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A Qualitative Study on Teachers' Perceptions of Co-Teaching in Inclusion Classrooms

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to examine teachers' perceptions toward co-teaching in inclusion classrooms and provide valuable information on relevant content, activities and assignments that focus on collaboration between school professionals. A second purpose of this study was to add knowledge to the existing literature describing factors for developing effective co-teaching programs in schools that serve large populations of students with disabilities in urban schools. This included examining their perspectives about the co-teaching model, their relationships formed with their co-teacher, and the support given by administration. The study was a descriptive study that used qualitative research methods to understand the perspectives of teachers involved in co-taught classrooms. The data collection method was semi-structured interviews. Participants consisted of general and special education teachers with at least two years of co-teaching experience employed in grades PK-8. The setting was an urban district located in New Jersey.

After the research was coded and analyzed, it was determined that collaboration was essential to the co-teaching process and support from administration was needed to work on issues such as co-planning and role ambiguity.

The study produced several results that align with concepts from the literature review. The results were categorized into six overarching themes: role of the teacher, exposure to the co-teaching model, collaboration, trust, training, and administrative support.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my loving children,

Carla, CJ, Carmen and Cameron,

and parents,

Joan and Vernon

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I would first like to thank my committee mentor, Dr. Anthony Colella, who was always there when I needed him answering questions about my writing and research. He provided guidance and instilled confidence to help meet the challenge of this rigorous program. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Barbara Strobert and Dr. Anthony Cavanna, because without their passionate participation and input this dissertation would have been difficult to complete.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background

The focus of this research study was to explore general and special education teachers' perceptions of co-teaching, which involves the use of a collaboration process to effectively and jointly educate students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom for the twenty-first century. The intent of this study was to examine how general education and special education teachers describe and interpret the instructional strategies and explore the supports and barriers when planning for co-teaching instruction. This chapter will give a brief overview of the background of the problem, discuss co-teaching and collaboration, and give an overview of the research questions, methodology, theoretical framework, definition of terms, limitations, and delimitations.

According to Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, and McCulley (2012), over the past 20 years a convergence of legislative pressure has challenged educators to find efficient yet effective ways to provide high-quality education for students with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and more specifically the Amendments to IDEA in 1997, emphasize the need to serve students with disabilities in the general education setting whenever possible. This new emphasis was included based on the principle that students are best served in settings most like those of their non-disabled peers (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2000).

Children with disabilities should only be removed from a general educational environment when satisfactory learning could not be achieved in the confines of a general classroom setting (Shady, Luther & Richmond, 2013). Due to federal policies, such as IDEA and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the model of instructional delivery requires educators to

address the issues of implementation, instruction, and effectiveness through co-teaching arrangements to make inclusive education work successfully in classrooms (Guess & Thompson, 1989; Murawski, Weidel, & Swanson, 2001; Cook, 2004).

Cook and Friend (1995) stated, "In response to recent trends and legislation promoting inclusive instruction and access to the general education curriculum many schools have implemented 'co-teaching' as a means for promoting effective instruction in inclusive classrooms" (para. 1). Co-teaching also provides support for increasing the inclusion of students with disabilities. Co-teaching reduces the student-teacher ratio through the physical presence of the teachers and may reduce the stigma for students with disabilities by placing them in general education classrooms. Co-teachers may also provide professional support for one another. Ideally, co-teachers collaborate in all facets of the educational process.

As the diversity of general education classrooms increase, co-teaching has become one of the standard methods of classroom instruction (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Gately & Gately, 2001; Malian & McRae, 2010; McKenzie, 2009). According to McKenzie (2009) and others, team teaching, cooperative teaching, and co-teaching are among the most successful collaborative models (Austin, 2001; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Friend, Reising, & Cook, 1993; Harbor et al., 2007; Idol, 2006; McKenzie, 2009; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Salend, 2008; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007).

Borman, Hewes, Overman, and Brown (2003) stated that reform initiatives have targeted schools with high numbers of at-risk students and low-test scores. Consequently, urban schools continue to exhibit lower student achievement than national expectations and norms. Various programs such as smaller classrooms, co-teaching, or partner teaching have been implemented in

elementary schools to reduce the number of children assigned to one teacher and foster more teacher-student involvement and teacher support for learning (Biddle & Berliner, 2002).

Co-teaching may be an effective method to meet the needs of students in inclusive classrooms because it presumes that general and special education teachers actively participate in the delivery of instruction, share responsibility for all their students, assume accountability for student learning, and acquire instructional resources and space. Together the educators create a learning situation that cannot be produced by a solo teacher (Friend, 2008).

McDuffie, Mastropieri, and Scruggs (2009) saw the benefit of two teachers in one classroom in their study. They found that students with and without disabilities who were in a co-taught classroom performed better on tests than did students who were in a non-co-taught class. Although the improvement in scores was small, it was seen for both students with disabilities and students without disabilities. However, two teachers in one classroom did not appear to have an additive effect on the quantity of time spent by teachers interacting with students with disabilities in a co-taught class. In other words, the students with disabilities did not receive additional individualized teacher interactions with the addition of the second teacher.

Magiera and Zigmond (2005) observed in a co-taught class that students with disabilities received more one-to-one interactions with both teachers than they did from one teacher in a non-co-taught class. However, the student with disabilities received fewer interactions with the general education teacher in the co-taught class than they would have received in a non-co-taught class.

There has been some research on negative outcomes of inclusion programs with co-teaching. These include higher instance of behavior problems, which implies inclusion teachers may devote too much time on discipline problems, thereby diminishing time spent on instruction.

First, behavior problems brought into the inclusion classroom by students with special needs may potentially have negative effects on other students in the classroom. Second, contrary to the inclusion assumption, inclusion programs may not necessarily help to raise students' self-esteem (Daniel & King, 1997).

Pearl and Miller (2007) observed that individualized supports and accommodations for special education students are rarely used in the co-taught classroom. They stated the accommodations in students' IEPs typically complement whole class instruction and not individualized instruction. Furthermore, they found that co-taught classes followed the same agenda as the general education classes. Both classes had the same goals and objectives for all students. The researchers observed that teachers provided special education students with the same type of instruction and materials as general education students.

Collaboration, often synonymous with co-teaching, is one subset of skills needed to effectively and jointly educate students with disabilities in 21st-century schools. It has been a crucial topic for education in the United States since the early 1970s when students with disabilities would receive their education in the least restrictive environment as close to their non-disabled peers while still experiencing academic success and not in separate classrooms or schools as was traditionally considered the appropriate setting for all students with disabilities. Since that time, discourse on collaboration between general and special educators, including the workings of this professional partnership, the impact on professional roles and responsibilities, and the effect on student achievement has permeated special education literature (Cook & Friend, 1995; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie, 2005; Murawski & Swanson, 2001; Nevin, Cramer, Voigt, & Salazar, 2008; Rea &

Connell, 2005; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Research on co-teaching was scarce ten years ago, but according to Murawski and Dieker (2008):

… recent studies have found that [co-teaching] can be a very effective method for meeting students' needs (e.g., Magiera, Smith, Zigmond, & Gebauer, 2005; Murawski, 2006; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). However, as with any paradigm shift, change is difficult and barriers are common. Teachers have reported a variety of frustrations with co-teaching; they include lack of training (Mastropieri et al., 2005), lack of administrative support (Dieker, 2001; Rea, 2005), and a lack of parity in the classroom (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Spencer, 2005) (p. 41).

In inclusive classrooms, co-teachers are expected to enhance the participation of students with disabilities and improve performance outcomes for all students. However, there is a gap in research on teacher collaboration, perception, beliefs, and methods about co-teaching (Zigmond, 2001; Grossman, Beaupre, & Rossi, 2001; Idol, 2006; Murray, 2004). It is important to develop further understanding about how teachers within urban settings view collaborative teaching, as well as what perceptions they have about factors that contribute to the success of the collaborative teaching models (Damore & Murray, 2009).

The existing literature on co-teaching reveals that there are very few qualitative explanatory studies on the perspectives of teachers involved in co-taught classes as they meet the needs of students with learning disabilities (Cronis & Ellis, 2000). Co-teaching arrangements

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have been shown to be beneficial for students, teachers, and school organizations alike. Cramer and Nevin (2006) stated:

At the secondary level, co-teaching has been found to be effective for students with a variety of instructional needs including learning disabilities (Rice & Zigmond, 1999); Trent, 1998); high-risk students in a social studies class (Dieker, 1998), and in a language remediation class (Miller, Valasky, & Molloy, 1998) (p. 3).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research design was to examine teachers' perceptions toward co-teaching and to provide valuable information on relevant content, activities, and assignments that focus on collaboration between school professionals. A second purpose of this study was to add knowledge to the existing literature describing factors for developing effective co-teaching programs that service large populations of students with disabilities in urban schools.

According to Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez, and Hartman (2009):

Co-teaching is gaining popularity as an instructional delivery service for supporting students in diverse classrooms. In spite of recent research indicating its effectiveness, co-teachers do not always realize its potential, often due to interpersonal or communication issues occurring between co-teachers" (para. 1).

Taking into account these elements, there is a need for a descriptive qualitative study that uses co-teachers' testimonies as the primary avenue for understanding and responding effectively to co-teachers' interpersonal style in order to maximize the professional satisfaction and success of co-teaching.

According to Harbort, Gunter, Hull, Brown, Venn, Wiley & Wiley (2007), "Much more information is needed to better understand the exact nature of the roles and behaviors of both the regular education and the special education teacher in these classrooms" (p.14).

Research Questions

This study investigated general and special education teachers' perceptions of co-teaching methods in a New Jersey public school to effectively educate students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom. The following research questions guided this study:

1.   How do general and special teachers describe their perception of co-teaching and instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

2.   In what ways, if any, can general and special education teachers improve and strengthen co-teaching instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

3.   How do general and special education teachers describe their support from administration for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is based on the social constructivist theory which states students bring prior knowledge to the learning environment, which serves as a foundation for their construct (Graber & Hare, 2007; Ultanir, 2012). Les Vygotsky (1978) viewed participant learning as a constructivist process. Broadly defined, constructivism is a collection of learning theories that postulate how individuals make meaning from experience through the process of integrating new experiences with prior knowledge (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

Vygotsky (1978) stated that human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. According to David (2014), "Vygotsky's theory is

one of the foundations of constructivism. It asserts three major themes regarding social interaction, the more knowledgeable other, and the zone of proximal development. Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development" (para. 2). Vygotsky felt social learning precedes development. Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of social interaction with the "more knowledgeable other." The "more knowledge other" refers to anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept.

Teachers function as "more knowledgeable others" by supporting students as they learn new information and practices that differ from those they usually employ. Teachers are encouraged to present cases, lessons, and demonstrations of the targeted skills to their colleagues as they progress. Using teachers to present information is consistent with the use of referent social power (Erchul & Raven, 1997) as a means of social influence.

David (2009) stated: "The zone of proximal development is the distance between a student's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration and the student's ability to solve the problem independently. According to Vygotsky, learning occurs in this zone" (para. 6).

Much of the recent interest in social constructivism can be linked to Vygotsky (1978) who argued that social interaction promotes development and learning. A central part of Vygotsky's approach is the role of more capable others, who facilitate the child's development by "scaffolding" the child within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD represents the distance between what a child can do with help from others (assisted performance) and what the child can do with no help from others (unassisted performance) (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

These theories call for teachers to design activities that facilitate students' development of knowledge by involving the students in conversation that stretches the boundaries of their knowledge (Steffen-Morrone, Harkness, D'Ambrosi, & Caulfied, 2004).

Vygotsky (1978) believed in developing social climates that foster strengths and build knowledge and confidence to improve teaching practices. He believed that learning depends upon interactions with others (e.g., teachers, peers, and parents). According to Draper (2013), "Therefore, learning is critically dependent on the qualities of a collaborative process within an educational community, which is situation specific and context bound (Eggen and Kauchak, 1999; McInerney and McInerney, 2002; Schunk, 2012)" (para. 1). A typical Vygotsky classroom would include co-teaching.

Design of the Study

The researcher selected a qualitative research study used to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers working in inclusion classrooms utilizing a co-teaching model. In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to reveal more fully the essences and meaning of human experience (Newton & Rudstam, 2001).

A case study was conducted to obtain a description of the "essence" of co-teaching students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom. The case study examined lived human experiences provided by the people involved (Creswell, 2003).

The school setting for this research study was an urban public school district in New Jersey. In this particular district, teachers are employed in grades PK-12. The Executive Director of Accountability granted approval to conduct this research. The building principals provided the researcher with a list of potential participants with at least two years of co-teaching experience. From the 65 invitations, 35 teachers responded favorably with interest.

Approximately 65 teachers received a letter of invitation indicating co-teaching for two years was a requirement to participate in the study. From the respondents, only eight general education teachers and eight special education teachers from four schools were purposely selected based on their willingness to participate and availability. Before the interviews took place, each participant was asked to sign an informed consent. For those participants who were not selected, they received a letter of thank you for their interest.

The data was mediated through a total of 16 semi-structured interviews rather than through inventories or questionnaires. The researcher developed an interview protocol with open-ended questions. In an effort to increase the validity and reliability of the interview protocol, a jury of three experts experienced in special education and co-teaching assisted the researcher in determining if there were any limitations, flaws, or other vulnerabilities within the interview protocol. The members of the jury of experts were not participants in the study. The feedback helped the researcher revise the interview questions prior to interviewing the participants.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in 30-minute increments during a non-instructional time and at a mutually agreed upon location, allowing the participants to reconstruct their experiences in a comfortable, natural environment. In an effort to establish confidentiality, a number was given to each participant, and school names were not mentioned in the report.

During interviews, a recording device and field notes were used to obtain information. Once the interviews were completed the information was transcribed directly by the researcher for data analysis. It was coded to determine emerging themes recurring among the answers, which focused on the literature review and the theoretical framework.

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to understand the challenges perceived by teachers who are involved with co-teaching in inclusion classrooms. According to McDuffie, Mastropieri, and Scruggs (2009), co-teaching is critical to the success of inclusion. This teaching strategy has been shown to impact K-12 student achievement.

There are many benefits of co-teaching including opportunities to vary content presentation, individualized instruction, scaffold learning experiences, and monitor students' understanding. Co-teaching in its most effective form can promote equitable learning opportunities for all students.

According to federal legislative changes, such as those described by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), reauthorized in 2004 (P. L. No. 108-466), and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (P. L. No. 107–110), students with increasingly diverse learning characteristics should have access to and achieve high academic performance in the general education curriculum. Co-teaching is a service that should serve the needs of students with (and without) disabilities through IDEA. Such teaching requires a re-conceptualization and revision for teacher preparation.

The results of this study can inform and guide the practices of instructional leaders on teacher perceptions of general and special education teachers on effective co-teaching practices for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. By analyzing the perceptions of the concerns of the teachers, educational leaders can have a better understanding of how teachers perceive the use of the model and how they reflect upon their own practices in an effort to increase teacher quality and make informed policy decisions.

Limitations

       1.   The researcher used interviewing as a data collection method. The researcher must make the assumption that the participants are entirely truthful in their responses and that the information will not be shared with others.

