12-2017

A Qualitative Case Study of Coteaching Relationships

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A Qualitative Case Study of Co-Teaching Relationships

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

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Keywords: Co-Teaching, Special Education, Relationships, General Education

ABSTRACT

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Co-teaching is defined as a general education teacher and special education teacher, who may or may not have the same area of expertise, jointly delivering instruction to a group of students with special needs and general education students in an inclusive classroom. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers in regard to forming co-teaching relationships in a school setting organized to serve special education students through co-teaching models. Participants were purposefully sampled following the typical case sampling strategy and included two public schools. Of the two schools, there were five special education teachers and two general education teachers that participated in in-depth interviews based on open-ended questions from a predetermined interview guide. Analysis of transcripts from the interviews helped identify the findings for this study. Through the analysis of the transcripts the data revealed becoming a co-teacher, communication, co-planning, continuity of teachers, and roles and responsibilities of co-teachers were factors of forming a cohesive co-teaching relationship.

DEDICATION

I am very grateful to my Heavenly Father. He has blessed me immensely throughout my life. The greatest blessing that I have been blessed with in this life is my family. Through their love and support I would not be the person I am today. I lovingly dedicate this study to my family.

To my wife and best friend, Jennie: thank you for always believing in me and seeing what I could not see in myself. You have always been by my side encouraging me to follow my dreams. This entire process was difficult and you supported me the entire way. I am eternally grateful for your love, patience, and guidance. I am excited to see what life holds for us now that I will no longer be in school. I look forward to being a "goofus on the roofus" with you. I love you more than I can say. Thank you.

To my children, Jameson, Paige, Averie, Lauren, and Alex: Daddy is done with this thing now. I look forward to spending a lot more time with you. Thank you for always encouraging me and being patient with me. I know it has not always been easy when I would have to leave to do school work. I want you to know that I did this for each of you. I wanted to show you that nothing is out of reach. You can do whatever you want to do in life and do not let anyone tell you otherwise. You are my greatest accomplishments in life and I am forever grateful for you love and support. I love each of you and will help you with whatever you want to do in life.

To my parents, Bob and Linda: Mom, you once told me, "You were meant for something special in this life." Those words echoed in my heart during the struggles I had during my college career. I always believed those words and tried to live up to them. Thank you for your nurturing love and guidance throughout my life. You instilled in me a strong work ethic and determination. I love you the most. Be happy I beat, Mom. Dad, I cannot tell you how much I

miss you. You were the greatest coach on this planet. You always believed there was a way to win at everything. When I complained about how hard and unfair school was you said, "… then quit. Or you can prove them wrong." Dad, I know no other way to honor you other than to say, I proved them wrong. Thank you. I love you.

To my sister and brothers, Barbara, Rob, James, and Marty: Barb, thank you for always being so loving and kind. You are one of the most generous people I know. I cannot lie, you are my favorite sister. Rob, I have always seen you as invincible. When I was little I looked up to you and wanted to be you. Thank you for the great example you have been to me in my life. James, thank you for being my best friend growing up. I do not think anyone can truly understand what your friendship meant to me. Marty, I am forever grateful to you for your love and generosity. I could not have asked for a better little brother. Thank you for always seeing the lighter side to things. No one makes me laugh easier than you. I thank each of you for your love and support during this long process. You each have motivated me more than you will ever know. I love you all.

To all of my nieces and nephews: Ashley, Mathew, Brittany, Skyler, Hadley, Payton, Savannah, Brooklyn, Sage, Harper, Melanie, Bostin, Felix, David, Grace, Micah, Zerrin, Anbrie, Jack, and Ava, Uncle Matt loves you. You can be anything you want to be.

To David and Mary Ann: Thank you so much for all of your love and encouragement. I will always be grateful for the beautiful young lady you raised. Without her, I would not have been able to do this. I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge the tireless work of my dissertation committee. Dr. Foley, thank you for not giving up on me. I appreciate your patient and guiding hand. Dr. Scott, thank you for guiding me through the murky waters of my methodology. I appreciate the long talks on the phone and your tireless help. Dr. Boyd, thank you for always being so positive. You were a guiding voice for me throughout the entire program. Dr. Marks, thank you for agreeing to be on my committee. I have fond memories of your classes while working on my master's degree.

I would also like to acknowledge my editor, Dr. Stephanie Tweed. Thank you for agreeing to take on this project. Your willingness to help and expertise are truly appreciated. Thank you for your quick and thorough work.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Dunn (1968) scrutinized the lawfulness of teaching children who were intellectually hindered in segregated classrooms. Dunn suggested the desertion of the special class based on a lack of evidence of the efficacy of such classes. Recorded in the text of the anti-segregation movement of the 1960s Dunn's article showed the need and want to end the segregated nature of classes for students with disabilities (Semmel, Gerber, & MacMillan, 1994). Though the article was criticized for its lack of scholarly writing, it provided motivation that resulted in access for students with special needs to the general education classroom. (Kavale & Forness, 2000).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975, just seven years after Dunn's article ("Education for All Handicapped Children Act," 1975). The mandates of the law were a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE), due process, and the implementation of individual education plans (IEP) (Kavale, 2002). LRE is a legal regulation that necessitates students with disabilities be taught in the general education environment with their peers. To keep students with disabilities from being placed in a segregated special education classroom, LRE was included in the law to help students with disabilities access the general education and prohibit the practice of segregating students with special needs (Osborne, Diamatti, & Curran, 1994). Many students with disabilities remain segregated through the use of pullout and categorical placements. The current sanctioned law today is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). Through its numerous modifications, the demand to give the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities is the backbone of this law.

Statement of the Problem

Including students who receive special education within the general education environment is not new. Researchers, policymakers, and educators have advocated it for years, yet achieving the goal of full inclusion for all students has proved difficult. Special education and general education have not yet developed an integrated system of collaboration to strengthen both entities (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1992). Within the last 10 years, co-teaching has emerged as one model with the capacity to join the traditionally parallel systems of special education and general education as well as effectively increase outcomes for all students within the general education classroom (Hunt, Soto, Maier, Muller, & Goetz, 2003). Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend (1989) first used the term cooperative teaching to describe the relationship between general and special educators' direct planned instruction that was provided to all students in the general education classroom.

Even though co-teaching is not a widely used practice, there have been successes when used. A three-year study by Walther-Thomas (1997) explained that teachers and administrators identified several benefits from using a co-teaching model. Students with disabilities reported a higher confidence in their abilities as learners. The study also showed that students with disabilities experienced improved academic performance, better peer relationships, and heightened social skills. Conversely, general education students were reported to benefit in the areas of improved academic performance, more interactions with the teacher, increased exposure to cognitive strategies, and improved classroom communities. The study suggested that there were strong benefits for special and general education teachers too. Both special and general education teachers reported higher levels of professional satisfaction and more opportunities for professional growth and collaboration.

Bandura (2000) claimed that the development of collective efficacy among faculty in promoting or prohibiting the development of co-teaching relationships is a barrier to co-teaching becoming a common practice. Collective efficacy is defined as the shared belief among people working toward like goals that collective strength can be used achieve those goals (Bandura, 2000). Studies have authenticated the relationship between teachers' perceived collective efficacy and its effect on student achievement (Goddard, 2001). However, public schools are organized in ways that resist opportunity to develop collective efficacy by supporting teachers' differentiated roles and the unequal status between classroom teachers and specialists (Kugelmass, 2001). The present organizational structure of schools limits the adoption of collaborative teaching arrangements that can support the needs of student with special needs in the general education classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers in regard to forming co-teaching relationships in a school setting organized to serve students with special needs through co-teaching models. The objectives were to describe how a co-teaching relationship develops between several general education and special education teachers in a special education co-teaching environment and to describe how special education and general education teachers construct collective beliefs that affect the development, implementation, and sustainment of a successful co-teaching relationship.

Research Questions

R1: What factors do general education teachers perceive to be facilitators of an effective co-teaching partnership?

R2: What factors do special education teachers perceive to be facilitators of an effective co-teaching partnership?

R3. What roles do general education teachers exhibit in co-teaching?

R4. What roles do special education teachers exhibit in co-teaching?

Significance of the Study

Federal and state mandates have called for special education students to be placed in the Least Restrictive Environment and access the general education curriculum of their general education peers. Combing the content knowledge of general education teachers with the adaptive techniques of special education teachers changes the way classes are taught for all students and can increase student learning (Fennick & Liddy, 2001). General education and special education teachers working within co-teaching classrooms can develop a relationship resulting in the belief that they can work together to create an environment where all students achieve. This study provides additional qualitative research on the ways general and special education teachers can create co-teaching relationships within the least restrictive environments that exist in most schools today.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the participant size. Because these are self-selected participants, the participant size was determined by responses of co-teachers who chose to participate in the study in one school system in northeast Tennessee.

Definition of Terms

To clarify meaning, several terms used during the study have been defined here.

Collective Efficacy- For the purpose of this study, collective efficacy is defined as the shared belief among special and general educators working toward like goals to use their collective strengths to achieve those goals.

Co-teaching- For the purpose of this study, co-teaching is defined as a general education teacher and special education teacher, who may or may not have the same area of expertise, jointly delivering instruction to a group of students with special needs and general education students in an inclusive classroom.

General Education Teacher- For the purpose of this study, a general education teacher is defined as a teacher who teaches typically developing children. The curriculum that is taught is based on state standards and evaluated by the annual state educational standards test.

Special Education Teacher- For the purpose of this study, a special education teacher is defined as a teacher who works with students who have a wide range of learning, intellectual, emotional, and physical disabilities. Special education teachers adapt general education lessons and teach various subjects to students with mild and moderate disabilities.

Overview of Study

Chapter 1 of the study provides an introduction to the study, along with research questions, operational definitions, the significance of the study, and limitations. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature including a brief history of policy, benefits, methods, barriers, definitions and perceptions, including the difficulties of special educations access to the general education curriculum. Chapter 3 provides information on the research methodology for the study. Chapter 4 provides the results, and Chapter 5 provides a summary, conclusion, and future research recommendations

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature pertaining to this study. The first section includes a brief description of the overall history of special education in the public schools. The next section discusses the history of inclusion in special education and the changes that inclusion meant for special education. The third section describes the feelings teachers have towards inclusion, whether those feelings are positive or negative. The fourth and fifth sections explore the aspects of successful inclusion and the benefits of inclusion respectively. The sixth section discusses the obstacles that administrators face when trying to implement inclusion. Next, co-teaching is introduced and defined. Co-teaching is also explained as a form of inclusion that is embedded in a special education curriculum. Finally, the researcher discusses the different forms of co-teaching.

It was not long ago that many inequities and injustices existed with respect to the education of children with disabilities. Up until the 1970s many of these children were excluded from educational opportunities; others received insufficient and inappropriate services (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). These inequities pressed parents to lobby and file suit for better educational opportunities for their children resulting in the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) (Brown, 2007). EAHCA provided federal funding for initiatives geared towards the education of children with disabilities. The EAHCA, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), guaranteed free and appropriate educational opportunities for all school age children with disabilities. The new mandates required children with disabilities all have Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) and be educated in the least

restrictive environment as much as possible. The least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of IDEA requires students with disabilities to be educated in general education classrooms unless the nature and severity of the disability are such that needs cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Etscheidt & Bartlett, 1999). The purpose of the LRE was to move the focus of educating students with disabilities from merely receiving educational services to ensuring these students have the supports necessary to achieve in the most appropriate setting (Hardin & Hardin, 2002). The reauthorization of IDEA in subsequent years gave students with disabilities and their parents a meaningful role in the evaluation process, IEP meetings, and placement decisions (Praisner, 2003). IDEA has affected every school in the country and has changed the roles of all the individuals involved in the educational process (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001). Administrators must be knowledgeable of the many laws and statutes pertaining to Special Education in order to understand the importance of including students with disabilities in general education. Reviewing the intent and language of the IDEA will assist principals in not only shaping school based policies and evaluating programs and their implementation but also in making informed decisions about placement, assessment, and service delivery models (Kluth, Villa, & Thousand, 2002). Despite the laws' emphasis on LRE, many students are still being segregated from their peers. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) sought to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged students and close the achievement gap between various subgroups of students, including those with disabilities, by imposing new requirements for standards, assessments, accountability, and parental involvement. The legislation committed to the education of children by ensuring all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. The Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) forced school districts and school officials to reevaluate

how students with disabilities are being served in schools (Kluth et al., 2002). While the two federal laws that govern the education of children with disabilities do not require inclusion, both require that a significant effort be made to find an inclusive placement.

