disabilities

MDPI

Article

Examining Unified Physical Education from the Teacher's Perspective

Zarah Ford and Martin E. Block *

Department of Kinesiology, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22904, USA; ghh2sn@virginia.edu
* Correspondence: meb7u@virginia.edu

Abstract

One of the greatest benefits of inclusion in general physical education (PE) is the opportunity for social interactions between students with and without disabilities. Unfortunately, interviews with students with disabilities who have participated in PE often find that social interactions with students without disabilities were limited. A model that promotes interaction between students with and without disabilities in PE is Special Olympics Unified Physical Education (UPE). In UPE, students with and without disabilities participate in activities together rather than the one-way focus on traditional peer tutoring. There have been anecdotal reports on the positive benefits of UPE for both students with and without disabilities. To date, there has been no published research on UPE. Additionally, some question how UPE has been implemented in schools, specifically questioning if UPE provided quality PE and whether students with disabilities were forced into UPE and denied opportunities to participate in general PE. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how UPE was developed and implemented in select U.S. schools and the impact on social interactions between students with and without disabilities. Interviews with twelve teachers who were directly involved in their UPE programs revealed the following four major themes: (1) our students were not being served appropriately, (2) a mix of PE standards and Special Olympics programming, (3) UPE is a choice, and (4) our students improved in many ways. The discussion examined the results in relation to the criticisms of UPE and how UPE proved to be a positive alternative to limited social interactions in general PE.

Keywords: unified physical education; disabilities; social interactions

check for updates

Academic Editor: Meredith Perry

Received: 27 June 2025
Revised: 25 August 2025
Accepted: 28 August 2025
Published: 31 August 2025

Citation: Ford, Z.; Block, M.E. Examining Unified Physical Education from the Teacher's Perspective. *Disabilities* **2025**, *5*, 76. https://doi.org/10.3390/disabilities5030076

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

Physical education (PE) provides students with the knowledge and skills needed to become physically active and remain physically active for a lifetime. Students without disabilities receive PE in the general setting, while most students with disabilities who have more intense support needs disabilities receive their PE in a separate, adapted PE setting. However, over the past 30 years, there has been an effort to include students with disabilities in general PE with their peers without disabilities [1]. One of the greatest benefits of inclusion in general physical education (PE) is the opportunity for social acceptance and interactions between students with and without disabilities. Inclusion can promote social factors such as learning how to interact with peers, playing cooperatively, taking turns, dealing with anger, following directions, listening quietly, staying on task, and generally behaving appropriately [2]. In addition, students without disabilities can learn that classmates who seem different on the outside might share similar interests, and

peers can learn to be sensitive to, respectful of, and comfortable with differences and similarities with peers with disabilities [3]. Finally, a quality inclusive experience should result in students with disabilities feeling a sense of belonging, feeling accepted, and feeling valued [4].

Unfortunately, interviews with students with disabilities who have participated in general PE often find that social interactions with peers were limited. Three recent reviews of the literature found that students with disabilities, while occasionally reporting positive experiences when included in general PE, more often reported negative experiences and even social isolation [5–7]. For example, Fröberg [5] said that general PE might not always provide students with disabilities a true inclusive experience where these students would gain a genuine sense of belonging and acceptance. Similarly, Holland and Haegele [6] found that students with disabilities in the studies they reviewed continue to experience discrimination and exclusion from both their teachers and peers. They also noted that many PE teachers did not provide appropriate modifications for students with disabilities. Rekaa and colleagues [7] summarized their main findings as students with disabilities often experiencing exclusion and a lack of belonging in PE, although they noted that in some of the most recent studies, some students with disabilities reported more positive experiences. They also found that class size seemed to be a factor in successful inclusive PE, with PE teachers reporting more favorable attitudes towards inclusion with classes of less than 30 students compared to larger classes.

If social interactions are important, but general PE, particularly when there are large classes, falls short of providing these opportunities, is there an alternative model?

2. Using Peers to Promote Inclusion in PE

The use of peer support to include students with disabilities in general PE has been promoted since the 1990s [8,9]. Research supports the positive effects of peer tutoring in inclusive PE settings in students with developmental disabilities [8], students with visual impairments [10], students who are deaf [9], students with autism [11], and even students with severe disabilities [12]. For example, Klavina and Block [12] trained elementary school students to serve as peer tutors to support classmates with severe, multiple disabilities in general PE. Results showed that peers learned to effectively instruct classmates with severe disabilities, and interaction behaviors between students with and without severe disabilities increased.

While peer support can effectively include students with disabilities in PE, the relationship is often one-directional: peers take on the role of tutor, while students with disabilities become the tutees. This dynamic may unintentionally reinforce a sense of hierarchy, suggesting that students with disabilities are dependent or less capable. In contrast, more balanced peer relationships, where all students contribute and collaborate equally, can foster mutual respect, reciprocal interactions, and greater social acceptance. Allport [13] created a "contact theory" that suggested contact with people different from oneself can lead to attitude change if presented under the following four specific conditions: (a) equal status, (b) cooperative pursuance of common goals, (c) personal interactions, and (d) identification and acceptance of social norms provided by authority. Traditional peer tutoring does result in personal interactions between students with and without disabilities. However, as presented in the research above, there is not equal status between students with and without disabilities (students with disabilities are dependent on peers to teach them), and there are no real opportunities for cooperation and pursuit of common goals (the goal is for the child with a disability to be tutored and to learn a motor skill or work on fitness). Does the traditional peer tutoring model help students with disabilities reach the

pillars of true inclusion as presented by Haegele and Maher [4]—a feeling of belonging, acceptance, and value?

3. Unified Physical Education

Special Olympics is best known for its sports programs. However, in the past ten years, Special Olympics has promoted more opportunities for students and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities to have meaningful interactions with peers without disabilities. These efforts led to the creation of Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools, a school-based program designed to create sports, classroom, and school activities that promote a climate of acceptance and social inclusion [14]. One component of Unified Champion Schools is Unified Sports, where students with and without disabilities compete on the same sports team. Another component of Unified Champion Schools is Unified Physical Education (UPE). In UPE, students with and without disabilities participate in activities together rather than the one-way focus of traditional peer tutoring. Peers can and do provide help as needed, but mostly students work together on common fitness goals, in cooperative activities, and to learn how to play various sports. It should be noted that Special Olympics does not consider UPE to be a stand-alone curriculum. Rather, UPE resources are designed to help educators with concepts and ideas to help make their existing curriculum more inclusive and accessible. As noted in the UPE Playbook:

> *Unified Physical Education provides a unique opportunity for students with and without disabilities to come together through ongoing educational and physical activities. The Unified Physical Education course is structured around the national physical education standards and grade-level outcomes, which include gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to maintain a health-enhancing level of fitness. Additionally, the class supports the development of leadership skills for all students, and the empowerment of ALL students to foster an inclusive class and school-wide environment. (p. 7).* [15]

There have been many anecdotal reports on the positive benefits of UPE for both students with and without disabilities, but to date, there have been no published research studies focusing specifically on UPE [16]. There has been limited research examining the effects of a Unified Champion School (of which UPE plays a part) on social interactions between students with and without disabilities [17,18]. This research has focused on the broader effects of Unified Champion Schools activities (Special Olympics Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement) that have a positive impact on students with and without disabilities, but it is not possible to parse out the unique effects of UPE programs in these schools.