       2.   It is assumed that all teachers have been part of co-teaching and understood what is meant within the content of this study.

       3.   The researcher brings her personal bias to the research topic, which may influence the analysis of the findings.

Delimitations

       1.   Interviewing teachers in northern New Jersey limits the perspectives of teachers from other areas in New Jersey. These findings, therefore, may be specific to the participants in this one school district rather than representative of other school districts in New Jersey.

       2.   The composition of the sample of more females than males – comparable school districts may have a higher percentage of male faculty members.

       3.   The population of teachers was limited to those with experience in prekindergarten through eighth grade inclusion classrooms.

       4.   Interviews are limited to currently employed district staff in one New Jersey urban district.

       5.   The study is conducted only in New Jersey.

       6.   Data is collected during the 2018 academic year.

Definitions of Terms

       Accommodations: Supports or services provided to help a student access the general curriculum and validly demonstrate learning (Brownell & Carrington, 2000).

Adaptations: Any procedure intended to accommodate an educational situation with respect to individual differences in ability or purpose (Carpenter, 2001).

Collaboration: an ongoing process (i.e., rather than a service delivery model) whereby educators with different areas of expertise voluntarily work together to create a solution to problems impeding student success, as well as to carefully monitor and refine those solutions (Santos, 2001).

Co-Teaching: two professionals sharing responsibilities for all students within a common location. According to the researchers, co-teaching promotes and supports the varied needs of students through collaboration and differentiated instruction. This model of instruction allows educators to meet the diverse needs of students in a classroom by combining their expertise and by developing common instructional goals for all students (Conderman & Hedin, 2012).

Elementary School: For the purpose of this study, an elementary school consisting of grade levels starting at Kindergarten through Sixth Grade.

Elementary School: For this study, an elementary school consisting of grade levels starting at Kindergarten through Sixth Grade.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that FAPE "must be available to any individual child with a disability who needs special education and related services, even though the child has not failed or been retained in a course, and is advancing from grade to grade" (IDEA, 2004, p. 46541).

General (Regular) Education Class: A general education class is an educational setting that is comprised of regular education, non-disabled students.

General (Regular) Education Teacher: A general education teacher is one who holds

either a provisional or standard certification, issued by the New Jersey State Board of Examiners (N.J.A.C. 6A: 9-12.1, 2009).

Inclusion: The term inclusion has been defined in a variety of ways. For the purpose of this study, inclusion is defined as students with disabilities receiving all or some of their instruction in a general education classroom with a general education teacher teaching in concert with a special education teacher (McCray & McHatton, 2011).

Inclusion Classrooms: For the purpose of this study, classrooms that include special and general education students.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): The IEP is the key legal document developed by a multidisciplinary team, including parents, school staff, and other personnel that details how the student receives a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The IDEA mandates that students with disabilities be educated with their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible. The IDEA states that students will be educated in inclusive settings and will be removed to separate classes or schools only if they are unable to receive an appropriate education in a general education classroom with supplemental services and accommodations (Katsiyannis et al., 2012).

Mainstreaming: Students who have been placed in a full-time special education class that is separate and being included slowly back into the general education classroom. They usually spend part of the day in the general education classroom and part in a special education classroom (Lindsay, 2007).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 provided an overhaul of the education system and requires states to establish challenging academic standards

for all schools, to test students regularly to ensure they are meeting those standards, and to employ teachers who are highly qualified (NCLB, 2001).

Special Education Teacher: A special education teacher in the state of New Jersey is one who holds either a provisional or standard certification issued by the State Board of Examiners, with an endorsement to teach special education students (N.J.A.C. 6A: 9-11.3, 2009).

Student with a Disability: A student with a disability is one who has been found eligible for special education and related services (N.J.A.C. 6A: 14-1.3, 2002).

Summary

General and special education teachers' perceptions of co-teaching, which involves the use of a collaboration process to effectively and jointly educate students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom, can directly and specifically impact the culture of a school district. The research study is organized into five chapters.

Chapter 1 of this study provides an introduction containing specific background information that is related to inclusion and effective ways to provide high-quality education for students with disabilities through co-taught methods with general and special education teachers. The chapter develops to describe the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, the theoretical framework, design of the study, significance of the study, the limitations and delimitations of the study, and key terms.

Chapter 2 of the study consists of a review of the literature related to the inclusion process and information about the co-teaching methods for teachers. Administrative support is discussed related to the improvement of the quality of services for students with disabilities.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter will explore the various pieces of literature related to co-teaching in an elementary and middle school educational setting. This literature review begins with a brief overview of the history of special education and then leads into (a) an explanation of inclusion, (b) information about co-teaching, (c) various examples of co-teaching models, (d) the theoretical framework and how it relates to co-teaching, and (e) administrative support. With increasing numbers of students receiving special education services, it is imperative that elementary and middle school administrators, as well as educational researchers take the time to examine the programs, models, and theories that are available to improve special education.

The historical overview expands upon the literature included in Chapter 1, highlighting the laws, regulations, and policies that have been established over decades. Different models for inclusion are also presented, representing a spectrum of viewpoints. Included is an introspection of the attitudes and perceptions of key individuals who are involved in the process of co-teaching and its practices. Lastly, the implications surrounding co-teaching, such as program planning, staff development, and resource allocation, are shared.

Literature Review

The review of the literature related to co-teachers' perceptions was conducted using a number of resources found in the Seton Hall University library database, peer-reviewed journals, texts, and websites. Computerized databases included *Dissertation Abstracts International (DAI), EBSCO host Research Databases, ERIC research databases,* and *ProQuest.* Search terms included perceptions of special and general education teachers about co-teaching, staff

development, administrative support, inclusion, collaboration, theories of collaboration, and co-teaching models. The style guidelines used in formatting this dissertation were obtained from the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition (2010).

The review of the literature included important themes relative to the problem statement such as:

- Perceptions of co-teachers in elementary and middle schools

- Co-teaching methods

- Types of support for co-teachers from administrators

- Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of literature

Historical Overview of Inclusion

According to the 22nd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), this report marked "the 25th anniversary of the passage of Public Law (P.L.) 94-142, (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975)" (United States Department of Education [USDE], 2000, p. V, Preface). Since that time, annual reports indicate the steady progress made in enforcing this Act, reflecting ongoing commitment to expand educational opportunities for children with disabilities. Special schools for children with disabilities existed during the 19th century and gradually increased over the next 100 years (USDE, 2000).

The nation's attitudes towards persons with disabilities have changed over the past quarter century. For the first 15 years of the Act's existence, it referred to "handicapped children." Ten years ago, Congress made significant changes. The Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990 (P.L. 101-476) was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and "handicapped children" were referred to as "children with

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disabilities." According to the USDE (2000), "These changes reflected both the activism of persons with disabilities and their advocates and an increasing public awareness that 'disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society' (USDE, 1995a, p. 5)" (p. V, Preface).

Before the 1970s, there were millions of disabled children who did not receive adequate or appropriate special education services from public schools. There were another million children who were excluded from school altogether (USDE, 1995a).

Disability advocates sought federal assistance to provide leadership and funding in order to provide a free appropriate public education for children with disabilities. The Bureau for Education of the Handicapped was established by Congress in 1966 under Title VI of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESEA). As these programs grew, the Bureau recommended that they be codified under a single law (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). The resulting Education of the Handicapped Act, P.L. 91-230, was passed in 1970. Around the same time, parents pushed for state laws requiring local education agencies (LEAs) to offer special education services to students with disabilities and provide partial funding for those services (USDE, 2000).

Each reauthorization of P.L. 94–142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975), most recently the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, has increased legislators' commitment to educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Students with disabilities are educated with students without disabilities in general education classrooms. They are exposed to the same curricular content and academic standards per state or school district guidelines.

More school districts are placing special education teachers in general education classrooms following the lead of prominent inclusion advocates, special education teachers, and parents of students with disabilities (Cook & Friend, 1995; McLeskey & Waldron, 1995; Roach, Salisbury, & McGregor, 2002).

In 1965, Congress enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in order to address the problem of inequality of education for students who were considered underprivileged or disadvantaged. This legislation provided the necessary resources to ensure an equal education for all students (Wright & Wright, 2007).

Shortly thereafter, in 1966, Congress amended ESEA to help states expand programs for handicapped children. In 1970, ESEA was replaced with Education of the Handicapped Act (P.L. 91-230) encouraging states to develop educational programs for individuals with disabilities (Wright & Wright, 2007).

During the 1970s, two court cases greatly enhanced the movement of equal rights for students with disabilities: *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* (Wright & Wright, 2007).

The PARC case dealt with the inclusion of students with mental retardation in the general education classroom. The law upheld that parents would be involved in the educational placement of their children and would have the means to resolve disputes with the school district. The Mills case involved suspending, expelling, or excluding students with disabilities from public schools in the District of Columbia. The school district asserted that it was too expensive to educate these students, but the courts maintained that schools must provide them an education and not deny their parents due process of law (Wright & Wright, 2007).

After these two landmark cases, the federal government initiated an investigation to determine the status of children with disabilities. This Congressional investigation in 1972 revealed that millions of children with disabilities were not receiving a proper education. Congress now recognized the need to provide laws to protect these students. On November 19, 1975, President Gerald Ford signed landmark legislation entitled the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), also known as Public Law 94-142. If states wanted to receive federal funds, EAHCA required schools to offer services to all students with disabilities (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2005; Wright & Wright, 2007).

The law ensured that students had access to equal education and due process of law. Congress also enacted "procedural safeguards," which were designed to protect the rights of parents and children with disabilities. In the 1980s, the term used to describe placing students with disabilities in the general education classroom was called "mainstreaming." For the first time, students who had been taught in separate classrooms were now learning in an environment with students *without* disabilities (Lerner, 2000).

By 1975, Congress had determined that millions of American children with disabilities were still not receiving an appropriate education. This situation was remedied by the passage of P.L. 94-142 which required that all students with disabilities receive FAPE. It provided a funding mechanism to help defray the costs of special education programs (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996).

Today, IDEA includes broad mandates for the provision of services to all children with disabilities (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). Although provisions have been added or amended in order to expand the provision of services to younger groups of children with

disabilities, or to improve the quality of the services provided under the law, the four purposes of IDEA have remained essentially the same:

> … to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their particular needs; to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents or guardians are protected; to assist States and localities to provide for the education of all children with disabilities; and to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities (USDE, 1995a, p. 1).

In 1990, EAHCA, or Public Law 94-142, was amended and renamed the Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA). The law was reauthorized in 1997 and again in 2004. There are several components of IDEA, but the essence of the law is captured in Parts A, B, and C. Part A of IDEA includes the General Provisions of the Act. "When Congress enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) in 1975, fewer than half of all children with disabilities were receiving an appropriate education; more than one million children were excluded from school" (Wright & Wright, 2007, p. 20).

Part A explains the necessity of the law and defines terms used within the new legislation, such as Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and Highly Qualified. Through IDEA, students were now entitled to FAPE, meaning parents did not have to pay for education provided for their child. Students were also guaranteed a teacher who was highly qualified, meaning he or she had to demonstrate competence in the subjects they taught (Wright & Wright, 2007).

One of the main purposes of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (1997) was to ensure that all eligible students with disabilities are given special education and related services to meet

their specific needs and to prepare them for employment and independent living. Another main purpose of the legislation was to guarantee that educators have available the necessary supports in order to increase the chances of success of their students with disabilities. One provision of IDEA is Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), which means that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children without disabilities (inclusion) (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1997).

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (1997), only when education in the general education classroom cannot be achieved (assuming the use of supplementary and supportive services was exhausted) can the school change placement into a more restricted environment.

According to Arends (2000), inclusion is the practice of including students with disabilities in general education classrooms, but the incorporation of inclusion in schools goes much beyond the simple physical placement of students with disabilities into the classroom and also includes to what extent the students are participating in classroom activities and assignments.

In 2004 when IDEA was last reauthorized, the law was aligned with a new federal law signed by George W. Bush in 2001 entitled No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This new law stated that all students, regardless of ability, should achieve proficiency on state standardized tests. The new law was aligned with IDEA to ensure that teachers, administrators, and school districts followed not only the requirements of IDEA but also NCLB (IDEA, 2004).

Four concepts of the reauthorization of IDEA were: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Continuum of Alternative Placements (CAP), Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), and the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The concept of LRE stated that

children with disabilities were to be removed from the general education classroom only when they could not be successfully educated within that classroom with the use of supplementary aids (IDEA, 2004).

The law also required that a CAP was to be made available for every student with a disability, taking into account the specific needs of each child (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2005). This meant that all placements should be made available to all students, ranging from separate school to home instruction, resource, or pullout rooms, regardless of their disability. Under IDEA, schools were now required to provide FAPE at no cost to parents (IDEA, 2004).

The 18th Annual Report to Congress on the implementation of IDEA shows that more than 95% of all students with identified disabilities receive their education and related support services in the public schools (USDE, 1996). For many students with disabilities, this does not mean separate classes in the same buildings as their peers. Today this means full-time participation in general education classrooms with typical peers. During the 1993 to 1994 school year, more than two million students with disabilities received all of their special education and related services within the context of their general education classrooms (USDE, 1996). This figure reflects an increase of more than 100,000 students in full-time general education placements from the previous year (USDE, 1996).

However, Kilanowski, Foote, and Rinaldo (2010) stated that:

Despite federal mandates propelling the inclusion movement in the United States, relatively little has been done to explore the current state of inclusive practice in terms of service models most often employed and other relevant classroom characteristics including number of students with disabilities, training experiences of educators, and other available educational support persons (p. 44).

School districts can decide how they are going to design effective inclusion programs with co-teaching models that are pertinent to the needs of teachers and students. Further, the synthesis of this data may serve as effective staff development programs in providing training programs in order to accommodate students more effectively in inclusion classrooms.

According to Kilanowski, Foote, and Rinaldo (2010):

… it is not clear what teachers would commonly recognize as sufficient to enhance inclusive practice or even what the norms are for a general education classroom to be considered inclusion. It is necessary to identify commonly employed inclusive practices, evaluate their efficacy, and assist teachers in implementing evidence-based, effective approaches (p. 44).

Pertinent data to be obtained would be the extent of special education training needed for general education teachers, what the optimal inclusion class size would be, how many students with severe disabilities could be accommodated in a single class, and the type and number of personnel support needed in order to make the class successful. Before this data can be obtained, however, it is necessary to gain a clearer understanding of the operational definition of inclusion in today's general education classes.

In conclusion, due to federal legislative changes such as IDEA reauthorized in 2004 (P.L. No. 108-466) and NCLB of 2001 (P.L. No. 107-110), the need for increased collaborative planning and teaching among school personnel is well needed in the future to comply with these legal mandates.

Inclusion in Public Schools

Over the past several decades, the model of instructional delivery for special needs students has changed substantially in response to federal policies. The Education for All

Handicapped Children Act of 1975, for instance, mandated that students receive education in the least restrictive environment. Later, IDEA in 1990—enhanced through amendments several years later in 1997—encouraged the placement of students with disabilities in general classroom settings (Murawski & Swanson, 2001).

