

1 Running Head: APE TEACHER WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES

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A Qualitative Inquiry into the Workplace Experiences of Adapted Physical Education Teachers

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Abstract

While much is known about the lived experiences of physical education teachers and individuals preparing for careers in physical education, there is a dearth of research on how adapted physical educators are socialized into and through their careers. While physical educators and adapted physical educators have similar goals, such as a general focus on teaching physical skills, they also have different roles and responsibilities as adapted physical educators work specifically with children with a range of cognitive, physical, and emotional disabilities. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to develop an in-depth understanding of the workplace experiences itinerant adapted physical education teachers. Participants included 31 itinerant adapted physical education teachers (22 female, 9 male) who were purposively selected from among 273 teachers who completed the initial quantitative survey. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Two members of the research team analyzed the interview data using a multiphase qualitative analysis procedure grounded in inductive and deductive analysis. Qualitative data analysis indicated that relationships with key stakeholders (e.g., colleagues, administrators, parents, students) were essential to the development of a coordinated, effective system of support for students receiving adapted physical education services. Nevertheless, the itinerant adapted physical educators in this study struggled to develop deep, supportive relationships with colleagues, administrators, and students across schools. relationships with key stakeholders (e.g., colleagues, administrators, parents, students) were essential to the development of a coordinated, effective system of support for students receiving adapted physical education services. Specifically, analysis resulted in the construction of three themes: (a) adapted physical educators rely on an unpredictable support system, (b) support for APE requires targeted relationship development, and (c) relationship

69 building and knowledge of the field aids advocacy efforts. Implications are discussed and

70 recommendations for future research and teacher development are provided.

71 *Keywords:* occupational socialization theory, school sociopolitics, marginalization, teacher

72 relationships, advocacy

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74 A Qualitative Inquiry into the Workplace Experiences of Adapted Physical Education Teachers

75 Socialization in educational settings involves a dynamic process whereby teachers
76 struggle to reconcile their own idea of what physical education (PE) should be with those of key
77 socializing agents (e.g., teacher educators, colleagues, administrators; Graber et al., 2017). For
78 example, PE is often viewed as marginal, or less important than other subjects, particularly in
79 relation to more academic forms of learning, such as math and science (Laureano et al., 2014).
80 Many PE teachers also feel isolated from their colleagues, particularly when they are itinerant,
81 which has been linked to maladaptive outcomes such as stress and burnout (Laureano et al.,
82 2014). Over time, PE teachers may internalize their marginal status, which has implications for
83 teaching effectiveness (Richards, Gaudreault, et al., 2018).

84 While the workplace experiences of physical educators have been studied for several
85 decades (Richards et al., 2019), scholars have paid considerably less attention to the ways in
86 which adapted physical education (APE) teachers have been socialized (Park & Curtner-Smith,
87 2018). In the US, APE teachers are those who deliver physical education services to children
88 with disabilities as guaranteed through federal government legislation (Individuals with
89 Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). Under federal law, students who qualify should
90 be provided physical education services that are specially designed, when necessary, along with
91 other forms of special education between from ages 3 through 21. These services may take place
92 in a variety of settings and employ a variety of instructional approaches, such as individual
93 instruction, small group instruction with other students receiving APE services, and integration
94 into general physical education settings with appropriate supports (Block, 2016). Placements
95 options are viewed as flexible and students may receive services across multiple settings.

96 While PE and APE teachers have similar goals, such as a general focus on teaching
97 physical skills, they also have different roles and responsibilities. For example, PE sits at the
98 intersection of at least three major social institutions with goals that are sometimes in
99 competition (i.e., education, health, sport; Lawson, 2018). APE teachers have to additionally
100 reconcile differences in goals related to special education (Wilson et al., 2017) while building
101 relationships with a variety of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and direct and related
102 service providers (e.g., occupational therapists). In addition to numerous stakeholders, APE
103 teachers work with upwards of 100 students on their caseloads (Obrusnikova & Kelly, 2009),
104 requiring them to understand special education policy and a broad range of disabilities (Wilson et
105 al., 2017). Many APE teachers are itinerant, which can lead to feelings of isolation and as if they
106 do not fit into the culture of any of their schools (Hodge & Akuffo, 2007). This may be amplified
107 if PE colleagues are unsupportive or use exclusionary practices (Haegele & Zhu, 2017).

108 Role socialization theory (Richards, 2015), which combines elements of occupational
109 socialization theory and role theory, may be used to understand the social construction of work
110 roles within a given community and how individuals are socialized into role performance.
111 Lawson (1983) explained that, ‘while institutions try to typecast individual actors and actions,
112 people also try to transform institutions. This suggests a social tug-of-war between the
113 institutions and people; each has the capacity to shape the other’ (p. 4), or, rather, as a dialectical
114 perspective of socialization (Schempp & Graber, 1992). Socialization into PE has been described
115 as occurring across three phases: acculturation, professional socialization, and organizational
116 socialization (Richards et al., 2019).