There have also been some who have questioned how UPE should be positioned in schools. Most notably, Lieberman and Houston-Wilson [19] voiced the following concerns about the implementation of UPE:

- Not following state or district PE curriculum;
- Following Special Olympics Sports calendar rather than the PE calendar;
- Forcing students with disabilities into UPE when they might prefer being in general PE;
- Having UPE count as adapted PE and circumventing the Individual Education Program (IEP) process;
- Having UPE count as fulfilling the PE requirement for students without disabilities;
- Curriculum being taught by teachers other than certified physical educators.

Does UPE create a more equal status and cooperative setting for students with and without disabilities and promote social interactions and even friendships between students with and without disabilities? Does UPE follow national and/or state PE standards, and

is the class instructed by certified PE teachers? Does UPE count as fulfilling the state PE requirements, or is it used as an extra elective? Does UPE count as meeting a student's IEP goals for adapted PE, or is UPE more of a supplement to adapted PE? Given the many questions about UPE and the lack of research, the purpose of this exploratory study is to gain a better understanding of UPE through interviews with PE and special education teachers who have created and have directed the programs. Questions focus on why and how teachers started the program, what the program looks like, how students are selected to participate in the program, and the effects the program has had on both students with and without disabilities.

4. Methods

4.1. Qualitative Methodology

Individual, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection with questions focusing on understanding physical and special education teachers' experiences in creating and directing their UPE programs. This study utilized a post-positivist position of critical realism [20], which acknowledges the subjective nature of each participant's understanding or reality, and that it is impossible to clearly articulate one's reality. In other words, the research team understood that participants viewed their experiences in creating and directing their UPE program through their own individual lenses with their own biases and perceptions of their reality.

It should be noted that rather than following a theoretical model to guide the analysis, we relied on a pattern-matching model based on results from the interviews. In addition, the research team was well aware of their own experiences with UPE and Special Olympics and reflected on these experiences, which may have presented biases and values when analyzing the data. The first author herself was a peer in a UPE program at her high school, having very positive experiences with UPE. The second author has a long history of volunteering with Special Olympics and has also had very positive experiences with Special Olympics. With this in mind, and acknowledging our own impact on how we may have subconsciously interpreted the results, the research team did their best to read and understand interview transcripts as impartially as possible. Ethical approval was granted through the University of Virginia institutional review board.

4.2. Sampling and Participants

Participants were recruited through a purposive sampling method to ensure that the programs fit the inclusion criteria (i.e., teachers who started and run a UPE program). Special Olympics Virginia and Special Olympics International were contacted about the study and then asked to send out a brief information flyer to PE and special education teachers who they knew started a UPE program. When a teacher contacted us via email, we replied with a detailed recruitment email that included a consent form. The recruitment emails describe the purpose of the study and the commitment of participants. Twelve teachers (eleven female and one male) contacted the research team and agreed to participate in the study, including five from Virginia, three from Missouri, two from California, one from Wisconsin, and one from Hawaii. Seven of the participants were PE teachers, four were special education (SPED) teachers, and one was an adapted PE teacher (see Table 1 for participant information). In many cases, UPE was part of the larger Unified Champion School program, but our participants' focus at their schools was UPE. Pseudonyms were used for all participants, school names, and any students who were mentioned during interviews.

Table 1. Participant backgrounds.

Name	School Level	Location	Gender	Age	PE/SPED
Helen	High School	Suburban	Female	44	PE
Mary	High School	Rural	Female	26	PE
Rich	Middle School	Urban	Male	55	PE/Science
Sarah	Middle/High	Rural	Female	40	Adapted PE
Farah	High School	Suburban	Female	47	PE
Ashley	High School	Urban	Female	33	SPED
Anita	Middle School	Suburban	Male and Female	53/45	SPED
Kristen	High School	Rural	Female	34	PE
Lynn	Middle School	Suburban	Female	36	PE
Laura	High School	Suburban	Female	42	SPED
Beth	High School	Rural	Female	48	PE
Missy	High School	Suburban	Female	48	SPED

PE: physical education teacher; SPED: special education teacher.

4.3. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom with all twelve participants, with each interview lasting between 45 and 60 min. The interview began by asking participants if they had read the consent form that explained the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were then asked, "after reading the consent form, do you verbally give your consent to participate in the study?" In addition to verbal consent, participants were asked if they consented to have the interview recorded, and all participants consented.

Semi-structured interviews were selected to encourage the participant to provide richer data in their responses but also align with predetermined themes that had been identified by the research team, including the following: background of participant, why they started their UPE program, and the structure of their UPE program. An initial draft of interview questions was created by the research team. Interview questions were then reviewed by a teacher who created and directs a UPE program at their school, a professor in adapted PE who expressed concerns with UPE, and the Unified Champion Schools team at Special Olympics North America. All of these professionals provided edits and suggestions for new questions. A final list of interview questions was then agreed upon by the two researchers, and Table 2 presents examples of questions included in the interview guide.

Table 2. Select interview questions.

Why?
• What motivated you to create a program in your school? ○ What was your purpose and intent when beginning the Unified Physical Education (UPE) program? What problem or gap were you trying to address? And why did you think UPE could address this problem? (Why did you specifically choose UPE?)

Table 2. *Cont.*

How?
• What was the process for starting UPE at your school? ○ What barriers or challenges did you have? ○ What facilitators or support did you have?
The Program (Operations)
• How do you plan your UPE curriculum? ○ For example, did you follow the Special Olympics UPE Playbook (to what degree and in what ways), or did you come up with your own lessons? Please elaborate. ○ Did you design your program in alignment with SHAPE national PE standards or your state PE standards? If yes, to what degree and in what ways? Please elaborate.
Participants
• How did you recruit students with and without disabilities? • Do the students with disabilities have a choice if they want to be in that program or if they want to just be in a regular inclusive setting or in a self-contained setting? Do they have any say in their placement? Please elaborate. • Does UPE count for the PE requirement for students without disabilities? Is it listed in the school's course catalog? Please explain how. • Does the UPE program count for the APE requirement for students with disabilities? How?
Implications of UPE
• Do you believe the relationships that were fostered in UPE were carried out throughout the school and outside the classroom? If yes, please explain. • Do you think that participating in UPE has changed the school experience of students with disabilities? (Do these students feel more accepted by peers?) If yes, please explain how. • Do you believe this program has led students outside of the UPE program to view students with disabilities differently (e.g., peers seem more accepting and welcoming to students with disabilities)? If yes, please explain how.