When schools started to become more inclusive of students with special needs, the need for one general education teacher and one special education teacher arose. Many researchers developed plans for the pairs of teachers to become more effective. As co-teachers, both the special education teacher and the general education teacher share the responsibility of education for every student in their classroom. Together, they have to understand each student's needs, create effective instructional plans, equally exchange roles and responsibilities, and use flexible teaching practices to create opportunities for student learning (Wilson & Blednick, 2011).

Educators must meet many challenges in the 21st century to provide for their students' individual needs. Both the special education teacher and regular education teacher should inspect their current practices and beliefs regarding effective methods of instruction. With the enactment of recent reforms in education, there is increasing diversity in the general education classroom. School-wide collaboration is necessary to meet the diverse needs of these students and to develop effective methods of service delivery. Collaborative teaching provides students a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2004).

According to Shady, Luther, and Richman (2013):

Inclusive education, by its very definition, implies that those with disabilities are given support and instruction in age-appropriate classrooms and within the framework of the core curriculum while also receiving the specialized instruction allocated in Individualized Education Programs (Halvorsen & Neary, 2001) (p. 170).

Nolan (2005) stated that inclusion is more than allowing people with and without disabilities to participate in the same activity; it is a service that is shared by both teachers.

In an inclusive classroom, special education teachers do not have their own classrooms but are assigned to other roles such as team teaching in classrooms that serve both special education and non-special education students together. School personnel must stop thinking and acting in isolated ways and stop saying, "These are my students and those are your students. They must relinquish traditional roles, drop distinct professional labels, and redistribute their job functions across the system" (Villa & Thousand, 2003, para. 16). Both special education and regular educators must be prepared to deal with special education students.

Burstein et al. (2004) stated that in an inclusive classroom, each special education teacher works on a team with the general education teacher. General educators and special educators plan and implement the curriculum, and together they provide support to students with and without disabilities who need assistance. The support takes several forms of providing individual assistance from both teachers during independent or group time, re-teaching, or adapting assignments.

All previously labeled special education teachers become classroom teachers and team-teach with the previously labeled general education teacher. The union of these two types of teachers also requires collaboration.

> When a classroom has more than one teacher and each teacher shares equal control, some important components should be discussed between the two teachers. These components include each teacher's educational philosophy, his/her concept of teamwork and also an instructional philosophy (Fink, 2004, p. 273).

In order for inclusion to work successfully, more than just a philosophical commitment for both principal and teacher is necessary. According to Tobin (2007), "It requires school level integration, classroom level strategies (Villa & Thousand, 2003)" (p. 2).

As stated in the research, many key findings relate to the critical role of collaboration in the school change process. Descriptions and analyses of school improvement address collaboration in relation to a range of education initiatives improving inclusive education and using faculty teams for students with disabilities (Cole & McLeskey, 1997).

The Idea of Co-Teaching

Co-teaching is a special education service-delivery model wherein one general educator and one special educator both have the responsibility to plan, deliver, and evaluate instruction for a diverse group of students, some with disabilities. Co-teaching depends on the strengths of the general educator, who understands the content, structure, and flow of the general education curriculum, and the special educator, who identifies unique learning needs of individual students and enhances curriculum and instruction to match those needs. Co-teaching accomplishes multiple objectives. First, a general education teaches the general education curriculum. Second, students with disabilities and those at risk are provided support from the special education teacher (Thousand & Villa, 1989).

According to Conderman (2011), co-teaching was described by Friend and Cook (2010) as "an approach that provides specialized services to individual students in a general education classroom" (para. 8). Co-teaching consists of two or more educators collaborating to instruct a diverse student group in a shared classroom. Co-teachers share their expertise and materials in order to develop common instructional goals. The co-teaching team is comprised of a general

educator along with a licensed professional such as a speech/language pathologist, reading or language specialist, or other general educators.

Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2008) assume teachers agree on a common goal and share common beliefs. They show parity and share leadership roles while completing tasks and utilize effective communication skills, all of which provide a fulfilling professional relationship. In recent years, co-teaching has gained popularity for a number of reasons. IDEA expects schools to hold high expectations for all students and ensure that they are included "in general education classrooms to the maximum extent possible. Most professional educators acknowledge that, given appropriate supports and services, most students should be held to the same academic standards (McLeskey & Waldron, 2007)" (Conderman, 2011, para. 9).

Through co-teaching arrangements, the requirements of both NCLB and IDEA can be met while still providing students with disabilities the specially designed instruction and supports to which they are entitled (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

Kloos and Zigmond (2008) believe that co-teaching has been preferred to ensure students with disabilities benefit from content instruction taught by specialists in general education classrooms. According to the law, students with learning and behavior disorders are required to learn the same content and demonstrate competence on the same tests as their nondisabled peers. Two instructional groups reduce the teacher-student ratio, providing students in each group more opportunities to respond and teachers of each group more opportunities to monitor student engagement and provide more frequent and faster corrective feedback.

Kilanowski-Press, Foote, and Rinaldo (2010) reported co-teaching isn't employed effectively in inclusive classrooms. Special education teachers use small group instruction and one-to-one support as opposed to the integration of special education expertise into the regular

education curriculum on a continuous basis. One-to-one student support emerged as the most prevalent type provided in inclusive classrooms.

According to Conderman (2011), co-teachers can begin their partnership by openly discussing their views on classroom issues and their individual goals for the co-teaching experience. This open and honest dialogue is critical for developing a trusting relationship. It allows co-teachers to actively engage in the three components of co-teaching: co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing.

Support from general education teachers is conceived as a key factor to allow special education teachers to feel they are part of the school environment and to experience greater personal accomplishment (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004). Without support, many special education teachers tend to feel isolated and are affected by higher levels of burnout (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Talmor, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005).

Previous researchers demonstrated that special education teachers are more positive about inclusion when they are provided with high-quality support (Reeve & Hallahan, 1994).

Inclusive models are based on one or more collaborative structures to facilitate ongoing problem solving and interaction among professionals (Laycock, Korinek & Gable, 1991). Some structures focus primarily on collaboration between pairs of teachers (Idol, 2006). Some well-known collaborative structures include cooperative teaching (Walter-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996).

Hourcade (1995) described co-teaching or cooperative teaching as a "restructuring of teaching procedures in which two or more educators possessing distinct sets of skills work in a co-active and coordinated fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviorally heterogeneous groups of students in integrated educational settings" (p.46).

Co-teaching partners share responsibility for direct instruction, curriculum development and/or modification, guided practice, co-teaching, enrichment of activities, progress monitoring, and communication with families and student evaluation (Walther-Thomas et al., 1996).

Both teachers provide all students with instruction, discipline, and support. This method of instruction helps co-teachers avoid unintentionally stigmatizing students with identified needs, and it helps eliminate the mental wall some teachers possess by reminding them to think about all class member as "our students" (Walther-Thomas et al., 1996).

The relationship between general and special education teachers is crucial to co-teaching because both must view themselves as *equal* to one another. *Matching philosophies about education, curricular accommodation, and the effective use of planning time* facilitate effective collaboration. *Frequent role switching* (one instructing the class while the other provides individual support and then reversing roles) allows for multiple ways of presenting material. *Flexibility* is key because being territorial about one's classroom can force special educators into the role of teacher's assistant, limiting their contributions (Bouck, 2007).

Thousand, Villa, and Nevin (2006) and Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) presented their meta-analyses and the benefits of collaborative partnerships of co-teaching for students. They suggested deploying two teachers in a fully collaborative practice is effective if the special education teacher is actively teaching to increase participation and provide immediate corrective feedback. The special education co-teacher should make a unique contribution to each co-taught lesson (Austin, 2001; Gately & Gately, 2001; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Murawski & Swanson, 2001; Trent et al., 2003; Walsh, 2012).

At the elementary level, co-teaching is widely accepted among general and special educators, with an overall agreement that co-taught classrooms are beneficial for all students (Gately & Gately, 2001).

According to Gurgur and Uzuner (2011) and Friend and Cook (2003), effective communication, sense of sacrifice and responsibility, respecting individuals, and planned teaching all affect a teacher's ability to implement the co-teaching approach effectively.

M. Kaplan (2012) believed that:

Strong co-teachers are able to provide seamless instruction for their students. Both teachers must come to a mutual agreement that they are equals in the classroom, and students must perceive both teachers as invaluable members of the classroom community. This can be particularly difficult for teachers who have taught alone for many years (para. 4).

Making decisions as a team is crucial to a strong partnership but is often an adjustment for veteran teachers. Strong co-teachers solve problems together.

Problems with Co-Teaching

The research indicated that planning time is a common problem with co-teaching. Bryant-Davis, Dieker, Pearl, and Kirkpatrick (2012) focused on planning practices of co-teachers, targeted specifically in middle schools. The special education teachers showed success aligning the modifications/accommodations needed with instruction; however, a high percentage of the lesson plans indicated the co-teachers did not plan together.

Scruggs et al. (2007) emphasized the importance of sufficient planning time and warned that the special educator's role is relegated to that of an assistant because of their lack of involvement with the general education teacher.

According to Papastylianou, Kaila, and Polychronopoulos (2009), "Role ambiguity is related to the uncertainty that can arise when the worker does not know what is required of him/her, how these demands will be satisfied and how he/she is expected to behave at work" (p. 30).

Volonino and Zigmond (2007) stated "special education teachers frequently assume the role of instructional aide. In addition, a variety of other factors inhibit their ability to provide specialized instruction within the general education classroom" (p. 295).

Conderman and Hedin (2014) stated special educators lack a distinct role and therefore often assume a position similar to a paraprofessional. Instead, special education co-teachers can contribute meaningfully by adding strategy components to classroom instruction to improve student outcomes in co-taught settings.

The implementation of the co-teaching approach is a challenge because special education teachers play a subordinate role and are often relegated to that of a paraprofessional or classroom aide (McKenzie, 2009; Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007; Harbort et al., 2007; Murawski, 2006; Gately & Gately, 2001).

Scruggs et.al. (2007) suggested the "'co-teaching model' is being employed far less effectively" (p. 412). Limited understanding of the co-teaching process and lack of experience by school staff are often factors leading to resistance to co-teaching.

Harbort et al. (2007) suggested that co-teaching is not an effective model in supporting special education students in the general education classroom because a large portion of the instruction is being devoted to the whole class and it becomes highly unlikely that instruction will be individualized and differentiated. They also suggested that highly qualified special education teachers were not effective because a significant amount of time was dedicated to non-

interaction instructional tasks.

Some studies suggest that current teachers lack the appropriate preparation for collaboration and they are underprepared to share a classroom and work with another professional (Cramer, Liston, Nevin & Thousand, 2010; Cramer & Nevin, 2006; McHatton & Daniel, 2008).

Bennett and Fisch (2013) did a study exploring the benefits of co-teaching in an undergraduate teacher education program. The study revealed that teachers did not have previous preparation in co-teaching to meet the challenges of collaboration and the needs of the learners.

M. Kaplan (2012) believes "all students are *our* students" (para. 12). Open communication is the key to a successful partnership and success of the class depends on the strength of co-teaching relationships. She also emphasized the use of a variety of co-teaching models to help maintain equality.

Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) found in a meta-synthesis qualitative study dating from 1995 to 2004 that administrators, teachers, and students believe in the benefits of co-teaching, the predominant collaborative practice "one teach—one assist," is the most ineffective approach because the special education teacher plays a subordinate role and is often relegated to the role of a paraprofessional or classroom aide.

The outcome of this dubious union is often a marriage that crumbles in front of the kids because the time and care needed to nurture and sustain it have not been provided (Kohler-Evans, 2006).

A. E. Kaplan (2012) indicated that the most common complaint from colleagues in co-teaching partnerships is that it is difficult to work with someone whose teaching style and

philosophy differ from your own. Success is less dependent on similar philosophies than it is on an open mind and willingness to compromise.

The problems of ineffective co-teaching may exist because investigators must identify characteristics, attitudes, and beliefs regarding the co-teaching model. These variables directly influence the success of co-teaching relationships, which in turn will affect the services that teachers provide to students (Friend, 2000; Lamorey, 2002).

In a focus group at the elementary and high school levels, concerns about sufficient planning time, administrative support, resources, professional development, and teacher willingness surfaced among co-teachers (Moore & Keefe, 2001).

Kilanowski, Foote, and Rinaldo (2010) stated that despite federal mandates propelling the inclusion movement in the United States, little had been done to explore inclusive practice in terms of service models, training experiences of educators, and other available educational support. School districts need to decide how to design effective inclusion programs with co-teaching models that are pertinent to the needs of teachers and students.

Rivera, McMahon, and Keys (2014) revealed general and special educators need to discuss their curricular strategies and philosophies, remain flexible to curricular modifications, and work on their co-teaching relationships. Training should be ongoing and include how to effectively use common planning time, give opportunities to observe and practice co-teaching with feedback, and methods to increase general educator adoption and flexibility. The administrators should be trained in promoting and supporting co-teaching.

Altieri et al. (2015) suggested a comprehensive special education program in rural areas consist of multiple types of support, including high-quality mentoring, common planning times, and ongoing leadership support.

Theoretical Framework

Lev Vygotsky (1978) believed social interactions actually create children's cognitive structures and thinking processes. He emphasized the significant roles adults and peers play in children's learning. Higher mental processes develop as children exchange ideas with adults and peers.

Vygotsky's concept of the learning environment relied heavily on social activity with other students and on learned inquiry through social interactions (Jones et al., 1998). The classroom is a premise for Vygotsky's constructivist theory where teachers exchange ideas and new ways of thinking about concepts and then those created ideas are internalized and become part of cognitive development.

Vygotsky (1978) believed children should be guided and assisted in their learning and viewed teachers, parents, and other adults as a key to their learning. Teachers are central to children's learning and cognitive development through direct teaching, guiding, and assisting them with incoming information.

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is when incoming information is too different from existing schemes for information to be assimilated. The teacher will adapt materials; take students through steps, model, and give detailed feedback to make learning more successful.

Socio-constructivists use the term *scaffold instruction* (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) to explain the deliberate transmission of knowledge. Scaffolding is the process through which a "more knowledgeable other" temporarily supports a learner in the zone of proximal development for a new task (Winn, 1994). The teacher will provide alternative schemes that can be incorporated, resulting in the learner's creation of a new scheme.

The basic features of scaffold instruction are co-participation, social interaction between teachers and students, titration of assistance by an instructor, and fading of teacher support to gradually transfer responsibility for learning to students (Meyer, 1993).

A typical Vygotsky classroom includes students working in groups and teachers monitoring their work and assisting those with special needs to gain meaning through experimentation and investigation (Jang, Reeve & Deci, 2010.) Vygotsky's concept of the learning environment relied heavily on social activity with other students and on learned inquiry through social interactions (Jones et al., 1998).

As public schools become more diverse, the co-taught classroom is amenable to Vygotsky's social constructivist theory. David and Kuyini (2012) noted that students learn through modeling and use that information in order to build new information on their own constructs.

Vygotsky's theory is a framework for teachers' use in the inclusion classroom. The social constructivism theory maintains that learning is based on real-life adaptive problem solving which occurs socially through shared experience and discussion with others. "New ideas are then matched against existing knowledge and the learner adapts rules to make sense of the world. Social constructivism places the focus on the learner as part of a social group, and learning as something that emerges from group interaction processes, not that takes place within the individual" (Draper, 2013, para. 5.) Learning is viewed as a social, actively engaged process and not a process of passive development due to external forces (McMahon, 1997; Derry, 1999).