117 During *acculturation*, individuals develop initial understandings, or subjective theories of
118 teaching physical education, through what Lortie (1975) referred to as the apprenticeship of

119 observation. Subjective theories can be defined as “complex cognitive structures that are highly
120 individual, relatively stable, and relatively enduring, and that fulfill the task of explaining and
121 predicting such human phenomena as action, reaction, thinking, emotion and perception”
122 (Grotjahn, 1991, p. 188). Relative to teaching careers, these are based primarily on the
123 experiences that prospective teaching recruits have with their own teachers. Physical education
124 recruits have fairly well-developed subjective theories before beginning teacher education that
125 emphasize competition and team sports taught through a teacher-centered instructional paradigm
126 (Ferry & McCaughtry, 2013; Flory, 2016). Given that many APE recruits do not experience APE
127 firsthand, they have an incomplete apprenticeship of observation, which could limit their
128 understanding of APE as a career (Holland & Haegele, 2020), and ill-developed subjective
129 theories. While this may lessen recruits’ understanding of APE as a career, their subjective
130 theories may be more malleable (Wilson & Richards, 2019).

131 Most individuals who decide to pursue careers in teaching enroll in initial teacher
132 education programs, marking the beginning of their *professional socialization* (Graber et al.,
133 2017). Given that socialization is dialectical, preservice teachers will automatically adopt the
134 values and beliefs taught by teacher educators (Schempp & Graber, 1992). Resistance may occur
135 when preservice teachers develop subjective theories that conflict with the values and practices
136 emphasized during teacher education (Richards, 2015). Because they have underdeveloped
137 subjective theories, APE teachers may be more receptive to the priorities emphasized during
138 teacher education and thus more likely to incorporate lessons learned into their subjective
139 theories (Wilson & Richards, 2019).

140 *Organizational socialization* begins when aspiring teachers obtain their first position in a
141 school environment and continues throughout their careers until retirement or early attrition

142 (Woods & Lynn, 2014). During this time, individuals are socialized into their role based on the
143 expectations that are developed and propagated within particular school environments (Richards,
144 2015). In some school environments, key stakeholders (e.g., administrators, colleagues, students,
145 parents) may value the role of PE and APE as an important part of children's holistic education
146 (Pennington et al., 2014), which is typically associated with a greater sense of support for the
147 discipline (Gaudreault et al., 2018). In others, PE is viewed as a waste of time or a service to
148 other school functions. Physical educators can enhance the value of their discipline through
149 advocacy designed to highlight the relevance of PE and APE (Lux & McCullick, 2011).

150 Current evidence suggests that school culture plays an important role in facilitating or
151 constraining APE teachers' use of evidence-based practices (Park & Curtner-Smith, 2018;
152 Wilson, Kelly, et al., 2020). Relationships with school support staff (e.g., paraprofessionals) and
153 PE teachers have implications for APE teachers' job satisfaction and teaching effectiveness. In
154 some instances, PE teachers may marginalize their APE counterparts by limiting access to
155 resources and creating environments that are exclusionary for children with disabilities (Holland
156 & Haegele, 2020). Accordingly, APE teachers may feel underappreciated and revert to using
157 custodial teaching practices (Park & Curtner-Smith, 2018). In more supportive environments,
158 teachers feel valued and are more likely to use evidence-based practices, particularly when they
159 are connected to other innovative APE teachers (Richards et al., 2020).

160 While evidence suggests that APE teachers feel valued and supported in certain contexts,
161 challenges stemming from marginalization are also evident in environments where APE is
162 devalued (Haegele & Zhu, 2017; Wilson et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the socialization of inservice
163 APE teachers is still not well understood. This is particularly the case relative to those who are
164 itinerant and have to travel to multiple schools (Richards et al., 2020). Working across school

165 buildings may leave teachers feeling as if they do not belong anywhere and requires that they
166 build relationships in multiple social contexts. The purpose of this study was to develop an in-
167 depth understanding of the workplace experiences of itinerant APE teachers. The following
168 research questions guided the study: (a) what benefits and challenges do itinerant APE teachers
169 perceive when traveling among schools?, (b) how do they navigate relationships with
170 administrators and school personnel across settings?, and (c) how do they work with their PE
171 colleagues to meet the needs of their students?