4.4. Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were automatically created through Zoom, and then the researchers utilized a thematic deductive–inductive analysis method following Bingham's five-phase process of qualitative data analysis [21]. For phase 1, each researcher examined each transcript independently. In phase 2, researchers met weekly, comparing notes and identifying themes through inductive analysis. For phase 3, the research team focused on identifying participant quotes that matched the identified themes. Then, in phase 4, the research team did pattern coding, identifying common themes between participants through statements, quotes, and patterns to best answer the research question in a meaningful way. Finally, phase 5 included placing quotes from different participants into common themes organized under each a priori code, such as "why you started the UPE Program." This organizational method ensured a clear description of the data with quotes specifically chosen to demonstrate the commonality shared across many different participants or outlier experiences noted by one or two participants. Finally, the entire draft of the paper was sent back to all participants, with a particular focus on ensuring that the researchers accurately captured and interpreted the cited quotes.

5. Results

An analysis of the interviews resulted in the identification of four major themes: (1) our students were not being served appropriately, (2) a mix of PE standards and Special Olympics programming, (3) UPE is a choice, and (4) our students improved in many ways. Several themes included sub-themes; both are illustrated below with direct participant quotes.

5.1. Our Students Were Not Being Served Appropriately

Participants started UPE programs to promote inclusion, engagement, and meaningful participation in students with disabilities in PE settings. Ashley (Missouri) shared her motivation for starting the program by explaining how students with disabilities were placed in large, overcrowded PE classes where they were often left on the sidelines.

> *Whenever I would go into PE, my students would just kind of be along the side of the wall in the gym. Not really do anything, especially if there was a contact sport going on, because they're more likely to get hurt or interfere with the game that was going on. And so, it honestly was not beneficial for them in any way, shape or form.*

Helen (Virginia) emphasized the importance of meeting everyone's needs, "*Well, I believe that when there's no plan, nobody gets serviced.*" Similarly, Mary (Virginia) talked about the challenges of general PE class sizes, saying, "*Sometimes it's just not a safe environment for them. A bunch of us kind of like realized that they're just throwing these kids into these classes, that their needs are not being met.*" Rich (California) agreed, noting that in his school, he saw that general PE was failing students with disabilities, "*those kids . . . weren't getting the services they needed. There wasn't a whole lot of modification or differentiation for the ones that needed it. It was pretty much just, let's throw (them into general PE).*"

These issues led Ashley to create a UPE program that had structured activities that ensured students could fully participate in PE while fostering social connections with their peers. Farah (Missouri) saw similar problems and noted that traditional PE was unsafe and failed to meet students with disabilities' needs.

> *They would put our students with disabilities in just random classes, and some of those classes would be a team sports class with upperclassmen that are competitive classes. And a lot of those kids didn't want to take the time to play games and help these kids. And it became a dangerous situation for the kids with disabilities in the class. And they weren't really being included in the classes.*

Several participants noted a lack of social interaction between students with disabilities and peers. It was not necessarily that peers did not want to interact with their classmates with disabilities, rather, they just did not know how. Peers were not naturally including students with disabilities in class activities, leading to unintentional isolation and limited interaction. For example, Ashley (Missouri), a special education teacher, described the lack of social interaction her students had with peers:

> *I was kind of always kind of tucked away in a little corner. Of our building, and the same thing with our students, and so they wouldn't really get exposed to their general education (Gen. Ed.) peers a whole lot. They would see them in passing, but there wasn't really a ton of interaction with their Gen. Ed. peers, and so we really wanted to capitalize on that and to get them involved more with their Gen. Ed. peers to build those relationships.*

Laura (Virginia) echoed that sentiment:

> *I (special education teacher) seek out opportunities for them (peers) to really integrate more with our kids and have more opportunities. Our students go to electives and get to*

> *know certain kids. And then some of those Gen. Ed kids would come by every morning and say, 'Hi!' So, just knowing that could increase social opportunities was exciting. I love the idea of incorporating more whole school engagement.*

Anita (Hawaii) added, "*They (students with disabilities) weren't excluded from them [elective classes], but their peers weren't too sure how to interact with them as much in those elective classes.*" Overall, teachers agreed that all students deserve a place to safely participate, build relationships, and be valued for their abilities, rather than their disabilities.

5.2. A Mix of PE Standards and Special Olympics Programming

Participants provided a lot of detail regarding how they organized their UPE classes. In many cases, participants reported that UPE looked very much like a general or adapted PE class. For example, Ashley (Missouri) said they "*started with a warm-up, and then the adapted PE teacher comes in, just to kind of help the PE teacher modify whatever they're doing for the day, and so she'll help several of them with their warm-ups, and then they go through the same units as a regular PE class. It's just modified.*" She also mentioned that the program is very individualized.

> *But you're always going to have those few students that still have a hard time participating with the group. And so, they're kind of sometimes off doing their own thing with the paraprofessional and their buddy. Sometimes the physical therapist is in there, the adapted PE teacher. And so, it's really individualized honestly, and so that everybody can come away with something.*

Similarly, Lynn (Missouri) said, "*We start with our middle school (PE) curriculum just because of space and equipment*", and Kristen (Virginia) noted that she tries to mirror the general PE units with the UPE program. "*For my UPE class, I take what we're doing in the 9th and 10th grade general PE classes, like if we're doing a volleyball unit, I take the volleyball unit, and I'll just make modifications based on it.*"

Participants who followed the general PE curriculum also mentioned that they try to align their program with SHAPE National PE standards or their state or local school district PE standards. For example, Ashley (Missouri) and Kristen (Virginia) both said "*yes*" when asked the question about aligning UPE with SHAPE standards. Similarly, Sarah (Wisconsin) spoke to her program's design in terms of following SHAPE standards. "*I'm very passionate about following the SHAPE standards, so that's the driving force behind how I'm developing the units.*" Others said they follow SHAPE standards but with modifications to accommodate their students' needs. Laura (Virginia) said, "*we modify the SHAPE standard to fit their program's needs.*" Similarly, Helen (Virginia) said, "*I would definitely say it is a modified version of what we do in regular PE.*" Rich (California) also explained the importance of modifying the SHAPE standards to fit his program year to year.