According to Draper (2013), social constructivists believe that sharing individual perspectives or collaborative elaboration:

"… results in learners constructing understanding together that wouldn't be possible alone (Greeno et al., 1996). Social constructivism maintains that while it is possible for people to have shared meanings, which are negotiated through discussion, it also acknowledges that no two people will have exactly the same discussions with exactly the same people. To this extent, social constructivism allows that multiple realities exist" (Draper, para. 6).

Teaching in the United States historically has been isolated work, but in recent years reformers have paused to transform schools into places where teachers work collectively on instruction (Lortie, 1975).

The main focus of social constructivism is social interaction with two or more participants to create knowledge. The participants must be involved in some form of interaction for knowledge to be constructed and they must have knowledge of prior social experiences (Gergen, 1999).

Co-Teaching Models

One of the first theoretical models of co-teaching proposed five variations (Friend, 2008).

1. One teach-One assist: one educator to retain the instructional lead in the classroom while the other teacher moves through the room and provides assistance and support to the students as necessary.

2. Station teaching: dividing the instructional content and the physical space of the classroom into two or more zones. Each teacher assumes responsibility for teaching a segment of the content at a prearranged station while students rotate through the stations.

3. Parallel teaching: two teachers jointly plan instruction, delivered simultaneously, each teacher delivering instruction to half of the students within heterogeneous groupings.

4. Alternative teaching: consists of one large group and one small group and permits intensive instruction for students with special learning needs in a reduced teacher-student ratio. Simultaneously, the other instructor provides instruction to the large group.

5. Team teaching: encourages parity between both teachers in planning and instruction.

Friend and Cook (2003) and Vaughn et al. (1997) stated the co-teaching options of parallel teaching, station teaching, and alternative teaching coexist, but the one teaching–one assisting option is replaced by a variation referred to as *interactive teaching*. In this format, the two teachers present instruction to the whole group, alternating the role of instructional leader for periods of 5-10 minutes. The lead teacher's role changes frequently, so both teachers have several opportunities to serve as the primary educator.

Content mastery by special education teacher*s* increases their self-efficacy to lead the lesson and interject alternative explanation of the material (Bouck, 2007; Dieker & Murawski, 2003).

Gately and Gately (2001) delineated eight components of the co-teaching classroom that contribute to the development of the collaborative learning environment.

1.   Interpersonal Communication

2.   Physical Arrangement

3.   Familiarity with the Curriculum

4.   Curriculum Goals and Modifications

5.   Instructional Planning

6.   Instructional Presentation

7.   Classroom Management

8.   Assessment

Gately and Gately (2001) characterized the co-teaching rating scale as an effective tool in identifying a profile of strengths and weaknesses in the co-teaching classroom. The scale focused on specific components of the co-teaching relations at each developmental level. Supervisors and teachers can determine the effectiveness of classroom practices and strategies to improve programs. A benefit of the co-teaching rating scale is to highlight important aspects of collaboration that contribute to the success of the co-teaching model.

Despite several variations of co-teaching described in the literature, the primary approach of co-teaching usually implemented is the version identified as "One Teach, One Assist" (Magiera & Zigmond, 2005; Cook & Friend, 1995; Scruggs et al., 2007). Traditionally, the regular education teacher (content area expert) assumes the primary responsibility for planning and instruction, while the special education teacher circulates in the classroom during instruction to provide clarification or assistance to individual students.

The Importance of Collaboration

Collaboration is defined as two or more equally certified or licensed professionals implementing shared teaching, decision-making, goal setting, and accountability for a diverse student body (Friend & Cook, 2007). The overall idea is to make sense of the culture shared by general and special educators to provide insight for co-teaching and inclusive practices.

Murawski and Hughes (2009) suggested that collaboration is the interaction between professionals who offer different areas of skills yet share responsibilities and goals. Mastropieri et al. (2005) propose that schools already necessitate cooperation in a variety of areas including "grade-level meetings, departmental meetings, field trip organization, school site councils, consultation between colleagues or specialists, and curriculum planning - the list goes on. Educators are keenly aware of the need to work with others to obtain the best results" (p. 269).

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Hamilton-Jones and Vail (2014) provided that in addition to public policy, professional teaching standards have emphasized effective collaboration as a vital skill and knowledge domain in teaching.

Broderick et al. (2005) and Vakil et al. (2009) made claims that a collaborative effort is required for successful inclusion to occur. Special educators should enter the field with adept collaborative skills in order to optimize services for students with disabilities in inclusive settings, and teacher training should be a common mechanism to build a better understanding about collaboration in school settings.

Friend (2003) stated that collaboration is an essential strategy for schools today because of the varied needs of the students. Friend described how special and general educators are under tremendous pressure to ensure high academic standards within a diverse student body. Friend added that teachers must work together to positively affect the learning of all students and collaboration has become a necessity, not a luxury.

Several researchers are beginning to understand how teacher collaboration affects student achievement. There is some evidence that schools characterized by higher levels of collaboration also have higher levels of student achievement (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Goddard et al., 2010).

Goddard et al. (2007) used surveys in a large urban district to find differences in how teachers collaborate on decisions about instruction and evaluation of the curriculum. The literature suggests that the type of school and teacher characteristics possibly influence teacher collaboration. It was one of the first large-scale studies to demonstrate a link between teacher collaboration and student achievement.

Policymakers have encouraged the creation of school-based professional learning communities and organizational structures which promote regular opportunities for teachers to collaborate with their colleagues (Carroll, 2007; Hamilton et al., 2000; National Staff Development Council, 2001). These initiatives are based on the assumption that collaboration enables teachers to strengthen their instruction, thus improving learning outcomes for students.

Strahan (2003) conducted case studies of three elementary schools that exhibited higher-than-expected levels of student achievement. He observed that teachers in these schools focused on collaboration on identifying students' learning needs and then designing ways to address these needs. He characterized these collaborations as "data-directed dialogue" (p.143) because they were informed by data from formal assessments and informal observations of students' learning. Adams (2008) concluded that the most effective professional learning communities were those characterized by "collaboration with a clear and persistent focus on data about student learning" (p. 89).

Walther-Thomas, Korinek, and McLaughlin (1999) also described how the ultimate goal in teacher collaboration is to focus on varying the instruction which leads to higher learning levels. Collaborative teachers can often develop student success by providing academic supports in typical classrooms. Resistance to co-teaching by school staff is often driven by a limited understanding of the co-teaching process and by lack of experience.

Senge (1990) reported that learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacities of a team to create results which its members truly desire. Therefore, people need to be able to act together. When teams learn together, not only can there be good results for the organization, but members will also grow more rapidly. "The discipline of team learning starts

with 'dialogue,' the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine 'thinking together'" (p. 230).

Bauwen, Hourcade, and Friend (1989) initially perceived collaboration as a service provided outside of general education and is now broadened to include providing instruction within the regular classroom. They refer to the model as collaborative teaching or now, more commonly, as co-teaching. Co-teaching became vital to the reformers' goal of integrating general, compensatory, and special education (Skrtic, Harris, & Schriner, 2005).

Supovitz (2002) found teams that maintained a high level of "group instructional practice" preparing together for instruction, co-teaching, observing one another, and grouping students flexibly for particular instructional purposes had better student achievement.

Stainback, Stainback, & Forest (1989) discussed the concept of professional collaboration in his narrative on the emerging roles for special educators. Peer collaboration is a process that involves teachers and other members of the educational community interacting and exchanging ideas concerning classroom interventions and solutions to specific instructional problems in mainstream settings. He stated peer collaboration has been a positive, beneficial impact on classroom teachers' attitudes toward mainstreaming.

Murawski and Hughes (2009) proposed that collaboration is not only essential to co-teaching, but it also is the lynchpin to effective instruction in education. Essentially, it permits teachers and other specialists to interact in controlled ways that allow flexibility of instructional opportunities. They state:

> The already overworked general educator who lacks the training and time needed to
>
> provide intensive strategies, collect assessment data, and ensure differentiated instruction

and cross-curricular connections is provided another professional with whom he or she can meet the same goals" (p. 273).

Forms of collaboration offer opportunities for critical analysis of teaching practices (Roth & Tobin, 2002), and support teachers' abilities to acquire and optimize pedagogical knowledge (Eick, Ware, & Jones, 2004; Eick & Ware, 2005). Collaborative arrangements greatly expand the teaching resources of teachers (Roth & Lee 2004). According to Rainforth and England (1997), in order to meet the challenge of successfully educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom, collaboration between the general and special education teacher is essential.

Successful inclusive practice requires collaboration between the class teacher and the wider school community, including support and specialist staff (e.g., educational psychologists, specialist teachers, and so on), as well as parents/caregivers (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, & Reid 2005; Janney & Snell 2006; Vakil et al. 2009).

Co-teaching takes collaboration to a higher level. All parties are vested in the lesson since they have each planned and assessed to ensure the outcomes align with their goals (Cohen, 2015).

Cramer and Nevins (2006) suggested recommendations for change in teacher education programs should include "structured opportunities for collaborative planning and teaching" (p. 272), co-teaching exercises, and/or internships in which general education and special education pre-service candidates have the opportunity to co-teach as part of their initial training.

Bronson and Dentith (2014) describe how evidence of high adult collegiality and a culture of high achievement were noted in a co-teaching kindergarten class. This case study revealed that such structures help produce orderly, successful, age-appropriate learning

communities for young children in high poverty urban schools. They also found that teachers needed more than time and space to create, sustain, and enhance positive partnering relationships and classroom structures. They need strong, knowledgeable instructional leadership that is purposeful and designed to meet the challenges facing teacher who choose to team with others.

According to Dufour (2004), working together to improve student achievement becomes the routine work of everyone in the school. Every co-teaching team is part of an ongoing process which identifies the current level of student achievement and establishes a goal to improve the current level. They work together to achieve that goal and provide periodic evidence of progress.

Langher, Caputo and Ricci (2017) suggest the overall relevance of perceived support is to reduce special education teachers' burnout. Students with special education needs are fully included in mainstream education, and collaboration with regular teachers is a critical issue. Supportive environments are needed especially in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, for female teachers (for emotional exhaustion), and for lower secondary schools (for de-personalization).

Administrative Support

Schools that are inclusive should have good administration support for co-teaching (e.g., Arguelles, Hughes, & Schumm, 2000; Dieker & Murawski, 2003). When a school has a *culture of sharing*, general and special educators are more likely to serve all students (Murawski, 2006). *Common planning time* is needed (Bouck, 2007) to prepare collaborative lessons and discuss curricular modifications. *Effective Training* provides necessary skills (Damore & Murray, 2009; Leko & Brownell, 2009), and *block teaching* (90-minute classes) enables the use of multiple teaching methods (Dieker & Murawski, 2003).

Researchers have suggested that teachers believe that co-teaching requires leadership that values collaborative practices (Damore & Murray, 2009). Gerber and Popp (2000) contended that the principal sets the tone for the appreciation of co-teaching.

In fact, Handler (2006) identified administrators' failures to show that they value collaboration as one challenge to inclusion and inclusive practices.

Burstein et al. (2004) found that teachers implementing inclusive practices credited the benefit of the principals' visions to help guide schools through the change process. Moreover, participants in a study conducted by Lehmann and Bambara (2006) indicated that having inclusion articulated in the school's vision and openly discussed by the principal attributed to their feelings of being supported in their inclusive efforts. A meta-analysis of 32 research studies related to co-teaching conducted by Scruggs et al. (2007) identified administrative support as a significant variable in co-teaching.

According to Barnett (1998), teachers' attitudes often reflected the support provided by their principals. Hammond and Ingalls (2003) reported that 70% of the general and special education teachers polled in their study held a positive attitude about the need for administrative support when implementing inclusionary programs. It is evident then that school staff is more receptive to inclusive programs when principals promote and support such practices.

In addition to the principal's actions in the initiation and implementation of co-teaching, researchers have found that principals' support increases the successfulness of such inclusive practices (Walther-Thomas, 1997; Sayeski, 2009).

Salend et al. (1997) discovered that new co-teachers believed in the benefit of the support provided by their principals. Similarly, in a study conducted by Damore and Murray (2009), 28

special education and 74 general education teacher respondents rated leadership support important to collaborative school practices.

Additionally, researchers asserted that teachers' efforts at inclusive education are more successful when their perceptions of needed resources, including administrative support, match their perceptions of the availability of these resources (Werts, Wolery, Snyder, Caldwell, & Salisbury, 1996).

Bronson and Dentith (2014) found that instructional leadership was inadequate and teachers were reliant on getting along with each other and organizing themselves with little guidance forthcoming from the building principal or other administrators in a large urban district.

Research has indicated that a lack of administrative support is reported to be among the top challenges to the success and effectiveness of co-teaching efforts (Damore & Murray, 2009). Administrative support is necessary for securing planning time (Hunt, Soto, Maier, Liboiron, & Bae, 2004). Principals take the lead in ensuring that time for co-planning between collaborating teachers is made available. Scruggs et al. (2007) reviewed in 30 of 32 qualitative research studies that common planning time between participating teachers is essential to the successful implementation of co-teaching.

Burstein et al. (2004) reported that collaborative planning time was considered an integral factor for perceived success in all of the co-teaching endeavors the group studied. Moreover, teachers interviewed in that study stated that increased common planning time would facilitate sustained implementation of inclusive practices. Common planning time and scheduling of classes are entities that principals are able to arrange and govern (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

Professional development is the vehicle by which schools increase the skills of its staff and renew the organization. Sparks (2002) stated that the quality of professional learning is linked to the quality of teaching and the skillfulness of leadership. Sparks and Hirsh (1997) further indicated that staff development has a critical impact on school reform efforts. Thus, schools practicing inclusive programs such as co-teaching must seek to implement professional development effective in increasing co-teachers' skills, learning capacity, and adaptability.

Grieve (2009) and Goodman and Burton (2010) found that teachers reported insufficient training and practical support and lacked access to information required to enable them to feel confident in implementing inclusive practices.

Duncan and Hmelo-Silver (2009) argued the need to implement innovative pre-service teacher education strategies result in an increase in K-12 student achievement. Preparing pre-service teachers to be effective co-teachers needs to be a significant component of teacher education curricula in higher education.

Research has found that targeted and ongoing professional development is critical in supporting and maintaining co-teaching in schools (Pugach & Winn, 2011). Indubitably, teachers must be adequately trained in effective co-teaching practices in order for inclusion to be successful and for students to receive the best education possible.

According to a study by Daane, Beirne-Smith, and Latham (2000), teachers who lacked the training skills necessary for co-teaching reported significant difficulties implementing the co-teaching model. Teachers who work in inclusive settings need substantial training to collaborate effectively. Friend et al. (2010) not only recommend enhanced professional development opportunities to support teachers entering collaborative relationships, but they also posit that

these teachers should attend the professional development sessions together for the optimal benefit.

General education teachers need workshops so they feel adequate teaching students with disabilities. In an inclusive classroom, general education teachers should work cooperatively with special education teachers to offer a quality program for all students (Anderson & Decker, 1993).

