapter 3: Method

Researcher Background

As a researcher, I am interested in occupational therapy and educational theories and practices that support inclusive education for students with significant disabilities. I am a certified occupational therapist and have ten years of experience working as a school-based therapist. At the time this study was conducted, I was employed as an occupational therapist with the Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program (PIOP), an outreach program funded by the Ministry of Education to provide support to students with significant disabilities across British Columbia. In my role with PIOP, I act as a consultant to support school teams to design and implement educational programs for students with significant disabilities, with a focus on accessing the BC Curriculum and developing relationships with peers. As an occupational therapist providing consultative services to schools in British Columbia, it has been my experience that strong collaborative working relationships between therapists and teachers is essential to providing efficient and effective support, which led me to pursue a Master of Arts in Special Education.

Philosophical Underpinnings

This study is underpinned by ontological relativism, which suggests multiple, subjective, constructed realities exist, and epistemological constructionism, which assumes knowledge is subjective and socially constructed and the “knower and the respondent co-create understandings” (Lee, 2012, p. 407). Thus, the knowledge that is constructed through interactions between myself (the researcher) and the participants will be specific to the context of the study, and my own subjectivity will contribute to this process (Carter & Little, 2007). In other words, my perspective, including my experience as a school-based OT, consultant with PIOP, and as a graduate student in Special Education, will shape this study. Thus, it is important
that I reflect on and am transparent about my subjectivity throughout the research process (Carter & Little, 2007).

**Participants**

**Participant selection.** Purposeful sampling was used to select a case for this study. In this instrumental case study, the case revolved around one student who was selected using criterion-based sampling. The following inclusion criteria was used: (a) attending school (Kindergarten – grade 12) in the lower mainland of BC; (b) a diagnosis of a physical disability and an intellectual disability; and (c) attending an inclusive classroom – meaning they spend the majority of their school day in the same classroom as their same-age peers.

After obtaining approval from both the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board and from the school board, I contacted the Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program’s (PIOP) district partner for the school district. The district partner is involved in the educational programming of students with significant disabilities in their district, but typically does not provide direct services for the student (i.e., is not the primary teacher, learning support teacher, case manager, or therapist). The district partner does not usually work directly with PIOP but acts as a bridge between PIOP (at the ministry level) and the student’s team (at a district level). The district partner was not a participant in this study but acted as a gatekeeper to assist in participant selection and in gaining access to the site.

Students who were supported by PIOP where I was directly involved with the student and/or their team were excluded from this study to avoid a conflict of interest, ensure that the student and their team did not feel pressured to participate, and to keep the client-therapist and researcher-participant relationships separate.
The district partner provided me with a list of the schools and contact information for the respective administrators where they knew a student(s) who met inclusion criteria was in attendance. I contacted each administrator by email, inviting them to participate in the study. Morningstar et al. (2015) identified a need for research “that examines the experiences of individual students under inclusive models” (p. 207). Thus, to select a case where a student with significant disabilities was known to be participating in the social and academic life of the classroom and the classroom was known to value and demonstrate inclusion, I used critical case sampling. According to Stake (2005), it is important to “choose that case which (you) feel (you) can learn the most” (p. 450-451), and critical case sampling allowed me to select a case where the student:

- participates in daily classroom routines
- holds valued roles in the classroom
- engages in social relationships with peers in the classroom
- participates in academic learning activities that are linked to grade-level curriculum
- participates in learning activities that challenge them cognitively

Each administrator received the School-Wide Inclusive Education Best Practice Indicators Rating Scale (New Hampshire Department of Education, n.d.), a self-rating tool that schools may use to guide inclusive programming and school improvement (see appendix A). This scale allows school teams to rate the degree that their school currently practices specific indicators of inclusion, using the following Likert scale:

- 1 – No evidence
- 2 – Minimal evidence
- 3 – Some evidence
• 4 – Adequate evidence
• 5 – Exemplary evidence

Administrators who were interested in participating in the study completed the scale with respect to the classroom where the student who met inclusion criteria was attending. Twenty-eight of the statements on the scale were selected prior to sending out the scales, and the first classroom to return the scale and receive a score of at least three in 25 of the 28 pre-determined statements was selected as the case for this study. The 25 statements were selected because they were related to this study’s definition of an inclusive classroom (i.e., related to holding valued social roles in the classroom; taking part in the daily classroom routines; engagement in learning activities that present a cognitive challenge; taking part in learning activities that are linked to grade-level curriculum; and interaction with same-age peers). As I was looking for a classroom that implemented inclusive practices, a score of at least three (indicating at least some implementation of the indicator) was required for the selected indicators.

Consent. After a site had been selected, I obtained consent from the classroom teacher, the education assistant, the parent of the student with disabilities, and the parents of the other students in the class. Only students whose parents consented to their participation in the study were interviewed. Parental or guardian consent was necessary for a student to participate in this study; however, it was equally as important that the student provided their assent to participate, as they have the right to refuse participation even if their guardian has consented (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013). Therefore, after parental consent had been obtained, I asked students to sign an assent form if they wanted to participate.

To obtain assent from the student with disabilities, I asked for their permission each time I collected observational data and relied on the education assistant to interpret their response. I
also asked the EA to inform me if their non-verbal communication indicated they were not comfortable or happy with my presence, and I would end the session of data collection immediately.

I also obtained assent from each participant throughout the process of the study. For example, I asked each participant to verbally assent to each interview and asked for permission before using artifacts as prompts during interviews.

Confidentiality and privacy. To protect the identity of the participants of the study, all names were given pseudonyms in the written report. During data collection, I used codes instead of names on all data (e.g., interview transcripts and fieldnotes) and the key to the code was stored in a locked drawer. Hardcopies of all data (e.g., the rating scales) and consent forms were stored in a locked filing cabinet. All computerized data (e.g., audio recordings, interview and fieldnote transcripts) were encrypted and stored on a password protected computer and backed up on a password protected USB drive.

Participant profiles. The case in this study revolves around one student with significant disabilities. Case study research is defined by the study of a phenomenon “within real-world context” (Yin, 2014, p. 16), so the context of this case (i.e., the classroom) is equally as important, and includes the regular members of the classroom. Therefore, participants included: the student with significant disabilities, the classroom teacher, the education assistant, and some of the other students in the classroom. Each participant was given a pseudonym and is described below.

Sophie. This participant has a physical and intellectual disability and was attending third grade in an inclusive classroom at the time of this study. She has been attending an inclusive classroom at this school since she was in Kindergarten. She walks with a walker or by holding
the arm of an adult for support and uses a wheelchair (pushed by another person) for long
distances. She has difficulty with fine motor coordination and she communicates using an
augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) system and non-verbal behaviours. Her
family speaks Tagalog and English at home.

**Leah.** This participant is a classroom teacher and was teaching the third-grade class that
Sophie was attending. This is the first year Sophie was a student in her class. At the time of this
study she had over 20 years of teaching experience and has taught more than 40 students with
disabilities throughout her career. She holds an MEd in Administration and Leadership.

**Rachel.** This participant is an education assistant, who previously worked as a support
worker for adults with significant disabilities. At the time of this study, she had been working as
the primary EA in Sophie’s class for five months.

**Colby, Gwen, Lola, Megan, and Sam.** At the time of this study, Colby, Gwen, Lola,
Megan, and Sam were students in Leah’s third grade class. Colby, Gwen, and Megan had known
Sophie since they were all in Kindergarten. This was the first year Lola and Sam were in the
same class as Sophie.

**Setting**

This study took place in a third-grade classroom in an elementary school in the lower
mainland of BC. The elementary school serves more than six hundred students from
Kindergarten to grade eight and has a large population of students who are English Language
Learners. The study took place in May and June of 2018.

**Research Design**

**Methodology.** A qualitative case study methodology was used to explore how a student
with significant disabilities participates in an inclusive classroom. Case study research promotes
the study of complex phenomena in its real-world context, especially when it is not possible to manipulate the behaviour of the participants, and the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context overlap (Yin, 2014). In this study, the case is the participation of a student with significant disabilities. As it would be impossible to understand the complexity of participation without considering the context in which it occurs (i.e., an inclusive classroom), case study methodology is an ideal choice.

This case study is instrumental, meaning a single case of interest was studied to provide further insight into the phenomenon; the case itself is not the primary interest, but by studying it, further understanding of something else can be achieved (Stake, 2005). In other words, studying the participation of a single student with significant disabilities who is experiencing a high level of participation in the academic and social life of their classroom contributes to an overall understanding of participation in an inclusive classroom for this population. In the field of inclusive education for students with significant disabilities, there is a need for research designed and implemented in an inclusive context (Morningstar et al, 2016). Thus, an instrumental case study design was chosen because the purpose of this study was to explore how meaningful participation occurs in an inclusive context and to investigate factors that influence participation.

Case study research can be used to develop analytical generalizations, which allows for comparison of the findings of the study to previously developed theory (Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Yin, 2014). Therefore, this study may lead to further development in theory or interventions that support the participation of students with significant disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

**Propositions.** Propositions that emerge from the literature review played an important role in determining the scope of the study, focused the collection of data, and supported the
development of the conceptual framework for this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) suggests that each proposition “directs attention to something that should be examined within the scope of the study” by “reflect(ing) an important theoretical issue (and) tell(ing) you where to look for relevant evidence” (p. 30). Based on the literature review, the following propositions were made:

1. Inclusive education includes both academic and social inclusion (Katz, 2012). Academic inclusion includes participating in learning activities that are cognitively challenging and linked to grade-level curriculum (Katz, 2013) and involves interactive learning with same-age peers (Carter et al., 2016; Feldman et al., 2016; Katz et al., 2012). Social inclusion includes holding valued social roles in the classroom (Katz, 2012; Specht et al., 2011), taking part in daily routines, acting as a contributing member of the classroom, and interacting with peers (Katz et al., 2012). To better understand participation in an inclusive classroom, participation in activities and roles related to both academic and social inclusion were explored.

2. The way a student will experience participation in this study will be similar to the way students have experienced participation in previous studies. This involves the act of taking part in an activity, the perception of belonging, and contributing to a group within a specific context (Eriksson & Granlund, 2004). This study examined how a student with significant disabilities experienced participation in an inclusive classroom.

3. Various personal factors facilitate school participation, including communication skills (Raghavendra et al., 2012), self-determination (Agran et al., 2006; Hughes et al., 2013), and will, motivation, and resilience (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009). This study identified
personal factors that facilitate school participation of a student with significant disabilities.

4. Environmental factors at various levels (i.e., the micro, meso, exo, and macrosystems) facilitate participation. For example, the physical environment (Anaby et al., 2013), peer support (Carter et al., 2016; Feldman et al., 2016), the classroom teacher (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Morningstar et al., 2015), services, systems and policies (Dymond, et al., 2006; Morningstar et al., 2015; Selanikyo et al., 2017), and attitudes and values of members in the classroom, school, and district (Anaby et al., 2013) affect participation. This study identified environmental factors at all levels that influence participation of a student with significant disabilities.

5. Characteristics of the learning activity influence school participation, such as Universal Design for Learning (Dymond et al., 2006, Kurth et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015) individualized and specialized supports and materials (Morningstar et al., 2015), and adaptations to the curriculum, instructional methods, and learning activities (Kurth et al., 2015). This study identified factors in the learning activities that promote participation of a student with significant disabilities.

6. Personal, activity, and environmental factors also present barriers to participation, including: (a) impairment effects, such as pain and fatigue; (c) negative attitudes towards children with disabilities; (c) inaccessibility of the environment; (d) inadequate policies, services, and supports; (e) lack of presence and proximity to peers; (f) excessive proximity to adults; and (g) physical, cognitive, and social demands of activities (Anaby et al., 2013; Coster et al., 2013; Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Giangreco et al., 1997).
This study noted barriers to participation in the academic and social life of the classroom for a student with significant disabilities.

**Conceptual framework.** The propositions were used to construct a conceptual framework, which helped to organize the data and described the relationships that developed through data collection and analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that the use of a conceptual framework will help determine what will and will not be studied; employ logic, experience, and/or previously established theory to describe relationships which may or may not exist in the data; and will provide “bins” to help the researcher organize general ideas and concepts (p. 18). An initial framework for this study (Figure 2) was developed based on the propositions and evolved throughout the research process.

*Figure 2. Initial conceptual framework.*
Baxter and Jack (2008) suggest that the conceptual framework is developed and refined throughout the course of the study, as themes are constructed from the data. They also caution that using a conceptual framework when taking a constructivist approach comes with the risk of the study becoming “driven by the framework” (p. 553). To minimize this risk and ensure all potential processes outside of this framework were considered, I engaged in reflexive journaling and on-going consultation with my academic advisor (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

**Unit of analysis.** In this study, the unit of analysis is the participation of a student with significant disabilities (i.e., Sophie) in the social and academic life of an inclusive classroom. Yin (2014) and Stake (2005) both suggest ‘binding the case’ to help focus the study by placing boundaries on what the case is and is not. This study was bound by context and by definition (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Context.** The context of the case was an inclusive classroom. Only instances where Sophie held valued social roles, was engaged in daily routines in the classroom, was engaged in tasks that were cognitively challenging and/or tasks that were related to grade-level curriculum, or was interacting with her peers were considered to be in the context of an inclusive classroom. Data collection did not occur before or after school, or during breaks. I also limited the time of data collection to occur within one school term, as the overall classroom context changes with a change in term (e.g., new teachers, classrooms, peers, etc.).

**Definition.** Data also were bound by the definition of participation. Kramer et al. (2012) define four levels of school participation in youth with disabilities:

“Doing what everyone else is doing” or participating in tasks and activities alongside and with peers, with or without modifications and accommodations, which facilitates the highest feelings of inclusion. “Fringe
“participation” occurs when students with disabilities have a restricted role in the participation of the activity. While this leads to fewer opportunities to interact with peers and does not necessarily foster feelings of inclusion, it is acceptable to students when it allows them to join in activities with peers that they would otherwise be excluded from and is considered better than not participating at all. “Waiting or watching” and doing nothing while peers participate in an activity, or “doing something different” (i.e., participating in an activity which is completely different from the activity the student’s peers are involved in) result in feelings of frustration and exclusion. In particular, “doing something different” is considered to be the most exclusionary, as the different activity is not typically relevant to the purpose of the activity the rest of the group is involved in, thus further segregating the student with a disability. Being part of the group, even if the student’s role is limited to “waiting or watching”, is preferred over “doing something different.”

(p. 771-772)

In this study, participation was bound to only include instances when Sophie was “doing what everyone else is doing” or involved in “fringe participation”.

Data Collection

Case study research relies on multiple sources that are used to corroborate the data (Yin, 2014). In this study, data were collected from interviews and from direct observations.

Interviews. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with the classroom teacher, the education assistant (EA), and five of Sophie’s classmates. The perception of participating and feelings of contribution and belonging are important elements of participation
Thus, I attempted to engage in a semi-structured interview with Sophie, to capture her perspective on her own school participation. The attempted interview was done in the presence of the EA, using Sophie’s communication book and Velcro communication strip and pictures. The communication system is relatively new to Sophie and the symbols that are familiar and available to her were limited, and as a result Sophie was not able to answer questions about school participation. Instead, we engaged in a social interaction, where Sophie used the picture symbols for “I like…” and “I want…” to ask me to sing her favorite songs or to identify people she liked. Although I enjoyed interacting with Sophie and she seemed to enjoy interacting with me, our interaction was not a reliable source of information on meaningful participation. To understand Sophie’s perspective on participating, I therefore took fieldnotes during observations of Sophie while she participated in social and academic activities in her class.

Throughout my visits to the classroom to collect data, I asked the EA, the classroom teacher, and other students to interpret Sophie’s non-verbal communication for me, so I could better understand what her specific behaviours meant. Throughout my observations, I would describe a behaviour I observed from Sophie to the EA, teacher, or other students, and ask them what they thought she was communicating. I also stated what I observed and what I thought it meant to Sophie. For example, “Sophie, you are pushing the iPad away. I don’t think you want to use it anymore” or, “Sophie, you are looking at the group of students sitting on the carpet. I think you want to join them.” The behaviours I observed most frequently are listed below, along with my interpretations, in Table 1.
Context influences participation (Eriksson & Granlund, 2004; Eriksson, 2005). In this case, the context is the classroom, and the classroom teacher, EA, and Sophie’s peers make up important parts of the social environment of the classroom, each of them in a unique relationship with Sophie. Therefore, the experiences and perspectives of different members of the classroom influence the context in which Sophie participates, and their interviews provided further insight into how her participation occurs. The classroom teacher served as a key informant (Yin, 2014) in selecting peers to be interviewed, as it was important that the peers being interviewed had a relationship with Sophie, so that their interview would provide a rich contribution to the data. Art projects that were displayed in the classroom were used as prompts during the interviews with Sophie’s peers.

Using interviews as a source of data provides insight from the participants’ perspectives. Semi-structured interviews encourage a fluid, flexible conversation guided by open-ended questions (Hermanowicz, 2002). The guiding questions that were used during interviews are included in Appendix B.

Table 1

| Interpretation Guide to Sophie’s Non-Verbal Communication Behaviour |
|---|---|
| Behaviour | Interpretation |
| Smiled, laughed, spit, or yelled | Enjoying an activity |
| Pushed an item away, threw and item on the floor, or hit the person nearest to her | Unhappy with an activity |
| Sat up straight, nodded, and made eye contact | Proud of herself |
| Looked at or reached for a person, place, or object | Wanting something or making a choice |
**Direct observations.** Observations allow researchers to collect data in the context in which it is occurring (Yin, 2014). Both informal and formal observations occurred during data collection. For example, informal data collection occurred as I made fieldnotes during interviews, and about general observations of the overall classroom context. Formal observations occurred during day-to-day classroom activities. A total of 24 hours of observations occurred over six different days, from May 29 until June 26, 2018. Two of the sessions of observations took place during the entire school day and the other four sessions took place during the morning only. Observations occurred on different days of the week and at different times of the day to minimize the effect of changes to the daily classroom life, such as absences, changes in routine, etc., and to capture various aspects of the classroom life. Fieldnotes were only taken during activities that were part of the daily life of the main classroom, for example, the daily morning Reader’s Circle, art project, English Language Arts lesson, daily exercise (i.e., laps around the school field), visit to the school book fair, and a fire safety lesson. Although some of these activities took place outside of the classroom, they were led by the classroom teacher and were activities related to the main classroom context. There were times when data were not collected, such as during recess or when the students went to music class with the music teacher.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis consisted of examining, categorizing, and recombining evidence using thematic analysis (Yin, 2014), a method used for “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79) by organizing coded data into themes (Bryman, 2008a). First, the entire data corpus was divided into datasets for analysis. The datasets included observations, interviews with the classroom teacher, interviews with the EA, and interviews with Sophie’s
classmates. Each dataset was analyzed using a process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, and Braun (2017):

Phase One – Familiarization of the data

1. First, an initial reading of the interview and fieldnote transcripts took place, and anything that was overly significant or striking was noted.