In the past 15 to 20 years there has been progress towards including students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Administrators, teachers, and parents have espoused this movement with differing views of support. While there are several challenges to inclusion in the general education classroom, there are also several advantages. Throughout the United States, school districts have, and continue to strive for, the progression of inclusionary programs. The U.S. Department of Education's 35th annual report to Congress for the implementation of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2013) stated that there has been an increase of students with disabilities being included in the general education classes to 61.1%. In 2005 the U.S. Department of Education's annual report to Congress (2005) reported the percentage of students with disabilities being taught in the general education classroom was at 49.9 %. From 2005 to 2013 there has been an increase of 11.2 %. The increase could show that schools continue to progress in improving access of the educational system for all students.

Hammond and Ingalls (2003) stated that many gains have been made with regard to including students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Still, more improvement and progress need to be made. Up-to-date schools implement inclusion in different degrees. There are schools that practice full inclusion, while others are choosing part time inclusion. Part time inclusion is where students spend time in both the special education classroom and the general education classroom with their general education peers. Simeonsson, Carlson, Huntington, McMillen, and Brent (2001) examined the participation in schools by students with disabilities and how the level of participation affects the students and the school environment as a whole.

Simeonsson et al. suggested that due to the limited resources and cost involved most districts do not participate in full inclusion. Jones, Thorn, Chow, Thompson, and Wilde (2002) suggested that the decision to place a student with disabilities in an inclusion setting should be made by the IEP team which consists of the parents, teachers, and students. Bowers (2004) indicated that when placing a student in an inclusion setting, the teacher needs to think about the individual student needs. Bowers also found that if students with disabilities are placed in the general education classroom without support services or accommodations, these students will not perform as well as their general education peers, academically or socially. For the student with disabilities to perform at his or her highest, a more restrictive setting like a special education class would be better.

History of Inclusion in Special Education

The history of special education and inclusion is a long one. It can be traced back as far as 1893 when a child who was labeled "weak minded" was expelled, and the Supreme Court of Massachusetts upheld that expulsion. The Supreme Court of Wisconsin in 1919 allowed the expulsion of a child with difficulties in speech although the child was found to have the academic and physical capabilities to benefit from public education. According to Alpers (2002), these expulsions were common all the way up to the 1960s. Alpers also reported the educational rights for children with disabilities stem from the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968. These legislations caused significant public debate and political pressure to be placed upon school administrators to change policies for children with disabilities. The political pressure mounted because children with disabilities were frequently discriminated against by their teachers and peers.

It would not be until the 1970s that children with disabilities would see rights to a free and appropriate education (FAPE). In 1971 the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) sued the state of Pennsylvania for and on behalf of children with Down Syndrome who were excluded from public education (Daniel, 1997). In 1972 when *Mills v. Board of Education* prompted an extended right of free public education to all children with disabilities, which included children with mental retardation, an emotional disturbance, a physical disability, and behavioral problems.

Special education within the public school system began as a specialized program separated from general education and was embodied in the categorical "special class" (Kavale, 2000). According to Kavale (2000), it was believed that this "special class" was the best way to provide universal education for all students with disabilities and a way to avoid conflicts. In 1968, Dunn began to question if special classes were justifiable. Dunn's position resulted in the attitudes towards special education being more favorable.

A legal debate whether to include students with special needs in the general education classroom became widespread in 1975 when The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was enacted. Today, the law is called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA was amended in 1997 and again in 2004 to help make some terms and provisions clearer from the initial law. Added to the law were related services, and the law also made the general education teacher a part of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team. Before, the general education teacher had not been required to be on the IEP team (Gordon, 2006).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is another important legislation that helped students with special needs. Section 504 provided an important legal mandate of the LRE (Alpers, 2002). Section 504 also helped mandate the use of supplementary aids and services for

students with disabilities. This also ensured that children with disabilities would not be discriminated against due to their disabilities.

In 1989, *Danile R.R. v. State Board of Education* established the judicial protocol of review for the LRE (US Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit, 1989). Daniel was a 6 year old boy with Down's Syndrome who attended pre-kindergarten class with his general education peers for half the day and attended an early childhood special education classroom for the other half of the day. As the school year progressed, Daniel's prekindergarten teacher informed the school placement committee that Daniel was not participating in class and not making progress. Due to this report, Daniel was removed from the prekindergarten classroom and placed in the early childhood special education classroom for the full day. The court ruled in favor of the school district stating that the district had properly provided a continuum of educational services. The court also ruled that the school district experimented with a variety of alternative placements, properly provided supplementary aids and services in an attempt to maintain Daniel in the general education classroom, and mainstreamed him to the maximum extent possible. Alpers (2002) reported that as a result of this ruling by the court, the Daniel Standard Test was designed. This test is used as a guide for courts in determining if schools have complied with the requirements of IDEA.

The IDEIA brought changes to special education by designating the resource room model as the primary placement for all students with disabilities. According to Kavale (2002), the resource room model is defined as academic instruction provided by special education teachers within a resource room setting, for a specified period of time, to a special education student whose primary placement is in the general education classroom. Another initiative that called for inclusive placements is the General Education Initiative (REI). The idea was to merge general and special education to create a more unified system of education.

Teachers' Attitudes About Inclusion

Various research studies and a review of the literature suggests there are a variety of both positive and negative teacher attitudes about inclusion. Hammond and Ingalls (2003) discovered that one of the major factors in deciding the success of an inclusive classroom is the general education teacher's attitude toward the inclusion classroom. Biddle (2006) stated that the use of appropriate accommodations and supports coupled with both the general and special education teacher's beliefs and attitudes significantly influence the inclusion classroom learning environment for students with disabilities. Biddle also found that a negative teacher attitude toward inclusion is directly linked to less frequent use of effective classroom accommodations for students with disabilities in the inclusive setting.

Beliefs and attitudes about inclusion have a wide variation. Much of the debate surrounding inclusion regards full inclusion vs. partial inclusion. Full inclusion means that students with disabilities are educated in the general education classroom full time. Special education services and supports are provided to the general education teacher and the student with disabilities. A partial inclusion model is where students with disabilities spend part of their day in general education classrooms and part of their day in the special education classroom. In both classrooms, supportive services are provided. Bowers (2004) stated that for some students with disabilities, the full inclusion model was able to meet their academic, social, and physical needs when supports and accommodations were used. Bowers also found that some students needs may be better met in a partial inclusion model. For instance, a sixth grade student identified with a learning disability who participates in the general language arts class, but is only reading on a third grade level may not be able to fully participate with general education peers and may benefit from more one-on-one instruction in the resource classroom. A student

with more severe disabilities could also have other needs which are best met in a one-on-one or small group setting. For example, a student with a severe cognitive delay or significantly lower than average intellectual functioning needs to learn daily living skills rather than the general education curriculum. The majority of research indicates most educators are not completely in support of full inclusion, but would like to make placement decisions on an individual case by case basis (Bowers 2004; Bricker, 2000; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Jones et al., 2002; Simmeonsson et al., 2001).

An attitude that is held by some teachers regarding inclusion is that it will create more work and responsibility. Teachers also feel that it will take time away from the general education students that are in their classrooms (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). Bricker (2003) reported that teachers become very frustrated and negative feelings toward inclusion develop when teachers feel that the day to day demands are increased on an already demanding classroom. General education teachers often reported that making additional accommodations for students with disabilities takes time away from other students in their classroom. However, Bricker stated that not only can special education students benefit from the increased accommodations, but many general education students can benefit as well.

Another contributing factor to negative feelings towards inclusion is the lack of collaboration between the general education teacher and the special education teacher. A study conducted by Hammond and Ingalls (2003) found that 82% of teachers believe that general and special education teachers do not collaborate enough to provide services for students with disabilities. Much of this has to do with a lack of common planning time. Teachers reported they do not have the resources or time to get together and plan appropriate accommodations for their students in their classroom with disabilities.

Hammond and Ingalls (2003) surveyed general education elementary school teachers to identify attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities. Their study found that many teachers hold negative attitudes toward inclusion because of: (1) a lack of commitment of school personnel and administration, (2) disagreement with the benefits of inclusion, (3) inadequate levels of collaboration and support from fellow teachers, (4) insufficient training for providing accommodations and services to students with disabilities, and (5) teachers feeling unprepared to handle students with disabilities in their classrooms. The Hammond and Ingall's survey showed the majority of general education elementary teachers were in agreement that there are some benefits to inclusion and they try to consider the general education placement first by providing individualized instruction to all students. However, the teachers also agreed that the inclusion programs within their schools were not fully implemented and not all students' needs were being met.

Aspects of Successful Inclusion

There are many aspects that affect the success of inclusion in the classroom today. The literature reviewed indicates negative attitudes can be changed to more positive attitudes if some or all of the following aspects are implemented or explored (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003).

Hammond and Ingalls (2003) discovered that many teachers are unprepared and lack sufficient training to fully deal with students with disabilities and lack support to implement successful inclusion programs. Biddle (2006) also found that for teachers to provide a variety of accommodations they need ongoing professional development to continue to develop their skills. Such opportunities could include attending workshops, observing in other classrooms, reviewing research on inclusion, and collaboration with colleagues to develop a successful inclusion program. A study by Leyser and Tappendorf (2001) reinforced Biddle's findings that teachers

need to attend various workshops and in-services to learn more about students with disabilities and inclusion. If teachers are provided with adequate training, they will begin to feel more comfortable working with students with disabilities and implementing various accommodations within their classrooms.

The success of inclusion is determined by the attitudes of both teachers and administrators (Jones et al., 2002). Inclusion must be supported school wide if it is going to be successful. McLeskey and Waldron (2002) found that administrative support is paramount to helping construct a successful inclusive school. The school administrators have to provide the staff with the support and resources needed to develop an inclusive setting within the school. McLesky and Waldron revealed that school administrators should provide support for program development, provide relevant staff development opportunities, and promote the need for the positive changes toward inclusion among building staff.

As stated earlier, collaboration between general education and special education teachers is another aspect that contributes to the success of an inclusion classroom and a teacher's attitude toward inclusion. Biddle (2006) discovered that together, general and special education teachers need the time to plan, work, and develop appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. Together the general education and special education teacher can develop various learning strategies and accommodations that will instill success for both general and special education students. The work of Hammond and Ingalls (2003) supported the finding that successful inclusion requires a lot of planning and coordination between general and special education teachers in order for inclusion to be successful in the classroom. Leyser and Tappendorf (2001) explained that it is helpful if general education and special education teachers attend in-services together. This will give these teachers the opportunity to share ideas and learn

how to effectively work together in order to teach all students within the general education classroom.

Inclusion Benefits

Several research studies have been conducted on how inclusive education impacts students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (Bricker, 2000; McLesky & Waldron, 2002; Peck, Staub, Gallucci, & Schwartz, 2004; Rudd, 2002). A review of this research indicated that there are many benefits to inclusive education. Full inclusion may not be appropriate for all students, but it does offer a variety of benefits to students, teachers, parents, and society.

A prevalent benefit of inclusion involves the academic progress of all students in the classroom. According to Rudd (2002), students with disabilities make significant academic, behavioral, and social gains when participating in the general education classrooms. Students with disabilities spend more time engaged in learning and feel more comfortable interacting with their peers when they are included in the general classroom. Bricker (2000) found that students with disabilities have more positive role models to learn from when involved with their non-disabled peers. One concern of teachers and parents of general education students, regarding the benefits of inclusion as reported by McLesky and Waldron (2002) is that inclusion may hinder the academic progress of the general education students. A study conducted by Peck et al. (2004) stated that nondisabled children enrolled in inclusive classrooms made greater academic gains on curriculum based assessment measures than those enrolled in traditional classes. There are many different perspectives on the success of inclusive education. Various factors such as teacher attitudes, a lack of teacher training, or difficulties with collaboration may contribute to these perspectives (Rudd, 2002).

Rudd (2002) explained that an aspect of inclusion that may be constructive is the social acceptance and peer interaction between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. Rudd reported that students with disabilities form stronger friendships with their non-disabled peers when they participate and learn together in their general education classroom. They also become more comfortable and accepting of each other's differences. These friendships may lead to less teasing and bullying of students with special needs. Jones et al. (2002) found that when students with disabilities are included in their general education classrooms they learn to socialize with their peers. This social interaction is much more valuable when it takes place in the general education classroom rather than a segregated setting. For example, the study stated that students with special needs received about 340% more social interactions in inclusion classrooms than in self-contained classrooms. Cawley, Hayden, Cade, and Baker-Kroczynski (2002) suggested that inclusive classrooms allow for greater social acceptance among all students. Friendships are formed and more interaction is encouraged. The inclusive classroom provides a great opportunity for all students to learn, work, and live together.