Fisher et al. (2003) researched five priority areas for professional development, which include collaborative teaming and teaching, curricular and instructional modifications and accommodations, personal supports, assistive technology, and positive behavioral supports.

Walther-Thomas (1997) found school administrators need to facilitate teachers in addressing issues, staff development, utilizing resources, managing classroom sizes, and balancing class rosters. Effective principals should provide the vision, incentive, recognition, and moral support to teachers during challenging stages in the inclusive process.

However, teacher preparation programs are often faulted for insufficient training in collaboration skills for special educators (Austin, 2001; Billingsley, 2004; Cook & Friend, 1995; Deiker, 2001; Friend, 2000; Greene & Isaacs, 1999; Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2004; Laframboise, Epanchin, Colucci, & Hocutt, 2004; Lovingfoss, Eddy, Molloy, Harris, & Graham, 2001; McKenzie, 2009; Otis-Wilborn, Winn, Griffin, & Kilgore, 2005; Turner, 2003).

Considerable evidence has indicated that both general and special educators feel inadequately prepared to serve students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Many regular education teachers are not trained to provide diversified instructional methods (Roberts & Mather, 1995).

Fuchs (2010) conducted a study in which general education teachers indicated that lack

of pre-service preparation is one of three main reasons they have difficulty working in inclusive settings. Teachers stated they were not taught how to differentiate instruction, make accommodations in the classroom, or work with special education support staff. The novice co-teachers often report using a "one teach, one support" approach in the classroom (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002).

To facilitate confidence and competence, "teachers need systematic and intensive training that includes research-based best practices in inclusive schools" (Burstein et al., 2004, para. 8).

While teacher preparation programs cannot always adequately train pre-service teachers for every situation that may occur in the classroom, there are many professional development-training programs that can be extremely beneficial for those working in inclusive settings. Professional development is critical for high-quality educators, as a lack of in-depth training greatly diminishes teachers' effectiveness in the classroom (Cook & Schirmer, 2003).

Dahle (2003) places a strong emphasis on the need for teachers to be properly trained in understanding students' disabilities. Professional development workshops positively impact teachers' abilities to teach students with specific learning disorders; however, according to DeSimone and Parmar (2006), these professional development opportunities are often not offered on a regular basis. A lack of professional development prospects can result in a continual cycle of teachers feeling frustrated in their abilities to teach in inclusive settings.

Research indicated that co-teaching is not an easy model to implement without adequate teacher preparation and support resources (Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996).

Shady, Luther, and Richman (2013) studied teacher attitudes and perceptions of inclusive education programs and the need for professional development as a basis for more effectively implementing and supporting an inclusive approach to education at a small elementary school in

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the United States. The results of this study indicated that a greater percentage of the participants did feel more knowledgeable about inclusive practices due to professional development.

According to Villa and Thousand (2003), the degree of administrative support and vision was the most powerful predictor of general educators' attitudes toward inclusion. Accordingly, administrators must take action to articulate the new vision of inclusion publicly, build support for this vision, and lead stakeholders to become actively involved.

Murawski and Bernhardt (2015) suggest teachers should find their own partners to co-teach. Teachers should complete surveys on learning preferences, multiple intelligences, personal dispositions, and relationship dynamics as a resource to identify individuals with complementary personalities.

Teachers in co-taught classrooms need direction at the beginning of their professional relationship to guide their initial efforts. It is a developmental process that involves open communication, interaction, mutual admiration, and compromise (Gately & Gately, 2001).

Teacher education programs need to provide candidates, particularly general education candidates, the skills to be effective co-teachers and to be capable of partnering with other professionals in the classroom to meet the needs of all students (Ford, Pugach, & Otis-Wilborn, 2001; Kamens, 2007; McKenzie, 2009; Swain, Nordness, & Leader-Janssen, 2012).

Kohler-Evans (2006) indicated the following recommendations for administrators and teachers:

- Place value on co-teaching as one of many inclusive practices.

- Find time for mutual planning time.

- Practice parity.

- Have fun.

- Don't Overlook the Small Stuff.

- Communicate, communicate, and communicate.

- Measure student progress over time.

- One size does not fit all.

Research has found that targeted and ongoing professional development is critical in supporting and maintaining co-teaching in schools (Pugach & Winn, 2011). Indubitably, teachers must be adequately trained in effective co-teaching practices in order for inclusion to be successful for students to receive the best possible education. Murawski and Bernhardt (2015) recommend evaluating both teachers at once and not in separate observations. Co-teaching is collaborative, so the supervision and evaluation process should be as well.

Co-teaching should be a priority for the school administration. According to Friend, Cook et al. (2010):

> Principals and other site administrators cannot be expected to lead staff members through this fundamental change or to integrate it with other school improvement efforts without increasing their understanding of it (Reynolds, Murrill, & Whitt, 2006). These leaders have the responsibility to partner teachers, arrange schedules and common planning time, and resolve dilemmas that arise (para. 46).

Summary

A number of studies for both general education and special education were reviewed and indicated that co-teaching in elementary and middle schools has gained popularity and can be successful in understanding the needs of special education students. However, the perceptions of special and general education teachers with regard to the co-teaching models are needed to gain insight into their delivery systems within the classrooms. Such factors about collaboration were

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explored as it relates to co-teaching, and teachers must work together to affect the learning of all students positively.

Current research has found that targeted and ongoing professional development is critical in supporting and maintaining co-teaching in schools (Pugach & Winn, 2011). Teachers must be adequately trained in effective co-teaching practices in order for inclusion to be successful for students to receive the best possible education.

Despite the research outcomes, there is still a lack of current research regarding teachers' positive and negative perceptions about co-teaching. As the usage of co-teaching in this country continues to grow, there exists an urgent need for more research on this topic.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the research design, the sample population, and the methodology and data analysis processes used in the study, which will be explored to serve as effective steps to improve instructional methods and develop staff programs in order to accommodate students more effectively in inclusion.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine teachers' perceptions toward co-teaching and to provide valuable information on relevant content, activities, and assignments that focus on collaboration between school professionals. The second aim of this study was to add knowledge to the existing literature describing factors for developing effective co-teaching programs that service large populations of students with disabilities in urban schools.

In response to recent trends and legislation promoting inclusive instruction and access to the general education curriculum, many schools have implemented "co-teaching" as a means of promoting effective instruction in inclusive classrooms and providing support for increasing the inclusion of students with disabilities (Cook & Friend, 1995). However, there is a gap in research on teacher collaboration, perception, beliefs, and methods about co-teaching (Zigmond, 2001; Grossman, Beaupre, & Rossi, 2001; Idol, 2006; Murray, 2004). Co-teaching reduces the student-teacher ratio through the physical presence of the teachers and may reduce the stigma for students with disabilities by placing them in general education classrooms.

The design chosen for this study was a qualitative method to provide a vivid description of the perceptions of both general and special education teachers with regard to inclusion and utilization of the co-teaching model. The aim was to better understand the co-teaching model concerning children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is employed in the field of education as a school psychologist. The researcher has been committed to supporting faculty and families of students with special needs for over 14 years. During classroom observations, the researcher has witnessed difficulties that

general and special education teachers have with addressing the various disabilities in co-taught classrooms. The researcher has witnessed many teachers' frustrations and listened to their complaints, so it was important to highlight the perceptions' of teachers in co-taught classrooms so that school leaders can positively shape their school culture and teachers can make their classroom a better learning environment. The researcher can convey relevant information about co-teaching while participating in school meetings where educational goals and pupil educational programs will be discussed. The researcher made every effort to remain unbiased and objective when analyzing the research data.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative research study:

RQ1. How do general and special teachers describe their perception of co-teaching and instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

RQ2. In what ways, if any, can general and special education teachers improve and strengthen co-teaching instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

RQ3. How do general and special education teachers describe their support from administration for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

Research Design

A qualitative research design is used in this study to collect information, opinions, knowledge, and experiences of people. Qualitative research is considered an "interpretive paradigm," which emphasizes the meanings and experiences of the study participants. Qualitative research helps explain how people interpret their environment and experiences and what meaning they place on those experiences (Merriam, 2009).

A qualitative research design is most suited to achieve rich and textured knowledge about

people's experiences of some phenomenon or issue. A quantitative design was not selected because data collection typically involves numerical data and would not provide the type of rich data required to answer the research questions. Qualitative designs may take the form of (a) a case study, (b) ethnography, (c) grounded theory, and (d) phenomenological designs (Creswell, 2012).

The aspects of this qualitative study focused on the phenomenon of human experience by exploring teachers' perceptions about co-teaching in Pre-K through 8th-grade classrooms. Research indicates that qualitative research typically deals with a small purposely chosen group of participants who will be able to offer a "rich description" of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2002).

A qualitative study intends to understand and describe an event from the point of view of the participants. A key characteristic of this approach is to study the way in which members of a group or community interpret themselves, the world, and life around them (Mertens, 2005).

The qualitative research method has to be flexible to allow for developing ideas and thought through the process of data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation from the interviews and observations. A qualitative method is best suited to explore true feelings and opinions of the selected teachers (Creswell, 2002).

This qualitative study was to gain insights into the experiences of general and special education teachers and how they viewed and interpreted their instructional planning, strategies and outcomes when teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The following section will describe the setting, participants, and the instrumentation used for the data collection.

Setting

The school setting for this research study was an urban public school district in New Jersey. In this particular district, teachers are employed in grades PK-12. The student population is ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse. Each school has faculty members that include a principal, vice-principals, classroom teachers who provide all academic instruction, special education teachers who are state certified, classroom aides, the child study team, related service providers (speech and occupational therapists), specialty teachers (art, music, physical education, bilingual, technology), school nurse, cafeteria workers, and custodians. The district partners with community service organizations and local township representatives to create and sustain an environment that supports education for each student.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), the research setting should be selected based on the following four issues: (a) physical access to the site, (b) variety of data sources available within the site, (c) amount of time access to the participants and data can be granted within the site, and (d) quality and credibility of the data provided within the site.

Population

The potential pool of participants included 65 teachers from four elementary schools who worked in PK through 8th grade as co-teachers. The teachers interviewed have various educational backgrounds ranging from a bachelor to master degrees in education. Teachers who teach music, art, library, technology, or physical education were excluded from the study.

This school district had previously utilized the co-teaching model. The researcher was specifically interested in studying general and special education teachers that co-taught language arts and math for at least two years. Teachers with less than two years of co-teaching experience were not considered because their experience would not provide a full picture of collaboration.

The rational for limiting the participants to teachers with co-teaching experiences would allow for a variety of opinions and understanding to the phenomenon under investigation (Marshall, 1996).

Sample

Eight special education and eight general education teachers were selected through purposeful sampling to understand how the phenomenon (the perception of co-teaching in inclusive classrooms) was seen and understood amongst a knowledgeable group of teachers who were available and willing to communicate their experiences in a reflective manner. The sample size of 16 participants is consistent with qualitative sampling since a smaller sample size would not allow for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2012). A thank you letter was sent to teachers who were not selected.

Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 1990).

In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, the school district, schools, and county names were not included in the findings. All participants were assigned numbers for identification (see Table 1).

MacMillan and Schumacher (1997) identified several ways of safeguarding research participants' rights to privacy, including (a) collecting and coding anonymously without ever knowing the participants' names, and (b) using numerical or alphabetical coding systems to link data to participants' names, then destroying the system at the end of the investigation.

The selection of participants in qualitative research "rests on the multiple purposes of illuminating, interpreting and understanding" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 27) their perspectives.

Therefore, these participants are selected based on the researchers' interest in developing an in-depth understanding of the participants' situation.

Data Collection

The approval to conduct this research was granted by the Executive Director of Accountability (Appendix A) before the collection of the data. The building principals provided the researcher with a list of potential participants. Approximately 65 teachers received a letter of invitation (Appendix B). From the 65 invitations, 35 teachers responded favorably with interest. From the respondents, only eight general and eight special education teachers from the four schools were purposefully selected based upon their availability and willingness to participate.

Before the interviews took place, each participant was asked to sign an informed consent (Appendix C). The informed consent is an important aspect of the ethical considerations for this study. The informed consent explained the researcher's affiliation with Seton Hall University; the purpose of the research and duration of the subject's participation; a description of the procedures followed; the voluntary nature of the participation; and a statement of how data will be confidential and maintained securely. Additionally, a contact number was provided in case they had any concerns or questions about the study. Those who were not selected received a thank you letter.

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews rather than through inventories or questionnaires that explored the breadth and depth of the phenomenon of co-teaching practices. Prior to interviewing the participants, the researcher developed an interview protocol with open-ended questions to ensure that the same information was collected from all participants (Appendix D). The interview protocol helped make interviewing across a number of

different participants more systematic and comprehensible by defining in advance the issue to be explored (Patton, 1990).

The open-ended questions were framed in such a way so the participants could present their views and perspectives in their own words and terms, in addition to taking the questions in any direction that they chose (Patton, 1990).

The open-ended questions helped not only to structure the interview, but also to explore, probe, and ask additional questions to expand on a particular topic. The interview helped to learn about the teachers' perceptions and how co-teaching methods impacted collaboration with each other, teaching practices, and professional growth.

A researcher must spend sufficient time collecting, analyzing, and examining the data to understanding the "variations in the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009, pg. 8). Interviews were then scheduled at a mutually convenient time and place for the participant to feel comfortable and free to give honest answers.

Before the interview, each respondent was assigned a number for identification purposes. The participants were asked to talk about their co-teaching process and their feelings about co-teaching. The researcher took field notes and/or used a recorded device, if permission was granted from the participant, to align for the accuracy of questioning. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes and remained confidential. Follow-up questions were used to further elaborate on answers given. The participants were reassured that all interviews, notes, and printed papers would be kept in confidence under lock and key with the researcher. The interview questions increased the likelihood that the results of the interview could be generalized. The interview questions were based on important themes found in the literature review and the theoretical framework.

Patton (1990) proposes researchers conduct interviews to learn the things they cannot directly observe. Qualitative interviewing is not used to get answers to questions, but to understand the experiences of the participants and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 1988).

Generally, qualitative studies use unstructured, open-ended interviews because they allow for the most flexibility and responsiveness to emerging issues for both the participants and the interviewer; however, the use of semi-structured interviews is not uncommon and used when the researcher seeks to obtain specific, more focused information (Schwandt, 2001).

It is asserted that using interviews in qualitative research would allow individuals to express in-depth information on their life situations in their own words, and the choice of utilizing interviews aligns well with this study (Lodico et al., 2010). Thus, conducting individual interviews would allow teachers to freely express their views on co-teaching (Creswell, 2012; Kvael, 2006; Turner, 2010).

Patton (2002) reported that the interview provided the researcher with a method to discover "what is in and on someone else's mind" (p. 341). Merriam (2009) also supports the need for interviewing as part of a qualitative study to "discover and uncover the experiences of the participants" (p. 93).

Field notes were taken during each interview. Field notes provided an opportunity to record what was seen and heard outside the immediate context of the interview. As noted by Spencer, Ritchie, and O'Connor (2002), field notes can include the thoughts about the dynamics of the encounter, ideas for later clarification, and issues that may be relevant during the analysis.

