

Barriers to Success in Postsecondary Studies for Students With Disabilities:

An Analysis of Current Policies and Practices

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## **Abstract**

Students with disabilities who wish to pursue education at the postsecondary level are impacted by various factors, including: differences between practices and policies at the secondary and postsecondary level, transition supports, and available accommodations. A comprehensive literature review was conducted in order to determine current barriers and effective supports in place for students with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary education. It was found that, in Ontario, students with a disability are nearly 24% less likely to attend university when compared to students without a disability, and those who do attend are more likely to attend college (Brown & Parekh, 2010; Finnie et al., 2011). Students with learning disabilities and ADHD report being unprepared and overwhelmed by the increase in responsibility and the workload, miss academic support from their parents, and experience more problems academically (Arscott, 2013; Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Currently, there are transition programs which have been identified as supportive by students with disabilities; however, these programs are not consistently delivered across the province. This study compared Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) documents and policies around supporting students with disabilities, the funding available, and the supports available between elementary/secondary and postsecondary education. The study focused on the transition supports for students with disabilities as well as the effectiveness of the programs available. Students with disabilities need support to develop academic coping strategies in order to meet the academic demands of postsecondary education, and, as stated by the OME (2013a), it is crucial for schools in Ontario to provide opportunities and support for all students to make a successful transition to postsecondary education.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The United Nations' (2007) *Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities* indicates that all people regardless of their physical or cognitive ability have the right to access education (article 24) and employment (article 27) to their fullest potential. Canada, along with other countries, have agreed to uphold these rights along with the other 48 articles through the implementation of policies and practices (United Nations, 2007). According to Statistics Canada (2018), people with disabilities between the ages of 25 to 64 made up the highest group of unemployed individuals in this country at an alarming 41% in 2017. Education has long been a key to economic independence for all members of society, however, based on the unemployment statistics, it is not surprising that research indicates that only 10% of students with disabilities are attending postsecondary education (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). This research examines the policies, programs, and supports available for students with disabilities at the elementary/secondary level as well as the postsecondary level in Ontario.

One of Ontario's greatest strengths as a province is its diversity (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2017b). The OME (2014) states that "embracing this diversity and moving beyond tolerance and celebration to inclusivity and respect will help us reach our goal of making Ontario's education system the most equitable in the world" (p. 8). Ontario schools need to provide a learning environment where every student can succeed (OME, 2014). It is especially important to provide the most optimal learning opportunities and support for students who are at the greatest risk of not succeeding; for example, racialized students, students with low socio-economic status, and students with disabilities (OME, 2014). As part of school climate initiatives, we know that when

students feel welcome and accepted, they are more likely to succeed academically (OME, 2014). The overall goal of public education is to prepare students to become contributing members of society. Postsecondary education is on its way to becoming a necessity in attaining a well-paying career and is often the desired pathway after completing secondary school (OME, 2013a).

This chapter will outline the background of the problem, address the problem statement, identify the purpose of this study, and discuss the significance of the study. The scope and limitations of this study will be addressed, and assumptions will be explored. Finally, an outline of the remainder of this document will be presented.

### **Background of the Problem**

Education policy for special education in the province of Ontario has been in existence since 1980 with the passing of Bill 82 (Bennett et al., 2019). With the *World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality* (UNESCO, 1994), a global call to action was taken up by many nations including Canada to strive for equal and inclusive education for children with disabilities. For the past few decades, recommendations, programs, and services along with government policy have guided our province to provide better educational outcomes for students with disabilities; however, there is still work to be done (Bennett et al., 2019). Currently in Ontario, the priorities among the education system are: (a) achieving excellence, (b) ensuring equity, (c) promoting well-being, and (d) enhancing public confidence (OME, 2017b). Every student in our publicly funded education system must feel engaged, included, and must be given the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or personal circumstance (OME, 2017b). In the last decade, the OME has worked on developing policies intended

to provide better educational outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Policy documents reveal a provincial commitment to these priorities, including but not limited to: *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (OME, 2009), *Learning for All* (OME, 2013c), *Creating Pathways to Success* (OME, 2013a), and *Achieving Excellence* (OME, 2014). All four priorities are fundamental to special education programs; however, ensuring equity is of particular importance (OME, 2017b).

Students involved in special education programs are considered to have a disability that results in requiring special education support in order to succeed. A disability emerges when individuals' way of moving, thinking, or interacting are restricted or limited as a result of particular barriers in their surroundings and/or barriers woven into societal structures (Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014). At the elementary and secondary level, students with disabilities are often provided with learning accommodations and adaptations to promote academic success (Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014). An adaptation involves changes in instructional methods or instruction that promote student learning (Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014). In fact, Ontario students with identified disabilities are required to have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) which outlines the accommodations that are being made to their academic programs. According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2013), as more students receive academic accommodations at the elementary and secondary level, more students with disabilities attend postsecondary institutions.

### **Problem Statement**

Pal (2014) defines public policy as “a course of action or inaction chosen by public authorities to address a given problem or interrelated set of problems” (p. 2).

Through the Education Act, a key policy document, Ontario mandates access to education for all K–12-aged students as a way to address the problem in inequity. Additionally, the OME has identified inclusion as a priority in several K–12 policy documents developed within the last 10 years and has developed policy documents to provide students with disabilities with programs that help ensure their successful completion of elementary and secondary education. Although K–12 education can be considered successful in this respect, the literature suggests success in transitioning to and completing postsecondary education has been less successful for students with disabilities.

In postsecondary education, students with disabilities continue to be an underrepresented group (McCloy & De Clou, 2013). Students with disabilities have higher dropout rates in secondary education and lower transition rates to postsecondary education (Brown & Parekh, 2010). The opportunities for students with disabilities at the postsecondary level seem to be constrained, as relatively few transition successfully to postsecondary education (Sweet et al., 2012). Students with disabilities comprise only 10% of the population within postsecondary education (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Furthermore, when compared to students without disabilities, those with disabilities are less likely to persevere until graduation (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). These numbers indicate an alarming problem since equitable access to postsecondary education is considered a fundamental human right as well as a means to future employment.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to examine current literature, key K–12, OME documents and programs, and various other legislation to better understand available

programs and supports for students with disabilities at the elementary/secondary and postsecondary level. The following questions guided the inquiry: Why do students with disabilities continue to be an underrepresented group within the postsecondary setting? Do the policies regarding support for students with disabilities promote success among such students? Is there a disconnection between secondary- and postsecondary-level policies and programs? This paper explores these questions by examining existing policies, programs, and supports at the elementary/secondary level and the postsecondary level.

### **Significance of the Study**

For many people, success is defined as successful completion of postsecondary education. However, the literature suggests the education system still falls short for some individuals (Shaw et al., 2009). When surveyed while in secondary school, 76.7% of students with disabilities reported that they had aspirations to continue on to postsecondary education; however, when surveyed 2 years after completing their secondary education, only 19% were actually attending a postsecondary institution (Newman, 2005; Shaw et al., 2009). This brings to question why there is such a huge gap between postsecondary aspirations and postsecondary participation among students with disabilities. If 76.7% of students with disabilities report wanting to continue their education to the postsecondary level, then why is the actual participation rate 2 years after completing secondary school only 19%?

These are concerning statistics, as an individual's level of education often determines career options and level of earnings. Individuals with a disability often have lower levels of employment, and earn less than individuals without a disability (McCloy & De Clou, 2013). Comparing individuals aged 25 to 34 with disabilities and without,

60% of those with a disability were employed, and 81% of those without a disability were employed, and average income differed by more than \$8,000 per year, with those without a disability making on average about \$8,000 more than those with a disability (Statistics Canada, 2008, as cited in McCloy & De Clou, 2013).

It is clear that an achievement gap exists between students with disabilities and those without, as there is a great difference in achievement between these groups of students (OME, 2013c). Such gaps in achievement often impact postsecondary access, career opportunities, level of earnings, and quality of life. Research has found that achievement gaps can be diminished, and academic achievement can be increased if there has been “a sustained and deliberate focus on individual students’ strengths and needs, assessment for learning, and precision in instruction through evidence-informed interventions (Fullen, 2007)” (OME, 2013c, p. 11). To achieve this, it is essential that the responsibility be shared by multiple stakeholders within the education system, including educators, community partners, parents, and students (Campbell et al., 2007, as cited in OME, 2013c).

All stakeholders play a significant role in promoting the success of students within the education system. Educators at every level of education—elementary, secondary, and postsecondary—will encounter an increasingly great number of students, each with different learning styles and learning needs (Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014). Educators at the elementary and secondary level are required to complete a 2-year teacher education program in which they learn about the different learning styles, and different teaching strategies to accommodate a classroom of multiple styles of learners. Professors at the postsecondary level, however, are not required to complete such a teacher

education program. According to the OME (2014), “The quality of student learning is closely related to the quality of the teaching force and its leaders” (p. 4). Student learning and student success is a reflection of the education system, educational institutions, policies and procedures, as well as the level of teaching.

This paper examines the current Canadian literature around existing supports for students with exceptionalities in publicly funded schools, programs, and supports currently available for students transitioning from secondary education to postsecondary education. Various federal and provincial policies and practices within the education system will also be examined in order to find answers to the challenges identified in the literature. Given the reality that students with disabilities continue to be an underrepresented group within postsecondary institutions, and are at a greater risk of dropping out before graduation when compared to students without disabilities, then examining several government policies may shed light on why this is the case. Five documents by the OME will be examined when discussing the elementary and secondary level. The *Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (OME, 2017b) defines an exceptional student, the responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in the education system, as well as the expectations and requirements among the education system from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The *Learning for All* (OME, 2013c) is a resource created for teachers to assist them in improving student learning and student success. *Funding for Special Education* (OME, 2012) outlines the funding breakdown for students with disabilities at the elementary and secondary level. *The Identification, Placement, and Review Committee* (OME, 2017c) and *An Introduction to Special Education in Ontario* (OME, 2017a) describe the support available at the elementary and secondary

level. When discussing the postsecondary level, the Human Rights Code (1990), the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Government of Canada, 1982), the Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act (2005), as well as five sections of the *Transition Resource Guide* (Regional Assessment and Resource Centre [RARC]) will be examined. The Human Rights Code, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act all outline the rights that students with disabilities have, and outline the duties that postsecondary institutions have in meeting the rights of their students. The five sections of the *Transition Resource Guide* include: (a) Rights and Responsibilities (RARC, 2019d), which outlines the responsibilities that postsecondary institutions have; (b) Advocacy and Disclosure (RARC, 2019b), which outlines the responsibilities that students have; (c) Financial Information (RARC, 2019c), which outlines the funding available at the postsecondary level; (d) Accessibility Services (RARC, 2019a); and (e) Support Services Available at Post-Secondary (RARC, 2019e), which both outline the support available when transitioning to and once at the postsecondary level.

### **Scope and Limitations**

This research was delimited to Ontario government policies and programs that were developed to assist students with disabilities successfully complete both K–12 schooling, and successfully transition into and complete their of postsecondary education. The policy documents reviewed were confined to those released within the 11 years prior to the start of this research. A review of support programs for students transitioning into postsecondary institutions was confined to most recent available documents that span from 2003 to 2019.

All policy documents used are the most up-to-date policies regarding the education of students with disabilities in Ontario. When examining programs and supports available to students with disabilities at the postsecondary level, I wanted to limit data to the last 10 years; however, as noted above, in some cases that was not possible. Academic literature used to examine the programs and supports available at the postsecondary level are confined to the last 16 years. The data collection and analysis took place from February to August 2019.

This research was limited by its scope. Government policy is typically fairly general, allowing institutions to modify the policy to meet their specific goals (Wu et al., 2018). A review of government policy documents and programs may not adequately reflect institutional policies and supports, which may be more or less than stated in government policy documents. A review of institutional policies was beyond the scope of this research; the actual enactment of such policy was not examined. However, individuals bring their own lens as bias when reading and enacting policy. Policies are intended to be carried out in specific ways, ways outlined in such policy; however, human difference may lead to a difference in the ways in which a policy is carried out. Additionally, it should be recognized that a review of policy documents and programs cannot capture the lived experiences of students with a disability.