Phase Two – Generating codes

2. In a subsequent reading of the transcripts or fieldnotes, numerous ideas or phrases were made, and key quotations in the text were highlighted.

3. The initial codes that were identified in the second reading were reviewed and reduced by combining similar or duplicate codes.

Phase Three – Constructing themes

4. Codes were sorted and combined to form potential themes and sub-themes.

5. Themes were refined by collapsing them together, breaking them apart, or removing those which did not have enough data to be supported, and a list of candidate themes was created.

Phase Four – Reviewing themes

6. Candidate themes were examined alongside the dataset, to see how they fit with the coded data, the entire dataset, and in relation to the research questions. At this stage, themes were examined to ensure each data extract fit, that the “range of important meanings” of each data extract is captured (Terry et al., 2017, p. 30), and that the themes themselves connect in a thematic map.

7. Themes were re-organized and refined again until all themes across the dataset fit into a thematic map.
8. All transcripts and fieldnotes were re-read to capture any data that had not yet been coded or to re-code for data that didn’t fit.

Phase Five – Define Themes

9. Analysis at this stage is more interpretative, and a detailed narrative was written as I began to make sense of the patterns in the data and the themes told a “story that is based on, and about, the data” (Terry et al., 2017).

Phase Six – Production of the Final Report

10. At this stage, the final written report was completed, which included the detailed narrative from phase five.

**Phase one.** Case study research is an iterative process where data collection and analysis occur at the same time (Baxter & Jack, 2008). During this study, when I returned from the field, fieldnotes and interviews were immediately transcribed verbatim and uploaded to NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software program. An initial reading of the transcripts took place, and anything that was significant was noted. Data extracts directly related to the propositions from the literature review and the initial conceptual framework were considered significant.

I also engaged in reflexive journaling after returning from the field, to address personal biases and motivations, and reflect on how my presence in the classroom, and my personal experiences, values, beliefs, and my role as a school-based occupational therapist, consultant with the Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program (PIOP), and graduate student in Special Education influenced the data collection.

**Phase two.** After I had familiarized myself with the data, initial coding began, using the manual coding function in NVivo 12, which allowed for verbatim, literal, or interpretative descriptions of each chunk of data to be entered as a code. Data analysis occurred at a latent
level, which goes beyond interpretation of the semantics and looks for “underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations – and ideologies – that inform the semantic content of the data” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 84). Data were analyzed using a theoretical or deductive approach and analysis was guide by the Canadian Model of Occupational Therapy and Engagement (CMOP-E), which considers factors in the person, occupation, and environment that influence participation (Polatajko et al., 2007). For example, as each chunk of data was analyzed, the three main factors that influence participation that were identified in this study’s initial conceptual model: person, environment, and activity, were considered. For example, to guide initial the initial coding phase, the following questions were considered:

- what is the person(s) doing?
- how is the person(s) behaving?
- what is the person(s) saying?
- what are the person(s)’s characteristics?
- what emotion(s) is the person displaying?
- what is the person(s) thinking?
- what value(s) are underlying what the person(s) is saying or doing?
- what attitudes(s) are underlying what the person(s) is saying or doing?
- what are the beliefs(s) that may be underlying what the person(s) is saying or doing?
- what are the characteristics of the activity?
- what are the expectations of the activity?
- how is the activity being performed?
- what does the physical environment look like?
• what is happening in the social context?
• what kind of interactions are happening?
• what kind of relationship(s) exist?
• what is the cultural context of the environment?

After each data source had been initially coded, codes were listed in a codebook, along with a description of the meaning of the code. As this study is underpinned by ontological relativism and supports the assumption that multiple, subjective, and constructed realities exist, the codebook was not designed to guide subsequent coding or as a check for inter-coder reliability, but rather served as a tool to document the process of coding to support transparency in the data analysis procedure (Tracy, 2010).

After the initial coding process was complete, transcripts were re-read, and their codes were reviewed, and similar or duplicate codes were combined. For example, “helping” was merged into “helping others”. At the end of phase two, a total of 516 initial codes existed. Across each data set:

• 63 codes existed in the data from interviews with the classroom teacher
• 166 codes existed in the data from interviews with the education assistant
• 133 codes existed in data from peer interviews
• 154 codes existed in data from classroom observations

Member checking interviews. At this point in the analysis, member check interviews were conducted. As this study is underpinned by relativism, I was not looking for validation that my interpretation of the data was ‘right’, but my aim was to create an opportunity for participants to be part of the analysis process, and for the generation of additional data and insight (Smith & McGannon, 2018), aligning with the constructionist positioning of this study. Tracy (2010) refers
to these interviews as “member reflections” (p. 846). During a member check interview, data extracts and their initial codes and descriptions of codes from the first interview were used to guide this second semi-structured interview (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Participants were invited to discuss their thoughts about the interpretation of the data. This process also created an opportunity for any differences in interpretation between the participant and the researcher to be explored (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Member check interviews were transcribed, and the transcription was compared to the transcript from the first interview and initial codes, leading to the generation of new codes and the adaptations and removal of existing codes (Birt et al., 2016).

Both Leah, the classroom teacher, and Rachel, the education assistant, agreed with my interpretation of their initial interviews, and the member check interview did not lead to the deletion or adaptation of existing codes. However, it provided the opportunity to further explore the interpretation of initial codes, and the comparison between the initial interview transcript and the member check interview transcript both generated new codes. For example, in the member check interview with Leah (L), we further explored the idea from her initial interview that students with disabilities should be “woven into all parts of the curriculum”. In the following extract, she further expanded on how Sophie participated in grade-level curricular content:

L: We haven't done so many in the last little while, but we've done a lot earlier on in the year. We did science experiments, so she loved that, and being active in her groups, a lot of grouping. So for science, doing a lot of, um, hands-on things.

Researcher (R): Right.

L: She can do anything with socials…we used a projector, so we watched a lot of biodiversity clips and we got to see different types of Indigenous homes and buildings
across Canada, of different groups. So...she loves that, she loves that. And then doing drawings, and she was always part of the group.

R: So then do you think that inclusion for her is a big, is being part of the group? Just being involved where everybody else is?

L: I think so, and contributing in her own way. Whether it's also doing a drawing, being spoken to and talking to the other kids, definitely, and engaging, and for her, she does communicate, and she'll nod, she'll...I think I've heard her, I think she's saying yes, yeah.

This extract led to the generation of the codes ‘interactive learning’, ‘group work’, ‘hands-on learning activities’, and ‘contributing in her own way’.

In the member check interview with Megan (M), one of Sophie’s peers, the code ‘uncertainty if participating differently is okay’ was removed after exploring this idea during the member check interview:

Researcher (R): I asked you if everybody participates and you said yeah? I think, it sounded like, I wasn't sure, I was wondering, when you first said yeah? It kind of sounded like you weren't sure if, if Sophie helps, if Sophie participates or not?

M: Yeah, she normally does.

R: Okay?

M: Unless it's something, like, unless it's something like really physical, well she does, she does participate in gym, like in the laps. She doesn't really do like the laps, she just goes half way and then back, half way and then back, she does probably like, I don't know how many. I don't really watch her doing it that much, I just know that she does that.
R: Okay, so even though she might not be doing the same thing, you would say she still is participating?

M: Yeeeh, even though it's not exactly the right thing, she's still participating in the main thing.

R: Okay, so it's not so much about doing everything the same way, it's more about being part of the group activity?/

M: Yeah.

In a member check interview with Gwen (G), another student in Sophie’s class, the code ‘friends make participation easy’ was adjusted to ‘friends make participation easier’:

Researcher (R): And I asked you what makes it easy to participate and you said that having a really good friend makes it easy to participate.

G: It makes it easier.

R: Easier.

G: Yeah.

R: Okay. What does that mean, it makes it easier to participate? Is it, is it still sometimes hard to participate, even if you have a friend?

G: Yeah.

R: Ahhh, how come? What, why would you say that?

G: Because sometimes things are just a bit harder for you. More challenging.

R: Yeah, yeah. And you can't rely on your friend to participate for you, right?

G: No. They can help you.

After the member check interviews were completed and codes were adjusted, a total of 560 codes existed. Across each data set:
• 86 codes existed in data from interviews with the classroom teacher
• 174 codes existed in data from interviews with the education assistant
• 146 codes existed in data from peer interviews
• 154 codes existed in data from classroom observations

At this point, the participant check was considered complete, as all participants felt satisfied with the interpretation of the data, and phase three of the analysis began.

Phase three. The next step of the analysis was to sort and collate similar codes into groups. Codes were analyzed individually to ensure similarity between data extracts associated with the code and were manually sorted into groups based on the description of the code and the data extract(s) associated with the code. As codes were analyzed and grouped, some codes were deleted or merged. Deleted codes were those that were either miscoded, the data extract had been given multiple codes with the same meaning, or a broad code had been made redundant by a specific code being given to the same extract; for example, one extract had been coded as both “communication” and “AAC is seen as communication”, which resulted in the deletion of “communication” from that extract. Codes that had similar meanings were merged; for example, "peers helping Sophie" was merged into the code "peers assisting Sophie". At this point, some of the code groups contained only one code and some codes only contained one data extract and were further analyzed in the next step. At the end of this process, a total of 504 codes existed.

Across each data set:
• 83 codes existed in data from interviews with the classroom teacher and were sorted into 15 groups
• 139 codes existed in data from interviews with the education assistant and were sorted into 28 groups
• 135 codes existed in data from interviews with peers and were sorted into 30 code groups
• 147 codes existed in data from classroom observations and were sorted into 24 code groups

Next, codes and code groups were examined to ensure similarities and relationships existed between the codes, and a central organizing theme was consistent throughout the group (Terry et al., 2017). This involved collapsing and breaking apart code groups, resulting in a list of candidate themes and sub-themes for each data set. At this stage, all the codes from the code groups and their extracts remained and were further analyzed and pruned in the next phase. At the end of phase three, a collection of candidate themes existed:

• Five candidate themes (including one of miscellaneous codes) existed in data from interviews with the classroom teacher
• Four candidate themes (including one of miscellaneous codes) existed in data from the interviews with the education assistant
• Four candidate themes (including one of miscellaneous codes) existed in data from peer interviews
• Six candidate themes (including one of miscellaneous) existed in data from classroom observations

**Phase four.** Phase four involved reviewing the candidate themes in each data set, to be sure they fit with the coded data, across the entire data sets, and that they were relevant to the research questions (Terry et al., 2017). First, the coded extracts of data in each theme were reviewed to ensure they connected to the overall concept of the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Extracts that did not fit with the overall concept were moved to either a new theme or added to an existing one and extracts that did not fit into an existing theme or did not
have enough data to support a new theme were discarded from the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once this step was complete, the entire data sets were re-read, to ensure the themes captured the meanings in the data set as a whole and to capture any data that had not yet been coded or to re-code for data that didn’t fit (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the end of this phase of analysis, all the themes in each data set were reviewed a final time to ensure their meanings answered the research questions.

**Phase five.** At this stage, a detailed, interpretative narrative was written (see Chapter 4: Results) for each theme, to tell the story of the data with respect to each data set as a whole, and with respect to the research questions, making sure themes were connected but did not overlap (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Each theme was named and defined, which led to the production of the final thematic maps (see Chapter 4: Results). At the end of phase five:

- Three final themes and five subthemes existed in the data from interviews with the classroom teacher
- Four final themes and seven subthemes existed in the data from interviews with the education assistant
- Two final themes and five subthemes existed in the data from interviews with peers in the classroom
- Four final themes and eight subthemes existed in the data from classroom observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Themes and Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Theme 1. Inclusion, A Social Construct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-theme 1.1: Teaching to Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-theme 1.2: A Valued Member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

*List of Themes from Across All Sources of Data*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Themes and Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Classroom Teacher | Theme 2. Classroom Teacher as a Guide  
• Sub-theme 2.1: Social Responsibility in Learning  
• Sub-theme 2.2: Group Work  
• Sub-theme 2.3: Sharing Ideas  
Theme 3. Tension – Individual Program vs Inclusive Education |
| Education Assistant | Theme 1. Building Connections through Communication  
Theme 2. Personal and Social Responsibility Facilitates a Sense of Belonging  
• Sub-theme 2.1: Personal Responsibility  
• Sub-theme 2.2: Social Responsibility  
Theme 3. The Education Assistant – Part of a Team  
• Sub-theme 3.1: How the Education Assistant Fulfills Their Role  
• Sub-theme 3.2: Working with the Classroom Teacher  
• Sub-theme 3.3: The School Team  
Theme 4. Including Sophie – An Individualized Program in an Inclusive Classroom  
• Sub-theme 4.1: Fitting Them In  
• Sub-theme 4.2: Work, But a Different Kind of Work |
| Peers             | Theme 1. Being a Member of the Class – Personal and Social Responsibility  
• Sub-theme 1.1: Doing Stuff Together  
• Sub-theme 1.2: Making a Contribution  
• Sub-theme 1.3: Classroom Teacher in Charge  
Theme 2. Creating a Classroom of Growth  
• Sub-theme 2.1: Choice and Creativity  
• Sub-theme 2.2: Supporting Growth and Learning |
| Classroom Observations | Theme 1. In This Together  
• Sub-theme 1.1: Sense of Belonging  
• Sub-theme 1.2: Same Activity, but a Different Way  
• Sub-theme 1.3: Learning to be Personally and Socially Responsible  
Theme 2. I Am Your Teacher  
• Sub-theme 2.1: Connecting with Students  
• Sub-theme 2.2: In Charge of Daily Routines  
• Sub-theme 2.3: Sophie’s Teacher  
Theme 3. I Have Something to Say  
• Sub-theme 3.1: Communication  
• Sub-theme 3.2: Choice  
Theme 4. Least Amount of Support Required |
Phase six. The final phase of the analysis was the production of the written report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017), which is included in Chapter 4: Results.

Quality of Study

Rigor. Rigor in qualitative research is demonstrated when the research presents an accurate version of the participants’ experiences and perspectives, and involves rich, descriptive, and abundant data and the use of appropriate procedures throughout the study (Tracy, 2010; Yin, 2014). Rigor was achieved through this study by utilizing multiple sources of data, spending a large amount of time in the field, taking careful and thorough fieldnotes, and through transparency in the data analysis procedures (Tracy, 2010). Using a computerized software program (NVivo 12), I created a case study database to help organize and document data that allowed me to keep a chain of evidence to contribute to the study’s transparency (Yin, 2014). This chain of evidence created an “audit trail” (Tracy, 2010) that included:

a. Interview and fieldnote transcripts
b. Notes of initial thoughts about data, taken after the first few readings of each transcript
c. A codebook of initial codes and their meanings
d. Detailed memos that documented all my interpretative choices throughout the entire data analysis process

The case study report clearly lays out the entire analysis process for the reader to follow, from the initial research question to the final conclusions.

Trustworthiness. To establish trustworthiness in this study, I used thick, rich descriptions and details in the narrative of the themes to provide the reader with an in-depth understanding of the phenomena (Tracy, 2010). Crystallization of multiple sources of data, as
described by Tracy (2010), is the use of multiple sources of data “not to provide researchers with a more valid singular truth, but to open up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue” (p. 844). I collected data from multiple sources and considered how the patterns in the data related to the study’s propositions and theoretical framework (Yin, 2014) by using the thematic maps from each source to develop the final conceptual framework. In other words, the final conceptual map presented evolved with the addition of knowledge gained from each data source.

Additionally, as described earlier, I conducted member check interviews, or “member reflections”, with participants after interview transcripts had been analyzed, by bringing the initial codes and themes from the analysis back to the participants and engaging in conversation; this process allowed for “collaboration and reflexive elaboration” on the findings (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). Member checking interviews provided an opportunity for participants to be part of the analysis process by participating in the interpretation of the data with the researcher (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Member checking interviews establish trustworthiness by providing a “practical opportunity (for the researcher) to acknowledge and/or explore with participants the existence of contradictions and differences in knowing” and discuss how to address them (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 108). This allows knowledge to be co-constructed between the researcher and the participants, aligning with the constructionist positioning of this study.

As this study is underpinned by relativism, which assumes there is no singular truth, the use of intercoder reliability or intercoder agreement measures is not appropriate (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Instead, my supervisor served as a ‘critical friend’ and “provide(d) a theoretical sounding board to encourage reflection upon, and exploration of, multiple and alternative explanations and interpretations as these emerged in relation to the data and writing”
(Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 113). After each phase of analysis, I shared the audit trail with my supervisor and I engaged in multiple, on-going conversations, both in person and by phone, with her throughout the entire analysis process.

**Reflexivity.** As a social constructivist, I recognize that my own values, biases, experiences, and beliefs influence the research process. Therefore, before stepping foot into the field, I had to address my own biases and motivations and considered how my personal experiences, values, beliefs, and role as a school-based occupational therapist, consultant with the Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program (PIOP), and graduate student in Special Education shaped the research process and informed the interpretation of data. To do this, I used reflexive journaling throughout the course of this study. Each time I left the field I wrote in a reflexive journal, making notes of my thoughts, feelings, and assumptions, and how I interacted with participants that day and how they interacted with me, and how my interactions influenced the collection and interpretation of the data.

I strongly believe in full inclusion in the social and academic life of the classroom for all students, including students with significant disabilities. In my experience with the Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program, I have worked with many students who communicate with AAC systems or non-verbally and I often ‘interpret’ behaviour as communication. This experience has undoubtedly shaped the way I interpret Sophie’s behaviour as communication. As an occupational therapist (OT), I view meaningful school participation through a specific lens, and this likely influenced the collection and analysis of observational data. As an OT, I was trained to address factors in the person, environment, and activity to facilitate participation. For example, in my work as a school-based occupational therapist, I often assess how a student’s physical abilities (e.g., fine motor control) and the physical environment (e.g., height of the desk)
influence their participation, and make suggestions to change the environment or to use adaptive equipment (including Assistive Technology). A classroom teacher, on the other hand, would view meaningful participation through a different lens. Therefore, I must be transparent about my perspective on meaningful participation, because as a social constructionist, my person becomes part of the research process. However, I have worked to ensure that the narratives of the participants and their meanings are at the forefront of this interpretive effort, using reflexive journaling and on-going conversations with my advisor to assist me in that respect.
Chapter 4: Results

This chapter focuses on the results of the data analysis from the four data sets (i.e., the interview with the classroom teacher, the interview with the educational assistant, interviews with classroom peers, and observations in the classroom), in respect to the research questions, “How does a student with significant disabilities participate in the social and academic life of an inclusive classroom?” and “What are the personal, environmental, and activity factors that influence participation in an inclusive classroom for a student with significant disabilities?” In this chapter, I will present a detailed narrative of the data analysis and the development of the conceptual framework. I begin by discussing the analysis of each of the data sets individually, starting with the interview from the classroom teacher, then the interview with the education assistant, the interviews with Sophie’s peers, and finally, the analysis of observational data. I will present the detailed narrative and discuss the thematic map from the respective data set in relation to the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework was developed and refined with the knowledge gained from each detailed narrative, and by the end of the discussion of each data set, a new version of the framework existed. I end this section with a summary of the key findings and a comparison of the initial and final conceptual frameworks.