At the end of each interview, there was a debriefing during which the participant spoke about their feelings to better clarify and understand their perceptions. This gave the participants

a chance to change or elaborate upon their responses. The transcription was reviewed for modifications or elaborations.

Table 1: Respondent Codes

Position of Respondents

Respondent Code #	General Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher
1	X	
2	X	
3		X
4	X	
5	X	
6		X
7	X	
8		X
9		X
10	X	
11		X
12	X	
13		X
14		X
15		X
16	X	

Tables 2-4 provided an overview of the three research questions and its sub-questions.

Table 2

Research Question 1:

How do general and special education teachers describe their perception of co-teaching and instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

Sub-Question	Data Source	Objective(s)
What is your definition of co-teaching?	Interview	To obtain the perception of co-teaching from each teacher
What co-teaching model is used in your classroom? Why?	Interview	To obtain information about what co-teaching model is being used in each partner's classroom
What is your instructional role in the co-teaching classroom?	Interview	To obtain information about the roles of teachers

Table 3

Research Question 2:

In what ways, if any, can general and special education teachers improve and strengthen co-teaching instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

Sub-Questions	Data Source	Objective
Do you feel your school is utilizing co-teaching properly? Why?	Interview	To obtain information about what is needed to co-teach properly
What are important qualities for co-teaching?	Interview	To obtain information about what qualities are important for strong co-teaching relationships

Table 4

Research Question 3:

How do general and special education teachers describe their support from administration for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

Sub-Questions	Data Source	Objective
Describe administrative support for co-teaching?	Interview	To obtain information about administrative support for co-teaching in the district
Do you feel adequately trained to co-teach?	Interview	To obtain information about training/professional development given for teaching

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a qualitative approach of thematic analysis. This process involved segregating the data into data clumps for further analysis and descriptions (Glesne, 2006). The researcher began the data analysis process simultaneously with data collection. The researcher reflected on interview data and field notes and then "categorized, synthesized, searched for patterns, and interpreted the data that was collected" (Glesne, 2006, p. 147).

A common procedure in the analysis of qualitative data was the identification of key themes, concepts, and categories. Linking the teachers' responses to common themes helped to answer the research questions. Huberman (1994) maintained that "just naming and classifying what is out there is usually not enough. We need to understand the patterns the recurrences, the whys" (p. 31). This allows the researcher to explain the teachers' perceptions of co-teaching as they relate to the co-teaching model. The descriptive analysis of the data came from transcribed

field notes.   The cross-case analysis enabled the answers among the different subjects to be linked to questions or central issues.

Validity and Reliability

The terms reliability and validity are the essential criteria for quality in quantitative paradigms.   In qualitative paradigms, the terms Credibility, Neutrality or Conformability, Consistency or Dependability, and Applicability or Transferability are to be the essential criteria for quality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985.) These findings can't be transferable because they will not be "true" in other experiences.

Reliability has the purpose of "generating understanding" in qualitative research (Stenback, 2001, p. 551). Patton (2001) states that validity and reliability are two factors, which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analyzing results, and judging the quality of the study.   To be more specific with the term of reliability in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use "dependability" in qualitative research (p. 300).

According to Creswell (2003), the researcher must use member checking. In this research, the researcher checked the understanding of the perceptions by paraphrasing and summarization for clarification. In order to increase the validity and reliability of the interview protocol, a jury of experts who were experienced in special education and the co-teaching process was assembled to test the clarity and applicability to the interview questions. The members of this panel were not participants in the study.   Questions that were not valid or reliable were either deleted or revised to eliminate any effect of the researcher's bias on the data. Participants had an opportunity to review the transcribed interviews for accuracy.

Interview questions were designed to support the three research questions under study. The interview questions are representative of the instructional, procedural, and staff development concerns noted in the literature describing the co-teaching process in elementary and middle schools.

To increase the validity and reliability of the interview protocol, a jury of three experts experienced in special education and co-teaching assisted with determining if there were any limitations, flaws, or vulnerabilities within the interview design. Their feedback helped revise interview questions before interviewing the participants. The members of this panel were not participants in the study. Participants of the panel were informed that the interview would be confidential.

Ethical Considerations

The approval to conduct this research was granted by the Executive Director of Accountability (Appendix A) before the collection of the data.   The building principals provided the researcher with a list of potential participants.

As a qualitative researcher, I needed to be aware of ethical issues inherent in the researcher-participant process when collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data. In order to ensure anonymity of the participants, all references to the specific school district, direct positions/titles, or any specific programming or terminology in use by the school district were deleted to comply with assurances made in the IRB correspondence.

While interviewing participants, I needed to be aware of any personal biases based on my own experience and research. Prior to conducting interviews, I made participants aware of my role and the rationale for the study. To ensure trustworthiness and establish credibility as a researcher, full disclosure of the purpose of my research study was provided to all participants.

Each participant signed an informed consent document before the interview. Numbers were used to identify the participants, and their school locations/positions were excluded for confidentiality. Merriam (2009) stated that while policies, guidelines, and codes of ethics have been developed by institutions, the federal government, and professional associations, the practice of ethics rests upon the researcher's own ethics and values.

Summary

This chapter discussed how the researcher executed the study. A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to collect data to address, either explicitly or implicitly, the purpose of the research study. This chapter also discussed the role of the researcher, the stages of research, and the method of data analysis.

The analytical approach in Chapter 3 addressed the research questions through the recognition of common themes related to the overall topic of the perceptions of general and special education teachers to then draw conclusions based upon the results and analysis of the 16 interviews. Finding the similarities, differences, perceptions, and outlooks of both types of teachers allowed an examination of co-teaching as it related to the influence of educational instruction in an inclusion class. This approach allowed the researcher to determine (from the subjects' perspectives) what occurred to create a current picture of and reasoning for the current instructional methods and factors that have influenced it. The analysis was consistent with the research design and methodology and served to assist the researcher with the findings presented in Chapter 4 and to analyze the data, which is presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine teachers' perceptions about co-teaching and to provide valuable information on relevant content, activities, and assignments that focus on collaboration between school professionals. Another purpose was to add knowledge to the existing literature describing factors for developing effective co-teaching programs that service large populations of students with disabilities in urban schools.

Background Information

In this chapter, a brief description of influential themes emerged from the interviews. This study focused on PreK-8th grade general and special education teachers who co-teach in a New Jersey public school. Sixteen teachers with at least two years of co-teaching experience participated in semi-structured interviews composed of questions specifically designed to address the three research questions that directed the focus of the study. These research questions were as follows:

RQ1. How do general and special teachers describe their perception of co-teaching and instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

RQ 2. In what ways, if any, can general and special education teachers improve and strengthen co-teaching instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

RQ 3. How do general and special education teachers describe their support from administration for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

Analysis of Research Question 1

RQ 1. How do general and special teachers describe their perception of co-teaching and instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

Findings.

The study found that all teachers expressed a positive perception about co-teaching for students with disabilities and that it is essential to service all types of students in the general education classroom. The majority of special education teachers felt a need to participate more with lesson planning, instruction, and disciplinary matters because it negatively affected students' views of them in the classroom. All of the special education teachers believed administration caused them to vary their co-teaching instruction so that the general education teacher can interact more with the students.

The majority of general education teachers mentioned a lack of knowledge about the co-teaching model and how to differentiate instruction, especially for special education students.

Two major themes emerged from the data analysis about teacher perception with co-teaching: roles of the teacher and exposure to the co-teaching model.

Themes: Research Question 1

Role of the teacher.

Interview participants characterized the roles of each teacher as a primary role and a secondary role. All of the special education teachers were confused about what role to assume with their partner. A special education teacher reflected:

The general education teacher presents the lesson and the special education teacher supports the general education students. My role is viewed as a secondary teacher in the classroom. (R3)

All of the special education teachers mentioned they were less involved with the content of the lessons and their primary duty was assisting the special education students. They stated general education teachers make all of the decisions with regards to curriculum planning and instruction. A special education teacher confirmed how the secondary role impacts their sense of worth in the classroom:

Special education teachers are not valued within the co-taught classroom because administrators utilize them for standardized testing or when the general education teacher has to attend a meeting. (R11)

In this district, co-teaching takes place on all grade levels from Prek-8. According to the special education teachers, the co-teaching dynamic is constantly evolving. They travel throughout different classrooms which creates a negative effect on how students view them as teachers. Two special education teachers explained that:

Special education teachers are not perceived as authoritative because the students view them as instructional assistants that sit in the back of the classroom and help the special education students. (R8)

The special education teacher works with small groups, and the general education teacher teaches the lesson, which is not a partnership or sharing of responsibilities in the co-teaching classroom. (R9)

Six out of eight special education teachers acknowledged adopting the secondary role because it was expected of them by the administration. They noted administrators determined teacher priorities in each classroom. They stated the administrators affect what roles are assumed in the classroom.

All of the special education teachers felt the school system was set up for the general education teacher to have the primary role in the classroom. They noted administrators determine priorities for each teacher in the classroom. They mentioned that administration actions affect teacher attitudes toward each other.

All of the general education teachers agreed they held the primary teaching role. Most wanted to employ interchangeable roles, but their administrators made them accountable for the classroom duties. Six out of eight general education teachers felt the administration does not understand that co-teaching involves a partnership to increase learning of all students in the classroom.

Seven out of eight general education teachers mentioned having intense pressure from the administration to make adequate yearly progress for their particular classroom. Several general education teachers suggested that the dominant co-teaching style was "one teach, one assist" to benefit administration for teacher evaluations. In this type of arrangement, the primary teacher has the responsibility of management, including instruction and discipline. The secondary teacher systematically checks and observes either small or whole groups. Two general education teachers spoke about how this approach negatively affects co-teaching:

The general education teacher plans the daily objectives for the special education teacher, and this creates feelings of worthlessness. (R7)

The role of the special education teacher is perceived as "complementary," and the general education students perceive them as assistants. (R16)

Exposure to the Co-Teaching Model.

All of the general education teachers felt they were inadequately trained in the co-teaching model which greatly affected their co-teaching delivery. The special education teachers

felt adequately trained in the co-teaching model, especially from their college courses and attending workshops. Two general education teachers expressed concerns about their lack of training and stated:

Without proper training on the co-teaching model, collaboration and team-driven decisions are very difficult. (R1)

Special education teachers are better trained in the co-teaching model, which explains why they are more familiar with the components of the co-teaching relationship. (R7)

Seven out of eight general education teachers favored the "one teach-one assist" model because they were primary decision-makers; however, they liked having two teachers in the classroom to meet individual needs.

Seven out of eight special education teachers favored the "parallel teaching" model because they have more opportunity to teach rather than assist the general education teacher. In addition, they can provide instructional strategies to help special education students. Despite these challenges, all of the teachers wanted to improve their program delivery, share responsibilities effectively, and increase administrative support.

Analysis of Research Question 2

RQ 2. In what ways, if any, can general and special education teachers improve and strengthen co-teaching instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

Findings.

The study found that teachers believe commitment to a collaborative process involving open communication improved and strengthened co-teaching instruction for students with disabilities. Collaboration is critical for developing trusting relationships and allows teachers to co-plan, co-instruct and co-assess. Collaboration is important to discuss teaching strategies, plan

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instruction, grade papers, and discipline together. However, collaboration is difficult because of insufficient opportunities to communicate during the school day.

All of the teachers felt co-instruction allowed them to break large, complex assignments into smaller steps and simplify the material for all students who needed the extra help. In addition, they mentioned co-assessment allowed both teachers to share grading which was very time consuming for the number of students in the classroom. The majority of general education teachers mentioned that special education teachers complement the teaching instruction. They stated that special education teachers provide graphic organizers to recall the main ideas or details for students struggling in the classroom.

Many special education teachers referenced the importance of trust and collaboration to improve academic instruction. They indicated moving around the building makes it difficult to collaborate and plan without common planning time with their general education teacher.

Two major themes emerged from the data analysis about improving and strengthening co-teaching instruction: collaboration and trust. These themes should be viewed together because one affects the other.

Themes: Research Question 2

Increase Collaboration.

All teachers indicated collaboration is critical to the effectiveness of co-teaching. They strongly agreed that collaboration builds communication and encourages flexibility with different co-teaching approaches.

All teachers mentioned co-teaching requires effective co-instruction, co-planning, and co-assessment. Six out of eight special education teachers insisted collaboration is imperative to achieve goals. A special education teacher agreed:

Collaboration is the big picture of co-teaching. When communication breaks down, everything breaks down. Co-teaching means that two teachers have mutual relationships and can work together. (R3)

A general education teacher commented:

Teachers need time to discuss goals and exchange ideas about classroom instruction. Two people are in a room working, planning and disciplining together. They get to know each other, and this can make teaching fun. (R10)

All teachers confirmed that planning time is essential in order to discuss lessons, plan student activities, review behavior management plans, etc. A general education teacher stated:

I would like to sit with my special education teacher and review the curriculum to develop ideas about what can work in our classroom. (R12)

Eleven out of 16 teachers confirmed their collaborative skills improved when they felt comfortable with their partner. In fact, during the interviews, it was revealed that partners who communicated well together had positive comments about their partners. Four out of eight special education teachers agreed that flexibility was the only way to have a successful co-teaching class. During the interview, two special education teachers stated:

When partners are flexible, they have the willingness to compromise. Two people are willing to respond to change and expectations. (R15)

It takes a lot of flexibility to share your class. You really have to listen and compromise with each other. Teachers need to have good communication skills and want to work with someone else. It is a good idea to ask questions to make sure it is okay with your partner. (R14)

Both teachers agreed that flexibility is necessary to adapt quickly to changes in the co-teaching classrooms.

Fourteen out of 16 teachers stated collaboration is an essential component for success in the co-taught classroom. The majority of general education teachers suggested collaboration is a way to discuss student progress, modifications, and accommodations in IEPs. The majority of special education teachers felt more comfortable developing lesson plans when they often collaborated with the general education teacher.

Earn Trust.

Another important theme that emerged during the interviews was trust. All teachers identified this is an essential component for effective relationships. Most of the teachers commented that trust develops good communication.

A general education teacher reflected on the experience:

Trusting my partner to share in lesson planning and disciplinary procedures allowed us to be more effective in the classroom. We became more comfortable communicating with each other. (R7)

A general education teacher suggested lack of trust creates negative feelings in the classroom and explained:

In the classroom, I have difficulty trusting my partner, and we disagree with classroom management and instructional methods. There is a conscious intention not to make things work. (R2)

A special education teacher confirmed:

From trust, teachers gain mutual respect, accountability and the ability to do great work together. You have to trust your partner to have a positive relationship. Trust means allowing your partner to develop ideas and showing tolerance and concern. (R15)

Twelve out of 16 teachers mentioned trust is critical for co-planning and collaboration to take place in the classroom. During the interviews, several teachers opened up about the importance of friendship with their partners and the relationship was fun and exciting. Fourteen teachers stated having a friendship with your partner makes teaching fun and exciting. Two general education teachers confirmed.