### **Assumptions**

The policy documents are developed to provide a framework for organizations, in this case school boards and schools, to adopt and implement into practice. The educational policy discussed in this research is developed to assume that if the policy is enacted and followed as outlined within the policy document that students with

disabilities will succeed at the elementary/secondary level, transition successfully to postsecondary education, and be successful throughout their postsecondary education. This research assumes that school boards and educators who are implementing such policy documents are following the guidelines established by the policy and enacting these within their classrooms and with their students on a regular basis. In fact, this assumption is difficult to regulate from school board to school board and school to school, since each takes the established guidelines of the policy and develops and implements the practices to support the policy guidelines.

### **Outline of the Remainder of the Document**

Chapter 2 will provide a review of the current literature. Chapter 3 will highlight the methodology used to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 provides an examination of the policy documents. Chapter 5 provides a discussion, and lastly Chapter 6 offers conclusions and implications.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Students in Ontario spend a minimum of 8 years in elementary school, followed by 4 years of high school, and many of these students continue on to postsecondary education. Classrooms across all formal education settings are comprised of students with a variety of different learning styles and require differing levels of support in order to succeed. Classrooms will likely include students with various disabilities including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), as well as Learning Disabilities. In order for students with disabilities to succeed to their fullest potential, they often require extra assistance in the classroom and in their learning, including access to an educational assistant, use of technology, extra time for assignments and tests, chunking content, multimodal presentation, use of visual schedules, and sensory breaks (Bennett et al., 2019). Such diagnoses affect the ways in which these students process information and learn. The efficiency and adequacy of the support that these students receive affects their learning and their overall academic success, thereby affecting their postsecondary options and possible career paths (McCloy & De Clou, 2013).

This chapter will provide a review of the current literature in relation to supports available for students with disabilities at comparison of the documents and policies, funding, and support available at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary level. A discussion of the barriers experienced at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels will follow. Finally, this chapter will provide a discussion on the participation rates in postsecondary education.

### **Barriers**

Despite the funding and supports available for students that require special education, students with a disability still face significant barriers at school, including both

academic and social barriers (Reid et al., 2018). These barriers for students with disabilities continue to be present across elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education systems. The following is an examination of the literature discussion regarding barriers at these levels of education.

### **Elementary and Secondary**

Reid et al. (2018) conducted a research study regarding the perceptions that parents/guardians had of their child's (with an intellectual disability) schooling through elementary and secondary school. Fifty-three percent (53%) of parents reported that their child was not receiving adequate academic accommodations and 68.2% of parents reported that their child's school was meeting 50% or less of their child's academic needs (Reid et al., 2018). Forty-five percent (45%) of parents reported that they needed to keep their child home from school because the school wasn't providing proper accommodations or services (Reid et al., 2018). Additionally, 32% of parents reported that their child needed additional support staff, such as an educational assistant, but did not have access to such support (Reid et al., 2018). Similarly, in 2016, People for Education reported that 26% of students in elementary schools are not receiving the recommended support (People for Education, 2016). In 2017, 24% of elementary schools and 15% of secondary schools reported not having the recommended support (People for Education, 2017).

The barriers that students experience in elementary and secondary school will impact their academic success, which will in turn affect their access to postsecondary options. Postsecondary programs often require a certain grade point average (GPA) to be considered for admittance into a program. Students' secondary school GPA has a strong

effect on university access (Finnie et al., 2011a). Having inadequate support at an elementary and secondary level will impact students' grades, which will affect their chances of getting accepted into post-secondary programs (Finnie et al., 2011a). Students with special education needs that do get accepted into postsecondary institutions face a new set of barriers, including financial barriers as well as barriers surrounding appropriate supports.

### **Postsecondary**

One of the main things that determines students' ability to participate in postsecondary education is their financial ability to afford postsecondary education (Finnie et al., 2011a). Students with disabilities often take a reduced course load in order to succeed in postsecondary settings (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). A reduced course load means more years spent in postsecondary education, increasing the overall cost of education, and resulting in less time spent in the workforce (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Limited funding at the postsecondary level may be considered a barrier for students with disabilities in accessing postsecondary education.

Another major barrier faced once students with disabilities reach postsecondary education is the difference in support available at the postsecondary level in comparison to what was available in secondary school. Students are required to self-advocate at the postsecondary level in order to receive support. Students that receive accommodation in secondary schools are not automatically guaranteed the same support in postsecondary education. Students sometimes find it challenging to become more independent and advocate for themselves (RARC, 2019d). Denhart (2008) found that students reported being reluctant to access accommodation because they feared the stigma attached to

being a student with a disability and being misunderstood by professors. Overall, research regarding postsecondary access suggests that students with disabilities face significant barriers (Sweet et al., 2012).

### **Participation Rates in Postsecondary Education**

Brown (2010) found that about 53% of students with a disability graduate secondary school, and about 31% of those confirm acceptance to a postsecondary institution (as cited in Sweet, et al., 2012). Sweet et al. (2012) compared students in Grades 11 and 12 with a disability and students without. The results show that there were twice as many students with a disability who received marks below 60% than students without a disability, and only 7% of students with a disability achieved marks over 80%, compared to 30% of students without (Sweet et al., 2012). It is significant to look at secondary grades because the likelihood of being accepted into a postsecondary program is highly dependent on secondary grades (Sweet et al., 2012). The results of a study conducted by Finnie et al. (2011b), show that students identified as having a cognitive or physical exceptionality had a participation rate in postsecondary education that was about 15% lower than the participation rate of students not identified as having an exceptionality. Brown and Parekh (2010) found that nearly half of the students identified as having a behavioural exceptionality had dropped out of high school, and less than one-third had graduated. The results show that postsecondary education was an unlikely path for students identified as having a behavioural exceptionality (Brown & Parekh, 2010).

Comparing participation rates of colleges in Ontario, students with a disability were 11% more likely to attend college and nearly 24% less likely to attend university when compared to students without a disability (Finnie et al., 2011b). When comparing

participation rates between students with and without disabilities at college and university, 24% of students with a disability pursued college, and only 18% confirmed acceptance to university, compared to 14% of students without a disability who pursued college, and 58% confirmed acceptance to university. Students identified as having a disability who get accepted to university or college are less likely to enroll in a business or health science program (McCloy & De Clou, 2013). Students with a disability who attend college are most likely to choose applied technology or social/community services, and those who attend university are most likely to choose to pursue a degree in social sciences or humanities (McCloy & De Clou, 2013).

Brown and Parekh (2010) found that 51% of students who do not have any disabilities confirmed an offer to university, and 14% confirmed an offer to college. However, only 9% of students identified as having a learning disability confirmed an offer to university and 22% confirmed an offer to college (Brown & Parekh, 2010). Five percent (5%) of students identified as having a behavioural disability confirmed an offer to university, and 9% confirmed an offer to college (Brown & Parekh, 2010). Two percent (2%) of students identified as having a mild intellectual disorder had confirmed an offer to university and 17% confirmed an offer to college (Brown & Parekh, 2010). Students identified as having a learning disability, a behavioural disability, or a mild intellectual disability were more likely to confirm an offer from a college than a university, whereas students without any exceptionality were more likely to accept an offer from a university (Brown & Parekh, 2010). One potential reason for this is that students with disabilities are not receiving adequate support in secondary school to assist them in achieving a high enough grade point average necessary to get accepted to

university. Students identified as having an exceptionality are more likely to have a grade point average below 75% in high school, making direct entry into college or university less likely (McCloy & De Clou, 2013). When comparing the participation rates of students with and without a disability in Ontario with other provinces in Canada, the effect of having a disability on access to university is greater in Ontario than in any other province (Finnie et al., 2011b).

Although the rates of participation in college and university are vastly different, the experiences were similar for students with disabilities (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Regardless if students were attending a college or university, they report that their disabilities increase their academic demands and they need to put increased time and effort into meeting the requirements (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). In order to meet the academic demands, students are required to employ time-management skills, organizational strategies, and adjust to the expectations of student independence in the postsecondary learning environment (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Tsagris and Muirhead (2012) found that students in postsecondary education with disabilities reported that they spent more time and put more effort in than their peers without a disability, but they received poorer results. Research shows that students in postsecondary education with a disability are less likely to complete their program and graduate, and those who do graduate often take longer to complete their program than students without disabilities (McCloy & De Clou, 2013).

### **Teaching Styles, Professors' Responsibilities, and Interactions With Professors**

Despite the ample research and knowledge surrounding how students with disabilities learn and strategies to support their learning, students with disabilities

continue to struggle for success in post-secondary education (Denhart, 2008). For over 20 years, a growing stream of research has asked students with disabilities to illuminate the barriers that they face in postsecondary institutions (Denhart, 2008). Two themes that consistently appear in the literature include being misunderstood, and having to work harder than students without a disability (Denhart, 2008). Students with disabilities report being regarded as “intellectually inferior, incompetent, lacking effort, or attempting to cheat or use unfair advantages when requesting accommodations” (Denhart, 2008, p. 484). Additionally, these students repeatedly report fearing discrimination as a crucial barrier affecting their success in postsecondary education (Denhart, 2008). Professors’ willingness to provide accommodations plays a critical role in student success, as professors ultimately decide whether or not to provide instructional accommodations (Nelson, et al., 1990, as cited in Donato, 2008). Faculty within postsecondary institutions often report feeling as though they are not prepared to provide the necessary supports for such students (Donato, 2008; Lombardi et al., 2011, as cited in Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014).

Professors at the postsecondary level are required to be knowledgeable about the issues students with disabilities face, and are also required to participate in the accommodation process (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018a). However, in most postsecondary institutions, professors are not required to have any sort of specific training or education regarding different disabilities or the issues they face leading up to and while attending postsecondary education. Many institutions, at least in Ontario, require their staff to complete a disability awareness training, but beyond this general training, specific training on strategies and methods to best support learners with various

disabilities is not mandatory. Donato (2008) conducted research in which professors were asked about their knowledge of disabilities. Professors reported that their knowledge of disabilities in the postsecondary setting was “moderate to good,” scoring themselves, on average, about a 3 on a scale from 1 to 5 (Donato, 2008). Professors also reported a lack of understanding regarding what accommodations are available at postsecondary institutions for students with disabilities (Donato, 2008). When asked what information would be helpful to assist in better understanding students with disabilities, professors reported that workshops and training sessions about basic awareness, online resources, and hands-on experiences/simulations would be useful (Donato, 2008). This chapter will focus on how teaching styles, professor responsibilities, and interactions with professors impact students with disabilities and their learning in their postsecondary education.

### **Teaching Styles**

Postsecondary institutions are gradually offering more options in terms of course delivery or teaching style in order to support the diverse group of students and learners who are attending. In addition to traditional lecture style courses, many universities and colleges in Ontario offer online classes, and an increasing number are beginning to offer blended courses, in which a portion of the course is taught in class, and the other portion is taught online. Many universities also offer seminars, labs, co-op, and experiential learning. Experiential learning engages students in hands-on learning experiences that will help in developing their skills. The diversity in teaching style and delivery mode offers more variety for students, in the hopes that students will succeed to the best of their abilities. However, lecturing remains the most dominant mode of teaching in postsecondary institutions.

## **Lecturing in Postsecondary Education**

The word “lecture” is derived from Latin, meaning “to read” (French & Kennedy, 2017). Since the 13th century, lecturing has been the dominant mode of teaching at postsecondary institutions (Freeman et al., 2014; French & Kennedy, 2017). During this time, postsecondary institutions often only had one copy of a book, as they were difficult to make and reproduce (French & Kennedy, 2017). The invention of the printing press hugely impacted the accessibility and availability of books; however, it had little impact on lecturers and their lectures (Moodie, 2014, as cited in French & Kennedy, 2017). The teaching method of presenting information to a class of passive learners is still considered a “good” teaching method in today’s postsecondary institutions (DiPiro, 2009). Lectures that are well organized, clear, and relevant are sometimes regarded as “high quality” (DiPiro, 2009). However, if one were to walk into a postsecondary lecture they are likely to find a fair number of students doing something other than listening to the professor (Strauss, 2017).