Obstacles to Inclusion

Although there are many benefits to inclusive education, there are also some barriers or obstacles. The most common barrier with inclusive education is the lack of appropriate support for both teachers and students. If the proper supports are not in place, direct instructional time could be taken from general education students (Hobbs & Westling, 1998). Placing students with disabilities in the general classrooms has the potential to consume too much of an already overworked teachers' attention (Kavale, 2000). Children with severe cognitive disabilities and those with severe behavioral disorders are more likely to be harmed than helped because teachers do not have highly specialized training to deal with their needs (Hobbs & Westling, 1998).

According to Hobbs and Westling (1998), general education teachers identified three other major problems associated with inclusion. Social and behavioral problems in which the student was perceived as disruptive or distracting to nondisabled students was identified as a potential problem. A second problem teachers identified were situations in which specialized assistance or adaptations were unavailable in the general education classroom. Hobbs and Westling reported that general education teachers feel unprepared and uninformed of student's special instructional needs. Hines (2001) supported this finding in that many general education teachers feel they have not received enough training and lack the knowledge to effectively teach students with special needs.

A third obstacle to inclusion is its financial costs. According to Downing (1997), many administrators and teachers are skeptical of the amount of services and instruction that can be provided, given the current state of many schools' current financial situations. Supports such as additional educational assistants, additional teachers, instructional supplies, transportation, and staff development for teachers all have a huge financial impact on school budgets.

There has been a strong movement to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom. This movement has been met with both support and resistance from teachers, administrators, and parents. While there are many benefits of inclusion, it is also an enormous challenge. The monumental challenge seems to be the varied attitudes held by teachers. Currently, it appears that the most popular attitude held by teachers is that inclusion is positive for students but there is a need to provide a continuum of resources for students with disabilities that may sometimes include a more restrictive setting (Downing, 1997). Research studies indicate that in order for inclusion to be successful, all parties involved must be supportive. For example, Bricker (2000) found that the attitudes of teachers, parents, and

administrators play an important role in how the inclusion process works. Teachers need to be informed and knowledgeable about the inclusion process and must have the skills to work with students from a variety of backgrounds. Bricker concluded that the challenge schools are faced with to make inclusion settings successful is simply the lack of resources.

What is Co-Teaching?

Cook and Friend (1995) defined co-teaching as two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended group of students in a single physical space. Cook and Friend explained that the definition of co-teaching has four key components to it. The first component to co-teaching is that it includes two professional educators and, on occasion, more. One of the teachers is a general educator while the other teacher is either a special education teacher or a specialist such as a speech/language therapist. The purpose for having a general educator and special educator are twofold. The general educator specializes in understanding, structuring, and pacing the curriculum. The special educator specializes in supporting the needs of students with disabilities. The special educator can enhance the curriculum and instruction to better support the needs of students with disabilities. Cook and Friend stressed that more than two educators can be present in the classroom. Some classes have paraprofessionals, parent volunteers, or older student volunteers that assist the teachers. However, these described arrangements do not meet the definition of co-teaching as previously described.

In the second part of the co-teaching definition, Cook and Friend (1995) specify that the educators are delivering substantive instruction. The co-teachers are not to supervise study halls and help with homework, explicitly instruct only one student, or anything that marginalizes the curriculum of the general education classroom. This second part of the definition of co-teaching

stressed that both the general and special educators are actively involved in the instruction of the students.

Cook and Friend (1995) stated that the third part of the definition of co-teaching refers to educators teaching a diverse group of students or blended group of students in the same classroom. Co-teaching involves special educators because students with disabilities have individualized education plans (IEP). These students have educational and learning needs that are met in the general education classroom through the service of the special education teacher.

Fourth, Cook and Friend (1995) explained that instruction is delivered primarily in a single classroom or physical space. This, however, does not mean that the groups cannot be separated for instruction that involves an activity that may intellectually demanding or complex. Using all four of the stated parts of the definition of co-teaching solidifies its pure intent.

Motivation of Co-Teaching

A review of the literature found that there are four motivating factors to co-teaching. The first motivation is increased instructional options for all students. This gives students, especially those with disabilities, more access to their own education. These options, however, not only benefit students with disabilities but students without disabilities as well. Schulte, Osborne, and McKinney (1990) explained that students without disabilities who are taught in co-teaching classes form meaningful friendships, develop an acceptance of individual differences, develop an understanding of diversity, develop a respect for all people, prepare students for a life of an inclusive society, get opportunities to master activities by practicing and teaching others, and achieve even greater academic outcomes.

A second motivating factor to co-teaching is the improvement of program intensity and continuity. According to Walsh (1992), students in a co-teaching classroom are able to receive more instruction and are more involved in their learning than would otherwise be possible in a classroom taught by a single teacher. Adding a second professional teacher minimizes the teacher to student ratio and gives greater opportunities for student participation and learning time. Co-teaching also facilitates more time spent in the classroom for students who normally left for special services. Walsh also explained that when students are pulled out from the general education classroom it stops the learning in the general education classroom. The student has to pack up, travel to a new destination, become familiar with the new surroundings, and then repeat the process on the return trip back to the general education classroom. This whole process can take up to 15 minutes, which is learning time lost for the student.

Walsh (1992) also explained that the curriculum for a child that is pulled from the classroom is often fragmented. That means the curriculums in the general education class and in the pull out special education class are often not aligned. A student with special needs being pulled from the general education classroom may not be receiving the same quality instruction.

The third motivation in co-teaching is reduction in the stigma for students. Redditt (1991) claimed that whenever you take a student with special needs out of the classroom, you are drawing attention from peers to that student. The students in the classroom see the student leave and know that student is somehow different. Redditt (1991) suggested that the stigma originates from immature attitudes of students and teachers towards students with special needs that require special education. Redditt claimed that keeping students with special needs in the general education classroom using co-teaching limits the stigma associated with a student in the special education program. Friend (2012) cautioned that while providing supports in the general

education classroom is preferable, the co-teaching framework requires that students be taught the general education curriculum with needed support and modifications. Friend stressed that students with special needs taught in a co-taught class should not be pulled aside into small groups while the rest of the class continues to be taught the general education curriculum. Even though these co-taught classes keep students with special needs in the classroom, it is in essence still a pull out method. Friend claimed that this does not help reduce the stigma for students with special needs.

The fourth motivation for co-teaching is the increased professional support. Teachers in a co-teaching companionship talk about the idea that they are able to relieve each other during instruction to help explain or clarify the other teachers' presentation to a struggling student or to the entire class (Wiggins & Damore, 2009). Wiggins and Damore also explained that co-teachers share the understanding of when to intervene on behalf of their partner due to the time shared with each other. They have been through good times and bad times together which helps teachers know each other's struggles. Wiggins and Damore claimed that there is an added measure of professional support that single teachers do not have.

When Should Co-Teaching be Used?

The skills, needs, and the instructional strengths of students with special needs and general education students have to be examined and considered appropriate and manageable by the co-teaching companionship (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Friend and Cook (1996) also say that when considering the extent a child with special needs will benefit from a co-teaching relationship there are a several important questions to ask:

1- Is the content of the general education curriculum appropriate for the student?

2- How much and what type of modifications and other support will the students require to benefit from the general education curriculum?
3- Does the student require direct intervention or instruction that is entirely different from instruction other students receive?
4- Is the ecology of the classroom appropriate for diverse learners?
5- Do other students in this classroom need modified curriculum or instruction?

Friend and Cook (1996) explained that the previous questions should be asked when considering placing a student with special needs in a co-teaching class. The purpose for this is to ensure that there is a match between content and learning rigor of the general education curriculum and the skills taught and learning needs of the students with special needs. Friend and Cook revealed that while most teachers appear to want all of their students to be successful in their classroom, a co-taught class may not be suitable for a student with special needs who is unable to meet the demands of the general education curriculum rigor. Either major or minor modifications can be made in the teaching methods of the curriculum, but it is still vital that the general education curriculum be deemed appropriate for the student with special needs.

White and White (1992) suggested that it is important to get the right mix of students in a co-taught classroom. This means that teachers look at the learning needs of all students with or without special needs. White and White questioned if the mix of students give cause to have a second teacher in the classroom. Is there a wide range in the diversity of learning styles in the classroom? White and White explained that if there are already several students without special needs that are at risk or have special learning needs in the classroom, then adding a limited number of students with special needs probably will not impact the instructional demands of the

classroom significantly. If this is the case, White and White suggested that having a co-teaching companionship would be beneficial.

Struggles of Co-Teaching

Although co-teaching may seem like a simple answer, teachers share that there are many struggles they are faced with. Ashton (2003) identified co-planning time as one of the major challenges that co-teaching companionships face. Ashton asked the question of how much co-planning would be ideal among co-teachers and found that teachers requested a minimum of weekly co-planning periods per co-teaching companionship. For example, if a special educator works with two different general education teachers, that special educator would have a planning period with each general education teacher each week. Ashton also found that while having a co-planning period each week would be ideal, it is not always plausible for school administrators to give a co-planning period as frequently as co-teaching companionships would like. With the pressures of trying to lift student achievement in schools, administrators struggle to give general and special educators designated times to co-plan.

Obviously planning time is not only an issue for co-teaching companionships. There is often a struggle for all teachers to find an appropriate amount of time to plan. Planning is especially important for new co-teaching companionships to help grow the relationship (Johnston, Knight, & Miller, 2007). Friend (2008) suggested that administrators and co-teaching companionships look at co-planning as a two component process. The first component should be about discussing critical topics and sharing key decisions. This should happen at least once a month, for a class period or even an hour; it just depends on what is available. The second component of this planning is on-the-fly-conversations with co-teaching companionships that happen throughout the course of a normal school day.

Friend (2008) gave three strategies for co-teaching companionships to help with co-teaching planning time:

- Compensated summer planning time: Professional teachers receive a stipend to meet with their co-teaching companion. Co-teaching companionships have the opportunity to set up their co-teaching classroom, discuss specific instructions and expectations for the beginning of the school year, and establish instruction that will occur the first few months of teaching.
- Planning with assigned continuing education credit: Teachers can receive credit for co-teaching with their companion after school. In some cases, several sets of co-teachers meet together to plan. This type of planning becomes an intense, useful, reflective, and recommended type of professional development. Teachers receive compensated time even though the planning occurred outside of school hours.
- Planning on district staff development days: Co-teaching companionships are dismissed from the general district staff activities to plan together.

Friend (2008) stressed that the strategies explained bring co-teachers together with minimal to no instruction time lost in the classroom. Using the described strategies gives supplemental planning time to the teaching companionships. This allows the co-teaching companionships to have more substantiated planning, rather than the on-the-fly-conversations planning that generally occur.

Another struggle for co-teachers is the basic characteristics of each teacher. Co-teaching may not be the most comfortable situation a teaching professional can find themselves in. The idea of sharing responsibility can be very daunting and frightening for a professional teacher. Tobin (2005) explained that the sharing of responsibilities such as modifying teaching styles,

preferences, and working closely with another adult can represent serious cause for stress for some educators. However, for other educators these same problems can be a source of invigoration and renewed positivity toward teaching.

Tobin (2005) explained that when co-teachers begin working together they must be willing to give and take a little. Teachers may wonder to what extent they are comfortable allowing another teacher to take over content with which they are quite familiar teaching. Tobin also raised the issue of co-teaching companionships being willing to confront one another when they disagree with a certain aspect of how the class is being taught, organized, or disciplined. There can be much angst for a teacher who is not willing to confront challenges that arise in the co-teaching companionship.

Co-Teaching as a Team

Cook and Friend (2009) discussed that successful co-teaching has to be more than just having both teachers plan a lesson together. Keeping open communication between both teachers is extremely important to the success of a co-teaching relationship. There can be great confusion for students who enter a co-taught classroom when the co-teachers do not have the same game plan. Cook and Friend explained that one teacher may not mind that students get up at any time during the class to sharpen a pencil. The other teacher may scold the student because the thought process is that the student should have sharpened the pencil before class or should ask permission. The first teacher's motivation is to take away the process of asking to sharpen a pencil because it distracts the class when a student asks. The second teacher's rationale is that the student is distracting the class by sharpening the pencil. Cook and Friend explained that neither teacher is wrong. The teachers merely need to discuss the situation before it becomes a source of bitterness for them and a cause of confusion for the students.