In the context of this study, participation has been defined as active engagement in a task, the perception of belonging and/or making a contribution and considers the context in which the participation occurs. I will describe how Sophie, a student with significant disabilities, participates in her classroom from the perspective of each data source. Through the collection and analysis of data, I came across several instances that captured one component of participation (i.e., either the act of taking part or making a contribution) and it was tempting to consider those as examples of meaningful participation. I chose to include some non-examples of meaningful
participation in my narrative, to contrast the examples of meaningful participation, and to add further depth and understanding to the complexity of participation.

**Classroom Teacher**

*A valued member of the class*

*Teaching to diversity*

*Group Work*

*A guide*

*Social Responsibility in Learning*

*Inclusion, a social construct*

*Tension - Individualized Program vs Inclusive Education*

*Sharing Ideas*

**Figure 3.** Thematic map 1 (classroom teacher)

**Inclusion, a social construct.** The first theme I will discuss focuses on the concept that the experience of inclusion in the classroom is created by the members of the classroom themselves. Inclusion is not something that is done or a set of practices that can be implemented, but is a dynamic, evolving experience that is dependent on the people in the context. Leah, the classroom teacher talked about how her particular group of students have their “own way of inclusion in the classroom” and explained, “every classroom is very different, depending on the child”. She described inclusion as a path:

The path of inclusion with her (Sophie) in it, with other kids that have learning needs. So, I think, but it takes growth. And so in my mind, if I took Sophie right now and said, ‘okay there isn't room in our class and you have to go to another class’, it would be really different. Because that journey hasn't happened, it took a whole year to create and grow.

From these two quotations we get the sense that who Sophie is, who her peers are (i.e., their personalities, their strengths, their difficulties), and their on-going interactions influence the
experience of inclusion in the classroom. This experience is not static, but grows as the students learn and grow together, as Leah explained:

> Being part of the group, (for example) at Reader's Circle...even though that's just a small little part of the morning and group work, even that, like, at the beginning of the year it's changed so much now, like how much she is a part of the classroom.

In other words, Sophie’s participation is influenced by the experience of inclusion that is socially constructed by the classroom and evolves and grows over time.

The group of students is not the only factor in creating an inclusive learning community, and the classroom teacher plays a key role in fostering an environment where inclusion can grow. Leah talked about the importance of “creat(ing) it at the very beginning,” and added: “any class here, I think with me, we probably would be at the same place we are now.”

This theme contains the following subthemes: (1) Teaching to Diversity, (2) A Valued Member, and (3) Classroom Teacher as a Guide

**Teaching to diversity.** This subtheme speaks to the idea that when the diversity of all the students in the class is recognized, respected, and celebrated, an environment that encourages being different is created. Inclusion is not about integrating a student with disabilities, but it’s about fostering understanding and celebrating the diversity of each and every member, so that all students can learn and grow:

> (It’s about) encouraging differences and that it’s okay to be different. (And it’s) inclusion of kids with all types of learning. Because it's not only children with significant disabilities or issues, it's that everybody has certain strengths and weaknesses, and I think that knowing that, right away, and being open to that and understanding that, I think that's helped the children grow.
Understanding and accepting that students have different ways of learning creates opportunities for students to participate in different ways. For example, when the classroom teacher recognizes the diversity in her students, students are encouraged to learn at whatever level and pace they are at and they have options to present their learning in different ways. Leah explained:

Some struggle with presentations, but maybe they'll show me in their writing. Or maybe they'll draw a picture. Or maybe they'll tell just me. (There are) different ways to be included….with some of them I conference, you know, one on one. And some of them will need for things to be chunked and broken down with writing.

Leah talked about giving students choice in their learning to show respect for their diverse learning styles and preferences:

I have a couple (of students) that will say, ‘Can I work on this on my own?’ And if that's their choice, that's okay, I have to respect that. I have a couple (of students) that sometimes don't always want to work with a partner (and) I encourage it. I don't want them always being completely on their own, but I will say, ‘If that's how you feel today, that's okay’.

When the culture of the entire classroom fosters a respect for diversity in participation and creates a climate where doing something differently is valued, Sophie can authentically take part in an activity in a different way than her peers by “contribut(ing) in her own way, whether it’s also doing a drawing (or) being spoken to and talking to the other kids” and she is still considered part of the group.
With a diverse group of students, it is important to present learning materials to the students in different forms, not only through reading and writing. This allows Sophie to engage in the learning material in a more meaningful way as well. Leah explained:

She can do anything with socials. We used a projector, so we watched a lot of biodiversity clips and we got to see different types of Indigenous homes and buildings across Canada. She loves that, she loves that. And then doing drawings…she was always part of the group.

*A valued member.* This subtheme highlights the role Sophie plays in her class and how she “contribute(s) to the fabric of the classroom”. From my interview with Leah, it is clear that Sophie is an important member of the classroom, and “all the kids, I mean, they love Sophie, and…she's one of the class and…they love her.” Being accepted as a valued member of the classroom leads to Sophie taking on a valued social role. Leah recognized that being part of the group was important for Sophie: “Yeah, anything that involves, I think a friend, for her, is a motivator”, and gave Sophie social roles in the class where she could contribute to a group. Sophie often helped her peers with their learning “in the groups”. For example, “we were doing spelling at the beginning of the year where she had the spelling words recorded on the iPad and she would press and then be the teacher.”

Leah also described an example of how Sophie supports the social and emotional development of her peers: “I was watching the one particular little boy that had some trouble with his emotional regulation (and) how I feel that his contribution and helping Sophie or communicating with her has changed him”. This example demonstrates how Sophie makes a contribution to the classroom; however, participation involves making a contribution to the classroom AND an act of taking part, and this example does not involve the second component.
While it does depict Sophie making an important contribution to her classroom, it is not an example of meaningful participation.

**Classroom teacher as a guide.** This subtheme speaks to the classroom teacher’s role in guiding students as they learn in an inclusive community. Leah talked about being there for her students, providing encouragement, and coaching them as they work, learn, and grow together. While she encourages students to take risks in their learning, she is there to guide them when they need direction:

Yesterday we shared our little block structures, and they had a little guiding sheet and some of them were just naturals. They were okay, but they were still really nervous getting up in front. And I said ‘we're all friends, it's okay, I'm right here. I will help guide you with your questions that you need to talk about it.’

She is also there to guide them as they navigate interpersonal issues:

So, I will, if there is an issue (between students), what I do is I get them to talk about it first. So tell each other how you're feeling and then when you need me I'm here. And then I will step in. But I will encourage them to talk about it first.

As a guide, the classroom teacher is ultimately in control, but students can make choices in how they interact with each other in the classroom, and they have room to make mistakes, knowing their teacher will guide them when necessary.

**Social responsibility in learning.** The second theme constructed from data from interviews with the classroom teacher is about social responsibility. The classroom has an expectation that students will “care(e) about each other and the environment…even just the simple things, keeping (the) classroom clean, and respecting each other's property, respecting each other's feelings” and that everyone is “responsible to keep (the) room organized (and) we can help each
other”. Learning is interactive, and this provides an opportunity for a diverse group of students to use their strengths to learn from each other and support each other in their learning. When I asked Leah if she did anything specific to help students feel like they were members of the classroom, she said: “lots of teamwork, lots of group work…(and) encouraging differences and that it's okay to be different.” This theme includes two sub-themes: (1) Group Work, and (2) Sharing Ideas.

**Group work.** Leah gives her students the opportunity to work in a group as often as possible, because it not only leads to sharing of ideas, but also creates opportunities for students to contribute to the learning activity in different ways. Group work was a key factor in including Sophie in Science and English Language Arts. Leah explained:

> Earlier on in the year we did science experiments, so she loved that, being active in her groups. (We did) a lot of grouping (and) a lot of hands-on things” and “doing the group projects for Charlotte’s Web, she always listened to the story, (and) we did posters (and) she was a part of that.

Using technology helped Sophie to have an active role in group activities. For example, Leah explained that during spelling review, they record the spelling words on Sophie’s iPad and she presses a button to ‘read’ the word allowed to peers to write down, and in science, “she would (use technology to) quiz her friends on, for example, what are the different states of matter.”

**Sharing ideas.** In the context of this classroom, sharing ideas with each other was considered an important way of participating and supported growth and learning in the students. Leah encourages her students to share ideas with each other to help each other learn:

> I noticed that a lot of them were hesitant to ask a question. I said, ‘You know what, it's really important that we just come up with a question for our friends because they really want to know what your thoughts are.’
Leah also talked about how sharing ideas with each other led to new thoughts and ideas: “They've told me that, well my friend helped me with my ideas, they gave me a new idea, or they had an idea. So just...sharing ideas (when you are) feeling safe with your friend.” This quotation also captures the idea that before students are willing to share their ideas, they need to feel safe and have “the idea of ‘no matter what, you're safe here and you can express yourself’.” Leah described how being able to express herself had an impact on the types of activities Sophie was doing in class:

Leah: And she does the shape sorting, and her pegs in the bin, and her lines, and her name...that was, I think for the first few months, she was tracing her name. That, not so much anymore.

Researcher: Why do you think that stopped?

Leah: I think we got into a little bit more of the different activities, and the book, her communication book came into effect a lot more, and so she was expressing what she wanted to do, and she doesn't always prefer the academic part of it.

Communication is not only about expressing ideas, and in order for an idea to be shared, it needs to be received. As her teacher and classmates understood Sophie’s communication better, she was better able to share her thoughts and feelings. Leah explained that because they “understand (Sophie), now we understand what her different emotions mean,” Sophie is able to express her ideas: “She likes certain things. She does have days where she’ll just push things away. But there’s certain things that she likes to do more than others.”

Being able to share her interests with others leads to sharing experiences, and Leah talked about how Sophie interacts with her peers: “(she likes) the bubbles, of course, and the singing. (And) the reading, (she) absolutely loves reading with friends.”
Tension – individual program vs inclusive education. This theme was initially called ‘Sophie’s Individual Program’ and many of the extracts included in this theme focused on a modified educational program that was developed for Sophie. According to the BC Ministry of Education (2016), a modified program “consists of individualized learning goals and outcomes which are different than learning outcomes of a course or subject” and “should be considered for those students whose special needs are such that they are unable to access the curriculum” (p. vi).

There are two components to Sophie’s educational program: (a) learning with her peers; and (b) an individualized program. Sophie’s individualized program was designed in collaboration with the school-based team to support development in her motor skills:

Well we talked about that at the very beginning of the year with the help of all the consultants and with (the learning support teacher). So with motor, we looked at her goals and her needs (and) she does the shape sorting, and her pegs…and her lines, and her name.

There is support for the classroom teacher and educational assistant in respect to the implementation of Sophie’s individualized program, and “that was mainly (learning support teacher) coming in and doing a little bit of training with Rachel and I.” However, the data did not indicate that consultants and specialists provided support for including Sophie in learning activities with her peers. This does not mean she did not receive support in this area, but Leah did not mention it.

I got the sense that Leah was working on how to integrate the two components of Sophie’s program, because a segregated program goes against her personal belief that “a child with disabilities should be included in all parts of the day and woven into every aspect of the curriculum.” Leah explained that Sophie works on her individualized program in the classroom alongside her peers and described instances where other students would work with Sophie on her
individualized goals, but she recognizes this is not the same interaction as when Sophie is included in the learning activities the rest of the class is doing: “In terms of her writing, sometimes she'll have a friend, and she'll do her lines (with) a pen (on) a white board…together, either with a friend or with Rachel (educational assistant).…but again, I mean it's different…”

Sophie has individualized learning goals and activities that make up part of her day, although Leah did not consider them to be the most important part of her day:

Leah: I mean she does have her own…things that she does have.

Researcher: But that's a small part of her day?

Leah: It is. It is really small.

This theme does not reflect meaningful participation, as Sophie’s individualized program takes place outside of what the rest of the group is doing, and therefore does not provide her with an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution, nor does it foster feelings of belonging. However, it is included because Sophie’s individualized program is a significant part of her educational program and the tension created by having an individualized program in an inclusive context helps us to understand the complexity of Sophie’s school participation.

**Summary of participation.** In the following text, key factors relating to the classroom context and participation that have been identified in this data analysis are listed in bold print. The following conceptual framework, as it has developed based on the data analysis of the interview with the classroom teacher, is illustrated in Figure. 4. In Figure 4, details have been added to the initial framework and relationships are shown.

Valued Social Roles

- **Student as a teacher**

Personal Factors
• Personal factors of student:
  o Being able to express self
  o Being understood by others
  o Self-determination

• Personal factors of peers:
  o Self-determination

• Personal factors of classroom teacher:
  o Guides and coaches students
  o Encourages students

Environmental Factors

• Social interactions between student, peers, and the classroom teacher
• Culture of respect for diversity, caring for others, social responsibility
• Sense of safety in the classroom

Activity Factors

• Multiple ways to represent, engage with, and express learning – Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
• Choice
• Group work
• Hands-on learning activities
Figure 4. Conceptual framework 1 (classroom teacher).
**Figure 5.** Thematic map 2 (education assistant).

**Building connections through communication.** This theme speaks to the importance of communication in facilitating social interactions. To connect with others, one needs to be able to express themselves. One of the ways Sophie communicates is through an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) system. The AAC system Sophie uses is a book with picture symbols. The front cover of the book has a Velcro strip, each symbol has Velcro on the back of it, and Sophie builds sentences on the strip using the symbols. For example, she often asks her peers to sing songs, using the symbol, ‘I want’ and a symbol representing a specific song. The inside front of the page has a ‘not available’ symbol that is used when Sophie asks for something that isn’t available or isn’t appropriate for the time (e.g., if Sophie asks for a song when the classroom teacher is reading a story, she will be told the song is not available). Sophie has the ability and the motivation to express herself, and Rachel, the education assistant (EA) explained that the AAC system “took off. It's like, it's exploded, it's really great! She's just requesting so much, and so fast, and I can't even keep up with her. So definitely next year they're moving up to the pointing”. Sophie also uses non-verbal communication to express herself. For example, “if she doesn't like something she'll push it away and or she'll get mad.” Communication goes beyond
expressing oneself and includes being understood by your communication partner. Sophie’s peers understand her nonverbal communication and respond to her so that she feels understood:

And, you know, if she's having a bad day or if they see her angry through her gestures or her mood or her vocalizations, they know, ‘Oh, she's not happy about something or she's not happy about this’, so they know, they can read her really well.

Rachel talked about how important it is for Sophie and her peers to understand each other.

Sophie’s peers learned how to use the AAC system and often use it to communicate with Sophie, which increased her use of the AAC system and helped build connections with her peers:

You know, especially with the communication book that she has, ever since it took off…I think she just got this new one in January maybe, but when the kids started learning it (in) maybe February (or) March, and they just love it, and they took off with it, everybody wants to do it. It's amazing, they all want to, you know, help her with the pictures, and it's really helped to, you know, like you say, bridge the gap.

Rachel also described how the AAC system gives students a way to connect and interact with Sophie during leisure activities:

On rainy days…(if) we can't go outside to the swing, we go upstairs, and she has different friends, usually it's the same group of girls. And I said, ‘Well, if you want to go upstairs with Sophie you have to play with her. And not just, like, go do your own thing and, you know, Sophie's all by herself.’ So then they're using the communication book and (they) sit around a table and she (hands the) strip to one and the other.

The social interactions between Sophie and her peers facilitate meaningful participation, because when Sophie’s thoughts, ideas, and opinions are understood by her peers, she is more likely to
feel as though she is contributing to the activity. For example, Leah explained how students ask for Sophie’s opinion when they are working together:

If she’s going to do art, they sit beside her, they ask her questions like, ‘Oh, what color do you want this to be?’ Or you know, ‘Blah blah blah’, and then they, ‘Oh you want pink, okay sure.’

**Personal and social responsibility facilitates a sense of belonging.** In the classroom, students demonstrate both personal and social responsibility. Rachel explained that being socially and personally responsible were important values in the classroom. For example, “team work, collaboration, you know… put your hand up, turn taking, acknowledging your fellow peers, you know, that kind of thing” is expected in the classroom. This theme has two subthemes: (1) Personal Responsibility, and (2) Social Responsibility.

**Personal responsibility.** Rachel talked about the expectation that students will take responsibility for their own actions. For example, she explained that having “respect, those kinds of things, respecting the teacher, respecting the peers as well” is one of the most important expectations in the classroom. Rachel further described how students take responsibility for their actions: “They put their hand up, they say ‘Please, thank you’, and they know (that if) they screwed up or hurt someone’s feelings, they sit down with that person and talk about what happened.” She also described the expectation to “be kind to one another. If you don't like it, don't do it to somebody else, that kind of thing.”

The students’ individual actions have an impact on how they interact with each other, including how they interact with Sophie:
They're very respectful, they see Sophie, even in the morning, before school, ‘Hi Sophie! How are you?’ Or hold the door open or, oh yeah, today at the bus I had got there late, and two of her classmates were pushing her already, up the sidewalk.

Sophie is also developing personal responsibility skills, which influences her interactions with her peers. For example, Rachel believes it is important that Sophie learn to rely on other people in the class, and talks about stepping back so that Sophie can look to her peers for support. She explained: “I don't want, you know, like Sophie doesn't always have me around...everybody's alike, we don't always have some worker with us everywhere. So she has to know that in the community, like, there's other people.”

**Social Responsibility.** Students demonstrate social responsibility through care and concern for each other, including caring for Sophie’s well-being. Leah describes how students look out for Sophie when “they're playing games…they'll be like, ‘Hey guys, look, Sophie's there, watch out. Don't hit her!’ They're very aware of their surroundings, they're aware of her, for safety.” Rachel described the students as advocates, nurturers, and helpers to Sophie:

Advocating and being responsible, leadership skills, those kind of things. There's lots of nurturing too, like mother birds in there (laughs) and that. They love Sophie too, and then they take on that role. And then they want to do the communication book with her, they love it so much that they're not even doing it properly!