172 **Methodology and Methods**

173 The current study was part of a larger investigation into the workplace experiences of
174 APE teachers (author citations) that used a sequential explanatory design beginning with a large-
175 scale, quantitative survey and then conducting follow-up interviews with purposefully selected
176 survey participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The human subjects review board at the lead
177 author's university approved this study and all participants consented to participation. A
178 phenomenological approach (Polkinghorne, 1989) was used to guide this study. Specifically,
179 phenomenology is a qualitative research tradition that assumes there are multiple, socially-
180 constructed realities, and seeks to understand the meaning individuals derive from their
181 experiences (Patton, 2015a). Toward this end, we adopted a social constructivist epistemology
182 that highlights the role that individuals play in the development of social reality (Kamberelis &
183 Dimitriadis, 2005). Such an approach aligns with role socialization theory given the focus on
184 understanding how individuals are socialized into and participate in the social construction of
185 their work roles (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009). With these design principles in mind, we placed
186 priority on understanding participants' perspectives on their lives and careers and the importance
187 they placed on social interactions in the workplace.

188 Participants and Setting

189 Participants were purposively selected (Patton, 2015b) from among 273 APE teachers
190 who completed the initial quantitative survey. A total of 128 teachers expressed interest in a
191 follow-up interview and provided an email address of which 77 served as itinerant teachers and
192 met criteria for participation. Interviews were completed with 31 teachers. Following these
193 interviews, data collection ceased given that we had recruited a sufficient number of participants
194 based on recommendations for reaching saturation in qualitative research (Patton, 2015b). While
195 complete participant demographics are presented in Table 1, some relevant characteristics are
196 highlighted herein. The participants in this study included 31 itinerant APE teachers (22 female,
197 9 male). Most of the APE teachers identified as Caucasian, with two identifying as Hispanic and
198 one participant reporting multiple races/ethnicities. As itinerant teachers, participants traveled
199 between two and 25 school buildings ($M = 7.35$, $SD = 4.87$). Most of these schools included
200 elementary and secondary placements ($n = 26$; 83.87%), but five of the participants (16.12%)
201 taught exclusively in elementary schools.

202 Data Collection

203 Data were collected through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview
204 protocol. This approach provided a common list of questions to guide the discussion while
205 ensuring the flexibility to pursue topics introduced by the participants (Patton, 2015b). All
206 interview questions were developed in reference to role socialization theory (Richards, 2015) and
207 based on the literature related to the workplace experiences of PE and APE teachers (e.g.,
208 Haegele & Zhu, 2017; Park & Curtner-Smith, 2018; Wilson, Kelly, et al., 2020; Wilson &
209 Richards, 2019). Example interview questions included: (a) 'please tell me a little about yourself
210 and your career as an APE teacher?,' (b) 'has there ever been an instance when APE services for

211 your students was negatively affected due to lack of administrative support? Please explain,' and
212 (c) 'how is adapted physical education viewed in your school(s)?' All interviews were conducted
213 over the telephone and were audio recorded for subsequent transcription, except for one
214 participant who preferred to write out responses to questions rather than talk over the phone.

215 **Data Analysis and Trustworthiness**

216 Two members of the research team analyzed the interview data using a multiphase
217 qualitative analysis procedure grounded in inductive and deductive analysis (Richards &
218 Hemphill, 2018). The process was deductive in that role socialization theory was used as a
219 guiding lens to interpret the participants perspectives and experiences, but retained an inductive
220 element through highlighting and seeking data that advanced and/or challenged the theory
221 (Patton, 2015b). The inductive component was particularly important in this study given the
222 limited prior research on the workplace experiences of APE teachers.

223 Open and axial coding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were used to develop patterns and create
224 an initial codebook. Once developed, a two-person team pilot tested the codebook using
225 previously uncoded data (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). The constant comparative method was
226 applied (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) by continuously revising and restructuring the codebook based
227 on newly coded data. After four iterations of pilot testing, the coding structure was reviewed by
228 other members of the team who acted as peer debriefers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) before all
229 interviews were coded, including those that had been coded during previous phases of analysis,
230 using the refined codebook. Once all data were coded, the full team met for a peer debriefing
231 session and to convert the codebook into a thematic structure used to present the results.

232 In this investigation, trustworthiness was addressed using a series of methodological
233 decisions intended to enhance the quality of the research design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First,

234 researcher triangulation was used to include the perspectives of two primary researchers in the
235 data analysis process (Patton, 2015b) while other members of the research team acted as peer
236 debriefers in the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Further, we maintained an audit trail in a
237 shared researcher journal throughout data collection and analysis to ensure transparency. Finally,
238 we intentionally searched for negative cases that conflicted with our main interpretations, which
239 are discussed alongside the main themes.