Instructional Beliefs

Austin (2001) discussed topics for teachers to discuss when preparing to co-teach. The first topic that Austin calls paramount is instructional beliefs. When co-teachers do not agree on their beliefs about a student's ability to learn, the opportunity for a student to experience success in the classroom will be met with major difficulties. Austin warned that teachers' instructional beliefs create the foundation of their practice, so it is possible that teachers may not agree on the general atmosphere that makes teaching and learning successful. To avoid this kind of calamity in a co-teaching relationship, Austin encouraged co-teaching companionships to discuss their instructional beliefs.

Co-Equality

Austin (2001) also warned that there must be coequality of the teachers in the eyes of the students. The goal is to have students respond to the teachers as classroom equals. To do this, teachers can arrange visual, verbal, and instructional cues that stress their equality. Austin stated that it is important for both co-teachers to have a space in the room. One should not be sitting at a student desk with all of their belongings piled around while the other teacher has a teacher's desk. The space in the classroom must be made to look as though it is both teachers' space. Another way to help alleviate any confusion about coequality in the classroom is to ensure that all correspondence home has both teachers' name on it. This not only helps the student see that the teachers are equal, but it helps parents know as well.

Confidentiality

Bowers (2004) explained that to keep successful co-teaching collaboration, teachers need to wary of confidentiality. As previously mentioned, Cook and Friend (1995) defined co-

teaching as two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended group of students in a single physical space. Usually this blended group is a group of students with special needs and general education students. The matter of confidentiality is of great concern for a co-teaching companionship. Co-teachers need to agree which of their activities are for public and which are to be kept confidential. Bowers (2004) revealed that even the best co-teachers inadvertently miscommunicate things that are confidential. Not only can a teacher inadvertently share confidential matters of a student, a co-teacher can share something that his or her co-teaching partner feels is confidential between the two teachers. Bowers explained that a special education teacher may share a lesson plan with other teachers that was used to help the class and give the credit to the co-teaching companion, but the other teacher may feel betrayed because that lesson was uniquely designed by that teacher. Bowers stressed that having conversations about what is to be kept confidential between the two co-teachers can help eliminate any hurt feelings and resolve confidentiality issues.

Routines

All classes have routines and a co-teaching classroom is no exception. Bowers (2004) discussed that co-teachers need to sit and collaborate on how they want their classroom routine to be run. There are two different types of routines in a classroom: organizational and instructional. Organizational routines include the everyday operation of the classroom. This includes how students enter the classroom, how students leave the classroom, where students are to be seated, how and where students sharpen their pencils, and other routines.

Instructional routines include the ways students are to organize their writing assignments, and also the headings at the top of the paper. Instructional routines can also include ways students are to ask for help, whether from another student or from the teacher, how an

assignment is turned in, and whether they are to keep assignment notebooks. With instructional routines and organizational routines, Bowers (2004) suggested that the co-teaching companionship meet together to collaborate on how they want both routines to be run. Again, this can cut down on irritation between the teachers and confusion for the students.

Behavior

Many teachers have a solidified belief about what is acceptable behavior in the classroom. These beliefs are connected to their own instructional beliefs and they can differ greatly in a co-teaching companionship. While teachers normally discuss with their students what their behavioral expectations are, co-teachers can set themselves up for frustration if they do not collaborate behavioral expectations together (Herrel, 2015). Herrel also discussed that it is important for teachers to talk with one another about the behavioral expectations they will have for a student with behavioral disorder. The teachers need to discuss what the alternative expectations will be for those students so their discipline message is clear to all students in the classroom.

Defining Roles and Responsibilities

Another area that co-teachers should be collaborative on is their roles and responsibilities. Eccleston (2010) supported that both teachers should define their roles and responsibilities so they are clear on what each will be doing in the classroom. Any collaborative relationship can be doomed from the start if one partner dominates, or leads in a direction that the other partner did not expect (Murawski, 2009). Murawski also expressed that teachers are naturally more territorial due to the subject content environment and are used to teaching in isolation. One partner may feel more qualified to teach the learning content and uneasy about

letting go. Murawski suggested that special educators who want to co-teach observe and assist in content specific classrooms to build a rapport with the teacher before acting as a co-teacher. Eccleston (2010) suggested that listing distinct responsibilities for all individuals affected by the co-teaching program will help all who are involved to understand the nature of the program and its impact for them. This means that the co-teachers and paraprofessionals who are involved in the co-teaching class will experience role changes and responsibilities. The collaborative effort of the roles and responsibilities should extend to more than those involved in the co-teaching classroom but also to the administration, other teachers, specialists, and the multidisciplinary team. All members who may be in contact with the co-taught class should be made aware of the co-teachers' roles and responsibilities. Eccleston claimed that providing proper information can dispel the resistance as well as provide a structure for continued planning in the classroom and school for the co-taught class.

Benefits of Co-Teaching

There is an old saying, "Two heads are better than one." Having two professional teachers facilitate a learning community gives diverse students the opportunity to be exposed to diverse personalities in the same classroom (Kaplan, 2012). Co-teaching gives opportunity for students, especially students with special needs, more time for one-to-one learning. Kaplan also discussed that there is opportunity for students to observe stronger modeling in the classroom.

Effective Co-Teaching Approaches

Co-teaching is a relatively new emergence in teaching. Research on the effectiveness of co-teaching and student outcomes is limited. However, the inclusiveness of co-teaching stretches out not only to instructors but students as well. When co-teachers are paired, they usually are

fully licensed and have the same teacher status so that both can fully participate in delivering instruction to their students. Therefore, the general education teacher is not solely responsible for teaching material to students without disabilities, nor is the special education teacher responsible for teaching students with special needs. Both teachers work together to deliver instruction to all students involved (Friend & Cook, 2000).

Friend and Cook (2000) identified co-teaching as a specific service delivery option that is based on collaboration. Co-teaching is designed to meet the educational needs of students with a wide range of specific education needs. Through co-teaching the teachers have a diverse set of teaching styles that can accommodate both students with special needs and students without special needs.

McCulley (2012) claimed that though students vary at all academic levels, they can benefit from the differing assignments and higher teacher attention in small-group activities that are made possible by co-teaching. Students exposed to co-teaching can experience a more intense and individualized instruction in the general education setting that increases access to the curriculum and decreases the stigma for special needs students. Students also have the opportunity to increase their understanding and respect for students. McCulley stated that students with special needs also have a greater opportunity for more stabilized instruction as the teacher can benefit from the professional support and sharing of teaching practices as both teachers work together.

As stated before co-teaching consists of two or more professionals that are certified that contract to share the instructional responsibility for a single group of students primarily in a single classroom or workspace. Within this single classroom or workspace, the co-teachers are

teaching specific objectives or content and both teachers are taking a mutual ownership and accountability for the students (Friend & Cook, 2000).

Review of the literature for co-teaching suggested that researchers agree on Cook and Friend's six approaches to co-teaching stations (Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Friend & Cook, 1996; Murawski, 2009; Pardini, 2006; Pugach et. al., 2012; & Salend, 2011). Those co-teaching approaches are: (1) One teach and one support, (2) Parallel teaching, (3) Alternative teaching, (4) Station teaching, (5) Team teaching, and (6) One teach and one observe.

One Teach, One Support

In this approach to co-teaching, one teacher has the primary responsibility to teach the curriculum and standards. The other teacher's primary responsibility is to circulate throughout the classroom providing unobtrusive assistance to students on an as needed basis. The teacher that circulates throughout the classroom can also distribute materials and observe and correct undesired behaviors (Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Friend & Cook, 1996; Murawski, 2009; Pardini, 2006, Pugach et. al., 2012, & Salend, 2011). Friend and Cook (1996) described several advantages to this specific co-teaching approach:

- Students receive individual help in a timely manner.
- It is easier to keep students on task because of proximity of the teacher
- It saves time when distributing materials.
- As a process observer, the supporting teacher can observe behavior not seen by the teacher directing the lesson.
- The supporting teacher can walk around and still continue to observe the other teacher model good teaching practices.

Friend and Cook noted the disadvantages of this co-teaching style:

- Students may perceive that one teacher has more control than the other.
- Students perceive one being the teacher and the other as a teacher's aide.
- A teacher walking around the room can be distracting to students.
- Students begin to expect immediate one-on-one assistance.

Parallel Teaching

There are times when student learning would be greatly facilitated if there were more supervision from the teacher. In parallel teaching, the teachers plan together but divide the classroom in half to teach the same information simultaneously in the class. For example, both teachers could be explaining the anatomy of a plant cell in two different parts of the room. (Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Friend & Cook, 1996; Murawski, 2009; Pardini, 2006, Pugach et. al., 2012, & Salend, 2011). Friend and Cook (1996) gave the advantages of parallel teaching:

- Preplanning provides better teaching.
- It allows teachers to work with smaller groups.
- Each teacher has the comfort level of working separately to teach the same lesson.
- Splitting the class allows students to be separated who need to be.

The disadvantages of parallel teaching are also discussed by Friend and Cook:

- Both teachers need to be competent in the content so the students will learn equally.
- The pace of the lesson must be the same so teachers finish at the same time, which is difficult to accomplish, especially with different learning styles.

- There must be enough flexible space in the classroom to accommodate two groups.
- The noise level must be controlled.

Alternative Teaching

In class groups, the need may arise when students need specialized instruction and attention. With alternative teaching, one teacher takes the responsibility for the large group while the other teacher takes responsibility of the smaller group that needs specialized instruction and attention stations (Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Friend & Cook, 1996; Murawski, 2009; Pardini, 2006, Pugach et. al., 2012, & Salend, 2011). Friend and Cook (1996), outlined the advantages of alternative teaching as follows:

- Working with small groups or with individuals helps meet the personal needs of students.
- Both teachers can remain in the classroom so one teacher can informally observe the other modeling good teaching.

Disadvantages to alternative teaching were explained by Friend and Cook (1996):

- Groups must vary with purpose and composition or the students in the group will quickly become labeled (e.g. the "smart" group).
- The students might view the teacher working with the larger group as the teacher in control.
- Noise level must be controlled when both teachers are working in the classroom.
- There must be adequate space.

Station Teaching

Station teaching is described in the following way: both teachers divide the instructional content and each takes responsibility for planning and teaching part of it. In station teaching, the classroom is divided into various teaching centers. The co-teachers pair at particular stations; the other stations can be run independently by the students or by a teacher's aide. For example, three or more science stations, each containing a different experiment, could be organized with the teacher and student teacher working with the two stations that need the most supervision. It is also possible to use an aide or parent volunteer to supervise stations (Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Friend & Cook, 1996; Murawski, 2009; Pardini, 2006, Pugach et. al., 2012, & Salend, 2011). Friend and Cook (1996) outlined the advantages of station teaching as follows:

- Each teacher has a clear teaching responsibility.
- Students have the benefit of working in small groups.
- Teachers can cover more material in a shorter period of time.
- Fewer discipline problems occur because students are engaged in active, hands-on learning.
- It is possible to separate students who need to work away from each other.
- This approach maximizes the use of volunteers or extra adults in the room.

Team Teaching

Both teachers are responsible for planning, and they share the instruction of all students. The lessons are taught by both teachers who actively engage in conversation, not lecture, to encourage discussion by students. Both teachers are actively involved in the management of the lesson and discipline. Teaming can be very effective with the classroom teacher and a student teacher or two student teachers working together (Friend, & Bursuck, 2012; Friend & Cook,

1996; Murawski, 2009; Pardini, 2006, Pugach et. al., 2012, & Salend, 2011). Friend and Cook (1996) outlined the advantages of team teaching as follows:

- Each teacher has an active role.
- Students view both teachers as equals.
- Both teachers are actively involved in classroom organization and management.
- This approach encourages risk taking. Teachers may try things in pairs that they normally wouldn't try alone.
- Two teachers may be better than one.

Disadvantages to team teaching were explained by Friend and Cook:

- Preplanning takes considerable amount of time.
- Teachers' roles need to be clearly defined for shared responsibility.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers in regard to forming co-teaching relationships in a school setting organized to serve special education students through co-teaching models. This chapter outlines the methodology used to conduct the study.

Research Design

This research design used a qualitative single case study. Yin (2003) stated that a case study uses empirical inquiry to study a modern-day phenomenon in the context of real life; where boundaries between the phenomenon and the real life context are unclear. Merriam (2001) described a case study as a means to understand a situation deeply and its meaning to those involved. According to Merriam, a case study describes and analyzes a single, bounded system where there is a finite amount of data to be collected.