It is often argued that lectures are boring, ineffective, and an outdated teaching method (see Clark, 2014; Di Piro, 2009; French & Kennedy, 2017). Clark (2014) describes lectures as a lazy and damaging pedagogy. Lectures yield the lowest rates of retention, and require the lowest levels of cognitive function (DiPiro, 2009), as they are overloaded with a huge amount of detail, making it extremely difficult for students to properly process all of the information (Clark, 2014). One of the reasons for poor encoding and poor retention is the failure to attend to the information being taught (Cherney, 2008). Craik and Lockhart’s (1972) levels-of-processing theory predicts that “information that is processed using a more deep and thorough analysis of meaning is

remembered better than information that is processed in a shallow and superficial analysis of structural features” (as cited in Cherney, 2008, p. 153). In order for information to be encoded at a deeper level, students must interpret the information being taught and connect it to other information or situations (Cherney, 2008).

Undergraduate students in classes in which professors lecture traditionally are one and a half times more likely to fail than students in classes in which professors engage students in active learning methods (Freeman et al., 2014). Active learning is defined as “any instructional method that engages students in the learning process” (Prince, 2004, p. 223). Student involvement is one of the most important predictors of success in postsecondary education (Astin, 1993, as cited in Prince, 2004). When comparing test scores measuring conceptual understanding, the scores were about twice as high in classes promoting student engagement in comparison to traditional lecture style courses (Hake, 1998, as cited in Prince, 2004). Active learning in the classroom that involves group discussions, practising by doing, or teaching others result in “much more effective long-term learning at higher levels of cognitive function” (DiPiro, 2009, p. 138). Studies have shown that active learning tasks also increase students’ confidence with the understanding class material (Townsend et al., 1998, as cited in Cherney, 2008).

Despite the ample research that outlines the benefits of active learning, obstacles including class size, lack of resources, and limited class time may limit professors’ use of active learning activities (Cherney, 2008). Many scholars have suggested a range of strategies that can be used in large lectures, including smaller group discussions, problem-solving activities, and showing videos and podcasts (Hattie, 2015; Hornsby, 2015; Light & Cox, 2001; Penson, 2012, as cited in French & Kennedy, 2017). Cherney

(2008) argues that teaching at its finest requires professors to consider a variety of educational tools in order to provide the richest educational experience for students. Based on the previous discussion, it is clear that it is necessary to present information in multiple ways in order to accommodate different learning styles (Cherney, 2008).

### ***Implications for Students With Disabilities***

There are several significant implications for students with disabilities in postsecondary institutions that offer lecturing as a primary means of attaining a course credit. These include, processing speed, engagement level, and learning styles. Lecturing does not maximize the efficiency of learning, nor does it account for differences in learning styles (DiPiro, 2009).

Cognitive processing is the term used to describe the different ways individuals process information as they learn (Sousa, 2001, as cited in Lerner & Johns, 2015). Lectures contain a huge amount of detail, making it extremely difficult for students to properly process all of the information (Clark, 2014). When information is not processed and encoded into a person's long-term memory, the information is not retained. One of the reasons for poor retention is the failure to attend to the information being taught (Cherney, 2008). Many would argue that lectures are boring and not engaging (French & Kennedy, 2017). "Learning is not a spectator sport" (Lerner & Johns, 2015, p. 96); students need to do more than just sit and have information lectured at them.

Typically, postsecondary classes are geared toward the auditory and digital learning styles, and students who have a visual or kinesthetic learning style may find themselves at a disadvantage (Cherney, 2008). Alcorn MacKay (2010) states that students sometimes need to adjust their learning to the teaching style of their professors,

rather than professors teaching to multiple learning styles. An effective style of teaching for one student may not be a good option for another, and Fuller et al. (2004) argue that professors need to offer variety and flexibility in their teaching (as cited in Vickerman & Blundell, 2010).

It is essential that educators consider presenting information in multiple modes to accommodate all students. Harrison (2003) states that “instructors need to shift their focus away from merely providing instruction, and instead, concentrating on facilitating learning by meeting the needs of the individual learners in their classroom” (p. 142).

### **Professors’ Responsibilities and Expectations**

At a traditional university in Ontario, a professor’s job typically consists of 40% research, 40% teaching, and 20% service (Clark et al., 2011). University faculty face increasing research expectations, to the point where research productivity has become one of the dominant criteria for hiring within universities (Prince et al., 2007). Prince et al. (2007) argue that first-class teaching and first-class research are full-time jobs on their own, so time spent on one takes time away from the other. Such a large emphasis on professors’ research will impact their level of teaching (Prince et al., 2007). Astin (1994) states that “attending a college whose faculty is heavily research-oriented increases student dissatisfaction and impacts negatively on most measures of cognitive and affective development” (as cited in Prince et al., 2007, p. 284).

It is interesting that postsecondary education exists to educate students, yet postsecondary institutions focus just as much on the actual teaching as they do the output of research. This is especially interesting when considering the fact that elementary and secondary institutions focus solely on teaching and the education of students. There are

vast differences in what teaching and learning looks like in elementary/secondary education and postsecondary education.

Elementary and secondary school teachers are required to complete a 2-year program in which they learn how to teach students effectively. Required courses discuss the various learning styles, the various needs of students in the classroom, universal design for learning (UDL), and differentiated instruction. Children do not all learn in the same way, and they process information in different ways (Lerner & Johns, 2015). The intention of the UDL framework is to address the learning needs of all students effectively, regardless of age, ability, or situation (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2017; Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014). UDL requires:

critically examining courses, texts, schedules, and other aspects of teaching and learning, calling for multiple means of representation to give students various ways of acquiring information and knowledge; multiple means of expression to provide students alternatives for demonstrating what they know; and multiple means of engagement to tap into students' interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation. (CAST, 2008, as cited in Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014, p. 7)

Incorporating differentiated instruction into a classroom provides students with multiple options for learning new information (Lerner & Johns, 2015). UDL requires teachers to be proactive in incorporating various teaching methods, activities, and assessment tools in order to accommodate for the range of diversity among students (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2017).

While educators at the elementary and secondary level require teacher education, educators at the postsecondary level require no such education. Educators at the postsecondary level are often required to have a PhD, and are considered to be experts in their respective fields. However, postsecondary educators may not be aware of how to teach students with varying learning needs, as they are not required to have any training/education on how to do so effectively. Research has shown that incorporating UDL into postsecondary courses has had a positive impact on academic performance and has increased access, participation, and progress (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2017). Further, the UDL framework aligns well with the learning needs of students with disabilities in postsecondary education, especially in regards to multiple means of engagement (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2017). UDL requires educators to take into account the background and experiences of all students in order to meet the diversity of their learning needs (OME, 2013c). Educators at the postsecondary level can meet the varying needs of all students through using effective instructional strategies, but they require the knowledge and skills in order to do so (Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014).

In a study conducted by Donato (2008), both faculty and students in postsecondary institutions stated institutional practices as a challenge for students with disabilities. Postsecondary institutions do not provide enough accommodation support or UDL to foster success among students with disabilities through their postsecondary education (Donato, 2008). Faculty often report feeling unprepared to provide the necessary supports for students with disabilities (Donato, 2008; Lombardi et al., 2011, as cited in Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014). Faculty also reported anxiety around ensuring that differentiated assessments would not result in an unfair advantage, and anxiety

around the standards in regards to supporting students with disabilities (Riddell et al., 2007). It is important for educators to understand that accommodations are provided to students to assist them, (Lerner & Johns, 2015), not to give them an advantage.

At Brock University, a Centre for Pedagogical Innovation provides workshops and trainings for professors, focusing on instructional development (Brock University, 2020). The goal of such workshops is to support professors in advancing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes about teaching and learning within postsecondary education (Brock University, 2020). While this is an excellent resource for professors to have, none of the workshops or trainings are mandatory, so only professors who choose to attend would benefit.

### ***Implications for Students With Disabilities***

Professors at the postsecondary level may not be adequately equipped to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Arscott, 2013). Unlike teachers at the elementary and secondary level, who are required to complete a teacher education program, professors are not required to complete a teacher education program. Professors are not required to have any sort of training or educational background regarding the needs of students with disabilities, the struggles they may face in postsecondary education, or how to provide accommodations that will promote success, whereas teachers at the elementary and secondary level learn concepts like UDL and differentiated instruction, as well as how to teach a classroom of students with different learning styles.

Students entering postsecondary education do so having been taught for 12 years by teachers who implement UDL and differentiated instruction in their classrooms; in other words, teachers who have been taught to teach various different learning styles.

This type of teaching often abruptly stops as soon as they enter postsecondary education, which could negatively affect students with disabilities, as it can be very difficult for students with disabilities to adjust to such a change.

### **Interactions With Professors**

In addition to professors' teaching styles and their responsibilities affecting student learning, the perceptions that professors hold and the interactions between professor and student also affects learning. Students who believe that there is stigma associated with their disability are less willing to seek help (Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002, as cited in Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Communicating information about one's disability can be a daunting task with the fear of possible discrimination or negative appraisal (Denhart, 2008; Skinner, 2007, as cited in Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Some students report being told that "they lacked the potential for academic studies" (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012, p. 59). Professors' willingness to provide accommodations plays a critical role in student success, as professors ultimately decide whether or not to provide instructional accommodations for such students (Nelson et al., 1990, as cited in Donato, 2008). Students attending university reported greater instances of apprehension regarding their professors' attitudes and willingness to provide accommodation in comparison to students attending college (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). College students often reported positive views of their professors' attitudes in offering accommodations (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students in both colleges and universities reported that their professors' willingness to provide accommodations increased or decreased their academic success (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). So, when professors were more willing to accommodate, students achieved greater academic success, and when professors were more

apprehensive and less willing to provide accommodations, students achieved less academic success (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Some professors noted the difficulties in differentiating assessments for students with certain disabilities, and stated that it “might be difficult to assess reliably and might result in unfair treatment for other students” (Riddell et al., 2007, p. 624).

It is crucial that professors in postsecondary education realize that students with disabilities require accommodations in order to succeed (Hill, 1996, as cited in Donato, 2008). Accommodations provide all students with equal access to postsecondary education, and need to be viewed as a necessity rather than providing a student with special treatment (Donato, 2008). Riddell et al. (2007) found that professors reported anxiety in differentiating assessments as they feared that in doing so they would be giving these students an unfair advantage. In a study conducted by Carney et al. (2007), the results showed that 63% of students had disclosed their disability to their professors, and 45% experienced a negative response from their professors (as cited in Donato, 2008).

In the same study (Donato, 2008), students were asked what skills they wished professors had to better assist them to achieve academic success. Students reported that professors need to have a greater knowledge of disabilities, patience, and better skills for working with students with disabilities (Donato, 2008). One of the most frequently cited barriers reported by students with disabilities is professors not understanding their needs as a student with a disability (Donato, 2008). Faculty members would agree that they are not prepared to provide the necessary support for such students (Donato, 2008; Lombardi et al., 2011, as cited in Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014). When asked what information would be helpful to assist in better understanding students with disabilities, professors

reported that workshops and training sessions about basic awareness, online resources, and hands-on experiences/simulations would be useful (Donato, 2008).

### **Transition Programs**

All students face various transitions throughout their education, including transitioning from grade to grade, elementary school to secondary school, and secondary school to postsecondary school, with each transition presenting its own set of challenges. In particular, the transition from secondary to postsecondary education involves challenges in academic adjustment and social adjustment (Alcorn McKay, 2010, as cited in Arscott, 2013). A successful student in postsecondary education is one who “not only has a strong academic background but also possesses the socio-emotional attributes needed to persist and succeed” (Gladieux & Swail, 2000, as cited in Sweet et al., 2012, p. 7). Students new to postsecondary education may experience increased stress because of an increase in program expectations, the size of campus, escalating homework assignments, program expectations, and an increase in peer interactions (Arscott, 2013). Such challenges can be particularly difficult for students with disabilities who have special education needs or that require special education support (Arscott, 2013; OME, 2017b).