240 **Results**

241 The results indicated that, while challenging to develop, relationships with key
242 stakeholders (e.g., colleagues, administrators, parents, students) were essential to the
243 development of a coordinated, effective system of support for students receiving APE services.
244 We developed three themes to communicate the participants' perspectives on navigating school
245 sociopolitics, including: (a) adapted physical educators rely on an unpredictable support system,
246 (b) support for APE requires targeted relationship development, and (c) relationship building and
247 knowledge of the field aids advocacy efforts. As the themes are presented, participant quotations
248 are used to support our assertions; participants are identified using pseudonyms.

249 **Adapted Physical Educators Rely on an Unpredictable Support System**

250 Given the constant movement among schools and associated challenges related to
251 managing equipment and relationships, providing APE services in an itinerant role may require
252 teachers to rely heavily on support from colleagues and administrators; however, support may be
253 unpredictable. Further, support may vary based on the source as well as the target or recipient of
254 the support. For example, administrators, colleagues, and support staff all offered different levels
255 and types of support predicated by who (teachers or students with disabilities) or what they were
256 supporting (APE services). Consistent among participants, 'the principals set the tone' (Zack) for

257 how PE and APE, which was often viewed as an extension of PE, were perceived within the
258 school. Ally provided a rich description of how principal support influenced her teaching:

259 If you have an administrator that has a crappy PE program, they're not going to care
260 about [APE]. They don't even care about PE. If you have an administrator that's really
261 supportive of the PE program, they're going to tend to be more supportive of [APE].

262 For Ally, therefore, support was shown by administrators who ensured physical space and class
263 time for her students, but she only received this in schools where PE was seen as relevant. Pam
264 described administrative support as 'fairly strong...because all three of my core schools are
265 running very strong PE programs...so the administration sees what PE does and I feel like it's
266 valued, which has made my job easier because I am...looped in as an extension.' While strong
267 PE departments aided in feeling supported, some participants viewed administrators with special
268 education backgrounds as most supportive. When asked, Jenna said, 'one [administrator] was a
269 special education teacher, so she really understands me.' Similarly, Linda had supervisors with
270 special education backgrounds who 'always got me all the equipment that I needed.'

271 However, others described administrators who were unsupportive or only concerned
272 when APE was of importance to other stakeholders. Chris found parent interest in APE or the
273 opportunity to appear inclusive as the only motivators for administrative support:

274 the district wants everybody to think that we're super-super inclusive. When there's an
275 opportunity to look like it, we are, but if it becomes inconvenient...then we try to make
276 adjustments. The students with disabilities aren't necessarily the priority for all resources.

277 Echoing Chris' feelings, others felt their services were viewed as burdensome. Cindy was the
278 only APE teacher in her district and had difficulty providing quality services to students on her
279 caseload but received no support because her administrators thought APE was 'a fluff thing.'

280 Finally, academic scheduling and convenience were factors for others as they navigated support
281 systems. Melissa described a situation in which her administrator told her quite poignantly that
282 ‘APE’s okay for your kids but not for everybody else. It disrupts the academic scheduling.’

283 While the administrators set the tone for support, APE teachers also faced unpredictable,
284 or unstable, relationships with colleagues. Like supportive administrators who had backgrounds
285 in special education, APE teachers described positive relationships with their special education
286 and IEP service provider colleagues such as occupational therapists (OT) and physical therapists
287 (PT). Kelsey said, ‘I don’t necessarily need support from other [PE] teachers. Who I need
288 support from is the classroom [special education] teacher, OT, PT, social worker, all of those
289 people are always available whenever I need.’ She added, ‘everybody has a good sense of
290 helping because they know that they are part of the IEP team.’ Likewise, Matt said, ‘we’re 100%
291 more successful in my labs when I take everybody else’s services into account’ and Noah
292 described his colleagues as ‘my team.’ For Dan, William, and Pam, the opportunity to
293 collaborate and work together with their special education colleagues made them feel more
294 supported and like they belonged to a group with a greater goal.

295 While outside relationships were valuable, relationships with PE teachers and
296 instructional assistants (IAs) within the gymnasium were central, but often unstable. For
297 example, Michelle believed her IAs had ‘the least buy in’ because it was a ‘physically
298 demanding time’ compared to other subjects and parts of the day. Others thought IAs viewed PE
299 as ‘their off period’ or ‘own personal exercise period’ (Nick). Others shared a similar sentiment
300 regarding PE teachers who were unwilling to include students with disabilities. Her colleague’s
301 ‘those are your kids, not my kids’ stance made Shelby feel unsupported. She recalled that she
302 had ‘never seen any teachers talk to any kids with disabilities,’ while Michelle’s colleagues

303 would say inappropriate and negative things about and in front of students with disabilities.
304 Michael and Chris thought overwhelming class sizes and the need to supervise other students
305 may have been the cause of some PE teachers dismissing APE and making comments about how
306 ‘they shouldn’t be in here’ (Zack) referring to students with disabilities in integrated PE settings.