When you work with a friend, it makes teaching fun. I enjoy working with my partner because we are good friends outside of the workplace. (R7)

When teachers have a warm, friendly relationship, students see a shared vision and good teaching. (R16)

Ten out of 16 teachers compared co-teaching relationships to that of a "marriage." They discussed how partners have a close working relationship with their co-teaching partner. They responded:

Co-teaching is a "give and take" relationship. You have to be willing to help each other. When teachers get along, they are modeling how to work as a team. (R3)

Several interviews indicated teachers with similar expectations make better co-teaching partners. A special education teacher commented:

I think the more you work with someone, the more comfortable you become sharing ideas and planning ideas with that person. When both teachers share the same beliefs, they enhance teaching and students master the goals. (R9)

Analysis of Research Question 3

RQ3. How do general and special education teachers describe their support from administration for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

Findings.

The study found that all teachers indicated a lack of support from the administration for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. It was evident that the teachers were frustrated because they needed more planning time, instructional strategies, and training to feel effective in increasing academic achievement. During the in-depth interviews, all 16 teachers were given the opportunity to share how they plan with other teachers, consult with the administration, and obtain training to be more effective in their co-teaching relationships.

All of the general education teachers stated they needed more professional development to learn more about the co-teaching model, to acquire more instructional strategies to address the needs of special education students, and collaborate effectively with their partners. Most general education teachers felt a need to use the "one teach-one assist" approach which does not involve much collaboration and flexibility. The majority of general education teachers stated administrators think that co-teaching is functioning properly in their school building.

Some special education teachers felt a need for training when they are assigned to new grade levels and content areas to be more effective with their partners. They mentioned general education teachers saw value co-teaching with partners who have similar knowledge and interest.

Finally, all teachers did not feel the administration shared a common goal with co-teaching. They did not devote too much time on co-teaching problems or formal training with the co-teaching model. Some special education teachers mentioned principals with experience in special education might have a more positive effect toward inclusion students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Two major themes emerged from the data analysis about administration support to increase academic achievement: training and planning time.

Themes: Research Question 3

Empower Teachers with Training.

All of the general education teachers mentioned a series of workshops or professional development is needed to address the negative effectiveness of the co-teaching model. They mentioned training could benefit teachers, administrators, and students because everyone should work towards a common goal. As far as training goes, the district provides training to special education teachers to develop their co-teaching practices. Some general education teachers stated, "We have to use the 'figure it out' method."

All of the special education teachers indicated professional development workshops are needed to improve teaching outcomes in the co-taught classroom. They indicated a series of professional development together with the general education teachers to possibly decrease the negative perceptions of co-teachers regarding the effectiveness of the co-teaching models.

All of the special education teachers felt the administration did not devote enough time for them to utilize their skills and knowledge in the classroom. They felt that in order to successfully implement a strategy together, the administration must allow them to plan goals together for all the students in the classroom. They want the administrators to share their vision.

Two special education teachers commented about administrative support:

Administrators are in a different lane about co-teaching. Perhaps they need training to understand how it works. Everyone should be well versed about the co-teaching methods, including administration, to understand how it can be done effectively. (R3)

General and special education teachers should be trained with partners to enhance collaboration and establish a co-teaching approach effective in the classroom. (R14)

A general education teacher commented training would discourage ineffective co-teaching:

General education teachers are being pressured to meet state standards but are not trained to address the needs of every student in the classroom properly. Co-teaching allows for two teachers to address the needs of all students, especially those with learning concerns. (R4)

All of the teachers mentioned that the administration does not give much consideration to the capacity of training co-teachers about the co-teaching model to increase student achievement. They stated everyone has to function with everyone working collaboratively towards a common goal.

Planning Time with Partners.

All teachers felt a lack of planning time for collaboration was a major concern. They stated collaboration is the key for vital communication. All teachers felt a common planning time empowered them to educate all the students in the co-taught classroom. Two special education teachers spoke positively about having common planning time:

Planning time enriches instruction and provides a noticeable improvement in student achievement. The lack of common planning time to collaborate is a factor that causes teachers to harbor negative attitudes toward co-taught setting. (R8)

General and special education teachers need common planning time to develop effective lesson plans and discuss assessment. (R14)

One general education teacher identified lack of communication negatively influences the co-teaching relationship:

The lack of planning time infuses negative feeling between teachers which results in a frequent change in partners. When frequent planning time is given throughout the school day, co-teachers are better prepared to teach. (R5)

Conclusion of the Findings

In this chapter, the researcher presented the qualitative data collected in semi-structured interviews from eight general education and eight special education teachers. All of the teachers had a positive perception about co-teaching and insisted it is beneficial to all students in the general education classroom. According to all teachers, co-teaching enables them to divide the workload evenly, individualize instruction, and discipline students effectively, if appropriately implemented. The following themes emerged from the findings: the role of the teacher, exposure to the co-teaching model, collaboration, trust, training, and planning time.

Perhaps the most compelling outcome of this study is that the general education and special education teachers perceive and execute different roles in the co-teaching classroom. General education teachers felt they were more responsible for the instruction, planning, and assessment of the students. The special education teachers viewed their role as the expert to modify and adapt the curriculum for the special education students in the classroom. The special education teachers felt they were perceived as "visitors" because they traveled to different classrooms and the general education teacher is perceived as the "expert" in the content area, instruction, and discipline because they stay in the same classroom. In addition, general education teachers felt inadequately trained in the co-teaching model and with the differentiation of instruction. Special education teachers felt a need for more training in assigned curriculum and grade levels.

While discussing the quality of co-teaching instruction, all of the teachers felt collaboration and trust is very important for co-teaching relationships. Many special education teachers mentioned moving around the school building makes it difficult to collaborate about daily instruction with general education teachers. General education teachers suggested without common planning time to collaborate about lessons, instruction, and even disciplinary procedures, it is hard to trust their co-teaching partner with classroom responsibilities.

All teachers indicated administration was not very supportive with co-teaching to support learning in inclusion classrooms. It was evident that teachers were frustrated with the lack of common planning time and training. In addition, the administration did not share an interest in implementing the co-teaching model effectively.

In Chapter 5, a summary of the findings in relation to the research questions will be presented, along with the discussion of the relationship between the findings and the relevant literature. Additionally, recommendations will be suggested for district policy, administration practice, and future research study.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter begins with a reinstatement of the purpose of the study and the research questions that guided the study, followed by a summary which reviews the implications of the findings and how they relate to the literature and conceptual framework. The final part of this chapter contains recommendations to policymakers and stakeholders for policy or practice and future research.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions toward co-teaching and to provide valuable information on relevant content, activities, and assignments that focus on collaboration between school professionals. Further, this study attempted to add knowledge to the existing literature describing factors for developing effective co-teaching programs that service large populations of students with disabilities in urban schools.

Friend and Cook (2010) described co-teaching as an approach that provides specialized services to individual students in a general education classroom. Especially, co-teaching involves two or more educators working collaboratively to deliver instruction to a heterogeneous group of students in a shared instructional space. In this environment, teachers blend their expertise, share materials, and develop common instructional goals.

Qualitative data was collected for this study, which was structured around the following research questions:

RQ1. How do general and special teachers describe their perception of co-teaching and instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

RQ 2. In what ways, if any, can general and special education teachers improve and strengthen co-teaching instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

RQ 3. How do general and special education teachers describe their support from administration for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

This qualitative research study produced several results that align with concepts from the literature review. The results were categorized into the following overarching themes: (a) role of the teacher, (b) exposure to co-teaching model, (c) collaboration, (d) trust, (e) training, and (f) planning time. The conceptual framework used to examine these results was based on the social constructivist theory, research findings, and literature.

Summary of Findings

Research Question One.

How do general and special teachers describe their perception of co-teaching and instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

All 16 teachers perceived co-teaching to be essential to service all types of students in inclusion classrooms. However, based on the responses given, the majority of general education teachers perceived co-teaching to be an approach where two teachers interact with the students, and the general education teacher assumes the primary role of instruction, lesson planning, and disciplinary procedures. On the other hand, the special education teacher perceived co-teaching to be an approach where both teachers interact with students, and the special education teacher assumes the secondary role and shares some teaching responsibilities within the general education classroom but focuses on the special education students. These perceptions about co-teaching from the general and special education teachers resulted in themes that emerged such as roles of the teachers and lack of understanding about the co-teaching model.

Role of the Teacher

Teachers assume many roles in co-teaching classrooms. These interviews suggested teacher roles were very ambiguous because there wasn't a formal identification of responsibilities. Special education teachers' roles constantly changed because there wasn't a definitive framework for co-teaching. Special education teachers suggested they improvised roles and responsibilities each day because they did not know what was expected from them. Special education teachers assumed their primary role was to add modifications and accommodations to special education students' programs. The data indicated classrooms varied immensely on how special education teachers were utilized in the classroom. In addition, special education teachers did not view their roles as important, so they worked solely with special education students in the inclusion classrooms.

The majority of general education teachers mentioned that they developed the curriculum, planned lessons, and provided disciplinary procedures in the inclusion classroom. Occasionally, they consulted with the special education teacher about lesson plans, but it was difficult because their schedules conflicted. The primary conclusion of the interview data suggests that the general education teacher is viewed as the primary teacher and the special education teacher is viewed as the secondary teacher.

According to Papastylianou, Kaila, and Polychronopoulos (2009), "Role ambiguity is related to the uncertainty when the worker does not know what is required of him/her, how these demands will be satisfied, and how he/she is expected to behave at work" (p. 301).

Ultimately, co-teaching consists of a small interdependent team and the members rely on each other to execute certain tasks. However, a team cannot properly function if roles are not clearly identified. Co-teachers are ambiguous about their roles and concentrate on issues that

distract them from teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2015).

It is suggested from the teachers that role ambiguity stemmed from a lack of administrative leadership. They wanted to have guidance about their responsibilities. However, the majority of the general education teachers assumed the primary role in the classroom, so special education teachers quite frankly became upset and automatically assumed the secondary role because they were permanent in that classroom.

Heizer (2013) suggest that when individuals know their responsibilities, they take pride in their job, which increases job performance. Conversely, if individuals develop a negative attitude towards their job, then productivity will decrease eventually influencing negative attitudes.

Magiera et al. (2005) suggested that special education teachers rarely were the primary instructor and monitored student work, reviewed homework, or assisted the students with disabilities.

Based on the interviews from all the teachers, the school system did not present a set of responsibilities to each teacher in the inclusion classroom. It was assumed that the general education teacher would take primary responsibility and the special education teachers would fit into the classroom activities. The special education teachers understood how to implement the co-teaching model, but general education teachers did not have the training to understand how it worked properly.

Special education teachers felt their roles changed constantly and there was no definitive framework for co-taught classrooms. These teachers used their "gut feelings" or instinct to decide what was needed for the day and what needed to be accomplished. Furthermore, the special education teachers felt that administration's expectations of them were to fill in for the

general education teacher, attend IEP meetings, and focus on servicing the special education students. These various expectations increased the overall role ambiguity of special education teachers (Beauchamp & Bray 2001; Papastylianou, Kaila, & Polychronopoulos, 2009).

Research supports the literature that co-teachers should be a small interdependent team that relies on each other to execute certain tasks. However, a team cannot properly function if roles are not clearly identified. In this district, the co-teaching models were not utilized properly, and the special education teachers felt very ambiguous about their teaching roles (Cook & Friend,1995; Friend & Cook, 2007).

Volonino and Zigmond (2007) indicated "special educators frequently assume the role of instructional aide and a variety of factors inhibit their ability to provide specialized instruction within the general education classroom" (p. 295).

Exposure to the Co-Teaching Model

The co-teaching approach uses various co-teaching models to address each student's educational needs. Murawski and Bernhardt (2017) stated all teachers should be familiar with the co-teaching models. The majority of the general education teachers were not as knowledgeable about the co-teaching models, but preferred the "One Teach, One Assist" model approach because it allowed them to do the majority of planning, instruction, and discipline in the inclusion classroom.

Despite several variations of co-teaching in the literature, the primary approach usually implemented is the "One Teach, One Assist" approach (Magiera & Zigmond 2005; Cook & Friend, 1995; Scruggs et. al., 2007). In this approach, according to Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007), the special education teacher is given the insubordinate role and often related to as a classroom aide.

With this in mind, the majority of the special education teachers preferred using the "parallel teaching" approach because they were given more opportunity to instruct the class and be a major part of the lessons. In the "parallel teaching" approach, both teachers are given an opportunity to plan and instruct.   In some situations with the parallel teaching approach, the special education teacher would re-teach and review lessons in small groups.

Magiera et al. (2005) researched and found the special education teacher was rarely the primary instructor but monitored student work, reviewed homework, or observed students solving problems independently. Conderman and Hedin (2014) stated special educators lack a distinct role and therefore often assume a position similar to a paraprofessional.

Despite the challenges to achieving success with the co-teaching models, all of the teachers wanted to work together harmoniously. They believed the major key to any co-teaching model was excessive and positive collaboration to understand better how to instruct, assess, and discipline.

Research Question Two:

In what ways, if any, can general and special education teachers improve and strengthen co-teaching instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

Walther-Thomas, Korinek, and McLaughlin (1999) described how the ultimate goal in teacher collaboration is to focus on varying the instruction leading to increased student learning. These authors state that collaborative teachers often develop student success by providing academic supports in typical classrooms.

<div align="center">

Increase Collaboration

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The theme of collaboration emerged during the interviews. All of the teachers identified this as essential for the success of co-teaching. For schools to function properly with co-teaching,

the administration must allow teachers to collaborate to make conscious team-driven decisions. The roles of co-teachers are ambiguous because they are not collaborating enough. Collaboration is essential for teachers to educate all students effectively in the co-taught classroom.

Cook & Friend (2010) stated collaboration is an essential strategy for schools today because of the varied needs of the students in the classroom. Teachers need to have collaboration skills to optimize services for each student.

Co-teaching takes collaboration to a higher level. According to Cohen (2015), all parties have become vested in the lesson since they have each planned and assessed so that the outcomes are in line with their goals.

Cook & Friend (2010) indicated teachers are under tremendous pressure to ensure high academic standards with a diverse student body so teachers must work together to affect the learning of all students positively. Collaboration becomes a necessity, not a luxury. Scruggs and colleagues (2007) emphasize the importance of sufficient planning time for the co-teaching model and warn of the implications of the special educator's role being relegated to that of an assistant.

Broderick et al. (2005) and Vakil et al. (2009) made claims that a collaborative effort is required for successful inclusion to occur. "Policymakers have called for the creation of school-based professional learning communities, including organizational structures that promote regular opportunities for teachers to collaborate with teams of colleagues" (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015, para. 2). See also Carroll, 2007; Hamilton et. al, 2000; and National Staff Development Council, 2001.

Collaboration between both teachers is essential for implementing inclusion in schools. Teachers have to work together to develop appropriate academic programs for students with

disabilities and cooperatively deliver quality instruction to regular education students. Collaborative leadership encourages organizational commitment, professional learning, and shared accountability. An interesting finding was the lack of collaboration administration had with co-teachers in inclusion classrooms.

In this study, general and special education teachers perceive co-teaching to be quite effective if both teachers in the co-taught classroom collaborate about responsibilities for planning, instruction, and proper assessment. The research suggests that successful co-teaching involves collaboration to develop lessons, assessment procedures, and behavioral plans. However, the administration does not schedule sufficient time for co-teacher collaboration during school time.