> *A lot of the activities that they might recommend doing, I find are great with a Gen. Ed. education group, but not so much with the group of kids that I have. So, I do my best to differentiate and modify based on the needs of the kids that I have, and from one year to the next it might be completely different.*

On the other hand, there are some teachers who do not align their program to SHAPE standards. For example, Beth (Virgina) states, "*for Unified, we just kind of do our own thing. I don't follow a set standard.*" Lynn (Missouri) explained how the changing district PE standards have resulted in a misalignment of her program with the SHAPE standards. "*Our Unified is not aligned, and our district is behind on aligning to the current (SHAPE standards) because our PE standards just changed. So, I would say, we are not aligned just due to the standards changing recently.*" These responses demonstrate that while many teachers may incorporate SHAPE

standards fully, the level of adherence varies and is often modified to meet classroom and student needs.

Other participants mentioned they do not necessarily follow the general PE curriculum in their UPE programs but rather the local Special Olympics calendar. This was the case in UPE programs paired with Special Olympics Unified Sports. Farah (Missouri) said, "*We're doing soccer, bowling, and track and field. We do spend some time in September working on skills and gameplay for soccer so they're ready for their Special Olympics event in October.*" Similarly, Anita (Hawaii) stated, "*Yeah, we definitely try and follow that, when we have our bowling competition for the sports, we'll try and align it with our bocce, because it's similar.*" She furthered her point by saying, "*we try and align it with our program so we can fit it within our UPE program versus doing something separate.*" Similarly, Laura (Virginia) explained that her program mirrors the school sports seasons and aligns with her local Special Olympics programs, saying, "*I'd say we're following. It's like a combination, because I think the school and the Special Olympics are doing the same currently.*" These teachers integrate the Special Olympics calendar into their teaching to provide students with the opportunity to apply and advance skills learned in UPE to Special Olympics competitions.

Beth (Virginia) was an outlier, noting that she does not follow the general PE or Special Olympics calendars. Rather, she comes up with her own unique activities that she feels best fit her students. "*I love Pinterest and Google and so I do a lot of just searching of different game ideas and then adapt them to what will work for our class and our ability.*"

5.2.1. Overall Focus of the Program

Most educators describe their classes as a combination of fitness, skill, sports, and social inclusion, with a strong emphasis on social connections. Several teachers emphasized the importance of fostering relationships with peers, using physical activities as a facilitator rather than the primary goal. For example, Anita (Hawaii) explained that her program leans heavily on building social skills first, stating, "*It's a little bit of a mix, but more for me definitely, more the social aspect and getting kids to work together and play together. . . the physical part is to me secondary.*" Similarly, Rich (California) preferred fostering long-term friendships over athletic development, describing his class as "*more of an inclusive social gathering where we get exercise every day. . . more than an athletic PE environment.*" This allows for both peers and students with disabilities to develop authentic, meaningful connections in a low-pressure setting while being active.

Although participants reported that the social portion of UPE was the main reason they felt their UPE program was successful, participants also reported that the physical component is also essential to the UPE experience. Teachers incorporate warm-ups, drills, and games to encourage movement and collaboration among peers. Laura (Virginia) noted that although her class is largely social, physical activity is constant: "*You are in a group. . . it's very social, like they. . . get to see and hang out with their friends. . . but it's definitely social and physical. They're moving the whole time.*" Likewise, Farah (Missouri) described a balanced approach by saying, "*We try and do a skill activity at the beginning of every class. . . then we play a sport. . . and we do the fitness every day.*" Incorporating both aspects allows for UPE to remain inclusive by engaging students in meaningful PE, adapting traditional social and physical goals to meet the needs of all participants.

5.2.2. Individualizing and Following the IEP

When asked whether they individualize instruction based on each child's IEP or follow a uniform curriculum, educators gave a wide range of responses. Some teachers, like Ashley (Missouri), described a highly collaborative environment: "*Our paras are assigned different students, and so when the adapted PE teacher is no longer there, she instructs the paras so*

that they know what to do and how to help the student be successful." She went on to explain that students have structured, alternating PE schedules where support is built in. In contrast, Anita (Hawaii) shared that individual goals are not directly targeted: "*We don't address their individual goals. We'll do it within the Bocce curriculum, I guess, or kickball, or whatever it is.*"

Several participants said that while some differentiation exists, most students follow the same core curriculum, with modifications implemented as needed. Farah (Missouri) shared that during planning, they review IEPs, but many of the goals are now social or behavioral: "*Not all of the kids have goals . . . some of them are social goals and following rules and things like that, not necessarily striking a ball.*" Kristen (Virginia) echoed this by explaining that her instruction is usually based around a shared activity but individualized within it: "*We're all going to be doing Bocce today. But I'll individualize within that.*" Similarly, Sarah (Wisconsin) described trying to blend IEP goals into UPE sessions but admitted that some goals required separate one-on-one time: "*We're working on moving our body . . . but to really give that extra one-to-one instruction, I still needed those individual times.*" Overall, most participants said their students with disabilities do not usually have individual IEP goals for adapted PE. As noted, Laura (Virginia) said, "*No students have an IEP specific for adapted PE. We don't have a licensed adapted PE teacher, so we can't provide IEP services in APE in that format.*" Missy (California) said that some of her students get APE consulting, but none have unique IEP goals. In the few cases when a participant mentioned IEP goals, they said they are written more generally. As noted by Lynn (Missouri), "*At our age level (high school) we typically don't have the 'can successfully catch a ball 3 out of 5 times.' A lot of my students' goals are 'will be participate in non-preferred activity 15 out of 40 min.'*"

5.3. UPE Is a Choice

5.3.1. Students Without Disabilities

Most participants reported that UPE was an elective class at their schools created through the school counselor for peers to participate in and receive credit. It is important to note that only one of our participants (Mary (Virginia)) said that UPE could be used to fulfill the PE state PE requirement; something she heard was recently allowed by the State Department of Education in Virginia. "*It can count as their 9th and 10th grade requirements. The only problem is, we don't have the health part that goes with it (a semester of health is required in 9th and 10th grade in Virginia). Because we don't offer the health part with UPE, we are not able to count it as a 9th grade or a 10th grade credit.*"