307 Although dismissive actions and roles may lead to feeling unsupported in PE, APE
308 teachers who had the opportunity to collaborate and team teach with their colleagues felt
309 supported. William described his PE colleagues as ‘a great team of teachers’ that he effectively
310 communicated with to ‘provide the least restrictive environment for my students.’ Jenna
311 provided a clear illustration of how productive a relationship can be for the integration of
312 students with disabilities. She said, ‘we’re all working as teachers together, team teaching on
313 activity and monitoring behavior, and because I’ve built those relationships with those ladies,
314 they know which students to kind of look out for and what things to look out for.’ Echoing
315 Jenna’s situation, Sam said, ‘if you came to my class not knowing who I was, not knowing that I
316 was an APE teacher...you would probably feel like there are just two physical educators
317 teaching a class of PE,’ highlighting the productive and positive learning environments that can
318 be created when APE teachers are supported and given autonomy.

319 **Support for Adapted Physical Education Requires Targeted Relationship Development**

320 As captured in the first theme, the participants in this study found support systems for
321 APE to be unpredictable and inconsistent. Further analysis of the interview data indicated this
322 occurred for two primary reasons. First, because participants were itinerant they ‘have to spread
323 my time out across multiple schools...I still don’t know all of the teachers that well at some of
324 my schools because I am only there twice a week’ (Andrea). This left Noah feeling as if he has
325 ‘to get to know a lot of teachers across all of these different schools...that is hard for relationship

326 building.’ Second, these itinerant-related challenges were exacerbated by negative stereotypes
327 about PE and APE that marginalized the participants and their services. When asked if PE was
328 marginalized in her district, Sue confirmed that it was and, ‘some of it is self-inflicted. Some PE
329 teachers are really on top of things, but then there's others who kind of struggle and PE is not
330 viewed as a real benefit to the school day.’ Harkening back to the first theme, participants felt
331 school personnel often made assumptions about APE based on how PE was perceived. Andrea
332 explained, ‘in the past I've had administrators that really value health and PE in general, and so
333 they give us a lot of support. It just is so different from every school. At the high school and the
334 secondary levels, PE is their last concern I feel like most of the time. Especially with me, since I
335 don't teach small groups at that level, they're not even really getting down to PE.’

336 Given their itinerant status and association with a marginalized discipline, APE teachers
337 were often forced to prove their legitimacy and illustrate the contributions they made within each
338 individual school environment before teachers in that school would provide meaningful supports.
339 Several of the participants indicated that this intentional process started with ‘positive
340 relationships with the people across the school buildings I work in. Those relationships are really
341 critical in being able to help each other as we work with students’ (Ella). However, given their
342 illegitimate, or outside, status as members of the school community, these APE teachers often
343 had to ‘go out of my way to get to know people...go to all these meetings and help with just little
344 things that have nothing to do with me. I just try and help so they know I'm there’ (Andrea).
345 Tammy felt she was ‘kind of not part of the department, so I moved my office next to theirs...I
346 was intentional about...talking with them and meeting with them...now we get along really
347 well.’ Sam provided a similar success story whereby, ‘after a bit of a rocky beginning,’ she

348 developed positive relationships with the PE teachers: 'I've established a really good rapport with
349 PE teachers where they feel safe asking for accommodation suggestions.'

350 Several of the teachers noted that developing positive relationships through 'mutual
351 respect whereby I give them opinions about modifications, and they suggest activities I can do'
352 (William) were possible but required time and investment. Jordan lamented that relationship
353 building across multiple schools 'takes a lot of work because building that rapport is so
354 important. It's not just me running into my school, teaching my class and getting out. I try to
355 communicate regularly with general PE teachers all the time.' Noah explained that he had to
356 prove he was an effective teacher before others would take him seriously: 'if you're in a building
357 long enough, you get a little bit more respect, because now that person can see what you're doing
358 over time, and how students are growing, and why what you're doing is important.' At times, the
359 process was frustrating and stressful, especially when it involved re-educating school personnel
360 who had misconceptions about APE. Sam explained, for example, how the

361 PTs didn't know that APE was a direct service, and they can't pull from my class for
362 therapy...that's just another relationship building opportunity. I tried to use good
363 communication techniques and explain that, you cannot remove, you can't substitute
364 physical therapy for APE, but I would love if you wanted to team teach with me.