As advocates, Sophie’s peers introduce her to others, speak up for her when she is not able to, and facilitate communication between Sophie and people who don’t know her as well. For example, they provide opportunities for their parents to interact with Sophie when “they say ‘Bye!’, like, we're waiting for the bus and they'll pass with their parents and be like, ‘Bye Sophie! See you tomorrow.’ And even the parents of these kids acknowledge and say, ‘Bye Sophie, see
you tomorrow.’ They make sure she doesn’t get left out by “advocating for Sophie, and stuff like, like today, ‘Did she get a donut at Sam’s birthday?’ They were just saying that, ‘No she didn't’ and then Sam was like, ‘Yeah, she can get a donut.’ It's stuff like that.” The students in the class also teach other people how to communicate with Sophie. For example, Leah explained:

If I'm sick and there's a sub for me that hasn't worked with her, the kids can, like, they know how to communicate with her with the book, so then, they'll tell (the sub), ‘Oh no, this is how you do it!’

Peers also feel a sense of responsibility to “help (Sophie) out with work, you know. Oh, you know, ‘I color this’, like taking turns (with her), that kind of thing.” Rachel has played a role in fostering a sense of responsibility to help Sophie in the students in the classroom. She talked about how she encourages students to help Sophie, and how that’s fostered their sense of social responsibility:

I'm always like, ‘Hey you, come here. You do this.’ Trying to um...how do you say when somebody is…delegating. Like delegating (laughs)...Yeah, delegating tasks to other kids to push myself kind of farther away. Cause I just don't want to be stuck with Sophie. I don't want, you know, like Sophie doesn't always have me around or...everybody's alike, we don't always have some worker with us everywhere. So, she has to know that in the community, there's other people. And the kids can see that too and have empathy and understand she's a normal kid like them. So I just try to back away but be supportive, I guess.

Rachel noticed this sense of responsibility in helping Sophie developed over time, as students became a more cohesive group. For example, “in the beginning it was like, more like, ‘Hey, you come!’ But now, they even offer sometimes, like, ‘I'll do it, I'll do it!”
The classroom teacher plays a role in coaching the students to create a caring, respectful community that includes Sophie. For example, Rachel explained that Leah “tells the kids to participate with Sophie, and ‘Hey, she's talking to you.’ So she always supports that way… ‘Hey, can you sing her that song? She's talking to you.’” Leah also reminds students to be aware of each other. For example, “in the gym, Sophie likes to scoot around on her butt, so (Leah)’s like, ‘Watch out for Sophie!’” And now the kids know. They’re like, they're playing games and they'll be like, ‘Hey guys, look, Sophie’s there, watch out.”

There is an expectation that Sophie learn to be socially responsible. For example, she is often given a role where she can help her peers learn:

They do spelling…you know…on the iPad…you have to record the words on the iPad and then she would press the…like, on the iPad, there's, I think, ten or twelve cards and she'll press one. And then I say whatever it says…And then the kid writes it down. So, practicing, like, helping the other students practice their spelling.

The education assistant – part of a team. Not only does the way students in the class interact with each other influence participation of a student with significant disabilities, so do the interactions between the adults in the class. This theme addresses the role the education assistant plays as a member of both the classroom and the school-based team, with respect to Sophie’s participation at school. This theme includes the following subthemes: (1) How the Education Assistant Fulfills Their Role, (2) Working with the Classroom Teacher, and (3) The School Team.

How the educational assistant fulfills their role. Students with significant disabilities often “require assistance at all times” at school, and typically spend a large amount of time with an education assistant (BC Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 63). Rachel spoke about how her philosophy on working as an EA and the role she plays in the classroom influence Sophie’s school
participation. Rachel believes in equality for all people, and she believes students with disabilities “should be treated like all the other kids, right?...Cause they're like us, they're no different, right?” Rachel also believes “every kid needs to be included” and explained: “it's nice to see them playing with (Sophie), and that’s the way it should be, I thought. This is about equality, this is about, we're all equal.” Rachel explained:

I'm all for inclusion. I worked in a group home for eleven years before this and it was all high needs adults. And we were all about inclusion too. It was always community events, go to the local parade, go out to the mall in your area, go out...everywhere! The parks. So, it's the same kind of thing, like these people, adults that I worked with, they need to be seen. Like just like these kids, they need to be seen.

Her beliefs about inclusion and students with disabilities determines where she thinks Sophie should spend most of her time:

They need to be included with their peers and...you know, they were separated from their peers, like, no. They need to be with their peers, like, like every other student basically. So, I'm all for it (inclusion) and it's so nice to see.

Rachel believes Sophie should be in the classroom, so it is important to her that Sophie spend us much of her day as possible with her peers, where she has opportunities to meaningfully take part in her learning community.

Rachel is flexible and open to any opportunity where Sophie can be part of the group. However, she prioritizes these opportunities over Sophie’s individualized (academics) program and indicates it is more important for Sophie to “have a positive experience at school” than to participate in academic programming. Rachel explained:
Some Student Support Workers (EAs) are…they're all about the academics. They're like, ‘Oh they have to do this today’ and it's like, for me, it's like ‘No, you don't have to do it.’ You just go through the day and, you know, no pressure, just easy-going, very go with the flow (laughs). You know, we still want to obtain our goals, but you don't want to push Sophie to the point where she's crying, you want to make her happy or else she's not going to have a positive experience at school. She's not going to want to come here, she's going to be hitting me, and then it's just more tension. Just enjoy the day!

As an education assistant, Rachel provides support to all the students in the class, not just to Sophie. For example, she described stepping back from Sophie and working with other students in the classroom, so that Sophie does not become dependent only on her and to give Sophie an opportunity to develop relationships with her peers. She tries to “be supportive and try to help other kids if Sophie’s okay,” and “to be that person that works with the other kids. I'm always like, ‘Hey you, come here! You do this.’ Trying to…how do you say when somebody is, delegating. Like delegating (laughs). Just trying to be supportive in the class.” She further explained, “So, (it’s) like kind of working ourselves out of a job. Like, the EAs (laughs), right? It's hard to say, cause we need a job, but basically that’s the model.”

**Working with the classroom teacher.** Education assistants typically work in the classroom, alongside the teacher. When the classroom teacher and education assistant do not get along it can be difficult for them to work together, and “sometimes you work with teachers that just clash. There could be tension… and then it makes it hard for the kid too, cause all the kids can feel it, can sense it.” Rachel described her relationship with Leah, the classroom teacher, as supportive, easy-going, and collaborative, and notes this positive working relationship allows them to work
together to support Sophie to participate in the classroom: “We just laugh and joke around all the time. And we're very laid-back.” She explained their relationship is:

really good. She's probably the sweetest teacher I have ever had. And she's really supportive as well…We're both easy-going. Or she'll give her opinions or ideas, and then myself as well, and then we, you know, collaborate and work around that. ‘What's the best? This is going to work, that won't work.’ That kind of thing.

The school team. Not only does Rachel talk about working with the classroom teacher, but she also considers her role in the larger community of the school. She values the “team approach” to the development and implementation of Sophie’s individualized program and appreciates the support she gets from the school-based team, the “team of school-based personnel which has a formal role to play as a problem-solving unit in assisting classroom teachers to develop and implement instructional and/or management strategies and to coordinate support resources for students with special needs within the school” (BC Ministry of Education, 2016, p. vi). Rachel explained that the development of Sophie’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) is:

a whole team approach. We just had an IEP and I swear there was like ten people there. There was the vice principal, the occupational therapist, we had the AAC, the augmentative communication person, we had me, we had the teacher, we had the physiotherapist. We had two ladies from the day care, and we had the resource teacher. So that's a lot of people to come up with these goals.

Rachel values working with a team, because there are:

people giving more ideas, you know. You don't have all the answers, and you don't have it all there. But when you talk to other people and you just start suggesting, like, ‘Oh that would be good.’… It's actually like, it's like a community, you know? It takes a community
to raise a child, they say. It's like all these people here, all these people that came together for Sophie.

Rachel looks to different members of the school-based team for different types of support. For example, an AAC consultant came into the classroom to teach the students in Sophie’s class about her AAC system. This led to more students using Sophie’s AAC system to communicate and connect with her:

The AAC (specialist), she came in (and) she trained, them. Well, she sent somebody, like another Student Support Worker that works in the district that she's taught and she's really good, and so she came in and we taught the class together. And then what we did is we went to a little room around here and we took five kids at a time with Sophie, and then they practiced using the sentence strip with us. So every time she requested something, they'd honour her request.

Rachel appreciates being trained by the specialists and members of the school-based team and explained how on-going consultation creates opportunities for joint problem-solving:

It's just very…it's good to know that you're not alone. Especially as a worker, cause, day in, day out, you're one-on-one with this kid. So it's nice to know that you have back up and that people understand. And if you have any questions, they're very helpful. And you could always go to your teacher, even other resources teachers that, they're not Sophie's resource teacher, but they come to me with ideas, ‘Why don’t you try this?’ or ‘Here's this book that you can get ideas from.’…So, that's, like I said, everybody's like a community, helping out, so it's really nice.

Rachel explained that it is important for the school-based team to work well together and respect each other’s time:
The most important thing for me, it's reliability. (If) I need the things, they're not going to take two months to get them to me. And open communication and feedback. They’re always, ‘So that didn't work, okay, let's try this next time. So if it's not working, here, I'll take that piece of equipment back.’

**Including Sophie – an individualized program in an inclusive classroom.** Rachel clearly values inclusion and believes it is important for Sophie to develop relationships with her peers and make a meaningful contribution to her learning community. However, Rachel also spoke about the difficulties she experiences when trying to integrate Sophie’s individualized program in an inclusive classroom. This theme includes the following subthemes: (1) Fitting Them In, and (2) Work, But a Different Kind of Work.

*Fitting them in.* Rachel discussed trying to find ways for Sophie to work on individualized learning goals in the context of the classroom’s day-to-day life: “It's like that little button, she says ‘Hello’. So, when she bumps into somebody she's always like practicing, you know, or interacting with other people, ‘Hi, how are you?’” She explained, when it comes to individualized learning goals:

well you just fit them in, right? Like, okay, we're going to go have fun on the playground, we're going to the swing, or we're going to music class, but you got to practice more of your walking and do some heavy lifting. So I'll get her to push her wheelchair. And then it's like full of stuff, so her pushing, she's gaining muscle but at the same time, she's like, ‘Oh, I'm going to go to music, this fun thing’, and at the same thing she's doing work.

*Work, but a different kind of work.* Although Rachel tries to find opportunities for Sophie to work on learning goals in the context of the classroom, this can be difficult:

“Sometimes it's hard because she is, you know, she might be chucking things in the class.” She
described it being difficult to include Sophie in tasks related to grade-level curriculum, because
Sophie’s cognitive skills are not at the same developmental level as her peers:

Sometimes it's hard to participate because…let's say, they (the other students) brainstorm
with her and then, if they ask her something everything's like (nods). Everything's (nods).
Do you like this? (nods). Do you agree with this?...so is it really, like, is that a real opinion?
It's just hard.

Similarly, Sophie’s motor skills are not at the same developmental level as her peers, which also
makes it difficult for Sophie to participate:

You know, like, like art. It’s hard for her to hold the crayon, her fine motor, you know, like,
drawing stuff, it's hard. Like writing, because she doesn't have the grasp or maybe (she
might) not understand you have to this before you get that. It's, it's the academics is very
tricky. That's for sure. And how much she understands…like the math they're on, obviously
she's not at that same level, you know, we're just counting… And then next year will be
even harder math and so how do you...you know, when she's in a grade four class and
they're doing big time fractions…Yeah, it's going to be, like, what would she do?, kind of.
If she's still (just) counting.

Sophie’s individualized program involves ‘seat work’ or ‘academics’ and includes
activities that focus on activities designed to improve fine motor dexterity (e.g., putting
clothespins on a car, rolling playdough), activities that involve sorting and matching shapes, and
activities that promote the development of early graphic skills (e.g., drawing vertical lines).
These activities are considered similar to the literacy and numeracy activities that her peers are
engaged in, although adapted for Sophie. For example, “if they're doing a writing, sometimes
she'll like do, we'll do lines on the whiteboard. But, you know, it's not the same level, they're doing
like, you know, writing opinions, for example, today. It's so different.” Rachel describes this as “doing her own thing, in her own way, but...kind of work, but different kind of work.”

I wondered if Rachel thought doing “a different kind of work” was meaningful participation for Sophie, and she spoke about how, on one hand, Sophie was working independently, alongside her peers who were also working independently. But it wasn’t an activity she enjoyed:

Rachel: I mean, she sees them doing their own seatwork and kind of thing, so, I think she thinks that, like, you know, she's doing something...so it doesn't matter that it's not what they're doing, it's like ‘Okay, I still have to do it...seat work's not her favorite, that's for sure.

Researcher: Why do you think she doesn't like it?

Rachel: Ah.....cause it's something she has to do (laughs)

Summary of participation. In the following text, additions to the classroom context and factors of participation that have been identified in this data analysis are listed in bold print. The following conceptual framework, as it has developed based on the data analysis of the interview with the education assistant, is illustrated in Figure 6. In Figure 6, details that have been added to the initial framework and relationships are underlined.

Valued Social Roles

- Student as a teacher
- **Student as a helper**

Routines

- **Individual goals woven into daily routines**

Tasks with a Cognitive Challenge
• Individual goals woven into activities

Personal Factors

• Personal factors of student:
  o Being able to express self
  o Being understood by others
  o Self-determination

• Personal factors of peers:
  o Self-determination
  o Self-awareness
  o Advocates
  o Nurturers and helpers
  o Use AAC system

• Personal factors of classroom teacher:
  o Guides and coaches students
  o Encourages students

• Personal factors of educational assistant:
  o Values inclusion in the class
  o Flexible
  o EA to the whole class
  o Delegates support to peers

• Positive relationship between educational assistant and classroom teacher

Environmental Factors

• Social interactions between student, peers, and the classroom teacher
• Culture of respect for diversity, caring for others, social responsibility, personal responsibility

• Sense of safety in the classroom

Activity Factors

• Multiple ways to represent, engage with, and express learning – Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

• Choice

• Group work

• Hands-on learning activities
Figure 6. Conceptual framework 2 (education assistant).
Peers – Colby, Gwen, Lola, Megan, and Sam

Figure 7. Thematic map 3 (peers).

**Being a member of the class – personal and social responsibility.**

Participation involves experiencing a sense of belonging and/or contributing to the community; therefore, to experience meaningful participation in the classroom one must first be considered a member of the classroom. Sam explained that a member of the class is “someone who is there often, and is nice, and has Leah as a teacher,” and Gwen described membership as being “in the class and you’re learning stuff from the same teacher”.

When speaking about membership in the classroom, students described classroom expectations that reflect taking personal responsibility for your actions and having obligations to the general class. Megan explained that members of the class are “pretty much there every day and they participate in everything and normally they’re pretty much friends with everybody and pretty much communicate with everybody in that class more often than other classes.” Similarly, Colby said that to be a member of the classroom students “have to be happy. They have to at least do a little bit of what Leah says. And even if they don’t finish their work they’re still a member of the class.” Sam also talked about personal and social responsibility in the classroom. For example, he said, “you should probably help other people and of course, be nice. And you should probably
get involved, like, when we're at the carpet and Leah is talking to us we all try and include each other and include ourselves.”

Students demonstrate personal and social responsibility in the classroom by taking part in classroom activities and interacting with each other; this theme contains the following subthemes: (1) Doing Stuff Together, (2) Making a Contribution, and (3) Classroom Teacher in Charge.

**Doing stuff together.** Most of the students who participated in interviews talked about the expectation of participating in classroom activities with peers. Megan explained that “if someone's doing something, you're pretty much included in it. That means it's like...you participate,” and Gwen described instances when “you get to play with everybody else.” Sam also talked about doing things with peers, such as “read(ing) together. And on Fridays when we get to play at the end of the day, they let us join in and play and stuff,” and Colby explained he likes “when people participate with me, so that not only one person plays.” Colby also explained that doing stuff together leads to happiness: “Cause when I'm with them, sometimes they're, they're being happy, cause they play with me. Like Sophie is happy when I push her on the swing.”

Doing stuff together is important, but it is just as important for people to know that they are welcome to join the group if they choose to. For example, Sam explained that in their class, “everybody’s open to doing stuff with you and you're open to doing stuff with them” and Megan defined inclusion as times when:

you're not excluded, cause excluded means you're not a part of it. Except exclusion's more of a mean way, sort of, normally… I think excluded means…normally how I see it, it's like, if someone wants to be in it and someone doesn't let them, it's being excluded…Excluding is like, if you're not doing an activity with somebody, it's not that they're excluding you if
you don't want to, it's not exclusion. If you want to and someone says, ‘No, I don’t want to play with you’, that's exclusion.

Megan also explained that “it doesn’t really matter if you are participating or not unless someone is not feeling good about it.” This captures the concept that participation involves both the act of doing something and feelings of belonging.

Students can have a different role in the activity or participate in a different way, but if they are engaged in an activity in the same subject area, it is still considered ‘doing stuff together’. For example, Gwen explained that participation means you “join everybody. You do what everybody else is doing. Like, if everybody's doing art, you do art too.” When I asked Megan about the importance of being part of the group, she clarified:

Researcher: So, doing something different is still participating, as long as you’re with the group and you feel like you are part of the activity?

Megan: Well...it can't be something completely different, it has to be something that's related.

Megan and Gwen both gave examples of how Sophie takes part in Reader’s Circle, a daily routine where each student takes a turn reading a page from their home reading book to the group. Sophie uses a Step-by-Step, an Assistive Technology (AT) device that plays recorded messages when a button is pressed. For example, Gwen explained that Sophie “uses this thing where she presses a button, and someone tells a story. So, it's kind of like she's talking.”

Sophie’s participated in a building project the class was doing, and according to Megan, “she just made (the project) a little simpler, it's like a robot. And she even presented it too. Rachel just said it for her. I think (Sophie) just held it. Megan also explained how Sophie participates in Phys Ed:
Sophie is able to participate in gym normally, just not doing everything as hard. Cause sometimes in games she just sort of…like, maybe during dodgeball, she normally just participates a little bit, she's on someone's team. She doesn't really do much, but she just participates cause she’s in the class.

Although the classroom culture is supportive of students participating in a different way, there are times when Sophie isn’t involved in the same activity as her peers, especially during activities that are related to grade-level curriculum. Megan explained that Sophie doesn’t participate in science, “but when we do science, Sophie and one of her friends, she chooses one of the friends with the pictures, I think. And then we sing songs with her.” She also spoke about instances in Phys Ed. when Sophie “doesn’t really play it.” For example, “if we're playing Rock, Paper, Scissors Tag, well, usually someone volunteers to play with her or something. But I've never done that before, but I've seen it.” Additionally, Megan explained that:

- sometimes in soccer the teacher asks someone to volunteer for Sophie, to do something with her on the side of the gym. Cause she can't really run or kick the ball, so someone else normally plays with her on the side.