Research shows that only a small percentage of students with a disability are in a position to successfully transition to college or university (Brown, 2010, as cited in Sweet et al., 2012). Students with learning disabilities face increased difficulty learning time management skills, managing free time, dealing with distractions, and focusing on their school work (Arscott, 2013). Students with learning disabilities also report being unprepared and overwhelmed by the increase in responsibility and workload, as well as

missing academic support from their parents (Arscott, 2013). Similarly, students with ADHD report more problems academically when compared to students without a disability (Weyandt & DuPaul, 2006, as cited in Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students with learning disabilities and students with ADHD report having to spend more time and put more effort into their work than students without a disability (Upton & Harper, 2002, as cited in Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). These students have equal cognitive ability as their non-disabled peers, but they have processing deficits, which affect their academic achievement (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). For these reasons, students with learning disabilities and ADHD need to develop academic coping strategies in order to meet the academic demands of postsecondary education (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

It is crucial for schools in Ontario to provide opportunities and support for all students to make a successful transition to postsecondary education (OME, 2013a). Despite the overall lower percentages mentioned in the previous chapter, there continues to be a rise in numbers of students with disabilities entering postsecondary education, with learning disabilities being the fastest-growing category (Arscott, 2013). One strategy that has been implemented across the province is the use of transition programs to aid in the move from secondary to postsecondary education (Arscott, 2013). “An important component of ensuring equity is supporting students through transition periods that we know pose challenges” (OME, 2014, p. 9). It is important that students with disabilities who are interested and capable of attending postsecondary education are not hindered by the circumstances of their disability or institutional policies and practices (Sweet et al., 2012). The OME has created various programs geared toward improving academic success among students with disabilities (McCloy & De Clou, 2013). In Ontario, all

colleges and universities that are publicly funded provide some sort of transition program for students with a learning disability (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

### **Postsecondary Transition Programs**

Additional to transition programs offered at the secondary level, many colleges and universities in Ontario offer transition services that are aimed towards students with disabilities entering postsecondary education (RARC, 2019e). All publicly funded colleges and universities in Ontario provide some sort of transition program for students with learning disabilities (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Transition programs provide workshops for students with disabilities to assist them in the transition from secondary school to postsecondary school (RARC, 2019e). Another service provided at postsecondary institutions for students with disabilities is the opportunity to meet with a learning strategist to develop strategies to improve learning and study skills (RARC, 2019e). Additionally, many universities and colleges provide peer mentoring, tutoring services, and social support groups available specifically for students with disabilities (RARC, 2019e).

### **Summer Transition Programs**

An increasing number of colleges and universities are offering summer transition programs for students with learning disabilities and ADHD (Arscott, 2013). Since students with learning disabilities are the fastest growing group of disabilities in postsecondary education, and students who have ADHD face similar challenges as students with learning disabilities, programs geared toward their specific needs offered before they enter postsecondary is warranted. Summer transition programs vary from school to school; some programs are only 1 day, while others are 6 to 8 weeks (Tsagris &

Muirhead, 2012). Regardless of the length of the program, all programs are designed to equip students with skills that will help them to succeed throughout their postsecondary education (McCloy & De Clou, 2013).

The first summer transition program, constructed by the Ontario government, took place in 2003, and was designed to meet the needs of students with a learning disability and/or ADHD (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). One college and one university piloted the program: Durham College and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (the latter corporately branded as Ontario Tech; Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). The program began with a 1-day outreach session in May offered to students with learning disabilities and ADHD as well as their parents (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). At the outreach session, students and parents were given information about the summer transition program as well as information about accessing support and the processes involved (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). There were several criteria that impacted students' ability to participate in the transition program including, an acceptance into a program of study and an up-to-date psycho-educational assessment confirming their disability (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

Following the 1-day outreach sessions, Durham College delivered a 2-week program, and Ontario Tech delivered a 1-week program (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Both programs were held at the end of August, and involved workshops with “an emphasis on self-advocacy, self-awareness and disability awareness, emotional coping strategies and learning strategies, time management, study skills, and a celebration day” (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012, p. 18). In the mornings the workshops were delivered in a classroom, using modes of instruction typically found in postsecondary education, including lectures and presentations (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). The afternoons were

spent in the computer lab where students learn how to use various assistive software (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

Tsagris and Muirhead (2012) report that the current trend in postsecondary transition programs is to focus on components aimed at self-determination and self-advocacy. Students with a disability in postsecondary education have an increased responsibility to advocate for themselves when it comes to accessing and receiving support (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students sometimes feel nervous, embarrassed, or fearful of discrimination, making self-advocacy daunting (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). The overall goal of the summer transition program is not to fully prepare students for postsecondary education; rather, it is to start the process (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). The main purpose is to introduce students to the support available to them and encourage continuous access to the support and services (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

### ***Success Rates of Attending the Summer Transition Program***

A study conducted by McCloy and De Clou (2013) found that attending the summer transition program improved that quality of students' transition to postsecondary education in several ways. The results show a positive association between attending the summer transition program and accessing the services available at the postsecondary institution during the course of their study (McCloy & De Clou, 2013). Students had the opportunity to begin the intake process during the summer before school starts (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students reported that attending the summer transition program helped to improve their orientation to campus and the services available, and increased their willingness to self-advocate as a person with a disability (McCloy & De Clou, 2013;

Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students who did not attend the summer transition program reported a lengthier and more difficult transition process (McCloy & De Clou, 2013).

Despite the fact that the summer transition program improved the quality of students' transition at the beginning of their programs, research has found that attending the program did not increase the likelihood of obtaining a GPA above 2.0 (McCloy & De Clou, 2013; Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). There was no difference between students who did and did not attend the program in terms of likelihood of obtaining a GPA above 2.0 (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Interestingly, college students were significantly more likely than university students to receive a GPA above 2.0 (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Seventy-three percent of college students had received a GPA of above a 2.0 at the end of their first semester, in comparison to 57% of university students (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Overall, students who received a GPA higher than 2.0 were actively engaged in their learning process, connected with faculty and teaching assistants, and were socially engaged with their peers (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Conversely, students who did not receive a GPA higher than 2.0 reported the highest level of social engagement and extracurricular activities, demonstrating the difficulty they experienced in managing their time spent on social commitments and academic commitments (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

Although attending the summer transition program did not increase the likelihood of obtaining a GPA above 2.0, Tsagris and Muirhead (2012) found that there was a positive association between increased use of academic support and increased performance. Similarly, Troiano et al. (2010) found that students who consistently accessed academic support had higher rates of success than students who did not access

academic support at all or did not access them consistently. Another study conducted by Newman et al. (2019) found that there was an increased likelihood of completing a college program when academic support was accessed by students. Additionally, students who attended the summer transition program reported that the peer interactions during the program “played a significant role in furthering their acceptance of their disabilities” (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012, p. 61), increasing their self-advocacy skills.

These findings indicate the importance of having transitional supports for students with disabilities prior to their transition to postsecondary education. It has been found to be beneficial for the students if the support goes beyond academic success and highlights the importance of making connections with the institution of their choice. The impact of these transition programs are positive, however, there are still issues/challenges with access and participation for students with disabilities.

### **Student Recommendations**

As part of a study conducted by Tsagris and Muirhead (2012), students were asked to give feedback on what types of support they’d like to see available within postsecondary education. The feedback provided highlights the need for “opportunities to improve outcomes through outreach and marketing of information about accessible services, Universal Instructional Design and professional development for faculty and staff to decrease stigma and discrimination, and an improved willingness to support campus accessibility” (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012, p. 10).

### ***Outreach and Marketing***

Students who participated in the study placed a high value on outreach of disability supports (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Some students indicated their choice of

postsecondary institution was dependent on the experience they had when meeting the Accessibility Center staff at outreach and recruitment events (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). In comparison, an equal number of students reported that they were unaware of the services provided at postsecondary institutions (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students recommended greater effort be put into advancing marketing and public awareness strategies for students with disabilities and their support networks (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

Prior to attending the summer transition program, students were required to register with the Accessibility Center (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). During the intake process students were guided through the process of accessing support, which made the process of accessing services easier (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). The majority of students who attended the summer transition program reported that they were encouraged to attend by their parents (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students recommended putting a greater effort and increased outreach regarding the services provided and the summer transition program to students with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary education, perhaps at the secondary school level (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

Students who attended the summer transition program had an increased awareness of the Accessibility Center and were more willing to seek assistance than students who did not attend the summer transition program (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Increased access to the services provided was associated with greater likelihood of success within postsecondary education (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students who attended the program recommended that all students with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary

education should attend the summer transition program, and there should be an increase in marketing the benefits of attending the program (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

### ***Assessments***

Many students who participated in Tsagris and Muirhead's (2012) study reported difficulties in obtaining the required psycho-educational assessment. One of the most frequently cited difficulties by students was the cost of getting the assessment done, ranging from \$1,800 to \$2,400 (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Another difficulty cited was the waiting period before actually getting that assessment done, which is often 3 to 6 months, or sometimes even longer (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Also, the assessment itself can take up to 8 to 10 hours to complete (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students recommended improving access to assessments, improving the accessibility to the information about the documentation required, and improving knowledge among secondary school teachers and guidance counsellors about what documentation is required so that students can start the process sooner (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

### ***Support for Students not Transitioning From Secondary School***

Some students in the study were not transitioning straight from secondary to postsecondary education (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Therefore, these students were unaware of the services and programs available, including the summer transition program (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). These students reported feeling as though they had missed out on information regarding the process for accessing supports (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students recommended that postsecondary schools create a transition program for students who are not transitioning straight from secondary school, including "second-attempt" students and mature students (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

### ***Professor Training***

In postsecondary education it is the students' responsibility to self-advocate, request accommodations, and then disclose their disability to their professors in order to receive accommodations (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). At the time of the study, students were required to hand an accommodation letter, provided by the accessibility office which indicated the accommodations needed to support the student, to their professors in person (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Several students reported experiencing some level of resistance from their professors when requesting accommodation (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). One student reported that one of their professors refused to offer lecture notes (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students recommended that professors be trained in learning disabilities and ADHD so they can understand the struggles these students face in the postsecondary environment (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

From the literature examined and presented, there exist some disparities as to why necessary supports are not in place for students with disabilities transitioning to and experiencing success in postsecondary education. It is suggested that various levels of support need to be in place in order to provide opportunities for success at postsecondary for students with disabilities. Stakeholders including policy makers, educational institutions, educators, parents, and students themselves all need to be involved in various capacities to ensure opportunities for success exist. In order to better understand this issue from a top-down model, current federal and provincial policy documents will be examined. Chapter 3 outlines the methods used for accessing and analyzing the documents, Chapter 4 provides an examination of these documents, Chapter 5 provides a discussion, and Chapter 6 offers conclusions and implications.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, a comprehensive literature review and policy analysis was conducted. The purpose of a comprehensive literature review is to review, critique, and synthesize the literature, and generate a new perspective on a topic (Torraco, 2016). By considering the increasing number of students with disabilities entering postsecondary education, and the rates of success among these students at the postsecondary level, the literature review from Chapter 2 highlighted some key issues for students with disabilities transitioning to and completing postsecondary education. Some of the issues that require further examination include: access to postsecondary; understanding of student-specific needs; and availability and quality of transition programs. Since we understand from the *Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities* (CRPD; United Nations, 2007) that individuals with disabilities have the right to equitable access to education, it is important to consider what policies have been developed to support these rights. With these issues in mind, and through examining existing policy documents, this research attempted to better understand the complex nature of ensuring policy is developed and enacted to best meet the needs of students with disabilities. Examining existing research evaluating OME documents as well as policies and supports at the postsecondary level provides a comprehensive look at the current state of the education system for students with disabilities. Examining existing research also allows for an understanding of the current programs and policy available for students with disabilities and how these programs are supporting their transitions to postsecondary. By comparing current research as well as policy designed to support students, conclusions could be drawn for how policy may be better utilized to help students succeed.

The databases that were used in conducting this research include Google Scholar and Brock University's Advanced SuperSearch, as well as OME websites and newspaper articles. When searching such databases, I tried to find research that was conducted within the last 10 years (since 2009), but in some cases more flexibility with dates was required as in some topic areas I did not find any research conducted in more recent years. Keywords used in searching for articles include "postsecondary education"; "students with disabilities"; "special education"; "policy"; "transition"; and "support." Additionally, as I read articles/policy documents I made note of previous studies used and looked in the references section for articles that may be relevant for this paper. A total of 25 journal articles, 12 ebooks/textbooks/chapters, 21 government/ministry documents, and three newspaper articles were used for this paper. All documents were examined for common trends including: support offered for students with disabilities at the secondary level and postsecondary level, success rates among students with disabilities at the postsecondary level, as well as perceptions of different stakeholders. Various stakeholder voices that were considered include policy makers, educators, parents, and students.