365 Like Sam, most participants saw this relationship building process as frustrating but
366 necessary to get the support they needed, often strategically supporting others to help build
367 relationships. Kelsey navigated interpersonal challenges diplomatically by finding common
368 ground to meet APE objectives while also helping another service provider. She explained,
369 'when the speech pathologist tells me what she is going to be working on, I try to find ways to
370 incorporate that into APE so we can work together.' Michelle explained that when confronted

371 with marginalization or, ‘a teacher who is a little bit nervous to work with some of our more
372 challenging students, I will work with them the best that I can...those are important opportunities
373 to show why APE is important.’ These efforts at mentoring and peer-teaching were directed at
374 improving the quality of education for students with disabilities because, as Erin explained,
375 many PE teachers did not have experience teaching students with disabilities:

376 A lot of our PE teachers who...want more information will come to [a training for
377 teaching students with disabilities] that we put on and they'll get information on how to
378 provide appropriate accommodations...I think the vast majority of them probably have
379 minimal to none as far as previous experience teaching students with disabilities.

380 **Relationship Building and Knowledge of the Field Aids Advocacy Efforts**

381 As documented in the previous theme, the APE teachers often had to contend with
382 challenges related to marginalization and assumptions about their work sometimes based solely
383 on negative experiences with PE teachers in the school. This marginalization often created
384 environments in which participants needed to advocate for themselves and the services they
385 provided. Similar to how relationship building bolstered support for APE, these relationships
386 also allowed teachers to develop social and political capital that could be used for advocacy.
387 Jenna explained, for example, that ‘it is a lot easier to work with people who like you. If you put
388 in the time to build relationships and they like you, they are going to support you when you need
389 it.’ Similarly, Kaylie believed that ‘to advocate for yourself or your kids you have to have good
390 rapport in your school. Without rapport, no one is going to listen.’

391 Several other participants described situations in which they leveraged their relationship
392 capital to advocate for themselves and their students. Shelby believed teachers she had a better
393 relationship with cared more about creating an integrated environment for students with

394 disabilities: 'if I have a good relationship with [the teachers], they're going to give me everything
395 they've got when it comes to working with my kids. I try to do everything that I can to have those
396 good relationships.' Similarly, when Matt started in his current school district, he had teachers
397 regularly pulling students out of his classes. However, as he explained,

398 I started building relationships and rapport with the other teachers and getting myself
399 known throughout the building. If you have that relationship and that rapport, other
400 teachers and support staff will value you and not want to pull students out of your classes.
401 They shouldn't be pulling them out anyways, but if I have a good relationship with a
402 teacher. I don't have to fight with them about it, so it makes it easier for everyone.

403 Participants also discussed the passion they brought to their job in a way that made it feel
404 as if advocacy, particularly advocating for students on their caseload, was a natural part of being
405 an APE teacher. Annie explained, 'I am always advocating for my kids, it's part of what I have
406 to do. I am positive and bring a good attitude to it, but I will fight for my kids when I need to.'
407 Similarly, Sam reflected on the effort required to develop an adapted sports league among high
408 schools in his county. He recalled, 'it's been a lot of advocacy work, and slow going, but that's
409 part of our job as APE teachers, advocating and trying to provide the best and most equitable
410 opportunities for our kids.' Along with Annie and Sam, most participants demonstrated parental
411 traits, describing the students they taught as '*my kids*' suggesting that, as Kathy put it, 'I
412 advocate for these kids like I would my own kids. I care about them like that.'

413 Teachers such as Alicia believed their passion and commitment to teaching students with
414 disabilities helped them work toward strategic goals. She explained that after watching her teach,
415 other teachers extended more opportunities to her students: 'I invite other teachers into my class
416 and get them involved. This helps them see how I teach, how much passion I bring...Then

417 suddenly they are asking my students to participate in assemblies!’ Similarly, Sue tried to
418 maintain a positive attitude and use it as an opportunity to show others her passion for APE: ‘I
419 always view [marginalization] as an opportunity to show you that I am not a stereotypical jock
420 PE teacher. I can show them my commitment to working with our kids...It’s a cool advocacy
421 opportunity.’ Melissa felt that her approach to teaching, in addition to the quality of her lessons,
422 helped actively challenge negative stereotypes and advocate for herself and her students:

423 I think they value [APE] more because they can see improvement, they see my
424 enthusiasm and what I bring to teaching, and they see maximum participation. I’m sure
425 you’ve met some not-so-great APE teachers where...they are still just rolling out the
426 ball... that’s going to give, a PE teacher or an administrator, the type of opinion that APE
427 really isn’t that valuable. I don’t ever want that to occur.

428 Finally, participants were able to advocate more meaningfully when they demonstrated
429 an understanding of public policies governing special education and APE. Ally spoke explicitly
430 about this point explaining, ‘the more you know [about special education policy], the better
431 advocate you can be. I have said to people, ‘do you want to deny your kids services based on the
432 law?’ Sometimes I have to be like that.’ Jordan explained, ‘relationships with others are
433 definitely the first step, that’s the easy way.’ He acknowledged, however, that sometimes
434 relationships and passion were not enough and ‘if you come up against roadblocks, you can refer
435 to policies and laws to get your students what they need.’