Although Sophie is engaging in a task alongside her peers, these extracts illustrate examples of “doing something different” (Kramer et al., 2012). In these cases, Sophie is not contributing to the group; thus, she is not experiencing meaningful participation.

**Making a contribution.** In this class, it is important to be socially responsible, by contributing to the learning community and supporting everyone in their learning. Lola talked about contributing when they “share our ideas.” Sam explained that students should “raise (their) hand if the teacher asks a question as much as (they) can” and noted that “everybody participates in class discussions” and “everybody seems to get along. You see a lot of people playing together at
recess and working together at the carpet sometimes, or at their desks.” Colby shared that “when you have friends you could just ask them questions and you might work with a partner. And you can speak to your partner and then write the answer down” to participate in science class.

Megan explained that sharing ideas is not only about expressing yourself, and “communication isn't always speaking. It can be...it's sometimes normally just understanding what someone means to say to someone.” The students’ understanding that communication involves more than speaking to each other allows students who communicate differently, like Sophie, opportunities to share ideas with their peers. For example, Megan described being able to understand Sophie using an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) system:

Megan: In that booklet, she has a friends page. It has a picture of everyone in the class.
She doesn't normally point to them but one time when I was with her in (room) 218 with (other students). And she has a teacher page. She even pointed to (educational assistant), she was here before Christmas. So she pointed to her once, but she's away now.
Researcher: Okay. What does it mean when she points to, to people in the book?
Megan: I guess she just wants to see them.

Megan also described how the AAC system also allows other students to communicate with Sophie so that she understands them:

Sometimes (the person Sophie would like to see) is not available so you just point to the unavailable thing. Cause you just have part of the top book where it says ‘unavailable’, so we point to it, so she knows that you can't do that right now.

Another way that the students contribute to the classroom community is by helping others. Sam explained that it’s important to “help other people. And, I don't know, you do stuff for other people,” and “when someone doesn't know what's going on you try to give some of the answers.”
Helping each other is a classroom expectation, and Lola explained that “if we don't really know we ask the people in our group.” Colby “like(s) coming to school so I can see my friends and talk to them, play with them, help them. So that they don't get bullied…I just help my friends. I protect them. I defend them.” Gwen explained that having friends at school makes it easier for students to participate in classroom activities, “because sometimes things are just a bit harder for you, more challenging. (And your friends) can help you.”

The classroom expectation is that students help each other, and this includes helping Sophie. For example, Colby explained that students in the class “play with Sophie (and) open the door for her so that they don’t have to go all the way there (to the door at the other end of the school).” Lola and Megan both described helping Sophie participate in art projects. For example, Megan “helped Sophie a little bit. I helped her make the cherry blossom, the pink part. So, she normally has a bit of help.”

*Classroom teacher in charge.*

The students I interviewed discussed the classroom expectation that students demonstrate personal and socially responsibility, and it is the classroom teacher who sets these expectations. Gwen described the classroom teacher as being “like the principal…boss lady.” Lola noted that the classroom teacher gives them directions, such as “when other peoples are not finished the teacher asks us to help them,” and Sam explained that “if people would have an argument, (Leah) helps, she talks a bit to them, helps them settle it. And then they're fine again.”
Creating a classroom of growth. Students spoke about the different classroom activities they are involved in and described elements of these activities that allowed them to engage in the learning in a way that was meaningful to them. This theme includes two subthemes: (1) Choice and Creativity, and (2) Supporting Growth and Learning.

Choice and creativity. In this class, students are given choice in what and how they are learning. For example, Sam explained that the students are often given a choice in the activity they want to work on, such as “in the morning, we go to our desks and we draw or finish up work.” Other students described having choice to participate in a large group activity. For example, during Reader’s Circle, Colby explained that “Leah asks people, ‘Who wants to start?’”, and Lola said “students volunteer to take part, by ‘rais(ing)’ their hand up so they (can) read.” Sam explained that they also have choice in who they interact with: “Well, we get to choose, like, who's your friend and who you're going to like and spend time with”, and Colby talked about having choices within specific classroom activities:

Home reading (is) when you choose a book and go home and read a bit of it…Then we do Reader's Circle (and) everybody reads their home reading book…And then, but when you start you have to choose one side, one side to go (after you). If my friend was here (points to his left) and the other one was here (points to his right), I have to choose.

Choice within classroom activities creates a classroom that allows for diversity in how a student participates. For example, as Colby described (above), all students in the class participate in the Reader’s Circle, but each student chooses the book they want to read, so all students are reading different books. I asked Lola how she chooses a book to read, and she told me: “I looked inside to see if it's okay for me.” In this design of Reader’s Circle, each student can choose a book they are interested in and that they can confidently share with their peers.
The classroom was decorated with various pieces of student work, including paintings, wooden structures, drawings, and posters, and the students spoke about the different projects they were working on. Some of the student projects were used as prompts during interviews with peers, and students explained how working on projects allowed them to make creative choices and gave them opportunities to engage with the materials in their own way. For example, Sam showed me a collection of collages of sunflowers and explained:

Sam: Well, like, we do, we drew the outline and then we do details and then coloured it in with pastels.

Researcher: Did you guys all do it in the same way?

Sam: Well, not the same designs…We did our own, like, the setting of where the petals are and what shape they are.

Megan and Colby showed me a row of paintings that were done in the style of famous artists and explained that each painting was different because everyone had the freedom to make their own artistic choices. Megan explained that “people are able to choose their title, and then how they make their Picasso thingy, because everyone's kind of different” and Colby said:

when I did my art, no one did the same thing…no one copied her, everyone did their own thing. Some of them copied Monet's and Picasso’s and they copied Van Gogh’s, cause we were all doing the same Van Gogh one, but all of them were different from the real one…When I saw theirs I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, all of them are different!’

When classroom activities are designed so that students have choice and the freedom to engage in the activity in different ways, it creates a classroom environment that accepts diversity and gives all students, including Sophie, room to participate in activities in their own unique way. For example, Colby explained that even though Sophie might take part in an activity in a
different way, she is still participating: “Yeah and she claps differently than us, but we don't care cause she does it her own way. Everyone does it their own way.”

**Supporting growth and learning.** The students described a culture in the classroom that facilitates growth and learning and encourages them to learn at their own pace. They also explained that what or how much you know isn’t as important as trying your best. Colby stated: “Yeah. Yeah. You just try hard and you'll get it one day.” Sam also spoke about trying and explained that students can ask their classroom teacher for help when they are frustrated or confused:

Researcher: So, if someone didn't know the answers, could they still participate in some of the classes?

Sam: (nods)

Researcher: Yeah? How do you think they could do that?

Sam: They could sort of...say like, ‘I'm not sure, but I, but maybe this is right’, and the teacher would like help them or something. So just to give it a try.

In this class, there is value in trying and this gives value to Sophie participating in a different way. Megan explained that in Phys Ed.:

Somebody could volunteer with (Sophie), maybe with Rachel to help her a bit...I don't know, like, help her throw the ball or something. And it doesn't matter if she doesn't get it in, it still means, I guess, she is participating…She's trying to play.

**Summary of participation.** In the following text, additions to the classroom context and factors of participation that have been identified in this data analysis are listed in bold print. The following conceptual framework, as it has developed based on the data analysis of the interview
with peers, is illustrated in Figure 8. In Figure 8, details that have been added to the initial framework and relationships are underlined.

**Valued Social Roles**

- Student as a teacher
- Student as a helper

**Routines**

- Individual goals woven into daily routines

**Tasks with a Cognitive Challenge**

- Individual goals woven into activities

**Personal Factors**

- Personal factors of student:
  - Being able to express self
  - Being understood by others
  - Self-determination

- Personal factors of peers:
  - Self-determination
  - Self-awareness
  - Advocates
  - Nurturers and helpers
  - Use AAC system
  - **Share ideas**

- Personal factors of classroom teacher:
  - Guides and coaches students
• Encourages students

• Personal factors of educational assistant:
  o Values inclusion in the class
  o Flexible
  o EA to the whole class
  o Delegates support to peers

• Positive relationship between educational assistant and classroom teacher

Environmental Factors

• Social interactions between student, peers, and the classroom teacher
• Culture of respect for diversity, caring for others, social responsibility, personal responsibility
• Sense of safety in the classroom, value in taking risks/trying
• Feeling welcome to participate with the group

Activity Factors

• Multiple ways to represent, engage with, and express learning – Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
• Choice
• Group work
• Hands-on learning activities, projects
• Creativity
• Connected to what everyone else is doing
Figure 8. Conceptual framework 3 (peers).


**Figure 9.** Thematic map 4 (classroom observations).

**In this together.** The classroom culture fosters a sense of belonging and of learning to be personally and socially responsible. Students are welcomed and made to feel as though they are part of a group and are learning how to take personal responsibility and to act in a way that makes a positive contribution to the learning community. This theme includes the following subthemes: (1) Sense of Belonging, (2) Same Activity, but a Different Way, and (3) Learning to be Personally and Socially Responsible.

**Sense of belonging.** Leah, the classroom teacher, fosters a sense of belonging in the classroom for Sophie by telling her that she is welcome in the class. For example, “the classroom teacher says hello and welcomes Sophie back after the lunch break and asks if she had a good lunch” (classroom observations, May 29, 2018). When “Sophie walks into the class and calls out, the classroom teacher pauses in her instruction and says, “Hi Sophie, welcome back!” (classroom observations, June 19, 2018). Another way that Leah facilitates a sense of inclusion is by making space for Sophie to join the group. For example,

During Reader’s Circle, the classroom teacher puts the bean bag on carpet, in the circle, for Sophie to sit on. The EA helps Sophie walk to the bean bag chair while the classroom
teacher helps students get organized in a circle on the carpet. The classroom teacher says, “We need to make room for our friends.”

(classroom observations, June 19, 2018)

Leah also ensures Sophie is included with her peers when they are outside of the classroom. The class was at a fire safety presentation and Sophie was seated away from her peers, and “during a break in the presentation, the classroom teacher suggests to the EA that they move Sophie’s stool, so she can sit with the group of kids. They move her stool so that she is sitting with her peers”

(classroom observations, May 31, 2018).

Not only does Leah ensure Sophie is included with her peers, but she teaches the students to include Sophie. For example, at the book fair:

Leah says she is going to make sure all kids get a ticket and will ask the students who have a lot of tickets to share. Sophie does not have a ticket, so the classroom teacher leaves to see if she can find a classmate to share one of her tickets with Sophie.

(class observations, May 31, 2018)

When the students leave the classroom, Leah ensures that Sophie is not left behind, further fostering a sense of belonging within the group. For example, when the class was getting ready to leave the room and Sophie was in the bathroom:

the classroom teacher goes to the bathroom to let the EA and Sophie know they are getting ready to go. When Sophie and the EA are on their way back, the classroom teacher tells the class that Sophie is on her way and that they can start walking.

(classroom observations, June 12, 2018)

Sophie’s peers wait for her, to make sure she isn’t left behind. When the class went outside to play on the playground:
two boys hold the door to the school open for all the kids as the students in the class run outside. The other kids go ahead of Sophie and she is the last one out of the door, but the boys wait to hold the door for Sophie.

(class observations, May 31, 2018)

Not only do the students wait for Sophie, but she waits for them. For example, all the students were instructed to run or walk around the field, before playing on the playground, and the classroom teacher asks Sophie where she wants to go and asks if she wants to go to the swings. Sophie does not respond. The classroom teacher tells her there are no other students left running laps. Sophie turns around.

(classroom observations, May 31, 2018)

**Same activity, but a different way.** Sophie’s sense of belonging in the class is fostered in the classroom as she is given the opportunity to participate in the same activities as her peers, in an adapted role. For example, Sophie does the activity in a different way:

During the fire escape simulation (field trip), students are supposed to roll out of the bed, crawl to the window, and escape down the ladder (route 2). Sophie did not get on bed, but she sat on floor and scooted across the room from the bed to the door and escaped through the front door (route 1).

(classroom observations, June 12, 2018)

At a book fair, Sophie found a way to participate that was easy for her, by “bum scooting to a box of books on the floor” (classroom observations, May 31, 2018). Another way Sophie participates in an adapted role is by doing a different version of what everyone else is doing. For example,

When the class runs laps, Sophie is not expected to run three laps, but is expected to walk in her walker in the same area as her peers. She waves and cheers them on and does some
walking. She is not dismissed to play on the playground until she has checked in with the classroom teacher and had her lap sheet marked, just like her peers.

(class observations, May 31, 2018)

The classroom teacher has set up consistent, interactive routines for students to participate in each day, and the students all know how they are expected to participate in these routines. For example, every morning, the students say ‘Hello’ to the adults in the classroom and Sophie says ‘Good morning’ to her peers. At the end of the school day,

Sophie presses the button on the Step-by-Step and the message is ‘Goodbye class.’ The students respond by saying, ‘Good-bye Sophie’. Sophie presses the button again and the message is, ‘Have a good evening.’ The students respond by saying, ‘You too.’

(classroom observations, May 31, 2018)

The students participate in Reader’s Circle every morning, where they sit in a circle on the carpet and each student takes a turn reading from their home reading book. When it’s Sophie’s turn:

The EA places the Step-by-Step in front of Sophie and tells Sophie to press the button. Everyone waits. The classroom teacher coaches the student who is sitting next to Sophie to press the button. The student does, and a recording of the EA reading a page of Sophie’s home reading book plays. When it is finished, the EA helps Sophie hold the book, so the class can see the pictures.

(classroom observations, May 31, 2018)

These scripted routines happen daily, and all the students, including Sophie, know how they are expected to participate in each of them.
**Learning personal and social responsibility.** Students in this class are learning to take responsibility for their actions and to act in ways that benefit the learning community. They show a sense of social responsibility by helping each other as they participate in classroom activities. For example, during Reader’s Circle, “students help each other if they don’t know a word” (classroom observations, June 12, 2018), and when “one student is reading, the student sitting next to her helps her with a few words that she is stuck on” (classroom observations, June 15, 2018). The expectation to help each other was made very clear, when Leah asked the students what they could do if they needed help with an art project, and “the class responds in unison ‘Ask a friend!’” (classroom observations, June 15, 2018).

Students are very willing to help Sophie. For example, they “take turns pushing her on the swings” (classroom observations, May 31, 2018) and one student “helps Sophie walk down a ramp by holding onto the walker and pointing the walker in the direction they need to go” (classroom observations, May 31, 2018).

The classroom teacher shows the students in her class how to demonstrate personally and socially responsible behaviour by coaching them, modeling expected behaviour, and giving them praise and encouragement. Leah coaches the students as they interact with each other. For example, after Sophie uses an AAC device, “one of the students sitting next to her presses the button on the Step-by-Step and the message starts. The classroom teacher says to the student, ‘Not another time, because that’s her voice’.” (classroom observations, June 19, 2018). Once, when Leah was handing out papers to the students,

she gives one to Sophie, saying ‘Here Sophie.’ Sophie pushes it away and another student takes it. The classroom teacher says, ‘No, that’s Sophie’s,’ and the student gives it back.
Sophie pushes it away again and the student says, ‘She doesn’t want it.’ The classroom teacher says, ‘That’s okay, leave it there, she will pick it up when she is ready.’

(classroom observations, June 12, 2018)

The students often needed coaching from Leah when they were communicating with Sophie. For example, during Reader’s Circle, “the student next to Sophie finishes reading and the classroom teacher prompts her to tell Sophie it’s her turn to read. The classroom teacher says, ‘Make sure she sees you’” (classroom observations, June 15, 2018). At the book fair, the classroom teacher encourages Gwen to ask Sophie if she wants a ticket. Gwen asks Sophie, but Sophie is not paying attention. The classroom teacher says, ‘I don’t think she heard you’. Gwen repeats the question and Sophie looks at her. The classroom teacher prompts Gwen to give her the ticket and Gwen hands the Sophie the ticket. Sophie pushes it away and Gwen says, ‘You can have the ticket, it’s yours.’

(classroom observations, June 12, 2018)

When one of the students asked Sophie if she could sit in her bean bag chair and Sophie didn’t notice or respond to her, Leah said to the student:

‘No, you have to get in front of her, so she knows you are talking to her’. The student gets in front of Sophie and asks if she can sit in her bean bag chair. Again, Sophie does not respond. The student stands up and says, ‘Arghhhh!’ The classroom teacher tells her to get Sophie’s attention and the student tries again. She gets Sophie’s attention, and asks if she can sit in her chair. Sophie nods.

(classroom observations, May 31, 2018)
Leah also teaches Sophie how to behave in the classroom. For example, “Sophie hits the classroom teacher, who says “Oh, gentle”. Sophie gently touches her hand” (classroom observations, May 31, 2018). During Reader’s Circle,

Sophie reaches out and makes a grabbing motion with her hand, as though she wants someone to come over to her. No one is responding to her and she stops reaching, and claps. She reaches for the iPad and grabs at another student’s book. The classroom teacher tells her that someone is reading and motions for her to be quiet.

(classroom observations, June 12, 2018)

To support students as they are learning, the classroom teacher also gives students praise and encouragement. For example, she gives praise and encouragement to individual students during Reader’s Circle, she praises students for “being a good friend to Sophie” (classroom observations, June 12, 2018), and compliments the entire class, for instance, when they “listened and respected each other and helped each other” (classroom observations, June 15, 2018). She also gives Sophie a lot of encouragement. For example, when Sophie was walking a long distance with her class, Leah “waves and says, ‘Good walking Sophie!’” (classroom observations, June 12, 2018), and during Reader’s Circle, “after Sophie takes her turn, the classroom teacher coaches Sophie to tell the student next to her it’s their turn, then says, ‘Good job Sophie’” (classroom observations, June 15, 2018).
**I am your teacher.** The classroom teacher is in charge of the classroom and is responsible for the learning of all of her students, including Sophie. She builds a relationship with Sophie and oversees Sophie’s daily routines and activities. This theme includes the following subthemes: (1) Connecting with Students, (2) In Charge of Daily Routines, and (3) Sophie’s Teacher.

**Connecting with students.** Leah, the classroom teacher, makes a point to connect individually with her students, including Sophie. For example, she “walks around the class, talking with the students to check in on how they are” (classroom observations, June 12, 2018), “checks in with kids on where they are at in their assignments” (classroom observations, June 19, 2018), and “often ‘moves around classroom, going between groups of students and talking to everyone’” (classroom observations, June 12, 2018). Leah interacts with Sophie on a regular basis, and “stops, crouches down next to Sophie, and says ‘Hi’ to her” as she walks by (classroom observations, May 29, 2018). She “talks to Sophie and encourages her to take a drink of water (classroom observations, June 12, 2018). When Sophie initiates communication with Leah, she takes time to respond. For example:

Sophie reaches for a hug from the classroom teacher. She hands her communication strip to the classroom teacher, with a message: “I like ‘Itsy Bitsy Spider (song)”. The classroom teacher asks her if she likes the song and Sophie nods. The classroom teacher sings the song and Sophie leans in for a hug from the classroom teacher.