This study used an emergent design to allow the researcher to identify emergent themes. Cavallo (2000) coined the term "emergent design" to describe a theoretical framework for the implementation of systemic change in educational and learning environments. To add flexibility to emergent design means to have researchers that are willing to be open to adaptation as deeper understandings emerge from the research.

Participants

The participants for this study included five co-teaching pairs of high school and middle school teachers. These co-teaching pairs teach a variety of subjects: two general education Algebra I teachers, two general education Geometry I and II teachers, and one general education Language Arts teacher. The five special education teachers co-teach with general education teachers. After permission was granted form the Institutional Review Board (IRB), all co-teachers were asked to participate in the researcher's study.

Site Selection

One Northeast Tennessee high school and one middle school were chosen as the sites for this research. Both schools serve general education and special education students in the same classroom using an inclusion co-teaching model. There are 11 special education teachers and 122 general education teachers at the high school. The high school enrolls 2,090 students with 14% of those students being minority. Gender distribution of this school is 49% female and 51% male. There are four special education teachers and 47 general education teachers at the middle school. The middle school enrolls 808 students with 24.3% minority. Gender distribution of this school is 49.2% female and 50.8% male.

Research Questions

1. What factors do general education teachers perceive to be facilitators of an effective co-teaching partnership?

2. What factors do special education teachers perceive to be facilitators of an effective co-teaching partnership?

3. What roles do general education teachers exhibit in co-teaching?

4. What roles do special education teachers exhibit in co-teaching?

Researcher's Role

In qualitative studies, the investigator acts as an observer in the setting that is being studied, either as the interviewer, the observer, or the person who studies artifacts and documents (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher served as the instrument because the researcher conducted in-depth interviews involving the co-teachers together and separately (Creswell, 2012).

Researcher's Bias

Being a special education teacher for eight years, with three of those years as a co-teacher, the researcher has a personal interest in the outcome of the data collected. As a special education teacher placed in a co-teaching partnership, it was sometimes difficult to find common ground with some of my co-teachers. I was placed with four different teachers my first year of co-teaching. It was extremely difficult to meet and plan with all four teachers and to keep up with the different lesson plans. Johnson, Knight, and Miller (2007) reported that planning time is essential for co-teachers to develop relationships. In my second and third year I was placed with two teachers. This made school more manageable. I was able to plan with my co-teachers more effectively but still took on more of a role as an assistant rather than a teacher. There is considerable evidence that the general education teacher tends to take the lead role and the special education teacher assists them instead of partnering in the delivery of instruction (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007).

Data Collection Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained and permission was granted from the school district and the high school prior to data collection. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews using pre-selected interview questions. Questions were developed by the researcher to help guide the research. The interviews were conducted separately in order to ensure that participants could answer freely. The interview form was also distributed to all participants during the interview with the encouragement to write their responses and take notes. The notes were collected for further data analysis.

The researcher used an audio recording device to capture single interview data. The digital audio recordings were then transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Word software. The participants were able to member check all transcripts for verification. To ensure that there would be at least five co-teaching pairs, reminders of the interview sessions were sent five times. Participation in the interviews required informed consent, which was obtained by the researcher.

The interview protocol conducted one on one interviews and used open-ended questions. Follow-up questions were asked as warranted. The researcher began data collection through a series of individual interviews. As each interview was completed the data were collected and were compared to responses from the other co-teacher participants. Questions not prepared by the researcher on the original interview form emerged. The researcher used an emergent design to ask follow-up questions that related to the emerging findings.

Data Analysis

Data were collected using one-on-one interviews. After each individual interview, data were analyzed and follow up questions were developed and asked. Data collected in this study were analyzed using the constant comparative method, in which the researcher examines a

particular set of information from an interview, focus group, observation, or document and compares it with another incident. The comparisons lead to possible categories that were compared with other emerging categories (Merriam, 2001). Open coding is the process of analyzing textual content to find a common theme to a recurring question (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The data were examined to identify emergent themes.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

While it is not possible to be completely bias-free, it was important to maintain researcher neutrality during the study (Patton, 2015). The researcher emphasized authenticity and trustworthiness as a focus, addressing the truths of respondents in the context of the study, the applicability of the findings to other settings, as well as the same or similar respondents over time, and the degree to which outcomes arose from data gathered as opposed to biases, motives, interests and perspectives of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To fulfill the requirements of trustworthiness, the researcher followed the guidelines of Lincoln and Guba. Lincoln and Guba reported the terms to address as credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher presented biases and limitations, such as acknowledging the small sample size of participants and that the researcher had established relationships with some of the participants as their special education colleague (Creswell, 2012). Participants were able to respond openly knowing that the researcher was neither a supervisor nor an evaluator.

Credibility

Credibility involved establishing the results of this qualitative study and ensuring that they were credible and believable to the participants in this study. Member checking was used to assist in establishing credibility.

Transferability

The researcher used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) definition of transferability to show that the findings of this study may have applicability in other contexts. This means that although these results are not generalizable to other contexts, there may be value to similar contexts and settings. The qualitative researcher thoroughly described the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research.

Dependability

The researcher used dependability to show that the findings are consistent to the study and could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was used to validate the data collected through cross verification from multiple single person interviews.

Conformability

The researcher also used conformability to show neutrality to the findings of the study and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest. The study was shaped by the respondents not the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

When the single interviews were completed, the researcher provided each participant with the findings of the study. The participants reviewed the results of the interviews for clarity

and accuracy to establish credibility. The participants concurred that the results were a clear and accurate representation of their perceptions.

Summary

This chapter includes a description of the research design, population and sample data collection, and the data analysis methods and procedures used in this qualitative study. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers in regard to their co-teaching experiences. Data were collected from participants who had given their consent and who were, at the time of the study, chosen due to being in a co-teaching partnership.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers in regard to forming co-teaching relationships organized to serve students in special education through co-teaching models in a school setting. This study was designed to allow special educators and general education teachers to express their perceptions about their co-teaching relationships.

This study was designed as a qualitative collective case study based on phenomenological inquiry. Participants from two public schools in Northeast Tennessee were purposefully sampled following the typical case sampling strategy. There were five special education teachers and five general education teachers who participated in in-depth interviews using open-ended questions from a predetermined interview guide. The interview guide was tested through a pilot interview with a volunteer; the data collected in the pilot interview were not included in the finding of this study. Interviews were recorded and accurately transcribed by the researcher. The researcher read the interview transcripts in an iterative fashion to identify emergent patterns and themes among participant responses. Study participants were asked to review the interview transcripts to ensure accuracy. Participants then had the option of continuing in the study or withdrawing.

Description of Participants

Ten participants were purposefully sampled for this study to represent co-teaching relationships in a public school. The sample was comprised of three special education teachers and three general education teachers from a northeast Tennessee high school and two special education teachers and two general education teachers from a northeast Tennessee middle

school. Participants, as well as any proper nouns they referenced, were assigned a pseudonym in an attempt to provide confidentiality. Table 1 is a summary of the participant demographic information.

Table 1.

Participant Demographic Information

Name (Pseudonym)	**School (Pseudonym)**	**Years of Co-Teaching**	**Subject Taught**
Mr. Grey	*High School A*	7	Math
Mr. Black	*High School A*	6	Special Education
Ms. Charlie	*High School A*	3	Math
Ms. Drake	*High School A*	5	Special Education
Ms. Edna	*High School A*	8	Math
Mr. Green	*High School A*	3	Special Education
Ms. Smith	*Middle School B*	3	Language Arts
Ms. Taylor	*Middle School B*	2	Special Education
Ms. Carter	*Middle School B*	5	Math
Mr. Brown	*Middle School B*	5	Special Education

Mr. Grey is a math teacher and baseball coach at High School A. He has been in education for 13 years with 7 of those years as a co-teacher. Mr. Grey admitted, “I was ready to

give up on teaching when I was approached by administration about co-teaching. It changed the way I viewed my profession."

Mr. Black is a special education teacher and baseball coach at High School A. He has been in education for 19 years with 6 of those years being a co-teacher. Mr. Black has always enjoyed working with students with special needs. He helped develop a gym class at High School A for all students with special needs.

Ms. Charlie is a math teacher at High School A. She has been in education for 15 years with 3 of those years being a co-teacher. Ms. Charlie said, "…because of the subject that I am teaching, they (administration) felt that it was important to have me teamed with a special education teacher to help students with various disabilities. Every year is different."

Ms. Drake is a special education teacher at High School A. She has been teaching for 15 years with 5 of those years being in a co-teaching relationship. Ms. Drake has worked with several different general education teachers at High School A and in a variety of different subjects as a co-teacher, including math, English, and science. Ms. Drake summed up co-teaching in one word, "I'm not good at summing things up in one word, but I would say, 'cooperative.' It's the only way to do it (co-teaching)."

Ms. Edna is a math teacher at High School A. She has been teaching for 25 years and 8 years as a co-teacher. Ms. Edna has taught at High School A for 24 years and has taught all available math subjects. Ms. Edna stated that, "… I've always had heart for those kids (students with special needs). I understand where they come from and the kinds of families many of them come from. I have similar people in my family that struggle and have a hard life and I just have a heart for them."

Mr. Green is a special education teacher at High School A. He has been teaching for 15 years with 3 of those years as a co-teacher. The three years of co-teaching have not been consecutive. Mr. Green said, "… I went into special education to help students that struggled like I did in school. I am extremely passionate about the students that I work with and want to help them feel successful."

Ms. Smith is a Language Arts teacher at Middle School B. She has been teaching for 15 years with 3 of those years being in a co-teaching relationship. Ms. Smith has taught both seventh and eighth grade Language Arts classes with a co-teacher. Ms. Smith was able to follow her seventh grade group to eighth grade after her second year co-teaching. "I felt that 'looping' with my students was a big advantage for them (the students) and for me. I knew their strengths and weaknesses. Even though I had a new co-teacher that third year I was able to help her (co-teacher) know the students' needs."

Ms. Taylor is a special education teacher at Middle School B. She has been teaching for 24 years with 2 of those years as a co-teacher. Ms. Taylor has spent her entire career as a special education teacher at Middle School B. Despite the amount of time that she has been at Middle School B, it has only been within the past two years that she has been asked to co-teach. Ms. Taylor stated that she had not been asked by administration to co-teach previously, "… because I was used as an interventionist. I was helping with RTI. Administration felt that it was important to put me with a co-teacher to help our students. It has been a good opportunity."

Ms. Carter is a math teacher at Middle School B. She has been teaching for 27 years with 5 of those years being a co-teacher. Ms. Carter also teaches the advanced Algebra class at Middle School B. Ms. Carter said, "I feel very blessed to be able to work with the staff here at Middle

School B and with my co-teacher. I am very lucky to teach the students that I have in my class. It is a privilege to come to school every day."

Mr. Brown is a special education teacher at Middle School B and has been teaching for 6 years with 5 of those years as a co-teacher. Mr. Brown is in a co-teaching relationship with another math teacher at Middle School B and teaches the seventh and eighth grade. Mr. Brown explained his thoughts about co-teaching, "I have had a co-teacher almost my whole career. It's what I'm used to, but it's interesting because nothing is the same from year to year."

Analysis of Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers in regard to forming co-teaching relationships in a school setting organized to serve special education students through co-teaching models. Data were collected using the interview guide:

1. What factors do general education teachers perceive to be facilitators of an effective co-teaching partnership?

2.What factors do special education teachers perceive to be facilitators of an effective co-teaching partnership?

3. What roles do general education teachers exhibit in co-teaching?

4. What roles do special education teachers exhibit in co-teaching?

Becoming a Co-Teacher

Teachers were asked how they came to be a part of a co-teaching partnership. With this question, there was only one consistent response. Administration approached each teacher

and asked the teacher to be a co-teacher. I then asked each teacher a follow up question, "Were you asked or told to be a co-teacher?" All 10 teachers responded with "asked" by administration. While this first question yielded the same response for all teachers, the reasoning behind administration asking each teacher to be a co-teacher varied.

Mr. Grey, a general education math teacher, described the way he was approached by administration to become a co-teacher:

> I was at a point in my career that was hard. I was ready to give up on teaching when I was approached by administration about co-teaching. It changed my career. Our school principal told me that math scores for our special education demographic had been very poor for some time. He wanted me to team up with a special education teacher and co-teach an Algebra 1 class. I guess he [principal] felt that I could help the students with IEPs. It was the best thing that could have happened for me.