436 Discussion

437 The purpose of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of the workplace
438 experiences of itinerant APE teachers. The results highlight the challenges APE teachers face in
439 navigating marginalization while developing and managing relationships with diverse

440 stakeholders across school environments that provided varying support for their discipline.
441 Advocating for APE required the APE teachers to develop social capital through targeted
442 relationship development. This often required that they take the first step in creating a
443 collaborative environment and seeking out meaningful relationships. This relationship
444 development process was arduous at times, particularly given differences in the cultures across
445 school buildings. Nevertheless, along with an understanding of special education law, having
446 positive working relationships was seen as essential for ensuring that their needs, and the needs
447 of their students, were recognized. Taken together, the results of this investigation both relate to
448 and extend role socialization theory and signal recommendations for both research and practice.

449 As previously noted in research with APE teachers (Park & Curtner-Smith, 2018; Wilson,
450 Kelly, et al., 2020) and educators more generally (Richards, Hemphill, et al., 2018), supportive
451 school cultures allowed APE and APE teachers to thrive while unsupportive cultures devalued
452 APE. Principals set the tone for this support and those who had subjective theories (Grotjahn,
453 1991) that embraced PE and APE as important parts of the school experience were more likely to
454 value and appreciate the service being provided by APE teachers. Other administrators, however,
455 did not understand the value of APE, due in part to the unclear nature of what APE teachers do,
456 and made assumptions about the discipline based on their impressions of the PE program. This
457 findings aligns with previous research connecting key stakeholders perceptions of special
458 education to their assumptions about the nature and purpose of special education (Ruppar et al.,
459 2018). Participants felt as if their services were being judged in part by their PE colleagues.
460 Teachers felt as if the marginal status of APE led to student placement decisions based on
461 scheduling or convenience rather than what was best for students (Wilson, Kelly, et al., 2020).

462 Assumptions about the quality of APE services in relation to PE programming were
463 particularly challenging given that participants lamented inconsistent and unreliable relationships
464 with PE teachers. This echoes prior research in projecting the belief that working with students
465 with disabilities was not the PE teacher's responsibility (Holland & Haegele, 2020; Wilson &
466 Richards, 2019). Relationships with IAs were also tense at times, in part due to role ambiguity
467 and inconsistent expectations related to supporting APE instruction (Bryan et al., 2013).
468 Participants described more positive and productive relationships with special education and IEP
469 support staff, leading them to identify more with their special education roots than those planted
470 in PE (Wilson et al., 2017). Again, however, this support was unreliable and inconsistent across
471 schools and some APE teachers discussed contexts in which special educators marginalized or
472 demeaned their role (Sato & Haegele, 2017). Accordingly, some itinerant APE teachers may not
473 know where they fit in, and who they look to for support is largely dependent upon the particular
474 context in which they work and assumptions that key stakeholders make about APE based on
475 their prior socialization (Richards, 2015; Wilson, Kelly, et al., 2020).

476 Given inconsistent support across settings, many participants discussed the need to be
477 proactive and intentionally develop relationships. The itinerant nature of their position, coupled
478 with the marginalized nature of APE, required participants to extend the olive branch (Lux,
479 2011) and take the initiative in the relationship building process. This manifested as reeducating
480 key stakeholders about the purposes of APE services, and the role of APE teachers, so as to
481 overcome the presence of subjective theories (Grotjahn, 1991) that diminished the value and
482 importance of APE (Holland & Haegele, 2020). This renegotiation of expectations (Richards,
483 2015) was approached intentionally among many participants, who, like general PE teachers, felt

484 relationship development was a necessary first step in creating a constellation of support that
485 better met the needs of students (Richards, Gaudreault, et al., 2018).

486 The burden of developing and facilitating these relationships is an arduous process,
487 which most APE teachers likely feel unprepared for through initial teacher education. Further,
488 some instances required APE teachers to strategically comply (Lacey, 1977) with the
489 expectations of other service providers (e.g., integration foci from OT/PT into APE). While
490 collaboration is important, APE teachers should not compromise their own instructional goals to
491 meet the needs and expectations of other service providers/areas. This highlights the lack of
492 professional preparation for other providers, such as PE teachers, to promote and enact
493 meaningful integration of students with disabilities into their classes. This is in addition to
494 challenges associated with suboptimal learning environments, such as excessive class sizes in
495 general PE, that make integration and coordination challenging (Lawson, 2018).