All other participants explained that UPE in their schools was something students could take after completing their PE requirements. For example, Farah (Missouri) said, "*If you want to take more PE classes, you can take advanced strength training, team sports, lifetime sports, or UPE. So, the kids that are in our class have already fulfilled their PE credit.*" Similarly, Lynn (Missouri), Laura (Virginia), and Anita (Hawaii) said UPE was an elective, with Lynn noting that her UPE program was often used "*as a leadership class that if they need a letter of recommendation at the end of this class, I would be able to write one for them.*" Laura noted that many of her peers so enjoyed UPE that "*some have taken it three or four times because they've managed to squeeze it into their schedule.*" Anita said, "*All students get four electives, so they could do cooking, UPE, music.*" Farah (Missouri) and Kristen (Virginia) noted that students needed to fill out an application and formally apply to be part of UPE. Farah said, "*Yeah, it's an application class. So, the kids have to fill in an application to be involved in the class and get teacher recommendations to get into the class, because we have so many kids that want it. There is now a waitlist for kids wanting to join the class.*" Kristen explained, at her school, "*So you would go through your counselor. However, it has become a very popular class to take, and we did us basically like a like a small screening to get through with the class last year. They had to fill like a Google form, basically just stating like, why they want to take the class.*"

A few participants mentioned a more proactive approach for recruiting students into the program. For example, Ashley (Missouri) explained: "*In the spring of the 6th grade year, because the kids that are our peer leaders are 7th graders, I'll go into the 6th grade classrooms. I have a Google slideshow that just lays it out. I introduce myself, and I tell them about Unified.*" Similarly, Beth (Virginia) talked about actively recruiting peers:

We do a slideshow in January of every topic that all students see about all class offerings and show them their options leading up to class registration. At class registration time while they're meeting with their school counselors. Counselors know to offer them personal fitness as an elective. There's a flyer that sits on the table with the school counselor as they're talking about elective options. They can read all about UPE, and then, if they choose UPE, then their name goes onto a list. Between their school counselor and I, we kind of work whether they would be a good fit and approve students.

5.3.2. Students with Disabilities

Most participants reported that UPE was a choice for students in self-contained special education classes in their schools, and most of the students in these special education classes did choose UPE. However, it was also apparent from the interviews that most special education teachers encouraged their students to choose UPE as a more appropriate alternative to participation in general PE, as it did not seem to accommodate their students' needs. This was most clearly articulated by Sarah (Wisconsin):

> *Yeah, so we have a lot of students with IEPs in the special ed. department at both the middle and high school level. To get into UPE, you have to have an adapted PE goal and services with me sometime in the past, which you know generally are most of the kids with an intellectual disability. Not all, but most. That's kind of like the first qualifying factor. Because I have a good understanding of those students' needs, and how they would thrive best, and where they wouldn't thrive best, which would be general PE—Too fast, not safe, and probably pushed off to the side not really included. We have plenty of students who have IEPs who socially and physically can and do participate in regular PE. And it works just fine.*

Similarly, Rich (California) hinted that general PE might not be the best option for his students with disabilities: "*That is a choice they can make. That was one of the reasons why we thought that it would be a good idea next year to make this (UPE) more the elective class as opposed to the general PE class, so that kids could have more choice in what it is they want to do, and how they want to do it.*" Beth (Virginia) said, "*Yep, they all do UPE, but they do have a choice. But nobody's ever really said no, so they all automatically do UPE.*" Similarly, Laura (Virginia) explained: "*We talked to the students (with disabilities) who have a voice in their class selection process. We ask them like; do you want to take this class. If they don't, we find a different elective during that time? But then everybody else pretty much chooses it (UPE).*" Missy (California) also mentioned choice, but she noted that most of her students in her special education class chose UPE. "*So here, it's everybody participates unless they choose not to. Largely, I would say, 95% of our students participate.*"

5.4. Our Students Improved in Many Ways

5.4.1. Physical and Health Benefits

Many participants reported that students with disabilities improved their fitness, motor skills, and sport-specific abilities through UPE. Ashley (Missouri) emphasized how increased access to resources and participation itself has been a game-changer. She explained, "*They're just actually able to participate in PE and work through different things . . . they're always out at the track. . . they don't have to miss that time.*" This shift from isolation to active involvement in a spacious and providing environment (with access to a gym and weight room) gives students consistent opportunities to build their physical abilities. Helen

(Virginia) supported this by providing a long-term example of a student. "*I have one… that last year, after his 5th year, can finally make a basket and now this year he never misses.*" She also noted that social motivation plays a critical role, saying that even a "*reluctant mover*" is encouraged to run and engage more actively when paired with the right peer.

Laura (Virginia) pointed out that some students show unexpected abilities when placed in a more inclusive and motivating environment. She said, "*I have one kid that activity is not his favorite thing. But give him a basketball on a court with a band playing, and he will skip up and down the court.*" These moments show how UPE meets students where they are, tapping into different learning styles and intrinsic motivations. Beth (Virginia) shared an example of a student's social and motor growth, "*we put him on the bike… we literally would just push him around… and now he pedals, he steers, he totally moves himself around.*" This demonstrates not only motor skill development but also increasing independence, which is something that is hard to measure. Overall, while some teachers explain that measurable fitness or skill gains can be hard to track without formal assessments, many see clear evidence of progress in physical ability, willingness to participate, and confidence, which are all critical foundations for long-term health and development.

Several participants highlighted how UPE creates opportunities for students to become more active and mindful about their health, particularly when the program includes structured activities and parent engagement. For example, Farah (Missouri) described a nutrition-focused pilot where "*weekly emails to the parents*" resulted in behavior change at home. She received an email from parents saying, "*[student] wanted to take a salad to school today for lunch… and they're carrying water bottles with them now that they didn't always carry.*" Similarly, Rich (California) noted that students in his class became more aware of their food choices, sharing that they now talk about "*bananas and cheese*" as symbols of healthy eating, and that students frequently discuss their breakfasts with him. Sarah (Wisconsin) also described using the Special Olympics "*High 5*" curriculum, with visual aids to teach concepts like hydration, nutrition, and endurance, which helped students process and retain health-related information. These examples show that when UPE is intentionally designed to teach wellness, especially through activities that extend beyond the gym, it can ultimately foster long-term healthy habits.

However, some educators acknowledged limits to UPE's impact on lifestyle choices, especially outside of school. Laura (Virginia) reflected that while "a few kids" were motivated to drink more water or walk more steps due to class incentives, many students' habits were constrained by home environments. "*What they eat and drink is really influenced by what the moms buy them.*" Lynn (Missouri) expressed frustration that participation drops when activities occur outside school hours: "*It falls flat… we struggle with anything that's not done during the school day.*" Anita (Hawaii) noted that UPE encouraged reluctant students to participate, but it did not clearly connect the program to long-term lifestyle changes. These mixed results suggest that while UPE has strong potential to promote physical activity and wellness, its success often depends on consistent reinforcement and family engagement, which is true for any PE program.