Mr. Black, a special education teacher, explained how he became part of a co-teaching relationship:

> I wanted to co-teach. Our principal asked me to co-teach and I told him, 'Sure!' I really wanted to co-teach a special education PE class but he [principal] wanted to team me up with a math teacher to help our students in special education. I eventually got the opportunity to co-teach a special education PE class.

Ms. Charlie, a general education math teacher, stated that her introduction to co-teaching:

"…because of the subject I am teaching. I am teaching Geometry and the subject material has always been difficult for our SPED students."

Ms. Drake, a special education teacher at High School A, explained that she was asked to be a co-teacher because:

> Mainly I was asked by principals to begin teaching in an Algebra setting for students with IEPs because I was a special education teacher. So all students in my class had IEPs or other learning disabilities. So I was paired with a general education teacher and co-taught two classes of Algebra and then that moved into four classes of Algebra and then later I even did some co-teaching in a Biology and English classroom in addition to that.

Ms. Edna, a general education math teacher, discussed why she was asked to be in a co-teaching relationship:

> We had talked about it in the math department for a while. We [administration and math department] knew that our math scores for our special education students were low and we felt we needed to do something about it. I've always had a heart for those kids [students with special needs], I understand where they come from and the kinds of families many of them come from. I have similar people in my family that struggle and have a hard life and I just have a heart for them. So when we [administration and math department] talked about co-teaching, I knew I wanted to be part of that.

Mr. Green, a special education teacher, explained how he became involved in a co-teaching relationship:

> I was told that High School A was going to be trying co-teaching and I was asked. I felt like it was a great opportunity to try something new. I was told that I would be a valuable asset due to my background in special education. I went into special education to help students that struggled like I did in school. I am extremely passionate about the students that I work with and want to help them feel successful.

Ms. Smith a general education language arts teacher, discussed why she was asked to be a co-teacher:

> Our school was looking for a way to help our most struggling students. The idea was to have two teachers in the same classroom to help teach. I was asked to that on one year for the initial phases of co-teaching and then I volunteered for the following two years after that. I really felt that our students were growing and the evidence showed in their work.

Ms. Taylor, a special education teacher, explained how she became involved in a co-teaching relationship:

> Officially, I asked [administration] first. I was part of two other special education teachers that heard about what High School A was doing. We heard of the success they were having and wanted to see if we could replicate that. However, I was used as an interventionist. I was helping with RTI. Administration felt that it was important to put me with a co-teacher to help our students. It has been a good opportunity.

Ms. Carter, a general education math teacher, discussed why she was asked to be a co-teacher:

> I was asked because of my years of teaching in math. I was also asked because I had prior experiences in co-teaching. Not necessarily with a special education teacher but I have had co-teachers in prior years. Sometimes it [co-teaching] was good and sometimes it wasn't. I feel very blessed to be able to work with the staff here at Middle School B and

with my co-teacher. I am very lucky to teach the students that I have in my class. It is a privilege to come to school every day.

Mr. Brown, a special education teacher, discussed why he was asked to be a co-teacher:

> When I was hired I was asked if I would mind being a co-teacher. I told them [administration] that I had been a co-teacher for all but one year of my career. I assumed that is why they wanted me. Even though I had co-taught before I wasn't entirely sure what I was going to be doing. I was hired two days before the school year started. I was told that I was going to be co-teaching with a seventh and eighth grade Language Arts class. The day school started I was changed to a seventh grade Language Arts and seventh grade Math class. Then the next day I was switched to two Math classes. One in seventh and one in eighth.

Factors of an Effective Skills Based Co-Teaching Relationship

Three ideas emerged during the interview of teachers on effective skills-based co-teaching relationship. The emergent ideas that persisted between the general education and special education teachers were communication, co-planning time, and continuity.

Communication

Communication was stated by all five general education and all five special education teachers as an important skill for an effective co-teaching relationship.

Mr. Grey stated that communication was important to an effective co-teaching relationship.

> In my opinion co-teaching is like being married. In a marriage you have to talk to your spouse. You cannot do whatever you want whenever you want, it will only lead to problems. I can't make all of the decisions in my co-taught class without consulting my co-teacher. It would not be fair to her or to our students. I think if we did not communicate with each other, the whole thing [co-teaching relationship] would crumble.

Ms. Taylor from Middle School B reported that co-teaching was like a marriage. Ms. Taylor stated that "…communication was of the utmost importance," when trying to secure an

effective co-teaching relationship. Ms. Taylor further stated why she felt that communication was like a marriage: “Look, I’ve been in a co-teaching relationship that was very unproductive. We simply did not communicate well. I do not think that it was intentional. We were both very busy doing other things that were important.”

Ms. Taylor laughed and explained what things she felt were more important:

> I am a teacher! Everything that I do is more important! Seriously though, I had grading that I had to get done and lesson plans to create and meetings to go to. My co-teacher had IEPs to write and IEP meetings to attend. We took the jobs that we had and kept them separate. I did not know what she was doing and vice versa. Our relationship was not very strong and that was because we did not talk. A marriage cannot last if you do not talk. Like I said, it was not intentional, I do not think we had the proper plans in place to help us communicate the way we should.

Mr. Black related co-teaching to a baseball team and the importance of communicating in a baseball game:

> If you aren’t talking on the baseball field you aren’t going win. If there’s a pop fly and the right fielder and center fielder are running for it, they better be talking to the other one or they’re going run into the other player and get hurt. The player has to keep an eye on the base coach too. That’s more hand signals than talking but it’s still communicating. The player needs to watch for those signals that can get him to the next base or to home plate. It’s just like being with a co-teacher. You have to talk to the other teacher or your class will suffer, your teacher relationship will suffer. The co-teachers have to look for those signals from the other teacher too, you know. If the relationship is strong you can tell when your co-teacher is struggling and needs help. He can give you that look like ‘Hey man, I’m dying out here can you step in and help explain that a different way.’ A strong relationship can pick up on those signals without any words. When you communicate then you have a winning team, a strong relationship. Sometimes you don’t even have to talk.

Mr. Green stated that communication was important to the success of a co-teaching team:

> Communication is important in any aspect of a relationship, especially a co-teaching relationship. With my co-teacher now, we sit and we talk about normal stuff besides the class that we teach… [Mr. Green laughs] we talk about class stuff too. I try to take a genuine interest in her family and the things that she likes. I believe that she does the same for me. Doing that [taking a personal interest] helps me feel like we are friends rather than just co-workers. I can joke around and feel comfortable around a friend more

than I would with someone that is just a person I work with. We still have a professional relationship but we're also friends. I think it makes us a stronger pair.

Ms. Edna discussed with me about her experience with a co-teacher that did not communicate with her:

> Toxic. The relationship was toxic. Everything started off fine and I thought our relationship was good. In the beginning we planned together, ate lunch together, and would talk on the phone together. I still don't know what happened. She started to give me the cold shoulder. She didn't want to eat lunch with me anymore. She stopped coming to our planning times. Things in the classroom began to fall apart. She even missed our class from time to time. I do not know what happened because she would not talk to me. I had other teachers tell me that I should not trust her because she was saying some negative things about me. It really hurt. I even had a student tell me, 'I don't think Ms. ----- likes you very much.' I could not get her [co-teacher] to talk to me. Administration had to get involved and eventually I was paired with a new co-teacher.

Mr. Brown reported communication as being the "lynch pin" in co-teaching. Mr. Brown went on to explain that, "if you are going to have a relationship that works then you need to communicate. Communication is the lynch pin to co-teaching. You communicate and you keep everyone on the same page."

Ms. Carter explained that communication,

> "…is the only way to keep a healthy relationship thriving. Communication in a co-teaching relationship is extremely important because it acts as the judge on whether or not your [co-teaching] relationship will survive. Being able to communicate effectively can also curb needless arguments. When you communicate, you can bypass the negativity in the relationship.

Ms. Charlie and Ms. Drake also reported that communication was an important aspect of a successful co-teaching relationship. Both teachers described forcing themselves to communicate effectively. Ms. Charlie reported,

> You have to learn to talk to your co-teacher. Sometimes it is hard, especially at the beginning. You may not have much in common but you have to force yourself to talk to your co-teacher. I am not a very outgoing person by nature but the more I talk to my co-teacher the more I get comfortable. Eventually we became friends and I didn't have to force myself anymore.

Ms. Drake's comments on communication were similar to Ms. Charlie's comments.

Ms. Drake stated:

> As a co-teacher I have to force myself to stop and listen. I have always been the type of person that likes to take charge of a situation. [Ms. Drake laughs] I guess you can call me a control freak but my mind is always running. Sometimes I need to force myself to stop and listen because when I don't, then I'm not hearing what my co-teacher is saying. That has led to problems in the past and it is something that I have tried to improve on. I am not trying to hurt anyone; it is purely my nature.

Ms. Smith also stated that communication was important in order for a co-teaching relationship to be successful:

> We all want to know what is going on. I appreciate being kept in the loop particularly when it comes to my own class [laughs]. Don't change things on me at the last second or at the very least let me know what is going to happen before you [the co-teacher] do it. My last co-teacher was notorious for changing things at the last second and it really bothered me. It kind of drove a wedge between us. Maybe it was me, maybe I was petty but that really bothered me.

Co-Planning Time

The second idea that teachers described as an effective skills based co-teaching relationship was co-planning. As stated previously, all 10 teachers stated that communication was important to an effective skills based co-teaching relationship. I wanted to know what barriers co-teachers faced with communication. There were a variety of answers such as honesty, time constraints, and personalities. However, seven of the 10 co-teachers stated that lack of a co-planning time is or could be a barrier to the success for co-teaching.

Mr. Brown, a special education teacher, stated some of the barriers he faced with communication:

> A common planning time is one of the biggest obstacles to co-teaching. I would say that having an actual time to plan with your co-teacher would be refreshing. I co-teach with two math teachers here [Middle School B]. I have a common planning with one of those teachers and 0 time to plan with the other teacher. Our class still runs okay, but it is not as efficient as the class that I can plan for with my co-teacher. I do plan with both teachers but one is face-to-face and the other is talking in the hallway and email. Sometimes we do not get a chance to talk or send emails and we kind of have to wing it.

Ms. Carter, a general education math teacher, stated some of the barriers he faced with communication:

> My first time being a co-teacher was a bit of a fiasco. My co-teacher had a different planning time than I did and we didn't get to plan together. We tried the best that we could. We would try to build in a time during the week that we could meet and sometimes we were able to, but most times there would be an IEP meeting or I would be asked to go to a meeting and we could not meet up. At best we were meeting once a month which was not enough. I have a planning time with my co-teacher this year and it is wonderful. We have the time to sit and plan through our lessons. We get to decide who is going to teach what and how we are going to present the lesson.

Mr. Grey, a general education math teacher, stated that lack of a co-planning time can be a barrier but only if "…administration does not set up a co-planning time for the team."

> In my opinion, a co-planning period is necessary to have a successful co-teaching relationship and successful class. I am lucky here at High School A. My principals made sure to give me and my co-teacher a common planning time. I know that is not always the case for all of the co-teachers but it is for me. I know that my co-teacher co-teaches with other teachers and they do not have co-planning time. I have been told that that is difficult and I know it is. I have been in that same boat too.

Mr. Black, a special education teacher, explained the importance of a co-planning time:

> We get co-planning together with one of our co-teachers but not the other one. I really like to meet with my co-teachers because they are the ones who know the subject. I am special education certified not math. I like knowing that my co-teacher knows the curriculum. A lot of times I am relearning this stuff too. When I don't get a co-planning time then I am sometimes learning in class right with the students. That can be a good thing sometimes I guess because if I don't understand what my co-teacher is teaching t hen odds are my students are getting it either. I can save them the embarrassment of raisin their hand and ask for them like, 'hey, can you explain that again? I'm not sure I understand that. It didn't make sense.' Still, I'd rather meet with my teacher so I know what I'm doing when I walk in to class.

Ms. Charlie, a general education math teacher, stated that the lack of co-planning was a major barrier to an effective skills based co-teaching relationship:

> [Big sigh] It is hard when your co-teacher is not sure what is going to be taught in class. It is hard to build a relationship when we do not get the time to meet and plan for the class. It is terrible to feel this way but I sometimes think of my co-teacher as an assistant. This is not my co-teachers fault. If we were to have a co-planning period then we would both be there and do it, we just don't get that time. We try, but it is hard with all of the other things that are required of us. So, essentially I feel like my co-teacher is there to support rather than to be an actual teacher. I know that my co-teacher has to teach with another teacher and they get a co-planning time and that makes it even harder to know

that they are getting time to plan their class together but I am, more or less, doing this on my own.