(classroom observations, June 12, 2018)

**In charge of daily routines.** The classroom teacher plans and oversees the daily routines and activities, including the routines and activities Sophie participates in. She gives the education assistant directions in what she would like Sophie to be doing and how to support Sophie. For example, she “comes over to the EA and tells her that it’s okay if she doesn’t do (an activity), it’s
time for music” (classroom observations, May 29, 2018) and she “tells the EA what she would like Sophie to do during outside time when the students run laps around the field, then play on the playground” (classroom observations, May 31, 2018). Not only does Leah give instructions to the EA, but Rachel often looks to Leah for guidance. For example, “the EA asks the classroom teacher if Sophie can use the iPad during Reader’s Circle” (classroom observations, May 31, 2018) and “if Sophie should read a book and give a weather report with her or with a peer, and what should be done first” (classroom observations, June 19, 2018). The EA also asks the classroom teacher if:

Sophie should stay on her bean bag on the carpet when students move to a new area of the classroom. The teacher says, ‘Actually, she can come and sit with the rest of us. Sophie, come and join our group here.’ The EA helps Sophie walk to carpet and puts her bean bag away.

(classroom observations, June 15, 2018)

**Sophie’s teacher.** Sophie recognizes the classroom teacher as her teacher, and looks to her for directions and guidance. When Leah gives an instruction, Sophie responds. For example, when Sophie and her peers were playing a clapping game on the carpet and Leah wanted to start a lesson, she “instructs the students to turn and face forward and says, ‘Eyes on me.’ Sophie turns and waves at her, and she waves back” (classroom observations, June 15, 2018). When Sophie and the EA were leaving the class to work on one of her individualized goals (i.e., walking up stairs), “Sophie stands at door and doesn’t move. The EA tells Sophie, ‘We can go, we will come right back.’ Sophie looks at the classroom teacher, who looks at her and waves and says, ‘Bye Sophie.’ Sophie walks out” (class observations, June 19, 2018).

The students are all sitting on the carpet and the classroom teacher is reading a book.

Sophie is sitting at her desk eating a snack. The classroom teacher tells the EA that when
Sophie is finished she can join the class on the carpet to listen to the story. The classroom teacher counts down from 3 to get the attention of the students. Sophie yells out and looks at the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher says “Yes, I am waiting.” And walks over to Sophie to tell her the class will be listening to a story and that she can join them after she finishes her snack.

(classroom observations, May 31, 2018)

I have something to say. Sophie interacts with the other people in her class, expressing herself and sharing experiences with them. She is also given choices throughout the day and makes decisions that determine how she spends her time, how she engages in learning activities, and how she interacts with her peers. This theme includes two subthemes: (1) Communication, and (2) Choice.

Communication. Sophie is a strong communicator, and greets the classroom teacher, the EA, and other students in her class. For example, when “Sophie walks into class in the morning and yells out and the classroom teacher says, ‘Hi Sophie’” (classroom observations, May 31, 2018), and when she “comes back from bathroom and yells out the classroom teacher says, ‘Hi, good walking! Good job Sophie!’” (classroom observations, June 12, 2018). She also gets the attention of people she wants to interact with when she “reaches out and claps her hands, and makes a grabbing motion towards a student” (classroom observations, June 12, 2018), and when she uses her AAC system. For example, “Sophie hands the communication strip to a peer, asking her to sing a song” (classroom observations, May 29, 2018), and during Reader’s Circle, Sophie reaches for her communication book and chooses a symbol representing a song. She puts it on her communication strip and passes it to a peer, who takes the symbol off the strip, opens Sophie’s book and shows her the song is not available.
Sophie shares what she likes with others and expresses when she is happy with what she is doing. Not only does Sophie express herself, but the people in her class understand what she is saying and respond to her communication. For example, “Sophie claps and a student sitting next to her smiles and claps with her” (classroom observations, May 29, 2018), and when “the EA blows bubbles and Sophie screams out with excitement, the other students in the class laugh” (classroom observations, June 15, 2018). When Sophie “chooses the symbol for another song, a student and the classroom teacher sing it to her, and she claps her hands and laughs” (classroom observations, May 31, 2018).

During an art project:

- a student takes Sophie’s hand and tries to help her finger paint, by holding her hand, pressing a finger in the paint, then pushing it on the canvas. Sophie pulls away and hits the student, who says, ‘She doesn’t want to do it,’ and moves the project away.

- Sophie also shares what she doesn’t like with the people in the class, and expresses herself when she is unhappy. For example:

  - the classroom teacher says, ‘Okay Sophie, let’s try. I want you to try your art. You can touch it.’ The EA holds Sophie’s arm under her wrists. Sophie reaches out and touches paint with finger tip, and the classroom teacher helps her to make a fingerprint on art, saying, ‘Good job Sophie, you did it!’ Sophie hits out at the student. The classroom teacher says, ‘Okay, you tried. I’m proud of you for trying. Good job. Do you want to do it again?’ Sophie hits out. The classroom teacher says, ‘No, she doesn’t want to do it again.’

(casual classroom observations, May 29, 2018)

(classroom observations, June 15, 2018)
When Sophie was working on an activity from her individualized program that was different from what her peers were doing, she “throws a basket on floor, pushes the basket away, and gives the EA a ‘First/Then’ card that says, ‘First do some work, Then play with bubbles’. The EA says, ‘Work first, then bubbles. It’s time to do work’” (classroom observations, May 31, 2018).

Sophie almost always has access to her AAC system, allowing her to initiate and respond to her peers. For example, during Reader’s Circle, “Sophie’s AAC system is on floor between Sophie and another student” (classroom observations, May 29, 2018), and “the EA puts Sophie’s AAC system and visual schedule on the desk in front of her” (classroom observations, May 29, 2018). However, at one point, Sophie’s AAC system was removed because she was expressing displeasure at the activity that she was being expected to complete and was using her AAC system to ask for a change in activities:

Sophie pulls away and hits the student, who says, ‘She doesn’t want to do it’ and moves the project away. Sophie flips through her communication book and requests the iPad. The EA asks if Sophie can use the iPad, and another student says, ‘After she finishes all the work.’ The classroom teacher comes over and to Sophie’s desk and says, ‘Wow, she doesn’t want to do it?’ Sophie reaches to her, and the classroom teacher says, ‘You don’t want to do your art? Maybe we should take the communication book away because she gets too distracted.’

(classroom observations, June 15, 2018)
**Choice.** In this class, Sophie is given the opportunity to make choices in how she participates in the classroom, and when Sophie makes a choice, that choice is honoured and respected by the members of the classroom. Sophie is often given the choice about where she wants to spend her time. For example, before the recess bell rang,

the classroom teacher asks Sophie if she will eat her snack in class before going outside for recess. Sophie claps and points to the students. The bell rings and the students leave. The EA comes into the classroom and Sophie smiles at her and reaches for her. The EA smiles back and uses Sophie’s AAC system to ask Sophie if she wants to have her snack now or if she wants to go to the playground. Sophie picks up the symbol that represents ‘playground’ and puts it on the symbol for ‘I want…’ The EA says, “I want playground”, smiles at Sophie, and says, “let’s go!”

(class observations, May 31, 2018)

In another example, as the classroom teacher gathered the students at the carpet to listen to a story, the EA tells Sophie they will join the class and listen to the story. She helps Sophie stand up and walk towards the carpet. Sophie stops in front of her walker and touches it. The EA asks Sophie if she wants to sit on the carpet with the class and listen to the story or if she wants to go for a walk with her walker. Sophie nods and touches the walker. The EA confirms that she wants to go for a walk, and Sophie and The EA leave the class with the walker.

(classroom observations, June 19, 2018)

Sophie is also given the choice to work with others, and “the classroom teacher asks Sophie if she wants some help and if she would like a friend to help her say ‘Good Morning.’ Sophie nods

(classroom observations, May 31, 2018).
Least amount of support required. Sophie requires physical support to take part in activities during the day. For example, she needs support from someone when she is walking without her walker, so that she doesn’t lose her balance and sometimes needs someone to guide her hand during activities that require eye-hand coordination to help with accuracy (e.g., pressing the button on the Step-by-Step). The EA often provides this support, but sometimes the classroom teacher or other students help Sophie. Regardless of who is providing assistance, they tend to give Sophie the least amount of support she requires, so that Sophie can be as independent as possible. For example, “Sophie walks inside, holding onto one of the EA’s arms for balance” (classroom observations, May 29, 2018. During Reader’s Circle, when “the EA puts the Step-by-Step in front of Sophie, one of the students gestures to indicate to Sophie that she should press the button. The EA prompts Sophie from behind, by guiding her at her elbow” (classroom observations, June 12, 2018). In another instance, “the EA gently guides Sophie’s hand to the knee of the person sitting next to her, to let them know it is their turn to read. The EA says, ‘Your turn’ to the student” (classroom observations, May 29, 2018).

Summary of participation. In the following text, additions to the classroom context and factors of participation that have been identified in this data analysis are listed in bold print. The following conceptual framework, as it has developed based on the data analysis of the classroom observations, is illustrated in Figure 10. In Figure 10, details that have been added to the initial framework and relationships are underlined.

Valued Social Roles

- Student as a teacher
- Student as a helper

Routines
• Individual goals woven into daily routines

• **Consistent**

• **Students know their roles**

Tasks with a Cognitive Challenge

• Individual goals woven into daily activities

Personal Factors

• Personal factors of student:
  
  o Being able to express self
  
  o Being understood by others
  
  o Self-determination
  
  o **Makes choices**

• Personal factors of peers:
  
  o Self-determination
  
  o Self-awareness
  
  o Advocates
  
  o Nurturers and helpers
  
  o Use AAC system
  
  o Share ideas

• Personal factors of classroom teacher:
  
  o Guides and acts as a coach to students
  
  o **Models examples of personal and social responsibility in the classroom**
  
  o Encourages **and praises** students
  
  o **In charge of classroom**
• Personal factors of educational assistant:
  o Values inclusion in the class
  o Flexible
  o EA to the whole class
  o Delegates support to peers
    o Looks to classroom teacher for guidance

• Positive relationship between educational assistant and classroom teacher

• Positive relationship between student and classroom teacher – classroom teacher feels responsible for student’s education, student sees the classroom teacher as their teacher

Environmental Factors

• Social interactions between student, peers, and the classroom teacher

• Culture of respect for diversity, caring for others, social responsibility, personal responsibility

• Sense of safety in the classroom, value in taking risks/trying

• Feeling welcome to participate with the group

• Sense of belonging – being physically included and verbally welcomed, no one is left behind

• Adapted equipment (e.g., AAC) is accessible

Activity Factors

• Multiple ways to represent, engage with, and express learning – Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
• Choice
• Group work
• Hands-on learning activities, projects
• Creativity
• Connected to what everyone else is doing
• Adaptations to activities
• Least amount of support she requires
Figure 10. Final conceptual framework.
Connections Between Themes in the Data Sets

Data from each source were analyzed individually to separate each perspective, to ensure that the voice of each participant is heard even though the final conceptual framework is an integration of all four analyses. Although each dataset was analyzed individually, there are commonalities in many of the themes constructed from each of the data sources. For example, the analyses of all four data sources suggest key factors that influence participation include a classroom culture that values socially responsible behaviour and supports diversity in learning, and the ability of all members of the classroom to communicate and share ideas with each other. Behaviours that demonstrate personal responsibility were identified as key factors in the analysis of data from the education assistant, classroom peers, and from observations in the classroom. Some factors were only present in the analysis of one or two data sources. For example, only analysis of data from the education assistant identified the role of the EA as a factor of participation, and only analysis of data from the peers identified ‘trying your best’ as a factor. However, this does not mean these factors are less important. Themes that were common between data sets are listed in Table 3.

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<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Common Themes Between Data Sets</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Data Set</td>
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</table>
| Social responsibility in the classroom | Classroom teacher interview  
| | Education assistant interview  
| | Peer interviews  
| | Classroom observations |
| Sharing ideas (communication) | Classroom teacher interview  
| | Education assistant interview  
| | Peer interviews  
<p>| | Classroom observations |</p>
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<tr>
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<th>Data Set</th>
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<td>Diversity in learning</td>
<td>Classroom teacher interview</td>
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<td>Education assistant interview</td>
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<td>Peer interviews</td>
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<td>Classroom observations</td>
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<td>Personal responsibility in the classroom</td>
<td>Education assistant interview</td>
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<td>Classroom observations</td>
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<td>Being part of a group</td>
<td>Classroom teacher interview</td>
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<td>Peer interviews</td>
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<td>Valued role in the classroom</td>
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<td>Peer interviews</td>
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<td>Individual program vs inclusive education</td>
<td>Classroom teacher interview</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education assistant interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher in charge</td>
<td>Peer interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the classroom (and how they interact)</td>
<td>Classroom teacher interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher as a guide</td>
<td>Classroom teacher interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Education assistant on a team</td>
<td>Education assistant interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher is Sophie’s teacher</td>
<td>Classroom observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging</td>
<td>Classroom observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Least among of support required</td>
<td>Classroom observations</td>
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**Summary of Key Findings**

The first research question asked how a student with significant disabilities participates in the social and academic life of an inclusive classroom, where participation is defined as both the act of taking part in an activity and feelings of belonging and contribution (i.e., the perception of
participating). Key findings in the data analysis reveals that Sophie, a student with significant disabilities, participates in her classroom by:

- Looking to the classroom teacher for guidance and instructions
- Having a role in consistent daily classroom routines
- Working on individual learning goals and outcomes that are woven into daily classroom activities
- Participating in the same activities as her peers, sometimes in an adapted or restricted role
- Contributing to the learning community in her own way using her skills and strengths and Assistive Technology (AT)
- Connecting with her peers (i.e., expressing herself and being understood)
- Making choices about the activities she participates in and who she interacts with

The second research question asked, “What are the personal, environmental, and activity factors that influence participation in an inclusive classroom for a student with significant disabilities?” With respect to this second question, analysis of the data revealed the following key findings:

- Personal factors influence the participation of a student with significant disabilities in an inclusive classroom. However, it is not only personal factors of the student with disabilities that have an impact on participation, but personal factors of all members of the classroom, including the classroom teacher, education assistant, and peers.
  - Key personal factors of students (with and without a disability) include behaviour that demonstrates personal and social responsibility and an ability to communicate with each other.
• Key personal factors of the classroom teacher include coaching students in personal and social responsibility and taking charge of classroom activities and the educational program for all students.

• Key personal factors of the education assistant include valuing inclusion, viewing their role as an education assistant to the class instead of as an assistant to one student, and looking to the classroom teacher for guidance.

• Environmental factors influence the participation of a student with significant disabilities. One of the most influential environment factors is the social environment that is created by all the members of the classroom and their interactions with each other. Another significant environmental factor is the classroom culture, and a classroom that is welcoming, values personal and social responsibility, and fosters feelings of safety, belonging, and respect for diversity supports participation of a student with disabilities. Access to supports (e.g., AAC system, AT devices) is also important.

• Factors related to classroom activities influence the participation of a student with significant disabilities. Learning activities that follow the principals of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), allow for interactive learning, creativity, and choice, and are easily adapted facilitate participation in the classroom. Activities are also connected to what the other students are doing.

**Final conceptual framework.** The final conceptual framework (Figure 10) was developed from knowledge gained from the analysis of each data source. A comparison of the final conceptual framework (Figure 10) with the initial conceptual framework (Figure 2) illustrates the enhanced understanding of the participation of a student with significant
disabilities in an inclusive classroom. Details were added to the personal factors, environmental factors, and factors of learning activities that influence school participation and relationships between the factors are illustrated. What was not shown in the initial conceptual framework is the interactions between the members of the classroom, and the final conceptual framework shows personal factors as a part of the social environment, not as a separate component as the initial framework suggested.
Chapter 5: Discussion

I begin this chapter by discussing the key findings of this study in respect to the final conceptual framework. Next, I discuss the key findings in the context of existing literature. Analysis of the data also included non-examples of meaningful participation (i.e., extracts from the data that did not include an indication of either the act of taking part or the perception of contributing or belonging) and these non-examples are included in the discussion. Finally, I present implications of this study, strengths and limitations, and a conclusion.

Discussion of Conceptual Framework

The final conceptual framework (Figure 10) was developed from the analysis of data from four different sources: interviews with the classroom teacher, education assistant, peers, and from classroom observations. When compared to the initial conceptual framework (Figure 2), the most striking observation is that personal factors are no longer a separate factor, but are embedded into the environmental factor, as part of the social environment, as shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Comparision of personal factors in the intial and final conceptual frameworks.
The classroom teacher spoke about inclusion being a social construct, and the people themselves and how they interact with each other contributes to the classroom environment. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Model (1979), which suggests the individual and their relationships within their immediate surroundings (microsystem) and their interactions (mesosystem) influences a person’s development and learning. However, it provides a new way of looking at factors that influence participation and suggests that it is not sufficient to consider the personal factors of a student without considering the personal factors of everyone in the classroom and how they interact together.

It is also interesting to note that most of the activity factors that facilitated meaningful participation are related to their design. For example, elements of Universal Design for Learning, choice and flexibility in how students could participate in learning activities, and group projects or hands-on learning activities facilitated Sophie’s participation in classroom activities. It is also notable that there is a lack of detail in the framework that represents ‘tasks linked to grade-level curriculum’. This does not necessarily mean that Sophie did not participate in these activities, but the evidence did not come up in the data, and further research in participation in the academic life of the class for students with significant disabilities is needed.

**Relationship of Findings to Existing Literature**

**Participation in the social and academic life of the classroom.** Social inclusion involves holding valued social roles in the classroom (Katz, 2012; Specht et al., 2011), taking part in daily routines, acting as a contributing member of the classroom, and interacting with peers (Katz et al., 2012). Results of this study suggest that a student with significant disabilities experienced meaningful participation when their individual learning goals and outcomes were woven into classroom activities and the daily classroom routines. This supports the argument
made by Mu and Royeen (2004) that “providing services and interventions in daily routines and natural environments can greatly increase or lead to students’ participation in school activities and environments” (p. 14). Findings from this study also suggest that being part of the group is key in participating in the classroom, which supports the argument that when students with significant disabilities use their strengths and skills to perform a meaningful role in classroom activities with their peers, they are more likely to experience meaningful participation at school (Causton & Tracy-Bronson, 2014; Mu & Royeen, 2004).