5.4.2. Social Benefits

The relationships built through UPE often extend beyond the classroom, fostering meaningful social connections throughout the school and even outside of it. Ashley (Missouri) observes that students now "*go out of their way to say hi*" during passing periods and lunch. Anita (Hawaii) adds that "*pair ups or little group friendships form,*" showing how UPE encourages new bonds. These friendships also continue beyond school hours. Laura (Virginia) shares that students "*text over the weekend and have group chats,*" and attend social events together. It brings tears to parents' eyes watching these friendships blossom because

their children finally experience genuine friendships. UPE also helps normalize inclusion, with Farah (Missouri) describing how students with disabilities are involved in activities like theater and lunch with varsity athletes. Beth (Virginia) notes that most students "*don't think it's anything different*" to include students with disabilities, showing a shift in school culture toward acceptance. Overall, our participants found that their UPE program seemed to promote lasting friendships and a more inclusive school environment that benefits all students, which is a major goal in the broader Unified Champion School model.

Participating in UPE seemed to transform the school experience for students with disabilities, fostering greater acceptance and inclusion among their peers. Ashley (Missouri) notes that before UPE, students with disabilities were often "*segregated at their own table, their own little corner,*" leading to unproductive and isolating class time. In contrast, UPE creates shared spaces where students are recognized and safe, as Helen (Virginia) describes, highlighting the importance of social visibility and community. Mary (Virginia) emphasizes a positive cultural shift, saying bullying has decreased significantly and "*everyone is accepted*" in high school since the program began. Sarah (Wisconsin) adds that involvement in UPE outside of class gives students ownership and pride, as they "*got some swagger now, walking down that hallway,*" which ultimately shows increased self-esteem and peer respect. Collectively, these experiences indicate that UPE improves inclusion and overall sense of belonging for students with disabilities.

Finally, the UPE program appeared to positively influence how students outside the program view their students with disabilities, fostering greater acceptance and advocacy. Ashley (Missouri) explains that peers now see students with disabilities as "*fun to be around*" and recognize their abilities, which encourages more meaningful interaction. Anita (Hawaii) adds that this acceptance "*bleeds outside of the classroom,*" with many students continuing participation in UPE activities through middle and high school. Kristen (Virginia) highlights how UPE empowers peers to speak up against inappropriate behavior, with students actively "*turning around the cafeteria*" to defend their classmates. Sarah (Wisconsin) notes that even students not in the program "*take a detour*" to support UPE and Unified Sports, contributing to a more "*positive, inclusive, compassionate environment.*" These reflections show that UPE fosters empathy, understanding, and a culture of advocacy beyond its immediate participants.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how UPE was developed and implemented in select U.S. schools. Interviews with twelve teachers who were directly involved in their UPE programs revealed four themes, with the following four discussion points emanating from the four themes: (1) UPE was created in large part to solve the problem of students with disabilities not being served appropriately in general PE; (2) more reciprocal peer interactions; (3) some participants reported that they followed their local/state Special Olympics programs, while others said they followed state and/or national PE standards; and (4) in most cases, UPE was an elective that could be selected by peers, and in most cases, students with disabilities had a choice to participate in UPE or general PE.

6.1. Solving the Problem of Challenges with Inclusion in PE

Participants reported that they chose to create UPE in their schools in large part to solve the problem of students with disabilities not being served appropriately in general PE. This was an interesting finding given that most of the participants in this study were PE teachers themselves, and they were voicing the difficulty they faced in trying to accommodate students with disabilities into their large, general PE classes. At least two participants

had advanced training in adapted PE, yet they still felt that trying to include students with disabilities in their general PE programs was very difficult, which resulted in poor experiences for these students. These findings are not surprising given that research over the past fifteen years has found that students with disabilities often described their experiences negatively, noting feelings of incompetence, experiences of isolation, and limited opportunities to interact with peers, and few accommodations were implemented by their PE teachers [5,6]. Persistent problems associated with inclusion in PE have led some researchers to question whether the use of the term inclusion should be used at all when talking about physically placing students with disabilities into a general PE setting without ensuring that they are accommodated and have meaningful opportunities for social interactions with peers [4,22].

Participants in this study believed UPE was a good solution to the challenges of placing one or two students with disabilities into a large, general PE program that had been designed for peers. UPE's smaller numbers with an equal mix of students with disabilities and peers (usually no more than ten students each) seemed to be more manageable for PE teachers. Additionally, UPE lessons were specifically designed to meet the needs of all students, and coupled with allowing peers to provide extra support as needed, ensured that students with disabilities experienced success and prevented feelings of incompetence. Participating together and having teachers intentionally plan for and promote meaningful social interactions prevented feelings of social isolation. In fact, many participants in this study said promoting positive social interactions was the most important goal of their program, and many noted that positive interactions during UPE carried into other aspects of the school day beyond the classroom, such as having lunch together.

6.2. More Reciprocal Peer Interactions

It was noted earlier in this paper that traditional peer tutoring usually results in peers taking on the role of tutor and students with disabilities taking on the role of tutee. While such a relationship does provide needed support and instruction to the students with disabilities, it may not lead to equal-status social interactions, acceptance, and a sense of belonging described in Allport's contact theory [13] or exposed more recently by Haegele and Maher (4). In contrast, participants in our study reported that, while support was provided by peers to students with disabilities, much of the program had all students participating together in cooperative activities, fitness training, sports skills, and team bonding. In fact, many participants noted that socialization was the major focal point of their program. For example, Rich (California) stated that he preferred fostering long-term friendships over athletic development, describing his class as "*more of an inclusive social gathering where we get exercise every day. . . more than an athletic PE environment. This allows for both peers and students with disabilities to develop authentic, meaningful connections in a low-pressure setting while being active.*"

This focus on promoting appropriate social interactions and fostering an environment of acceptance and belonging is a key tenant of the UPE that may not be afforded in a general PE setting. As noted by many participants, general PE at their schools had large classes, and it was difficult in these settings to promote social inclusion of students with disabilities. Additionally, it is likely that most PE teachers would say their PE programs prioritize the development of motor, sport, and fitness over social skills. As a result, general PE may not be the best placement for students with disabilities if one of the major goals is socialization. This was confirmed in reports by students with disabilities who were included in general PE, saying they often felt socially isolated and lost in general PE settings [5,6]. The smaller, more intimate setting provided by UPE, as well as carefully planned activities that focus

on socialization, makes UPE a uniquely positive environment that would be difficult or impossible to translate to large, general PE settings.