This research examined various policies and practices within the education system that may contribute to why students with disabilities continue to be an underrepresented group within postsecondary institutions, and why those that do attend are at a greater risk of dropping out before graduation when compared to students without disabilities. Five OME documents were selected to analyze based on their current nature (last 10 years) and their relevance to the topics of special education and supports for students with disabilities at the elementary and secondary level. A search of the OME website yielded the following five documents: *Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12*

(OME, 2017b) defines an exceptional student, the responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in the education system, as well as the expectations and requirements among the education system from Kindergarten to Grade 12. *Learning for All* (OME, 2013c) is a resource created for teachers to assist them in improving student learning and student success. *Funding for Special Education* (OME, 012) outlines the funding breakdown for students with disabilities at the elementary and secondary level. *The Identification, Placement, and Review Committee* (OME, 2017c) and *An Introduction to Special Education in Ontario* (OME, 2017a) describe the support available at the elementary and secondary level. It was important to consider the recommendations from documents related to human rights for people with disabilities. The Human Rights Code (1990), the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), and the Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act (2005), were examined for guidelines related to access to education. Finally, five sections of the *Transition Resource Guide* were examined for guidelines specifically related to the identified issue of transitions. The *Transition Resource Guide* is the only OME document that focuses on supports and access for students with disabilities and postsecondary education. The five sections of the *Transition Resource Guide* include: (a) Rights and Responsibilities (RARC, 2019d), which outlines the responsibilities that postsecondary institutions have; (b) Advocacy and Disclosure (RARC, 2019b), which outlines the responsibilities that students have; (c) Financial Information (RARC, 2019c), which outlines the funding available at the postsecondary level; (d) Accessibility Services (RARC, 2019a); and (e) Support Services Available at Post-Secondary (RARC, 2019e), which both outline the support available when transitioning to and once at the postsecondary level.

Overall, the documents examined aimed to focus on current policy related specifically to transitions for students with disabilities and support for students with disabilities. Chapter 4 will discuss the findings of the examination of the documents. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the findings and Chapter 6 will conclude and offer implications.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS—EXAMINATION OF POLICY**

The Ontario government recognizes that all students are unique, and is committed to “enabling all students to reach their full potential, and to succeed” (OME, 2017b, p. 2). The *Ontario Human Rights Code* states that all students have the right to equal treatment in education (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018a). The OME is committed to ensuring that all students are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to succeed, and recognizes that students must be given opportunities to succeed that align with their interests, abilities, and goals (OME, 2017b). Students must be given learning opportunities and the support that they require to succeed in Ontario’s education system (OME, 2017b). The OME (2017b) recognizes that some of the students who are at risk of not succeeding are those who require some form of special education. In order to provide learning opportunities and supports for students who require special education, the ministry establishes policies regarding the delivery of such education (OME, 2017b).

This chapter will examine various policies and practices within the education system that may contribute to why students with disabilities continue to be an underrepresented group within postsecondary institutions, and why those who do attend are at a greater risk of dropping out before graduation when compared to students without disabilities. The information examined from the documents are organized under the following categories for both elementary/secondary and postsecondary: Programs and Services; Funding; and Supports Available.

### **Programs and Services**

#### **Elementary and Secondary**

The OME sets out regulations, develops policy documents, and establishes the legal obligations of school boards (OME, 2017b). The main source of the legalities regarding special education and the provision of programs and services offered at the

elementary and secondary level are governed by the Education Act (OME, 2017b). Under the Education Act, the Minister of Education is required to ensure that all students with exceptionalities in Ontario are provided with appropriate special education programs and services. Subsection 8(3) of the Education Act (1996) states:

The Minister shall ensure that all exceptional children in Ontario have available to them, in accordance with this Act and the regulations, appropriate special education programs and special education services without payment of fees by parents or guardians resident in Ontario, and shall provide for the parents or guardians to appeal the appropriateness of the special education placement.

The OME (2017b) defines an exceptional student as a student whose “behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program by a committee” (p. A3). Special education programs are based on continuous assessment and evaluation and includes a plan to meet the needs of each specific student (OME, 2017b). Special education services are the facilities and resources required to develop and implement a special education program (OME, 2017b).

Under the regulations of the Education Act, the school board is responsible for establishing an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee, and providing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students identified as being exceptional (OME, 2017b). School boards are also responsible for reviewing special education plans and preparing reports regarding the programs and services that are being provided (OME, 2017b). In addition to the responsibilities of the school board, the OME recognizes the multiple other stakeholders within the education system, and outlines the roles and

responsibilities of other individuals involved, including principals, teachers, an parents, as well as the students themselves (OME, 2017b).

In *Learning for All*, the OME (2013c) states that students learn best when classroom instruction and the learning environment are geared toward students' strengths, interests, needs, and stage of readiness. The vision and purpose of the *Learning for All* document is based on seven beliefs:

(1) all students can succeed, (2) each student has his or her own unique patterns of learning, (3) successful instructional practices are founded on evidence-based research, tempered by experience, (4) universal design and differentiated instruction are effective and interconnected means of meeting learning or productivity needs of any group of students, (5) classroom teachers are the key educators for student's literacy and numeracy development, (6) classroom teachers need the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports all students, and (7) fairness is not sameness. (OME, 2013c, p. 1)

*Learning for All* is a resource for teachers to use to improve student learning and student success. This document provides assistance in planning and delivering instruction that will benefit all students. Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiated instruction results in instruction that responds to the characteristics of a diverse group of students (OME, 2013c). Such instruction is tailored to the unique needs and strengths of the students as individuals (OME, 2013c). Incorporating UDL into their classroom, teachers plan and design learning environments that will encourage success among a diverse group of students (OME, 2013c). Differentiated instruction provides teachers

with the opportunity to address specific skills and difficulties among individuals in the class (Raynal & Rieunier, 1998, as cited in OME, 2013c). Both UDL and differentiated instruction share the same goal of “providing a range of instructional strategies, resources, learning tasks, and assessment tools in order to meet the different strengths, needs, levels of readiness, and learning styles or preferences of the students in a class” (OME, 2013c, p. 12).

Overall, at the elementary and secondary level there are numerous documents and policies that outline the responsibilities of multiple stakeholders, including the OME, the school board, principals, teachers, parents, and students. Such documents and policies provide instruction and guidance for all stakeholders, and exist to provide the best possible education for all students.

### **Postsecondary**

Similar to the policies outlined for elementary and secondary students with disabilities, students who attend a postsecondary institution in Ontario have the right to equal treatment without discrimination on the grounds of disability (RARC, 2019d). Postsecondary institutions have a responsibility to “accommodate students with disabilities up to the point of undue hardship” (RARC, 2019d). The Human Rights Code (1990), the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) each outline the duties that postsecondary institutions have in meeting the rights of students with disabilities. Postsecondary institutions meet the rights outlined in these legislations by providing accommodations for students with disabilities (RARC, 2019d). All publicly funded universities and colleges in Ontario have an Accessibility Services Office, which is responsible for coordinating and providing

accommodations and services for students with disabilities (RARC, 2019d). Students with disabilities take a much larger role in the accommodation process in postsecondary school than they did in elementary and secondary school (RARC, 2019d). These students are required to disclose their disability to the Accessibility Office and provide proper documentation in order to receive accommodations (RARC, 2019b).

In comparison to the documents and policies at the elementary and secondary level, those documents relevant to the postsecondary level focus primarily on the responsibilities of the institutions and the rights of the students. Often, other stakeholders, including professors and parents, are not included in policies at the postsecondary level.

## **Funding**

### **Elementary and Secondary**

In addition to ensuring that all exceptional students in Ontario are provided with appropriate special education programs and services, the OME is also responsible for funding elementary and secondary schools in Ontario (OME, 2012). The funding formula used by the OME allocates funding based on student enrolment as well as the unique needs of each school (OME, 2012). To meet the needs of each school, funding is provided through special purpose grants, one of which is the Special Education Grant (SEG; OME, 2012). The SEG is comprised of six components: (a) the special education per-pupil amount—funding towards the cost of special education programs and services; (b) the differentiated special education needs amount—funding to address the variation of needs of students who require special education; (c) the special equipment amount—funding for equipment needed to support students; (d) the special incidence portion—funding to ensure that support staff are properly trained to ensure the health and safety of students

with extraordinarily high needs; (e) the facilities amount—funding to provide programs in government approved care and treatment, custody, and correctional facilities, including hospitals, mental health centres, and community group homes; and (f) the behavioural expertise amount—funding for school boards to hire personnel who have an expertise in applied behaviour analysis (ABA; OME, 2017b). The purpose of the SEG is to provide funding for students who require special education programs, services, and equipment to be successful within the classroom (OME, 2012).

### **Postsecondary**

Funding for students with exceptionalities at the postsecondary level varies greatly from the funding provided at the elementary and secondary level. At the postsecondary level there are two grants available to students with disabilities: the Bursary for Students with Disabilities (BSWD) and the Canada Student Grant for Services and Equipment for Persons with Permanent Disabilities (CSG-PDSE; RARC, 2019c). In order for students to qualify for the BSWD and/or the CSG-PDSE, they must have disability-related educational costs for services or equipment which they require for participation in postsecondary education, and they must qualify for student loans (OSAP; RARC, 2019c). In order for the disability-related educational expenses to be covered by the grants, the Accessibility Services office must approve the expenses (RARC, 2019c). It is clear that based on the different procedures for accessing funding between elementary/secondary and postsecondary education, discrepancies exist for students with disabilities entering postsecondary education when seeking support for their disability related challenges. In order to better understand the structure of available funding, current available supports must also be examined.

## **Supports Available**

### **Elementary and Secondary**

At the elementary and secondary level, an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) determines whether a student is considered to be exceptional (OME, 2017c). All students identified as being exceptional by the IPRC must be provided with an education that will enable them to succeed (OME, 2017a). School boards in Ontario must develop an IEP for all students who have been identified as exceptional by the IPRC (OME, 2017a). Additionally, school boards are also able to develop an IEP for students who have not been formally identified as exceptional by the IPRC but require special education services (OME, 2017a). In the 2014/2015 school year there were more than 178,500 students identified as being exceptional by the IPRC, and an additional 162,000 students were provided with special education services who were not formally identified as being exceptional (OME, 2017a).

An IEP is a “written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, based on a thorough assessment of the strengths and needs that affect the student’s ability to learn and to demonstrate learning” (OME, 2017b, p. E6). Describing students’ strengths include their learning styles, previously acquired learning skills, cognitive processing, and communication abilities (OME, 2017b). Students’ needs outline why they require an IEP, referring to any cognitive and/or processing challenges that students may have, as well as any skill deficits that will interfere with their ability to learn (social skills, attention, emotional control, etc.; OME, 2017b). An IEP outlines the learning expectations of the student, and the accommodations needed in order to assist the student in achieving the learning expectations identified

(OME, 2017b). Accommodations may be one of, or a combination of the following: (a) instructional accommodation—an adjustment in teaching strategies, (b) environmental accommodations—changes or support in the physical learning environment, and (c) assessment accommodation—an adjustment in assessment activities (OME, 2017b). Teaching strategies are provided that go beyond teaching strategies that are expected to be implemented in a regular classroom, such as UDL and differentiated instruction (OME, 2017b).

Many individuals are involved in the development and implementation of such IEPs. In order to best support students with special education needs, a combined effort of multiple stakeholders and individuals who will support the student are needed. Principals are responsible for ensuring that teachers are developing IEPs and that they are including parents in the development of their child's IEP (OME, 2017b). Teachers and principals work alongside special education educators and parents in developing an IEP, as well as taking into consideration the recommendations from the IPRC (OME, 2017b). An IEP is used as an accountability tool for everyone who has responsibilities under the plan, including teachers, parents, and the student (OME, 2017b).