As noted above, findings from this study suggest Sophie is included in the social life of the classroom. However, being part of the social life of the classroom does not necessarily translate into the development of friendships with classmates, and there is evidence in existing literature that many relationships between students with disabilities and their peers can be described as helper-helpee relationships rather than reciprocal friendships (Kishi & Meyer, 1994). Although many instances of natural interactions between Sophie and her peers were observed and there appeared to be mutual feelings of enjoyment in their relationships, Sophie’s peers often described ways they “help” her. For example, Colby explained that he often pushes Sophie on the swing and holds the door open for her, and Megan described helping her with an art project. Often, students without disabilities tend to provide more of the help in friendships with students with disabilities, but true friendship goes beyond providing help (Rossetti, 2011). Rossetti (2011) suggests friendship between students with and without disabilities includes “meaningful connections, shared humor, and friendship work” (p. 31). Friendship work is primarily enacted by students without disabilities and includes “naturally providing necessary supports during interactions” in their friendship with students with disabilities, and although it becomes part of the relationship, it is not the primary focus of the relationship (Rossetti, 2011, p.
Rossetti also suggests classroom teachers model the use of supports that can become friendship work (e.g., prompting a student to use their AAC system), to facilitate the development of meaningful friendships between students with and without disabilities. Although this study did not focus on friendship, it is important to note the difference between helper-helpee relationships and friendship, and the role the classroom teacher plays in facilitating friendships between students with and without disabilities becomes an important component of social inclusion.

Academic inclusion involves participating in learning activities that are cognitively challenging and linked to grade-level curriculum (Katz, 2013) and interactive learning with same-age peers (Carter et al., 2016; Feldman et al., 2016; Katz et al., 2012). Findings from this study suggest a student with significant disabilities participates in activities that are linked to grade-level curriculum in an adapted or restricted role. For example, Sophie participates in activities that are linked to grade-level curriculum by taking on the role of a teacher or helper to her peers, such as using an AT device to read out spelling words to her peers when they are studying. Sophie also participates in grade-level curriculum when learning activities involve group projects, and she contributes to her group in ‘her own way’.

Although Sophie’s participation may be considered meaningful (i.e., she is contributing to her learning community and actively taking part) and is linked to grade-level curriculum, she is not engaging with curricular content herself or taking part in cognitively challenging tasks. It is interesting to note that the learning goals and outcomes on Sophie’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that were mentioned by her classroom teacher and education assistant focus on improving motor function and social skills, not on cognitive learning. Furthermore, the activities associated with the learning goals on her IEP are not related to the activities her peers are
involved in or part of the grade-level curriculum. This disconnect between individualized programs and grade-level curricular content was identified by Fisher and Frey (2001) as a barrier to inclusive education, and the authors suggest greater efforts should be made to support students with significant disabilities to engage in grade-level curriculum. It is interesting that in a classroom that implements highly inclusive practices and facilitates meaningful participation in the social life of the classroom for a student with significant disabilities, there is a lack of participation in the academic life of the classroom. The classroom teacher identified tension in the two separate pieces of Sophie’s education program – her individualized program that is limited by the learning outcomes designed by the school-based team and are not connected to grade-level curriculum, and an inclusive education program. This suggests that while we are getting better at understanding how students with significant disabilities participate in the social life of the classroom, we still don’t have a good understanding of how to include them in the academic life of the classroom, and further research in this area is needed.

**Personal factors of the student with significant disabilities.** First, Sophie’s ability to communicate with her peers played a significant role in her participation in the classroom. Sophie expresses herself using non-verbal communication, vocalizations, and her Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) system. The classroom teacher, education assistant, and other students in the class also communicate with Sophie using her AAC system, and they all received guidance and training in how to ‘speak’ using the AAC system from a district ACC specialist. The use of a common ‘language’ facilitates meaningful social interactions and shared experiences between members of the classroom and is consistent with the findings of Raghavendra et al. (2012), who found “an increased number of opportunities for communication, combined
with development of communicative competencies with AAC for both partners in the interactions, can lead to a positive participation” (p. 41).

Communication allows Sophie to connect with her peers and provides a way for her to express herself and share how she feels with the people in her classroom. Her ability to express herself facilitates her ability to make choices about what she does and where she spends her time in the classroom, fostering self-determination in learning. This is consistent with existing literature that suggests self-determination can support students with significant disabilities to have a voice in how they engage in their learning (Agran et al., 2006).

**Social environment.** Findings from this study suggest the social environment influences participation, which is consistent with existing research. First, support from peers facilitated Sophie’s school participation. This is consistent with findings from Carter et al. (2016), who suggest peer support facilitates school participation by increasing social interactions and providing opportunities for students with disabilities to engage in the same activity as their peers. Results of this study indicate Sophie develops her communication skills by engaging in social interactions through non-verbal communication and her AAC system, and supports the argument by Feldman et al. (2016) that social interactions with peers allows students with significant disabilities to practice interpersonal skills in context.

Second, the classroom teacher and education assistant influence the social environment of the classroom. Findings from this study suggest the classroom teacher plays a role in coaching and guiding students. This style of classroom management creates a learner-centred classroom that shifts “from teacher direction and control to an emphasis on student engagement, self-regulation, and community responsibility with teacher guidance” (Evertson & Neal, 2006, p. 8) and fosters “individual students’ intellectual and moral development” (Evertson & Neal, 2006, p.
In other words, a learner-centered classroom fosters a classroom community that emphasizes both personal growth and social responsibility.

The way each school staff enacts their role and works on the team influences participation of a student with significant disabilities (Dymond et al., 2006; Morningstar et al., 2015), including how the education assistant works in the classroom. Rachel, the education assistant, talks about “stepping back” from Sophie to work with other students, allowing Sophie opportunities to interact with other students and the classroom teacher. Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, and Macfarland (1997) suggest that when paraprofessionals are in constant proximity to students with disabilities, it interferes with their interactions and relationships with the classroom teacher and with their peers. When Rachel steps back from working one-to-one with Sophie, these relationships can grow and flourish. Furthermore, the other students are more likely to see her as another member of the classroom instead of ‘Sophie’s EA’, and therefore are more likely to see Sophie as a full, individual member of the classroom, instead of ‘a student with an EA.’

A unique finding from this study is the concept that the personal factors of all members of the classroom and their interactions with each other influence the participation of a student with significant disabilities. For example, results of this study suggest that behaviours of students in the class that demonstrate both personal and social responsibility facilitated participation of a student with significant disabilities. It is expected that students will contribute to the classroom community, and students do this by sharing their ideas with each other, helping each other, showing care and concern towards each other, and by advocating for themselves and others.

When the students are personally and socially responsible in the classroom, an inclusive culture is created, leading to a sense of belonging for all students, including Sophie. When she experiences a sense of belonging with her peers in the classroom, Sophie is much more likely to experience
meaningful participation in the activities she engages in (Willis et al., 2017). The classroom teacher plays a key role in creating a classroom climate that fosters development in personal and social responsibility, values inclusion, celebrates the diversity of all students, nurtures growth and learning in all students, and facilitates relationship development among students. This illustrates how the personal factors of class members are influenced by the context; for example, for students in the class to help Sophie during learning activities, the classroom culture needs to value social responsibility in learning, which needs to be supported and encouraged by the classroom teacher.

**Other environmental factors.** Existing literature suggests the physical environment plays a role in facilitating student participation (Anaby et al., 2013). Interestingly, results of this study did not identify access to the physical environment as a factor of school participation. However, results do suggest the use of Assistive Technology (AT) and AAC facilitates school participation, which supports previous findings that identify access to individualized supports and materials as a key factor in school participation for students with significant disabilities (Morningstar et al., 2015).

Services, systems, and policies, including collaborative relationships between members of the school-based team, has been identified as a facilitator of school participation of students with disabilities in existing literature (Calculator, 2009; Dymond, et al., 2006; Morningstar et al., 2015; Selanikyo et al., 2017). Interestingly, in this study, only the education assistant identified collaboration with members of the school-based team as a key factor of participation. This does not mean that service, systems, and policies are not key factors, but it is interesting to note that this was only identified in the analysis of data from the education assistant. Results of this study suggest the IEP is developed by the school-based team and implemented primarily by the EA, not the
classroom teacher, and it is possible that the role of the school-based team is more influential from the EA’s perspective. Perhaps factors within the classroom itself are more significant than factors in the broader system. Perhaps these factors would have been more apparent if data had been collected at a different time in the school year.

Calculator (2009) suggests on-going consultation with the SLP or ACC specialist is necessary to support further development of AAC skills. Findings from the current study indicate the AAC specialist provides training and guidance on the AAC system at the beginning of the school year. However, periodic and segregated training sessions is not enough to improve skills in AAC, as “communication skills do not develop in isolation but, rather, in the context of meaningful activities at school” (Calculator, 2009, p. 102). One of the benefits of frequent collaboration with members of the school-based team is an increase in student progress (Calculator, 2009), and on-going consultation with the SLP or ACC specialist will further support development of AAC skills. When consultation is done in the classroom context, it provides opportunities for students to engage in grade-level curricular content using AAC (Calculator, 2009).

I had expected to learn about the role the school occupational therapist (OT) plays on the school-based team, but this did not come up during this study. This does not mean that the OT’s role does not influence participation, but it is interesting, especially considering this study used an occupational therapy framework as a theoretical framework to study participation. However, this does support the findings of Bonnard and Annaby (2016) that there is a lack of evidence of how school-based OTs facilitate school participation and a need for continued research in collaborative consultation practices of school-based occupational therapy (Villeneuve, 2009; Villeneuve & Hutchinson, 2012; Villeneuve & Shulha, 2012).
The learning activities. Results of this study suggest classroom activities that allowed for diversity in learning facilitates participation of a student with significant disabilities. Elements of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) were indicated, such as offering choice, providing different ways to engage with learning materials, different ways of presenting material, and different ways for students to share what they have learned. Numerous studies have found UDL to be an effective framework in facilitating participation of students with significant disabilities (Dymond et al., 2006, Kurth et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015), as UDL encourages diversity in learning, creating a classroom culture where students can engage in the learning material in a different way, but still be considered part of the group.

Barriers to participation. As previously stated, the disconnect between Sophie’s individualized program and grade-level curricular content presented a barrier to academic participation, and several factors contributed to this disconnect. First, the classroom teacher and education assistant did not appear to place a high value on Sophie’s individualized, academic program. For example, Leah, the classroom teacher describes Sophie’s individualized program as a “really small part of her day” and Rachel, the education assistant, indicates Sophie’s individual program is not the biggest priority of the day: “for me, it’s like, ‘No, you don’t have to do it.’…We still want to obtain our goals, but you don’t want to push Sophie…you want to make her happy.” Furthermore, when Sophie demonstrates frustration or displeasure (e.g., throws an object on the floor or hits out), when she is expected to engage in activities from her IEP, the reaction of the EA, teacher, or peers is to stop the activity. It is important that they recognize and acknowledge what Sophie is communicating, but it is interesting that Sophie is not expected to take part in activities that she doesn’t like, despite the fact that these activities make up a significant piece of her educational program. This is consistent with findings from Anaby et al.,
(2013), who suggest attitudes of staff present some of the largest barriers to participation. In these examples, both Leah and Rachel’s attitudes seem to reflect a lack of perceived value of Sophie’s individualized education plan (IEP). It is unclear why Sophie’s IEP does not appear to be highly valued. Perhaps Leah and Rachel value social inclusion more than access to the general curriculum, or perhaps Sophie’s IEP is not meaningful in an inclusive context. Regardless, the attitudes of the classroom staff towards a student’s IEP in an inclusive context appears to influence participation and is an area that warrants further investigation.

A lack of individualized supports, adaptations, and alternative strategies has been reported in existing literature to be a barrier of participation (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009). Findings from this study suggest a lack of adaptations to the general curriculum and use of specific teaching strategies to facilitate Sophie’s cognitive learning. This does not necessarily mean that they did not exist in the classroom, but they were not observed during this study. It is possible that the classroom teacher did not have the specialized skills or instructional technology required to teach a student with significant disabilities, as findings from a study by Sokal and Sharma (2014) indicate 43% of teachers who participated in their study had not received any formal teacher training about teaching students with diverse needs, despite that fact that 95% of teachers teach in classrooms that includes students with disabilities.

Implications

Connect the IEP with grade-level curriculum. Results from this study indicate a lack of meaningful participation in the academic life of the classroom. In fact, findings from this study indicate Sophie did not find activities related to her individualized program to be meaningful and expressed displeasure and frustration during those activities, despite working alongside or with a peer during these activities. It is possible she wasn’t experiencing a sense of
belonging or contribution with these activities, or perhaps she didn’t see a purpose to the activities. Learning activities that are designed to meet individual learning outcomes may become more meaningful if learning goals were based on curricular content instead of on building foundational motor skills. For example, if students are learning about poetry in English Language Arts, instead of focusing on foundations of writing (e.g., pre-graphic skills, such as drawing vertical lines), perhaps students could learn about poetry through song, pictures, or with the symbols on their AAC device. In other words, by shifting the focus from building physical skills in an individualized program to participation in curricular content, students are more likely to experience meaningful participation in the academic life of the classroom.

Another suggestion for increasing meaningful participation in grade-level curriculum is to look at the core competencies or processes that are necessary as students engage in learning across all subjects. In British Columbia, the Ministry of Education recognizes that all students need to develop certain skills in order to engage in rich, life-long learning, and BC’s redesigned curriculum is built on literacy and numeracy foundations, essential learning, and six core competencies, including three Personal and Social Competencies (BC Ministry of Education, n.d.a). The Personal and Social Competencies include both personal and social responsibility and are “the set of abilities that relate to students' identity in the world, both as individuals and as members of their community and society…(and) encompasses the abilities students need to thrive as individuals, to understand and care about themselves and others, and to find and achieve their purposes in the world.” (BC Ministry of Education, n.d.b). All students are expected to develop personal and social competencies, including students with significant disabilities, and using the Ministry of BC’s core competencies to assist in the development of IEPs would ensure the IEP is based on curriculum. Furthermore, as all students are developing
skills in the core competencies, students with significant disabilities will have the opportunity to work on an individualized program in the context of the classroom, as opposed to a segregated program. In other words, using BC’s curriculum to guide the development and implementation of a student’s IEP can foster feelings of belonging and lead to opportunities to contribute to the classroom community, therefore increasing opportunities for meaningful participation.

**Implement a Universal Design for Learning framework.** Universal Design for Learning supports inclusive education for students with disabilities (Dymond et al., 2006, Kurth et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015), and results of this study suggest elements of UDL (e.g., choice, multiple means of engagement) facilitated Sophie’s participation in the classroom. Although UDL provides opportunities for Sophie to participate in learning activities, a lack of participation in activities with a cognitive challenge and activities related to grade-level curricular content was noted in this study. UDL facilitates academic inclusion in the classroom and can be used to support meaningful participation in grade-level curriculum (Katz 2012). Using a UDL framework to design learning activities where students work towards individualized learning goals in the context of grade-level curriculum is one possible way to bridge the gap between individualized programs and inclusive education for students with significant disabilities.

**Focus on communication.** Findings from this study indicate that being able to express herself and be understood by her peers contributed to Sophie being accepted as part of the group and allowed her to contribute to the classroom community and develop relationships with her peers. Sophie uses an AAC system to communicate, and her classroom teacher, the education assistant, and other students in the class use the AAC system with her, leading to more social interactions and an increase in participation in the classroom (Raghavendra et al., 2012).
Calculator (2009) suggests having an AAC system is not enough, and students need to be taught specific communication skills and be encouraged to use it during daily routines for it to facilitate participation at school. When the AAC system of a student with significant disabilities is considered one of the ‘languages’ spoken in the classroom, the communication symbols can be used by all members of the classroom, woven into daily classroom routines, and integrated into grade-level curriculum.

**Focus on self-determination.** Agran et al., (2006) suggest teaching students to use self-determination strategies of goal-setting, self-monitoring, and self-instruction facilitates participation in the general curriculum. Perhaps the addition of self-determination strategies (e.g., goal-setting) to IEPs will give students with significant disabilities a louder voice in how they participate in classroom activities. Furthermore, if self-determination strategies are used to support student engagement in curricular content instead of a separate, individualized program, they are more likely to feel as though they are part of the group, thus more likely to experience meaningful participation.

**Collaboration from specialists should be on-going and take place in the classroom context.** The concept that inclusion is a social construct and dependent on personal factors of all members of the classroom and their interactions with each other is a key finding from this study and is illustrated in the final conceptual framework by embedding personal factors within the environment, rather than as a separate factor. When consulting members of the school-based team suggest strategies to facilitate participation in the classroom, they need to consider how the members of the class interact with each other. For example, if a specialist is recommending strategies to encourage a student with significant disabilities to initiate greetings with peers, they need to understand how students in the class greet each other and what language is common in the
classroom. Findings from this study suggest communication plays a significant role in a student ability to participate in the classroom. Given this, and the expertise of school-based occupational therapists in participation, more emphasis should be put on developing collaborative relationships between all members of the school-based team, including speech-language pathologists and OTs.

**Future Research**

In this study, a lack of meaningful participation in the academic life in the classroom was identified. Further research in connecting student IEPs to meaningful participation in grade-level curriculum and the use of UDL frameworks in inclusive classrooms may further increase our understanding on how a student with significant disabilities participates in the academic life of the classroom. Furthermore, studies investigating the role of the members of the school-based team (e.g., occupational therapists, AAC specialists) when the focus of the IEP is on meaningful participation or the role of the school-based team in a UDL framework would contribute to the development of collaborative models in inclusive education.

**Strengths and Limitations**

**Strengths.** One of the major strengths of this study is the use of case study methodology to study participation of a student with significant disabilities. Understanding the experiences of a student who communicates non-verbally can be difficult, and the extensive time in the field that was required in this case study research allowed me to become familiar with how Sophie communicates. The use of multiple sources of data provided multiple perspectives and points of view, adding to the richness of the data and allowing for crystallization of the data to occur (Tracy, 2010). Another strength is the use of propositions to link data to previously established theory, which allowed me to compare the findings of this study to previously developed theory and make analytical generalizations of participation of students with significant disabilities.
Finally, taking a constructionist position allowed my perspective as a school-based occupational therapist, my role as a consultant with the Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program (PIOP), and my experiences as a graduate student in Special Education to shape the interpretation of the data, resulting in a unique perspective on school participation of a student with significant disabilities.