6.3. Some Follow SHAPE Standards/Some Follow Special Olympics

One of the concerns highlighted by Lieberman and Houston-Wilson [19] was that UPE programs may not follow state or district PE standards and a school PE calendar but rather follow the Special Olympics Sports calendar. This was true for about half the participants in this study, who said they followed their local/state Special Olympics schedule when creating their curriculum. These participants mentioned how their UPE program was integrated with Unified Sports, with many UPE students (both students with disabilities and peers) also participating in Unified Sports. This flow from school-based UPE to afterschool Unified Sports can be viewed as a positive aspect of UPE rather than viewed as a concern, as participation in Unified Sports allowed more opportunities for social interactions and true friendships to develop. As noted in Ollila and Haegele's [16] recent review of the literature on Unified Sports: "*The uniqueness of Unified Sports allowed for disabled and nondisabled participants to build relationships with one another with having the common ground of sports*" (p. 13).

On the other hand, about half of the participants reported that they followed state and/or national PE standards when creating their UPE program schedule. These participants mentioned that they valued PE standards and wanted their program to be parallel with the general PE curriculum. Additionally, following the school's general PE curriculum allowed students in UPE to easily move back to general PE if they chose. However, none of our participants mentioned that students with disabilities or peers moved back and forth between UPE and general PE. Additionally, as noted earlier, most of our participants said that general PE was not appropriate for their students with disabilities, given the large class sizes and lack of individualization.

Finally, one participant said that she created her own curriculum, noting that most of her students did not participate in afterschool Special Olympics, but she also did not believe that the general PE curriculum was appropriate for her students with disabilities, who had more moderate and severe disabilities. The participants' choice of which curriculum to follow seemed to come from what they felt worked best for their students with disabilities population. One could argue that those teachers who followed Special Olympics were not providing a comprehensive PE program for their students. However, most secondary school PE programs focus on sports and fitness. Following the Special Olympics calendar likely provided similar sports and fitness development that peers were receiving in general PE. And, unlike general PE at the participants' schools, the sports and fitness training provided in UPE was likely more individualized and geared to participants' skill levels. Throughout these interviews, it was evident that no program was standardized in terms of following calendars, but one common goal was to meet their specific students' needs.

6.4. UPE as an Elective and a Choice

Another concern voiced by Lieberman and Houston-Wilson [19] was whether schools would force students with disabilities into UPE when they might prefer being in general PE. This did not seem to be the case in our study. While many of our participants said they encouraged their students with disabilities to participate in UPE, they also offered the choice to go to general PE. Participants also noted that those few students with fewer support needs and who had experienced success in general PE often chose to go to general PE, but they often participated in UPE (by choice) as well. Again, our participants clearly expressed that general PE was not appropriate for their students with disabilities, particularly those

with more moderate and severe disabilities, making the opportunity to choose to participate in general PE a false choice.

Regarding the concern that UPE would count as adapted PE, thus circumventing the IEP process, this did not appear to be the case with any of our participants. Participants who directed UPE programs in school districts that had adapted PE specialists continued to have IEP goals for their students. One reported that the adapted PE specialist came into UPE to work on IEP goals, while another noted that the adapted PE teacher came at a different time from UPE to provide one-on-one adapted PE. Another teacher noted that they changed how IEP goals were written to focus more on generally being more active or social goals rather than mastering a motor skill. But most of our participants taught in school districts that did not have an adapted PE specialist, so none of the students had specific adapted PE goals in their IEPs. This is likely the case in many states where smaller school districts do not have an adapted PE specialist. For example, Virginia has 132 school districts, but only about fifteen, mostly the larger school districts that surround Washington, D.C., have adapted PE specialists. UPE can be a good alternative to adapted PE in these rural school districts by providing a more individualized program with the added bonus of extra support and social interactions provided by peers that is not available in small-group-adapted PE settings.

The last concern shared by Lieberman and Houston-Wilson [19] was schools allowing UPE to count as fulfilling the PE requirement, which they suggest could prevent peers from having a comprehensive PE experience. Again, this did not seem to be the case with any of our participants. All our participants said that UPE was an elective that was offered after peers completed their regular PE requirements. Some mentioned that their school offered advanced PE after students fulfilled their minimum state PE requirements, with a variety of offerings from weight training to yoga classes to team sports. UPE was added as another option for advanced PE. Ollila & Haegele [16] noted that the Virginia Board of Education recently approved the option of allowing Unified PE to count toward required PE credits for ninth and tenth grade students across all Virginia schools. Ollila and Haegele [16] expressed concerns that there is no empirical data showing that UPE provides a PE program equal to what is offered in general PE, thus allowing an untested program to be approved for use in all Virginia school districts. This is a valid concern, although it should be noted that Virginia, like many states, allows students to fulfill their PE requirements virtually by performing physical activities at home and reporting this activity to their school-based PE teacher for approval [23]. Surely an in-school UPE program conducted by a licensed PE teacher is better and much more comprehensive than a student self-reporting walking around the neighborhood, going to their local fitness club to work out, or participating in a club sports team.

7. Conclusions

This paper examined Special Olympics Unified PE, which at its core is designed to promote a welcoming, inclusive PE experience, allowing students with and without disabilities to socialize and participate in physical activity together. The 12 PE and special education teachers interviewed in this study said that their UPE program provided an environment that accommodated the needs and abilities of their students, which led to positive experiences for both their students with and without disabilities. In relation to the concerns voiced by Lieberman and Houston-Wilson [19], results from our participants did not support these concerns. Most of the programs followed their local or state PE curriculum, and those that followed the local Special Olympics calendar still provided a broad program of sport and fitness development. And while most programs encouraged students with moderate and severe disabilities who spent most of their day in a self-

contained, special education class to participate in UPE, there was an option for these students to participate in general PE. However, many of our participants reported that general PE was not appropriate for their students, and as a result, these students were not having a positive experience. In most cases, UPE turned out to be a better option than general PE in terms of providing accommodations and gearing activities to all students rather than just the skilled students. Additionally, it encourages more social interactions between students with and without disabilities. Finally, there was a concern that UPE would count as adapted PE and circumvent the IEP process for students with disabilities, and for peers, there was a concern that UPE would count towards the state PE requirement. Neither scenario took place in our participants' schools, although it was noted that in Virginia, the State Department of Education recently approved UPE to count towards fulfilling the state-mandated PE requirement.

8. Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

The strength of this study was the in-depth interviews with participants, allowing for a rich understanding of how UPE was created and run in several different schools in the U.S. However, there were some limitations to this study. This was a small study with 12 participants who created and directed UPE in their schools. Results should be viewed with caution, as we acknowledge that our participants, while honestly describing their programs, may be biased due to their investment in their programs. Additionally, future studies should expand this research by interviewing or surveying larger samples of teachers who have created and implemented UPE and include participants from other countries. Future research should also examine experiences of students with and without disabilities who participated in UPE with a focus on social interactions, feelings of acceptance, and when possible, how UPE experiences compare to general PE experiences.