### **Postsecondary**

The supports available in postsecondary education vary greatly in comparison to supports available in elementary and secondary schools, as the laws that regulate accommodations are different (RARC, 2019d). The legislative structures that outline how to accommodate students with exceptionalities are not nearly as detailed at the postsecondary level in comparison to the legislative structures at the elementary and secondary level (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018b). Students who attend a

postsecondary institution will not automatically receive the same accommodations that they received in secondary school (RARC, 2019d). Students supported with an IEP through elementary and secondary school no longer have that IEP or those supports once they reach postsecondary education (Arscott, 2013). More specifically, the visual supports and strategies often used at the elementary and secondary level are not the norm at the postsecondary level (Arscott, 2013).

All postsecondary institutions provide policies and services to students with disabilities, but there is a wide range of delivery methods and structures between various postsecondary institutions (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018b). Students must first self-identify as an individual with a disability, and register at the Accessibility Office of the college or university (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students must then provide the required documentation to verify their disability (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). The documentation needed to show proof of a disability that is required at many postsecondary institutions in Ontario is much more specific and comprehensive than what is required in elementary and secondary school level (RARC, 2019d). Such documentation may include a psycho-educational assessment conducted within the last 3 to 5 years, a diagnosis by a psychologist, psychiatrist, or physician, or a medical form or letter from a specialist which indicates the student's diagnosis (RARC, 2019a). After the documentation has been provided and verified students can make the choice to seek available supports and services provided (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Accessibility Advisors review the documentation and determine what accommodations students need (RARC, 2019a). Accommodations in postsecondary education often include extended time on exams, limiting exams to no more than one per day, access to a computer or spell

check on exams, a note-taker in class, or a sign-language interpreter (RARC, 2019a). In order to access the supports available, students are often required to self-disclose their disability to their professor/instructor (Tsagris, & Muirhead, 2012). If students do not self-advocate as a student with a disability they will not receive any support.

### **Elementary and Secondary Transition Programs and Supports**

Well-coordinated planning prior to a transition into or out of a program helps to ensure that students have all the necessary support in order to make a successful transition (OME, 2017b). Ontario's education and career/life planning program is designed to assist students in developing the capacity to achieve their goals and to make successful transitions from secondary to postsecondary education (OME, 2013a). *Creating Pathways to Success* (OME, 2013a) outlines a conceptual framework to support schools in developing a comprehensive career/life planning program for Kindergarten to Grade 12. The career/life planning program is based on four questions that correspond with four areas of learning (OME, 2013a). The four questions are: (a) Who am I? (b) What are my opportunities? (c) What do I want to become? (D) What is the plan of achieving my goals? (OME, 2013a). The four areas of learning that correspond with these questions are: (a) knowing oneself, (b) exploring opportunities, (c) decision-making and goal setting, and (d) achieving goals and making transitions OME, 2013a). The career/life planning program involves various learning activities related to the curriculum, as well as school-wide activities (OME, 2013a). Through Grades 7 to 12, students work on building an Individual Pathways Plan (IPP), which focuses on making a successful transition to secondary school and possible postsecondary destinations (OME, 2013a). As a province-wide directive, all students, regardless if they have a disability or not, are required to take

a Career Studies course in Grade 10, which includes planning for the transition from secondary to postsecondary school (OME, 2013a).

As a part of the compulsory Grade 10 Career Studies class, students are required to record their initial postsecondary destination, postsecondary goals and create a plan of how to achieve their goals in the IPP (OME, 2013a). In doing so, students explore different career opportunities and develop self-knowledge (OME, 2013a). *Creating Pathways to Success* (OME, 2013a) is founded on the vision that all students should leave secondary school with a plan for an initial postsecondary destination with confidence in their ability to implement and adapt their plan as needed. Research has shown that there have been “significant positive outcomes when clearly articulated education and career/life planning programs are implemented across an education system” (OME, 2013a, p. 7).

Another transitional support available at the secondary level is the dual credit program. Dual credit programs are aimed toward students that have the potential to succeed, but face significant challenges in completing their secondary school graduation requirements (OME, 2013b). Students may experience challenges completing the requirements because they are disengaged and underachieving (OME, 2013b). Students enrolled in a dual credit program take college or apprenticeship courses while they are still in secondary school (OME, 2013b). The courses taken count twice: once toward students’ Ontario Secondary School Diploma and once toward a postsecondary Certificate, Diploma, or a Certificate of Apprenticeship (OME, 2013b). The intention of dual credit programs is to assist secondary school students in completing their Ontario

Secondary School Diploma requirements as well as making a successful transition to college and/or apprenticeship programs (OME, 2013b).

Additionally, since 1998, it has been required under the Ontario Regulation 181/98 (“Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils”) that transition plans be a part of the IEP for students transitioning from secondary school to postsecondary school (OME, 2013a, 2017b). Since September 2014, it has been required under Policy/Program Memorandum No. 156 (“Supporting Transitions for Students with Special Education Needs”) that a transition plan be provided for all students with an IEP, even if they have not been identified as exceptional by an IPRC (OME, 2013a). The requirement to create a transition plan for all students with an IEP could be incredibly helpful for students that do not qualify for the support offered at their postsecondary institution. Having a transition plan may end up being the only type of “support” that such students have.

To set the foundation for a successful transition from secondary education to postsecondary education a plan that reflects the students’ strengths and needs is essential (OME, 2013a). A transition plan must take in to consideration the learning needs of the student as well as the physical and emotional needs of the student (OME, 2017b). Looking at the information provided in students’ IPP from when they transitioned from elementary to secondary school may provide valuable information for developing the transition plan from secondary to postsecondary education (OME, 2017b). A student’s transition plan from secondary to postsecondary education should include the specific goals for the transition, the actions required to achieve the goals, the person/agency involved in providing assistance in achieving the goals, and timelines for meeting the goals (OME, 2017b). The likelihood of a successful transition is increased significantly

when the school collaborates with the student, parents, employers, and community agencies when developing the transition plan (OME, 2017b). A detailed transition plan will help to ensure that educators, the school, and the board are prepared to meet the needs of the students to aid their transition to postsecondary education (OME, 2017b). The goal of a transition plan is to help students to make a successful transition from secondary education to postsecondary education, and while they may be helpful for these students, transition plans are currently not required by or recognized by postsecondary institutions.

The findings presented from examining the selected policy documents provide insight into what practices are outlined by the OME. These guidelines combined with the current literature presented in Chapter 2 will be discussed in Chapter 5, followed by conclusions and implications in Chapter 6.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

This research has focused on the current issues surrounding the successful transition and completion of postsecondary education for students with disabilities. Through examining literature and current policy, several key findings ensue, including: transitions, learning environments (institutional structures) and supports. The following is a discussion of the findings based on these three concepts.

### **Transitions**

It is clear that transitions continue to be a challenge for individuals with disabilities throughout their postsecondary education. According to the OME and from the literature discussed, transition support for all students is beneficial for overall success. Transitional support for students with disabilities are invaluable when transitioning from elementary to secondary or secondary to postsecondary (McCloy & De Clou, 2013; Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). The IPP, IEP transition plans, and dual credit programs support students to develop a plan, participate in meaningful pre-college programs, and identify how to access support for their transition to postsecondary education (OME, 2013a, 2013b). An increasing number of colleges and universities are offering summer transition programs for students with learning disabilities and ADHD (Arscott, 2013). Summer transition programs tend to focus on self-determination and self-advocacy, as students with disabilities have an increased responsibility to advocate for themselves (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Although the summer transition program did not increase the likelihood of achieving a GPA above 2.0; overall, participation in the program improved the quality of students transitioning to postsecondary education and increased the likelihood of their accessing support and increased success (McCloy & De Clou, 2013; Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the documentation, policies, funding, and supports offered differ between secondary and postsecondary education, and students who receive support in secondary school are not automatically granted accommodations in postsecondary education. Dillon (2007) suggests that collaboration between secondary schools, parents, students, and postsecondary institutions may provide better service for students with disabilities (as cited in Arscott, 2013).

Additionally, students recommended increasing the marketing and outreach in terms of supports and programs available, including information about what documentation/assessments are required and how to access such assessments to assist with a smoother transition (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Students also recommend providing transition programs not only for students transitioning straight from secondary school, but also for “second-attempt” students and mature students. It was also suggested that disability training be provided for professors so they can better understand the challenges that students with disabilities face in postsecondary education (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Professors in postsecondary education are considered experts in their field of study; however, they are not required to take any sort of education training. As a result, students often have to adjust their learning to the professor’s teaching style (Alcorn MacKay, 2010, as cited in Arscott, 2013).

### **Learning Environments (Institutional Structures)**

Students who attend a postsecondary institution in Ontario have the right to equal treatment without discrimination on the grounds of disability (RARC, 2019d). Postsecondary institutions have a responsibility to “accommodate students with disabilities up to the point of undue hardship” (RARC, 2019d, Legal Rights section, para.

2). However, the practices within colleges and universities may interfere with the education and accommodations students with disabilities receive. Since professors at the postsecondary level are not required to have any sort of teacher education qualification, they usually do not have any training as an educator. It may be difficult to effectively accommodate students with disabilities when professors do not have any background education regarding teaching methods and strategies such as UDL and differentiated instruction. The education that professors hold affects the education that students receive.

Despite evidence that lectures yield the lowest retention rates (DiPiro, 2009), lecturing remains as the most dominant teaching style in postsecondary education (Freeman et al., 2014; French & Kennedy, 2017). Students are one and a half times more likely to fail when their professor's teaching style is lecturing (Freeman et al., 2014). Student involvement is one of the most important predictors of success in postsecondary education (Astin, 1993, as cited in Prince, 2004). However, how can we expect professors to be able to meet the needs of a diverse student population if they have never been trained how to do so? Professors are not taught about UDL or differentiated instruction prior to being hired, nor are they made aware of the struggles that students with disabilities face and how to accommodate them. Perhaps requiring professors to take courses about teaching methods and strategies would affect the mode of instruction and assessment they choose, which would likely affect success rates not only among students with disabilities but also students without disabilities.

A professor's willingness to provide accommodations is a significant predictor of student success (Nelson et al., 1990, as cited in Donato, 2008; Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). It is crucial that professors understand that providing accommodations allows for

equal access to education, and is in no way providing students with an advantage or special treatment (Donato, 2008). Both students and professors report that professors are not adequately prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Donato, 2008; Lombardi et al., 2011, as cited in Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014). Professors reported that workshops and training sessions about basic awareness, online resources, and hands-on experiences/simulations would be helpful in assisting them to better understand students with disabilities (Donato, 2008).

It is essential that professors be open to other teaching methods, to better accommodate multiple learning styles. Requiring professors to have some sort of teacher education may help in their openness of teaching methods other than lecturing. There is ample research on the benefits and positive outcomes of incorporating active learning strategies into the classroom. Many scholars have suggested a range of strategies that can be used in large lectures, including smaller group discussions, problem-solving activities, and showing videos and podcasts (Hattie, 2015; Hornsby, 2015; Light & Cox, 2001; Penson, 2012, as cited in French & Kennedy, 2017). Making professors aware of this information and providing opportunities, perhaps through required workshops or courses, on how to incorporate active learning into their classrooms may assist them in delivering a more effective lecture.

### **Supports**

All students who pursue a postsecondary education are required to make autonomous efforts to ensure their success academically and socially, but students with disabilities require an additional level of independence as well as self-advocacy skills (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). At the secondary level, access to education for students with

disabilities is regulated by the Education Act, whereas at the postsecondary level, access to education for students with disabilities is regulated by the Human Rights Commission, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The difference in regulation affects the funding and the available support.

The support available at the secondary level affects students' success in secondary school as well as access to postsecondary education. Students identified as having an exceptional ability are more likely to have a grade point average below 75% in secondary school, making direct entry into college or university less likely (McCloy & De Clou, 2013). The likelihood of being accepted into a university program decreases significantly when a student's GPA is below 70% (Sweet et al., 2012).

At the secondary level, the cost of assessment and necessary supports are funded by the OME, whereas at the postsecondary level the cost of assessment falls on the individual, as they are required to provide documentation of proof of a disability in order to receive support. In order for students to qualify for the grants available at the postsecondary level, they must have disability-related educational costs for services or equipment which they require for participation in post-secondary education, and they must qualify for student loans (OSAP; RARC, 2019c).