**Limitations.** This study has some limitations. First, data collection occurred over the course of one month, which provides only a snapshot of a student’s participation in that context. A case study which takes place over a year would present even more data and would capture changes to the student’s participation that occur between terms in the same school year. Second, this study only considers the case of one student’s participation. While much can be learned from studying a single, critical case, and analytical generalizations can be made from this study, a collective case study would serve to strengthen those generalizations (Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Yin, 2014). Furthermore, although an attempt was made to interview Sophie, the interview was not a reliable source of information on participation. Thus, our understanding of Sophie’s perspective on participation is limited to classroom observations and the interpretation of her behaviour by the researcher. Another limitation is the selection of the case. An important feature of an instrumental case study is to choose the case you ‘feel you can learn the most from’ (Stake, 2005), and my selection was limited to the cases the district partners of PIOP and my personal contacts in school districts in the lower mainland of BC identified as potential cases. The use of the School-Wide Inclusive Education Best Practice Indicators Rating Scale (New Hampshire Department of Education, n.d.), assisted in the selection, but by choosing the first case that met previously established criteria, it is possible another, ‘better’ case could have been selected. Finally, although member checking interviews provided an opportunity for participants to
contribute to the analysis process, they were only conducted after the initial coding phase of data analysis. Therefore, the social construction of knowledge is limited to the initial stages of interpretation, and the final stages of analysis were based solely on the researcher’s interpretative efforts. A member checking process that involves member check interviews at “each macro-stage of interpretation,” would ensure a socially constructed interpretive process occurred throughout the entire process of analysis (Harvey, 2015, p. 34).

**Conclusion**

This purpose of this study was to enhance the understanding of how students with significant disabilities participate in inclusive classrooms by exploring meaningful participation in context. Key findings from this study indicate students with significant disabilities participate in inclusive classrooms when they use their strengths and skills to contribute to the learning community and by connecting with peers, sharing ideas, and making choices about what and where they participate. Using an occupational therapy model to investigate participation (i.e., the Canadian Model of Occupational Therapy) provided a unique framework to study participation and provided a greater understanding of how the interaction of factors relating to the person, environment, and activity influences participation of students with significant disabilities in an inclusive classroom. Key factors that influence participation include: (a) student’s ability to communicate; (b) classroom culture that respects diversity, fosters a sense of belonging and safety, and values personal and social responsibility; (c) access to adapted materials and Assistive Technology (AT); (d) elements of Universal Design for Learning (UDL); (e) interactive learning; (f) weaving individualized learning outcomes into classroom activities and routines. Additional findings suggest that the interactions of personal factors of all the members of the class influence participation and contribute to the social environment in the classroom. By
focusing on meaningful participation in the classroom, practitioners of inclusive education can facilitate inclusion in the social and academic life of the classroom for students with significant disabilities.
References


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Appendices

Appendix A School-Wide Inclusive Education Best Practice Indicators Rating Scale

School-Wide Inclusive Education Best Practice Indicators: Self-Rating Survey

This document reflects a set of inclusive education best-practice indicators that can be used as a framework to guide inclusive programming and school improvement. It was adapted from the Best Practices guide authored by Jorgensen, McSheehan, and Sommersheet, and from the Kentucky Alternate Assessment Portfolio Teacher’s Guide. The Best Practice Indicators are divided into twelve areas that impact effective inclusive education for students with disabilities.

Instructions for completing the document:

Read and consider each indicator carefully. Rate the degree to which your team/school currently practices each indicator using the following scale - No evidence (NE), Minimal evidence (ME), Some evidence (SE), etc. in the columns headed “Progress.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>No evidence (numerical rating of 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>Minimal evidence (numerical rating of 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Some evidence (numerical rating of 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>Adequate evidence (numerical rating of 4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>Exemplary evidence (numerical rating of 5)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

At this time, don’t mark anything in the column labeled “Total.” The shaded columns titled “Planning.”

Most of the indicators use the singular form “The student...” Rate the indicators according to whether they are in evidence for most students with disabilities on your team in your school.

Key:

- General Education Teacher
- Special Education Teacher
- Administrator
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ME</td>
<td>ME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. High Expectations and Least Dangerous Assumptions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The inherent value and dignity of students with significant disabilities is respected. All</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students with significant disabilities pursue the same learner outcomes as students without</td>
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<tr>
<td>disabilities. When students do not currently demonstrate content knowledge or skills, the</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>least dangerous assumption principle applies, and all aspects of their educational programs</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>continue to reflect high expectations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 &quot;Person First&quot; language is used.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Language regarding the student’s functioning or developmental level is not used, rather,</td>
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<tr>
<td>descriptions of the student focus on abilities and needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3 Annual goals on the student’s IEP reflect content standards from the general education</td>
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<tr>
<td>curriculum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4 Predictions are not made that the student will “never” acquire certain knowledge or skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.5 People speak directly to the student rather than through a paraprofessional or other person.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.6 People use age-appropriate vocabulary and inflection when talking to the student.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.7 In order to respect privacy, staff discuss the student’s personal care, medical needs, and</td>
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<tr>
<td>other sensitive issues out of earshot of other students, and only with those who need to know.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Students with disabilities work on the same grade level content standards as typical peers</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>with appropriate supports.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.9 Student’s individual discipline and behavior intervention plans rely on teaching appropriate</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>skills (punishers or aversives are not used).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Inclusive Best Practice Indicators

### General Education Class Membership and Full Participation

**Progress**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NE</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>AE</th>
<th>EE</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>TI</th>
<th>Priority</th>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

- **2.1** The student is on the roster of and formally a member of an age-appropriate general education class.
- **2.12** The student attends the school he/she would attend if he/she didn’t have a disability.
- **2.13** The student progresses through the grades according to the same pattern as students without disabilities.
- **2.14** The student matches at graduation at the average age at which other classmates without disabilities graduate.
- **2.15** The student receives a diploma upon discharge from special education.
- **2.2** The student learns in outside-of-school, age-appropriate, and inclusive environments after the age of 18 and before he/she receives a high school diploma or is discharged from special education.
- **2.21** The student is not pulled out of general education classes for instruction.
- **2.22** Related services are delivered primarily consultation in the classroom.
- **2.23** Related services are delivered in typical, inclusive environments.
- **2.3** There are no places or programs just for students with disabilities.
- **2.31** Students with disabilities are proportionally represented in classes, courses, clubs, and extracurricular activities.
- **2.32** The student’s name is on all class lists, lists of groups put on the board, job lists, etc.
- **2.4** The student receives the same materials as students without disabilities, with supports (i.e., accommodations and adaptations) provided as necessary.
- **2.5** The student participates in classroom and school routines in typical locations, such as the Pledge of Allegiance, lunch count, jobs, errands.

**Inclusive Best Practice Indicators**

### General Education Class Membership and Full Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NE</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>AE</th>
<th>EE</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>TI</th>
<th>Priority</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **2.6** The student rides the same school bus as his/her peers without disabilities.
- **2.61** The student attends classes with other students, arriving and leaving at the same time.
- **2.62** The student participates in classroom instruction in similar ways as students without disabilities, for example: whole class discussions, at the board, in small groups, when called on by the teacher.
- **2.7** The student participates in school plays, field trips, and community service activities.
- **2.8** The school is physically accessible.
- **2.9** The school accommodates the student’s sensory needs.
- **2.91** The student’s individual behavioral goals are aligned with the school-wide behavioral rules.
- **2.92** The student’s individual behavior supports and interventions are similar to ways that students without disabilities are supported.

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153
### INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Quality: Augmentative and Alternative Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The student has a means to communicate at all times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>The student has a means to communicate for a variety of purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>Although the student may have multiple ways of communicating, a primary means of communication is identified. The student's communication system is programmed with messages to demonstrate learning of age-appropriate core academics, communicate with his/her age-appropriate classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>AAC systems are provided to enable the student to communicate for the purposes of self-determination and futures planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>Supports are provided to enable the student to communicate for the purpose of self-determination and futures planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>The student, his/her family members, and classmates without disabilities participate in the selection of messages programmed into the AAC system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>When acting as a facilitator, people clearly engage in a support role, not actively participating in the content of the interaction between the student using AAC and his/her conversational partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>When conversing with the student as a conversational partner, classmates and adults utilize information provided by facilitators to converse directly with the student, not with the facilitator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Training and support to use the AAC system is provided to the student in the contexts and routines in which the student will communicate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>Training and support to use the AAC system is provided to the team, including classmates, in the contexts and routines in which the student will communicate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>AAC supports take into consideration the communicative functions of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Quality: Augmentative and Alternative Communication</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>A variety of funding sources and streams (Medicaid, Medicare, private insurance, school funding, etc.) are utilized to acquire and maintain assistive technology and AAC systems, and to support training of the student, his/her family, classmates, and support personnel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS</td>
<td>Progress</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NE</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Support</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Based on common content standards for all students</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11 Presented in a variety of accessible formats including written information at appropriate reading levels, and in formats as indicated on the student support plan (e.g., video, picture/symbols, actual objects, demonstrations, orally, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12 Individualized through the development of personalized performance demonstrations for some students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Reflects principles of Universal Design for Learning (CAST):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To support recognition learning, provide multiple, flexible methods of presentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To support strategic learning, provide multiple, flexible methods of expression and apprenticeship</td>
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<tr>
<td>• To support affective learning, provide multiple, flexible options for engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.21 Reflects the learning styles of all students in the class by the use of visual, tactile, and kinesthetic materials and experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.22 Prioritizes the use of research-based strategies for increasing student achievement, such as:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Identifying similarities and differences</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Summarizing and note taking</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reinforcing effort and providing recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Homework and practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Nonlinguistic representations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Cooperative learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Setting objectives and providing feedback</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Generating and testing hypotheses</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Questions, cues, and advance organizers</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using technology in presentation of content and to support students' demonstration of learning</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.23 Is provided in multiple formats such as individual, pairs, small groups, and whole class.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Supports...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Are provided within the general education class and other typical environments to enable the student to participate in and benefit from the general education curriculum and other inclusive learning opportunities and activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.31 Are defined by a specific student support plan, and may include: physical, emotional, and sensory supports; adapted materials; assistive technology and augmentative communication; personalized performance demonstrations; personalized instruction; and individualized grading and evaluation plans.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Supports...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Are consistent with a school wide positive behavior interventions and support philosophy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.41 [For an individual student’s challenging behavior] are designed after completion of a functional behavioral assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

155
### INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Curriculum, Instruction, and Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>[For an individual student’s challenging behavior] focus on teaching a new skill that replaces the function of an inappropriate behavior.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>[For an individual student’s challenging behavior] take into consideration the student's sensory needs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Evaluation and Grading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>Includes criteria for judging success that reflects general education curriculum standards and individualized IEP goals and objectives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>Reflects benchmarks similar to those of students without disabilities.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>Reflects evaluation methods similar to those of students without disabilities.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>Allows the student to receive grades that reflect “personal best” achievement and improvement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ongoing Authentic Assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Authentic, performance-based assessments are conducted within typical activities in inclusive environments for the purpose of identifying students’ learning and communication styles, preferences and interests, academic strengths and weaknesses, and need for support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Present level of performance statements on the IEP reflect the:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• student’s talents, abilities, skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• student’s learning styles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• student’s preferences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• supports that the student needs to learn well</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Assessment reports reflect the student’s abilities and needs rather than deficits and weaknesses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>If the student has difficulty communicating, assessment tools and strategies are chosen accordingly.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Teachers and related service providers use ongoing dynamic assessments instead of discrete, one-time assessment tools.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Family-School Partnership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Families and schools are engaged in partnership to create quality inclusive educational experiences for students with significant disabilities. Families are connected to resources for developing their own leadership and advocacy skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Family priorities are reflected in annual goals on the student’s IEP.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Families acknowledge teachers’ efforts on behalf of their child.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Families know about resources for building their own leadership and advocacy skills relative to their child’s education.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Families attend case-management meetings or planning meetings on a regular basis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Families have input and receive regular information about their child’s social behavior.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Individual behavioral interventions reflect the family’s cultural practices.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7. Team Collaboration</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.1</strong> The roles and responsibilities of all teachers and staff reflect the commitment and skills needed to teach and support all students, including those with disabilities.</td>
<td>NE 1 ME 2 SE 3 AE 4 EE 5</td>
<td>Total check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.2</strong> Special education staff work within the general education classroom as co-teachers, team-teachers, small group instructors, or one-on-one support teachers for all students in the class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.3</strong> The roles and responsibilities of special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and related service providers reflect the provision of supports and services to students to enable them to participate in and benefit from the general education curriculum and to teachers to enable them to effectively teach heterogeneous classes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.4</strong> There is collaborative planning time during the day for general and special education teachers, and related service providers to ensure all parties are familiar with the lesson content and appropriate supports are provided for the student.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7.5</strong> Teams use formal processes for conducting meetings, problem-solving, making decisions, and evaluating their own effectiveness.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7.6</strong> There is a team in place for teachers to discuss and problem-solve learning and behavioral concerns for individual students.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.7</strong> A special educator is designated as an &quot;Inclusion Facilitator&quot; for students with more significant developmental disabilities, including autism, intellectual disability, and multiple disabilities. That special educator does not have a classroom of students, per se, but provides leadership to students' educational team members around the design and implementation of supports that enable the student to fully participate in general education instruction in the general education classroom and in typical, inclusive social activities.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8. Social Relationships and Natural Supports</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>8.1</strong> The student with disabilities has the same variety of social networks as students without disabilities: close friends, acquaintances, kids they share activities with, etc.</td>
<td>NE 1 ME 2 SE 3 AE 4 EE 5</td>
<td>Total check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8.2</strong> The student with disabilities participates in the same variety of inclusive and typical extracurricular activities as students without disabilities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8.3</strong> When needed, adults facilitate the building of social networks for the student.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8.4</strong> Whenever possible, physical, emotional, and instructional supports are provided by non-special educators — by classroom teachers, librarians, classmates, office personnel, volunteers.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8.5</strong> The student has the opportunity to provide support and assistance to others as well as to receive it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9</th>
<th>Futures Planning</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>The student has a graduation plan, not simply a transition plan, developed using the principles of person-centered planning.</td>
<td>NE 1 ME 2 SE 3 AE 4 EE 5 Total</td>
<td>TI check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Graduation planning includes choices of postsecondary education, work, community living, leisure and recreation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>When chosen by the student and his/her parents/guardians, the school supports his or her education in non-school, age-appropriate learning environments after the age of 18 and before special education services are discontinued.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>Structures are in place for students transitioning between grades to ensure that supports and educational programs are passed between receiving and sending schools.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>Structures are in place for students transitioning between preschool to elementary, elementary to middle, and middle to high school involving families, teachers and support staff to ensure that supports and educational programs are passed between receiving and sending schools.</td>
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</table>

## INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10</th>
<th>Self-Determination</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>The student with significant disabilities communicates his or her own thoughts, needs, opinions, and wishes, with support from augmentative communication, friends, family, and educators.</td>
<td>NE 1 ME 2 SE 3 AE 4 EE 5 Total</td>
<td>TI check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>The student actively participates in a process of academic goal setting, monitoring, and evaluation of performance and uses the results to improve overall performance.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>The student with disabilities participates in IEP meetings from junior high through graduation.</td>
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### INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS

#### 11. School Leadership

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<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>Priority</th>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>The values of diversity and inclusion are evident in the school’s mission statement.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>General and special education administrators promote the values and benefits of inclusive education at meetings, in school improvement plans or annual reports, in school newsletters or Web sites, and in conversations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>General and special education personnel participate together in school wide improvement and reform efforts that benefit students with and without disabilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>General and special education administrators serve on a building leadership team together, making collaborative decisions about all school policy and practices.</td>
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#### 12. Professional Development

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<th>Total</th>
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<th>Priority</th>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>Teams use reflective practice strategies and structures to engage in job-embedded learning and professional growth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>General and special education staff attend professional development events together.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>General education staff identifies learning about students with disabilities in their professional development plans.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>Special education staff identifies learning about general education curriculum in their professional development plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>Regular review of student learning data informs the content and format of district, school, and individual professional development plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>Professional development includes topics related to practices that facilitate the learning of all students, including those with the most significant disabilities.</td>
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</table>

References:


Kentucky Alternate Portfolio Teacher’s Guide, 2004
Appendix B Guiding Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

Questions that guided the semi-structured interviews with the classroom teacher include:

1. Tell me about your philosophy and beliefs on inclusive education for students with significant disabilities? What are the school’s values and practices regarding inclusion?
2. What does it mean for a student to participate in class?
3. How do you know when a student is participating in your class? Does everyone in this class participate regularly? Why or why not?
4. What happens for students who are learning English or who have a disability – do they participate? If yes, can you tell me about that? What facilitates participation? If not, why not? What do you see as barriers to participation?
5. How do students in your class take part in classroom activities or daily routines? Are all students involved? Why or why not?
6. Can you tell me about the different student roles that exist in your classroom?
7. What makes a student a member of your class?
8. Is everyone included in the social activities of the classroom? Why or why not?
9. How do you ensure all students are engaged in what they are learning? What about students who are learning English or who have a disability? Can you tell me about any programs, strategies, adaptations, or modifications you use?
10. Describe your experiences with your school-based team with respect to including students with diverse needs in your class. What are your relationships like?
11. Do you have any experience working with a school-based occupational therapist? Tell me about it.

Questions that guided the semi-structured interviews with the EA include:
1. Tell me about your philosophy and beliefs on inclusive education for students with significant disabilities? What are the school’s values and practices regarding inclusion?

2. Can you tell me about your role in the classroom?

3. What does it mean for a student to participate in class?

4. Does everyone in this class participate regularly? Why or why not?

5. What happens for students who are learning English or who have a disability – do they participate? If yes, can you tell me about that? What facilitates participation? If not, why not? What do you see as barriers to participation?

6. How do students in your class take part in classroom activities or daily routines? Are all students involved? Why or why not?

7. Tell me about the different student roles that exist in the classroom?

8. What makes a student a member of this class?

9. Is everyone included in the social activities of the classroom? Why or why not?

10. Describe your experiences with your school-based team with respect to including students with diverse needs. What are your relationships like?

11. Do you have any experience working with a school-based occupational therapist? Tell me about it.

Questions that guided the semi-structured interviews with Sophie’s peers included:

1. What does it mean to be included? What does it mean to be included in your classroom?

   Is everyone in your class included?

2. What makes someone a member of your classroom?

3. What does it mean to participate in class?
4. Does everyone in this class participate regularly? If yes, why? What are some of the things that encourage or allow students to participate? If not, why not? What do you see as barriers to participation?

5. What are the roles students play in the classroom?

6. Tell me about classroom routines. How do students participate in them?

7. Does everyone in your class participate in social activities in the classroom? Why or why not?

8. Tell me about some of your classroom activities. Groupwork? Assignments?