Author Contributions: Z.F. and M.E.B. equally contributed to all aspects of this paper, including formulating the research study, interviewing participants and transcribing interviews, and writing all parts of the paper. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: There was no funding for this paper.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The University of Virginia Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study on 3 December 2024 (approval number 7113).

Informed Consent Statement: All participants verbally consented to participate in the study after being sent the informed consent form a few days ahead of the interview. Verbal consent was obtained rather than written because we were able to immediately record and receive verbal consent via the Zoom transcripts. On the day of the interview, participants were asked if they had read the informed consent form that was sent to them, if they had questions, and then verbally consented to participate in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data is available upon request from authors.

Conflicts of Interest: There is no conflict of interest. Neither of the authors had any affiliation with Special Olympics Unified Programs, nor did they have any affiliation with any of the participants or their schools.

Disability Language/Terminology Positionality Statement: Language used in this paper upholds the intrinsic worth and dignity of all individuals as human beings. We chose to use person-first language throughout this paper with the specific term "students with disabilities." Person-first language follows the terminology used in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Additionally, person-first language is typically used in schools in the United States, and our participants (U.S. physical education and special education teachers) also preferred person-first language when talking about their students. Finally, we made every effort to refrain from utilizing negative, patronizing, or condescending terms.

References

1. Block, M.E.; Obrusnikova, I.; Lloyd, M. History of adapted physical activity and inclusion in North America. In *Inclusive Physical Education Around the World: Origins, Cultures, and Practices*; Heck, S., Block, M.E., Eds.; Taylor and Francis: London, UK, 2020; pp. 9–27.
2. O'Neil, K.; Olson, L. Promoting Social Acceptance and Inclusion in Physical Education. *Teach. Except. Child.* **2021**, *54*, 6–15. [CrossRef]
3. Molina Roldán, S.; Marauri, J.; Aubert, A.; Flecha, R. How inclusive interactive learning environments benefit students without special needs. *Front. Psychol.* **2021**, *12*, 661427. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
4. Haegele, J.A.; Maher, A.J. Toward a conceptual understanding of inclusion as inter-subjective experiences. *Educ. Res.* **2023**, *52*, 385–393. [CrossRef]
5. Fröberg, A. Perspectives on the integration of students with disabilities in physical education: An umbrella review of reviews published between 2010 and 2020. *Eur. J. Adapt. Phys. Act.* **2021**, *14*, 9. [CrossRef]
6. Holland, K.; Haegele, J.A. Perspectives of students with disabilities toward physical education: A review update 2014–2019. *Kinesiol. Rev.* **2021**, *10*, 78–87. [CrossRef]
7. Rekaa, H.; Hanisch, H.; Ytterhus, B. Inclusion in physical education: Teacher attitudes and student experiences. A systematic review. *Int. J. Disabil. Dev. Educ.* **2018**, *66*, 36–55. [CrossRef]
8. Houston-Wilson, C.; Dunn, J.M.; Van der Mars, H.; McCubbin, J. The effect of peer tutors on motor performance in integrated physical education classes. *Adapt. Phys. Act. Q.* **1997**, *14*, 298–313. [CrossRef]
9. Lieberman, L.J.; Newcomer, J.; McCubbin, J.; Dalrymple, N. The effects of cross-aged peer tutors on the academic learning time of students with disabilities in inclusive elementary physical education classes. *Braz. Int. J. Adapt. Phys. Educ. Res.* **1997**, *25*, 15–32.
10. Wiskochil, B.; Liberman, L.J.; Huston-Wilson, C.; Petersen, S. The Effects of trained peer tutors on the physical education of children who are visually impaired. *J. Vis. Impair. Blind.* **2007**, *101*, 339–350. [CrossRef]
11. Ward, P.; Ayvazo, S. Classwide peer tutoring in physical education: Assessing its effects with kindergartners with autism. *Adapt. Phys. Act. Q.* **2006**, *23*, 233–244.
12. Klavina, A.; Block, M.E. The effect of peer tutoring on interaction behaviors in inclusive physical education. *Adapt. Phys. Act. Q.* **2008**, *25*, 132–158. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
13. Allport, G.W. *The Nature of Prejudice*; Addison-Wesley: Reading, MA, USA, 1954.
14. Special Olympics. Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools. 2025. Available online: https://www.specialolympics.org/what-we-do/youth-and-schools/unified-champion-schools (accessed on 25 May 2025).
15. Messerole, M.J.; Tarr, S.J.; Quinn, B. *Unified Physical Education Resources*, 2nd ed.; Special Olympics: Washington, DC, USA, 2019.
16. Ollila, B.R.; Haegele, J.A. Special Olympics' Unified Sports and Physical Education programming: A systematic review. *Quest*, 2025; *in press*. [CrossRef]
17. Siperstein, G.N.; Summerill, L.A.; Jacobs, H.E.; Stokes, J.E. Promoting Social Inclusion in High Schools Using a Schoolwide Approach. *Inclusion* **2017**, *5*, 173–188. [CrossRef]
18. Yin, M.; Jodl, J. *Social Inclusion of Students with Intellectual Disabilities: Global Evidence from Special Olympics Unified Schools*; Special Olympics Global Center for Inclusion in Education: Washington, DC, USA, 2021; Available online: https://resources.specialolympics.org/community-building/youth-and-school/unified-champion-schools/social-inclusion-of-students-with-intellectual-disabilities-global-evidence-from-special-olympics-unified-schools (accessed on 25 May 2025).
19. Lieberman, L.J.; Houston-Wilson, C. Changing the name of Unified Physical Education. *J. Phys. Educ. Recreat. Danc.* **2018**, *89*, 7–8. [CrossRef]
20. Richards, K.A.; Hemphill, M.A.; Wright, P.M. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation in Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*; SHAPE America: Washington, DC, USA, 2023.
21. Bingham, A.J. From data management to actionable findings: A five-phase process of qualitative data analysis. *Int. J. Qual. Methods* **2023**, *22*, 16094069231183620. [CrossRef]

22. Haegele, J.A. Inclusion illusion: Questioning the inclusiveness of integrated physical education: 2019 National Association for Kinesiology in Higher Education Hally Beth Poindexter young scholar address. *Quest* **2019**, *71*, 387–397. [CrossRef]
23. Virtual Virginia. 08999 Health & PE 10 (Not Driver Education). 2025. Available online: https://virtualvirginia.org/course/hpe-10/ (accessed on 25 May 2025).

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.