The supports available are vastly different between secondary school and postsecondary school. At the secondary school level, school boards are required to develop an IEP for all students who have been identified as exceptional by the IPRC and provide appropriate support. At the postsecondary level, students are required to self-advocate and provide specific and comprehensive documentation as proof of a disability before receiving support. Additionally, at the elementary and secondary level, multiple

individuals are involved in the development of a student's IEP, including principals, teachers, and parents. Processes vary from institution to institution, but it is not a common practice to involve professors, parents, and students when determining types of accommodations for a student. Perhaps involving such individuals in the accommodation process at the postsecondary level would decrease students' reluctance to access support, resulting in an increase of success among students with disabilities. Perhaps collaboration between such individuals may also assist in the transition from secondary school to a postsecondary institution. Secondary schools and postsecondary institutions each offer transition programs for students with disabilities, however, there is little communication and collaboration between them.

When considering the identified gaps in student success at postsecondary for students with disabilities, it has been important to examine various factors. The policy documents have provided a framework to consider what consistent work can and should be engaged in in order to increase the postsecondary opportunities for success for students with disabilities. Strong policy exists and many educational institutions adopt their best practices from these recommendations. The research presented can be a starting point for the next steps needed to ensure consistency in the overall experiences and success of students with disabilities at postsecondary. Chapter 6 offers implications and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Over the past decade, special education in Ontario has been under intense scrutiny in academic literature and in the public eye (Sweet et al., 2012). Despite the legislation that encourages publicly funded schools to move toward more inclusive policies and practices for students with disabilities (Sweet et al., 2012), the dropout rate of these students remains alarmingly high. As a result, young people with disabilities as a group experience higher unemployment rates, lower paying jobs, lower income, and increased poverty (Murray et al., 2000, as cited in Denhart, 2008). National statistics state that students with learning disabilities who attend college have a dropout rate close to 70% (Newman et al., 2010, as cited in Lightner et al., 2012). Furthermore, these students receive a lower grade point average than their peers without disabilities, and they are more likely to take a leave of absence from their studies (Newman et al., 2010, as cited in Lightner et al., 2012). These findings paint a troubling picture of how the current education system, specifically in Ontario, fails to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Students with disabilities in Ontario are at a greater disadvantage in relation to access to and participation in postsecondary education.

This calls to question the effectiveness of the policies, supports, programs, and services offered to students with disabilities in Ontario. This chapter will connect the literature presented thus far and examine the different stakeholders involved in postsecondary education, and how policies, supports, programs, and services affect each stakeholder, followed by suggestions regarding how to make improvements to better assist students with disabilities in Ontario moving forward.

### **Stakeholders**

Within the education system, a stakeholder refers to “anyone who is invested in the welfare and success of a school and its students” (Great Schools Partnership, 2014,

para. 1). Parents state that leadership amongst school authorities is crucial to the quality of education that their children receive, and suggest that low expectations and the stereotypes surrounding students with disabilities impacted their success (Reid et al., 2018). This is something that all stakeholders need to be aware of. When students believe that there is a stigma associated with their disability, they are less likely to seek help, which is a concern for parents (Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002, as cited in Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). When students do not seek help, professors are unaware that they require support or assistance, therefore do not provide any.

### **Policy**

Policy makers develop policies to assist in a smooth and fair execution of responsibilities within an institution. Inclusive policies at the elementary/secondary level as well as the postsecondary level were created to encourage students with disabilities to continue with their education (Sweet et al., 2012). However, many policy makers are concerned that students with disabilities may be disadvantaged when it comes to accessing postsecondary education (Finnie et al., 2011a, 2011b). Sweet et al. (2012) state that some students with disabilities have postsecondary aspirations, but are not adequately prepared or supported.

Access to education for students with disabilities is regulated by the Education Act at the secondary level, and the Human Rights Commission, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act at the postsecondary level. While all of these legislations focus on offering a fair and equitable education for all students, the difference in legislation leads to differences in policy and support. The lack of continuity in policies between secondary and postsecondary education may contribute to some of the difficulties experienced by students and parents alike. Students

who receive support in secondary education are not automatically granted the same support in postsecondary education (RARC, 2019d). It is common practice for students entering postsecondary to be required to provide new documentation in the form of recent assessment reports and medical practitioner reports, even if they had these on file in the secondary system. At the postsecondary level, students must self-advocate for themselves in order to access the support available, and must provide specific and comprehensive documentation before accessing the support (RARC, 2019d; Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Additionally, documents and policies at the elementary and secondary level include responsibilities of various stakeholders, including the ministry, the school board, principals, teachers, parents, and students, whereas documents as policies at the postsecondary level often focus on responsibilities of the institution as a whole and the responsibilities of the individual. This could be damaging to student success as the postsecondary level as only two stakeholders seem to be recognized: the institution and the individual, when in fact this is not the case.

While students with disabilities are required to self-advocate for themselves at the postsecondary level, parental involvement for parents of children with disabilities typically does not diminish once they have reached the postsecondary level (Bianco et al., 2009). These parents are often consistently involved in advocating for their child at the postsecondary level throughout the duration of their postsecondary education (Bianco et al., 2009; Hetherington et al., 2010). They request information regarding postsecondary options for their child, and play a major role in negotiating services for their children (Adreon & Durocher, 2007, as cited in Alcorn MacKay, 2010). Policy makers should take into account the involvement of parents in their child's postsecondary education. Using policy to build bridges between postsecondary support systems, faculty, and

families can provide students with disabilities a more positive postsecondary experience. The overall goal for consistent understandings of support and expectations for each stakeholder through clear and concise policy can help promote student success.

Students and faculty alike within postsecondary institutions have reported that institutional practices may impede the learning of students with disabilities (Donato, 2008). Practices within postsecondary institutions may interfere with the education that students with disabilities receive. Donato (2008) argues that postsecondary institutions do not provide adequate support or UDL to foster success among students with disabilities. This is not surprising considering professors at the postsecondary level are not required to have any sort of education training. If professors are not taught to effectively teach students with varying learning styles and needs, then how can we expect them to?

The purpose of the education system include socialization as well as educating students to produce effective members of society. Policies are put in place to serve the best interests of the students, but how can school administrators and policy makers be sure that the policies are going to serve the best interests of the students without allowing students to have a voice and hold power in policy making decisions? Within current educational policy, there is no mechanism that exists for students with disabilities to critique existing policies or participate in creating new ones (Denhart, 2008). Power is exemplified in selection and implementation of policy. Students may be considered the biggest stakeholders when it comes to their own education, yet they often hold very little power and are underrepresented in policy decisions. Who better to express student needs than the students themselves? Critchley (2003) states that “very often when educational policies are being produced, the policy makers forget to consult with the right people (the students)” (p. 102).

Overall, the most effective way to find out what students with disabilities need in terms of support at the postsecondary level would be to ask the students themselves. Tinklin et al. (2004) state that until postsecondary institutions consult with students with disabilities directly, “they will remain ignorant of the difficulties and barriers faced by them” (as cited in Vickerman & Blundell, 2010, p. 21). Postsecondary institutions need to advocate for students’ views, opinions, and experiences while also meeting their needs (Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). Postsecondary institutions should provide support for students with disabilities without these students feeling the need to adapt in order to “fit-in” to the existing practices (Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). In order to better ensure success among students with disabilities, they need to have an input when it comes to educational policies around the types of support and accommodation they receive at the postsecondary level.

### **Support**

The support that students receive in postsecondary education varies greatly in comparison to the support they receive in secondary education, as the laws and policies that regulate accommodations are different (RARC, 2019d). Professors teach and provide accommodation as policies state they should, and the success of students depends on such teaching and support. Policies often focus on the students individually, without including parents as a part of the support, which is troublesome, as parents of students with disabilities offer continuous support throughout their child’s postsecondary education.

Parents report feelings of frustration due to the lack of communication and information from post-secondary institutions (Hetherington et al., 2010). They often report feeling as though they are lacking in knowledge around how to effectively support their child as they transition to postsecondary education (Hetherington et al., 2010).

Parents' feelings of frustration and lack of knowledge could be affecting their children's success, as they may be the primary means of support for their children through their postsecondary education. There are no policies or programs to assist parents in supporting their children. Parents are let down by the current system, and this is an issue that needs to be addressed because they struggle to support their children through their postsecondary education, which affects their children's experiences and success. Parents of children with disabilities require more information and communication from postsecondary institutions in order to successfully assist their children. Increased information and communication would likely have a positive effect not only for parents, but may also positively affect students' experiences and success. Asking parents what information and support they need from postsecondary institutions to better assist their children may be a good starting point.

Despite feeling as though they are lacking in knowledge around how to effectively support their child as they transition to postsecondary education, many parents encourage their children to attend the summer transition programs. In fact, the majority of the students who attend the summer transition program state that they did so under encouragement from their parents (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Summer transition programs are designed to provide students with skills that will increase success throughout their postsecondary education (McCloy & De Clou, 2013), however, attending the program did not increase the likeliness of obtaining a GPA above 2.0 (McCloy & De Clou, 2013; & Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). So, the summer transition programs are not achieving the desired result of what they were put in place to do. These programs need to be improved to execute the desired result of assisting students to succeed in their postsecondary education.

Furthermore, summer transition programs are often geared toward students with learning disabilities and ADHD who are transitioning straight from secondary education. This excludes students with any other disability, as well as students who are not transitioning from secondary education such as mature students or returning students who started a degree/diploma program and did not complete their requirements. I question why all transition programs are geared toward students with ADHD or learning disabilities who are transitioning straight from secondary education. It is not fair to assume that students with a disability other than ADHD or a learning disability and students who are not transitioning straight from secondary education do not require support through their transition. These students may also benefit from transition programs. It is necessary to improve transition services to assist students to adjust to the expectations and requirements of postsecondary education.

### **Teaching at the Postsecondary Level**

Students spend a minimum of 12 years in elementary and secondary education with teachers who have learned about UDL, differentiated instruction, different learning styles, and how to teach different types of learners. Professors at the postsecondary level are not required to have such training and therefore may not have learned such concepts throughout their own education. As a result, there is a gap between the education that students receive at the secondary level and the postsecondary level. Perhaps if there wasn't this gap between secondary and postsecondary education, the transition would be less of a challenge. The transition is often challenging because of the differences between secondary to postsecondary education, as it involves both academic adjustment and social adjustment (Alcorn McKay, 2010, as cited in Arscott, 2013). Providing professors at the

postsecondary level with mandatory teacher education classes may result in support for the professors themselves as well as support for the students.

Students with disabilities often cite that one of the greatest barriers to their postsecondary education is professors and other faculty members not understanding their needs (Donato, 2008). In a study conducted by Carney et al. (2007), 63% of students with disabilities disclosed their disability to their professors, and of that 63%, 45% reported having a negative response from professors (as cited in Donato, 2008). Professors report feeling unprepared to provide support for students with disabilities (Donato, 2008), which would lead to negative interactions and experiences for such students, and could result in students not being successful or dropping out altogether.

Increasing teacher education among professors may be beneficial for both students and the professors themselves, as professors have reported feeling unprepared to provide support for students with disabilities (Donato, 2008). Professors that do not have any teacher education do not have the same set of knowledge and skills as the teachers at the elementary and secondary level. This is an issue because professors may not be aware of how to effectively teach students with varying learning needs, resulting in feelings of unpreparedness, and affecting student success.

This is incredibly worrisome for all students, as Ben Jaafar and Anderson (2007) indicate that there are “high-stakes consequences for students who fail, with few or no consequences for the teachers who fail them” (p. 225). However, perhaps this issue of professors not being adequately prepared to support students with varying needs and learning styles is not an issue of the professors, but rather a deeper, systemic issue that needs to be addressed. Professors are often doing what is required of them, and often they are likely doing so to the best of their ability. However, students with disabilities are still

struggling to succeed. This calls to question the effectiveness of the policies and procedures currently in place within postsecondary institutions in Ontario, and who is making such policies.

### **Conclusion**

Through an examination of the literature and analysis of current policy in Ontario, it is clear that what the policy suggests as far as supporting students transition to and success in postsecondary education is not in fact what the literature reports as the norm for students with disabilities.