496 The relationship building process described in the second theme was critical not only in
497 terms of advocating for the needs of their students, but also for themselves and the role of APE
498 more broadly. In line with previous research (Lux & McCullick, 2011; Olson & Roberts, 2020),
499 several participants discussed how they were able to leverage these relationships in ways that
500 challenged marginality and renegotiated the purpose and goals of APE services within their
501 schools. Through these advocacy efforts, the teachers attempted to balance their social
502 positioning to bring greater awareness to themselves and their work. Rather than building mutual
503 respect, however, the teachers discussed the relationships they developed as social and political
504 capital that could be used to ensure students received appropriate services and support. In
505 addition to relationship building, several participants discussed a knowledge and understanding
506 of special education law as a key contributor to advocacy initiatives. This further highlights the

507 potency of adapted physical education teacher education as a socializing experience (Wilson &
508 Richards, 2019) and affirms previous research suggesting that reliance on special education law
509 may help to elevate the status of APE (Wilson, Richards, et al., 2020).

510 **Conclusion**

511 In conclusion, the results of this study provide recommendations for how APE teachers
512 can more effectively navigate the sociopolitical dynamics of the schools in which they work. To
513 summarize, Figure 1 provides a visual representation of a process model for how itinerant APE
514 teachers navigate the organizational workplace environment. Specifically, APE teachers
515 experience unpredictable support and encounter mixed value relative to the services they provide
516 across multiple school environments. These conditions require they intentionally and proactively
517 employ targeted relationship building strategies to accrue the social and political capital needed
518 to discuss the role of APE in the education and lives of children with disabilities. Through these
519 conversations and other advocacy initiatives, APE teachers can reeducate and help key
520 stakeholders reformulate their subjective theories regarding the purpose and goals of the service
521 and its' providers roles. Over time, this reeducation can elevate the status of APE across
522 individual schools and increase the extent to which APE teachers perceive that they matter or are
523 important to others in the schools where they work.

524 To date, the current study represents one of the most in-depth investigations of APE
525 teachers' experiences in the sociopolitical contexts in which they work. Importantly, many of the
526 teachers in this study took it upon themselves to reach out and develop relationships with key
527 stakeholders that supported their students while challenging marginalization and promoting the
528 value of APE. The social strategies and sociopolitical savvy required for these negotiations have
529 been discussed and piloted in physical education teacher education curricula and advanced

530 licensure programs, but different types of skills are likely required for APE teachers given the
531 unique nature of their work. The results of this study, and future research efforts, could help to
532 further define the different relational skills needed and forge recommendations for both initial
533 teacher education and continuing professional development for APE teachers. Such an approach
534 would mirror the push in education more generally to equip preservice and inservice teachers
535 with the capacity to navigate challenging relationships and develop resiliency.

536

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653

654

655 *Table 1.*

656

657 Complete participant demographic information

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Region	Years	CAPE	Schools
Michael	Male	White	South	18	Yes	15
Annie	Female	White	Midwest	9	No	2
Linda	Female	White	West	20	Yes	7
Kelsey	Female	White	West	22	Yes	6
Rick	Male	Hispanic	South	25	Yes	10
Nick	Male	White	West	3	Yes	7
Tammy	Female	Hispanic	Midwest	5	Yes	3
Alicia	Female	White	South	15	Yes	6
Andrea	Female	White	West	19	Yes	4
Kathy	Female	White	Northeast	14	Yes	5
Sam	Female	White	Midwest	23	Yes	9
Ally	Female	White	West	44	No	7
Pam	Female	White	West	10	Yes	2
Ella	Female	White	Northeast	9	Yes	14
Chris	Male	Multiple	Midwest	2	No	5
Kristy	Female	White	West	5	Yes	13
Michelle	Female	White	South	20	No	3
Matt	Male	White	West	20	No	15
Erin	Female	White	South	10	Yes	7
Dan	Male	White	South	5	Yes	8
Shelby	Female	White	South	7	Yes	4
Zack	Male	White	West	30	Yes	7
William	Male	White	South	7	No	25
Noah	Male	White	Midwest	5	Yes	5
Cindy	Female	White	South	14	Yes	11
Jenna	Female	White	South	12	No	4
Jordan	Female	White	Midwest	17	Yes	5
Jessica	Female	White	West	31	Yes	5
Kaylie	Female	White	South	1	No	4
Melissa	Female	White	South	5	Yes	4
Sue	Female	White	South	4	No	6

658 *Note.* Years = Total teaching years; CAPE = Certified Adapted Physical Education specialist;

659 School = Total number of schools visited as part of teaching appointment.

660

Figure Captions

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Figure 1. Visual representation of the conceptual model for understanding APE teachers experiences in the sociopolitical environments in which they work with a focus on advocacy through relationship development that targets enhanced perceived mattering and marginalization