Ms. Charlie, a general education math teacher, explained how the lack of a co-planning time put a strain on the co-teaching relationship:

> Yes, but it has nothing to do with the co-teacher personally. I feel like we have a good relationship but it is hard not to get frustrated at times. The co-teaching relationship would be much stronger and our students would benefit if we had that co-planning time. [Nervous laughter] I think administration is tired of hearing that from both of us. My co-teacher wants that planning time as much as I do and we have been vocal about it. I understand that there is only so much that can be done but if we are going to co-teach and be successful then we need all of the correct tools.

Mr. Green, a special education teacher, stated that co-planning was essential to the co-teaching relationship:

> I have one [co-planning time] with my co-teachers. I did not have one my first year and I don't think that it [co-teaching] went very well. This year has been a lot funner. I feel more like a teacher rather than an extra person in the class. I used to be against co-teaching after my first year because I did not feel like I was really a teacher. This year has been great because I get to sit down with both of my co-teachers and plan the class. We get to decide who is doing what. I also get the opportunity to give my professional opinions about modifying the lessons and assignments. I get tell my co-teachers, 'I don't think we should make the test that long, or they should be able to do this without any problems.' I appreciate the fact that they [co-teachers] value my input and I value theirs. They are the curriculum experts.

Ms. Edna, a general education teacher, reported that co-planning was essential to the co-teaching relationship:

> Being able to co-plan is the basis to a successful co-teaching relationship. I have been a co-teacher for eight years and I have had years with co-planning and years without. The years that I had a co-planning time were far better as far as relationships go.

Ms. Edna further explained why she felt that the years with co-planning time were better:

> We are on the same page! We both know what's going on when the class starts. We had time to get to know each other better during those planning times. I got to figure out and see what my co-teachers strengths and weaknesses were. I knew where to pick up when my co-teacher ran in to a weakness and the same for me. My weaknesses were made evident during planning time and we were not afraid to share those weaknesses with each other. I really feel like you are closer to being one teacher than two teachers when you get

> the proper time to plan. It is in those planning meetings that you really get to know your co-teacher.

Continuity of Co-Teachers

The third idea that teachers described an effective skills based co-teaching relationship consisted of was continuity of co-teachers. As I pressed for more understanding through my interview on what consisted of an effective skills based co-teaching relationship I asked the question, "How important is it to have the same co-teacher from year-to-year?" Of the 10 teachers interviewed, again, seven felt that having a consistent co-teacher from year-to-year was important. The three that did not feel that having the same co-teacher from year-to-year were Mr. Mr. Green, Ms. Taylor, and Ms. Smith. Also worth noting about these three are that they have the least amount of co-teaching experience among the 10 teachers interviewed.

Mr. Grey, a general education math teacher, explained how important it is to have the same co-teacher from year-to-year:

> I know I am one of the lucky ones here at High School A. When I was first asked by administration to be a co-teacher I was paired with a great special education teacher. We were lucky enough to teach together for five years before she left for another position. Our first year was all about learning about each other but by the end of the year we could finish our sentences for the other person. The second year only helped us grow stronger because we had that connection and understanding. The growth of our students increased higher each year we were together. After she left it was difficult to reestablish that kind of relationship with a new teacher. Luckily I was paired with another great special education teacher and we have built that same type of relationship. I think it would be extremely difficult to start over every year in my opinion. It's difficult enough to open up your classroom to begin with, to have to do that with a new person every year or two would be very deflating.

Mr. Black, a special education teacher, explained how important is it to have the same co-teacher from year-to-year, he said:

> Oh man! I have had so many [co-teachers] these past 6 years. I've been with one for 3 of those 6 years and that is the one I have the strongest relationship with. I get to co-plan

with her and I know her better than the other co-teacher. My other co-teacher and I were put together at the start for this year and I have to start all over. We are still getting to know what the other person likes and what we don't like. I would have liked to stay with the co-teacher I had last year but she moved out of the state. Life would've been easier for me if I got to the co-teachers as last year but that was not in the cards.

Mr. Black continued by explaining what made being with a new co-teacher difficult:

You get used to your partner. You know how the other one is feeling and how they are doing that day. You get to know that personality and can help out when you see them struggling. When you start with someone new, then you start from the bottom and work your way up.

Ms. Charlie, a general education math teacher, reported the importance of having the same co-teacher from year-to-year. She said:

Everyone wants consistency and predictability. I am on my third year as a co-teacher and I have never been with the same teacher more than one year. It is very taxing to start over each year. I am not a very outgoing person and it stresses me out. I have enjoyed my co-teachers but it would be wonderful to have the same co-teacher for at least a few years. So, essentially I have to start over each year trying to define our responsibilities and getting to know my co-teacher. I think it would be nice to have a co-teacher that I did not have to start over with each year. I think my co-teacher this year feels the same way because we have already requested to be together next year.

Ms. Drake, a general education math teacher, reported how important it is to have the same co-teacher from year-to-year. She said:

I have been with the same co-teacher for 5 years. It has been wonderful. I co-teach in other classes and I have not had the same consistency each year with those teachers. With the co-teacher that I have been with for five years it's like being with your best friend or spouse. I know her and she knows me. We have built a strong relationship together and strong class together. I know that sounds funny, but we truly have built, not just a class, but a successful program together for these students. I would be distraught if I had to change co-teachers now. I feel like this program is our baby and we are nurturing it together. I don't have that same feeling with the other class I co-teach in. We have not had that time together and that's exactly what co-teachers need together: time. It takes time to build a successful program.

Ms. Edna, a special education teacher, explained why she thought it was important to have the same co-teacher from year-to-year. She said:

It's important I guess. I've had co-teachers for a period of time and new co-teachers after one year. I do feel it's important to say that sometimes change can be good. Sometimes a change in a co-teacher relationship is necessary to get a more productive co-taught class. However, if you are wondering about the ease of having the same co-teacher from year-

> to-year then it is very important to me. You become familiar with your partner. Sometimes I don't even have to say anything to my co-teacher because he knows what I'm thinking. Co-teachers form bonds just like everyone else and change is always difficult. I think more teachers would be willing to co-teach if they had the opportunity to stay with the same teacher each year.

Ms. Carter, a general education math teacher, explained how important it is to have the same co-teacher from year-to-year. She stated:

> I feel blessed to be with the co-teacher that I teach with. We have been together for two years and we have a great rapport. To start the year with a familiar face and to get pick up where we left off with our relationship before summer break has been a blessing. We are stronger this year than last year and I think that is because we knew what to expect out of each other. I think our students see the connection that we have and they do not know who is the math teacher and who is the special education teacher. That is important. We have that familiarity with each other and the students see us as equals. My role is not any bigger or more important than his [co-teacher]. It helps form a stronger since of respect from the students. Unfortunately, the students know who is an assistant and who is not. There is a different respect given to a teacher than there is given to an assistant. The students know that we [co-teacher] are a team and that we are both teachers, so there is a deeper respect.

Mr. Brown, a special education teacher, stated how important it is to have the same co-teacher from year-to-year:

> I enjoy having the same co-teacher. It is important for the students especially if you teach the same students the next year. Those students know what they are getting in to with you and the other teacher. Expectations were set the previous year and students know them. As a co-teacher you have already established what your roles are and you don't have to reassign or figure that kind of stuff out again.

Roles of a Co-Teacher

The interview questions were used to discover how co-teachers define their responsibilities. An interesting phenomenon happened when speaking to each co-teacher. The general education teacher and special education teacher mentioned that they were the experts in their respective field. The general education teacher would defer to the special education teacher in areas of modification, accommodations, and general IEP goals. The special education teacher would defer to the general education teacher in the areas of curriculum content.

Mr. Grey, a general education math teacher, reported how he and his co-teacher defined roles and responsibilities. He said:

> That starts on the very first day in my opinion. While you are first meeting with your co-teacher you have to sit down and decide who is going to do what. Who is going to teach this part of the lesson? Who is going to help the struggling students? Who is going to communicate with parents? Who is going to set up meetings? Who is ultimately responsible for the content and who is responsible for providing accommodations and modifications. Since I started co-teaching at High School A I have always had the mindset that I am the math expert and my co-teacher is the special education expert. When it comes down to it, I am responsible for knowing the math content and delivering it and my co-teacher is responsible for making sure that the students are being met with what it says in the IEP. I guess we're both responsible for all of it, but if I share with my co-teacher what I'm strong in then we are both making a strong team. Over time you begin to become strong in those areas that you knew nothing about.

Mr. Black, a special education teacher, explained how he and his co-teacher defined roles and responsibilities. He said:

> Responsibilities are easy to figure out when you are a co-teacher. I'm the SPED teacher. That's the stuff I'm responsible for. My co-teacher knows the math and that's what their responsible for. You go to your planning meetings and that's what you do. You tell your co-teacher what those students with special needs need. I'm the SPED teacher and I have the IEPs and I know what they need. My co-teacher tells me what we will be learning and what we need to get through for that day. I let her tell me how it needs to be taught and then I give my opinion about how meet the student needs.

Ms. Charlie, a general education math teacher, explained how she and her co-teacher defined roles and responsibilities. She said:

> I go through this every year but I have never had a problem with it. It is more of a pain to do it year after year than anything else. It has to start the first day with your co-teacher. You have to talk to each other before that first day and set those roles and responsibilities up. My administrator told me that I am the curriculum expert and my co-teacher is the special education expert. When I first meet with my co-teacher that is where I begin. I let my co-teacher know that I have the curriculum that needs to be taught and they have the special education knowledge to help set the student up for success. I try to set up what each one of us will do by going through a check list of what needs to happen. I don't get the planning time with my co-teacher but I do get help in the way of having grading done for me and parents contacted when necessary. I think it is important to set up those guidelines together and to agree on them so that both us feel a sense of purpose.

Ms. Drake, a special education teacher, stated how she and her co-teacher defined roles and responsibilities. She said:

> We make a checklist and go through it. We divvy up the responsibilities and make sure that we are both in agreement. She has the curriculum content down and I know the special education laws. We divide it up that way. I don't mind to help with grading because I can help my co-teacher see where my students are struggling and come up with an alternate way to explain the material that is difficult for them. …but we just split the duties up. There is a lot to do and to be successful both of us have to pull our own weight.

Ms. Edna, a general education math teacher, stated how she and her co-teacher defined roles and responsibilities. She said:

> Co-teachers have to set up time to meet and discuss their roles and responsibilities. Nobody wants to be told what to do. One of the hardest things to do as a co-teacher is relinquish your role as the one in control. [Laughs] We are teachers and don't like to give up control. We are very territorial. That is something I have had to give up [control] with my co-teachers. My space is his space. My class is his class. My students are his students. We have to share everything and that includes the roles that I would normally have as a teacher. The way I see it, I teach math and take care of that aspect. He is the special education teacher and he takes care of that end.

Mr. Green, a special education teacher, explained how he and the co-teacher defined roles and responsibilities:

> It [roles and responsibilities] is an easy split. General education and special education. I take care of my part and my co-teacher takes care of her part. I'm not sure what else to say about that. I have never actually sat down and gone through every type of responsibility and said, 'you do this and this, and I do this and this.' We are both pretty good about doing what needs to be done and do it. I don't think it needs to be some official process. I do the special education things and she does the other things.

Ms. Smith, a general education language arts teacher, stated how she and her co-teacher defined roles and responsibilities. She said:

> The way that I have done it is doing it the way my administrator suggested. She recommended we reach an agreement on scheduling, classroom procedures and behaviors, classwork and homework policies, grading, and home communication together so we present a united front at all times. She [administrator] also suggested that I lead in the language arts curriculum and let my co-teacher lead the special education curriculum. That is always how I have done it. This gets tricky when you change co-teachers but I have always followed this method.

Ms. Taylor, a special education teacher, stated how she and her co-teacher defined roles and responsibilities. She said:

> My co-teacher was very organized with this. We met together and came up with different policies and procedures for the class and who would teach them. We also decided on who would take care of the different responsibilities in the class. I am the special education

> teacher so I took on the assignment of dealing with problematic behaviors and she decided that if there needed to be any communication home then she would do it. We also came up with our grading policy together.