Strahan (2003) conducted case studies that exhibited higher than expected levels of student achievement because teachers collaborated to identify students' learning needs and ways to address the needs.

Adams (2008) concluded that the most effective professional learning communities were those characterized by "collaboration" (p. 89).

Earn Trust

The literature revealed that trust is crucial to breaking down negative attitudes toward teacher relationships. Trust is needed to share different views about teaching in the co-taught classroom properly. Vygotsky (1978) believed that higher mental processes develop when information is shared during activities. The social constructivist theorist believed that learning works best in a social environment. In a co-taught classroom, when teachers trust each other, they can maintain a proper dialogue and explain information together throughout the classroom.

All the teachers indicated having a positive attitude with their co-teacher helped to strengthen their relationship. Some of the teachers compared good co-teaching to a successful marriage. The two people are happy together and can build a strong bond together. When co-teachers are in agreement, they are capable of communicating and sustaining a successful partnership within the classroom, which is a positive role model to their students.

Kohler-Evans (2006) compared co-teaching to a marriage in which individuals discuss their roles and responsibilities to have a successful relationship. Just like a marriage, co-teachers must help and care about each other to sustain the arrangement. Some teachers mentioned that administrators should have teachers fill out a personality survey to determine if two teachers are compatible before placing them together in a classroom.

These interviews suggested people appear more productive when they can work with someone they are compatible with and can trust. They can share ideas, be more flexible, and share a vision to help students succeed.

Mao, Chen, and Hsieh (2009) mentioned that workplace friendships increase job performance. Teachers who are friends have a more productive relationship in the classroom. If teachers have high flexibility and willingness to adapt to change, both partners will achieve their goals. Co-teachers must strive together to complete a unit.

Kohler-Evans, Webster-Smith & Albritton (2013) indicated teachers and administrators need to 1) place value on co-teaching, 2) find time for mutual planning, 3) practice parity, 4) have fun, 5) don't overlook the small stuff, 6) communicate, 7) measure student progress over time, and 8) one size does not fit all.

Research Question Three

In what ways, if any, can general and special education teachers describe their support from the administration for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

As stated in the literature, schools that are inclusive should have administrative support to facilitate co-teaching (Arguelle, Huges, & Schumm, 2000; Dieker & Murawski, 2003). When schools have a culture of sharing, general and special educators are more likely to serve all students (Murawski, 2006). According to Bouck (2007), common planning time is needed to prepare collaborative lessons and discuss curriculum. "*Effective Training* provides necessary skills (Damore & Murray, 2009; Leko & Brownell, 2009), and *block-teaching* (90-minute classes) enables the use of multiple teaching methods (Dieker & Murawski, 2003)" (Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014, p. 73).

All of the teachers indicated that a lack of administrative support creates role ambiguity and decreases chances to collaborate. The research suggested co-teachers need leadership that value collaborative practices (Damore & Murray, 2009). Gerber and Popp (2000) contended that the school principal sets the tone for the appreciation of co-teaching.

Collaborative leadership encourages organizational commitment, professional learning, and shared accountability. It is a way for all stakeholders to get involved in the decision-making process. Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty (2005) stated when administration is involved with decision making, the staff may agree their ideas and form a school culture based on administrative philosophy.

Empower Teachers with Training

To facilitate confidence and competence, "teachers need systematic and intensive training that includes research-based best practices in inclusive schools" (Burstein, et al., 2004, para 8.)

Additional training was suggested by general education teachers to increase their knowledge about the co-teaching model and special education teaching practices. All teachers felt the school district should train principals on the co-teaching model so that they will have better knowledge of how to implement it in the classroom.

Special education teachers felt a need for training in new content and grade level curriculum to feel more comfortable co-teaching with their partner. The most common reported topics for professional development included co-planning and co-teaching, conflict resolution, and classroom management. Pancsofar and Petroff (2013) found that professional development for co-teaching increases confidence, interest, and attitudes amongst teachers.

Professional development is the vehicle by which schools increase the skills of its staff and renews the organization, and it is linked to the quality of teaching (Spark, 2002). Research has found that ongoing professional development is critical in supporting and maintaining co-teaching in schools (Pugach & Winn, 2011).

According to Langher, Caputo, & Ricci (2017):

In this regard, support from the general education teachers in a school is conceived as a key factor which allows special education teachers to feel as though they are part of the school environment and to experience greater personal accomplishment (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001), acceptance, and participation (Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008), (p. 123).

Research indicated that a lack of administrative support is reported to be among the top challenges to successful co-teaching (Damore & Murray, 2009). Administrative support is necessary for securing planning time (Hunt, Soto, Maier, Liboiron, & Bae, 2004). Principals

should take the lead ensuring that co-planning time between co-teachers is available (Scruggs et al., 2007).

Many professional development areas are important, but research indicated that five are a high priority. These areas include collaborative teaming and teaching, curricular and instructional modifications and modifications, personal supports, assistive technology, and positive behavioral supports.

Planning Time with Partner

Data supported and extended the notion in the literature that teachers need more time and space to create, sustain, and enhance positive partnering relationships in classroom structure (Bronson & Dentith , 2014).

During the interviews, teachers didn't feel they were given enough planning time to collaborate with their partners. Several teachers stated administrators need to meet with the co-teachers and learn more about the co-teaching models. In addition, the administration needs to become more aware of the problems that exist in the co-taught classrooms.

Policymakers have called for the creation of school-based professional learning communities and for organizational structures that promote regular opportunities for teachers to collaborate with teams of colleagues (Carroll & Rosson, 2007; Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2000)

All teachers shared that planning time was difficult because each teacher had different preparation periods. They were forced to discuss the needs either before or after school informally. Researchers asserted teachers' efforts at inclusive education are more successful when their perceptions of needed resources, including administrative support, match their perceptions of the availability of these resources (Werts, Wolery, Snyder, & Caldwell, 1996). Administrative support is necessary for securing planning time (Hunt, Soto, Maier, Liboiron, &

Bae, 2004). Principals should take the lead ensuring that co-planning between collaborating teachers is made available.

Scruggs et al. (2007) researched that common planning time between participating teachers is essential to the successful implementation of co-teaching. Similarly, Burstein et al. (2004) reported that collaborative planning time was considered an integral factor for perceived success in all of the co-teaching endeavors in the group study. Moreover, teachers interviewed in the study stated that the increased planning time would facilitate sustained implementation of inclusive practices.

Common planning time and scheduling of classes are entities that principals can arrange and govern (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

Concluding Comments

In this study, all of the conclusions are interconnected. Each issue influences the next, causing a cycle of events. An examination of the teachers' transcripts revealed that a lack of administrative support drives role ambiguity and lack of collaboration. The building administrator plays an important role in supporting and maintaining effective co-teaching relationships. With the understanding of special education and school wide issues, the building administrator can develop effective co-teaching teams by considering partner's styles, preferences, and strengths. They should provide co-teachers with sufficient co-planning time, opportunities for professional development, and frequent feedback about their co-teaching approach. Overwhelmingly, co-teachers reported that co-teaching is an effective approach for all students.

Recommendations for Policy

Policymakers should offer specific suggestions on exceptional co-teaching models

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because research indicates more school districts are placing special education students in general education classrooms following the lead of prominent inclusion advocates, special education teachers, and parents of students with disabilities (Cook & Friend, 1995; McLeskey, Waldron, Zigmond, & Jenkins1995; Roach, Salisbury, & McGregor, 2002).

In addition, federal mandates such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) state that all children with disabilities should "have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their particular needs" (Owens et al., 2016, p. 196). For many students with disabilities, this does not mean separate classes in the same building as their peers.

Recommendations for the Administration

The school administrator plays a critical role ensuring that teachers have sufficient co-planning time to build trust, share responsibility, and make innovative changes to teaching practices in their classroom. The building administrator should provide professional development opportunities about the co-teaching model to bring specificity about teaching strategies and accommodations to advance the co-taught initiative.

According to Salend (2008), it is important that co-teaching partners discuss why they want to work together and agree on the goals they have for their classroom. They need to establish a set of ground rules for collaboration and discuss what they expect from each other, as well as their concerns and fears about working cooperatively.

Recommendations for Future Research

In order to meet the increasing needs for effective co-teaching classrooms, it is recommended that quantitative research be conducted at the elementary level looking at special education student achievement both before and after the implementation of co-teaching. A

quantitative design with a larger sample would allow for generalization to a larger population (Creswell, 2012).

A second area for future research would be to interview elementary school administrators on their perceptions' about co-teaching and the type of professional development they perceive is needed to supplement beginning teachers.

A final area for future research would be to conduct a similar study with a suburban district.

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Appendix A

District Approval Letter

PATERSON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Department of Accountability
90 Delaware Avenue, Paterson NJ 07503
Office: (973) 321-0715   Fax: (973) 321-0000

Annalesa Williams-Barker, Ed.D.   Eileen Shafer
Executive Director   Acting State District Superintendent
abarker@paterson.k12.nj.us

January 8, 2018

Dear Institutional Review Board:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that the Paterson Public Schools District has given Cheryl Banks permission to conduct the research entitled, *Teachers' Perception of Co-teaching in Inclusion Classrooms* at voluntary participating K-8 school buildings. This communication also serves as assurance that this sponsoring graduate school and graduate candidate complies with requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) and will ensure that these requirements are followed in the conduct of this research.

Sincerely,

Annalesa Williams-Barker

Preparing All Children for College and Career

Appendix B

Letter of Invitation

Dear Fellow Educators of PPS:

I am inviting you to take part in a research study. My name is Cheryl Banks. In addition to being a School Psychologist for the Paterson Public School District, I am also a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services. I am conducting research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. Upon successful completion of my dissertation, I will be receiving my doctorate in K-12 Educational Leadership, Management and Policy.

I have received permission from Dr. Annalesa Williams-Barker, Executive Director of Accountability Teacher/Principal Evaluation to conduct my research here at PPS. The purpose of this research study is to examine teachers' perception concerning co-teaching in inclusion classrooms. Examining teacher's perceptions concerning the co-teaching process could provide districts with information that can help them design, implement, and maintain more effective teacher instructional practices in inclusion classrooms. By understanding these perceptions through the help of research, school leaders can build on the benefits of co-teaching arrangements to increase student achievement and better understand the roles of the regular and special education teacher.

I am asking for approximately 16 volunteers to participate in my research. After I have a list of volunteers, I will send out a demographic questionnaire to be completed by each volunteer. All participants must have at least two years of co-teaching experience.

If you are selected from the pool of volunteers to participate in this study, you will be required to sign an informed consent form. I'll ask you to meet with me for approximately 30 minutes to talk about your personal perceptions concerning your co-teaching experiences in an inclusion classroom. The interviews, which could be audio recorded, will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and location. The audio recording is optional, based on your consent.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the research at any time and/or request that your transcript of your interview not be used. You have the right to refuse to answer any question if it makes you feel uncomfortable. There is no penalty for withdrawing from the study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relationships with PPS with me. You will receive no compensation for participating in the research study.
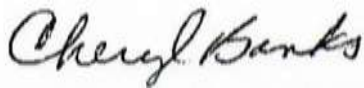
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed. All data collected from you will be coded with a number that is only known by me. Your real name will not be used. The identity of all participants will be carefully protected in both the research and reporting phases of this study.

All audio recordings will be transcribed and put on a USB flash drive. The audio recordings will be erased. All of the research data on the USB flash drive will be securely stored in a locked cabinet in my home. I will keep the research data for a period of three years and then it will be destroyed.

I thank you for any consideration for your possible participation. If you are interested in participating in my research study or want to discuss it with me in more detail, please contact me at my school (973) 321-0090 ext. 20915 or email cbanks@paterson.k12.nj.us. If you prefer, you may contact my Dissertation Advisor, Dr. Anthony Colella, at Seton Hall University (973) 761-9389.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Banks

Cheryl Banks, Doctoral Candidate, Seton Hall University

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Dissertation: Teachers' Perceptions of Co-teaching in Inclusion Classrooms.

The Researcher's Affiliation: The researcher for this study is Cheryl Banks. Cheryl Banks is a doctoral student at Seton Hall University, College of Education.

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research is to examine teachers' perceptions on co-teaching in inclusion classrooms utilizing the ideas of co-teaching models and exploring whether they have a positive effect on their teaching practices, professional growth and their relationships with other co-teachers. The participants for this research study were asked to participate because they are practicing teachers in a New Jersey school district that teach in inclusion classrooms. Participation in this research will require approximately 30 minutes of the participants' time over the next few months to participate in a one-to-one interview and to review the transcription of their interview.

Description of the Procedure: If the participant chooses to take part, the researcher will ask each participant to be involved for approximately thirty minutes. Field notes and/or audio recordings of the conversation will be transcribed solely by the researcher. Approximately 16 teachers will be interviewed one to one in person. Participants will be asked the same questions, which have been reviewed by a panel of experts. Different probing questions may be asked depending on the participant's responses.

The interview will take place during a time that does not impede upon educational instruction and at the participants' school in a mutually agreed upon location to allow the participant to reconstruct their experiences in a comfortable, natural environment.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary; any teacher may decline to participate without penalty; any participant may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If the participant feels uncomfortable during the interview session, the participant has the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview without penalty.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Participants' identities will be kept completely confidential but will not remain anonymous because the researcher will know the identity of the participants. All participants will be given a code number so that the researcher can identify the actual participants' responses to interview questions. The researcher will not disclose who participated in the study, or who made individual responses at any time.

Storage of Confidential Data: All data will be stored in a locked facility for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. After the storage time the data gathered will be shredded and the audiotapes destroyed. A digital copy of the data will be stored electronically on a USB memory key in the researchers' home in a locked cabinet.

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Access to Confidential Records: Only the researcher will have access to the data.

Risk or Discomfort: There are no known risks associated with taking part in this study. Answering questions and talking with the researcher about your co-teaching experiences could cause some stress, however, you have the right to refuse questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Direct Benefit from this Research: There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the information learned from this study will be added to the research on co-teaching in inclusion classrooms. The research could influence school districts contemplating how best to support, design, develop and implement effective co-teaching strategies and training.

Remuneration: There is no monetary remuneration for participation in this study.

Contact Information: Please contact Cheryl Banks, the principal researcher, at my school (973) 321-0090 ext. 20915 or email cbanks@paterson.k12.nj.us for any questions or problems. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher, you may contact the Seton Hall Dissertation Advisor, Dr. Anthony Colella, (973) 761-9389.

Participant Consent:

I have read, understand, and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this consent form. I fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research program as a participant. In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to the audiotaping of the interview.

Agreement to be Audio-Recorded or Not:

- o   I agree to be audio recorded
- o   I do not agree to be audio recorded

_____   _____

SIGNATURE   **DATE**

_____

PRINTED NAME

Research/Interview Questions

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*Research Question 1***:**

How do general and special teachers describe their perception of co-teaching and instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

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*Research Question 2***:**

In what ways, if any, can general and special education teachers improve and strengthen co-teaching instruction for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

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*Research Question 3***:**

How do general and special education teachers describe their support from administration for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms?

Appendix E

Certificate of Completion

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Cheryl Banks** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 09/10/2017.

Certification Number: 2481260.