“Many critics of the disjuncture between legislated accessibility and actual [postsecondary education] participation point to inadequate support at universities and colleges” (Reed et al., 2003, as cited in Sweet et al., 2012, p. 3). Legislated accessibility aims to remove and prevent barriers for individuals with disabilities within postsecondary education, yet the actual participation of such students calls attention to the inadequate support that these students receive at the postsecondary level. Others point out the lack of academic preparation for students with special needs from Kindergarten to Grade 12 (OME, 2009, as cited in Sweet et al., 2012). When asked if schools were meeting their child’s needs, 53% of parents reported that their child was not receiving adequate academic accommodations and 68.2% reported that their child’s school was meeting 50% or less of their child’s academic needs (Reid et al., 2018). The barriers that students experience in elementary and secondary school will impact their academic success, which will in turn affect their access to postsecondary options. This exemplifies the need for greater support for students with disabilities through elementary and secondary education to better prepare them for postsecondary education.

While support and accommodation and the elementary and secondary level may be an underlying issue affecting student success at the postsecondary level, there is not much that postsecondary institutions can do about changing the policies and procedures at the elementary and secondary level. Postsecondary institutions can however research and examine how to improve the support that these students are receiving once they reach the postsecondary level. Communication and collaboration between secondary and postsecondary institutions may assist postsecondary institutions in providing more effective programs and support. Further, giving students and parents a voice may improve services and supports. Asking students with disabilities as well as parents of students with disabilities what they need in terms of support and accommodation would likely be useful to policy makers and professors. Furthermore, increasing teacher education among professors is likely to have a positive effect on student success.

Postsecondary institutions need to provide a learning environment that will promote the success of all students, and understand that students with disabilities require certain support and accommodation in order to succeed. The fact that students with disabilities receive a lower grade point average than their peers without disabilities and are at an increased risk of dropping out does not mean that they are not intelligent enough to complete a degree/diploma program. It does, however, call to question the adequacy of support and accommodation that is provided within postsecondary institutions. Donato (2008) states that “higher education provides an opportunity for empowerment and equity for students with disabilities” (p. 32). It’s time for postsecondary institutions to update their policies in order to better provide such an opportunity for empowerment and equity for students with disabilities.

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## Appendix

### Definitions of Terms

<b>Disability</b>	Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2013, p. 2)	
<b>Behavioural Disabilities/ Exceptionalities</b>	A learning disorder characterized by specific behaviour problems over such a period of time, and to such a marked degree, and of such a nature, as to adversely affect educational performance and that may be accompanied by one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● an inability to build or to maintain interpersonal relationships;</li> <li>● excessive fears or anxieties’</li> <li>● a tendency to compulsive reaction;</li> <li>● an inability to learn that cannot be traced to intellectual, sensory, or other health factors, or any combination thereof</li> </ul> (OME, 2017b. p. A14)	
<b>Communicational Disabilities/ Exceptionalities</b>	<b>Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</b>	A severe learning disorder that is characterized by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● disturbances in: rate of educational development; ability to relate to the environment; mobility; perception, speech, and language;</li> <li>● lack of the representational symbolic behaviour that precedes language</li> </ul> (OME, 2017b, p. A15)
	<b>Deaf and Hard of Hearing</b>	An impairment characterized by deficits in language and speech development because of a diminished or non-existent auditory response to sound. (OME, 2017b, p. A15)
	<b>Language Impairment</b>	A learning disorder characterized by an impairment in comprehension and/or the use of verbal communication or the written or other symbol system of communication, which may be associated with

		<p>neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors, and which may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● involve one or more of the form, content, and function of language in communication; and</li> <li>● include one or more of: language delay; dysfluency; voice and articulation development, which may or may not be organically or functionally based</li> </ul> <p>(OME, 2017b, p. A15)</p>
	<p><b>Speech Impairment</b></p>	<p>A disorder in language formulation that may be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors; that involves perceptual motor aspects of transmitting oral messages; and that may be characterized by impairment in articulation, rhythm, and stress (OME, 2017b, p. A15).</p>
	<p><b>Learning Disability</b></p>	<p>One of a number of neurodevelopmental disorders that persistently and significantly has an impact on the ability to learn and use academic and other skills and that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● affects the ability to perceive or process verbal or non-verbal information in an effective and accurate manner in students who have assessed intellectual abilities that are <i>at least</i> in the average range;</li> <li>● results in (a) academic underachievement that is inconsistent with the intellectual abilities of the student (which are at least in the average range), and/or (b) academic achievement that can be maintained by the student only with extremely high levels of effort and/or with additional support;</li> <li>● results in difficulties in the development and use of skills in one or more of the following areas: reading, writing, mathematics, and work habits and learning skills;</li> <li>● may typically be associated with difficulties in one or more cognitive processes, such as phonological processing; memory and</li> </ul>

		<p>attention; processing speed; perceptual- motor processing; visual-spatial processing; executive functions (e.g., self-regulation of behaviour and emotions, planning, organizing of thoughts and activities, prioritizing, decision making);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may be associated with difficulties in social interaction (e.g., difficulty in understanding social norms or the point of view of others); with various other conditions or disorders, diagnosed or undiagnosed; or with other exceptionalities;</li> <li>• is <i>not</i> the result of a lack of acuity in hearing and/or vision that has not been corrected; intellectual disabilities; socio-economic factors; cultural differences; lack of proficiency in the language of instruction; lack of motivation or effort; gaps in school attendance or inadequate opportunity to benefit from instruction</li> </ul> <p>(OME, 2017b, pp. A15–A16)</p>
<b>Intellectual Disabilities/ Exceptionalities</b>	<b>Giftedness</b>	<p>An unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated (OME, 2017b, p. A16).</p>
	<b>Mild Intellectual Disability</b>	<p>A learning disorder characterized by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an ability to profit educationally within a regular class with the aid of considerable curriculum modification and support services;</li> <li>• an inability to profit educationally within a regular class because of slow intellectual development;</li> <li>• a potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment, and economic self- support</li> </ul> <p>(OME, 2017b, p. A16)</p>

	<b>Developmental Disability</b>	<p>A severe learning disorder characterized by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● an inability to profit from a special education program for students with mild intellectual disabilities because of slow intellectual development;</li> <li>● an ability to profit from a special education program that is designed to accommodate slow intellectual development;</li> <li>● a limited potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment, and economic self-support</li> </ul> <p>(OME, 2017b, p. A16)</p>
<b>Physical Disabilities/Exceptionalities</b>	A condition of such severe physical limitation or deficiency as to require special assistance in learning situations to provide the opportunity for educational achievement equivalent to that of students without exceptionalities who are of the same age or development level (OME, 2017b, p. A16).	
<b>Multiple Disabilities/Exceptionalities</b>	A combination of learning or other disorders, impairments, or physical disabilities that is of such a nature as to require, for educational achievement, the services of one or more teachers holding qualifications in special education and the provision of support services appropriate for such disorders, impairments, or disabilities (OME, 2017b, p. A16).	
<b>Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)</b>	ADHD is characterized by symptoms of inattention, and/or symptoms of hyperactivity/impulsivity. Individuals with ADHD often have a great deal of difficulty focusing their attention on a given task or activity, often resulting in unfinished tasks. Students with ADHD are often described as fidgety, unable to sit still for more than a few minutes, and as acting without thinking (Barlow et al., 2012).	
<b>Learning Styles</b>	<b>Visual Learners</b>	Students who are visual learners prefer learning through figures, pictures, graphs, flowcharts, videos etc. (Othman & Amirudin, 2010).
	<b>Aural/Auditory Learners</b>	Students who are aural learners prefer to listen to lectures, presentations, group discussions, audio books, etc. (Othman & Amiruddin, 2010).
	<b>Reading Learners</b>	Students who are reading learners prefer reading printed word, textbooks, lecture notes, journal articles, etc. (Othman & Amiruddin, 2010).

	<b>Kinaesthetic Learners</b>	Students who are kinaesthetic learners prefer hands-on experience, and practice doing an activity/task. (Othman & Amiruddin, 2010).
<b>Universal Design for Learning (UDL)</b>	<p>UDL provides teachers with broad principles for planning instruction and designing learning environments for a diverse group of students. The broad learning principles include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Equitable use;</li> <li>● Appropriately designed space;</li> <li>● Flexibility;</li> <li>● Simplicity;</li> <li>● Safety;</li> <li>● Different modes of perception</li> </ul> <p>(OME, 2013c, p. 12).</p> <p>The aim of UDL is to provide access to the curriculum for <i>all</i> students, and to assist educators in designing products and environments to make them accessible to everyone, regardless of age, skills, or situation (OME, 2013c, p. 14).</p>	
<b>Differentiated Instruction</b>	<p>Differentiated instruction (DI) is based on the idea that because students differ significantly in their <i>strengths, interests, learning styles, and readiness to learn</i>, it is necessary to adapt instruction to suit these differing characteristics (Ministry of Education, 2013c, p.17).</p> <p>Differentiated instruction includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● providing alternative instructional and assessment activities;</li> <li>● Challenging students at an appropriate level;</li> <li>● Using a variety of groupings to meet student needs.</li> </ul> <p>Differentiated instruction does not include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● doing something different for every student in the class;</li> <li>● Disorderly or undisciplined student activity;</li> <li>● Using groups that never change, or isolating struggling students within the class;</li> <li>● Never engaging in whole-class activities with all students participating in the same endeavour.</li> </ul> <p>(OME 2013c, p. 18)</p>	
<b>Individual Education Plan (IEP)</b>	<p>An IEP is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● a written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, based on a thorough assessment of the strengths and needs that affect the student's ability to learn and to demonstrate learning;</li> <li>● a working document that contains the transition plan, a detailed and coordinated plan that helps to ensure that a student has supports in place to facilitate educational transitions;</li> <li>● a record of any accommodations needed to help the student achieve the learning expectations identified in the IEP, given the</li> </ul>	

	<p>student's identified learning strengths and needs;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● a working document that identifies learning expectations that are modified from the expectations for the regular grade level in a particular subject or course, as outlined in the Ministry of Education's curriculum policy documents, if modifications are required;</li> <li>● a working document that identifies alternative expectations, if required, in areas not represented in the Ontario curriculum;</li> <li>● a record of the teaching strategies specific to modified and alternative expectations and of assessment methods to be used to determine the student's progress towards achieving these expectations;</li> <li>● a working document that is developed at the beginning of a school year or semester or at the start of a placement and that is reviewed and adjusted throughout the reporting period;</li> <li>● an accountability tool for the student, the student's parents, and everyone who has responsibilities under the plan for helping the student meet the stated goals and learning expectations as the student progresses through the Ontario curriculum.</li> </ul> <p>An IEP is <i>not</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● a description of everything that will be taught to the student;</li> <li>● a list of all the teaching strategies used in regular classroom instruction;</li> <li>● a document that records all of the student's learning expectations, including those that are not modified from the regular grade level curriculum expectations;</li> <li>● a daily lesson plan.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC)</b></p>	<p>An IPRC is a formal committee that meets and decides if a student should be identified as exceptional and, if so, the placement that will best meet the student's needs. An IPRC must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● invite the parent and the student (if the student is 16 years of age or older) to attend the IPRC meeting;</li> <li>● review relevant information about the student;</li> <li>● describe the student's strengths and needs;</li> <li>● decide whether or not the student should be identified as exceptional;</li> <li>● identify the area(s) of the student's exceptionality or exceptionalities, according to the categories and definitions of exceptionality provided by the Ministry of Education;</li> <li>● decide on an appropriate placement for the student;</li> <li>● provide reasons for the placement if deciding for a placement in a special education class;</li> <li>● discuss proposals for special education programs and services if the parent, or the student age 16 or over, requests it;</li> <li>● review the identification and placement at least once in each</li> </ul>

	<p>school year, unless the parent gives written notice dispensing with the review. (OME, 2017b, p. E6).</p>
<p><b>Individual Pathways Plan (IPP)</b></p>	<p>Starting in Grade 7 students will document their learning in education and career/life planning in a web-based IPP (Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 18). In Grades 7 and 8, the IPP process will emphasize planning for the transition from elementary to secondary school; in Grades 10 to 12, it will emphasize planning for the student's initial postsecondary destination (OME, 2013a, p. 19).</p>
<p><b>Grade Point Average (GPA)</b></p>	<p>A measure of a student's academic achievement at a post-secondary level which is calculated by dividing the total number of grade points received by the total number of classes taken (Vocabulary.com, n.d.)</p>