When I asked Ms. Carter to tell me how she and her co-teacher defined roles and Responsibilities, she said:

> I have had years where my co-teacher did not fulfill any roles or responsibilities. That person was more or less taking up space in my classroom. It was difficult because I needed that person to help me modify the content but she was unwilling or possibly did not know how. I would look to her as the expert in that area but I seemed to always end up doing it on my own. I never felt confident in how I modified assignments and tests. I would ask for validation but I usually got the same answer, 'that works.' It has worked best when I meet with my co-teacher and we go over everything that we want to do. There are some compromises and sometimes we change the role or responsibility. It just depends how and what we like to do. As long as we both agree to it. I think this helps us create a stronger relationship because it prevents us from stepping on toes and offending the other person.

Mr. Brown, a special education teacher, explained how he and his co-teacher defined roles and responsibilities. He said:

> Defining roles and responsibilities has to be done during that elusive planning time. I have had a lot of co-teachers over the years I have always tried to be fair. There are several roles and responsibilities that need to be split up. Special education is my specialty [laughs] and that is the natural area for me to accept roles and responsibilities and the same goes for my co-teacher. I just make sure we're both in the same boat so I don't get myself in trouble.

Summary

Chapter 4 includes the findings of the study. The researcher conducted 10 in depth interviews with participants who were purposefully sampled based on the typical case sampling strategy. The participants were selected from a Northeast Tennessee high school and Northeast Tennessee middle school. The participants included five general education teachers and five special education teachers. Participant interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The researcher read the transcripts in an interview fashion to locate patterns among responses and identify emergent themes. The researcher reported the findings under the headings

derived from the central and guiding questions. The findings were reported through the use of quotations from participant interviews that were conclusive to the emergent themes.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers regarding forming co-teaching relationships in a school setting organized to serve students with disabilities through co-teaching models. This study was designed to allow special educators and general education teachers to express their perceptions in regards to their co-teaching experiences.

This study was designed as a qualitative collective case study based on phenomenological inquiry. Participants were identified through purposeful sampling following the typical case sampling strategy and included teachers from two public schools in Northeast Tennessee. From the two schools, there were five special education teachers and five general education teachers who participated in in-depth interviews based on open-ended questions from a predetermined interview guide. Interviews were recorded and accurately transcribed by the researcher. The researcher read the interview transcriptions in an iterative fashion to identify emergent patterns and themes among participant responses. Participants were asked to review the interview transcriptions to ensure accuracy. Participants then had the option of continuing in the study or withdrawing.

Recommendations for practice and further research have been included in this chapter to support the strengthening of co-teaching relationships.

Conclusions

Several themes emerged throughout the process of analyzing the data. Those themes were reported in Chapter 4 and organized around the central guiding questions. The central questions for this study were: To describe how a co-teaching relationship develops between several general education and special education teachers in a co-teaching environment and to describe how special education and general education teachers construct collective beliefs that affect the development, implementation, and sustainment of a successful co-teaching relationship. The guiding questions were:

1. What factors do general education teachers perceive to be facilitators of an effective co-teaching partnership?

2. What factors do special education teachers perceive to be facilitators of an effective co-teaching partnership?

3. What roles do general education teachers exhibit in co-teaching?

4. What roles do special education teachers exhibit in co-teaching? The remainder of this section consists of a summary of those themes as well as conclusions derived from the findings.

Becoming a Co-Teacher

This study showed that teachers who were asked by administration to be a co-teacher were more likely to agree to be a co-teacher than those who were not asked. Ten of the 10 participants were asked by administration to become a co-teacher and were agreeable to the idea. This research found different reasons why school administration asked each teacher to be a co-teacher. Interviews revealed that a factor in being asked to be a co-teacher was the subject that a

teacher taught. This study showed that four of the five general education teachers taught math. Administrators approached the math teachers and asked them to be co-teachers to help the students who were struggling in that subject. General education math teachers were approached by administration to be co-teachers due to low math scores for the students in special education. All five special education teachers were approached by administration and asked to be a co-teacher due to their backgrounds in special education. Administrators asked the special education teachers to co-teach with the general education math teachers to help modify the curriculum for the students with disabilities.

Factors of an Effective Skills Based Co-Teaching Relationship

Three themes related to the factors of an effective skills-based co-teaching relationship. The themes were communication, co-planning time, and continuity of co-teachers.

Communication

The first main theme that arose during the participant interviews was communication. Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez, and Hartman (2009) stated that one of the reasons co-teaching does not reach its potential is because of poor communication among co-teachers. The importance of communication in a co-teaching relationship was apparent among all interviewees.

It is evident that communication can either make or break a co-teaching relationship. Several of the interviewees mentioned that communication was the basis to a strong co-teaching. I found that communication is important to both teachers when making decisions about the co-taught class or the students that are shared. When decisions are made by one co-teacher without the other co-teacher having knowledge, the relationship can weaken or deteriorate. When teachers are communicating well or making an effort to communicate, the evidence shows that

the co-teaching relationship can be very strong. In fact, communication between co-teachers can strengthen a relationship so much that the co-teachers are able to communicate without verbal communication. The evidence suggested that co-teachers can sense what the other co-teacher may need by a look or body language. The evidence also suggests that teachers can strengthen their co-teaching relationship by communicating about personal aspects of their life and not just professional aspects.

As one of the interviewees suggested, communicating with a co-teacher can be uncomfortable, but to build a stable relationship, co-teachers have to communicate. Part of that communication that builds a strong relationship is listening. Communication is not merely talking with the co-teacher but listening to what the co-teacher is saying. A participant admitted that when she does not listen to her co-teaching partner, that is when problems arise. The evidence from the interviews suggests that communication is a two-way street. To build an effective skills based co-teaching relationship, co-teachers must communicate and listen to their co-teaching partner.

Co-Planning

Co-planning time was the second theme that emerged from the interview and guiding questions. The literature supported co-planning as a factor in effective skills based co-teaching relationship. Ashton (2003) identified co-planning time as one of the major challenges faced by those in co-teaching relationships. Ashton asked how much co-planning would be ideal among co-teachers and found that teachers requested a minimum of weekly co-planning periods per co-teaching companionship. For example, if a special educator works with two different general education teachers, that special educator would have a planning period with each general education teacher each week. Ashton also found that while having a co-planning period each

week would be ideal it is not always plausible for school administrators to give a co-planning period as frequently as co-teaching companionships would like. With the pressures of trying to lift student achievement in schools, administrators struggle to give general and special educators designated times to co-plan.

While planning is important for all teachers, it is especially important for new co-teaching companionships to help grow the relationship (Johnston, Knight, & Miller, 2007). Friend (2008) suggested that administrators and co-teaching companionships look at co-planning as a two component process. The first component should be about discussing critical topics and sharing key decisions. This first component should happen at least once a month, for a class period or even an hour. The second component of this planning is on-the-fly-conversations with co-teaching companionships that happen throughout the course of a normal school day.

The data collected in this study confirmed that co-planning is essential to the success of an effective skills based co-teaching relationship. The study found that co-teachers who do not have a scheduled co-planning time struggle with their co-teaching relationship. Teachers reported that classes that are co-taught without a co-planning time are more difficult than classes that are co-taught and have a co-planning time. The issue is that co-teachers do not have the time to discuss the matters of the class. Some co-teachers admitted to "winging it" when class starts. The study also showed that there can be a sense of resentment toward another co-teacher when a co-planning period is not available to the co-teaching relationship. There can be a sense that the other co-teacher is viewed as merely an instructional assistant in the classroom to help rather than to co-teach the class.

The study revealed that teachers who have a co-planning period have a stronger relationship than those who do not. The study suggested that teachers are able to get to know

each other during these planning periods and see themselves as friends and not just professional colleagues. Teachers who had a co-planning period together reported a stronger sense of communication and felt as though they were "one teacher" in the classroom. The co-teachers also reported that they were able to read each other's body language and moods and help the co-teacher that might be struggling without there being a disruption to the learning process. The study also showed that having a co-planning period is beneficial for the special education teacher who may not be familiar with the curriculum being taught in the co-taught class. Special education teachers are not experts in the field of math, language arts, science, or social studies, and they lean on the general education teachers to be the content specific expert. One teacher even reported learning the math as the students learn in class because the two teachers did not have co-planning time together. Had there been a co-planning period, the special education teacher would be able to ask the co-teacher about certain aspects of the curriculum that were not understood.

Continuity of Co-Teachers

Continuity of co-teachers was the third theme that emerged from the interviews. The researcher was not able to find any research that suggested that the continuity of teachers was important. However, when interviewing these 10 teachers, the researcher found that having a continuous teacher from year-to-year was extremely important. There were three co-teachers that did not feel that having the same co-teacher each year was important, but it is worth noting that these three co-teachers have the least amount of co-teaching experience among the 10 teachers interviewed.

This study revealed that a co-teaching relationship that is together for several years is stronger than a co-teaching relationship that changes from year-to-year. Co-teachers who change

teaching partners every year or two have a difficult time forming bonds and building trust with one another. The co-teachers reported having a new co-teacher and starting over each year was hard. The reason that it was hard is that the co-teachers were starting to get to know each other and find a system and pattern for working together. The study also showed that working consistently with the same teacher is easier for certain personalities. A co-teacher who was not very outgoing reported that it was very taxing for her due to not having a very outgoing personality. The co-teacher would be able to avoid developing a new relationship; something that she finds difficult, if administration left her with the same co-teacher. The study also found that both special education and general education teachers enjoy having consistency and predictability. Having the same co-teacher each year helps a co-teacher have consistency and predictability.

Co-teachers who have been together for several years reported having a stronger bond. In some cases the co-teacher reported that it is like being with a spouse or a best friend because the co-teachers know each other that well. The co-teachers found that when you are with the same co-teacher for more than one or two school years an understanding develops between the two. The co-teachers are able to not only build a strong class together, but also a strong program. The co-teachers also reported that the stronger relationship between the co-teachers due to staying together is beneficial for the students. The students can sense the connection between the two teachers, and that helps the students feel more secure with their teachers. This is especially true for co-teachers who follow a group of students to the next grade the following year. The students are already familiar with their co-teachers and know what to expect from the very first day of school.

Roles of a Co-Teacher

Any collaborative relationship can be doomed from the start if one partner dominates, or leads in a direction that the other partner did not expect (Murawski, 2004). Murawski also explained that teachers are naturally more territorial due to the subject content environment and are used to teaching in isolation. One partner may feel more qualified to teach the learning content and uneasy about letting go. Murawski suggested that special educators who want to co-teach observe and assist in content specific classrooms to build a rapport with the teacher before acting as a co-teacher. Eccleston (2010) suggested that listing distinct responsibilities for all individuals affected by the co-teaching program will help all that are involved to understand the nature of the program and its impact for them. This means that the co-teachers and paraprofessionals who are involved in the co-teaching class will experience role changes and responsibilities. Due to the different responsibilities that teachers have, I used the interview questions to help answer how co-teachers define their responsibilities.

Recommendations for Practice

The study indicated following needs for co-teachers to build a successful relationship. Co-teachers and administrators that are trying to build a successful relationship together in their classroom should include the following:

- Administration request: An administrator who is interested in having teachers co-teach needs to look for teachers who might be interested in co-teaching. An administrator can do this by interviewing, speaking with a teacher, or sending out a survey. Once the administrator finds a teacher that is interested, the teacher should be asked by the administrator and not assigned.

- Communication between the two teachers: Teachers that are in a co-teaching relationship should communicate with one another. It is recommended that co-teachers meet before the summer is over and discuss their roles and responsibilities. Meeting together before the school year begins will lay the ground work for a successful co-teaching relationship.
- A co-planning time: Administrators should provide the resource of planning time to co-teaching partners by creating a master schedule that includes a common planning time for both teachers at least once a week.
- Continuity of co-teachers: Administrators should consider keeping a co-teaching companionship together for more than one year. Co-teachers that are able to stay together for more than a year or two have a stronger relationship than co-teachers that have a new co-teacher each year.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study could be expanded in the following ways:

- Further studies could include the study of quantitative data to determine the success of a co-teaching relationship by using test scores, grades, attendance rates, etc.
- An area for further research is in the "Continuity of Co-teachers." What are the effects of having a steady co-teaching relationship on the teachers and the students vs. the effects of having co-teachers that are only together for a shorter period of time?

Summary

The overall purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers regarding their co-teaching experiences. This study was designed to allow special educators and general education teachers to express their perceptions in

regards to their co-teaching experiences. Ten co-teachers were purposefully sampled to participate in in-depth interviews for the purpose of sharing their perceptions. The findings of the study were organized and reported by themes that arose during the participants' responses. The themes that emerged arose were summarized and compared to the literature reviewed. This chapter also includes recommendations for practice and future recommendations for future research.

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